

## **EUDORA WELTY and MYSTERY**

Eds. Jacob Agner and Harriet Pollack

Edited Collection CFP

It's no secret that southern author Eudora Welty was an adamant believer in mystery. In so many of her fictions and photographs, Welty's genius relies heavily on the puzzling detail, the withholding plot, the cryptic conclusion, and the opaque mystery at the heart of her characters' motivations. It is less known, however, how often in these puzzling stories Welty engages with the mystery genre. A prolific reader and moviegoer, Welty was an enthusiastic fan of crime and detective fiction, and consequently, from her Depression-era collection *A Curtain of Green* (1941) through her Civil Rights stories (1960s) and late-life manuscripts, many of her fictions in unexpected ways touch the topics of murder, mystery, and mayhem, of criminal psychology, detective work, policing, and/or justice. Not coincidentally, the most productive period of Welty's career (approximately from 1941 to 1955) coincides with the "classic" film noir phase in Hollywood cinema. Then in her late life, Welty shared a literary relationship and epistolary intimacy with crime writer Ross Macdonald (aka Kenneth Millar). Yet the full mystery of Eudora Welty's genre work is still something to be uncovered.

This collection aims to follow the clues in Eudora Welty's fiction, photography, juvenilia, non-fiction, correspondence, and biography to discover the ways in which Welty worked within, against, and beyond mystery and detective fiction. How do Eudora Welty's signature talents as a southern modernist, a woman writer, a comedic eye, and an innovative genre revisionist take on the American crime genre?

This CFP invites essays on the following topics (and more). Please send 300-word proposals to [jkagner@olemiss.edu](mailto:jkagner@olemiss.edu) by 12.15.18

Suggested topics include:

- Meditations on the theme of mystery in Welty's writings and/or photography
- Close readings of Welty's work through the frameworks offered by mystery, detective, crime, film noir, whodunit, cozy mystery, weird tale, police procedural, speculative, pulp, and/or horror genres
- Comparative and/or intertextual readings of Welty with other popular mystery and crime artists (i.e. Ross Macdonald, Edgar Allan Poe, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, William Faulkner, and Chester Himes, as well as those mentioned in her correspondence such as Elizabeth Daly, Ngaio Marsh, James M. Cain, John Collier, Roald Dahl, Kenneth Fearing, Dick Francis, and Patrick White, or those she was known to be fond of such as Wilkie Collins and Tony Hillerman.)
- Identifications and/or reworkings of the specific components of genre fictions utilized by Welty

- Examinations of the vexed topic of gender in the mystery genre (the femme-fatale, toxic and hard-boiled masculinities, misogynoir, etc.) and Welty's interventions on this matter
- Investigations of Welty's fiction's attention to race and the U.S. South in relation to crime, cultural/institutional policing, and southern history (Jim Crow, racial violence, the Civil War, Reconstruction, white flight). Similar enquiries into her fictions' attention to class, gender, or ability in relation to crime, cultural/institutional policing, and southern history are encouraged
- Studies of Welty's depiction of "the rough south" (i.e. her outlaw stories, her relationship to Southwestern Humor, her white working class fictions, etc.)
- The cultural contexts of mid-century "noir" sensibilities in Welty's era (lynching, WW2, the Holocaust, post-war trauma, the Cold War, atomic anxiety, McCarthyism, urban/industrial expansion, American materialism, etc.)
- Further considerations of the significance and impacts of the relationship between Welty and Ross Macdonald