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PLACE, RACE, AND MODERNISM IN THE WORKS OF E. M. FORSTER AND EUDORA WELTY

by

MARNY BORCHARDT

Under the Direction of Randy Malamud

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines similarities between the works of E. M. Forster (*A Room with a View*, *A Passage to India*) and Eudora Welty ("Powerhouse," *Delta Wedding*). This study focuses on three areas: the importance of a sense of place for both writers, their nuanced critiques of racism and other intolerances, and their subtle, yet inherently modernist philosophies and methodologies. This dissertation also argues that both writers deserve a prominent place in the modernist literary canon.

INDEX WORDS: Eudora Welty, E. M. Forster, British literature, Southern literature, Modernism, Race, Place, Twentieth-century literature

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MARNY BORCHARDT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Georgia State University

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2013

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For Samantha

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INTRODUCTION

During my senior year of high school, my English teacher showed a movie entitled *A Room With a View*. I had always loved British pop music and culture, but this was my first experience of a British period drama. While I found the movie's visual aspects thrilling, the story's underlying subversiveness especially piqued my interest. The movie was also my first exposure to E. M. Forster. Over time, I saw other Merchant Ivory productions of his novels, but I did not read any of his works until preparing for my primary Ph.D. exam. As a lifelong Anglophile, I relished Forster's profoundly British turns of phrase, his obsession with social graces and class issues, and his droll sense of humor. He celebrated and embodied positive, quintessentially British traits while simultaneously critiquing his culture's darker aspects.

Besides gravitating towards British literature during the course of my studies, I have also found myself drawn to American Southern literature. As an almost native Atlantan, I knew about *Gone With the Wind* from an early age, and I distinctly remember devouring the novel on a family car trip when I was eleven. During my undergraduate years, I studied the novels of many Southern writers, both black and white, but I did not encounter Eudora Welty until I began work on my M.A. I found her lyrical portrayal of the Depression-era Deep South striking, and her subtle yet deep humanism moving.

When I began my dissertation, I knew I would focus on literature from the first part of the twentieth century, since modernism was a personal favorite. I also knew that my work would involve a comparison between British and Southern writers, since I saw many similarities between the two cultures. During the early- to mid-twentieth century, both the South and Britain had a heavily mythologized sense of self that provided justification for the oppression of British colonial subjects and black Southerners. Both cultures also justified their oppression through a

self-serving definition of “civilization” in which “civilized” people needed to bring “savage,” non-white peoples out of the darkness of their supposed ignorance and into the light of a superior culture and race. While many white Southerners interacted daily with black Southerners, the great majority of British people had little actual contact with the people of India. Nevertheless, the attitude of superiority to and supposed understanding of these oppressed peoples infiltrated both cultures on a primal level. In terms of literature, this fascination with and objectification of the Other infused genres such as the British imperial and Southern plantation romances.

In the nineteenth century, both British imperialists and Southern slave owners witnessed their cultures’ ascents to great wealth and power, only to grapple in the twentieth century with the aftershocks of an empire’s waning influence. For both the British and Southerners, the resulting cultural upheaval played a significant role in the literature of the following century. While the timeline of the events for these two cultures does not match up exactly, since the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery in the United States occurred in 1865 and the British Empire’s hold on India began to loosen in the aftermath of World War I, both civilizations contended in the first half of the twentieth centur with similar issues. Great Britain and the South both had to navigate a new world in which the formerly dominant and supposedly superior culture no longer held absolute dominion over the lives of former subjects/slaves. During this era, intellectuals from both cultures also began to examine their pasts through modernity’s much-altered perceptions, and to seek innovative ways of expressing their gestalt through the arts. In a literary sense, this time period witnessed a renaissance for British and Southern American writers, both of whom lived in worlds where rigid, unshakeable social tenants and time-honored artistic traditions had lost their relevance.

After I established the similarities between the two regions, selecting specific works from a long list of personal favorites was a challenging task. While the more recognizably modernist and stylistically avant-garde novels of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner seemed the logical choices, I

kept returning to the comparatively more conventional works of Forster and Welty. Then, to my delight, I learned that, not only was Forster one of Welty's greatest literary idols, but the two corresponded and eventually met when Cambridge University invited Welty to deliver a series of lectures. She described the thrill of the meeting in a letter to her friend Frank Lyell dated August 3, 1954.

> I had lunch with Forster. He wrote me a note saying he had learned…I was in Cambridge, was just about to set off for the Continent, and could I have lunch with him in his rooms at King's, the last day, which was also the next day I think. I of course had overwhelming feelings of joy – had meant to write and ask if I might "wait on him," but had not yet done it. He had all his own things in his rooms, bookcases 2 rows deep. The electric heater was on – for my benefit, I'm sure, because later on I heard him agreeing with the gyp that it was quite hot … – sherry waiting, and the lunch brought in and served on his own little table – hors d'oeuvres and chops and vegetables and fresh raspberries and cream, white wine, and then coffee by the fire. He talked about his family portraits hanging round the room, and some letters and papers he'd just come into possession of – and when I asked if he might be going to write something about them, he said a sketch was rather in his mind. He asked if the college people attending the Conference knew anything about books – "They generally don't" – and was very kind about what I was up to. He said he hardly saw how he would ever get back to America, because of the need, if he came, to lecture, and to be put on show, and said the same thing was true of India – that he would very much like to go, but just didn't feel he wanted to undergo any more of that. Isn't it sad?...After lunch he put on a jaunty fat tweed cap with a button on top and took me for a walk….He was absolutely darling. As we parted in front of King's he said, "I shouldn't worry for a moment about what to tell them about writing – just tell them to stop it!"

> And then, that night, at something called "General Discussion – Literature," Arthur Mizener oratorically said "Now you can't go saying *Passage to India* is a great novel, come come! It's simply a novel of manners that's gone wrong. When you finish it, you're left with nothing but a vacuum!" I was put in the ridiculous position of having to defend *A Passage to India*. You *know* what I think of [Mizener]. He regards the confer ence as a show, that's obvious, and doesn't really care what he's saying, so long as people gasp, laugh, defend themselves, get mad, and the rest – all of which I do, to my fury. I was so upset after General Discussion: Literature that as I was coming home I literally kicked myself and got in with my foot all covered with blood. (Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History)

As Welty and Forster biographers have often noted, both writers had exquisite manners resulting from their refined, cultured, and privileged backgrounds. Welty's description of the family portraits hanging in Forster's room brings to mind the importance both writers placed on family relationships in their personal and artistic development. They also both enjoyed socializing, especially with other writers and artists. However, despite such conviviality, both were intensely private and shy people who kept their personal lives hidden from public view. All of the personal accounts and interviews I have read indicate that they also shared a similar sense of humor – understated, sly, and sophisticated.

Although I find these personal similarities interesting, they are not my primary focus. In her letter to Lyell, Welty's brief but vivid description of her visit with Forster provides an example of her heightened sensitivity to place. Forster shared this sensitivity, and my first chapter will examine the personal and artistic importance of place in their works. Welty's outrage over Mizener's ridiculing *A Passage to India* provides a glimpse of the fierce morality behind her examinations of racism that frequently escaped critics' attention. Chapter two will focus on the similar ways in which Forster and Welty subtly critiqued the injustices embedded in their respective cultures. At various times, critics have described both authors as one-dimensional

and sheltered products of their environment who remained oblivious to the upheaval and revolutionary nature of the modernist era. When Forster encourages Welty with his conspiratorial comment that "'I shouldn't worry for a moment about what to tell them about writing – just tell them to stop it," he winkingly acknowledges their shared subversive streak and dislike of being "put on show" and having to bow to the institution of Literature. Chapter three argues that, despite both writers' decorous and traditional facades, Forster and Welty championed and, in their own quiet ways, embodied the modernist aesthetic, and that both writers deserve a prominent position in the modernist literary canon.

CHAPTER ONE: A SENSE OF PLACE

In the spring of 1947, Eudora Welty received a fan letter describing her short story "The Wide Net" as a tale full of "wild and lovely things." Much to her delight, the letter ended with E. M. Forster's nearly illegible signature.

> "The letter was kindness, undreamed of kindness," she said and it bore the marks of her tears, she said at a centenary celebration of Forster in 1979. Forster had reinforced her "instinctive belief that mystery in human relationships exists per se," and had strengthened her "recognition of place as a prime source of enlightenment in fiction." (Waldron 78)

Both Welty and Forster wrote fiction that emanated from their profound understanding of their respective cultures and the indelible stamp their cultural heritage left on them as individuals. They explored their cultures' societal norms, celebrated the accompanying quirks, and illustrated disturbing injustices they saw through the examination of relationships in their stories.

In *The Eye of the Story*, Welty's study of the writing craft, she explains that "place is where [the writer] has his roots, place is where he stands; in his experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point of view" (117). A well-bred Southern lady through and through, Welty clearly revered the genteel, tradition-steeped aspects of her culture while simultaneously embracing progressive interests in racial equality, liberal politics, and the arts. She loved her home state of Mississippi, despite its many contradictions and flaws that she unflinchingly revealed to readers. This love for the place that shaped and informed her personally and artistically shines through even in her stories' ugliest moments. Forster, like Welty, had a profound sensitivity to what his biographer, P. N. Furbank, describes as the "spirit of place" (116, 119). Whether contemplating British, Italian, or Indian landscapes,

he always looked to his surroundings for inspiration and as the impetus to conquer periods of writer's block. In order to define more thoroughly how the sense of "place" inspired and informed both of these writers' works, it is necessary to first establish the ways in which their birthplaces and families shaped them as individuals and artists. Then, a close examination of how their respective identities as an Englishman and a Mississippian influenced the points of view, events, and characters in selected works will follow. Finally, this chapter will describe the thematic similarities in their writings.

Born on January 1, 1879, in London, E. M. Forster, whose father died when he was still an infant, had a comfortable childhood under the watchful eyes of his mother, grandmother, and great-aunt. His mother, Alice "Lily" Forster, had an especially profound influence on his life. Forster's "love affair" with his mother made his childhood

> Radiantly happy…and it went on, in a sense, for the rest of both their lives. Indeed it dominated Forster's existence and caused him much frustration in later years. All the same, it was not the sort of mother-son affair which leads to tragedy. Lily was an extremely possessive mother, but not an emotionally smothering one; there was a coolness and briskness – something of the sister as well as of the mother, one might say – in her feelings for Morgan [Forster], and this kept a certain balance in their relationship. (Furbank 21-2)

They lived together and traveled together, discussing his literary works and personal philosophies, and he remained devoted to her until her death in 1945.

Early critics viewed Forster's dedication to the women in his family as evidence of his latent homosexuality and timid nature. This antiquated stance in no way does him justice. Besides moving in sophisticated and forward-thinking intellectual and artistic circles, Forster loved to travel and found great literary inspiration in exotic locales. He even lived in both Egypt and India for significant stretches of time. Instead of recognizing Forster's sensitivity to locales as a creative strength and the embodiment of an adventurous spirit, Anne M. Wyatt-Brown

mistakenly views Forster's emphasis on place as the result of childhood trauma. She writes that two events - when Forster and his mother were evicted from his childhood home, Rooksnest, and an unfortunate encounter with a pedophile – were responsible for a deep sense of insecurity:

> The move from Rooksnest exacerbated Forster's sense of impotence because it made him aware that he and his mother were vulnerable to the whims of others…clearly, the impact of the loss of his house was overwhelming. Periodically, thereafter, he suffered from acute separation anxiety, often triggered off by a generalized feeling of rootlessness. His novels demonstrate his concern with their focus on the importance of homes, stability, and a sense of place. Both the sexual encounter and the loss of his house taught Forster that he had little control over his own life. (116)

Wyatt-Brown's depiction of Forster as a passive victim of circumstances illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding of his personality. Despite a conservative demeanor, Forster lived a life of intellectual and artistic daring.

As this chapter will later reveal, critics have also mistakenly described Welty as a timid soul who lived a sheltered, privileged life, and whose sensitivity to place grew out of a relationship with a domineering mother and a lack of life experience. As George Dangerfield of *Time* noted in the conclusion of his dismissive review of *Delta Wedding*:

> Tall, blue-eyed Eudora Welty, a spinster of 37, has never lived in the Delta country ("It just seemed…a good place for the events to happen"). Daughter of an insurance company executive, she was born, bred, and still lives in Jackson, Miss., where she quietly passes her time writing, painting and photographing. She also likes flowers and "soft music, classical music, as well as dance music – and triumphant bursts of music." She is a member of the Junior League. (108)

In addition to failing to recognize the novel's complexity and progressive messages, Dangerfield also did not know much about Welty. While her lifelong residence in Jackson and her

membership in the Junior League did indicate Welty's status as a Southern woman of privilege, Welty, like Forster, loved to travel and possessed an adventurous streak. No Welty biographer would ever describe her as having "quietly pass[ed] her time."

While Welty's traditional Southern upbringing led early critics to mistakenly dismiss her as a provincial homebody, Forster's typically Edwardian upbringing included the expectation that he should travel. However, in stark contrast to Forster's genuine interest in different peoples and search for literary inspiration, the typical Edwardian traveler set out for exotic locales with a dramatically different sense of purpose, and in *A Room With a View*, Forster gently mocks the sensibilities behind Edwardian tourist literature. In 1827, Karl Baedeker founded a publishing company that primarily produced travel guides. For the British traveler, the detailed information presented in these guidebooks represented the only way to experience the "true" culture and nature of a place (Butler and Russell 93). As members of the world's foremost imperial power, British travelers of the era viewed foreign countries and cultures as commodities their innately superior cultural, political, and racial position entitled them to consume.

Mocking the stereotypically fussy and humorless British tourist had already become a common Victorian literary trope by the time Forster wrote *A Room With a View*. In keeping with Forster's subtly subversive methods, he uses the image of the "red nosed" British tourists with red guidebooks to probe the boundaries between tourists and natives instead of merely lampooning British mannerisms. James Buzard describes Forster's critique of British tourism, and notes how

> Shaped by the discourse of tourism, [Forster's] art also provides a critical view of the conditions and strictures of the discourse's ideological boundaries. Stemming from this difficult position, the special project of Forster's early work (which establishes conditions on which his later writings are based) is to investigate the conditions of existence within the discourse of tourism and the possibilities of circumventing or transcending the

> obstacles tourism places between the traveler/writer and the true understanding he seeks, both of himself and of the visited place. (159)

Chapter three will examine Forster's subversions of literary structures and motifs in greater detail in addition to explaining how they reveal a quintessentially modernist sensibility many critics have overlooked.

To Forster, nothing was more important than people trying to "only connect," a phrase that appears several times in *Howards End*, his novel about class-consciousness and the sometimes tragic results of its accompanying social boundaries. In *A Room With a View*, he uses a much lighter touch to show the cultural snobbery, logistical difficulties, and comic misunderstandings that can occur when tourists attempt to appreciate and understand a foreign place and people. During the novel, young Lucy Honeychurch attempts to get to know the "true" Italy, struggles to synthesize her experiences abroad, and grapples with her impending adulthood once she returns home. Who is Lucy Honeychurch? How does she interpret her experiences in Italy? What does she think about her culture's traditional views concerning love, sexuality, and marriage? How does she feel about her status as a young woman in turn-of-the-century England? As Lucy navigates these issues, Forster also reveals his personal critique of the British sense of self and place, and questions whether or not an outsider can truly understand a foreign people and culture.

The novel opens with young Lucy Honeychurch and her spinster cousin, Charlotte, checking into a pension in Florence and bemoaning its lack of authenticity. The Cockney "signora" running the establishment and a stiff-necked group of English tourists dining under pictures of the late Queen Victoria and a dead English poet laureate produce an instant sense of stuffiness and disappointment for Lucy, leading her to remark, "Charlotte, don't you feel, too, that we might be in London? I can hardly believe that all kinds of other things are just outside" (3). Lucy and her cousin have come to Italy in search of the essence of Florentine art and life,

and, in addition to receiving rooms without a proper view, they have traveled far only to find themselves staying in a satellite version of life at home.

As the ladies enter the class consciousness-charged drawing room, arguing over which one should have which room, the other lodgers immediately begin to assess Lucy and Charlotte in an attempt to classify the new arrivals and satisfy themselves that they are the "right" kind of people. As Forster notes, Lucy and Charlotte sound "if the sad truth be owned – a little peevish….Some of their neighbours interchanged glances" (4). In a shocking breach of protocol, one of the guests, a Mr. Emerson, calls out to the ladies:

> "I have a view, I have a view." Miss Barlett was startled. Generally at a pension people looked them over for a day or two before speaking, and often did not find out that they would "do" till they had gone. She knew that the intruder was ill-bred, even before she glanced at him. He was an old man, of heavy build, with a fair, shaven face and large eyes. There was something childish in those eyes, though it was not the childishness of senility. What exactly it was Miss Bartlett did not stop to consider, for her glance passed on to his clothes. These did not attract her. He was probably trying to become acquainted with them before they got into the swim. So she assumed a dazed expression when he spoke to her, and then said: "A view? Oh, a view! How delightful a view is." (4)

Compared to the other guests, Mr. Emerson seems vital and interesting to the reader. He speaks frankly with purpose and good intent, unlike the other silent, judgmental, and thoroughly English guests. Even though Lucy and Charlotte are far from home, British manners and sensibilities still dictate their behavior. For Lucy, however, once they begin to explore Italy's art and landscapes, those manners and sensibilities begin to seem contrived and cause her a great deal of confusion. Italy's romance and charm affect Lucy, just as they had affected Forster and, while under Italy's spell, she finds herself repeatedly breaching British decorum and behaving in a passionate and spontaneous way. In *A Room*, "The pre-eminent contest…is

between what Forster's narrator calls 'the real and the pretended'….It is a battle between the spontaneous response to life (the direct, open, sincere, and childlike) and the muddled response (the self-conscious, rehearsed, ostentatious, inhibited and excluding)" (Heath 4-5). The difference between the spontaneous and muddled in the opening pension scene reveals Forster's sentiments regarding social conventions and typically British uptight behavior. The supposedly better class of people come off looking priggish and condescending, while the socially inferior Emersons seem to personify all the traits Forster valued and perhaps wished he could embody himself.

As a closeted homosexual, Forster's frequently revealed the strain of disguising his true nature in his personal letters and writings. When the writer D. H. Lawrence, with whom he cultivated a close literary and personal friendship, rebuked Forster for his severe emotional restraint, the conversation had a liberating effect. Forster decided to try to be more emotionally open and even showed his novel *Maurice*, which chronicled the loves of a young gay man, to several literary friends. His friends' positive responses gave Forster a big boost of confidence in both a literary and personal sense. However, in accordance with his wishes, *Maurice*, which he wrote after *A Room*, was published only posthumously (Furbank 3-14). Forster desperately wanted to live a life of emotional honesty, but the risks were clearly daunting for him.

In addition to Lucy's positive gut reaction to the Emersons, her piano playing displays a passionate and willful personality lurking under a meek and carefully constructed "proper" facade. For Lucy, playing the piano represents an escape from her rigid social confines. The joy playing brings her and a tendency to select powerful, dramatic pieces, as opposed to the "pretty" ones deemed more proper for a young woman, indicate that behind her thoroughly respectable appearance lurk emotional complexity and a strong will. Mr. Beebe, after listening to her storm through a Beethoven piece, remarks "'If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting – both for us and for her" (30). Just like Lucy, Forster was the product of a middle-class British upbringing and always presented a studiedly proper façade to

outsiders. With his conventional appearance, refined manners, and devotion to the women in his family, Forster would have seemed downright banal to those not in the know. Like Lucy, however, he found an outlet for his true self to emerge through his travels and experiences in Italy, the country that had "given him a vision, and [that] ever afterwards he would think of…gratefully as 'The beautiful country where they say "yes",' and the place 'where things happen'" (Furbank 96).

Lucy represents a frustrating and often amusing paradox for the reader. She constantly frets over issues of decorum, yet laments before a key scene in the novel that nothing "interesting" or shocking ever happens to her. The limitations of her proper upbringing and her desire to give in to her real emotional impulses do battle throughout the story. From the very start of the novel, the reader constantly cheers for Lucy and hopes that her time in Italy will allow her passion and natural instincts to push through all of her well-bred ways and lead her to emotional truth, which, in turn, will enable her to live a happy and fulfilling life. Near the end of the novel, Mr. Emerson gives voice to the reader's hopes when he exhorts Lucy to remember Italy's liberating effect upon her and make the honest, and correct, choice to marry George:

> "I used to think I could teach young people the whole of life, but I know better now….Do you remember in that church, when you pretended to be annoyed with me and weren't? Do you remember before, when you refused the room with the view? Those were muddles – little, but ominous – and I am fearing that you are in one now….You love the boy body and soul, plainly, directly, as he loves you, and no other word expresses it. You won't marry the other man for his sake….Now it is all dark. Now Beauty and Passion seem never to have existed. I know. But remember the mountains over Florence and the view." (197-99)

At the opposite end of the emotional spectrum lies Lucy's fiancé, the appropriately named Cecil Vyse, who embodies everything uptight, judgmental, and closed-minded in

Edwardian manners and thought. Just like an actual vise, Cecil maintains a death grip on his emotions and self-expression. He fancies himself a progressive, intellectual man, but he holds antiquated and naive notions about people, especially women. He likes to think of himself as sophisticated, but, as Lucy thinks to herself, for a young man who has "spent a quiet winter in Rome with his mother….Cecil, since his engagement, had taken to affect a cosmopolitan naughtiness which he was far from possessing" (95).

Cecil also reveals his complete ignorance about life in the suburbs to much comic effect when he visits Lucy's family at their home, Windy Corner. On the way home from a neighborhood garden party, he makes a speech full of platitudes and factual mistakes to Lucy and her mother about the benefits and beauty of country life and the natural world. He claims, for a Londoner such as himself, nature is a much needed joy and tonic:

> Nature – simplest of topics, he thought – lay around them. He praised the pine-woods, the deep lakes of bracken, the crimson leaves that spotted the hurt-bushes, the serviceable beauty of the turnpike road. The outdoor world was not very familiar to him, and occasionally he went wrong in a question of fact. Mrs. Honeychurch's mouth twitched when he spoke of the perpetual green of the larch. "I count myself a lucky person," he concluded. "When I'm in London I feel I could never live out of it. When I'm in the country I feel the same about the country. After all, I do believe that birds and trees and the sky are the most wonderful things in life, and that the people who live amongst them must be the best….The country gentleman and the country labourer…may have a tacit sympathy with the working of Nature which is denied to us of the town. (97-98)

Cecil's inability to connect with the Honeychurch's sense of place illustrates his superficiality and lack of connection with all of them. For Forster, nature represents "the spontaneous self, the centre of our profoundest sincerity" (Singh 14), so it is inevitable that Cecil, with his class and cultural snobbery, feels out of sorts at Windy Corner.

Cecil is also incredibly ignorant about women. His only understanding of them comes from the women in his family, his readings, and works of art he has pondered. He constantly thinks of Lucy in terms of the work of this painter, or that sculptor. To him, all women are ornamental, one-dimensional figures without individual personalities or quirks. He clearly remains stuck in Victorian conventions regarding feminine behavior in which "it was generally thought that women were naturally predisposed to certain traits, qualities, and abilities which in turn dictated their proper role and sphere in life" (Owen 6) and has not yet embraced the Edwardian New Woman ideal. He becomes flustered and repelled whenever Lucy shows emotion or shares intellectual opinions that he finds unappealing. When she expresses strong dislike for an arrogant English pastor they encountered in Italy, who happens to deserve her scorn for his intolerant ways, he feels as though she has revealed an unfortunate and unfeminine side of herself. He thinks how he "longed to hint to her that not here lay her vocation; that a woman's power and charm reside in mystery, not in muscular rant" (97).

Cecil has no physical passion for women, and the stiffness apparent in his courtship of Lucy brings to mind the rigidity of and lack of spontaneity in typical upper-middle-class British courtship conventions in which "all courtship was essentially conducted in public: at parties, dances, and teas; during afternoon calls; at picnics and musical evenings; in the presence of chaperones" (Mitchell 155). It also hints at his possible homosexuality. When he finally musters the nerve to ask Lucy for a kiss, the ensuing scene, which occurs in a beautiful outdoor setting, albeit in England, is in diametric opposition to her heady kiss in the Italian violet field with George. As Cecil moves in for the kill, he instantly feels the need to recoil, and his comic clumsiness causes his pince-nez to be smashed and bent between their faces. Like Forster, Cecil cannot muster any physical passion for women, and, also like Forster, he travels to Italy with his mother. When considering this combination, the reader cannot help wondering if Forster imbued Cecil with elements of his personality, or if he used Cecil to "demonstrate the lure of aestheticism to the homosexual man" (Fillion 6). Cecil is a comical yet cautionary figure.

Through Cecil, Forster makes light of his own fussy and uptight tendencies while simultaneously mocking contrived and class-conscious behavior. After his trip to Italy, Cecil fancies himself a true sophisticate, but when even Italy fails to soften Cecil's aestheticism and emphasis on rigid social conventions, readers know that he will inevitably fail in his attempts to connect with Lucy in a natural, and therefore meaningful, way.

While Cecil returns from Italy the same awkward aesthete, Forster returned from his trip a different man. Forster and his mother arrived in Italy in the fall of 1901. At first, he found himself behaving like a typically rigid and fussy British tourist. However, Italy eventually charmed him and inspired the comic short story "Story of a Panic" (1902), in which a stuffed-shirt narrator drolly describes the chaos that ensues when Pan makes an appearance amongst British tourists picnicking in Ravello. This trip also gave him the kernel of a story that Forster called "The Lucy Novel," which over time evolved into *A Room*. Forster's Italy trip had an enormous impact on both his personality and writing:

> He had, in fact, received a revelation. Something had shifted in his soul, and energies he had only half-glimpsed in himself were now in his possession. For all the tameness of his outward existence, he was able, imaginatively, to respond to the "greatness" of life. When his friends read his first books, what surprised them was their vigour and largeness. They had expected a book by him to be as they pictured Forster himself: charming, old-maidish, a little ineffectual….So far, he had not felt "important." Now he did so, having trusted the imagination. Italy, which he had been slow to love, had at last done a great thing for him. It had told him that one could live in the imagination; and he knew now for certain that he was a writer. (Furbank 92-93)

The liberation Forster experienced in Italy also occurs for characters in *A Room*. Lucy does not realize it until later in the novel, but Italy's spirit of place leaves an enormous impression upon her. The first event involves her witnessing of a stabbing in the Piazza

Signoria. Her subsequent "rescue" by George Emerson and their brief and surprising moment of passionate kissing in a field of violets all shape her eventual decision to break her engagement to Cecil and instead marry George. While she initially comes back from Italy determined to "behave," something changed in her at the moment of the stabbing. Of course the moment has sexual overtones, considering the phallic nature of a dagger and the blood spilt that ruins her souvenir art reproductions which, incidentally, are all nudes (Pasternak Slater vii), but the moment also gives Lucy, who moments before had fretted that nothing ever "happened" to her, a glimpse of raw passion and pathos sorely lacking in her provincial life back home.

Interestingly, Lucy's sexual awakening occurs in the Piazza containing a copy of Michelangelo's *David*. Raymond-Jean Frontain, who writes primarily about seventeenth-century English literature, has also extensively studied the figure of David in terms of homoerotic literature and art. He describes Michelangelo's *David* as follows:

> Michelangelo's *David* gives witness to the artist's Neo-Platonic philosophy, which holds that the beauty of the soul can only be communicated through the beauty of the body. But the celebration of physical beauty in the pursuit of a spiritual ideal can easily become a pretext for indulging the very desires that Neo-Platonism urges men to transcend. It is this tension between the spiritual ideal and the erotically charged physical perfection by which it is reached that has made Michelangelo's *David* among the most famous works of art in the modern world. And it's a work that has been routinely adopted by gay men as a symbol of their desire. Because it is recognized as "high art," any person of taste is justified in displaying it. As such, it's also a sign that closeted or guarded gay men can use to communicate to like-minded persons without arousing the suspicions of the censorious. (15)

While the David statue does not make an appearance in the novel, Lucy associates George with the masculine sensuality of Michelangelo's works. When she sees George in the Peruzzi chapel, she imagines him as a figure on the Sistine Chapel, "carrying a burden of acorns. Healthy

and muscular" (23-24), and Forster describes George as "Michelangelesque" (126) when he goes for a nude swim with Freddy and Mr. Beebe. Forster's Michelangelo references "were surely ambivalent in meaning, carrying male homoerotic as well as heterosexual connotations" (Smith 57), and Lucy's response to the sensuality of both Italy's great works of art and its landscape mirrors Forster's own sensual awakening during his Italy trip.

George also undergoes a transformation in Italy, but his change is of an epistemological nature. He and his father, although lower than Lucy's family in class status, are well-read intellectuals. George struggles to find his *raison détre*, and when Lucy accidentally intrudes on his private contemplation of a field of violets, the two share a spontaneous and passionate kiss that the beautiful setting clearly provokes. For Forster, "love may be the supreme emotion…but ideally it ought to be reinforced by the spirit of…place" (Singh 147). George typically behaves like an emotionally distant and socially awkward young man; however, like Lucy, Italy seems to awaken in him a passionate nature simmering under a proper English facade.

Miss Lavish, a caricature of a bold, convention-flouting, libertine writer, is the only other person besides Lucy's horrified cousin Charlotte to witness the kiss. Miss Lavish claims to have a profound appreciation for Italy's spirit of place, but she expresses her appreciation in such an over- the-top manner, even calling out "A smell! A true Florentine smell!" (16), that she appears ridiculous. Even her pen name, "Joseph Emery Prank," underscores her silliness. She continually boasts about her status as a "radical" and how well she understands Italy and its people, yet, as chapter two will discuss, with her references to a "dear dirty back way" (15) to Santa Croce and her loud cries of "Buon giorno! Buon giorno!" to passerby, her understanding of a sense of place is comically shallow.

Miss Lavish cuts an absurd figure running around in a military cape, throwing out random bits of Italian to the locals, who eye her warily, and groaning about "the Britisher abroad…walking through my Italy like a pair of cows" (18). She does not realize that Italy in no way "belongs" to her and that the dreadfulness of her writing is the only "shocking" and "radical"

thing about her. Her terrible writing, however, does serve a greater purpose later on, when she puts the violet field kiss into her latest book, to Lucy and George's horror. Cecil, another one who mistakenly claims to be forward-thinking, reads the passage aloud as an example of bad contemporary literature. As soon as Cecil leaves the area, George kisses Lucy again, sparking the beginning of her decision to part with convention, dump Cecil, and choose George and love over all else. Miss Lavish's bogus posturing as a radical and shocking artist leads Lucy to own up to her real feelings and live an emotionally honest life.

The only person in the entire novel who has the nerve and lack of class-consciousness necessary to live the emotionally "true" life that Forster desperately desired is the elder Mr. Emerson. When the group from the pension goes on an excursion to picnic in Fiesole's picturesque landscape, "A little scene ensues" (60) when the carriage driver picks up his "sister" on the way and kisses her. The passengers' proper British sensibilities are offended, and the two lovers are separated. Only Mr. Emerson objects to the separation, but his protests go ignored. When the young lady gets out of the carriage, Mr. Eager cries out "Victory at last!" and claps his hands together. Mr. Emerson replies, "It is not victory….It is defeat. You have parted two people who were happy" (61).

Readers cannot help but find Mr. Emerson, with all of his spontaneity and sincerity, a touching and funny character, since he says what he means and means what he says, something unheard-of in polite Edwardian society. Mr. Beebe sums up this attitude when he says of Mr. Emerson "He is rather a peculiar man….It is so difficult – at least, I find it difficult – to understand people who speak the truth" (8). Mr. Emerson tends to speak loudly and gesticulate grandly, but he always has the best intentions. Instead of appreciating his kind and considerate ways lurking under a rough exterior, the other residents at the pension, with its claustrophobic, pseudo-British atmosphere, cluck over his "horrible" manners, consider him a ruffian and political outsider, brand him as lower-class, and socially isolate him.

Ironically, the reader comes to realize that, besides having a gentle inner nature, Mr. Emerson also is the most well-read and culturally sensitive individual in the British group. He and his son do not carry Baedeker Guides, but they connect to Italy's spirit of place in a far more meaningful way than their fellow travelers. Mr. Emerson's encounter with the bossy, intolerant, and fantastically named English pastor, Mr. Eager, aptly sums up everything that disturbed Forster about the nature of British solipsism and tourism. Lucy, who has lost her Baedeker and Miss Lavish, her companion for the day, wanders into the Peruzzi Chapel in Santa Croce and bumps into the Emersons. As they look around the church, they overhear Mr. Eager giving a lecture to a group of his parishioners full of all kinds of religious bombast that appalls Mr. Emerson, who loudly disagrees with no regard for "polite" behavior.

Lucy doesn't consider the intellect and sensitivity behind Mr. Emerson's words, since she has yet to shrug off conventional manners. In a significant display of her emotional and intellectual immaturity, she only worries about what her mother would think. Mr. Eager and his Bible-and Baedeker-toting flock soon appear, and Mr. Eager frostily tells Lucy and Mr. Emerson that the church is too small for two tour groups and that they will "incommode" him no longer. Mr. Emerson feels terrible and rushes after them to apologize. Mr. Eager's narrow-minded, know-it-all, and overly pious attitude encapsulates all the things that irritated Forster about the British, both at home and abroad. Mr. Eager thinks he represents spiritual and cultural authority, and his flock, with their spiritual and cultural reference works in tow, agree without question. In much the same manner, the British of Forster's era didn't question their sense of superiority to other cultures, religions, or races. This attitude produced a breed of instantly identifiable tourists that horrified Forster whenever he went abroad, and, as he laments in his essay "Notes on the English Character," "English character is incomplete in a way that is particularly annoying to the foreign observer. It has a bad surface – self-complacent, unsympathetic, and reserved" (*Abinger Harvest* 13).

In terms of the British Empire as a political entity, its aggressive expansionist policies spoke volumes about the enormous appetites lurking under a restrained veneer. As for the seemingly endless greed behind the enormous territorial gains of the Empire during the nineteenth century, "there was no singular and characteristic policy dominating the seemingly unstoppable growth of the Empire" (Levine 82). Clearly, the British had a profound compulsion to experience and consume cultures with temperaments and values dramatically different from their own. This impulse to consume was rooted in the British Empire's belief in its ability to grasp the "essential knowledge" of the Other, "their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities" (Said 38). This insatiable desire to "know," and therefore in a sense own, the resources and people of a country also receives close examination in *A Passage to India* (1924). However, unlike the lightly comic tone of *A Room*'s examination of Edwardian social conventions and tourism, *A Passage* produces a stinging critique of imperialist impulses that belies its conventional appearance.

A Passage also explores the human cost of the culture clash between Britain's modern Eurocentricity and India's ancient culture. As Paul Armstrong notes,

> [The novel] invokes the ideal of non-reified, reciprocal knowledge of other people and cultures only to suggest that interpretation invariably requires distancing, objectifying prejudgements. The novel insists that truth and justice can be determined unequivocally – Aziz is innocent and India must be liberated from the yoke of British oppression – but its manipulation of point of view demonstrates the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of attaining a lasting consensus about any matter or of discovering a final uncontestable meaning to any state of affairs. (367)

This passage aptly summarizes the many questions the novel raises. Who are the Anglo-Indians? How do they perceive themselves? How do they perceive India? Are friendships

between the British and Indians possible? How do Indians perceive both themselves and the British? The novel's misunderstandings, muddles, and mysteries present the reader with the identity crises of a waning empire and its subjects' struggle to come to terms with an increasingly modern world.

Like Lucy Honeychurch, Adela Quested travels to another country in order to view and partake of its culture. Adela goes to India to visit her fiancé, Ronny Heaslop, the City Magistrate of the fictional city of Chandrapore, to see her future home, and to strive to understand what she constantly describes as the "real" India. Throughout the novel, British and Indian characters flounder through awkward moments and utter disasters as they attempt to understand one another. From the beginning of the novel, Miss Quested's "quest" for understanding entails one blunder after another. Adela's desire to experience the real India creates much confusion and downright indignation at the Chandrapore Club, the Anglo-Indian social hub where expatriates have their tea, enact popular stage dramas, play polo, tennis, and cards, and generally behave as they did in England. Just like the pension in Italy, a safe, comforting satellite version of home exists to allow the Britisher abroad to feel at ease among his own. While the pension represents the stiff-necked nature of British culture and its consumerist, elitist attitude towards tourist destinations, the Club represents the arrogance and bigotry of British imperialism at its worst. Indians are not allowed in the Club, and the snatches of members' conversations regarding "the native issue" range from the amusingly ignorant to the hateful and murderous.

Adela first encounters confusion when she informs the Club's women, with nothing but good intentions and the desire to present herself as an open-minded and modern sort of girl, that she wishes to interact with Indians and get a feel for this strange new place she will soon call home. Instead of offering advice about where to go and what to do, the women immediately warn her against such a foolish notion:

> She became the centre of an amused group of ladies. One said: "Wanting to see Indians! How new that sounds!" Another: "Natives! Why, fancy!" A third, more serious,

> said "Let me explain. Natives don't respect one any the more after meeting one, you see." "That occurs after so many meetings." But the lady, entirely stupid and friendly, continued: "What I mean is, I was a nurse before my marriage, and came across them a great deal, so I know. I really do know the truth about Indians. A most unsuitable position for any Englishwoman – I was a nurse in a Native State. One's only hope was to hold sternly aloof." "Even from one's patients?" "Why, the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die," said Mrs. Callendar. (19)

This scene represents one of many cases of racism in the novel, which chapter two will discuss more thoroughly. This episode also serves as an illustration of the strangely xenophobic nature of Imperial Britain once its members left the island, and the way in which feminism, which had become acceptable in early twentieth-century British popular culture, immediately evaporated away from the safety of home. Adela's stubborn insistence on ignoring the matrons' advice causes the Club members and her fiancé great irritation and confusion, much to her surprise. Her attempts to immerse herself in the culture and mindset of the Anglo-Indian do not succeed.

For all of her posturing, Adela does not truly seek to see and understand Indians and their country. The moment she and Ronny first decide to call off their engagement, she no longer cares about seeing India and longs to return home. She desperately wants people to think of her as a modern, liberal sort, and when a "bridge party" at the Club that includes Indian guests in a goodwill gesture is an awkward failure, she expresses indignation at the rudeness of her countrymen. However, she makes no progress against the "echoing walls of [Indian's] civility" (34), and no connection occurs. The theme and literal sound of an echo pop up throughout the novel, and, for both British and Indian characters, the echo represents the futility of their trying to understand one another.

In Adela's case, her quintessentially British love of all things literal, logical, and orderly prevents her from opening up to an ancient culture and people who place little value on the traits she holds dear. She and Ronny briefly rekindle their engagement only after a strange

nighttime car crash in which a hyena, a goat, and a ghost are all suggested as the cause. In the aftermath of the crash, Ronny represents the British voice of reason and gives everyone calm instructions, as opposed to the agitated and emotional Nawab Bahadur, who wrings his hands and curses in Arabic. Ronny soothes Adela's jangled nerves and appears as a pillar of stalwart British virtues in the chaos of the Oriental night. Adela's contentment, however, does not last, and, when faced with the mystery and timeless echo of the Marabar Caves, her stereotypically British pluck and stoicism vanish in an instant.

Since the novel's publication, critics have struggled to make sense of the Marabar Caves, and Sujit Mukherjee aptly summarizes the various schools of thought that have developed.

> The most oft-repeated assertion is that the nullity of the caves offers a nihilistic message to mankind; the caves not merely have no value in themselves, they also have the ability to deny value. Another popular view is that the caves represent the sterility of the spiritual wasteland that is India. The emptiness of the caves is sometimes interpreted as awareness of the supreme absolute; their hollowness has been called a higher aspect of reality in as much as it is matter without mind. (501)

The Barabar Caves, the inspiration for Forster's fictional caves, had a historical connection with the Ajivika sect, not Hinduism, which critics have traditionally associated with the novel's "Caves" section. While Mukherjee believes ascribing the caves a literal function would "be doing violence to the symbolic structure of the novel" (503), he asserts that recognizing the Caves' true origin would allow critics to focus on the real center of the novel, the "Temple" section, in which Forster suggests that Hinduism offers a way to make sense of a chaotic, unknowable modern world.

While the history behind the place that inspired the Marabar Caves is interesting, Mukherjee's assertion about "Temple" representing the novel's "center of gravity" (503) is

inaccurate. As much as *A Passage* explores the inherent difficulties of understanding other people, places, and cultures, it also contemplates the meaning, or lack thereof, of existence in the modern world. Instead, the "Caves" section represents what Frederick Crews describes as "the symbolic heart of the novel" (155). In addition, the "Caves" section represents the essence of the modernist complaint/condition, an idea central to the novel's purpose and that will receive further examination in the third chapter.

Adela's trip to the caves represents yet another of her attempts to see the real India. Many ironies swirl around the expedition, including when Aziz, the outing organizer, initially proposes the trip, he does not actually want to take Adela and her future mother-in-law to the caves. Many comical small disasters happen before the ladies and Aziz finally arrive at the caves, and Aziz, who cannot contain his increasing irritation with Adela, eventually chooses to remain outside the caves and have a cigarette. While inside one of the caves, Adela has a bizarre, hallucinatory experience that leads her to falsely accuse Aziz of molestation. What causes her to behave in such a manner? Perhaps the answer exists somewhere in Crews's suggestion that the caves' echoes return only what they are offered (159).

For Adela, her trip to India began with the promise of exoticism, excitement, and the contented life of a married woman. Instead, she experiences boredom, isolation, and romantic disappointment. She finds little charm in Chandrapore's scenery, dislikes the intolerant and unwelcoming Anglo- Indians, blunders every time she tries to interact with Indians, and realizes her marriage to Ronny will bring nothing but emptiness and disappointment. All of these realizations result in a crisis when she confronts the caves' echo, which serves as the voice of all her disillusionment and loneliness. The world of the Anglo-Indian, the essence of India and its people, the comforts of marriage…all of these things seem unknowable, impenetrable, and overwhelming to Adela, and she experiences emotional meltdown when faced with her own inadequacies and failures.

In the wake of her breakdown, Adela retreats to the rarified British atmosphere of the Club and wallows in the suddenly solicitous attentions of the Club women. She allows herself and others to indulge in all sorts of speculation about what really happened in the cave and the manner in which revenge and justice will be exacted. Her seeming fragility suddenly endears her to the Anglo-Indians, and, as Forster sarcastically notes, "Although Miss Quested had not made herself popular with the English, she brought out all that was fine in their character" (161). Suddenly, she epitomizes all things quintessentially British and feminine. Her fiancé gains martyr status and takes on the role of a protector of sacred British womanhood in the face of the licentious, leering Oriental. However, despite the ego-soothing perks of the situation she has created, another nagging echo begins to play in Adela's mind – that of Mrs. Moore asserting that "of course" Aziz is innocent. Adela then absolves Aziz in court in a chaotic scene over which a physically striking punkah wallah passively watches, totally oblivious to the cultural, ideological, and racial war raging between the world's foremost imperial power and one of the world's most ancient civilizations. Forster uses the punkah wallah as a symbol for all that is beautiful, mysterious, and impenetrable about India, and as a representation of India's indomitable spirit of place.

Near the end "The Caves" in the aftermath of Aziz's trial, Cyril Fielding, the only individual in the novel who comes close to embodying all of Adela's liberal posturings, ponders the fundamental differences between Indian and British sensibilities and concludes the following:

> Civilization strays about like a ghost here, revisiting the ruins of empire, and is to be found not in great works of art or mighty deeds, but in the gestures well-bred Indians make when they sit or lie down. Fielding, who had dressed up in native costume, learnt from his excessive awkwardness in it that all his motions were makeshifts, whereas when the Nawab Bahadur stretched out his hand for food or Nureddin applauded a song, something beautiful had been accomplished which needed no development. This

> restfulness of gesture – it is the Peace that passeth understanding, after all it is the social equivalent of Yoga. When the whirring of action ceases, it becomes visible, and reveals a civilization which the West can disturb but will never acquire. (227)

Just as the British will never understand and actually conquer India, the Indians will never understand or actually submit to Britain. The seeming inability of people from vastly different places to know one another and achieve lasting friendship devastates Mrs. Moore, the only other Britisher with tolerant leanings.

When Mrs. Moore first arrives in India, she feels a powerful connection to the landscape's spirituality that makes the British spirit of place pale in comparison:

> Mrs. Moore, whom the club had stupefied, woke up outside. She watched the moon, whose radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England the moon had seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all the other stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the old woman and out, like water through a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind. She did not dislike *Cousin Kate* or the National Anthem, but their note had died into a new one, just as cocktails and cigars had died into invisible flowers. (21-22)

Mrs. Moore's heightened sensitivity to place indicates her open and accepting nature; however, after spending more time in the atmosphere of Imperial India, she begins to feel a frightening sense of apathy. Shortly before her disastrous visit to the Marabar Caves, Mrs. Moore looks out her window, and, instead of finding inspiration in her surroundings, she feels doubtful about love's ability to overcome the barriers between people.

> Mrs. Moore pushed up the shutters and looked out. She had brought Ronny and Adela together by mutual wish, but really she could not advise them further. She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over

> marriage; centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man. And to-day she felt this with such force that it seemed itself a relationship, itself a person who was trying to take hold of her hand. (120)

This despair reaches its nadir when she enters one of the caves and its mysterious atmosphere and booming echoes trigger an epiphany. She nihilistically thinks "'Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same – 'ou-boum'" (134). Under the influence of Imperial India's spirit of intolerance and arrogance, Mrs. Moore's sensitivity to place leads her to lose faith in the ability of individual relationships to make meaning out of human existence. Her realization in the cave marks the beginning of her sharp emotional and physical decline, which culminates in her death at sea on the way back to England.

Despite her absence from the trial proceedings, Mrs. Moore's presence remains in India when she winds up morphing into some kind of Hindu demigod known as "Esmiss Esmoor" during the course of the trial and the ensuing chaotic street celebration of Aziz's victory. Indians misunderstand both who she was and how to pronounce her name, but no matter. She still serves as some sort of beacon of truth. Esmiss Esmoor also appears in part III, "Temple," during an elaborate, and, to the British observers, seemingly nonsensical Hindu festival complete with a comically misspelled banner that reads "God si Love." The festival's air of levity serves as a much-needed counterweight to the gloom and pessimism emanating from the caves. However, it also illustrates the futility of people from such different worlds trying to understand and accept one another. Despite the Empire's best attempts, the ancient and infinite nature of Indian identity and consciousness remains intact, and, despite the best attempts of individuals to overcome this insurmountable divide between the two places and

consider one another friends, barriers inevitably arise. Forster offers no happy ending and no pat solutions in this novel. The question of a true connection between the British and Indians receives an answer every bit as inscrutable and nullifying as the Marabar Caves' echo.

In her essay "Place in Fiction" (1957), Eudora Welty writes that "Sometimes two places, two countries, are brought to bear on each other, as in E. M. Forster's work, and the heart of the novel is heard beating most plainly, most passionately, most personally when two places are at a meeting point" (130). Like Forster, Welty placed tremendous importance on human relationships and the desire for personal connection in her fiction. At the end of *A Passage to India*, Aziz and Fielding go for a last horseback ride before Fielding's return to England and argue about the future of England's rule of India.

> And Aziz in an awful rage danced this way and that, not knowing what to do, and cried: "Down with the English, anyhow. That's certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty five-hundred years we shall get rid of you; yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then" – he rode against him furiously – "and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends." "Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want." (293)

Fielding's poignant query represents the beating heart at the center of the novel's anti-imperialist message. It also illustrates Forster's deep personal and artistic belief in the redemptive power of simple human connection. Like Forster, Welty also frequently wrote about the meeting of people from different worlds and their desire to "only connect," and she used simple human relationships to highlight injustices. However, unlike Forster, the "two places, two countries" bearing upon each other in her works originated from the same location - the American South.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the South existed in a cultural vacuum

created by a schizophrenic legacy of brutality and self-aggrandizing faux gentility. James C. Cobb explores the evolution of Southern identity and explains that as early as the post-Revolutionary period, cultural differences started to appear between the Northern and Southern states. He quotes a letter in which Thomas Jefferson noted the following about the different regions to his friend, the Marquis de Chastellux:

> "In the North," Jefferson wrote, "they are cool, sober, laborious, independent, jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others, interested, chicaning, superstitious, and hypocritical in their religion. In the South they are fiery, voluptuary, indolent, unsteady, jealous for their own liberties, but trampling on those of others, generous, candid, without attachment or pretensions to any religion but that of the heart." (11)

This quaintly amusing identification of the Southerner as an exotic, temperamental hothouse flower, which Jefferson associates with the region's steamy climate, also underscored the South's blossoming into a fully realized, geographically contained financial and cultural empire, which, like the British Empire, was achieved through one race's complete subjugation of another on both a physical and ideological level. While the planter class "forcefully affirmed slavery as a divinely constituted hierarchy" (Sehat 80), the British government utilized a "strident pseudo-scientific mythology of race" (Fryer 165) to validate their sense of superiority and lay claim to the riches their subordinates produced. The British traveled far and wide to find others to subjugate and thus build their empire, while the planter class's empire rested on the backs of imported slaves whose descendants labored in the South's sugar cane and cotton fields.

In the early 1900s, the Southern Empire, though in tatters, still existed in an ideological and mythological sense for white Southerners. They dwelt in a different world from black Southerners, whose lives remained brutalized by the legacy of slavery. While the rest of America viewed the South as the bigoted intellectual wasteland portrayed in H. L. Menken's infamous essay "The Sahara of the Bozart," Southern culture, in all of its ugliness and beauty, provided writers of the era with rich material. During the Southern Renaissance, which dates

from around 1920 to 1950, writers produced works that sought to capture the complexity of a world in which gentility and brutality existed side by side. For some writers of the Renaissance, the portrayal and examination of the complicated dance of race relations between former subjugators and subjects represented a vital aspect of their work. Welty, for example, wrote about the dramatically different experiences of black and white Southerners and the ways in which their lives intersected, and for her, Mississippi serves as ground zero for the exploration of the dichotomous nature of the Southern sense of place and self.

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, to parents who encouraged a love for the written word and intellectual curiosity, Welty had a privileged upbringing. In *One Writer's Beginnings* she describes her idyllic childhood and tells readers that

> It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming up of themselves like grass. Yet regardless of where they came from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them – with the books themselves, cover and binding and the paper they were printed on, with their smell and their weight and with their possession in my arms, captured and carried off to myself. (6)

She also describes how much she loved sitting and listening to adults talk and gossip. This innate love for all aspects of storytelling combined with an easygoing personality and formidable intelligence led her to move in Jackson literary and artistic circles at an early age. After studying at the Mississippi State College for Women (now called the Mississippi University for Women), she decided to study literature and art at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Upon graduation, she knew she wanted to earn a living through writing and that spending some time in New York City would provide her with the necessary intellectual and artistic sophistication to do so.

In order to earn her parents' blessing, Welty went to New York under the guise of

attending graduate school at Columbia, though she actually took advertising and typing classes. She found New York inspiring and thrilling but could not secure a job, and, after her father's death in 1931, she returned to Jackson and found work doing a bit of editing and writing for a local radio station whose owner had been a friend of her father's. After a stint as a society column writer for the *Commercial Appeal*, which did not suit her at all, she was hired as a junior publicity agent for the Mississippi Advertising Commission. This job sent her all over the state of Mississippi, and thus began her real education as a writer (Marrs 42-53).

In a 1975 interview, Bill Ferris asked Eudora Welty about her sense of place in fiction and if she thought of Mississippi as unique and special. She replied:

> Oh, absolutely. Since it's the only [place] I really know, it's the whole foundation on which my fiction rests….Something shapes people, and it's the world in which they act that makes their experiences – what they act for and react against. And, with its population, a place produces the whole world in which a person lives his life. It furnishes the economic background that he grows up in, and the folkways and the stories that come down to him in his family. It's the fountainhead of his knowledge and experience. I think, of course, we learn to grow further than that; but if we don't have that base I don't know what we can test further knowledge by. It teaches you to think, really. (158-59)

During her stint as a junior publicity agent, Welty worked on a project for the WPA involving the creation of a state automobile guide. In addition to gathering a wealth of logistical information about her home state, she also documented her travels and experiences on the job with her cherished camera. Welty's gadget-loving father, an avid amateur photographer, had instilled in her a life-long love for photography that greatly influenced her writing. As she noted in *One Writer's Beginnings*:

> It [photography] had more than information and accuracy to teach me. I learned in the doing how *ready* I had to be. Life doesn't hold still. A good snapshot stopped a moment from running away. Photography taught me that to be able to capture transience, by

> being ready to click the shutter at the crucial moment, was the greatest need I had. Making pictures of people in all sorts of situations, I learned that every feeling waits upon its gesture; and I had to be prepared to recognize this moment when I saw it. These were things a story writer needed to know. And Ifelt the need to hold transient life in *words* – there's so much more of life that only words can convey – strongly enough to last me as long as I lived. (92)

Three of Welty's photos made it into the completed guide, entitled *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State*. Besides representing a professional opportunity, the experience of working on the guidebook also rewarded her artistically. For the first time, she got a real look at life for Mississippians of all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. She had the chance to observe, photograph, and, of course, meet segments of the population that she would otherwise never have encountered (Marrs 52-53). This wealth of practical and artistic information greatly enriched her fiction and, in particular, enhanced her portraits of life in the Delta in both "Powerhouse" (1941) and *Delta Wedding* (1945).

For the majority of its inhabitants, life in the Delta during the Depression was a rough existence. With little industry to speak of and a brutal sharecropping system reeling from the devaluation of cotton, the Delta had little to offer, and, for its black residents, slavery's legacy of deeply entrenched racism exacerbated these difficulties (Busbee 183-85). However, in testament to the resiliency and artistry of its black community, the region produced a remarkable antidote to its hard times - the blues. The blues represent a combination of African musical traditions, field hollers, and spirituals. The musical form straddles the line between the sacred and profane, allowing its performers and audiences to temporarily forget their hard times by "stomping" the blue devils of melancholy and hardship. Charles Simic explains how the transformational powers of the blues communicate a literal sense of place in addition to offering relief for the universal ache of the human condition.

> Like all genuine art, the blues belong to a specific time, place, and people which it then, paradoxically, transcends….The blues poet has been where we are all afraid to go, as if there was a physical place, a forbidden place that corresponds to a place in ourselves where we experience the tragic sense of life and its amazing wonders. In that dive, in that all-night blues and soul club, we feel the full weight of our fate, we taste the nothingness at the heart of our being, we are simultaneously wretched and happy, we spit on it all, we want to weep and raise hell, because the blues, in the end, is about a sadness older than the world, and there's not a cure for that. (135, 139)

This raw and raucous celebration of transcendence, which many critics deem the Rosetta Stone of American music, migrated north along with black Delta residents looking for better opportunities and eventually laid the foundation for jazz. Welty had heard about and met many local blues musicians while traveling in the Delta for her WPA assignment, and this experience led to a lifelong love of the blues and jazz. She especially loved a Stride pianist named Fats Waller. Riccardo Scivales offers the following definition of stride piano playing:

> Stride is not simply fast ragtime-like tempos or, worse, the old-time "silent movie music" cliche with which it is often associated. Its expressive range is in fact much wider, and includes an introspective side often marked by a strong blues feeling. In addition to being a compositional idiom, Stride is also a way to play the blues or popular songs. (6)

Waller, also known as "Filthy" Fats Waller since he enjoyed a bawdy reputation and his virtuoso improvisational performances often featured raunchy lyrics and innuendos, was a consummate entertainer (Bearden 3). Welty owned all of his records, and, after going to see him perform one night at a concert and dance in Jackson, an experience she frequently described in interviews as transcendent and revelatory, she went home and wrote "Powerhouse" in one sitting.

Alligator, Mississippi, the improbably named setting of "Powerhouse," is actually a real hamlet in the area of the Delta known as the "chitlin' switch," a name originating from Slim and Slam's 1939 song "Chitlin' Switch Blues" (Hall 66). Powerhouse, a big-city musician, has come

to tiny Alligator with his band to play a whites-only dance. The story's musicality establishes itself immediately with the cymbal-like opening crash of the first sentence's loud proclamation "Powerhouse is playing!" and an opening paragraph breathlessly describes his exotic appearance that leaves the audience transfixed and a little unnerved. It is bad form for whites to express approval of and admiration for blacks, but phrases such as "You can't tell what he is" and "fanatic, devil" do little to diminish his charismatic appeal. The narrative voice/audience also describes his features, including his "beverage colored" light skin, "African feet of the greatest size," and a "mouth…going every minute: like a monkey's when it looks for something." Powerhouse also "looks like a preacher" when his mouth closes, but when it opens, it seems "vast and obscene" (131). In typical blues fashion, his performance blurs the line between the holy and the blasphemous, much to the obvious fascination and suppressed delight of his white audience.

Despite this fascination and delight, the audience must maintain the proper decorum, and Welty immediately establishes a huge emotional gulf between the musician and his audience. They observe Powerhouse from a distance, eagerly enjoying his musical offerings yet clearly expressing a sense of racial superiority and an unwillingness to interact with him on a personal level with comments such as "people of a darker race – so likely to be marvelous, frightening" (131). This sort of simultaneous repulsion and attraction dynamic also appears in *A Room With a View*. The English tourists have traveled far to absorb Italy's great art, culture, and landscape, yet strangely feel the need to establish their dominance over Italians in a hierarchy of their own imagining. They segregate themselves from locals and stay in their class-conscious British pensions and make comments denigrating the Italians. In the droll words of Mr. Beebe,

> The Italians are a most unpleasant people. They pry everywhere, they see everything, and they know what we want before we know it ourselves. We are at their mercy. They

> read our thoughts, they foretell our desires. From the cab-driver down to – to Giotto, they turn us inside out, and I resent it. Yet in their heart of hearts they are – how superficial! They have no conception of the intellectual life. (32)

Just as Forster's uptight and judgmental tourists refuse to acknowledge the artistic and sensual passions Italy stirs within them, the members of Powerhouse's enthralled audience remain buttoned-up and repeatedly remind themselves of their superiority over the compelling figure on stage.

While Powerhouse's audience definitely behaves like British tourists observing the "natives," Powerhouse does not technically qualify as a native since he has come from the "big city," which readers may interpret as New York – but no matter. As soon as the musicians cross the Mason-Dixon line, the rigid rules of the Jim Crow-era South apply, so even though his performance rivets the audience, they conspiratorially refuse to give in to Powerhouse's attempts to seduce them musically.

> It's a bad night outside. It's a white dance, and nobody dances, except a few straggling jitterbugs and two elderly couples. Everybody just stands around the band and watches Powerhouse. Sometimes they steal glances at one another, as if to say, Of course, you know how it is with them – Negroes – band leaders – they would play the same way, giving all they've got, for an audience of one….When somebody, no matter who, gives everything, it makes people feel ashamed for him. (133)

Despite the ominous and vaguely threatening atmosphere, Powerhouse pounds the keys, nimbly improvises, and takes every single request. However, the audience upholds unspoken taboos about the ways in which their society demands they act toward a black man, no matter how spectacular or sophisticated the artistry.

Powerhouse is acutely aware of the audience's perceptions, and, while playing a waltz, he tells both the band and his audience an improvised and surreal story about a telegram he received informing him that his wife, Gypsy, had killed herself. When telling the story,

Powerhouse and his band fall into a call-and-response rhythm going over the details of the telegram, including the fact a man named Uranus Knockwood signed it, and debating its veracity. For some readers, the name Uranus Knockwood may bring the word "peckerwood" – a colorful term for a racist – to mind. Kenneth Bearden notes critics have overlooked "the most obvious reading of the name, the phonetic one, if you will – 'your anus knock wood'" (42).

Considering the complex musical and cultural history underlying the earthier aspects of the blues, both explanations seem too simplified. The dirty joke aspect of Uranus Knockwood cannot be discounted since Powerhouse was based on "Filthy" Fats Waller who wrote a song called "Hold Tight (Want Some Seafood Mama)," a song whose oral sex reference Welty charmingly claimed not to understand. However, Uranus Knockwood also serves as a sinister specter representing both the brutality of life for black Delta residents and the ugly shadow of racism that follows African Americans in all locales and aspects of life. Alan Lomax writes that in the Delta,

> Country people are not afraid to look Death in the face. He is a familiar in their lives, especially in the violent jungle of the Delta. They have seen him in the houses drowned by the great river and in the towns splintered by tornadoes; they have seen him in the faces of the young men shot down in a gambling hall or in the guise of an old fellow who came home to die after a hard day's plowing, his body on the cooling boards still bent from years stooping over cotton rows. (14)

As Powerhouse revels in his performance, creates double entendres, and entertains himself, his band, and his audience, both he and his music acknowledge and pay tribute to this harsh life. He may come from the "big city," but he and his music are of the Delta and represent the hardships of generations who have struggled to make lives for themselves in the region. Given that he makes up his story while simultaneously improvising upon such a highbrow thing as a waltz, it only makes sense that his purpose in telling the tale is equally complex.

The strangeness and inscrutability of the Uranus Knockwood story brings to mind the

Marabar Caves incident in *A Passage to India*. As discussed earlier, critics trying to interpret the meaning of the Marabar Caves and their echo have yet to settle on a definitive answer about their meaning, just as critics have not come to an agreement about Powerhouse's story. Did Powerhouse really receive a telegram informing him of his wife's suicide? Does he even have a wife? Why does he tell such a disturbing story? Does he expect his listeners to believe him? Is there some coded message he is trying to deliver to his listeners? Readers, Powerhouse's band members, and the audience do not receive any elucidation regarding the specific purpose of the story or the amount of truth it contains. If one considers the Caves' echo as a representation of a white European's inability to understand the "real" India and therefore connect with the land and its people, then perhaps Powerhouse's story can represent the obstacles he faces when trying to connect with his audience artistically and personally as a way to overcome racial inequalities.

When Powerhouse tires of playing the waltz, he calls for a break and the musicians leave to walk in torrential rain to "Negrotown" since the dance hall will not serve black customers. Joel Vance describes some of the difficulties Waller faced while playing in the South.

> On a date in Mississippi, where the band was booked at a backwoods affair, local white apes slashed the tires of Waller's car and poured sand in the gas tank. Hotel accommodations for the band were simply not possible down South, so the musicians had to be put up in private homes. They were denied meals in restaurants, and gas stations refused to service 'Old Methusela' as the bus was nicknamed….Most of his work on the road consisted of grueling and infuriating one-nighters, usually promoted by quick-buck sharpies who sometimes refused to pay the band after the performance and then called in the law to run it out of town. (128)

Kenneth Bearden discusses Vance's biography in connection with his discussion of Welty's story and notes:

> Aspects of Waller's life and experiences…certainly impacted Welty's story. Even if we were to grant the fact that Welty had not heard any of these details, Waller himself carried those details of his life in with him that night in Jackson, and they undoubtedly affected his performance. Being the artist she is, the observer she is, Welty would have picked up on the tension. (4)

Away from the "big city," even a figure as charismatic and well-known as Powerhouse cannot escape the rigid rules of life in the South.

Spirits seem to lift as the musicians head toward the World Café to have some beers, but instead of shaking off the feelings of isolation and frustration left over from the dance hall, Powerhouse again encounters an audience with whom he cannot connect despite his best efforts. The first indication of this frustration occurs when Powerhouse gives one of his musicians some money for the nickelodeon to hear some real blues after their performance catering to the tastes and whims of a white audience. The musicians read all the song titles to Powerhouse, prompting him to pointedly ask,

> "Whose 'Tuxedo Junction'?"…. "You know whose." "Nickelodeon, I request you please to play 'Empty Bed Blues' and let Bessie Smith sing." Silence: they hold it like a measure. "Bring me all those nickels on back here," says Powerhouse. "Look at that! What you tell me the name of this place?" "White dance, week night, raining, Alligator, Mississippi, long ways from home." (136)

Powerhouse's disappointment with the jukebox selections echoes the well-documented financial and artistic exploitation of this era's black musicians. Erskine Hawkins, a jazz trumpeter, wrote "Tuxedo Junction," and had some modest success with the song. However, once Glenn Miller and his orchestra covered it, it became a number one smash (Deffaa 145). Unfortunately, such a situation was typical for black musicians of the era. They received little recognition or financial gain from their art, while white musicians with savvier agents and attorneys cashed in on their genius. In a 1993 interview, Toni Morrison describes this appropriation.

> White critics, in general, claim it [jazz] as American, which it is, but it's almost as though it was made with their culture, and so black people have no part in it, except marginally, to provide the music. To talk about it is to appropriate it. On one hand, art that is disseminated is good, that's what it was for. But on the other hand is the constant dis crediting of the musicians and their impact: commercially, they made no money. The white people who imitated their music made money. The "king of swing" was Benny Goodman!...The white musicians in the States were feeding off of it, claiming it as their own…. (Carabi 93)

The nickelodeon with only white artists leaves Powerhouse's hopes of finding musical solace in Negrotown dashed, and he then turns to a black audience to find the connection he so desires.

Slowly and shyly, the staff of the World Café and its patrons gather around Powerhouse, and he begins his Uranus Knockwood story again. This time, he does get a response from the audience, as "all the watching Negroes stir in their delight, and to their higher delight he says affectionately, 'Listen! Rats in here'" (137). He then expresses his frustration with the nickelodeon that exemplifies white musicians' appropriation of black music. He turns to his audience and "conflates Uranus Knockwood to Bing Crosby by calling him a 'no-good pussy-footed crooning creeper, that creeper that follow around after me, coming up like weeds behind me…bets my numbers, sings my songs" (Bouton 82). He then offers his audience another version of the call and response portion of the story, and "everybody in the room moans with pleasure" (138). The audience attempts to reach out to Powerhouse in return, and a local man named Sugar-Stick Thompson gets pushed to the front of the crowd. Sugar-Stick achieved local fame when he "dove down to the bottom of July Creek and pulled up all those drownded white people fall out of a boat. Last summer, pulled up fourteen" (139). However, Sugar-Stick does not respond to Powerhouse's greeting, and a moment of awkward silence descends. A couple of audience members announce their personal relation to Sugar-Stick, but the attempt at connection falls flat. Powerhouse then tries to pick up the Knockwood story thread, but his

musicians stop him, and he calls an end to the intermission. They return to the dance hall frustrated at the inability of the Negrotown residents to rise above the "dominant discourse" of white culture (Bouton 84) with their uninspired nickelodeon and story of heroics based on the rescue of whites.

Once they return, he entertains the audience's boring requests, but plays with both an "outrageous force" and "glimmering and fragile" delicacy. In the final lines of the story, with his virtuosity on full display, he makes one last attempt to reach his audience when they request the song "Somebody Loves Me":

> He's already done twelve or fourteen choruses, piling them up nobody knows how, and it will be a wonder if he ever gets through. Now and then he calls and shouts, "Somebody loves me! Somebody loves me, I wonder who!" His mouth gets to be nothing but a volcano. "I wonder who!" "Maybe…" He uses all his right hand on a trill. "Maybe…" He pulls back his spread fingers, and looks out upon the place where he is. A vast, impersonal and yet furious grimace transfigures his wet face. "….Maybe it's you!" (141)

Despite his anger and frustration, he cannot resist making one last effort to get his audience to tap into the deeply buried love and admiration he knows they must feel for him. Welty acknowledges that, in the time and place of her story, not even inspired art and gestures of friendship can overcome the racial, social, and cultural barriers that have stood firmly in place for generations. The ending of "Powerhouse" recalls Fielding's touching moment with Aziz at the conclusion of *A Passage to India*, when he pleads with Aziz to give their friendship another go despite the insurmountable obstacle of their differences. In both stories, the best human intentions cannot overcome the worst human impulses. Neither work offers solutions for moments when injustices prevent people from connecting, but, in placing the prosaic human cost of these situations before readers, they both create lasting images of particular times and places.

While “Powerhouse” explores the realities of the Delta during the Depression from the point of view of a black outsider, *Delta Wedding* (1946) describes the same era and locale from the perspective of the dominant culture, and, in particular, from the sheltered, privileged vantage point of the Fairchild family. The novel started out as a short story entitled “Delta Cousins” that described the domestic goings-on as a wealthy Delta family prepared for a wedding. Welty wrote the story in an attempt to cheer up her longtime friend, John Robinson, who was serving in the military during World War II. Robinson, who attended high school with Welty in Jackson, descended from a prosperous family of original Delta settlers that still had property in the Delta, and he knew its history intimately (Marrs 11). In addition to taking her on a sightseeing visit in the region, he also showed her the diary of his great-grandmother that described, in great personal detail, life in the Delta for the planter class. The diary would serve as a huge inspiration for Welty as she wrote *Delta Wedding* (Waldron 154-59).

When Welty showed parts of the novel in progress to her New York-based agent, Diarmuid Russell, he worried that, even though he enjoyed what he had read, the story would not resonate with contemporary readers since it evoked a specific time and place that most readers would not find compelling (Marrs 120). However, Welty persevered, and through the combination of her WPA work in the Delta and Robinson’s personal family anecdotes and historical knowledge of the area, she created a phenomenally atmospheric and touching portrait of a way of life that, while beautiful in many ways, masked a great deal of ugliness and would soon confront the powerful changes inherent in the coming of the modern era.

As Welty explained in a 1972 interview, she made the choice to set the novel in 1923 because not much occurred that year:

> In the case of *Delta Wedding* I chose the twenties…. I had to pick a year – and this was quite hard to do – in which all the men could be home….It couldn’t be a war year. It couldn’t be a year when there was a flood in the Delta because those were the times be

> fore the flood control. It had to be a year that would leave my characters all free to have a family story. It meant looking in the almanac – in fact, I did – to find a year that was uneventful and that would allow me to concentrate on the people without any undue out side influences; I wanted to write a story that showed the solidity of this family and the life that went on on a small scale in a world of its own. So the date was chosen by necessity. (Bunting 50)

Since the novel presents readers with an intimate portrait of the Fairchilds and their life in the family's primary home, Shellmound, Welty didn't want any outside factors figuring into the novel's plot. In the interview, she also discussed the ephemeral nature of the Fairchilds' world.

> **CTB:** In a criticism of *Delta Wedding* Louis D. Rubin, Jr., remarked: 'The closed little world of Shellmound is doomed. The wide world will come in; there will be disorder, change.' Is that a fair assessment? Is Shellmound with its way of life and its values doomed?
>
> **Miss Welty:** Oh, yes. I think that was implicit in the novel: that this was all such a fragile, temporary thing. At least I hope it was. That's why I searched so hard to find the year in which that could be most evident. Well, you're living in a very precarious world without knowing it, always. (Bunting 50)

The "closed little world" Rubin refers to was one still under the spell of the Old South's mythology of Southern aristocracy. In 1955, Francis B. Simkins published an article in *The Journal of Southern History* that, though outrageously racist by today's standards, succinctly explains this mythology. Besides claiming that the Anglicizing of "barbaric" Africans did them a huge favor and "the white man has more often been discontented with the Negro than the Negro with the white man" (6), Simkins asserts that, in the legend of the Old South, the prototypical Southern Gentleman "lived in a feudal splendor that was justified by the belief that he had ancestors from the novels of Walter Scott" (13). Welty, an avid Scott fan since childhood,

peppered *Delta Wedding* with references to his work, including the name Marmion, the title of another home on the Fairchild plantation, and the name of a doll belonging to the first character that appears in the novel, Laura McRaven. Through Laura, Welty begins her exploration of the Old South mythology fueling the charmed life of the Fairchilds.

Many critics have noted that Welty frequently champions the outsider in her fiction, and, in the first chapter of the book, nine-year-old Laura, who lives in Jackson and whose mother, a Fairchild, has recently died, rides the "Yellow Dog" (Yazoo-Delta) train alone to attend her cousin's wedding in the Delta town of Fairchilds, Mississippi. As soon as the train crosses into the Delta, the land itself takes center stage.

> In the Delta, most of the world seemed sky. The clouds were large – larger than horses or houses…larger than anything except the fields the Fairchilds planted….The land was perfectly flat and level but it shimmered like the wing of a lighted dragonfly. It seemed strummed, as though it were an instrument and something had touched it….In the Delta the sunsets were reddest light. The sun went down lopsided and wide as a rose on a stem in the west, and the west was a milk-white edge, like the foam of the sea. The sky, the field, the little track, and the bayou, over and over – all that had been bright or dark was now one color. From the warm window sill the endless fields glowed like a hearth in firelight, and Laura, looking out, leaning on her elbows with her head between her hands, felt what an arriver in a land feels – that slow hard pounding in the breast. (4)

Such lyrical descriptions of the landscape appear throughout the novel, providing readers with a deep sense of the wild and beautiful physicality of the Delta. This particular description, with its otherworldly aura, immediately prepares the reader for immersion into the appealing yet self-absorbed world of the Fairchilds. Even though the ways of the Old South and plantation life will soon fade into obsolescence, the Fairchilds exist in a bubble, secure in their status at the top of the Delta social and economic hierarchy. They personify everything about what it means to be a "Delta person," a "regional identity that Welty exposes as conflated with

aristocratic whiteness" (Costello 1). Even though Laura receives affection and attention from her cousins, she cannot overcome the feeling she does not quite qualify as a true Fairchild. Throughout the novel, she observes her kin from a distance, and, although she desperately wants their acceptance and finds them beautiful and fascinating, she recognizes their solipsism. As she notes early in chapter one, "these cousins were the sensations of life and they knew it….Things waited for them to appear, laughing to one another and amazed…everything came to Shellmound to them" (17).

While the Fairchilds' charisma and palpable zest for life appeal to Laura, a deeper need draws her to her cousins. In the wake of her mother's death, she hopes to find a surrogate mother figure amongst her Delta family. She turns to another outsider at Shellmound, her uncle Battle's wife, Ellen. Watching Ellen rushing around attending to the needs of her eight children, Laura wonders if there might be some room for her in Ellen's Delta world:

> Even some unused love seemed to Laura to be in Aunt Ellen's eyes when she gazed, after supper, at her own family. Could she get it? Laura's heart pounded. But the baby had dreams and soon she would cry out on the upper floor, and Aunt Ellen listening would run straight to her, calling to her on the way, and forgetting everything in this room. (26)

Ellen, a Virginian, also comes from an elite old family, but, throughout the novel, the Fairchild aunts make little comments about how Ellen just does not fit the mold of a true "Delta person" since she was raised outside of the region.

> Aunt Tempe said to India…in the voice in which she always spoke to little girls, as if everything were a severe revelation, "When your mother goes to Greenwood she simply goes to the closet and says, 'Clothes, I'm going to Greenwood, anything that wants to go along, get on my back.' She has never learned what is reprehensible and what is not, in the Delta." (25)

Even though Ellen, technically speaking, is more of a Fairchild than Laura, she also feels a sense of exclusion in her own home and amongst her children. Like Laura, she sometimes steps back and watches the Fairchilds in action, marveling at their physical similarities and intense love for one another. Also like Laura, Ellen has a particularly soft spot for her husband's brother, George.

George, with his good looks and even temperament, embodies everything the real rulers of the roost, the older Fairchild aunts, find aristocratic about the family and emblematic of a true Delta gentleman. They think of George as the "heart" of the family, even though he has left the Delta to practice law in Memphis. While Dabney's upcoming wedding represents the main event of the narrative, somehow George always seems to represent the family's main focus. Lucinda MacKethan accurately describes George as an "object character":

> The object character is often at the center of a novel as the one who is watched, almost always seen from the outside by most of the other characters. He both epitomizes his place and stands more or less free from it, and this is the source of his fascination for other characters, most of whom are attracted to him by an urge to define him more firmly in terms of place in order to preserve their own need for stability. George Fairchild is such a character in *Delta Wedding*, so often the center of his family's thought, representing for them the security and permanence of their social order but somehow mysterious and, in a way, threatening, because he does not seem to be pinned down in their place, as they themselves are content to be. (260)

George has the temerity to care about people outside of his family even, in a shocking breach of plantation decorum, the black Fairchild field workers. After Dabney witnesses George break up a fight between two of the workers' children, "all the Fairchild in her had screamed at his interfering – at his taking part – *caring* about anything in the world but them" (46). To the outsiders Ellen and Laura, this ability to care about others makes George especially endearing.

As Laura thinks to herself, "he out of all the Delta Fairchilds had kindness…as if he could see a fire or a light, when he saw a human being – regardless of who it was, kin or not" (98). However, despite George's ability both to personify and to defy Delta convention, he does not represent any sort of coming change or questioning of the status quo. Welty reserves that honor for female characters in a characteristically subtle yet bold statement that will receive a close examination in chapter three.

When Gayle Graham Yates interviewed Welty in 1987, she brought up the importance of family in many of her works, to which Welty responded "In my case, it was…the way I was brought up that taught me what I wanted. I am interested in human relationships. That is my true core. That is what I try to write about" (101). Critics have written dismissively about the minimal plot action of *Delta Wedding*, since not much occurs besides Laura arriving for a visit, George reconciling with his estranged wife, and Dabney's marriage. Many reviewers found the novel's depiction of the Fairchilds' world too narcissistic and removed from reality to have any literary merit. *The New York Times* called the book "'pallid, over-refined, painted for admirers of a particular school of esthetics, not for the general public'…*Time* Magazine branded it a "'Cloud-Cuckoo Symphony'" (Marrs 142). These reviewers completely overlooked the technical and emotional virtuosity on display in the novel. Granville Hicks aptly describes the novel's complex sensitivity.

> The book is a triumph of sensitivity: the atmosphere of the Delta in September; the excitement and commotion of a household preparing for a wedding; the feeling of a crowded house; the feeling of a house full of children; the special quality of a particular and unusual family, the Fairchilds. It is a technical triumph, too; the constant, subtle shifting of the point of view to render the most that can be rendered. (73)

The descriptive power with which Welty evokes the time and place of the Fairchild world is profound, but much more lurks beneath the surface of its aesthetic appeal. While the novel

describes a pampered lifestyle that the legacy of slavery and abject racism made possible, chapter two will explain how Welty uses remarkable sleight of hand to give the Fairchilds' black employees a definite presence in the narrative, and how she explores the patriarchal nature of plantation society's racism, despite critics' charges that all of the novel's black characters are voiceless and practically invisible.

While both Welty and Forster place enormous emphasis on the spirit of place in their writings, their true focus always remains on people. In "On Writing," Welty describes a childhood experience in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave:

> As a child I was led, an unwilling sightseer, into Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and after our party had been halted in the blackest hole yet and our guide had let us wait guess ing in cold dark what would happen to us, suddenly a light was struck. And we stood in a prism. The chamber was bathed in color, and there was nothing else, we and our guide alike were blotted out by radiance. As I remember, nobody said boo….Fiction is not the cave; and human life, fiction's territory, merely contains caves. I am only trying to express what I think the so-called raw material is *without* its interpretation; without its artist. Without the act of human understanding – and it is a double act through which we make sense to each other – experience is the worst kind of emptiness; it is obliteration, black or prismatic, as meaningless as was indeed that loveless cave. Before there is meaning, there has to occur some personal act of vision. And it is this that is continuously projected as the novelist writes, and again as we, each to ourselves, read. (136-37)

Welty's description of a cave's silent emptiness does not contain the frightening and dispiriting "Boum" Mrs. Moore experiences; however, it still illustrates a personal and artistic credo that she and Forster shared: that the only way to make meaning out of the many "caves" in life – moments that seem hopeless or struggles that seem insurmountable – is through our personal

relationships with one another, and that fiction, with its ability to allow glimpses into the hearts and minds of others, provides the perfect “place” to do so.

CHAPTER TWO: RACE AND OTHERNESS

Two weeks after the end of World War II, Eudora Welty learned Theodore Bilbo, a Mississippi senator whom she despised, planned to run for reelection on the sort of platform that made him hugely popular with a large portion of his constituents, and made her furious. A virulent anti-Semite, proud member of the KKK, opponent of anti-lynching legislation, and proponent of segregation, Bilbo represented the very worst aspects of Welty's home state. In a letter to Diarmuid Russell, Welty described her difficulties with putting the finishing touches on *Delta Wedding* and lamented the current state of Mississippi politics. Her outrage about Mississippi's deplorable race relations felt especially strong, she explained, since she was currently re-reading *A Passage to India*. The novel's exploration of the human cost of racism underscored her indignation and made her feel sick about what bigotry led people to do to one another (Marrs 135).

Twenty years later, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Welty again referenced Forster's novel in her acclaimed essay, "Must the Novelist Crusade?" (1965). The essay expresses her frustration with the constant demands upon her as a Southern writer to "say something" in her work about Mississippi's institutionalized racism. She explains that, while journalism's purpose involves the dissemination of fact and the debate about its meanings and repercussions, fiction instead represents the "possibility of a shared act of imagination between its writer and its reader" (147). She also noted "fiction is stone-deaf to argument. The ordinary novelist does not argue; he hopes to show, to disclose. His persuasions are all toward allowing his reader to see and hear something for himself" (149). Of course, when a morally troubling subject such as intolerance or racism occurs in fiction, readers should be able to recognize the injustice for themselves and understand its inherent immorality. This understanding occurs, Welty explains, through the reader's consideration of human relationships in the story.

It can be said at once, I should think, that we are all agreed upon the most

> important point: that morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction, and the serious writer has never lived who dealt with anything else.…*A Passage to India* is an old novel now. It is an intensely moral novel. It deals with race prejudice. Mr. Forster, not by preaching at us, while being passionately concerned, makes us know his points unforgettably as often as we read it. And does he not bring in the dark! The points are good forty years after their day because of the splendor of the novel. What a lesser novelist's harangues would have buried by now, his imagination reveals. Revelation of even the strongest forces is delicate work. (148, 154)

As fans of each other's works, Welty and Forster shared artistic sensibilities and, once they met each other for lunch in Cambridge in 1954, they realized they also enjoyed one another's company. Welty told Walter Clemons of the *New York Times* about this lunch with one of her literary idols saying, "'The luckiest thing happened….Our waiter was drunk and he came lurching on like a Shakespearean clown, and that put us both at ease and made our meeting so easy" (Waldron 238). The two authors also shared certain elements in their upbringings and personalities that made them unusually empathetic toward all types of people, and therefore adamantly opposed to any sort of intolerance.

Both writers were also excellent listeners. To speak with Forster "was to be seduced by an inverse charisma, a sense of being listened to with such intensity that you had to be your most honest, sharpest and best self" (Moffat 11). In the first section of *One Writer's Beginnings* entitled, of course, "Listening," Welty described her lifelong love of listening to people talk and the importance of this love in her craft.

> When we…bought our first automobile, one of our neighbors was often invited to go with us on the family Sunday afternoon ride. In Jackson it was counted an affront to the neighbors to start out for anywhere with an empty seat in the car. My mother sat in the back with her friend, and I'm told that as a small child I would ask to sit in the middle, and say as we started off, "Now *talk*."….Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories.

> Listening *for* them is something more acute than listening *to* them….My instinct – the dramatic instinct – was to lead me, eventually, on the right track for a storyteller: the *scene* was full of hints, pointers, suggestions, and promises of thing to find out and know about human beings. I had to grow up and learn to listen for the unspoken as well as the spoken – and to know a truth, I also had to recognize a lie. (14-16)

Accordingly, both writers, despite having large circles of friends and literary admirers, tended to prefer the role of observer in social situations. This is not to say they were boring company, just that they had unusually strong powers of observation.

> Morgan looked impeccably ordinary, like "the man who comes to clean the clocks." It was a canny disguise….Though he was one of the great living men of letters, in a loose-fitting tweed suit and a cloth cap he slipped unnoticed into the crowd or sat quietly at the edge of the conversational circle. This mousy self-presentation was no accident….His pale blue eyes were terribly nearsighted, but everyone close to him noticed that they missed nothing. (Moffat 11-12)

While both authors were outgoing and innovative in their literary endeavors, friendships, and travels, for different reasons they adamantly protected their private lives and let very few people into their most personal confidence. One could argue that, as sensitive artists and naturally shy individuals, both writers placed themselves on life's peripheries for the sake of their work and in order to protect their privacy as public figures, but after considering details about their personal lives and letters, this explanation alone does not suffice.

As a closeted homosexual who struggled against familial and societal constraints, Forster knew he was gay from an early age and had no moral qualms about his orientation. He knew who he was and never expressed the desire to find some sort of "cure" for his sexuality. Unfortunately, his self-awareness and acceptance did little to lower the obstacles to living as an openly gay man during his lifetime, and in his personal letters he often expressed the desire to live his romantic life out in the open and find the same love, comfort, and stability with a man

that he saw in heterosexual relationships. Throughout his life, he remained hopeful that society would eventually accept homosexuality, but, until then, he made sure he always presented himself to society as the embodiment of propriety and kept a friendly, yet studiedly low profile in public. Sexually speaking, he was a late bloomer and did not begin to live an actively gay lifestyle until his early forties, but even then he scrupulously guarded his reputation against scandal. Aside from one incident of blackmail at the hands of a lover's wife, very few people, including his mother, knew of his homosexuality. To his closest confidants, he expressed great admiration for the nerve of more outspoken gay artists and intellectuals like Oscar Wilde and Lytton Strachey, but during his lifetime he reserved his feats of published literary daring for stories that pushed the boundaries of class and race (Moffat 11).

Some biographers consider the scant amount of information about Welty's love affairs and her polite, but firm, requests that friends and family not talk to journalists or biographers a matter of either a painful spinsterhood resulting from her unattractive physical appearance, or a case of closeted lesbianism. Ann Waldron, in particular, seems to go out of her way to include quotations from people who remarked upon Welty's supposed homeliness throughout her biography. She also bizarrely sums up Welty's enormously successful 1984, which witnessed *One Writer's Beginnings* staying on the *New York Times* best-seller list for almost the entire year, among other achievements, with the following statement:

> The girl who was remembered for being so ugly had reached a pinnacle where her looks and style clearly eclipsed those of the Jackson belles who had been invited to dances in the Delta. She had achieved a great deal, by persistence and hard work at her art, by never faltering as a dutiful daughter, and by cultivating the quiet modesty that struck everyone she met. (335)

While Waldron's biography does contain accurate information about Welty's life and writings, her strange emphasis on Welty's appearance greatly detracts from the overall quality of her work. Beauty and desirability are subjective things, and far too many first-hand accounts detail

Welty's incredible charm, sense of humor, and infectious laugh to give any credence to this claim.

Waldron also hints Welty may have had an affair with the Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen (225). Bowen, who reportedly had numerous affairs with men and women and whom biographers have frequently portrayed as a sexual predator, was Welty's close friend and literary confidant. She did visit Bowen on a trip to Ireland, but in no way does that alone constitute an affair. As Suzanne Marrs, a noted Welty biographer, explains,

> Beyond expressing attitudes that Eudora revered and shared, Bowen was a model of independence, moving freely in Europe and America, setting her own course as Eudora had found herself able to do….Moreover, Eudora liked Bowen tremendously well. Theirs was an immediate meeting of the minds, especially as minds turned to fiction: both believed a story should reveal rather than resolve mystery….Small wonder that she would write Bowen, from the *Ile de France* as she sailed from England in 1951, "You were sweet – you are beyond any saying, all you thought & did & knew & brought about – you did *so much* – but I let you, loved it & took my pleasure"….In language that to the contemporary ear might sound sexually charged, Eudora bid farewell to the convergence of two writing lives….Ardent as these…letters to Bowen are, neither of them, nor any of Eudora's other letters to Bowen, suggest real intimacy. (200-01)

While no evidence exists to support Waldron's assertions about Welty's sexual preference, significant evidence does exist of Welty's quiet, but steadfast, support of the gay community. In addition to having several queer literary idols, Welty also had many important friendships with gay men and women, perhaps the most significant of which was her friendship with John Robinson, whose family history served as the inspiration for *Delta Wedding*, and to whom she dedicated the novel. When Welty found out Mary Doll, the daughter of the prominent editor Mary Lou Aswell, one of Welty's closest literary and personal confidants, intended to write

a memoir about her mother, Welty immediately voiced her concerns in a letter. In addition to respectfully disagreeing with Mary Doll's depiction of Mary Lou as a disinterested and dismissive mother, Welty also reprimanded Mary Doll for her pejorative comments about her mother's sexual orientation and many lesbian friends.

> In this letter so full of desire for personal truth and integrity, Eudora sent words of dismay and of sympathy. She sought to testify to Mary Lou's greatness of spirit, to help a daughter recognize the beauty of her mother's life and accept its complexities, and to demonstrate that love and friendship transcend the boundaries of gender, age, and sexual orientation. Eudora stated that she was not herself a lesbian, but also asserted that she held Mary Lou, whatever her sexuality, in the highest regard. Her fervent wish was for Doll to do so as well. (Marrs 510-11)

When *The New York Times* asked Welty to review Forster's posthumously published collection of queer short stories, *The Life to Come* (1987), she had the following to say:

> Have we been as ready for Forster's honesty as we thought we were? His greatness surely had root in his capacity to treat all human relationships seriously and truthfully… and of course, the best realized of the homosexual stories dovetail perfectly into the best of all his work. Even the earliest and most ephemeral of them will be recognized as the frailer embodiments of the same passionate convictions that made for the moral iron in his novels. (*The Eye of the Story* 232)

Welty's phrase, "moral iron," perfectly describes what is so compelling about both her work and Forster's: an absolute conviction that personal relationships have the capacity to overcome all of society's manufactured hatreds. They both quietly, but firmly, championed love, compassion, and tolerance through their stories with a boldness that belied their conservative mannerisms. They also always maintained a properly decorous appearance and demeanor. As is true of Forster, Welty's reserved façade in no way inhibited her writing, for, as she famously

noted in the last sentence of *One Writer's Beginnings*, "…all serious daring starts from within" (114).

Despite their conventional appearances and closely guarded personal lives, both Welty and Forster were able to identify intimately with being outside "the norm." Their unconventional interior make-ups made them especially sensitive to the insidiousness of bigotry, and enabled them, in their distinctive ways, to express their condemnation of such behavior. This chapter will explain how both writers used nuanced portrayals of the complexities of ordinary human relationships to illustrate the nature and consequences of intolerance. While *A Room With a View* and "Powerhouse" describe the bigotry behind the fascination with and consumption of the Other's culture, *A Passage to India* and *Delta Wedding* address the racism and subjugation at the center of two waning empires.

While *A Room With a View* describes instances of intolerance that do not revolve specifically around race, they highlight late Victorian/early Edwardian stereotypes regarding culture, class, and otherness. England's imperial arrogance resulted in an intense xenophobia that manifested itself in the behaviors of English tourists traveling around the Continent, and "Victorian Englishmen were predisposed to despise foreign countries and peoples simply because they were foreign: ignorantly, unreasonably, and with a great deal of arrogance" (Porter 407). However, despite such a condescending air toward all things foreign, a real hunger for and curiosity about the different and exotic infiltrated all levels of British society. This need to establish superiority while simultaneously desiring to consume created a schizophrenic repulsion/attraction dynamic that haughty manners did little to hide.

In terms of culture, which represents a significant focus of *A Room*, the carefully constructed logic behind Victorian England's justification of its cultural supremacy in the face of the Continent's intellectual and artistic achievements explains the arrogance so prevalent among English tourists. As Bernard Porter explains,

> Happiness…held nations back. So did intellectual and artistic pursuits. All the English acknowledged that foreigners were far better painters and poets and musicians than they themselves were….They also believed that these were fields where it was, in a way, a sign of inferiority to be superior. Art was like hopscotch or cat's cradle….It may also have directly stifled progress by distracting men away from more useful pursuits….This was one of the things that the traveler Samuel Laing noticed at the time: that the most 'civilized' (that is, liberal-capitalist) countries of Europe were those which knew 'little or nothing of the fine arts,' while 'the countries in the lowest state' of civilization – 'Italy, for instance…are those in which the taste and feeling for the fine arts are most generally diffused.' (422)

This dour and haughty attitude was so ingrained in Forster's consciousness that his first trip to Italy wound up a disappointment. He found it difficult to shake his English inhibitions, especially since his mother accompanied him on the trip. He felt smothered with boredom in stuffy pensiones that mimicked his middle-class lifestyle back home, struggled with maps and directions, sprained an ankle, broke a wrist, and felt that his English reserve prevented him from absorbing all that Italy had to offer. However, the trip did open his eyes regarding his strait-laced existence. From the beginning of the journey, "he dimly understood what would become the central premise of his two Italian novels: that the best lessons of Italy for the Englishman were corporeal. The art he encountered was ecstatic, irrational" (Moffat 59-60). The physical and artistic passion he found in Italian culture, combined with its romantic landscapes, provided the inspiration behind "Story of a Panic," which Forster's gay confidants amusedly recognized as his first subconscious effort at homoerotic writing, and led to the formation of an idea for a novel about a proper young Englishwoman's intellectual and sensual awakening on a trip to Italy. "The Lucy Story," as Forster first called *A Room*, mocked everything that irritated him about English notions of superiority, and also expressed his belief that meaningful human connection was possible only with the embrace of difference.

One of the most amusing targets of Forster's critique of English cultural arrogance appears in the form of Miss Lavish. Miss Lavish, the pseudo bohemian and "scandalous" writer, believes herself to have made a real connection with the locals and raves on and on about the passion and life force found in Italy. However, she speaks of the locals in an insultingly diminutive tone and shows no real respect for Italian culture, making a fool of herself in the process. In one memorable scene, she drags the naïve Lucy out for an "adventure," promising to show her the "real" Italy.

> "One doesn't come to Italy for niceness…one comes for life. Buon giorno! Buon giorno!" bowing right and left. "Look at that adorable wine-cart! How the driver stares at us, dear, simple soul!" So Miss Lavish proceeded through the streets of the city of Florence, short, fidgety, and playful as a kitten, though without a kitten's grace. It was a treat for the girl to be with any one so clever and so cheerful; and a blue military cloak, such as an Italian officer wears, only increased the sense of festivity. "Buon giorno! Take the word of an old woman, Miss Lucy: you will never repent of a little civility to your inferiors. *That* is the true democracy. Though I am a real Radical as well. There, now you're shocked!" (16)

For all of Miss Lavish's "radicalism," she joins in with the rest of the pensione guests' class snobbery and snubs the socially undesirable Emersons, and Lucy, under the influence of the other guests, initially does the same despite her attraction to George. Only after returning from her trip and enduring a brief engagement to the insufferable Cecil does she break with convention and admit her love for George, someone considered her inferior in terms of class. In accordance with Forster's personal credo, she finds real connection and happiness only when she leaves societal constraints behind and ignores difference.

While Miss Lavish's foolishness does no real harm to anyone, the figure of Mr. Eager, an Anglican clergyman living in Florence, illustrates an ugly and decidedly un-Christian attitude. With his steadfast refusal to interact with the "vulgar" Roman Catholic locals as equals, despite

the fact that he lives among them, and his expressions of scorn regarding their more emotive and physically demonstrative behavior, he constantly makes himself look like a self-righteous prig. Instead of respecting local customs, he adamantly insists that all of the Italians around him conform to his version of proper decorum.

From an early age, Forster had recognized the Anglican church's hypocrisy and intolerance and rejected its tenets. Throughout his life, he identified himself as an agnostic, and, in his writings, discussed Christianity, Anglicanism, and its role in British national identity and foreign policy (Furbank 66). Thirty years after the publication of *A Room* and twelve years after the publication of *A Passage*, he expressed what he called his "philosophy" in the essay "What I Believe" (1938):

> I do not believe in Belief. But this is an age of faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defense, one has to formulate a creed of one's own. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy are no longer enough in a world which is rent by religious and racial persecution, in a world where ignorance rules, and science, who ought to have ruled, plays the subservient pimp. (*Two Cheers for Democracy* 73)

While *A Room* expressed a lighthearted view of English people's inflated sense of importance and cultural imperialism, Forster had gained a much deeper understanding of the ugly side of the Empire and had personally grappled with issues of intolerance and racism by the time he began writing *A Passage*.

In a 2007 article in *The Independent,* historian Zareer Masani, the openly gay son of a Parsi father and Hindu mother, explains that he always wondered how "a shy and retiring Edwardian" such as Forster could produce the resounding critique of imperial arrogance and racism in *A Passage*. He found his answer when he received access to one hundred and thirty of Forster's unpublished personal letters. Masani spent an afternoon reading through the letters, some of them addressed to and from a man named Sir Syed Ross Masood, one of Forster's great loves and the dedicatee of *A Passage*. Biographers have detailed how

Masood's heterosexuality prevented him from returning Forster's passion. However, in a remarkable display of tolerance considering the times and his conservative Muslim background, Masood still maintained a close friendship with Forster throughout his life. In fact, as Masani points out, Masood "encouraged Forster to sublimate his thwarted passions in a novel about India, assuring him that he was 'the only Englishman in whom I have come across true sentiment and that, too, real sentiment even from the oriental point of view.'" Masani concludes that Forster's sexuality, combined with his traditional English background, allowed him to explore other types of difference "with extraordinary subtlety and sensitivity, at once the insider as well as the outsider" (5).

Some critics, considering the novel's dedication and Forster's attraction to Masood, charge that the novel represents nothing more than an echo of the author's unrequited love for Masood and his physical lust for the exotic other. Many of Forster's novels (*A Room With a View*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Howards End*) do involve the emotional, intellectual, or sexual liberation of an upper-class, conservative English person at the hands of a socially inferior or racially different character, and Forster did have love affairs with working-class and ethnic men. He was perfectly aware of his attraction to the Other, even writing in his diary regarding his passion for Masood that "We like the like and love the unlike" (Moffat 91), but to reduce the novel's premise that things such as imperialism and racism destroy meaningful interpersonal relationships to a matter of simple lust degrades the intelligence, empathy, and poignant humanism at the novel's core.

When Forster worked as a secretary for the maharajah of Dewas's court, the tolerant maharajah knew of Forster's homosexuality and instructed a barber at his palace, an attractive young boy named Kanaya, to acquiesce to any of Forster's sexual advances. He did, and Forster was disgusted by the sadistic streak that gained ascendancy within him because of his absolute authority over the boy. The incident led him to make the connection between his personal lust and cruelty and the corruption behind imperialism and its subjugation of the other.

> With a clinical eye Morgan watched his own complicity in the privileges of race and caste. He came to see how his brief stint of perverse cruelty was part of the grander temptations of colonial power. He decided that he could no longer think…of his colonial adventures with a benign curiosity. These reflections led Morgan to deeper questions. Was his desire for some 'emotional response' from Kanaya merely a projection of Western erotic conventions? 'It is difficult to find the emotion of a man whose aim it is to give pleasure to others.' Was it ludicrous to ask for sincerity from a whore? How much of his own desire was just a veneer of romanticism over a cold-blooded expression of power? On the other hand, it seemed grotesque to Morgan to deny consciousness or agency to Kanaya…just because [he wasn't] white. In the murky world of English-colonial relations wasn't skepticism that a brown man could feel affection for him simply a different sort of bigotry? (Moffat 184)

Forster's critical self-awareness and examination debunks critics' simplification of the novel as an ode to his lust and a Western eroticizing of the Orient as a whole. It also underscores the importance of Welty's argument regarding the novel's inherent morality that allows readers to see the consequences of intolerance and, in this case, imperialism for themselves. However, such a straightforward means of critiquing English imperial evils has left some prominent critics unconvinced.

Some skeptical academics feel *A Passage* implies the English only needed to treat Indians with more compassion, not abandon imperialism. Lionel Trilling used the example of Mrs. Moore's opinion of Ronny's conduct to illustrate this point:

> Mrs. Moore, regarding her son Ronny while he excuses any unpleasantness of the Raj on the grounds that it administers justice, thinks, 'One touch of regret – not the canny substitute, but the true regret from the heart – would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution' (p. 51). These statements have led

> …Trilling, among other critics, to conclude that: "*A Passage to India* is not a radical novel…It is not concerned to show that the English should not be in India at all…The novel proceeds on an imperialistic premise." (Hawkins 55)

Initially, Ronny started his job with a friendly attitude toward Indians, only to lose his humanity because of his position as an imperial official. As Fielding realizes, "every human act in the East is tainted with officialism" (169). The innate power structure of the Raj destroys any chances for real friendships between the occupiers and the occupied, and Ronny's corruption mirrors Forster's moral dilemma in the wake of the Kanaya incident.

As for Mrs. Moore, she is a far more complex character than Trilling asserts. As the novel progresses, she begins to struggle with the futility of trying to find understanding and harmony in a world where divisive forces such as imperialism, racism, and religious intolerance exist. After confronting the meaningless "boum" of the Marabar Caves, Mrs. Moore begins to feel a profound emptiness.

> The more she thought about it, the more disagreeable and frightening it became. She minded it much more now than at the time. The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur: "Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value."…But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from "Let there be Light" to "It is finished" only amounted to "boum." Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul….She sat motionless with horror…then she surrendered to the vision. (133-34)

This sense of terror that spirals into a sense of futility evolves into a full-blown nihilism that eventually leads to her spiritual and physical death. Even though she can find no answer to the emptiness she sees in the world, her matter-of-fact declaration of Aziz's innocence does lead

Adela to revoke her accusation. Mrs. Moore's recognition of intolerance and her subsequent despair about humanity's inability to conquer it embodies Forster's personal frustration with the matter. After all, the novel does not end with a solution to Fielding and Aziz's inability to be friends.

Other critics, such as Andrew Shonfield ("The Politics of Forster's India"), have faulted Forster for not creating Indian characters that express sufficient anti-British sentiment, and for not using the novel to make an aggressive case for Indian independence. Such an approach, however, neglects Forster's gift for using simple gestures and words to show the power of humanism in the face of hatred. Also, in keeping with Welty's assertion about fiction needing to be stone-deaf to arguments, Forster did not explicitly include his personal conviction about the matter, which happened to be very forward-thinking, in the novel. He had discussed the inevitability of Indian independence in his nonfiction writings as early as 1922. As Hunt Hawkins notes,

> In 1924, when *Passage* appeared, the Indian movement led by Mahatma Gandhi was still not yet agitating for independence. They said they wished to achieve dominion status and remain within the empire. Forster took what was at the time a more radical position by declaring that India inevitably had to become free. In an article in *The Nation and the Athenaeum* in 1922, Forster stated that 'ten years ago' Indians had looked to Englishmen for social support, but now it was 'too late,' and he anticipated 'the dissolution of the Empire.' These phrases are repeated at the end of the novel when Aziz cries 'Clear out, all you Turtons and Burtons. We wanted to know you ten years back – now it's too late.' (58-59)

Like Welty, who personally supported liberal politicians and even canvassed for Adlai Stevenson, Forster took an active interest in political issues and advocated for equality in a more direct manner outside his fiction. Marxist critics like Derek S. Savage feel *A Passage* fails to reveal the financial and labor exploitation at the center of the Empire's presence in India.

Savage derides Forster for his “liberal mind” and takes him to task for not exposing the inner workings of colonialism:

> What are the characteristics of the liberal approach to life? First of all, the liberal mind is a *medium* mind, a mind which fears extremes and which therefore is predisposed towards compromise. It inhabits a middle region of life, that of people, and therefore its characteristic expression is a social and political one; but it is incapable of moving beyond people, as they appear on the social level, to an understanding of the principles and forces which govern their lives, and this incapacity applies both to spiritual and economic realities….As to the social question, Forster would prefer, we gather, to any social change, a perpetuation of the old order of ‘democratic’ capitalism. But he praises ‘democracy’ while showing no awareness of its capitalistic and therefore incipiently totalitarian substructure: ‘democracy’ is considered solely from a superficial political point of view, the façade (Parliament, the Press) is naively accepted at its face-value. One is reminded of his treatment of ‘the Indian question’ in his fifth and last novel, where the ugly realities underlying the presence of the British in India are not even glanced at, and the issues raised are handled as though they could be solved on the surface level of personal intercourse and individual behaviour. (46-47)

Apparently, according to Savage, a reader must understand economic and political theories in order to recognize, and therefore reject, the evils of colonialism and racism. This elitist assertion underestimates humanism’s power to motivate social change. Forster may or may not have been able to expound upon the economics behind the British presence in India, but the novel’s core argument revolves around the human cost of imperialism and racism, not the more technical ins and outs of the imperial profit and power structure. As Welty notes in “Place in Fiction,” “the heart of the novel is heard beating most plainly, most passionately, most personally when two places are at a meeting point” (30-31), and this meeting point is every bit as relevant as the most theoretically sophisticated arguments against institutionalized intolerance.

While *A Passage* distills the myriad evils of imperialism's intolerance down to its effect upon individual relationships, this does not mean that the novel presents a simplistic portrayal of the nature of bigotry. In accordance with Forster's love for examining the infinite muddles of the human condition, the story's primary victim of English racism is himself a bigot. Aziz dislikes Hindus and never misses an opportunity to point out what he sees as their slack and dishonest nature. Likewise, Hindu characters also express a dislike for Muslims. All of these pejorative sentiments reach a point of confluence during Aziz's rape trial. The haughty colonizers sit literally above their Indian inferiors in order to assert their dominance, the Hindu magistrate who has aligned himself with the Empire presides, the noble Muslim defendant feels great indignation because his accuser is homely and, meanwhile, the physically splendid and Buddha-esque punkah wallah hovers over all, every bit as unknowable as the Caves and seeming to say that the only way to transcend all the earthly foolishness occurring in the court-room is not to care.

On the surface, Aziz's exoneration appears momentarily to unite Hindus and Muslims, but Forster knows how people really work. When Mr. Das makes the conciliatory gesture of asking Aziz for medical advice and to compose a poem for his brother's magazine, a telling conversation ensues:

> "My dear Das, why, when you tried to send me to prison, should I try to send Mr. Bhattacharya a poem? Eh? That is naturally entirely a joke. I will write him the best I can; but I thought your magazine was for Hindus." "It is not for Hindus, but Indians generally," he said timidly. "There is no such person in existence as the general Indian." "There was not, but there may be when you have written a poem. You are our hero; the whole city is behind you, irrespective of creed." "I know; but will it last?"…"Excellent," said Aziz, patting a stout shoulder and thinking: "I wish they did not remind me of cow dung"; Das thought: "Some Muslims are very violent." They smiled wistfully, each spying the thought in the other's heart, and Das, the more articulate, said: "Excuse my

mistakes, realize my limitations. Life is not easy as we know it on the earth." (142) Das's words eloquently express a painful truth about human nature that Forster understood and accepted. For the most part, people really do want to connect; however, despite their best intentions, suspicions and divisions will always exist.

Forster also accepted the irony that people typically experience unity only through a shared hatred. Adela, who begins as an outsider in Chandrapore, becomes the representation of virtuous English womanhood to club members in the wake of her accusations against the supposedly leering and licentious Oriental, and the tentative joining of Hindus and Muslims only occurs when they unite in outrage against the Anglo-Indians. This does not mean that instances of real connection do not happen. In small gestures, such as Mrs. Moore surprising Aziz by taking off her shoes before entering a mosque, and Fielding putting his arm around Aziz and plaintively asking why they cannot be friends, Forster illustrates the simple grace possible in the face of humanity's worst impulses. Through his use of "fission and fusion; of separateness and of desired union…Forster…compels us to believe…only 'the secret understanding of the heart,' which may fail but can never really be defeated…[offers an] answer to the voice of the Marabar" (White 644, 656). Welty also accepted the inevitability of error and evil, and, like Forster, she found transcendence through people's efforts to love one another, even when they did not succeed. "Powerhouse," like *A Room* and *A Passage*, involves members of a dominant race ogling the Other. The story also describes attempts to overcome socially constructed barriers. However, of the three works, "Powerhouse," despite its mere ten-page length and minimal plot, does so in the most sophisticated and subversive manner.

In August of 1940, Welty traveled to Vermont to participate in the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. In a letter to her longtime friend, the writer Frank Lyell, she wrote that while she enjoyed the beautiful setting, she found the experience "rare, literary, talky when you wish it were quiet" and noted that "a lot of old ladies are here, they change hats for every meal" (Marrs 66). She also expressed annoyance with the presence of Carson McCullers, her loathed literary

contemporary and rival. To add insult to injury, her recently written short story, "Powerhouse," received a poor reception from conference participants. Upon figuring this out, she immediately packed her bags and headed home. It is surprising that her fellow writers did not appreciate the story's humanism, considerable daring, and technical virtuosity. Powerhouse could have wound up as nothing more than a one-dimensional, eye-rolling, shucking and jiving, foot-stomping caricature that trivialized the cultural significance of jazz/blues. Instead, Welty presents a multi-layered depiction of racism's nuances that illustrates her powers of perception. Dean Flower notes the following of the story:

> "Powerhouse" takes a journey into the racist mentality of a white audience that is embarrassed and fascinated by this demonic black performer, then follows Powerhouse convincingly into his own racial community to show a knowledge and moral authority beyond theirs – an identity unrestricted by race, gender or class. Alice Walker once asked her whether she ever "really knew" any black people, unaware of Welty's essay about Ida M'Toy, a former midwife in Jackson who ran a used clothing business. The essay says nothing about Ida's race but simply shows how deeply Welty knew this woman who was so "full of all the wild humors and extravagances of the godlike." That was what Welty tried for in her fiction – the fiercest secrets….Toni Morrison once noted that certain "fearless" women…like…Eudora Welty are able to "write about black people in a way that few white men have ever been able to write…not patronizing, not romanticizing." (6)

This description of someone with the "wild humors and extravagances of the godlike" fits Powerhouse as well. His larger-than-life stage persona, dazzling piano playing, daring musical and verbal improvisations, and expressions of love in the face of the dominant race's hatred and appropriation of black cultural contributions all make him an extremely charismatic and morally just character. However, his personality has another layer that only someone intimately familiar with black culture could create.

While Powerhouse uses the blues to express anger and frustration, he also uses its idiom to deliver improvisational musical and verbal feats that leave his audiences transfixed. Some scholars, failing to recognize the complex and subversive nature of Powerhouse's performance, have derided the blues for simply expressing anger and frustration instead of real social protest. This trend prompted Angela Davis to explain how this approach

> …fails to consider the interpretive audience to which the blues is addressed, and treats potential protest as necessarily constructed in terms established by an imagined white oppressor. Like many white scholars in the early 1960s who attempted to define their work as antiracist, this [notion] of black subjectivity reek[s] of paternalism. (92)

Powerhouse's sophisticated and subtle form of subversion goes completely over the heads of his white audience. In short, Powerhouse embodies the trickster figure known in African American culture as the Signifying Monkey. Welty's use of this trope demonstrates her profound understanding of the subtleties of black culture, and illustrates the fierce intellect and anger at work in Powerhouse's performance. Reine Dugas Bouton offers a succinct explanation of the Signifying Monkey.

> In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. uses the term "signifyin(g)" to represent the rhetorical strategies in which black speakers make non-native language their own….The Signifying Monkey, a trickster figure, toys with language and audience to revise traditionally oppressive discourse….Signifyin(g) through indirection functions in two ways: it allows the speakers to even the playing field against their white, governing audience and it enables the speakers, who ordinarily have no voice, to engage in revisionary tactics for the benefit of themselves and their community….Signifyin(g) tricksters do not operate in a vacuum; rather, in a defiant movement, they revise traditional narratives and dominant expectations with a passion and ingenuity that escapes censure. (77-78)

In the story's first paragraph, the narrator says of Powerhouse "You can't tell what he is. 'Negro man'? – he looks more Asiatic, monkey, Jewish, Babylonian, Peruvian, fanatic, devil" (131). Right away, readers receive the message that the audience is fascinated and repulsed by this man's otherness. Another monkey description follows ("his mouth is going every minute: like a monkey's when it looks for something"), and, in the next paragraph, his fingers seem like "long yellow-sectioned strong big fingers, at rest about the size of bananas" (131). On the surface, these words represent nothing more than standard racial epithets; however, the close reader who knows African American culture will recognize the appearance of the Signifying Monkey.

Phrases such as "not a show-off," "a person of joy," "a fanatic," "obscene," "the promise and serenity of a sibyl," and "so monstrous he sends everybody into oblivion" come flying at the reader in quick succession, mimicking the speed of Powerhouse's piano playing and the rapidity and skill of his improvisation. The contradictory descriptions also illustrate how the audience does not know what to think about Powerhouse. They simultaneously love and hate him, and, since his real nature is unknowable, they fear him. They can't resist approaching him with written requests, but they do so "laughing as if to hide a weakness" (132). The narrator describes Powerhouse's "secret" face and its "mask." Even the way he communicates with his band remains a mystery to the audience. He "signals" them by calling out numbers instead of verbal commands. During his performance, he "seems lost – down in the song….But he knows, really…pouring it out in the greatest delight and brutality….He looks down so benevolently….On the sweet pieces such a leer for everybody!" (132).

In addition to a benign, playful side, the traditional trickster figure has a malicious streak, which Powerhouse unhesitatingly displays to his white audience. The stage gives him the freedom to drop the mask of the "good negro" that all black Americans had to wear in the South at that time. He taunts the audience, but not in a way they can pin down. When he returns from intermission, "no doubt full of beer, they [the white audience] said, he got the band tuned up

again in his own way. He didn't strike the piano keys for pitch – he simply opened his mouth and gave falsetto howls – in A, D and so on – they tuned by him" (140). Powerhouse knows his audience thinks of him as a savage, and, with a practically visible eye roll, he gives them a savage gesture dripping with sarcasm. He humors most of their requests, but only on his terms. The audience squirms when "he's already done twelve or fourteen choruses, piling them up nobody knows how, and it will be a wonder if he ever gets through" (141). He re-appropriates white culture and makes it black; a subversion that makes the audience a little uncomfortable and therefore unwilling to dance or appear too enthusiastic.

Through Powerhouse's performance, Welty makes it clear that she understands the aesthetics at the center of the blues. Musicologist Ayana Smith examines the blues idiom and explains how

> Like the double entendres of the signifying trickster character, the music of the blues encompasses several contradictory elements. These elements intersect to create a single form of expression that manifests itself in many different styles….The music is improvisatory yet formulaic….The performer's genius lies in the ability to create originality out of pre-existing musical topoi. As an oral literature, the texts contain elements of the miniature epic; the drama here is not one of Odysseus or Aeneas, but the life of the generic African-American, represented in a patchwork of smaller, sometimes personal or individualistic vignettes. Yet those narrative elements can be arranged in such a way as to be inscrutable, enigmatic or even nonsensical. (82-83)

Powerhouse and his band meld the formulaic and familiar popular music the white audience requests with the organic and improvisational jazz/blues idiom. He takes the audience's requests for standards from the popular – meaning "white" – musical canon, then transforms the songs into a decidedly black musical form with his all of his bending, stretching, and improvising over the song's recognizable structure until it becomes unquestionably "his," then serves it back to the dazzled audience with a proverbial wink and a smile.

Powerhouse and his band refuse to play any waltzes, an especially "white" musical form, except "Pagan Love Song." When the audience requests it, he responds with a groan, and begins to mercilessly mock his unwitting listeners. Literary scholar Kenneth Bearden explains the raunchy aspects of Powerhouse's mockery:

> The ultimate significance of Powerhouse as Signifying Monkey now becomes clearer; while his performance of the requested 'Pagan Love Song' is on one level a form of entertainment for the white audience, it is, at a deeper level, a form of entertainment for Powerhouse and the band. The joy they get is not from merely performing, although performing is a source of release; they also enjoy laughing at the audience's expense. The signifying which goes on with the rendition of "Pagan Love Song" totally escapes the white audience's comprehension. What also totally escapes their attention is the "paganly" sexual gestures Powerhouse complements his 'love song' with: "Powerhouse's head rolls and sinks…He groans…with wandering fingers….His mouth gathers and forms a barbarous O, while his fingers walk up straight, unwillingly, three octaves"….The narrative voice misses the juxtaposition of the sacred (Love) and the profane (Pagan), and…mistakenly remarks, "it is a sad song." (7)

The narrator illustrates how the audience, believing in its supposed superiority to Powerhouse, in actuality lacks the intelligence and sophistication to know he is toying with them. Powerhouse then abruptly calls for an intermission after remarking dismissively "What time is it....What the hell place is this?" (134). Of course, the musicians cannot get a drink at the dance hall, so they go to a bar in the black part of town, and Powerhouse continues his performance.

In contrast to the white audience, the people in the World Cafe play right along with Powerhouse's improvisational games. When Powerhouse calls a waitress over after referring to her as "living statue," she signifies with a smile, flirtatious posture, and sassy "How I going to know who you might be? Robbers? Coming in out of the black of night right at midnight, setting down so big at my table?" He replies "Boogers…his eyes opening lazily as in a cave…" and the

waitress “screams delicately with pleasure. O Lord, she likes talk and scares” (136). Despite a change in locale and a warm welcome, the dominant discourse’s cultural appropriation still follows Powerhouse and his band into Negrotown. The bar’s nickelodeon contains only white artists performing black music. It is a disheartening moment, but Powerhouse pushes it aside to perform for and try to connect with his awestruck audience.

As soon as the Uranus Knockwood story starts, this audience immediately joins in to participate in a call-and-response manner, punctuating Powerhouse’s improvisations with proclamations such as “Ya! Ha!”, “Yeahhh!”, and “Oh, Powerhouse!” The audience is so excited by this performance they shove somebody forward for a solo. Welty writes of this moment that “…somebody moves forward like a slave, leading a great logy [sluggish] Negro with bursting eyes…” (138). This “Negro with bursting eyes,” Sugar-Stick Thompson, is prompted to tell Powerhouse his story about rescuing a bunch of white people who almost drowned, but for some reason he does not. In this scene, Welty underscores the power of white oppression. Powerhouse can express his outrage and indignation through his art, but Sugar-Stick does not have that outlet and remains mute, even within the safety of his own community (Bouton 84). This theme of subjugation through silencing will receive further examination in this chapter’s discussion of *Delta Wedding*.

As the band returns to the dance hall, Powerhouse tinkers with the Uranus Knockwood story again, and announces that he will send Knockwood a telegram that says, “What in the hell you talking about? Don’t make any difference: I gotcha. Name signed: Powerhouse” (140). If, Knockwood represents the specter of racism, then Powerhouse’s telegram announces his victory over that “no good pussyfooted crooning creeper” (138) through his signifying. If Knockwood represents white artists who appropriated black music and reaped financial rewards without acknowledging or properly paying the original artists, then Powerhouse wins again with his appropriation of white music that occurs throughout the performance for the white audience. In fact, the story ends with Powerhouse performing George Gershwin’s “Somebody Loves Me.”

He plays multiple choruses and improvised trills and shouts out “Somebody loves me” multiple times, clearly signifying right in the audience’s face.

The story ends with Powerhouse repeating the song’s last line, “Maybe it’s you,” with “a vast, impersonal and yet furious grimace” (141). While Powerhouse’s musical and verbal virtuosity are technically very different from the Shakespearean fool’s simple tumbling and juggling, Powerhouse, like the fool, serves as a moral compass voicing truths about human nature that no one else seems willing to acknowledge. He understands how the audience perceives him and knows his performance will not bridge the chasm between the races, but he still reaches out to the audience with a mocking, angry, and yet playful declaration of love. Like the ending of *A Passage*, the possibility of a real connection exists, but cannot come to fruition.

Besides demonstrating a masterful understanding of the Signifying Monkey trope, “Powerhouse” also allows Welty to don the Signifying Monkey mask. She does this through the manipulation of language and images with a sophistication that has, as Kenneth Bearden notes,

> Escape[d] the probing intellects of most literary scholars, scholars who have continually attempted to identify “truly artistic” elements associated with the Western literary tradition. And just as the Monkey takes pride in pushing his own luck, in “going out on a limb,” Welty sees risk as a vital part of truly artistic, truly enjoyable creation: “When we think in terms of the spirit,” she states, “which are the terms of writing, is there a conception more stupefying that that of security?....No art ever came out of not risking your neck. And risk – experiment – is a considerable part of the joy….” (9)

In addition to “Powerhouse,” *Delta Wedding* also represents tremendous artistic risk on Welty’s part. Besides reducing the novel to a plotless exaltation of Southern white womanhood, a misconception chapter three will address, many critics have charged Welty tacitly accepts and therefore approves of the racism fueling plantation society. They base their accusation on what they see as the relegation of the black characters to the story’s periphery, and the virtual silencing of those characters’ voices.

Since, however, Welty tells the story of *Delta Wedding* from the point of view of privileged white characters, it makes sense for the reader to infrequently see and hear the black characters. She understood the concept of subjugation through silencing, and she illustrates how the Fairchilds engage in this throughout the novel. For example, when two of the Fairchild sisters, Dabney and India, ride over to the Grove to visit their maiden aunts, they pass one of the Fairchild's field laborers, Man-Son, picking cotton in one of the fields. When he raises his hat to greet the bride-to-be, Dabney finds this breach of decorum strange, and, after nodding "sternly" to him, she cries out "'Man-Son, what do you mean? You go get to picking!'….She trembled all over, having to speak to him in such a way" (46). Speaking to Man-Son in this manner makes Dabney uncomfortable, but she knows as a Fairchild, and as the future wife of the plantation overseer, she must rebuke Man-Son's mildly friendly gesture and ensure that he remains conscious of his position as a subordinate.

While Man-Son gives an appropriately submissive response to Dabney's rebuke, two black characters, Pinchy and Aunt Studney, seem to turn the tables on the Fairchilds' hegemony. Throughout most of the novel, Pinchy struggles in the throes of a mysterious religious conversion process that both white and black characters refer to as "coming through." Many critics interpret Pinchy's coming through as a veiled reference to a pregnancy, something that Welty would neither confirm nor deny. Whatever the actual nature of this episode, Pinchy's silence illustrates Welty's extraordinarily acute perception of an African American perspective. As Gwen Banks notes,

> [Welty] draws perceptive readers into a more intimate understanding of the workings of oppression in the lives of her characters and implicates readers in that very oppression. Welty…places readers in the story with the intention that those sensitive to the story's racial dynamics will come to realize their own complicity and will as a result adjust their moral allegiances….[She] does not "crusade" in the sense of addressing polemic

> to her readers; instead, she reveals the damage done to individual lives and presents individual ways of coping with or subverting the oppressions her characters face in language that does not alienate even a conservative readership. (59)

Pinchy's refusal to speak to anyone, especially the Fairchilds, during her "coming through" period temporarily subverts the dominant culture's racism. Under the guise of a religious experience, she can ignore the Delta's rules about interactions between the races. As Ellen notes, "When Pinchy was coming through, she had not looked at her at all….Now, speaking primly, back in her relationship on the place, she was without any mystery to move her" (300).

Pinchy's silence in the face of her subjugators represents a small, but potent, gesture. A much more aggressive gesture comes from Aunt Studney, who manages to frighten the physically formidable Uncle Battle, the Fairchild family patriarch. With her mysterious over-the-shoulder sack and terse reply of "Ain't studyin' you" to anyone who dares address her, Aunt Studney goes anywhere she pleases on the plantation, even showing up uninvited in the Shellmound kitchen to help herself to a cup of coffee. She remains mostly silent by choice and refuses to engage in dialogue with anyone except to tell them she will not pay them any mind. With her mysterious nature and voodooish appearance, Aunt Studney represents all things unknowable and frightening about the Other for the Fairchilds. Her apparent mental illness allows her the freedom to exist outside the parameters of her society's rules. She simply does not care about what goes on around her. In a way, she is reminiscent of the punkah walla in *A Passage*, who, with his obliviousness, transcends all of the hatred seething in the courtroom.

In *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State*, the 1938 WPA publication that contained three of Welty's photographs, a section entitled "Negro Folkways" describes the unique nature of the Mississippi "folk" Negro.

Different from the Louisiana folk Negro in speech and from the east coast Negro in

> heritage, the Mississippi folk Negro stands alone, a prismatic personality. Those who know him well enough to understand something of his psychology, his character, and his needs, and like him well enough to accept his deficiencies, find him to be wise but credulous – a superstitious paradox. He seems to see all things, hear all things, believe all things. But ask him a question and he will have neither seen, heard, nor believed. He counsels with himself and walks his way alone. When he does talk, however, the Negro achieves a natural vigor of speech that few writers obtain. With a severely limited vocabulary and an innocence of grammatical niceties, he resourcefully gathers all the color of a scene and in simple words drives home his meaning with sledge-hammer force…the Mississippi folk Negro neither lays up monetary treasures nor invests in things of tangible value. He spends money for medical and legal advice, a virtue that undoubtedly would bring him praise but for the fact that he has never been known to take anyone's advice about anything. The remaining portion of his crop money goes to the dentist, the burial association, and to places of entertainment. In the distant future he hopes to be buried in style; for the present he may be satisfied with a gold tooth – one on a plate and in front, that he can take out, look at, then put back for others to see. (22)

The absurdly paternalistic tone of this explication of the "folk Negro" represents the standard white view of rural African Americans at the time of its publication and demonstrates the hegemonic device of justifying subjugation through the claim of "knowing" the subjugated better than he knows himself. Forster also recognized this tactic, and several Anglo-Indian characters in *A Passage* repeatedly claim to "know" the true nature of the Indian as a justification for their bigotry. The police superintendent insists to Fielding that "psychological laws…justify his right to treat Indians as objects of his administrative power….Knowing is an act of taking power over others if it is not a reciprocal recognition" (Armstrong 368).

While Forster critiques this form of subjugation by making the Anglo-Indians look like self-important fools, Welty applies a more subtle tactic in *Delta Wedding*.

In her 1946 review of the novel, Diana Trilling, wife of Lionel Trilling, made several cuttingly derisive remarks about *Delta Wedding* and Southern culture.

> I find it difficult to determine how much of my distaste…is dislike of its literary manner and how much is resistance to the culture out of which it grows and which it describes so fondly….Nothing happens in "Delta Wedding"….Domestic bustle and a spattering of family reminiscences are all the narrative structure Miss Welty needs to house her treasures of sensibility….If one finishes her book with a strong sense of confusion as to Miss Welty's own judgment upon certain aspects of Delta life, one has no reason to feel that it is because Miss Welty lacks the ability to communicate any content she wants to….It is where "Delta Wedding" implies – and the implication is pervasive – that the parochialism and snobbery of the Fairchild clan is the condition of the Fairchild kind of relaxation and charm, or that the Fairchild grace has a necessary source in a life of embattled pride, that I must deeply oppose its values. (578)

In addition to revealing significant intellectual snobbery, Trilling's review relegates Welty to the role of a sheltered, tremulous Southern Belle who romanticizes white privileged plantation and domestic culture. However, Trilling fails to understand that, while the novel affectionately describes the Fairchild's graces and failings and domestic events, it also pays deep and respectful homage to black Deltans and their culture. In fact, the novel's opening lines reference black Delta culture when Welty writes "The nickname of the train was the Yellow Dog. Its real name was the Yazoo-Delta. It was a mixed train," in a reference to W. C. Handy's seminal 1914 blues song "Yellow Dog Blues" which refers to the Yazoo-Delta railroad and is also commonly associated with the mass popularization of the genre (Sylvester 14).

Besides demonstrating an appreciation for the cultural contributions of black Deltans, Welty also uses auditory and visual cues to subtly underscore how the Fairchild's lifestyle and

sense of entitlement depend on the exploited labor of African Americans. Readers hear the continual thumping of the cotton press and the "sounds of the negroes" – bits of conversations, laughter, and the songs of the cotton pickers – constantly percolating under the tumult of wedding preparations, rowdy children, and romantic complications. Readers also see the cotton lint, tangible proof of the work going on in the fields, that sticks to everything in the house "every morning like a present from the fairies" (8), and, despite some critics' assertions otherwise, black characters do have a distinct voice and presence in the novel.

In terms of the train itself, many critics, such as Betina Entzminger, accurately note the Yellow Dog signals the change coming to the Delta in terms of race since it is a "mixed" train. This representation of integration and social change, which will destroy the Fairchilds' idyllic lifestyle, is foreshadowed in the frequently re-told incident involving George and cousin Maureen on the train's trestle.

> "Why did they let the Yellow Dog almost run over them?" Laura made her way to the table and leaned on it to ask Orrin, who answered her gravely, with his finger in his place in the book. "Here's the way it was – " For all of them told happenings like narrations, chronological and careful, as if the ear of the world listened and wished to know surely. "The whole family but Papa and Mama, and ten or twenty Negroes with us, went fishing in Drowning Lake. It will be two weeks ago Sunday. And so coming home we walked the track. We were tired – we were singing. On the trestle Maureen danced and caught her foot. I've done that, but I know how to get loose. Uncle George kneeled down and went to work on Maureen's foot, and the train came. He hadn't got Maureen's foot loose, so he didn't jump either. The rest of us did jump and the Dog stopped just before it him them and ground them all to pieces." (23)

In terms of the trestle incident, Entzminger convincingly sums up the event as an example of George acting as the chivalrous white knight of Delta manhood trying to protect his family from the coming changes. However, she also describes black characters in the novel as

nothing more than fetishized manifestations of white characters' rebellious impulses and guilt. This approach trivializes Welty's intentions. With her incredibly sensitive understanding of human nature and insistence upon revealing the humanity at work in all of her characters, why would Welty create one-dimensional figures in a novel of such rich detail? This approach greatly simplifies both the characters and Welty's artistry, and misses Welty's subversion of the hegemonic device of "knowing" the Other.

After Laura's chaotic first meal at Shellmound, Ellen finally has a moment to give her undivided attention to the little girl. She takes her into the kitchen to help bake a cake for George and Robbie. When they walk into the kitchen, Ellen orders Roxie, one of the "Fairchild Negroes," to get out, and announces that she and Laura will make a cake. Roxie promptly tells Ellen, whom Aunt Mac and Aunt Tempe frequently deride for not adhering to the proper Fairchild and Delta codes of feminine behavior, what she needs to do.

> "You loves *them*," said Roxie. "You're fixin' to ask me to grate you a coconut, not get out." "Yes, I am. Grate me the coconut." Ellen smiled. "I got fourteen guinea eggs this evening, and that's a sign I ought to make it, Roxie." "Take 'em all: guineas," said Roxie belittlingly. "Well, you can get the oven hot." Ellen tied her apron back on. "You can grate me the coconut, and a lemon while you're at it, and blanch me the almonds. I'm going to let Laura pound me the almonds in the mortar and pestle." (29)

Roxie must live according to the Delta code of conduct for black female domestic workers, and, in this scene, she gently reminds Ellen that she, too, must adhere to certain rules.

Aunt Mashula's coconut cake is the proper thing for a Fairchild woman to bake in this situation, and Ellen should command Roxie to execute certain tasks for her, not dismiss her. A proper Delta woman always relies on "her people" and knows, as Troy states, that being a true Deltan means "knowing how to handle your Negroes" (125). While Roxie does not want Ellen to receive a rebuke for unorthodox behavior, she also does not want to receive a rebuke herself. Out of necessity, "the Fairchild Negroes" must know their bosses' expectations, needs, and

whims. Welty understood the survival rules for black Deltans, and, even though the bulk of the novel represents the point of view of the Fairchilds, who regard them for the most part "as beneath notice," she still finds moments to give readers glimpses of the people living on the peripheries of the Fairchild world who make their languorous lifestyle possible.

When George makes his first dashing appearance in the novel, Roxie and "the others" see him first. Roxie, who knows the Fairchilds better than they know themselves and thereby subverts their hegemonic "knowing," narrates the scene, and takes a little dig at George with a reference to his surreptitious drinking:

> Then coming over the grass in the yard rode Mr. George Fairchild – in his white clothes and all – on a horse they had never seen before. It was a sorrel filly with flax mane and tail and pretty stockings. "She's lady broke. She's wedding present for Miss Dab"…."Wouldn't it be a sight did Mr. George pull out and take a little swallow out of his flask made all of gold, sitting where he is – like he do take?" "Miss Ellen! Here come Mr. George!" (63)

She knows about the horse being a gift, she knows George likes to sneak a drink, and she knows that he does so out of a solid gold flask. Staying one step ahead of your white bosses represented a crucial survival technique in the segregated South, and Welty makes a clear reference to the gossip grapevine making this possible in Brunswick-town, the black section of Fairchilds, when Shelley Fairchild brings Partheny, an elderly black woman who was Dabney's nurse and who dabbles in conjuring, a cup of broth.

> The little houses were many and alike, all whitewashed with a green door, with stovepipes crooked like elbows of hips behind, okra, princess feathers, and false drag-onhead growing around them, and China trees over them like umbrellas, with chickens beneath sitting with shut eyes in dust holes. It was shady like a creek bed. The smell of scalding water, feathers, and iron pots mixed with the smells of darkness. Here, where no grass was let grow on the flat earth that was bare like their feet, the old

> women had it shady, secret, lazy, and cool. A devious, invisible vine of talk seemed to grow from shady porch to shady porch, though all the old women were hidden. (167)

Shelley's unease about the "vine of talk" reflects her subconscious understanding that "the Negroes" knowledge of all things Fairchild surpasses her own. This detailed knowledge gives them a sense of authority, as demonstrated when Partheny suddenly appears out of nowhere to dress Dabney for her wedding. "She went straight and speaking to nobody to Dabney's closed door and flung it open. 'Git yourself here to me, child. Who dressin' you? Git out, Nothin',' and Roxie, Shelley, and Aunt Primrose all came backing out" (277). Partheny, despite moments of dementia, knows all and therefore presents a powerful image of agency in the face of subjugation. She may have to accept the injustices of life in the segregated South, but she still finds a way to exert authority and make herself heard even in the Fairchilds' most sacrosanct moments.

In 1971, Welty published a collection of photographs she took during her WPA stint entitled *One Time One Place: Mississippi in the Depression: A Snapshot Album*. In the preface, she discusses the many photographs she took of black subjects and, in particular, she focuses on the first photograph in the book, an elderly black woman standing with her chin raised in front of what looks like a sharecropper's shack. Her face is heavily creased, and her clothes are shabby but neatly pressed.

> In taking all these pictures, I was attended, I now know by an angel – a presence of trust. In particular, the photographs of black persons by a white person may not testify soon again to such intimacy. It is trust that dates the pictures now, more than the vanished years. And had I no shame as a white person for what message might lie in my pictures of black persons? No, I was too busy imagining myself into their lives to be open to any generalities. I wished no more to indict anybody, to prove or disprove

> anything by my pictures, than I would have wished to do harm to the people in them, or have expected any harm from them to come to me….What I respond to now, just as I did the first time, is not the Depression, not the Black, not the South, not even the perennially sorry state of the whole world, but the story of her life in her face. And though I did not take these pictures to prove anything, I think they most assuredly do show something – which is to make a far better claim for them. Her face to me is full of meaning more truthful and more terrible and, I think, more noble than any generalization about people could have prepared me for or could describe for me now. I learned from my own pictures, one by one, and had to; for I think we are the breakers of our own hearts. (10-11)

This intense desire to reveal people's individual stories gives Welty's photographs a quiet, but indisputable, power. Like Forster, she understood how to "see" the individual behind the construct of race, and, in her gentle way, she gave depth and complexity to even the most marginalized characters in her works.

CHAPTER THREE: A PLACE IN THE MODERNIST CANON

In her 1924 essay entitled "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Virginia Woolf spiritedly countered Arnold Bennett's claim that England had "no young novelists of first-rate importance at the present moment, because they are unable to create characters that are real, true, and convincing" (319). She noted that Mr. Bennett's traditional literary understanding of character was no longer valid, and the current state of world affairs had forever altered our understanding of reality. She specifically named the moment when everything changed.

> And now I will [assert] that on or about December, 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910….All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, politics, and literature….I must recall what Mr. Arnold Bennett says. He says that it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of surviving. Otherwise, die it must. But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? (319 – 25)

Woolf's reevaluating of literary tradition and questioning our understanding of reality represents the spirit at the heart of modernism.

The unprecedented pace of industrial, technological, scientific, social, and cultural change that occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the collapse of previously-held systems of belief and produced an impulse to, as Ezra Pound explained, "make it new day by day" (265). Malcolm Bradbury succinctly describes the modernist artistic credo as a result of

> the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, or existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. [Modernist] art [is] consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when…all realities have become subjective fictions….The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over. (Bradbury 27-28)

When considering this dramatic break with nineteenth-century tradition, it seems unlikely that E. M. Forster and Eudora Welty, with their refined upbringings, well-mannered demeanors, and adherence to more traditional literary conventions would champion the modernist aesthetic. However, with their understated, but persistent, questioning of their cultures' status quo through examinations of human relationships and their subtle tweaks of literary traditions, Forster and Welty embodied the movement's progressive social and literary philosophies

During his time at King's college, Forster's election into the Apostles introduced him to some of the brightest and most progressive thinkers of the era. While the exceedingly shy Forster tended to be more of an observer than a participant in the society's discussions, Leonard Woolf described his unique place within the group.

> [Lytton Strachey] nicknamed him the Taupe, partly because of his faint physical resemblance to a mole, but principally because he seemed intellectually and emotionally to travel unseen underground and every now and again pop up unexpectedly with some subtle observations or delicate quip which somehow or other he had found in the depths of the earth or of his own soul. (Sowing, 188)

Despite Forster's quiet demeanor, clearly his powers of observation and the profundity of his words had an impact upon his listeners. Leonard Woolf's words are also applicable to Forster's

novels since, as will be discussed shortly, subtle and delicate quips consistently "pop up" throughout his works, revealing a surprisingly progressive agenda.

When Forster joined the Bloomsbury Group, he again chose a peripheral role in discussions, and, again, his words and opinions had a significant impact. Many of the group members deferred to Forster as a figure of authority, and considered his opinions sacrosanct. Michael Hoffman and Ann Ter Harar discuss how Virginia Woolf's diaries reveal she considered Forster an important mentor.

> Woolf's diaries testify to the influence that Forster's critical response had on her self-esteem. Her entries reveal that with each successive novel it is Forster's judgment she awaits and his critique that – other than Leonard's – she values most highly…After the publication of *Jacob's Room*, the letter containing Forster's simple praise ("I am sure it is good") is the one Woolf "liked best of all" (Diaries 2: 209). While anticipating reviews of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf writes: "The only judgment on Mrs. D I await with trepidation (but that's too strong) is Morgan's. He will say something enlightening (3:22)." When she receives his approbation three days later, her sparse diary entry underscores the significance of the event. "Well, Morgan admires…This is a weight off my mind." She notes, as well, that Forster "kissed my hand" (3:24). (2)

Forster also praised *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's masterpiece of high modernism. In a letter to Woolf dated 5 June, 1927, he wrote of the novel that "It's awfully sad, very beautiful both in (non-radiant) colour and shape; it stirs me much more…than any thing else you have written" (qtd. in Furbank 145).

For Eudora Welty, reading *To the Lighthouse* was also a moving experience. In her 1981 forward to the novel, she describes reading the book for the first time:

> As it happened, I came to discover *To the Lighthouse* for myself. If it seems unbelievable today, this was possible to do in 1930 in Mississippi, when I was young, reading at my own will and as pleasure led me. I might have missed it if it hadn't been

> for the strong signal in the title. Blessed with luck and innocence, I fell upon the novel that once and forever opened the door of imaginative fiction for me, and read it cold, in all its wonder and magnitude….Reading *To the Lighthouse* now, I am still unwarned, still unprepared in the face of it, and my awe and my delight remain forever cloudless. (vii)

While Welty did not claim membership in a modernist-oriented intellectual coterie like the Bloomsbury Group, she did openly voice her admiration of modernist writers and techniques (Kreyling 110-11), and, as her words about *To the Lighthouse* illustrate, aspects of the modernist style had a significant impact upon her imagination.

While Forster also championed the modernist impulse, this does not mean he always found it appealing. In the "Fantasy" chapter of *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster discusses James Joyce's *Ulysses.* While he applauds Joyce's technical virtuosity and states that the novel represents "perhaps the most interesting literary experiment of our day" (120), he also expresses severe disapproval of what he views as the "degradation" occurring within the plot, particularly in the "Circe" episode:

> [*Ulysses*] is a dogged attempt to cover the universe in mud, it is an inverted Victorianism, an attempt to make crossness and dirt succeed where sweetness and light failed, a simplification of the human character…in Night Town…Heaven and earth fill with infernal life, personalities melt, sexes interchange, until the whole universe, including poor, pleasure-loving Mr. Bloom, is involved in one joyless orgy. Does it come off? No, not quite. Indignation in literature never quite comes off…all through the book we have similar experiments – the aim of which is to degrade all things and more particularly civilization and art, by turning them inside out and upside down. (121-22)

Forster's comments that "Indignation in literature never quite comes off" and that *Ulysses* represents an "attempt to make crossness and dirt succeed where sweetness and light failed, [and is] a simplification of the human character" bring to mind the sentiments Welty expresses in

"Must the Novelist Crusade?" While Welty's essay primarily concerns how fiction treats racism, she writes,

> …the voice that seeks to do other than communicate when it makes a noise has something brutal about it; it is no longer using words as words but as something to brandish, with which to threaten, brag or condemn. The noise is the simple assertion of self, the great, mindless, general self. And for all its volume it is ephemeral. Only mean ing lasts….Enormities can be lessened, cheapened, just as good and delicate things can be. We can and will cheapen all feeling by letting it go savage or parading in it. (153)

While Welty expressed exception to a heavy-handed ideological bent in literature, Forster found Joyce's purposefully disrespectful inversions of cultural institutions a pedantic, ill-mannered incarnation of modernist ideology. For both writers, the importance of fiction resided in its communication of meaning through the subtleties of human relationships, not the writer's pontification about the evils of racism or purposeful thumbing of the nose at cultural sensibilities. Forster, who always conducted himself with enormous dignity, viewed *Ulysses* as the work of an *enfant terrible*, and he had little tolerance for badly behaved people.

Despite making curmudgeonly comments about the women's suffrage movement –"'the Suffragettes are becoming a real danger….It is difficult for an outsider to settle at what point physical force becomes justifiable'" (qtd. in Furbank 180) – Forster endorsed women's personal and artistic liberation. As he optimistically stated in "The Feminine Note in Literature" (1910),

> What you mistake for the masculine or the feminine will disappear, and personality, and nothing besides personality, will remain. For think of the past. Think how, until lately, women were the servants or playthings of men. On such rare occasions as they did acquire culture, their outlook was too conventionalised and limited to win them immortality. Time has changed much of this, and will change more. A freer atmosphere is at hand, and the artificial products of the past – the Chatelaine, the Grande Dame, the

> Bluestocking – will be blown away and give place to the individual…distinguished only by personal qualities. (20)

Considering the domineering presence of female relatives in his life and, later, his occasional conflicts with the wives of his lovers, it should not come as a surprise that Forster struggled with misogynistic feelings. He advocated for personal freedoms, but in keeping with his dislike for Joyce's "indignation" in *Ulysses*, he found the feminist movement's tone an ill-mannered distraction. Naomi Black describes Forster's conflicted view of feminism:

> After Virginia Woolf's death, E. M. Forster said that there were "spots of [feminism] all over her work, and it was constantly in her mind." He did not like feminism, and thought the "cantankerous" *Three Guineas* the worst of her books. In fairness to Forster, we must note that he also generously insisted that the young women of future generations should have the final word on Woolf's feminism, instead of elderly men like himself. (12)

In terms of feminist scholarship, some critics have labeled Forster a misogynist and argued "Forster's misogyny was perhaps a natural corollary of his homosexuality" (Sarker 136) and "we must accept the fact that Forster saw women as part of the enemy camp. While not precisely antagonistic to them, he believed them to be allied with the forces and institutions of repression" (Showalter 7). However, Forster's work is in keeping with the modernist emphasis on the "ideals of freedom, justice, and equality" (Giroux 2). Just as he considered "With a clinical eye…his own complicity in the privileges of race and caste" (Moffat 184) after his encounters with a male prostitute in India, Forster's understood his irritations with feminism originated from his personal experiences and decorous nature.

Eudora Welty also distanced herself from what she perceived as the feminist movement's stridency. In a 1974 interview for *The Miami Herald*, Jonathan Yardley wrote that Welty

> gets a lot of Women's Lib mail, asking her to take a stand or sign a petition…and

> although she always replies politely she does not get exercised about the subject. "I don't think anything is against women writers," she says. "I've always been my own boss, I've never had any prejudice shown to me, so I have no bone to pick. I do think women should be paid as much as men, which I don't suppose anyone would disagree with. I don't see why, just because I write stories, that should give me any authority….Maybe I'm shirking responsibility, but I don't think so. Everything I feel is in my stories." (Prenshaw 11)

Later, this chapter will discuss how Welty's innate feminism, despite a demurral from a formal association with the Women's Liberation movement, permeates *Delta Wedding*. As is the case with Forster, Welty's reluctance to publicly endorse progressive movements in no way reflects the humanist and modernist values at the core of her works. Both writers created female characters with a desire to independently navigate male-dominated society.

While Forster conducted himself with dignity, his formality and insistence upon decorum, even in artistic endeavors, does not detract from his accomplishments as a modernist. In a 2006 article in *The Guardian* entitled "Enlivened by Exasperation," John Mullan describes E. M. Forster's influence in the writings of the contemporary novelist Zadie Smith. When asked to name her favorite Forster novel, Mullan writes, "Smith…recommended *A Room with a View*, perhaps for the unusual reason that it is full of lessons in 'how to behave.'" Smith did not mean matters of everyday table or conversational etiquette. Her comment underscores how Forster expressed his modernist sensibilities in his own quiet and well-mannered way. In other words, the novel employs its era's familiar literary tropes to subtly encourage the subversion of late Victorian/early Edwardian social and artistic conventions without all of the "indignation" and degradation of a work like *Ulysses*. Instead of making the novel a tirade against Victorianism's intolerances, Forster illustrates the happiness found in a life free from the constraints of "Society." *A Room with a View* has a traditional structure, and ends like any proper comedy of manners – with a marriage. This has lead some critics, such as Lionel Trilling, who described it

as “a very modest little novel” (*The Kenyon Review* 167), to dismiss the book as entertaining, but formulaic. This view, however, does not do the novel justice. When Forster published *A Room*, he had just returned from his first trip to Italy. While the trip proved inspirational in many ways, he still had little life experience, no sexual experience, and an obsequious relationship with his mother (Furbank 96). He was very sheltered and, in a way, innocent. This innocence infuses the novel and gives it a very light feel. However, the novel does pose some challenges to the norms of the times, including traditional women’s roles.

In *A Room With a View*, Lucy struggles with and then triumphs over Edwardian feminine convention. Despite choosing the traditional route of marriage, Lucy’s choice of marrying for love instead of social position makes her a transitional feminist figure. While her choice is not as uncompromising as Lily’s Briscoe’s in *To the Lighthouse*, it still represents a flouting of conventional behavior for a young woman of Lucy’s class. Lucy also represents an idealization of Forster’s dream of someday having the courage to break from society’s rules and openly love the person of his choice. Just as Forster hid his sexuality behind a façade of British propriety, he also masked the novel’s modernist and feminist impulses behind traditional literary structure.

In addition to promoting a more modern view of love and feminine roles, the novel encourages the subversion of Edwardian classism. Charlotte, who personifies the Edwardian view of society, always makes herself look ridiculous by fretting over the socially correct thing to do. When Mr. Emerson kindly offers the ladies his room with a view, Charlotte cannot believe her ears, and her response illustrates her elitist views.

> Generally at a pension people looked them over for a day or two before speaking, and often did not find out that they would “do” till they had gone. She knew that the intruder was ill-bred, even before she glanced at him. He was an old man, of heavy build, with a fair, shaven face and large eyes. There was something childish in those eyes, though it was not the childishness of senility. What exactly is was Miss Bartlett did not stop to

> consider, for her glance passed on to his clothes. These did not attract her. He was probably trying to become acquainted with them before they got into the swim. So she assumed a dazed expression when he spoke to her, and then said: 'A view? Oh, a view! How delightful a view is!'…The better class of tourist was shocked at this, and sympathized with the new-comers. (4)

Besides repudiating Edwardian snobbery, the narrator's slyly derisive tone mocks Charlotte's social affectations and demonstrates Forster's belief that when people let go of society's artificially constructed barriers, and, in a modernist fashion, question the nature of their realities, they can "see" themselves, other people, and the world around them. Had Charlotte been able to see through Edwardian conventions, she would have found the "something childish" in Mr. Emerson's eyes as indicative of an open and honest character. As Harold Bloom notes, "Forster…wishes *to make us see*, in the hope that by seeing we will learn to connect, with ourselves and with others" (*E. M. Forster* 3). Charlotte fails to recognize Mr. Emerson's significant worth because she is unwilling to "see" people outside of her society's constructs; therefore, her actions seem small and petty in light of Mr. Emerson's generosity. The act of "seeing" was also vitally important to Eudora Welty, who, after all, named the second section of *One Writer's Beginnings* "Learning to See." Like Forster, Welty's unusually acute powers of perception made her "a loving observer" (Westling 587) capable of "seeing" people as unique individuals despite social barriers.

While *A Room* debunks the relevance of Edwardian gender and class conventions, in terms of literary form it does not present the reader with any experimental challenges. However, Forster does sneakily introduce a modernist attitude towards art. In an echo of the era's break from literary traditions, visual artists adopted "a style and…theoretical stance…break[ing] the codes and conventions of visual production – especially those preserved by Academies" (Dawtrey 177). When Lucy loses her Baedeker, she is at a loss. How will she know what works to examine in Santa Croce and what John Ruskin, the influential Victorian

cultural critic and Man of Letters, said she should enjoy?

> Her first morning was ruined, and she might never be in Florence again. A few minutes ago she had been all high spirits, talking as a woman of culture, and half persuading herself she was full of originality. Now she entered the church depressed and humiliated, not even able to remember whether it was built by the Franciscans or the Dominicans. Of course, it must be a wonderful building. But how like a barn! And how very cold! Of course, it contained frescoes by Giotto, in the presence of whose tactile values she was capable of feeling what was proper. But who was to tell her which they were? She walked about disdainfully, unwilling to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date. There was no one even to tell her which, of all the sepulchral slabs that paved the nave and transepts, was the one that was really beautiful, the one that had been most praised by Mr. Ruskin. (19)

While this passage reflects Lucy's difficulty transcending popular convention, the narrator's mildly sardonic tone marks it as a jab at the typically Victorian love of categorizing and inventorying all things, including something as subjective as artistic merit. This impulse sprang from the era's "sheer amount of new information available – new inventions firing the Industrial Revolution, new flora and fauna brought back in the age of imperial expansion – [and] fed an urge to numerate, to classify" (Flanders 117). Mr. Emerson encourages Lucy to consider the frescoes in an honest way, and loudly voices his own derisive opinion of a particular work, much to Mr. Eager's distress. Mr. Emerson's outburst over what he deems an unfairly lauded piece of art causes Lucy to forget "how to behave" (22). For a moment, she considers the possibility of behaving outside the norm, but does not yet have the courage. When Lucy later walks into the violet field with the cab driver calling out "Courage and love" (66), Forster seems to gently make fun of his own quest to live a meaningful and emotionally honest life.

Despite such levity, *A Room*, with its muted artistry and modernist use of satire, merits far more critical attention than it has received. Wendy Moffat explains how John Lehmann and

Christopher Isherwood, both of whom viewed Forster as a mentor, recognized the progressive nature of Forster's early novels, and in comparison to the more recognizably modernist "great experimenters" such as Joyce and Woolf,

> Forster's early novels seemed sedate. But to John and Christopher, these subtle satires of buttoned-up English life were revelatory and unpredictable. Christopher admired Morgan's light touch, his razor balance of humor and wryness, insight and idealism. "Instead of trying to screw all his scenes up to the highest possible pitch, he tones them down until they sound like mothers'-meeting gossip…There's actually *less* emphasis laid on the big scenes than on the unimportant ones." The novels looked at life from a complicated position – finding a dark vein of social comedy in the tragic blindness of British self-satisfaction. In spite of their sensitivity, they had a sinewy wit. (5)

In comparison to *A Room*, *A Passage to India* seems the work of a more worldly, and, at times, cynical writer. During the sixteen years between the publication of *A Room* and *A Passage to India*, Forster gained a tremendous amount of personal experience. He traveled extensively, had lovers, and broadened his artistic tastes. He also witnessed many ugly things – the arrogance and bigotry of the British Empire, World War I, and the virulent homophobia that prevented him from living openly as a gay man. His greatly increased personal and artistic sophistication combined with the tumultuous world events that occurred during the years between novels resulted in a work that still retained bits of his "sinewy wit," but, overall, had a much darker tone and view of the human condition. *A Passage to India* also makes a strong case for Forster's status as one of the great modernist authors.

When considering the many mythological and religious references in *A Passage*, it is tempting to look at those references as Forster's use of what T. S. Eliot described in "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" (1923) as the "mythical method" (178). With this method, modernists employed mythological references and images because, in their opinion, they "faced a world devoid of order; fearing entropy, they intuited, primarily through the potentialities of metaphor

and myth, an order behind, within, or above the chaos of modern experience" (Johnson 540). However, Forster firmly disassociated himself from this methodology in a critical, but kind, letter to a graduate student who had sent him his master's thesis on *A Passage*. The thesis, entitled "More than India: The Mythological Meaning of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*," was, according to its author, "a solemn conglomeration of supposed allusions from Hinduism, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and other specialized sources" (Selig 471). In the letter, Forster wrote:

> Dear Mr. Selig,
>
> Many thanks for your interesting and generous thesis on *A Passage to India*, and for the M.S. copy of it which I am glad to possess. I hope you won't think me ungrateful and discourteous, but – as perhaps you presume – I fail to follow most of your criticism. For one thing, you credit me with the reading of much I have never read. I never thought of Aum [Ohm] when I wrote Boum, and I was unaware of the subdivisions of the mystic syllable. I have never read Miss Weston [*From Ritual to Romance*], have only glanced at Frazer [*The Golden Bough*], have never been interested in Plato, never thought of his Cave in connection with the Marabar, and throughout your thesis have encountered inferences and comparisons that surprised me. You may reply that I knew all the above subconsciously, and then of course you have got me!....Your affection for the book is evident, and I much appreciate it….I also agree with many isolated judgments….It is your critical method that I feel compelled to reject – and maybe my subconscious will one day rise to the surface, and demonstrate to me that I am wrong! (qtd. in Selig 473)

For Forster, the graduate student's clinical dissection of *A Passage* strays too far from his much simpler *raison détre* – the importance of human relationships. Despite Forster's never having "thought of Aum when I wrote Boum" and his disassociation from the movement's

mythological trope, this does not diminish the modernist import of the Marabar Caves incident. For Adela and Mrs. Moore, exploring the Marabar Caves causes great upheaval in their lives. This upheaval represents some of the existential dilemmas of modernism.

Many modernists, such as T. S. Eliot, utilized Christian theology and imagery in their work, while others, like Virginia Woolf, declared themselves atheists. Christianity, along with other religions, found itself in a state of crisis during the first part of the twentieth century. In his essay "Modernism as a World-Wide Movement" (1925), Eustace A. Haydon, a religion historian at the University of Chicago, described this modernist crisis as

> the struggle of the future to free itself from the clinging hands of a dying past; in another [sense] it is the anxious effort to adjust old values to a new era of larger knowledge and more complex activity. Sometimes, in the past, the change has come swiftly with much dread and aching of heart; more often it has been the result of a slow, unconscious drift of the generations. Today, however, all the religions of the world have been shocked into awareness of a strange and startling transformation of the religious problem of the planet. Modernism is now a world-issue and that it should be the same for all religions is a new thing under the sun. Never before, in human history, have all religions faced the same problems, the same tasks, and the necessity of adjustment to the same science. (Haydon 1-2)

During his years at Cambridge, Forster came under the influence of another undergraduate, Hugh Meredith, a spirited, and avowedly atheist, intellectual force. Meredith's guidance, along with Forster's decision that he did not care for Christ's personality since he had no humor and seemed to like suffering, led him to abandon Christianity with very little fuss" (Furbank 61-62). Eudora Welty also found fault with Christianity's teachings, and as she explains in *One Writer's Beginnings*, she "painlessly came to realize that the reverence I felt for the holiness of life is not ever likely to be entirely at home in organized religion" (37). However, for Mrs. Moore in *A Passage*, the break is cataclysmic. Prior to the cave incident, Mrs. Moore

demonstrates a tolerant liberalism dramatically different from the standard Victorian racism and blatant cruelty of other women in the Chandrapore Club. As evidenced in her visit to the mosque in the second chapter, Mrs. Moore's Christianity includes respect for other faiths. However, though God "had been constantly in her thoughts since she [had] entered India…oddly enough he satisfied her less. She must needs pronounce his name frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious" (43).

Upon hearing the Cave's echo, she realizes that all of Christianity's "divine words from 'Let there be Light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'" (134). Her vague dissatisfaction with Christianity spirals into a nullification of her belief system, and "in some indescribable way [it begins] to undermine her hold on life" (133). This sudden leveling of hierarchies echoes the modernist detachment from traditional belief systems and societal constructs. For sensitive Mrs. Moore, the modern era's "'trauma of alienation' – a feeling that the past is unmoored, the future uncertain, and the present an unstable relation of people and things" (Krasner 7), proves overwhelming.

While Mrs. Moore's stark epiphany in the caves illustrates the era's spiritual crisis, Ade-la's experience in the caves reveals a feminist perspective on the cultural chaos of the early twentieth century. Prior to the twentieth century, the Victorian notion of True Womanhood, with its relegation of women to the domestic sphere, outlined the qualities necessary for a woman to have fulfilling life. As Barbara Welter notes,

> The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (152)

When Adela first arrives in India, she seems prepared to take on the traditional role of a True Woman. However, as the novel progresses, she begins to express indecision about marrying Ronny that is indicative of the dramatic cultural changes concerning marriage occurring for women in the early twentieth century. In her description of these changes, Jane Miller explains how

> What had initially been designated the Marriage Question in the 1890's came to be perceived during the Edwardian era as the Marriage *Problem*. The majority of Edwardian women did expect and desire to marry, but they were doing so later in life and with more personal volition….Because of new opportunities for higher education and employment, more women were leading independent lives before marriage, and were subsequently less tolerant of the traditional, patriarchal structure of marriage which required subservience, self-abnegation, and a limited sphere of activity and influence. (40)

While Adela does travel all the way to India in an attempt to secure a husband, her questioning the wisdom of marrying Ronny reflects the influence of the Edwardian New Woman. The New Woman figure originated in a *fin de siècle* literary genre known as New Woman fiction (Richardson and Willis 1-3). New Woman novels, such as Mary Chavelita Dunne's *Keynotes* (1893) and Frances Elizabeth Clarke's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), gave female readers an outlet for questioning Victorian gender norms. Their formulaic plots revolved around characters who either rejected matrimony or struggled to escape an unhappy marriage. While not breaking any new literary ground, the novels served a powerful purpose since they allowed women to express discontent with the status quo without taking the drastic step of abandoning the institution of marriage. Gail Cunningham explains how New Woman novels

> In portraying marital breakdown, adultery, free love or bachelor motherhood unaccompanied by the approved moral retribution – or indeed heavily supported by an impassioned moral defence – …were ruthlessly hacking away the foundations of

> idealized femininity on which much of the Victorian moral structure was built. More or less overtly they both were broadcasting the ideas of the New Woman, and an avid public hung on their every word, eager to be either loftily inspired or deliciously shocked. (Cunningham 19)

With the advent of first, the Edwardian era, and, then, modernist sensibilities, New Woman fiction faded away. However, "rhetoric about the New Woman continued, fulfilling various political and aesthetic agendas" (MacLeod Walls 230), and the term New Woman became synonymous with any expression of female independence. As for Adela, her outspoken ways and disapproval of the Chandrapore Club's Victorian social structure and imperial racism all indicate her independence and progressive inclinations. Adela worries about the monotony of a life with Ronny in which "[they] would look into the club…every evening, then drive home to dress; they would see the Lesleys and the Callendars and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite them and be invited by them" (38). When she prepares to enter the caves, she realizes that she and Ronny do not love each other. Despite getting her emotions "well under control" (136) and deciding not to break the engagement since it will cause so much trouble, once she hears the cave's echo, she enters a fugue-like state and disaster ensues.

The nature of Adela's experience in the cave has been the subject of much critical debate. Many scholars interpret the cave as a symbol of female sexuality, and they attribute Adela's rape accusation to sexual repression (Davidis 268). Jungian critics have detailed what they view as the scene's complicated "Jungian synchronicity (meaningful coincidence[s])" (Broege 48). Considering Forster's admitted ignorance regarding female sexuality (Furbank 37) and his claim that when examining literature psychoanalysis is best left behind in favor of "analogies with natural states" ("The Creator as Critic" 65), these interpretations seem unnecessarily complex. Adela's breakdown results from a failure to make meaningful connections with others – Ronny, the women in the Club, Indians – and is indicative of the

modernist crisis of alienation. Sara Murphy accurately asserts that Adela accuses Aziz of rape in a desperate attempt to stabilize herself after the emotionally harrowing cave experience (32), not as an expression of frustrated sexual desire for Aziz, for, while she finds him attractive, she does not "admire him with any personal warmth" (137).

After the failure of both her marriage dreams and her efforts to connect with the "real" India, Adela expresses a stubborn determination to chart her own path. After the trial debacle, she tells Fielding she will return home to England and create an independent life with a career and "heaps of friends of my own type" (237). While Adela does not embody the more radical aspects of the New Woman, since she is not "capable of espousing the trappings of the New Woman, driving cars, traveling alone, shortening her skirts" (Murphy 31), she does question convention and express agency. Adela, with her desire to make a future for herself outside of marriage, is a transitional, but effective, feminist figure. She cuts her ties to convention, but has not yet found a new way to be. In a similar manner, Forster also represents a transitional figure. In *A Passage*, Forster admonishes tradition but offers no answers to the early twentieth century's sense of disconnection and alienation. Just as Adela's presence on the peripheries of feminist convention does not diminish her importance, Forster's peripheral role in modernism does not decrease the weight of his contributions.

Lois Cucullu considers Forster's presence on the outskirts of modernism and explains that "Contemporaries and critics alike have consistently assigned him to the periphery…and have explained his placement by reference to artistic diffidence, dated politics, maternal deterrence, or sexual frustration" (19). While Cucullu correctly disagrees with these suppositions, she goes on to argue that Forster's "alleged marginality" was not due to his naturally reserved demeanor or preferred role as an observer. Instead, she contends, Forster deliberately affected a pose of marginality in order to find a place among what she labels the "clerisy" – or the "elite producers" of the modernist movement (21-27). Such manipulative and false behavior does not fit with art historian Kenneth Clark's recollection of Forster. Clark, a

close friend of Forster's, described him as "a man with a genuinely free mind….He believed in human beings and human relationships and thought nothing else mattered. He loved people, places and music. He disliked institutions, categories and hierarchies" (197). Clark's description provides a far more compelling, and accurate, representation of Forster than Cucullu's argument. In addition to underscoring his modernist mindset, Forster's opposition to "hierarchies" makes it unlikely that he would have wanted a place in an "elite" social or artistic group. Forster's eschewing of societal constructs and emphasis on humanism echoes Eudora Welty's statement that "morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction, and the serious writer has never lived who dealt with anything else" ("Must the Novelist Crusade?" 148). In addition to discussing the morality of *A Passage* later in the essay, Welty also alludes to *Howards End* and Margaret Schlegel's "gentle and daring" (156) desire for people to "only connect." Powerhouse expresses a similar desire for connection with both his white and black audiences, and, through his modernist performances, Welty illustrates the importance and difficulty of enacting Forster's words.

In his essay "Tolerance" (1941), Forster posits that learning to tolerate differences represents the only way for society to recover from the hatred and chaos fueling World War II. He notes that

> The world is very full of people – appallingly full; it has never been so full before – and they are all tumbling over each other. Most of these people one doesn't know and some of them one doesn't like; doesn't like the color of their skins, say, or the shapes of their noses, or the way they blow them or don't blow them, or the way they talk, or their smell or their clothes, or their fondness for jazz or their dislike of jazz, and so on. (45)

While Forster's words primarily concern the quirkiness of human nature, they also illustrate the significance of jazz discourse in the modernist era. Most modernist artists did not express much opinion about jazz per se. However, it functioned "as a conspicuous feature of modernity….Jazz unquestionably informed modernism as intellectual challenge, sensory

provocation, and social texture" (Rasula 157).

When considering the most popular jazz artists of the twenties and thirties, jazz scholar Alfred Appel, Jr. convincingly likens their vocal styles to the works of prominent modernist artists such as Alexander Calder and Pablo Picasso:

> As singers, [Louis] Armstrong, [Fats] Waller, [Jack] Teagarden, and [Billie] Holiday typically had to modify or tear apart and rebuild poor or mediocre Tin Pan Alley material in a procreative manner analogous to the ways in which modernists such as Picasso begot paper collage, wood assemblage, and metal sculpture. (8)

In addition to providing a compelling comparison, Appel also interestingly asserts that of all the popular jazz performers, Fats Waller was the most "literary" with his puns, razzes, and language play. Therefore, many writers were fans, and, as Appel explains,

> As "literary" turns, Waller's caprices and parodies are implicitly moral acts of character, the domain of traditional satire….No wonder so many writers have admired and loved Waller, including…Eudora Welty, whose "Powerhouse," probably the best story about jazz, was written…after she had seen Waller perform a one-night stand….Her version of Waller turns out to be a multicultural Proteus and paragon. (102)

Indeed, in Welty's story, the narrator's first description of Powerhouse's exotic "Asiatic, monkey, Jewish, Babylonian, Peruvian" appearance immediately establishes him as a culturally mutable figure, and his "big glowing eyes…African feet of the greatest size…and long yellow-sectioned strong big fingers, at rest about the size of bananas" (131) create a larger-than-life image in the reader's mind. This description also establishes the white audience's perception of black culture and identity.

Of course, Powerhouse knows how his white audiences view him. Throughout his performance, his signifying expresses his simultaneous bemusement and outrage, and allows him to subvert racist ideology right under his audience's noses. Powerhouse's signifying,

through the appropriation of and improvisation over white musical conventions, also illustrates jazz's modernist impulse since, as jazz scholar Stuart Nicholson notes,

> Appropriation is a recurring theme…[in jazz]…and reveals a continuing dialogue, not only with popular culture but other musical forms…. modernism [appropriated] whatever elements it needed for experimentation and articulation, [and] jazz, an exemplary expression of the modernist impulse in American culture, continued this practice…. (217)

In Welty's story, Powerhouse's nimble, cerebral, and subversive musical and cultural appropriations serve as a vivid illustration of her skills in both the blues/jazz and modernist idioms.

In addition to demonstrating Welty's understanding of jazz's innate modernism, Powerhouse's signifying on his white audience's racism also touches upon the modernist fascination with primitivism. Primitivism grew out of the modernist belief that Western civilization would soon begin to decline. In response, primitivist artists "sought an infusion of energy from primitive cultures, by which they referred not only to colonized peoples but also to medieval Europe and preclassical antiquity" (Lewis 71). Modernism scholar Marianna Torgovnick argues Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), more than any other painting of the period, embodies the artistic spirit of modernism. She primarily bases her theory on the painting's referencing of African masks, and she explains how powerfully primitive objects resonated with modern artists (119-120). When considering Welty's lifelong love for jazz/blues performers who regularly put on the mask of the signifier, it is clear, with her keen ability to "see" people, that she intimately understood the black perspective on primitivism in addition to finding it inspiring.

In Europe, primitivism's power manifested itself most significantly in Paris from 1907 to roughly 1935. During those years, Paris went through what French art historian Jean Laude described as a period of "negrophilie" (Sweeney 3), and the Parisian avant garde became enamored with African art and culture and, in turn, black American culture. French audiences fawned over black American musicians and performers with a paternalistic fascination. In a

subversion of negrophilie's racist impulses, Josephine Baker, the black American dancer who conquered Paris with her "danse sauvage" (Martin 311), would stroll through the streets of Paris with "her panther, which she adorned with a diamond collar. Owning a wild animal of the jungle, she signified on French primitivist yearnings and the benefits she had reaped from catering to their desires" (Lemke 147).

Like Josephine Baker, Powerhouse plays to white audiences' preconceived ideas for financial gain. While his sullen, Jim Crow-era white audience differs markedly from negrophilie's Parisian sophisticates, fascination with the primitive permeates the dance hall atmosphere where he and his ironically-named "Tasmanians" perform. Powerhouse gleefully parodies his white audience's assumptions. He knows his audience finds him "monstrous," "wild," "savage," and "barbarous," and he tweaks their misperceptions mercilessly with repeated switches between key-pounding savagery and effortlessly sophisticated musical and verbal improvisation. Fats Waller also engaged in a similar type of parody. At the end of performances of one of his signature songs,"Your Feets too Big," which Fred Fisher, a white German immigrant, originally wrote, Waller would frequently change the refrain "your feets too big" to "your pedal extremities are obnoxious" or "your pedal extremities are colossal" (Berger 7).

In addition to connecting with a modernist primitivism, "Powerhouse" also utilizes modernist mythological tropes – albeit from a non-traditional perspective. In an echo of Forster's demurring response to the significance of myth in *A Passage*, during a 1972 interview on William F. Buckley's show, "Firing Line," a panelist asked Welty if her prodigious use of myth and folklore represented "the source of power" (107) in her writing. The question surprised Welty and, after a pause, she replied:

> I will use anything, you know, whatever is about that I think truly expresses what I see in life around me. I have used Mississippi folklore…Greek and Roman myths or anything else, Irish stories, anything else that happens to come in handy that I think is an expression of something that I see around me in life. I don't start out just to write

something and use folklore. It's just there to be plucked. (107-08)

While Welty's comments distance her from a straightforwardly modernist technique, the mythological references in "Powerhouse" illustrate how, in stories about race, her "sights…are set higher than merely ordering the present by imposing patterns drawn from archetypal tales" (T. McHaney 93).

In an examination of Welty's photography, Daniele Pitavy-Souques notes that black subjects have a powerful, larger-than-life presence. Likewise, she correctly adds, black characters in her writing make a significant impact upon readers since "Welty paints African Americans as life forces filled with creative power and very old lore" (107). Powerhouse, with his imposing physical form and flashy improvisations, "fills" the story. At the beginning of his performance in the dance hall, Powerhouse interrupts his aggressive playing to suddenly and quietly lay "his finger on a key with the promise and serenity of a sibyl touching the book" (131). Through this description, the narrator/audience acknowledges Powerhouse's otherworldly quality, and Welty makes it clear his performance carries mythological import.

In *The Hero and the Blues*, Albert Murray discusses the didactic nature of literature and the mythological epic hero's significance in "establish[ing] the context for social and political action" (10). Murray goes on to name the jazz/blues performer as the embodiment of the epic hero since "improvisation is the ultimate human (i.e., heroic) endowment" (107). In addition to exemplifying the blues hero with his consummate improvisational skills, Powerhouse also embodies the heroic nature of the blues performance with his epic quest to deliver a message of optimism to his listeners, in particular his black audience.

While Powerhouse's performance for the white audience involves playing the exotic, half-savage entertainer, his interactions with black characters in the story reveal his true nature. Powerhouse "loves" (132) the way his band plays, and looks at them "kindly" (133) to encourage their performances. On the way to Negrotown, he looks at his clarinet player and, after teasing him about his height, asks, "You got a dry throat, Little Brother, you in the desert?" (135), and

thoughtfully offers him a mint. When he arrives in Negrotown, his gentle teasing of the "living statue" waitress (136) and metaphoric wink to his starstruck audience when he "says affectionately, 'Listen! Rats in here" (137) both illustrate his playful nature. He interjects a moment of comedy into his Uranus Knockwood story, and his audience's subsequent laughter, despite the tale's sinister and disturbing notes, makes his face glow "like a big hot iron stove" (138). He then initiates a call-and-response improvisation that leaves "Everybody in the room moan[ing] with pleasure" (138). In that brief moment, Powerhouse and his audience effectively stomp what Albert Murray calls the blue devils of melancholy. As Murray notes,

> In a sense the whole point of the blues idiom…is to state the facts of life. Not unlike ancient tragedy, it would have the people for whom it is composed and performed confront, acknowledge, and proceed in spite of, and even in terms of, the ugliness and meanness inherent in the human condition. It is thus a device for making the best of a bad situation. (Murray 36)

Welty clearly understands the purpose of the blues idiom, and, throughout the story, Powerhouse offers his black listeners messages of encouragement and love in a determined effort to overcome the fact that life "is…mostly a low-down dirty shame" (Murray 37).

When Powerhouse and his band prepare to return to the dispiriting atmosphere of the whites-only dance, he again offers encouragement and uplift with humor. After asking his musicians to riff on the spelling of Knockwood's given name, which "puts them in a wonderful humor" (140), he tells them that he's going to send Knockwood a telegram that simply says "'What in the hell you talking about? Don't make any difference: I gotcha.' Name signed: Powerhouse" (140). All of the musicians laugh uproariously, and "a look of hopeful desire seems to blow somehow like a vapor from his own dilated nostrils over his face and bring a mist to his eyes," leading Powerhouse to note dreamily, "Reach him and come out the other side" (140), and, for one moment, everyone transcends the blue devils of melancholy.

In 1944, E. M. Forster wrote "I myself am a sentimentalist who believes in the

importance of love….I only believe that it is important in itself and that the desire to love and the desire to be loved are the twin anchor ropes which keep the human race human" ("A Clash of Authority" 685). Welty espoused this belief as well, and, in *On Writing*, she describes the importance of writing with love. She also notes, however, that "out of love you can write with straight fury" (86). Powerhouse embodies this fury when, at the end of the story, he delivers the lyric "Somebody loves me….Maybe it's you" (141) in a joking, yet confrontational, manner to his white audience. In this moment, the frustration and anger simmering under Powerhouse's performance at the whites-only dance surfaces. In addition to illustrating Powerhouse's humanism, this moment imparts "the ambiguous, complex, and mysterious nature of love... at the heart of [Welty's] best fiction" (Wolff 84). In *Delta Wedding*, Welty explores these complexities and mysteries in a densely layered, modernist snapshot of Delta life in 1923.

With its original publication in 1946, *Delta Wedding* appeared after the pinnacle of European high modernism. Nevertheless, the novel employs a high-modernist device – contemplation of the "thematics of time and temporality, [and] the elegiac mysteries of…memory" (Jameson 16). In his discussion of modernism in *Delta Wedding*, literary scholar Michael Kreyling recounts how when Welty reviewed Virginia Woolf's posthumously published *A Haunted House and Other Stories*, the piece "An Unwritten Novel" provided her with the blueprint for *Delta Wedding*. He notes that Welty did not want to write a traditional narrative, and Woolf's piece demonstrated, with an

> insight…both technical and psychological…[that] point of view – contrary to the realistic rule – need not be unified in one central consciousness, and the membrane between one human consciousness and another is not a thick rind but permeable tissue. (83)

Kreyling goes on to explain how George's dramatic rescue of Maureen on the Yellow Dog trestle, which occurs roughly two weeks before the novel begins, represents the foundation of Welty's modernist and "self-conscious plan to negate realistic, progressive narrative" (88).

Multiple characters retell the story, and, with each retelling, a different understanding of the story's significance in the family's collective memory surfaces. While Kreyling's Argument is convincing, the retelling of the story, in fact, functions as part of the novel's modernist examination of the mythology behind the Old South.

In 1964, George B. Tindall wrote "there are few areas of the modern world that have bred a regional mythology so potent, so profuse and diverse, even so paradoxical, as the American South" (2), and many early critics mistakenly viewed *Delta Wedding* as a nostalgic portrait of the mythic Old South. In a 1972 interview with Linda Kuehl, Welty voiced her opposition to this interpretation. When Kuehl mentioned that the poet John Crowe Ransom described *Delta Wedding* as "'one of the last novels in the tradition of the Old South" (82), Welty responded:

> I revere Mr. Ransom, but his meaning here is not quite clear to me. I wasn't trying to write a novel of the Old South. I don't think of myself as writing out of any special tradition, and I'd hesitate to accept that sanction for *Delta Wedding*. I'd hesitate still more today, because the term itself, "Old South," has a connotation of something unreal and not quite straightforward. (82)

Welty's comments rightfully disassociate *Delta Wedding* from such a distorted interpretation, and they also underscore her inherently critical view of the Old South and its accompanying lore.

In the opening pages of the novel, Welty immediately establishes the myth-laden nature of the Delta through the perceptions of Laura Fairchild as she rides the Yellow Dog train, with its "almost anthropomorphic characterization" (Sylvester 4), to attend her cousin Dabney's wedding. The moment the train crosses into the Delta, the salesman sitting across from her falls asleep, "with a groan" (2), as if a spell has been cast. Laura contemplates the landscape and thinks how it looks "as if a hand reached along the green ridge and all of a sudden pulled

down with a sweep, like a scoop in the bin, the hill and every tree in the world and left cotton fields" (2), and how the land "seemed strummed, as though it were an instrument and something had touched it" (3). In this otherworldly, dream-like moment, Laura notices that, while everything in the Delta seems magical and larger-than-life, nothing looms larger than the Fairchilds' cotton fields. In the town named after them, the Fairchilds are the mythological gods who have literally shaped the land, and they represent the embodiment of plantation legend.

In the Fairchild world, the past "lives in and subsumes the present" (Fabricant 52). Portraits of the Fairchild ancestors and heirlooms with attached histories fill Shellmound and the Grove, and the Fairchild aunts and great aunts vigilantly maintain the family's history with the constant reiteration of stories and lineages. More than anything, the aunts love to evoke the memory of Denis, Battle and George's brother who died in World War I. As Dabney notes, "Aunt Tempe came and stated it like a fact of the weather, that it was Denis and always would be Denis that they gave the family honor to" (152). To the Fairchilds, Denis represents the prototypical Southern Cavalier. William Robert Taylor defines this archetypal hero at the center of plantation legend as the man who will always "kneel down before the altar of femininity and familial benevolence" (126). In the wake of Denis's death, his brother, George, falls into the role of family Cavalier, and, according to his family, his standoff with the Yellow Dog on the trestle exemplifies his heroic stature.

Critics have correctly identified the Yellow Dog as symbolic of the racial changes coming to the Delta; however, the train also represents a disruptive element in the Fairchild family mythology. Since the family mythology is based upon the tenets of plantation lore, the train, through its association with modern technology and role in the trestle rescue story, signals the disruption of both the Fairchilds' and the Old South's mythological and cultural hegemony. When Roy tells his version of George's trestle heroism, Aunt Tempe immediately states that George "'Naturally…did it for Denis'" (152). While this statement implies that George rescued

Maureen, Denis's daughter, out of his devotion to his brother, Tempe's words also underscore her belief in George's fundamentally heroic and chivalrous nature.

Despite the family's efforts to cast George as their next hero, he does not fit the mold. He lives and practices law in Memphis instead of Fairchilds, and he married outside of his social class instead of finding a class-appropriate wife. George does not feel bound to confine himself to the insular, out-of-date world of Shellmound. As Dabney notes, "George loved the world….Not them! Not them in particular" (46). He also demonstrates unchivalrous behavior. When Ellen tells George about the strange girl she found wandering in the woods, he loutishly says, "'Yes, I met her…and I took her over to the old Argyle gin and slept with her….She's older than you thought'" (103). When his wife, Robbie, who loves him with a ferocity startling and undignified to the Fairchilds, leaves him in her fury over the Yellow Dog incident, George simply lets her go.

During his short lifetime, Denis also failed to live up to the Cavalier ideal. He drank too much, gambled too much, and, like George, married someone the family viewed as socially inferior. As Jan Nordby Gretlund notes, "The curious thing about this family legend is that Denis's life was not a very aristocratic one by any standard. He did have great potential, but he never did much" (111). Gretlund then explains how "The family legend of Denis's promising potential and his sad end reads as an allegory of the potential and the end of the Old South" (111). While Denis and George do serve as allegories, the lesson they reveal about the Old South is a moral allegory, not one of unfulfilled potential. Both men embody the charismatic and appealing aspects of plantation lore, but, in reality, they are complex and, in some ways, morally flawed individuals with a profound sense of entitlement and arrogance. In other words, through Denis and George, Welty shows readers the unreality and dishonesty of both the Fairchild and Old South mythology. Yes, the image of the Old South does have a certain grace and romantic appeal, but it also served as a justification for slavery.

In light of modernity's encroaching presence, as evidenced by the constant intrusion of the Yellow Dog incident in the family's narrative, Welty also makes it clear that the Old South myths are losing their power. The vacant Marmion, one of the homes on the Fairchild's plantaion, serves as an example of "the most grandiose and romantic visions of the southern…imagination…[with its] deliriously hubristic" (Russ 92) appearance. As Dorothy D. Griffin notes,

> Marmion was built on the unreality of the Southern past, when the legend of the Old South was at its height….The house, literally and figuratively, provides a richly spiraling staircase for the imagination, the domain of romance….Marmion, the heart of romance…is the world of "Once Upon A Time," where no one lives. (106)

While Marmion stands as a testament to the vanity of both the Fairchilds and the Old South, it will eventually be made habitable for Dabney and her husband, Troy. Dabney and Shelley, the two oldest Fairchild girls, have both begun to break away from Fairchild tradition, and, through Welty's use of multiple consciousnesses, the two young women offer a feminist take on white, male Southern mythology. In addition, Dabney's selection of a husband echoes Lucy's choice in *A Room*, while Shelley's personality and concerns about marriage recall Adela's in *A Passage*.

The first time readers enter Ellen Fairchild's consciousness, she is thinking about the physical beauty of her children with their "wide towering foreheads…fair hair and…soot-dark, high eyebrows and shadowy lashes" (26). Dabney, the prettiest of her children, and Ellen both initially seem to fit the belle and matron archetypes of late nineteenth, early twentieth-century white Southern womanhood. Nina Baym explains how, according to Old South myth,

> The postbellum woman…comes in two versions – belle and matron. Functioning within a larger description of Southern life, these types are at the pinnacle, the crown, the apex, of that life. As the highest product of the system, Southern women are to a large extent its justification. The Southern belle is a princess, idle and free; the Southern matron a queen, always busy, to be sure, but busy with gracious ceremony and elegant

appearances. (Baym 193)

Ellen, pregnant for the tenth time, exemplifies the Southern matron, since she runs everything and takes care of everyone within the walls of Shellmound. Ellen also fulfills her expected role as caretaker of the Fairchilds' "people," especially old Partheny, who tends to have "spells" that leave her bedridden.

On her way to deliver broth to Partheny in Brunswicktown, the black section of Fairchilds, Ellen has the earlier-mentioned encounter with a strange young girl with "skin…white to transparency" (91) and a transcendent beauty. The girl's unearthly beauty causes Ellen to think about all of the romantic poetry Denis used to read and, despite Ellen's gentle questioning, the girl refuses to identify herself. Before they part, the girl tells Ellen she is headed for Memphis and asks for directions to the train. After the wedding, the photographer tells everyone, right before taking their picture, about how a young girl walking the train track to Memphis was hit and killed by the train he took to get to Fairchilds. To Ellen, the moment is "a vision of fate; surely it was the young girl of the bayou woods that was the victim this man had seen" (287).

While the incident represents an example of how mysteries and strange occurrences "echo like mantras in Welty's fiction" (P. McHaney 377), the girl's death also represents Welty's final, and feminist, statement on the fate of the plantation myth. Southern white women, whose freedom to assume a mask of refinement and societal graces was only possible through slavery, represent the "embodiment…[of] what the South as a whole has cultivated; they are Southern culture….[Therefore] the myth of Southern womanhood…is really a myth of Southern manhood" (Baym 193). I interpret the strange, sylph-like girl as embodying both Southern white womanhood and Southern mythology. Therefore, her death via a train serves as a powerful image of modernity's inevitable triumph over the "unreal" and "not quite straightforward" Old South and its accompanying hegemony.

On the surface, Dabney, the second-oldest Fairchild girl and the first to marry, seems the epitome of the Southern belle. She is appealing, carefree, and secure within the Fairchild family mythology. However, she challenges the power of family myth and wonders about other ways to look at the world. As she thinks on the way to visit her aunts at the Grove,

> Sometimes, Dabney was not so sure she was a Fairchild – sometimes she did not care, that was it. There were moments of life when it did not matter who she was – even where. Something, happiness – with Troy, but not necessarily, even the happiness of a fine day – seemed to leap away from identity as if it were an old skin, and that she was one of the Fairchilds was of no more need to her than the locust shells now hanging to the trees everywhere were to the singing locusts. What she felt, nobody knew! It would kill her father – of course for her to be a Fairchild was an inescapable thing, to him. (42)

While Dabney is about to get married and assume a traditionally Southern domestic role, she, like Forster's Lucy Honeychurch, has chosen to marry for love outside of her social class. Both women are transitional feminist figures. While neither character represents a dramatic depature from tradition, they still express agency and choose love over conforming to societal and familial expectations. Liza Kramer views Dabney's marriage to Troy as "her plot…to accomplish what she could not on her own, that is, secure her possession of the land that is the source of her wealth and identity, insuring the productivity of the land itself through *his* knowledge of how to work it" (140). With this argument, Kramer underestimates Welty's belief in Forster's "only connect" message.

An intense physical attraction exists between Dabney and Troy, and critics have correctly noted that "Welty makes clear Dabney's sexualized notion of Troy through constant references to his differences from the Fairchilds…and through references to his body" (Patterson 82). Dabney knows her family's feelings about her marriage, and when her aunts give her a night light, a cherished family heirloom as a gift, Welty writes, "'I've done enough,'" Dabney thought, frightened, not quite understanding things any longer. "'I've done enough to

them.' They all kissed good-bye…. while the green and gold shadows burned from the river – the sun was going down" (62). In that moment, while the sun literally sets in the background, it also figuratively sets on the power of both the Fairchild family and the Old South.

The night light, a symbol of Fairchild family tradition and myth (Westling 85), is an especially poignant image since Dabney carelessly drops and shatters it. In a demonstration of Welty's typically "loving gaze," Welty does not pass judgment on the aunts. Instead of making them unappealing manifestations of Southern racism, the guardians of the Fairchild mythology are eccentric and entertaining examples of a powerful familial bond. Readers cannot help but feel pity for the aunts whose worldview is rapidly becoming obsolete.

Welty also makes Dabney a realistic feminist hero. While she reveals a desire for self-determination in her choice of a husband, she also reveals an unfortunate self-absorption. When Dabney returns to Shellmound with the night light, she spots Troy in the house, and in her eagerness to run to him, she carelessly drops the night light, "and it broke and its pieces scattered. [Laura and India] heard that but no cry at all – only the opening and closing of the screen door as she went inside" (68). In this description, Welty seems lightly to chide Dabney for her carelessness. While Dabney is choosing a more modern path, she should still respect her aunts' loving intentions. Welty's valuation of some aspects of Southern family tradition echoes Forster's clear affection for certain Victorian and Edwardian conventions. While both writers valued and emphasized progressive values and change, they also expressed their philosophies through a gentle humanism that never pointed fingers directly at anyone.

In contrast to Dabney's expression of agency through her choice of husband, Shelley, the oldest Fairchild girl, grapples with issues of patriarchy in a more direct manner. When she goes to fetch Troy for the wedding rehearsal, she walks in on Troy handling a conflict between two of the Fairchilds' male field hands. When Troy shoots the finger off of one of the men, Shelley's fear and disgust lead her to think about Troy's "convincing performance" as overseer, and to wonder if

> the behavior of all men were actually no more than this – imitation of other men….Then all men could not know any too well what they were doing….She felt again, but differently, that men were no better than little children….Women, she was glad to think, did know a little better – though everything they knew they would have to keep to themselves…oh, forever! (259)

Like Forster's Adela, Shelley is sensitive and cerebral. Shelley also resembles Adela since, in some ways, she embodies New Woman traits. She smokes, drives, is preparing for a trip to Europe – although, like Lucy, she will travel with a female relative – and reads F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and The Damned*. Dan Fabricant describes Shelley as favoring a secluded life, passive, and sexually insecure. This argument mistakenly diminishes Shelley in the same manner as the critics who incorrectly dismissed Adela as sexually repressed and hysterical. Shelley is a writer, so assuming the role of observer seems a natural fit, and many critics have rightly associated Welty's touching description of Shelley's room, her writing space, with all of its heirlooms and personal effects, as a place "in which patriarchal power is undermined" (Kreyling 15).

After Dabney's wedding, Shelley thinks about what lies ahead for her, including her trip to Europe, and how experiencing more of the outside world will change her. She then has a vision inspired by a particular moment during the reception:

> …she had been dancing with George, with his firm, though (she was certain) reeling body so gaily leading her, so solicitously whirling her round. "Bridesmaid," he called her. "Bridesmaid, will you dance?" She felt it in his cavorting body – though she danced seriously, always moved seriously – that he went even among the dancers with some vision of choice. Life lay ahead, he might do anything….She followed, she herself had a vision of choice, or its premonition, for she was much like George….Shelley's desire fled, or danced seriously, to an open place – not from one room to another room with its door, but to an opening wood, with weather – with change, beauty. (289-90)

For Shelley, the Fairchilds' houses filled with heirlooms, people's pictures, and powerful family myths, feel too confining. From her room, her observation perch and writing space, Shelley imagines a different way to be. Like Adela, Shelley does not know exactly how her life will unfold but, no matter what happens, it will involve her own choices instead of the options society has pressed upon her.

Whether it is an Italian carriage driver shouting at Lucy to seek courage and love in *A Room*, or Fielding's mournful plea for friendship with Aziz at the conclusion of *A Passage*, for Forster, love represents the primary agent of the simple, but progressive, changes that modernity enabled. Likewise, whether it is Powerhouse signifying on his white audience for not having the courage to express their admiration, or the Fairchild girls' ruminations on family, men, tradition, desire, and marriage, Welty also delivers an ultimately uplifting message about love's possibilities in an era that, for some, seemed on the verge of collapse. While many prominent modernist writers expressed the era's gestalt through dramatic literary innovations, Forster and Welty instead produced powerfully honest and deceptively complex portraits of people at their worst and best during a historically and culturally tumultuous time. Over the years, their works have transcended whatever criticisms and limitations various schools of thought have attempted to impose upon them, and this transcendence serves as a powerful argument for both their inherently modernist nature and rightfully prominent place within the era's literary canon.

CONCLUSION

In an era that saw the sun set on the British Empire, the shell shock of World War I, the disaster of the Great Depression, and the brutality of the Jim Crow South, E. M. Forster and Eudora Welty wrote about the modern human condition in ways unlike those of their modernist peers. Both writers were products of respectable middle-class families, excellent educations, and thorough immersions in their respective cultures' mores. With their refined manners and reserved demeanors, Forster and Welty did not openly declare political, social, or cultural agendas, and they did not seek to dazzle readers with obvious feats of literary daring. Instead, their works demonstrate a profound reverence for the importance of individual relationships. Through such relationships, Forster and Welty explored the nature of their respective cultures, critiqued the modern era's many injustices, and expressed hope that people would some day understand how to transcend the ugliness and uncertainty of the world around them.

Throughout their lives, Forster and Welty embodied, respectively, the best aspects of British civility and the most gracious parts of Southern culture. Throughout their careers, they espoused the importance of a sense of place in a writer's creative process. In addition, they knew that in order to understand people properly, you had to "see" them through society's artificially constructed facades. Due to their acute powers of observation and considerable sensitivity, Forster and Welty found ways to illustrate their cultures' failings without preaching, and demonstrated how personal relationships represented the only way to circumvent the barriers society placed between people. While celebrating the richness of their respective cultures, both writers always remained true to the idea that love trumped all other forces in the world.

In terms of modernist literature, Forster and Welty possessed a far more sophisticated understanding of and appreciation for the modernist aesthetic than their early critics realized. Both writers worked within traditional literary conventions in order to endorse progressive phi-

losophies. Their quiet, but unequivocal, endorsement of human rights always emerged through their meditations on the nature of people's relationships, and their ability to view things from someone else's vantage point represents a truly modernist mastery of multiple perspectives. Unlike the writing of more visible modernist icons such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, a profound love for life and humanity permeates Forster and Welty's works. While Joyce celebrated the more prosaic aspects of life and human nature through the complexities of high modernist literary devices, Woolf merged narrative voices and consciousnesses in order to contemplate the inevitable march of time and life's ephemeral nature. Forster and Welty, however, were emphatic humanists and omniscient observers who accepted the modern world's occasional ugliness, then, in acts of "secret daring," questioned societal convention and illustrated how people's love for one another transcended all of life's indignities.

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