

Volume 11

Issue 1 (2015)

A Forum on the Rhetoric of Food

DOI: 10.13008/2151-2957.1215

pps. 1-15

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Recommended Citation

Bryan, Victoria. ““Out of Her Safety into His Hunger and Weakness”:
Gendered Eating Spaces in Eudora Welty’s “A Wide Net” and
“Flowers for Marjorie.”” *Poroi* 11, Iss. 1 (2015): p. 1-15 <https://doi.org/10.13008/2151-2957.1215>

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“Out of Her Safety into His Hunger and Weakness”

Gendered Eating Spaces in Eudora Welty’s “A Wide Net” and “Flowers for Marjorie”

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Poroi 11,1 (May 2015)

Keywords: Eudora Welty, short stories, foodways, gender, Southern spaces

Food plays an important role in Eudora Welty’s writing—as evidenced by the vivid description of the coconut cake in *Delta Wedding* and the elaborate repast in *The Optimist’s Daughter*. Food played an integral role in her career, as well. In her article entitled “Baking the Cake: My Recipe for Mashula’s Coconut Cake,” Anne Romines argues that “recipe writing was [a] significant motif in Welty’s life and career. She was one of the writers who collected recipes and food remembrances for a projected book, to be titled *American Eats*” (Romines, 2009, 98). Romines quotes John T. Edge as having described this projected collection to be “an account of group eating as an important American social institution...” (Romines, 1999, ix). Though eating is something we all must do to survive, authors like Welty imbue eating and food preparation with more meaning than others and allow it to signify distinctions between classes, races, communities—and especially genders.

Though Welty utilizes food as a gendered symbol in many of her texts, “The Wide Net” and “Flowers for Marjorie” utilize food to demarcate female space from male space. Written during the Cold War, these stories operate within the kind of cultural ideologies established by Alan Nadel in his landmark text *Containment Culture*—ideas that have been elaborated on by several authors, including Susan Faludi in *The Terror Dream*,¹ Nadel and Faludi—among others—draw on the differentiation between genders, races,

¹ Though *The Terror Dream* focuses on analysis of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, much of her analysis reaches backwards in American history to show a pattern of containment in relation to gender and race.



religions, and other markers of individual differences to illustrate how American culture has tended to compartmentalize simplified elements of complicated issues in order to avoid directly addressing difficult problems. In the case of the Welty stories in question, the male characters compartmentalize their lives into spaces dominated by women—where they perceive an inability to feel comfortable or welcome—and spaces dominated by men—in which they can seek camaraderie. Welty does not simply delineate spatially, however. She uses foodstuffs in various forms and prepared and ingested in various ways as markers of gender difference. It is this conflation of gendered food and gendered space that defines the character William Wallace’s drive to escape his wife Hazel’s grasp in “The Wide Net,” and in “Flowers for Marjorie” drives Howard, after killing his wife, away from the home-space and into the outside world, which Welty defines by the concentration of nutrition-less food and alcohol consumption.

Food and eating often perform crucial symbolic work in literary texts and can be similarly compartmentalized. Studied as an “anthropological classifier, signifier, and identifier from the 1960s onward” (Hirschman, 2004, 548), the examination of food has a rich history that extends into the 21st century. Amy Bentley writes in *Food, Drink, and Identity* that “[s]ince it is such a strong component and shaper of identity...food is deeply enmeshed in a collective as well as an individual sense of identity.... [P]eople imbue particular foods with meaning and emotion, regardless of whether they are involved in its production or merely its consumption” (Bentley, 2001, 180).² In other words, the food that we produce and consume delineates groups and bonds individuals. It ties us to our individuality, while also tying us to our religious, national, racial, and class groups. The affiliations we maintain through food extend to gender. Sarah Sceats opens her book *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women’s Fiction* by establishing the idea that “[f]ood is our centre, necessary for survival and inextricably connected with social function. What people eat, how and with whom, what they feel about food and why...are of crucial significance to an understanding of human society” (Sceats, 2000, 1). Sceats is not alone in her assertions; the study of foodways in literature and culture has gained significant traction of late and tends to use food as a vehicle for establishing feminine community. Although Sceats makes this particular

² Her contribution to this 2001 collection focuses on food-related riots that have cropped up in relation to national identity, and attempts to explicate how food can incite such anger, such a sense of inclusion and exclusion, and such passionate resistance to oppressive policies.

assertion in relation to human beings as whole, the rest of her study goes on to focus primarily on women's writing.

Many food scholars of late have narrowed their focuses to a pool of female authors—and for good reason. In *Writing the Meal: Dinner in the Fiction of Early Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Diane McGee argues that “meals have particular resonance in the writing of women” and for women writing in the early twentieth century, “even across class lines, some aspect of getting the meal on the table is generally a major daily preoccupation” (McGee, 2001, 3). McGee goes on to argue that an examination of eating as female writers represent it in their writing “leads into questions about the larger domestic role of women, about the representation of mothering and nurturing, about the political, economic, and class situations that underlie a particular meal, about philosophical issues, about time and death” (McGee, 2001, 4). Sidney Mintz argues in *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and Past* that food as a cultural and literary symbol provides “a remarkable arena in which to watch how the human species invests a basic activity with social meaning” (Mintz, 1996, 7). It is important to note here that the delineation taking place in descriptions of food production and consumption has much to do with the supposedly inherent—but actually socially constructed—differences between male and female eating.

Such social meaning can extend to the familial and cultural responsibilities with which women have traditionally been charged (such as those discussed by McGee), and in many cases can be extended beyond that into the “regulation of patriarchal law” (Heller, 2003, 1). Examples of this date back to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Noted scholars such as Hélène Cixous have pointed to the importance of the act of eating as that which brought sin into the world. In her landmark essay “Extreme Fidelity,” Cixous examines the relationship between this introduction of sin and the rejection of the legitimacy of female “oral pleasure” (Cixous, 1994, 15). Hirschman's study of the architecture of American foodways supports the claims Cixous was making in the mid- to late 1980s.³ When asked about masculine and feminine eating, the subjects of the study tended to answer in generalized, absolutist language. The study reports one man's representational response: “Guys drink beer; girls drink wine. Guys [eat] steak; girls [eat] seafood” (Hirschman, 2004, 551). When asked similar questions about the kind of eating men and women do, one woman responded,

³ “Extreme Fidelity” was published in English in 1988. It was adapted from a lecture Cixous gave in French in 1984.

“Probably guys would go for the red meats and stuff like that. Girls are more chicken eaters.... I always envision guys eating ... big, huge sandwiches ... and girls are more like vegetables and fruits” (Hirschman, 2004, 551). Despite the approximate forty-year gap, Hirschman’s study and Cixous’s theories echo each other in that there is something socially constructed about the differences between female and male consumption. Further, these studies show that food reinforces commonly held beliefs about the supposedly innate differences between men and women that are actually social constructions meant to maintain the delineation between the two. These studies, however, focus on the *kinds* of foods men and women ingest and do not address the *spaces* in which these foods are prepared and eaten and the demarcation of gender that takes place in these kinds of constructions.

Eudora Welty’s “The Wide Net” and “Flowers for Marjorie” utilize masculine vantage points to explore denials of feminized civility in favor of masculine communities. These works are set apart from the fiction examined by Fiedler, however, in that Welty defines her male spaces in terms of food and consumption and uses pregnancy as a marker of civilized space, familial responsibility, and the male isolation that Fiedler argues causes men to seek uncivilized, homosocial spaces.

Instead of falling into the tendency to talk about the construction of cooking spaces as primarily female and spaces outside of the home as primarily male, this article interrogates Welty’s choice to present various cooking and eating spaces as either masculine or feminine, thus allowing men the same access to food production as women. To accomplish this, I utilize Leslie Fiedler’s landmark article “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in Huck Honey!,” which suggests that American literature exhibits a pattern that shows male figures seeking out spaces in which they can commune with other men and avoid the responsibilities of the home-space (providing for a family, being responsible to a wife and children, etc.). The relationship these male characters seek with one another are not lustful or licentious. Instead they represent the height of innocence, and Fiedler argues that “to doubt for a moment this innocence, which can survive only as *assumed*, would destroy our stubborn belief in a relationship simple, utterly satisfying, yet immune to lust” (Fiedler, 1948, 665, emphasis in original). Fiedler’s article argues that “the camaraderie of the locker-room and ball park, the good fellowship of the poker game and fishing trip, a kind of passionless passion, at once gross and delicate” is the “essential aspect of American sentimental life” (Fiedler, 1948, 665). It provides male characters a space where their masculinity is

accepted and through which they can be understood and protected from the civility that threatens the development of such masculine community.

“THE WIDE NET”

In “The Wide Net,” William Wallace seeks a masculine space in which he can form bonds that unify masculine homosocial relationships and form a community in which he and his male friends can exist comfortably. Wallace senses a deficiency in and isolation from his home life that he shares with his pregnant wife, Hazel. When he goes out drinking all night and comes home to find that Hazel has gone missing, he gathers the men from the surrounding community (several of whom he was out drinking with the night before) and sets out with a net to seine the river for his wife’s body. During their half-hearted search, the men take up fishing and commence a massive fish fry during which they dance, sing, and enjoy themselves. Their search attempts are unenthusiastic and futile, and William Wallace ultimately finds Hazel in their kitchen later that day preparing dinner.

Elements of the search for masculine community as defined by Fielder crop up in this very basic plot outline in how a home-space is clearly divided from the wilderness in this story. William Wallace feels isolated from his wife and their child because the nature of pregnancy dictates that much of the process is taken care of by the woman’s body while he—at least bodily—is left out. The pregnancy provides the occasion for William Wallace to seek masculine community in light of his newfound isolation from the family that binds him to the domestic space. His relationship with the character Virgil is based on the male camaraderie about which Fiedler writes. When discussing their night out drinking, William Wallace wonders aloud, “Why did I feel I could stay out all night” to which Virgil responds, “It was nice to be sitting on your neck in a ditch singing...in the moonlight. And playing on the harmonica like you can play” (Welty, 1943, 38). This male camaraderie eventually extends to the entire search party after they have given up on finding Hazel’s body and have commenced the fish fry during which Welty describes many of the men as being “half-naked” (Welty, 1943, 58).

The shift that takes place on these men’s excursion from a rescue mission to a fishing trip draws attention to the fact that the images that illustrate whether a space is masculine or feminine center on whether the space is civilized or not. In her article “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Ed Gentry,” Betina Entzminger has taken a similar approach to understanding isolation and masculine

community as she analyzes the 1970 novel *Deliverance* as a story of “middle-aged men trying unsuccessfully to reclaim this lost authentic self” (Entzminger, 2007, 98). Various other analyses of contemporary literature has taken up these themes, as well. Catherine Roach has examined this delineation of masculine and feminine space as it relates to settled and unsettled territory in looking at popular contemporary romance novels (Roach, 2010). Critics have also chosen to contend with the racial overtones of Fiedler’s article as they analyze the tropes of the “loyal sidekick” and “buddy formula” seen in the pairing a young, while, male character with an older, black, male character (Colombe, 2002).⁴ In doing so, they point out that civilization is normative and that society has constructed acceptable forms of—among other things—race, gender, sexuality, and community formation (Simawe, 2000, 59). In these examples, as in *Huckleberry Finn* and the Welty stories in question here, female-dominated spaces threaten the search for masculine camaraderie and drive male characters into unsettled territory to reclaim their wildness.

Welty’s stories are set apart, however, by the fact that the images that illustrate whether a space is masculine or feminine center on food production and consumption. If a meal requires a kitchen for its preparation, it exists in a feminine space, but a meal that men can hunt, gather, and/or cook over a fire is inherently masculine and enlivens male characters in a way that a feminized meal does not. Considering the importance in Welty’s career of “group eating”—to which John T. Edge refers in his description of *American Eats*⁵—it stands to reason that Welty ties the process of establishing male community to a kind of “group eating” that is specifically masculine and decidedly non-feminine. In fact, feminized meals serve only to entrap William Wallace as he bounces back and forth between his masculinized space where he seeks male camaraderie and the feminized space to which he must continue to return.

The scenes that contain masculine forms of eating, though, are freeing for these male characters and allow for male bonding and euphoric elation. The men are not able to step out of the feminine

⁴ Fiedler’s article focuses on Huck Finn and Jim, and subsequent utilization of Fiedler’s theory has focused on the black/white pairing, as well. Welty does not utilize this kind of pairing in either of the stories in question here, but instead focuses on creating masculine pairs in masculine space who keep masculine company.

⁵ The collection for which Welty gathered recipes and to which she contributed.

realm directly into a masculine realm in which they can commune with nature and each other, though. This kind of escape from feminine space must happen gradually as the men have been so confined by the feminine that they must slowly adjust to a space defined in masculine terms. After William Wallace and Virgil have set off for the river to look for Hazel, William Wallace catches a rabbit and “act[s] as if he wanted to take it off to himself and hold it up and talk to it” (Welty, 1943, 40). He feels a connection to this rabbit, but it quickly takes on the aggressive nature that has often been associated with masculinity when he places “a palm against its pushing heart” (Welty, 1943, 40). This inclination here is to kill the rabbit for food, but even Virgil knows that this is not yet possible, as evidenced by his asking “What do you want with a live rabbit?” (Welty, 1943, 40) This question does not suggest that Virgil doesn’t know what William Wallace’s intentions are. Instead, it suggests that Virgil realizes that the two of them have not yet been separated from the feminized sphere (where food is prepared with ovens, in kitchens, with the use of full pantries, etc.) for long enough to engage in food preparation in a masculine space that will later be defined by camp fires and minimal utensils. Also important is the fact that they do not yet have a large enough community to make such action acceptable.

Not until more men from town are introduced into the search party—most notably, Old Doc—are the men able to comfortably engage in masculine forms of food production and consumption in masculine space. With Doc’s introduction to the search party come references to masculine forms of eating. Soon after he joins the men, Doc starts speaking about the “changing-time” and the food-related rituals that come with the “changing-time,” saying, “It’s going to turn from hot to cold, and we can kill the hog that’s ripe and have fresh meat to eat. Come one of these nights and we can wander down here and tree a nice possum....Persimmons will all get fit to eat, and the nuts will be dropping like rain all through the woods here. And run, little quail, run, for we’ll be after you too” (Welty, 1943, 48). The rituals of eating about which Doc waxes poetic center on food preparation that can be completed without the use of the pantries or the ovens or the dining room tables that characterize feminine eating space. Men, when able to escape into a masculine realm, are free to eat meat, fruit, and vegetables that they can gather or kill and prepare in wilderness like that which currently surrounds this search party. This kind of masculinized food ritual crops up when the search party has seined the river and, having failed to find Hazel’s body, Virgil says, “It’s time we ate fish” (Welty, 1943, 58). The search for Hazel develops into a fish fry

during which the men take the fish that were caught in the net, cook them over an open fire, and eat them without the use of plates or utensils. The scene that follows is a scene of elation as William Wallace “leap[s] all over the place and all, over them and the feast and the bones of the feast, trampling the sand, up and down, and doing a dance so crazy that he would die next” (Welty, 1943, 50). The exuberance of his actions is compounded by the “tears of laughter streaming down his cheeks” and “the two days’ growth of beard” that suddenly “jumps out, bright red” from his face (Welty, 1953, 59), as if this marker of unbridled masculinity were unable to show itself at all until William Wallace felt sufficiently freed from feminine confines.

Welty lays out forms of feminine eating in stark contrast with such forms of masculine eating. William Wallace and Hazel’s courtship illustrates these differences by utilizing consumption imagery. Welty portrays their courtship as awkward, quiet, and strained from the moment he meets her on the road to the night when he joins her at her parents’ house and sits and eats with the family. William meets Hazel for the first time “coming along the road holding a little frying-size chicken from her grandma, under her arm, and she had it real quiet” (Welty, 1943, 36). His first perception of her is as a woman who is in control of and capable of manipulating the actions necessary for preparing food effectively. That night he goes to her parents’ house to eat the chicken she was carrying. While recounting this story of their courtship to Virgil, he calls this “trying their table out” (Welty, 1943, 37), indicating the importance of food preparation in a marriageable woman. While recounting this visit to her parents’ house, he recalls noticing that “her mama eats like a man” because he “brought her a whole hat-ful of berries and she didn’t even pass them to her husband” (Welty, 1943, 37). In this definition of masculine eating, William Wallace suggests that a woman’s relationship to food should be defined in terms of serving, not pure consumption. Hazel’s willingness to “leap up and take a pitcher of new milk and fill up the glasses” is what he remembers clearly enough to report of her from the first night of their courtship, suggesting that her willingness to serve food made her womanly, desirable, and marriageable (Welty, 1943, 37).

Despite her willingness to serve, though, the scenes in which they eat at a table, the scene in which William Wallace courts Hazel, and his descriptions of her that are defined by food and the kitchen are laced with discomfort and suggest that he feel stifled and confined within this realm. The things she values, from manners and propriety to the water from a specific well, are things to which he fails to ascribe the same value. That the water she boasts is “the

best water in the world” he doesn’t find “remarkable,” and he consistently pushes against the manners she attempts to make him respect by asking questions she finds inappropriate. His discomfort tied to this courtship has to do with the fact that his visit with her and her family during dinner indicates that he is “trying their table out” and is forced to act within the confines of courtship rituals enacted by civilized society (Welty, 1943, 37).

In the home he shares with Hazel, William Wallace encounters the most anxiety. His relationship with his wife is strained and uncomfortable because of her stand-offish nature and her attempts to evade his touch, and his feelings of isolation while in their home are mirrored in Welty’s portrayal of the rituals of food production and consumption in their household. Hazel is described in terms of the kitchen and related spaces for serving, storing, and consuming food. When he comes home at the beginning of the story to find his wife missing, he initially looks around the house but then conducts the most thorough part of his search for her by “turn[ing] the kitchen inside out” (Welty, 1943, 34). When the thorough search through the kitchen proves, as far as William Wallace is concerned, that she is no longer in the house, he commences his search for her outside of the feminine sphere. During the initial part of his search for Hazel’s body, his conversation with Virgil reveals quite a bit about his perception of his wife. He finds her to be a fairly smart girl, a fact he defends to Virgil by saying, “You ought to see her pantry shelf, it looks like a hundred jars when you open the door,” an accomplishment Virgil calls “a woman’s trick” (Welty, 1943, 39). Hazel is not only condemned to the feminine sphere that has traditionally been defined as the kitchen in a physical way, but her ability to think and process information is limited to that which is required to organize a kitchen effectively.

The reminders of the feminized sphere (pregnancy, the preparation of food, etc.) are tension-filled and encourage William, in a Fiedler-esque way, to seek this masculine space in a natural, pastoral landscape. He seeks this masculine space in an effort to escape the feminized sphere of the town, home, and kitchen which blatantly threaten the bonds formed within his masculine community. By engaging in the male camaraderie that he finds once he is able to justify his temporary escape from the domestic sphere, the community William Wallace finds allows him to engage in homosocial interactions and draws stark contrasts between the home-space as a feminized, civilized, domestic sphere and the wilderness as a space that can accommodate such male-centered homosocial bonding. We see William Wallace partake of the food he catches with his male friends while supposedly trying to find

Hazel's body in the river, but we do not see him partake of any food Hazel makes for him. The fact that he does not partake of her food is mirrored in his refusal the night before to keep her company as in both cases he opts for the company (and the type of food) he can attain in the presence of a community of men.

“FLOWERS FOR MARJORIE”

“Flowers for Marjorie,” by contrast, demonstrates a failed attempt to seek out natural space and develop masculine community and in doing so amplifies Fiedler's claims that natural, rural space (rather than industrialized, urban space) is necessary in the formation of masculine community. As established above, Welty's stories, at least those in question here, draws on Cold War constructions of gender differences, and as such, tend to delineate female space and male spaces in containment-inspired ways that do not allow for natural overlap between the genders. Our twenty-first century understanding of the malleability of gender and our willingness to consider gender as a constructed ideology challenge this black-and-white demarcation. While “The Wide Net” and “Flowers for Marjorie” both illustrate a historical moment marked by inflexibility in understanding gender, “Flowers for Marjorie” demonstrates the violence that can arise when this inflexibility meets a changing world.

Even a foray into what Fiedler sees as masculine space proves to be “too good to be true” for Howard as he attempts to deny the feminized, civilized space of his home defined by his wife Marjorie, her pregnancy, and her connection to food preparation and consumption and seek the bonds of masculine community in Depression-era New York City. U. W. McDonald, Jr. writes that this story centers around “a young couple from Mississippi now living in a tiny one-room fourth-floor apartment in New York, where they have moved in his unsuccessful effort to find work” (McDonald, 1977, 35). This highly specific description of Marjorie and Howard elucidates quite a few elements of Howard's discontent (which lead to Marjorie's murder). Howard is trapped in the ultra-modernized world of New York City and thus cannot find solace, as William Wallace does, in the natural, pastoral landscape Fiedler observed that male characters so often seek. Howard is defined by hunger while his wife, Marjorie, is defined by nurturing images (bowls, fullness, etc.). Her murder is grotesque, but as Mikhail Bakhtin argues, “Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully...revealed in the act of eating”

(Bakhtin, 1986, 281). It stands to reason, then, that Marjorie, the most grotesque character in this story, should be so directly tied to images of eating and consumption. Even after stabbing his wife in an effort to escape from the confines of time and money—elements of feminized space—he finds that he has escaped into a world in which modernity is guarded by women. His few attempts at forming masculine bonds are short-lived, but they are framed by reminders of natural, pastoral landscape and characterized by oral fixations that bring no nourishment (chewing gum wrappers, toothpicks, whiskey, and alcohol). Susanne Skubal writes that this kind of eating is motivated by a Freudian “instinctual domain” that “comprehends a fundamental judgment about ourselves and the world: this will be a part of me; this other won’t” (Skubal, 2002, 3). This kind of delineation dominates Howard’s decisions as his attempts to escape the confined feminine space fail. Ultimately, this failure persists because he is so separated from the “immensity of water,” the “virgin forest,” and the pastoral landscape that Fiedler’s assessment of American literature points out is so important to masculine camaraderie.

Just as with “The Wide Net,” Howard’s search for masculine community is defined by spaces of food consumption and preparation; however his search is foiled and results in the denial of nourishment. His failed attempts to form a masculine community provide three major areas of focus: 1) Marjorie is pregnant and Howard feels isolated from his family and unable to fulfill a traditionally masculine role as a result; 2) the images that define a space as feminine in this story center on food production and consumption, while the spaces that are defined as masculine are defined by orally fixated actions that provide no nourishment; and 3) their home-space exists not separate from, but in lieu of, natural wilderness making it impossible for Howard to create meaningful male/male relationships.

Howard and Marjorie’s destitute financial state causes Howard to define their relationship and the life they share in negative and lacking terms. He fixates on their lack of money, their lack of livelihood, their lack of food, and their lack of time (mostly in relation to the fact that Marjorie is pregnant and the baby will come regardless of his ability to find a job). Jan Norby Gretlund writes of Welty’s time spent in New York City that “men out of work made a deep impression on the young photographer. Suzanne Marrs adds that Welty’s photographs focus on “rather ordinary looking people who during conventional business hours sit on Union Square park benches...because they have no jobs to occupy their days and provide them with purpose and *sustenance*” (1981, 50, emphasis

mine). Howard's condition certainly reflects the images portrayed in these photographs, and his lack of sustenance (to be discussed later) seems to take a backseat only to the lack of purpose Marris points out here. He focuses on their insufficient resources, but because of Marjorie's pregnancy and her ability to stay focused on possibility rather than lack, he continues to view her as a full, round, satiated person.

His ineffectual attempts to provide for his family are not the only fixation for Howard—he also exhibits an oral fixation that results from his consistent hunger. As he moves through the story, he sucks on a toothpick (and oral activity that can give him no nourishment) and he focuses on his inability to eat. While he and Marjorie are fighting about his inability to get a job and the inevitability of the birth of their child, Marjorie attempts to break the tension by asking if he has had anything to eat. His response is violent and he finds himself being “astonished at her; he hated her, then. Inquiring out of her safety into his hunger and weakness!” (Welty, 1969, 199). Because his hunger is a direct result of his inability to find work and his inability to find work directly challenges his traditionally masculine role in his household, he conflates hunger with weakness and disdains any reminder of it. Reminders of his supposed weakness are prevalent, however. Howard chewing on a toothpick opens the story, an orally fixated action that does not provide nutrition. Other reminders of his lack of nutrients include the “dainty pink chewing gum wrapper” (Welty, 1969, 192) that floats by him in the park, the machine in the window of what is probably a bakery shop that made doughnuts (Welty, 1969, 201) and Howard's reflection being cast in the “chewing-gum machine mirror” in the subway (Welty, 1969, 202). The chewing gum is akin to the toothpick in that the oral activity it produces does not nurture the body and the doughnut machine is contained behind glass so that the doughnuts are not accessible. Further, when he stabs his wife, he notices that her blood pools in her lap, and “her lap was like a bowl” (Welty, 1969, 200), but this similarity only serves to provide a food-like image of which Howard cannot partake and from which he would receive no nourishment.

In light of these reminders of his hunger, Howard begins actively denying himself food, as if doing so would remove his regular bodily needs and allow him to separate himself from that which reminds him of his diminishing masculinity. After Marjorie's murder and his brief travels around the city, he spends a nickel on whisky, gambles the rest of his money, is sickened while watching “the many nickels that poured spurting and clanging out of the hole” in the gambling machine (Welty, 1969, 203), and allows a

good amount of his winnings to be spent on more drinks for him and the men around him. He wanders a bit more and passes a restaurant. He has his winnings from gambling, but decides that “now it [is] too late to be hungry” and “wanted only to get home” (Welty, 1969, 206). He has decided that the time for being hungry has passed and seeking food would be unrewarding.

The despondency he feels is directly tied to his lack of money and resources, but is less literally representative of the separation he feels from nature and his inability to connect in any meaningful way with other people, much less other men. As Skubal argues, “We aspire to commonality if not communion with others” through the things we eat (Skubal, 2002, 3). In light of the importance the social aspect of eating plays in our lives, it stands to reason that Howard denies his hunger when he is also denied the ability to commune with other men. New York City replaces nature in this story and removes from Howard any possibility that he might be able to escape into the natural world to commune with other men in a meaningful, Fiedler-esque way. Marjorie’s murder is an attempt on Howard’s part to escape from the female space in which he feels trapped, in which he has no control, and for which he cannot provide the necessities for living. Her murder, however, is carried out in vain since Howard’s attempts to escape the home-space and enter into pure camaraderie with men do not have the necessary backdrop of untouched American wilderness Fiedler argues is necessary for male/male community to form.

The pattern of male figures seeking out space in which male/male community can form properly and where the responsibilities of the home-space can be fully (though temporarily) denied that Leslie Fiedler discusses in “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in Huck Honey!” are at work in “The Wide Net” and “Flowers for Marjorie” despite the fact that Howard’s search is a failed one. The similarities of these stories allow for a discussion of the denial of the home-space and the home-space’s alignment with the preparation and offering of food (or a lack thereof) in favor of spaces of homosocial bonding. In short, William Wallace foregoes the feminized domestic sphere of family and nurturing in attempts to establish masculine community through the preparation and consumption of food. William Wallace is successful in a way that Howard cannot be, however, because he has access to a natural, pastoral landscape that, as Fiedler points out, has been continuously masculinized in American literature while Howard is trapped in a modernized world defined by women. Applying a discussion of gendered eating habits and food preparation processes to Fiedler’s well established understanding of gendered

landscapes augments his important interpretation of American literature by combining a traditional literary reading with the newer—but still influential—lens of food politics and eating habits.

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