

Fall 12-15-2010

Eudora Welty's Theatrical Sketches of 1948: Summer Diversion or Lost Potential? *Bye-Bye Brevoort* and Other Sketches

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EUDORA WELTY'S THEATRICAL SKETCHES OF 1948: SUMMER DIVERSION OR
LOST POTENTIAL? "BYE-BYE BREVOORT" AND OTHERS

by

LESLIE H. GORDON

Under the direction of Pearl McHaney

ABSTRACT

Eudora Welty is well-known for her many works of fiction and non-fiction, but not known for her works for the theater. In the summer of 1948 Welty moved to New York and wrote, in collaboration with another writer, a musical revue entitled *What Year Is This?* Only one of the sketches, "Bye-Bye Brevoort," was ever produced. This and other sketches in the unpublished manuscript deserve to be studied alongside Welty's other work. These writings provide a window into her love of New York, her vast knowledge of the fine arts, and the evolution of her writing styles. In January of 2010, a reading was staged at the Balzer Theater at Herren's, Atlanta, Georgia. Audience reaction indicates that these pieces, both songs and skits, deserve more attention.

INDEX WORDS: Eudora Welty, musical revue, Broadway theater, Hildegard Dolson, "Bye-Bye Brevoort," New York City, Diarmuid Russell, Russell and Volkening, Hotel Brevoort

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

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

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December 2010

Dedication

To my late mother, Rosalyn Weiser Gordon, who would have loved to have done this, but chose another path. And to my beloved husband Blake T. Leland, whose brilliance and patience inspired me to muddle through.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Pearl McHaney for introducing me to Eudora Welty's writings for the theater. Thanks also go to Dr. McHaney for being a tireless and gracious advisor. I would also like to thank Dr. Tom McHaney for assuring me that I could really pursue my studies when I had almost given up. I would also like to acknowledge Tom Key who offered Atlanta's best performers for a staged reading of unknown work because he believed in the project and shared my excitement. And thank you to Dr. Matthew Roudané who encouraged my work in drama and serves as a reader for my thesis and to Dr. Geoffrey Haydon for permitting his music to be included here in Appendix B. I would like to acknowledge The Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Eudora Welty, LLC, for giving me permission to use Welty's letters and unpublished manuscripts including lyrics for this work. A very special thanks goes to the staff of Georgia State's Rialto Center for putting up with my double life while I was being both its Director and a graduate student. And thanks again to my beloved Blake, for standing by me through all of this and more.

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Introduction

This thesis examines what are admittedly minor works, but minor works by Eudora Welty, a very great writer. By works, I mean a series of what Welty termed “theatrical sketches,” written in 1948. One of these sketches, “Bye-Bye Brevoort,” that was eventually produced Off-Broadway in 1956, is the focus of this thesis. I will also take into account the other sketches Welty wrote at the same time as “Bye-Bye Brevoort” and put this writing in context with other theater at the time and with the author’s life. These theatrical works are among the unpublished manuscripts housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) entitled *What Year Is This?* by Welty and Hildegard Dolson, a humor writer and friend. The two constructed the sketches, working together in New York in the summer of 1948, finishing in the fall after Welty had returned to her home in Jackson. Despite its almost unknown status among Welty’s writings, “Bye-Bye Brevoort” provides a gateway to understanding Welty’s life-long interest in theater and her experience of New York City.

The actual writing of the revue, Welty’s collaboration with Dolson, and the sketches in The Welty Collection have received little recognition in the area of Welty studies. “Bye-Bye Brevoort” was selected for inclusion in *Plays in One Act*, collected by Daniel Halpern, and published in 1991 by the Ecco Press of New York. A special limited edition by Palaemon Press (North Carolina) was printed as a commemorative keepsake to raise funds for Jackson, Mississippi’s New Stage Theatre in 1980 in a run of 486, all signed by Welty. Elizabeth Evans’ 1981 monograph on Welty discusses *What Year Is This?* in her chapter “A Woman of Letters” (14-15). Evans also includes almost a full page on the play in the chapter “The Prism of Comedy” (46-47). Evans, saying that the piece “bristles with comically absurd elements,” wisely includes the title alongside better-known works like *Losing Battles*, *The Ponder Heart*,

The Robber Bridegroom, and *Delta Wedding*. Suzanne Marrs, mentioning some of the pieces in her book *One Writer's Imagination*, calls them “lively and amusing” (108). Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, in her insightful essay “Sex and Wreckage in the Parlor,” printed in the *Southern Quarterly* in 1995, makes a strong case for “Brevoort” as a model that helped Welty establish themes and characters in the stories in *The Golden Apples*. Pearl McHaney reprints the “Brevoort” script and a section of the song “Song of the Times,” part of the *What Year Is This?* manuscript, in *Eudora Welty: Occasions: Selected Writings* (2009).

Given my own background in theater, I found myself wondering how this material, so little of which made it to the stage, would be received by a present-day audience. Only “Bye-Bye Brevoort” was produced, once in 1949 and again in 1956. To have an understanding of these theater pieces, my feeling was that they should be produced. Therefore, part of my research is based on an investigation into the contemporary theatrical relevance, or lack thereof, of “Brevoort.” Through a theatrical reading, I worked with actors and audience to see how the script of “Brevoort” and some of the other works “play” today.

There is no denying that much of Welty’s fiction has dramatic or cinematic elements. “Why I Live at the P.O.” (1936) and “Where Is the Voice Coming From” (1963) are monologues. *Delta Wedding* (1946) includes many interior monologues and highly dramatic scenes. *Losing Battles* (1970) is nearly all dialogue. Critics and readers, such as Leslie Kaplansky (“Cinematic Rhythms in the Short Fiction of Eudora Welty”), Alfred Appel (*A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty*), Dina Smith (“Cinematic Modernism and Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples*”) and Barbara McKenzie (“The Eye of Time,” *Eudora Welty: Critical Essays*) have noted that Welty thinks in cinematic terms and have commented that some of her scenes seem like scenes from the silent movies that she loved. A large number

of her narratives are cinematic in nature, following her characters like the eye of a camera, noting the tiny details of everyday life in the way a lingering lens might. After all, Welty was also an accomplished photographer.

When I speak of Welty's theatrical writing in this thesis, however, I refer specifically to her writing of plays, skits, or songs to be performed by actors before an audience. In addition to cinematic qualities, there are many Welty writings that have dramatic strengths and therefore, may be considered theatrical, but I refer here to works intended for the stage. I propose that the sketches undertaken in 1948 provide insight into a neglected chapter in Welty studies, one that is both interesting in itself and one that deserves to be examined in the context of her biography and her other literary works.

Chapter I: Welty's Life-long Interest in the Theater

Eudora Welty's interest in theater is rooted in her childhood. In *Eudora Welty: A Biography*, Suzanne Marrs tells of Welty composing plays for her dolls. According to Marrs, Welty didn't want baby dolls, but large dolls that she could use in her plays (9), and she often "enlisted her brother and others in neighborhood theatricals" (14). As a child, Welty traveled across the United States, visiting family in West Virginia and Ohio and accompanying her father on business trips. Welty was the eldest of three children, and her mother sent her in her stead while she stayed home with Welty's young brothers. Welty and her father took in theater wherever they traveled, and they attended revues and plays of all kinds. In an interview with Walter Clemons in 1970, Welty states, "When I first went to New York, my father took me to the Palace, and I was a goner. I saw all the great acts" ("Chat" 32). The Palace, the grandest vaudeville house on Broadway, was the most important venue for performers from its opening in 1913 through the 1930s when they added movies. The phrase "We're going to New York to play the Palace!" meant a sure theatrical success. Between 1915 and 1930 all of the well-known stars played the Palace: Harry Houdini, dancer Ruth St. Denis, Fanny Brice, Sarah Bernhardt, Irving Berlin, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, George Jessel, Jack Benny, Judith Anderson, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Beatrice Lillie, Bob Hope, Ethel Merman, Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante, and Eddie Cantor. ("Welcome to the Palace Theatre," www.palacetheatreonbroadway.com.) In the 1950s the Palace once again presented variety performances grown out of the vaudeville tradition featuring Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis, and Judy Garland. So Welty's early introduction to the Broadway stage was to vaudeville—the theatrical form that preceded a type of performance that dominated the stage in the 1940s and 1950s – the musical revue.

In another interview, Welty remarked to actress and theatrical manager Jane Reid Petty, “I’ve always been stagestruck” (“The Town...” 207). In 1986 in an interview with Patricia Wheatley, Welty said “...we loved things coming to town – in the theater and so on. The Century Theater, then an old opera house, would bring many Broadway plays on their way from Memphis to New Orleans. They had to spend the night somewhere so they stopped in Jackson and gave a performance” (“Eudora Welty: A Writer’s Beginnings” 127-28). In *One Writer’s Beginnings*, Welty mentions that her mother sent her with her father to see the Sigmund Romberg operetta *Blossom Time* (19), and later Welty mentions seeing the coloratura Galli-Curci, Blackstone the Magician, the pianist Paderewski, the mystery *The Cat and the Canary*, and the musical *Chu Chin Chow*. “Our family attended them all” (86).

Her mother was one of the founders of the Little Theatre¹ of Jackson. In an essay written in 1983, reprinted in *Art to Life: Welty and Theatre* by Patti Carr Black, Welty remembers, “My first introduction to what they [the Little Theatre] were doing came when I followed my mother up the winding iron staircase of the Blind Institute’s outside fire escape helping her carry a tea table to the stage entrance at the top [...] I became attached for life to the pursuit of putting on theater in Jackson (17-18).” Welty’s creative life included an interest in “putting on theater” that reached far beyond the city of Jackson, however. As biographers report, and as Welty repeatedly stated in interviews, theater was a part of her life early on. She was secretary of the Dramatic Club in high school and college and often acted in and wrote for the stage in both. Elaine Saino in “Welty and Drama” reports about Welty’s appearance in *Icebound* and in *The Rector* while at Mississippi State College for Women (MSCW).

In reference to the plays written at MSCW, Marrs reports about “her skit ‘The Gnat,’ a take-off of the Broadway hit called *The Bat*, [which] poked fun at the college faculty and

¹ Theater and Theatre: unless cited or quoted, the -er ending is used throughout.

staff..." (17). The plot of *The Bat*, a play by Mary Roberts Rinehart, is set in motion by a maniacal serial killer who dresses in a bat costume and flashes a batlike shadow on the wall just before he strikes. Most of the action takes place in a spooky old house where a number of innocent bystanders, chiseling crooks, murder suspects, and cowering bystanders converge. When the police show up, everything seems to be under control – and then *The Bat* strikes again! Both the play and the subsequent film made in 1926 had surprise endings. Welty's parody skit "The Gnat," collected in Black's *Early Escapades*, is a hilarious send-up that is set in the MSCW library and is supposed to feature the play's namesake dressed in the school's gym bloomers. The curtain is to rise on the actual librarian, a Miss Cuthbertson, stacking up the money from overdue library fines. She looks up and sees a "right scary looking" thing dressed as a gnat. It tells the librarian to "give me that jake." She replies, "Take the money if you must, you insect, but leave my reading cards." The sketch, printed in *The Spectator*, the college newspaper, but likely never performed, includes stage directions like "Curtain lowered for two hours to denote lapse of time." Like the film and the play of *The Bat*, "The Gnat" begins and ends with a request that the audience not divulge the outcome to future audiences.

Welty, calling herself "a wit and humorist of the parochial kind," (79) refers to this venture into playwriting in *One Writer's Beginnings*: "I saw *The Bat* and wrote 'The Gnat,' laid in MSCW. The Gnat assumes the disguise of our gym uniform [...] and enters through the College Library after hours; our librarian starts screaming at his opening line, 'Beulah Culbertson, I've come for those fines' " (79). The skit, although very short, adheres closely to several signal actions in the play. "The Gnat" references secret passages and laundry rooms. *The Bat* features a secret room and characters go up and down a laundry chute. "The Gnat" includes a comment about a fire starting at the college; *The Bat* starts a fire to distract his would-be captors.

After two years at MSCW, Welty went to Madison to attend the University of Wisconsin. After graduating from Wisconsin in 1929, she moved back home and reconnected with all of her close Jackson friends. In the fall of 1930, Welty convinced her family to let her move to New York City with five of her Jackson friends. (Marrs *Eudora* 24-25). According to *Black in Art to Life: Welty and Theatre*, this was “her big leap to theatre access [...] They set about sampling the many treats that Manhattan had to offer; museums, art galleries, nightclubs in Harlem and Greenwich Village, and especially theatre” (2). Although enrolled in the advertising/secretarial program at Columbia University, Welty was not really interested in her course of study, and she became the one of her group of friends who went to Times Square to buy theater tickets. Welty didn’t always buy tickets, though. She attended many of these plays with Frank Lyell, one of the five Jacksonians enrolled at Columbia. (Lyell went on to study at Princeton and become a professor of English at the University of Texas-Austin, an author and a critic.) Lyell would reportedly “second act” the shows, mixing with the patrons outside at intermission, then following them into the theater without a ticket. Or the pair would buy the cheapest seats and sneak down to better ones after the start of the show. (Marrs *Eudora* 13, 17, 26-27). Unfortunately, in 1931 Welty was called home. Her father developed leukemia and died. His death, and the fact that the United States was in the middle of the Depression, curtailed any immediate plans to return to New York.

Welty was in Jackson without a job, but with time to write stories, take photographs, and, it appears, spend lots of great times with her Jackson friends. They included Nash Burger, Hubert Creekmore, Lehman Engel, and Frank Lyell, her fellow theatergoer. The group “gathered frequently at the Welty house to drink and talk and laugh and listen to music – literature and the theater and the New York scene filled their conversations, and they loved hearing classical music

and jazz” (Marrs *Eudora* 44-45). And no doubt they attended the Jackson Little Theatre. Welty’s writings for the stage include an unpublished “farce for a Little Theatre.” The play, entitled “The Waiting Room,” was written in 1935 during her period at home with her friends and features a cast of fourteen. It takes place in the “junction station of a small Southern town.” Welty provides a wonderfully detailed description of the space, including a sketch of the layout of the stage done at the top of the manuscript. She includes touches such as a “ticket cage built out from the rear wall, [...] a large poster showing a train belching smoke about to demolish a 1914 open car full of ladies with veils,” a “penny weighing machine,” a clock that doesn’t run, and projecting doors labeled “Ladies” and “Gents.” The plot concerns showgirls, a snake, a wrestler, a “butcher boy” (apparently a salesperson who travels on the trains renting pillows, selling souvenirs, fruit, and magazines), a ticket agent, and a pair of eloping lovers. Perhaps this play was written with roles for some of her friends in mind. Marrs reports that Welty had worked backstage at Jackson’s Little Theatre, had acted in a play in 1937, and once had submitted a play for consideration (55). It might have been “The Waiting Room.” As far as we know, the next things that Welty wrote specifically for the theater were the sketches that made up the revue *What Year Is This?* in 1948.

Over the course of her life, Welty had a wide, cosmopolitan experience of performance of all types as well as of visual arts. While she was making her reputation as a superb prose writer, she was spending a good deal of the time going to all kinds of theater. But New York seemed to hold a special fascination for her. Marrs chronicles many of the amazing programs Welty enjoyed. At one point, Marrs notes

[New York’s] diversity of life [...] had had a powerful impact upon Eudora, and it continued to do so. She was not to be a stereotypical white girl from Mississippi,

for her openness to experience brought her in contact with cultures vastly different from her own. She had already come to appreciate the world of jazz and the African American jazz artists she had heard at the Cotton Club and Small's Paradise. (*Eudora* 40)

An example of this diversity is a Welty letter about the Hindu dancer Uday Shan-Kar. Writing to Frank Lyell in 1933, Welty states, "He is marvelous – very beautiful – he is continuously divine – really his dances are like the humor of the gods – he has the most enchanting body I have ever seen, he uses it like a voice – I don't know anything about the Hindu cosmos but the appeal of all he does is very direct and you are instantly enchanted" (Marrs *Eudora* 41). Around the same time, Marrs reports that Welty saw Martha Graham dance and saw the Russian actress Alla Nazimova perform in *The Cherry Orchard*. In April of 1936, Welty was in New York for the WPA presentation of Orson Welles' production of *Macbeth* with an all-black cast. This was the acclaimed production known as the "Voodoo Macbeth" set in Haiti – it played in Harlem. The show was noteworthy not only for its cast, but also for the lines that wrapped around the block in Harlem. It was quite a feat to get tickets, and it is impressive that the young woman from Jackson, Mississippi, got to see it during its short run. To give further evidence of her wide-ranging arts interests, Welty during a sojourn in New York in 1944 saw *Catherine Was Great* with Mae West; *Carmen Jones*, the African American version of *Carmen*; heard the New York Philharmonic; saw *Oklahoma*. In 1951 Welty traveled to London and saw *Three Sisters* starring Ralph Richardson and went to Glyndebourne to the opera. In 1953 in New York she saw Bea Lillie; saw Danny Kaye "four or five times," apparently loving his performance in Shaw's *Misalliance*. She also saw Lehman Engel conducting *Wonderful Town* (Marrs *Eudora* 224-25). (Engel, her Jackson friend, was both musical director and conductor for *Wonderful Town* by

Leonard Bernstein. The lyrics were by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, and the book by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph A. Fields, who would later team up adapt Welty's 1954 novella *The Ponder Heart* for the stage. Engels received the Tony award for Best Musical Direction that year. On that same trip in 1953, Welty apparently also read *The Ponder Heart*, her new story, out loud to William Maxwell, her friend and editor at *The New Yorker*. It seems it was destined to be a play. In May of 1954 she saw Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer in *Ondine*. During this visit, the producer Herman Levin,² whom Engel introduced to her, urged Welty to turn *The Ponder Heart* into a play. She also saw Engel's opera *Malady of Love* (Marrs *Eudora* 234-5). In London in 1954, Welty took in the musical comedy *The Boyfriend*; went to the Edinburgh Festival; saw *Macbeth*; saw Fonteyn perform in "Firebird;" heard Isaac Stern play; and attended the Edinburgh Tattoo (Marrs *Eudora* 242). Back in New York, she saw Shirley Booth in *By the Beautiful Sea*, also saw *Bus Stop*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the musical *Fanny* (Lehman Engel, vocal arranger and conductor), and *The King and I* with Zachary Scott. In late 1954, *The Ponder Heart* was apparently of interest to producers, so back in Jackson, Welty was "engaged in Broadway negotiations" (Marrs *Eudora* 244). Throughout her life, Welty took advantage of opportunities to see the best of what the theater (and often dance, music, and opera) world(s) had to offer.

² Levin produced numerous Broadway hits, including *Call Me Mister*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Great White Hope*. (Internet Broadway Database, hereafter referred to as IBDB)

Chapter II: Context: New York Theater of the 1940s and 1950s

As I mentioned earlier, Welty and Dolson wrote a series of skits or sketches in the summer of 1948 in New York. And, as the letters quoted in Chapter III will note, Welty's agent Diarmuid Russell was not amused by this undertaking and apparently did not think the sketches funny. In *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell*, Michael Kreyling states, "Russell, Welty knew by now, was just a little impatient with her, for he was immune to the attractions of the theater and Welty had always been charmed. She meant to enjoy the interlude, however, and tried to keep her agent's frowns to a minimum" (142).

Prior to her move to New York, Welty had published two story collections, a novella, and a novel. She had written the short stories "Music from Spain," "Sir Rabbit," "Shower of Gold," "Moon Lake," and "June Recital." These stories were later to become part of *The Golden Apples*. Welty was under pressure from her publisher to work on another novel as it had been two years since *Delta Wedding* was published. However, Welty resisted. Kreyling quotes a letter written on March 14, 1948, in which Welty told Russell "[...] I intend to go on as fancy takes me and maybe the nucleus of the stories [is] still to come, so what I've done so far doesn't define it" (142). Instead of a novel, Welty worked on a funny play while she allowed her unconscious to work on the story collection. In some ways, this is exactly what Prensaw talks of in her essay "Sex and Death in the Parlor," noting that "the farcical sketch rightly warrants attention for its wit and spirited broad humor, its composition at a crucial moment in the writing of what many critics regard as Welty's richest and most complex literary achievement, *The Golden Apples...*" (109). Prensaw believes that Welty's work on "Brevoort" helped her shape the stories that became *The Golden Apples* into a connected whole (115).

The New York theater season of 1948 when Welty and Dolson were composing their revue included several plays that have become classics in modern theater: Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Lillian Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest*, Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine*, and Noel Coward's *Present Laughter*. *A Streetcar Named Desire* had opened in December of 1947 and ran for over two years. The season also featured Anita Loos' comedy *Happy Birthday* featuring Helen Hayes (which ran for almost two years). Musical shows that season included *High Button Shoes* with music and lyrics by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, produced by George Abbott, choreographed by Jerome Robbins, featuring Nanette Fabray and Phil Silvers; *Allegro* by Rodgers and Hammerstein with a singing/dancing cast of sixty-seven; the revue *Make Mine Manhattan* starring Sid Caesar; revivals of older shows such as the Marc Blitzstein musical *The Cradle Will Rock*; operas or operettas playing in Broadway theaters; and many others.

Although arguably the heyday of the big Broadway musical was on the wane, a dominant genre was still the musical revue, a series of sketches, songs, and dances that may or may not have a connecting through-line. This is the format in which Dolson and Welty chose to work.

The revue style attained dominance in the early part of the twentieth century but came to prominence during the Depression. Growing out of the variety acts that were featured in vaudeville, the first revues were the inheritors of those singers, writers, and comics. The earliest forms of the revue were extravaganzas, "primarily a showcase for feminine beauty" (Engel 54) as epitomized by Ziegfeld's *Follies* (1907 - 1931) and George White's *Scandals* (1919 - 1928). The theatrical revue style consisted of numerous songs and sketches by different writers and composers. Many outstanding composers got their start writing for the revue format. According to Engel in *The American Musical Theater*, "in revues the young composers had the invaluable

experience of creating material for real productions [...] without the responsibility of composing an entire score” (65-66). Some of the most notable composers who got their start in a revue include George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and Harold Arlen. Interest in the lavish shows waned in popularity by the early 1930s. “The formula of girls and scenery and costumes had become passé...” (Engel 67). The format of the revue as a series of musical and comic sketches remained the same but there were other factors that caused the change into the type of sophisticated revue reflective of the one written by Welty and Dolson. One of the obvious factors was money – during the Depression, dollars were scarce and simplicity was necessary. There was also a desire by a “new kind of audience to deal with literate ideas” and the new revue format provided “an incomparable medium for satirizing and commenting on events and new cultural currents in the contemporary society” (Engel 67). These new revues continued well into the 30s and 40s, introducing such artists as Alfred Drake, Hermione Gingold, Carol Channing, Nanette Fabray, and Sid Caesar. The 50s, however, “were witness to the gradual disappearance of the revue from the Broadway stage” (Engel 70). Most historians blame television, for the ubiquitous musical variety shows on the small screen virtually upstaged the live revue. In fact, between 1956 and 1958 Engel notes that there were twenty-two variety shows per week on New York television (71). Even Brooks Atkinson, in his introduction to Engel’s book, states, “In point of fact [...] revues [...] have become victims of technological obsolescence since America became swamped in television.” But in 1948 when Welty and Dolson were collaborating, the musical revue format was still alive and well.

The New York theater of the 40s heavily influenced Hollywood, and Broadway stars were often household names. It is worth noting that of the plays on Broadway in 1947 and 1948,

at least seven were musical revues featuring large casts of singers, dancers, and actors with scripts and scores created by numerous writers, composers, and lyricists.

The first staging of “Bye-Bye Brevoort,” the only piece of the revue to be performed as far as is known, came only a few months after the script was turned in to the theatrical agent Monica McCall. The Red Barn Theatre in Westboro, Massachusetts, part of the summer theatre circuit, included it in a revue compiled by Mississippi-born composer and lyricist Brown Furlow.

It took eight more years, until 1956, before one of the sketches from the 1948 summer’s work was to be produced in New York City. “Bye-Bye Brevoort” was chosen to be part of Ben Bagley’s *The Littlest Revue*, a combination of sketches and music and dance, at the Phoenix Theatre in New York City. The Phoenix, located on Second Avenue, a small Off-Broadway house, produced “established masterpieces of the drama plus its traditional wind-up [i.e. end-of-season] musical” (Calta 32). The Phoenix was unusual for the time in that in a single season it used a company of the same players in various productions, a true repertory company, as well as introducing new faces to New York audiences. In 1956, Welty was well-known and much admired, so inclusion of a work by her would certainly be a credit to the production. It is also worth noting that *The Ponder Heart* was successfully playing, starring David Wayne on Broadway at the same time, so Welty’s name would be recognizable to theatergoers. The sketches that made up *The Littlest Revue* were by various authors, with lyrics and music in the interludes written by Ogden Nash and Vernon Jones. All that Marris reports in her biography is that “it seems likely that Welty saw *The Littlest Revue*, which opened on May 22, 1956, and included her skit ‘Bye-Bye Brevoort’ written for the revue she and Hildy Dolson had planned years ago” (Marris *Eudora* 276). In a letter to Diarmuid Russell dated June 10, 1956, Welty

references the closing of *The Littlest Revue* “despite all that signing I did” seems to indicate to me that she was definitely present at a performance giving autographs.

It is also interesting to know what else was at the theater in the 1956 season. In the *New York Times* in June of 1956, in his article “Season in Retrospect,” Louis Calta notes

Theatre-goers will remember this season for having brought forth such meritorious ventures as *The Diary of Anne Frank* [...] which won the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and Antoinette Perry awards; the extraordinarily popular musical *My Fair Lady*; the ambitious *The Most Happy Fella*; the profoundly moving *The Lark*, as adapted by Lillian Hellman from Jean Anouilh’s play; Samuel Beckett’s stimulating and puzzling *Waiting for Godot* and the lavish presentation of Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great*. In the field of the musical, the City Center scored with *The King and I*, *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Carmen Jones*. The Phoenix offered excitement in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *A Month in the Country* [...] and, not least, it introduced the inimitable French pantomimist Marcel Marceau. (1, 3)

The article also states how many performances had been done of each play, including *The Littlest Revue*, which ran for thirty-two performances. (The year-end revue was typically a limited run, and most of the Phoenix productions seem to have run about the same amount of time.) *The Ponder Heart*, at the Music Box, on the other hand, ran for 149 performances. Other noteworthy New York productions (not noted by Calta) include Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine*, August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and *The Stronger*, Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge*, and Ira Levin’s *No Time for Sergeants*, featuring Andy Griffith and Don Knotts in his Broadway debut.

Calta's article demonstrates a remarkable season, but also the cultural importance of the theater in the 1950s. Theater is still with us, but without the impact of seasons such as this one or the one when Welty was writing the revue, 1948. Theater was central then – hit songs came from musicals, everyone knew about the plays that were on Broadway, the news of the theater corresponded to today's newspaper writings about film stars and deals being made. Welty's sketch "Bye-Bye Brevoort" is minor, but it is significant in that it was part of a production taking place in the period that is regarded as the golden age of American theater.

Chapter III: Writing the Revue: A History of the Collaboration

The summer of 1948 was a busy one for Welty. She was supposed to be in the process of constructing the collection of short stories that was to become *The Golden Apples*, technically one of her most challenging but also one of the most important books of her career. She had made two long visits to Jackson friend John Robinson in San Francisco where it appears the romance she was hoping for between them did not develop. And she was looking to please her agent, Diarmuid Russell, of Russell and Volkening, who was not only her business manager but also her dear friend. Russell had no love for the theatre. He felt it was a risky business, and he certainly did not stand to earn any money from it for either his client or for himself (Kreyling 142, 148-149). But Welty was in New York nonetheless in an intense collaboration with Hildegard Dolson writing a musical play.

Welty's friendship with Dolson probably originated in Dolson's relationship with Russell and Volkening, for she was also a client of Russell's (Marrs *Eudora* 164). Dolson, a humorist and freelance writer, had published two books before the collaboration (*How About a Man* in 1938 and *They Shook the Family Tree* in 1946). Dolson also wrote for magazines including *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *McCall's*. Additionally, she wrote advertising copy for some of New York's largest department stores such as Gimbel's and Macy's.

That summer in New York Welty shuttled between Dolson's hot apartment in the city and the lavish estate of acquaintances in Bedford Hills, Westchester County, just a short train ride from Grand Central Station. Welty was learning how to write for the theater and experimenting with collaboration techniques. Welty and Dolson began trying to write a single, coherent musical play but ultimately decided on the Musical Revue format rather than a play. Welty's experiences during the collaboration, although amusing, also seemed to hold moments

of frustration. Her letters to her friends, primarily Jackson companion and romantic interest John Robinson, describe a summer that was productive, frustrating, but sometimes also fun.

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) houses the Welty correspondence, and the letters there document the process that led to *What Year Is This?* The two writers were both familiar with the New York theatrical scene, even though only Dolson resided in the city. The references in the sketches are very sophisticated, and the two share a common language about culture. For example, in the “television sketch” referred to in a Dolson letter quoted later, a sexy Russian spy is trying to seduce a potential informant by inviting him to her apartment to watch a television set – something that very few people had access to at that time. Welty’s “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag” makes reference to surrealist painters and contemporary artists little-known outside the international art world. Their writing was targeted to a knowledgeable audience based in New York.

Welty’s letters to friends and the letters to her from Dolson paint a clear picture of the bumpy road from creative concept to the final typewritten script that could be considered for production. The two secured the home of acquaintances in ritzy Bedford Hills, Westchester County. Russell lived nearby in Katonah, also in Westchester. Staying in the country house would allow them to escape the heat in Dolson’s Greenwich Village apartment. The house, however, was overrun by construction workers. The letters, excerpted below, describe the summer. In the beginning, Welty and Dolson were collaborating on a musical play with a single plot line. In fact, early in the summer of 1948, Welty writes from New York City to John Robinson:

Hildy and I work daily on our musical comedy, and typewritings, cries, groans, cheers and just little meditative statements of “The jewel is now in her turban”

come out of the room from 11 in the morning until ?. What a wild chance, but it is fun, and whatever happens we are enjoying the work [...] Saw *Make Mine Manhattan*³ which is really the first one we felt we could aim at – good. (n.d.; 1948)

But in a subsequent letter to Robinson also mailed from the city, Welty describes a change from the original idea of a jointly-written play. “We’ve changed to a revue. It’s easier. When we got along in our musical comedy to the entrance of the ingénue, we couldn’t get a word out [...] We’re doing some work separately now that it’s a revue, but the result has been that I don’t work at all” (n.d.; 1948). Possibly attending *Make Mine Manhattan*, in addition to the problems the two had in constructing dialogue together, inspired the change to the new format, given Welty’s allusion to “aiming at” the revue style.

Welty and Dolson move to the estate of their acquaintances, Helen and Eddie Merrill, who were summering in Maine, and settled in to write. Unfortunately for the two would-be playwrights, there were serious renovations going on while they were there. While Welty could enjoy sitting in the orchard, walking in the woods, and swimming in the pool, Dolson was not as susceptible to the charms of nature. Then there were the workers. In another letter to Robinson, Welty wrote, “Hildy takes the painters etc. harder than I do, just can’t work with the distraction, and I think if she didn’t feel she’d be deserting me she’d go home today” (n.d.; 1948). In the same letter, Welty gives a wonderful description of the house and the renovations.

...the painters think they will be through the most part in two weeks more. I do think we’ve been a little bit fooled. The house is tremendous, three floors, and

³ *Make Mine Manhattan* ran on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theater between January 1948 to January 1949. This successful musical revue starred Sid Caesar and a cast of 40 singers and dancers and was written by Richard Lewine (music) and Arnold Horwitt (lyrics). Brooks Atkinson, the *New York Times* drama writer, described the revue as “composed of good-humored sketches and hurdy-gurdy music” and “an evening of light entertainment about local affairs.” (Historic New York Times [HNYT] 16 Jan 1948, p. 26, and Internet Broadway Database [IBDB].)

should be plenty of rooms for us to move about freely, but furniture is pushed into rooms not being worked on, stairs blocked, etc., and the men (five yesterday) forever underfoot. Isn't it really absurd! [...] Every day a new person appears in the kitchen or somewhere in the house, and just waits to be asked what, doesn't explain. The butcher, the fish man, a man in shorts who said he would take "the keys," a man for "a clamp" which he opened a closet and took out – he was accompanied by two thumb sucking children – the painters' contractor who appeared at 9 AM Sunday with a roll of canvas.[...] It's all like a play, which I guess we should be writing as it happens, instead of writing songs about this and that. I wrote two songs today, intact, which I think was a good day. Have about completed a skit. Did a finished song previously, and have notes on some other skits. So some work does get down. The second half of August ought to be easier. Surely by September the revue all ought to be done, rewriting, any interviewing, etc. I don't really have much hopes now for ere [our?] production [...] But anyway, we're moving ahead, it was a gamble from the start. (n.d.; 1948 [likely early August])

In another letter to Robinson hand-written from the city while waiting for a train back to Westchester, Welty writes, "We work. I work medium. I like to cook – and I find it almost makes the heat bearable, I'm not really bad – Hildy says 'wouldn't you rather make a skit?' but I make a cake!" (n.d.; 1948, marked "Thursday")

Another of her remarkable letters to Robinson describes other sorts of distractions at the Westchester estate:

[...]lovely day – sparkling all around, the blue sky, you can see green hills so far the soft white clouds, windy and fresh – the pool in a little while, nobody’s there, the sweet grass, cold water, heat of sun, and only the sound of horses cropping up the hillside – I swim more or less with nothing on [...] yes I do get distracted – that’s good! I’ll send you a song – what any of it will play like, don’t know. I should be hearing in my head all this coming out of Broadway, probably Jewish, funny people’s mouths. Will try to get a skit in shape to send, need a word from the outside world. (n.d.; “Saturday morning,”[likely mid-August])

“Bedford Sunday” is all that’s on the following letter to Robinson and must have been sent with drafts of the sketches. “When you have time to read the enclosed would be pleased to know if you laughed, or what. The art skit⁴ is of course my homage to Danny Kaye. [...] we are trying to clean up our revue and household – and go to the pool frequently.”

In a letter to Robinson marked only “Bedford H. [Bedford Hills] Thursday,” Welty makes interesting references to her work with Dolson:

A play is different, more objective piece of work, can be talked out ahead, but a novel is such an inner experience and things that complicate and lead it along are probably too delicate and tenuous until they appear in form in the writing
 [...]This present collaboration works fine, but only because we’re writing our separate skits. We fell down miserably on the musical

⁴ The skit referred to is “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag.” The piece, suggested by Welty’s artist friend from Jackson Helen Lotterhos references contemporary artists of the day. Welty describes a full ballet that is set among fabric scenery painted with artworks. Welty’s notes accompanying the number state that she doesn’t want “too many paintings, but they are all of quickly recognizable styles known to the audience.” She suggests “Picasso, Dalí, Mondrian, Paul Klee, Matisse, and Grandma Moses” styles. (Unpub. ms. “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag.” 1). Welty calls for the ballet to be “a beautiful one. The costumes suggest figures recognizable from well-known paintings, such as a Chagall peasant bride or Degas ballerinas.” (EW Collection, MDAH.)

comedy because we couldn't write lines together. Such different personalities.

And that with obvious, plaything stuff like a musical. Just now I feel like nothing so much as getting through with this and getting down to something of my own, a story, some honest work – this has been fine fun, but not anything more. Hope to finish up during September when I'll be home for a month. ([late August]1948)

In this letter Welty thanks Robinson for comments on the sketches sent to him earlier. Also she notes that she and Dolson are leaving. They are cleaning up with “Clorox, etc.” and Welty’s heading back to the city to leave on the train for the three-day trip to Jackson on Monday (n.d. 1948).

Although the friends thought their musical project would be done by August, the work continued through the fall. Dolson mentions the revue in an undated letter to Welty ([September] 1948), “Have done exactly ½ day’s work in the past two weeks, but a business lunch date Monday finished up my odds and ends, and plan to spend the next two weeks on re-writes of skits [...]” Dolson goes on to describe a revue she attended called *Small Wonder*⁵:

I went to *Small Wonder* a few days after it opened, and was wishing all evening that you could be seeing it too. This is going to sound awfully cocky – but after all the times you and I have both had such doubts about our revue, it won't hurt to have a cocky interlude. Anyway, Miss Welty, whoever put *Small Wonder* together didn't have as much sense of theatre as you and I have [...] All during the two acts I was thinking “Whew, if

⁵ *Small Wonder*, according to Lewis Funke’s column in the *New York Times* (p. X1) on July 25, 1948, opened at the Coronet on September 15. The revue starred Tom Ewell and is described as a “musical revue in two acts and twenty scenes,” with a cast of twenty. Brooks Atkinson's review on in the *Times* September 16 (p. 33) says that “the wonders of *Small Wonder* are uniformly small and become uniformly monotonous.” The play ran for 134 performances, closing on January 8. (*Historic New York Times Database* [HNYT].)

Eudora and I thought our stuff was too much in one mood, what can these people be thinking of?" Much too much straining after satire, until the audience felt a longing to get back on the alkaline side, and away from all that acid [...] Wish I could give you all my reasons for feeling encouraged after seeing *Small Wonder*, but most of them are hard to put down on paper [...] The revue as a whole didn't come off anywhere near being as good as *Make Mine Manhattan* or *Angel in the Wings*,⁶ and it showed a puzzling lack of comedy. That is, it swung mostly from satire to almost mawkish sentiment, and there wasn't one big number that gave the feeling of lushness and rhythm a revue needs. For all the things that may be wrong with our material, I honestly believe we're on the right track. (n.d. 1948)

Despite Dolson's upbeat tone, it becomes clear in Welty's letters to her agent and to Robinson that she doesn't share Dolson's excitement over the possibilities. The next few letters show her retrospective disappointment in, and impatience with, the revue-writing process. In an undated eight-page letter to Robinson sent once Welty returns to Jackson, her feeling about the writing experience in Westchester is not so pleasant. "I was right ready to leave my fine estate – stayed long enough – All was just a bit outside my real bent, while fun, the place, the people around (except Diarmuid), the revue, Hildy (though I like her all right, she's just a set Yank and we

⁶ *Angel in the Wings* played at the Coronet from December 11, 1947 to September 4, 1948. The revue starred comedians Paul and Grace Hartman, who, according to Lewis Funke's *New York Times* column, "are usually associated with the supper clubs." Brooks Atkinson's review on December 12 praises the Hartmans for their "inspired parodies," one of which is a skit featuring the couple playing "explorers interpreting native dance to a ladies' garden club" that is a "humorous satire on lecture platform explorers, garden clubs, and just about anything else you can think of." He goes on to laud the revue material, and calls the two lead performers "a royal pair of entertainers." Atkinson concludes by calling *Angel in the Wings* "a capital show." (IBDB and HNYT 12 Dec 1947 p.36)

never saw really eye to eye over an onion [maybe opinion?] or anything else” (n.d. 1948). In the same letter, Welty asks

What do you really think of revue now? I did show Diarmuid two skits and some songs, “Think Machine” and “Mr. Kittibrew,” and he and Henry [Volkening, Russell’s partner in the agency] said they never did laugh a single time! I felt low over it – They said [unreadable - although?] the situations were funny, they could not, themselves, visualize, as I can visualize, and in fact consider the skits mostly as action and props (all lines spontaneous and fictional). (September 1948)

Around the same time as the letter to Robinson, Welty writes Russell and apologizes since he didn’t like what he read. (Of the two skits she mentions to Robinson in the previous letter, only one, “Think Machine,” made it into the final script. “Kittibrew” was deemed too long. Also “Kittibrew” is a garden club skit, and could be perceived to be too similar to a sketch in *Angels in the Wings*. Later, Dolson drops one of her sketches from the final copy because she believes it to be similar to something she saw in another revue.) Welty writes

Dear Diarmuid, don’t you and Henry feel bad about not liking those skits – I felt that I came away leaving us all sad and hot sitting there. It’s really helpful to know what seems funny or not at this point – and situations and lines must both be funny or neither will be, really. I’m going to finish the rest of the stuff, best I can, and after that go back to the first ones – meanwhile seeing if the Little Theatre people can bring any enlightenment by speaking and doing some of it for me. Anyway, it all being such a shot in the dark, everything helps and we’ll all just hope that somewhere along the line the stuff will get useably funny. There ought to be some solution, only a few drops of which, poured in a tubful of water,

will turn things funny, the way it can turn them green, or develop negatives. (n.d.
1948 [Sept.]

The same letter references “a little choo-choo boat”⁷ that she constructed for Russell’s son Willie. “Choo-Choo Boat” is the title Welty gives one of her musical numbers in the revue. The letter ends with the postscript, “Hope to begin a story soon – that I would be terribly distressed if you didn’t like – but this revue is no more part of that than the train is part of the landscape – just a device – but must work.” At the time, she was finishing *Golden Apples* and the story she alludes to is eventually titled “The Wanderers.” In another letter to Robinson marked “Saturday” (but an archivist has written “September 1948”), Welty mentions the story she is working on currently and her intent to finish the revue.

My story was an interruption but think maybe also served to get something out of my system so I could get back and finish up my part of the revue in short order. I still think it deserved three weeks only and the dragging out plus the other circumstances make me want to finish it up with a good bang and be done with it. I feel restored now from being a little nervous – hope Hildy does too.

In an undated letter from Dolson to Welty but most likely written in September, 1948, Dolson is clearly taking the lead on the order of the songs and sketches. The “Art Gallery” ballet she refers to is “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag,” the homage to Danny Kaye that Welty had sent to Robinson earlier in the summer.

⁷ A choo-choo boat, as described by Welty in the script, is “a shoe box with stars and moons and suns cut in its sides for windows, with transparent colored paper pasted over the holes, an open hole cut in top for chimney, and a candle burning inside, pulled by a string.” This particular number is one of the most poignant in the script, matching “What Happened to Waltzes Like This” as a nostalgic look back at simpler times. And from Welty's stage directions: “The original Choo-Choo Boat, prevalent over most of the United States when we were children, was probably an imitation of the brightly lighted steamboats plying our inland rivers.” (CCB t.s. 1)

Am enclosing opening and closing songs, and eager to hear what you think of them.[...]Am aiming to turn everything in first week in October. Does that approximate date suit you – and will you be back in New York before then so we can spread everything on floor and arrange final order.[...] in the tentative outline of first and second acts, we put “Art Gallery” ballet at end of first act, but it seems to me “What’s Happened to Waltzes Like This” should have that spot instead, because [the] first act ought to close with not only dancing, but an accompanying song that audience can hum as they go into lobby for intermission. If you agree, “Art Gallery” could open second act.

On October 1, 1948 a letter from Hubert Creekmore⁸ from Iowa City asks “How is the revue coming? I never got to send you the thing on *Small Wonder*, but now I guess you can see it. It seems to have caught on a bit. I saw the Peter Lind Hayes show, *Heaven on Earth*,⁹ and it was as bad as they said. Lehman’s show sounds as if it will be a good one; ‘dirtiest one in fifteen years’ he says, and all the girls naked. (By good I mean a hit.)”¹⁰ And in the fall of 1948, Welty writes to her agent Russell:

⁸ Hiram Hubert Creekmore, a Mississippian from an influential family, was known for his translations from the Greek and Roman, his novels, and for his poetry. He also studied playwriting at Yale. A member of Jackson's “Night-Blooming Cerus Club,” the literary, intellectual group of young people of which Welty was a part, Creekmore wrote successfully for the Jackson Little Theatre. Creekmore also attended Columbia University at the same time that Welty was studying advertising and was one of the friends going to theater on a regular basis with Welty. His sister married Welty's brother Walter.

⁹ *Heaven on Earth* was a musical comedy that opened on September 16, 1948 and played for twelve performances before closing. Atkinson's review said that the show “sets a new standard for mediocrity and drives all our happy dreams away.” He calls Peter Lind Hayes “a monotonous leading man for a musical show.” He concludes his review with “If this *is Heaven on Earth*, where do the sinners go?” (HNYT, 17 Sept. 1948. p.29)

¹⁰ Engel's show referred to in Creekmore's letter must be *Alive and Kicking*, a big musical revue featuring Gwen Verdon and Carl Reiner and a cast of forty-four, according to the IBDB. Engel was the musical arranger. The show ran for forty-six performances at the Winter Garden. Atkinson's review on page 25 in the *New York Times* on January 18, 1950, calls it “never really exciting,” but he reserves some praise for several performers. He also lauds the choreography of Jack Cole, calling it a “great treat.” (There is no mention of naked girls.)

Yes, I will be glad to be through with the revue and will do. The most inconvenient part is that I have absolutely no memory of the contents – of my own and when Hildy mentions a song, haven't an idea how it goes. But maybe the fresh look will do good and I'll dash it off – especially as I want to go on to other things. That revue all part of the strain of New York life – not for me. Not fair to Hildy in this matter. I have just all the intensity I can stand right here - I know what's best for me. If it weren't for the few people that are my reason for coming, I'd never come back – then I always must come, for that.

Likely written on October 30, 1948 while on a train heading back to New York from a trip to Alabama, Dolson seems to be having an experience similar to Welty's need to write a story instead of completing the revue. But Dolson is clearly reinvigorated and more than ready to focus on finishing.

I finally got "Television" re-written (ending) but got so bogged down trying to re-do Psychiatric skit that I stopped and wrote a piece for *New Yorker*. (Rejected already.) Have you been feeling – as I did – that the musical had become so remote a project it seemed impossible to finish? But just the last day or so of Alabama visit I began to think of it surprisingly often, and I got interested all over again. So this is what I wanted to ask you about: both you and I will probably be pretty busy with our own writing from now on, and may not settle down to do actual new material for musical, no matter how good our intentions. (I'm assuming you feel as I do, and maybe that's all wrong, so just let me know your reactions.) Anyway, I've been making lists on the train, and it seems to me we could turn in what we have now, with only minor polishing, and get an opinion

from Monica McCall¹¹ and Lehman Engel¹² (if he has time to read it). Probably you agree with me that as it stands now, it's not a complete revue, and some of stuff might have to be tossed out. But now that I've started thinking about it again, it seems we have enough good things to justify showing. Then if somebody were interested and discussed specific changes and additions, it would be tangible enough to work on seriously for awhile. The Waltz number is one we need badly, for change of mood, but if you'll write one chorus (popular song length) that's enough, don't you think, if you describe the scene and evening clothes you want? Then if you'd rather not do Watering Spa (and the Waltz ending to first act could swing alone, I should think) that would mean you'd only have lyrics of one chorus.

The only skits we have now are "Think Machine," "Television," and I hope you'll agree to include a shortened "Kittibrew," because I still think that would be funny on stage. If necessary, the "Perfume Cure" could count as a fourth skit. This still leaves us one or two short, but what the hell – a discerning producer could wheedle more out of us!

For production numbers, several that we'd planned as shallow-set songs really need a deep stage anyway – for instance "New York Times,"

¹¹ Monica McCall was a powerful literary and theatrical agent. Her deal-making and representation of noted playwrights and producers was regularly covered in the New York newspapers. She was often mentioned in the "News of the Stage" and "Gossip of the Rialto" columns in the *New York Times*, most often as the agent for a particular play or artist. Her papers are housed at the Gottlieb Archive at Boston University. She was the companion of and agent for Muriel Rukeyser and is credited with being able to spot talented writers early in their careers and getting them into print. McCall had her own agency and worked frequently in both theater and film. (HNYT)

¹² Lehman Engel was a composer, conductor, and musical arranger. Engel, a Jackson native, was another of Welty's closest friends. He was at Juilliard when Welty and the other Jacksonians were at Columbia. His 1967 book *The American Musical Theater: A Consideration* is a classic history of the evolution of the art form. He began the Lehman Engel Musical Theater Workshop in New York and later in Los Angeles. He conducted the recordings of numerous Broadway shows. He won six Tony awards and was nominated for four others during his career. (IBDB)

and "Launderette" and "Moonburn." So plus the Waltz scene, the Art Gallery, "Choo-Choo Boat" and lush other-Planet ballet which we'd already planned as deep sets – we'd have several more possibilities. Can write more coherently when I have my folders and lists in front of me, at apartment, but wanted to write you while I was feeling the upswing of enthusiasm again. Guess I had to be away from it awhile to get a change of mind. Will try to see *Love Life* soon and report to you. (November 1948)

On a Sunday in November, Dolson reports that she has seen the Weill-Lerner revue *Love Life*.¹³

I hadn't even written you how nervous I was before I saw it, because the advance publicity made me feel it was much too close to our over-all idea. Am happy to report there's no resemblance. As for anything in *Small Wonder* being like "Yes, Dear" – it certainly wasn't in the show when I saw it, and friends who've seen it since gave their opinions on various numbers, not mentioning any new material, so I strongly doubt if there's anything to worry about. I already mentioned the resemblance to Publisher skit and "Alice Foote" song, so on tentative outline

¹³ *Love Life*, a Kurt Weill / Alan Jay Lerner musical, opened on October 7, 1948. Prior to its opening in New York, Lerner and Weill wrote a "column" in the *New York Times* that supposedly chronicles a conversation on a street in front of Boston's Shubert Theater. The headline reads "Two On The Street" with the next line stating "Collaborators Stage a Scene Aimed at Explaining Their Musical Play." The scene describes an encounter between a man on the street and the two authors. Written like a script, the two writers use the opportunity to explain to the man that the play is a vaudeville, but tied together with a plot and spans 150 years. The two, in answering questions, promise all of the elements of vaudeville, including singing, dancing, and comedy. The column ends with the Man saying "this I've got to see" and going to the window to purchase a ticket. Although the authors call the play "a vaudeville" Brooks Atkinson in his *New York Times* review certainly disagreed. He called it "cute, complex, and joyless--a general gripe masquerading as entertainment." He has high praise for Weill, though, saying that most of the musical's "pleasures come out of Mr. Weill's music box. He has never composed a more versatile score with agreeable music in so many moods--hot, comic, blue, satiric, and romantic." (HNYT and IBDB) The show, despite Mr. Atkinson's review, ran into the month of May, 1949, for a total of 252 performances. [NOTE: *Love Life* takes place over 150 years and Welty and Dolson's songs and sketches stretched from past to future. This is the only reason I can think of for Dolson's fear of similarities, expressed to Welty in the November 1948 letter.]

attached have omitted both, if that's okay with you.¹⁴

Diarmuid and Henry said very positively that they thought the sooner we turned it in, the better it would be, because topical revues can be lopped off bit by bit if they sit on the shelf too long. I didn't mean we should turn it in saying "this is only part," but I doubt if that would be necessary, because we already have about enough material provided we have four or five skits altogether – see outline attached [See Appendix A]. I wrote an opening for the other-planet ballet, also a description of the ballet, and did a song to go with it because it seemed to need one. Will type up the whole thing and send to you – also rewrite I did on the lyrics of "I'm Asking You," in which I tried to make it more topical.

I love the sound of the "When I'm In Bed With You" song of yours. Am eager to see it. I'm also hoping you'll finish up the "Hormones" song you did some wonderful lines on – and, of course, "What's Happened to Waltzes Like This."

Later in the same letter Dolson reports encouraging news.

A woman I've met recently said that if you and I were willing, she'd like to show our finished script to a friend who is looking for a musical to do and has a composer in mind, and already has promises of part of backing financially. Of course things like that dissolve overnight, but for the present, it sounds like one possible place. However, I think we should first get opinions from Lehman Engel and Monica McCall. ([November] 1948)

¹⁴ No outline is attached to the copy held by MDAH. However, in the "Welty and Drama" file at MDAH, the sketches are identified as by either Welty or by Dolson.

And, importantly for the purposes of this thesis, on the seventh page of the handwritten letter, Dolson writes, “Did you have a chance to try the old ladies at Brevoort idea? Think of it often as I pass Brevoort being dismantled, and hope you write it.” ([November] 1948) On December 4, 1948, Welty notes that she “wrote a remaining skit for revue and am typing up the whole.” This is most likely “Bye-Bye Brevoort.”

This skit, really a one-act play, reflects the description of the chaos in the Westchester house. It is also highly likely that Welty saw the *New York Times* article on July 17, 1948, with the headline stating “Brevoort to Close as Hotel July 31.” The hotel has its own amazing story – it was the first hotel built on Fifth Avenue, in 1854. The Brevoort was not only a stopping place for titled Europeans, but also a residence for the gentry. The famous hotel hosted society functions, weddings, and balls. Edna St. Vincent Millay, Isadora Duncan, Eugene O’Neill and Lincoln Steffens are some of the many names associated with the famous Brevoort Hotel, named for Henry Brevoort, a wealthy landowner descended from Dutch settlers. Nathaniel West lived there from 1935-36. The hotel hosted huge banquets for the wealthy – a *New York Times* article talks about a dinner in honor of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney before she was to sail to England to winter on “The Continent” (*NYT* 3 Jan 1913). The Dickens Society held their annual meetings there. The hotel restaurant was padlocked once for violating prohibition, and the management’s defense was that it was only catering to the wishes of its elite residents and other clientele. This hotel had its own colorful history and it was a recognizable New York landmark that would serve as the perfect site for the sketch.

From the following letters, written in December, after Welty has had time to sift through her emotions from the summer and to finish work on the revue, Welty’s attitude toward the pieces seems to change. It is clear that she and Dolson have been corresponding about their

individual contributions, and have even discussed a title. Dolson, on Sunday, December 19th, 1948, writes to Welty:

Came in groggy from belated Christmas shopping the other day and opened your letter and actually laughed out loud. Think “Bye-Bye Brevoort” has some of the funniest lines you’ve written yet – with Desmond and Evans my favorites. The Raymond Duncan¹⁵ part seemed rather strained to me, and also a few of the lines on skating. But if we get a professional reaction in January, we’ll know better where we went off. “The Feet Out Blues” has some wonderful rhymes – loved the Bankhead one, and born on a sled.¹⁶ It seemed to me the last two lines were superfluous – because the verse just before is such a good summing-up of “one likes the feet hot – one likes ‘em cold.”

In a P.S. to this letter, Dolson discusses the title for the revue:

On the title – *The 49ers* – I love it, but am dubious about the time element. If by any miracle we’d get a production, it couldn’t be before the end of 1949, which would mean the title losing its significance right away. My less important objection – completely personal probably – is that the magazine ‘47 (and ‘48) was such a flop.¹⁷ I think *The 49ers* is better as a title than *What Year Is This?* – if it

¹⁵ Raymond Duncan was the brother of dancer Isadora Duncan and was well-known in New York for what could be called his eccentricities. Duncan and his wife, adopted what he believed were the customs of Ancient Greece. They wove their own fabric, dressed in togas and sandals, and even caused a stir in New York when the *Times* reported, on January 9, 1910, that their son Menalkas was picked up by police on West 47th Street for being “clad in a blouse stretching from his neck to half way below his knees, a pair of sandals, and, apparently, nothing else.” The headline reads “Bare-Legged Boy Shocks Policeman” and is followed by the remark “Parents Add to the Sartorial Disturbance by Appearing in Breezy Costumes” (*HNYT* p. 3, 9 January 1910).

¹⁶ Refers to the following rhyming sequences in Welty’s “Feet In, Feet Out Blues:”

He: “I only said when we wed; You never did warn; That, baby, you were born; On a sled.”

She: “Oh to free my body and soul from this ghastly blanket!”

He: “Now you’re acting like Tallulah Bankhead.” (FIFO Blues, t.s.1)

¹⁷ ‘47 was the title of a magazine that was started by a group of writers who were also its owners/publishers. According to the *New York Times* column “People Who Read and Write” by John K. Hutchens on page 16 on

weren't for that time element – and also that it doesn't tie the elements of skits and songs together as much – in that it says what year it is – whereas we've been doing stuff that combines a lot of eras – Brevoort, moon-rocket ballet – waltz – television – and is deliberately suggesting the past, present, and future in a melange. (Gosh, is that what we're doing?!) Maybe we can still get a better title that has same implications. (December 19, 1948)

On January 8, 1949, Lehman Engel writes, “As to your revue, I would certainly be most happy to have a chance to read it and you can certainly be sure that I will tell you the truth as far as I know it. So ask Diarmuid Russell, please, to send it to me when it is in shape.” Also early in January, Dolson writes Welty,

Am enclosing the ‘Other Planet’ ballet: Typed up the Hollywood skit but want to do another draft before I send it next week. Also have most of songs polished, with the entrances described, and will type up. Stopped today to do a King Features piece but will be finished with it Friday and back to revue [...] Maybe we can turn in to Monica McCall (and Lehman?) end of this month don't you think?” (January 1949)

Then Welty writes to Russell on January 10, 1949, stating that Engel offered to “read our revue and tell what he thought – which might save us a lot of time, and would be good to get right at the start.” In another letter, mailed from Jackson to Russell, Welty writes of eyestrain (likely from having to type up the revue), but says that the manuscript is finally done. “Waiting on Hildy's okay to some new material, to send you up my part of revue. Got it done last week, and

September 29, 1946, “Since it hopes, of course, to outlive 1947, the name will change annually.” It did not last past the first year. (HNYT)

glad to get free of it, it was a mean type-job – did the four copies. Will send you two, one for Lehman, is that right? Hope for some luck, but luck it would be” (January 10, 1949).

Sometime in January Dolson writes to Welty about an upcoming February 15 departure to Arizona for a month. The letter reveals something of the origins of the collaboration between the two of them.

Such a beautifully efficient lot of copies you sent up. I turned first act into Diarmuid on Wednesday, and you and I can both feel relieved and pleased because once he'd seen the whole act put together, he was really quite enthusiastic. Said he could even begin to visualize the way things would play or sing. Turned in second act to him this morning – also two complete sets of everything – and he was to read second act this afternoon and turn one copy of revue over to Monica McCall and one to Lehman – probably they'll receive tomorrow. Whee – so at least it's done, and I too wish you were here so we could celebrate at the same Schraffts we started off in. There was really so much fun connected with doing it - enough to far overshadow the grind part – and I'm awfully glad we carried out that originally casual “it would be nice to do a musical someday.” (January 1949)

On February 2, 1949, Welty writes to Russell, “Hildy says she turned in the revue, and I'm glad. I do hope it's not a nuisance now, but will have some kind of miracle happen to it. I'm not much proud of it but it's probably the best I can do with it, and how a thing will play is a blissful mystery to me, so all can be trusted to that maybe.” (NOTE: this letter also mentions her eyes are better.)

Dolson, in undated letter (must be prior to February 10, 1949, since she mentions tickets for a show on that date) gives Welty promising news.

Hooray – first reaction is good. Monica McCall phoned Henry and said she liked the revue very much. I’m seeing her at 11:30 A.M. Monday. She told Henry there are a lot of problems about selling a revue, and of course I’ll pass on to you everything she says. No word from Lehman yet. Am leaving Tuesday A.M. [...] I imagine that M. McCall means it’s customary to get the music written and then show to producers, but will know Monday and write you either before I leave or from our first overnight stop. Henry [Volkening] said that Monica Mc is very outspoken, so it’s nice her reaction is good. (February 1949)

The letter also states, “The last two revues – *All for Love*¹⁸ and *Along Fifth Avenue*¹⁹ – got awful reviews. Had to swap *Lend An Ear*²⁰ tickets to later date – February 10, and will write you after I see it.”

In a letter marked “Tuesday” and thanking Russell for his letter advising her one of her works was to be translated into Indonesian, Welty writes, “You were noble to read all that revue – glad I was away down here when you did it – Maybe something lucky will happen – maybe not. Will see. I know Lehman’s so busy – this just about the time some show of his was to begin rehearsal – might take a while for him to get to see our stuff” ([1949]). In an undated letter to Hubert Creekmore (mentioning that Dolson is in Arizona, so it must be mid-February), Welty

¹⁸ *All For Love* received a negative review from Brooks Atkinson, even though it featured Paul and Grace Hartman, the couple mentioned by Monica McCall as potential performers for *What Year Is This?* Atkinson, in his review of January 24, 1949, calls it “a musical show in an obsolete style without a single good song or a set of intelligent lyrics.” (HNYT p.16)

¹⁹ *Along Fifth Avenue* featured Nancy Walker and Jackie Gleason opened on January 13, 1949. Atkinson describes himself after seeing it as “a slightly discontented theatregoer” and stated he felt that the show “wastes the talents of two comedians.” (HNYT p.28)

²⁰ *Lend An Ear* was lauded by Atkinson when it moved to Broadway in December of 1948. He describes it as a “an intimate musical revue [that] is a model of skill and taste.” He concludes by saying that “everybody has amiably conspired to make *Lend an Ear* an ideal band-box revue.” (HNYT 17 Dec 1948 p.38)

describes Engel's comments²¹: "Lehman, with great kindness, read it, did I tell you? He thought there was nothing wrong with it, no sharp endings or blackout matter. Said all the songs were usable and would take music OK, and the skits were "a little literary" but "perfectly feasible." Probably exactly on the head [(February 1949)].

Later in the same letter:

Have done nothing but work since Christmas. First typed up the revue, and we turned it in to Monica McCall, R & V's theatre agent, and she said she thought it good (had done lots of revision by the way) and would see about whatever had to be done, I suppose show it to composers and producers? Anyway she asked for a lot more copies and that's the last I've heard. Hildy's been in Arizona but when she gets back I guess she will investigate as to whether any luck seems brewing. It's all plain luck and simple gamble of course, so anything that happens will be a surprise. [...] Anyway we finished up with our work on that revue, which was a relief, then I had to start right in typing up the stories for the new book.

Welty also references Lehman Engel's comments in a February 1949 letter to Russell.

Lehman wrote, as you will have seen too, and I think highly of his opinion as from both the artistic and the working end of a show – and believe he must be right. He sort of agrees with you and Henry too about the skits. Will send letter on to Hildy in Arizona. He was good to give all that time to the reading – if we ever (God forbid) have to work any more on revue, we'll have good idea where to tackle from thisvmeanwhile I'm all for letting Miss McC worry around with it as it is!

²¹ Engel's letter with the referenced comments are not in the Welty Archive but could be in the Engel Archive at Millsap's College.

In what appears to be her next letter to Russell, dated 18 February 1949, Welty says, “I know you are as relieved as we are that Miss McCall thinks the revue does all right, knowing no more than we did what we’d done. Hildy wrote me a nice letter telling of her interview just before taking off on her trip. Now we can just forget it and feel lucky if anything happens.”

Dolson writes from Arizona, probably around February 22 of 1949, after getting Engel’s comments from Welty, telling her about the Monica McCall meeting before leaving New York.

Wasn’t really disturbed by Lehman’s report on the revue. Monica McCall had mentioned that “See Your Analyst” would play well, and that our other skits might need some peeling down to make a more direct blackout. However, she said that so many changes are made according to the preferences of a particular producer that she felt we ought to show it as is. She also said that it would be possible to show pieces of the revue (probably to sell to the shows already scheduled for production, that needed more material). But she said she liked the revue enough to prefer showing it as a whole.

In a letter dated February 23, 1949, Welty says to Robinson:

We got some reports on our revue. Monica McCall, the theatrical agent, said it was the best she’s read in years, and Lehman, [on] whose word I rely, said the revue was possible but thought the skits didn’t come off sharp enough. So we’ll just sit back and see – McCall said it was a long business selling a revue, getting music written first for one thing.

In a letter dated Thursday, April 21, 1949, Dolson sends Welty a clipping from the *New York Herald Tribune*. In the column under the heading “News of the Theater” Bert McCord writes

Hildegarde Dolson and Eudora Welty have collaborated on the sketches of a revue to be called “What Year Is This?” This is a new field for both writers. Miss Welty, who alternates writing short stories with receiving awards, is a native of Mississippi and her talents have thus far been devoted mostly to work of a serious nature. There is no need to mention any of her literary efforts here, except that it might be noted in passing that the 1936 edition of *Manuscript* contained a story of hers entitled “Death of a Traveling Salesman.”²²

Miss Dolson is from Pennsylvania and is given to lighter subjects than those treated by her new partner. Her affinity for the stage was manifested when she first came to New York. With a friend of hers, she became a dancer in a Forty-second Street burlesque house. Of this experience, she later wrote that “we saw, heard and smelled the whole backstage life of burlesque and took in only what we understood, which was practically nothing. Our interpretation may not have been quite the same as Gypsy Rose Lee’s, but like her, we had a lovely time.

No one has yet been commissioned to write the music for *What Year Is This?* Monica McCall represents the authors.

In the accompanying letter, Dolson states:

Am enclosing this clipping from the *Tribune* yesterday – evidently a release from Monica McCall’s office. I liked the part about you – and imagine my surprise to learn I’d been a burlesque dancer (instead of having written one set of lyrics for burlesque). Had a note from M. McCall yesterday saying she was working on

²² Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* was currently playing on Broadway.

getting Dwight Deere Wiman²³ interested in the revue “through a devious route,” (He’d be wonderful – don’t you think?) and would let us know the minute anything concrete happened. She had waited to show it until the copyright was okay in Washington.

Lehman Engel’s letter about our revue still baffles me a little – the part about “Lyrics without music have no permanent value.” Surely he didn’t think we wanted popular song lyrics published in limp leather – as immortal. And it seems very unimportant to me whether “See Your Psychiatrist” is closest to a format. “Think Machine” is still the freshest and most imaginative of the skits – and as M. McCall said, “Think what a sensitive producer with imagination could do with it.”

Dolson’s P. S. says “I don’t want to get M. McCall’s publicity people into trouble but will try to suggest they be more accurate and not give us such racy pasts.”

Apparently at least one of the works was of interest to producers. Fellow Mississippian Brown Furlow asked to use some of the sketches in a revue he planned for the summer of 1949. The piece “Bye-Bye Brevoort” received its first production in the Red Barn, a theater on the Straw Hat circuit. Eighty-nine summer playhouses are listed in the *New York Times* of August 28, 1949 as part of the “Straw Hat Trail.” The theaters range from as far south as North Carolina, to Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland up through New York State, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. The Straw Hat summer theater started in the 1920s when stage

²³ Dwight Deere Wiman was a well-known Broadway producer whose career spanned a quarter century, from the 1920s through his death in 1951. Some of his hits included the Rodgers and Hart musical *Babes in Arms* in 1937 and the dramatization of Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* in 1947. Wiman produced 56 plays and musicals on Broadway and wrote, produced, and directed at least two original musical revues in the 1930s. According to the website of the New York Public Library, Wiman, the direct descendant of the John Deere tractor manufacturer, is best known for his musicals and revues. (NYPL Archives-4755)

stars would play at theaters in towns frequented by tourists and summer residents. These summer theaters operated only from June through August. The list of plays in the August 28 *New York Times* lists Westboro's Red Barn Theatre running *Lo and Behold*, "a new revue by Brown Furlow and William Happ" (HNYT p.X2). Furlow wrote music and lyrics for a revue or play called *The Man Who Stole Sixth Avenue*, and Happ Williams wrote words and music for something called *The Whipping Boy* which ran at the Red Barn just before *Lo and Behold*. There seem to be no records of a New York production of either show, although there were several mentions in theater columns of a search for producers for the Furlow show.

In a letter marked Friday, sometime in August before Labor Day of 1949, Dolson writes

Brown Furlow phoned and said he'd tried to get you and me, to explain the delay, and to tell us that he's had an elegant piece of luck. The music we heard of his (mostly from *The Man Who Stole Sixth Avenue*) is being used for a revue thrown together hastily for production in Red Barn Theatre, Westboro, Massachusetts (August 30 - September 4). A friend of his wrote the skits. He was so anxious you and I should go up to see it, but I explained you wouldn't be back till later in September. I'm driving up with friends of his over Labor Day weekend, and will report to you afterward. Do so wish you were here to go along. Monica McCall thought it would be a good idea to let them take some sketch from our revue (just for those six performances) if they were in a jam for material, and Brown said they were. I checked with Diarmuid, and also told Brown I wanted to wire you for permission if they decided definitely they would like to use one of ours. He went up to Massachusetts last Saturday, for rehearsals this

week, and M. McCall and I were surprised to read in Wednesday *Tribune* that “one sketch is used through courtesy of Eudora Welty and [Hildegarde] Dolson.” She expected to hear from Brown by today, telling her what skit, and will wire him if she doesn’t get word. As she said, “He’s such a nice boy I’m sure it’s all right.” He had a talk with her before leaving town. Hartmans [stars of the revue *All for Love*] have been on a summer tour, but she’s phoning them when they get back, to ask if they’d want to see our revue. (She apologized for delay, but said they were friends of hers and she wanted to talk to them personally instead of just sending it off to them.) I’ll let you know as soon as I get word from Brown, but Diarmuid said he was sure you wouldn’t mind and would trust McCall’s judgment.

In a letter dated Sunday, August 21, Furlow writes

Dearest Eudora,

By now Hildy has probably told you that my revue, “Lo and Behold,” is being done up here. Also that she very sweetly volunteered some of the sketches from *What Year Is This?* You’ll be happy (I hope) to know that “Bye Bye Brevoort ” will be used – everyone is crazy about it. Will you be back in New York in time to come up here? Hildy, when I talked to her Friday, says she definitely will be up. Please try to be here if it’s at all possible.

After complimenting her on *The Golden Apples* (published August 18), Furlow ends with

“Thank you again to you and Hildy for being so sweet about your sketches and please try to

come up for the show. Performances are from August 30th through September 4th.” He signs “Fondly, Brown.”

On August 30, 1949, the Tuesday before Labor Day weekend Dolson writes:

Just heard from Brown Furlow today, and they’re using “Bye Bye Brevoort,” Am so terribly sorry Brown didn’t do as I asked – let me know ahead so I could wire you for permission. He must have gotten in a whirl of rehearsals and not stopped to think. The thing that really upset me is that it sounds from his note as if they’ve used both our names on the posters and programs – when it’s entirely your skit. I called Diarmuid to tell him what happened, and how embarrassed I feel if they’ve included me on the credits. He calmed me down, but I still feel it was a confused thing for those people to do, especially since Brown knew your name was on the skit. Forgive my not having managed things better. At least I’ll send you a straight – and I hope unconfused – report on the show. Since I only got Brown’s note on their opening day, I couldn’t very well wire bawling him out, but will be there Sunday and wish so much you’d be there too.

Monday night after seeing the show, Dolson writes a six-page letter and gushes:

The “Bye Bye Brevoort” was enchanting – and backstage afterward he actress who played Millicent said to me so earnestly, “Will you please tell Miss Welty we loved it, and so we really worked hard on that.” And the gangly young director said, practically with tears in his eyes (when I congratulated him), “There just wasn’t enough rehearsal time to bring out all the charm. But tell Miss Welty I was crazy about it.” Actually, they did a remarkable job, despite almost no props, and local amateurs included with a few professionals. The New Yorkers in the

audience (about 20 last night) naturally were the ones who laughed most, because of all references that they'd catch, and people from a tiny Massachusetts town wouldn't, but Westboroites loved Desmond and the maid, Evans, and the sea-shell and the wreckers, etc. Towards the end, there was one place that seemed a bit too wordy – with the lines about bearded bullies skating etc., when the climax was already approaching, but for overall effect I think you'd have been awfully pleased at the way it played.

Your special delivery arrived Saturday eve, and I was so glad to get it, because after my saying to Brown, “Why, sure, take some of our stuff if you get in a jam for material,” I was horrified at the slapdash hurry with which they proceeded when my one stipulation had been that we must wire you first to get permission, if it was definite.

The letter goes on to laud Furlow's music, saying that he is the superior songwriter, and calls Happ's contributions “vulgar.” Dolson references the friends of Furlow's she was riding with, saying, “They and a dozen other New Yorkers sent you ecstatic messages on ‘Bye Bye Brevoort’ via me.” And later in the same letter: “[...] there were so many attractive talented kids in the cast (they outdid themselves on Bye Bye)” and ends with “Somebody has got to put [on] a couple more skits from our revue (preferably the whole revue) so we can see them. This first sample was a delight.”

In a letter that Dolson says is a follow-up to the last letter, she mentions

One of the people who went up to Westboro to see show – and who loved your skit and a lot of Brown's songs – told Edith Lutjens about it as soon as she got back to New York. So Lutjens got all interested – and asked to see *What Year Is*

This? and M. McCall has sent her a copy. Lutjens is the one who produced *Medium* and *Telephone* [two one-act operas by the composer Gian Carlo Menotti that debuted in the mid-forties] and designed costumes for *Madwoman*,²⁴ and sounds so very nice.

Dolson goes on to say

Brown said he was going to work on music for our lyrics. E. Lutjens asked to hear music too, but since he hadn't finished any, he said would she please read our script first. Did I tell you that the actress who did Evans in "Bye Bye" was especially good, and that the costumes were remarkable for summer stock. I do so wish you could have sat there watching, and hearing audience laugh.

The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* of Sunday, July 17, 1949, features a column headlined "Eudora Welty Joins Hegira of Mississippians to Europe" which focuses on her upcoming trip to Europe planned for the following Fall. In the body of the article, author Rhea Talley also reports that a "new form of literary venture has entered Miss Welty's life." The story recounts the meeting of Welty and Dolson in "the Schrafft's at Fifth Avenue and Thirteenth Street, which is in Greenwich Village, [Welty's] favorite part of town" when they came upon the idea of "writing a musical show." Welty is quoted as saying, "We first tried a musical show with a plot [...] but that was too much trouble...The theatrical agent who has the script likes it. I don't know myself." The columnist goes on to say that "Miss Welty will be happy if *What Year Is This?* pays off, but meanwhile she's not giving it a second thought."

²⁴ *Madwoman* refers to the play *The Madwoman of Chaillot* by Jean Giraudoux, in translation by Maurice Valency, that opened at the Belasco Theatre on December 27, 1948. According to Brooks Atkinson's review on December 28, the producer, Alfred de Liagre, Jr. (a client of Monica McCall), "has had the wisdom to import Christian Berard's airy and imaginative scenery and his humorously blousey costumes for the demented old crones who speak the sanest lines in the play. M. Berard's touch is as light and fanciful as Giraudoux's." There is no mention of Lutjens as costumer, either in the *New York Times* or the *Internet Broadway Database*.

Welty was in Europe for nine months, visiting Italy, France, England, and Ireland. She met writers who were to become longtime friends and met friends from home, traveling all the while. Hildegard Dolson came to visit her and later Welty met up with John Robinson, who was in Italy on a Guggenheim, and the two traveled together. There seems to be nothing farther from Welty's mind than her theatrical sketches from 1948. Although Welty mentions writing a play in the 1960s, that work, if it exists, has yet to turn up. So far as is known, these revue sketches were the last we know of her writings for the stage. But it was not the last word about "Bye-Bye Brevoort."

On March 6, 1956, almost eight years after the creation of the revue, Norris Houghton of the Phoenix Theatre, an off-Broadway house on Second Avenue at 12th Street, writes:

Dear Miss Welty:

We are making progress on our tiny revue. All it needs is more material by Eudora Welty! We are meeting with Hildegard Dolson on Friday but meanwhile I long for you to think about sketch material which is where we are weakest.

We want to make the revue as sharp and timely as possible. We still want to use the "Bye Bye Brevoort" sketch and I have a message for you from our director, Paul Lammers, who wonders whether because of the tiny cast of THE LITTLEST REVUE it might be possible for the characters of Whichaway and Chrome to be combined. His memo to me continues: "Perhaps some of the lines could be shared by Fortescue and Dupree. The other problem is the ending. I felt that a stronger ending may be found by giving the last line to Fortescue and combining it with a final and devastating explosion."

Would you be kind enough to think about this and since I somehow doubt that you have a copy, I am sending it, under separate cover to refresh your memory. This is but the first of what I dare say may be a series of communiques to you reporting on the progress of *The Littlest Revue* which is scheduled to open on May 15th. That means all our material must be in hand by the first of April.

It was pleasant meeting you at the Reynals' and I look forward to seeing you again when next you are in New York.

Cordially yours,

Norris Houghton.

Welty has written on the bottom of this letter that she sent to Russell Mach 12, 1956.

Dear D -

I told him in N.Y. and wrote him just now, that he's welcome to any of my material he can use and doesn't find too old and stale – but that I just can't write any other sketches now, or rewrite this. I told him I was more than willing to leave any tightening up, etc. to what comes of its being tried over and worked out. That if it's much altered they can say "adapted from" instead of "by."

E-

In her accompanying note to Russell, Welty asked, "How did Hildy get along with him?"

On April 10, 1956, Hubert Creekmore wrote, on the last page of a three-page letter, written from his New York apartment:

Yes, you must write a play, or plays. Dialogue is one of the main points and you're excellent in that; the others are in structure, and you can handle that when you come to it. Start now and go on. I'm going to myself, as soon as I can get

steady on my feet; as you know I've meant to write some for a long time. Your sketch of the Old Lady in the Brevoort is in the new show by Ogden Nash and others, and I hear from those close to it, that it's the best they have. You'll be here for the opening of that too – about mid-May – so another premiere celebration.

It's called *The Littlest Revue*.

Based on the script found in the archives that was used by the Phoenix Theatre, the director reversed the last lines and allowed Fortescue's "I think there's something of elegance gone" to close the play.

The Ponder Heart was a success on Broadway – it had opened on February 16, 1956 to extremely favorable reviews. But it closed in June. On June 20, 1956, Welty writes to Russell about the closing night of *Ponder Heart*. This is the letter that includes her little hand-written note on the side of the second page, "I guess you saw *Littlest Revue* closing too – in spite of all that signing I did!" That appears to be the last full production of any of the works of Welty and Dolson from the summer of 1948.

Chapter IV: Producing “Bye-Bye Brevoort” and Other Sketches

As a former theater director, I believe an actual production is necessary in order to reveal more than what can be gleaned by reading a script on the page. Actors bring life into the written word and in contemplating a full production, one must gauge audience reaction too. As noted earlier, only “Brevoort” of the seventeen pieces included in *What Year Is This?* had been mounted, but other sketches seemed viable. Some of the works call for big production numbers, with elaborate sets, costumes, and lighting. Welty is responsible for seven other pieces in the script that was finally submitted to Monica McCall. “Yes Dear,” is a sketch or skit like “Brevoort,” and then there are six musical numbers: “The New York Times,” “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag,” “What Happened to Waltzes Like This,” “Choo-Choo Boat,” “Hormones,” and “Feet In, Feet Out Blues.” Dolson contributed another nine.

“Yes Dear” (also called “The Think Machine” in the set details and in some of the correspondence between Welty and Dolson) deals with an addled professor-type and an early computer that is actually a character in the play. As the sketch unfolds, the audience learns that the professor’s invention, a huge, room-filling construction complete with, as Welty states, “adding machine, ticker-tape attachment expelling tape, toaster, cash register, ice crusher, thermometer” (“Yes Dear” t.s. 1) and other items, is the protagonist of the play. At certain points in the action, Welty calls for the machine to spit out tongs, sparklers, a woolen muffler, and a drawer that opens out to become a bed.

“Waltzes” is a look back to Victorian times, with summer garden parties, bands playing on bandstands, and dancing couples. “Choo-Choo Boat” calls for the cardboard shoeboxes that are filled with candles and pulled by strings that Welty recalls from childhood and had made for Russell’s son. The musical piece is bookended by the calls of parents to their children to come in

as darkness settles. “Feet In, Feet Out Blues” is set in a bedroom. The singers are a married couple who fight over the covers. The husband wants his feet covered and the wife wants the opposite. “The New York Times” also features young marrieds, like those in “Feet In,” who sing and dance to lyrics like, “The New York Times is bright and early. It’s at your door when the dawn is pearly” and “a reader’s interest never fails, as long as there’s a Bloomingdale’s” (“NYT” t.s. 1).

“Fifty-Seventh Street Rag” is a surreal musical number including a full ballet and designed to feature a single versatile actor/comedian playing sixteen different roles. (Welty intended the role as an homage to Danny Kaye, as she wrote to John Robinson in the summer of 1948.) “Fifty-Seventh Street” calls for a crowd of people at an art opening and a full corps de ballet. Welty describes the set with “walls at an angle – two- or three-sided set – so as to show paintings hung on them.” “Hormones” is a song about what appears to be a new topic in the 40s. Welty’s stage directions describe the singer as “a young lady, in Harlequin glasses. Has latest best-seller from the Science shelf...” (“Hormones” t.s. 1). The song’s first verse concludes with, “The story of Hormones – It’s the drumbeat and the trombones, The Music of the Spheres, To an up-to-date girl’s ears.” The song concludes with “Samson had them in his hair, They’re elsewhere in Miss West. Einstein has them above the brow, And Merman in her chest” (“Hormones” ts. 1-2). But the most significant of the works is the one-act play “Bye-Bye Brevoort.”

“Bye-Bye Brevoort” opens with three elderly women, stereotypes of aged aristocrats, in a sitting room awaiting their high tea. These three (and a fourth, Desmond Dupree, who arrives later) refuse to acknowledge the passing of time. Their hotel, the formerly-elegant Brevoort, is being torn down around them. However, as they are all wearing hearing aids, they don’t seem to

know or choose to ignore what is happening. The female characters are Millicent Fortescue, Violet Whichaway, Agatha Chrome, and Evans – the young, sexy maid who talks to herself (and thus to the audience). As the curtain rises to the sound of loud bangs from the demolition, we see the three women seated in wicker furniture with a large tea table in a room “crowded with abundant Victorian furnishings”²⁵ Welty’s stage directions call for a dumbwaiter, an old-fashioned telephone, a big sea shell, and “a large silver dish with a mountain of calling cards in it.” Welty specifies stands with plants with “luxuriant growth” and “at least one musical instrument.” Her directions also call for “a large dark oil painting of a lady ancestor in ornate frame.” The furnishings must fall or jiggle – the play is accompanied by crashes and other noises as the hotel is in the process of being destroyed. Welty describes her cast as “three old Brevoort relics, in Fortescue’s sitting room, each playing her own game of solitaire” (*Occasions* 45). The ladies are waiting for the return of Evans, the maid, and for Desmond Dupree, the old dandy who visits them every Thursday.

Reading the description of the sketch, we might think it a trifle, a cartoon. (Welty was a gifted cartoonist, and she went to lots of movies too, so she could very well have had cartoons in mind when she created “Bye-Bye Brevoort.”) One stage direction calls for the use of dynamite sticks to light cigars – this is right out of early cartoons, as is a scene of buildings falling down around the heads of those inside of them. Welty read S. J. Perelman and saw Marx Brothers movies – any or all of these could have been influences on the writing of the sketch. She also chose the Brevoort intentionally (as she did everything). Her audience would have known well the illustrious hotel and its inhabitants – another reason for its inclusion in *The Littlest Revue*.

²⁵ All references to “Bye-Bye Brevoort” and the script used for the staged reading are from the version printed in Welty, *Occasions: Selected Writings*.

The idea of aged aristocrats refusing to acknowledge change is nothing new in Southern writing. There are obvious contrasts – servant and master; class distinctions; real world and imagined. The play, on first reading, seems depressing – comic cruelty directed at the old and the infirm. What is funny about four elderly people watching their world collapse? But by the fourth and fifth reading, the classic comic gags and slapstick became engaging. The play is a burlesque but also a situational comedy – and the protagonist is the hotel, which must literally “take a pratfall” itself, collapsing completely by the end of the skit.

But from a producing standpoint, the play could be difficult to mount. The requirements for excessive technical support for the demolition that has to take place around the players; the expensive props like a silver tea service and two nearly identical paintings that have to be switched out subtly while other activity is going on; not to mention the manipulation of a fake pigeon that flies through the window, is able to accept a crumb of cake, and then flies out, pose problems that would give any potential producer pause. But the play is very playable and could be very funny if superbly cast. (And from a director’s point of view, casting is ninety percent of the task.) Superbly cast is what it appears to have been, with Charlotte Rae, Larry Storch, and Tammy Grimes in the New York production. Timing is everything, and with a professional production like *The Littlest Revue* at the Phoenix Theater, it must have been hysterically funny.

Within the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the newly re-opened Drama section of the Welty Collection included the script used by the Phoenix Theatre Company. This version contained none of the stage directions. The references were made to “napkin business” or “shell business” but in typical theater fashion, the choices of movement and any other stage actions are left to the director. The script, now eight pages instead of Welty’s seventeen, reflects a few line changes. Acquiescing to the request of the director, Paul Lammers, it combines the

characters of Whichaway and Chrome, and flips the last two lines, allowing Fortescue instead of Desmond Dupree the last word. Other changes include reducing the number of wreckers to two (from three) and slight amendments to two lines. Otherwise, the play is exactly as Welty wrote it, but without the beautifully detailed stage directions that reveal so clearly her visual imagination.

In 2009, I met with Tom Key, Artistic Director of the professional theater Theatrical Outfit. Key, a well-respected actor and director, is dedicated to producing work about the South. He has successfully adapted work by noted Southern writers and has an interest in producing a work by Welty. Like most people, Key had not heard of the sketches but agreed to work on a reading. We decided to use a Monday night (traditionally a “dark” night in an equity, i.e. union, house) since both the space and actors would be available. Tom Key and I met again in November and December of 2009. Together we went through the songs and sketches copied from the Welty Collection in the Archives. I planned at the time to focus mainly on “Brevoort,” but in my discussion with Key, decided that more of the skits and songs deserved to be staged. Therefore, I contacted Dr. Geoffrey Haydon, composer, arranger, musician, and author, and an expert on the American songbook. Haydon knew a little about Welty and a lot about her friend Lehman Engel, which could be one of the reasons he agreed to meet. I hoped Haydon could find contemporaneous music that may have inspired Welty. I made the assumption that Welty, since she did not write music, might have composed with contemporary tunes in mind. However, Haydon could not discern any and offered to write new music. We discussed the songs “What Happened to Waltzes Like This,” “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag,” “The New York Times,” “Feet In, Feet Out Blues” and “Choo Choo Boat.” Joe Gransden, an Atlanta-based (but nationally known) musician, band leader, and singer, was asked to participate in the production and bring some of these songs to life for the first time with Haydon’s music.

Key contacted some of the best actresses in the area to participate in the evening. Brenda Bynum, Carolyn Cook, Judy Leavell, and Jackie Prucha, all award-winning Equity actresses, agreed to read. Key himself would read and Jack Rogers, an Equity actor who was also an established production manager, would also read. Rogers would assess the technical requirements of a fully staged show. We cast the roles based on my knowledge of the characters and Key's knowledge of the actors' ranges.

According to Actors Equity rules, Equity actors working on a staged reading are allowed to rehearse only a limited number of hours and "blocking," i.e. being told where to move or what to do by the director, is not allowed. Therefore we agreed that performers would be seated and would not deal with any props. The actors were paid Equity scale for a staged reading. Because of the tight schedules of all of the participants (but also because they were all highly skilled), we agreed on one rehearsal only, the night before the reading. Performers were sent scripts with their characters noted.

The rehearsal was not only to introduce the actors to each other and to their characters but also to guide me in further identifying humorous lines, deciding about music placement and listening for new interpretations of the script. Haydon brought the music he'd composed and Gransden saw the notes and lyrics for the first time that night. We decided on the order of the pieces. The group agreed that "Fifty-Seventh Street Rag" would be read aloud by the actors and Haydon would provide a ragtime musical interlude between verses. At the end of rehearsal, the order of the evening would be "Waltzes," "Yes, Dear," "The New York Times," "Feet In, Feet Out Blues," "Fifty-Seventh Street Rag," and then "Bye-Bye Brevoort." For the staged reading, the company read all but "Hormones," left out because it seemed it would appear very dated to a

contemporary audience. “Choo-Choo Boat” was ultimately eliminated because of time constraints.

The reading of “Bye-Bye Brevoort,” the premiere of the sketch “Yes, Dear” and of the songs listed above took place in the Balzer Theatre at Herren’s, in Atlanta, on Monday, January 11, 2010. The event was attended by a small invited audience consisting of theater-goers, Theatrical Outfit subscribers, students, teachers, actors, directors, and friends. Attendees were given a simple printed program stating the names of the performers and the order of the reading and another page showing representative works by the visual artists named in “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag.” The space seats 200; about seventy people attended the reading.

For each of her theatrical sketches Welty imagines extraordinarily detailed sets and action. Therefore, the reading of her descriptions was an essential part of the evening. Yet a staged reading by its very essence requires a stripping away of the playwright’s instructions, so the songs or the sets have to be introduced verbally. “Waltzes,” as mentioned before, takes place at a turn-of-the-century private dance. The curtain is to rise on a full stage of dancers. “Paper lanterns, light frothy dresses, a stringed orchestra playing somewhere...” Welty calls for a boy and a girl to walk on and begin the song:

What’s happened to waltzes like this?

They never get waltzed anymore.

Waltzes that end that begin with a kiss

And ladies that lift off the floor?

What’s happened to waltzes like this?

When kisses were riches and not mere inflation -

When music was dangerous sans syncopation -

It was more than a waltz, it was sweet hesitation -

What's happened to waltzes like this? ("Waltzes" t.s. 2)

For "Yes, Dear," the dialogue is between the Think Machine (a very early giant computer) and the absent-minded professor named Cranium. Through Welty's descriptions, the audience learns what the machine looks like; that there are items (such as tongs, paddles, a muffler, and sparklers as noted earlier) used at various times; and that there are steady noises that "suggest a running motor, bubbling sounds, and occasional loud reports or up-boilings." Welty writes, "Free use of the imagination is urged, only condition being that the Machine is supposed to make itself perfectly intelligible to Professor Cranium, and keep up its side of the conversation in its own way. Cranium, on his part, must give the impression of carrying on conversation with the Think Machine which is treating him the way a wife would" (2). By including directions, the viewers know the set-up. At the end of the sketch the Think Machine starts telling Cranium what to do and the stage directions read "the bed [...] shoots out of the bottom drawer. It runs up on Cranium and it begins sliding back into the Machine." By the time the final descriptor is read, the bed being "swallowed up into the machine on the black stage with pistons chugging as the curtain falls," all of the action can be imagined.

The next song was "The New York Times." Laughter filled the house all the way through, starting from the opening line: "The New York Times is the paper for me. And the reason why is plain to see: The New York Times is always The New York Times." The next rhyme drew even more laughs: "It never printed news unfit to print. Others did but the *Times* din't. Oh the *Times*!" ("Times," t.s. 1) "Feet In! Feet Out!" like "Waltzes," and "The New York Times," is designed to be sung by a male and a female, but Gransden, as the sole singer, had to

sing both parts again. The song caused the laughter of recognition from the audience – this type of observational humor is not time-bound, but still relevant. However, since the night’s presentation had to be simple, the songs were stripped out of their imagined dramatic situations. Numbers that are meant to be musical dialogues were presented by a single voice. Many of the nuances were lost. To determine what really works for a contemporary audience, the songs should be re-staged.

“Fifty-Seventh Street Rag,” set in the art gallery, is a long, complicated recitation set to music about various modern artists and their works. We presented only the verses that were intended to be sung, but Welty intended them to be part of an extraordinarily detailed ballet. Although we assigned each actor a single verse for the reading, the central character, a young man, is directed to perform each of the sixteen different characters. Welty’s stage directions require him to “stagger around room,” then “a frenzy comes over him to show, one by one, the types that come into the art gallery” (“Fifty-Seventh Street,” t.s. 1). Welty hoped that Danny Kaye might play the role of the young man caught up in a typical New York gallery scene in the 1940s. The lyrics contain clever references to contemporary and other popular (or in some cases controversial) artists of the 1940s. Some of those include Klee, Arp, Cezanne, Dalí, Picasso, Tchelichew, Kuniyoshi, and Henry Moore. One of the funniest verses, and one that got the strongest laughter from the audience, is described as a “Grandma Moses type:”

My little pretties of deers in dimity’ve
 Done right well. That’s American Primitive.
 Sonny, it’s as homey as cheese and crackers.
 I can let you have it for a thousand smackers.
 Just as old-fashioned as Ring-around-the-Rosey –

Nobody puts the blinkers on Grandma Mosy. (“Fifty-Seventh St.” t.s. 7)

To a tune scored by Haydon, the group, after each verse, chanted, with a train-like rhythm:

Modern Art’s coming down the track,

Tchelichew, Tchelichew, Tchelichew, Tchelichew.

Retrospective, introspective, non-objective, true perspective,

Arp – – -Arp! (“Fifty-Seventh St” t.s. 5)

The end of the number moves into the ballet which Welty describes as “a beautiful one. It utilizes, with as much imagination as desired, the kinds and varieties of modern paintings as well as the kinds of people connected with a modern gallery” (“Fifty-Seventh St”. t.s. 9). Welty suggests that the costumes reflect the works of specific painters, such as a Chagall peasant bride, a Walt Kuhn blue clown, Degas ballerinas, Toulouse-Lautrec cafe figures and Picasso acrobats. She goes on to say “The ballet should be full of light, color, elegant movement, speed, and humor [...] A suggested color range is that of modern and nineteenth century paintings – pinks, mauves, violets, rose, blue, soft greens and yellows, and some blacks and darks and brights.” Her powerful descriptions are certainly clear.

The final piece in the evening was “Bye-Bye Brevoort.” Welty’s extensive, detailed stage directions indicating details of the room, the clothing and the furniture were read aloud. The conceit of a painting registering expressions and then falling off a wall, the banging of hammers as the hotel is being demolished, and a dumbwaiter, broken telephone, and articles of clothing ranging from hats to bicycle clips had to be imagined by the audience. There was much laughter throughout the reading. The audience seemed particularly taken with Tom Key’s personification of Desmond, described by Welty as “our Thursday tiger,” “an old sport” and “looking frightfully

crêpey” (*Occasions* 45). The reading was probably compromised by three wreckers being read by one person and some of the jokes were lost simply because they are sight gags that were not clear in a first reading/hearing. But the actors clearly liked the characters and gave lively readings that played off of the audience response.

At the conclusion of the reading, Welty scholar Pearl McHaney and I answered questions from the audience. We responded to questions concerning the fact that this was written as a revue and the sketches would not have needed to be connected. Some actors and audience members commented on the poignancy of the passage of time as shown in both “Brevoort” and “What Happened to Waltzes Like This.” Several people thought that the “Brevoort” would make a good radio play, or that the evening might work as part of a 1950s television variety show. There was a lively discussion about what New York meant to residents of the South in the 1940s and 1950s – one actress offered that, although she grew up in a small town, New York was a mecca for a certain educated class of Southerners. Additional discussion touched on Welty’s interest in films and vaudeville, her long love affair with New York and the theater, and her history of seeing the greatest plays, performers, musicians, and dancers of the day.

A survey was handed out or e-mailed to self-selected audience members with requests that they reflect on the experience before answering. The responses from those who knew Welty’s works focused mainly on how little they all knew about her theatrical interests. Some respondents said that the evening illuminated another side of Welty although they recognized her work through the beautifully detailed directions that were read aloud. One person commented on the “sense of wit, of experimentation and fearlessness” in the work, qualities they associated with Welty.

Those who were less or unfamiliar with Welty's work expressed interest in reading her, or in reading more of her work. Others felt the characters were caricatures. Most were positive about continuing the project with further staging and additional works, perhaps one or two short stories, included in a Welty evening. (See Appendix C.)

Post-show meetings with Tom Key, Jack Rogers, and Geoffrey Haydon provided valuable insight into the possibilities for further staging. Haydon, who provided a wealth of information on the musical revue style, felt that Welty's verses were worthy of a score. He was impressed by what he termed the "actors' buy-in" and felt a recording for radio theater or podcast might be a logical next step. Jack Rogers, an experienced theatrical production manager as well as actor, felt his experience was "wonderful...the evening was a great thing to be a part of." Rogers felt that while some of the material was a bit dated, it added to the fun of the performance. Rogers feels that the Think Machine in "Yes Dear" would be a big challenge for a designer, but might involve a puppeteer and has the possibility to "become an icon, like Audrey II in *Little Shop of Horrors*." Rogers also feels that a full production of "Brevoort" would require a "really creative sound designer to capture the demolition around the characters." He also feels it would be interesting to see what a set designer might come up with, such as "sawdust falling down, the walls falling." Rogers feels that the sketches are "hilarious." He noted that they are certainly "period pieces, but an audience going to theater, especially an evening of Welty, is going to appreciate this humor." Rogers also made the astute observation that in a way, the musical revue with its satirical sketches was a predecessor to the long-running *Forbidden Broadway* series that satirizes plays and playwrights. (*Forbidden Broadway* opened in 1982 and has run almost continuously with yearly updates. The latest version closed in 2009.)

Tom Key was pleased with the way the reading “attracted significant audience.” He felt the program “really engaged them. They were thrilled – they felt they’d discovered a lost treasure.” Key feels that the staging allowed the audience and performers to gain an “enormous appreciation of [Welty’s] wit. It felt like something we’d been missing for so long.” Key feels there could be strong interest in exploring this aspect of the Welty narrative – these specific works for the theater. Key also talked of the “recognition of her vision in another voice – the vision of Eudora Welty, but in the voice of Manhattanites.” Key also commented that the post-show discussion afterwards was a “true testament to the evening’s success.” The audience “felt the liveliness” of the works. Key shares my belief that work should continue on a possible production featuring a reading of one of Welty’s better-known works coupled with scores for the songs and fuller mounting of the sketches.

The January reading and its subsequent responses leads me to believe that there is value in re-staging *What Year Is This?* The reading made clear that the songs don’t really work on their own, when pulled out of an entire production number that would include costumes, sets, dancers, and singers. Welty’s descriptions of the songs could be incorporated with more rehearsal time and more voices would add to their success. But the two sketches, “Brevoort” and “Yes, Dear” could be brought to life through some simple staging. If such a production could be done, we would have a better idea of the reach of Welty’s comic voice as seen through the lens of her writing for the stage.

Conclusion

“Bye-Bye Brevoort” and the other sketches by Welty in *What Year Is This?* have not lost their relevance. Although the sketches may be minor, they are not insignificant in relation to Welty’s other works. They may not be central, especially in the context of her full body of work, but writing for the theater freed her imagination in ways that other work did not. The many monologues in her writings, the deeply dramatic strain that runs through her prose, the stunning visuality of her observations, which can be linked to dramatic writing, are all present in these sketches.

The works should find a place on the stage. A production of works by Welty, as discussed with Tom Key, would prove of theatrical and scholarly interest to a wide audience. A full production would demonstrate, in a concrete way, how the links between Welty’s unknown works for the theater relate to her theatrically-inflected prose.

In the previous section I reported on my conversation with Tom Key who agrees that this material is theatrically viable. The kind of program that I envision could begin with a well-known work—the monologue “Why I Live at the P.O.” from Welty’s first collection of stories, *A Curtain of Green*, published in 1941, would be a good opening to a Welty evening. Following “P.O.” might be the song “What Happened to Waltzes Like This.” “Waltzes” is not comic, but describes an idealized world of summer nights and garden parties enjoyed by an elite class, a nice contrast to Sister and Pappa-Daddy and Stella Rondo of China Grove in “P. O.” “Waltzes” could lead into “Yes Dear”—the dialogue between Cranium and his Think Machine. The first half of the program might conclude with the recently-archived *Streetcar* sketch, rejected by Dolson in the original revue out of deference to Williams. This version portrays Blanche as lost in Greenwich Village instead of searching for Elysian Fields. The second part could open with

the “Duet with Dancing Chorus” number, “The New York Times.” A couple wakes to a “dull, loud, heavy thud,” the delivery of the Sunday *Times*. Although some of the references to columnists and long-gone department stores may be obsolete, they are interesting from a historical point of view. My suggestion would be to include a reading of “Shower of Gold,” the first story of *Golden Apples*, the work Welty created before her summer with Dolson in New York. “Shower of Gold” is a monologue, and balances with *P.O.* in subject and style. Using imagery from classical mythology and referencing the poetry of Yeats, “Shower of Gold” introduces us to Katie Rainey (the narrator) and the inhabitants in and around MacLain, Mississippi. As a monologue, it serves as the news (like a *New York Times*) of Morgana. Next would be “Bye-Bye Brevoort,” followed by a staging of “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag.” The evening would close with “Choo-Choo Boat,” the most evocative of the pieces in the revue. “Choo-Choo Boat” begins with a scene in summer twilight lit in deep blue. “The hush and mystery of ‘playing out’ in the dark in childhood is the note to strike for’ (CCB t.s.1). Children drag toy boats made of shoeboxes and lit by candles, through the streets, singing

When it gets first dark in the summer street,
 And the night birds sing and the air is sweet,
 Light the candle, tie the string –
 It’s the hour for you to bring
 Your Choo-Choo Boat in the evening!

The children move “on different levels in different directions, meeting, joining, passing with the brightly lighted boats.”

In the folder of works that Russell and Volkening sent to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History when the office was sold and moved is the cover page to the typed

manuscript of Welty's own sketches for *What Year Is This?* On the first page, Welty wrote, "Skits for a revue. These are mine, and Hildegard Dolson wrote an equal number. Nobody wanted to do our show" (Folder 1, Box 330). It's time for that to change.

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Appendix A

List of Sketches in *What Year Is This?* housed in the Welty Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

***What Year Is This?* by Hildegard Dolson and Eudora Welty**
List of Songs and Sketches

1. Opening Song	“What Year Is This?”	Dolson
2. Song	“What Happened to Waltzes Like This?”	Welty
3. Curtain Song	“We Met in a Launderette”	Dolson
4. Song	“Feet In, Feet Out Blues”	Welty
5. Sketch	“Spots Before Your Eyes”	Dolson
6. Song	“The New York Times”	Welty
7. Song	“Wanna Be Fooled”	Dolson
8. Sketch	“See Your Analyst Twice A Year”	Dolson
9. Song	“One for Sorrow”	Dolson
10. Sketch	“Yes, Dear”	Welty
11. Song	“Choo-Choo Boat”	Welty
12. Song	“Hormones”	Welty
13. Sketch	“Beverly Hills Tightens Its Belt”	Dolson
14. Song	“Taking the Perfume Cure”	Dolson
15. Song/Ballet	“Fifty-Seventh Street Rag”	Welty
16. Song	“Taking the Perfume Cure”	Dolson
17. Sketch	“Bye-Bye Brevoort”	Welty

Appendix B

Staged Reading Programs; Handouts including samples of artworks referenced in “Fifty-Seventh Street Rag;” List of Performers; and Geoffrey Haydon’s original Musical Score for songs written by Welty as part of *What Year Is This?*

Eudora Welty's Dramatic Works
A Reading from "What Year Is This" – Dramatic Sketches from 1948
January 11, 2010, Balzer Theatre at Herrens
Home of Theatrical Outfit

Songs and Sketches:

"What Happened to Waltzes Like This?"
"Yes, Dear"
"The New York Times"
"Feet In, Feet Out Blues"
"57th Street Rag"
"Bye-Bye Brevoort"

Followed by Q & A
Moderated by Leslie Gordon and Pearl McHaney

Actors:

Brenda Bynum
Carolyn Cook
Tom Key
Judy Leavell
Jackie Prucha
Jack Rogers

Music:

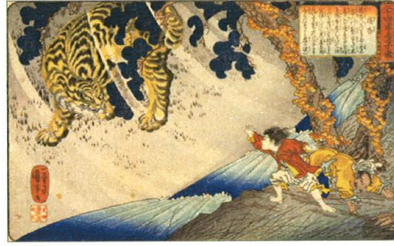
Geoffrey Haydon, piano and composer/arranger
Joe Gransden, singer

Extra Extra Extra Special Thanks to:

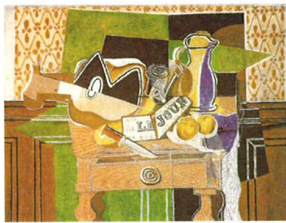
Tom Key
Pearl McHaney
Geoffrey Haydon
Theatrical Outfit
Staff of the Rialto Center at Georgia State University
Blake Leland
Tom McHaney
The Mississippi Department of Archives and History - The Eudora Welty Collection



Klee



Kuniyoshi



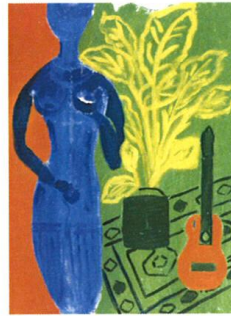
Braque



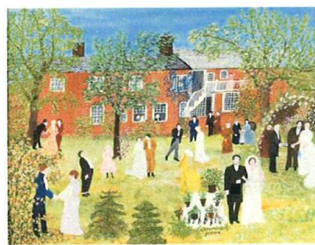
Cezanne



Degas



Valucha



Grandma Moses



Arp



Henry Moore



Walt Kuhn

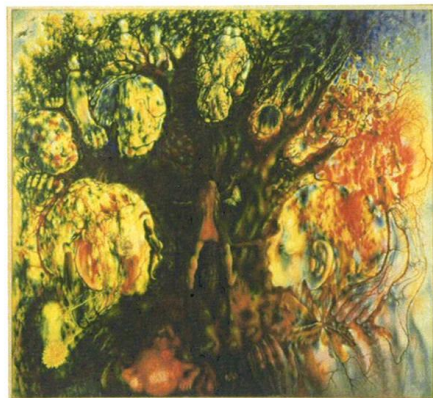


Marc Chagall - Musée National Marc Chagall

Chagall



Picasso



Tchelitchew



Dali

What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?

lyrics by Eudora Welty
music by Geoff Haydon

Vocals

Wat's hap-pened to waltz-es like this? They

Chords: Eb, Eb, Bb7

Vox.

ne-ver get waltzed a-ny-more Waltz-es that end that be-

Chords: Bb7, Eb, Eb7

Vox.

gin with a kiss And la-dies that lift off the floor? When

Chords: Ab, F7, Bb7

2
19

What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?

Vox.

vi - o - lins - growled, And chan-del-liers tin-kled, And hearts stayed young And not

19

E^b Fm B^b7 Fm B^b7

25

Vox.

Rip Van Winkled And the bright stars the bright Moon the bright eyes What's happened? They

25

E^b E^b7 A^b

31

Vox.

twin kled round and round What's hap-pened to waltz-es like


31

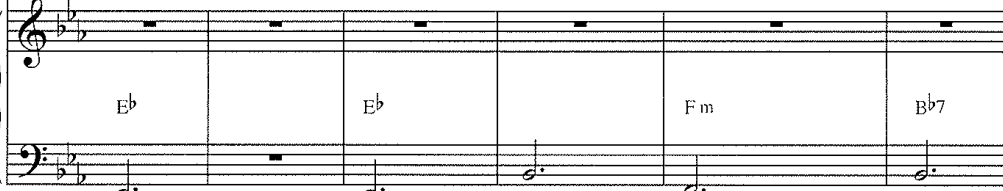
A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b

What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?


3

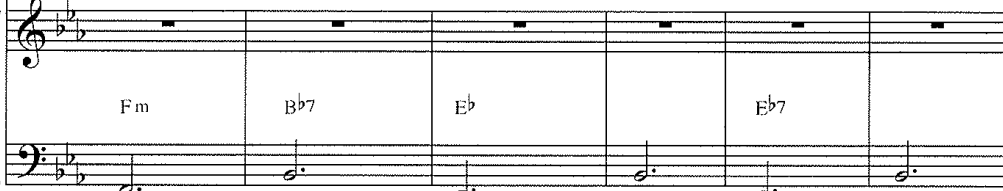
37

Vox.  this? Oh a girl-needs - a whirl And a boy needs to run a - round


 E^b E^b F m B^b7

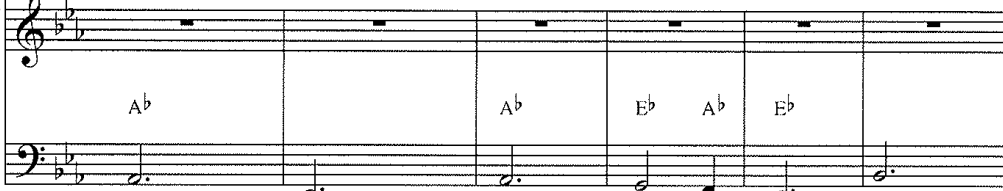
43

Vox.  Waltz the night through, dears, and may-be the sun a - round Waltz for the waltz for the

 F m B^b7 E^b E^b7

49

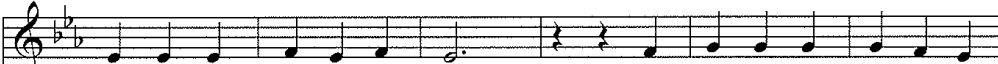
Vox.  schmalz What's hap pened? They spun a - round and round What's

 A^b A^b E^b A^b E^b


4

What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?


55

Vox. 
 hap-pened to waltz-es like this? When kis-ses were rich-es and

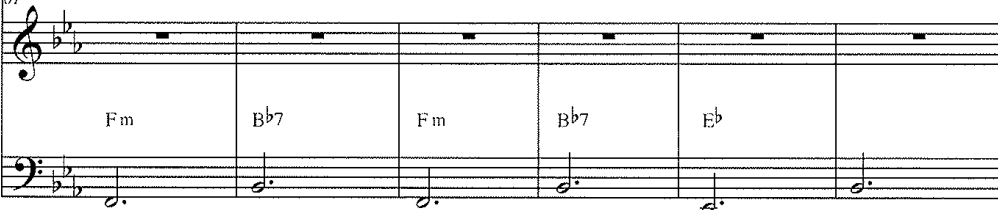
55


 A^b E^b A^b E^b E^b

61

Vox. 
 not mere in-fla-tion, When mu-sic was dan-ger-ous Sans syn-co-pa-tion It was

61


 Fm B^b7 Fm B^b7 E^b

67

Vox. 
 more than a waltz, it was sweet hes-i-tate hes-i-tate what's hap-pened? Hes-i

67


 E^b7 A^b A^b

What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?

5

73

Vox. ta - tion but round and round What's hap-pened to waltz-es like

73

A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b

79

Vox. this? When you waltz this way, dear, Be - fore you for - get You'll be

79

E^b E^b F m B^b7

85

Vox. diz - zy and dream-ing And then if she'll let you, you'll kiss her, em - brace her, and

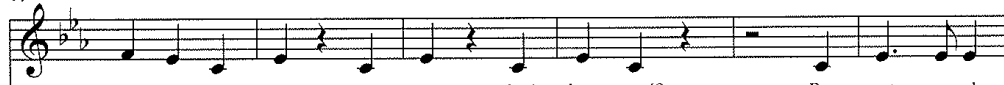
85

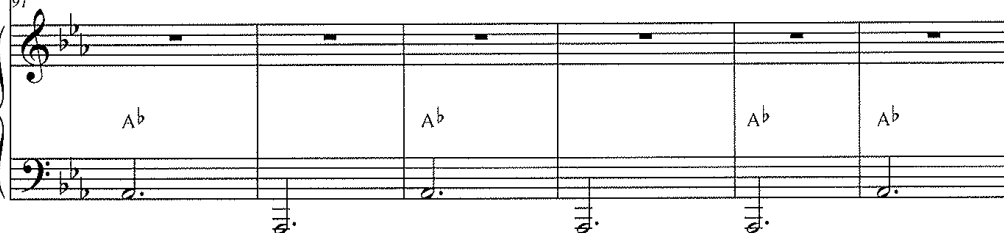
F m B^b7 E^b E^b7

6


What's Happened To Waltzes Like This?

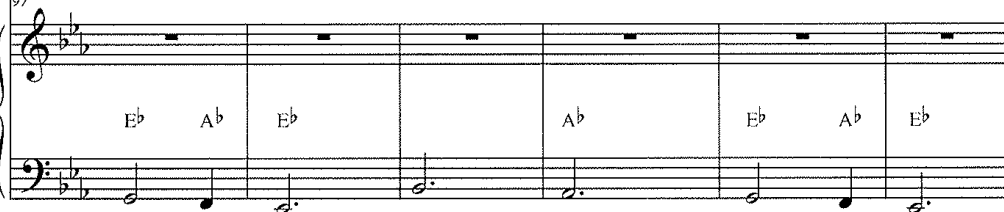
91

Vox.  make it per - pet pet pet what's hap-pened? Per - pet - u - al

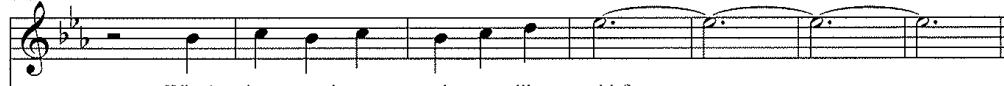
 A^b A^b A^b A^b

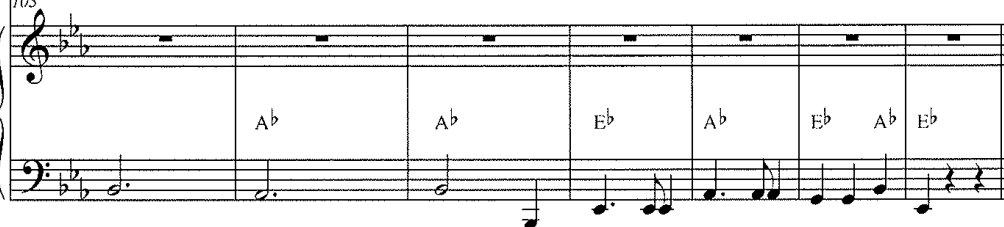
97

Vox.  round and round What's hap-pened to waltz - es like this?

 E^b A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b E^b

103

Vox.  What's hap-pened to waltz - es like this? _____

 A^b A^b E^b A^b E^b A^b E^b

2

The New York Times

lyrics by Eurora Welty
music by Geoff Haydon

Vocals

The New York Times is the pa-per for me, And the

rea-son why — Is plain to see The New York Times — is al-ways the

New York Times — It ne-ver print-ed news un - fit to print

Chord symbols: B \flat G m7 C m7 F7 B \flat G m7 C m7 F7 A \flat 7 G7 G \flat 7 F7 E \flat B \flat C m7 E \flat B \flat G m7 C m7 F7 B \flat G m7 C m7 F7

New York Times

Vox. ²₁₃

Oth-ers did__ But the Times__ di'n't__ Oh the Times!__ The

A^b7 G7 G^b7 F7 E^b E^b B^b A7

Vox. ¹⁷

New York Times__ is bright and ear - ly__ It's at your door__ when the dawn is pear - ly

D B m7 E m7 A7 D B m7 E m7 A7

Vox. ²¹

Oh the Times!__ The Book Re-view I love bet-ter than books, But

G G D C m7 B^b G m7 C m7 F7

New York Times

3

25

Vox.

Lit-er-a-ture's love-ly From the way it looks I can read all day In So-ci-et-y's blurb

25

A^b7 G7 G^b7 F7 B^b G m7 C m7 F7

29

Vox.

Who mar-ried who In which su-burb Oh the Times!

29

A^b7 G7 G^b7 F7 E^b E^b B^b

33

Vox.

And a read-er's int-er-est Ne-ver fails As long as there's a

33

E m7 A 7 D B m7 E m7 A 7 D B m7

4

New York Times

37

Vox. Bloom-ing - dale's — Oh the Times! — Ma-cy's may come and

37

Em7 A G D G D E^b B^b G m7

41

Vox. Gim-bel's may go But the New York Times is sta-tus quo O - bi - tu - ar-ies are

41

Cm7 F7 A^b7 G7 G^b7 F7 B^b G m7

45

Vox. not my dish — But when I go, That's where I wish To the New

45

Cm7 F7 A^b7 G7 G^b7 F7 E^b B^b

New York Times

5

49

Vox.

York Times To The New York Times —

49

E^b E^bm B^b E^b E^b B^b

The image shows a musical score for the song 'New York Times'. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature. The lyrics are 'York Times To The New York Times'. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. The piano part includes chord symbols: Eb, Ebm, Bb, Eb, Eb, Bb. The score is marked with a measure number of 49 at the beginning of both staves.

3

Feet In! Feet Out!

lyrics by Eudora Welty
music by Geoff Haydon

Vocals

The first system consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is a whole rest. The piano accompaniment is in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (Bb and F). The right hand plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes: Bb (Bb4), F7 (F4), Bb (Bb4), F7 (F4). The left hand plays whole rests.

Vox.

5

Feet in! Feet out! Feet out! Feet in!

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 5 with the lyrics "Feet in! Feet out! Feet out! Feet in!". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern and chords: Bb, F7, Bb, F7, Bb, F7, Bb, F7.

Vox.

13

I want the cov - er at the foot Tucked in!

The third system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 13 with the lyrics "I want the cov - er at the foot Tucked in!". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern and chords: Bb, F7, Bb, F7.

Feet In! Feet Out!

Vox. ²/₁₇

Tucked out! Feet in

¹⁷

B^b F7 B^b F7

Vox. ²¹

Feet out I've got the feet-out blues

²¹

B^b F7 B^b F7

Vox. ²⁵

When I'm in bed with youse. Feet in

²⁵

B^b F7 B^b F7

Feet In! Feet Out!

3

29

Vox.

Feet out Our wed-ded life is but a sum-mer-time thing

B \flat F7 B \flat F7

33

Vox.

In the win-ter time we fight all night til spring Feet in

B \flat F7 B \flat F7

37

Vox.

Feet out

B \flat F7 B \flat F7 B \flat

4

Feet In! Feet Out!

42

Vox.

Feet in Feet out

42

F7 B \flat F7 B \flat F7

47

Vox.

Je t'aime Ga - bin! Mais I've got the

47

B \flat F7 B \flat F7 B \flat

52

Vox.

feet-out blues — When I'm in bed wiz youse. —

52

F7 B \flat F7 B \flat

SHE: MY FEET ARE LIKE TOAST

Cold Feet Blues

lyrics by Eudora Welty
music by Geoff Haydon

Vocals

Like most, you boast! Though we're wed I don't want a -

Vox.

I - cy ghost for a host Ess in bed There'll be

Vox.

socks on my feet as well as my head. —

Cold Feet Blues

Vox. ²/₁₄

No - bo - dy knows ___ How my toes op - pose ___ a ___ draft ___ ^{SHE}
(Phoocy.)

14

G7 C7 G7

Vox. ¹⁸

But my toes ___ they had no more chance than Taft ___ ^{SHE}
(Or Dewey.)

18

C7 G7

Vox. ²²

I prefer a stab in the back to feet When the feet are cold as ice And sleet!


22

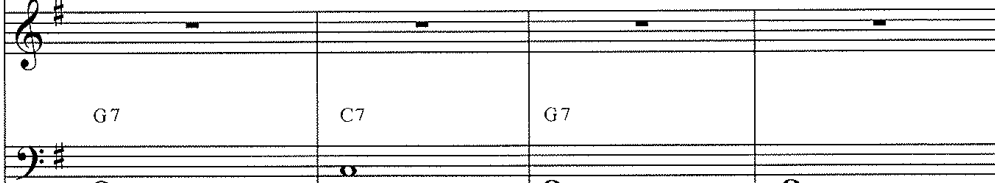
D7 C7 D7 C7 G7 D7

Cold Feet Blues


3

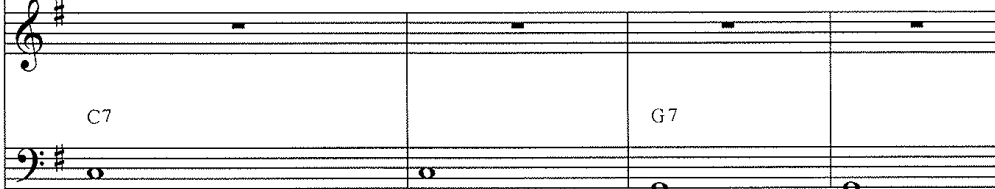
28

Vox. 
 Whe-ther I trust a psy - chi-a-trist or not I'd like to hear him guess what you've got.


 G7 C7 G7

32

Vox. 
 Oh to free my bo-dy and soul — from this ghas-tly blan-ket! Our


 C7 G7

36

Vox. 
 blan - ket heats e - lec - tri - cal - ly Our bed - light is a pic - ture - On


 D7 C7

4

Cold Feet Blues

Vox. ³⁸ ³ ³
ev - er - y side we are sup - plied with ev - er - y mod - ern fix - ture And

D7 C7

Vox. ⁴⁰ ³ ³
yet like a man and wife of old One likes 'em hot and one likes 'em

D7 C7

Vox. ⁴²
cold.

G7

Appendix C

Transcriptions of the audience responses to the post-show survey distributed at the Welty Staged Reading at the Balzer Theatre at Herren's are included in this appendix.

Responses after Welty Reading at Theatrical Outfit
January 11, 2011

Respondent 1

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Hearing the readings a second time, with more pumped up performances by the actors and with the music in place, and Geoff's marvelous playing, they were better and more interesting. Familiarity helped, of course. I agree that the Brevoort sketch is something better suited to television or film (one could imagine the Sid Caesar show or Carol Burnett's "repertory" group doing it quite wittily).

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I think the sketches do, like the items in Pearl's *Occasions* volume, show dimensions of Welty that folks who've read only the novels and the stories have not perceived. I think, thus, a consideration of her forays into theater (starting with the Little Theater Period and including the W, maybe what might have been going on at Wisconsin, if one can find that, the Columbia year, these sketches in the late forties, and her final joining up with New Stage (Patti Black says that Welty resisted New Stage at first because of her loyalty to her mother's engagement with the Little Theater; but when New Stage replaced Little Theater – buying its space: i.e. the Little Theater had a nice dedicated space; when did it get that?). Her board memberships at New Stage (where she got them to produce a play by Jim Lehrer). Etc. You've got a great project going, maybe even a book!

Other comments?

I guess I just put that above. Anyway, great work, two great occasions, marvelous acting and musical talent – this is a marvelous and valuable project you've done and it will be appreciated deeply in the Welty (and American Lit) field.

Respondent 2

Other comments?

I don't really know Eudora Welty except vaguely as one of those Southern woman writers. It does not surprise me however that a writer whose roots are in region enjoys New York. I've been about this material from the beginning. As I said after the performance, I could see it as Prairie Home Companion Style staged radio show with an MC and a sound effects guy. What might be really interesting is a "Eudora Welty in New York" play with an actress playing Eudora Welty and, perhaps making use of letters talking about the New York experience. A kind of everyman character could wander through the skits, perhaps comically imagining the ballet. The

most interesting thing about the material is the idea of the Southern woman discovering her inner New Yorker.

Respondent 3

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

With only one readthrough in rehearsal and one readthrough to reflect upon, I would say that my response did not change a great deal. It is always fun to read an audience and feel the places they connect with. Feedback from people I knew who were there was interesting – despite the farcical treatment, the 3 ladies did engender a certain amount of “recognition” and sympathy. As an actor, I felt that EW also managed very well to create 5 very distinct characters in a short time. Even the ladies had their distinct differences in tone and attitude.

If you know Welty’s work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I am familiar with her other work, and, yes, I was initially quite surprised by these pieces. But the more you told us about her life in those early New York days, the more it made sense. And, having recently reread “The Optimist’s Daughter” I actually began to see in “Brevoort” some of the same sensibilities and techniques in a nascent stage.

Other comments?

What is in these pieces already and what is always a hallmark for me in her work is the laser-point observation of human behavior – she sets it down and lets it speak for itself, which it does beautifully, because her eye and ear are so sure and specific. All we have to do is watch and listen and we know exactly what is going on through the actions and interactions of her characters.

It was a delightful evening and I so enjoyed it. Friends of mine who came were most impressed – and surprised – by a side of Ms. Welty they had not suspected.

Respondent 4

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

I think the works become richer after reflecting on them and certainly the brief discussion afterwards stimulated some thought. I think knowing what influenced the works greatly enhanced my appreciation of them.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Definitely, her works for the theater were completely unknown to me and though I've known her for the humor in her works, I've always associated her with writing strictly about the South. The fact that these works were comical sketches about New Yorkers rather than Southerners was a surprise to me. The elaborate stage directions and descriptions, however, were right in line with Welty's style. These pieces changed my stereotypical concept of Eudora Welty as a spinner of Southern tales to a much more worldly and diverse artist.

Other comments?

As you mentioned, I was immediately struck with the question of how does one execute the stage effects. "My Dear" brought to mind images of the scenes from the movie "Chitty-chitty Bang-bang" and I could imagine a team of stage hands/puppeteers manipulating this mechanical thing on stage. On the other hand, sometimes what we conjure up in our minds is much more satisfying than someone else's interpretation, so I can really see this piece as a "radio show" with all the sound effects of the machine crying, chiding and nagging.

Being someone who is not mechanically inclined, I was delighted to discover (well into the run of the show) how the books were made to tumble out of the bookshelves in "Blythe Spirit" and greatly appreciated the engineer who volunteered at the community theater and loved to dabble in creating special effects like making the tea cart roll across the stage in "Titanic" or the rose petals fall off the bud in "Beauty and the Beast." I am always amazed when the white handkerchief shows up with blood stain when held to the actors face as all these things facilitate "the willing suspension of disbelief" which makes the theatrical experience what it is. I would love to see the portrait with the changed expression at the end of "Brevoort"!

I loved the concept of combining the almost absurd dance element into the museum piece (can't remember the title) because it blends the artwork with the spectators and everything becomes multi-dimensional. Twyla Tharpe should choreograph it.

I appreciated the comments others made about the similarity of the works to a "New Yorker" comic strip and indeed the characters, humor and style of the pieces reminded me of one of my favorite writers and poets ala Ogden Nash, Christopher Morley who wrote in the early 1900's for the Philadelphia "Evening Public Ledger."

The songs were simply fun and delightful and remind me of another favorite, a contemporary musician and lyricist who plays word, rhyme and rhythm – Michael Franks ("Popsicle Toes" – speaking of feet).

As to whether or not the pieces are viable for the theatrical venue; I think that's questionable if they are taken alone. I did not find them terribly profound; just whimsical observations of life. But combined with other and the elements of music, lyrics, dance, visual art and dramaturgy, they gain substance as an exploration of an era with a certain style of wit, humor and theatricalism.

Respondent 5

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Hearing the works read truly brought them to life (fantastic casting, by the way!)

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

The work presented represents a very different side of Miss Eudora (for me). The pieces are so urban in their settings/topics/characters, etc. They represent a new image (or what I imagine) of Welty as a woman & writer – but it's still very much the words of Welty that I know and love.

Other comments?

Don't laugh – but I could visualize the pieces being presented via animation or puppetry.

Fantastic adult cartoons/caricatures come to life!!

I wasn't aware Miss Eudora has ever penned any lyrics!! A lovely surprise!

The work also makes me a bit sad for her. As forward-thinking (modern, liberal, what have you) as Miss Eudora was (and I image as her Mississippian neighbors thought of her too – when she took off for school/Europe/NY), she remained very much the stereotypical (I really don't like that word) Southern spinster (returning to care for family, hearth & home) to the end. It makes me wonder “what would have been” had she remained in NY.

Respondent 6

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Other comments?

In short, it was a truly illuminating evening. I've been attracted to Welty's work ever since I read that old warhorse “A Worn Path” for a Southern Lit class in high school, and it has been quite a journey getting to know her better since then, through my own reading and, most significantly, through Dr. McHaney's wonderful seminar. I really loved the questions that people asked after the performance, because I think they really crystallized various aspects of

how Welty is regarded in the popular imagination today. Was she really that funny? Are we supposed to take these scenes and songs as a whole, identify some thread between them? I was reminded of one of my absolute favorite Welty quotes, from *One Writer's Beginnings*, one I love to take out and read from time to time:

“The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily – perhaps not possibly – chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories and novels follow: it is the continuous thread of revelation.”

When the question was asked about whether there was or should be some sort of “flow” between the scenes/songs, I thought of that first sentence: “In their significance to ourselves they find their own order.” That seems to sum up Welty as I understand her and as I saw her on Monday. Are the scenes/songs connected? No. Does it matter? No. Does the whole of them, taken together in whatever order, reflect a sort of Weltian ethos? Absolutely. My first reaction to hearing the songs/scenes spoken (or sung) live was a sense of wit, of experimentation and fearlessness. She loved and, I believe, understood the theatre as medium as limitless as prose fiction. The first song (“...Waltz”) actually reminded me a great deal of Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music*, though Welty’s lyrics predate it by some years; her other lyrics, especially the museum song, absolutely reminded of the film comedy-musicals of the 50’s...*How to Marry a Millionaire*, etc. As for the scenes, particularly *Bye, Bye, Brevoort*... while they were written in the shadow O’Neill, et al, I’m inclined to agree with the audience who observed their attention to passing times. Welty simply did it her way, others be damned. They are extraordinarily funny (especially as performed by Tom Key and the rest of the company) but also hint at a very profound sense of loss, not so much for the culture they depict (upper class ninnies, brainy-yet-clueless scientists obsesses with innovation for innovation’s sake) but for a moral center. In both scenes, rather exceptional people (whether rich or smart) are faced with a world crumbling around them, be it “brilliant” invention that really isn’t so great or a lifestyle that the world has rendered irrelevant. Maybe that’s the word for it, relevance.

I won’t belabor the point, but, as a Southern writer, I’m sure that loss was encoded somewhere in Welty’s thinking, not because she (or Faulkner, or McCullers, or O’Connor) necessarily yearned for what was gone, but because they yearned for *something* greater than what the world afforded the average person during the early 20th century, particularly in the South. I tell my friends, I don’t truly envy people my age who are already bankers, or stock brokers or lawyers, making six figures. What I envy is that they have *something*, nefarious and gross it may be, that they can call their own. A career, a boyfriend/husband/significant other, whatever. I don’t think that Welty necessarily felt any overwhelming lack in her life, which was so rich and so full; but perhaps she was just so attuned to a certain cultural malaise that glided unseen beneath the supposed golden age of the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s (and beyond).

Respondent 7

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

One issue that came up is that if someone like Carolyn Cook did the machine to Tom's scientist, the sexual tension would have framed the lovely goofy intellectual aspect of the script and evening.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

She is master of the moment and short form. At this very rough stage the plays tended to feel less focused and the songs too narratively flat.

Other comments?

Right now the mix seems focused only for a Welty audience.

Respondent 8

Other comments?

My impression from the performances both musically and verbally is that they are caricatures of people living during her time in New York viewed from her Southern perspective – a real commentary on New York life from an adult living in New York for an extended period of time but was not raised in New York.

Respondent 9

Other comments?

What an absolutely delightful evening we enjoyed last night at the Theatrical Outfit Theater. I was a guest of Joan Houghton's and was thrilled to be part of the audience at a "Premiere." The cast was absolutely wonderful and interacted as if they had been together for many presentations. I loved the format and the true delight on the actors' faces as they listened to and watched their fellow actors. I am sure that Eudora Welty is still laughing tonight. My only disappointment was that I wanted an Act II.

I enjoyed the discussion that followed and was impressed by how many men asked questions. It made me feel as if we, the audience, were an integral part of the presentation.

Joan is the unofficial president of the "Tom Key Fan Club" which now has two new members! Thank you so much for including me in a truly enjoyable evening.

Respondent 10

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Actually not. I love the notion of you sorting dusty letters and manuscripts! I was surprised at how much the audience laughed. I think as much due to the delivery of the actors as to the text. The think machine or waltz seemed dated (which of course they are!) and much of the rest reminded me of the kinds of things witty people did to entertain (show off to) one another in New York and the Hamptons in a certain period. Not insightful theatre.

I agreed with comments about the radio. Thought the actors were fabulous!! Would like to have heard more from them about working with the material. Tom Key's comment about "loss" seemed on the mark as did the comment about anyone who read in the South going to Mecca – NY.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I've not read Welty so feel a bit out of my element.

Other comments?

Just because you're passionate about something doesn't necessarily mean you can do it well. I'm wondering if this work was a bit like what artists in many disciplines do...dabble...test their skills and souls in multiple media. Hmmm...

The details in the stage directions were so specific as to sometimes be more interesting than the actual text (though I wonder what producers of the pieces might have thought) reminded me of the old adage, especially in poetry, "show, don't tell."

All that said...I actually enjoyed it... as much to watch you (what were you scribbling and highlighting??) in your element as to hear Eudora.

Respondent 11

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Absolutely. I wasn't sure how well reading it would go – was it dated? Perhaps, but it was so funny once we read it aloud that I changed my mind. I teach young actors that comedy should be like a good cartoon – begin with a truthful situation, then going nuts with it. She certainly did that.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I guess I never thought about how overtly funny she could be, although "Why I Live at the P. O." is one of the funniest (and most touching) pieces I've ever read. I also think of her as mostly

Southern – in fact, until I did research on the Brevoort, I wondered if this were a Southern piece and these Southern ladies.

Other comments?

I was so pleased to hear how much the audience listened to the words especially in the songs. I couldn't hear Joe as well where I was sitting, but they really got a lot. Delightful experience!

Respondent 12

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Though I am an avid reader I find that either hearing the words directly from the author (in this case, not possible) or presented as you did Monday night I often feel a much deeper connection. The actors in Monday night's reading brought the words to life. It was easy to imagine the work as a stage production.

I also felt the work was timeless. As I looked around the audience; all ages were represented, and everyone seemed to be engaged. Humor and good literature cross all barriers.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I have read several of her short stories and a couple of her books but this broadened my appreciation and prompted me to order several books. The depth and breadth of her talent is amazing, short stories, novels, photography, theater, a truly renaissance woman. What a treasure and I'm looking forward to learning more about this fascinating woman.

Respondent 13

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

If I understand this correctly, you're asking if my response now differs from my response during the reading. Yes for a couple of reasons. One is the initial surprise and delight at hearing her work written for theatre (many voices, characters, dialogue, staging description, etc.) when I'm more accustomed to her prose. Her humor comes out of course, both in description and dialogue as well as her timing. Which brings me to the second point. The Q & A session brought up some other relevant points that put these works in context – the context of her own life (where she was living, who were her friends) as well as the larger cultural context (popular music, artists of the day, etc). For instance, Blake's question about the possible influence of short films and your point about Welty really studying the mechanics of writing for the theatre. I think that really came out. Welty is a stickler for details and accuracy so it doesn't surprise me that she

went to some length to study the mechanics of a different style of writing. Her comic timing comes out in her theatre writing as much as it does in her prose.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Like most people, I know Welty from her prose, and more recently her photography. Which, when I first saw some of those images some 20 years ago (grad school), I was really impressed. She does have a good eye, and again the more I read Welty and look at her photos, her attention to detail, her accuracy and framing (both photos and stories) is really masterful. I didn't know that she had dipped (dived!) into songwriting and playwriting. I think if she had pursued those, she would have applied the same vigorous techniques that she brought to her prose and her photography. The description of the machine in "Yes, Dear" is a perfect example - who needs a set designer with that detailed image she created?!

Most casual readers, I imagine, think of Welty as a Southern writer – someone who lived in the South, wrote about the South, whose life was shaped exclusively by the South. It's a convenient image – the female Faulkner. But she really had a world of experience beyond Jackson (experiences that Faulkner never had – probably never wanted – and that most Southerners of her age and background didn't either). I love that she tackled the subject of NYC and the contemporary art world (not a Southern topic) and she succeeded.

Reading and to some degree, photography is a solitary experience, but theatre is a communal experience...the cast with the audience, the director with the cast. Attending this reading was, for me, a whole new way of experiencing Welty's creative power. She's funny, witty and perceptive on the page and on the stage.

Other comments?

One final point... remember the letter I told you about that Welty wrote to a friend who had read her book and written Welty a letter. Welty thanked the person for the letter and said that as a writer she begins with a certain kernel of truth or knowledge or experience that she hopes will carry through the work and that the reader will share. But as the writer, you don't know if that will happen because you're too thick into it and you don't have the perspective to know if that little kernel makes it all the way through. Well, I think it carried through in these works and if Welty had been there Monday night, she would have been well pleased at the success you brought. She would've been laughing along with the rest of us.

Respondent 14

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

I'm such a reader that I'm sure I missed a lot during the reading (especially because some of the women were hard for me to hear). The discussion after helped me to imagine some readings as

radio dramas. I wonder if “Yes, Dear” would work in a STAC class on either gender or technology.

If you know Welty’s work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Oh, yes, I had thought of her as much more rural. Hearing these readings definitely provided a different dimension to Welty. I also think of her creation of interior monologues. These dramatic readings were also a surprise.

Other comments?

I’ll need to go back and read Welty. Seeing her dramatic skills makes me wonder about some of her technical skills in the short stories.

There’s a real note of nostalgia in these works, “What Happened to Waltzes Like This?” and “Bye-Bye Brevoort” especially. I’m wondering whether that note is evident in the stories, too. Indeed, how typical are these works in the Welty canon?

Even before answering your questions, I want to frame my answers by the fact that my knowledge of Welty comes primarily from a class in Southern literature (my first graduate school class!) back in Spring 1969. I looked on the web to see if I could find the collection of Welty stories that was used in the class (I’m sure it was an inexpensive paperback) and couldn’t find the exact collection but do remember reading the following stories: “Why I Live at the P.O.,” “Lily Daw and the Three Ladies,” “Clytie,” “A Worn Path,” “Petrified Man,” and “Powerhouse.” Because of both the context and the content, I thought of Welty as a Southern writer, so your readings were a bit of a surprise.

Respondent 15

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Yes - My response at the reading was one of levity and gaiety – the pieces were amusing. Later, the only thing that has stuck with me is the image of old highbrow ladies drinking tea while the building is being demolished...which is a funny image even now. I think about that night as being more of an important event in the work of a great writer than a powerful night of performance.

If you know Welty’s work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I don’t know Welty’s work but the event has made me more interested in her.

Other comments?

The last piece was a lot of fun and I'm glad it was uncovered. The first piece feels very "theater of the absurd" – not sure of the date it was written but it feels very dated, very 1940's.

Respondent 16

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

I didn't find my response to be that different. My initial reactions of what I found humorous were reinforced by audience response. Also, my perception of the pieces as over-the-top, and cartoony (in a good way) were reinforced by the actors' performances.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I am by no means a Welty expert, but I was absolutely surprised at how funny the writing is. I expected more pieces in the style of "choo-choo boat" as opposed to the laugh-out-loud silliness of the other pieces.

Other comments?

Doing it as a reading truly helped to free me from any perceived need of "realism". I thoroughly enjoyed the process and the freedom given the performers to make their performances live out loud. I truly loved the vaudevillian style and in your face humor of the pieces. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity and hope we can do it again sometime!

Respondent 17

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

I'm familiar with "Why I Live at the P. O.," Welty photographs, and short stories that I read quite a long time ago. Even so, the answer is yes, my "spoken word" response is significantly different:

Hearing the text puts spaces between the words and brings to life different phrasing than what comes across in reading. It's a musical response, or even a conversational response, to me. And because I had no input into the pacing of the performance – I'll "put it down for a few minutes and pick it up later when I'm off the phone," that's not happening in the theatre – I responded to the momentum differently than I would in reading. The immediacy, compared to reading, also got me. It was so much fun to laugh out loud and keep moving.

Hearing the material read brought me right alongside her. I know she's known as a "keen observer," but because of the presentation format and the "out loud" itself, I felt like I was sitting next to her, looking with her at her people. It's a different experience, to feel the author leaning over and whispering in your ear, "See? *Those* are the ladies I was telling you about last week." I felt that watching the stuff performed. Reading her work would give me intimacy with the work, the characters, the story, but hearing the work made me a temporary best friend of the author.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I don't know Welty's work well, but I do know it "at all," and hearing the works for the theater changed my ideas about her. I had no idea that her sense of humor was so snappy and crisp, no idea that her work was so full of music (even if she wrote lyrics and not melodies). I didn't know she was so funny out loud.

My sense of her amazing sharpness of observation, of her ease at dialogue, did not change. But her carrying into such a different subject than I was used to – New York in its heyday – was unknown to me.

Other comments?

The professor and his machine piece brought to mind Charlie Chaplin or even the flip side, the funny side of grim "Metropolis."

Respondent 18

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

For me, there is nothing quite like the live theater. I enjoy the experience in retrospect, but not to the extent that I do in the moment.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I was surprised by the acidity of the tone of the works for the theatre. I now see Eudora Welty has a broader range than I realized.

Other comments?

I enjoyed the reading very much. Good luck on your project!

Respondent 19

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Yes! Wish I could hear all Welty's stories in dramatic format. This presentation made me wonder how "Why I Live at the P. O." would come across – or "Clytie" – they seem made to order for drama.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Makes her and her characters more human, real, entertaining, and down to earth – less academic, intimidating, or off-putting.

Now I want to read all her works I've not yet read. "Delta Wedding" for starters.

Other comments?

Here's hoping Theatrical Outfit will adapt something of Welty's to perform in regular season. Perhaps an evening of three short stories – heaven!

p.s. I'm not a theater professional – just a casual appreciator.

Respondent 20

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

No – it was enjoyable to see the reading – the actors brought more life to the work than maybe there is on the page.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Although fine – not sure the works are theatrical or witty enough to carry an evening. Find more of the works (if possible) or adapt a short piece to make a fuller evening if you want to put these on – the music was well done and made the lyrics work.

Other comments?

The short play was wonderful – and another short piece (with "Yes, Dear") might work.

Respondent 21

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Yes! The evening was delightful. Thank you.

It opened a whole new dimension. I had only been familiar with the novels and short stories.

Other comments?

I hope you have other opportunities to present this program. If you do, I have two suggestions: You faced down and we heard a very few of your comments during the program itself. (The readers' projection was fine especially Tom.)

The question and answer session was frustrating. If we were behind the person, we couldn't hear the question. Invariably you answered, speaking only to him. This could be rectified easily by repeating the question and addressing everyone with the answers. Otherwise, there is no reason for 90% of your audience to stay for the Q & A session.

A surprise: The number of men present.

Respondent 22

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

While listening to the presentation, I laughed a lot. In thinking about it since then I have realized that her perspective on life struck a chord with me and makes me want to read some of her work. While she wrote many years ago some her themes are very contemporary.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I had not read any of her work before. However, hearing what you presented makes me want to read some of her stories.

Other comments?

It was a very enjoyable evening.

Respondent 23

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

No. I don't think it is. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and favorite sketch was "Bye-Bye Brevoort."

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

I am quite familiar with Welty's work and this does not really alter my perception of her because I've already appreciated the humor and wry wit in her writings. There is a playfulness about our human condition and the absurdity of certain characters that is pure Welty. She has a keen sense of the ridiculous.

Other comments?

I thought the songs were fun but could almost be advertising jingles.

Respondent 24

Do you find that your response while hearing the works read is significantly different from your retrospective response to the reading?

Not significantly different. I enjoyed hearing and seeing the performance but did not feel there was a lot of meaning to it. It was witty and "period" but did not seem to have depth. Tom Key's remark made me wonder if there was a layer of integrity I was unaware of. Upon further reflection, I have returned to my initial assessment – amusing, skillfully presented, not life changing.

If you know Welty's work at all, does hearing the works for the theater modify your concept of Eudora Welty? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

These pieces suggest someone who takes risks, and I recall her writing as seeming more careful and contained. The place identification of New York startles me out of my pre-conceived ideas about Welty; she really did know and love that wild city.

Other comments?

A very impressive presentation.

Appendix D

This section includes my hand-written pre-production notes, written before meeting with the team of actors/actresses. I have also included selected non-consecutive pages from the unpublished manuscript of *What Year Is This?* These particular pages are included to demonstrate Welty's descriptive language, some cuts made for the reading, character assignments, or notations about music.

NOTES FOR READ - THROUGH
 General / More specific / Brevort /
 Golden Age of Theater
 mother one of founders of Jackson LT
 Brevort hotel - summer 1948 - Hilde
 Dolson. (Wetly wrote for NYT - during war)
 Friends in NY - Creekmore, Engel
 Wetly born 1909 - 2 brothers
 1925-27 - MS State College for Women
 27-29 - UW - Madison (graduated)
 30-31 - Columbia Sch. of Business /
 Secretarial / Advertising
 1940 - D. Russell, I.C. agent
 Wetly's love affair w/ theater. Made
 Plays w/ her dolls, acted in HS, MCSW.

Wrote parody of B-way touring hit
 "The Bat" - poked fun of college & staff

Wetly at Columbia - not much interested
 so she was one of her group to purchase
 theater tickets - (often 2nd acted shows)

As a child traveled w/ her father - he
 loved theater.
 Engel - Juilliard

1933 - in NY looking for a job - saw
Maudie Graham, Uday Shankar

1936 - Saw WPA Malbeth

May - Aug NYC 1948

Brewer Hotel - 1st ^{hotel} built on 5th Ave
home to titled Europeans; hosted
huge banquets.

NYT article "Brewer to Close as Hotel" -
definitely saw this while she & Pokon in
NY working -

1949 - Mavis says EW still struggling w/ review -
got GA ~~pub~~ ^{reads} publication in 1949 (Spring)

1959-60 - rec'd Ford Feth grant for playwriting -
intent was to "apprentice" to Phoenix Theatre -
she could not accept (mother's illness)

1956 - big theatre season on B'way -
Anne Frank; Meet Happy Fella; Miss Julie;
Adding Machine; View from the Bridge etc

Brevort - named for Dutch landowner
family in NY since 1630
he was ^{one of} richest men in NYC when hotel
built - cousin to the Vanderbilts

Relevance of these sketches to her other
work - Bolder Apples - what she was
working on

Phoenix Theatre - off-Broadway
house - 2nd Ave.

Ponder Heat a Broadway at same
time as Little Revue

Make point abt Brevort Hotel
being known by all New Yorkers

also Wetty would have been
well-known too.

The following pages are part of the Welty Archive at MDAH. These selected pages from the rehearsal and production are the property of MDAH and Eudora Welty, LLC.

YES DEAR

Skit

CHARACTERS:

FIRST MAN BEFORE CURTAIN

SECOND MAN BEFORE CURTAIN

PROFESSOR CRANIUM, a rabbity little man *Tom*THE THINK MACHINE *1.5**most collapse roles*

The THINK MACHINE can be a papier-machê front with table top, hiding 1 or 2 persons to work it from behind, ~~as described~~. The imagination should be given free play in working it. As for looks, a large stove-like mass is suggested, wider than it is tall; the more complicated its effect, the better; attachments should be readily identifiable for their comic effect, but for the most part can be painted on—they should be more of a suggestion of what a highly complicated machine Professor CRANIUM has invented than a pretended one.

measures wind
Along its table-like top, a row of apparatus, crucibles, a windsock, anemometer, a wind gauge with spinning cups, seismograph, aerial, and in their midst a big Cyclops eye of a searchlight fitted with red, green, and yellow lights like a traffic signal. Rising highest of all this line-up is a mounted, old fashioned brass telescope, extended, and trained on the door as the CURTAIN RISES; it follows CRANIUM wherever he goes.

Attached at lower levels or at the sides of the THINK MACHINE are its adding machine, ticker-tape attachment expelling tape, toaster, cash register, ice crusher, thermometer, barometer. *more clear early computer*

The THINK MACHINE's front has one big, operable drawer, and is decorated with various push buttons and gear handles, probably painted on. *explain*

Persons working the machine are equipped with a set of lazy tongs, a paddle, a muffler, and sparklers (fireworks). They keep going appropriate phonograph records, blow a grade-crossing whistle, and sound a time gong.

Provided by records and sound-effects behind it, the THINK MACHINE keeps up steady, though muted and varying, noises. These suggest a running motor, bubbling sounds, and occasional loud reports or up-boilings. Free use of the imagination is urged, only condition being that the MACHINE is supposed to make itself perfectly intelligible to PROFESSOR CRANIUM, and keep up its side

of the conversation in its own way, as shown below. CRANIUM, on his part, must give the impression of carrying on conversation with the THINK MACHINE which is treating him the way a wife would. He has to raise his voice a little all the time to be heard in the same room with the machine, and may repeat a remark now and then; "I said, etc.," as though the MACHINE asked him crossly, "What's that?"

esp. important
 SCENE: Small apartment, one room. Door left, THINK MACHINE center, lamp, armchair, table w/ telephone right. Further props could be dictionary on stand, mounted globe, etc, or any simple, professional touches, like a book.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN: TWO MEN at left of stage under umbrellas, lighted as if by streetlight. PROFESSOR CRANIUM, who has forgotten to put his umbrella up, hurries across stage and off, carrying also a little paper sack and a briefcase, and the evening paper.

FIRST MAN

There goes Professor Cranium, the brainiest man in town.

SECOND MAN - *1.2.10N*
RANDOM

Yeh?

FIRST MAN

Wonder who hangs him up to dry after a rainy night?

SECOND MAN

Eh? Wife maybe?

FIRST MAN
 (Indignantly)

Professor Cranium's not married, he invents things.

SECOND MAN

Yeh?

FIRST MAN

He lives for science alone. He invented the Think Machine!

SECOND MAN

(MACHINE calculates and shoots him out a paper. He reads off.)

5,738,449 to one. Chances?

(MACHINE sounds brief siren)

Germs! H'm.

(He sneezes again. MACHINE extends white handkerchief on lazy tongs and has him blow his nose.)

The Western Hemisphere today was quite overcast. In fact the rain was coming down ninety a minute. A hot toddy's what I need.

(Ticker tape begins whirring out at great rate and tries to intercept the PROFESSOR. He picks up and reads.)

If ninety a minute, fifty-four hundred an hour. Thanks, dear. Now—

(Attempts to walk by but gets swamped by tape. Reads further.)

If fifty-four hundred an hour, a hundred twenty-nine thousand—yes, dear, but let's drop the weather, shall we? Weren't we talking of a toddy for Daddy? On second thought, I think I'll make it a cold toddy!

(He beams cheerfully. But MACHINE's light goes from green to yellow. Telescope follows him to table and watches him bring out a bottle and pour a jigger and mix, or a periscope could rise and hang away over to watch him.)

Pardon, dear. Could you spare me a few ice cubes?

(MACHINE throbs. He gets out a pan of ice cubes.)

Ah, crush it for me, will you dear, that's a girl.

(He feeds into crusher and MACHINE makes grinding noises.)

Jack needs to communicate, behave, like combat, neg. wife - props?

From the start

I will stage props directions

old fashioned ice cube tray - aluminum

God bless you, dear, you can really do one job of pulverizing! How nice your little cogs do meet!—

Frankenstein was such an under-bite. (shows her)

6
from face here

(He pours drink into glass and holds it up.)

Here's mud in your eye!

(Drinks. MACHINE's light goes from yellow to red. But he says brightly:

Well, that little cold toddy was so warming, I think I'll try--

(He crosses to bottle again. Telescope follows him. As soon as he pours, the MACHINE's grade crossing whistle sounds.)

Oh, please dear, let's not be difficult. This is mostly H₂O plus 4.

(He mixes. Impishly calls out to MACHINE:

make it clear!

What about a 'machino' cherry, eh dear? Ha, ha, ha.

(~~Laughs in professorial way.~~ MACHINE after a moment, and as he lifts the glass, comes at him suddenly with a ruler and raps his knuckles.)

Now that's puzzling.—You didn't want a drink, did you?(Aside) One drink today. Tomorrow, two drinks, day after tomorrow, three drinks. Arithmetical progression. Then, the Subtracted Weekend. Can't risk that. I'll have to down this entire bottle myself—right now.

(MACHINE makes horrible buzzing angry sounds, like swarm of bees. CRANIUM scoots back from it.)

What's that, dear? What? What?

part part very funny.
must get across w/
voices only

(Large calendar page is thrust tremblingly up on top of MACHINE, reading the date of that evening.)

clear to
At this point did become, audience...

Tuesday the 19th. Ah, is it? Time does fly. Anything special about Tuesday the 19th, dear? Oh, dear, I do hope I haven't missed any comets. Are you telling me I've missed a comet?

(MACHINE grows more agitated still. Ticker tape flies out like eruption from volcano.)

Now dear, do calm down. Jesssst a minute. Just take it easy, and think quietly! Is anything wrong? Squeaks? Leaks? You have got a draft somewhere. (Sneezes) Why, your temperature is up to 310—you've got fever! Butter! Butter!

(He rushes after butter and daubs the MACHINE anxiously. MACHINE quivers all its attachments. Spins the calendar sheet like a paper windmill.)

Oh, my Lord & Taylor, now I know. You kept waiting for me to think of it—today's our anniversary!

(MACHINE sounds gong.)

And your feelings are hurt! Oh dear. Our anniversary. A year ago today I made you at Yonkers. You were an old wash stand, to begin with. And we had our picture taken together in Popular Mechanics—I had one foot on your fender.

(MACHINE throbs or sobs louder. He rubs butter on furiously, whips rag like a shoeshine boy, polishes brighter.)

And I meant to get you a present.

(Sounds like brakes applied.)

Oh, nothing nice. A Daylight Saving Time attachment for your Fourth Dimensional buzzer. It can keep.

(Sobbing noises resumed)

Oh, I know what you really had your heart set on. The Palomar lens, for your Add-a-Lens necklace. But are you aware, dear, how much money I make a week at the Institute?

(Ribbon with figures on it runs around the top of the MACHINE, like news on the Times Building: "Exactly thirty-nine and no one hundredths.")

FIFTY-SEVENTH STREET RAG

(Ballet)

Idea suggested by Helen Lotterhos

Characters:

THE YOUNG MAN - Jack
 THE CLEANING WOMAN - Carolyn
 ART LOVERS OF 57TH STREET - all cast - all switch
 MEMBERS OF THE BALLET -

Scene:

An Opening in a 57th Street Art Gallery.

The Gallery is of the small, intimate type which shows mostly modern paintings and not too many of them. At rise of curtain, it is jammed with people to the walls, so that for the first few moments little of the show itself can be seen.

note specifics of her description!

The walls are at an angle—two-or-three-sided set—so as to show paintings hung on them. These are large-sized pictures painted onto the set, with frames, and hung low. There aren't too many paintings, but they are all of quickly recognizable styles known to the audience. For instance, they would represent Picasso, Dali, Mondrian, Miro, Paul Klee, and Grandma Moses as to style. They would range in subject matter of course from non-objective to primitive, and probably include a Harlequin, a cubist still-life, a surrealist piece, an abstract, a nude or so, a portrait in late-Picasso style, a childlike stick-man composition. It's suggested to be sparing as to number of paintings, and make all visible to audience, heightened and recognizable at once for well-known styles (not as exact copies of actual paintings).

2

A curtained doorway, R. Radiator along one wall. In center, a round leather divan, customary art gallery kind. Before this, in center foreground, on the floor, a statue in the style of Henry Moore—an oversize female nude with big holes here and there, in reclining position on a slab. This should be low enough to sit on, like a bench, and strong enough to hop up and dance on. (Could this be made on base of low wooden table, with wire and padding or plaster? In any case it should have the little head and heavy thighs of the Moore style.) The statue, as well as the paintings, can't be seen at CURTAIN RISE on account of the people in the room.

At CURTAIN RISE, the crowd of the Art Lovers establishes an instant and noisy impact. All are animated, blowing cigarette smoke straight up, making emphatic or deprecatory gestures, talking without a stop. They are "real" people, not caricature types, for the YOUNG MAN in his song and dance is to caricature them. There are plenty of both men and women. Dealers can be seen moving about here and there, one or two painters, pretty young girls, critics, a club lady—enough types to give variety to the group and establish it immediately, but only faintly stylized.

The Art Lovers circulate busily, pushing hard, and wave to friends. Nobody is able to see much of the paintings themselves, though now and then someone stands on tiptoe and cranes his neck, and some jab their fingers toward a painting in argument. One partisan keeps shaking his fist in the air characteristically. Above the jabber of voices one voice is heard calling:

A LOUD CRY — Brenda

Another opening, next door! Even more amusing!

(Someone leaves through the curtained doorway, and the crowd follows obediently, still animated. An old lady comes back for her reticule, and then she too is gone. Nobody is left but the young man, who is now revealed sitting on the round divan, directly above the reclining statue. His hat is pushed back, his knees are up, his head clasped around them, the show catalogue dangling from nerveless fingers. He seems dazed, as if shipwrecked onto this island. Enter the cleaning woman, a frail, plain little creature with dust rag, mop, and pail, to clean up after the mob. At first, she does not see the YOUNG MAN.)

3

CLEANING WOMAN

(Sadly) To Cost: Very visual sketch...
 all communicated by
 reading-voice + no
 dancing. So how to vary
 voices, timbre, etc.

The same old flotsam and jetsom!

(She starts picking up old catalogues and other litter. Gives a familiar flick of the rag to statue, and same to the YOUNG MAN, who is unaroused. She collects the catalogue out of his hand. Picks up glove from floor.)

There's always one right-hand glove!

(She puts it on, a long white glove, preens, directly before the YOUNG MAN, who comes to life, jumps immediately to his feet, and tips his hat.)

Oh! I just wiped you down with Renuzit!

GEORGE PLAYS
 M.L. TONE
 (Ragtime)

YOUNG MAN

Much obliged, I'm sure.

(Still in a daze, he hands out a tip.)

CLEANING WOMAN

(Pushing his hand back)

(YOUNG MAN becomes suddenly dynamic. A frenzy comes over him to show, one by one, the types that come into the art gallery. The CLEANING WOMAN turns into the audience by taking her stand to one side with the mop, in some classical pose perhaps.

delete for reading
 (The number is meant to be very quick and light, delivered with the free play of the dancer's invention and imagination. He can use all ideas the room and decorations give him, and certainly use the Henry Moore-style statue in his cavorting. The only hand prop that comes to mind (and none at all may be needed) is a painter's beret, which YOUNG MAN could pick up off floor or retrieve from CLEANING WOMAN, and use lightly to suggest a lady's hat, a beard, a fig leaf, or for itself.

(YOUNG MAN starts by shaking his fist in the air like the angry partisan who has just been in the gallery, and jumping in frenzy.)

AS WILD PARTISAN: - Jack

Hey Hey!

Paul Klee (Klay)

Is here to stay!

Tchelicew *cheff*

Is really tough

When you know your stuff

Arp Arp,

You're a dog if you carp

At a painting that looks

Like an egg that cooks

*rhythmic reading
 must be important.
 must space out words,
 pauses around -ing,
 Jack tends to rush*

Wells's prose-wonderful example

The ballet is primarily a beautiful one. It utilizes, with as much imagination as desired, the kinds and varieties of modern paintings as well as the kinds of people connected with a modern gallery.

One set of dancers' costumes are free adaptations of either well-known or imaginary examples of certain painters' work. Suggestions: Eugene Berman Courtier with plumed hat; Figures of the Picasso "Rose" period; A Walt Kuhn "Blue Clown;" Paul Klee stick-men doing tumbles and falls; Chagall peasant bride in sentimental costumes and wreath; grotesque with large masks showing simultaneous profile and front-view, like late Picasso; a Dali figure; Degas Ballerinas; Toulouse-Lautree Café figures, such as a pair dancing; a metamorphosis-figure, as in Tchelichew, one whose tights are painted like a leaf, etc.; Harlequins and nudes.

The effect would be more spectacular and more subtle at the same time if there were more than one of certain costumes—for example, a pair of Walt Kuhn "Blue Clowns", three Picasso acrobats, etc.

A smaller set of dancers are people connected with the Art Gallery. Some are in black and white and may also be in duplicate. Some of the people remembered from the opening are on hand again, artists, critics, newspaper reporters; lady amateur painters in smocks and sun hats, a group of children being led by a lecturing teacher could wind through; nuns, art students—some in love, hand in hand, and the ranting partisan is back.

The ballet should be full of light, color, elegant movement, speed, and humor. The idea is not to be cautious or literal about actual paintings, but to let them be suggested as beautifully and with as much free play of the imagination as

possible. A suggested color range is that of modern and 19th Century paintings—pinks, mauves, violets, rose, blue, soft greens and yellows, whites, and some blacks and darks and brights. The little reproductions accompanying were chosen for both color suggestion and costume suggestion as might be useful, the Picasso “Family of Saltimbanques” seeming to the writer to have everything. Costumes repeated in various amount, depending on the effect desired, may give emphasis or importance to their color.

The YOUNG MAN and the CLEANING WOMAN could lead the dance at the start, it could absorb them, and at last leave them alone again. The YOUNG MAN could put on his hat and exit, and the CLEANING WOMAN mop up his tracks as the CURTAIN FALLS.