The Portrayal of Women in Selected Short Stories by Eudora Welty. (Volumes I and II).

Philip Allen Tapley
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BY EUDORA WELTY. (VOLUMES I AND II)

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural
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in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

Although Eudora Welty is a literary artist noted for her feminine approach, she is not a feminist. "In writing fiction," she says, "I think imagination comes ahead of sex." Most of the selections in her short-story volumes portray women characters, however, usually from points of view which focus upon the experiences of women from their particular angles of vision. Her women range from the young girl in "A Visit of Charity" to the aged Phoenix in "A Worn Path."

This study examines Miss Welty's portrayal of women, their roles and conflicts, an aspect of her fiction that has received comparatively little critical treatment. Twenty-one stories are analyzed in detail, twenty from A Curtain of Green, The Wide Net, The Golden Apples, and The Bride of the Innisfallen, and an additional story, "A Sketching Trip," from The Atlantic Monthly (June 1945). Three of the several patterns of characterization of women in Miss Welty's short stories have been selected for analysis: initiates, isolated spinsters, and mother-women.

The initiates include seven girls or women who undergo or are beginning to undergo a heightened awareness of themselves in relation to other people and to the world. "A Visit of Charity" is analyzed as an example of tentative initiation; "A Memory," "The Winds," and "At the Landing"
as examples of uncompleted initiation; and "Livvie," "A Sketching Trip," and "A Curtain of Green" as examples of decisive initiation. The analyses are set within the context of American literary treatments of initiation and of psychological theories about initiation.

The isolated spinsters, those whose singleness causes spiritual, psychological, or economic isolation, include ten women in six stories. These characters are studied against the background of Erich Fromm's beliefs about isolation and life-fulfillment and against the stereotype of the single woman in American fiction. "Why I Live at the P.O." depicts a spinster in a public position. "Asphodel" presents three women as feminine, helpless spinsters. "Clytie" and "The Burning" contain aristocratic spinster sisters. "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" depict a teacher and her student as isolated spinsters.

This study concludes that Miss Welty's portrayal of women is neither simple nor sentimental and that she uses realism of homely details to force her reader's attention upon conditions of the human spirit which transcend the world of things. By carefully individualizing her characters, she avoids re-creating stereotypes found in much popular fiction about women. Miss Welty's women are not only human, but their experiences also cross the sexual divide and provide insight into the common human situation. Her women seek, but do not always find, fulfillment through relationships with others. Sometimes, as in "The Bride of the Innisfallen," her women discover freedom outside the marriage-bonds. Finally, patterns of characterization in her short stories point the way toward portrayal of women in her major novels.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In *Images of Women in Literature,*¹ one of the new literary textbooks whose selections are centered around contemporary themes, a story by Eudora Welty, "At the Landing," is included under the thematic heading of "Man's Prey: the Sex Object." Although she has written often and well about women from women's points of view, she has never been noted as a crusader for any cause or movement, including women's liberation. She has counseled the serious writer not to propagandize in fiction.² Furthermore, she believes that a writer should resist the tendency to write consciously and deliberately from either a "masculine" or "feminine" point of view, either of which limits the approaches to reality: "In writing fiction, I think imagination comes ahead of sex. A writer's got to be able to live inside all his characters: male, female,


²"Must the Novelist Crusade?" *Atlantic*, October 1965, 104-108.
old, young. To live inside any other person is the jump.
Whether the other persons are male or female is subordinate." She insists that in writing her stories and reading those of other writers, she is "not interested in any kind of a feminine repartee." Sexism as a "cause" in literature is clearly not her concern:

I don't care what sex people are when they write. I just want the result to be a good book. All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply at all to women writers. We've always been able to do what we've wished. I couldn't feel less deprived as a woman to be writing, and I certainly enjoy all the feelings of any other human being. The full complement is available. I have the point of view of a woman but if I am not able to imagine myself into what another human being who is a man might feel, which I have to do all the time when I write, well, it's just from poverty of imagination. It's a matter of imagination, not sex.

The artistry of literature, not feminist polemics, is Eudora Welty's main concern as a writer.

Because Eudora Welty is a woman writer and because she has often, but by no means exclusively, written about women, Jonathan Yardly says that she has sometimes been dismissed as a "'woman's writer'" or as "a teller of sentimental tales, some of them vaguely elusive but all of them quite

3 Charles T. Bunting, "'The Interior World': An Interview with Eudora Welty," Southern Review, 8, New Series (Fall, 1972), 725-726.

4 Ibid., p. 726.
within the mental reach of the Wednesday Lecture Club." Leslie Fiedler has attacked her writings on the "grounds of feminism and a false attenuation of the Southern temper," Marie-Antoinette Manz-Kunz observes. In particular, Fiedler has labled Miss Welty's style as "'true Magnolia Blossom or Southern Homosexual style: pseudo-magical and pseudo-religious..." In contrast, Fiedler praises Faulkner's language because of "'its agonizedly male'" qualities. "One must assume, therefore," Miss Manz-Kunz says, that Fiedler's "criteria for the evaluation of style are predominantly subjective and extraliterary and thus subject to the fallacy usually ascribed to the feminine mind!"

As if in answer to Fiedler, John Edward Hardy has praised Eudora Welty for her femininity: "There is no fictionist whose writing is so thoroughly and unmistakably feminine and at the same time so little tainted by feminism." As Miss Welty has explained in her Southern Review

5."The Last Great One?" review of Losing Battles, New Republic, 9 May 1970, p. 34.


interview, she cares nothing about "any kind of feminine repartee." Thus no study of feminism in the works of Welty can be written, as Josephine Jessup has written about Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, and Willa Cather.8 What can be written, however, is a study of the women characters of Eudora Welty, an aspect of her literary art that has not yet been explored in depth. As this study hopes to show, Miss Welty's stories about women are seldom simple and almost never sentimental. Eudora Welty uses realism of homely details to force her reader's attention upon conditions of the human spirit which transcend or engulf the world of things.

Joyce Carol Oates' comments on Eudora Welty's literary approach support the assumption that her writings are neither simple or sentimental. While Miss Oates admits "the essential femininity of the narration and the subject, the reality, which is narrated" in Miss Welty's stories, she also admits that Miss Welty "balloons our expectations." Behind the "conversational and slightly arch tone" of her stories are to be found "amazing revelations" of horror that may "evolve quietly" out of gentility. Even when Miss Welty writes of the poverty-stricken and ignorant, she is always "'genteel.'" In her best stories the horror is not "emphasized, underlined, somehow exaggerated so that we

may absorb it in a way satisfying to our sensibilities," the way horror is treated in the stories of H. H. Munro and John Collier, for example.

The subtle impact that Welty's stories make upon the reader is, to Miss Oates, inextricably bound up with her "feminine," "genteel" approach.

Like Kafka, with whom she shares a number of traits, she presents the distortions of life in the context of ordinary, even chatty life; she frightens us. I have no doubt that her intentions are not to frighten anyone, or to make particular judgments on life, but the effect of her fiction is indeed frightening. It is the bizarre combination of a seemingly boundless admiration for feminine nonsense—family life, food, relatives, conversations, eccentric old people—and a sharp, penetrating eye for the seams of this world, through which a murderous light shines. Flannery O'Connor, who was certainly indebted to Miss Welty's stories, abandons entirely the apparatus of "realism"; she has no patience for, no interest in, real people. Amazing as some of Flannery O'Connor's stories are, they are ultimately powerless to move us seriously—like the beautiful plays of Yeats, they are populated with beings not quite human. Eudora Welty's people are always human.

The "femininity" and "gentility," then, that one finds at first glance in Miss Welty's stories are deceptive. Though her stories involve what Miss Oates calls "feminine nonsense"—family life, food, relatives, conversations, eccentric old people—" these subjects are not really "nonsense" to Miss Welty. To her, at least some of these are


10Ibid., pp. 54-55.
central concerns of almost every woman. But most important, nearly all of Miss Welty's women to be analyzed in this study are searching for, have found, or fail to find, meaning through love, through a loving relationship with another person. No one knows better than Eudora Welty's women that "life takes meaning from the relation between human beings" and "that the relationship of persons generates the fabric of life."\textsuperscript{11} Whether or not anthropologist Ashley Montagu is correct in his assumption that "because women have had to be so unselfish and forbearing and self-sacrificing and maternal, . . . they possess a deeper understanding than men of what it is to be human,"\textsuperscript{12} it is true that Eudora Welty's women are very human and that most of them have much love to be given and shared, though the impulse to love is sometimes tragically thwarted in them.

Miss Welty examines her heroines both as individuals and as role-players: mothers, wives, lovers, would-be lovers, daughters, sisters, spinsters. She studies them in moments of joy, revelation, frustration, affection, selflessness, hate, loneliness, passion, selfishness, madness, and violence. Miss Welty's "sharp, penetrating


eye for the seams of this world, through which a murderous light shines," is prepared to show the reader that behind the "feminine nonsense" of women's lives one may indeed sometimes find "amazing revelations" of horror: the loneliness of old women in nursing homes ("A Visit of Charity"), a tyrannical father and rape ("At the Landing"), madness and suicide ("The Burning," "Clytie"), vulgar sexuality and abortion ("Petrified Man"), death by accident ("A Curtain of Green"), the virtual imprisonment of a young woman in a house of death ("Livvie"), benumbing poverty and murder ("Flowers for Marjorie"). Considered in these ways, Eudora Welty's fiction about women is, in Miss Oates' words, "indeed frightening." But Miss Welty has also depicted joyful and affirmative experiences of women: a happy and fruitful marriage ("Death of a Traveling Salesman"), a woman's fulfillment through suffering and service ("Shower of Gold"), a woman's renewal of her life and sexuality ("A Curtain of Green"), a young woman's falling in love for the first time ("Livvie"), and an old woman's celebration of life through sacrifice ("A Worn Path"). Miss Welty is a woman writer of great courage, insight, compassion, originality, and artistry, and in her fiction she has dealt with the whole life of woman from young girlhood to old age, as the analyses will show.

Since Katherine Anne Porter's appreciative introduction to Eudora Welty's first collection of short stories,
A Curtain of Green\(^{13}\) (1941), Miss Welty has never lacked critical attention. The inclusion of two of her short stories in the first edition of Brooks and Warren's influential anthology, *Understanding Fiction* (1943),\(^{14}\) helped introduce her stories to a generation of college literature students. Robert Penn Warren's perceptive essay, "Love and Separateness in Miss Welty" in 1944\(^{15}\) defined several basic themes in her first two volumes of short stories, including *The Wide Net* (1943). In 1946 John Crowe Ransom published a balanced review of her first novel, *Delta Wedding*,\(^{16}\) that helped promote her reputation as a novelist. In 1952 Granville Hicks' article on Miss Welty in *College English*\(^{17}\) provided a valuable overview of her literary career through the publication of her third collection of short stories, *The Golden Apples* (1949).


\(^{14}\)(New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts). The two stories included were "A Piece of News" and "Old Mr. Marblehall."

\(^{15}\)This essay first appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, 6 (Spring 1944), 246-259 and was reprinted in Warren's *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1958), pp. 156-169.

\(^{16}\)"Delta Fiction," *Kenyon Review*, 8 (Summer 1946), 503-507.

\(^{17}\)"Eudora Welty," *College English*, 16 (November 1952), 69-76.
Meanwhile as her works appeared, they were being widely reviewed in major popular and scholarly journals, and many of her stories, considered fine examples of contemporary short-story writing, were being included in other textbooks for use in college literature courses. A Modern Library edition of her collected stories in 1952 helped make her works available to a wider popular audience.

The first complete study of her works, Ruth Vande Kieft's *Eudora Welty*,18 appeared in 1962. This book was followed in 1965 by Alfred Appel's *A Season of Dreams*,19 a more detailed examination of Miss Welty's works than Miss Vande Kieft had provided. In 1959 Albert J. Griffith wrote the first doctoral dissertation on Miss Welty's works,20 and many more have been written since then on one aspect or another of her fiction.21 Scores of articles

18 (New York: Twayne).


and scholarly essays on her writings have appeared since the 1950's; these, like the dissertations, have dealt mainly with her use of myths and symbols, her connection with Southern regionalism, and her early employment of grotesque and gothic elements. As Alfred Appel has commented in his bibliography on Miss Welty in *A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature* (1969),

Eudora Welty is a New Critic's writer par excellence. Not surprisingly, the intricacies and obliquities that make her fiction so fascinating have also shaped the special and often specialized nature of the critical commentary on that fiction. Most of the pieces on her in recent years have not been "essays" as such, but rather brief explanations of one problematic story or another. It is rare when Welty criticism goes beyond the microscopic to view a work in some context, though the best Welty criticism—by Ruth Vande Kieft, Robert Penn Warren, and Granville Hicks—has also been able to take a longer view.22

Since the publication of Appel's bibliography, two careful studies of themes and techniques in her short stories have been published: Zelma Turner Howard's *The Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories* (1973)23 (exigeses of selected

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pieces from the first three volumes of stories) and Marie-Antoinette Manz-Kunz's *Eudora Welty, Aspects of Reality in her Short Fiction* (1971). Although the various books, dissertations, and critical studies have dealt in different ways with Eudora Welty's art of characterization, only a single article has been written on one of the most important aspects of her fiction, her characterization of women. In 1961 Mary C. Buswell published "The Love Relationships of Women in the Fiction of Eudora Welty" in the *West Virginia University Philological Papers*. Within her thirteen-page article she attempts to deal with women in Miss Welty's fiction: the old maid, the young unmarried girl, and the married woman. She includes very brief examples from selections in all four collections of short stories and in three novels (*Robber Bridegroom*, *Delta Wedding*, and *Ponder Heart*) as well. John Edward Hardy has paid tribute to Miss Welty as a woman writer in "The Achievement of Eudora Welty" in *Southern Humanities Review* (1968). However he is not concerned with her portrayal of women characters but rather with her achievement in certain thematic areas: viz., the absurd, racial problems, and isolation.

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24 See footnote six for bibliographical information on this book.

25 13 (December 1961), 94-106.
As a woman writer, Eudora Welty has written often (and well) about the problems, conflicts, and roles of women. Of the seventeen stories in *A Curtain of Green*, fifteen deal with women characters. Only "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" and "Powerhouse" contain women characters of small significance. Three of the stories in this volume have titles that contain the names of their major women characters: "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "Flowers for Marjorie," and "Clytie." In many of the stories in this volume, the major character is not only a girl or a woman, but the story is also told from her point of view, e.g., "A Visit of Charity," "A Curtain of Green," "A Worn Path," "A Memory," "Why I Live at the P.O.,” and "Clytie." In at least six of the stories in *A Curtain of Green*, the relationships and/or conflicts between husbands and wives are primary concerns: "A Piece of News," "The Key," "The Whistle," "Flowers for Marjorie," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," and "Old Mr. Marblehall." The women's ages and roles vary intriguingly in the stories. In "A Memory" the major character is a young girl being initiated into the world of adult reality. Marjorie in "Flowers for Marjorie" and Sonny's wife in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" are young married women who are expecting babies. In "A Curtain of Green" Mrs. Larkin is a young widow trying to cope with the reality of her husband's death. Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." is a relatively young woman.
frustrated by her spinsterhood and by her family's supposed lack of acceptance of her. In "A Worn Path" Phoenix is an aged Negro grandmother devoted to sustaining the life of her invalid grandson.

Similar generalizations may be made about Miss Welty's second volume of stories, *The Wide Net* (1943). Of the eight stories in this collection, only two do not deal with women at all: "First Love" and "A Still Moment."

"The Wide Net" depicts the problem of Hazel, a young expectant-mother, who plays a trick on her boyish husband to shock him into maturity. "Asphodel" deals with three middle-aged spinsters who live under the domination of an aristocratic virago. "The Winds" and "At the Landing" deal with the initiation of young girls into maturity. "Livvie" portrays a young Negro woman who discovers love for the first time after her aged husband's death.

In *The Golden Apples*, (1949), Miss Welty's third collection of short stories, all seven selections concern women in various roles—as mother, wife, initiate, or spinster. "Shower of Gold" concerns the marriage of a gentle lady to a wanderer. "June Recital" portrays the sad life of a middle-aged spinster piano teacher who can find neither love nor acceptance in a small Mississippi town. "The Wanderers" is the story of a former pupil of the piano teacher who must cope with her own position as an isolated spinster in the same town.
In _The Bride of the Innisfallen_ (1955), Miss Welty's last volume of short stories, all seven selections again deal with one aspect or another of the life of woman. "The Burning" relates the grim story of two spinsters whose home is burned during the Civil War and who kill themselves in protest. "No Place for You, My Love" and "The Bride of the Innisfallen" are studies of women who seek satisfaction outside of marriage. "Ladies in Spring" depicts three ladies, a middle-aged rainmaker, her niece, and a housewife with whose husband the rainmaker's niece is having an affair. "Going to Naples" portrays a middle-aged Italian-American mother escorting her teen-age daughter on a trip to Italy and, in the process, trying to find a husband for her daughter.

Even this brief survey of Eudora Welty's short stories should suggest the considerable scope and variety of her characterizations of women. In her article Miss Buswell deals with only twelve of these short stories, and her commentaries are seldom longer than three or four sentences. Since no extended study has been made of this important aspect of Eudora Welty's fiction, this study is intended to provide an in-depth examination of her characterization of women in twenty representative short stories selected from each of the volumes and one story from _The Atlantic Monthly_ which has never been included in one of Miss Welty's short story collections and which has
received almost no critical attention.

The stories have been grouped under three significant headings, according to the roles that women play in their stories. The initiates include seven girls or women ranging in age from twelve to about twenty-five who undergo or are beginning to undergo maturation or widened consciousness or awareness of themselves in relation to other people and the world around them. Seven stories are analyzed in the section on the initiates, according to the type of initiation each girl or woman undergoes. The analysis of the initiates is accomplished within the context of American literary treatments of initiation and of psychological theories about initiation, especially those of Carl Jung, as interpreted by Joseph L. Henderson. The isolated spinsters are a second group studied. These are ten unmarried women in six stories who suffer spiritual, psychological, or economic isolation because of their singleness. They are studied against the background of spiritual or psychological isolation and life-fulfillment,

26. Stories of initiates to be analyzed and the collections in which they are found are "A Visit of Charity," "Memory," and "A Curtain of Green" (Curtain of Green); "The Landing" and "Livvie" (The Wide Net); and "A Sketching Trip" (Atlantic, June 1945, pp. 62-70).

27. Stories of isolated spinsters to be analyzed and the collections in which they are found are "Clytie" and "Why I Live at the P.O." (Curtain of Green); "Asphodel" (The Wide Net); "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" (Golden Apples); and "The Burning" (The Bride of the Innisfallen).
as defined by Erich Fromm, and against the stereotype of the single woman in American fiction, as defined by Dorothy Deegan. The third group of women characters to be analyzed are the mother-women, a term for women devoted to home and family as employed in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899). The mother-women (found in eight stories\(^{28}\)) include expectant mothers, mothers with children, and women whose views toward marriage and childbirth make them anti-mother-women.

As Appel has pointed out, "Eudora Welty is a New Critic's writer par excellence," and with their textual complexities ("intricacies and obliquities") and organic wholeness, her stories demand close reading to determine the patterns of characterization. The meaning of recurring points of view, themes, symbols, and figures of speech must often be discovered before one is able to understand a story on its deeper levels. For these reasons it is often necessary to quote freely from her works. The number of stories to be analyzed has been limited to allow detailed exigeses, but the stories chosen are sufficiently representative so that the discussion is balanced and offers a broad cross-section of her works.

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\(^{28}\) Stories of mother-women to be analyzed and the collections in which they are found are "Flowers for Marjorie," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "Petrified Man," and "A Worn Path" (Curtain of Green); "The Wide Net" (The Wide Net); "Shower of Gold" (Golden Apples); and "Ladies in Spring" and "Going to Naples" (The Bride of the Innisfallen).
The overall purpose of this study is to view Eudora Welty's characterization of women within the context of twenty-one of her short stories—to "take a longer view" of this important aspect of her work, rather than the shorter view which Appel says most Eudora Welty criticism has taken. But because of the "intricacies and obliquities" of her stories, even a "longer view" of her characterization of women must necessarily be limited. Twenty-one short stories have been chosen for detailed analysis because they best reveal the three major patterns of character portrayal of initiates, isolated spinsters, and mother-women. Eudora Welty's five novels have been excluded since they are beyond the scope of this investigation. As the concluding chapter will attempt to demonstrate, Miss Welty's portrayal of women in her short stories has helped establish patterns of characterization which are continued in four of her more important novels.
CHAPTER II

THE INITIATES

Literary and Psychological Background

The theme of initiation has been pervasive in American literature since the eighteenth century. Such factual narratives as Franklin's *Autobiography* (1793), Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1849), and Cummings' *The Enormous Room* (1922) as well as a great variety of novels such as Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1801), Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and Knowles' *A Separate Peace* (1959) treat the theme of initiation. Nearly all the works of Thomas Wolfe, and many of Melville's and Hemingway's, dramatize this theme.  

The process of initiation as treated in American fiction usually involves the experiences of young men in their "teens and early twenties—the transitional state between the relative freedom of boyhood and obligations of

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adulthood," as William Coyle has observed. In fact, W. Tasker Witham has explained that "important novels dealing with adolescent males are far more numerous and far franker than those dealing with adolescent females. Over ninety percent of the best novels about adolescence are centered on boys. . . ." Conversely, few works of American fiction treat the theme of initiation of young women. Cather's *My Antonia* (1918), Tarkington's *Alice Adams* (1921), Suckow's *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl* (1925), and McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) may be listed as exceptions. Of course there are more men writers than women writers, Coyle comments, "but this does not fully account for the discrepancy. Perhaps the American girl is assumed to be born with knowledge that the young man must acquire through experience."

Several short stories and novels by Eudora Welty employ the theme of initiation of either adolescent males or females. "First Love" depicts a twelve-year-old deaf-mute, Joel, who learns the lessons of love and death

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4 Coyle, "Perspectives," p. 2.
through his one-sided friendship with Aaron Burr in early nineteenth-century Natchez. In "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" twenty-year-old Steve is initiated into a world of cruelty and evil in his job as barker in a carnival that has enslaved a small, crippled black man and disguised him as an Indian maiden who is whipped and made to eat raw chickens for public titillation. However, another group of stories, ones directly applicable to the present study, concern the initiation of adolescent females. The young girl artist in "A Memory," Josie in "The Winds," and Jenny Lockhart in "At the Landing" undergo the process of initiation from innocence into experience. Not all of Miss Welty's female initiates are adolescents, however. The Negro wife of Solomon in "Livvie," Delia Farrar in "A Sketching Trip," and Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green" are already mature young women when they undergo their particular initiations.

The theme of initiation has been defined and explained in various ways in recent American literary criticism. Probably Brooks and Warren were among the first to use the term initiation to describe a particular kind of short story. In analyzing Hemingway's "The Killers" and Anderson's "I Want to Know Why" in the influential Understanding Fiction (1943), they describe initiation as the protagonist's "discovery of evil and disorder...and his first step toward the mastery" of a self-discipline as he
struggles to assimilate and live with his new knowledge.  

Leslie Fiedler’s definition of initiation (1958) seems to follow from Brooks and Warren’s. To him, initiation is “a fall through knowledge to maturity; behind it there persists the myth of the Garden of Eden, the assumption that to know good and evil is to be done with the joy of innocence and to take on the burdens of work, of childbearing, and death.” Fiedler is correct in identifying myth with the modern interpretation of initiation, for the initiation stories of Welty and many other writers parallel the experiences of their protagonists with those of mythical figures.

Since World War II critical interest in the theme of initiation has been greatly encouraged by the appearance of full-length novels about adolescence by J. D. Salinger, Truman Capote, Vladimir Nabokov, and others. Extensive psychological studies of adolescence have been made by Erik Erikson, Peter Blos, Bruno Bettelheim, Edgar Friedenberg, and Selma Fraiberg. “For better or worse,” write Arthur and Hilda Waldhorn, “the adolescent is one of

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6Leslie Fiedler, "Redemption to Initiation," New Leader, 26 May 1958, p. 22.
the emerging heroes (or, some might argue, anti-heroes) of contemporary literature and culture." Indeed, to "many contemporary writers and psychologists, the adolescent symbolizes the confusion and conflict of the mid-twentieth century." The Waldhorns see initiation occurring when "an apprentice youth faces some physical, intellectual, or emotional conflict that complicates his becoming an adult." Whether his initiation experience "is the transport of first love discovered or the despair of first love lost, or the early stirrings of rebellion against authority, or the newly awakened consciousness of death, the experience is, for an adolescent, fresh and sudden, and its impact upon his sensibility overpowering." The adolescent initiate's life is a dramatic process in which he is "[t]rying to formulate identity on several levels—self, sexual, social, and occupational. . . ." For these reasons, "the adolescent ego commonly vacillates between hope and despair."7 Several stories by Miss Welty, including "A Memory" and "The Winds," depict their young protagonists in such an emotional upheaval.

In the 1960's several studies of initiation in American fiction appeared, in addition to that of the Waldhorns (1966). In "What Is an Initiation Story?" (1960),

Mordecai Marcus offers this definition:

An initiation story may be said to show its young protagonist experiencing a significant change of knowledge about the world or himself, or a change of character, or of both, and this change must point or lead him towards an adult world. It may or may not contain some form of ritual, but it should give some evidence that the change is at least likely to have permanent effects.8

To Marcus's definition Ihab Hassan in Radical Innocence (1961) adds the idea that initiation is frequently an "ordeal" and may often be "painful."

Initiation can be understood... as the first existential ordeal, crisis, or encounter with experience in the life of a youth. Its ideal aim is knowledge, recognition, and confirmation in the world, to which the actions of the initiate, however painful, must tend. It is, quite simply, the viable mode of confronting adult realities.9

William Coyle in The Young Man in American Literature (1969) offers further explanation of the initiation theme:

The youth undergoes an experience that reveals hitherto unrecognized or uncomprehended aspects of the human condition. Modern life and the modern imagination being as they are, his new knowledge is more likely to be unpleasant than otherwise. It does not seem necessary to limit

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the term initiation to stories involving some form of ritual, although ritual is an intrinsic part of the anthropological meaning of initiation.\textsuperscript{10}

These definitions by Marcus, Hassan, and Coyle suggest five central points about the theme of initiation as it involves the women of Eudora Welty and as it will be discussed in this study:

(1) Initiation may involve the end of innocence. (This may be the innocence of childhood or of unawareness in adulthood.) (2) The end of innocence may be viewed as an "existential ordeal, crisis, or encounter with experience" or a series of such incidents with a cumulative effect. (3) Initiation may involve the gaining of knowledge or the possibility of the gaining of knowledge about (a) oneself, (b) the world, (c) oneself in relation to others, which may lead to (d) a change of character and/or "confirmation in the world" of "adult realities." (4) The new knowledge, whatever form it takes, may be unpleasant

\textsuperscript{10}Coyle, "Perspectives," p. 2. Coyle observes that "English has no term equivalent to the German Bildungroman or Erziehungsroman (education-novel) for a story of a young man's encounter with the adult world. In fact, this theme is not restricted to the novel but appears in all forms of literature, particularly in the short story, but less often than one might expect in poetry and drama. Such terms as education, apprenticeship, maturation, and coming-of-age are sometimes used; and if one wished to invent a term, threshold story might do, since the young man usually is poised to enter a new phase of his life. Still, initiation, even though it has been borrowed from anthropology, seems the most appropriate term because it suggests a formative change involving not only pain or loss but also the beginning of a new stage of life" (pp. 1-2).
and even painful. (5) Ritual may be involved.

As Marcus points out, "the name and analytic concept of the initiation story derive basically from anthropology." Primitive cultures often emphasize the rite de passage from the stages of childhood or adolescence to that of maturation and confirmation as full-fledged members of the adult society. Sometimes initiation or puberty ceremonies involve both physical and mental torture, such as the dismemberment of various parts of the body, fasting, isolation, and "indoctrination in secret tribal beliefs." The purpose of such rites, according to anthropologists, is to test the initiate's endurance, ensure his tribal allegiance, and to uphold the power of the adult establishment.\(^{11}\)

Then there is a group of "literary anthropologists" whose belief is that initiation "propitiates the adult or supernatural world" and is "a stage of human life." It is important to note that few initiation stories depict adult society "deliberately testing and indoctrinating the young, or show...the young compelled in a relatively universal manner to enact certain experiences in order to achieve maturity." Ritual is found in some initiation stories, but it is usually of individual rather than of social origin. Education is essential in a story of

\(^{11}\text{Marcus, "What Is an Initiation Story?", p. 29.}\)
initiation, but education usually occurs through experience rather than indoctrination.\textsuperscript{12} This point applies directly to the initiation stories of Eudora Welty in which young persons are educated through experience, not indoctrination.

Ritual may be found in fiction in two forms, according to Marcus: "through the portrayal of the formalized behavior of primitives or folkpeople and through symbols which suggest mythological parallels in people or action."\textsuperscript{13} Of the stories being analyzed in this chapter, "Livvie," with its folk superstitions and Edenic imagery, contains both forms of ritual. Miss Welty's employment of myth is not restricted to this story, however. Throughout \textit{The Golden Apples} she utilizes Greek mythology for symbolic purposes, and "Circe" in \textit{The Bride of the Innis-fallen} is a retelling of a story from the \textit{Odyssey}.

Chester Eisinger, in commenting on Miss Welty's use of myth and legend, makes these statements:

One is more aware of the bright color of myth and legend in her treatment of the past than of the presence of drab fact. She is herself, in fact, as one of her critics has suggested, a legend maker; and when she gets beyond the confines of the South, she is quite willing to enter the realm of world myth. Her utilization of myth, a dimension of her preoccupation with the past, arises from a conviction

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 29-30.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 30.
that mythic patterns are deeply ingrained in the human consciousness and possess therefore a perennial relevance. 14

Various myths have been identified in Miss Welty's stories and novels: Proserpina's descent into hell, the resurrection of Phoenix, the guilt-motif and the Ancient Mariner, the golden apples of antiquity, and the myths of Zeus-Danae-Leda and Perseus and Ulysses. Eisinger explains that Miss Welty does not incorporate any single myth into a story without first modifying the material. She "work[s] by indirection" and "give[s] out hints rather than fully completed analogues. Her practice in the short stories shows her relying on association and allusion more than on direct borrowing." 15

Since her stories of women initiates involve mythical parallels and rituals, any analysis of her stories must take into account her employment of the mythic method in giving order to present existence, a need which T. S. Eliot recognized in his comments on Joyce's Ulysses:

In using the myth in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling,


15 Ibid., p. 263.
of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. . . . Psychology . . . , ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art. . . .

Eliot's "The Waste Land," which made extensive use of Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, was, along with the poetry of Yeats and The Cantos of Ezra Pound, among the forerunners of the "mythical method," Harry C. Morris has observed; and "if Miss Welty is not the first to use the method, she follows it; and she is, to my knowledge, the first to apply it to short fiction and to American regional themes." William M. Jones feels that "Quite consciously Miss Welty has taken the characters common to several mythological systems and translated them into present-day Mississippians."  

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17 Morris, "Eudora Welty's Use of Mythology," p. 35.

Her use of the mythic method may stem not only from her awareness of this tradition in the writings of such modern figures as Eliot, Joyce, and Yeats but also from her awareness of the psychological theories of Freud, Jung, and their disciples. Of course, she is much too subtle an author to use the theories of these men without a transformation of them through the refining force of her imagination. Any manifestation of psychological theories found in Miss Welty's stories will be embedded deeply in concrete figures and situations. Moreover, she is far too elusive ever to admit to the influence of any particular psychological or philosophical school. Her stories have not been uninfluenced by modern thought, and they show evidence, however muted, that she is well read in modern philosophy and psychology. In a 1972 interview she was asked if she has been influenced by any particular psychologist or philosopher, to which she replied:

..I don't think any ideas come to you from other people's minds, when you're writing as directives. You can't take hints and suggestions from this person and that to know where you're going. It's just outside the whole process of writing a story. That all has to come from within. It doesn't mean that you haven't read things and understood things through reading and come to think things through reading that don't filter down and apply. What I mean is you're not using a snippet of Freud and a little piece of Jung or anything like that. .. .19

Perhaps it is not too much to maintain that she has indeed
"read and understood things," especially the theories of
Jung and his school concerning individuation and initia-
tion, that have influenced her writing. Her short stories
(as well as her novels) contain individuals—especially
girls and women—whose initiations are often presented
through symbolic meaning. Like Jung, she finds parallels
between phenomena in modern man's life and that of the
ancient hero. According to Zelma Turner Howard, Miss
Welty "establishes norms of behavior through suggesting
references to such heroic archetypes as Ulysses, Heracles,
or Perseus. Her moral judgement of the protagonist's
behavior becomes evident when he achieves or fails to
achieve his full potential of heroism as did the arche-
typal hero or as he reveals personal inadequacies which
render him incapable of achieving his autonomy." 20

Miss Welty's characterization of women initiates may
perhaps be better understood after a description of the
psychological relationship between the myth of the hero
and the universal pattern of human initiation. Such infor-
mation will help support Miss Howard's assertion that myths
are Eudora Welty's major "rhetorical device" in her

20 Zelma Turner Howard, The Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's
Short Stories (Jackson: University and College Press of
presentation of the "archetypal rite of initiation from innocence into experience.""\textsuperscript{21}

Joseph Henderson, a psychologist of the school of Jung, has explained the parallels between the actions of ancient mythical heroes and those of modern man. Perseus will serve as an example of the pattern of the myth of the hero. His birth was miraculous but humble. He demonstrated early his superhuman strength. He rose rapidly to prominence and power, struggled triumphantly with the forces of evil, and fell victim to the sin of pride (hubris). He experienced punishment by betrayal and finally a "heroic" sacrifice that terminated with his death. According to Henderson, such godlike figures as Perseus, Achilles, and Theseus are of significance for these reasons:

These godlike figures are in fact symbolic representatives of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks. Their special role suggests that the essential function of the hero-myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness—his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses—in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 67.

When the complete hero myth, "the whole cycle from birth to death," is considered, one finds that at each stage in the cycle the hero story evidences "special forms" that parallel not only a specific point reached by the individual in his "ego-consciousness" but also the particular problem facing him at a given time. Thus, Henderson explains, "the image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality." Moreover, the hero image is not synonymous with the ego. By means of the hero image—a symbol—"the ego separates itself from the archetypes evoked by the parental images in early childhood." Jung believes that every person has in infancy "a feeling of wholeness, a powerful and complete sense of the Self. And from the Self—the totality of the psyche—the individualized ego-consciousness emerges as the individual grows up." The emergence of the individual ego does violence to the original feeling of wholeness; ego and Self have constantly to adjust themselves in order to keep the psyche healthy. A sense of autonomy from the original wholeness must be achieved if the individual is to relate to his adult milieu. The hero myth often reveals a degree of liberation occurring. But the hero myth shows only that it is possible for the liberation to take place, "so that the ego may achieve consciousness." The liberation may not necessarily take place, however. After the ego-consciousness is awakened, it must be maintained and developed "in
a meaningful way, so that the individual can live a useful life and can achieve the necessary sense of self-distinc-
tion in society."^{23}

The need for, and the difficulty of, the individual's achieving a balance between the awakened consciousness of selfhood and complete absorption into society is one of the chief themes of Miss Welty's stories—especially of her initiation stories of women. As Henderson points out, liberation of the "ego-consciousness" is not always assured; the parallel of the hero-myth illustrates only the possi-
bility of liberation. In Miss Welty's stories liberation—from innocence to experience—may sometimes be only partial or even unsuccessful.

Individuation may occur only if "young men and women are weaned away from their parents" and become "members of their clan or tribe," Henderson writes. In more sophis-
ticated societies the "weaning" is achieved more gradually and less ritualistically than in tribal societies. In making the break from childhood to adulthood, "the original parent archetype will be injured, and the damage must be made good by a healing process of assimilation into the life of the group." The group becomes a substitute for the injured archetype, a second parent, through a ritual that is very much like symbolical sacrifice. Through this

^{23}Ibid., pp. 128-129.
ritual the initiate returns to the "deepest level of original mother-child identity or ego-Self identity" through which he experiences "a symbolic death." Thus the initiate's "identity is temporarily dismembered or dissolved in the collective unconscious"; then he is brought back from this state by a "new birth" into oneness with the larger group.24 As Louise Y. Gossett has noted, several of Eudora Welty's stories of women initiates follow a pattern of symbolic death and rebirth25—resulting in varying degrees of awakened consciousness, of individuation, and of movement from innocence to experience.

It is significant that the "rite of passage" which Henderson describes—with its symbolism of death and rebirth—accompanies every "stage of life to the next, whether it is from early childhood or from early to late adolescence and from then to maturity." In fact, "every new phase of development throughout an individual's life is accompanied by a repetition of the original conflict between the claims of the Self and the claims of the ego. This conflict may appear strongest, not in adolescence but in the "period of transition from early maturity to middle

24 Ibid., pp. 129-130.

Some of Miss Welty's most interesting stories of women initiates concern those who are no longer adolescents, for example, Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green" and Delia Farrar in "A Sketching Trip."

No matter what the age of the women initiates in Miss Welty's stories, they differ from the heroic figures in myth in that they are not consumed or destroyed in achieving their goals. As a rule her women do not suffer from hubris; usually they undergo a three-part ritual of initiation: (1) They must sacrifice worldly ambition and submit completely to the ordeal. (2) Of their own volition they must experience the trial, without promise of success. (3) They must face the prospect of death (usually symbolic) as part of the ordeal. According to Henderson, the purpose of such a ritual is "to create the symbolic mood of death from which may spring the symbolic mood of rebirth." This initiation process enables the initiate to harmonize his internal conflicts, Miss Howard believes, and allows him to become "truly human and truly the master of himself."

In summary, initiation involves (1) an act of submission, which (2) may lead to a time of containment, and finally (3) to a final "rite of liberation."

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27 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
Submission is an especially important part of the initiation ritual for the woman or girl. A girl's "essential passivity" is emphasized in her initial rite of passage. The menstrual cycle which she must endure is indeed a major "physiological limitation" on her "autonomy." Moreover "it has been suggested that the menstrual cycle may actually be the major part of initiation from a woman's point of view, since it has the power to awaken the deepest sense of obedience to life's creative power over her." The girl thus "willingly" accepts "her womanly function, much as a man gives himself to his assigned role in the community life of his group." However, the girl—or woman—also has her initial trials of strength (as man has in the ancient myths and in human society) and endures a final sacrifice in order to experience the new birth. Henderson describes this sacrifice as enabling "a woman to free herself from the entanglement of personal relations and to fit her for a more conscious role as an individual in her own right," an achievement which Welty records in several of her initiation stories about women. Whereas the woman's sacrifice frees her from dependence solely on personal relations as a basis for her raison d'être and allows her to become a genuine human being, "a man's sacrifice is a surrender of his sacred independence: He becomes more consciously related to woman."\(^{28}\)

\(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 134.
Yet another type of initiation is encountered in the sexual union of male and female. In this ritual man is acquainted with woman and woman with man in a manner that corrects a primal and deep-seated "male-female opposition." To Henderson, the union of man and woman is "represented as that symbolic ritual of a sacred marriage which has been at the heart of initiation since its origins in the mystery-religions of antiquity." This aspect of woman's initiation is represented in some of Miss Welty's stories; however, the institution of marriage itself and the woman's role as wife and mother are not depicted in Welty's stories of initiates but in those of mother-women, another group of women to be discussed in this study.

In addition to analyzing depiction of female initiates according to the characteristics of the archetypal ritual which Henderson has outlined, it will also be useful to utilize Marcus's classifications or types of initiations. First is the tentative type in which the protagonist is led "only to the threshold of maturity and understanding," and fails to cross it definitely. "Such stories," Marcus explains, "emphasize the shocking effect of experience, and their protagonists tend to be distinctly young." Second is the uncompleted type of initiation in which the protagonist definitely achieves maturation and understanding.

29 Ibid.
but is left "enmeshed in a struggle for certainty." Occasionally the protagonist in this kind of initiation story achieves self-discovery. Third is the decisive initiation in which the protagonist definitely and firmly achieves maturity, understanding, and self-discovery.  

Three stories from A Curtain of Green, three from The Wide Net, and one from The Atlantic are especially interesting for demonstrating Eudora Welty's rich and subtle art of characterizing girls and women. The analyses are organized according to the type of initiation involved: tentative, uncompleted, or decisive. The analyses also follow a chronological order from the youngest and least mature initiates to the oldest and most mature. Marian, the fourteen-year-old protagonist of "A Visit of Charity," is both the youngest initiate and the only tentative initiate. The young girl artist in "A Memory," Jenny in "At the Landing," and Josie in "The Winds" are examples of uncompleted initiation; these young women are in their mid-to-late adolescence, although no precise ages are given for them. Twenty-five-year-old Livvie in the story of the same title, Delia Farrar of "A Sketching Trip," and Mrs. Larkin of "A Curtain of Green" are somewhat more mature women (all are in their twenties) whose decisive initiations are analyzed last in this chapter.

30 Marcus, "What Is an Initiation Story?", p. 32.
Tentative Initiation

"A Visit of Charity"

The initiation of fourteen-year-old Marian in "A Visit of Charity" is of the tentative type. She is a Campfire girl who has come to a nursing home for old ladies on a "visit of charity": to bring a potted plant to the old ladies and pay them a visit. If a Campfire girl brings flowers to the Old Ladies' Home, she will earn an extra point, and if she takes a Bible with her on the bus and reads it to the old ladies, her points will be doubled.\footnote{Eudora Welty, A Curtain of Green and Other Stories (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1941), p. 225. All references to the stories in this collection will be placed in the text with the abbreviation CG followed by the page number. Bracketed letters in quotations from Miss Welty's stories indicate slight alterations in tense and capitalization necessary for grammatical clarity within the sentences containing the quoted matter.}

Marian, the reader soon learns, is not a very perceptive girl, although at one point in the story she seems to be capable of perceiving the pathos of the lives of the old people she visits. Her visit has not been motivated by love or concern but by selfishness since she hopes, evidently, to earn a higher rank in the Campfire girls by her act of "charity." Furthermore, her selfish innocence, her lack of knowledge about old people, their loneliness and despair, appears to be the result, almost, of a
conspiracy by society to prevent the young's knowing about the old. (The nursing home is on the outskirts of town, away from the main currents of life where the young would be found.) Moreover, the cold atmosphere of the institution itself (of organized charity itself, perhaps, which seems just as unfeeling as Marian) is evidenced in its exterior which is "of whitewashed brick" that reflects "the winter sunlight like a block of ice" (CG, 220). The nurse in white is crisp and masculine and to Marian looks "as if she [is] cold." The impersonality of the nurse is suggested by the comment she makes on the potted plant Marian has brought with her, "You have a nice multiflora cinereria there" (CG, 221). Instead of calling the chrysanthemum by its more common name, the nurse unwittingly emphasizes her own (and the institution's) coldness and detachment. Appel believes that "the old women have been coldly 'classified' and filed away, seemingly, for all time."\(^32\)

As they walk down the hall of the home while the nurse tries to decide which ladies Marian will visit, the nurse remarks, "There are two in each room." Marian has already heard "behind one of the doors, an old lady of some kind clear [ing] her throat like a sheep bleating."

Marian apparently thinks of the women as sheep, or as something less than human, as she blurts, "Two what?" (CG, 221)

Then Marian is ushered into a room occupied by an elderly woman with a "terrible, square smile and hands like 'bony claws'" and an old woman "lying flat in bed with a cap on and a counterpane drawn up to her chin." Marian is made even more anxious by the darkness of the room and the wet smell. Her imagination is active, however. The drawn window shade and the shut door make her think of "being caught in a robbers' cave, just before one [is] murdered" (CG, 222-223).

Soon the chrysanthemum is "snatched" from Marian, and the ambulatory woman exclaims, "Pretty flowers. . . . Pretty--pretty. . . ." Marian's thoughts at this remark reveal that she has not really considered the recipients of her charity nor the significance of her act, beyond the fact that she will earn a point in the Campfire Girls! "Marian [wished she has] the little pot back just a moment-- she [has] forgotten to look at the plant herself before giving it away. What [does] it look like?" (CG, 223)

Then the bed-ridden woman interjects her presence. The reader and Marian soon learn that the two old women are counter-figures or contraries. "Stinkweeds" cries the bedridden woman sharply. To Marian, "She has a bunchy white forehead and red eyes like a sheep's. . . . and she
bleat[s] . . . ." The animal imagery in this story, especially the description of the one old woman as a sheep and the other as a bird with "bony claws" (CG, 223-224), further emphasizes Marian's lack of understanding of these wretched women as human beings.

The shock of being shut in a room with the old women does affect Marian, however. When asked her name, she cannot remember it, and she answers that she is a Campfire girl. Following Marian's remark there is a grimly comical conversation between the two old ladies, in which one learns that the bedridden woman has not been conditioned to accept the Bible reader as "enjoyable":

"Watch out for the germs," said the old woman like a sheep, not addressing anyone.
"One came out last month to see us," said the first old woman.
A sheep or a germ? wondered Marian dreamily, holding onto the chair.
"Did not!" cried the other old woman.
"Did so! Read to us out of the Bible, and we enjoyed it!" screamed the first.
"Who enjoyed it!" said the woman in bed.
Her mouth was unexpectedly small and sorrowful, like a pet's.
"We enjoyed it," insisted the other.
"You enjoyed it--I enjoyed it."
"We all enjoyed it," said Marian, without realizing that she had said a word (CG, 224).

The bedridden woman argues that she is not sick and that she has more sense than the other old woman. The first old woman whispers, "That's only the contrary way she talks when you all come." Then the first old woman reaches out (leaning over in her rocking chair) and touches Marian. Her hand feels "like a petunia leaf,
clinging and just a little sticky." She confides in Marian, "'When I was a little girl like you, I went to school and all" (CG, 226). Then the bedridden woman tells the first old woman to hush and erupts in words of despair, hate, and frustration, directed at the first old woman:

"...You never went to school. You never came and you never went. You never were anything—only here. You never were born! You don't know anything. Your head is empty, your heart and hands and your old black purse are all empty, even that little old box that you brought with you you brought empty—you showed it to me. And yet you talk, talk, talk, talk, talk all the time until I think I'm losing my mind! Who are you? You're a stranger—a perfect stranger! Don't you know you're a stranger? Is it possible that they have actually done a thing like this to anyone—sent them in a stranger to talk, and rock, and tell away her whole long rigmarole? Do they seriously suppose that I'll be able to keep it up, day in, day out, night in, night out, living in the same room with a terrible old woman—forever?" (CG, 226-227)

In one fierce and terrible speech the bedridden woman had defined her own life and that of her roommate, trapped, forgotten, penniless, unloved, unwanted, without past or future. As far as their lives are concerned, they "never were anything—only here," only residents of the Old Ladies' Home. The bedridden woman has further described her own sense of frustration at lying helpless in a room occupied by a woman who is ambulatory (a small blessing) and of whom the bedridden woman is jealous. The bedridden woman has also exposed the pathetic poverty of the ambulatory woman, stripped her seemingly, of pride and dignity.
The last line of the passage previously quoted suggests that the quality of the lives of these old women, walled up in a room together to live out their lives, is like that in Sartre's *No Exit*, an everlasting hell.

The first old woman cackles that the bedridden woman is angry because it is her birthday, and evidently she has been forgotten. Marian draws close to the edge of the bed of the bedridden woman. And it is at this moment that Marian, upon whom the pathos of the scene has made little impression up to now, seems nearest to establishing some human contact with the old woman:

"How old are you?" Marian breathed. Now she could see the old woman in bed very closely and plainly, and very abruptly, from all sides, as in dreams. She wondered about her—she wondered for a moment as though there was nothing else in the world to wonder about. It was the first time such a thing had happened to Marian. Italics mine.

"I won't tell!"

The old face on the pillow, where Marian was bending over it, slowly gathered and collapsed. Soft whimpers came out of the small open mouth. It was a sheep that she sounded like—a little lamb. Marian's face drew very close, the yellow hair hung forward.

"She's crying!" She turned a bright, burning face up to the first old woman (CG, 228-229).

Marian's momentary identification with the old bedridden woman, an identification that occurs accidentally because of the girl's childish interest in birthdays, shows that she is capable of sympathy and even of empathy—but not for long. Becoming frightened and self-conscious again, the girl rushes from the room, but not before the
first old woman clutches her and begs, "in an affected, high-pitched whine, 'Oh, little girl, have you a penny to spare for a poor old woman that's not got anything of her own? We don't have a thing in the world--not a penny for candy--not a thing! Little girl, just a nickel--a penny--"" (CG, 229). Her poverty exposed by her bedridden roommate, the first old woman is now reduced to begging.

To Miss Welty the old women seem to symbolize lonely and suffering old age, isolated and neglected by society, which fails even to teach its young about old age, final illness and death. Marian's horror at what she discovers in the Old Ladies' Home is not unlike that which the inhabitants of Huxley's Brave New World, protected from the realities of human mortality, experience when they are confronted with the bloated and diseased body of Linda, who has returned from the Indian Reservation.

Once outside the Old Ladies' Home, Marian takes refuge in her youth and good health and is confirmed in her self-absorption as she stoops and retrieves from under a prickly shrub (her sharp selfishness?) "a red apple she had hidden there." Marian's means of escape is the bus, and she jumps on and takes "a big bite out of the apple." The Golden Rule is meaningless to Marian, and her "visit of charity" is only a visit of selfishness.

Marian's initiation is clearly of the tentative type, for she is led "to the threshold of maturity and
understanding" but does not cross it. "A Visit of Charity" confronts its young protagonist with the ugly effects of experience, but as Alfred Appel has commented, "rather than an understanding of the reality of the shut-in's world, the insensitive and point-seeking Campfire girl has brought with her a sense of the callous indifference and unconscious cruelty with which the young too often treat the aged." She achieves no liberation, no individuation, for she is unable to empathize with the old ladies, to perceive their common humanity. Doubtlessly protected since childhood from life's ugly realities, Marian is not prepared to be initiated into the life of the group. At the end of the story, Marian has regained her composure; once more, Appel concludes, "the egoism of the child reasserts itself. She is once again 'protected' against human involvement. . . . The story's controlling irony is implicit in its title; Marian's visit is not in the least 'charitable,' and the home--supposedly a haven--is rather a hell. 'A Visit of Charity' is remarkable for the way in which its comic, satiric, and grotesque effects all contribute to a deeply felt sense of pathos."33

The idea of the Old Ladies' Home being a "hell" has been explored in some detail by Lodwick Hartley, who affirms the presence of myth in Marian's initiation

33 Ibid., p. 42.
experience. Hartley has traced the influence of the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Inferno on Welty's depiction of Marian's descent into the underworld—her visit to the nursing home. Her experience is that "of contact of the living with the living dead." The potted plant that she carries is a talisman, like the Golden Bough which gave Aeneas the power to withstand encounters with terrible specters as he entered the underworld. The plant enables Marian to confront the terrifying elderly women of the Home. The significance of the flower as a talisman is emphasized by Marian's not surrendering the flower willingly; the nurse has to snatch it from her hand. Marian is quite frustrated when the flower—her talisman—is set on top a high chest out of her reach.34

There are many additional mythological parallels which Hartley has discovered. Mythical characters and incidents are often paralleled with non-mythical elements in stories of initiation. For example, Marian's story of initiation brings to mind Proserpina, who, like Marian, has yellow hair; also Marian's hair is described as "straight"—suggesting Proserpina and the vegetation goddess of Greek myth whose yellow hair symbolizes grain. The potted plant becomes a passport for Marian (as the Golden Bough for Aeneas) in her voyage across the Acheron: "There was

loose, bulging linoleum on the floor. Marian felt as if she were walking on the waves, but the nurse paid no attention to it. In this interpretation Marian is the "passenger" and the indifferent "boatman" is the nurse. The "bleating" noises that Marian hears as she enters the hall of the Home can be compared with "the wails that earthly visitors traditionally hear before they actually enter the underworld proper."35

The damp, dark room of the old ladies, their screeches and personal conflicts "suggest the most disagreeable aspect of human life which Dante saw perpetuated in the after-life," Hartley maintains. "And, indeed, Miss Welty suggests that the old women will go on forever in their horror just as Dante's sinners go in Inferno." When Marian flees, the attendant stops her to ask, "Why won't you stay and have dinner with us?" This invitation parallels an important incident in the Proserpina story: that eating in the underworld subjected the visitor to retention there. Thus "Marian's recognition of the fact and her rejection of it are instinctive and immediate."36

Escaping the confines of the Home, Marian retrieves an apple from beneath a prickly bush, which may represent the "gloomy wood that traditionally stretched at the very


36Ibid., p. 353.
gates of the underworld as well, perhaps, as the dark wood in which Dante wandered at the opening of the Inferno." The apple, Hartley believes, may represent Proserpina's eating four seeds of the pomegranate, a type of apple. In Marie de France's Lay of Guingamor the fruit of the apple tree is "the element of control between the lower and the upper world." Marian's apple may also symbolize such an element of control between two worlds. Since she is young and is not committed to the underworld, she partakes of the apple in "a desperate affirmation" of her belonging to the mortal world.37

Hartley's suggestions of mythic parallels are interesting and suggestive of the possibility of "the informing influence of myth subconsciously at work in the artist," but his excusing Marian's rejection of the old women--examples of "death-in-life or the living dead"--overlooks the central theme of "A Visit of Charity": Marian's refusal to love the old women.

Charles May has a more satisfying explanation for the apple symbol in relation to the theme of love in "A Visit of Charity." He believes that Marian may be regarded as a type of Eve and that she (like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) develops "an awareness of her own separateness" in partaking of the apple. Erich Fromm's

37Ibid., pp. 353-354.
interpretation of Adam and Eve's discovery of their separateness is that they strengthened their loneliness as "strangers" by failing to learn to love each other. Thus the word charity in the title of the story means love although the theme is the difficulty of loving or the failure to love. Marian has her first confrontation with unloved people in the Old Ladies' Home: "Marian's visit is her first experience with the difficulty of loving." Moreover, her experience reminds the reader at once "of the Old Testament loss of man's oneness" in Adam and Eve's fall from the garden and of "the difficulty of following the New Testament message of how man might heal that division—through love."38

In defining brotherly love, Erich Fromm has written: "In order to experience this identity it is necessary to penetrate from the periphery to the core. If I perceive in another person mainly the surface, I perceive the differences, that which separates us. If I penetrate to the core, I perceive our identity, the fact of our brotherhood."39 Marian's failure is that she cannot or will not see beyond the surface of the two old women's lives in order to love them and obey the biblical command, "'Love

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Finding herself in a new, unfamiliar, and terrible world in the Old Ladies' Home, she not only feels the strangeness of the old ladies but is also "a stranger to herself." The motif of "strangeness" or of people being strangers is further emphasized by the relationship of the two old ladies, roommates, who are complete strangers to each other and do not love one another. 40

Therefore, in biting into the apple at the end of the story, Marian shows that "nothing is solved" and that she "has learned nothing." 41 May's remark seems to suggest, then, that Marian's initiation is of the tentative type.

If Marian demonstrates the difficulty of obeying the New Testament injunction to love one's neighbor, her unconcerned bite into the apple is a striking symbol of her failing to "feed" the "sheep" or "lambs," which the old women are called in the story. She has refused to give the apple to Addie, who has asked for a gift (implicitly asking for love); symbolically Marian has refused to share her love. 42 In her self-centered state Marian is

41 Ibid., p. 341.
42 Ibid.
not prepared to face—or to answer—the haunting questions put forth by unloved old Addie: "Who are you? You're a stranger—a perfect stranger! Didn't you know you're a stranger?" (CG, 227)

Uncompleted Initiation

"A Memory"

"A Memory" is one of several stories in A Curtain of Green that contains an adolescent initiate. Katherine Anne Porter was the first to comment that "there might be something of early personal history in the story of the child on the beach, alienated from the world of adult knowledge by her state of childhood." The girl, who remains nameless, undergoes an initiation of the second type, the uncompleted. According to Marcus, this type of initiation leads the protagonist to maturation and understanding but leaves him searching for "certainty." 

The point of view in "A Memory" is important. Miss Welty presents the story in the first person. Her narrator is an adult woman who, according to Zelma Turner Howard, "from her present safe state of maturity recalls her first step from childhood into early young womanhood."  

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44Marcus, "What Is an Initiation Story?," p. 32.
45Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 50.
Wayne C. Booth believes that an author's "manipulation of point of view can reveal the meaning of a work," and, as Miss Howard points out, in "A Memory" the protagonist tells the narrative from her own point of view "as it arises out of [her] awakened consciousness or what almost becomes [her] stream-of-consciousness." 

At the very beginning of the story the narrator tells the reader that she is looking back to the time when she was a girl and "lay on the sand after swimming in the small lake in the park." Her art lessons have begun to shape the way she looks at the world:

> From my position I was looking at a rectangle brightly lit, actually glaring at me, with sun, sand, water, a little pavilion, a few solitary people in fixed attitudes, and around it all a border of dark rounded oak trees. Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look out at everything (CG, 147).

The narrator's carefully-guarded vision becomes an instrument of protection as she "form[s] a judgment upon every person and every event which came under [her] eye." She admits that she is "easily frightened" of the unpleasant or unexpected (CG, 148). Furthermore, she explains that her parents lovingly shield and protect her from the ugliness of experience:

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When a person, or a happening, seemed to me not in keeping with my opinion, or even my hope or expectation, I was terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness which tore my heart with a kind of sorrow. My father and mother, who believed that I saw nothing in the world which was not strictly coaxed into place like a vine on our garden trellis to be presented to my eyes, would have been badly concerned if they had guessed how frequently the weak and inferior and strangely turned examples of what was to come showed themselves to me (CG, 148).

The young girl waits and looks, an onlooker and not a participant in the bustling life she sees about her. She states that she does not know what she is looking for, "but in those days I was convinced that I almost saw it at every turn." She becomes obsessive about looking: "To watch everything about me I regarded grimly and possessively as a need." With her hands squared like a framing device over her eyes, the girl sees everything "as a kind of projection." She feels that the secret mystery of life is concealed in each person, "and from the smallest gesture of a stranger I would wrest what was to me a communication or a presentiment" (CG, 148-149).

The narrator also explains that she was in love then with a boy at her school. She never expresses her passion; it exists entirely in her mind. She and the boy "never exchange...a word or even a nod of recognition." Her most enduring memory of him is that one day on the stairs at school she touches his wrist by accident, but he does not seem to notice. She would dream repeatedly of this
encounter. . . on the stairs, until it would swell with a sudden and overwhelming beauty, like a rose forced into premature bloom for a great occasion" (CG, 149).

Thus begins the narrator's "dual life, as observer and dreamer." She feels so intensely that everything she witnesses must have "absolute conformity" to her ideas that at school she "sits perpetually alert, fearing for the untoward to happen." But she learns her first major lesson about reality: that one cannot prevent its chance intervention. The boy she loves develops a nosebleed and rushes from the room. She faints, she says, as a result of "this small happening which close[s] in upon my friend" and which becomes "a tremendous shock" to her. The shock of this event is even greater than one would at first think. The narrator asks, "Does this explain why, ever since that day, I have been unable to bear the sight of blood?" (CG, 150)

Not knowing where the boy lives or what his parents are like, the girl is constantly uneasy about him; she worries about his parents' being "crippled" or "dead" and of the possibility of his house "catching fire in the night and that he might die." Enshrouded in her sense of mystery about him, the girl concentrates so deeply on observing the boy that even years afterward "she could reproduce the clumsy weave, the exact shade of faded blue in his sweater. I remember," she says, "how he used to swing
his foot as he sat at his desk—softly, barely not touching the floor. Even now it does not seem trivial" (CG, 151).

It is, then, an explanation of her habit of observation and an account of her first love that the author presents in the first part of the narrative. The transition to the second half, which presents the point of conflict, is made with this statement: "I still would not care to say which was more real—the dream I could make blossom at will, or the sight of the bathers. I am presenting them, you see, only as simultaneous" (CG, 151). The narrator, Zelma Turner Howard believes, has thus described "her world of illusion" and proceeds to describe "the world of reality."^8

The bathers of which the narrator speaks are, in addition to the boy's nosebleed, the second—and most major—example of the intervention of unsought reality and experience in the girl's life. A man, two women, and two young boys make up the group of bathers who appear suddenly on the beach beside the dreaming girl. To her they appear to be "squirming, ill-assorted people who seem... thrown together only by the most confused accident, and who seem...driven by foolish intent to insult each other, all of which they enjoy with a hilarity which astonishes her heart." The people are of the class called "common" when the narrator was a girl. Their bathing suits reveal

^8Ibid., pp. 52-53.
exactly "the energy" and "the fatigue of their bodies." The older boy "protrudes from his costume at every turn." With "darting, sly glances...he clumsily around the others, inflicting pinches, kicks, and idiotic sounds upon them." The younger boy is "thin and defiant" and is constantly being annoyed by the older boy (CG, 152-154).

The three adults are even more disturbing than the children as they lie in "leglike confusion together." The man's arms are flabby, and desultorily he scoops sand around the older woman's legs. The older woman is fat, unnaturally white, and wears "a bathing suit which has no relation to the shape of her body." Moreover, "[her] breasts hang heavy and widening like pears into her bathing suit. Her legs prone one on the other like shadowed bulwarks, uneven and deserted, upon which, from the man's hand, the sand pile[s] higher like the teasing threat of oblivion." Meanwhile the older woman laughs repeatedly. The younger woman, lying at the man's feet, is "curled tensely upon herself." She is wearing "a bright green bathing suit like a bottle from which she might," it appears, "burst in a rage of churning smoke." She seems to contain "genie-like rage." The two boys meanwhile run among the adults, "pinching them indiscriminately and pitching sand into the man's roughened hair as though they are not afraid of him. The protagonist seems surprised
to note "that they are all resigned to each other's daring and ugliness" (CG, 152-154).

She also senses that though no words are spoken among the group, they somehow seem to be communicating with each other "in the confusion of vulgarity and hatred which twine among them all like a wreath of steam rising from the wet sand." She is especially shocked when the man takes a handful of crumbling sand and "pours it down inside the woman's bathing suit "between her bulbous descending breasts." There the sand hangs, brown and shapeless, making them all laugh." The others howl with laughter. "The man smile[s], the way panting dogs seem to be smiling, and gaze[s] about carelessly at them all and out over the waters. He even look[s] at me, and include[s] me," the narrator remarks. Stunned, she returns the look, wishing them all dead (CG, 154).

Finally the younger woman chases the children toward the water. The older boy whirls through the air and onto a nearby bench, from which he jumps, "heavy and ridiculous," into the sand below. The young woman comes "running toward the bench as though she would destroy it, and with a fierceness which takes my breath away," the narrator notes, "she drag[s] herself through the air and jump[s] over the bench" (CG, 155). Such active verbs in this passage as whirl, dash, churn, tumble, running, and drag suggest the impact that the electric, fierce, and
capricious physical movements of the bathers make upon the girl.

The ugly reality of the bathers is too much for the girl, and she closes her eyes and tries, she says, to "withdraw to my most inner dream, that of touching the wrist of the boy I love... on the stair." The sweetness which surrounds this memory in her mind soon comes to her, "but the memory itself [does] not come to me... . I do not know, any longer, the meaning of my happiness: it [holds] me unexplained" (CG, 155-156). The unexpected, chance happenings of reality have permanently dislodged her escapist daydream. But she cannot then explain why.

When she looks again at the bathers, the fat woman pulls "down the front of her bathing suit, turning it outward, so that the lumps of mashed and folded sand c[0]me emptying out." The girl feels "a peak of horror, as though the woman's breasts themselves ha[ve] turned to sand, as though they[are] of no importance at all and she [does] not care" (CG, 156). If the intertwined bodies of the bathers on the beach represent, as Ruth Vande Kieft believes, "wildness, chaos, abandonment of every description, a total loss of dignity, privateness, identity," and "destruction of form," then the girl's horror at the woman's turning the sand out of the bosom of her bathing suit represents "a final threat to human existence itself." The protagonist thus "has a premonition that without form--
the kind she has been imposing on reality by her device of framing things like a picture—there is for human beings no dignity or identity, that beyond the chaos of matter lies oblivion, total meaninglessness."49 As the girl emerges from the "protection" of her dream and the "undefined austerity of [her] love," she feels "victimized" and weeps at the sight of "the small worn, white pavilion" which no longer represents an ordered part of the protective picture she once framed with her fingers (CG, 156-157).

The last sentence of the last paragraph of the story, "That was my last morning on the beach," seems to represent the end of the morning of the girl's life and of her unprotected life as dreamer upon what Robert Penn Warren has called the first "glistening auroral beach of the world."50 She thinks ahead to the return to school in the winter, and she imagines the boy she loves "walking into a classroom" where she will watch "with this hour on the beach accompanying her recovered dream and added to [her] love" (CG, 157). She knows then that he will look back, "speechless and innocent," and than stare "out the window, solitary and unprotected."


What has the narrator learned in her initiation? To Zelma Turner Howard, "the narrator realizes that she has failed to communicate, to make the recipient of her love aware of either her emotions or her existence. She is also cognizant that she has been even less able to relate than have the ugly, ill assorted people whose warmth of relationship in their complete awareness "twine[s] among them all." At the end of the story, "her state of innocent unreality ha[s] been tempered with reality, while her young love remain[s] innocent . . . of the hurt of awareness which [is] yet to come." 51

The universality of this story is suggested by J. A. Bryant, Jr., who feels that "[a]nyone who has visited such a beach will recognize these bathers and possibly deplore them, but the story does not ask us either to laugh or to condemn. It does not ask us to side with the girl." 52 The author's carefully controlled, detached point of view simply presents the situation. However, most critics do not agree with Bryant's conclusion that the story does not "try to persuade us that the girl has achieved a real understanding of her experience. . . ." 53

51 Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 54.

52 J. A. Bryant, Jr., Eudora Welty, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 66 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), p. 8.

53 Ibid.
The narrator has told us that in the future she will watch her friend at school "with this hour on the beach accompanying my recovered dream and added to my love." Although the process of "rebirth" or initiation is frequently painful, especially for one so young, the girl has indeed begun to come to grips with the world of unaesthetic and disorganized humanity represented in the bathers on the beach. Complete awareness of the world of adult reality, however, has not been achieved by the girl. She still does not understand the world of adult love since at present she can only dream of loving the boy and is content to worship him from afar. Nevertheless, after the incident on the beach she seems much more aware of the existential chaos of life and of the "solitary and unprotected" life of the boy she loves. Liberation in the sense that Henderson employs the term seems quite possible for the girl in "A Memory."

As Chester Eisinger has pointed out, Miss Welty does not lament "innocence lost in the chaos of experience." In fact, "it is experience which accounts for the mystery of personality, a mystery which, at its most profound depths, leads us to the secret of life itself."^54 In "A Visit of Charity" Marian flees in fear from the experience, the knowledge, of human frailty, incoherence, and

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54 Fiction of the Forties, p. 270.
loneliness embodied in the lives of the old ladies in the nursing home. She insulates herself against experience with her childish (and also selfish) innocence. Her initiation is certainly of the tentative type while that of the girl in "A Memory" is uncompleted. She partially recognizes what Eisinger calls "the vitality of human beings," a "life force" which makes "intense claims" upon humanity, \(^{55}\) but there is finally an uncertainty in her outlook toward this life-force, which another young girl, Jenny Lockhart, in "At the Landing" comes somewhat nearer to understanding.

"At the Landing"

Jenny has been reared by her elderly grandfather in a village, The Landing, which has been flooded many times by a nearby river. Soon after the story opens, Grandfather Lockhart dies, and she summons courage to descent into the village and report his death. Meanwhile Jenny has met and fallen in love with virile, wildly handsome Billy Floyd, a local fisherman. A flood comes, and Jenny is rescued by Billy Floyd, who rows her away in his boat and seduces her after he has saved her life. The flood subsiding, Jenny returns to The Landing to clean the flood debris from her dead grandfather's old house, and in doing so, realizes that she must go in search of Billy Floyd. When she comes

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
to the river and asks for him, she is raped by the fishermens.

The power of this beautiful and difficult story derives from its unusual use of the initiation theme with mythical and archetypal overtones. Jenny's initiation is an important example of the uncompleted type, as will be shown. According to Eisinger, "At the Landing" demonstrates "what happens when the forces of nature...life forces, are unleashed upon a character who cannot accommodate herself to them."^56

In his dreams the night that he die[s], Grandfather Lockhart, a rigid and resolute old aristocrat, visualizes the flood that is to come later in the story. He arises and comes to Jenny's room to tell her about it; as he enters her room "he reach[e] as if to lift an obstacle that...is stretched there--the bar that crossed the door in her mother's time." Grandfather is wearing a brocade robe which seems "to weigh upon his fragile walking like a chain, and yet it could have been by inexorable will that he [wears] it, so set [are] his little steps, in such duty he drag[s] it."^57 The pattern of imagery is of locks,

^56 Ibid., p. 271.


All references to the stories in this collection will be placed in the text in with the abbreviation WN followed by the page number.
bars, cords, suggesting being bound, locked up, inhibited, kept within limits, which is precisely what has occurred to Jenny in her grandfather's house. Perhaps the family name itself—Lockhart—suggests the grandfather's locked heart, which has caused him to deny Jenny's mother the passionate life for which she yearned and to isolate his granddaughter, whom he has reared.

The Lockhart house itself, a decaying old house (mildly suggestive of the Grierson mansion in "A Rose for Emily") situated on a hill above the town, symbolizes the family's elevated position as aristocracy and also isolation from the town below. The grandfather's frail old age, the granddaughter's shyness, and the fact that they are "both too good" (according to the old ladies in the village) cause them to stay inside (WN, 180).

Jenny is thus trapped, as Appel asserts, "in the house of tradition, pride, and death." In the parlor hangs one of Jenny's mother's paintings, "The Massacre at Fort Rosalie." Since she is cut off from the townspeople, her habitation may be seen as a fort which walls her in from the outside world.58

One night before his death, Jenny and her grandfather eat together, as is their custom, in a pavilion on a knoll overlooking the river valley. The pavilion is shadowed

58 Season of Dreams, p. 188.
by an "ancient circling thorny rose, like the initial let-
ter in a poetry book," suggesting further the restricted
life which Grandfather Lockhart has forced first upon his
daughter and then upon his granddaughter. As the grand-
father and granddaughter sit at the table smiling at each
other, an act of "long habit," the detached narrator ex-
plains the parallel between Jenny and her dead mother:

But her grandfather could not look at her
without speculation in his eyes, and the gaze
that went so fondly between them held and
stretched tight the memory of Jenny's mother.
It seemed strange that her mother had been
dead now for so many years and yet the wild
desire that had torn her seemed still fresh
and still a small thing. It was a desire to
get to Natchez. People said Natchez was a
nice little town on Saturdays with a crowd
filling it and moving around.

. . . He deprecated raving simply as raving,
as a force of Nature and so beneath notice or
mention. And yet—even now, too late—if
Jenny could plead. . . ! In a heat wave one
called the cook to bring a fan, and in his
daughter's first raving he rang a bell and
told the cook to take her off and sit by
her until she had done with it, but in the
end she died of it. But Jenny could not
plead for her (WN, 182-183).

Later, in section three of the story, Jenny enters a small
room that had been "her mother's last room"—evidently
before her death. Jenny thinks of her mother "who was kept
guard on there, who struggled unwearily and all in lone-
liness. . . ." (WN, 204). Evidently in her "ravings"
Jenny's mother was locked up in her room (as she had been
at an earlier time when she occupied the larger bedroom
which had later been Jenny's, next to her grandfather's
room), a rather gothic detail suggesting Rochester's mad wife in *Jane Eyre*.

Perhaps now the grandfather is remorseful that he did not take his daughter's "raving" more seriously, for it killed her. The memory of her death is "still fresh" to him. Obviously he could not understand Jenny's mother's desire for people and activity, so attached is he to his life of quiet solitude at The Landing. His pride is established by the fact that he despises female screams and hysteria "as a force of Nature," as uncivilized and therefore "beneath notice or mention" (*WN*, 183). His pride may also have prevented his seeking outside help for his "raving" daughter.

Although "At the Landing" is Jenny's story, one must nevertheless understand her grandfather and her relationship to him in order to understand her. She is entirely submissive to him:

> Her grandfather, frail as a little bird, would say when it was time to go in. He would rise slowly in the brocade gown he wore to study in, and put his weight, which was the terrifying weight of a claw, on Jenny's arm. Jenny was obedient to her grandfather and would have been obedient to anybody, to a stranger in the street if there could be one. She never performed any act, even a small act, for herself . . . It might seem that nothing began in her own heart (*WN*, 183).

The result of her grandfather's domination over his is a completely passive will. She has not even been capable of that last hysterical, rebellious raving which had destroyed her mother. When her grandfather dies, Jenny automatically
transfers her submissiveness to the nearest strang male, 
who happens to be Billy Floyd, the young man introduced 
at the beginning of the story as the grandfather describes 
his dream to Jenny:

"The river has come back. That Floyd came to tell me. The sun was shining full on 
the face of the church, and that Floyd came around it with his wrist hung with a great 
long catfish. 'It's coming,' he said. 'It's the river.' Oh, it came then! Like a head 
and arm. Like a horse. A mane of cedar trees tossing over the top. It has borne down, and 
it has closed us in. That Floyd was right. . . . That Floyd's catfish has gone loose and 
free. . . . And all of a sudden. . . it took its river life back, and shining so brightly 
swam through the belfry of the church and 
downstream" (WN, 178-179).

Billy is a symbol of freedom and of the life-forces, esp-
ecially fecundity. The catfish that he holds across his 
wrist as he comes through town may be a phallic symbol, 
"his easily and naturally expressed sexuality" (like the 
flood which he presages), as Appel has pointed out.59
Billy may be seen as a river god; but, as Robert Penn 
Warren has suggested, Billy is also a field god.60 Whatever he is, Jenny has been expressly forbidden by her grand-
father ever to speak to him.

59Ibid.

60Robert Penn Warren, "Love and Separateness in Miss 
p. 166.
The characterization of Billy is an example of Welty's use of the mythic method. Billy is a wildly attractive young man about whose origin there is a good deal of conjecture among the old people in the village. Some believe that he has the wild blood of a Natchez Indian, though the Natchez had long been extinct, "massacred." One old lady believes that the Natchez were "the people from the lost Atlantis" who escaped from the flood "when the island went under." Such conjectures, of course, help emphasize the fabulous and mysterious qualities of this godlike creature and establish his mythic proportions in the story. The most sensible assumption is that "he is really the bastard of one of the old checker-players, that has been let grow up away in the woods until he got big enough to come back and make trouble." Like a field-god, "he could scent coming things like an animal...." His life in nature has exposed him to the sun, which "has burned his skin dark and his hair light, till he appears golden in the road" (WN, 207-208).

Jenny's initiation may be said to begin when she first sees Billy Floyd. The narrator comments, "And if in each day a moment of hope must come, in Jenny's day the moment was when the rude wild Floyd walked through The Landing carrying the big fish he had caught" (WN, 184). The story of Jenny's initiation is rich in mythic and archetypal connotations. Billy Floyd, as has already been pointed out
is a symbol of sexual potency. Jenny is first attracted to him because he is "in the world." The river has formed a new channel three miles from the town called The Landing, but now and then it returns and floods the town. Whenever a flood comes, Billy Floyd apparently precedes the flood in the town as a harbinger. When the flood arrives, Jenny is brought "into the world," for she must join the townspeople on the highest point above the river. When he carries Jenny away from the group of townspeople huddling at the edge of the water on a hill and violates her, Billy Floyd, in his sexual potency, is a symbolic extension of the flood itself. To Appel, "Billy Floyd represents the beauty of Eros; a network of sexual symbols proclaims his role in the story."61

Miss Welty employs the motif of life-death pairing in relating Jenny's story. Jenny is a loving, though passive, young girl who resides in a house of death. When she first meets Billy face to face she has obtained permission to visit her mother's grave. Billy, who represents the free, unrestrained forces of life, is ironically encountered initially in a place of death, a cemetery. The second time they meet, he stands in a sunny pasture with the Lockhart horse; she stands in the cemetery. The description of the scene in which this second meeting takes place

61 Season of Dreams, p. 189.
is noteworthy for its lyrical beauty, evoking the mood of awakened love in springtime; although she stands among graves, Jenny is aware only of life, not of death:

. . . The pasture, the sun and the grazing horse were on his side, the graves on hers, and they each looked across at the other's. The whole world seemed filled with butterflies. At each step they took, two black butterflies over the flowers were whirring just alike, suspended in the air, one circling the other rhythmically, or both moving from side to side in a gentle wave-like way, one above the other. They were blueblack and moving their wings faster than Jenny's eye could follow, always together, like each other's shadow, beautiful each one with the other. Jenny could see to start with that no kiss had ever brought love tenderly enough from mouth to mouth.

Jenny and Floyd stopped and looked for a little while at all the butterflies and they never touched each other. When Jenny did touch Floyd, touch his sleeve, he started (WN, 187).

On a previous day, when Jenny had encountered Billy for the first time, (their meetings are always "tender and tentative," according to Appel62), she had watched him walk through the pasture, stoop at the spring for a drink of water, and then throw "himself yawning down into the grass" for a nap. In the deep grass all Jenny could see of Billy was "the one arm flung out in the torn sleeve, straight, sun-blacked and motionless" (WN, 186).

As Ruth Vande Kieft has explained perceptively, Jenny gradually learns about love, "its mysteries and changes, and the mystery of human identity. These

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62Ibid.
revelations come to her by seeing, feeling, and guessing—by intuitive perception." For example, watching Billy that first day involved in innocent, physical acts (walking, drinking water, falling asleep), Jenny knows "dimly that her innocence has left her, since she could watch his... But if innocence has left, she still does not know what is to come" (WN, 186). Miss Vande Kieft explains this passage in this way: "... a knowledge of innocence presupposes some knowledge of experience, of what might not be innocence, out of which contrast springs the recognition of innocence." Jenny's initiation into the world of adult feeling has begun, but she is doomed to acquire only incomplete knowledge of it.

Jenny discovers the mystery of human personality, of "love and separateness," first identified in Miss Welty's stories by Robert Penn Warren. The knowledge that Billy "lives apart in delight," from her life or those in the village, can "make a strange flow fall over the field where he is, and the world go black for her, left behind." What she gains is a kind of "moral knowledge of a mystery that is in the other heart." The mystery of personality is "a fragile mystery... in everyone and in

63 Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 42.
64 Ibid.
herself." She is frightened by the prospect of hurting another (or of being hurt) when the mystery of personality is not completely understood, as it can never be (or should be), Miss Welty seems to feel. To Jenny, as to other Welty characters, "the secrecy of life was the terror of it" (WN, 189).

There are symbolic suggestions in the descriptions of Billy's riding the Lockhart horses. As he rides, Jenny lies in the grass. She thinks that "he might even have jumped across her." Appel believes that Jenny transforms Billy's "'riding' in anticipatory thoughts of the male and female sexual postures," in Miss Welty's words, "the vaunting and the prostration of love" (WN, 189).

If Jenny's initiation story records her symbolic rebirth from death into life, the rebirth occurs in a first definite, physical manner after her grandfather's death. For the first time Jenny goes forth "into the world," even though it is no further than the village store at the foot of the hill. There she finds Billy Floyd, whose wild good looks now seem unattractive to Jenny within the cramped walls of the store. Cut off from the out-of-doors, from the beauty of trees, waters, and grass, he seems "a different man." Standing "in the dim and dingy store with a row of filmy glass lamps and a pair of boots behind his

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66 Season of Dreams, p. 189.
head, . . . there was something close, gathering-close and used and worldly about him." To Jenny the "something handled and used about him" partakes even of "the odor of the old playing cards that the old men of The Landing shuffled every day over their table in the street" (WN, 194). Thus Billy is implicitly the life force, meant to be free and uncircumscribed by space or by the materialistic paraphernalia of modern life, symbolized by the goods in the store. Jenny leaves Billy in the store, preferring her vision of the Billy of the forest and river. Soon after he leaves the village, only to return with the flood about which her grandfather had dreamed.

The continuing process of Jenny's symbolic rebirth is paralleled by the arrival of the flood, which suggests childbirth and motherhood. Daily the storm clouds open "like great purple flowers" and pour out "their dark thunder." At night the storm is "laid down on their houses like a burden the day has carried. . . ." When the river reaches the village, it comes "like a hand and arm. . . , whirling and bobbing the young dead animals around on its roaring breast. . . ." Boat whistles begin crying as faint as baby cries in that rainy dark" (WN, 199). When Jenny returns home after the flood has receded, the old mansion "seems to draw its galleries to itself, to return to its cave of night and trees,

67 Ibid., p. 191.
crouched like a child going backwards to the womb" (WN, 203-204).

Rescuing her from the flood, Billy takes Jenny to high ground above her ancestors' graves. When she tries to articulate her gratitude for his saving her life, he scowls. It is clear that he does not love her, does not want to communicate with her. They remain silent, although "[s]he would like to tell him some strange beautiful thing, if she could speak at all, something to make him speak." She falls asleep, and after a while he wakes her, and "[w]hen her eyes [are] open and clear upon him, he violate[s] her and still he [is] without care or demand and as gay as if he were still clanging the bucket at the well" (WN, 200-201). He spears an animal and cooks it, and they partake of it. This detail, Appel suggests, is a celebration of her "birth," of her coming "into the world."

Jenny tries to communicate her love for Billy. At first she can only whisper, but finally her words come "a little louder and in shyness" she changes them "from words of love to words of wishing." Billy does not respond. Jenny expresses her wish for a permanent, domestic relationship with Billy: "'I wish you and I could be far away. I wish for a little house.'" Gradually she understands that

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68 Ibid.
for Billy all of life is merely "a taking freely of what was free." She could stir no feeling in him; "[s]he could make him neither sorry nor proud." When she is ill after eating and has to vomit, he walks away and waits "apart from her shame" (WN, 201, 202). Proud and unapproachable, to show pity is beneath him, as it had been with Grandfather Lockhart. When the flood has subsided, Billy departs. To Appel, Billy "is more like a natural force than a man." 69

In her innocence, Jenny yet knows there is "a first country" of love which she has not entered, and the dream of this country finally takes her out of The Landing, once and forever into the world. What she longs for is the quiet security of love, as revealed in her wish expressed to Billy. A love reciprocated is, above all, what she desires. She wonders "what more love would be like... More love would be quiet." She can never be as quiet as she wishes until she is "quiet with her love." That love will be "the center of everything," even "the center of thunder," and that love will be a harmonizing and tranquillizing force. She knows she is incomplete as a person and as a woman. She has many stages of growth ahead of her. She feels that she is "like a house with all its rooms dark from the beginning." Before she can be a complete person, "someone would have to go slowly from room to room,

69 Ibid.
slowly and darkly, leaving each one lighted behind, before going to the next" (WN, 205-206, 208). This passage also seems to suggest that Jenny has come "into the world" by symbolically experiencing a rebirth but that there is much she has yet to learn in the darkness of the future, her life a house of darkness.

Jenny has begun to know about love in the spring of the year. As summer comes, the languorous fecundity of nature beckons:

It was July when Jenny left The Landing. The grass was tall and gently ticking between the tracks of the road. The stupor of air, the quiet of the river that went behind a veil, the sheen of heat and the gray sheen of summering trees, and the silence of day and night seemed all to touch, to bathe and administer to The Landing. The little town took a languor and a kind of beauty from the treatment of time and place. It stretched and swooned. . . .

Pears lying on the ground warmed and soured, bees gathered at the figs, birds put their little holes of possession in each single fruit in the world that they could fly to. The scent of lilies rolled sweetly from their heavy cornucopias and trickled down by shady paths to fill the golden air of the valley. . . . (WN, 210).

It is Eden, the world of innocence, that Jenny leaves, in order to discover, as Eisinger asserts, "the secret of love and separateness and the mystery of individual being. . . and wisdom." Although she has already been initiated into sex, her knowledge of the world is incomplete,
her rebirth into the world still indefinite. As she leaves the old Lockhart mansion "for the last time," she looks back; she does not hate the house, for the "long moss sway[s]" as "tenderly as seaweed" in the trees surrounding her home. Then she walks into the wilderness; "green branches close. . ." over her old home. The vines en-shroud everything, and "[p]assion flowers bloom. . . with their white and purple rays about her shoulders and under her feet. . . . She fear[s] the snakes in the sudden cool" (WN, 211, 212).

Jenny feels that it is an inevitable journey that she takes: "She herself [does] not know what might lie ahead," having never seen herself. Looking "outward with the sense of rightful space and time within her, which must be traversed before she could be know at all," she will not discover herself in the end, "but the way of the traveler" (WN, 206). She leaves the protection of her family home and enters the wilderness of experience; in her growing knowledge she begins to know of passion, as symbolized by the flowers. And her fear of the snake may suggest her fear of the reality of evil, symbolized by Satan as he first appeared to Eve in Eden. The universal implication of this story is suggested by Ruth Vande Kieft: Jenny "has no final revelations to give to any lover; she is only herself, like every other human being, on a perplexing journey through life, engaged in the perpetual and difficult process
of finding herself, her meaning, her destination." Jenny makes many discoveries in "the process of coming into the world; and each discovery is...only the revelation of yet another human mystery." 71

Further archetypal symbolism has been pointed out convincingly by Appel. He believes that at the end of the story, where she is raped by all the men in the fishing village, she encounters the fearful power of evil. She already knows about love, and "to move completely from the house of death, the world—including evil—must be re-created for her, the history of the race relived (she has the sense of rightful space and time within her')." There is an "'original smile'" on Jenny's face as the first man enters the houseboat to rape her, suggesting that what she has discovered is the universality of evil, since she too is of Adam's race. 72 An old woman in the fishing village who sees Jenny after she has been ravaged seems to accept the girl's fate as a part of life. She asks: "'Is she asleep? Is she in a spell? Or is she dead?'" (WN, 214) The other villagers—including the men who continue to throw their knives into the trees for sport, making a pit sound—are indifferent to her fate. (The sexual symbolism of the story is consistent to the end; the knives of the men of the village may suggest the phallus in the sex act.)

71 Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 43.
72 Appel, Season of Dreams, p. 192.
Critical opinions about the nature of Jenny's initiation are interestingly divided. Zelma Turner Howard, Ruth Vande Kieft, and Alfred Appel believe that there has been some degree of maturation and understanding in Jenny as she undergoes her initiation into the world, but Chester E. Eisinger and Mary Anne Ferguson feel there has been neither understanding nor maturation in Jenny.

Zelma Turner Howard sees Jenny as achieving an even greater amount of maturation and understanding than Appel and Miss Vande Kieft see in her. Miss Howard believes Jenny's initiation follows the archetypal pattern described by Henderson. Jenny is freed from "the entanglement of personal relation," of her will being subordinate to that of a father figure; and she consciously moves to a role as an individual in her own right. She also encounters another aspect of the archetypal initiation ritual, the trial of strength, Miss Howard believes: "Jenny's trial of strength comes in her realization of and acceptance of unrequited love, in her overcoming the humiliation of her violation by Floyd and the river men, and in her acceptance of the violation without loss of inner dignity." Though Miss Howard admits that "Jenny's initiation leads to uncertainty," she feels that Jenny has achieved an "inner ordering of her existence."73

73Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 69.
Ruth Vande Kieft and Alfred Appel are somewhat more tentative in their evaluations of Jenny's initiation. Neither seems to see her as consciously moving to a role as an individual and neither sees her as accepting her violation by the river camp men "without loss of inner dignity." She is so passive and lies so quietly (as if dead) at the end of "At the Landing" that Howard's assumption is questionable.

Both Miss Vande Kieft and Appel believe that Jenny has learned the nature of good and evil, innocence and experience, but has arrived only "at the landing" of her journey, having very recently "arrived" or "been born" into the world.74 As her story ends, Appel says, Jenny is at the "point of debarkation, waiting for Billy Floyd and the next stage of her journey."75 Thus Appel and Miss Vande Kieft seem to agree that "At the Landing" meets the qualifications for the uncompleted type of initiation defined by Marcus in which the protagonist achieves a degree of maturation and understanding but is left "enmeshed in a struggle for certainty."76

74 Season of Dreams, p. 193; Eudora Welty, p. 43.
75 Season of Dreams, p. 193.
76 Marcus, "What Is an Initiation Story?", p. 32.
To Eisinger, Jenny has not been adequately prepared to profit from her experiences:

The fate that overtakes Jenny rightfully comes to one who has hoped for too much; she has yearned for the happy, mutual consummation of love in a little cottage, a sentimental dream. It is a fate that comes to one who is released into the world too suddenly and with too little preparation; her will has not had the discipline of independent action, and her spirit has not been sufficiently toughened by the bruising contacts of daily life.77

Eisinger's opinion seems to oppose Miss Howard's; he does not believe that Jenny moves consciously toward individuation since "her will has not had the discipline of independent action."78 Mary Anne Ferguson emphasizes even more greatly the complete passivity of Jenny and her acceptance, as sex object, of whatever the masculine world chooses to impose upon her:

Eudora Welty implies that sexual victimization is inevitable not only because it is natural but because a young girl, overprotected by society, cannot distinguish between sex and love. Jenny's obedience when her grandfather insists on keeping her confined to his house makes her easy prey. . . . Her innocence as the result of her sheltered life leads her to assume that her generous love for Billy Floyd, the first man she encounters, is mutual—that he can sense her desire to be fully a person as she senses his. When she is released from her captivity by her grandfather's death and a flood which sends her out into the world, Billy rapes her as thoughtlessly as he spears a piece of meat from the fire. . . , while to her his rescue

77 Fiction of the Forties, pp. 271-272.

78 Ibid., p. 272.
and feeding symbolized love. Even after he leaves her, her 'dream of love' makes her happy. . . . This powerful story shows Jenny's illusions of love as all that gave meaning to her life; even 'what was done to her' leaves her with a smile.  

Whereas the young girl in "A Memory" passively loves her young friend from afar, Jenny, whose consciousness has been awakened to the possibility of fulfilled love, goes one step further and seeks her love in the world. But as Miss Ferguson believes, Jenny has not been sufficiently prepared for her entry into the world. In love with the idea of love, she becomes the victim of her illusions. Unlike the Negro girl in "Livvie," who is mature enough to make a conscious choice when offered love, Jenny remains "at the landing"—the threshold—of maturity and self-understanding.

"The Winds"

"The Winds" also deals with the initiation of a young girl. Josie's initiation may be classified as the uncompleted type: although she definitely achieves a degree of maturation and understanding, she is still in need of the protection and love of her parents as the narrative ends. After the first section of the story, "The Winds" is made up almost wholly of flashbacks and reveries as Josie recreates the recent past—especially the immediately preceding

summer—in the process of preparing for her long metamorphosis from innocence to experience.

Isaac Rosenfield was one of the first critics to comment on Eudora Welty's tendency to have her characters "largely engaged in flashbacks and in reveries; words are written down, not spoken." Rosenfield then charges Miss Welty with ignoring "the resources of Southern speech" in the stories of The Wide Net. More recent critics are satisfied that she has indeed demonstrated her command of the Southern idiom in many works so that only Rosenfield's suggestions about the dream-like quality of Miss Welty's stories need be taken seriously. It is true that the stories in The Wide Net make extensive use of flashback and reverie—including the three stories of initiation being considered in this study from that volume. However, the "subjectivism" for which Diana Trilling once criticized Miss Welty seems entirely appropriate and thematically successful in stories which depict the inward drama of sensitive young women.

In "The Winds" Josie's initiation from childhood into the greater maturity of adolescence is symbolized by a storm at the autumnal equinox. J. A. Bryant feels that the


paralleling of initiation and storm is "misplaced... for the correspondence is too obvious and worn to be redeemed by any but the most extraordinary of strategies." However, Bryant does not suggest what "extraordinary... strategies" could have "redeemed" the story. Although "The Winds" is not Miss Welty's best story of initiation, the motif of the winds does not seem to be too greatly hackneyed to be employed as effective symbolism.

"The Winds," like "Livvie" and several other Welty stories, takes place near the Natchez Trace. Whereas in "Livvie" the Trace is a symbol of the "creative life force," in "The Winds" the Trace is "a haven for lovers." Josie awakes in the night and hears what she thinks are the cries of "joy" voiced by the older girls of the town on a hay-ride. In her mind Josie envisions the scene: "the Old Natchez Trace... at the edge of her town, an old dark place [where] the young people" go. In addition to being called the Old Natchez Trace, it is also "Lover's Lane" (WN, 114).

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82 Bryant, Eudora Welty, p. 15.


84 Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 86.
Thus Josie's unconscious mind has begun to center on those areas of her life which interest and also disturb her most: youth, love, heterosexual relationships, and the passing of time. In her mind she also sees the hay wagon with "the long white-stockinged legs of the big girls" hanging down on one side and "the boy's black stockings stuck out on the other side." She identifies with them; her heart rises "longingly to the pitch of their delight," just as her father picks her up from her bed as the violence of the storm increases. Still half asleep, she wonders if she is old enough to be invited to the hay-ride. The sounds of the chorus (which merge with the sounds of the wind) seem "to envelop her," but she is half-aware that it is her "father's thin nightshirt" she lies close to "in the dark" (WN, 115).

Caught up in the storm of her movement from childhood to adolescence, Josie is nevertheless comforted by the physical nearness of her father. A perceptive girl, she is also aware of her mother's "strangely argumentative" voice as she remarks to Josie's father, "'I still say it's a shame to wake them up'." As the parents move the children from the upstairs bedrooms to the safety of the downstairs living room, Josie is still aware of the "calls and laughter of the older children" coming closer (WN, 115). It is important that Welty repeats the word older as a motif in the story; for Josie is trying to understand the lives and
searchings of those older than she, and she half looks forward to and half dreads joining them in the life of the future, which she senses will be the end of innocence.

The journey from upstairs to downstairs is made without the aid of electricity at the direction of the father. To Josie it is as if he has "to keep the halls and turnings secret within," as if he will have to release her in the "halls and turnings" of her journey to maturity. As they pass her mother's bedroom she recognizes "the scent of her mother's verbena sachet and the waistshape of the mirror" (WN, 115), perhaps symbols of Josie's own developing femininity. 85

"[T]his slow and unsteady descent" to the living room makes Josie think again of Lover's Lane--possibly because the road there would also be dark on a hayride but also because both Trace and stairwell remind her of the uncertain (hence dark) journey to maturity she is making. Once in the living room, Josie is awake and wishes to look out the front window to check on a "big girl" who lives across

85 One is reminded of the vague stirrings of womanhood in Miranda, the nine-year-old protagonist of Katherine Anne Porter's "The Grave." Wearing a ring which her brother has found at an old grave site, Miranda wishes to return to the farmhouse, "take a good cold bath, dust herself with plenty of Maria's talcum powder[,] put on the thinnest, most becoming dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a wicker chair under the trees. . . ." Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 365.
the street; but her father, anxious about the storm, asks, "Josie, don't you understand—I want to keep us close together. Perhaps having sensed his daughter's thoughts of breaking away from the family circle in her desire to go on a hayride with other boys and girls, he wishes at first to protect her against outside experiences. The father says "cautiously" over Josie's sleeping brother: "Once in an equinoctial storm a man's little girl was blown away from him into a haystack out in a field" (WN, 118).

As the mother sighs, "Summer is over," Josie herself realizes that "in the coming of these glitering flashes and the cries and calling voices of the equinox," summer becomes "the past. The long ago..." Josie asks her father about the meaning of the equinox. He answers that it is "a seasonal change, . . .like the storm we had in winter." The father repeats, "You mustn't be frightened, Josie. . . .You have my word that this is a good strong house." Although her father wishes to reassure her, Josie nevertheless continues to sit closely by her mother even while she is aware of the lightning stamping "the pattern of her father's dressing gown on the room" (WN, 119). Perhaps the maternal comfort which her mother provides is yet at this point in her life less frightening than the physical presence of her father—who represents the male principle and is thus somewhat disturbing to her in her new
consciousness of sex. The reader has earlier been told that the girl was aware of her father's body through his "chin nightshirt" as he picked her up out of her bed and before he has donned his robe.

The rebirth motif which Henderson has described as a universal element in the initiation ritual is strikingly suggested in "The Winds." As lightning continues to flare up before the front window of Josie's house, "the persistence of illumination seemed slowly to be waking something that slept longer than Josie had slept" (WN, 119). She is aware of something strange and mysterious about her life—the possibility of some new knowledge, and her body trembles while her mother holds her.

Josie is again conscious of going on a journey; "the house moves slowly like a boat that has been stepped into" (WN, 120). Earlier she has imagined that the group of young people on the hayride are singing, "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream..." (WN, 115). She lies "drifting in the chair," and she moves slowly "through the summertime, the way of the past..." (WN, 120). The "past," the "summertime," is her childhood, which she is leaving. In flashbacks the next several sections of the story recount her girlish friends, songs, superstitions—the joys of childhood.

In the second section of "The Winds" Josie relives in reverie some significant experiences from the "morning" of
her life. She recalls the music from the organ of the "monkey-man" who cries "Is there a penny upstairs or down?"; the search for signs of fairies in the early morning; the attempt to raise a magic Queen from a sand castle; the dialogue with the colored housekeeper over how old the children will be when they die. Everything seems unsoiled, pristine to her at this "hour" of her life. She appears to wish to preserve life untouched. Riding her bicycle, "the golden Princess, the name in a scroll in front," she is careful "to touch nothing, to make no print on the earliness of the day." She therefore rides "with no hands, no feet, touching nowhere but the one place, moving away into the leaves, down the swaying black boards of the dewy alley" (WN, 120-121). Yet this unconscious wish to preserve innocence, the reader feels, will in the end be unsatisfactory for this healthy young girl, who, unlike Marian in "A Visit of Charity," is neither stupid nor selfish.

Josie's own home is a symbol of identity and security to her (as an extension of her parents whose gentle firmness, understanding and affection will help see her through the "winds" of her adolescence): she is "secure that the house [is] theirs and identical with them—the pale smooth house seeming not to yield to any happening, with the dreamlike arch of the roof over the entrance like the curve of their upper lips." In contrast, the old "double-house"
across the street looks "somehow in disgrace, as if it had been born into it and could not help it." Josie is saddened by this suggestion, but she is even sorrier that it too looks "like a face, with its wide-apart upper windows, the nose-like partition between the two sagging porches, the chimneys rising in listening points at either side, and the roof across which the birds sat." Like the experiences of the families it shelters, the house is "inscrutable." It seems as if there are "always some noise of disappointment to be heard coming from within—a sigh, a thud..." (WN, 121-123).

The old double-house is occupied by eight children who have "a habit of arranging themselves in the barren yard in a little order, like an octave, and staring out across the street at the rest of the neighborhood—as if to state, in their rude way, "This is us." Josie and all her friends are forbidden to play with these children. The most important of the eight children is Cornella, who, to the fascinated Josie, is "nearly grown and transformed by age" into some mysterious being (WN, 123).

The daily "preparation" by Cornella is performed in the morning. To Josie it seems that Cornella is "forever making ready." She suns her hair, or has "just washed it and comes out busily to dry it." Her hair is "bright yellow, wonderfully silky and long" and is "as constant a force as a waterfall to Josie, under whose eyes alone" it
descends. Through Josie's mind run the lines of the fairy tale: "Cornella, Cornella, let down thy hair, and the King's son will come climbing up." Sometimes Josie "in her meditations invoke[s] Cornella" in this ritual: "Thy name is Corn, and thou art like the ripe corn, beautiful Cornella" (WN, 124). Zelma Turner Howard believes that yellow hair in Welty's stories suggests "sun-blessed characters" including Billy Floyd of "At the Landing" and Jamie Lockhart of The Robber Bridegroom. The allusion to corn is yet another example of Welty's use of mythic parallels in her stories, for corn is an ancient emblem of fertility and was a central symbol in the Greek religious ritual celebrating the plenitude of the earth. 

Cornella is, probably unconsciously to Josie, an example of newly-bloomed young womanhood, symbolized by her hair, "like the ripe corn."

It is mildly shocking to the lady-like Josie that Cornella would brush her hair "out in public" while "looking out, steadily out, over the street." Identifying with Cornella from the other side of the street, Josie feels "the emptiness of their street too." When the buttermilk man comes along the street in his cart singing his "sad"

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86. Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 102.

The song about milk, potatoes, and peas for sale, Cornelia is anything but saddened. Even though "Josie's love begins to go toward her." Cornelia is very angry, and stamps her foot. Josie feels "oppression" then that Cornelia's life has dimensions which she cannot understand. Josie has not yet learned the meaning of frustration and disappointment. "Called in to dinner before she can understand," she has "a conviction: I will never catch up with her. No matter how old I get, I will never catch up with Cornelia." As section two of the story ends, the reader is told that everything Josie has run after "in the whole world comes to life in departure before her eyes and covers her vision with wings." A vision of June-bugs, lightning bugs, butterflies, and bees—-insects she has played with during the preceding summer—overcomes her in a "great tempest of droning and flying" while she puts out her hand after something that flies ahead, a symbol of her reaching out after experience out of the innocence of childhood (WN, 124-125).

Section three of the story is brief, re-establishing the fitful sleep of Josie as she enters another reverie in section four. The storm winds without merge with the notes of "'Beautiful Ohio' slowly picked out in the key of C down the hot afternoon" by Cornella, while "through the tied-back curtains of parlors the other big girls, with rats in their hair and lace insertions in their white dresses, practice...forever on one worn little waltz, up and down
the street, for they take lessons" (WN, 126). Cornella, obviously culturally-deprived by the town's standards, is not acceptable company for the other girls; she is too much in public and wears high-heeled shoes. At one point in her dreams during the storm Josie wishes to look out the front window for Cornella, and her mother exclaims, ''How many times have I told you that you need not concern yourself with--Cornella!' The way her mother said her name was not diminished now" (WN, 118).

Without being consciously aware, Josie evidently has learned several valuable but puzzling lessons during the preceding summer. A small lesson in the mortality of animal life is contained in the body of "a dead bird with its feathers cool as rain" discovered while Josie and her friend grovel "in the dirt under the bandstand hunting for lost money." The girls are comforted by running "out in the sun." There they spy pathetic old Biddy Felix, who has come "to make a speech" to which there is no one to listen as he cries out a disturbing lesson of transience of life: "The time flies, the time flies"! Human madness, the transience of life, and poverty--observed as Biddy waves his arm, "like a bat in the ragged sleeve"--are lessons learned and almost forgotten by Josie that summer. She is even aware of having been frightened when she and her girl friend close in "upon the hot tamale man, fixing their frightened eyes on his lantern and on his scars" (WN, 127).
Parting from her friend, she passes a "dragon—the Chinese figure in the garden on the corner that in biting holds rain water in the cavern of its mouth." Josie is especially afraid of being alone with the figure, "for stone dragons open... their mouths and beg... to swallow the day," loving "to eat the summer." To Josie it is "painful to think of even pony-rides gobbled, the way they all went, the children every one... crammed into the basket with their heads stuck up like candy-almonds in a treat" (WN, 128). Thus the Chinese figure symbolizes the terrifying appetite of time as it devours life and experience. There is a certain sly humor in the child-like absurdity of the figure with the heads of the children sticking out of its mouth, but this does not alter the significance of the dragon as time-eater in this wondering girl's mind.

But the greatest source of perplexity to Josie is Cornella, who lives in the double-house "only by the frailest indulgence," since, unlike Josie, she is "not even a daughter in her side of the house" but "only a niece or cousin." Her lack of protecting parents or a sense of identity provided by a home imbues her with a "frailty" which is even more greatly emphasized by her coming outside "without a hat, without anything." When she "dart[s] forth from one old screen door of the double-house," she has "just bathed and dressed... , her bright hair... done
in puffs and curls with a bow behind" (WN, 128). Oppress­
 sing signs of poverty, of "frailty," plague young Cornella, 
 who apparently wishes to triumph over poverty and cultural 
 deprivation with her youth and beauty. Her daily antici­
pation seems to be of escape or deliverance from her un­
happy circumstances in a house filled with the noises of 
"disappointment." Yet Cornella is not pathetic. To Josie 
she represents the feminine mystique. Josie awaits the 
times when Cornella walks "lightly down the steps, down 
the walk, ... in some kind of secrecy swaying from side 
to side, her skirts swinging around, and the sidewalk 
echoing smally to her pumps with the Baby Louis heels." 
Then "Cornella would turn and gaze away down the street, 
as if she could see far, far away, in a little pantomime 
of hope and apprehension that would not permit Josie to 
stir." Josie "lift[s] her hand softly and ma[kes] a sign 
to Cornella"... while almost saying her name, to which 
Cornella responds by stamping her foot. As if Cornella is 
a magisterial teacher of the mysteries of life and Josie 
is an initiate into those mysteries who has been rebuked, 
Josie "[i]n a seeking humility" stands and bears "her shame 
to attend Cornella... , the adored queen of her heart," 
who stands "still, haughtily still, waiting as in pride" 
... (WN, 129-130). Cornella's waiting for something, 
the nature of which Josie is unsure, parallels Josie's own 
unconscious waiting for the first stirrings and changes of
maturity. As these changes come, Alfred Appel says perceptively, "[t]he electric quality of the atmosphere, rendered in several find images, is a fitting correlative for the body metabolism of a girl entering puberty." 88

In one of the middle sections of the story Josie's developing capacity for affection—already demonstrated in her unexpressed love for Cornella—is further evidenced in her feeling for the family cow, Daisy, a "small tender Jersey with her soft violet nose" who presents Josie with "her warm side." Daisy allows Josie to cry her girlish tears on her "shining coarse hairs" and does "not move or speak but[holding] patient, richly compassionate and still" (WN, 131). Having observed that nature can be fierce and violent (as in the continuing equinoctial storm of the present nighttime), she has already learned that nature (represented by Daisy) can also be warm, congenial, and comforting. This is but one of the paradoxical facts of life that Josie can or will come to know during her rite of passage from innocence to experience.

While the house is "taken to the very breast of the storm," Josie lies "as still as an animal" and—panic, stricken—thinks "of the sharp day when she would come running out of the field holding the ragged stems of the quick-picked goldenrod and the warm flowers thrust out for

88 Season of Dreams, p. 186.
a present for somebody." It comes to her that "the future [is] herself bringing presents, the season of gifts." The gift she will bring is herself, and the recipient will be the man who will receive her in love and in the oneness of marriage. The vision of her developing womanliness and womanly function naturally brings her anxiety; yet she also looks forward to her future. She wonders when the day will come "when the wind [will] fall" and she and her friends will "sit in silence on the fountain rim, their play done," while the boys "crack...nuts under their heels..." (WN, 134). When the storms of adolescence are over, she and her girl friends will accept their feminine roles, the play of childhood over, and their womanhood will be with the males (the "boys"), symbolized by the fountain. The boys' cracking the nuts under their heels suggests both the happy celebration of marriage and the Jewish custom of the groom's breaking a wine glass, when the wedding ceremony is performed, to symbolize the consummation of the marriage and the hope of the couple's fertility.

Toward the end of the story Josie recalls one of her most cherished memories: the evening during the preceding summer when she and her family attended the Chautauqua to hear a trio of lady musicians. The woman cornetist has the effect of piercing Josie "with pleasure." The passion of the woman's song and her intensity in playing it (Josie can "see the slow appearance of a little vein in her
cause Josie to listen "in mounting care and sus-
pense, as if the performance [leads] in some direction
away— as if a destination were being shown her." She then
observes Cornella sitting nearby, "with her face all wild." Cornella too feels the passion of the moment, of the music
that seems to speak of love, youth, passion. Josie turns
quickly to look for her parents, perhaps in fear of what
she is discovering. But they are "far back in the crowd"
and cannot see her and are probably "not listening" (WN,
136-137).

As she lies in bed that night after the musical per-
formance— and after "the kisses of her family [are]
put on her cheek"— she looks out at the town whose "lights for-
ever seem. . . an island boat," and she waits for the tide
of experience, of insight, that will set her about her
journey. At last it seems to her "that a proclamation had
been made in the last high note of the lady trumpeteer when
her face had become set in its passion, and that after that
there would be no more waiting and no more time left for
the one who did not take heed and follow. . . ." (WN, 137-
138). [Ellipsis points are Miss Welty's.] The proclama-
tion the woman trumpeteer makes is the invitation— the
urging on— of the girl to maturity, to fulfillment, to
passion. The time of innocence has past, and the time of
experience must be accepted. To Appel, Josie realizes
"that to become a 'big girl' like Cornella she will have
to leave behind the joys of her childhood; growth involves a loss." 89

Then the "breaking sound" of "the first thunder" in her life is heard. "It's over" (WN, 138), her father says comfortingy. Since "Josie's expanding perceptions have been delicately tuned to the storm's course," Appel observes, 90 the soft, tranquil rain that follows suggests the feeling of peace Josie has attained through an acceptance of her developing maturity. Before falling asleep,

she listened for a time to a tapping that came at her window, like a plea from outside. . . . There, outside, was all that was wild and beloved and estranged, and all that would beckon. . . . her, and all that was beautiful. She wanted to follow, and by some metamorphosis she would take them in—all—every one (WN, 139).

The metamorphosis has begun in Josie's life wherein she will develop from an innocent girl to an experienced woman. Having undergone the dark night of the first storm of developing maturity—an example of symbolic rebirth as defined by Henderson—she has submitted to natural and inevitable forces of growth and has now achieved a degree of liberation and even of individuation.

89 Ibid., p. 187.

90 Ibid.
Conversely, as Ruth Vande Kieft has pointed out, Cornelia "is lost in the equinoctial storm (the change from childhood to adulthood) because [she] lacks the stability of home, the comforting presence of mother and father, through whose love and order and control Josie may be gently guided into the hazards of maturity." Cornelia's desperate and final lostness is further emphasized by a scrap of paper containing a note in indelible pencil which Josie finds the next morning "clinging to the pedestal of the column" on her front porch: "The name Cornella was on it [the note], and it said, 'O my darling, I have waited so long when are you coming for me? Never a day or a night goes by that I do not ask When? When? When?..." (WN, 140). [Ellipsis points are Miss Welty's.]

**Decisive Initiation**

"Livvie"

The plaintive note upon which Miss Welty ends "The Winds" contrasts vividly with the joyous conclusion of "Livvie," in which the young Negro girl is not abandoned as Cornella is. Like "The Winds," "Livvie" is set on the famed Natchez Trace. In such stories as "First Love" and *The Robber Bridegroom* Welty has treated the Trace of history and legend, but in "Livvie" the trail is, to

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91 *Eudora Welty*, p. 64.
Zelma Howard, "a kind of creative life force within itself." The Natchez Trace is the scene of the heroine's initiation, "her place of 'death' and her place of rebirth."\textsuperscript{92}

Livvie's initiation is of the decisive type, as defined by Marcus. In this type of initiation, the protagonist definitely and firmly achieves both maturity, understanding, and self-discovery. To Miss Howard, Livvie's name has an "affective, positive connotation,"\textsuperscript{93} although her life has been of a negative nature during her residence in what Robert Penn Warren has called "a house of death."\textsuperscript{94} She is a twenty-five year old black girl, married for nine years to an elderly man, Solomon, of her own race. On the first day of spring, Solomon lies dying in his remote, secure, respectable little home on the edge of the Natchez Trace. Livvie experiences an awakened consciousness of her femininity when a cosmetics saleswoman calls on her and allows her to apply lipstick to her lips—the first time Livvie has ever worn lipstick. Then, on a walk on the ghostly Trace, she meets a brightly-dressed young man, Cash. Together, they frolic in nature and

\textsuperscript{92}Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{94}"Love and Separateness," p. 165.
return to Solomon's bedside only when Livvie has a premonition that he is near death. Solomon chides the young people for not being able to wait until his death, but, as a sign of forgiveness, he presents Livvie with his beloved silver watch and dies. Cash then sweeps Livvie into a dizzying embrace.

Nature is one of the most important aspects of Livvie's story of initiation. The symbolic ritual of initiation in "Livvie" shows, Eisinger feels, "youth and love as natural forces [italics mine] displacing age and being freed from it by death." The non-human world of nature and the human world of nature are paralleled in an important and artistic manner in this story: "The inevitability of the events in this story is achieved by a method of narration which conveys the impression somehow, that what happens is as natural as the rhythm of events in the non-human world of nature."95 To J. A. Bryant, Jr., "Livvie" is one of the three best stories in The Wide Net because of its masterful technique and because of its beautiful "recreation. . .of the natural world in which we see clearly enough what is before us but also perceive more than meets our eye."96

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95 Fiction of the Forties, p. 271.

96 Bryant, Eudora Welty, p. 15.
As Ruth Vande Kieft has judiciously observed, the narrative method in "Livvie" is deceptively simple; she agrees with Bryant that there is "more than meets our eye," for the story possesses a complex "thematic structure . . . subtly adjusted to the ambiguities of actual human experience." She, like Bryant, has high praise for "Livvie":

The beautiful balance of the opposing values, their easy, natural embodiment in character and situation, the purity of the language, and the sympathy and detachment of the vision, give this story a deservedly high place among Miss Welty's works.

The initiation of Livvie, her return to life through Solomon's death, provides the structure of the story. The original title of the story, "Livvie Is Back," explicitly stated its theme. The clash of opposing values concerns the balance, safety, order, wisdom, and respectability which Solomon's name, his house, and his life-pattern suggest versus the instinctive, uncontrolled, unordered, insecure but nevertheless preferable life which Cash represents. Between these values is the protagonist of the story, Livvie, who understands and evaluates both sets of values but chooses the latter because it signifies life and vitality, not death and coldness. However, the story

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98 Ibid.
is not that easy, Miss Vande Kieft believes, for Solomon's way of life does represent to Livvie certain admirable moral values, as will be shown.

Like Jenny Lockhart in "At the Landing," Livvie is isolated and submissive to a father figure. In Livvie's case the "father" is her husband, who, like the aging Major Maggiore in Hemingway's "In Another Country," has married a young wife in order to enjoy human springtime in the winter of his life. In order to ensure his keeping Livvie, Solomon has isolated her in his house in "the deep country" on the Natchez Trace:

Once people said he thought nobody would ever come along there. He told her himself that it had been a long time, and a day she did not know about, since that road was a traveled road with people coming and going. He was good to her, but he kept her in the house. She had not thought that she could not get back. Where she came from, people said an old man did not want anybody in the world to ever find his wife, for fear they would steal her back from him. . . (WN, 153).

Just as Jenny defers to her grandfather, so does Livvie to Solomon; both girls efface themselves as women and human beings, and the story of each is the record of her awakening, told from a point of view that reveals each character's need "to communicate." 100

99 Ibid., p. 61.

100 Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 4.
Before the coming of Cash, Livvie does not dare have a will of her own. She has been so greatly conditioned to the idea of male superiority that she can only answer "'Yes, sir," when Solomon asks her before marrying her, "'Would she be happy?" He asks the question in a "very dignified" manner, for he is "a colored man that own[s] his land and ha[s] it written down in the courthouse. . . ." He is old, and she, young—and female in addition. For these reasons she would only listen and answer when questioned (WN, 153).

The motif of youth and old age is established at the beginning of the story as Solomon asks Livvie, "if she [is] choosing winter, would she pine for spring, and she sa[yas], 'No indeed.'" The years pass and Solomon grows old and gives out until at last he sleeps "the whole day in bed." But Livvie is "young still" (WN, 153-154). Since he is in a comatose state, Livvie becomes the nurse-queen of Solomon's castle of respectability. Indeed, everything in this "nice house. . . of three rooms" is balanced and neat, symbolizing the comfort and respectability for which Solomon has worked all his life:

The front room was papered in holly paper, with green palmettos from the swamp spaced at careful intervals over the walls. . . . There was a double settee, a tall scrolled rocker and an organ in the front room all around a three-legged table with a marble top, on which was set a lamp with three gold feet, besides a jelly glass with pretty hen feathers in it. Behind the
front room, the other room had the bright iron bed with the polished knobs like a throne, in which Solomon slept all day. . . . There was a table holding the Bible, and a trunk with a key. On the wall were two calendars, and a diploma from somewhere in Solomon's family. . . . Going through that room and on to the kitchen, there was a big wood stove and a big round table always with a wet top and with the knives and forks in one jelly glass and the spoons in another, and a cut-glass vinegar bottle between, and going out from those, many shallow dishes of pickled peaches, . . . preserves, . . . pickles and. . . jam always sitting there. The churn sat in the sun, the doors of the safe were always both shut, and there were four baited mouse traps in the kitchen, one in every corner (WN, 154-155).

With this description Eudora Welty is "not simply cataloging," Appel maintains, "but brilliantly projecting the quality of Solomon's life--its dignity, discipline, and order." He feels that Miss Welty's "pages of tightly written description could well serve as a textbook example for writers to illustrate how the naturalistic details of a scene can work symbolically without ever announcing themselves as symbols." 101

One may parallel the shut doors of the safe in Solomon's kitchen, symbolizing security and safety, with the bottled branches of the crape-myrtles in the yard, a precaution taken to keep "evil spirits from coming into the house--by luring them inside the colored bottles, where they cannot get out again" (WN, 156). It is significant

that Solomon has spent precisely nine years (the time he has been married) preparing the bottle trees. The folk superstition of the bottle-tree attests, Appel believes, to Solomon's unvoiced concern over having a youthful wife. "The 'spirits' which Solomon is guarding his house (and wife) against are implicitly sexual," and the bottle trees establish the major pattern of symbolism in the story, which occurs in spring, near Easter, and concerns rebirth, resurrection, and the life-forces. The pattern of sexual imagery, though subtle, is carried out consistently in the story as Livvie is freed from her house of death to a new life with Cash.

Just as Jenny has been forbidden by her grandfather to speak to the inhabitants of The Landing, Livvie is also cut off from all human communion:

\[\text{[T]here was nobody, nobody at all, not even a white person. And if there had been anybody, Solomon would not have let Livvie look at them, just as he would not let her look at a field hand, or a field-hand look at her. There was no house near, except for the cabins of the tenants that were forbidden to her, and there was no house as far as she had been, stealing away down the deep still Trace (WN, 157).}\]

All is as still as death. The imagery in this portion of the story suggests the entrapment and death-in-life which Livvie suffers. When she walks along the Trace, it is as if she wades a river, for the "dead leaves" are "as high as her knees." The Trace is a place of stasis, for Livvie

\[\text{102Ibid., p. 194.}\]
finds that "it [is] not like a road that went anywhere." One day while exploring, she discovers "a graveyard without a church, with ribbon-grass growing about the foot of an angel (she has climbed up because she thinks she sees angel wings), and in the sun, trees shining like burning flames through the great caterpillar nets which enclosed them. . . . [T]he mourning dove [makes] the only sound in the world." She longs for an escape from her prison: "Oh for a stirring of the leaves, and a breaking of the nets!" (WN, 175-158)

Livvie's liberation—"the breaking of the nets" of her life—occurs on the first day of spring; on this day spring is "as present in the house as a young man would be." After this bit of foreshadowing one may well guess that the source of Livvie's release will be a young male, her sexual equal. Keenly aware of life about her, she can hear the noises from the fields as the men and girls hoe in the fields, preparing them for crops. Sometimes "as if at a signal. . . .they would all start at once shouting, hollering, cajoling, calling and answering back, running, being leaped on and breaking away, flinging to earth with a shout and lying motionless in the trance of twelve o'clock." The old women bring food, followed by children who come "like a pounding stream overflowing the fields, and set upon the men, the women, the dogs, the rushing birds, and the wave-like rows of earth. . . ." (WN, 161).
Like Eula Varner in Faulkner's Snopes trilogy, Livvie is an earth goddess. She is young and fecund, like the land; she loves the land and identifies with it:

> Even in the house the earth was sweet to breathe. Solomon had never let Livvie go any farther than the chicken house and the well. But what if she would walk now into the heart of the fields and take a hoe and work until she fell stretched out and drenched with her efforts, like other girls, and laid her cheek against the laid-open earth, and shamed the old man with her humbleness and delight? (WN, 162)

But Livvie, incidentally, is not a cruel girl; she waits on the bedridden Solomon lovingly and dutifully, trying to coax him to eat the good food she carefully prepares. Livvie regrets the cruel wish to hurt Solomon; she is reminded of a statement her mother made once: "I rather a man be anything, than a woman be mean'" (WN, 162).

As section two of the story ends, Livvie wonders if Solomon dreams of her with "his small hand with the wedding ring curled close in sleep around the quilt. . . ." She is life-centered, not death-centered like Solomon. She wishes to flee when she thinks that in his death-sleep Solomon "might carry her with him that way" (WN, 163).

Section three begins with the arrival of Miss Baby Marie, who is the "harbinger" of Livvie's liberation. This woman is a cosmetics saleswoman who at first appears young but then is seen to be old. Her artificial "beauty"
is highlighted by a face "covered with intense white and red, with a little patty-cake of white between the wrinkles by her upper lip. Little red tassels of hair bobbed under the rusty wires of her picture-hat." As if she is a high priestess performing the rites of beauty before Livvie, "with an air of triumph and secrecy she now drew open her little suitcase and brought out bottle after bottle and jar after jar. . ." (WN, 163-165).

A sense of her own femininity, of her own natural sexual powers as a woman, is awakened in Livvie as she applies lipstick for the first time in her life. She is like an Eve in Solomon's Garden of Eden in that she judges everything in terms of the uncommercial and innocent world of nature she has known. To Livvie the lipstick fragrance is like that of chinaberry flowers; but she is told by Miss Baby Marie (who ironically is no baby at all) that the lipstick contains "secret ingredients." As she applies the lipstick, the fragrance is "like incense." Aided by the priestess of "secret ingredients," Miss Baby Marie (whom Alfred Appel sees as "the 'tempter' in Livvie's prison paradise," offering the innocent girl "a purple lipstick—an emblem of sin and of the knowledge of life")\(^{104}\), Livvie is "carried away in the air through the spring." Symbolically, Livvie has been awakened to her own sexuality by the cosmetic, and she has now begun unconsciously the

\(^{104}\) *Season of Dreams*, p. 195.
journey which will deliver her from the barren death-in-life that she has shared with Solomon. In her vision Livvie sees her mother "holding up her heavy apron... loaded with ripe figs" and her father "holding a fish-pole over the pond" which holds "little clear fishes swimming up to brim" (WN, 165-166). To Zelma Turner Howard these are "sexual symbols and... devices to foreshadow Livvie's union with Cash, the virile field god," an interpretation that is congruent with the pervasive sexual symbolism in this story.

Miss Baby Marie departs with her cosmetics when she learns that Livvie cannot pay for them. As Appel comments, "...[T]he 'tempter's' visit has been successful; the lipstick—or 'apple' has made Livvie explicitly aware of her needs." She is aroused as she looks in the mirror at her painted face and touches her lips with her hand. "It seems as if her heart beat and her whole face flames from the pulsing color of her lips" (WN, 168).

Livvie returns to Solomon's room and sits by him. She senses that "[h]e's fixin' to die." Then she goes for a walk on the Natchez Trace where "she [sees] a sight... a man, looking like a vision--she standing on one side of the Natchez Trace and he standing on the other." Robert Penn Warren's original assertion that Cash is a field god

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(he is also one of Solomon's field hands) is supported by Livvie's feeling that Cash is a "vision." He is dressed in his bright new Easter clothes—"leaf-green" coat, "high-up tawny pants," "luminous baby-pink satin shirt," and a plum-colored hat with an "emerald green" feather. In his bright new costume Cash represents "a transformed field hand," **alive, virile, full-fleshed, and charismatic.** "He has a round head, a round face. all of him is young." Like the brightly-colored Easter eggs which his costume suggests, he is a symbol of fertility. His plum-colored "platter-shaped round hat" contrasts startlingly with Solomon's "black hat hanging on the peg on the front door, the blackest thing in the world" (WN, 169).

Appel considers the men's hats phallic symbols, Cash's throbbing purple hat representing fecundity and Solomon's black derby impotence and exhausted old age. The hats are paralleled with the bottle trees as sexual symbols.¹⁰⁶

Cash looks at everything with "insolence"; he is potentially violent. "...[H]e move[s] along kicking the flowers as if he could break through anything in the world. ..." He is the antithesis of the respectable and controlled Solomon. Livvie is sufficiently perceptive to feel that "Cash must have stolen the money, stolen it from Solomon," in order "to look so fine before the harvest. ..." His every movement, moreover, is fraught with strength: he

¹⁰⁶ *Season of Dreams*, p. 199.
brings his spread hand down forcefully every time he
laughs and kicks his heels together. Livvie is momentarily
chilled, for it seems as if he is "bringing that strong
hand down to beat a drum or to rain blows upon a man, such
an abandon and menace [are] in his laugh." She frowns but
nevertheless moves closer to him when suddenly "his swing­ing arm draws [her] in at once and the fright [is] crushed
from her body, as a little match-flame might be smothered
out by what it lighted." As they kiss, her womanliness is
aroused, and "she [is] dazzled by herself then, the way
he had been dazzled at himself to begin with" (WN, 170-171).

One may regard the Trace which separates Cash and
Livvie when they first meet as representing Livvie's mar­riage to Solomon, an impediment to their developing rela­tionship. As the two young people gradually approach each
other and finally embrace, Solomon again makes a claim upon
Livvie, for she has a premonition of his impending death.
She rushes toward the house. Livvie's intuition of death
seems to be peculiarly feminine, a feeling "that could not
be told" (WN, 171).¹⁰⁷ Cash follows her, picking up a

¹⁰⁷ In "The Mill" E. A. Robinson's miller's wife has
a similar premonition at the very moment that her husband
has hanged himself, "because there are no millers any
more." The American Tradition in Literature, ed. Sculley
stone and sailing it into the bottle trees, already begin­ning his assualt on Solomon's orderly kingdom before the "king's" death. "[S]ounds clatter. . .through the bottle trees like cries of outrage." The quiet of the house is further violated as "Cash stamp[s] and plunge[s] zigzag up the front steps and in at the front door." As section two of the story ends, Livvie sits by Solomon's bed and hears no sounds except "the light springy steps of Cash walking and walking in the front room, and the ticking of Solomon's silver watch. . ." (WN, 172-173), appropriate symbols of the impatient vitality of Cash and the still life of old Solomon.

The beginning of section three picks up the motif of Cash as an impatient animal: "there [is] a noise like a hoof pawing the floor," and Cash enters the room. He is the ruthless male, willing to destroy his opposition if need be. To Livvie his face is "bright and bare of pity" and looks "sweet to her." His dominance fills the room, and Livvie arises from Solomon's bedside and holds up her head. "Cash [is] so powerful that his presence [gives] her strength even when she [does] not need any" (WN, 173). Ruth Vande Kieft feels that Cash's bright, pitiless face is "sweet" to Livvie because she will "have to be cruel to break with Solomon."108

108 Eudora Welty, p. 62.
While he sleeps, the young couple reads in his face the story of his life:

... It told them like a mythical story that all his life he had built, little scrap by little scrap, respect. A beetle could not have been more laborious or more ingenious in the task of its destiny. When Solomon was young, as he was in the picture overhead, it was the infinite thing with him, and he could see no end to the respect he would contrive and keep in a house. He had built a lonely house, the way he would make a cage, but it grew to be the same with him as a great monumental pyramid and sometimes in the absorption of getting it erected he was like the builder-slaves of Egypt who forgot or never knew the origin and meaning of the thing to which they gave all the strength of their bodies and used up all their days (WN, 173-174).

Although Solomon's dream is in the beginning a worthy one, it has become an obsession. His comfortable and ordered house, a symbol of his dream, has become a cage in which he is both prisoner and jailer; for young Livvie is also his prisoner. Solomon has lost the reason for living in the midst of making a living and seeking respectability, and now his house is his burial place. However, as Miss Vande Kieft has observed, Solomon represents "a certain decency and reserve, even a certain moral order," which Cash--"a commercially transformed field god...in his gaudy clothes...purchased with money stolen from Solomon"--will destroy.109 Cash's name is significant, for

109 Ibid., p. 61.
surely he represents not only a field god but also the same 
crass (and even amoral) commercial values as Miss Baby-
Marie.

As Robert Penn Warren has suggested, Solomon's 
respectability is "the dream, the idea which has with­
ered," 110 but to Miss Vande Kieft Solomon also represents 
"a simple wisdom and nobility" 111 in spite of his failure 
to live life fully. Livvie, Appel maintains, understands 
"that any new freedom found with Cash will only be won at 
the expense of the dignity, balance, security, and moral 
order of her life with Solomon." 112 Miss Welty seems to 
be saying that in every gain there is a corresponding loss 
and that moral choices are not always clear cut. The con­ 
flict of opposing values in this story should correct any 
notions that it embodies "romantic primitivism," Appel 
asserts; some readers have been led to this interpreta­ 
tion through a "quick and superficial" scanning of it. 113

A "quick and superficial" reading of "Livvie" may 
preclude one's recognizing the opposing values of the moral 
conflict—the instinctual force of the id represented by 

110 "Love and Separateness," p. 165.

111 Eudora Welty, p. 62.

112 Season of Dreams, p. 196.

113 Ibid.
Cash, and the force of the super-ego, respectability and conformity, represented by Solomon. This conflict is symbolized in a graphic little tableau when Livvie returns to Solomon's deathbed after her return from the Trace with Cash. She stands "above the prone old man and the panting young one, erect and apart." Solomon is wide awake, and Cash—already prepared to take the "territorial imperative"—raises his strong arm, while "radiant sweat stands on his temples." But he does not strike Solomon; his arm remains suspended in the air, "as if something might have taken hold." Movement flickers in Solomon's strict, old, frail face. The relentless inner strength and mystery of life illuminate his face. "It is that very mystery that Cash with his quick arm would have to strike, and that Livvie could not weep for" (WN, 174-175). The implication seems to be that if death does not release Solomon, the sexually-moved Cash, ready to claim Livvie—to liberate her from the house of death—will have to free her by violence, and that Livvie understands and even tacitly agrees to this possibility.

But Solomon's kingly dignity in his hour of death so impresses Cash that he cannot strike; although he strongly desires Livvie at that very moment so that he is "throb­bing in his Easter clothes," Cash is awed by Solomon's frailty, an opponent his strength does not know how to challenge. Temporarily quelled, he steps behind Livvie "like a round-
eyed schoolboy on whose unsuspecting head the dunce cap has been set" (WN, 175).

While Livvie sobs, Solomon delivers his death speech, explaining his life, acknowledging its errors, and recognizing the irony of his wife's being claimed by one of the field hands, from whom he has tried to protect her:

"Young ones can't wait... So here comes the young man Livvie wait for. Was no prevention. No prevention. Now I lay eyes on young man and it come to be somebody I know all the time, and been knowing since he were born in a cotton patch, and watched grow up year to year, Cash McCord, grewed to size, grewed up to come in my house in the end—ragged and barefoot" (WN, 175).

Solomon can show his contempt for Cash only by coughing with "distaste." He continues talking, his lips moving like a chanter's."

"When Livvie married, her husband were already somebody. He had paid great cost for his land. He spread sycamore leaves over the ground from wagon to door, day he brought her home, so her foot would not have to touch ground. He carried her through his door. Then he grewed old and could not lift her, and she were still young."

"...God forgive Solomon for sins great and small. God forgive Solomon for carrying away too young girl for wife and keeping her away from her people and from all the young people would clamor for her back" (WN, 176).

Lifting his hand, he offers Livvie his silver watch—his proudest possession—and she ceases crying. Acknowledging that time has run out for him, he surrenders it symbolically to the young Livvie and, by extension, to the young Cash, whose young lives lie before them. Recalling Chaucer's Merchant's Tale, Bryant comments that "[s]eldom
in fiction has January given way to May with such grace and avoidance of pain. Nature wins effortlessly here. ..."114 To Appel, in "symbolically forgiving and releasing Livvie to Cash, Solomon gravely inaugurates the 'rites' which herald her joyful rebirth."115

The denouement (which may be considered the fourth section of the story) is less than a page long and records Livvie's final and complete surrender to Cash. Its tone is joyful as Cash sweeps her into an embrace, to which she is not at first completely submissive. As Cash bends his face to hers, she keeps one "hand stiff and still," the one that holds the dead Solomon's watch. But quickly this one last act of loyalty to Solomon is brought to an end; "the fingers softly let go, all of her limp, and the watch falls somewhere on the floor." Appel sees the release of the watch as Livvie's "signaling her return to Time and the rotating wheel of life."116 As she acquiesces to Cash's pressing young masculine ardor, Livvie hears "the full song of a bird," and she rests "in silence in Cash's trembling arms, unprotesting as a bird on a nest." The story ends on a lyrical note of ripeness and promise as the sun sparkles the bottle trees and "the young peach

114Bryant, Eudora Welty, p. 15.
115Season of Dreams, p. 197.
116Ibid., p. 198.
shines in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring" (WN, 177).

Miss Welty continues a pattern of sexual imagery even in the last lines of the story. To Appel the couple is linked symbolically in the last sentence where the "sexual correspondences" are drawn from nature, a practice in the story as a whole for which Bryant, Eisinger, and Miss Vande Kieft praise Welty. Thus Livvie responds to Cash as the "'young peach' among the bottles (female and male organs) responds to the 'sun'; their passion reaches its climax, 'shining with the bursting light of spring.'"

As Miss Howard has stated lucidly, "Livvie" may be interpreted as the heroine's movement "from a 'death' of static order and stifling certainty with Solomon, a life that has ignored her autonomy as an individual, to a life with Cash of questionable values, wherein she will have to make choices and exercise judgment." Livvie thus achieves Jungian individuation through an archetypal initiation of the type explained by Henderson.

Like Jenny, Livvie is freed from subjection to the will of a father figure. Livvie consciously moves to a role as an individual in her own right. Her "trial of strength,"

117 Ibid., p. 199.
118 Ibid.
119 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 86.
an element in the archetypal pattern of initiation, is her refusal to become Cash's woman before the death of Solomon frees her. Moreover, she knows that her life with Cash will be uncertain, at best, and perhaps not very respectable. Livvie dares to have the courage of the hero; unlike Prufrock, she is not overcome with inhibiting respectability and prevented from leading a rich, instinctive life of the senses. Thus the pattern of Livvie's life becomes, like her name, one of fulfillment. This story, as Eisinger remarks, reminds the reader of two important themes in the fiction of Eudora Welty: "[t]he vitality of human beings, the intense claims of the life force." 120

"A Sketching Trip"

"A Sketching Trip," printed in The Atlantic in June 1945,121 and never included in a collection of Miss Welty's short stories, also concerns the initiation of a young woman artist and may be compared with "A Memory." Although "A Sketching Trip" is not one of Miss Welty's best stories because of its excessive length (about 10,000 words), contrived plot resolution, and rather self-conscious style,

120 Fiction of the Forties, p. 270.

121 Pp. 62-70. All references to this story will be placed in the text with the abbreviation "ST" followed by the page number.
it is nevertheless an interesting account of decisive initiation and helps complete one's understanding of this theme in Welty's short stories. Very little attention has been paid to this story; Alfred Appel mentions it only once (in his bibliography), and Ruth Vande Kieft dismisses it in three sentences.

Both "A Memory" and "A Sketching Trip" concern childhood experiences that are recalled through adult points of view. Whereas "A Memory" is told in the first person, "A Sketching Trip" is narrated in the third person. A painter, Delia Farrar, goes on a sketching trip in the country, reconstructs a childhood experience, and gains a new insight into the world and her art. The girl in "A Memory" is already an incipient artist; Delia Farrar apparently has found her profession in the years following a summer vacation with her mother at Fergusson's Well, Mississippi.

Like the girl in "A Memory," Delia feels that "there has passed away a glory from the earth" that she has known as a child. Though the effect of experience is not altogether bad for the girl in "A Memory," she nevertheless feels a sense of loss when the protective framework that she has imposed upon life collapses. The adult Delia, in contrast, knows that as a girl she discovered something at

122 *Season of Dreams*, p. 266.

123 *Eudora Welty*, p. 187.
Fergusson's Wells which the intervening adult years have clouded over:

The sky was violet and silky, like one of those big plums. It was a day you could touch. It was texture she had always wanted—she was excited, a little, going under the fragrant trees—and hoped so much to learn; and surely, texture she had felt as a child at Fergusson's Wells—then she had first put out her hand and touched what was around her—an outer world. At the time she knew it—that was the remarkable thing. She knew this was discovery; she had reached with her full reach, put out adoring hands and touched the world ("ST," 62).

Delia feels that she must recapture her childlike response to nature if her painting is to have life:

In her painting, she had never shown this joy—were you ever able?—a joy that had no premonition or thinking back, that had neither pity nor calculation or other thought of herself—only a touching of the outward pulse, the awareness of a tender surface underneath which flowed and trembled and pressed life itself. It was as if this pulse became the green of leaves, the roundness of fruit, the rise and fall of a hill, when she began to paint, and could have become—anything ("ST," 62).

The young girl's developing sensitivity enabled her to perceive through the senses the throb of the life-force; and she rejoiced at the discovery. However, this unself-conscious response to life and nature apparently is no longer enjoyed by the adult Delia Farrar. As she began to paint, perhaps in later girlhood, after the Fergusson's Wells experience, the world of nature itself (fruit, leaves, hills) became symbols under whose "tender surface...flowed and trembled and pressed life itself." This intuitive
perception of the "pulse" of life, "when she began to paint . . . could have become—anything." The tense in this quotation is important: "could have become" suggests possibility and potentiality but not accomplishment. Hence she wishes to be able to paint this unalloyed joy, which has never been one of the accomplishments of her art.

"A Sketching Trip" reveals the tricks that memory can sometimes play upon one, disguising and concealing the truth of a situation and perhaps even the sources of one's deep-seated attitudes and behavior:

She had come here once as a child, with her mother, and that was twenty years ago. If she had ever since thought of Ferguson's Wells it was as a closed place; and it was not only with the idleness of a complete faith in her own past and childhood, but with a further idleness—an undisturbed belief that the greatest happiness had quite naturally occurred here, some magnificent festivity, a spectacle of beauty ("ST," 62).

Although her conscious memories of Ferguson's Wells are of happiness (for here as a child she had first felt the texture of the world), she wonders "with a moment's absurd anticipation what had kept her from returning long before this . . .," for "[h]er home was only twenty miles away." But "[t]hat one summer's buggy ride" away from Ferguson's Wells "had made it remote" ("ST," 62). In her symbolic ride away from childhood and into adulthood she has made the place and its associated qualities "remote" in her memory. It is as if she has repressed memories of the
resort until then, covering them over with thoughts of "the greatest happiness" that had occurred there.

Through a series of flashbacks, Delia recalls not only the happy times at Fergusson's Wells but also some disturbing experiences which she is only now able to understand. As she approaches the main house at the Fergusson's Wells resort, individual details of the scene from her childhood are clear, "but the whole [is] faded, with the fading of all things with summer lives and of something being, in that very moment, forgotten" ("ST," 63). In the summer of her life (early adulthood) she has forgotten the experiences at Fergusson's Wells, but one by one they return in the flashbacks that are recounted in sections two through six of this long story.

In providing motivation for each of the story's flashbacks, Miss Welty demonstrates her constant concern for the craft of fiction. Delia Farrar remembers her childhood visit to the ruins of an earlier Fergusson mansion when she sees a painting of the old house. She recalls that she was told a tale of illicit love and revenge about the old house, but her immature mind could not grasp the meaning of love, hate, and violence. At the scene as a child she could see the house's "structure all laid bare" ("ST," 67) with its roof gone. Merely "the anatomy of the story" ("ST," 67) of intense adult emotions was clear then to Delia. This incident from the long ago and one of more
recent occurrence come clear to Delia only in maturity. Miss Welty has shown well, through memory, the sense impressions which a child might have. Moreover, she has evoked these impressions in such a way as to allow the adult narrator a second look (mature awareness).

As Delia is exploring the apparently abandoned Fergusson's Wells hotel, she recognizes some of the old dining room furniture and recalls a shooting that took place there in her presence, when she was a child. Mr. Fergusson had shot at Mrs. Fergusson's lover, and in the resulting turmoil all the guests fled from the hotel and it was closed permanently. The shooting incident had never been mentioned again by Delia's mother ("ST," 69). The memory had remained in Delia's subconscious mind for over twenty years until her return to the old hotel. Then, as an adult, she is able to understand the significance of the incidents of passion and revenge which her childhood innocence had prevented her understanding.

As Miss Welty has observed of Katherine Anne Porter's stories, "Often the revelation that pierces a character's mind and heart and shows him his life or his death" may come in variety of ways: "in a dream, in retrospect, in illness or in utter defeat." For Josie in "The Winds" the revelation of her approaching womanhood has come in a

dream; for Delia Farrar the revelation has come "in retrospect" and is two-fold. She has learned something about the nature of adult emotions. She has also learned that just as the Fergusson mansion is now "faded like an old photograph" ("ST," 63) so is the entire quality of the commercial, "inn-keeper type" of Southern gentility epitomized in Mrs. Fergusson. Genteel, tranquil, and hospitable in appearance only, the South that Welty pictures here is a subtle example of both the Gothic decadence and the "alien commercial world" which Louise Bogan first identified in A Curtain of Green.  

Delia is entranced by Mrs. Fergusson, the mistress and hostess of Fergusson's Wells, who has "reddish-gold hair . . . shaped on her head like the paper in a Christmas bell." Her eyebrows are "thin and perfect"; over them Delia—with her quick, perceptive eyes—notes "tiny holes in the skin as though she had been pricked with the thorns of roses." Mrs. Fergusson would sit in a lawn swing, "moving only gently, with crossed ankles, . . . giving off in sighs the odor of almonds—of Bird's Eggs, those almonds covered with milky colors that could be bought at the Century Theatre in Jackson." When she walks, there is a combination of "jangling and sliding of scents, like the moving of bead strands over the breast and bracelets down the arm, and floating

125 Louise Bogan, "The Gothic South," review of A Curtain of Green, Nation, 6 December 1941, p. 572.
like the plumes of birdtails from her hair, and she smelled like all the sweet of the world" ("ST," 63). The intrigued Delia follows Mrs. Fergusson everywhere, forgetting about her own mother. But it is "not from love" that Delia follows this woman:

It was very strange—Mrs. Fergusson was rather the first person she had not loved. She followed her out of a lack of love, and the more remorselessly—more as she would follow a man selling cotton-candy at the Fair with a paper cone of an evil-looking strawberry-colored froth in each extended hand, just because he was selling it. We don't always follow what we love, Delia thought, as she stood now hesitating on the steps; we follow something followable ("ST," 63).

This passage seems to make clearer Miss Welty's meaning in the story. The parallel between the cotton-candy salesman offering the "strawberry-colored froth" for sale and the artificial, mechanical sweetness and "froth" of the red-haired Mrs. Fergusson suggests that Delia has followed the example of Mrs. Fergusson—representing false, empty commercialism—in her art. It was not the commercial which Delia loved as a child, but the opposite of it, the pure, natural texture of the world. What she has followed is surely that which was "followable" to an impressionable young artist—the commercial, the compromising, the falsely pleasing kind of art painted upon demand for the world's marketplace.

Delia recalls Mrs. Fergusson's daily walks after the mid-afternoon shower; Delia would follow after her, and
Mrs. Fergusson would turn, make "a tender, charming gesture with her hand," and ask, "Precious darling, what is it?"
Delia receives the squeeze of Mrs. Fergusson's hand "promptly and eagerly." Yet she feels "disappointment" and "a dark...wariness" in her contact with Mrs. Fergusson. The child senses something cold, artificial, and mechanical in the older woman's "charming gesture" ("ST," 64).

For Mrs. Fergusson, though enchantingly dressed in pale georgette and her cheeks pinked beyond the imagination, never once transformed herself, even in her voice, by saying one thing to this person, another thing to another. Everybody, even Mirrabel, a common brown rabbit around whose neck Mrs. Fergusson had tied a blue candy ribbon, was "Precious." She was a creature of a baffling and terrifying sameness. To Delia she was never, for one moment, an allurement--it was a kind of outrage with a promise to it. As from a germ, a seed inside, she knew that spreading, helpless gesture of Mrs. Fergusson's palms made her feel not her own fresh chivalry, but old chivalry, used, stale, ancient--other people's ("ST," 64).

Without being aware of it, Delia has in actuality followed the practice of Mrs. Fergusson's "old chivalry, used, stale, ancient"--hence false, debased, meaningless, a matter now of mere form. She has not trusted "her own fresh chivalry," her own fresh, valid, and intuitive drives as an individual and as an artist. As a result she has compromised her life and her art and therefore cannot achieve in her art that sense of "joy that has no premonition or thinking back, that has neither pity nor calculation or
other thought of herself" ("ST," 62). The negative qualities that are not part of the "joy," it may be assumed, are those that accompany Mrs. Fergusson's "old chivalry," corrupted because adapted to commercial purposes, i.e., innkeeper.

With the recollection of Mr. Torrance, Mrs. Fergusson's favorite boarder, Delia's narrative begins to take the form of an allegory. Mrs. Fergusson is corrupted Southern gentility reduced to the merely mechanical. Mr. Torrance (whose name suggests torrents) represents the smooth, self-important, ravenous, and finally overwhelming (torrential) mercantile spirit--Louise Bogan's "alien commercial world":

Mr. Torrance was silky-looking with a mouth of silk. He seemed full of the well waters, brimming. He drank out of Number 1. He was weighty as a seal. When he sat alone at his table the room seemed pinned, anchored down; it was his chair that fastened it forever to the round world. Food steamed toward him on its little winds. He groaned in joy all to himself, as he drew the napkin over his roily lap, like a mother covering her good child and wishing it sweet dreams. He was as perfect as wax fruit in his pink-shaded hands and face, and a pin tried in his cheek, she had imagined, would be likely to make only a powdery hole--from which the wind of his laughter, though, would suddenly strike you, and his near, choppy teeth would shoot crumbs of his laughter at little girls ("ST," 65).

Mr. Torrance is a striking symbol of hollow materialism, and the joy which comes to him during the meal is not the joy of discovering a spiritual principle in the world, the discovery of the girl Delia before she lost it, but the satisfaction of consumption. His eating is but a metaphor
for the whole complex of self-satisfied consumption and materialism which is the death of art:

Eating, he entered his world and dream. He ate off in a remoteness, and not until he was finished and had drawn a sigh would he return from that long perspective back to your presence, seeming to shudder his plump coat a little like a robin finishing up. Then he simply flew to your side, fronting and touching you with his breast if you were a lady, or Mr. if you were Mrs. Fergusson... ("ST," 65)

If Mr. Torrance represents commercialism and consumption, Mrs. Fergusson represents the object of his affections, representing "the old chivalry, used, stale, strangely used, and even exploited, by the lady at the Saturday-night dances, which she loves, ... mother-of-pearl colored, and nearly unreal— for surely every kind of wash and scent and color had covered it again." As Mrs. Fergusson retires for the evening, whispering "Precious darling" to Delia while she bends and kisses the child, "Delia kisses her respectfully" ("ST," 65), as if she is paying homage to the "old chivalry" even while as a child she perceives its falseness and emptiness.

Mr. Torrance represents an insidious threatening force to the ladies sitting quietly in the rockers on the porch, as if the rockers are "boxes in the stable... full of hens." As he passes by the porch after the dance, Delia remembers that "the world changed... the way a night breeze in moonlight suddenly shatters the intricate pattern
of quiet within the leaf, another will say. "Well, will be told that night is on the steps." Thirlwell's world. "27," 26),
can dren on the porch, has symbolizes a change in Wells, which is itself social order of the South.

Returning from an at the Wells accidental his lips pursed for a

His mouth was like boys in spring, ready to give rise to Mrs. Ferguson's with that said, that he would have happened, struck with the air, and scatter apart with a rainbow Torrance, with all at her face, let he wielded her on after before him, reserved, While she, a horse seemed to be making the rings on both phosphorescently in the laughing "3", of

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If Mr. Torrance represents the spirit of commercialism and consumption, Mrs. Fergusson, who becomes the object of his affections, represents an aging Southern coquette—"the old chivalry, used, stale, ancient"—who is willingly used, and even exploited, by Mr. Torrance. At the Saturday-night dances, which she loves, her face appears "mother-of-pearl colored, and nearly unreal— for surely every kind of wash and scent and color had covered it again." As Mrs. Fergusson retires for the evening, whispering "Precious darling" to Delia while she bends and kisses the child, "Delia kiss[s] her respectfully" ("ST," 65), as if she is paying homage to the "old chivarly" even while as a child she perceives its falseness and emptiness.

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of quiet within the leafy porch and someone will rise and another will say, 'Well—good night!' and no more stories will be told that night before any child stretched listening on the steps." This is "how Mr. Torrance revolted their world" ("ST," 65). Delia, along with the other children on the porch, has begun to perceive that Mr. Torrance symbolizes a change in the social order of Fergusson's Wells, which is itself perhaps a symbol of the changing social order of the South.

Returns from an outing one afternoon, the children at the Wells accidentally encounter Mr. Torrance, "with his lips pursed for a kiss."

His mouth was like an agate, that pride of boys in spring. He was leaning over just ready to give it to Mrs. Fergusson—strike Mrs. Fergusson's little glassy mouth with it, with that hard, thumping release an agate would get under the thumb of a frowning boy. What would have happened? Would Mrs. Fergusson, struck with the agate kiss, have flung back and scattered everything in Fergusson's Wells apart with a rainbow light? Not yet. Mr. Torrance, with almost a push of his eyebrows at her face, let her go. Almost like a beetle he wielded her on ahead of him out of the parlor, with his eyebrows forking and driving her before him, reserving her for future lairs. While she, a morsel, all inviting and caught, seemed to be making little dazzling motions, the rings on both her hands twinkling phosphorescently in the hall gloom. She was laughing ("ST," 67-68).

This passage is significant, for it provides both a fore­shadowing of the climax of the story—"everything in Fergusson's Wells [being scattered] apart"—but also a vivid description of Mr. Torrance as preying insect and
Mrs. Fergusson as a mesmerized "morsel." Although it would be an exaggeration to read this story as an allegory of agrarian versus industrial in the tradition of the Vanderbilt group of the 1920's and 1930's, it is possible to view Mrs. Fergusson's "old chivalry" as the New South with its set of inherited values now become mere form and custom. Mr. Torrance, "forking and driving her before him" represents the "beetle" of modern commercialism which will consume her, the South, and thereby infect even its young artists, like young Delia Farrar. However, the critic of Miss Welty should be aware that she has warned against an author's writing polemics, and any treatment of political or social themes in her fiction will be very oblique indeed.

Until she has reconstructed the place of Mr. Torrance and Mrs. Fergusson in her memories, Delia does not think of Mr. Fergusson. Delia recalls that he "always came last—now even to the memory" ("ST," 65). He was the owner of the resort, although the guests were inclined to forget this fact since he was always in the background, engaged in menial tasks. A self-effacing man, he was always saying "Excuse me."

He would take himself off in an old black planter's hat and sit in a shed, making something. He had one good eye and one that had had sand rubbed in it, a lesson to children in summer. Off at a little distance, with perhaps one little boy following him, he could be seen carrying things from one point to another across the park, across the back yard—ladders, lengths of chain, buckets, and demijohns, a purpling flour-sack of figs.
Perhaps he did the work. For the Negroes were Mrs. Fergusson's, and wore white coats ("ST," 65).

In this story Mr. Fergusson represents the welling up of the life force, of the need to be loved, which, if denied, sometimes results in violence. Refused love by his wife, who represents "the old chivalry," and replaced in her affections by the acquisitive materialist Mr. Torrance, Mr. Fergusson reacts by shooting at Mr. Torrance during an evening of magician's tricks. Asked to surrender his hat to be used by Mr. Torrance in one of his routines, Mr. Fergusson is identified by all in the room as he bares his bald head, which glows "like a small, single light itself, a chilly light. . . ." He looks over the heads of the assembly, "stony and single-eyed, like a lighthouse, at his wife," whom he is silently asking to love him. No one dares "look at Mrs. Fergusson, who [is] caught up now in his glare and beam. . . ." Hatless, he turns and leaves the room. Mr. Torrance sets the hat down on a little table and "flicks his cuffs for a new trick," saying "You see, I have nothing up my sleeves." But Delia thinks, "So of course he has" ("ST," 68), recalling after two decades the air of dishonesty about the man.

The group is shocked when Mr. Fergusson re-enters the room with a gun and shoots at Mr. Torrance but misses him. Mayhem breaks loose in the room, which is also the dining room filled with cabinets of dishes. Delia remembers that
"the room shook like a forest of china" ("ST," 68). While some women faint, the mothers grab their children to their skirts; Delia recalls these details about the incident:

Crying softly, struggling in some feminine grasp, [she] heard it on all sides—the breaking, the shattering and echoing—it was the imminent closing of the Wells, the end of vacation, of her own adventure, she heard—all and each gave out its fragile, summerlike, falling, crystal sound. . . . The incident had never been mentioned again. They left in the morning; the only one who stayed was an old lady. . . . The Fergusson's Wells carriage had borne them all smoothly away and the little colored boys with their wilted fistfuls of flowers had run out and pleaded, 'Violence! Violence!' beside the rolling wheels. . . . ("ST," 69).

The irony of the Negro boys' malapropism ("violence" for "violets") is that violence has indeed been done to Delia's conception of the world, although she "forgets" the "violence" in the years ahead.

In the last section of the story, set entirely in the present, Delia is surprised when the aged Mr. Fergusson himself enters the dusty old dining room, interrupting her reverie. Reuben, the old colored servant, accompanies the old man. The Fergussons' only son, now grown and affluent, sends his father cases of Bourbon which Reuben hides in various parts of the old house for the man to search for as a way of filling up the emptiness of his days. Delia is surprised to learn that Mr. Fergusson did not succeed in killing Mr. Torrance and that Mrs. Fergusson and her lover had eloped after that summer and now live only forty miles away ("ST," 69).
Mr. Fergusson, it seems, deeply desired love from his wife. With "weak teasing tears of laughter" shining in his old eyes, he confesses to Delia, whom he remembers from that summer years before: "I thought she'd sweep me off my feet... I still thought she'd do it, one day. Up till the very minute I fired that load of rabbit shot I thought she might." Delia recognizes that that "spark in his eye [is] pride." Mr. Fergusson—self-effacing and graceless putterer—incongruously desired to be loved passionately by his wife. Delia thinks, "How could you ever tell the ones who wanted to be swept off their feet in the world—those who were just going to taste the lotus, but hadn't yet?" ("ST," 69) The flowers of Tennyson's poem "The Lotus Eaters" was an enchanted fruit: eaten by Odysseus' men, it induces a state of dreamy and contented forgetfulness.126 Ironically, Mr. Fergusson's lotus is a fruit he would never taste, and for twenty years he has not forgotten that one frenzied moment when his act of violence "—the breaking, the shattering and echoing—" meant "the imminent closing of the Wells" and the beginning of a life of seclusion for him.

Like the girl in "A Memory," Delia has learned several lessons in that childhood experience at the Wells. Not

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only has she learned about human violence and chaos in her last evening as a child at the Wells, but she has also learned, unfortunately, that it is the selfish and commercial element in life (symbolized by Mr. Torrance and Mrs. Fergusson) which often succeeds—and it is this route that she has taken in her own career as an artist. But now with the help of the new knowledge of, and insight into, her childhood experience, she feels that it is love—seen paradoxically in such an unlikely person as Mr. Fergusson—which must replace the falseness and mechanicalness of the Mr. Torrances and Mrs. Fergussons in life and in art before one can know the "joy that has [s] no premonition or thinking back, that has [s] neither pity nor calculation or other thought of [one] self"

In the final paragraphs of the story Delia returns to the site of "a haunted house" ("ST," 70), the ruins of an ante-bellum mansion, which had once been the home of the Fergussons and also the scene of a legendary murder of a wife and her lover by the enraged husband (an ironical parallel to the affair between Mr. Torrance and Mrs. Fergusson). Twenty years before, she had visited the scene with several other children under the watchful eye of Miss Mews, Mr. Fergusson's half-sister, who had also painted the older Fergusson mansion as it might have appeared in the days of its grandeur" ("ST," 66-67).
Delia is moved to paint the ruins of the old house, which sets atop a high hill above Fergusson's Wells. Not being pleased with any of the sketches she has made, she begins to meditate on the beauty of the evening light on the ruins of the old house. In doing so, she has something of a mystical experience:

She stood up and gazed awhile at the color of the bricks intensified with the deepening light. The badness of her work went out of her. The chimney itself, in its beauty, in its presence, as long as it stood there, was enough. Enough, she thought, for all the error applied to that place, all misconceptions, for all that went astray in sight of it, better than a dream. Not the house as it had once stood, but something before that, some exuberance of its inception, seemed hovering about it. Smoothed, worn by them all, it rose taller than any happenings or any times that forever beset the beauty itself of life. It was no part of shelter now, it was the survivor of shelter, an entity, glowing, erect, and a fiery color, the ancient color of a phoenix ("ST," 70).

Delia's "sketching trip" has thus become for her a journey into the past—into repressed memories of early childhood influences—which has freed her from the baneful following of the empty, commercial, and hence unreal example of Mrs. Fergusson. Her senses are restored to their original childhood purity by a ritual of initiation in which her old view of life has died and the original one is re-born. She is able to feel the joy of life, love, and of creation symbolized by the ancient chimney, a symbol of the human spirit. It is as if the impurities of her own spirit have been burned away in that symbolic fireplace; "the badness
of her work went out of her" ("ST," 70).

Delia's vision of the fireplace, which is of "the ancient color of a phoenix," suggests the symbolic death before rebirth as discussed by Henderson, who has also explained the significance of the bird as a symbol of transcendence. The bird represents intuition, operating through the individual or medium in a trance-like state.\(^{127}\)

In her vision of the chimney as phoenix, Delia experiences psychic growth and an inner ordering of her existence. Moreover, in observing Mr. Fergusson's love for his wife (though she was not worthy of that love, which was never returned), Delia learns what it is to love another person than oneself. She is finally placed in harmony with external nature so that once again she knows the joy of oneness with the pulse of life which she has known as a child but has lost by choosing to follow the wrong master.

A rich, instinctive life of the senses and harmony with external nature thus seems a strong possibility for Delia. As she returns to her car with her three wet paintings, she sees

> . . . a little boy, brown-haired. Dappled like grass in the last sun, he lay in the curve of the embankment with his scratched, ruddy legs straddled upwards and his toes curled in the clover, silent while his eyes followed her. . . . He was eating berries from his cupped hands, his lips stained purple and gently parted ("ST," 70).

Miss Welty's apparently naked young lad, entirely at home in nature, suggests Dionysus, who was sometimes represented as "young and delicate"\(^{128}\) in ancient Greek mythology. She has chosen to allow her young Dionysus to partake of the juice of Southern blackberries rather than of grapes, but the mythological parallels often present in stories of initiation are nevertheless apparent in her narrative.

"A Sketching Trip" is an example of a decisive initiation in which the protagonist definitely and firmly achieves maturity, understanding, and self-discovery. However, this work lacks the power of related selections in the published collections of short stories. "A Sketching Trip" would have to be greatly condensed to stand with Miss Welty's finest stories, for its many descriptive details are not always functional. Moreover, the story suffers from a contrived denouement, the appearance of Mr. Fergusson in the very room in which she believes he killed Mr. Torrance twenty years before. It is a little too neat to have the supposed killer relate the truth, that Torrance is still alive, and gather up all the other loose strands of the narrative. Finally, the story's style appears somewhat self-conscious. The too-great luxuriance of figures of speech, for which Miss Welty's writing has been criticized,\(^{129}\) is quite noticeable. For example, Mr. Torrance's

\(^{128}\) Norton and Rushton, Classical Myths, p. 135.

\(^{129}\) Trilling, "Fiction in Review," p. 386.
entrance into the dining room at Fergusson's Wells is "immediately and ruddily reflected in the hundred flushed faces of the cut-glass vinegar cruets and compotes of strawberry preserves which watched him with the compound eye of an insect" ("ST," 64). Later in the story Miss Welty compares drawing "a finger through the warm dust on a soundless piano key" to "finding dust on a person's eyelashes, a person sleeping in the sun" ("ST," 65). Mrs. Fergusson's being "enchantingly dressed" ("ST," 64) is an epithet that Miss Welty could have wisely eschewed. Such stylistic extravagances suggest obvious reasons why she has chosen not to include "A Sketching Trip" in her collections of short stories. However, as a portrait of the artist as a young girl this story, along with the more superior "A Memory," provides valuable insight into an author who, in the words of Katherine Anne Porter, has been able to free herself "from self-love, self-pity, self-preoccupation, that triple damnation of too many of the young and gifted, and has reached an admirable objectivity"130 in her finest stories.

"A Curtain of Green"

A rich, instinctive life of the senses and harmony with external nature seem definite possibilities for Delia Farrar as a result of her almost Wordsworthian

re-identification with the "outward pulse" of nature, "underneath which flowed and trembled and pressed life itself." A similar discovery of "the vitality of human beings, the intense claims of the life force,"¹³¹ is made—although more painfully—by Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green."

Like Livvie, Mrs. Larkin is one of Miss Welty's married initiates; the difference is that Mrs. Larkin has known mature adult love and Livvie discovers it for the first time. In both stories each protagonist's libido—the creative force or will to live¹³²—has been influenced by the presence of death and death-like elements. For Livvie, marriage to an old and finally dying man and life in virtual seclusion have delayed her awakening to the full fruition of womanhood. Mrs. Larkin's libido has been affected seriously by the accidental death of her husband before her very eyes. Both Livvie and Mrs. Larkin experience a "rite of passage"—with its symbolism of death and rebirth—into a new and fuller understanding of life and death, of themselves, and of themselves in relation to the world. Such initiations, as Henderson has pointed out,

¹³¹ Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 270.

often occur in middle and later life.\textsuperscript{133}

The portrayal of Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green" is accomplished through the point of view of what Zelma Turner Howard has called "a reliable but detached narrator" whose role is "to observe and report to the reader the protagonist's actions and reactions." Since Mrs. Larkin's behavior departs from the accepted norm of behavior, she cannot tell her own story without incoherent results. Thus the author had to choose a narrator who would "report objectively and reliably the protagonist's unusual behavior as well as the reactions of others" to the unusual behavior. The narrator must simply report the actions; for example, he opens the story with a weather report; "Every day one summer in Larkin's Hill, it rained a little. The rain was a regular thing, and would come about two o'clock in the afternoon" (CG, 209). The narrator cannot comment on or interpret the thoughts and actions of the protagonist or of the other persons in the story. The reader must remain free to come to his own conclusions. The objective approach of Eudora Welty in "A Curtain of Green" and in some other stories, Miss Howard concludes, is "employed to avoid the sentimental, the emotional, and the overly didactic tone that could pervade a story which is concerned

\textsuperscript{133}"Ancient Myths and Modern Man," pp. 30-31.
with the suffering of the innocent."\textsuperscript{134} It is not that Miss Welty lacks compassion for her characters, as Kay Boyle has charged,\textsuperscript{135} but that she feels she must reveal her illusion-possessed characters for what they are, victims of "an impossible dream" (CG, 215). Mrs. Larkin is such a character; her husband was killed in spite of the fact that she believes "her love for her husband was keeping him safe" (CG, 214).

She recalls the details in a painful flashback one day as she works in her garden:

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
. . . Memory tightened about her easily, without any prelude of warning or even despair. She would see promptly, as if a curtain has been jerked quite unceremoniously away from a little scene, the front porch of the white house, the shady street in front, and the blue automobile in which her husband approached, driving home from work. It was a summer day, a day from the summer before. In the freedom of gaily turning her head, a motion she was now forced by memory to repeat as she hoed the ground, she could see again the tree that was going to fall. There had been no warning. But there was the enormous tree, the fragrant chinaberry tree, suddenly tilting, dark and slow like a cloud, leaning down to her husband. From her place on the front porch she had spoken in a soft voice to him, never so intimate as at that moment, "You can't be hurt" (CG, 213-214).
\end{quote}
\end{center}

However, Mrs. Larkin's love for her husband is powerless to prevent the horrible occurrence:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134}Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, pp. 18-19.
\item \textsuperscript{135}Kay Boyle, "Full Length Portrait," New Republic, 24 November 1941, 707.
\end{itemize}
But the tree had fallen, struck the car exactly so as to crush him to death. She had waited there on the porch for a time afterward, not moving at all—in a sort of recollection—as if to reach under and bring out from obliteration her protective words and to try them once again...so as to change the whole happening. It was an accident that was incredible, when her love for her husband was keeping him safe (CG, 214). [Ellipsis points are Welty's.]

Like the narrator of "A Memory," Appel points out, Mrs. Larkin has tried "to order reality," but the chaos of chance and accident have proven too great for "the protective powers of love" of both females. The girl in "A Memory" could not prevent her friend's inexplicable nosebleed, and Mrs. Larkin could not prevent the terrible accident. The result of the trauma for Mrs. Larkin is that she has tried to annihilate herself—her ego, her identification with others and the world—by obsessive work in her wild, green garden.

Miss Howard feels that there is large human truth in the "incident of life"—the accident—with which Miss Welty chooses to incite the action of "A Curtain of Green." Human beings find it difficult "to accept a freak accident that involves the sudden death of a loved one." If the loved one is a young person, "a feeling of helplessness and bitterness" may develop, "a feeling that fate is cruel and unfair, an attitude of non-acceptance greater than that

136 Season of Dreams, p. 30.
normally evoked by a natural death of a loved one following a period of illness." In short, the sudden, violent death of young Mr. Larkin has left his wife utterly incapable of confronting "her shock and loneliness."^137

She works compulsively—"without stopping"—all day long in her "large, densely grown" garden plot; she appears a "clumsy, small figure" in an "old pair of men's overalls rolled up at the sleeves and trousers." She is "over-vigorous, disreputable, and heedless" of either the weather or the opinions of her neighbors, to whom she never turns for advice about what to plant and to whom she never sends any flowers from her garden. Looking down from their upstairs windows, the women of the town "locate...her from their distance almost in curiosity, and then forget her" (CG, 209-212).

It is as if Mrs. Larkin wishes not only to isolate herself in what her neighbors call a "jungle" (a metaphor for her life, Appel asserts^138), but also to conceal her womanliness now that her husband is dead. In addition to the pair of "untidy overalls," she often wears "her hair streaming and tangled where she has neglected to comb it." At one point in the story "the clumsy sleeves" fall back, "exposing the thin, unsunburned whiteness of her


^138 Season of Dreams, p. 32.
arms, the shocking fact of their youth" (CG, 210, 216).
It is made clear, then, that Mrs. Larkin is yet a young woman, but one in whom the well springs of feeling have seemingly dried up. She has not visited her neighbors since they called on her shortly after her husband's death a year before. And "she has never once been seen anywhere else" (CG, 210) but in her garden where she can only occasionally tolerate the presence of one person, Jamey, a colored boy who helps her (CG, 213).

In enslaving herself to work in her garden Mrs. Larkin does not attempt to subvert nature, Bryant thinks, but "participates in its luxuriant wildness." She can seldom be seen cutting, separating, or tying back her shrubs. "To a certain extent, she seems not to seek for order, but to allow an overflowering, as if she consciously ventures forever a little farther, a little deeper, into her life from seed and shrub catalogues and sets them out without plan and in great haste. It is as if in recognizing that nature represents the chaos of nature, Ruth Vande Kieft observes, Mrs. Larkin "plunges herself into the wild greenness out of which death fell: nature unpruned, uncultivated, formless in its fecundity. In the process of plunging, she hopes to discover the essential meaning of

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139 Eudora Welty, p. 12.
nature; the knowledge itself will give her a kind of power over it, even though paradoxically she must abandon herself to it.\footnote{Appel believes that in allowing the garden complete, uncontrolled freedom, Mrs. Larkin has apparently hoped that the green jungle "will provide her with a refuge and answer to the meaning of her husband's death." The paradox of her situation is that "after having shut out the everyday world and having drawn a self-protective curtain of green around herself and created a fecund world which would seem to exclude all suffering and death, she nevertheless cannot block the memory of her husband's death."\footnote{The memory appears to her "as if a curtain ha[s] been jerked quite unceremoniously away from a little scene" (CG, 213). Sometimes, the narrator points out, Mrs. Larkin is struck by existentialist despair:}

She felt all at once terrified, as though her loneliness had been pointed out by some outside force whose finger parted the hedge. She drew her hand for an instant to her breast. An obscure fluttering there frightened her, as though the force babbled to her. The bird that flies within your heart could not divide this cloudy air... She stared without expression at the garden (CG, 215).\footnote{Ellipsis points are Miss Welty's.}

\footnote{Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 29.}

\footnote{Appel, Season of Dreams, p. 31.}
As Henderson has pointed out, the bird may represent both
intuition, transcendence, and an initiation journey.\textsuperscript{142}
"The bird that flies within your heart" probably repre­
sents intuition or the will to love, which has been thwarted
by the accidental death of Mr. Larkin. Hence, Mrs. Larkin's
intuition has not yet been able to penetrate "this cloudy
air" to be restored to a sense of oneness with nature and
her fellow man.

The principal incident in "A Curtain of Green"—the
incident that precipitates the initiation of Mrs. Larkin—
concerns Jamey, the young black boy in her employment. As
he works in her garden one afternoon, kneeling in a flower
bed, she notes "a look of docility in the Negro's back"
which—for some ambiguous reason—angers her.

She forced herself to look at him, and noticed
him closely for the first time—the way he
looked like a child. As he turned his head
a little to one side and negligently stirred
the dirt with his yellow finger, she saw,
with a sort of helpless suspicion and hunger,
a soft, rather deprecating smile on his face;
he was lost in some impossible dream of his
own while he was transplanting the little
shoots. . . . That glimpse of the side of
his face, that turned-away smile, was a
teasing, innocent, flickering and beautiful
vision—some mirage to her strained and wan­
dering eyes (CG, 215).

Miss Howard believes that Miss Welty's choice of a child
servant rather than an adult servant is deliberate. "The
trusting innocence of the child may remind Mrs. Larkin of

\textsuperscript{142}"Ancient Myths and Modern Man," p. 115.
her own shattered illusions. Perhaps Jamey's absorption in an impossible dream of his own reminds her of her once possible dream. Perhaps the mirage is of the child she has been denied."\textsuperscript{143} Because of Mrs. Larkin's love of her husband and her home, she does indeed have great potential for loving. Miss Howard's conjecture about Mrs. Larkin seems to contain a good deal of validity.

The shock, loneliness, and anger that have remained unexpressed in her in the year since her husband's death loom up in Mrs. Larkin as she stands directly above the day-dreaming boy, who is not even aware of her presence. She thinks of the ease with which she could kill Jamey with her hoe, so trusting and innocent he is. She now has the power—as nature did when it destroyed her beloved husband—to annihilate a human life. In terms of Jungian psychology, Mrs. Larkin's \textit{libido}—her creative urge—has been temporarily overshadowed by her \textit{mortido}—her destructive urge.\textsuperscript{144} As she raises the hoe above the boy's head,

\begin{quote}
...she gripped the handle tightly, tightly, as though convinced that the wood of the handle could feel, and that all her strength could indent its surface with pain. The head of Jamey,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{144} These terms are defined in Berne, \textit{Layman's Guide to Psychiatry}, pp. 60-61.
bent there below her, seemed witless, terrifying, wonderful, almost inaccessible to her, and yet in its explicit nearness meant surely for destruction, with its clustered hot woolly hair, its intricate, glistening ears, its small brown branching streams of sweat, the bowed head holding so obviously and so deadly its ridiculous dream.

Such a head she could strike off, intentionally, so deeply did she know, from the effect of a man's danger and death, its cause in oblivion; and so helpless was she, too helpless to defy the workings of accident, of life and death, of unaccountability (CG, 216).

Like the aging woman in Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," Mrs. Larkin faces "utter defeat," and, like Granny, she is pulled by the forces of life and death:

...Life and death, she thought, gripping the heavy hoe, life and death, which now meant nothing to her but which she was compelled continually to wield with both her hands, ceaselessly asking, Was it not possible to compensate? to punish? to protest? Pale darkness turned for a moment through the sunlight, like a narrow leaf blown through the garden in a wind (CG, 216-217).

Mrs. Larkin has been infuriated by Jamey's tranquility, his self-possession, his quiet acceptance of life (qualities she deeply desires), and momentarily she has had an urge to kill him wantonly—as a gesture of protest or compensation—just as her husband was killed. But Mr. Larkin had been killed, as Ruth Vande Kieft explains lucidly,

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"out of oblivion—without malice or motive." His death was without motive or meaning. If Mrs. Larkin kills Jamey, the death of the child would also be meaningless because it would in no way compensate for her husband's death. And as an act of protest, it would be doubly meaningless because, Miss Vande Kieft concludes, "life and death are arbitrarily given and taken, pointlessly interchangeable. . . ." 146

These questions about punishment, compensation, and protest for her husband's death having flashed through her mind, rain begins to fall upon Mrs. Larkin, signaling the freeing of her libido so that she may again be able to love, give, build, even procreate. 147 The ritual of her initiation has begun; to Miss Vande Kieft the rain is Mrs. Larkin's "release. . . . It is a chance of nature which saves her from committing a meaningless murder, just as it is a chance of nature which kills her husband." 148 Mrs. Larkin sighs, lowers her hoe, and listens to the rain falling. To her the sound and feel of the rain are "gentle." The rain marks "the end of waiting" (CG, 216).

146 Eudora Welty, p. 30.

147 These are the qualities of the libido as explained by Berne, Layman's Guide to Psychiatry, p. 60.

Like Delia Farrar at the end of "The Sketching Trip," Mrs. Larkin has a vision which seems to unite her with the pulse of life in her garden:

In the light from the rain, different from sunlight, everything appeared to gleam unreflecting from within itself in its quiet arcade of identity. The green of the small zinnia shoots was very pure, almost burning. One by one, as the rain reached them, all the individual little plants shone out, and then the branching vines. The pear tree gave a soft rushing noise, like the wings of a bird alighting (CG, 216).

Two images in this quotation are important: the pear tree and the bird. Both perhaps become symbols in this story of renewed life force and intuitive powers. The pear symbol, which is at least as old as Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale" and famous also in Katherine Mansfield's story "Bliss," represent the possibility for fruition through marriage for Mrs. Larkin.\(^{149}\) Earlier, before the rain, the pear tree "in mid-April hung heavily almost to the ground in brilliant full leaf, in the center of the garden" (CG, 211). Then, Miss Howard says, "the rains of fruition" come, and the reader is able to see "the concept of fulfillment in proper perspective."\(^{150}\) The noise of the pear tree sounding "like the wings of a bird alighting" suggests again the symbol of the bird, representing

\(^{149}\) Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 25.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., p. 26.
transcendence and the initiation experience. Moreover, Miss Welty chooses to set her story in "mid-April" to emphasize Mrs. Larkin's springtime release from an unnaturally sterile, wintery life of the emotions.

Mrs. Larkin surrenders to the rain as she feels it beat against her in a "wind of deep wet fragrance. . . . Then as if it has swollen and broken over a daily levee, tenderness tears through her sagging body" (CG, 218). Having submitted herself to the forces of nature in this ritual of initiation, she now enjoys a period of containment, and finally of liberation.

It has come, she thought senselessly, her head lifting and her eyes looking without understanding at the sky which has begun to move, to fold nearer in softening, dissolving clouds. It was almost dark. Soon the loud and gentle night of rain would come. It would pound upon the steep roof of the white house. Within, she would lie in her bed and hear the rain. On and on it would fall, beat and fall. The day's work would be over in the garden. She would lie in bed, her arms tired at her sides and in motionless peace: against that which was inexhaustible there was no defense.

Then Mrs. Larkin sank in one motion down into the flowers and lay there, fainting and streaked with rain. Her face was fully upturned, down among the plants, with the hair beaten away from her forehead and her open eyes closing at once when the rain touched them. . . (CG, 218-219).

In this passage, Louis Y. Gossett believes Miss Welty wishes the reader to see that Mrs. Larkin, "her vitality chilled by the death of her husband," feels the rain and "drops to
the earth reconciled to her impotence against fate and reunited with nature and her own sexual vitality."\(^{151}\)

Zelma Turner Howard maintains that the education of Mrs. Larkin is even greater:

She may realize that just as sunshine and rain are necessary for the fruition of flowers, both are also necessary for developing the fullness of one's life.

Mrs. Larkin discovers the precarious balance, the thin line between life and death, for even she possessed the power and the momentary inclination to bring death to the trusting and innocent; she feels a fluttering of identity with the child whom she is unable to destroy; she understands that an intermingling of joy and sorrow are necessary to the proper maturing of man-kind; but most important, she realizes that sparing the life of an individual is of far greater significance than an over-production of numerous plants.\(^{152}\)

But most important, Miss Howard asserts, "in the coming of the rain" Mrs. Larkin "finds not forgetfulness but some measure of inner reality. . . ."\(^{153}\) She understands finally that "against that which was inexhaustible, there [is] no defense." Having fainted among the flowers as the rain comes, her face is "fully upturned," that is, responsive to the liberation which nature provides. The painful shattering of her original illusion that her love could keep her husband safe from harm may, Miss Howard concludes, have


\(^{153}\) Ibid., p. 27.
led "to realization, discovery, and maturity" for Mrs. Larkin, whose initiation may be considered decisive, since she seems to have achieved greater self-understanding as well as a symbolic rebirth in which she is again able to respond with love, e.g., to the innocence of the boy Jamey.

In each of Eudora Welty's stories of initiation, the motif of revelation is important. Marian's initiation into the world of illness and old age is tentative because she flees from the revelation of loneliness and suffering she finds in the old women's home. Her selfishness prevents her reaching out in love to the two old women she encounters. The revelation of physical grotesqueness and vulgarity which penetrates the young girl's sheltered vision in "A Memory" modifies her vision and helps prepare her for life in an unsheltered world. Her initiation and that of Josie in "The Winds" are uncompleted. Both girls achieve a degree of maturation and understanding but are left struggling for certainty. The revelation of what it means to be a mature woman comes to Josie in a dream, and she experiences a symbolic rebirth as she surrenders to natural and inevitable forces of growth. The revelation that accompanies Jenny Lockhart's initiation in "At the Landing" leads her to confuse a sexual relationship with genuine

\[154\text{Ibid.}\]
love. Unlike Josie, Jenny does not have the wise guidance of loving parents to help her through the storms of immaturity. Jenny's initiation is also uncompleted, for she is not like the more mature Livvie, who is able to make a conscious choice when offered love. "Livvie" experiences a symbolic rebirth as she is liberated from Solomon's house of death into a new and joyous life with the virile young Cash. Livvie's initiation, like that of Mrs. Larkin and Delia Farrar, is decisive because she achieves maturity, understanding, and self-discovery. She is aware that in loving Cash she must abandon the respectable values which Solomon represents; but she makes her decision consciously. She is also sufficiently mature to honor her marriage-bond with her husband by not surrendering to Cash's sexual advances until after Solomon's death. Like Livvie, Mrs. Larkin and Delia Farrar experience a symbolic rebirth which reunites them with the vital forces of nature. Delia Farrar's powers as an artist are strengthened through her rebirth; Mrs. Larkin's sense of her womanly potentiality is restored through the dream-like experience which reveals to her the need to accept both life and death as necessary parts of an earthly existence. For Josie, Mrs. Larkin, and Delia Farrar a dream is the source of revelation, a technique that Miss Welty praises in the work of Katherine Anne Porter.  

155"The Eye of the Story," p. 266.
The revelation for these three women is the possibility of life-fulfillment. Their dreams, however, are tempered by reality, as is Livvie's vision of life with Cash. For the girl in "A Memory" the dream world is pierced by reality necessary for preparing her for life in the world. For Jenny Lockhart, however, the dream-world of her immaturity keeps her "at the landing," in a state of innocence which makes her a victim, not a victor like some of the other women, especially Livvie, Delia Farrar, and Mrs. Larkin, who in their maturity reaffirm "the vitality of human beings" and "the intense claims of the life force." 156

156 Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 270.
CHAPTER III

SPINSTERS AS ISOLATEES

Philosophical and Psychological Background

Until they are released from their symbolic imprison­ment and are able to re-establish bonds of love and understanding with nature and their fellowmen, some of Eudora Welty's women initiates—including Livvie and Mrs. Larkin—are among the group of characters first identified by Robert Penn Warren, those "who, in one way or another, are cut off, alienated, isolated from the world."¹ But Miss Welty has a large number of isolated people in her stories who never experience symbolic rebirth and are therefore doomed to lead death-like lives. "One of the basic realities of human experience...is solitude," John Edward Hardy believes, and "Miss Welty's fiction has, indeed, provided us with some of the finest studies in this mode. It is remarkable...that she has been able to treat convincingly, from the inside, the experience not only of women in solitude but of men"² as well. For example,

Miss Welty's stories of traveling salesmen, "Death of A Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitch-Hikers," are (besides "Why I Live at the P.O.") probably the most famous examples of isolation in her writings. However, among her isolated characters—those who are never able "to escape into the world," one finds ten single women, old maids, in six stories whose experiences provide substantial insight into her methods of characterization and into an important theme in her fiction, that of "love and separateness." These women are Sister in "Why I Live at the P. O." (CG), Clytie and Octavia Farr in "Clytie" (CG), Cora, Phoebe, and Irene in "Asphodel" (WN), Miss Myra and Miss Theo in "The Burning" (The Bride of the Innisfallen), Lotte Eckhart in "June Recital" and Virgie Rainey in "The Wanderers" (The Golden Apples). Since only one critic has


4 Miss Welty's writings contain many spinsters. Aimee Slocum, the old maid in "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," is, like Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." and Miss Hattie Purcell in "Ladies in Spring," the postmistress of a small Mississippi village. "Sister" Anne Fry in "Kin" is a dependent spinster. Several old maid aunts appear in Miss Welty's first novel, Delta Wedding. A spinster, Edna Earle Ponder, is the narrator of Miss Welty's short novel, The Ponder Heart. Miss Welty's most recent novels contain several old maids, notably Miss Lexie Renfro and Miss Julia Mortimer in Losing Battles and Miss Adele Courtland (like Miss Julia Mortimer, a retired school-teacher) in The Optimist's Daughter.

The present chapter includes at least one story about spinsters from each of Miss Welty's collections of short stories.
discussed Miss Welty's unmarried women—and without any attempt to relate this group to her treatment of the theme of isolation—, the purpose of this chapter is to examine Miss Welty's characterization of the old maid in her short stories and to show the connections between characterization and the theme of alienation, isolation, or cut-off-ness. In addition, the depiction of the single woman will be compared with the traditional characterization of the old maid in American literature.

Miss Welty's clearest statement about estrangement is to be found in "A Still Moment" in *The Wide Net*. Lorenzo Dow, the obsessed frontier evangelist, "could understand God's giving Separateness first and then giving Love to follow and heal in its wonder; but God had reversed this, and given Love first and then Separateness, as though it did not matter to Him which came first" (93). To Miss Welty, man seems doomed to suffer separateness unless through love he can re-establish something of that original, harmonious love which can "heal in its wonder." Until one is able to reach out, through love and understanding, to establish communion and communication with his fellow man, Miss Welty seems to say, he will be among those "human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face

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of the earth" that Cassie Morrison discovers in "June Recital."  

Erich Fromm's explanation of man's separateness and need for reconciliation compares interestingly with Miss Welty's. Fromm explains man's fall symbolically; man's fall caused him to lose harmony with nature and his fellowman or, in Miss Welty's view, to lose absolute love and to gain separateness. Particularly striking is the similarity of thinking about the "accidentalness" of man's life; to Lorenzo Dow God seems whimsical and illogical in giving man separateness after love. To Fromm, man becomes "aware of his aloneness and separateness" and "of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death":

Man, who lives in the Garden of Eden, in complete harmony with nature but without awareness of himself, begins his history by the first act of freedom, disobedience to a command. Concomitantly, he becomes aware of himself, of his separateness, and his helplessness; he is expelled from Paradise, and two angels with fiery swords prevent his return.

Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time reason and imagination, he is aware of his aloneness and separateness;

6Eudora Welty, The Golden Apples (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 85. All references to the stories in this collection will be placed in the text with the abbreviation GA followed by the page number.


of his powerlessness and ignorance; of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death. He could not face this state of being. . . . if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the old ones, regulated by instincts. Even if all his physiological needs were satisfied, he would experience his state of aloneness and individuation as a prison from which he had to break out in order to retain his sanity.\(^9\)

In order to preserve their sanity, Livvie, Jenny Lockhart, and Mrs. Larkin break from their prisons of "aloneness."

However, a striking fact about most of the isolatoes discussed in this chapter is that they are frustrated or largely unsuccessful in breaking from the prisons of their "aloneness."

The connection between "alienation" and psychological states has been pointed out by F. H. Heinemann:

The facts to which the term "alienation" refers, are, objectively, different kinds of dissociation, break or rupture between human beings and their objects, whether the latter be other persons, or the natural world, or their own creations in art, science and society; and subjectively, the corresponding states of disequilibrium, disturbance, strangeness and anxiety. . . . There is one point common to all of them, i.e., the belief that a preceding unity and harmony has been transformed into disunity and disharmony.\(^10\)

Miss Welty's achievement in writing about the theme of

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\(^9\) The Sane Society, p. 30, quoted in Hammond, p. 68.

alienation is that she has not presented cold case histories; she has instead shown the tragic cost—in human terms—of individuals' failure to achieve unity and harmony with the world. Four of the single women in the stories analyzed in this chapter lost their sanity (or live in private worlds) and three of them commit suicide because of the psychical disequilibrium resulting from alienation. The opinion of a reviewer in *Time* shows a misunderstanding of Miss Welty's thematic emphasis on the failure of human beings to understand one another: "Like many Southern writers Miss Welty has a strong taste for melodrama, and is preoccupied with the demented, the queer, the highly spiced. Of the 17 pieces only two report states of experience which could be called normal."11 But as Granville Hicks has pointed out, *Time's* statistics are probably correct, although it is apparent when one reads carefully

.. .that Miss Welty is not preoccupied with violence and horror, in the way that Erskine Caldwell so often is and not even to the extent that William Faulkner sometimes is. The meaning of the story is never in the violence, nor is the abnormality of the characters their important quality. . . . Squalor, violence, and decadence have in themselves no importance for Miss Welty. They are merely facts, and facts whether pleasant or unpleasant, are no more than means to an end. What matters in her stories is never

the thing that happens but the effect of things on human beings. Her concern, in other words, is with states of mind, and her emphasis falls upon those emotional states that cannot easily be articulated.\(^{12}\)

As Hicks says, facts--pleasant or unpleasant--"are no more than means to an end" to her. Moreover, the present writer feels that Miss Welty's command of the "facts" of a situation helps provide what James has called "solidity of specification." Her art has all the subtle nuances and suggestiveness of James's most mature prose.

Like Hicks, Alun R. Jones believes that Miss Welty's main concern is not with the external qualities of her characters but with their internal states and qualities.

The stories are concerned largely with single moments of personal crisis and move towards and explore the nature of conflict as the characters struggle to clarify their choices, to come to terms with themselves and the world around them. Although a strong sense of an ordered community binds the settings of the stories together, it is the dark, inner lives of the characters that interest her more than public faces. She is more concerned with individual self-deception than with social hypocrisy.\(^{13}\)

Jones's comments suggest several aspects of Miss Welty's

\(^{12}\)Granville Hicks, "Eudora Welty," *College English*, 14 (November 1952), 70, 71.

art, especially of characterizing women. First, as her single women struggle "to come to terms with themselves and the world around them" they frequently resort to "self-deception" --organizing their lives around fantasies and dreams, as Alfred Appel says, "to bridge the distance between love and separateness." Second, the presence of "an ordered community" is important in the stories of isolated spinsters, who are often regarded as pathetic, singular, eccentric, quite different from "normal" married women by the members of the community (or by members of their own families). Third, Jones writes, Miss Welty is primarily concerned with "the dark, inner lives" of her isolated spinsters as they represent "woman's loneliness and her search for a world of love." The state of harmony and equilibrium which Eudora Welty's isolatoes struggle to achieve has been defined by Fromm as "productive orientation."

The productive orientation of personality refers to a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience. It covers mental, emotional, and sensory responses to others, to oneself, and to things. Productiveness is man's ability to use his powers to realize the potentialities inherent in him.

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15 "World of Love," pp. 177, 178.

To Guyton B. Hammond, Fromm's concept means "a total configuration of character, a mode of relating to the world and to oneself which employs one's inherent powers."\textsuperscript{17}

Three "modes of relatedness"—reason, love, and creativity—enable one to become truly human:

With his power of reason man can penetrate the surface of phenomena and understand their essence. With his power of love he can break through the wall which separates one person from another. With his power of imagination he can visualize things not yet existing; he can plan and thus begin to create.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, Hammond explains, "the productive orientation in these three ways overcomes man's separation from nature, his fellow man, and himself, and... is, at the same time, a realization of his inherent potentialities."\textsuperscript{19} Whereas the more mature initiates in Miss Welty's stories—Livvie, Delia Farrar, and Mrs. Larkin—are able to achieve a productive orientation through the powers of reason, love, and imagination, all but one of the isolatoes fail to do so and thus are doomed to lead meaningless lives.

Through love, Fromm explains, the separated are reunited and alienation is overcome:

\textsuperscript{17}Fromm, \textit{Man in Estrangement}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{18}Fromm, \textit{Man for Himself}, p. 88, quoted in Hammond, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{19}Man in Estrangement, p. 52.
The necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them, is an imperative need on the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends. The need is behind all phenomena which constitute the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word.²⁰

Love involves the giving of self, Fromm believes, and "is the expression of one's aliveness":

In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness.²¹

This elemental joy, of delight and pleasure in life, which one finds Delia Farrar, Livvie, and even Mrs. Larkin experiencing at the end of their stories of initiation, stems precisely from the act of loving and the giving of self, resulting in a sense of oneness with nature and with other human beings, in a new sense of human vitality and productivity. In contrast with these women, Miss Welty's isolatoes fail tragically to achieve a productive orientation and thus often suffer disturbance, strangeness, anxiety, and finally even insanity or death.

²⁰The Sane Society, p. 30, quoted in Hammond, p. 52.

Literary Background

In analyzing Eudora Welty's isolated spinsters it will be useful to refer to characteristics of the old maid as she has appeared in American fiction, 1798 to 1945. The old maid as a character type has been studied in Dorothy Yost Deegan's *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels*. Miss Deegan examines over one hundred novels, seven in depth, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* (1911), Ruth Suckow's *The Folks* (1934), Joseph Hergesheimer's *Mountain Blood* (1915), Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), and Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase* (1908), in all of which a single woman plays a major role. Miss Deegan defines a single woman as one over twenty-five or thirty years of age who has had to adjust to the fact that she will probably never marry. In literature, Mary Anne Ferguson believes, "the old maid is rarely seen as choosing her role; an old maid

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22 *The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels* (New York: Octagon Books, 1951), pp. 40-81. Since Miss Deegan has written the only detailed study of the old maid in American literature, extensive use has been made of her book to establish necessary background information on the subject.

23 Ibid., p. 27.
must have been jilted or had her lover die or somehow been deprived of an opportunity to marry."

The novels studied by Dorothy Deegan reflect the unhappy situation of the unmarried woman in American society, a situation that has probably not changed appreciably even in recent years when the institution of marriage seems to have dropped greatly in prestige. Miss Deegan has described the situation of the single woman in this way:

It is understandable that a culture such as that of the Western world which places so much emphasis upon the romantic aspects of marriage would express sympathy for the woman who must live her life without it. But regardless of her importance as an individual, or of what successful contribution she may have made, society still talks about her "failure to marry." Add this sense of failure to whatever biological frustration she may feel in not following the "normal" pattern of life, and her personal efficiency is almost certain to be affected.

Miss Deegan finds that in American novels women's failure to marry usually leads to wasted and relatively unproductive lives.

Some women seem to succeed in sublimating their energies and desires, but many, having been denied "the crowning experience of life" (to use another familiar phrase), take refuge in minor matters, attach undue importance to details, and lavish their affection on things and less-than-human creatures. They not

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25 Stereotype of the Single Woman, p. 4.
infrequently take an inordinate interest in other people's affairs in a desperate effort to "fill the gap" in their own lives. By its attitude toward her, society places the single woman on the defensive and makes her into a supersensitive personality—thereby molding her into the very kind of person it criticizes her for being.26

The net result of old maidhood for most women depicted in American fiction (including that of Eudora Welty) is alienation or isolation and failure to achieve a productive orientation.

Hepzibah Pyncheon in The House of the Seven Gables is in many ways the prototype of the isolated spinster in American literature. She is depicted as homely, ungraceful, and inefficient. Like Hepzibah, Miss Welty's Clytie and Octavia Farr and Miss Theo and Miss Myra are symbolic of "'old gentility' brought face to face with the hard necessaries of living."27 Like Hepzibah, Clytie has never had a lover; she lavishes her love upon her drunken brother and paralyzed father, while Hepzibah is devoted to her feeble-minded brother, Clifford.

Meta Beggs in Joseph Hergesheimer's Mountain Blood represents yet another stereotype of the single woman; she is a schoolteacher in a small Virginia mountain village.

26 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

27 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
is not well liked, and remains a stranger—like Lotte Eckhart, the German piano teacher in Miss Welty's "June Recital." Hergesheimer's heroine is referred to as "the Beggs woman" by the villagers, a phrase that epitomizes her isolation in the community.  

Miss Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, a popular book in its day, is significant mainly in its depiction of a pair of old maid sisters, Miranda and Jane Sawyer. In American fiction maiden sisters almost always live together, usually in the old house after the parents' death, and are emotionally dependent upon each other. Some live on a small income, probably inherited, though they sometimes earn their living by such domestic undertakings as dressmaking. "Many of them," Miss Deegan says, "are of the gentlewoman variety, much given to family pride." Both "Clytie" and "The Burning" by Miss Welty contain pairs of aristocratic maiden sisters. Like the sisters in Miss Wiggin's novel, one of the sisters in each of Miss Welty's stories is aggressive, narrow, unimaginative, and domineering, while the other is soft, loving, and dreamy.

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28 Ibid., p. 63.

29 Ibid., p. 77.

30 Ibid., p. 119.
Like Jane Sawyer in **Sunnybrook Farm**, Miss Myra in "The Burning" has apparently once been in love, while the older sister has never loved a man.

Hepzibah Pyncheon as well as Mattie Silver in **Ethan Frome** is equipped to do only domestic tasks and is not good at those. Although Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." is postmistress of the tiny village of China Grove, Mississippi, she runs the family household and serves everyone, while Clytie has replaced Lethy, the colored cook, as the housekeeper in the Farr household and is not very efficient at her tasks. The frequent role of the old maid as unpaid family servant is seen in four of the six stories by Miss Welty being studied in this chapter; while Sister and Clytie prepare food for their families and generally run the households, Lotte Eckhart in "June Recital" not only provides economic support for her widowed mother but is also her nurse since Mrs. Eckhart is confined to a wheelchair. In "The Wanderers" Virgie Rainey runs the family farm singlehandedly after her mother's stroke. Assuming the role of servant to her family is usually an indication of each woman's lack of status.

Six of the seven single women in novels studied in depth by Miss Deegan reside in small towns. The setting

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 116.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 81.
is a farm or plantation in two stories and a small town or village in four stories being studied in this chapter. The narrator in "Why I Live at the P. O.," Virgie Rainey, and Miss Eckhart are middle-class, as are six of the women studied by Miss Deegan. Clytie and Octavia Farr, Miss Myra and Miss Theo and the women in "Asphodel" are, like Hepzibah Pyncheon, of faded aristocracy.

Miss Deegan also notes that the names of single women in American fiction frequently have a quaint or old-sounding quality, suggesting that the women themselves are quaint or peculiar individuals; neither Hepzibah Pyncheon nor Meta Beggs, for example, has a romantic-sounding name, just as the names of Clytie and Octavir Farr and Cora, Phoebe, and Irene in Miss Welty's stories are distinctively quaint.

In the seven novels given concerted study by Miss Deegan, all of the women are tall and sturdy but also thin and gaunt. In addition, "not one is widely and wholesomely influential. All are regarded as amusing, queer, or grimly tragic figures." Similar generalizations can

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 83.
35 Ibid., pp. 105, 82.
also be applied to some of the single women in Eudora Welty's short stories, as will be shown.

When the single women in American fiction have a noticeable ambition, as a rule it is altruistic—to help someone, a family member, a close friend, or a distant relative, achieve an ambition. Very few of the single women openly express a desire for a husband, children, or a home, for the simple reason that when these women appear for the first time in their stories, they are already middle-aged or past the point when such an ambition is likely to be fulfilled. Sister, Lotte Eckhart, and Miss Myra in Welty's stories express—rather obliquely—their wish for a husband and children. Miss Eckhart encourages the iconoclast Virgie Rainey to become a great concern pianist; through her loving interest in Virgie, Miss Eckhart seems to express her suppressed maternalism. Virgie Rainey has had affairs with many men but has not married.

The single women in American fiction are quite frequently thwarted or frustrated for one or more of the following reasons: adult domination, tradition, family or social position, helpless dependents. One may assume that Miss Theo and Miss Myra as well as Clytie and

36 Ibid., p. 87.

37 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
Octavia Farr, all being of aristocratic background, are thwarted by family or social background, as is Miss Emily Grierson in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." Clytie is dominated by her imperious sister, Octavia; and the narrator in "Why I Live at the P. O." is seemingly thwarted by the demands made upon her by her mother, uncle, grandfather, and finally, her sister and her niece, until she "rebels" and goes to live at the post office. Miss Eckhart is held back by the need to support and care for her invalid mother; although she is never actually cruel to her mother, at one point she becomes so greatly frustrated by her mother's sarcasm that she slaps her. Cora, Phoebe, and Irene in "Asphodel" are victims of the tyranny of the town "benefactress," Sabina McInnis.

Few of the women in American novels studied by Miss Deegan show evidence of success in a gainful occupation. Except for Sister, postmistress of China Grove; Virgie Rainey, a bookkeeper-typist; and Miss Eckhart, a piano teacher, Miss Welty's characters live upon invisible means or on some small income. Miss Myra and Miss Theo and the Farr sisters live in the old family home after one or both of their parents have died.

The single woman in American fiction is not as a rule admired by those around her. Occasionally her goodness

38 Ibid., pp. 113-114.
(unselfishness, devotion, loyalty, or altruism) is praised. Seldom is she praised for her beauty. Some admire her for her courage, endurance, or efficiency; seldom is she admired for her sense of humor. When she is not admired, she is criticized for her unpleasant disposition or some fault of character, peculiarity, inefficiency, homeliness, selfishness, malicious gossiping, overbearingness, narrow-mindedness, prudishness, tactlessness, indecisiveness, or jealousy. In general, when the attitudes of others can be distinguished in Miss Welty's stories, it is mainly the spinsters' peculiarity which is disliked.

In addition, unfavorable references to physical characteristics of the single woman are often found. First is an unflattering reference to age, along with a frequent use of the uncomplimentary terms "old maid" and "spinster," with their suggestions of age. Perhaps the most pronounced characteristic is the constant reference to unappealing physical qualities, usually homeliness of face and spareness of form. "Apparently," Deegan believes, "angularity and spareness are thought to be a characteristic attribute of the single woman." Miss Welty's portrayal of all of her single women is, as a rule, not glamorous. Some are described as thin, gaunt, and old (Clytie, Octavia,

\[39\text{Ibid., pp. 100-103.}\]

\[40\text{Ibid., p. 105.}\]
Miss Eckhart, and the three women in "Asphodel"), but Virgie Rainey is still somewhat attractive at forty. In the physical descriptions of her old maids, Miss Welty has followed no formula, nor has she merely cataloged details. A few well chosen details are usually sufficient to establish qualities necessary for understanding her characters.

On the whole, the single women in American fiction have little to say about their attitudes toward marriage.\(^\text{41}\) Usually the women have not married for one of several reasons: the "right man" could not marry them (Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." has lost Mr. Whitaker to her sister, Stella-Rondo, who has in turn lost him); some cherish an ideal rather a real person (Clytie); some, whose lovers have died, do not marry anyone else (Miss Eckhart in "June Recital"); some cannot or do not leave parents or family (Clytie's family depend on her for their meals and Miss Myra and Miss Theo devote their lives to caring for the dead brother's illegitimate child); some do not marry because to do so would mean descending in the social scale (Clytie, Miss Theo and Miss Myra, and the three old maids in "Asphodel"). In actuality, only Sister and Virgie Rainey have real suitors. Sister loses her only

\(^{41}\)Ibid., p. 107. However, Miss Deegan has found that most spinsters in American novels desire marriage; the same is true of Eudora Welty's spinsters, although they do not openly express this wish.
opportunity to marry, and Virgie apparently never manages to get any of her suitors to propose.

In summary, Miss Deegan makes these points about the stereotype of the single woman in American fiction:

... One notes the striking apathy and resignation among single women. The first hint of this becomes evident in the fact that either ambition among the women studied was lacking or else the novelist did not consider it an important element to include, either of which has cultural significance. Furthermore, while attitudes toward the single women are freely expressed by friends, family and neighbors, the feelings of the women about themselves and their lives are rarely spoken. They do not discuss their singleness. Only a few show any zest for living. Life is not good and they are not happy, but they patiently accept their lot. Their lives flow along in an even tenor, with not much worth struggling for and not much success. Apparently, they feel they are at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control, and the spirit of rebellion, or even of protest, is strangely lacking.

As the analyses of Miss Welty's spinsters will show, Miss Welty's spinsters are not always apathetic or resigned to their fate. Although they do not dwell on their singleness, their neighbors may indeed discuss it freely, as in "June Recital" and "The Wanderers." A spirit of protest or rebellion, even if it is timid or ineffective, is present in every one of Miss Welty's spinsters--especially in Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." and Virgie Rainey in "The Wanderers."

42Ibid., pp. 112-113.
Mary Catherine Buswell finds four main types of older single women in Eudora Welty's stories. First is the woman who holds a somewhat important position in her tiny community—as postmistress, for example. "This type," Miss Buswell says, "has definite opinions about persons and happenings in the community and may serve as a narrator or as an interpreter. . . . This type is independent, somewhat stiff, opinionated," and known "for her authority and her peculiarities." Sister in "Why I Live at the P. O." will serve as an example of this type. Second is the old maid who is still girlish, "gentle. . . . and feminine in the helpless sense." The three spinsters in "Asphodel," Cora, Phoebe, and Irene,—although not mentioned by Miss Buswell as examples of this type—will be analyzed under this heading in the present study. A third group are "the frustrated spinsters of the old plantation class who have not been able to maintain their standards" because "life has not only proved much less than their dreams but. . . . has even taken away the dreams." Clytie and Miss Theo and Miss Myra are striking examples of this group. Finally there are Virgie Rainey and Lotte Eckhart, "a combination of the types already mentioned and a good reflection of community attitudes toward the old maid. . . . ." Miss Eckhart is "an outsider," Miss Buswell
believes, "first because she is a German who speaks a strange language and eats strange food, and second because she is unmarried." This "foreign" piano teacher, indeed an "outsider" in Morgana, Mississippi, is the most thoroughly characterized of Miss Welty's isolated spinsters.

In the only previous study of the subject, Mary Catherine Buswell writes only one paragraph on each of Miss Welty's spinsters. A full or detailed account is lacking, to date, on this important character type. Therefore, the following character analyses constitute a rather detailed study of at least one representative example of each type of old maid as an isolato whose unmarried situation and family circumstances have contributed significantly to her state of isolation and failure to achieve what Erich Fromm has called a productive orientation. Each isolated spinster is found in a different problematical situation, with intriguingly varied, psychological and affective implications. In addition, each story will be scrutinized for ways in which Miss Welty's characterization of old maids is different from, or similar to, those methods which Miss Deegan has found in American fiction.

Spinster in a Public Position

"Why I Live at the P. O."

According to Katherine Anne Porter, "Why I Live at the P. O." is one of a group of stories in which the "spirit is satire and the key [is] grim comedy."\(^4\) Sister, postmistress in the tiny Mississippi village of China Grove, resides with her mother, grandfather, and uncle in the family home and describes in her raucous first-person narrative the series of events leading up to her withdrawal from the family and moving into the back of the post office.

Sister, like her feminine counterparts in "Petrified Man," indeed lacks inner resources. The emptiness of her life and the poverty of her experience is depicted, as Zelma Turner Howard has pointed out, through her patterns of speech; her "utterances lack rhythm and free natural idiom and abound in negatively suggestive metaphors, vulgarisms, formidable clichés, and repetitious slang.\(^5\) Examples of these various speech mannerisms from "Why I Live at the P.O." will appear in the quotations employed in the discussion which follows. Not only the speech


patterns but also the method of narration—first person point of view—contribute to the humor of this story, as Alfred Appel has explained:

[Sister's] uninterrupted monologue is delivered in a vulgar, colloquial style and resembles the traditional oral story, for rather than something to read, it long since seems to have become something to tell to at least a listener, if not to an audience. In the long opening section, the narrator relates to her imaginary 'listener[s]' a series of events which occurred on the Fourth of July. In "How to Tell a Story," Mark Twain remarked that 'the humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it.' Herein lies the wonderful, grim humor of Miss Welty's story. As far as Sister is concerned, she is blameless and reports the events of the story with the utmost honesty.

However, it is not the comic, grotesque, or colloquial style of this story that has generated the greatest critical discussions.

Miss Porter sums up this story by calling it "a terrifying case of dementia praecox."47 Her interpretation has been followed in the main by nearly all her major critics, including Robert Penn Warren, Alfred Appel, and Ruth Vande Kieft. Warren writes that Sister is "isolated from her family by her arrogance, meanness, and sense of


persecution." Alfred Appel compares the story with "Old Mr. Marblehall" as "another revelation of a private terror, but realized on a grim comic level. ... More terrifying than [Sister's] self-imposed isolation in the dementia praecox which cuts her off from humanity."

Ruth Vande Kieft cites Henri Bergson's essay on "Laughter" in which "anything is laughable in a human being which suggests rigidity. ... The rigidity of the postmistress of China Grove takes the form of an idée fixe. She follows up her single idea with relentless logic until it puts her in rebellious isolation from the world about her. ..." Like the other critics, Miss Vande Kieft feels that Sister thinks and acts with "the insane logic of the paranoid," although "she is not felt to be so because of the marvelous energy, self-possession and resourcefulness with which she carries out her revenge (so that our pity is not aroused), and because of the inescapable comedy in her situation. ..." Marie-Antoinette Manz-Kunz pushes Miss Porter's interpretation to the extreme in commenting that "Why I Live at the P.O." is "a sheer clinical study of the distortions of reality caused by mental

48 "Love and Separateness in Miss Welty," p. 160.
49 Season of Dreams, pp. 46, 50.
50 Eudora Welty, pp. 67-68.
Dismissing this story as a psychological case study, Miss Manz-Kunz fails to understand the story's deeply human and universal implications.

Frederick J. Hoffman prefers to call Sister's actions "neurotic" rather than paranoid. If one accepts this distinction, then he can read "Why I Live at the P.O." without regarding it as a sheer psychological report, since to some extent everyone is neurotic. According to Dr. Eric Berne, a true paranoid is a person who habitually projects into other persons his own feelings and sees reflected in others' actions a personal message or threat. Therefore, Berne writes, "Such a mental state, involving projection and reflection of feelings, and increased significances, we call 'paranoid,' especially when the person feels that people are doing everything they do for mortidinous reasons, that is, to warn, threaten, insult or harm him." Thus the paranoid usually has no rational basis for his suspicions. But in Miss Welty's story, there are people--

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Sister's own family—who are involved in acts to "threaten, insult, or harm" her! Sister's feelings may well be considered valid—even though, as Hoffman has commented, "we are permitted only the narrator's view of things, but that will serve." [[Italics mine.]] Hoffman seems to feel that not all the meanness in the family is Sister's, for even though the narrator may be considered neurotic, Miss Welty "sees to it that the character is taken at face value, and not for some museum specimen." 55 In other words, some acts of cruelty and indifference reported in the story do suggest that they must be "taken at face value," for Sister is not a totally unreliable narrator or "some museum specimen."

Robert Y. Drake and J. A. Bryant are among the few critics who have differed from the line of interpretation first introduced by Miss Porter in her introduction to A Curtain of Green in 1941. Drake interprets Miss Porter's remark about Sister's suffering from dementia praecox as "meaning that Miss Porter believes that Sister, who has quarrelled with her family and left home to live in the post office, is suffering from the delusions of persecution which constitute paranoia. Now nothing could be further from the truth—except that we are all surely

54 Art of Southern Fiction, p. 55.

55 Ibid.
paranoid, to some extent."\(^{56}\) J. A. Bryant also considers Miss Porter's "diagnosis... an exaggeration." Furthermore, Bryant says, "if there is anything terrifying" in Sister's narrative, "it is not the questionable psychosis..." Instead, what is terrifying is "the exposure of human pettiness, unwittingly burlesqued in the language and gestures of an ethically insensitive narrator." Although he feels that Sister is not a heroine with whom the reader can sympathize, Bryant suggests that she has grounds for her feelings of persecution: "Undoubtedly the postmistress has been grievously abused and by people quite as insensitive as she is, but one feels no inclination either to support her quarrel or to side with her excommunicated victims."\(^{57}\) However, the objectivity which Bryant finds "Why I Live at the P.O." has not prevented the belief by several mature and perceptive adult readers

\(^{56}\) "Comments on Two Eudora Welty Stories," Mississippi Quarterly, 13 (Summer 1960), 126.

\(^{57}\) Eudora Welty, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 66 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), pp. 8-9. Hoffman has perhaps best summarized Miss Welty's approach to fiction; unlike Bryant, he does not find complete objectivity in such a story as "Why I Live at the P.O.," but rather he finds that Miss Welty "is committed to her characters, and has promised them loving care, and sometimes sympathy, but no sentimentality. There is also much humor and much irony here, but they are not superimposed upon her people. Her people possess these qualities, or deserve to have them." Art of Southern Fiction, p. 55.
that Sister is a heroine with whom one may at least partially identify.\(^{58}\)

A careful examination of Sister's first-person report of why she has come to live at the post office reveals that her isolation is largely the result of her own unmarried status and her unconscious frustration at having neither husband nor child in a society and a family that place great value on both. In Miss Welty's *Losing Battles* the attitude of the rural community toward the recently-deceased school-teacher, Miss Julia Mortimer, is that "she ought to have married somebody"\(^{59}\) and then her life—and death—would not have been so pathetic. However, Sister's sole opportunity for marriage, it seems, was quashed by her own sister's winning Mr. Whitaker—"the only man who ever dropped down in China Grove..." (CG, 106). As the story opens, Sister reminds her listeners that she "was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo

\(^{58}\) The present writer discussed this story at length with a group of Alexandria, Louisiana, professional persons meeting at the home of a physician, Dr. Robert J. Freedman, on October 23, 1973. The group agreed with Dr. Freedman, who feels that Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." indeed has grounds for feeling persecuted. Dr. Freedman believes that Stella-Rondo, rather than Sister, is a dangerous woman. He also notes that in his long experience as a practicing physician he has seen many cases of sibling rivalry carried into adulthood, as in Miss Welty's story.

until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again" (CG, 89). In this initial sentence Sister unwittingly suggests the reasons for her actions. As Miss Deegan has found, the old maid in American novels, when frustrated in her pursuit of a family of her own, will often attempt to find a substitute. For Sister the substitute has been her own immediate family—her mother, her grandfather, and her bachelor uncle—whom she names individually in the first sentence. She not only lives in the same house with them, but cares for and serves them in many large and small ways. Although she does reveal some petty, embittered, and unpleasing qualities of character, she nevertheless demonstrates some genuine concern for the family, especially for Uncle Rondo.

During the years between Stella-Rondo's marriage to Mr. Whitaker and her return with her child to the family home, Sister evidently has attempted to form some kind of productive orientation whereby she can live an emotionally-satisfying life. Thus she "was getting along fine," or as well as she could, with her family until the return of Stella-Rondo, the prodigal-daughter. Having stolen "Mr. Whitaker from Sister" (she went with Mr. Whitaker first") by telling him that Sister was "one-sided... bigger on one side than the other" (CG, 89), Stella-Rondo sets about to alienate Sister from the entire family, leaving her emotionally detached and completely isolated. "Why I
Live at the P.O." is, as Alun Jones has commented, a presentation of a single moment "of personal crisis" which "move[s] towards and explore[s] the nature of the conflict as the character. . . . struggle[s] to come to terms with [herself] and the world around [her]." The story is, then, a study in alienation as defined by Heinemann; it records Sister's "rupture" with her family and the "corresponding state. . . . of disequilibrium, disturbance, strangeness and anxiety" which results from this rupture. Failing to marry and give birth to a child, which she evidently deeply desires, Sister may well falsely blame her sister for her spinsterhood, but Stella-Rondo as well as the rest of the family constantly remind Sister that it is not she who married Mr. Whitaker—emphasizing her dependent status as an old maid whom life has passed by.

The concept of family is important in this story. As Thomas H. Landess has observed, Miss Welty has often written about the family; "indeed, the subject is central to her fiction, as it is to the work of most twentieth-century Southern writers." Robert Y. Drake feels that "most

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60"World of Love," pp. 176-177.

61Existentialism and the Modern Predicament, quoted in Hammond, pp. 11-12.

southerners, especially those from big families, are perfectly familiar with the guerilla warfare which exists within the secular Communion of Saints which is the family" and that the conflict in "Why I Live at the P.O." cannot be dismissed as "interfamily tensions," "personality stresses," or even as "sibling-rivalry." When Sister remarks, "There I was with the whole entire house on Stella-Rondo's side and turned against me," one understands that "it is not so much Stella-Rondo's 'side' as it is Stella-Rondo herself that the 'whole entire' family are accepting." It is Stella-Rondo the married daughter with a child of her own that the family welcomes back. Sister, the unmarried and barren daughter, is excluded and slighted as the family defers to Stella-Rondo and her "adopted" child.

Evidently—even when one makes allowance for Sister's possible exaggeration of the facts—Stella-Rondo has always been the favorite child; Sister makes these additional comments about Stella-Rondo at the beginning of the story:

Stella-Rondo is exactly twelve months to the day younger than I am and for that reason she's spoiled.
She always had anything in the world she wanted and then she'd throw it away. Papa-Daddy gave her this gorgeous Add-a-Pearl necklace when she was eight years old and she threw it away playing baseball when she was nine, with only two pearls (CG, 89).

Stella-Rondo always wins the prizes and then abandons them. Having broken up the developing relationship between Mr. Whitaker and Sister and then having gotten "married and moved away from home, the first thing she did was separate. From Mr. Whitaker! This photographer with the popeyes she said she trusted" (CG, 90). It was cruel enough, Sister seems to hint, that Stella-Rondo stole Mr. Whitaker from her; but now she has abandoned him just as she did the necklace when she was a girl. Moreover, Stella-Rondo has "brought this child of two." The mother's delight at seeing her daughter and new granddaughter overcomes her surprise: "Here you had this marvelous blonde child and never so much as wrote your mother a word about it" (CG, 90). The mother feigns anger with the younger daughter, as she says, "I'm thoroughly ashamed of you." But Sister adds—knowingly: "Of course she wasn't" (CG, 90).

To Robert Drake, Stella-Rondo may be considered the prodigal daughter come home again, and perhaps Sister is "the righteously indignant elder brother." But unlike the prodigal brother in the biblical story, Stella-Rondo lacks penitence, which especially angers Sister. To Drake, Sister "resents also the family's willingness to be dazzled by Stella-Rondo's glamor as a separated woman." 64

64 Ibid., p. 128.
In addition, Mama makes a great motherly (or grandmotherly) fuss over the child whom Stella-Rondo brings with her. Sister's own frustrated motherhood is surely more deeply embittered by the sudden appearance of the child and the grandmother's unquestioning acceptance of it.

The reader learns that since childhood Sister has been compared unfavorably with Stella-Rondo. Having initiated a chain-reaction of alienation between the family members and Sister, Stella-Rondo is now successful in causing Papa-Daddy to voice his low opinion of Sister.

Oh, he told Uncle Rondo I didn't learn to read till I was eight years old and he didn't see how in the world I ever got the mail put up at the P.O., much less read it all, and he said if Uncle Rondo could only fathom the lengths he had gone to to get me that job. And he said on the other hand he thought Stella-Rondo had a brilliant mind and deserved credit for getting out of town (CG, 94).

Grandfather's attitude toward Sister is only one of several family attitudes that make her feel like an unwanted dependent: Stella-Rondo has earlier initimated to Mr. Whitaker that Sister is physically malformed; the mother shows a decided preference for the married daughter with the child whom she can spoil just as she did the child's own mother, when she was a girl. "Mama's" apparent belief of Stella-Rondo's lie that little "Shirley-T." is adopted especially vexes Sister, who notes that the child is "the spit [sic] image of Papa-Daddy if he'd
cut off his beard" (CG, 90)\(^5\) and that "she looks like Mr. Whitaker's side too. That frown." To Sister, Shirley-T indeed "looks like a cross between Mr. Whitaker and Papa-Daddy" (CG, 91). Sister for one refuses to be swayed by Stella-Rondo's prevarications.

When the mother criticizes Sister for making uneasily-digested green-tomato pickle relish, since the child and Uncle Rondo have sick stomachs, Sister remarks, hotly:

Well, Stella-Rondo had better thank her lucky stars it was her instead of me came trotting in with that very peculiar looking child. Now if it had been me that trotted in from Illinois and brought a peculiar-looking child of two, I shudder to think of the reception I'd of got, much less controlled the diet of an entire family (CG, 97).

The mother reminds Sister of her unmarried status: "But you must remember, Sister, that you were never married to Mr. Whitaker in the first place and didn't go up to Illinois to live" (CG, 97). Not only has Sister failed to acquire a husband and child, but the family has also refused to grant her the status of an independent, mature individual. She is called only "Sister," suggesting and emphasizing the fact that she has no identity except in her relationship to--and dependence on--the family. Moreover, as the mother scolds Sister, she shakes a spoon in

\(^5\)Stella-Rondo takes Sister's innocent remark and turns it against her, telling the grandfather that Sister thinks he should cut off his beard. In anger, he calls her a "hussy" (CG, 91).
her face, as if she were a naughty child. When the mother replies that if Sister had returned home with her "little adopted girl" the family would also have been "overjoyed," Sister retorts, "You would not." The mother then gives Sister a peremptory order—"Don't contradict me..." (CG, 97)—an act which stresses Sister's position as a grown woman being treated as a dependent child. In addition, Sister is physically chastised by her mother—she is slapped in the face—when she defies a parental order not to mention a cousin who "went to her grave denying the facts of life" (CG, 98).

Sister's apparent dislike of Stella-Rondo's child may be interpreted as jealousy of the younger Sister's bearing the child of the man whom Sister herself had hoped to marry. And in pretending, evidently, that the child is not hers by Mr. Whitaker, Stella-Rondo refuses to grant the reality of a relationship—as wife and mother—for which Sister longs with all her heart. Sister retaliates by intimating that the child is not normal because she has not talked since her arrival, whereupon the child breaks out in song in "the loudest Yankee voice I ever heard in my life" and "jumps up and down in the upstairs hall," evidently in imitation of the childhood speciality—tap dancing—of Shirley-T.'s Hollywood namesake. "Not only talks, she can tap-dance!" calls Stella-Rondo, adding a childish and cutting remark, "Which is more than some
people I won't name can do" (CG, 99). Sister--husbandless, childless-- is further taunted by Stella-Rondo for a lack of accomplishment which her two-year old has. The upshot of the incident, according to Sister, is that

. . . Mama just turned on her heel and flew out, furious. She ran right upstairs and hugged the baby. She believed it was adopted. Stella-Rondo hadn't done a thing but turn her against me from upstairs while I stood there helpless over the hot stove. So that made Mama, Papa-Daddy and the baby all on Stella-Rondo's side (CG, 100).

Although the details recounted by Sister concerning her conflict with the family are seemingly laughable and indicative of emotional immaturity, one senses that Sister is indeed not so much paranoid as neurotic, and quite unhappily so. To her, all the family members now dislike her and are against her--even the child, by whom, one suspects, Sister would like to be loved. But since she is unable to fulfill the Fromm ideal of uniting with other living beings and being related emotionally to them, her life is not joyous but bitter and uncreative. Earlier in the story the eccentric Uncle Rondo has donned Stella-Rondo's "flesh-colored kimono, all cut on the bias" and, in Sister's word, "disports" through the house and yard in it. The kimono, which had been part of Stella-Rondo's trousseau, is a rather obvious symbol of the sexual relationship between Mr. Whitaker and Stella-Rondo, a relationship that the old maid sister is surely
envious of. It is this fact—and not the cheapness of Mr. Whitaker's having taken pictures of Stella-Rondo while she wore the garment (CG, 95, 96)—that has caused Sister to call the kimono a "terrible-looking flesh-colored contraption I wouldn't be found dead in" (CG, 95). Ironically, the reader feels, Sister would have been delighted to be found alive in that very garment by Mr. Whitaker himself!

But now, with great cunning, Stella-Rondo sets out to alienate the last family member, Uncle Rondo, from Sister. The younger sister makes this announcement to the uncle: "Sister says, 'Uncle Rondo certainly does look like a fool in that pink kimono!'" Sister then asks the reader-listener, "Do you remember who it was really said that?" (CG, 101). At that remark, Uncle Rondo, who is eating ketchup and biscuits, "jumps out of his chair and tears off the kimono and throws it down on the dirty floor and puts his foot on it" (CG, 102). (And, Sister reports, "It had to be sent all the way to Jackson to the cleaners and repleated.") Ironically, it is Sister who has just asked him, "Do you think it wise to disport with ketchup in Stella-Rondo's flesh-colored kimono?" Sister says—honestly, she thinks—that she is "trying to be considerate! If Stella-Rondo couldn't watch out for her trousseau, somebody had to" (CG, 101). What Sister fails to understand about herself is that her consideration for
Stella-Rondo's trousseau probably stems from her desire to be its owner, complete with the sexual experiences which the flesh-colored garment seems to symbolize.

After this temper-tantrum, Uncle Rondo shouts, "So that's your opinion of your Uncle Rondo, is it? ... I look like a fool, do I? Well, that's the last straw ..., to hear you come out with a remark like that behind my back." Sister denies the charge vigorously: "I didn't say any such of a thing, Uncle Rondo. ... and I'm not saying who did, either. Why I think you look all right. Just try to care of yourself and not talk and eat at the same time. ... I think you better go lie down" (CG, 102).

Sister is apparently fond of her bachelor uncle; she explains "that Uncle Rondo has been marvelous to me at various times in the past. ... Once Stella-Rondo did something perfectly horrible to him--and he took the radio back he had given her and gave it to me. Stella-Rondo was furious! For six months we all had to call her Stella instead of Stella-Rondo, or she wouldn't answer. I always thought Uncle Rondo had all the brains of the entire family. Another time he sent me to Mammoth Cave, with all expenses paid" (CG, 101). Because of his former kindnesses to her, Sister is not prepared for Uncle's next action.

At 6:30 the next morning, Sister reports, Uncle Rondo got his dramatic revenge:
... He threw a whole five-cent package of some unsold one-inch firecrackers from the store as hard as he could into my bedroom and they every one went off. Not one bad one in the string... Well, I'm just terribly susceptible to noise of any kind, the doctor has always told me I was the most sensitive person he had ever seen in his whole life, and I was simple prostrated. I couldn't eat (CG, 102-103).

Convinced, then, by his explosive act that the whole family is "against" her, the frustrated spinster makes up her mind "to go straight down to the P.O. There's plenty of room there in the back. . . ." To assert her independence, Sister is prepared to act with alacrity, motivating herself by saying, "If I have anything at all I have pride" (CG, 103).

She "marche[s]" (CG, 103) into the parlor where the family is playing cards—ironically, Old Maid, a game defined as one in which "the players draw from one another to match pairs and the one holding an odd queen at the end loses"—and snatches various objects—fan, needle-point pillow, radio, fern, vases. These are objects which have contributed to the comfort or amusement of the family and which they will miss when Sister takes them to her new home in the post office. She also takes with her the fruits and vegetables (and especially "the watermelon rind

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preserves") which she has "put up" (CG, 105) to help supplement the family's diet.

Mama, still defending Stella-Rondo's coming home with her child as a case of homesickness, makes a plea for family peace, asking, ironically, "Now, why don't you all just sit down and play Casino?" (CG, 106). Casino, like Old Maid, is a simple card game; but in the former game "the cards that are face up on the table are taken with eligible cards in the hand." Whether or not she is aware of the etymology of the word casino (Italian casa--house--plus -ino--diminutive suffix = casino: little house), Mama is in effect asking the family to "play house" once again as they did before the disruption and before Sister's unexpressed but quite evident intention to leave home.

Uncle Rondo, however, does not wish to play the peace-maker; he says derisively: "Well, Sister, I'll be glad to donate my army cot if you got any place to set it up, providing you'll leave right this minute and let me get some peace" (CG, 104). The uncle obviously taunts the spinster niece with the fact that as a dependent female relative she has no place to go. Sister makes this triumphant reply:

67 Ibid., p. 229.
68 Ibid.
"Thank you kindly for the cot and 'peace' is hardly the word I would select if I had to resort to firecrackers at 6:30 A.M. in a young girl's bedroom." I says back to him. "And as to where I intend to go, you seem to forget my position as postmistress of China Grove, Mississippi," I says, "I've always got the P.O."

Well, that made them all sit up and take notice (CG, 104).

Sister, as the old maid in the family and as the odd queen in the mock-heroic battle of family affections which the card game of Old Maid symbolizes, now seems to be playing the winning hand. She is proud to have "made them all sit up and take notice." When all the family announce that they will not condescend to come to the post office to pick up letters or to mail them, Sister reminds them that they will be cut off from the world. Her parting word to Stella-Rondo is that if she refuses to come to the post office, she will have no way to write Mr. Whitaker if she wishes to return to him. At this "Stella-Rondo just bawled and wouldn't say another word. She flew to her room and slammed the door" (CG, 108). With that symbolic slamming Sister and Stella-Rondo complete their alienation. When she has moved her goods into the back of the post office, Sister has succeeded, she thinks, in isolating herself from the rest of the family, to punish them for their alleged maltreatment of her.

But in the short epilogue to the story, Sister reports: "That's the last I've laid eyes on any of my
family or my family laid eyes on me for five solid days and nights" (CG, 109). She seems to be quite content in her living quarters, surrounded by beloved and familiar objects, rather like the homebody spinster in Mary Wilkins-Freeman's "A New England Nun."

But oh, I like it here. It's ideal, as I've been saying. You see, I've got everything cater-cornered, the way I like it. Hear the radio? All the war news? Radio, sewing machine, book ends, ironing board, and that great big piano lamp--peace, that's what I like. Butter-beans planted all along the front where the strings are (CG, 109).

But, the reader feels, no matter how often Sister says she is happy, in actuality she is not content. She is cut off from her only source of companionship, her family, such as they are. Sister inadvertently admits that she is lonely since she does not see many people at the post office.

Of course, there's not much mail. My family are naturally the main people in China Grove, and if they prefer to vanish from the face of the earth, for all the mail they get or the mail they write, why, I'm not going to open my mouth. . . .

But here I am, and here I'll stay. I want the world to know I'm happy.

And if Stella-Rondo should come to me this minute, on bended knees, and attempt to explain the incidents of her life with Mr. Whitaker, I'd simply put my fingers in both my ears and refuse to listen (CG, 109-110).

If Sister's energy in carrying out her intention to move to the post office is any indication of her stubborn devotion to her new way of life, the implacability suggested in her last statement is disturbing. With her fingers
stuck in her ears—refusing to listen—Sister has indeed isolated herself more effectively than she thinks. Failing to utilize what Fromm calls the "modes of relatedness"—reason, love, and creativity—Sister cannot break through the wall which separates her from her family. Her power of imagination—or creativity—has enabled her only to visualize a new home, in separateness, cut off from her family. Yet they too have shared in her isolation, in failing to recognize her need for acceptance and understanding, in favoring the married daughter over the unmarried one, in refusing to grant, or to help Sister achieve, adult dignity and maturity. Not being able to receive or give love, Sister fails to live a joyous life, no matter how often she says that she "wants the world to know I'm happy." Far from being merely an "abnormal character," as Eisinger calls Sister, she is a pathetic example of separateness without love, of a "human being...terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth" (GA, 85), although she never leaves the narrow, stuffy confines of the tiny China Grove post office.

Sister is a victim, in part, of her own self-deception. She deceives herself when she protests that she is happy in her new independent life. She has not yet reached that point of self-knowledge which the widowed Mrs. Linde

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achieves in *A Doll's House* as she explains to her old lover, Krogstad: "... [N]ow I am quite alone in the world—my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least pleasure in working for one's self..." Then she asks Krogstad to "give me someone and something to work for."\(^70\) When she is able to face the same reality, Sister will be ready to achieve a productive orientation; until then she dwells apart in a prison that is not made of stone walls.

Sister is representative of a type of spinster that appears in Miss Welty's stories. She is stiff, independent and opinionated. Yet Sister is more than a character type; she is nicely differentiated as a woman with her own little crotchets and desires, vanities and absurdities. Moreover, she has at least a rudimentary sense of the comic, at least of the comic qualities of others. She observes that though her mother weighs two hundred pounds, she "has real tiny feet" (CG, 98).

Like Edna Earle Ponder in *The Ponder Heart*, Sister also "serves" the family as cook and housekeeper, a role, Drake notes, shared by "many another old-maid in a large southern family."\(^71\) The old maid's serving as family


\(^71\) "Notes on Two Eudora Welty Stories," p. 128.
servant is, of course, to be seen in other American novels, from *The House of the Seven Gables* to *Ethan Frome*. Sister reminds the reader of her vocation at least twice in the story. First, at the beginning, one learns that on that blistering Fourth of July when Stella-Rondo arrives home unexpectedly with her child, Sister slaves "over the hot stove, trying to stretch two chickens over five people and a completely unexpected child into the bargain, without one moment's notice" (*CG*, 90). Later she is found making "some green-tomato pickle," for, she says, "somebody had to do it. Of course Mama had turned both the niggers loose; she always said no earthly power could hold one anyway on the Fourth of July, so she wouldn't even try" (*CG*, 96-97). As Drake has observed, quite perceptively, they—the grandfather, mother, sister, niece, uncle, and servants—

...are Sister's family, her vocation, her cross; and she can never really let them go. ... Ostensibly, Sister tries to sever every connection between the family and herself. ... But the family ties are ultimately indissoluble, as we learn indirectly in her final lines. 'And that's the last I've laid eyes on any of my family or my family laid eyes on me for five solid days and nights,' she says, implying that the family bond is so powerful that even a few days' absence seems momentous. ... 72

Drake believes that Sister's family are to blame for the rupture of the family circle and that perhaps Sister is

72Ibid., p. 129.
conscious of the ridiculousness of a grown woman's running away from home:

Perhaps, by indirection, Miss Welty is saying that the sanctity of the family circle, based as it is on a complex give and take of service of love, is paramount. And when this sanctity is violated, as it is when the rest of the family reject or are indifferent to Sister's 'service,' the most far-reaching consequences result. In this case the consequences are ludicrous because they are made, so self-consciously, to exceed the provocation. It is almost as though Sister is inwardly aware of the absurdity of her self-imposed exile but is determined, once and for all, to show the family that they cannot abuse their claim on her. . . . Her dawning awareness of the world outside China Grove makes for a conscious determination, on her part, to assert her importance and dignity. . . . 73

It is doubtful, however, that Sister is aware of the absurdity of her actions. Furthermore, in trying to assert her pride and independence and to teach her family a lesson, she has probably further isolated herself. And very possibly rather than achieving "importance and dignity" in the eyes of the community, Sister may very well seem even more eccentric and crotchety to the inhabitants of China Grove.

In characterizing Sister, Miss Welty seems to have been aware of the stereotyped old maid in American fiction and to have avoided obvious repetitions of the stereotype. For example, the reader never learns whether or not Sister is thin and gaunt, like most old maids in fiction; however,  

73Ibid., p. 130.
one may assume that she is sturdy in order to run the household and to serve as postmistress as well. On the other hand, it is undeniable that she is neurotic—the state of many spinsters in American fiction. Sister herself tells her listener that the family doctor told her she "was the most sensitive person he had ever seen in his whole life" (CG, 103). Evidently she has failed to understand the irony of the physician's veiled comment on her neurosis. Sister's alleged physical deformity (one breast's being larger than the other) was probably invented by Stella-Rondo to convince Mr. Whitaker of her greater physical attractiveness.

Like many old maids in American fiction, Sister is inquisitive about the lives of others—compensation, one may suppose, for her own rather emotionally sterile life. Papa-Daddy chides her for trying to read all the mail at the post office, and Uncle Rondo, a registered pharmacist, remarks, "I'll thank you from now on to stop reading all the orders I get on postcards and telling everybody in China Grove what you think is the matter with them" (CG, 107). But Sister by no means agrees to cease engaging in her favorite pastime at the post office: "I draw my own conclusions and will continue in the future to draw them" she says. "If people want to write their inmost secrets on penny postcards, there's nothing in the wide world you can do about it, Uncle Rondo" (CG, 107).
Finally, an air of failure seems to linger about Sister. She is bitter because she lost Mr. Whitaker to Stella-Rondo. Evidently the younger sister has been the favorite child since the girls were very young. The women's mother never makes any directly invidious comparisons, but the grandfather expresses his opinion of the stupidity of Sister and the brilliance of Stella-Rondo. And Stella-Rondo herself intimates that she thinks the whole family is smarter than Sister (CG, 107). When Sister is moving her belongings to the post office, the mother cries out. "Ungrateful child! After all the money we spent on you at the Normal!" (CG, 105). If she has attended teacher's college, why has Sister not taken up teaching as her vocation? Perhaps she was a failure at that too. When the grandfather finally condescended to help her get a position, it was as the town's postmistress. And Papa-Daddy (the grandfather) has evidently never let Sister forget that it was his influence that helped get her the position. Sister herself cannot forget that

74 Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 97, has pointed out that Sister's figures of speech in "Why I Live at the P.O." are "all negative [Italics mine] in denotation and in connotation." For example, in telling her story, "Sister introduces her Uncle Rondo to the listeners: 'He's Mama's only brother and is a good case of a one-track mind. Ask anybody. A certified pharmacist.'" This spirit of negativism is but an additional quality of the old maid in American fiction which Miss Deegan found in her research.
China Grove is "the next to smallest P.O. in the entire state of Mississippi" (CG, 92). However, when she seems without independence and dignity in her own family home, Sister finds a sense of esteem and importance in her position as postmistress, and the post office becomes her fortress of pride as well as her home.

**Feminine, Helpless Spinsters**

"Asphodel"

The second type of spinster found in Miss Welty's stories is gentle, very feminine, and rather helpless, the kind of Southern woman seen in the stereotype of the maidenly Aunt Pittypat in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. This kind of old maid does not assert herself and is always ladylike. She nearly always shuns anything remotely sensual or sexual, and her point of view is somewhat aristocratic, quite the reverse of the lower middle-class women of Miss Welty's "Why I Live at the P. O." and "The Petrified Man."

"Asphodel," which is narrated by three old maids—Cora, Phoebe, and Irene, is also unlike "Why I Live at the P. O." in that its method is only partially realistic. As Ruth Vande Kieft has pointed out, "'Asphodel' contains a fascinating blend of realism, mythology, allegory, and
fantasy." The story concerns the three old maids who go on a picnic and spread their lunch under the shadow of the "six Doric columns" which are the ruins of the burnt-out plantation mansion of Asphodel. The women then narrate in Greek-chorus and set-speech method the melodramatic history of Miss Sabina, whose dark magnolia-shaded mansion dominates one hill above the village, and Mr. Don McInnis, whose lovely Greek-revival mansion (Asphodel) once dominated the other hill. It seems that Miss Sabina, like the women telling the story, is inclined to be an old maid. Her father commands her to marry Don McInnis, and she obeys--stiffly. Sabina, with her "stiff white gown" at the wedding and the dark mahogany roses on the ceilings of her mansion, represents the attempt to control instinctive life-forces under stern, narrow traditional morality and the cold artificiality of art. On the other hand, Don McInnis is described as "a great, profane man" (WN, 99), lion-like--alive, virile, potent, life-embracing, fiercely independent, like Billy Floyd in "At the Landing." The roses which grow around his mansion are real--and wild--like its owner.

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75 Eudora Welty, p. 57. To Appel (Season of Dreams, p. 85), "Asphodel" is an allegory in its "oblique attack on the ruling class and the ineffectuality of its descendants - a parody of the romantic view of Southern gentility as perpetrated by Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind (1936) and a hundred other novels." Appel then analyzes several of the old maids' speeches to show how they parody "cheap fiction" (p. 97).
Three children are born to Sabina and Don McInnis; but the lives of all three end tragically, in violent death or suicide. In time Don McInnis proves unfaithful to Sabina, and she hurls curses at him and at the townspeople who she thinks have protected his paramour. She chases him from the town with a whip. He takes refuge in his mansion, Asphodel, which mysteriously burns that very night. From that day forward Don McInnis is considered dead, killed in the fire. Miss Sabina becomes increasingly more imperious. She rules the town and all its inhabitants, old, young, black, white. She arranges marriages and burials, christening rites and housewarmings. As the town's richest benefactress, she claims the right to regulate the creative rhythms of their lives. She wears dark brocade gowns and rich jewels, which drag her aging body almost to the ground. On the day of her death she marches to the small village post office, the one place which has seemingly been off limits to her. She forces her way into the building and demands her letter, but there was none for her. "She never knew a soul behind the town" (WN, 107). She demands to see the townspeople's letters, for--shut off from the life-force as she is--she wishes to share vicariously in the lives of others. But, the old maids remember, "We held onto our letters as onto all far-away or ephemeral things at that moment, to our secret hope or joy and our despair, too, which she might
require of us" (WN, 106). Then she seizes all the letters in a frenzy, tears them to pieces, "and even puts bits in her mouth and appears to eat them" (WN, 109). In her madness, Miss Sabina wishes to absorb into herself the lives of the townspeople. But in seeking life, she finds death; she collapses and dies.

This, then, is the narrative of Miss Sabina and Mr. Don McInnis. The main significance of their story is the old maids' telling of it and their unconscious revelations about themselves. They have worshipped Miss Sabina from afar all their lives; they have shared vicariously in her marriage, childbirths, and death. They have had no life separate from Sabina's. They are softer, more feminine, more gentle counterparts of the life-fearing—if not life-hating—Sabina. As they come to Asphodel for their picnic, they are still in mourning for Sabina; they come in "a mourning procession" (WN, 95).

They look "modestly upward to the frieze of maidens" (WN, 96) on the Doric columns of the mansion's ruins. The Dionysian qualities of the architecture and of the spirit of Don McInnis which lingers about the house disturb them somewhat. Instead of responding to the glorious summer day and its promise of life, joy, and potentiality, they can only look "modestly upward to the frieze of maidens." Like the maidens frozen in time on the entablatures, they cannot participate in life; they are only onlookers.
"They are not young," the narrator tells the reader, and they are dressed in "white dimity" ([WN], 95), suggesting their starched, unspoiled, middle-aged girlishness, rather incongruous with the somewhat pagan setting and warm, sensuous summer day. However, they cannot resist the warm waters of the nearby brook; they take off their shoes, "and their narrow maiden feet" hanging trembling in the rippling water ([WN], 96). Their "narrow maiden feet" symbolize their "narrow maiden" lives, untouched by direct experience, filled mainly with the stuff of dreams.

The wind "shakes loose their gray and scanty hair" ([WN], 97). To Zelma Turner Howard, such hair represents denial of the life-force,76 and Miss Sabina wears a black wig (black, luxuriant hair representing the rich drive of the life-force) to cover her scanty, greying hair. They are frightened of life and of the unexpected. "I used to be scared of little glades," Phoebe says. "I used to think something, something wild, would come and carry me off" ([WN], 97). The reader suspects that this statement also expresses a partial desire for just such an experience. Looking back at the days of their youth, the old maids recall that at Sabina's wedding Don McInnis "had all the wildness we all worshipped that first night, since he was not to be ours to love" ([WN], 101). Perhaps what the

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76Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 80.
old maids are saying is that the unrestrained Dionysian life-forces—"wildness" is the ladies' word—which Don McInnis represents could be worshipped, could be made an ideal to be dreamed of but not to be hoped for in life. They have lived their lives vicariously; the ritualized retelling of Sabina's story helps fill the void of their empty lives;

Here in the bright sun where the three old maids sat beside their little feast, Miss Sabina's was an old story, closed and complete. In some intoxication of the time and the place, they recited it and came to the end. Now they lay stretched on their sides on the ground, their summer dresses spread out, little smiles forming on their mouths, their eyes half-closed, Phoebe with a juicy green leaf between her teeth. Above them like a dream rested the bright columns of Asphodel, a dream like the other side of their lamentations (WN, 109).

Their "lamentations" are both their mourning for Sabina, benefactress of the town, and for their own lost lives, although they are not consciously aware of a sense of loss or of unfulfilled potential in their stiff, maidenly lives—coolly chaste--, as symbolized in their dimity dresses.

They are doubly self-deceived, however; in continuing to live life vicariously through Miss Sabina—who is now dead—they not only fail to lead their own lives but, also, carry with them the image of a woman who herself hated life even though she tried to partake of it in the letter-eating ritual in the post office. Audrey Hodgins
sees an ironic parallel between the old maids and Miss Sabina.

In her terrible attempt to possess life, Sabina achieves only a perverted kind of self-gratification and finally death. She thought she had driven that force, embodied in her husband... from the house; but she lived to acknowledge its presence within herself. She had tried to keep the power of others in rein, but finally can put the bit only in her own mouth.

Sabina's orgy in the post office is complemented, unwittingly, by the picnic of the three old maids. Their 'little feast' is only a mild indulgence. "This is the kind of day I could just eat!" cried Cora ardently. They were laughing freely... they lay stretched on their sides on the ground, their summer dresses spread out... their eyes half-closed, Phoebe with a juicy leaf between her teeth... they pressed at the pomegranate stains on their mouths."

They too—under the shadow of phallic-like columns of Asphodel—attempt to partake of the life-force through physical gratification.

But Cora, Phoebe, and Irene have failed to achieve Fromm's productive orientation, just as Sabina McInnis failed to do so. Their mere sensory response to the life-force in partaking of the food—especially the winey pomegranates—does not assure them of emotional responses to others, to nature—which will help them realize their inherent potentialities. Like Miss Sabina, but much less


77"The Narrator as Ironic Device in a Short Story by Eudora Welty," Twentieth-Century Literature, 1 (January 1956), 216.
dramatically, the three old maids are isolated from the sources of life.

At the climax of the story, a strange, satyr-like man—suspiciously like the supposedly-dead Don McInnis—appears and breaks up the old maid's party:

All at once there was a shudder in the vines growing up among the columns. Out into the radiant light with one foot forward had stepped a bearded man. He stood motionless as one of the columns, his eyes bearing without a break upon the three women. He was as rude and golden as a lion. He did nothing, and he said nothing while the birds sang on. But he was naked (WN, 109).

The women flee in terror. Although the death of Sabrini has come too late to liberate them, Miss Hodgins says, the old maids have temporarily been unhitched (they have already been likened to their tame old buggy-horse), they have loped on the hills, and even "flaunt[ed] their tails," that is, "their gray and scanty hair." They jump into the cart, pulled by their faithful old horse, and they move away from Asphodel, leaving the "pasture" of sexual experience "unexplored." Finally, as Miss Hodgins observes, "they raise the buggy-whip (the symbol of Sabina's power) over the old horse and consequently re-iterate Sabina's power over them." 78

After having been stared at by the "satyr" and chased by a herd of goats (symbols of the procreative urge of life),

78Ibid.
the old maids arrive at what they consider a safe place. The women reaffirm their spinsterhood and Sabina's hold over them by granting assent to Irene's statement: "I am thankful Miss Sabina did not live to see us then. . . . She would have been ashamed of us—barefooted and running." And Cora cries that old Don McInnis "ought not to be left at liberty." She has "a good mind to report him to the law." In other words, that which is sensual or sexual "ought not to be left at liberty"; it should be bound, limited, restrained, reported "to the law," whether the law be civil, moral, or social. At whatever cost, the Dionysian life-force, symbolized by Don McInnis, must be controlled. Among the old maids, Phoebe, whose name suggests that of Phoebus Apollo--"often associated with the higher developments of civilization, approving codes of law. . . . inculcating high moral and religious principles," appears to be the most Apollonian (like Sabina). However, several times her voice is described as soft and gentle. At the end of the story, Phoebe laughs audibly as they pass Miss Sabina's house, set high on a hill. The reader feels that Phoebe may actually prefer the Dionysian vision, symbolized by Don McInnis and Asphodel, to the Apollonian system of binding principles which Miss Sabina

has symbolized:

Her voice was soft, and she seemed to be still in a tender dream and an unconscious celebration—as though the picnic were not already set rudely in the past, but were the enduring and intoxicating present, still the phenomenon, the golden day (WN, 113).

Finally, Phoebe, of all the old maids, has had the clearest vision of the joyous potential of the life-force. For her, the picnic will always be a present and enduring image of the shining possibilities of life, symbolized in "the golden day" which her very name suggests. Yet she too is isolated in the end, for she seems too inextricably bound up in the timid conventions of society, represented by her maidenly friends and by the lingering spirit of Sabina, ever to experience life and to achieve Fromm's productive orientation. Therefore she is doomed to live "apart in a dream" (WN, 106).

As for the stereotyped qualities of the old maid in American fiction, Miss Welty has in "Asphodel," as in "Why I Live at the P.O.,” avoided re-creating at least the obvious stereotyped spinster. Like many old maids in American literature, Cora, Phoebe, and Irene are curious about public happenings and join the women of the village at the home of Miss Sabina whenever there is some crisis in her life. And, like many spinsters in fiction, they live their lives vicariously, finding Sabina's deadly life an ironic substitute for their own lack of life-purpose. The reader never learns how Cora, Phoebe, and Irene make their living;
they seem to exist on an invisible means. It is obvious, however, that they are not as wealthy as Sabina, for they worship her, in part, because she is so rich and powerful.

Stereotyped physical qualities of the old maid are almost negligible in this story. The reader feels that the women are small, delicate—perhaps even slender—women; one learns explicitly that they have "narrow maiden feet." Gentle references to age are given: "They are not young," and their hair is described as "gray and scanty." They are, in all, chaste, prim women; they dress in "white dimity" and are ashamed to be seen "barefooted and running" when they are chased by Don McInnis's goats.

The reader never learns whether any of the three has ever had a lover; one supposes not, however, since they strangely love (and fear) Don McInnis from afar, even though Miss Sabina had always "forbade" their coming to Asphodel, "or even to say his name" (WN, 96).

Finally, one finds that Miss Welty has attempted to differentiate the three old maids. Even though their talk is highly stylized, the reader is allowed to see that Phoebe has a "delicate and gentle way" (WN, 100), that Irene is "always the last to yield" (WN, 97), and that Cora, who drives the buggy, is actually the more aggressive of the three women. Though they remain in their fantasy worlds, the three old maids in "Asphodel" at least find some consolation in their friendship for each other,
which is a compensation that Clytie, the isolated spinster to be examined next, does not enjoy.

Aristocratic Spinster Sisters

"Clytie" and "The Burning"

It seems appropriate to discuss "Clytie" and "The Burning" as a unit since they are similar in several ways. First, both stories deal with isolated spinsters of the old plantation class who represent, like Hepzibah Pyncheon, "old gentility"\textsuperscript{80}—or "old chivalry, used, stale, ancient--" as Miss Welty described Mrs. Fergusson in "A Sketching Trip."\textsuperscript{81} Second, both stories depict pairs of maidenly sisters living in their decaying family mansions;\textsuperscript{82} in both stories the older sister is masculine and dominant, the younger sister softer, yielding, more loving. Third, at least one sister in each story is, or becomes, mentally deranged, and three of the sisters end

\textsuperscript{80}Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{81}Atlantic, June 1945, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{82}The Gothic elements in Miss Welty's stories, including "Clytie" and "The Burning," are ably discussed by Appel, A Season of Dreams, pp. 73-103. In addition, Maria-Antoinette Manz-Kunz provides a European's interesting opinion of the Southern Gothic in Eudora Welty, Aspects of Reality in her Short Fiction, pp. 49-52.
their lives in suicide. In both stories it is largely the aristocratic pride of the families of the old plantation class that isolates them in their tomb-like mansions complete with family skeletons and that prevents the women, especially Clytie and Miss Myra, from achieving Fromm's productive orientation, the fulfillment of the need "to unite with other living beings, to be related to them. . . ." 83

Clytie's tale of loneliness and isolation is narrated by what Zelma Turner Howard has called "a reliable but detached narrator. . . .who suggests what seems to be transpiring in the consciousness of Clytie Farr. . . ." 84 Katherine Anne Porter praises the clarity of narration in "Clytie": "[T]he very shape of madness takes place before your eyes in a straight account of actions and speech, the personal appearance and habits of dress of the main character and her family." 85 Though the story concerns the rather incoherent mind of its main character, the point of view is not at all incoherent, as it appears to be in "The Burning." The first-person narration of "Why I Live at the P.O." would not be suitable in "Clytie"

83 The Sane Society, p. 30, cited in Hammond, p. 52.
84 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 18.
85 "Introduction" to A Curtain of Green, pp. xxii-xxiii.
because, Miss Howard believes, "Clytie's faithful narration of her own story would, perhaps, be self-consciously omissive and fragmented, as well as incoherent and incomprehensible to both the narrator and the reader." Therefore, in "Clytie," as in "A Curtain of Green," Miss Welty chooses a dependable, objective narrator to report incidents and reactions to incidents in order to communicate the story's meaning. The method of narration in "Clytie" adds yet another dimension, one that is fully developed in "June Recital," that of the community's attitude toward the eccentric Clytie and the entire Farr family.

The Parrs occupy a large, two-story mansion in the tiny village of Parr's Gin; the name of the village suggests both the degree of prestige the family enjoys (or once enjoyed) and the principal source of income of the area--cotton-farming. Like many old families in the South, the Parrs have made their money through the cotton-gin and the general store, which a brother, Gerald, still tries to run. Once a grand and flourishing family, the Parrs now number only four: the ancient father, who lies blind and paralyzed from a stroke; Gerald, a dipsomaniac whose wife left him after he pointed a gun to her breast

86 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 19.

87 Ibid.
"only. . .to play with her" and "to show her that he loved her above life and death" (CG, 167); Octavia (whose name suggests to Alun Jones "a cold, Roman matron")\(^88\), the older sister (now middle-aged); and Clytie, who serves the household as maid and cook since Lethy, the old Negro servant, was let go. A younger brother, Henry, died by shooting himself in the forehead.

This story invites being read as an allegory of the passing of the old order—the Old South—with its "old chivalry, used, stale, ancient." As an allegory "Clytie" contains some resemblance to Faulkner's macabre tale of the clash of the old and new orders, "A Rose for Emily," which also involves an isolated spinster who becomes demented.\(^89\)

\(^88\)"World of Love," p. 179.

\(^89\)Appel, Season of Dreams, p. 83. In addition, Mary Anne Ferguson in Images of Women in Literature singles out "A Rose for Emily" as the epitome of the stereotype of the old maid in American literature:

Emily Grierson is prevented from marrying because her tyrannical father requires her services, and because in the rigid Southern class system of her environment, no suitor is considered good enough for her. One suitor. . ., who arrives on the scene after Emily's father's death, is her last hope. The shocking denouement of the story shows Emily's desperate need to keep him: at her death, the townspeople find his bones carefully preserved in the double bed which might have been the marriage bed. Emily murdered her suitor and has kept his body for thirty years. We do not learn whether he had tried to escape because of her unattractiveness or whether she could not bring
Clytie is the only member of the Farr family who tries to maintain any contact with the outside world:

She usually came out of the old big house about this time in the afternoon, and hurried through the town. It used to be that she ran about on some pretext or other, and for a while she made soft-voiced explanations that nobody could hear, and after that she began to charge up bills, which the postmistress declared would never be paid any more than anyone else's, even if the Farrs were too good to associate with other people. But now Clytie came for nothing. She came every day, and no one spoke to her any more: she would be in such a hurry, and couldn't see who it was (CG, 159).

It is the opinion of the town's "ladies standing in the door to feel the cool" that "Miss Clytie's wits were all leaving her, . . . the way her sister's had left her" (CG, 159). Clytie would simply stand on the street--sometimes in the rain--until someone tells her "to go home." Passive and entirely helpless, wearing an old-rain-soaked bonnet, she looks like a "horse. . . waiting for some one to come along the road and drive her to shelter" (CG, 160).

Yet this crazed, grotesque woman has a glowing inner vision that lights up her days and gives her life meaning.

Emily has most of the characteristics of the old maid stereotype. She is physically unattractive ("What would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her"), pitiful, irrational, queer, finally crazy (pp. 24-25).

The family pride which isolates both Clytie and Emily and prevents their having a meaningful relationship with others is the most striking parallel between the two stories, in addition to the lingering presence of death and decay.
For years she has studied faces in the streets of the town, and when she is back in the old house, busy preparing meals for the other members of the family, she thinks about the faces:

Anyone could have told that there were not more than 150 people in Farr's Gin, counting Negroes. Yet the number of faces seemed to Clytie almost infinite. She knew now to look slowly and carefully at a face; she was convinced that it was impossible to see it all at once. The first thing she discovered about a face was always that she had never seen it before. When she began to look at people's actual countenances there was no more familiarity in the world for her (CG, 162-163).

Each face is separate, individual, mysterious. The mystery and sacredness of each human being's personality and individuality are known to her as to no one else in the village; everyone sees her only from the outside, a demented and pathetic old woman, but she can see human worth and dignity in every face.

Was it possible to comprehend the eyes and the mouths of other people, which concealed she knew not what, and secretly asked for still another unknown thing? The mysterious smile of the old man who sold peanuts by the church gate returned to her; his face seemed for a moment to rest upon the iron door of the stove, set into the lion's mane. Other people said Mr. Tom Bates's boy [probably the village idiot], as he called himself, stared away with a face as clean-blank as a watermelon seed, but to Clytie, who observed grains of sand in his eyes and in his yellow lashes, he might have come out of a desert, like an Egyptian (CG, 163).
Clytie also understands everyone's secret search "for still another unknown thing"—love.

Clytie's name suggests the water nymph in Greek mythology who was in love with Apollo; losing him to another girl, she watched Apollo as he traveled through the sky, and before long she was made into a sunflower. Like the girl in the myth, Clytie is also a watcher—not of the sky but of faces.

In the street she had been thinking about the face of a child she had just seen. The child, playing with another of the same age, chasing it with a toy pistol, had looked at her with such an open, serene, trusting expression as she passed by! With this small, peaceful face still in her mind, rosy like...flames, like an inspiration which drives all other thoughts away, Clytie had forgotten herself and had been obliged to stand where she was in the middle of the road (CG, 162).

The child's face suggests innocence and peace to her; she thinks of the child's face as she prepares food over the flames of the kitchen stove. Perhaps as she performs a mother's task of preparing food for her father, sister, ...
and brother, her other "children," who are not at all "open, serene, trusting"—she thinks of the child as her own, as the child which her spinsterhood has denied her. The vision of the child's face, with its look of innocent love, is an overwhelming "inspiration" to her, so powerful that it "drives all other thoughts away."

Sometimes her vision of faces is interrupted by the more familiar—and greatly unpleasant—faces of her family. In particular, a vision from her girlhood haunts her:

Their faces came between her face and another. It was their faces which had come pushing in between, long ago, to hide some face that had looked back at her. And now it was hard to remember the way it looked, or the time when she had seen it first. It must have been when she was young. Yes, in a sort of arbor, hadn't she laughed, leaned forward...and that vision of a face—which was a little like all the other faces...and yet different, yet far more—this face had been very close to hers, almost familiar, almost accessible...It was purely for a resemblance to a vision that she examined the secret, mysterious, unrepeated faces she met in the street of Farr's Gin (CG, 168).

Her most frequent vision, then, comes to her from the days of her youth, when she was "in a sort of arbor"—perhaps a private place—and where she had "laughed" and "leaned forward," as if for a touch, a kiss. Perhaps this earliest vision is of a time when she was in love, or hoped to be in love; and cut off from that possibility, through the years she has sought compensation for that
loss through the vision from her youth. And always that
most pleasing of visions is interrupted by other more
familiar faces--of her family and of the people in the
village.

The narrator reports that there was a time when
Miss Clytie dressed up in her "outfit...in hunter's
green, a hat that came down around her face like a bucket,
a green silk dress, even green shoes with pointed toes.
She would wear the outfit all one day, if it was a pretty
day..." (CG, 169). It is as if she donned her most
becoming outfit--green like the "arbor" of her favorite
vision--in preparation for a materializing of her vision,
which, never appearing, made her look, "as one of the
ladies in the store remarked, disappointed" (CG, 169).
But now, the townspeople note, "she never dresse[s] up
any more," for "she [is] becoming more frightened all the
time" and shuns human contact more than ever:

Once in a while when a neighbor, trying to
be kind or only being curious, would ask her
opinion about anything--such as a pattern of
crochet--she would not run away, but, giving
a thin trapped smile, she would say in a
childish voice, "it's nice." But the ladies
always added, nothing that came anywhere close
to the Farrs' house was nice for long (CG, 169).

Gentle Clytie, longing to love and be loved, reviled by
the town for her great timidity which they mistake for
aristocratic pride ("the Farrs were too good to associate
with other people"), is doomed to seek the ideal in the
realm of dreams and fantasy, like other characters of Miss Welty—Cora, Phoebe, Irene, Miss Theo, and Miss Myra—discussed in this chapter.

The ugliest reality to break in upon Clytie's visions of mysterious—and sometimes loving—faces is her elder sister Octavia. The reader is first introduced to her as Clytie returns from an afternoon of face-gazing in the village. Octavia is a lover of the dark, contrasting with Clytie, a lover of the light. Octavia's authoritarianism is symbolized in her standing in the stairwell, waiting for her sister, looking "like one of the unmovable relics of the house" (CG, 161). She dresses in black and wears, somewhat ironically, a "diamond cornucopia" brooch at her bosom. Though her hands are "wrinkled," they are "unresting," for she continually fondles the cornucopia, in "an unwithered grand gesture" (CG, 161). Although the cornucopia may symbolize the horn of plenty, Octavia in her barrenness and tyranny has nothing to give but hate: she upbraids her sister with scurrilous remarks: "It is not enough that we are waiting here—hungry. . . . But you must sneak away and not answer when I call you. Go off and wander about the streets. Common—common—!" (CG, 161) But Clytie answers softly, "Never mind, Sister," Octavia continues scolding "in the same vindictive voice, a loud voice, for she was usually calling" (CG, 161).
As if to prevent change—and to shut out the real
world—Octavia demands that the windows be shut and the
drapes drawn all the time:

Rain and sun signified ruin, in Octavia's mind. Going over the whole house, Clytie made sure that everything was safe. It was not that ruin in itself could distress Octavia. Ruin or encroachment, even upon priceless treasures and even in poverty, held no terror for her; it was simply some form of prying from without, and this she could not forgive. All of that was to be seen in her face (CG, 163-164).

Like Miss Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily," Octavia values her aristocratic, proud isolation more than any treasure. Imperious in every act, she even insists on feeding the paralyzed father, only because it is Clytie's turn. Studying her father's old face, with its whiskers which "stuck out like needles all over the wasted cheeks," Clytie begins to spew out "rapid, bitter words to her sister, the wildest words that came to her head." Then she cries and gasps, "like a small child who has been pushed by the big boys into the water." The older sister orders her to cease: "That is enough," Octavia says peremptorily (CG, 165). Prevented from performing even a simple deed of love for her father, Clytie can react only with weeping—a natural feminine act that the callous Octavia is never seen engaged in.

Like some dark priestess, with her "thick hair, growing back after an illness and dyed almost purple, [falling] over her forehead" and with the snake-like
"accordion pleats which fall the length of her gown" opening and closing "over her breasts" while she breathes (CG, 166), Octavia rules over the shadowy interior of the Farr mansion, which may symbolize Hades. Willingly isolated in a living tomb, Octavia would naturally hate her sun-loving sister, "a potential bringer-of-light." While working in the kitchen, Clytie gazes out the "secretly opened window" (CG, 171). Later, after she lovingly holds up her drunken brother's head to serve him coffee and listens to him weep without scolding, as Octavia would have done, she hears a cheerful noise:

Outside the closed window a mockingbird began to sing. Clytie held back the curtain and pressed her ear against the glass. The rain had stopped. The bird's song sounded in liquid drops down through. . . .trees. . . .

Lover of light and nature, Clytie is irresistibly attracted to the soothing song of the bird, a song of joy, as contrasted with dirge-like sounds of the weeping Gerald. "Go to hell," George shouts, rather ironically, since Clytie's life with the family is hellish: suffering and isolation, not solace and companionship, are what her family provide.

91 Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 22.

92 Ibid.
The evil influence of Octavia on Clytie is visible in several ways and undermines her gentle human impulses. A next-door neighbor shows her a new rosebush all in bloom, and Clytie comments—timidly—"It's nice." But within an hour Clytie comes bursting into the yard, screaming that her "sister Octavia says you take that rosebush up and move it away from our fence! If you don't I'll kill you" (CG, 169-170).

In addition, she threatens to kill a neighbor's gentle little boy who sometimes picks up Octavia's cat and sings to it when it goes under the fence into his yard (CG, 170). And sometimes, "imitating her older sister," she curses softly, "in a full, light stream" (CG, 170) while she works in the garden. Neighbors recall that years before, Octavia did the same while working the garden, "but in a loud, commanding voice that could be heard in the post office." Occasionally Octavia, who never leaves the second story of the house, looks down at Clytie from the window, and when Octavia "let[s] the curtain drop at last, Clytie [is] left there speechless" (CG, 171).

Failing to find a sense of identity or common interest with the members of her family, Clytie longs for Lethy, the old Negro servant whom Octavia has dismissed. Because Lethy loves Clytie and old Mr. Farr, Octavia hates the black woman. Sometimes Lethy comes to the Farrs' back door and begs to be admitted to see Clytie, and especially
Mr. Parr, but Octavia keeps the family's isolation complete by sending Lethy away (CG, 164). Sometimes Clytie's longing for love makes her obsessive-compulsive, and she rushes through the gate into the town "in a gentleness compounded of fright and exhaustion and love, an overwhelming love" (CG, 171).

The climax of the story concerns Clytie's one effort to reach out to a human face, to establish some human contact. Mr. Bobo, the town's barber, is allowed to come to the Farr mansion once a week to shave old Mr. Farr. The barber had initially been ordered to come by a peremptory note from Octavia. Passing the shadowy statue of Hermes in the hall, Mr. Bobo appears to Clytie to be a bringer of news and light from the outside world (CG, 173). Just as the frightened barber resolves not to come to the home of the "mad" Farrs again, even though "it was something to be the only person in Farr's Gin allowed inside the house" (CG, 174), Clytie approaches him "in her funny, sideways walk, and the closer she [gets] to him, the more slowly she move[s]" (CG, 175):

Clytie looked at his small, doubtful face. What fear raced through his little green eyes! His pitiful, greedy, small face—how very mournful it was, like a stray kitten's. What was it that this greedy little thing was so desperately needing?

Clytie came up to the barber and stopped. Instead of telling him that he might go in and shave her father, she put out her hand with breathtaking gentleness and touched the side of his face.
For an instant afterward, she stood looking at him inquiringly, and he stood like a statue, like the statue of Hermes.

Then both of them uttered a despairing cry. Mr. Bobo turned and fled, waving his razor around in a circle, down the stairs and out the front door; and Clytie, pale as a ghost, stumbled against the railing (CG, 175-176).

In her overwhelming loneliness and love, Clytie has finally reached out to another human face, only to be repelled by it:

The terrible scent of bay rum, of hair tonic, the horrible moist scratch of an invisible beard, the dense, popping green eyes—what had she got hold of with her hand! She could hardly bear it—the thought of that face (CG, 176).

Ironically, it is not "overwhelming love" that she finds in the greedy barber's face, but hate, repulsion, fright—and in her recognition of his feelings about her, she feels kindred emotions, and her sustaining vision of faces is broken. She can no longer bear "the thought of a face"!

Moving to the back door of the house as Octavia calls for the shaving water, Clytie goes obediently to the rain barrel. She feels now that this object is "her friend, just in time, and her arms almost circle...it with impatient gratitude." The barrel is full, "dark, heavy," and gives off a "penetrating fragrance, like ice and flowers and the dew of night" (CG, 176-177), suggestive of death, the funereal, and the tomb. Seeing a face in the barrel, she recognizes it as the one "she has been
looking for, and from which she has been separated."

Giving a sign, one finger of a hand touches her dark cheek. She leans lower, closer to touch the face, as she had to touch the barber's face.

It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were drawn together as if in pain. The eyes were large, intent, almost avid, the nose ugly and discolored as if from weeping, the mouth old and closed from any speech. On either side of the head dark hair hung down in disreputable and wild fashion. Everything about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of waiting, of suffering. . . .

Too late, she recognized the face. She stood there completely sick at heart, as though the poor, half-remembered vision had finally betrayed her. . . .

She bent her angular body further, and thrust her head into the barrel, under the water, through its glittering surface into the kind, featureless depth, and held it there (CG, 177-178).

It is there that the motherly old Lethy, whose name suggests oblivion and forgetfulness, finds Clytie, where she has fallen straight forward into the barrel, "with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs" (CG, 178).  

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93 In "Miss Harriet," Guy de Maupassant's story of a middle-aged English spinster living in a rural hotel in Normandy, the denouement is similar to that in "Clytie." In Maupassant's story the isolated old maid commits suicide by throwing herself down a well. Casting a light down the well, the narrator sees that the body has gone down head first and that one leg sticks straight up while the other is pinned beneath the trunk of the body. While Miss Harriet's stockings are white, Clytie's are black. In addition, the narrator points out that Miss Harriet (like Clytie) loved "everything so tenderly and so passionately" and yet found no normal human outlet for
Ruth Vande Kieft provides a perceptive explanation of Clytie's illusions and of her death:

Clytie sees the ghastly disparity between what she once was and ought to have been (the loving, laughing creature of her youth) and what she has become (ugly, warped, inverted). Also, perhaps, she realizes that the only love in that house, if not in that town, was the love she made: there was no one then to embrace, no nature to plunge into but her own, no love possible but narcissistic love, no reality but her own reality, no knowledge possible but the knowledge of death, which is the immersion into oblivion.94

Unable to establish Fromm's productive orientation whereby she can penetrate the wall which separates one person from another (which, ironically, she has tried to do in reaching out to touch Mr. Bobo), the isolated spinster reconciles her feelings of disequilibrium, disturbance, strangeness, and anxiety by choosing to rejoin the natural world through death by water, a sacrificial act that does not save but destroys her at the same time that it releases her.

Clytie's life is tragic, Zelma Howard believes, because she was "born for life in the sun, for love, for enjoying human relationships...but is doomed to live in a house of hate, of death, and decay. Her search for


94 Eudora Welty, p. 40.
identity, for love, for human relationships becomes the obsessive pursuance of an ideal which she discovers to be an illusion." 95 Thus only "in the companionship of death," Alun Jones observes, can Clytie find "release from the sufferings of her absurd, unlovely, and unloved life." 96

Like "Clytie," Alfred Appel has suggested, "The Burning" (Miss Welty's only story of the Civil War) concerns "white characters...who have descended from the Old Order...are unable to function in the world...and are victims of a kind of moral suicide..." 97 In both stories (and in "Asphodel" as well, perhaps) the degeneration of the Old Order in the South is epitomized in the old maids, "embodiments of a tragic inability to cope with reality..." Finally, the "family closets" of the characters in both stories hold not only the proverbial skeletons but also "memories of a tragic history." 98 Therefore, "Clytie" and "The Burning" are not only important studies of isolated spinsters but also

95 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 23.
96 "World of Love," p. 178.
97 Season of Dreams, pp. 142, 141.
98 Ibid., p. 142.
(like "Asphodel") allegories depicting the decay of the Old South, with its "old chivalry, used, stale, ancient," no longer viable in a changing world.

Many consider "The Burning" one of Miss Welty's most enigmatic stories. Especially puzzling is the story's point of view, which has been explained in various ways. Thomas H. Carter believes that Miss Welty uses "a shifting point of view (which remains, I should say, actually the author's). . . ." In "The Burning," Edward Weeks writes, "the horrors. . .are blurred over by the observer's limited point of view, the result being rather like a death march played on a music box." Louis Rubin provides a more perceptive explanation of the story's point of view, one that seems to have influenced later critical opinions. He maintains that the story is seen mainly

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99 "The Burning" appears in *The Bride of the Innisfallen* (1955), Miss Welty's first volume of short stories since 1949. This book was received cautiously by the reviewers and was noted mainly for its experiments in narrative technique. "The Burning" represents one of her experiments in point of view, which early critics, such as Edward Weeks and Louis Rubin, do not consider very successful.

However, J. A. Bryant in *Eudora Welty*, p. 38, remarks that "'The Burning,' frequently criticized for being enigmatic, . . .is not enigmatic about anything that matters." Bryant considers the story's narrative thread clear and coherent.


through the mind of the "idiotic slave girl," Delilah, whose sharply limited perception "can permit no meaning, no knowledge to become real. Events are not 'lost' for her; they do not even exist." She cannot understand death; "nothing but the most trivial can make any impression on her consciousness."^102

In her thorough study of Miss Welty's fiction, Ruth Vande Kieft seems to have taken a hint from Rubin as she analyzes the point of view in "The Burning":

The characters in this story are clearly conceived, but monolithic: a pair of genteel maiden sisters, and an obedient young slave, Delilah. The point of view is difficult to locate, but the narrator is usually hovering in and around the consciousness of Delilah, recording what is said and done in a language subtly adjusted to the minds, mode of life, relationships, and idiom of the three women. With a few notable exceptions—particularly Delilah's hallucinations—the sentence structure and language are simple, and the description is sharply detailed, textural, impressionistic. Frequent gaps in the action have the effect of averted eyes; confusions and ambiguities are abundant. Miss Vande Kieft thus seems to see a good deal more coherence in the story than Rubin does, but she also admits that its "narrative technique" is "strange, verse-seeming" because Delilah is "the main center of consciousness of the story":

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Delilah is innocent and does not understand the meaning of the horror, cruelty, and catastrophe that she witnesses. Her world is shattered into fragments, but she cannot make a tragic shape out of the fragments... Delilah's nature accounts, then, for the fragmented, confusing effect of the narrative method.\textsuperscript{104}

In spite of its difficulty, Thomas H. Carter defends "The Burning" as the "best piece" in The Bride of the Innisfallen, "certainly the only one that represents Miss Welty at anything like her best..."\textsuperscript{105} Although the present writer does not agree with Carter's evaluation ("No Place for You, My Love" is probably the best story in the volume), he can agree that the story, in spite of its complexity, is one of Miss Welty's most graphic depictions of isolated spinsters.

Alfred Appel has made much of the Negro servant's final act—swimming into a river to escape the flames of Sherman's burning of the countryside. Appel sees her act as a "spiritual rebirth," which is to be compared with the sterile deaths by suicide of the white women, Miss Theo and Miss Myra.\textsuperscript{106} But the purpose of the present essay is not to analyze Delilah or her point of view but to ascertain...

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., p. 155.

\textsuperscript{105} "Rhetoric and Southern Landscapes," p. 294.

what she relates about the two isolated, aristocratic maiden ladies. Failing to understand the tragic meaning of the burnings and the pathetic deaths, Delilah tells about Miss Myra and Miss Theo the small but nevertheless meaningful details that contribute significantly to one's understanding of them, both as women and as isolatoes.

The basic action of "The Burning" contains a good deal of violence and horror. Perhaps the muted method of storytelling that Miss Welty has chosen prevents the unartistic piling up of horrible details that greatly weakens the impact of Ambrose Bierce's "Chickamauga," a tale of the effects of a similar Civil War burning on a deaf-mute child. In "The Burning" Miss Theo and Miss Myra's sewing session in a shuttered elegant parlor of their remote rural plantation home is interrupted by the arrival of a group of "soldiers with red eyes and clawed, mosquito-racked faces" who taunt the women with their helplessness (there being no men on the plantation) and then rape the younger sister, Myra. Forced to evacuate the house with nothing but the clothes they are wearing, Myra, Theo, and Delilah emerge into the hot afternoon to the sound of "catcalls and owl hoots from under the trees" (BI, 33), noises made by soldiers who comment on

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107 Eudora Welty, "The Burning," in The Bride of the Innisfallen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 29. All references to the stories in this collection will be placed in the text with the abbreviation BI followed by the page number.
the possibilities of sexual encounters with the women. The house is set afire, and screams like the "bellowing" of a "bull" are heard: Phinny, the mysterious half-black child who occupies the upper story, is burned alive as the soldiers set fire to the house (BI, 35).

After seeing the house ravaged and burned, the women begin walking to Jackson, where, upon their arrival, they note the burnt-out ruins of once-familiar buildings; returning to the country, the women stumble upon a hammock on the lawn of a ruined plantation. Using the hammock ropes, Delilah helps the women prepare nooses to hang themselves in the trees. When the women are dead, Delilah removes their jewelry from their bodies and returns to the site of Rose Hill, home of Myra and Theo, exhumes Phinny's bones from the ashes, ties these, the jewelry, and a silver goblet into a rag on her head, and wades into a river to escape the flames of continuing destruction in the vicinity.

The sisters' isolation is symbolized in the darkened, shuttered parlor at Rose Hill where they sit with their backs to the door of the room, their actions reflected in the large Venetian mirror which hangs over the fireplace. William McBurney sees believable parallels between the mirror symbol in the story—everything, including the rape of Myra, is seen reflected in the mirror—and that in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott." As Miss Myra and
Miss Theo begin their descent into the world—caused by force, not, ironically, by the chivalric charm of a Sir Lancelot—they also journey to a city, Jackson, while Tennyson's lady travels to Camelot. The ladies in both selections die after singing a swan-song.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps no other story by Miss Welty depicts to markedly the clash of "old chivalry—used, stale, ancient," with the unchivalric and brutal actions of the Yankees (hence New South too). Refusing at first to recognize the presence of the threatening Yankees in their parlor (one of them has even ridden a horse up the front steps), Miss Theo upbraids Delilah for appearing in her "dirty apron" to tell about the "added" eggs of the "black broody hen" (BI, 29). Theo's Southern gentlewomanly qualities are strangely incongruous in this situation: "Step back, Delilah, out of harm's way," Miss Theo says "in such a company-voice that Delilah" thinks "harm is one of two men." One of the men laughs snidely. The two men push the little tables and chairs out of the way to prepare for their act of rape. One pushes Miss Myra "down where she stood and drop[s] on top of her." Meanwhile,

here in the mirror the parlor remained, filled up with dusted pictures, and shuttered since six o'clock against the heat and that

¹⁰⁸"Welty's 'The Burning,'" Explicator, 16 (November 1957), Item 9. Another interesting parallel is that while Miss Welty's women are sewing, Tennyson's heroine is weaving on her loom.
smell of smoke they were all so tired of, still glimmering with precious, breakable things white ladies were never tired of and never broke, unless they were mad at each other (BI, 30).

The fragile, artificial and ultra-feminine quality of the parlor contrasts strikingly with the rude, animalistic, male activity in the room and the smell of war and destruction outside the shuttered windows. The "old chivalry" in which the women have believed is of little protection to them now. After they have had their pleasure, the men say—perversely understated, "we just come [sic] in to inspect," to which Miss Theo answers, angrily, "You presume, you dare"! (BI, 30)

The elder sister, like Octavia in "Clytie," is the stronger, the more masculine. However, unlike Octavia, Theo loves and protects her younger sister. Theo picks up her sister from the floor and carries her bodily across the room and places her in a chair. In this act, Theo's "bands of black hair [are] awry, her clothes rustling stiffly as clothes through winter quiet." Stern, starched, stiff—even wintery, Theo slaps Myra's rapist for his unchivalric act in a house without male defenders: ". . . [I]nspect"! Theo orders. "'No man in the house to prevent it. Brother—no word. Father—dead. Mercifully so—'" She speaks in "an almost rough-and-tumble kind of way used by ladies who didn't like company—never did like company, for anybody" (BI, 30, 31). The narrator's
comment underlines the old maids' liking of isolation. Like Octavia, Theo, at least, values her proud aristocratic privacy above all else.

Theo continues to act as her younger sister's protector against the Yankee men. She asks, while lovingly stroking her fainted sister's hair, "Is it shame that's stopping your inspection? . . . . I'm afraid you found the ladies of this house a trifle out of your element. My sister's the more delicate one, as you see. May I offer you this young kitchen Negro [Delilah], as I've always understood--" (BI, 31) Myra, awaking, knocks back her sister's protecting hand. She seems to want reality—even if it is rough and terrible, although Theo wants her to remain innocent, "asleep in the heart" (BI, 31).

When the men first enter the room on the horse, Myra asks, rather girlishly, as if she were on a picnic, "Will you take me on the horse? Please take me first" (BI, 29). Perhaps, however, Myra is rather like Delilah; she is so addled or innocent—or both—that she does not understand the full significance of what has happened to her!

As one of the soldiers announces that they have come with orders to set fire to the house, "his voice makes a man's big echo in the hall, like a long time ago" (BI, 32). For too long Rose Hill has been without men; like the Southern code itself, the occupants of the house have
grown old, stale, and fragile, isolated from change and reality—and even from crude masculinity.

As the first section of the story ends, Delilah is raped in the grassy yard; "young and strong," she screams "for them all—for everybody that wanted her to scream for them, for everybody that didn't." But she screams loudest for herself, "who [is] lost now—carried out of the house, not knowing how to get back" (BI, 33). As a black woman freed—after suffering, however—from the protection and seclusion of the old house and the old system, she does not know how to "get back" and thus must—and does—go forward to survive (being "young and strong," she will endure and prevail) in the new system (New South); but Miss Myra and Miss Theo (the Old South) are doomed, unable to survive in the new order.

In the second section of the story, the women emerge, like the Lady of Shalott, from their tower of isolation, determined, "in their crushed and only dresses" to face whatever comes, "without any despising left in their faces which [are] the same as one, as one face that [doesn't] belong to anybody." Both women now share "one clarified face" (BI, 34). Like Clytie's clarified vision at the end of her story, the women now see and understand the situation directly; it is no longer merely reflected in a mirror in which they see life indirectly.
In the third section of the story the women trek to Jackson under the hot July sun. Constantly the smell of smoke is in the air. The women—the two whites and the black—appear like innocent children together:

They walked here and there, sometimes over the same track, holding hands all three, like the timeless time it snowed, and white and black went to play together in hushed woods (BI, 36).

Surveying the ruins of burned-out Jackson, the three women share a sense of dismay at the devastation to be found everywhere. The lovely purity of the snow-time of their childhood is a striking contrast with the charred vista that now lies all about them.

Theo, whose name in Greek means "God," tried to play the god in refusing to admit that the message she had been sent two days earlier—that Rose Hill would be burned—could actually be true. Perhaps she had intended to keep the soldiers away by the strength of her will, just as Mrs. Larkin tries to prevent her husband's death by loving him. Theo apologizes to Myra: "I blame only myself [in letting] you remain one hour in that house after it was doomed. I thought I was equal to it, and I proved I was, but not you" (BI, 38). Theo continues to consider herself the strong sister and to protect her younger sister.

However, the two women disagree over the child, Phinny. Myra insists that the child is hers, a myth she
evidently must believe to make her frustrated motherhood (like Albee's Virginia Woolf's) easier to bear. But Miss Theo insists that the child was their dead brother Benton's. Immediately, the rather addled Myra picks up her sister's story and praises Benton: "Dear Benton. So good. Nobody else would have felt so bound" (BI, 37). Then the two sisters continue their discussion of Benton and his admirable code of honor, which, one suspects, they have invented to make his disappearance more acceptable:

"...I told him what he owed a little life! Each little life is a man's fault, I said that. Oh, who'll ever forget that awful day?"
"Benton's forgotten, if he's dead. He was so good after that too, never married."
"Stayed home, took care of his sisters. Only wanted to be forgiven."
"There has to be somebody to take care of everybody."
"I told him, he must never dream he was inflicting his sisters. That's what we're for."
"In at the front door on the back of a horse," said Miss Theo. "If Benton had been there!" (BI, 37-39)

Myra, however, has only been temporarily hushed on the subject of the baby's parentage. She asks her sister, plaintively:

"...Why do you say it wasn't my baby?...I had Phinny. When we were all at home and happy together. Are you going to take Phinny away from me now?...Oh, don't I know who it really belonged to, who it loved the best, that baby?...You hide him if you want to...Let Papa shut up all upstairs. I had him, dear. It was an officer, no, one of our beaux that used to come
and hunt with Benton. It's because I was always the impetuous one, highstrung and so easily carried away. . . .And if Phinny was mine--" (BI, 38-39)

Theo blurts, "Don't you know he's black?" Myra whispers, ironically, "He was white. . . . He's black now." The two women embrace while Myra weeps. Then Delilah suggests, "Could be he got out. . . . He strong, he."

The supreme irony of this absurdly comical debate over the parentage of the child Phinny is that he is really Delilah's; before he was taken from her he was called Jonah (BI, 45). The reader is led to believe that the child is Benton's and for that reason the aristocratic women have taken him to live in their house with his real mother as his nursemaid—an ironical parallel to the story of Moses in the Old Testament; Moses too was adopted by an aristocrat, the Egyptian queen, and his mother—like Delilah, an outsider—was hired to nurse him.

In section four of the story, the women commit suicide by hanging. First, Theo hangs Myra, whose "young, lifted face [is] looking out" (BI, 41). Like Clytie, Myra, who has the capacity for love and for living life, is obedient to her older sister to the last, even until death. Incongruously, Theo remarks, "I learned as a child how to tie, from a picture book in Papa's library—not that I ever was called on. . . . I guess I was always something of a tomboy" (BI, 41). Ruth Vande Kieft
explains the women's "apparent perversity" in this way:

. . . he old style of southern gentlewoman behaves with faultless consistency, which means in extreme circumstances (as in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily") that she may behave insanely. . . . Sufficiently warned of the coming destruction, she [Theo] can't "understand" the message, pulls down the shutters, and goes on living as if nothing is going to happen; attacked, turned out, she retains her dignity and consummates her protest with suicide. Miss Myra persists in the only mode known to her: that of being a gentle, passive, protected child-lady.109

Completing the hanging of Myra and about to complete her own, with Delilah's help, Theo makes a last indignant speech of protest to Delilah; to the last she takes pride in her masculine strength:

"I've proved. . . what I've always suspicioned: that I'm brave as a lion. That's right: look at me. If I ordered you back up that tree to help my sister down to the grass and shade, you'd turn and run: I know your minds. You'd desert me with your work half done. So I haven't said a word about it. About mercy. As soon as you're through, you can go, and leave us where you've put us, unspared, just alike. And that's the way they'll find us. The sight will be good for them for what they've done (BI, 41-42).

Then Theo comes "sailing down from the tree" as Delilah thinks, "She was always too powerful for a lady." Theo's fall does not kill her but only breaks her neck and leaves her alive where she twists "in the grass like a dead snake until the sun" (BI, 42) sets and she dies.

Prevented by aristocratic pride and by an "old chivalry--used, stale, ancient," neither Theo nor Myra has been able to achieve Fromm's productive orientation; forced to find compensation for her frustrated motherhood in imagining that she is Phinny's mother, Myra becomes crazed and incoherent. Theo, on the other hand, is hardly more successful in fulfilling her role as a woman. She becomes masculine and life-hating in her attempts to protect her younger sister, who becomes weaker as the elder sister becomes stronger. But Delilah stands as a norm amidst the psychical disequilibrium which isolation has brought upon the two white women. Stolid, unimaginative, and strong, she rescues the bones of her child, Phinny, whom "she worship[s] still, though it was long ago he was taken from her the first time" (BI, 45). True to the life-force within her and unencumbered by the crushing cultural baggage of honor and chivalry that has doomed Miss Myra and Miss Theo to a death-in-life and finally to a real and horrible death, Delilah wades courageously into the Big Black River, becomes "submerged to the waist, to the breast" but keeps wading, knowing--deeply, primitively attuned to nature--that "it would not rain, the river would not rise, until Saturday" (BI, 46).

"Clytie" and "The Burning" indeed reflect the unhappy situation of the unmarried woman in American society as Miss Deegan finds her in the American novel. Miss Welty's
spinsters share at least a few characteristics with those
Miss Deegan has analyzed in such novels The House of the
Seven Gables, Mountain Blood, and Rebecca of Sunnybrook
Farm. Like the Sawyer sisters in Rebecca of Sunnybrook
Farm, Octavia and Clytie, Miss Theo and Miss Myra are
maiden sisters living together in the old family home.
The elder sister in each case is dominant, the younger
obedient and passive. Since they are of aristocratic back­
ground, none of these women must actually work for a living,
though their families are quite poor and subsist on meager
rations. Apparently neither Octavia nor Theo has ever been
in love, but Clytie and Myra seem to have the potential for
loving and being loved in return. Both Clytie and Myra
appear to long for a child, Myra more obviously than
Clytie. Like Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O.," Clytie
is the servant of her household but is not very efficient
at her task. Some physical characteristics of Miss Welty's
spinsters are similar to those in the traditional depiction
of the old maid: Clytie is described as "angular"; at
other times she appears to be not only thin but also gaunt.
However, like Theo, she is a sturdy woman and her long legs
carry her very fast. Quite noticeably in both stories the
spinsters have an altruistic ambition: Clytie devotes
much of her time and energy to the care of her drunken
brother Gerald and to her blind, paralyzed father, although
neither is capable of returning her affection. Theo has
devoted her life to protecting Myra, and Myra has devoted her life to the care of her brother's child by Delilah. In general, Clytie, Octavia, Theo and Myra are prevented by tradition, family, and social position from developing a productive orientation or a mode of relatedness that would allow them to realize their human (and womanly) potentialities. In addition, the peculiarity of Octavia and Clytie and the overbearingness and unpleasant disposition of Octavia cause them to be disliked in their village. None of these women appears ever to have had a lover, and for this and other reasons, they share a "spirit of resignation, of emotional stagnation, and of inarticulateness" with other spinsters in American fiction.\(^{110}\) As has been shown, Miss Welty's spinsters sometimes share certain qualities with other older single women in American fiction. But her characters are three-dimensional in their own right, although they may at times come close to being caricatures, which real characters sometimes are.

**Teacher and Student as Spinsters**

"June Recital" and "The Wanderers"

The two old maids in Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, Virgie Rainey and Lotte Eckhart, may be discussed as a unit because their lives are interconnected in two stories, \(^{110}\)Deegan, *Stereotype of the Single Woman*, p. 100.
"June Recital" and "The Wanderers." The story of Lotte Eckhart in "June Recital" is the most complete study of an isolated spinster in Miss Welty's shorter fiction and is of special significance because it records in detail the attitudes of the small town citizens toward the old maid teacher in their midst. Virgie Rainey is a young girl in "June Recital," but her inability to accept the love offered her by Miss Eckhart contributes substantially to that teacher's sense of estrangement. In "The Wanderers" Virgie is herself middle-aged and single, and although she has lived in Morgana many years with her mother, she is still just as much an isolato as when she was a wild girl of sixteen. But Virgie's life is different from that of most of the old maid isolatoes studied in this chapter; realizing her loneliness and that of all "wanderers" upon the face of the earth, she is able to reaffirm the joy of living and to leave Morgana to make a new life for herself after her mother's death.

There are seven stories in The Golden Apples that present a forty-year history (c. 1900-1940) in the lives of the eight principal families of the small logging-and-farming village of Morgana, Mississippi, located midway between Vicksburg and Jackson. Some critics consider The Golden Apples, a novel, although Miss Welty says it

is not a novel. The stories may be read separately, and several of the individual stories have been anthologized.

"June Recital" is the second story in *The Golden Apples*. Sixty-seven pages long, it is Miss Welty's most ambitious short story. To Robert Daniel it is the most "successful" piece in *The Golden Apples*. It is told from the point of view of two young people, Loch Morrison (age twelve) and Cassie Morrison (age sixteen), but its principal character is Lotte Eckhart. The story records her pathetic and futile efforts to achieve Fromm's productive orientation whereby she can break down the lonely walls between herself and others and thus love and be loved. The present action of "June Recital" takes place on a warm summer's afternoon, but flashbacks in the mind of Cassie carry the story several years into the past to her own relationship with Miss Eckhart. In her flashback Cassie recalls remarks and conjectures about the piano.

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teacher that she has heard from her mother and other women in the community.

"June Recital" is divided into four sections. The first and third sections are seen from Loch's point of view, the second and last from Cassie's. In the first section, Loch, who is recovering from malaria, lies in bed studying the house next door through his father's telescope while his sister tie-dyes a scarf in her room. Like Huckleberry Finn, young Loch sees a good deal but does not understand the significance of it, nor does the reader until section two, when Cassie characterizes the Miss Eckhart in detail. Loch sees a dirty, "unsteady-looking woman" (GA, 25) carry newspapers and tree branches into the living room of the old deserted MacLain house next door. He thinks she is decorating the room (she also stuffs the piano full of newspaper) for a party. As she moves about, Loch notices that she pulls "the corners of her skirt up like a girl." and that "her old legs" are "thin..." Her walk is "zig-zagged...," "[s]uch a show-off, carefree way for a mother to behave" (GA, 28), Loch observes—rather ironically since the old woman has never been a mother. As section one ends, the old woman begins to pick out the tune of Für Elise on an old piano (GA, 30).

In the story's second section, Cassie hears the sound of the piano in her room, but since her room is on the side
of the Morrison home opposite the MacLain home, she cannot see the strange ritual going on there. It is June, and Cassie begins to think about the June recital that used to be held in the MacLain home when Miss Lotte Eckhart taught piano there and when Virgie Rainey was her star pupil. "Fur Elise was a standard practice piece for the piano pupils. Cassie has not seen Virgie in several years, and she wonders where Virgie and Miss Eckhart have gone. A line of poetry (from Yeats' "The Song of Wandering Aengus") "tumbles in her ears": "Though I am old with wandering . . ." (GA, 31). As the reader soon observes, this line of poetry is a statement of theme of "June Recital" as well as all the stories in The Golden Apples.

Cassie recalls that with "her methodical mind" Miss Eckhart couples "on purpose" the lessons of Cassie and Virgie, because one plays so well and one so poorly. German exactness is also one of Miss Eckhart's traits; she is "punctual" and "formidable" (GA, 33) about the girls' times for music lessons. In addition, Miss Eckhart is "as tireless as a spider" as she "wait[s] so unbdudgingly for her pupils" (GA, 33). The rather uncomplimentary but nevertheless vivid comparison of the piano teacher with a spider parallels an earlier simile: Loch, observing Miss Eckhart pushing a heavy object in the house next door,

114 Italics and ellipsis points are Miss Welty's.
thinks she looks "like a spider with something bigger
than he can eat..." (GA, 28). These figures of speech
are fitting when one recalls that this rather unattractive
and nervously energetic woman is being seen through the
eyes of two children.

Cassie remembers Miss Eckhart as "a heavy brunette
woman whose age [is] not known" (GA, 34). She also has a
marked eccentricity: a dislike of flies and the tendency
to swat them constantly, even during piano lessons, and
even if the flies land on a girl's hands while she is
playing! (GA, 35) In addition, the woman's handwriting is
as precise as her daily routine.

Cassie could see the bills clearly, in elaborate
handwriting, the "z" in Mozart with an equals-
sign through it and all the "y's" so heavily
tailed they went through the paper. It took a
whole lesson for those tails to dry (GA, 35).

Miss Eckhart is also a stern taskmaster during piano
lessons:

And there were times, perhaps on rainy days, when
she walked around and around the studio, and you
felt her pause behind you. Just as you thought
she had forgotten you, she would lean over your
head, you were under her bosom like a traveler
under a cliff, her penciled finger would go to
your music, and above the bar you were playing
she would slowly write "Slow." Or sometimes,
precipitant above you, she would make a curly
circle with a long tail, as if she might draw
a cat, but it would be her "P" and the word
would turn into "Practice!" (GA, 35).

The piano teacher's precision becomes especially apparent
to the whole town when she plans the yearly recital,
Cassie's father says, "like a military operation. . . in all its tactics and dress" (GA, 59). The annual recital even ends with "Marche Militaire" played by four children.

Cassie recalls that Miss Eckhart's "studio" has seemed to be such a "dedicated" place. "How much later," however, "had it occurred to Cassie that 'the studio' itself, the only one ever heard of in Morgana, was nothing more than a room that was rented? Rented because poor Snowdie MacLain needed the money?" (GA, 34). The fragile, feminine contents of the room, very sweet and candy-like, make the studio seem "in some ways like the witch's house in Hansel and Gretel, Cassie's mother said, 'including the witch'" (GA, 34).

Mrs. Morrison, like the other women in the community, dislikes Miss Eckhart, Cassie remembers:

Her mother, Cassie had long known in her heart, could not help but despise Miss Eckhart. It was just for living so close to her, or maybe just for living, a poor unwanted teacher and unmarried. But there are other "reasons" why the small Southern community dislikes Miss Eckhart. She had once been attacked by a Negro in the dark, and for this—a terrible breach of decorum and a violent act—they could not forgive her because, possibly, of a fear in their own minds that a similar experience might befall them.

One time, at nine o'clock at night, a crazy nigger had jumped out of the school hedge and got Miss Eckhart, had pulled her down and threatened to kill her. That was long ago.
She had been walking by herself after dark; nobody had told her any better. When Dr. Loomis made her well, people were surprised that she and her mother did not move away. They wished she had moved away...; then they wouldn't always have to remember that a terrible thing once happened to her. But Miss Eckhart stayed, as though she considered one thing not so much more terrifying than another. (After all, nobody knew why she came!) It was because she was from so far away, at any rate, people said to excuse her, that she couldn't comprehend; Miss Perdita Mayo, who took in sewing and made everybody's trousseaux, said Miss Eckhart's differences were why shame alone had not killed her and killed her mother too; that differences were reasons (GA, 50-51).

As she continues to listen to the tune of Für Elise floating through the summer air, Cassie thinks "that perhaps more than anything it was the nigger in the hedge, the terrible fate that came on her, that people could not forgive Miss Eckhart" (GA, 51).

Morganians, however, find still other "differences" between Miss Eckhart and themselves that provide "reasons" for their isolating her. When people smell the Eckharts' food cooking, "the smell [is] wrong. . . . It is the smell of food nobody else has ever tasted":

Cabbage was cooked there by no Negro and by no way it was ever cooked in Morgana. With wine. The wine was brought on foot by Dago Joe, and to the front door. Some nice mornings the studio smelled like a spiced apple. But it was known from Mr. Wiley Bowles, the grocer, that Miss Eckhart and her mother...ate pigs' brains. . . . (GA, 55).

115As Miss Deegan has noted in Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels, p. 115, the old maid dressmakers--like Miss Perdita Mayo in "June Recital"--in American fiction are "much given to gossip."
When World War I comes, the people in Morgana associate the German ways and food of the Eckharts with the war; the piano teacher is accused of being a German sympathizer: "...even after 1918 people say Miss Eckhart was a German and still wants the Kaiser to win...." (GA, 55).

Miss Eckhart lives with her crippled mother in one room just off the "studio" which she rents from Snowdie MacLain. One of Miss Eckhart's favorite expressions, one frequently used with her pupils, is "Danke schoen!" One day Miss Eckhart's mother screams the words out repeatedly--apparently in protest at hearing them so frequently. The piano teacher leaves her pupil at the piano and walks quietly through the room and slaps her mother on the side of the mouth (GA, 54-55). At other times old Mrs. Eckhart would roll her wheelchair into the studio and tap her thimble against the chair arm in time with the piano music which a pupil would be playing. "Ordinarily," Cassie remembers, "Miss Eckhart never seemed disturbed by her mother's abrupt visits. She appeared gentler, more bemused than before. ..." Then Cassie wonders, "Should daughters forgive mothers (with mothers under their heel)?"

But Cassie prefers to think of the two old lonely women as loving each other and as having been happy--somewhere in the world--before they came to Morgana:

Cassie would rather look at the two of them at night, separated by the dark and the distance between. For when from your own table you saw
the Eckharts through their window in the light of a lamp, and Miss Eckhart with a soundless ebullience bouncing up to wait on her mother, sometimes you could imagine them before they had come to you—plump, bright, and sweet somewhere (GA, 54).

But the Eckharts are to have no peace; Morganians insist that Miss Snowdie can do without the Eckharts and should evict them.

When old Mrs. Eckhart dies, Miss Snowdie keeps Miss Eckhart on as a roomer because "Miss Eckhart need[s] a friendly roof more than she [does] herself" (GA, 55). The malicious gossip about the Eckharts continues, however, even after the mother's death:

...[S]tories began to be told of what Miss Eckhart had really done to her old mother. People said the old mother had been in pain for years, and nobody was told. What kind of pain they did not say. But they said that during the war, when Miss Eckhart lost pupils and they did not have very much to eat, she would give her mother paregoric to make sure she had slept all night and not wake the street with noise or complaint, for fear still more pupils would be taken away. Some people said Miss Eckhart killed her mother with opium (GA, 57).

During the town's worst persecution of poor Miss Eckhart, however, the piano teacher is still comforted by having her best pupil, Virgie Rainey. Cassie remembers that Miss Eckhart, with "a round smile on her face," used to say, "Virgie Rainey brings me luck!" (GA, 37-38) When Virgie has to stop taking lessons after her brother is killed in France, Miss Eckhart's luck seems to leave her "for good" (GA, 56). In addition, people notice that "Virgie's hand
los[e] its touch. . . ." Perhaps it is that nobody seems to want "Virgie Rainey to be anything in Morgana any more than they. . .want. . .Miss Eckhart to be. . ." (GA, 56).

Miss Eckhart's last stroke of cruel luck comes when Miss Snowdie has to sell her house and move to the country. The new owner of the house puts Miss Eckhart out and retains "the piano and anything Miss Eckhart has or that Miss Snowdie has left for Miss Eckhart" (GA, 57). Miss Eckhart goes to live in a room in a house on the edge of town. Meanwhile, the townspeople, Cassie recalls, notice changes in the former piano teacher:

[She] got older and weaker, though not noticeably thinner, and would be seen from time to time walking into Morgana, up one side of the street and down the other and home. People said you could look at her and see she was broken. Yet she still had authority. She could still stop young, unknowing children like Loch on the street and ask them imperative questions, "Where were you throwing the ball?" "Are you trying to break that tree?" . . .Of course, her only associates from first to last were children, not counting Miss Snowdie (GA, 58).

As peculiar as she seems to the narrow-minded, small-town Southerners, Miss Eckhart becomes even queerer in the isolation that the community has imposed on her because of her "differences" and her poverty. Because she is shy—and distant because she is shy—the women of the town consider her proud. In addition, she is not a church-member (indeed a cause of suspicion in any small, rigidly-Protestant Southern town), and—most of all—because she is an old maid:
Missie Spights said that if Miss Eckhart has allowed herself to be called by her first name, then she would have been like other ladies. Or if Miss Eckhart had belonged to a church that had ever been heard of, and the ladies would have had something to invite her to belong to... Or if she had been married to anybody at all, just the awfullest man--like Miss Snowdie MacLain, that everybody could feel sorry for (GA, 58).

As Carol Porter Smith has pointed out, Miss Eckhart does try, in a mild and ineffective way, to reach out to other people. Her "quest for the potentialities of life is centered in two abortive relationships..." with Hal Sissum and Virgie Rainey. Hal Sissum works in the shoe department of Spights' store and takes pride in fitting all the ladies of the town. He has praise for Miss Eckhart's "pretty ankles," unusual "for a heavy lady like herself." A local matron remarks acidly that it is a surprise "for Miss Eckhart, of all people, to turn up with such pretty ankles, which made it the same as if she didn't have them" (GA, 44). When Miss Eckhart comes to be fitted for shoes, Sissum treats her with special chivalry and even gives her a choice of shoes, a privilege he does not extend to the other ladies of the town. Miss Eckhart, obviously smitten by Sissum's gallantry, buys several pairs of shoes at a time from his at short intervals (GA, 44). The town

ridicules her: "She didn't know how to do about Mr. Sissum at all" (GA, 44). It seems that fate and "differences" conspire to keep Sissum and Miss Eckhart apart.

But what could they either one have done? They couldn't go to church together; the Sissums were Presbyterians. . .and Miss Eckhart belonged to some distant church with a previously unheard-of name, the Lutheran. She could not go to the picture show with Mr. Sissum because. . .he played the music there every evening after the store closed—he had to; this was before the Bijou could afford a piano, and he could play the cello. He could not have refused Mr. Syd Sissum who bought the stable and built the Bijou.

Miss Eckhart used to come to the political speakings in the Starks' yard when Mr. Sissum played with the visiting band. Anybody could see him all evening then, high on the fresh plank platform behind his cello. Miss Eckhart, the true musician, sat on the damp night grass and listened. Nobody ever saw them really together any more than that. How did they know she was sweet on Mr. Sissum? But they did (GA, 44-45).

Miss Eckhart values highly a Billikin doll that Sissum gives her. The comic doll, given to every child whose parents buy him a pair of Billikin shoes, is kept in Miss Eckhart's studio on "a little mineret table, as if it were a vase of fresh red roses." But like everything in her life, Miss Eckhart loses the doll, for one day "her old mother [takes] it. . .and crack[s] it across her knee" (GA, 47).

Then, finally, Miss Eckhart loses even Mr. Sissum, who "is drowned in the Big Black River one summer—f[alls] out of his boat, all alone." Miss Eckhart, of course, comes to the funeral, although it is a Presbyterian service. She crowds her way up to the coffin at the graveside
rites, "a stranger to their cemetery, where none of her people lay. . . ." The citizens of Morgana, selfish to the last, cannot even allow Miss Eckhart the opportunity to express her sense of loss in the only way she knows how, in a mad sort of nodding of her head, "sharply to one side and then the other. . . . It was strange that in Mr. Sissum's life Miss Eckhart, as everybody said, had never know what to do; and now she did this" (GA, 48). Deciding that it is crying she did at the cemetery, some of the ladies stop their little girls from taking any more music from Miss Eckhart (GA, 48-49). Such peculiar behavior was not to be brooked, especially from an old maid--a Yankee German Lutheran eater of pigs' brains!

The other relationship Miss Eckhart tries to cultivate is with Virgie Rainey; Miss Eckhart has the affection of a mother for Virgie, who is, like the piano teacher, an outsider in the community because her parents are poor (they pay for their daughter's piano lessons with fruit, vegetables, and milk from their farm) and because Virgie is proud and refuses to be trodden down by the condescending ways of the community. In addition, Miss Eckhart recognizes Virgie's genuine talent as a musician and encourages her to develop her skill. The teacher assigns her a difficult Liszt concerto, which none of the rest of the pupils "could ever hope to play" (GA, 53).
Virgie would be heard from in the world, playing that, Miss Eckhart said, revealing to children with one ardent cry her lack of knowledge of the world. How could Virgie be heard from, in the world? And "the world"! Where did Miss Eckhart think she was now? Virgie Rainey, she repeated . . . , had a gift, and she must go away from Morgana. From them all. From her studio. In the world, she must study and practice her music for the rest of her life. . . (GA, 53).

Miss Eckhart evidently wishes to live some lost or misspent part of her youth in envisioning Virgie's leaving Morgana and becoming a great pianist "in the world." But the townspeople, especially the women—perhaps jealous that their daughters do not have Virgie's talent—feel that "the very place to prove Miss Eckhart crazy [is] on her own subject, piano playing: she [doesn't] know what she [is] talking about" (GA, 53).

But Cassie, now grown older, can partially understand Miss Eckhart's fondness for the youthful, independent, talented Virgie. For one rainy afternoon the piano teacher plays a passionate concerto for the girls:

Coming from Miss Eckhart, the music made all the pupils uneasy, almost alarmed; something had burst out, unwanted, exciting, from the wrong person's life. This was some brilliant thing too splendid for Miss Eckhart, piercing and striking the air around her the way a Christmas firework might almost jump out of the hand that was, each year, inexperienced anew.

It was when Miss Eckhart was young that she had learned this piece, Cassie divined. Then she had almost forgotten it. But it took only a summer rain to start it again; she had been pricked and the music came like the red blood under the scab of a forgotten fall. . . (GA, 50-51).
Miss Eckhart was sharing with the girls—quite impromptu—an intensely meaningful, sensitive experience from her own youth. The pupils had long regarded her as desiccated, and, learning that she too can have strong feelings, which they can not quite understand, they feel uneasy. "What Miss Eckhart might have told them a long time ago was that there was more than the ear could bear to hear or the eye to see, even in her." Again, in a powerful scene, Eudora Welty has expressed one of her basic themes: the mystery of the human personality, which must not be gainsaid.

The great significance of Virgie Rainey in Miss Eckhart's life has been summarized succinctly by Alfred Appel:

Virgie Rainey is Miss Eckhart's only gifted student. . . . Virgie [herself] plays the piano with such a passion that when she finishes her number at one annual "June Recital," her clothes are wet and stained with perspiration. She is the piano teacher's last hope—the only consolation and artistic justification for her boring and frustrating existence. But in her fearlessness Virgie only intensifies Miss Eckhart's private agonies, for Miss Eckhart has a "timid spot in her soul," a little vulnerable place, and Virgie finds it and shows it to others. Virgie refuses to use the metronome, throws sheet music on the floor, and insists on playing pieces her own way; having made an exception of Virgie, Miss Eckhart now falls "humble before her impudence." All the little girls can tell that Virgie is turning Miss Eckhart from a teacher "into something lesser. And if she was not a teacher, what was Miss Eckhart?"

117 Season of Dreams, pp. 212-213.
But Virgie, who admits much later in her life that she has not really hated Miss Eckhart (GA, 243), rejects the teacher's proffered love—having discovered a "timid spot in her soul" (GA, 40)—and also her gifts: "a little butterfly pin made of cut-out silver" and "an armful of books that were written in German about the lives of the masters, and Virgie couldn't read a word." Virgie's father "tore out the Venusberg pictures and fed [the books] to the pigs" (GA, 56-57). But these gifts do not cause Virgie to express her love for Miss Eckhart "or go on practicing as she told her."

Miss Eckhart tried all those things and was strict to the last in the way she gave all her love to Virgie Rainey and none to anybody else, the way she was strict in music; and for Miss Eckhart's love was just arbitrary and one-sided as music teaching. . . . Her love never did anybody any good. Italics mine. (CG, 57)

When her father dies, Virgie quits taking piano lessons and begins "prostituting" her talent (in Miss Eckhart's view anyway) by playing the piano at the Bijou Theatre. She has also become known as a girl of easy virtue. And somehow on that warm June afternoon when Loch sees Miss Eckhart go into the old MacLain house, the old woman knows that Virgie is upstairs sleeping with a young sailor, "Kewpie" Moffitt. The old piano teacher has returned to the MacLain house to destroy it, its contents (which include all the furnishings of her old piano studio), and Virgie and herself too, in a ritual of conflagration.
In the fourth section of the story, Miss Eckhart is prevented from succeeding in this last grand gesture by a farcical pair of townsmen who burst into the house, put out the fire, and then proceed to take Miss Eckhart away to the state mental hospital in Jackson (GA, 68-77). The piano teacher's lone defender in Morgana is Cassie Morrison, who comes running from her house, barefoot and in her petticoat and in "full awareness turned toward town, crying, 'You can't take her! Miss Eckhart!'" (GA, 78) But she is "too late for anybody to hear her." As the townsmen, with Miss Eckhart in custody, advance toward the business section of the village, they meet the townswomen returning from their weekly Rook party. Chester Eisinger has perceptively defined the importance of Morgana's ladies:

In "June Recital" the community functions... to exclude those who will not bend to its will or conform to its mores. It manifests itself in bodily form in the procession, like an animated frieze, stately and well-ordered, of the ladies of the town who march off to their afternoon Rook game in the beginning and then march back again at the end. Their order and their serenity give the tone and create the frame for the chapter. These are the ladies who have shut out Virgie Rainey and Miss Eckhart... and make Virgie a little tart and drive... Miss Eckhart to madness. 118

Although Eudora Welty is not a literary naturalist and does not necessarily believe in social determinism, she is nevertheless aware of the shaping—and misshaping—power of the community.

118 Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 280.
The townswomen meet Virgie and shame her just as she and her half-naked sailor boyfriend burst from the smoking house (he runs in the opposite direction, toward the river):

The front door of the empty house fell to with a frail sound behind Virgie Rainey. A haze of the old smoke lifted unhurriedly over her, brushed and hid her for a moment like a gauzy cloud. She was coming right out, though, in a home-made dress of apricot voile, carrying a mesh bag on a chain. She ran down the steps and walked clicking her heels out to the sidewalk—always clicked her heels as if nothing happened in the past or behind her, as if she were free, whatever else she might be. . . (GA, 79).

In her defiant rage for freedom, from her family poverty, from the narrow ways of the town, from the cloying love of Miss Eckhart, from all that binds, Virgie refuses even to recognize or speak to her old teacher; the meeting between them "amounted only to Virgie Rainey's passing by, in plain fact. She clicked by Miss Eckhart and she clicked straight through the middle of the Rook party, without a word of the pause of a moment" (GA, 80). She expresses no sympathy for Miss Eckhart, just as the townswomen express none. Further down the street, tin pans are beaten in a procession that accompanies the mad woman; "then little children's and Negro nurses' cries, 'Crazy! Crazy!'" (GA, 80). One is reminded of Huck's sad observation after the King
and Duke have been tarred and feathered: "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another."  

Cassie has joined Loch in his room in the last section of the story, and she has seen from his window the final act of the strange drama being played out next door. She recalls her shock at seeing Virgie's sailor-boyfriend run half-naked from the house toward the river and at seeing Miss Eckhart and Virgie's wordless confrontation on the "deadquiet sidewalk." Gentle, loving Cassie reflects upon the state of isolation of the two women; she sees them as representatives of a countless number of similar people on the face of the earth:

What she was certain of was the distance those two had gone, as if all along they had been making a trip (which the sailor was only starting). It had changed them. They were deliberately terrible. They looked at each other and neither wished to speak. They did not even horrify each other. No one could touch them now, either.

. . . That much was out in the open. Gratitude—like rescue—was simply no more. It was not only past; it was outworn and cast away.

Both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them—human beings, roaming, like lost beasts (GA, 84-85).

No other story by Eudora Welty illustrates so clearly or in such detail the painful human problem of isolation.

Miss Eckhart is isolated not only from the community as a whole because of her "differences"—not the least of which is being an old-maid—but from the two people she tries

to love, abortively. Like several old maids whom Miss Deegan has identified in American fiction, Miss Eckhart is unsuccessful in her love affair because fate and timidity prevent her making her feelings known until too late. Failing to win the man she loves, Miss Eckhart turns to an altruistic love for her most gifted pupil, who cannot accept her love and encouragement. As Cassie observes sadly, Miss Eckhart's "love never did anybody any good." Since she cannot achieve the productive orientation which Fromm believes is necessary for a full, healthy, and creative life, the piano teacher suffers psychical disturbance, disequilibrium, anxiety, and strangeness which finally result in her being committed to the state mental hospital, where she dies, released at last from being "terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth."

Miss Eckhart is Miss Welty's fullest portrait of an old maid in her short stories. The piano teacher is a composite of the authoritarian, stiff spinster exemplified by Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O."; of the ultra-feminine, girlish, rather helpless spinsters represented by Cora, Phoebe, and Irene in "Asphodel"; and of the loving, soft, and tender spinsters characterized in Clytie and Myra. And, most significantly, the specific (and unfavorable) attitudes of the community toward a "foreign" old maid are given full and complete expression in "June Recital."
In "The Wanderers" more than twenty years have elapsed since the action of "June Recital." Virgie Rainey (through whose mind the action of the story is filtered) is past forty, lives with her widowed mother (like Miss Eckhart), and milks the cows and does the other farm and house chores before and after her day spent as a typist-bookkeeper in Mr. Nesbitt's store. She is still a passionate woman, with a rich inner life which the town's harsh criticisms cannot subdue. At seventeen she had run away from Morgana by hopping a freight train. She had gone to Memphis (city of sin and allurement in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha stories) and back again. What is it she returns to? Perhaps even at that young age she knows that life has to be lived somewhere, and perhaps, like Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter, she wishes to show the women of her town that she can endure their opprobrium. Jumping off the slow train from Memphis that July afternoon, "her suitcase [was] as light as a shoebox, so little had she to go away with and now to bring back--the lightness made it easier" (GA, 234).

Virgie returns from Memphis to a stern, hard life on the farm:

"You're back at the right time to milk for me," her mother said when she got there, and untied her bonnet and dashed it to the floor between them, looking up at her daughter. Nobody was allowed weeping over hurts at her house, unless it was Mrs. Rainey herself, for son and husband, both her men, were gone (GA, 235).
Virgie realizes, of course, that there are "practical changes to begin at once with the coming back": there will be no music, no job at the movie theatre, no piano.

But in that interim between train and home, she walked and ran looking about her in a kind of glory, by the back way.

Virgie never saw it differently, never doubted that all the opposites on earth were close together, love close to hate, living to dying; but of them all, hope and despair were the closest blood—unrecognizable one from the other sometimes, making moments double upon themselves, and in the doubling double again, amending but never taking back (GA, 234).

Virgie is one of the truly wise persons in Miss Welty's fiction; she has learned the meaning of discipline, a hard lesson, for she was a willful girl—and still is in some ways. But she recognizes complexities and contraries of human life and feeling and still finds life an exciting adventure.

When she was a child she would sometimes bump her head against the wall in sheer anger and defiance of the social, economic, and emotional walls that exist as barriers in life. The psychological walls which Fromm believes all human beings must break down before they can form a productive orientation to life are, however, very real in the mind of Virgie Rainey. She has a strength and life-drive for which her present life provides, unfortunately, insufficient outlets. She seems to use each cow she milks both as a wall upon which she can beat her head, so to speak, and also as another physical being.
that she can confront and wrestle in an act of protest:

Her fingers set, after coming back, set half-closed, the strength in her hands she used up to type in the office but most consciously to pull the udders of the succeeding cows, as if she would hunt, hunt, hunt daily for the blindness that lay inside the beast, inside where she could have a real and living wall for beating on, a solid prison to get out of, the most real stupidity of flesh, anguish for anguish (GA, 235).

Quite obviously Virgie is still a driven, unsatisfied woman.

Virgie's love-life has continued to be irregular as when she was a girl. She has had a series of affairs with second-rate men, but none has ever resulted in marriage. In the village Virgie's mother hears whispers of her daughter's sexual life. Waiting, "she heard circling her ears like the swallows beginning."

. . . talk about lovers. Circle by circle it twittered, church talk, talk in the store and postoffice, vulgar men talk possibly in the barbershop. . . .
   "So long as the old lady's alive, it's all behind her back."
   "Daughter wouldn't run off and leave her, she's old and crippled."
   "Left once, will again" (GA, 205-206).

Then Virgie's mother dies, and the townswomen gather in the Rainey home to lay out the body and to prepare food. Virgie knows that as the people gather, they will talk--about her, her family, and her past--and she is prepared for it: "Always in a house of death. . . all the stories
come evident, show forth from the person, become a part of the public domain. Not the dead's story, but the living's" (GA, 210).

Virgie's boss, Mr. Nesbitt, has dated her and also feels, somewhat condescendingly, that he is Virgie's protector. In a conversation between Mr. Nesbitt and Virgie the day of her mother's funeral, the reader learns how a man—under the guise of protecting a woman—can sometimes succeed in belittling her at the same time he inflates his own ego. The man's pride in "forgiving" Virgie her errors (clerical and personal) suggests a similar scene in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in which the male chauvinist Helmer remarks:

> You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her freely and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it were, doubly his own; he has given her a new life, so to speak, and she has in a way become both wife and child to him.120

Nesbitt, too, cannot accept Virgie as a mature individual in her own right, because, in the opinion of the community she has no identity without a husband!

"Cheer up, now, cheer up," Mr. Nesbitt was saying to her, seeming to lift her to her feet by running his finger under her chin. His eyes—so willed by him, she thought—ran tears and dried. . . .

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120 *Three Plays by Ibsen*, p. 193.
"Virgie, tell Mr. Thisbee who's your best friend in this town." He had brought the new man in the company.
"You, Mr. Bitts," Virgie said.
"Everybody in Morgana calls me Mr. Bitts, Thisbee; you can too. Now wait. Tell him who hired you when nobody else was in the hiring mood, Virgie. Tell him. And was always kind to you and stood up for you."
She never turned away until it was finished; today this seemed somehow brief and easy, a relief. . . .
"You, Mr. Bitts. . . ."
"And if you ever made any mistakes in your letters and figgers, who was it stood behind you with the company?" (GA, 211).

Mr. Nesbitt, whom Sinclair Lewis could have used as a model for Rabbitt, thinks of the "helpless" Virgie as a child, just as Helmer considers Nora a child as he "forgives" her. Perhaps Mr. Nesbitt's attitude suggests a kind of Southern chivalry—"used, stale, ancient"—that paradoxically places woman on a pedestal by stepping on her. Of course, in the opinion of the community Virgie is a fallen woman (she has had many affairs), and Mr. Nesbitt feels he is morally superior in "forgiving" her and allowing her to work for him.

Virgie finds that her past life and unmarried status isolate her in various ways, especially among the women. She walks into the kitchen of her mother's house the day of the funeral, and

. . . the women stopped what they were doing and looked at her as though something—not only today—should prevent her knowing at all how to cook—the thing they knew. She went to the stove, took a fork, and turned over a piece or two of the chicken, to see Missie
Spights look at her with eyes wide in a kind of wonder and belligerence (GA, 212).

Then the women, having finished "laying out" Virgie's mother, force Virgie to come and look at her. When she does not cry—not even to appease the women, another old maid in the community (the same one who had been most critical of Miss Eckhart) snaps, "Your mama was too fine for you, Virgie, too fine. That was always the trouble between you." And with that moral judgment of Virgie, the women lift Virgie bodily and draw her into the bedroom to show her her mother (GA, 213). Later the women discuss what will be done with Katie Rainey's household goods, and one of them asks, "What does Virgie care about housekeeping and china plates without no husband, hm?" (GA, 214).

There are two persons in the community, however, who know that marriage is not always a paradisical state. One of these is Cassie Morrison, whose mother was always vaguely dissatisfied with her life. One night after dinner Mrs. Morrison went to her room and shot herself. Cassie's father becomes senile, and Cassie—an old maid now herself—lives with her father and takes care of him. The second person is Jinny MacLain, the mayor's wife, who had earlier left her husband but returned to him, primarily to aid his political career. In her absence he has an affair with an innocent country girl who kills herself in shame after Ran MacLain sleeps with her. Jinny has taken her husband
back only on her terms, one of which is that he buy her a huge diamond ring: "I deserved me a dimond ring," she says vulgarly. Looking "at the burns and scars" on Virgie's hands—signs of the man's work she has done on the Rainey farm—"making them stigmata of something at odds in her womanhood" (GA, 225), Jinny says:

"Listen. You should marry now, Virgie. Don't put it off any longer," she said, making a face, any face, at her own words. She was grimacing out of the iron mask of the married lady. It appeared urgent with her to drive everybody, even Virgie, for whom she cared nothing, into the state of marriage along with her. . . . She was casting her eye around the room, as if to pick Virgie some husband then and there. . . (GA, 225).

To Jinny, too, marriage is the only state in which woman has any status, with its diamond ring as a symbol. And it seems to be her feeling that Virgie should marry and get the upper hand in the relationship just as she, Jinny, has done. But Virgie seems to reject the idea of marriage—especially if it involves "selling" one's self as a wife, as Jinny has done.

As the people leave that morning to go home to prepare for the funeral, Virgie feels at last a sense of freedom, a sense of oneness with nature that is almost mystical:

As [the people] went, they seemed to drag some mythical gates and barriers away from her view. She looked at the lighted distance, the little last crescent of hills before the country of the river, and the fields. The world shimmered. . . Each tree like a single leaf, half hair-fine skeleton, half gauze and green, let the first suspicious wind
through its old, pressed shape, its summertime branches (GA, 218).

Virgie walks to the nearby river, removes her clothes, and wades in. She glories in the sensitiveness of her body to the water:

Her breasts around which she felt the water curving were as sensitive at that moment as the tips of wings must feel to birds, or antennae to insects. She felt the sand, grains intricate as little cogged wheels, minute shells of old seas, and the many dark ribbons of grass and mud touch her and leave her, like suggestions and withdrawals of some bondage that might have been dear, now dismembering and losing itself. . . . She hung suspended in the Big Black River as she would know to hard suspended in felicity (GA, 219).

Virgie has been released from "bondage" to the care of her mother, a servitude that, though "dear," has kept her from seeking a new "felicity." She is now free to seek a new life. In a splendid, psychologically-accurate, and highly individualizing detail, the reader learns that Virgie, though she has just had something of a spiritual experience, "would have given much for a cigarette, always wishing for a little more of what had just been" (GA, 220).

Later, at the funeral and after it, Virgie recognizes a soul-brother in old King MacLain, the father of the MacLain twins and something of a fertility god121 to the

women of the community. King had married Miss Snowdie Hudson and she bore him two sons; but he, who was rumored to be the father of half the orphan children in the area, represents—like Billy Floyd, Don McInnis, and Cash—the life-force, powerful, wandering, uncapturable. He has wandered far in search of "the golden apples of the sun" (the last line of Yeats' "The Song of Wandering Aengus"), which Carol Porter Smith defines as "a sensual, perfect peace and harmony." King MacLain has wandered far in search of that which is, in the last analysis, unattainable. The walls of fate, society, and even mortality prevent one's attaining this perfect state, this nirvana, upon this earth. Virgie is one of King MacLain's few spiritual "children" in The Golden Apples. The similarities between these two characters have been pointed out by Carol Porter Smith:

[Virgie] and King are clearly kindred spirits, freed somehow of the ties which bind others to the town. Neither is really a part of the community. . . . They are unlike the majority of the town's residents who were "still watching and waiting for something they didn't really know about any longer, wouldn't recognize to see it coming in the road." King has actively sought for what he wanted, though he apparently did not find it. Virgie, too, embarks on her quest at the end of the story, though there is no guarantee that she will find what she is

looking for or even knows what she seeks.\(^{123}\)

Virgie has long known that she is different from the other townspeople; she "had felt a moment in life after which nobody could see through her, into her—felt it young" (GA, 233). And she has learned, like King, that one must butt against the walls of life's limitations, that the struggle, the search are, after all, what life is all about. Virgie asks herself, "What fortress indeed would ever come down, except before hard little horns, a rush and a stampede of the pure wish to live?" (GA, 233). The same indomitable spirit that had prevented her being crushed by her poverty and reputation as an iconoclast when she was a child, that had caused her to butt her head against a wall as a protest against limitations, out of "the pure wish to live," now gives her courage. After her mother's burial, she decides suddenly that she will give away all her mother's household goods and leave Morgana. She remarks to a Negro helper, "I'm not scarey any more" (GA, 237).

Leaving Morgana the next morning in her rattletrap car, Virgie drives to the county seat, MacLain, appropriately named after the principal family in the county. There she sits in the rain on a bench and reflects on her past, present, and future life. She recalls a picture of Perseus

\(^{123}\text{bid.}, \text{pp. 143-144.}\)
slaying Medusa that hung on the wall of Miss Eckhart's piano studio. Miss Eckhart had explained that the picture was "the same thing as Siegfried and the Dragon." Then Virgie thinks of her relationship with Miss Eckhart:

Miss Eckhart, whom Virgie had not, after all, hated—had come near to loving, for she had taken Miss Eckhart's hate, and then her love, extracted them, the thorn and then the overflow—had hung the picture on the wall for herself. She had absorbed the hero and the victim and then, stoutly, could sit down to the piano with all Beethoven ahead of her. With her hate, with her love, and with the small gnawing feelings that ate them, she offered—and when Virgie was young, in the strange wisdom of youth that is accepting of more than is given, she had accepted the Beethoven, as with the dragon's blood. That was the gift she had touched with her fingers that had drifted and left her (GA, 243).

This passage has been lucidly explained by Louis Rubin:

Virgie knows then, that though she had denied Miss Eckhart to the last, she had never rejected her. ... Now [the music] was part of her, that knowledge and that terror, and unlike Cassie Morrison and others of Morgana, she could not hide away from her knowledge of time and isolation in the everyday life of the community. The dragon's blood was on Virgie Rainey: "In Virgie's reach of memory a melody softly lifted, lifted of itself. Every time Perseus struck off the Medusa's head, there was the beat of time, and the melody. Endless the Medusa, and Perseus endless."124

Eisinger adds that "somehow this memory leads Virgie to

124Rubin, Faraway Country, p. 147.
see the need of absorbing the past into one's experience so that one could go on in life."\textsuperscript{125}

Thus Virgie knows that all persons are to some extent isolated; most try to repress this knowledge—as almost all the citizens of Morgana—but Virgie is able to face life in all its complexity and yet to feel a "pure wish to live." But for the other Morgana citizens, Rubin asserts, the town

\ldots acts to conceal such knowledge of the 'real world.' The everyday pursuits of business and pleasure in the small Mississippi community, the parties, the politics, the marriages and funerals, manage to keep the various inhabitants successfully diverted. Time flows by—forty years of it. \ldots but they manage to ignore it, and keep from themselves the fact of their individual loneliness and separation through immersion in community life.\textsuperscript{126}

And because Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey, as old maids with "differences," represent loneliness and separation to the townspeople, they conspire to shut out these women from their midst in order to shield themselves from the despair of knowing that all men and women are, to some extent, "terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth." To protect themselves, then, Rubin believes, Morganians make

\textsuperscript{125}Fiction of the Forties, p. 282.

\textsuperscript{126}Rubin, Faraway Country, p. 147.
... no room for the individual act that transcends the need and desire for community approval. The heroic, the tragic, the artistic must be trimmed to fit into the complicated fabric of the town's doings. Without these proportions being insisted upon, the community cannot serve its proper function: it cannot screen out from its inhabitants' awareness the awful knowledge of individual separation and loneliness. 

Only Virgie, finally, who was excommunicated long ago from the community, can—in existentialist terms—accept life for what it is, essentially absurd, and go forth to find a meaning in it for herself. As she sits at the MacLain courthouse, she muses over the men with whom she has had affairs—from Bucky "Kewpie" Moffitt to Mr. Nesbitt to Mr. Mabry, her last lover. Mr. Mabry sees her on the courthouse lawn and passes her by, but Virgie knows in reality "she has passed him" (GA, 242) in her individuality, in her intellectual and emotional maturity. She could have had a husband if she had desired one, but she consciously makes the decision to remain single. Alone among Miss Welty's spinsters in the short stories Virgie Rainey develops a productive orientation through self-knowledge, empathy, and philosophical balance. Without husband or children, she has achieved what Sartre would call "authenticity" or personhood. She is about to begin what Cassie has both predicted and hoped for Virgie: "A life of your own, away" (GA, 240).

127 Ibid., p. 148.
The story of Virgie Rainey will serve as a terminus, then, for the examination of Eudora Welty's depiction of isolated spinsters. Virgie Rainey, alone among the ten spinsters analyzed in this chapter, is not defeated by her single status. A strong, imaginative, and intelligent woman—and not the product of a wealthy, aristocratic upbringing, either, but of the lower middle-class—Virgie alone stands when the other women fall. She is not thwarted by family, society, or morality—the fate of Sister, Miss Eckhart, and Cora, Phoebe, and Irene, respectively, for example. Nor is she driven to madness and suicide, the fate of another isolated spinster, Clytie.

It would be too much to claim that in "The Wanderers," written twenty-five years ago, Miss Welty presents a modern liberated woman in Virgie Rainey. But it is evident that if Miss Welty has at times made use of some of the conventional methods of characterizing the single woman, she has helped break the literary stereotype of the old maid in depicting Virgie Rainey, a powerful and credible model for all those who would burst from their isolation and become mature human beings. Zelma Turner Howard has ably described Virgie's "liberation":

Virgie acquires discipline through her unselfish care of her ill mother [for five years] and the animals and through her perceptive contemplation of the strengths and weaknesses of the unheroic Morganians. At the conclusion of "The Wanderers", . . . she is seen in the process of
permanently liberating herself from the taboos, the unheroic, the selfish, and the egocentric as she symbolically leaves Morgana. Virgie, in her search for identity, butts her head against convention and denies her virginity. . . . After her complete liberation, she is portrayed as perceptive and aware of her own, as well as others', strengths and weaknesses; as in possession of powers of growth; and as a creature of all time in touch with the universe.128

What Mary Anne Ferguson has written of the modern liberated woman could as well apply to Virgie Rainey:

"The liberated woman is aware of the choices open to her. This awareness frees her from the compulsiveness of traditional role-playing and at the same time awakens her to the complexity of living and loving. To be fully human is to face the hardness of life with strength."129 If breaking of stereotyped images helps restore humanity, then Virgie's question continues to be worth asking: "What fortress indeed would ever come down, except before hard little horns, a rush and a stampede of the pure wish to live?" (GA, 233).

128Howard, Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 70.

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES

BY EUDORA WELTY

VOLUME II

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER IV

MOTHER-WOMEN

Literary Background

In her novel The Awakening (1899) Kate Chopin contrasts two kinds of women, those she calls the "mother-women"\(^1\)--whom Per Seyersted describes as "the self-effacing species of nest-makers"\(^2\)--and those who believe that marriage is "a decoy to secure mothers for the race,"\(^3\) a trap that robs them of their individuality and authenticity as human beings. In Mrs. Chopin's novel, Adele Ratignolle, apparently happily-married and the mother of several children, is the epitome of the mother-women. "It was easy to know them," Mrs. Chopin writes, "fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were the women who idolized their children, worshipped their


husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." The religious significance of the mother-woman has been explained by Seyersted:

Catholic Adèle is a striking illustration of the patriarchal idea of the submissive female who writes her history only through her family... While such confinement of the female made Margaret Fuller consider her to be 'only an overgrown child,' it was exalted by Catholics of both sexes in their deification of the Virgin Mary, the Goddess Mother. Mme. Ratignolle clearly reflects this cult; she is a "faultless Madonna" and a supreme example of the 'mother-woman'.

In contrast with Adèle Ratignolle, Edna Pontellier discovers that she does not love her husband. Choosing not to be chained to a loveless marriage, she flings her wedding ring to the floor, leaves her husband and children, moves into her own home in the New Orleans French Quarter, takes a lover when she finds that she cannot attain the idealized love of her dreams, and finally ends her life by drowning in the ocean off Grand Isle.

These were indeed shocking acts for a high-born Catholic in the nineteenth century, and criticisms of Kate Chopin's novel were severe. One may assume that readers in the late Victorian period would have found especially unnatural Edna's belief that her two children

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4 Ibid., p. 888.

5 Kate Chopin, p. 140.
are "antagonists who...sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days." Yet the feelings about women's sole destiny being mother of the race, shared by Edna's mother-woman friend Adèle Ratignolle and by most of the readers of the novel—and probably by the general public then and now—have been reiterated by a modern, influential psychologist, Erik Erikson, who believes that "the stages of female growth are all dedicated to the moment when she will 'commit herself to the love of a stranger and to the care to be given to his and her offspring.'" Furthermore, Erikson maintains that women's "somatic design harbors an 'inner space' destined to bear the offspring of chosen men, and with it, a biological psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy...".

Erikson's thesis is shared—in part—by Eudora Welty. As the analyses of initiates and isolated spinsters in the present study have shown, Eudora Welty believes that many women are frustrated and unhappy individuals until they are able to form a rich and meaningful attachment and

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commitment to another through love. In "Livvie" the young Negro woman finds fulfillment as a woman in her sexual union with the young man, Cash, who rescues her from her aged husband's house of death. Yet a woman's relationship with a man based merely on sex—the situation of the confused Jenny Lockhart in "At the Landing"—is not sufficient. Such a relationship must be accompanied by mutual, permanent love and respect by both the man and the woman. Jenny mistakes Billy Floyd's sexual exploitation of her as real love. Until she is able to achieve a genuine, mature love relationship with a man, she will remain "at the landing," at the first, tentative stage of fulfillment as a person and as a woman. A more mature and consummate adult love of a woman for a man is seen in "A Curtain of Green" in which Mrs. Larkin has cared for her husband deeply and has tried, unsuccessfully, to keep him safe through her love. When he is killed in a freak accident of nature before her eyes, however, she wages a war with the "curtain of green" in her garden until she is restored to a sense of union with nature and with her own sexual potency, which she has tried to repress in her grief after her husband's death. Among Miss Welty's isolated spinsters, Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." and Miss Eckhart in "June Recital" lead especially frustrated and unhappy lives because of their failure to achieve a productive orientation through love and marriage, which
they seem to desire deeply. However, Virgie Rainey is able to face life as an unmarried woman whose existence is not meaningless—in spite of the fact that she has not fulfilled what Erikson would call her biological and psychological destiny (bearing a child). She would rather risk promiscuity than be denied passion, and she is by no means a virgin. In fact, at the end of her story, Virgie unreservedly affirms "the pure wish to live" (GA, 233).


However, instead of dealing with all the forms of marriage relationships in Miss Welty's short stories, this chapter will examine only those mothers who may be compared or contrasted with Kate Chopin's famous definition of the

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mother-woman. These characters, who are found in all four volumes of Miss Welty's short stories, may be divided into three groups. First are the young women who are pregnant with their first child; as Miss Buswell has pointed out, pregnancy is a "barrier" that is sometimes raised between husband and wife in Miss Welty's stories. Marjorie in "Flowers for Marjorie" and Hazel in "The Wide, Net" are examples of young women whose pregnancies cause crises in their husbands' lives. In "Death of a Traveling Salesman," Sonny and his pregnant wife represent a positive and healthy attitude toward heterosexual love and childbirth.

A second group of mother-women are those who have long been married and have given birth to children and whose lives testify to their willingness to become "ministering angels" to their children and/or husbands. These woman include Mrs. Serto in "Going to Naples," Mrs. Coker in "Ladies in Spring," Snowdie MacLain in "Shower of Gold" and other related stories in The Golden Apples, and the aged grandmother, Phoenix, in "A Worn Path."

A third group represent what may be called the antitheses of the mother-women. These are women who, like Edna Pontellier, feel that children are only impediments to their individual freedom. These women even dominate and

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9Ibid.
emasculate their husbands. Leota, Mrs. Pike, and Mrs. Fletcher in "Petrified Man" are examples of the anti-mother-women.

A study of Eudora Welty's mother-women, with the considerable variety of human situations that their lives dramatize, should demonstrate that her stories are not like those works described by Anne Roiphe:

It used to be that women's novels were mixtures of high romance and tragedy—cosmetic formulas designed to cover the monstrous pockmarks and bruises of feminine existence. They created an illusionary landscape in which love, sex, child caring and childbearing took on such bright warm colors that the reader was naturally reluctant to turn back to the prosaic and small realities of her own life. Many women read novels by male writers; in these the beautiful women, if they were good, tended to die in childbirth; if they were bad, they tormented a man, ruined his career and poisoned his life. Often the females were in the novel to further the man's growth, to teach a boy about sex or a man about duty. They were rarely a subject in themselves for scrutiny, study or wonder.

If Eudora Welty is not concerned with menstruation, contraceptives, and breast cancer, subjects treated by some very recent women novelists, she nevertheless has not written


11 For example, Doris Lessing, The Summer Before the Dark; Erica Jong, Fear of Flying; Sue Kaufman, Diary of a Mad Housewife; Joyce Carol Oates, Do With Me What You Will and Wonderland; Anne Roiphe, Long Division.
romanticized "cosmetic formula" tales of marriage and childbirth. "When women are writing well," Miss Roiphe says, "their work resonates across the sexual divide and speaks to the common human dilemma." In her stories of mother-women, Eudora Welty writes no polemics for women's liberation. Instead, she describes the lives of women with their men and children as she sees them, as subjects in themselves for "scrutiny, study or wonder." Eudora Welty is not only a veritist but is also, above all, concerned with "the common human dilemma."

**Expectant Mother-Women**

"Death of a Traveling Salesman"

"Death of a Traveling Salesman" is Eudora Welty's earliest-published short story (*Manuscript*, 1936). In a tribute to Miss Welty, Robert B. Heilman states, "What is remarkable is how well [this] apprentice work holds up, how much of substance it has, how much of the imaginative resonance and subtlety—and with how much of sensibility and art it invites reflective re-reading." To Granville Hicks, "Death of a Traveling Salesman" is, in some ways, reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson; Hicks finds

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the story a "tremendously effective" account of a "salesman, sick and lost, [who] comes upon a man and woman, the latter pregnant, living in primitive poverty. It is the simplest, most basic kind of human association, and the salesman is moved by it." Robert W. Daniel finds that this story "introduces what was to become its author's most characteristic theme: the counterpoint of human love, in the prelapsarian state of the hill couple, and the human loneliness, represented by the salesman, R. J. Bowman, who is brought by the action of the story to envy their primitive existence." Daniel especially praises Miss Welty's presentation of both motifs "without a vestige of sentimentality."15

Clearly "Death of a Traveling Salesman" is a well regarded story, although it is one of Miss Welty's earliest. Most critical discussions of the story center on R. J. Bowman as an isolato and as an example of a man who pursues a tarnished American Dream of success, rather like Death of a Salesman, with which this story has been


Although Bowman is the central figure in the story, the pregnant wife of the red-dirt farmer, Sonny, is herself a fitting subject for "scrutiny, study, wonder." Sonny's wife is not only one of the most powerful portraits of a mother-woman in Miss Welty's fiction, but to John B. Vickery she is also a striking earth-mother symbol. In fact, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* "drifts toward documentary," Heilman notes, while "Miss Welty's story moves toward myth." Some examples of the mythic method employed in this story will be given in the discussion that follows.

Women in their roles as wives and mothers are naturally associated with the home or house. Anne M. Masserand has noted the significance of house or home in the stories of Eudora Welty; for her, "as for most of the Southern writers, [it] is one of the major elements of the story. A cosy, warm, and safe place, it is opposed to the road of the uncertain journey." Not only may the house or home

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16 Heilman, "Salesmen's Deaths," p. 20. Although Heilman does not discuss parallels between Linda Loman and Sonny's wife, both are striking examples of mother-women.


18 "Salesmen's Deaths," p. 28.
be the secure and happy habitation of the people who reside in it, but it is also an even more "positive sym-
bol" in that it "may be the aim of the traveller's quest, a traveller who would have forgotten the value of home."
Thus in the house, the home, which is the habitation of Sonny and his pregnant wife, "the forces of life are
active and the traditional values are respected." In "The Winds" and "A Memory" the homes of the young girl
protagonists are places that have offered love and protec-
tion from life's storms; in "At the Landing" and "Livvie,"
the houses of the young women protagonists have been
prisons or houses of death, not of life. It is R. J.
Bowman's shocking discovery of the fundamental importance
of home, love, and family embodied in Sonny and his wife,
a discovery that he has missed what could have made his
life richly worthwhile, which kills him.

The story is seen from Bowman's point of view. His
discovery of life, especially in Sonny's wife, is a stunning example of the kind of epiphany associated with James
Joyce's stories, especially "The Dead," in which the male
protagonist also discovers--too late--that he has missed some of the most meaningful things in life, the love of
his own wife and the significance of his home and family.

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As the story opens, Bowman, who has traveled "for fourteen years... for a shoe company through Mississippi" gets lost in his Ford on "a rutted dirt path" (CG, 231). He has been ill: "This is his first day back on the road after a long siege of influenza" (CG, 231). He has grown noticeably weaker and paler. Getting lost, he feels that he has had a cruel trick played on him, "like the practical joke of an old drummer, long on the road" (CG, 231). In his anger and exhaustion, he has dreamed all afternoon of the comfort and security which the home of his dead grandmother represented: "She had been a comfortable soul." Bowman wishes "he could fall into the big feather bed that had been in her room." (CG, 232). These dreams of his grandmother--"a comfortable soul"--and her feather bed may symbolize the death-wish. But they may also be the beginning of Bowman's realization that what he has desired most in life, and has been afraid to commit himself to, is a home of his own.

He is a bachelor, and during his illness he had spent a long recuperation in a hotel room. He remembers that "he had not even been sorry when the pretty trained nurse said good-bye... He had given the nurse a really expensive bracelet, just because she was packing up her bag and leaving" (CG, 232). Had his intimacy with this attractive "ministering angel" reminded him too greatly of his need and desire for a permanent relationship with a
woman—and not in an impersonal hotel room? Perhaps that is why he wished to flee. Like Tom Harris, the salesman in Miss Welty's "The Hitch-Hikers," restlessness and rootlessness have become such a way of life for Bowman that he must avoid anything reminding him of his elemental loneliness.

The chief meaning of his life has been his work, his unbroken fourteen-year record on the road: "He had never been ill before and never had an accident. . ." (CG, 232). He has been a success in his vocation and has occasionally sought the company of women:

He had gradually put up at better hotels, in the bigger towns, but weren't they all, eternally, stuffy in summer and drafty in winter. Women? He could only remember little rooms within little rooms, like a nest of Chinese paper boxes, and if he thought of one woman he saw the worn loneliness that the furniture of that room seemed built of (CG, 232-233).

Bowman has never been at home in hotels, not even in the luxury of the larger ones. His association with women seems to have been with prostitutes in tiny cubicles ("little rooms within little rooms") in brothels. The memory of any particular prostitute is as strong as "the worn loneliness" that the furniture in the room symbolizes, quite the opposite of the picture of "home" offered by Anne Masserand. As he pauses in the luxurious hotels to study his own image "in the wavy hotel mirrors. . .for that inevitable instant on the landing, walking downstairs
to supper" (CG, 233), he is reminiscent of Eliot's Prufrock, also inordinately concerned with his appearance, and, like Bowman, also afraid of death and desirous of an intimate, meaningful relationship with a woman.

Bowman, in his lostness in "this desolate hill country," sees that "there [is] not a house in sight..." (CG, 232). There is for him no home. Furthermore, he is going to a town named Beulah. As Heilman has pointed out, there is a town named Beulah in Bolivar County, Mississippi. Heilman believes that the name Beulah is very important in this story and is probably not coincidental. He identifies Bowman with Bunyan's Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress, in which Beulah is the land at the end of the earthly journey.  

"Beulah" cannot help being evocative, and the more it is so, the richer the ironies. It is difficult to forget Bunyan's Beulah, or alternatively those later and lesser offspring of the Protestant imagination influenced by Bunyan—the "Beulah Land" hymns. In Bunyan's Beulah the air is "very sweet and pleasant"; birds sing and "flowers appear" daily; Christian and Hopeful find "abundance of what they had sought for in all their pilgrimage." The "Beulah Land" of E. P. Stites and John R. Sweney is also "heaven's borderland"; it is a "land of corn and wine," "sweet perfume," and "flowers...never fading." The "Beulah Land" of Mary M. Hughes is a "beautiful land with meadows fair." Such images of delight introduce an initial irony: Beulah is indeed not what Bowman has found in erring to a cold and barren road's end. What is more, "Beulah"

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20 "Salesmen's Deaths," p. 27.
means "married," and in Bunyan's Beulah "the contract between the bride and the bridegroom was renewed," the enduring relationship alien to Bowman's way of life.21

John B. Vickery finds interesting and suggestive parallels between Beulah in the poetry of Blake and Miss Welty's use of the name in "Death of a Traveling Salesman":

...Blake's state of Beulah is called a world of lover, beloved, and mutual creation, of father, mother, and child. Similarly, Bowman, in the farmhouse, finds himself in a world populated by Sonny, his wife, and their unborn child. In this world of Blake's, love is the dominant power, one which relaxes all tensions and provides a pleasant rest for man. By the same token, Bowman is made to realize the depth of love shared by Sonny and his wife, to feel for a moment something of the same order himself, and to see that his life is empty and lonely without it.22

When he drives his car into a ravine, which is indeed the road's end, Bowman discovers a Beulah-land of "lover, beloved, and mutual creation" in the home and marriage of Sonny and his wife.

Bowman climbs out of the car, retrieves his suitcase and sample case, and sees the car roll down into the ravine. Then he approaches the nearest house, located back up the road on a hill.

It was a shotgun house, two rooms and an open passage between, perched on the hill. The whole cabin slanted a little under the

21 Ibid.
heavy heaped-up vine that covered the roof,
light and green, as though forgotten from
summer (CG, 235).

The cabin leans but is supported by the vine, which, in
its verdancy, seems to symbolize the life-force which
helps shore up and enrich the house and, by extension, its
inhabitants. The vine, "forgotten from summer" may repre­
sent the unconscious (hence "forgotten," in the blood in
Lawrencian sense) love and life--rich, freely-given,
"heaped-up." The vine transforms the small, humble home,
which "slants a little," as if the love present there is
so great that the little house cannot contain it.

But R. J. Bowman, traveling salesman, is too ill and
debilitated at this point to see the house or its occu-
pants as representatives of the traditional values of
home; he has indeed forgotten these values (he had
apparently once known them in some form as indicated by
memories of his grandmother's comfortable home and bed).
To Ronald E. McFarland, Bowman's dilemma is a failure in
perception:

Miss Welty portrays a man who is led to the
brink of vision but who turns away at the
prospect of the anguish he should suffer if he
were to change his life. R. J. Bowman...re-
mains throughout in a weakened physical state
which is representative of his psychological
(or spiritual) disability to comprehend or
care about humanity. In terms of perception,
Bowman's disability is dual. His sight is,
apparently, myopic. His vision is nonexistent.
As the story progresses Bowman recovers his
physical ability to see, but the process of
the growth toward perception stops short of vision. The pervasive irony of the story is that although as a salesman Bowman has been many places and encountered many people, only when his travels stop does he really "see" what has been before his eyes all along. An example of what may be considered myopia (one that McFarland overlooks) has already been mentioned: Bowman’s studying himself closely in the mirrors in the hotel passageways. (This may also be considered narcissism, for Bowman takes pride in his natty appearance: "[H]e was a man who always wore rather wide-brimmed black hats, and in the wavy hotel mirrors had looked like a bull-fighter" [(CG, 237).]

As Bowman approaches the cabin on the hill, he sees a woman in the doorway. When he sees the woman close up, he feels "at once that she [is] old," another error in perception, as will be shown:

She had been cleaning the lamp, and held it, half blackened, half clear, in front of her. He saw her with the dark passage behind her. She was a big woman with a weather-beaten but unwrinkled face; her lips were held tightly together, and her eyes looked with a curious dulled brightness into his. He looked at her shoes, which were like bundles. If it were summer she would be barefoot. . . . Bowman, who automatically judged a woman’s age on sight, set her age at fifty. She wore a formless garment of some gray coarse material, rough-dried from a washing, from which her arms

appeared pink and unexpectedly round. When she never said a word, and sustained her quiet pose of holding the lamp, he was convinced of the strength of her body (CG, 236-237).

However, the woman’s weather-beaten face and shapeless clothes, which make her seem old to Bowman, do not conceal her young, womanly arms. The significance of this single youthful aspect of the woman is not clear to Bowman until later in the story, when he has seen Sonny and his woman together. Bowman at first thinks that Sonny is the woman’s son; as the three sit at the table to partake of the humble meal which the woman has set before them, Bowman sees—by the light of a lamp which turns “the whole room gold-yellow like some sort of flower”—(CG, 248) that the woman is not old at all:

A pain pressed at his eyes. He saw that she was not an old woman. She was young, still young. He could think of no number of years for her. She was the same age as Sonny, and she belonged to him. She stood with the deep dark corner of the room behind her, the shifting yellow light scattering over her head and her gray formless dress, trembling over her tall body when it bent over them in its sudden communication. She was young. Her teeth were shining and her eyes glowed. She turned and walked slowly and heavily out of the room, and he heard her sit down on the cot and then lie down... (CG, 250-251).

This scene serves as the climax of the story. Bowman is poised on the edge of a simple yet profound discovery that will affect him dramatically.

When the woman first allows him to come into her house to rest after he has driven his car off into the
At first he felt hopefully secure. His heart was quieter. The room was enclosed in the gloom of yellow pine boards. He could see the other room, with the foot of an iron bed showing, across the passage. The bed had been made up with a red-and-yellow pieced quilt that looked like a map or a picture, a little like his grandmother's girlhood painting of Rome burning (CG, 238).

He again thinks of his grandmother, who "had been a comfortable soul." (A cloud that he has seen earlier also reminds him of "the bolster on his grandmother's bed.") He feels temporarily at peace in the room, but the room seems cold. The hearth has no fire: "Why is there no fire?" he wonders. When Sonny--"a big enough man, with his belt slung low about his hips, with a hot, red face that was yet full of silence"--at last comes home from farming for their neighbor, Bowman notices that the man (who looks about thirty) is "strong, with dignity and heaviness in his way of moving" (CG, 240-241). Entering the room, the man and woman stand "side by side." Bowman feels "he must account...for his presence here" (CG, 241). He realizes that it is he, not these hill people, who is isolated. Silently but cheerfully Sonny hitches up his mules and prepares to pull Bowman's car from the ravine. "Sonny's goin' to do it," the woman says, and repeats it, "singing it almost like a song" while "sitting in her place by the hearth" (CG, 242), like a rural version of Hestia, goddess of the hearth and symbol of the home.
Bowman notes that she looks out the window into the growing darkness "with only satisfaction in her face." She is not unhappy; she is satisfied. Her poverty has not entrapped her. In this house with her man, Sonny, she is happy; remote as they are, the couple is not lonely: Bowman recognizes this much. The life-force, which he has denied for so long, wells up in him:

...He wanted to leap up, to say to her, I have been sick and I found out then, only then, how lonely I am. Is it too late? My heart puts up a struggle inside me, and you may have heard it, protesting against emptiness...It should be full, he would rush on to tell her, thinking of his heart now as a deep lake, it should be holding love like other hearts. It should be flooded with love... (CG, 243).

He dreams of loving, and he would direct his loved one to

...[c]ome and stand in my heart, whoever you are, and a whole river would cover your feet and rise higher and take your knees in whirlpools, and draw you down to itself, your whole body, your heart too (CG, 243).

He has envisioned this "old" woman as one he might have loved, but the vision of fulfilling love fades, and he sees only the "placid crouching woman across the room" (CG, 242-243). Bowman feels "ashamed and exhausted by the though that he might, in one more moment, have tried by simple words and embraces to communicate some strange thing—something which seemed always to have just escaped him. ..." (CG, 244).
Like the lovely, smiling face in the vision that lights up the days of the pathetic Clytie, Bowman's vision fades, and he is rather relieved. His thoughts turn to the next day when he will be in his car "on a good graveled road. . .somewhere." He wishes to escape commitment and the realization of his lonely, empty existence. The palliative for this emptiness is the soothing rhythm of the motor-car. "He could feel in his pounding temples the readying of his blood for motion and for hurrying away" (CG, 244). Bowman's dilemma has been defined perceptively by Miss Welty herself in her famous essay "Place in Fiction": "Being on the move is no substitute for feeling. Nothing is. And no love or insight can be at work in a shifting and never-defined position, where eye, mind, and heart have never willingly focused on a steadying point." When Bowman is forced to focus his vision on "a steadying point," then his "eye, mind, and heart" are awakened to the possibilities of love, home, a sense of place, roots, permanence, security, and life-meaning.

The house has remained dark and the hearth cold because Sonny insists on performing the ancient colonial ritual of carrying live coals from the neighbor's fire, symbolizing the deep sense of community that these

24 South Atlantic Quarterly, 55 (January 1956), 68.
people share with their neighbors. They have shunned Bowman's offer of artificial light—matches—from the outside, mercenary world. Albert J. Griffith sees Sonny, whose name suggests fire or the sun, as a Prometheus figure. The earth reverberates when Sonny walks; like Prometheus, he helps a desolate man. And he is also a bringer of fire from Redmond (whose name may symbolize Hephaestus or Zeus). Sonny is often described in terms of heat, warmth, and light in the story, as is his wife. Sonny offers Bowman some of his homemade whiskey, which is kept hidden in an outside cache. Sonny insists, graciously and hospitably in his crude way, that they drink the liquor inside, not "outdoors, like hogs" (CG, 249). Griffith notes that the woman sets the meal on the table, "almost ceremoniously, then serves golden corn bread." Furthermore, "if Sonny, in restoring to helpless man the elemental necessities of life, resembles Prometheus, his grave wife resembles one of the earth goddesses, several of whom have been described in the various myths as the wife of Prometheus." Griffith's examples help support Heilman's belief that Miss Welty's story is mythical, not documentary.


26Ibid.
As the salesman and the woman wait in the gathering darkness for the return of Sonny with the coals to start the fire and light the lamp, Bowman feels "as if she has shown him something secret, part of her life, but has offered no explanation." He cannot understand or abide the silence, and he rattles on about having "a nice line of women's low-priced shoes" (CG, 239). To the primitive couple, words mean true communication—basic and sincere—not empty small talk as in the mercenary, artificial world which Bowman represents. When the car is pulled from the ravine and Bowman is free to go, "he longs to stay" (CG, 246). He has noted now, again, that the woman leaves the place where she sits and goes "to the other man's side." Bowman wonders:

From what was he being deprived? His chest was rudely shaken by the violence of his heart. These people cherished something here that he could not see, they withheld some ancient promise of food and warmth and light. Between them they had a conspiracy. He thought of the way she had moved away from him and gone to Sonny, she had flowed toward him. . . .

When he accepts the invitation to stay for supper, he notes that the woman, as she announces that the meal is on the table, stands "looking at them, tall and full." (CG, 250). Then Sonny says, confirming what Bowman has felt unconsciously in noting the woman's fullness and her
flowing to the side of Sonny: "She's goin' to have a baby..." (CG, 251).

In a flash of recognition fully as dramatic as John Marcher's final understanding of his loss in James's "Beast in the Jungle," Bowman now knows the truth, and it stuns him:

Bowman could not speak. He was shocked with knowing what was really in this house. A marriage, a fruitful marriage. [Italics mine.] That simple thing. Anyone could have had that. Somehow he felt unable to be indignant or protest, although some sort of joke had certainly been played upon him. He has also only moments before recognized the woman's youthfulness. There was nothing remote or mysterious here—only something private. The only secret was the ancient communication between two people. But the memory of the woman's waiting silently by the cold hearth, of the man's stubborn journey a mile away to get fire, and how they finally brought out their food and drink and filled the room proudly with all they had to show, was suddenly too clear and too enormous for response (CG, 250-251).

McFarland, however, observes that "a fruitful marriage" with its attendant "'ancient communication between two people'" is not at all a "'simple thing.'" And "Bowman's 'failure to perceive that fact points up once again his lack of vision.'"²⁷ Bowman's "vision" may be imperfect, but it is not, as McFarland asserts, completely a "failure."

Bowman sits in silence, not finishing his meal. The woman goes into the bedroom, while her husband stares peacefully into the fire" (CG, 251). As the man and wife retire to their conjugal bed, Bowman lies down on the hearth to sleep. "He hears breathing, round and deep, of the man and his wife in the room across the passage. And that is all. But emotion swells patiently within him, and he wishes that the child were his" (CG, 252). Sonny’s wife’s condition as a mother-woman has aroused quite a different emotion in Bowman than have the prostitutes he has visited in their "worn loneliness." He gets up, puts on his coat, gets his bag, leaves money (the only thing he can offer) under the lamp, and goes out into the night, "ashamed. . . ."

On the slope he began to run, he could not help it. Just as he reached the road, where his car seemed to sit in the moonlight like a boat, his heart began to give off tremendous explosions like a rifle, bang bang bang.

28 In "William Blake and Eudora Welty," Vickery offers a lucid explanation of the significance of Bowman’s unfulfilled sexuality—his failure to father a child: "Here again there is a connection with Blake. For while it is in Beulah that the sexual aspect of life can be fulfilled, the failure to attain the essence of this state will turn it into Ulro or Hell. Thus, Bowman leaves Beulah, dropping back into the world of time and death. He does so because his unfulfilled sexuality is due to that imaginative passivity which Blake identifies with Beulah and contrasts with the active energy that leads man on from Beulah to Eden" (p. 631). With his great energy and sexual potency, Sonny represents the active, fertile aspect of life.
He sank in fright onto the road, his bags falling about him. He felt as if all this had happened before. He covered his heart with both hands to keep anyone from hearing the noise it made.

But nobody heard it (CG, 253).

In a denouement whose piercing quality is in direct proportion to its controlled quietness, Bowman dies, like Willy Loman, alone, pathetic.

When he strayed from the main road at the beginning of the story, Bowman had been looking for the town of Beulah, and "if a geographical Beulah has eluded Bowman," Heilman says, "he has at least seen the 'married' state and a kind of renewal of contract, and with painful longing he has half-reached toward it; Sonny and his woman do offer him an 'abundance' of what they can, literally of the 'corn and wine' named in the hymn." But, as Zelma Turner Howard has observed, Bowman can only try "to repay kindness and love with money before dying from the shocking realization of the emptiness of his existence." If Bowman had been able to rise above his merchant's mentality and to accept the elemental gifts of love and warmth freely given by Sonny and his wife, Vickery believes, and


if he had been able to overcome his weaknesses, he might have reached Beulah and even have gone on to Blake's Eden, a place of perfect love.31

The beauty of the relationship between Sonny and his wife as presented by Miss Welty is that Sonny's wife finds her deepest sense of meaning in relationship to her husband and her home; her sense of fullness in the child she is carrying and the peace, happiness, and satisfaction that both husband and wife feel, seems to promise that as parents these people will have as rich a life as they now have as husband and wife. Sonny's wife may be, in Mrs. Chopin's term, a "ministering angel," but she does not efface herself in the presence of her husband; she does not have to, for they are seen several times standing side-by-side. Their relationship is one of mutual respect, understanding, sharing, and love; their "only secret was the ancient communication between two people."

As Heilman has pointed out, ". . . Sonny and his woman are the symbolic human family, at once domestic and societal; the rural no-man's land becomes the world. And Bowman is an everyman, but a true everyman as solitary, and, above all, the most meaningful solitary--the one for whom, if only too late, solitude is not enough, and

who knows it." The heart of the salesman, which at one point he imagines "flooded with love" and which is genuinely moved (in spite of McFarland's contrary opinion) at the idea of "a fruitful marriage," fails him in the end, while Sonny and his wife—the fecund earth-goddess and mother-woman, sleep the life-restoring sleep of the living in their conjugal bed.

"Flowers for Marjorie"

The peace and contentment of Sonny and his expectant wife in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" are not shared by Howard and his pregnant wife in "Flowers for Marjorie." Both couples live in poverty; the former couple is able to live a life of simple dignity and happiness in their two-room shotgun house because the "eye, mind, and heart" of both have "focused on a steadying point." They have


33 Alfred Appel, A Season of Dreams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 11. Appel acknowledges Miss Welty's "social consciousness"; he believes, however, that she "is concerned not so much with the surface events" of the poverty-stricken lives of her characters ("Flowers for Marjorie," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "The Whistle," "A Piece of News") or "with the socio-economic causes...as with the reaction of the inner life to these conditions." Appel finds that "she writes about backcountry people...in a sensitive and sympathetic manner" (p. 13).

34 Welty, "Place in Fiction," p. 68.
a deep sense of place, of identification with their milieu, that gives them strength, endurance, and a sense of oneness with the natural rhythms of life. It is a "primitive existence,"\textsuperscript{35} to be sure, but one that R. J. Bowman, restless traveling salesman, greatly envies. In "Death of a Traveling Salesman," Sonny's expectant wife is an especially admirable example of the mother-woman because of her appreciative, unconscious acceptance of her simple life and because her love of home and husband makes her child-expectancy the full fruition of her womanhood. She is, like Kate Chopin's mother-women, a "ministering angel." But Sonny's wife does not "flutter... about with extended, protecting wings."\textsuperscript{36} She is quietly protective of her home and husband and in a simple and unassuming manner carries out her wifely duties: cleaning the lamp, preparing food. She is not overly dependent on her strong husband, but draws strength from his sturdy and willing male energy: she is proud that with his mules her husband can pull Bowman's car from the ravine; she waits patiently while her husband, indeed a Prometheus figure, brings heat and light to their home by carrying a live coal from their neighbor's home. Sonny and his

\textsuperscript{35}Daniel, "Eudora Welty: The Sense of Place," p. 278.

\textsuperscript{36}Kate Chopin, \textit{The Awakening}, vol. 2 of \textit{Complete Works}, p. 888.
wife, as has been pointed out, offer simple warmth, food, and protection in their home to the ill, enfeebled, lonely Bowman.

"Flowers for Marjorie" and "Death of a Traveling Salesman" are stories of pregnant mother-women that can be compared in several interesting, significant ways. A comparison of the two will help illuminate the meanings of the former story, which is somewhat more complex.

In "Flowers for Marjorie" the character who is lonely, frustrated, and isolated is not a salesman but the husband himself. His condition makes him incapable of understanding, appreciating, or sharing his wife's sense of peace, tranquility, and quiet happiness (even in the midst of adversity) that the developing life within her seems to foster. The reader learns that the young couple has come up to New York from Victory, Mississippi, and that the young husband has been unable (or perhaps unwilling?) to find work in the huge, impersonal city which is in the grips of the terrible Depression of the 1930's. Howard's feelings of "stagnancy and deprecation" (CG, 193) are established at the beginning of the story as he sits

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37 Since both Marjorie and Howard are "defeated" in "Flowers for Marjorie," the name of their Mississippi hometown is rather ironical. Zelma Turner Howard, The Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, pp. 82-83, notes that Victory, Mississippi, figures ironically in three stories by Miss Welty: "Flowers for Marjorie," "The Hitch-Hikers," and "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies."
listlessly all day on a park bench and even refuses to join a labor demonstration. His wife has expected him to inquire about a job at Columbus Circle, which he has not done (CG, 193).

He is a Southerner from a small town in which the intimacy, personableness, warmth, and friendliness apparently have not prepared him for life in the cold, unfriendly metropolis. When he looks at his soft, pretty wife and listens to her low, smooth, calm voice he is reminded "that in Victory, Mississippi, all girls are like Marjorie—and that Marjorie [is] in turn like his home." Marjorie is not like the "dark, nervous, loud-spoken women" Howard finds in New York (CG, 196). His "home" in Mississippi must have been rather like the concept of home presented by Southern writers, as Anne Masserand has pointed out: "a cosy, warm and safe place." Later, after winning handfuls of nickels from a slot machine in a bar, he hears the voice of "a Southern man" (CG, 203). Howard is so pleased at his winnings and at hearing the voice of the Southerner that he buys drinks all around, in a grand gesture of hospitality and Southern gentlemanliness. However, his sense

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of well-being in the bar is only temporary. In effect, Marie-Antoinette Manz-Kunz states, "harassed by unemployment and worries as to how to provide for the bare necessities of...living... Howard has been completely unbalanced by the deracination from his native environment and the senseless gyration in the city."39

Howard lacks the strength and energy of Sonny, who works willingly in the fields of a neighbor to provide for himself and his wife and who walks a long distance to bring fire to their hearth. Unlike Sonny, Howard does not derive quiet strength, courage, and energy from his pending fatherhood. Howard is embittered and enfeebled by this added demand upon him. His passivity is pointed out in the first sentence of the story: "He was one of the modest, the shy, the sandy-haired--one of those who would always have preferred waiting to one side..." (CG, 192). Sitting on the park bench, he can only look downward, seeing pairs of "still" feet in "V's." When a chewing-gum wrapper is thrown at his feet, he spits at it and kicks it, as "at some sensing of invitation." Someone even tries unsuccessfully to get his attention to ask if he is "goin' to join the demonstration at two o'clock" (CG, 192).

Whereas Sonny's homecoming from a day of work is silently joyous and confident, Howard's is unwilling, pathetic. He tries not to think about Marjorie, but he has to:

Always now like something he had put off, the thought of her was like a wave that hit him when he was tired, rising impossibly out of stagnancy and deprecation while he sat in the park, towering over his head, pounding, falling, going back, and leaving nothing behind it (CG, 193).

Clearly Howard's problem has become, in his mind, staggeringly momentous, a challenge he cannot meet and which makes all of life seem vastly absurd to him. In this frame of mind, his wife, home, and child-to-be do not bring him joy, fulfillment, or peace. Arriving at home and trying to hide the fact that he has not spent the day job-seeking, he sees a bright yellow pansy stuck in the buttonhole of Marjorie's coat which lies upon a chair. She tells him that she found the flower while walking around the block (CG, 194). The flower, which to Alfred Appel represents Marjorie's "immunity from despair," causes Howard to give "a silent despairing laugh that turned into a cough." He "wincers inwardly" at the flower.

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40 John Edward Hardy in "The Achievement of Eudora Welty," Southern Humanities Review, 20 (Summer 1968), pp. 272-273, feels that Miss Welty has "faced... unflinchingly, the reality of the absurd." He lists a number of interesting "absurdist" characteristics in "Flowers for Marjorie."

41 Season of Dreams, p. 21.
as if his wife has "displayed some power of the spirit" (CG, 194) which he cannot share.

He notes her "soft cut hair" which is "blowing and streaming like ribbon-ends" as she sits on a small trunk in front of a window, supporting her head on her hand (CG, 194). Instead of feeling at home in his home, where there is love, warmth, and tenderness in his young wife, Howard's sense of isolation looms larger:

There were times when Howard would feel lost in the one little room. Marjorie often seemed remote now, or it might have been the excess of life in her rounding body that made her never notice any more the single and lonely life around her, the very pressing life around her (CG, 194).

To Miss Manz-Kunz, Marjorie—like Sonny's wife—draws "comfort and security from her participation in the natural rhythms".\textsuperscript{42}

She is going through one of the phases of the eternal cycle of birth, growth, reproduction, and death. This fills her with a sense of belonging and thus of duration. With the new life enfolding within her and the certainty of its progression she becomes a symbol of Nature undistorted inside her industrial surroundings.\textsuperscript{43}

Unlike her husband, who has lost whatever source of strength he had back in Mississippi, Marjorie is a fuller,

\textsuperscript{42}Eudora Welty, Aspects of Reality, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
richer person in her potential maternity, even though she is thousands of miles away from other girls like her in Victory, Mississippi. She is a whole person, as Miss Manz-Kunz says, because she participates in the "natural rhythms." In contrast, Howard, who is cut off by accident or by paralysis of the will, cannot or does not participate in the "natural rhythms" of the male (as Sonny does) by involvement in meaningful work and by providing for lives for which he is responsible. Howard evidently does not abandon Marjorie and her expectant child because of some lingering sense of honor or obligation.

The flower symbolism is important in "Flowers for Marjorie" because it parallels Marjorie's womanly beauty, fecundity, and bright outlook on life. The first major example of the violence of Howard's despair is his fantasy of seizing the flower from her coat and tearing the petals off and stamping them on the floor. He is astonished when he discovers that the act of violence is only "a terrible vision" (CG. 195). The rage for destruction of the flower (symbol of his wife's fecundity and "power of the spirit") is a grim foreshadowing of his murder of Marjorie.

In his moral and spiritual paralysis, with its accompanying view of life as essentially absurd and meaningless, time has seemed to stop for Howard. As Zelma Turner Howard has pointed out, "[h]e has no money, no job, and no prospects for providing for his wife and their unborn
child—a child who continues to develop as if in defiance of Howard's stopped time." Although Howard may have had some prospects (he had refused to inquire about the Columbus Circle job) and is therefore not completely freed from moral and ethical responsibility, Miss Howard is correct in her interpretation of the "stagnancy" of time for Howard. He asks Marjorie, "harshly": "How long before your time comes?" With a "reproach" of "softness," which Howard finds maddening because it is not violent or harsh like his reproaches, Marjorie replies, "Oh, Howard, can't you keep track of the time? Always asking me. . ." (CG, 195).

She took a breath and said, "In three months—the end of August."
"This is May," he told her. . . . He almost warned her. "This is May."
"You know for sure—you're certain, it will happen when you say? He gazed at her.
"Why, of course, Howard, those things always happen when they're supposed to. Nothing can stop me from having the baby, that's sure." Tears came slowly into her eyes.
"Don't cry, Marjorie!" he shouted at her.
"Don't cry, don't cry!"
"Even if you don't want it," she said.
He beat his fist down on the old dark red cloth that covered the couch. He felt emotion climbing hand over hand up his body, with its strange and perfect agility (CG, 194-195).

After a second violent act—this time a real one, beating his fist on the couch, Howard tries his typical escape mechanism, shutting his eyes.

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44 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 110.
Forever hopeful, still believing in his ability to act as a provider for her and the child, Marjorie says softly: "I expect you can find work before then, Howard." Then "in wonder" he stands to his feet, almost praying "let it be the way she says." He is overcome by his love and concern for her. And then "pressed by tenderness," he pulls the pansy "softly" from her coat, crosses the room with the flower, kneels beside the place where she sits, and offers her the flower as a loving tribute. She whispers, out of love for him, "We haven't been together in so long" (CG, 196). Then in an act that suggests her dual role as mother and wife, as a mother-woman and "a ministering angel," she places "her calm warm hand on his head, covering over the part in his hair, holding him to her side, while he [draws] deep breaths of her cloverlike smell of her tightening skin and swollen thighs" (CG, 196-197).

There are few scenes between man and woman in Miss Welty's stories (and she has written frequently and well of love-relationships between the sexes) as tender as the one just described. Yet the moment of peace and intimacy

45Mary Anne Ferguson in Images of Women in Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 7, notes that "In myth and in life the roles of mother and wife overlap; the difficulty for even a husband to separate the roles in his mind is reflected in the common American custom of a man's referring to his wife as 'Mother.'"
between Marjorie and Howard is short-lived; while he is at her side, aware of the small life developing within her, he is again obsessed with time. He hears "the ticks of the cheap alarm clock [grow] louder and louder as he buries his face against her, feeling new desperation every moment in the time-marked softness and the pulse of her sheltering body" (OG, 197).

Marjorie—without scolding—returns to the subject of provisions for the baby, a natural and traditional expectation by the wife of the husband: "If they would give you some paving work for the three months, we could scrape something out of that to pay a nurse, maybe, for a little while afterwards, after the baby comes--" But Howard is angered and made even more anxious by her hopeful suggestion. Jumping to his feet, "his muscles as shocked by her words as if they had hurled a pick at the pavement in Columbus Circle at that moment," he speaks sharply, drowning out "her murmuring voice":

"Work?" he said sternly, backing away from her. . ." When did I ever work? A year ago. . . six months. . .back in Mississippi. . .I've forgotten! Time isn't as easy to count up as you think! I wouldn't know what to do now if they did give me work. I've forgotten! It's all past now. . .And I don't believe it any more--they won't give me work now--they never will--" (OG, 197).46

46 The four pairs of three ellipsis points are Miss Welty's.
After this tirade, Howard "moves further back until he stands against the wall, as far as possible away from Marjorie, as though she were faithless and strange, allied to the other forces" (CG, 198). Howard's paranoia has cut him off from what could be his greatest source of strength, his wife.

Marjorie suddenly seems to understand for a moment the degree of her husband's desperation, the failure of his will:

"Why, Howard, you don't even hope you'll find work any more," she whispered.
"Just because you're going to have a baby, just because you can't go around forever with a baby inside your belly, and it will really happen that the baby is born—that doesn't mean everything else is going to happen and change!" He shouted across at her desperately, leaning against the wall. "That doesn't mean that I will find work! It doesn't mean we aren't starving to death." In some gesture of his despair he had brought his little leather purse from his pocket, and was swinging it violently back and forth. "You may not know it, but you're the only thing left in the world that hasn't stopped!" (CG, 198)

But Marjorie continues to sit "as undismayed as anyone could ever be" (CG, 199), not because she is callous or indifferent to their plight, Zelma Turner Howard says, but because "Marjorie perceives an unquestionably hopeful connectedness between the progression of her own fertility and the natural progression of time."  

47 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 110.
Meanwhile, Howard continues "backed against the wall" (surely a symbol of his trapped feeling). He sees Marjorie inhabiting "her world of sureness and fruitfulness and comfort" (CG, 198)—the supreme traits of the mother-woman and of the home which she represents. However, he feels in his isolation that he is "forever apart" from her world, whereas she is "safe and hopeful in pregnancy" (CG, 199). He wants her to "suffer" in her world too, as he feels he suffers in his.

Like the eternal mother-woman—like Sonny's wife, Linda Loman, and Kate Chopin's Adèle Ratignolle—Marjorie offers Howard sustenance in the form of food: "Have you had anything to eat?" she asks. He is "astonished at her" and "hates her, then... [i]nquiring out of her safety into his hunger and weakness!" (CG, 199).48

While Edna Pontellier prefers to take her lunch alone, with her husband eating lunch at his club downtown, Mrs. Ratignolle's husband, who runs a pharmacy below their apartment, comes up every day to take his meals with his wife. "The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished," Mrs. Chopin writes, "it was surely in their union." Furthermore, Edna, in sitting down to dinner with them, thinks 'Better a dinner of herbs,' though it did not take her long to discover that it was no dinner of herbs, but a delicious repast simple, choice, and in every way satisfying." The Awakening, vol. 2 of Complete Works, p. 938. This scene contrasts very sharply with Edna's husband's criticisms of her neglect of her household duties, including her careless supervision of meals (Ibid., pp. 993-934).

48 Italics are mine.
His vaunting male pride cannot at first accept willingly the gift of food which she offers; he flings the empty purse to the floor violently. He walks across the room and picks "up a small clean bent saucepan, and put[es] it down again." It is one of the objects, familiar and homey, which they have taken with them wherever they have moved, from rented room to rented room (CG, 199). Blindly he seizes the butcher knife, returns to Marjorie (who murmurs for the last time in her "patient, lullaby-like voice"), and stabs her below the breast, killing at once his wife and his unborn child. At the moment of this "gently" violent action, he feels that they are "now both far away, remote from each other." He notices with horror that Marjorie's lap has become "like a bowl," full of blood (CG, 199-200).

But in killing his wife, Howard has not really arrested time. He hears the exaggeratedly-dreadful tick of the alarm clock, and he throws it out the window. "Only after a long time [does] he hear it hit the courtyard below" (CG, 200). Seizing the empty purse, he flees into

Mary Catherine Buswell, "The Love Relationships of Women in... Eudora Welty," p. 101, believes that Howard's problem may be jealousy of their expectant child. "He may resent the wife's absorption in the new life within her" that causes her not to notice him in the same way as before. Thus, one may conclude, Howard's immaturity may give him a greater need for a mother than for a pregnant wife to provide for. Perhaps, even, he is ill-prepared for mature adult love.
the streets where he experiences an absurd late-afternoon odyssey. He passes a group of laughing, playing children. A boy bumps him with a bicycle, "but it never hurt[s] at all" (CG, 201). He studies the goods in the shop windows—gaudy, vulgar assortments of "colored prints of the Virgin Mary, . . . all kinds of birds and animals, . . . little gray pasteboard boxes in which [are] miniature toilets and night jars to be used in playing jokes, and in yet another box a bulb [is] attached to a long tube, with a penciled sign, 'Palpitator—the Imitation Heart. Show her you Love her!" (CG, 201). Although John Edward Hardy believes that "Flowers for Marjorie" suffers from "contrived" imagery, some of the images mentioned here are nevertheless sharply ironical and thematically significant. The colored prints of the Virgin Mary suggest the cheap sentimentality of the concept of both the Holy Mother and of motherhood inherent in an artificial, mercenary society. Perhaps, too, Howard—even in the numbness of his nightmare odyssey—is reminded of the death of his own wife, a faultless mother-with-child. The "Imitation Heart" contrasts significantly with the real, loving heart of Marjorie, who might have been able to save him with her genuine love if Howard had allowed her to do so.

In an ironical change of luck, Howard wins handfuls of nickels out of a slot-machine in a bar after he has entered to spend a coin that a stranger has unexpectedly placed in his hand (CG, 202). He has also sought human contact with the "friendly" Miss Ferguson at the employment office. He longs to make his confused life clear:

If he could only tell Miss Ferguson everything, everything in his life! . . . Then it would come clear, and Miss Ferguson would write on a little card and hand it to him, tell him exactly where he could go and what he could do (CG, 204).

This helpless, passive little man, described in the beginning as "one of those who would always have preferred waiting to one side . . . ," can not depend upon his own resources and strength to save himself, his wife, and his child. He can only be told "exactly where he could go and what he could do" (CG, 204). He is turned away by Miss Ferguson, whom he cannot win with his "complimentary tones" (CG, 205).

In the most sharply ironical scene in the story, Howard is suddenly astonished to be told, upon entering a "large arcade:"

"You are the ten millionth person to enter Radio City, and you will broadcast over a nationwide red-and-blue network tonight at six o'clock, Eastern standard time. What is your name, address, and phone number? Are you married? Accept these roses and the key to the city" (CG, 205).

He tries to hand the key and the roses back to the woman who has given them to him, while "men with hawklike faces
aim. . . . cameras at him. . . ." Again, he is asked mechanically, "What is your occupation? Are you married?"

Howard, feverish and frightened, watches for an opening in the crowd that has gathered and then flees with the bouquet of roses in his arms (CG, 206).

All the world—pedestrians, moving automobiles and trucks—seem to "melt out of his way." He passes a restaurant but feels "it is too late to be hungry." Perhaps he remembers the food which Marjorie has offered him lovingly. "He wants only to get home" (CG, 206), but in killing Marjorie he has destroyed his home. He dreams that he is only having a dream or that perhaps he is dead. "Now in the end everything and everybody is afraid of him." He passes "children playing," and they shrink from him (CG, 206). In his nightmare world, isolation is complete, and it is terrifying.

Arriving at his apartment, he finds the broken clock in the courtyard and, upstairs, the inert body of Marjorie (CG, 207). This man of dreams and fantasies has had a late afternoon of unexpected and unforeseen "good" fortune which has overwhelmed him. Finding his wife dead (early in the story he has had visions of killing her in smashing the pansy and in the striking to the floor of the purse, "softly like the body of a shot bird"),
Howard knew for a fact that everything had stopped. It was just as he had feared, just as he had dreamed. He had had a dream come true (CG, 207).

As Ruth Vande Kieft has lucidly observed, Howard returns "with his gift of flowers for his lovely flower-loving wife (whose round and fruitful lap should be filled with roses instead of a pool of blood)—his good luck, his 'break,' his 'dream come true.'" But it is a "nightmare come true. He now faces the impossibility of any personally significant chance or change or hope, the absolute and unalterable fact of death." 52

Finding a policeman directing traffic, Howard confesses his crime—but only after standing "for a little while beside him... embarrassed to be asking anything of a policeman and to be holding such beautiful flowers" (CG, 207). Grasping the frightened Howard by the arm, the policeman walks toward the apartment house, speaking in a voice of threat, condescension, and reassurance combined: "Don't be afraid, big boy. I'll go up with you" (CG, 208). As they walk side by side up the sidewalk, the roses fall from Howard's hands to the concrete where little girls run "stealthily and put them in their hair" (CG, 208). Ironically, the little girls—who will one day be mothers, wives, and sweethearts themselves—accentuate their own

femininity with the flowers that might have been a tribute to the life-giving and loving Marjorie.

Howard's failure, Miss Manz-Kunz argues convincingly, is that he thinks wrongly that it is Marjorie who has changed:

He cannot comprehend that he is the one who has changed, who has lost his way in the hubbub of the city, whereas his wife has not altered at all from what she was in the country and thus can find a sun-coloured pansy bright and wide-open even on the lifeless concrete. For him life has become a paralyzing succession of meaningless actions and false hopes followed invariably by deception. Lacking work and food and having lost the will to look for a job and accept the responsibility attached to it, he has permitted himself to be entirely victimized by the inevitably recurring pattern which has jostled him fairly into insanity.53

If Howard could have accepted his wife's love and sense of fulfillment and have shared in it by completing the natural rhythms of home and family as provider, husband, and father, he might have been able to find a "steadying point" in the city and to lead a full and joyous existence. Like Bowman in "Death of a Traveling Salesman," Howard should have been able to enter his wife's world "of sureness and fruitfulness and comfort" (CG, 199), and because of the deep love of a woman for him, his heart should have been "holding love like other hearts. It should have been flooded with love..." (CG, 243). But for Howard and

53 Eudora Welty, Aspects of Reality, p. 38.
Marjorie, "a fruitful marriage... that simple thing" (CG, 251), is not to be.

"The Wide Net"

That "The Wide Net" concerns an expectant mother-woman and that her husband, like Howard in "Flowers for Marjorie," finds it difficult to accept the emotional and psychological change in her (a heightened awareness of her own womanhood and the importance of parenthood) is made perfectly clear in the first paragraph of the story:

William Wallace Jamieson's wife Hazel was going to have a baby. But this was October, and it was six months away, and she acted exactly as though it would be tomorrow. When he came in the room she would not speak to him, but would look as straight at nothing as she could, with her eyes glowing. If he only touched her she stuck out her tongue or ran around the table. So one night he went out with two of the boys down the road and stayed out all night (WN, 34).

However, William is a much simpler man (a reviewer in Time calls him an "oaf") than Howard; though William and Hazel are poor, like Miss Welty's other young couples in which the wife is pregnant, he is not driven to an act of violence, but of irresponsibility. As Mary Catherine Buswell has pointed out, "William Wallace Jamieson, bored with marriage and feeling neglected because of his wife's absorption in her pregnancy, goes on an all-night drinking

spree with his friend, Virgil Thomas. By this action he illustrates the male refusal to accept responsibility, including sexual responsibility. 55

Both William and Howard may be contrasted with Sonny in "Death of a Traveling Salesman." Sonny has accepted his wife's pregnancy and his "sexual responsibility," and together they share a "fruitful marriage." In their home, as R. J. Bowman discovers, there is the "private... secret... , ancient relationship between Sonny and his wife thus serves as a norm with which the troubled relationships between the couples in "Flowers for Marjorie" and "The Wide Net" may be compared.

It is also noteworthy that in all three stories of expectant mother-women the point of view is essentially that of the male protagonist. In all three stories Miss Welty is presenting her mother-women through the eyes of men because she wishes to emphasize the men's discovery (or failure of discovery) of the meaning of a "fruitful marriage," of parenthood, of home and family, of mature adult relationships between men and women. In her stories, of married men and women, Miss Welty seems to be presenting the need for mutual affection, companionship, and communication.

55"Love Relationships of Women in... Eudora Welty," p. 103.
In her novels, especially *Delta Wedding* and *Losing Battles*, Miss Welty has dealt with what sociologists call "the extended family," in which "grandparents and brothers and sisters of the husband and wife" reside in the family home in addition to the "nuclear family," the husband, wife, and their children. In addition, both *Losing Battles* and "Clytie" present yet another variation of the family pattern, the matriarchal, in which the "extended family live[s] under the authority of the mother" or a mother figure. In "Death of a Traveling Salesman," however, Miss Welty seems to be presenting not so much a matriarchal and authoritarian family system as "a companionship family system, based on mutual affection, intimate communication, and mutual acceptance of division of labor and procedures of decision-making."^58

Although she is by no means a sociologist in fiction, Miss Welty has written often of the family in its various forms. As Malcolm Cowley has pointed out, the Southern literary mind includes especially a deep responsiveness

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^57 Ibid., p. 19.

^58 Ibid., p. 9.
"to the elemental nature of existence [and] of family and community." Miss Welty herself emphasizes the importance of the family: ". . . [T]he unit of everything worth knowing in life is in the family. . . , [and] family relationships are the natural basis of every other relationship."

In presenting the mother-women and their husbands in "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "Flowers for Marjorie," and "The Wide Net" Miss Welty not only points up the need for "a companionship family system" but also emphasizes the "conjugal family," the basic husband-wife unit. And the focal point of each story is the expectancy of a first child within the conjugal unit. Miss Welty does not sentimentize her story-material; she never follows the "cosmetic formula" which, to Anne Roiphe, characterizes much of women's fiction. Miss Welty's expectant mother-women look and act like mother-women; their pregnancies make them


full-bodied, heavy, and slow. Yet in their expectancy there is a mysterious womanly beauty which all three women (Hazel, Marjorie, and Sonny's wife) reflect. In her sixth month of pregnancy, Marjorie sometimes feels "some momentary discomfort." She endures the pain as "[h]er breath whistle[s] a little between her parted lips." And the vagaries of behavior that often accompany a woman's pregnancy are seen in Hazel Jamieson's curious actions in "The Wide Net."

For William Wallace Jamieson it is the change from "a conjugal family" to "a nuclear family" (husband, wife, and child) within his marriage that seems to disturb him most. He has quite obviously enjoyed his year of marriage with the lovely, golden-haired Hazel; he has enjoyed winning her from all the rest of her numerous suitors who used to "fight over her" when there was "a singing at the church" (WN, 38). But in her pregnancy, Hazel is no longer William's playmate. Like Marjorie, Hazel seems to be in another world. Although it is Howard's world that is lonesome and isolated in "Flowers for Marjorie," it is Hazel's world that is lonely in "The Wide Net." Because her husband cannot understand her special need for affection and mature understanding, she plays a trick on him to frighten him into recognition of these things. After he has stayed out all night carousing with the "boys" (Miss Welty's use of "boys" suggests the adolescent
attitude of William toward marriage and fatherhood and also the adolescent character of his activities during his "night on the town"), he returns home to find that Hazel has left him "a little letter, in an envelope" (WN, 34-35). Simple fellow that he is, he is frightened by the letter, the written word, because it symbolizes "doing something behind someone's back" (WN, 35). He is justifiably anxious as he reads the note, and after having done so, "he crushes the whole thing in his hand instantly." The letter has said in effect that his wife "will not put up with him after that [the all-night drinking spree] and is going to the river to drown herself" (WN, 35).

William, "his face red like the red of the picked cotton field he ran over" (WN, 35), runs out of his farmhouse shouting to his drinking chum, Virgil, that they must drag the river for Hazel. As Eugene Armfield has pointed out, the people in Miss Welty's stories, and especially The Wide Net, are "disarmingly 'ordinary' and the events have an air of casualness." In contrast to the more somber tones of "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "Flowers for Marjorie," the alleged drowning is an incident for comedy in "The Wide Net." The delightfully "ordinary" quality of Miss Welty's characters is to be

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seen, for example, in William's response to Hazel's note: "Drown herself... But she's in mortal fear of the water!" (WN, 35)

When William gets Virgil's attention to tell him about the note, Virgil replies, "Haven't you had enough of the night?". . . The men's pants are "all covered with dust and dew" because they have slept off their drunkenness in a ditch. "They [have] had to carry the third man home flat between them (WN, 35). Virgil's response to William's report is natural and simple: "Why, that ain't like Hazel" (WN, 35). Virgil says he will join the river-dragging: "Let me go set inside the house and speak to my mother and tell her a story, and I'll come back" (WN, 36). This last statement points up one of the central concerns of this story, the double standard that exists for men and women. William and Virgil can go off on an all-night drunk and not think of their women-folk. But if Hazel chooses to disappear suddenly in remonstrance, she is accused of "doing something behind someone's back." Furthermore, Virgil, who is not married, must lie to his mother ("tell her a story") to excuse his night's absence.

"The Wide Net" is a significant story, Mary Catherine Buswell believes, because it "incorporates many of the male, the female, and the small-community attitudes toward
marriage and presents an interplay between the sexes." Having offered this suggestive generalization, however, Miss Buswell does not support it with more than one or two examples. "The Wide Net" thus offers rich material for a concerted study of men's and women's attitudes toward marriage and childbirth.

For example, the men take it for granted that loneliness is woman's plight in life and that she must accept it unquestioningly. The idea of a "companionship family system" is foreign to the men of Miss Welty's community:

"How come Hazel to go and do that way?" asked Virgil as they started out.
William Wallace said, "I reckon she got lonesome."
"That don't argue—drown herself for getting lonesome. My mother gets lonesome."
"Well," said William Wallace. "It argues for Hazel."
"How long is it now since you and her was married?"
"Why, it's been a year."
"It was this time last year. It seems longer," said William Wallace, breaking a stick off a tree in surprise (WN, 36).

Naturally his marriage has seemed longer than a year to William since his wife has been pregnant for half of that period and since he has not yet adjusted to his sexual responsibility as a husband and father-to-be. If he feels lonely or frustrated, he can carouse with the "boys" and yet expect no reprisal from his wife. It is interesting

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64 "Love Relationships of Women in...Eudora Welty," p. 103.
that Sonny in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" does not have to go outside his own home to drink, but offers R. J. Bowman some of his home-brewed whiskey to be drunk hospitably in the house, not "outdoors, like hogs." Sonny has learned the value of home, as defined by Anne Masserand: "[a] cosy, warm and safe place, . . . opposed to the road of the uncertain journey; a place where love can blossom."\(^{65}\)

As the two men walk along, "kicking at the flowers on the road's edge," on their way to home of Doc, who owns "the wide net" needed to drag the river, William recalls sentimentally the beginning of his courtship with Hazel:

"I remember the day I seen her first, and that seems a long time ago. She was coming along the road holding a little frying-size chicken from her grandma, under her arm, and she had it real quiet. I spoke to her with nice manners. We knewed each other's names, being bound to, just didn't know each other to speak to and she says, 'Mind your manners,' and I kept on till after while she says, 'If you want to walk me home, take littler steps.' So I didn't lose time. It was just four miles across the field and full of blackberries, and from the top of the hill there was Dover below, looking sizable-like and clean, spread out between two churches like that. When we got down, I says to her, 'What kind of water's in this well?' and she says, 'The best water in the world.' So I drew a bucket and took out a dipper and she drank and I drank (WN, 36-37).

With the sharing of the water from the well, the pastoral love-affair between William and Hazel begins. William obviously had marriage on his mind; he tells Virgil that he helped eat the frying-size chicken at Hazel's parents' home that night.

"We ate the chicken... and it was tender. Of course that wasn't all they had. The night I was trying their table out, it sure had good things to eat from one end to the other. Her mama and papa sat at the head and foot and we was face to face with each other across it, with I remember a pat of butter between. They had real sweet butter, with a tree drawed in it, elegant-like. Her mama eats like a man. I had brought her a whole hat-ful of berries and she didn't even pass them to her husband. Hazel, she would leap up and take a pitcher of new milk and fill up the glasses. I had heard how they couldn't have a singing at the church without a fight over her (WN, 37-38).

This scene is reminiscent of Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in which Ichabod Crane is as impressed with the Van Tassels' plentiful table as he is with Katrina's beauty. The difference is that Ichabod's greedy vision of plentifulness with Katrina extends even to sexual gratification as symbolized in their having a numerous progeny. Evidently that possibility has not entered William's mind when he is trying out Hazel's parents' table.

Virgil grants that Hazel is "a pretty girl, all right" (WN, 38). But he is as immature as his friend, for he cannot face the prospect of maturity and old age. The rich possibilities in a couple's spending their lives together do not enter his mind. He can only mutter:
"It's a pity for the ones like her to grow old, and get like their mothers" (WN, 38). However, William seems to be rather afraid of his mother-in-law: "Another thing will be that her mother will get wind of this and come after me. . . ." Virgil agrees that Hazel's "mother will eat you alive." William fears that Hazel's mother has been observing his immaturity and has "just been watching [for] her chance" (WN, 38) to upbraid her son-in-law.

"Why did I think I could stay out all night?" moans William. "Just something come over you" (WN, 38), Virgil answers, having observed the state of boredom in marriage that William has "suffered" the night before. He has alleviated that "suffering" at least in part by attending a carnival (a place, evidently, where his pregnant wife would not have been allowed to accompany him) and then "sitting on [his] neck in a ditch singing. . . .in the moon-light. . . .[a]nd playing on the harmonica. . . ." (WN, 38). To Miss Buswell, "William Wallace reveals the accepted male version of the wife in remarking, "'Even if Hazel did sit home knowing I was drunk, that wouldn't kill her. . . .'" He grants that she is not a naive woman and that she probably knows what he was up to. His callous attitude is further illustrated in his remark, "What she knows ain't ever killed her yet. . . . She's smart, too,  

66"Love Relationships of Women. . . .in Eudora Welty," p. 103.
for a girl" (WN, 38). William is without doubt one of the greatest unconscious male chauvinists in Miss Welty's writings. Yet she does not shake a finger of blame at him nor condemn him in any way. Her depiction of this country "oaf" is, the reader suspects, "disarmingly ordinary," both in appearance and in attitude.

If woman is considered innately inferior in the most pronounced and intransigent male-chauvinist view, and if--like Chaucer's Patient Griselde--she is expected to be perfectly submissive and an example of "wyfly hoomlinesse," Hazel does not quite fit the stereotype. Her act of rebellion at her husband's indifference has shocked him. If she is so "smart" (her husband's definition of intelligence is her "wyfly hoomlinesse" in "putting up" a hundred jars of canned fruits and vegetables), her husband does not "see how she could turn around and jump into the river" (WN, 39).

To Virgil, all women are like Chaucer's wife of Bath, using their womanly wiles and deceits: "It's a woman's trick," he growls, repeating William's earlier thought that Hazel's letter is an act of "doing something behind someone's back." In order to make him suffer more, William thinks, Hazel "jumped in the river because she was scared

67To Mary Anne Ferguson, Chaucer's Griselde is a perfect example of "the submissive wife." Images of Women in Literature, p. 11.
to death of the water and that was to make it worse." Her husband thinks she is such a frightened little creature that he does not "see how she brought herself to jump." Since women are natural cowards, in Virgil's thinking, Hazel "[j]umped backwards. . . .Didn't look" (WN, 39).

The bulk of the narrative of "The Wide Net" is concerned with the ritual of dragging the river, a day-long festivity joined by an assortment of odd men, boys (both black and white), and Doc, the wise old community doctor to whom the wide net belongs. Doc asks, "You-all were out cuttin' up, so Lady Hazel has to jump in the river, is that it? Cause and effect?" But Doc finds it difficult to believe that Hazel has killed herself: "Of course a thousand things could have happened to her" (WN, 45), he says as he lights his pipe as philosophically as Robinson's Old King Cole. To William's angry question about whether or not she may have been carried off by gypsies, Doc answers, "Now that's the way to argue, see it from all sides. . . .But who by?. . . .There's no booger around the Dover section that goes around carrying off young girls that's married" (WN, 45-46).

However, Doc's wisdom does not extend beyond the conception of woman held by his own sex in his own region. "My advice remains, Let well enough alone," he says. "Whatever this mysterious event will turn out to be, it has kept one woman from talking a while" (WN, 46). Doc's
conception of woman as talking too much (of being even a scold, like Hazel's mother?) is ancient: in the age of Chaucer, scolding, talkative woman was represented by Mrs. Noah, the nag of medieval English drama. But Doc, too, appreciates Hazel's beauty, and though he speaks in cliches, he seems to think of Hazel as an earth-goddess: "...Lady Hazel is the prettiest girl in Mississippi, you've never seen a prettier one and you never will. A golden-haired girl" (WN, 46-47). Yellow hair, to Zelma Turner Howard, is a quality of the "sun-blessed characters" in Miss Welty's stories—those symbolizing fecundity, potentiality, and love. In addition, as Richard Rupp has observed, "The Wide Net" is a romance, involving "a trial of love." William is the country-bumpkin knight and Hazel ("Lady Hazel" to the old doctor) the lady to whom the knight must prove his worthiness. The ritualistic "search" in "The Wide Net" has been admirably summarized by Rupp:

"The Wide Net" celebrates a timeless place and its rural ways. The particular feast involved is a ritual hunt for a presumably drowned wife. The action is a full, obvious feast with several components thereof: a celebrant, Old Doc; two deacons, the husband, William Wallace, and his friend, Virgil Thomas; two little Negro acolytes, Sam and Robbie Bell; a liturgical action, dragging the net up the Pearl River; a river deity, the King of the Snakes; and a ritual combat between Virgil and William. Moreover, the

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68 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 102.
path of the hunt is always the old Natchez Trace, suggesting a traditional action; and the whole society participates in a secular feast and procession which even nature imitates. 69

The "search," a reviewer in Time comments, "is made the occasion for creating some wonderfully suggestive images of the whole of existence. But [William] is never, even incidentally, a man looking for the corpse of his wife." 70

What the Time reviewer has missed is pointed out by Rupp: "the hunt... has been meaningless on the rational level. But as celebrative action, it has revealed the context of communal love within which the marriage will find meaning and foison." 71

Ruth Vande Kieft sees a relationship between the ritual search in "The Wide Net" and "the fertility rites of the primitive cultures, the folk ceremonies which marked the changes in season or the celebration of birth and marriage... The clan's ritual of dragging the river takes place at the turn of a season, shortly before a birth, at a time of change in the life of the young hero who is about to become a father... For the hero, the


71 Celebration in Postwar American Fiction, p. 71.
ritual involves a testing of strength and fitness, an elemental struggle with potential alien forces or evil powers [the King of the River—a huge snake], and a discovery of the mysteries of life." In staring down the King of Snakes, Miss Vande Kieft believes, the hero of Miss Welty's romance has proved himself in his "initiation to his new role as defender and protector of the family."72

William Wallace probably does achieve greater conscious awareness of his wife's needs and feelings and, therefore, becomes a better husband and father-to-be. In William's driving for Hazel's body in "the deepest place in the whole Pearl River" (symbolizing the point at which dark, deep subconsciousness meets consciousness in the mind), the narrator wonders if

...so far down and all alone had he found Hazel? Had he suspected down there, like some secret, the real, the true trouble that Hazel had fallen into, about which words in a letter could not speak... how (who knew?) she had been filled to the brim with that elation that they all remembered, like their own secret, the elation that comes of great hopes and changes, sometimes simply of the harvest time, that comes with a little course of its own like a tune to run in the head... (WN, 56).

What William has probably discovered is the meaning of the rhythms of life, the mysteriousness of existence, the hope for a deep and meaningful life that brings "elation."

This is a feeling, a discovery, Miss Welty seems to say,

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72Eudora Welty, pp. 65-66.
that all who have loved another truly know. The "harvest
time" in the quoted passage surely has to do with the
procreative aspect of life that in itself brings "great
hopes and changes" in the lives of husband and wife.

Later the men and boys dress and cook the fish they
have caught. In a curious, primitive ritual celebration
of fertility (which seems to symbolize his acceptance of
his own male sexuality), William takes a big, undressed
catfish (the men are all stripped to the waist), fastens
it to his belt buckle, and does a dance that makes the
fish go "up and down." The men laugh, and "tears of
laughter stream...down his cheeks" and brighten his
"two days' growth of beard" (WN, 59). The men's and boys'
part in the adventure ends with what Rupp has called "a
triumphant procession of fecund nature"\(^73\) as all the males
come marching through town, headed by William Wallace car-
rying a string of fish (symbol of fertility, according to
Joseph L. Henderson\(^74\)). The little boys who have caught
a baby alligator are "tossing it into the air, even, like
a father tossing his child" (WN, 66).

\(^73\) *Celebration*, in *Postwar American Fiction*, p. 71.

\(^74\)"Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in *Man and His
p. 154.
As the procession through town breaks up, William walks toward his own home. He passes "an old white church glimmering there at the crossroads." In his mind's eye he sees "a lady in white take a flowered cover off the organ, which was set on a little slant in the shade, dust the keys and start to pump and play. . . ." (WN, 70). Miss Howard believes that music has the following symbolic meanings in Miss Welty's stories, meanings that are quite significant when applied to this scene in "The Wide Net":

Eudora Welty assigns to music the overall symbolic representation of the positive or the potentially positive, the psychic, the transcending music suggests a type of fulfillment or potential fulfillment; music represents a kind of discipline or potential discipline, inner order, and control.75

Although Miss Howard does not discuss "The Wide Net" in terms of these possible meanings of music symbolism, the theme of William's maturation as a husband and father and his acceptance of his wife as a mother-woman are made clearer through the previously-quoted scene of music in church. Upon hearing the music, "William smiles faintly, as he would at his mother, and at Hazel, and at the singing women in his life, now all one young girl standing up to sing under the trees the oldest and longest ballads there were." The "oldest and longest ballad" must surely be a song of love, of fruition, of "ancient communication

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75 *Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories*, p. 78.
between two people," symbolized in the figure of William's own mother and of his wife (a mother-to-be) and of "all the singing women in his life"—all potential mothers (WN, 70).

There is a rainbow over his house, symbolizing—no doubt—peace and the passing of the first domestic storm over the home of the Jamiesons. William is thinking of his wife as a woman as he looks at the moon, which appears "small and of gauzy material, like a lady's summer dress, a faint veil through which the stars showed" (WN, 70). Entering the house, he hears his name called. And whatever "he might have hoped for in his wildest heart, it was better than that to hear his name called out in the house." In a joyous but subdued reunion, the husband asks the wife how she feels, and she replies: "I feel pretty good. Not too good." As she talks, she looks "mysterious." He remarks that he cut his foot while seining the river for her. She scolds him lightly, and then offers the mother-woman's almost-greatest gift, food: "Supper's ready and I wondered if you would ever come again, or if it would be last night all over again. Go and make yourself fit to be seen," she orders, as "she runs away from him" (WN, 71).

After they have eaten, they sit on the front porch together, and she explains that she hid behind the door early that morning as he came home and found her letter.
(WN, 71-72). He turns her lightly across his knee and spanks her. In spite of this outward sign of his authority as lord of the house, he has begun to see differently. She lies smiling in the crook of his arm and tells him that she will "punish" him again if he neglects her. "Next time will be different too," she promises. Then she stands up and looks through the first-dark out across the yard and beyond, "into the dark fields where the lightning-bugs flickered away." She is perhaps looking into the future, rather dark and unknown but dotted by small bits of light, which perhaps love can provide in the otherwise bleak and uncertain future of mortal life. He rises and stands beside her, "trying to look where she looked." Side by side, they face the future. She takes him by the hand and leads him into the house, "smiling as if she [is] smiling down on him" (WN, 72).

Hazel is indeed a mother-woman, even a "ministering angel," but unlike Kate Chopin's Adèle Ratignolle, she has not been content to efface herself as an individual. She loves her husband and obviously anticipates the coming of her child, but while she has matured as a woman during her expectancy, her husband has remained a boy, wishing to have his sexual pleasure but not to take responsibility for it. Through her melodramatic gesture of drowning (which evidently nobody has really believed in), however, she has caused her husband to reflect upon and accept not
only his male potency but also his sexual responsibility as husband and as father. With his wife—an example of the eternal mother-woman—smiling down upon him as they look into the darkness of the future, William seems to face a joyous life with Hazel now that he has survived his ordeal of love.

**Mothers with Children**

In an interview with Kenneth Bunting, Eudora Welty comments that to her "the strongest thing" in her 1970 novel *Losing Battles* is "the solidity of the family." 76 "The solidity" of family values is celebrated (and sometimes criticized) in several of Miss Welty's novels and short stories. 77 To her, family "solidity" involves "a sticking together...[and] both a submerging and triumph of the individual, because you can't conceive of the whole unless you are an identity. Unless you are very real in yourself, you don't know what it means to support others or to join with them or to help them." 78 In this section


77 Of *Delta Wedding*, for example, Miss Welty says, "I wanted to write a story that showed "the solidity of the family and the life that went on a small scale in a world of its own," ibid., p. 721. *The Ponder Heart* and, to a lesser extent, "Kin" in *The Bride of the Innisfallen* also present the "solidity of the family."

the characters to be studied, four women with children, are powerful agents of family solidity. They are women with a firm sense of self-identity who in their individual ways help "to support others" in the family and "to join with them or to help them."

"Ladies in Spring" and "Shower of Gold," the two stories to be studied first, present what Mary Catherine Buswell has called "a frequent though minor theme" in Eudora Welty's stories: infidelity in marriage. In "Ladies in Spring" the solidity of the family is apparently not seriously affected by the husband's extramarital activities; at the end of the story he is back at work on the farm. But in "Shower of Gold" King MacLain's wanderings take him far from home for many years at a time, and his wife Snowdie assumes the role of both father and mother to their twin sons. Sometimes, as in "Going to Naples," the third story examined here, the family solidity provided by the mother threatens to stifle her teen-aged daughter. However, in "A Worn Path," the last story to be analyzed, mother-love is quite literally a source of survival for a child. In their varied ways, all these women are examples of "ministering angels," as Kate Chopin defines the mother women.

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79 "Love Relationships of Women in...Eudora Welty," p. 102.
The situations of the four women with children are different from those of the expectant mother-women and provide additional evidence of the rich fertility of Eudora Welty's imagination and knowledge of the family. If Jane Austen held an "ardent belief that the unit of everything worth knowing in life is in the family," then Miss Welty's stories of mother-women with children also testify to that belief. But Miss Welty is not a Kathleen Norris; she does not sentimentalize "mother" or motherhood. Her stories demonstrate that to an author of clear vision the possibilities for characterizing even so popularly-stereotyped a figure as "mother" are almost inexhaustible.

In these four stories alone, Miss Welty has presented families containing mother-women with children that represent strikingly different social and ethnic backgrounds: white Mississippi dirt-farmers in "Ladies in Spring," white middle-class merchants in "Shower of Gold,"

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81 In addition to sentimentalizing "mother" in her famous and popular Mother (1910), Miss Norris helped fill the pages of women's magazines of her day with stories of home and children, usually making use of what Anne Roiphe has caused "the cosmetic formula" in women's fiction. A much later example of a sentimental tribute to "mother" is a small collection of adulatory pieces entitled With Love to Mother, ed. Donald T. Kauffman (Old Tappan, N. J., 1964).
Italian-Americans in "Going to Naples," and a lower-income-class Negro in "A Worn Path." Miss Welty demonstrates indeed that "pure motherhood" belongs "to no time and place" (BI, 169) nor class nor race.

"Ladies in Spring"

Of the seven stories in The Bride of the Innisfallen, "Ladies in Spring" is one of three set in Mississippi. This story focuses on the consciousness of a small boy, Dewey Coker, of the village of Royals, as he plays hooky from school and goes on a fishing trip with his father; however, the influence of Mrs. Coker, a mother-woman, is felt throughout the story, although she is seen only briefly. In the woods the boy and the man encounter two of the ladies of the town, each at different times. Miss Hattie Purcell, the town's postmistress and also its self-styled rainmaker, has come into the woods during a spring drought to perform her ritual that will bring rain before the day is over. The other woman that the man and the boy encounter in the woods is Miss Opal Purcell, the young niece of Miss Hattie. The father has reluctantly allowed the boy to come with him on his fishing expedition, probably because he had planned an assignation with Opal, who calls him three times in the woods without the man's answering her.

This beautifully-told story of a boy's initiation into the mysteries of adult sexuality involves a simple
yet affecting conflict between the roving male instinct represented by the father and the mother-woman instinct (home, security, permanence) represented by Dewey's mother. As his names indicates, Dewey is young, fresh, and innocent, rather like the springtime in which the story occurs.

In "Ladies in Spring," Miss Hattie is an interesting representation of mother-nature herself. It is she who brings rain which transforms the brown countryside to a green paradise and restores fish to the river. Her seemingly magical power to restore fertility may be compared with that of Blackie Coker, Dewey's father, who represents the liberated force of male sexual potency.

To Zelma Turner Howard, many of Miss Welty's "passionate characters who are filled with the life force...are blessed with thick, luxuriant dark hair"82 as is Blackie Coker.

Dewey catches the only fish on that particular fishing trip, but along the way he has taken a journey toward maturity and greater knowledge, as Miss Welty rather explicitly tells the reader. The father and son encounter Miss Hattie as they are leaving the woods, and when it starts to rain, they walk with her under her huge umbrella into the village, where Dewey goes with Miss Hattie to the post office. He spends part of the afternoon there

82Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 80.
as it continues to rain, and Miss Hattie, a spinster, mothers him a bit. He considers returning to school for the rest of the afternoon because the class is studying King Arthur, and he finds that mythical ruler's sword Excalibur very interesting. Finally Miss Hattie lets Dewey go, and he rides the school bus home. When he shows his goggle-eyed fish to his mother, she fusses at him and tells him that he is as bad as his father. In the last section of the story, Dewey returns alone to the old broken-down bridge where he and his father had tried to fish in a small fishing hole. Fish abound in the swollen river, and flowers in the verdant woods. Fertility has indeed been restored.

J. A. Bryant has special praise for Miss Welty's narration in "Ladies in Spring":

The beauty of the author's technique in elaborating this bare story is that it scarcely seems to be a technique at all. It is almost as if the season itself had taken young Dewey in hand, sowing data like seeds for the awakening to come later. Take, for example, the wetness that appears everywhere in the story as soon as the drought breaks—in the trees, on the grass, on the flowers that pop out as the water begins to fall, and on the faces of the country people in the little town. Wetness also seems to bring out details of color, particularly blue and pink, as they turn up in the flowers, in the clothes hung out to dry, and in the patchwork quilt that Opal throws over her head to run from one house to another.83

The method of narration in this story seems to parallel the rhythms of nature itself in its simplicity. The significance of the narration lies in the effect that the day's events have on the small boy, rather like young Seth in Robert Penn Warren's "Blackberry Winter." But in this story there is no odious tramp to teach the boy evil; rather what he learns is the reality of adult passion (his father) and adult responsibility (his mother).

An examination of several key passages in "Ladies in Spring" will make clearer the characterization of the mother-woman and attendant feelings and conflicts which influence the maturation of Dewey. Miss Welty very subtly suggests that Hattie Purcell may be representative of mother nature herself. She is a provider of an element necessary for life, just as Dewey's mother provides other necessary elements: food, warmth, and security. When Miss Hattie is first seen, she is wearing black, which Margaret Bolsterli (following Sir James Frazer's interpretation in The Golden Bough) sees as "the color traditionally associated with the rainmaker." Miss Hattie's ritual is described in the following manner:

Miss Hattie brought rain by sitting a vigil of the necessary duration beside the nearest body of water, as everybody knew. She made no more sound at it than a man fishing. But

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Something about the way Miss Hattie's comfort shoes showed their tips below her skirt and carried a dust of the dry woods on them made her look as though she'd be forever: longer than they would (BI, 86).

Miss Hattie surely represents the omnipresent and enduring forces of nature. Her ritual, like that of nature itself, is barely perceptible except to the closely-observing eye. And she looks "as though she'd be there forever," like the workings of the universe, time out of mind. Later she offers her big, black umbrella to the man and the boy to walk under, rather like the dome of the world--the sky--which nature (Miss Hattie) can control.

Like nature, which takes for granted the forces of procreation and fertility and is not concerned with human morality and its restrictions, Miss Hattie is oblivious to the planned assignation of her niece and Blackie Coker. Yet she has in random but natural ways provided opportunities for one of her young, Dewey, to learn of human feelings and sexuality through the occurrences of that day.

As the boy and the man fish from an old bridge, they hear the father's name called through the woods by a lady who is but dimly seen:

"Blackie?" she called, and a white arm was lifted. ...The sound was like the dove-call of April or May, and it carried as unsurely as something she had tried to throw them across the airy distance (BI, 87).
In this story of mythical overtones and ritual initiation, Opal—whose name suggests a milky-white gem—has "a white arm" and a "face [shining] clear as a lantern light in nighttime" (BI, 87). She may be interpreted as a variation of Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. The dove is often associated with Aphrodite cults, and the sound of Opal's voice is "like the dove-call." Opal calls Blackie's name three times, but the man never answers. After Dewey has seen her once, she disappears into the woods. The note of longing, even of lamentation, in the woman's voice has made the boy think of death; he notes that the sound of it is different from any sound he has heard a lady make before:

When the lady turned and disappeared into the trees... Dewey could easily think she had gone off to die. Or if she hadn't, she would have had to die there. It was such a complaint she sent over, it was so sorrowful. And about what but death would ladies, anywhere, ever speak with such soft voices--then turn and run? Before she'd gone, the lady's face had been white and still as magic behind the trembling willow boughs that were the only bright-touched thing... (BI, 87-88).

85If Opal is an Aphrodite figure, Mrs. Coker is a version of Hestia, guardian of home and hearth, and is opposed to the anti-family principle of sexual freedom which Opal represents.

Not only is Dewey becoming aware of passion in man and woman, he is becoming aware of less attractive physiological facts as well: his father's repressed passion for Opal makes him sweat. He also frequently associates what he sees in the woods that day with his mother. When he again sees the strange woman who calls his father's name, there is "a little gentle thunder" (BI, 89). Dewey instinctively knows that the woman is frightened:

\[\ldots\] Dewey knew that her eyes shut, as well as he would know even in his sleep when his mother put down the windows in their house if a rain was coming. That way, she stood there and waited. And Dewey's father—whose sweat Dewey took a deep breath of as he stood up beside him—believed the one that lady waited for was never coming over the bridge to her side, any more than she would come to his (BI, 89).

In the presence of the boy, the product of Blackie's union with the other woman—Dewey's mother—, Opal and Blackie can only long for each other from a distance. Blackie's wife is surely on his mind as his lover calls for him, because his son is with him. The boy also thinks of Mrs. Coker, the protecting mother who stays at home to put the windows down during a rain to keep the house a warm, secure place.

Later as Miss Hattie, Blackie, and Dewey walk out of the woods under the postmistress's umbrella, they meet Opal. Dewey notices that all three adults have a peculiar kind of look:
Opal Purcell had a look, to Dewey, as if she didn't know whether she was getting wet or not. It was his father's fishing look. And Miss Hattie's rainmaking look. He was the only one--out here in the rain itself--that didn't have it.

Like a pretty lady's hand, to tilt his face up a little and make him smile, deep satisfaction, almost love came down and touched him (BI, 93).

Obviously the boy has learned something about the nature of human love. In one of those delightfully "ordinary" touches of characterization for which Miss Welty has been praised, Opal is described as a robust and even rather unromantic object of Blackie's passion: she is a "plump" woman who sometimes waits on "people in the Feed and Seed" (BI, 92). When her aunt asks Opal why she has been in the woods, she makes up an excuse of a curiously domestic nature--that she has been "hunting poke salad."

Opal has also felt the effects of spring; she has "a blue violet in her dress, hanging down from a button-hole" (BI, 95) as if the flower is a silent badge of her love and passion. Although the violet is traditionally considered a flower that blooms shyly in out-of-the-way places, Opal wears her violet-badge openly and proudly. Later when he arrives home, Dewey notes his mother's "big-sky violets," which she "loves," blooming in the yard (BI, 99). Opal's flower is worn on her person; Dewey's mother's flowers, which she "loves," are grown in the yard. In this paralleling of flower-imagery, there
seems to be implicit comparison: Opal offers Blackie love and sexual fulfillment free of domestic impediments; she wears the uncultivated or wild flower of love on her person. The flowers for which Mrs. Coker has love are grown in the yard; they are rooted, cultivated in the domestic environment of home and family which Blackie evidently tries to escape in his would-be tryst in the woods. Love, as represented by the violet, is fresh, personal, and spontaneous in Opal, but rooted and bound, perhaps not spontaneous, at the Coker home. Miss Welty points out that Mrs. Coker "loves" her violets, but does she love Blackie in the way that he wishes or desires to be loved? Have her duties as a mother-woman made it difficult for her to perform as a wife and lover also? These intriguing questions are left unanswered by Miss Welty. However, she states explicitly that "fifteen years later it occurred to [Dewey] it had very likely been Opal in the woods" (B1, 99). This mature awareness of the truth of a situation one has encountered as a child is a narrative pattern found in one of Miss Welty's earlier stories, "A Sketching Trip," which also involves marital infidelity.

It is significant, too, that the group from the woods pass the Baptist and Methodist churches, "streaked with rain." Though the natural processes of life—represented by the rain—are shared by all, including the
church-members whose edifices are "streaked with rain," the good Baptists and Methodists of Royals would hardly approve of another "natural" force, the (abortive) sexual encounter between Blackie and Opal. As has been pointed out previously, Miss Welty is well aware of the influence of an ordered community, and the adulterous relationship of the lovers (they have surely met in the woods before) challenges the sanctity of the institutions of marriage and the home, clearly represented in this story by the devoted Mrs. Coker, a true mother-woman. At the end of the story, Mrs. Coker's anger would also clearly express the church-members' feelings if they knew the truth about Blackie Coker.

As the procession of four tramps through the life-giving rain back into the village, the eyes of Dewey and Opal "together look...out of their corners at the 'Coming Saturday' poster of the charging white horse" at the movie theatre. Adventure and romance appeal to both young people, the difference being that Opal has evidently had hers in the past in the woods with Blackie Coker. But Dewey's real-life romance and adventure lie in the future. It is certain, at least, that knowledge will come to him later.

Blackie surrenders his fishing pole to his son and goes his own way; the boy goes into the post office with Miss Hattie. In a characteristically motherly action, she
sweeps a big cloth out of her purse and rubs Dewey's rain-wet head. He thinks the cloth "might have been a dinner napkin" because he rubs "cornbread crumbs as sharp as rocks out of his eyes" (BI, 96). Miss Hattie invites Dewey to make himself at home in her home in the back of the post office, which represents, to the boy, settled peace and domesticity. He notes her comfortable rocking chair and her little gas stove (BI, 98). Thoughts of home, of mother, of the meaning of things he has seen that day run through his mind. When the rain stops, Miss Hattie dismisses him, and he runs to catch the school bus to go home.

The description of the Coker home is important since it clearly establishes the values represented by the third of the "ladies in spring" in this story, Dewey's mother.

After the bus put him down, he ran cutting across under the charred pines. The big-sky violets his mother loved were blooming, wet as cheeks. Pear trees were all but in bloom under the purple sky. Branches were being jogged with the rush and commotion of birds. The Cokers' patch of mustard that had gone to seed shone like gold from here. Dewey ran under the last drops, through the hooraying mud of the pasture, and saw the corrugations of their roof shining across it like a fresh pan of cornbread sticks. His father was off at a distance, on his knees—back at mending the fences. Minnie Lee, Sue, and Annie Bess were ready for Dewey and came flocking from the door, with the baby behind on all fours. None of them could hope to waylay him (BI, 99).
This scene of homeliness and domesticity is complete with Dewey's sisters and the baby. The shape of the roof reminds him indirectly of his mother ("like a fresh pan of cornbread sticks") who is the preparer of food, as are all mother-women in Miss Welty's stories. The father has returned from the "fishing trip" to his farming chores. Like a Mississippi Rip Van Winkle, he has wandered (but not for twenty years) from the routine of the domestic life and has returned to the bosom of the family.

Dewey encounters his mother in the cow lot:

...Behind her, blue and white, her morning wash hung to the ground, as wet as clouds. She stood with a switch extended most strictly over the head of the silky calf that drank from the old brown cow—as though this evening she knighted it (BI, 99).

The boy's thoughts become attached to the calf and ownership of it, perhaps symbolizing his own unconscious wish for a cow with which to start his own farm some day.

"Whose calf will that be? Mine?" he cried out to her. It was to make her turn, but this time, he thought, her answer would be yes.
"You have to ask your pa, son."
"Why do you always tell me the same thing? Mama!" (BI, 99)

As is customary in the traditional family, the father makes the decisions, and the mother defers to him.

Dewey offers the mother the fish he has caught, and she turns, shrieking:
"Get away from me!... You and your pa! Both of you get the sight of you clear away!"
She struck with her little green switch, fanning drops of milk and light. "Get in the house! Oh! If I haven't had enough out of you!" (BI, 100)

The mother, of course, is perturbed because of the lapse from duty of both her men (Blackie from his farming chores and Dewey from attending school); but one also suspects that her telling the boy to go into the house represents her wishing to keep him among her brood, to keep him safe and warm within the confines of the family circle. She is an example of Kate Chopin's mother-woman, fluttering about in her own way with "extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threaten[s] her precious brood."

What she may also suspect—and may even wish to protect Dewey from—is the force of the not-easily-bridled male sexuality embodied in his father, a force by which the mother feels threatened when it is expressed anywhere other than in the home, with her, and for the purpose of procreation. (The Cokers have five children.)

Margaret Bolsterli has explained quite perceptively the overall meaning and symbolism of "Ladies in Spring":

The title implies the effect on Dewey of the strange behavior of ladies in springtime. There are of course, three ladies: Miss Hattie, the strange woman in the woods who turns out, probably, to be Opal, and his mother, whose outrage when he gets home is too great for the mischief he has done unless the implications of "going fishing" are being brought into play. Dewey's mother represents the everyday world of responsibility, of home, children,
fatherhood, and work which Blackie has deserted to go fishing. She knows very well that "going fishing" is not only escape from this world of responsibility but a euphemism for freedom to do whatever he wants, including, as it does in this case, making a date with a girl. 87

The reader has learned earlier that Mr. Coker's brother, Lavelle, "had run off a long time ago, by Dewey's reckoning" (BI, 94–95). Perhaps in Mrs. Coker's mind there is the threat, the terrible possibility, of her husband's making a permanent "fishing trip," like his brother.

Miss Bolsterli feels that Dewey has indeed been initiated into his father's world of "fishing":

When Dewey plays hooky and goes with his father, he is taking part in that other world of "fishing," and he is as guilty as his father. The fish he offers her is as damning as any evidence will ever be, "its eye and its mouth as agape as any big fish's." It is significant for the mythical framework that Blackie's assignation was to take place on a bridge whose connections with the river banks have been broken so that it looks like an altar. "The bridge stood out there, high on its single foot like a table in the water." Continuity is implied in this "fishing" which is passed along from father to son. Dewey will behave the same way when his turn comes. Fertility will always be assured. 88

It is doubtful whether or not Dewey will follow his father's example "all the days," like Warren's Seth

87 "Mythic Elements in 'Ladies in Spring,'" p. 71.

88 Ibid., pp. 71–72.
followed the tramp in "Blackberry Winter." Less doubtful, however, is the father's wish for the boy to be able to lead a relatively independent, self-reliant life. Even though he refuses to initiate him personally into the mysteries of the "fishing trip," he does not prevent the boy's going along, to see and interpret what he can, even though Blackie does not have his planned assignation with Opal. As the father and son share their lunch of biscuits and jelly, the father remarks,

"This bridge don't belong to nobody. . . . It's just going begging. It's a wonder somebody don't stretch a tent over this good floor and live here, high and dry. You could have it clean to yourself. Know you could."

"Me?" asked Dewey.

His father faintly smiled and ate a biscuit before he said, "You'd have to ask your ma about it first" (BI, 87).

This scene is complex and significant in that it illustrates both Blackie's desire to "escape" to his own Walden Pond (with perhaps a little extramarital sex thrown in for good measure) and also the desire for his son to have a life of his own. But he respects his wife enough to suggest that the eventual break between mother and son, which will mark the boy's maturity, will have to be accomplished with the mother's blessings. Finally, perhaps, the idea of the life in the tent on the bridge represents simply the necessary separateness and privacy (without sex even) which every human being must have in order to keep his sanity and self-identity. Blackie wanders, but
he returns to make the family circle complete once again. And like the fixed foot of the compass in Donne's famous poem, the mother-woman—Mrs. Coker—does "in the center sit,/ Yet, when the other far doth roam,/ It leans, and hearkens after it,/ And grows erect as that comes home." 89

"Going to Naples"

The story of a group of Italian-Americans traveling by ship from New York to visit in Italy, "Going to Naples" is not set in Mississippi and does not depict Mississippians. Critics are inclined to stereotype a writer, and some of the first reviewers of Eudora Welty's fourth volume of short stories did not feel that her command of "foreign" scenes and persons (i.e., non-Mississippians) is as firm as her native materials (Mississippi and Mississippians). In addition to "Going to Naples," other "foreign" stories in this volume include "The Bride of the Innisfallen" (set in England and Ireland) and "Circe" (set on an ancient Greek island in the Mediterranean). An anonymous reviewer in the Virginia Quarterly Review writes that the stories in this collection "do not measure up to her best work, for too often they lack point

and meaning, are abortive and static rather than dynamic. This may result partially from Miss Welty's attempt to increase her range, socially as well as geographically. On the other hand, a reviewer in Time praises Miss Welty's "collection of atmosphere pieces" and compares them with the work "of the great French school of impressionist painters." And the same reviewer finds "Going to Naples" "perhaps Eudora Welty's finest canvas in the present gallery." Thomas H. Carter considers "Going to Naples" one of the author's weakest stories for somewhat the same general reasons that the Virginia Quarterly Review critic lists. J. A. Bryant, writing in retrospect in 1968, feels that all of the stories which "carry Eudora Welty out of her own private region...are...successful...and indicate...that though she writes best about what she knows, she generally knows whatever she sees."


93 Bryant, Eudora Welty, pp. 39-40.
Bryant is correct in his assertion that Miss Welty "writes best about what she knows" and "generally knows whatever she sees." What she has seen and recorded so beautifully in "Going to Naples" is precisely what the reviewers have missed. This story does not "lack point and meaning," as the Virginia Quarterly Reviewer has stated about all the stories in The Bride of the Innisfallen. In addition to charming atmosphere, "Going to Naples," contains an important theme which is symbolized in the letter "M": two black men sit together daily on a bench on the Pomona's deck, and "together their four feet formed a big black M, for getting married. . ." (BI, 159). An auxiliary meaning of this rather explicit but significant symbol is that the "M" also represents "mother" or "mother-woman." Mrs. C. Serto, mother of eighteen-year-old Gabriella (and these are but one of six pairs of mothers and unmarried daughters on the ship) is probably the busiest, most dedicated, and most inexhaustible mother-woman in all of Miss Welty's writings. Mama Serto is accompanying her daughter to the old country to visit Mrs. Serto's mother, Nonna, who is yet another mother-woman in this robust, comical narrative of the marriage game. Mrs. Serto's greatest ambition is to find a husband for the wide-hipped, loud-mouthed, high-spirited daughter. This quest provides
the action for "Going to Naples," which Louis Rubin considers "one of Miss Welty's funniest stories."^94

Mama Serto never resists the opportunity to remind Gabriella that she is unmarried and that she must be constantly on guard not to miss an opportunity for matrimony. When Gabriella wears hair curlers to mass in the ship's chapel, a little comic scene takes place in which Miss Welty defines Mrs. Serto's mother-womanliness:

"Curlers!" hissed Mama in Gabriella's ear. She gave Gabriella's cheek one of her incredibly quick little slaps—it looked for all the world like only a pat, belonging to no time and place but pure motherhood (51, 169) [Italics are mine].

Mrs. Serto is certainly a prime example of the kind of female Kate Chopin had in mind when she described mother-women as mother-hens, "fluttering about with extended, protecting wings" to take care of their "precious brood. They are women who idolize their children, worship their husbands, and esteem it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." If one can imagine a fat, loquacious Italian-American "ministering angel" who is self-effacing only to the extent that she talks constantly of love, marriage, and childbirth and that she is devoted religiously to the task of marrying off her daughter, then he has a mental

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image of Eudora Welty's version of the mother-woman in this story. Miss Welty, however, sees Mama Serto's actions as timeless and universal, "belonging to no time and place but pure motherhood" (BI, 169).

When Mrs. Serto and Gabriella first enter the ship, Mama says in her comically unidiomatic English: "Hold straight those shoulders. Look the others," as she points to the other five young girls for whom there are just the right number of single young men for "pairing off," although three of them are "for the priesthood" and one, Poldy, "on his way now to marry a girl in Italy that he has never seen" (BI, 157).

Mama Serto chides Gabriella for being fat:

"You saw! Every girl on ship is fat!"—exactly what she said about school and church at home. "In Napoli, when I was a girl, your Nonna told me a hundred times, 'Little daughter: girls do well to be strong. Also, be delicata.' You wait! She'll tell you the same. What's the matter? You got pretty little feet like me." Mama framed herself in the engine-room door, and showed her shoe.

But not every girl coming into the dining room had to pass seven tables to reach her own, as Gabriella did—bouncing along sideways, with each table to measure her hips again as briskly as a mother's tape measure. . . (BI, 157).

In addition, Mama Serto chides Gabriella for being single and not producing babies to add to the already sizable Serto family stock. Though Mrs. Serto may be accused of "momism," Gabriella is sufficiently high-spirited to "talk back" to her mother:
"You are youngest of six daughters, all beautiful and strong, five married to smart boys, Maria's Arrigo smart enough to be pharmacist. Five with babies to show. And what would you call every one those babies?" The word rushed out. "Adorable!"
"Bellissimo! But you hang back."
"So O.K.! If you wouldn't follow me all the time!"
"I know the time to drop behind," said Mama sharply (BI, 158).

When Gabriella waves good-bye to the Statue of Liberty at the beginning of the story, the reader suspects that she is waving farewell (half-consciously) to the days of her girlhood and the fun, games, tricks, and occasional study at St. Cecilia school for girls in Buffalo. She is a ripe eighteen, but she is not going to be hurried into marriage by her mother; at the end of the story when the boat lands at Naples, Poldy and Aldo, Gabriella's boyfriend, laugh about Poldy's bride being able to recognize him because he "sent her a whole dozen poses." Gabriella thinks unhappily about the young girl whose "future was about to begin."

Poldy's and Aldo's laughs met like clapped hands over Gabriella's head, and she could hardly take another step down for anger at that girl, and outrage for her, as if she were her dearest friend, her little sister. Even now the girl probably languished in tears because the little country train she was coming on, from her unknown town, was late. Perhaps, even more foolishly, she had come early, and was languishing just beyond the gate, not knowing if she were allowed inside the wall or not--how could she know? No matter--they would meet. The Pomona had landed, and that was enough. Poor girl, whose name Poldy had not even bothered to tell them, her future was about to begin (BI, 198).
In her youthful independence, even though she is under the watchful eye of her mother, Gabriella feels sorry for Poldy's innocent young bride-to-be. Her feeling of outrage may be partially directed at her own situation, too, since her mother is determined to marry her off.

Gabriella meets Aldo Scampo, a young, tanned, blond veteran, and they engage in a mild flirtation. In his presence, as a rule, Gabriella's screeching (for which she has become infamous on the ship) ceases. She becomes softer, quieter, more feminine. Naturally Mrs. Serto encourages their relationship as much as possible. They play ping-pong together, walk on deck, and finally express their affection for each other through a few discrete kisses. Playfully one night she bites his upper shirt sleeve and finds his arm, "rigid and wary, with a muscle that throbbed like a heart" (BI, 165). Gabriella is learning something about male strength and beauty (learning it without much of her mother's help), and she is not altogether repelled by what she learns.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Serto has checked out Aldo's eligibility as a husband-to-be for her daughter. What she has discovered is this:

...He was unmarried, was Californian, had mother, father, sisters, and brothers in America, and his mother's people lived in Nettuno, where they partly owned a boat, but as he rattled around in a cabin to himself, the complete story was not yet known (BI, 159-60).
The "complete story" turns out to be not at all to Mrs. Serto's satisfaction. Aldo is not interested in marrying and is going to Rome to study the cello on the G. I. Bill (BI, 204). Cello-playing is not quite the same skill as her son-in-law Arrigo's pharmacy, the ultimate in professions to Mama Serto's middle-class mind.

Before learning "the complete story" about Aldo, however, Mama Serto continues talking (usually non-stop) about marriages and wedding dresses. She is quite impressed that Poldy is taking his wife's wedding dress to her in Italy, and she gives Gabriella reports on the dress at "gentle intervals" (BI, 163). Moreover, Mrs. Serto never tires of hearing young Poldy talk about his bride:

"My sweetheart and I are going to have a happy, happy Christmas," Poldy announced, rubbing his hands together. . . .

"So you never seen your girl, eh? remarked Mr. Fossetta, a small dark father of five, who sat just in front of him. All the Serto table sat together in church—Mama thought it was nice. Today they made a little square around her. At her right, Poldy locked his teeth and gave a dazzling grin.

"We've never seen each other. But do we love each other? Oh, boy!"

At every opportunity Poldy pulls out his fiancée's photograph to show to those around him.

... Poldy reached in his breast pocket and produced his papers. He prodded under the elastic band and held them all together to take out a snapshot, and passed this up to Mr. Fossetta. The first time he'd tried to pass that was in the middle of the movie while the lights blinked on for them to change the reel.
"Yes, a happy, happy Christmas," said Poldy. "Pass that. Why wouldn't we be happy, we'll be married then. I'm taking the bridesmaids' dresses, besides the bride's I told you about, and her mother's dress too, in store boxes. Her aunt in Chicago, that's who gave me the address in the first place—she knows everything! The names and the sizes. Everything is going to fit. Wait! I'll show you something else—the ticket I bought for my wife to come back to the U.S.A. on. Guess who we're going to live with. Her aunt [!]" (BI, 167-68).

By the time the romantic lad has finished his monologue, no one at the table except Mrs. Serto is inclined to listen. It is noteworthy that even at their table in the ship's dining room Mrs. Serto organizes the group as she would a family to which she is a mother.

Everybody took a chance to yawn or look out the window, but Mama inclined her head at Poldy going through his papers and said, "Sweetest thing in the world, Christmas, second to love." She suddenly looked at the other side of her. "You paying attention, Gabriella?" (BI, 168)

But Gabriella is not paying attention; she is not impressed by the photograph of Poldy's fiancée that passes in front of her nose. But Mama Serto is exasperated when she is not given enough time to study the photograph and Poldy grabs the picture from her to pass it on: "Wait, wait!" she cries. "There went who I love best in world... Little bride. Was that nice?" (BI, 168) Later, during mass, the quiet is broken by "two noisy almost simultaneous smacks: Poldy kissing his bride and snapping her back under the elastic band" (BI, 169).
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Mama Serto's encouraging Gabriella to "pay attention" to the wedding talk has not been completely in vain, however. As Aldo and Gabriella walk in the lower part of the ship near the roaring engine room, she is reminded of that honeymoon mecca of past years, Niagara Falls:

It sounded here a little like the Niagara Falls at home, but she had never paid much attention to them [until now?]. Yet with all the deafening, Gabriella felt as if she and Aldo were walking side by side in some still, lonely, even high place never seen before now, with mountains above, valleys below, and sky (BI, 170).

However, following the good old European custom, Mrs. Serto does not allow Gabriella too many opportunities for such romantic escapades without her mama's presence. Chaperonage is, in short, taken for granted by the six mothers with daughters on board the Pomona.

Mrs. Serto has become friends with Mrs. Arpista, whose daughter, Maria-Pia, has "caught" the other eligible young man, Joe Monteoliveto. Mama Serto does not limit her advice to her own daughter, however; she feels free to advise Mrs. Arpista that her daughter, who has been walking round the deck, looks pale: "Signora Arpista, your Maria-Pia needs to sit down, look her expression" (BI, 159). Sometimes, however, the mothers leave their daughters and gather in the public room. There, "the full congregation" gathered, Mrs. Serto continues "with the subject she loves the best—under its own name, now: love" (BI, 175).
Like the women of Morgana in *The Golden Apples*, these mother-women take the moral atmosphere of the ship as one of the areas which they must protect as "ministering angels." They universally condemn La Zingara, an actress—"thin, but no one could say how young" (*BI*, 160). She is seen through the eyes of the well-padded Italian-American mothers in images connoting sharpness and unflattering angularity: Her lips move "like a scissors" (*BI*, 161); she has a "knifelike smile" (*BI*, 173). Even Aldo is repelled by this woman's shopworn worldliness.

...[w]hen La Zingara clattered out on deck, with a spectacled youth at her heels, and, seeing Aldo, gave the sharp laugh of experience, Aldo shut his lips, like a reader who has just licked his finger to turn a page. But Gabriella sat up and caught her hair and her skirt, seeing those horn-rims: that young man was marked for the priesthood [!]"

With the pop of corks being drawn from wine bottles, La Zingara kicked off her shoes. Then she began dancing in her polished, bare feet over the deck. ("Practicing," she had replied with her knifelike smile when the mothers wondered where she went all day--furiously watching an actress rob the church). She made the horn-rimmed young man be her partner; to dance like La Zingara meant having someone to catch you... (*BI*, 173).

This suggestive passage points up the essential innocence of all of Zingara's onlookers except Aldo: Gabriella, who pulls down her skirt when the novitiate-priest passes by with La Zingara and who fails to recognize the jaded aura of the actress; the mother-women, who do not know where the actress keeps herself all day (although the
reader suspects that Aldo knows, since she gives him "the sharp laugh of experience"); and the young priest who is too innocent to know that La Zingara is "using" him.

At the end of the story, La Zingara, wearing false furs, leaves the ship to join "alas, a country clown, with red face and yellow shoes" and "arms also outflung." Aldo yawns, "Well, there she goes" (BI, 190-191). Gabriella has learned from Maria-Pia that the boys on the ship call La Zingara Il Cadavere among themselves (BI, 191). Evidently the more robust womanliness of a Gabriella is more attractive to Aldo Scampo and Joe Monteoliveto. Or is their contempt of La Zingara but a pretense to prevent the mother-women and their virgin daughters from learning of the young men's possible secret "visits" to this sinister woman? But the mother-women and the young men act to isolate the actress from the girls, a protection of youth that the irrepressible Daisy Miller found exasperating in Rome in the 1870's!

Mama Serto not only condemns La Zingara for having questionable morals but also for being a spinster! Gabriella's mother admonishes her again not to neglect her matrimonial opportunities. Pulling her daughter to her, Mrs. Serto scolds, "If you don't pay attention, you be like Zingara some day—old maid! You see her neck? Then you cry for somebody to take you even to Sicilia! But who? I'll be dead then, in cemetery!" (BI, 191)
The reader is reminded of the community's feeling about the spinster Miss Eckhart in "June Recital": Miss Eckhart would have been "saved" if "she had been married to anybody at all, just the awfullest man" (GA, 58). In other words, any marriage may be preferable to no marriage in the thinking of the Mrs. Sertos and Morgana-ladies of this world.

And almost as unforgivable as spinsterdom, in the thinking of Mrs. Serto, a thorough-going mother-woman, is the sin of marrying twice. An old man who is called only "Papa" has, like many of the older people on board the ship, come home to Italy to die. He is met by no one at Naples. "He had nobody: she knew it. It was the punishment for marrying twice" (BI, 201). To this conservative Catholic woman, marriages are indeed made in heaven, and God makes a marriage only once!

The high point of this story is Gala Night, the last night before the ship's arrival in Naples. But the sea is high, and many are sick, including Mrs. Serto and Aldo. But Gabriella is unaffected, goes to the party alone, and surprises everyone by being "filled with grace" (BI, 186). She dances tirelessly with Joe Monteoliveto, and then alone— and without chaperonage!

The mothers gently cocked their heads from side to side, the old men re-lit their tobacco, and poured out a little vino. That great, unrewarding, indestructible daughter of Mrs. Serto, round as an onion, and tonight
deserted, unadvised, unprompted, and unrestrained in her blue, went dancing around this unlikely floor as lightly as an angel.

Whenever she turned, she whirled, and her ruffles followed—and the music had to catch up. It began to seem to the general eye that she might be turning around faster inside than out. For an unmarried girl, it was danger. Some radiant pin through the body had set her spinning like that tonight, and given her the power—not the same thing as permission, but what was like a memory of how to do it—to be happy all by herself. Their own poor daughters, trudging uphill and down as the ship tilted them, would have to bide their time until Gabriella learned her lesson (BI, 186).

Their tongues clacking, the other mother-women feel sure that the unchaperoned Gabriella, asserting herself in the rhythm of the dance, will invite trouble. But without her mother—without even Aldo—Gabriella has simply expressed her joy, her "stampede of the pure wish to live" (GA, 233), much in the manner of Virgie Rainey who is also "liberated" at the end of "The Wanderers."

The next day, before the boat lands, Aldo kisses Gabriella one last time. Observing them, Mama Serto raps "Aldo's skull with her knuckle—the crack of her wedding ring" echoing "out all over the Mediterranean. . . ." (BI, 193-194). She has obviously expected him to propose to her daughter after their tourist-class romance. It is ironically appropriate, then, that Mama Serto should strike him with her wedding ring.
In tracing the journey motif through "Going to Naples," Carol Porter Smith points out that "the central fact of the voyage from New York to Naples... neatly brackets most of the story's action":

Those in tourist class are going to Italy for many different reasons. Aldo goes to study, Gabriella and her mother to visit Mrs. Serto's mother, another passenger goes to marry a bride he has never seen, and many of the old people are clearly going home to die. With this combination of characters and purposes, the voyage comes to have a personality of its own within the story.95

But what Miss Smith calls "a secondary aspect of the journey motif" in the story is in actuality its primary motif: Mrs. Serto's "continuing quest for a suitable marriage for Gabriella."96 It is a quest of the mother-woman for her daughter's security, symbolized in the "M" of the black men's feet, a quest which Hazel's parents pursued in inviting William Wallace Jamieson to dinner one night, a quest that is surely as old as the institution of marriage itself. Miss Welty's achievement in dealing with this ancient theme is that she has invested it with gentle charm, comedy, and a vivid sense of time, place and situation.


96Ibid.
Mama Serto's quest is, of course, undeterred. When the boat arrives in Naples, she exaggerates Aldo's interest in Gabriella and compliments her daughter's sex appeal upon greeting her own aged mother on the dock:

"Look what I see!" cried Mama, without ceasing to pat Nonna's cheek. "Mr. Scampo! Ah, I thought we had seen the last of him. On board ship—poor mamma mia!—he was passionately running after our Gabriella. It was necessary to keep an eye on her every minute."

"Her fatefulness is inherited from you, Crocefissa, my child," said Nonna. "All my girls have been so afflicted but five, like me, married by eighteen," Mama said—pat, pat, pat (BL, 202).

When Aldo approaches them, Gabriella screams a fraternal greeting:

Nonna bent a considering head her way as though to place the pitch.

"That she gets from her father," said Mama. "The Siracusano!"

"Ah," replied Nonna. "Daughter, where is my little fan? Somewhere in my skirts, thank you. With the years he has calmed himself, Achille? You no longer tremble to cross him?"

Gabriella said absently, "She should've seen him hit the ceiling when I flunked old typewriting."

"Per favore!" cried Mama to her. "Quiet about things you know nothing about, yet! Say good-by to Mr. Scampo" (BL, 202-203).

There was a time, the reader is led to believe, when Mr. Serto, whose loud voice the mother thinks the daughter has inherited, was a figure of authority in what must have been a traditional, patriarchal family. Mrs. Serto commands her daughter to cease speaking of her
father's temper, a husband's rages being a reality about which Gabriella—in her unmarried innocence—can know nothing.

Aldo walks on, carrying two suitcases and his cello case. Mama can not forgive him for not being a more serious suitor for her daughter on Gala Night:

Mama said, "If you think this fellow looks strong, mamma mia, I tell you it is an illusion!" "Only on Gala Night," protested Gabriella, "That's the one and only time he faded out of the picture. And so did you, Mama."
"We stop first thing at Santa Maria to thank Holy Mother for one fate she saved you from!" (BI, 203)

But Gabriella, enthralled by the sights and sounds of the harbor of the exotic Italian port, is not particularly unhappy when Aldo simply shakes hands with all three women, quite formally, and looks at Gabriella as if she were "someone he...never expected to see again" (BI, 206). To Aldo and Gabriella their shipboard romance has been only a short, simple, and relatively uninvolved encounter between two young people just setting out on their quest in life, which is simply to live.

In an ironical reversal of roles, Mama weeps when Aldo walks away; in the presence of her ancient mother, she reverts to the role of daughter:

She was being the daughter—the better daughter.
But Nonna was still the mother. Her brown face might be creased like a fig-skin, but her eyes were brighter now than tears had left Mama's, or than the lightning of bewilderment
that struck so often into the eyes of Gabriella. Surely they knew everything. They had taken Gabriella for granted (BI, 206).

To the old woman, her own daughter is the sole object of her attention. Nonna has seen Gabriella and taken her "for granted." Weeping in seeing Aldo go and in being with her own old mother after so many years, Mrs. Serto feels that she is "the better daughter." As the youngest of the three generations of women, Gabriella is naturally bewildered. Nonna's bright eyes upon seeing her own daughter demonstrate that the mother-woman instinct seldom dies, even when a woman is very old. Old Phoenix in "A Worn Path" is yet another striking example of the mother-woman in old age.

Mrs. Serto is the romantic, marriage-minded mother-woman to the last. As the three women move off with the porter and the luggage into the heart of Naples, Mama asks, "And the nightingale. . . , is the nightingale with us yet?" (BI, 207) Although Mrs. Serto is probably not aware of the treatment of the nightingale in poetry, she probably does associate the song of the bird with spring and love, for the male nightingale sings his richest song during the breeding season. As Mrs. Serto disappears from view, she is still pursuing "the subject she loves the best. . . : love." Of course, her wish for her daughter's happiness through marriage stems from her love for her.
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It is true mother-love, timeless, universal, "belonging to no time and place but pure motherhood" (BI, 169).

"Shower of Gold"

"Shower of Gold" is the initial story in The Golden Apples (1949) and takes the form of a monologue, a method of narration that looks back to Miss Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O." (1941) and forward to The Ponder Heart (1954). The story of Snowdie and King MacLain's marriage is told by "Miss" (Mrs.) Katie Rainey to a passerby who stops to buy something at the Rainey fruit-and-vegetable stand. The Rainey farmhouse is located on the edge of the village of Morgana, and the home Miss Snowdie's parents built for her is located just across the road.

"Shower of Gold" depicts Snowdie Hudson MacLain, one of Miss Welty's most devoted mother-women. She is wholly dedicated to the care and preservation of her home and "nuclear family" (although her husband is "absent" most of the time) and is sadly aware at the end of The Golden Apples that she has erred in wanting King MacLain to come home again. This story is also significant in that the community's attitudes about marriage, childbirth, and homemaking are clearly reflected in Miss Katie, who shares those attitudes.
"Shower of Gold," like all the stories in *The Golden Apples*, invites interpretation through Greek myth, as J. A. Bryant has suggested:

..."Shower of Gold" specifically invites us to think of the Danae story. In the monologue of Virgie Rainey's mother... we learn how King MacLain, a tea and spice salesman long given to unexplained absences (he is the story's Zeus figure), on one brief return home met his albino wife, Snowdie, in the woods and got her with twins. When Zeus visited Danae in her cell, of course, he begot Perseus; but Snowdie's twins are a Castor and Pollux, destined to disturb their father's peace of mind as Perseus did, though less seriously. This, in fact, is the main business of the amusing story that Katie Rainey tells, how King MacLain returned home on one of his visits and got as far as the front steps only to be put to flight by the spectacle of two little boys masked with Halloween false faces, decorated with scraps from their mother's sewing basket, and roaring on roller skates around the MacLain's wooden porch like a Mississippi tornado.  

"[T]he main business" of "Shower of Gold" amounts, however, to far more than Bryant thinks. This story is Eudora Welty's most thorough study of a mother-woman as seen by her own community. The story offers lagniappe by depicting, additionally, the marriage of the other mother-woman who narrates the story.

King MacLain is not only a Zeus-Jove figure in his prolific sexuality (it is rumored that half the orphans in the country are his offspring); he is secretly the idol of almost every woman in the community. Although the women

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97Bryant, *Eudora Welty*, p. 27.
obviously love the little albino Snowdie Hudson because she is sweet and gentle, they are all a little jealous—and surprised—when King marries her, of all people. Katie interprets his marrying Snowdie as "showing off" (GA, 4). To Katie, King represents male willfulness and lack of foresight:

Some said King figured out that if the babies started coming, he had a chance for a nestful of little albinos, and that swayed him. No, I don't say it. I say he was just willful. He wouldn't think ahead. Willful and outrageous, to some several. Well: he married Snowdie. Lots of men wouldn't have: no better sense (GA, 3-4).

Little Snowdie MacLain, who isn't exactly "ugly"—but with "the little blinky lines to her eyelids" and "that tender, tender skin like a baby" (GA, 3), is hardly the woman the Morgana wives think King would marry. Snowdie's father, a storekeeper, educated her to be a teacher. "And," Katie says, "I guess people more or less expected her to teach school: not marry" (GA, 5). In other words, the community expects Snowdie to be an old maid. They want her to be a spinster schoolteacher so that they can feel sorry for her since they could never feel sorry for Miss Eckhart, the other old maid teacher in Morgana, because she was "strange" and a foreigner to boot. Snowdie could not see very well, but the board of education overlooked that, "knowing the family and Snowdie's real good way with Sunday School children" (GA, 5). Without being
aware of it, Miss Katie has granted that she and the other Morgana women recognize Snowdie's inclination to be a mother-woman: she likes children and gets along well with them.

The community observes every step of Snowdie and King's courtship, marriage, and childbirth. Morgana's women approve of the marriage, and evidently they try to dissuade her from mating with King. "Of course, gentle people aren't the ones you lead best" (GA, 4), Katie says, because Snowdie quietly but firmly sticks to her decision to marry King. Their marriage then follows a routine that finds him leaving home for longer and longer periods. Educated to be a lawyer, he makes his living representing a tea-and-spice company and, thus, is an additional example of the rootless traveling salesman in Miss Welty's stories. When he returns home, the couple meet in the woods, not at home.

"When he does come," Katie reports, "he's just as nice as he can be to Snowdie. Just as courteous. Was from the start." Katie offers some of her pickle-barrel philosophy when she generalizes, "Haven't you noticed it prevail, in the world in general? Beware of a man with manners. He never raised his voice to her, but then one day he walked out of the house. Oh, I don't mean once" (GA, 4).
The reader begins to notice in Miss Katie's monologue that she and the community have one explanation for the happenings in the MacLain family and that Snowdie has another. The community's attitude as reflected in Katie's talk represents what they want to believe, not what is necessarily the truth. On the other hand, Snowdie is a private person and quietly protests against the meddling of the community women. According to Katie,

..[[King]] went away for a good spell before he come back that time. She had a little story about him needing the waters. Next time it was more than a year, it was two--oh, it was three. I had two children myself, enduring his being gone, and one to die. Yes, and that time he sent her word ahead: "Meet me in the woods." No, he more invited her than told her to come--"Suppose you meet me in the woods" (GA, 4).

Less acquiescent than Snowdie, Katie says she would have had some questions to ask before meeting King in the woods:

And it was night time he supposed to her. And Snowdie went without asking "What for?" which I would want to know of Pate Rainey. After all, they were married--they had a right to sit inside and talk in the light and comfort, or lie down easy on a good goosefeather bed, either. I would even consider he might not be there when I came. Well, if Snowdie went without a question, then I can tell it without a question as I love Snowdie. Her version is that in the woods they met and both decided on what would be best (GA, 4).

Although she is inquisitive and a prattler, Katie's good sense is nevertheless revealed in her observation that if the couple is going to meet, even briefly, they could do
so in the manner of civilized adults within the warmth, comfort, and security of the family home, not in the dark woods. Katie says she became Snowdie's friend when the twins were expected. Katie would take Snowdie milk and butter. "I hadn't been married long myself, and Mr. Rainey's health was already delicate so he'd thought best to quit heavy work. We was both hard workers fairly early." The "solidity" of Katie's marriage with her stolid husband, Fate, contrasts vividly with Snowdie's uncertain life with King MacLain.

In the period of time between Snowdie's and King's wedding in the MacLain Presbyterian Church and the meetings of the married couple in the woods, he travels, selling his wares, coming home fairly often. Snowdie is the perfect mother-woman and housewife, according to Katie:

...She stayed home and cooked and kept house. I forget if she had a Negro, she didn't know how to tell one what to do if she had. And she put her eyes straight out, almost, going to work and making curtains for every room and all like that. So busy. At first it didn't look like they would have any children (GA, 6). Katie says she has grown tired of counting King's comings and goings. Morganians wonder if perhaps Snowdie is "winning" in her struggle to domesticate King. King in reality pleases the Morgana women precisely because he is full of surprises. Katie asks, "Why do I try to figure [King out?] Maybe because Fate Rainey ain't got a surprise in him, and proud of it" (GA, 6). Fate (rather ironically
named since he is a thoroughly domesticated husband) criticizes the townswomen's nosy-ness in commenting, "Well, now, let's have the women to settle down and pay attention to homefolks a while" (GA, 6). To Pate, the regular rhythms of life, the farm chores, and the business of making a living are far more important than the mysterious journeys of King MacLain. Perhaps, too, he is jealous of all the attention paid to the handsome, six-foot-tall King, who always dressed in a white linen suit.

When Snowdie learns she is pregnant with King's children, she is quietly ecstatic and comes to share the news with her neighbor:

Here comes Snowdie across the road to bring the news. I seen her coming across my pasture in a different walk, it was the way somebody comes down an aisle. Her sunbonnet ribbons was jumping around her: springtime. Did you notice her dainty waist she has still? I declare it's a mystery to think about her having the strength once. Look at me. I was in the barn milking, and she come and took a stand there at the head of the little Jersey, Lady May. She had a quiet, picked-out way to tell news. She said, "I'm going to have a baby, too, Miss Katie. Congratulate me" (GA, 6).

Miss Katie is so surprised that she can say nothing; she can only sit and study Miss Snowdie's curious, bright appearance:

Me and Lady May both had to just stop and look at her. She looked like more than only the news had come over her. It was like a shower of something had struck her, like she'd been caught out in something bright. It was more than the day. There were her eyes all
crinkled up with always fighting the light, yet she was looking out bold as a lion that day under her brim, and gazing into my bucket and into my stall like a visiting somebody. Poor Snowdie, I remember it was Easter time and how the pasture was all spotty there behind her little blue skirt, in sweet clover.

William Jones identifies the mythological parallel of Jove's (or Zeus's) visit to Danaë in the form of a shower of gold with Mrs. Rainey's description of her first view of Snowdie after Snowdie has met King most recently in Morgan's woods, "probably the woods of King Arthur's half sister Morgan la Fee." Moreover, Jones maintains that in the previously-quoted passage from "Shower of Gold" ". . . Miss Welty is fusing elements common to various mythological systems. The Easter reference, the blue skirt, the clover, and the spices add to the pagan myth the idea of the Virgin Mary's own discovery that she was to give birth to a hero." 98

Although certain aspects of Jones's interpretation may be open to question, Miss Welty's description of Snowdie MacLain does compare strikingly with the ecstasy of that "faultless madonna," Adèle Ratignolle in Kate Chopin's The Awakening, when she learns that she is expecting again. Snowdie's name suggests immaculateness and purity; with her snowy skin, crinkly eyes, "quiet, picked-out way to tell news," and aura of golden light,

she resembles representations of the Holy Mother in paintings and even in the scriptures. Snowdie, like the Virgin Mary, "has pondered" her children "in her heart." These additional parallels between Snowdie and the Holy Mother, parallels which Jones does not mention, further emphasize the radiant potentiality of Snowdie Hudson as mother-woman extraordinary.

When King's hat is found on the edge of the Big Black River, suggesting that he is drowned, "Snowdie kept just as bright and brave, she didn't seem to give in" (GA, 7). Katie conjectures that Snowdie must have thought of two possible explanations for his death: that he is dead or that he has left her for good. But whichever possibility she decides upon, Katie asks, "Why [does] her face have that glow?" She smiles when people ask about King (suggesting the mysterious smile of the famous Mona Lisa) and does not "rage and storm," as people expected her to do. "The Hudsons all hold themselves in" (GA, 7), Katie judges.

Katie also feels that Snowdie is an innocent woman and is victimized by that innocence; in this judgment Katie may be right.

But it didn't seem to me [Katie says], running in and out the way I was, that Snowdie had ever got a real good look at life, maybe. Maybe not from the beginning. Maybe she just doesn't know the extent. Not the kind of

look I got, and away back when I was twelve years old or so. Like something was put to my eyes (GA, 7).

Katie's opinion is that Snowdie is a victim of illusions which stem from a sheltered upbringing, while Katie herself was forced to take a good, hard look at life, close up, early in life.

As the years pass, Snowdie learns to protect her privacy by keeping her distance. She continues with her domestic routines, taking pride in her housekeeping and in caring for her rowdy little boys:

She just went on keeping house, . . . and she seemed to settle into her content. Like a little white kitty in a basket, making you wonder if she mightn't put up her paw and scratch, if anything was, after all, to come near. At her house it was Sunday even in the mornings, every day, in that cleaned-up way. She was taking a joy in her fresh untracked rooms and that dark, quiet, real quiet hall that runs through the house (GA 7-8).

Katie protests that she and the rest of Morgana's ladies love Snowdie; they resent not being able to feel "very close to her all the while" (GA, 8). They try to involve her in church and club activities, but she prefers her own privacy. Organization-minded mothers rule communities, Philip Wylie feels, and shut out all those they consider undesirable.\(^{100}\) In *The Golden Apples* organization-minded women ostracize Virgie Rainey, Lotte Eckhart, and even

King MacLain, who is desired by the women as a vital "fructifying force" and, to Chester Eisinger, because "he cannot be contained in a prosaic community of ordinary mortals." To Carol Porter Smith, the whole community conspires to protect Snowdie MacLain, who in turn resents the community's interference in her affairs and seeks to hold them off from her life.

When her twin sons are born, Snowdie "claps the names on them of Lucius Randall and Eugene Hudson, after her own father and her mother's father." Morgana interprets her choice of names as "the only sign she ever give. . .that maybe she didn't think the name King MacLain had stayed beautiful" (GA, 8-9), for she does not name her sons after her husband.

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102 "The Journey Motif...of Eudora Welty," p. 112.
bastard children, for these children have been born of mothers of an insignificant social status!

The central episode in the story concerns King's alleged appearance one Halloween evening several years after he is supposedly drowned. He has disappeared before the birth of his sons, and encountering them in their Halloween costumes on the front porch of the MacLain home that October dusk must have been a disconcerting experience. He approaches the front door, according to a report that is purposely kept from the ears of Snowdie, and is greeted by the shrill voices of his own sons (who do not recognize him, their own father) shouting, "How do you do, Mister Booger?" (GA, 14) They surround their father in ring-around-a-rosy fashion and will not let him out. Finally he breaks from their ring after calling "once or twice on the Lord" (GA, 14), according to report, and runs toward the river. Later the children tell their mother that the man said, "I'm going. You stay" (GA, 15).

At the first report that there is a "booger" on the porch, Snowdie, who has apparently been waiting patiently for King's return all these years, runs excitedly to find him; Mrs. Rainey has been sewing with Mrs. MacLain and gives this report:

... Snowdie dropped her scissors on the mahogany, and her hand just stayed in the air as still, and she looked at me, a look a minute long. And first she caught her apron to her and then started shedding it in the hall.
while she run to the door—so as not to be caught in it, I suppose, if anybody was still there. She run and the little glass prisms shook in the parlor—I don't remember another time, from her. She didn't stop at the door but run on through it and out on the porch, and she looked both ways and was running down the steps. And she run out in the yard and stood there holding to the tree, looking towards the country, but I could tell by the way her head was held there wasn't nobody (GA, 15).

Even the Negroes in the town are part of the conspiracy to protect Miss Snowdie from the truth; old Plez, an aged Negro who was passing the MacLain house when King went up on the porch and was frightened away by his own children, denies seeing King. The community that destroys Lotte Eckhart by isolating her and that later ostracizes Katie Rainey's daughter, Virgie, for her iconoclastic ways tries to form a protecting circle around Snowdie. But Snowdie still loves King and would have taken him back, even after the half-dozen years he has been gone:

After he'd gone by, Snowdie just stood there in the cool without a coat, with her face turned towards the country and her fingers pulling at little threads on her skirt and turning them loose in the wind, making little kind deeds of it, till I went and got her. She didn't cry (GA, 16).

Katie says that she hopes King "hit a stone and fell down running, before he got far off from here, and took the skin off his handsome nose, the devil" (GA, 16). Katie's last statement, like a good man she makes in the story, is interestingly ambiguous and perhaps says as much about
herself (and the other women in the community) as about the MacLains:

But I bet my little Jersey calf King tarried long enough to get him a child somewhere.
What makes me say a thing like that?
I wouldn't say it to my husband, you mind you forget it (GA, 17).

Snowdie MacLain and her children appear in the next story, "June Recital," in which Snowdie runs a boarding house, having abandoned the house in the country, which, the reader learns in "The Wanderers," has burned. Snowdie acquires the reputation of a kind, generous woman, willing to help those in need, like Lotte Eckhart. She may be compared with Hester Prynne in the way that she grows in moral stature through suffering. In the last story of The Golden Apples Snowdie MacLain comes to prepare the body of Katie Rainey for burial. Forty years have passed since the first story occurred. Snowdie understands Virgie Rainey and does not chide her, as the other women do. Virgie notes that Snowdie is "now as at all times a gentle lady" (GA, 215).

In "The Wanderers" the wanderer King MacLain has come home, an old, senile man, an embarrassment to his wife. Snowdie does not know what to do with him, drives him places in the automobile, reminds him not to eat foods that are too rich, and generally mothers him, out of necessity, as if he were a child. The community says that
"when her flyaway husband had come home a few years ago, at the age of sixty-odd, and stayed... , she had never gotten over it—first his running away, then his coming back to her." Their considered opinion is that "he didn't want to come at all. Now he has her mixed up with Nellie Loomis" (GA, 217), one of his old girl friends.

During the funeral preparations at the Rainey residence, Snowdie explains the circumstances under which King returned to Morgana:

"Virgie, I spent all Mama and Papa had tracing after him. The Jupiter Detective Agency in Jackson. I never told. They never found or went after the right one. But I'll never forgive myself for tracing after him" (GA, 229).

It is sadly ironical that Snowdie MacLain, a lovely, gracious lady with a great capacity for loving, has wasted her life longing for the return of a man who, she discovers only too late, she was better off without. But she is a mother-woman to the last and, having reared her sons the best way she can, now devotes the rest of her life to the care of the man with whom she entered into a conjugal relationship many years before. Snowdie has indeed proven herself a "ministering angel" not only to her family but also to the whole community. She is the epitome of Christian gentlewomanliness in Miss Welty's stories: yet she has maintained her own quiet identity without effacing herself unnaturally. While King has
sought "privacy by direct escape from community involvement," Carol Porter Smith observes, Snowdie has kept her own privacy and self-identity by remaining within the community, but "cutting off unnecessary community incursions into her life." She refuses to participate in the community discussion of the breakup of the marriage of her grown son, Ran, and simply offers him a home with her when his wife leaves him. Similarly, when her other grown son, Eugene, leaves his wife and returns from California to die from tuberculosis, she takes him in and nurses him until his death.

To Alfred Appel, King MacLain, "the most fulfilled of the wanderers" in The Golden Apples, is "also the least complicated." Unlike his wife, "he possesses no moral or rational intelligence; he gets older, but he does not develop or change." Snowdie "is one of a group of characters" in the book "who serve as foils to the rebellious, searching wanderers." Snowdie, like Cassie Morrison in "June Recital," is a "passive, protective, adoring, and sympathetic spectator...", stable, retiring, unmysterious...", to whom the "wanderers return." Snowdie is "sensitive and perceptive," and her "powers of insight

develop quietly." Although she realizes, as she tells Virgie Rainey in "The Wanderers," that she has erred in "tracing after" King and then having to care for him in his doddering old age, she accepts her duty quietly and with dignity. To family and friends alike her life's work has been as "a ministering angel," Kate Chopin's epithet for the mother-women who faithfully accept their lot in life. Those who know and have loved and been loved by Snowdie MacLain could well salute her with the words of the angel to Mary: "The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." 

"A Worn Path"

Old Phoenix in "A Worn Path" is Eudora Welty's most poignant short-story depiction of a Negro mother-woman. Delilah in "The Burning" is another Negro mother-woman. She is probably the mother of the child Phinny who perishes in the burning plantation, but her role in the story is secondary to that of the white spinster sisters. In "A Worn Path" Phoenix is the only character drawn in detail; the story is truly hers since all the events are seen from her angle of vision. Her significance as a powerful mother-woman is not made evident until the latter

104 Appel, Season of Dreams, p. 217.
part of the story when the reader learns that the reason for her long and strenuous journey by foot from her rural cabin into Natchez is a true "visit of charity," to be contrasted with Marian's selfish mission in "A Visit of Charity." A frail and ancient woman, she exhibits true selflessness in her love of her young grandson who has some years before drunk lye and now must have medicine periodically to soothe the pain of his burned throat and, very probably, to keep him alive. Through the love, strength, and endurance revealed in her sacrifice of herself (she meets many obstacles along the way that could have killed an elderly woman), she is reminiscent of Dilsey in Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury*. Dilsey and Phoenix are prime examples of people who "not merely endure" but "prevail." 106 But Miss Welty has in no way imitated Faulkner in her depiction of the Negro. She has ample opportunity, as she explains in the foreward to her collection of photographs, *One Time, One Place*, 107 to observe rural Mississippi Negroes (and whites) in her work as writer-photographer for the WPA during the Depression. Although she is an educated Southern white woman,


she knows her subject well, as John Edward Hardy has observed:

But precisely what is remarkable about her treatment of Negroes...is [an] unforced recognition of their essential humanity. As clearly as any other white American author, including among the others Twain and Faulkner, she has penetrated the cliches of social stereotype in the creation of her Negro characters. She is intensely aware of the cliches, and often deliberately sets them up as a foil to the final intuitive recognition of the human person. And she has a finely discriminating eye and ear for the characteristics of speech and manner that set the Negro apart from the white—an at least entirely plausible sense of what constitutes Negroness even in thought processes...The final authenticity of the characters is in their carefully delineated, human individuality, not in their...complex typicality, while at the same time they remain distinctly Negro.108

"Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" and "Powerhouse" may be listed as examples of stories in which Miss Welty has dealt well with Negro men and their "essential humanity."

But in her studies of Negro women—"The Burning," "Livvie," and "A Worn Path"—, Alfred Appel believes, "Miss Welty has shown a special sympathy and respect for the Southern Negro woman and...like writers as various as Faulkner and James Baldwin, she seems to feel that the Negro's endurance in the South has had much to do

with the strength of the Negro woman." To Appel, "A Worn Path" is to be seen particularly as "an effort at telescoping the history of the Negro woman.\textsuperscript{109}

It is, however, not the role of the Negro woman per se that is to be emphasized here but rather her role as a Negro mother-woman. As such, she shares universal qualities with all mother-women and these qualities will also be treated in this study. But Phoenix's race makes her a particular kind of mother-woman, just as Mrs. Serto's Italian background surely affects her qualities as a mother-woman in "Going to Naples."

The reader learns that only Phoenix and her grandson remain of what may once have been a large family: "We is the only two left in the world," Phoenix says (CG, 288). One may perhaps assume that her qualities of strength and courage stem at least in part from the "matricentric" family structure found among the poorer Negro families, particularly in the South. Phoenix, who says she "was too old at the Surrender to go to school" (CG, 287), is surely a product of the old "matricentric" family structure. A widely-used sociology textbook defines the "matricentric" Negro family in this way:

\textsuperscript{109}Season of Dreams, p. 166.
Historically the Negro family of the United States has been matricentric. Under slavery the mother remained the important figure in the family. The affectional relations of mother and child developed deep and permanent attachments. If the father was a member of the family group, his relationship was often casual and easily broken. The slave mother and her younger children were treated as a group. The wife, relatively free and independent from her husband, developed a keen sense of personal rights... This importance of the mother's role in the family during slavery in part accounts for the dominant position of the mother and the presence of the matricentric family form in lower-class and some middle-class families today.  

Several points in this quotation are important in relationship to Phoenix's role as a mother-woman in "A Worn Path." First, the "affectional relation" of grandmother and child is "deep and permanent." She cannot imagine a life without her grandson; hence the grandmother (really the mother figure in this story) and the grandson form a strong family unit or "group." Finally, the grandmother has formed not so much a "keen sense of personal rights," like the slave-mother, but a keen sense of personal responsibility. To Zelma Turner Howard, Phoenix's sense of personal responsibility results in a "gigantic act of love" which "prolongs the life of her grandson." Furthermore, Phoenix is "Miss Welty's version of primitive, unencumbered humanity which is now almost non-existent. Phoenix's love for her
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110 Burgess, et al., The Family, from Traditional to Companionship, p. 123.
Phoenix's "gigantic act of love" indeed qualifies her to be called one of Kate Chopin's mother-women. To Miss Chopin, these women "flutter...about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imagined, threaten[s] their precious brood." A particularly striking parallel between Miss Chopin's definition and Phoenix is, of course, that the Old Negro woman bears the name of the bird that figures in the ancient Egyptian myth. According to Dan Donlan, the phoenix "retains immortality by restoring itself every five hundred years by setting fire to its nest and immolating itself by fanning the fire with its wings. From the ashes a new phoenix arises." Patterns of imagery in "A Worn Path" support interpretations of Miss Welty's Phoenix as a symbolic variation of the Egyptian sun god. Several studies have been made of the story's Phoenix symbol, and the present analysis, 

111 Rhetoric of Eudora Welty's Short Stories, p. 72. Miss Howard's comment is especially interesting since she is a Negro, a native of Mississippi, and a professor of English at Mississippi Valley State College (biographical information on the book's back cover).


113 In addition to the essay by Donlan, the following studies analyze the mythical aspects of Phoenix in "A Worn Path": William M. Jones, "Welty's 'A Worn Path,'"
although it will make reference to the mythical overtones in the story, will not treat these in detail. It should be sufficient to state that Phoenix in "A Worn Path" represents the life-force which triumphs over travail in order to ensure the possibility of life; Phoenix's will to live, defiance of death, and life in nature in which she uses the course of the sun to measure time all make her name pregnant with meaning. One is inclined to agree with Appel that the name of Phoenix serves mainly "as a symbol of the immortality of the Negro's spirit of endurance," and, one might add, of the Negro mother-woman's "spirit of endurance."

Unlike Kate Chopin's mother-women, Phoenix does not "flutter" as she is aware of the very real harm that faces her ill grandson. Her "protecting wings" are indeed "extended" as she sets out boldly on her ritual journey to seek the medicine that will save his life. Several times she is described as bird-like; but the most distinctive phrase suggesting her importance as a protective mother-bird occurs when she thinks of the need to buy her grandson a Christmas gift (a tribute of love): She lifts

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114 Season of Dreams, p. 166.
up a hunter's accidentally-dropped coin "with the grace and care they would have in lifting an egg from under a setting hen" (CG, 283). As she sets out on her December journey, she carries a thin cane with which she taps the frozen earth to frighten away any animals or insects that will get in her way. Her tapping "makes a grave and persistent noise in the still air, that seems meditative like the chirping of a solitary little bird" (CG, 275). Phoenix meditates on the meaning of her journey: to save a loved one's life. She thinks of her grandson as a small bird which she must protect. When she finally arrives at the doctor's office in Natchez to get the "charity" medicine, she describes her grandson in this way:

"My little grandson, he sit up there in the house all wrapped up, waiting by himself . . . . We is the only two left in the world. He suffer and it don't seem to put him back at all. He got a sweet look. He going to last. He wear a little patch quilt and peep out holding his mouth open like a little bird. I remember so plain now. I am not going to forget him. . . . no, the whole enduring time. I could tell him from all the others in creation" (CG, 288).

Her "little bird" of a grandson, with his parched throat causing him to hold his "mouth open like a little bird," is the last child in the aged Phoenix's nest, and he

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115 One is reminded of Anne Bradstreet's affecting poem, "In Reference to Her Children," in which the children's leaving home is compared with young birds'
is dearer to her than "all the others in creation." This need, to help restore, soothe the pain, and continue life in one so dear to her, is the deep source of Phoenix's hanging on to life, although she is so old that "she walk[s] slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock" (CG, 275). The rhythms of her walk are like those of time itself, which she, in her venerableness, seems to represent so graphically. In addition to her aged walk, she has other physical characteristics which suggest both her antiquity and her timelessness:

Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor of copper (CG, 276).

Passing a spring on a journey, she drinks from its waters, thinking, "Nobody know who made this well, for it was here when I was born" (CG, 280).

Phoenix's mission of mercy makes her fearless in the woods. In fact, the unity she feels with the things around her are indicative, Miss Manz-Kunz says, of her leaving a nest. However, Phoenix's grandson will probably never leave her "nest" for the reader learns that the boy's "throat never heals" (CG, 287).
"complete unison with the beat of the universe." Phoenix has "become part of the universal motion without impairing [her] own rhythm." She believes "in life" because she "can trust it" and is "on intimate terms with it." Moreover, the rhythm of the universe pulsates" through her body as she advances "confidently and steadily along the path of [her] destiny." She has learned "to regard and respect the existence and appointment of every object [she] encounter[s] and accept[s] it with tolerance and humility."116

Although Miss Manz-Kunz does not make the comparison, one is inclined to associate Phoenix's identification with nature with that of Ike in "The Bear" after Sam Fathers has him initiated into the mysteries of the wilderness. And like the aging Ike in "Delta Autumn," Phoenix is almost singular in her love of, and respect for, all forms of life--animals and human. (Later she meets a white hunter who has little respect for life.) She calls out to all the animals of the forest to get out of her way and not to impede her quest:

"Out of my way, all you foxes, owls, beetles, jack rabbits, coons and wild animals! . . . Keep out from under these feet, little bob-whites. . . . Keep the big wild hogs out of my path. Don't let none of those come running my direction. I got a long way. Under her small black-freckled hand her cane, limber

116 Eudora Welty, Aspects of Reality, p. 35.
as a buggy-whip, would switch at the brush as if to rouse up any hiding things (CG, 276).

She accepts the animals in the forest as natural denizens. However, she is aware that the purposes of the natural world and of man's world do not always coincide. She accepts as natural "trial[s]" (CG, 277) such things as having to crawl under a barbed-wire fence, crossing a bayou on a narrow log-bridge, braving the presence of an alligator blowing bubbles, and having briars catch at her dress, thorns which she addresses as "doing" their "appointed work. Never want to let folks pass, no sir" (CG, 277). Climbing up a hill through pine trees, she is aware of having to walk down through oak trees. She is familiar with every aspect of the landscape through which she must go on "the worn path" to perform her "visit of charity."

As additional proof of Phoenix's unity with her world which Miss Manz-Kunz has recognized but has offered no examples to illustrate, one can point out the passage in which Phoenix passes by a group of boarded-up cabins, homes no longer sites of the love, warmth, and security which her own still offers to her little bird-like grandson:

She followed the track, swaying through the quiet bare fields, through the little strings of trees silver from weather, with the doors and windows boarded shut, all like
old women under a spell sitting there. "I walking in their sleep," she said, nodding her head vigorously (CG, 280).

Although she is aware of her departed friends, once occupants of the now deserted cabins, Phoenix is not ready for death; in fact, she defies it: Approaching some "big dead trees, like black men with one arm, . . . standing in the purple stalks of the withered cotton field," she sees a buzzard (CG, 278), harbinger of death. "Who you watching?" she asks courageously. Temporarily mistaking a scarecrow for a ghost, she says "sharply": "Ghost, who be you the ghost of? For I have heard of nary death close by" (CG, 279).

The examination of even these few passages from the story should clarify statements made by Appel concerning the use of myth in "A Worn Path":

Miss Welty avoids confusing the folk with the folksy--of parodying her material. She seems to have discovered that the important relationship of formal art to folk art rests in the archetypes of primitive ritual, in the great world myths, rather than in reproductions of the "picturesque" surface texture of folk-life. In "A Worn Path," these great myths are embedded within the folk context. Phoenix's journey is thus rendered as a minor-scale Odyssey. In the frozen, forbidding back-country of the Natchez Trace, Phoenix is faced with at least twelve obstacles which require a heroic exertion to surmount.117

Some of these obstacles (the foot bridge, the wire fence, the climbing of the hill, the thorny bush, the buzzard)

117 Season of Dreams, p. 167.
have already been mentioned. In addition, she does not wish to encounter a snake (CG, 278-279), an ancient symbol of evil and death which she is careful to avoid in her maternal quest to restore life.

Clearly, John Edward Hardy asserts, Phoenix is unconsciously aware of the pulsations of the life-force in nature (pulsations, one might add, that white women, e.g., Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green" and Delia Farrar in "A Sketching Trip," must learn for themselves):

In "A Worn Path," old Phoenix is on intimate speaking terms with the trees, the earth, the sky, the birds and beasts of the forest. The story [indeed] takes on the tone of myth. But the habit of mythologizing the lives of Negroes, as Miss Welty is keenly aware, is one of the best established and most effective methods that the white man has devised for denying them full status in the cultural community. It is I think deliberately, therefore, that she risks here and there letting the "mythiness" degenerate into mere quaintness, tempting us to a view of the old Negress as one of a race apart, about whom we are obliged to feel no more than a certain condescending curiosity—and then, at the very end of the story, suddenly puts matters in quite a different light. 118

The full significance of "A Worn Path" indeed comes clear only toward the end in two important incidents involving white persons.

The first of these incidents involves a white hunter who finds Phoenix after she has been chased by a dog and falls into a ditch from which she cannot rescue herself.

He condescendingly helps her and asks "Granny" where she lives. She answers, "Away back yonder, sir, behind the ridge. You can't even see it from here." Phoenix has obviously come far from home. The white hunter questions her, "On your way home?" (CG, 281) Very possibly he feels that home is the place an aged woman, especially an aged black woman belongs. However, she tells him she is going to town. He is not prepared to accept "the keen sense of personal rights" (and responsibilities) which Burgess, Locke, and Thomas report that the rural Negro wife-mother has often felt since slavery days.\(^{119}\) The hunter advises Phoenix that she has come too far and that she has no serious business to perform in "town" and so far away from home:

"Why, that's too far! That's as far as I walk when I come out myself, and I get something for my trouble." He patted the stuffed bag he carried, and there hung down a little closed claw. It was one of the bob-whites, with its beak hooked bitterly to show it was dead. "Now you go on home, Granny!"

"I bound to go to town, mister," said Phoenix. "The time come around."

He gave another laugh, filling the whole landscape. "I know you old colored people! Wouldn't miss going to town to see Santa Claus!" (CG, 282)

Phoenix, knowing "the time [has] come around" for her mission to restore life, contrasts sharply with the white hunter, whose mission in the woods has been to take life.

\(^{119}\) The Family, p. 123.
In his self-centered confidence and feeling of superiority, he sees Phoenix's mission as the frivolous, childish act of going to town to see Santa Claus! Ironically, it is not a childish visit to the artificial agent of gift-bringing (Santa Claus) that Phoenix pursues, but an adult "mission" that will bring the greatest of gifts: life. Furthermore, his own sense of charity, of love, is itself small and niggardly. He says that he would give the old woman a dime if he had any money with him; then he accidentally drops a nickel in the grass, which Phoenix picks up secretly and guiltily, probably with the idea of buying her grandson a Christmas gift in Natchez.

Arriving "in the paved city" of Natchez, Phoenix becomes aware of the mercantile symbols of Christmas in the streets:

There were red and green electric lights strung and criss-crossed everywhere, and all turned on in the day-time. Old Phoenix would have been lost if she had not distrusted her eyesight and depended on her feet to know where to take her (CG, 284).

Phoenix, attuned to the natural rhythms of life in the fields and woods, loses her powerful sense of intuition in the artificial and mechanical rhythms of the city. The visibly gaudy, mercenary signs of the celebration of advent (the Christmas lights) contrast significantly with the true gift of love and sacrifice in the heart of the primitive old Phoenix. She encounters one true act of
charity in the gaily-decorated city: a wealthy, scented woman puts down her armload of gifts at Phoenix's request in order to tie her shoes for her. Only with difficulty can the aged Phoenix bend over. This true and selfless act of charity is not to be interpreted as Phoenix's exploiting the lady's Southern noblesse oblige in order to humiliate her or punish her for her pride. The wealthy woman recognizes Phoenix's need and responds immediately and unquestioningly just as Phoenix responds immediately and unquestioningly to the need of her grandson.

At the doctor's office, however, Phoenix again encounters a condescending and falsely charitable attitude, a repetition of that which the white hunter demonstrated. Neither the attendant, who does not know Phoenix, nor the nurse, who recognizes her as the old woman who comes every few months for "free" medicine, is able to perceive the "essential humanity" of Phoenix nor the love in her heart that has brought her on an arduous journey. The nurse asks mechanically, "Now how is the boy...Is his throat any better?...Is your grandson's throat any better since the last time you came for the medicine?" Momentarily the aged Phoenix cannot collect her thoughts sufficiently to answer

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120 This is the interpretation of Hardy in "Eudora Welty's Negroes," pp. 228-229.
coherently. The nurse addresses her sharply: "You
mustn't take up our time this way, Aunt Phoenix. . . .
Tell us quickly about your grandson, and get it over. He
isn't dead, is he?" (CG, 286-287) The reader strongly
suspects that the nurse does not really care whether or
not the boy is dead.

Phoenix has first approached the doctor's office in
a "fixed and ceremonial stiffness," indicating that she
must act the part of a charity recipient. Later, when
she has difficulty recollecting her thoughts in the nurse's
presence, Phoenix seems "like an old woman begging a dig-
nified forgiveness for waking up frightened in the night."
She answers that the boy is "not dead, he just the same.
Every little while his throat begin to close up again, and
he not able to swallow. He not get his breath. He not
able to help himself. So the time come around, and I go
on another trip for the soothing medicine" (CG, 287).
Phoenix is reminded that she can get the medicine "for this
obstinate case" only as long as she able to make the trip
along "the worn path" to get it.

As she gives Phoenix the medicine, the nurse says
coldly, "'Charity,'. . . making a check mark in a book."
Then the attendant gives Phoenix five pennies because
"[i] t's Christmas, Grandma" (CG, 288). The old woman
compares the nickel which she found when the hunter dropped
it with the five pennies just given her.
Then she gave a tap with her cane on the floor. "This is what come to me to do," she said. "I going to the store and buy my child a little windmill they sells, made out of paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world. I'll march myself back where he waiting, holding it straight up in this hand."

She lifted her free hand, gave a little nod, turned around, and walked out of the doctor's office. Then her slow step began on the stairs, going down (CG, 289).

From the cold "charity" of white Natchez Phoenix will tread "the worn path" once more to her home of warmth, love, and security where, to Anne Masserand, she will "bring back medicine (life) and toys (joy) to her grand-
son. . . . "121

Ironically, it is with the small gifts of "charity" from two "uncharitable" people that the selfless Phoenix will buy her beloved grandson a little papermill for Christmas. Confident that "he going to last," like her, Phoenix returns to her only descendant; she is an undaunted and still dignified mother-woman. Between the grandmother and grandson, Saralyn Daly observes, "ranges the gamut of humanity, those who act and those who endure."122 Phoenix returns to this child who is part of herself, treading a path, Sara Trefman says, "not worn merely because the


central character has undergone the trip before. Rather, it is worn because this is the symbolic journey made by all who are capable of self-sacrifice, of whom Christ is the archetype." 123

In Phoenix the mother-instinct is sure and strong, despite her advanced years. Her concept of home and family is bound up inextricably, no doubt, in her racial consciousness of the place and importance of matricentric responsibility. She is truly a striking example of Kate Chopin’s mother-woman as "ministering angel," but she is not a self-effacing woman because of her maternal instinct. Her individuality and authenticity as a human being are exemplified in her sense of oneness with nature and in the simple dignity she exhibits as a result of her years spent unconsciously as a tender exemplar of the philoprogenitive.

This primitive Phoenix-figure has gained her strength and endurance in great part through a natural and unconscious achievement of Fromm’s productive orientation, which provides "a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience." 124 She is an alive and productive

123 "Welty’s 'A Worn Path,'" Explicator, item 56.

woman, even in old age, because she has learned the fundamental lesson that love is self-giving: "She doesn't come for herself" (CG, 286), the nurse says to the attendant in the doctor's office where Phoenix has come for the medicine. Phoenix is in tune with the world and its natural rhythms because, in Fromm's philosophy, she has learned "to love productively, to love without greed, without submission and domination, to love from the fullness of [her] personality." Life is a celebration to her, not because she is ignorantly blissful or self-deceived, but because she is filled with the love associated with "pure motherhood" (BI, 169). If Phoenix were able to articulate her own ability to love, she might describe it, like Fromm, as the highest expression of human potency:

In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence, as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness. Phoenix is given life through the transforming act of love which frees her from any taint of selfishness. "She is a


saint," Hardy maintains, "one of those who walks always in the eye of God, on whom He has set His sign, whether ordinary men are prepared to see it or not. . . . [S] he has done nothing for herself, for her own advantage, either psychological or material." Moreover, "sanctity is never self-regarding," and Phoenix "must see herself as a sinner." The theft of the hunter's nickel is "Phoenix's private remorse: 'God watching me the whole time. I come to stealing.'"127 Thus nowhere does Phoenix regard herself as a saint, or even as a particularly good woman. Yet Phoenix is at once a very humane and very human person and mother-woman.

Finally, Miss Welty's achievement in "A Worn Path" is a sensitive but not sentimentalized portrait of an enduring and prevailing Negro mother-woman who is worthy of comparison with three other powerful portraits of Negro mother-women in modern American literature: the grandmother in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, the ancient ex-slave in Ernest J. Gaines' The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, and Dilsey in Faulkner's Sound and the Fury.

Anti-Mother-Women

"Petrified Man"

If Eudora Welty's stories of mother-women point up in varying ways the positive values she thinks should exist between men and women in marriage, then "Petrified Man" is a chilling account of the narrative values that petrify men and women and stultify meaningful relationships between them. Like "Why I Live at the P.O.," Frederick J. Hoffman maintains, "'Petrified Man' is...a classic of folk humor and vulgarity."\(^{128}\) To Merrill Maguire Skaggs, "'Petrified Man' is surely one of the most humorous pieces of recent literature, simultaneously suggesting the frivolity of women and plight of the males they symbolically emasculate—or petrify into stone. It is, of course, a serious story, but its theme is propelled by wickedly satiric humor."\(^{129}\) Richard Rupp believes that in "Petrified Man" there is "a comic tension between point of view and the author's values."\(^{130}\) Katherine Anne Porter has further explained Miss Welty's method in this story:

\(^{128}\) Art of Southern Fiction, p. 56.


\(^{130}\) Celebration in Postwar American Fiction, p. 75.
"Petrified Man" offers a fine clinical study of vulgarity—vulgarity absolute, chemically pure, exposed mercilessly to its final subhuman depths. Miss Welty has simply an eye and an ear sharp, shrewd, and true as a tuning fork. She has given to this little story all her wit and observation, her blistering humor and her just cruelty; for she has none of that slack tolerance or sentimental tenderness toward symptomatic evils that amounts to criminal collusion between author or character. Her use of this material raises the quite awfully sordid little tale to a level above its natural habitat, and its realism seems almost to have the quality of caricature, as complete realism so often does. Yet, as painters of the grotesque make only detailed reports of actual living types observed more keenly than the average eye is capable of observing, so Miss Welty's little human monsters are not really caricatures at all, but individuals exactly and clearly presented.

Ruth Vande Kieft agrees with Miss Porter that "Petrified Man" is "a chilled, appalled recognition of abysmal vulgarity" presented through the "scathing, annihilating laughter of satire." Miss Vande Kieft finds "no close parallel" between "Petrified Man" and Miss Welty's other stories, which, instead of "caustic laughter," reveal "tolerance and affection."

"Petrified Man" takes place in the temple of narcissism and vanity that American women have built—the beauty parlor. The story is a collection of what Hoffman has

131 "Introduction" in A Curtain of Green, pp. xx-xxi.

132 Eudora Welty, p. 72.
called "conversational gems" between a group of women, principally Leota, the owner of the beauty shop, and Mrs. Fletcher, one of her regular customers. Their language is filled with chiches, slang, solecisms, non-sequiturs, and crude double entendres. Their talk is chiefly of being "beautified," sex, pregnancy, marriage, and money. As Lee J. Richmond has pointed out, "from a place which women visit to beautify themselves, the beauty shop is transformed by Miss Welty into a place where the ugliest features of these women's inner selves are revealed." It is doubly ironical that when the women look into the mirror, as they frequently do, they cannot see themselves for what they are: monsters. The incongruity—between what the women think they see and what they really are—is, of course, the classic approach of satire. And the biting and bitter quality of "Petrified Man" indeed is reminiscent of the Juvenalian satire of Swift. Nowhere in "this pitiless indictment...of the venal spirit of modern civilization" is there any of the lovely lyricism one has come to expect in the stories

133 Art of Southern Fiction, p. 56.

134 "Symbol and Theme in Eudora Welty's 'Petrified Man,'" College English, 60 (December 1971), 1201.

135 Ibid.
of Eudora Welty. The author is surely indignant about the twisted relationships she finds in a certain stratum of American life. Like Swift in "A Modest Proposal," she employs a persona (here personas) through which she presents her scathing criticisms. Her personas are employed in a "dramatic" method which allows them to damn themselves with every word they utter. Her method of narration is as objectively free of authorial commentary as Hemingway's, which Miss Welty praises in her essay "The Reading and Writing of Short Stories."

In his infamous attack on "viperism" in American life, Philip Wylie includes what he calls "common women," which takes in the majority of American women who, he feels, have helped weaken the fabric of American life by conspiring to make men less than men. Wylie's Generation of Vipers was first published in 1942, a year after "Petrified Man" appeared in The Atlantic. Although no direct influence by Miss Welty on Wylie's view of women can be proven, there are certain strong parallels between his depiction of women and that of Miss Welty in "Petrified Man." If nothing else, the women he characterizes and those Miss Welty presents can indeed be called "common" in the lowest sense of the word.


137 Generation of Vipers, pp. 184-205.
Announcing, "'Gentlemen, mom is a jerk," Wylie goes on to call her a "great little guy. Pulling pants onto her by these words," he says, "let us look at mom":

She is a middle-aged puffin with an eye like a hawk that has seen a rabbit twitch far below. She is about twenty-five pounds overweight, with no sprint, but sharp heels and a hard backhand which she does not regard as a foul but womanly defense. In a thousand of her there is not sex appeal enough to budge a hermit ten paces off a rock ledge. She none the less spends several hundred dollars a year on permanents and transformations, pomades, cleansers, rouges, lipsticks, and the like—and fools nobody except herself. If a man kisses her with any earnestness, it is time for mom to feel for her pocketbook, and this occasionally does happen.138

To Wylie, "mom" is a compulsive smoker and drinker:

She smokes thirty cigarettes a day, chews gum, and consumes tons of bonbons and petits fours. ... She drinks moderately, which is to say, two or three cocktails before dinner every night and a brandy and a couple of highballs afterward. ... 139

Moreover, Wylie maintains that "mom" has an empty mind and is curious only about "other people's business":

She was graduated from high school... in her distant past and made up for the unhappiness of compulsory education by sloughing all that she learned so completely that she could not pass the final examinations of a fifth grader. She reads the fiction in three women's magazines each month and occasionally skims through an article... . She reads two or three motion-picture magazines also.

138 Ibid., p. 191.

139 Ibid.
As an interesting sidelight, clubs afford mom an infinite opportunity for nosing into other people's business. Nosing is not a mere psychological ornament of her; it is a basic necessity. Only by nosing can she uncover all incipient revolutions against her dominion and so warn and assemble her co-cannibals.

[She knows] nothing about medicine, religion, law, sanitation, civics, poetry, literature, or any other topic except the all-consuming one of momism. . . .

One must, of course, make allowances for Wylie's hyperbole in his vituperative sketch of women as he found them in 1942 and in 1955 when he updated the book. However, several of the details which characterize women in Wylie's sketch parallel those of women in Eudora Welty's beauty shop. Together, Wylie and Miss Welty emphasize what Ruth Vande Kieft has called "woman's inhumanity to man." That Wylie and Miss Welty both saw certain tendencies in American women contributing to the "petrification" of both men and women further increases the force of Miss Welty's satire; by comparison with Wylie's generalized characterization, Miss Welty's is seen to be sharper and deeper because, as Miss Porter has observed, "Miss Welty's little human monsters are. . . .individuals exactly and clearly presented." What emerges from the pages of "Petrified Man" is a record of negative attitudes toward marriage,

\[140\] Ibid., pp. 192,193.

\[141\] Eudora Welty, p. 72.
childbirth, and family that make Mrs. Fletcher, Leota, and Mrs. Pike—the three principal characters in the story—startling examples of anti-mother-women.

First of all, the artificial world of Leota's beauty shop is portrayed in the details about cosmetics and hair-styling. Mrs. Fletcher is hidden in "this den of curling fluid and henna packs" (CG, 32). Leota presses her "strong red-nailed fingers into Mrs. Fletcher's scalp." Mrs. Pike is described as "a very decided blonde." As Leota combs "Mrs. Fletcher's hennaed hair," strands of it "float. . . out of the lavender teeth [of the comb] like a small storm-cloud" (CG, 33). Leota tells Mrs. Fletcher that her hair is "commencin' to fall out." The latter asks, "'Is it any dandruff in it?" As Mrs. Fletcher questions Leota, "her hair-line eyebrows [dive] down toward her nose, and her wrinkled, beady-lashed eyelids bat. . .with concentration." "'Bet it was that last perm'nent you g. . . me that did it,' Mrs. Fletcher [says] cruelly. 'Remember you cooked me fourteen minutes'" (CG, 33-34). Just these few grimly comical details chosen from the first few pages of the story support Wylie's assertion that certain "common" women consider cosmetics and beauty treatments as sources of beauty—"and fool. . .nobody except [themselves]." As for sex appeal, Miss Welty's Medusa-like women lose their femininity instead of heightening it as they attempt to transform nature through art—of the most mechanical kind.
While she is giving Mrs. Fletcher her set-and-shampoo "treatment," Leota puffs on a cigarette, which "she flick[s] into the basket of dirty towels" (CG, 33). There are also piles of curling papers on the floor. Wylie's portrait of "mom" also involves heavy smoking and lack of knowledge of "sanitation," which Leota and other women demonstrate often throughout the story. When another beautician, Thelma, enters Leota's booth to answer a question, she takes "a drag from Leota's cigarette" (CG, 35). The word drag has a markedly unpleasing (and even masculine) connotation, especially since it describes a woman's act of smoking a cigarette.

While Sonny's wife, Marjorie, and Hazel all accept their pregnancies as joyful experiences that complete their womanhood, the women in "Petrified Man" all regard having a child as a curse and a conspiracy by men to destroy the women's figures and make them ugly. As Richmond has observed, to these women "[t]he beautiful miracle of childbearing is an odious sacrifice." While Sonny's wife, Marjorie, and Hazel are depicted as experiencing a pleasing "fullness" during pregnancy, Mrs. Fletcher does not like the way she looks in the mirror and wishes to

142 "Symbol and Theme... in 'Petrified Man,'" p. 1202.
disguise her pregnancy. Worse yet, she considers having an abortion. If anyone has had doubts about the modernity of Eudora Welty's characterization of women, he should doubt no longer after reading "Petrified Man" in which unwanted pregnancy and abortion are common topics.

Moreover, as Wylie points out, clubs sometimes provide women with the opportunity to practice "nosing into other people's business," and Leota's beauty shop is certainly the weekly gathering place of a "club" of ladies whose sole delight is catching up on the latest gossip. The unofficial president of Miss Welty's "club" in "Petrified Man" is, of course, Leota. Here is a salacious bit of conversation she has with Mrs. Fletcher:

"Well,...you know what I heard in here yestiddy, one of Thelma's ladies was settin' over yonder in Thelma's booth gittin' a machineless, and I don't mean to insist or insinuate or anything, Mrs. Fletcher, but Thelma's lady just happ'med to throw out--I forgotten what she was talkin' about at the time--that you was p-r-e-g., and lots of times that'll make your hair do awful funny, fall out and God knows what all. It just ain't our fault, is the way I look at it" (CG, 34).

A joyful occasion for Sonny's wife, Marjorie, and Hazel, pregnancy repels Mrs. Fletcher, who is irrationally angry that anyone would guess her secret: "Why, I just barely knew it myself!" she cries (CG, 36). She vows revenge on the person who "told."
As it turns out, Mrs. Pike, the new "roomer" at Leota's house, is the guilty person. Like Leota's husband, Mr. Pike is unemployed, and Mrs. Pike has taken a job in a hat shop while Leota minds her roomer's three-year-old boy, Billy, in the beauty shop. During part one of the story, Mrs. Pike and Leota are the best of friends; thus Leota says she does not mind Billy's "hangin' around" the beauty shop where "he couldn't hurt a thing." Mrs. Fletcher, however, says flatly, "Well! I don't like children that much. . . . I'm almost tempted not to have this one" (CG, 36-37). Even though she is childless, Mrs. Fletcher obviously considers having a child to be the depletion—rather than completion—of her womanhood. Leota, who feels that men want their wives to have babies so that the husbands' virility will be visibly demonstrated, comments on Mrs. Fletcher's threat of abortion: "Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn't have it now" (CG, 37).

The "companionship" type of marriage and family defined by Burgess, Locke, and Thomas as the contemporary "norm" or standard\(^\text{143}\) certainly does not exist in the homes of any of the three women depicted in "Petrified Man." Their marriages are strictly matriarchal. As Burgess, Locke, and Thomas have reported, "In the United States

\(^{143}\)The Family, p. 9.
there is an occasional...family group dominated by a
matriarch. More often in our society there is the small-
family group controlled by the wife. The ridicule implicit
in the phrases 'the henpecked husband' and 'the wife wears
the pants' suggests that this matriarchal role is not
socially sanctioned but arises in personal interaction."¹⁴⁴
Both of the common phrases employed in this quotation
definitely apply to the marriages of the women in Leota's
circle. To Leota's remark that Mr. Fletcher would "beat
[her] on the head" if she does not have his child, Mrs.
Fletcher screams, sitting "up straight" (a posture of
defiance), "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me." At
this statement, Leota replies (enjoying her crude sexual
joke), "He can't[?]") At the same time she winks at her-
self in the mirror. Mrs. Fletcher is slightly more naive
than Leota, however, and does not understand Leota's
facetious remark:

"No, seree, he can't. If he so much as
raises his voice against me, he knows good
and well I'll have one of my sick headaches,
and then I'm just not fit to live with..."
(CC, 37).

Miss Welty seems to be suggesting that Mrs. Fletcher finds
it convenient—as a means of controlling her husband—to
pretend to be ill, even to pretend that she is ill with
"woman's misery." Leota, dispensing free advice on

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 21.
domestic problems as she performs her beauty ritual (whose artificiality, incidentally, reminds one of Miss Baby Marie, the cosmetics saleswoman in "Livvie"), suggests that Mrs. Fletcher accept her pregnancy and try to hide it as long as she can. "You just get you one of those Stork-a-Lure dresses and stop worryin'" (CG, 37).

Finally Leota volunteers the information that it is her friend Mrs. Pike, whom the reader hears about but never sees, that has discovered Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy. While Mr. Pike and Fred, Leota's husband, were on a fishing expedition, which one critic interprets as the men's having an assignation with women more desirable than their own shrewish wives, Mrs. Pike and Leota were spending the Sabbath drinking beer and driving aimlessly around town in the Pike's 1939 Dodge. Mrs. Pike, whose name has been interpreted as meaning a sharp-nosed fish, a spear, and a variant of "peek" ("pike": to be nosy), is


146 Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 74.


148 Donald A. Ringe, "Welty's 'Petrified Man,'" Explicator, 18 (February 1960), item 32. "Pike" as a pronunciation of "peek" is a New Orleans dialectalism, Ringe says, and Mrs. Pike is from New Orleans.
certainly an embodiment of the practice of "nosing into other people's business" that Wylie lists in his sketch of "mom as jerk."

Mrs. Fletcher notes Mrs. Pike's "sharp eyes," and Leota remarks how "very observant" she is. According to Leota, Mr. Pike noted Mrs. Fletcher's expectant condition as the latter woman ran into the drugstore, "leavin' I reckon Mr. Fletcher in the car." Mrs. Pike's observation was: "I bet you another Jax that lady's three months on the way" (CG, 38-39).

Miss Welty has her women (c. 1939) drink (although, unlike Wylie's women, they are not drunkards), smoke (but not quite "thirty cigarettes a day"), and talk openly and coarsely about sex in order to expose their lack of femininity. Whatever knowledge these women have of sex may indeed be termed perverse. Leota particularly has been impressed by the freaks in the "travelin' freak show" which came to town "yestiddy" (CG, 39). Her grotesque attitude toward childbirth is revealed in her lengthy description of some Siamese twins she has seen. She remarks to Mrs. Fletcher: "...Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself... .Well, honey, they got these two twins in a bottle, see? Born joined plumb together--dead a course... ." The reader is inclined to agree with Mrs. Fletcher, who cries "Glah!"
in disapproval (CG, 39-40). Leota attributes the birth of the Siamese twins to the fact that "their parents was first cousins and all that." Such an absurd idea brings an equally absurd response from Leota's listener: "Me and Mr. Fletcher aren't one speck of kin, or he could never of had me." Leota agrees: "'Of course not!... Neither is me and Fred, not that we know of" (CG, 40).

In spite of the fact that these women protest against maternity, their talk is filled with references to sex, particularly to details suggesting the diminution, enfeebling, or even emasculation of men.

"...Well, honey, what Mrs. Pike liked was the pygmies. They've got these pygmies down there, too, and Mrs. Pike was just wild about 'em. You know, the tee-ninie men in the universe? Well, honey, they can rest back on their little bohunkus an' roll around an' you can't hardly tell if they're sittin' or standin'. That'll give you some idea. They're about forty-two years old. Just suppose it was your husband!"

"Well, Mr. Fletcher is five foot nine and one half," said Mrs. Fletcher quickly.

"Fred's five foot ten," said Leota, "but I tell him he's still a shrimp, account of I'm so tall" (CG, 40).

However, the pygmies in the freak show hardly compare with its star attraction, the petrified man. Leota's gullibility is suggested in her believing the story that everything the "petrified man" has eaten since he was nine years old has gone to his joints and turned to stone. "He's turning to stone," Leota exults. "How'd you like to be married to a guy like that? All he can do, he can move
his head just a quarter of an inch. A course he looks just terrible." Pretending not to be interested and to be shocked by such details, Mrs. Fletcher replies, "frostily": "I should think he would... Mr. Fletcher takes bending exercises every night of the world. I make him" (CG, 42).

Obviously, Leota's mind is sex-ridden, just as Mrs. Fletcher's mind is centered on controlling her husband's life, even to making him take exercise. Leota denigrates Fred for his passivity, caused, no doubt, by her own aggressiveness: "All Fred does is lay around the house like a rug. I wouldn't be surprised if he woke up someday and couldn't move" (CG, 42). The spirits of both Fred and Mr. Pike, the reader learns, have been so greatly enfeebled by their domineering wives that they are no longer capable of taking the traditional male responsibility of making a living for their families. Unlike Sonny, they have no pride in being providers, nor do their wives have sufficient confidence in them to motivate them to any higher activity than fishing, "bulling around," or loafing.

Sadly, the women in this story bear out in several ways Wylie's charge that the typical American woman knows "nothing about medicine, religion, law, sanitation, civics, poetry, literature, or any other topic except the all-consuming one of momism..." For Miss Welty's women
astrology and fortune-telling have become substitutes for religion. Both Mrs. Pike and Leota consult "Lady Evangeline," a Negro fortuneteller, for advice in matters of love and money. In addition, their reading is restricted to Screen Secrets and Startling G-Man Tales. Since their own lives lack glamor and meaning, like the women in Wylie's sketch, these women escape into the vulgar fantasy world of pulp magazines and cheap "cosmetic formula" novels. Mrs. Fletcher thinks she is an intellectual because she met her husband in a rental library; on her second trip to the beauty shop she reads a novel with a banal title, Life Is Like That (CG, 46).

Mrs. Fletcher, who is just a little more discriminating than Mrs. Pike and Leota, finds it difficult to believe that Leota has told her new friend all the facts of her private life. However, Mrs. Fletcher's delicacy does not extend to refusing to listen to gossip when Leota offers to divulge some. For example, Leota reports that Mrs. Pike, being from New Orleans where "ever'body... believes ever' thing spooky," was told by a fortuneteller that "she was goin' to go from State to State and meet some grey-headed men, and, sure enough, she says she went on a beautician convention up to Chicago. Mrs. Pike is also a beautician... She says sure enough, there was three men who was a very large part of making her trip what it was, and they all three had grey in their hair and
they went in six states" (CG, 44-45). One may perhaps assume that Mrs. Pike's three businessmen "who [were] a very part of making her trip what it was" found a little extra-marital sexual pleasure in her. Curiously, Mrs. Pike is pleased to have "got Christmas cards from 'em," too! In addition, Leota discloses some vulgar information about her own sex life:

"Honey, me an' Fred, we met in a rumble seat eight months ago and we was practically on what you might call the way to the altar inside of half an hour," said Leota in a guttural voice, and bit a bobby pin open. "Course it don't last. Mrs. Pike says nothin' like that ever lasts" (CG, 45).

Cynical and jaded, Leota cannot believe in the possibility of an enduring romantic love relationship between a man and woman in marriage. What she fails to recognize, Miss Welty intimates, is that without mutual respect, sharing, communication, and concern--exemplified, for example, in the marriage of Sonny and his wife in "Death of a Traveling Salesman"--no couple can achieve an enduring relationship.

The second section of the story takes place a week later in the same setting, Leota's beauty shop. Mrs. Fletcher is increasingly concerned about what her pregnancy is doing to her figure. She is still angry with "a certain party" (CG, 46) for announcing to the town that she is expecting; otherwise she would resort to an abortion.
Leota tries to console Mrs. Fletcher with the story of Mrs. Montjoy, another member of Leota's beauty "club."

"Listen, honey, you're just a virgin compared to Mrs. Montjoy," he come in here not the week before and not the day before she had her baby—she come in here the selfsame day, I mean to tell you. Child, we was all plumb scared to death. There she was! Come for her shampoo an' set. Why, Mrs. Fletcher, in an hour an' twenty minutes she was layin' up there in the Baptist Hospital with a seb'm-pound son. It was that close a shave. I declare, if I hadn't been so tired I would of drank up a bottle of gin that night... (CG, 47).

Even though Leota says she was "scared to death" by Mrs. Montjoy's having her hair done while suffering from labor pains, the reader is aware that the hairdresser has richly enjoyed the experience.

"See, her husband was waitin' outside in the car, and her bags was all packed an' in the back seat, an' she was all ready, 'cept she wanted her shampoo and set. An' havin' one pain right after another. Her husband kep' comin' in here, scared-like, but couldn't do nothin' with her a course. She yelled bloody murder, too, but she always yelled her head off when I give her a perm'nent... .

"Just wanted to look pretty while she was havin' her baby, is all," said Leota airily... "but I bet a hour later she wasn't payin' no mind to them little end curls..." (CG, 47-48).

These passages are significant in several ways in emphasizing some of the chief themes of "Petrified Man." Mrs. Montjoy's vanity is as great as that of the other women who frequent Leota's beauty shop; however, her vanity is pushed to the ultimate point of absurdity when she wishes to look exquisitely coiffed even in labor!
Leota demonstrates her sadism in exulting in Mrs. Montjoy's labor pains. In addition, like the other husbands in the story, Mr. Montjoy is obviously henpecked. His good sense, expressed in his concern for his wife's having a beauty treatment when she should have been in the hospital, does not prevail. Mrs. Fletcher remarks that Mrs. Montjoy's "husband ought to make her behave... He ought to put his foot down."

"Ha," said Leota, "A lot he could do. Maybe some women is soft."

"Oh, you mistake me, I don't mean for her to get soft--far from it! Women have to stand up for themselves, or there's just no telling. But now you take me--I ask Mr. Fletcher's advice now and then, and he appreciates it, especially on something important, like is it time for a permanent--not that I've told him about the baby. He says, 'Why, dear, go ahead!' Just ask their advice" (CG, 48).

The women speak of the conjugal relationship as if it is a sexual battle between enemy camps. With their references to the dangers of women's being soft and needing to "stand up for themselves," these women conduct an argumentum ad absurdum that is mercilessly exposed. Throughout the story Mrs. Fletcher seems to be asking her husband's advice on such "weighty" topics as whether or not it is time for her to get a permanent. But she has not yet told him about their expected child. "Just give men the illusion of having the upper hand," Mrs. Fletcher seems to say. Interestingly, her name has been interpreted as an ancient
kind of arrow, a suggestive image in this battle of the sexes.149

Leota's response to Mrs. Fletcher's suggestion about seeming to seek the advice of her husband, who, in a typical Caspar Milquetoast fashion, will probably acquiesce anyway, whatever the woman's request, shows that she has not understood at all: "Huh! If I ever ask Fred's advice we'd be floatin' down the Yazoo River on a houseboat or somethin' by this time (CG, 48-49). Robbed of male drive and forcefulness by the "momism" inherent in his wife and even in the society around him, Fred can only dream—like a middle-aged Huckleberry Finn—of "floatin' down the Yazoo on a houseboat." When Lady Evangeline, the fortuneteller, reads Leota's palm and says that her lover is "goin' to work in Vicksburg," Leota takes the old Negro literally. Since she has no lover except Fred and since Fred "ain't workin' here," she orders him to go to work in Vicksburg. "Is he going?" Mrs. Fletcher demands to know. "Sure," answers Leota, confidently. "He don't want to go, but I ain't gonna put up with nothin' like that. Lays around the house an' bulls—with that good-for-nothin' Mr. Pike. He says if he goes who'll cook, but I says I never get to eat anyway—not meals" (CG, 49). Quite

149 Jones, "Welty's 'Petrified Man.'"
obviously, the torrid romance between Fred and Leota that began eight months before in a car's rumble seat and that "practically" had them to "the altar inside of half an hour" is passed! She no longer values Fred, even in his somewhat effeminate role of family cook.

The greater part of the second section of the story concerns the failure of the friendship between Leota and the Pikes, who live in Leota and Fred's rented room. In this incident the women's greed, sexual frustration, and coarseness is completely exposed. The reader has already learned that Leota is jealous of a former lover who has married a rich woman. The beautician has been given satisfaction by Lady Evangeline who tells her that her former lover's marriage will not last past three years from March 8, 1941, which Leota has encircled on her calendar! (CG, 43-44) When Mrs. Pike identifies the photograph of a man wanted for committing four rapes in California, Leota's greed and envy are unbearable. The man turns out to be Mr. Petrie, a neighbor of the Pikes at one time in an apartment building on Toulouse Street in New Orleans. While the Pikes are sitting with Fred and Leota reading Startling G-Man Tales, Mrs. Pike erupts: "'Mr. Petrie is wanted for five hundred dollars cash, for rapin' four women in California, and I know where he is[!]''

"So Mr. Pike says, 'Well whatta you know about that,' an' he looks real hard at the photo and whistles. And she starts dancin'
and singin' about their good luck. She meant our bad luck! I made a point of tellin' that forgune-teller the next time I saw her. I said, 'Listen, that magazine was layin' around the house for a month, and there was the freak show runnin' night an' day not two steps away from my own beauty parlor, with Mr. Petrie just settin' there waitin'. An' it had to be Mr. and Mrs. Pike, almost perfect strangers'" (CG, 51-52).

"Fortune-tellers don't care" (CG, 52), Leota adds remorsefully, sensing somehow that her substitute-religion has let her down.

The reader is somehow strangely gratified to find that there is at least one man—Mr. Petrie—capable of asserting his masculine will and potency, if even in so perverted a manner. Additionally, one can understand and appreciate Mr. Pike's temporary anger at giving Mr. Petrie over to the law to collect the reward, because Mr. Petrie had once been kind to the Pikes. If there is no honor left among these women, at least there is a little honor in one man, even if he loses it, too, in the end:

"Have they gotten the five hundred dollars reward already?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well," said Leota, "at first Mr. Pike didn't want to do anything about it. Can you feature that? Said he kinda liked that ole bird and said he was real nice to 'em, lent 'em money or somethin'. But Mrs. Pike simply tole him he could just go to hell, and I can see her point. She says, 'You ain't worked a lick in six months, and here I make five hundred dollars in two seconds, and what thanks do I get for it? You go to hell, Canfield. . . ." (CG, 52-53).
The irony here is doubly meaningful: both Fred and Mr. Pike are already in a type of hell in their marital slavery ("petticoat tyranny" Irving calls it in "Rip Van Winkle"). And the petrified man—Mr. Petrie with an ending added to his name—is not at all petrified (not as much as the husbands in this story) since he is capable of performing four rapes "all in the month of August." Again, the good sense of a husband does not prevail: Leota cries all night at their—her—bad luck even though Fred advises her to forget the matter and go to sleep since "the whole thing [is] just a sort of coincidence. . . ."

Miss Welty cannot resist the urge to satirize even woman's so-called intuition as the females all buzz about having felt something "funny" in the presence of the petrified man in the carnival. "Funny-haha or funny-peculiar?" (CG, 54-55) Fred has asked. Do these women think they have gotten vibrations from the man's sexual drive, vibrations which both frightened and titillate them, since their own husbands seem so devoid of such energy? At any rate, all the women seem pleased that Mr. Petrie has been forced to hide in a carnival and has been caught and punished for his acts of passion against their fair sex.

Leota reflects upon the situation:

"Four women. I guess those women didn't have the faintest notion at the time they'd be worth a hundred an' twenty-five bucks a piece some day to Mrs. Pike. We ast her how old the
fella was then [when she used to serve him his breakfast in his apartment in New Orleans], an' she says he musta had one foot in the grave, at least. Can you beat it?"

"Not really petrified at all, of course," said Mrs. Fletcher meditatively. She drew herself up. "I'd a' felt something," she said proudly (CG, 54).

Leota's crassness reaches its ultimate point in her calculating the money value of each rape in terms of the total amount of ransom. She has no power of empathy for the tortured victims, only a sense of loss that she has not received the reward money and the honor of exposing the petrified man and, thus, symbolically castrating him, as she has her own husband. As for the "feeling" which Mrs. Fletcher and Leota say they have had (or would have had) in the presence of Mr. Petrie, what is it but the fear of losing their virginity, even though they are married? Neither has ever really been touched by true love or passion, for she is incapable of it, just as Mrs. Fletcher is incapable of valuing "a fruitful marriage...[t]hat simple thing," which brings a warm glow to the home of Sonny and his wife.

Since the women cannot punish Mrs. Pike, they can only punish her child, whom Leota is still "minding" in her beauty shop while the Pikes prepare to leave town on their reward money. Billy Boy is at least one male capable of an independent act: he gets into Leota's purse and eats up some stale peanuts. The degree of Leota's anger is
not, of course, equal to the pettiness of the crime:

"You come here to me!" screamed Leota, recklessly flinging down the comb, which scattered a whole ashtray full of bobby pins and knocked down a row of Coca-Cola bottles. "This is the last straw!"

"I caught him! I caught him!" giggled Mrs. Fletcher. "I'll hold him on my lap. You bad, bad boy you! I guess I better learn how to spank little old bad boys," she said.

Leota's eleven o'clock customer pushed open the swing-doc. upon Leota paddling him heartily with the brush, while he gave angry but belittling screams which penetrated beyond the booth and filled the whole curious beauty parlor. From everywhere ladies began to gather round to watch the paddling. Billy Boy kicked both Leota and Mrs. Fletcher as hard as he could, Mrs. Fletcher with her new fixed smile.

Billy Boy stomped through the group of wild-haired ladies and went out the door, but flung back the words, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" (CG, 55).

Leota can only vent her anger and frustration on this (almost) helpless child; the degrading and violent act of spanking him publicly with the hairbrush—a spanking which all the women gather to see—is perhaps a symbolic attempt to emasculate even this small male. (One is also reminded of "the hard backhand...of womanly defense" which Wylie has described.) Mrs. Fletcher demonstrates her perverted sense of the meaning of motherhood as she exclaims excitedly: "I guess I better learn how to spank little old bad boys."
Lee J. Richmond has explained well the pervasive imagery of petrification in "Petrified Man" and its ultimate meaning in the story:

The image of the petrified man is Welty's most ambitious symbolic projection. By the story's end, the perceptive reader is aware that the title, with its purposeful omission of the article "the" relates to Leota and Mrs. Fletcher. Their hearts are stony, rigid, impenetrable. They are the "freaks" outside the traveling show. By extension, of course, Welty's indictment of them is expressive of a culture which bets on appearances, on callousness, and on material values. The last paragraphs show the women frantically in pursuit of Mrs. Pike's son, Billy Boy. His speech ends the dark comedy and reveals the terrible legacy which an adult world leaves to its young: 'If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?' The theme of spiritual petrification is embodied devastatingly in a child's ingenuous, yet prophetic, words.150

"Petrified Man" is indeed, behind its laughter, a dark and foreboding story.

If Miss Welty's portrayal of women's attitudes toward love, marriage, and childhood seems to make them antimother-women, one should remember that she has presented more positive portrayals of mother-women in "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "The Wide Net," "A Worn Path," and even "Going to Naples." And to be a good mother and wife, a woman need not necessarily be the opposite of Leota and her circle, i.e., submissive to her husband, Miss Welty

150 "Symbol and Theme... in 'Petrified Man,'" p. 1203.
seems to say; she can enjoy with him a "companionship" type of marriage in which there is a definite division of male-female roles (perverted in "Petrified Man" where the women support the men and the men do the housework) but in which there is also mutual sharing, warmth, love, understanding, and communication. Where mother-love is rich, deep, and natural, it can not only produce but also sustain life, Miss Welty believes, as shown in "A Worn Path." If the husband is unable to share in the wife's world, the result is truly tragic, as shown in "Flowers for Marjorie." But a woman can devote her life to an ideal of love and marriage that is unrealistic, especially if the man is incapable of the mature responsibility of marriage and child-rearing. This state of affairs is depicted in "Shower of Gold." Miss Snowdie, however, does not become desiccated: her love for others grows as a consequence of her rejection by King MacLain. His restless male wandering and indiscriminate sexuality are not really so bold and shocking an opposition to the community's efforts to emasculate him as are Mr. Petrie's cruel sex acts.

However, sex only in a marriage (as demonstrated in that of Fred and Leota) is not enough; there must also be love. And the crowning point of love between man and woman is their having a child, a mutual act of procreation which truly provides the blessed situation Bowman discovers—
"a fruitful marriage," a situation he is doomed never to achieve. It is this writer's belief, after examining these seven stories about mother-women and one about anti-mother-women, that Eudora Welty is indeed not an advocate of women's liberation in its most extreme forms. She believes in love, marriage, and childbirth—although she herself has chosen to remain single. Miss Welty also seems to believe that it is possible for a woman to be happy and live a fulfilled life without marriage or children if she is truly liberated and in tune with the rhythms of the world through the largeness and freedom of her own heart, as demonstrated in Virgie Rainey. Nor does Miss Welty believe that a woman must necessarily become a living embodiment of Kate Chopin's self-effacing "ministering angel" to be a successful mother-woman. Snowdie MacLain retains her own quiet individuality as a mother-woman although the community tries to regulate her life and make her accept its pity because she married a wanderer. The power of love demonstrated between the sexes and between mothers and children in Miss Welty's stories of mother-women is, as William M. Jones has said, the "love that renews and [the]love that will lead the ancient and eternally young one back down the worn path." 151

Mary Catherine Buswell has admirably summarized Eudora Welty's fictional treatment of the "human search for the truths of the heart":

Instead of assuming the role of the omniscient author in making her judgments, she uses the dramatic method of revealing her viewpoint through the speech and actions of her characters. Her tone is genial and humorous, as she records the problems of self-identity and reciprocity between the sexes, and indicates that reciprocity is desirable for life fulfillment. She sees human relationships as the primary conflict in life, rather than the conflict of man versus his environment or his God.152

Unlike Jean Paul Sartre, Eudora Welty does not conclude, after presenting "human relationships as the primary conflict in life," that "hell is other people." Nor does she conclude, like Philip Wylie, that hell is "mom—a great little guy." To her, "hell is other people" only when basic human values and love have become distorted into hate and negation, into spiritual and sexual petrification, as in "Petrified Man."

152 "Love Relationships of Women in...Eudora Welty," p. 106.
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152 "Love Relationships of Women in...Eudora Welty," p. 106.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study of women characters in Eudora Welty's short stories begins with an analysis of the tentative initiation of twelve-year-old Marian into an old women's world of loneliness and deprivation in "A Visit of Charity" and ends with an analysis of the loveless women dehumanized and defeminized by their vulgar values in "Petrified Man." Both stories—and all those analyzed between—demonstrate one of Eudora Welty's most pervasive themes, the need for love in a world of separateness. Erich Fromm's philosophical explanation of the problem is worth repeating:

The necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them, is an imperative need on the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends. The need is behind all phenomena which constitute the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word.¹

The younger women initiates treated in Chapter II struggle with varying degrees of success toward uniting with "other living beings" on a mature level. Marian

rejects human communion; when the old ladies cry out for love, she can only flee, leaving them alone in their mausoleum-like room. In "A Memory" the young girl-artist tries to reconcile her idealized, platonic love for the young boy of her dreams with the ugly but real and human physicalness she has encountered in the people on the beach. Somehow the reader feels that the girl has been prepared to love on a more mature level as a result of her discovery. But she, like Josie in "The Winds," has an uncompleted initiation. Both girls are involved in a search for certainty, a search that will perhaps one day unite them with another human being, a man, in marriage and childbearing, the full fruition of their womanhood.

Josie's dream during the storm, in which she is protected by the warm love of her parents (just as the girl in "A Memory" has been protected—perhaps too much—by her parents' love), concerns her developing womanhood and realization of adult love and loss. Her observation of the neighborhood girl, Cornella, has been a major factor in her beginning maturation. Jenny Lockhart in "At the Landing" is at the first landing of maturity at the end of her story; she has confused a sexual relationship with Billy Floyd as real love, and until she is able to recognize the difference, she will continue to be victimized, Miss Welty seems to say. Jenny, too, has been sheltered—
or rather isolated—by her aged grandfather. Unlike Josie, she does not have the warm, understanding guidance of a mother and father to help her until she is sufficiently mature to love and live as an individual, as a woman. Livvie, too, although she is older than the other girl initiates, has never really known the joy of heterosexual love. Imprisoned in a house of death by her husband, old Solomon, she is finally released by his death to love the virile young Cash. She has developed enough mature awareness to recognize that her youthful love of Cash means the abandonment of Solomon's wise, conservative values. But, as Solomon himself says on his deathbed, it is unwise to couple spring with winter, and he grants the rightness and naturalness of Livvie's loving a man who is her youthful equal.

Livvie's initiation—like that of the somewhat older women initiates, Mrs. Larkin and Delia Farrar—is of the decisive type. All three women definitely and firmly achieve maturity, understanding, and self-discovery, although these take different forms in their lives. For Mrs. Larkin, especially, sanity and humanity as well as a sense of her womanly sexuality are restored when she is able to overcome the spiritual paralysis caused by the terrible death of her husband and to love the child whom she has almost killed in vengeance against nature for taking the life of her beloved husband.
Thus the search for love, the need for love, is revealed quietly but effectively in Miss Welty's various stories of initiation. All the characters in these stories, with the exception of Marian, feel compelled to "unite with other living beings" and "to be related to them." In being able to give of their love, or in anticipation of having this gift to bestow upon another, these women—especially Livvie, Josie, and Mrs. Larkin—achieve, or are prepared to achieve, human productivity as defined earlier by Fromm. Because of the significance of Fromm's idea, it seems relevant to review it here:

In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness.2

However, the life-record of Miss Welty's isolated spinsters reveals little "heightened vitality and potency." Though many of these women, Clytie, Myra, and Lotte Eckhart in particular, have much love to give, they are frustrated in their attempts to love and as a result lose their sanity. The preservation of sanity, according to Fromm, depends on human fulfillment through love.

Clytie, prevented by her tyrannical sister from loving her paralyzed father or the old Negro Lethy (who is able and willing to love both Clytie and Mr. Farr) and rejected by the town because of her eccentricity, loses both sanity and life. To Miss Welty, the love which is needed for human vitality and potency does not necessarily depend on a woman's marrying and having children, although these are desirable for some women as the full fruition of their womanhood. If a woman is able to love another person—a friend or family member (parent, sister, brother, etc.)—and have that love returned, she has a raison d'être. But Miss Eckhart's love for her pupil Virgie Rainey is not returned. In addition, when Hal Sissum is drowned, Miss Eckhart loses her single opportunity for fulfillment as a woman through heterosexual love. Like Clytie, Miss Eckhart is rejected by the community. When Virgie abandons her and she loses Hal and her mother through death, she is left pathetically alone—except for the warm regard of one of Miss Welty's most admirable mother-women, the gentle Snowdie MacLain, who cannot save the old piano teacher.

To Miss Welty, there often seems to be something in woman's make-up that compels her to love maternally, if not sexually. This situation is to be seen in Lotte Eckhart's singling out Virgie Rainey to receive all her love and in Myra's claiming the Negro Delilah's child as her own in "The Burning." Sister in "Why I Live at the
P.O." probably unconsciously wishes that Stella-Rondo's child by Mr. Whitaker were hers. However, Sister fails to find human and womanly fulfillment even through loving her family, who cannot accept her as a mature person. And, rather ironically in a group made up of dependent relatives, her family seem to reject her in part because of her spinsterhood.

Sometimes, too, a dominating relative or other person may thwart a woman's ability to love. Octavia, Clytie's older sister, and Sabina McInnis, the tyrant in "Asphodel," represent something like pure hate, the very opposite of woman's need to love. The pride and domination of Octavia and Sabina thwart the potentiality for love of the women who are submissive to them. Octavia's influence poisons Clytie's life and cuts her off from all access to love. Sabina McInnis has so controlled "her" town and its inhabitants, including the three spinsters, Phoebe, Cora, and Irene, that they can only flee from the Dionysiac possibility of male love and sexuality represented by the naked Don McInnis. The three old maids in "Asphodel," like those in "Clytie" and "The Burning" as well, are also isolated from the opportunity to love by their aristocratic, genteel backgrounds, rather like Miss Emily Grierson in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," whose despotic father and aristocratic position combined prevent her loving, except in a terrible, perverted way.
Of the isolated spinsters, only Virgie Rainey is strong enough to break out of her isolation and to achieve a sense of selfhood, of individual authenticity, without marriage, without childbearing. But earlier in her life she has risked promiscuity rather than loss of passion and has thus become anathema in her community. Unlike any of the other isolated spinsters, she alone is able to face life maturely at the end of her story and to affirm joyously "the pure wish to live."

Robert Penn Warren has praised Miss Welty for creating art that is not "an escape from the incoherence of the world, but...a celebration of its richness." He says that she is "secure in an instinctive trust of self and in the knowledge that only out of the strong shall come forth sweetness."³ One is tempted to pursue parallels (but not too far) between Virgie Rainey and Miss Welty. Virgie, as Warren says of Miss Welty, does not attempt to escape "from the incoherence of the world" but is able to celebrate "its richness." At the end of her story she is "secure in an instinctive trust of self" and in her strength is able to view all of Morgana with both empathy and dispassion. Like her mentor, Miss Eckhart, she is still a lover of beauty (of music), and this helps enrich her

³"Out of the Strong" (one of "Five Tributes"), Shenandoah, 20 (Spring 1969), 39.
life. Of course, Miss Welty, too, is a lover of beauty, for she has devoted her life to the craft of fiction and has also expressed herself in painting, photography, and flower-growing. Like Virgie Rainey, she devoted part of her life to the care of an aging mother until her death. (Miss Welty helped care for her mother until Mrs. Welty's death in 1966 after a long illness.) One cannot help agreeing with Jonathan Yardley that Miss Welty's "femininity only enriches her work...and her spinsterhood adds yet another complicating dimension."  

Though Miss Welty's isolated spinsters sometimes bear general resemblances to the conventional characterization of the single woman in American fiction, her women are nearly always fully-individualized people, "always human," in the words of Joyce Carol Oates.  

It is in Miss Welty's mother-women that one finds some of her strongest and richest characterization. Snowdie MacLain in "Shower of Gold" and Phoenix in "A Worn Path" are especially outstanding examples of women who sustain life in themselves through love of others. They are indeed Mrs. Chopin's mother-women as "ministering

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4 "The Last Good One?" review of Losing Battles, New Republic, 9 May 1970, p. 34.

angels," but without complete self-effacement, which Mrs. Chopin thought was the fate of most mother-women. Both Snowdie and Phoenix maintain quiet dignity and strength as individuals.

In addition, Snowdie MacLain and Mrs. Coker in "Shower of Gold" have to cope with marital infidelity, although Blackie's little sexual fling in the woods with Opal Purcell brings him back to the farm and to the family circle, whereas King MacLain is never really a part of Snowdie's family circle.

Snowdie, Phoenix, and Mrs. Coker, like the three expectant mother-women (Marjorie in "Flowers for Marjorie," Sonny's wife in "Death of a Traveling Salesman," and Hazel in "The Wide Net"), are devoted to home and family, major elements in nearly all of Miss Welty's stories. From her earliest short stories, such as "Death of a Traveling Salesman," to her more recent ones, such as "Ladies in Spring," the home is depicted, according to Anne Masserand, as a "cosy, warm and safe place, ... opposed to the road of the uncertain journey. ..., a place where love can blossom." Particular tragic is Howard's inability to accept the promise of...

love, security, and fruitfulness which Marjorie represents. Unable to enter her world, he can only destroy it—along with any possibility for a meaningful, fulfilled life of his own as a man, a husband, or a father.

Of the marriages which Miss Welty presents in her short stories, that of Sonny and his wife in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" may best be held as a norm. They are poor, but their love and mutual concern for each other make their relationship something R. J. Bowman yearns for, "a fruitful marriage." Some may feel that Sonny's wife is too submissive to her husband, but a closer look at the story shows that these two live within the framework of what sociologists call a "companionship family" in which "affection is the basis for its existence" and in which "common interests and activities coexist with mutual acceptance of division of labor within the family and individuality of interests." Their marriage contrasts sharply with those of the anti-mother-women in "Petrified Man" in which Miss Welty presents a strongly unpleasant picture of perverted, loveless relationships between men and women. In this scathing satire, Miss Welty presents women who take pride in dominating their husbands. The irony of "Petrified Man" is that the women's beauty

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treatments, artificial and mechanical, do not heighten their femininity but only emphasize further their empty, sterile lives. Their interest in sex is prurient, and they cannot accept pregnancy as the natural embodiment of womanly fruition, as Marjorie, Hazel, and Sonny's wife accept it happily. Pregnancy is unwanted by the women in "Petrified Man" because they think it distorts their bodies. One pregnant woman even hints darkly that she will get an abortion. They cannot love children, like Snowdie, Phoenix, and Mrs. Serto demonstrate in their stories, and can express only hatred for little Billy Pike by spanking him, an act symbolizing their wish to dominate, and even punish, the men in their lives. Miss Welty seems to believe firmly in the need for mutual love, respect, and sharing among men and women in marriage; she sees that marriage can never have "vitality, potency, or joy" unless such a relationship can be established and maintained.

She also knows that too much love can sometimes smother or thwart another's individual personality. A mild example of this problem is presented in "Going to Naples," in which the super-mother-woman Mrs. Serto overplays the role of mother until her daughter, free of her mother's control, expresses her own individuality and even her liberation the night she does the wild dance in the ballroom of the ship.
In yet another story, "The Bride of the Innisfallen," the young American wife living in London with her husband leaves him and goes to Ireland alone because, though he loves her, he cannot share her simple joy in living. Joy—that too is necessary in the conjugal relationship, Miss Welty seems to say. "Love with the joy being drawn out of it like anything else that aches—that was loneliness" (BI, 81), the young wife thinks as she reaches Cork and plans to telegraph her husband. She feels that she has been "nearly destroyed" in her conjugal relationship. She does not want it to lack that "pure joy—the kind you were born and began with..." (BI, 81). Perhaps the young American wife's feeling is akin to Hazel's in "The Wide Net." Like the woman in "The Bride of the Innisfallen," Hazel, too, leaves her husband until he is able to understand her "elation that comes of great hopes and changes..." (WN, 57). However, unlike the American wife who goes to Ireland, Hazel is reunited joyously with her husband. The "Innisfallen" heroine considers telegraphing her husband, "Don't expect me back yet," but she knows that he will say, "You hope for too much" (BI, 82). Like Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in The Awakening, the young American wife desires a life of joy and fulfillment in marriage which, evidently, she does not find. Her leaving her husband is not as dramatic as Edna's but she, too, has experienced an "awakening" of
her own nevertheless. She is not lonely in Cork although she is alone. Like Virgie Rainey, she has only a "pure wish to live." "Secure in an instinctive trust of self," as Warren has said of Miss Welty, the American girl walks joyously through the streets of Cork and lets her "message, unfinished and unsent, . . .go into the stream of the street" (BI, 83). She goes into a pub, which to her seems to be a "lovely room full of strangers" (BI, 83).

Like the woman in "No Place for You, My Love" (BI, 3-27), who has evidently left her husband for a similar reason and who has a long evening of pleasure with a married man among the Acadians in South Louisiana, the young American wife in "The Bride of the Innisfallen" will not accept the proposition that the Morgana women believe firmly in The Golden Apples: that "being married to anybody at all, just the awfullest man" (58) is better than not being married. The husbands of the women in "The Bride of the Innisfallen" and "No Place for You, My Love" do not appear to be "awful. . .men," but that is not the point. Although Eudora Welty believes, with Fromm, that "the necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them is an imperative need [for] fulfillment," she does not single out any particular route as the way for a woman to achieve that fulfillment. As Louise Gossett has said, Eudora Welty has "never adopted any single, social, material, or metaphysical map
for her world. It is as if she has refused to number the routes into experience for fear of implying that any one must be followed instead of another."\(^8\) Perhaps in stories like "No Place for You, My Love" and "The Bride of the Innisfallen" Miss Welty is presenting the need that some women have, like Nora in Ibsen's _A Doll's House_, "to be independent in order to find themselves."\(^9\) In offering this possibility—and in not condemning it in her heroines in these stories—Miss Welty seems to be providing a rather modern view of woman, even a moderately "liberated" view, although she has never identified her writing or her name with the feminist cause, as she remarks in the passage that begins the first chapter of this study.

Eudora Welty has also pursued the three basic patterns of characterization in her novels, and her achievement there is also complex, rich, and deserving of a detailed study, which, however, is beyond the scope of this investigation. For example, mother-women abound in Miss Welty's first full-length novel, _Delta Wedding_ (1946). The most interesting woman in the book is


Ellen Fairchild, mother of eight children and expecting a ninth, who reflects upon the meaning of life, marriage, and womanhood as her second-oldest daughter (age seventeen) prepares to marry. Robbie Reid Fairchild, Ellen's sister-in-law, is like the women in "The Bride of the Innis-fallen" and "No Place for You, My Love" in that she too leaves her husband, but Robbie returns to him when they have come implicitly to understand themselves better as a conjugal unit and as a part of George's extended family. Finally, their relationship becomes more than sexual and blossoms into mature, joyous love. Laura, the young motherless niece in *Delta Wedding*, is an initiate—like Josie in "The Winds"—into the meaning of love, family, and her own femininity. There are also spinsters in *Delta Wedding*, two feminine, aristocratic aunts who, in their timid ladylikeness, resemble the three middle-aged spinsters in "Asphodel." These aunts, like Cora, Phoebe, and Irene, are afraid of the idea of a relationship with a man and of bearing children, as they intimate to their niece, Dabney, who is about to marry. These spinsters, too, are isolated to the extent that their fear of life has prevented their achieving a productive orientation.

*The Ponder Heart* (1954) depicts Miss Edna Earle, non-stop talker in a first-person monologue that resembles the earlier "Why I Live at the P.O." Like the women in *Delta Wedding* and in the 1970 novel *Losing Battles,*
Edna Earle is devoted to the preservation of the family, even if her only family is eccentric Uncle Daniel. Although she makes her living running a small hotel in the village of Clay and participates in its social life, she would like to marry and settle down with a traveling salesman, Mr. Springer. She is aware that there is much love in the world, as there is in the "Ponder Heart" of Uncle Daniel. "Love!" she says. "There's always somebody who wants it." But Edna is not an isolated spinster in the sense that the spinsters in the short stories are isolated. She shares Uncle Daniel's isolation after he has given away all his money in a hilarious courtroom scene, and the town, according to Edna Earle, is penitent for being so greedy. Like the women in Delta Wedding and such mother-women as Mrs. Coker, Marjorie, Snowdie MacLain, and Katie Rainey in the short stories, Edna is very domestic. She is concerned with the matters of housecleaning, preparation of food, and care of flowers. But behind what Joyce Carol Oates would call this "feminine nonsense" there is a woman who, like the old maid aunts in Delta Wedding and like Sister in "Why I Live at the 

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P.O.," has much love to give, more than she is able to give even to Uncle Daniel.

A lengthy study of the matriarchal Renfro family in Losing Battles could be made. Suffice it to say that this long novel contains two of Eudora Welty's most memorable characters, Miss Julia Mortimer and Beulah Vaughn Renfro, mother-woman par excellence. Miss Julia, like Miss Eckhart in "June Recital," is a spinster teacher. She is determined to save her Mississippi red-dirt farmers' children from their ignorance, even at the cost of her fulfillment as a woman—at least in the opinion of the mother-women (especially Beulah Renfro) who feel that Miss Julia has not lived because she has not married and borne children. Yet Miss Welty seems to suggest that there is a certain grand dignity, joy, and even triumph for Miss Julia who has bravely fought her "battle" against ignorance and insularity and has made her own "separate peace" with the world at the time of her death. If family and anti-family values seem to clash in this novel, as Thomas H. Landess has suggested, the clash is not the same as in "Petrified Man." Gloria Short, who has married into the Renfro family, had been "chosen" by Miss Julia to succeed her as a teacher. But Gloria knows

she cannot be both a teacher and a wife by the standards of rural Mississippi in the 1930's, and she chooses marriage. But the course of love is seldom smooth in life, or in good art, and Gloria is faced with a role-conflict. She cannot function freely as a wife and mother as long as she lives in the same house with her husband's ultra-domestic mother and the other members of this large, noisy extended family. Gloria's struggle, however, is not material for soap opera because of Miss Welty's inimitable method of narration and striking, comic verisimilitude.

Miss Welty's last novel, *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972), contains an interesting initiate, Laurel Mckelva Hand. Though she is much older than the initiates in the short stories, Laurel experiences an insight (similar to that of Mrs. Larkin in "A Curtain of Green") into the nature of love, grief, loss, and loneliness. The main conflict of the novel is between Laurel and Fay, Laurel's stepmother. Fay, Laurel feels, has desecrated her beloved mother's house by marrying elderly Judge Mckelva after his first wife's death. Laurel has warm, personal memories of the closeness of her mother and of her father (who is also dead now), of the many happy hours they spent reading aloud to each other. Laurel recalls hearing the familiar voices of her parents reading as she fell asleep as a girl. Laurel's important discovery, however, is
that Fay is one of those "whose own life had not taught her how to feel."\(^{13}\)

In her vulgarity, pretense, and inability to feel except upon the most superficial level, Fay is rather like the women in "Petrified Man." Because she cannot give, but only receive (probably her main reason for marrying the judge), Fay experiences no "heightened vitality," potency, or joy, as Fromm believes giving and feeling contribute to life. Fay sees giving only as "deprivation," not as an "expression of [her] aliveness." Thus she is powerless to understand the relationship that existed between Judge McKelva and his first wife.

Understanding Fay's make-up, and powerless to affect it, Laurel returns to her life in Chicago. By reliving through memory her past life in the old family home the night after father's funeral, Laurel has gained a heightened awareness of her parents' love for each other and of her love for her own dead husband, Philip. Like Virgie Rainey, Laurel is able to face the future, though childless and husbandless. The basic human truth which has been reaffirmed for Laurel—that love and feeling are necessary for one to be truly human—is known to nearly all of Eudora Welty's women, young and old alike.

In her stories Miss Welty has recorded—with candor, compassion, and artistic control—the whole life of woman from girlhood to young motherhood to old age. This study has emphasized three of Miss Welty's dominant patterns of portrayal of women: initiates, isolates, and mother-women. As a literary master, she has presented subtle variations of characterization within these patterns that testify to the rich fertility of her imagination. An understanding of this important aspect of her fiction, never explored in-depth before, should provide greater insight into the achievement of a writer whose approach to her subject has never made use of "a cosmetic formula" and has never oversimplified nor sentimentalized that subject. To Louis D. Rubin, Eudora Welty "is no lightweight; she is not merely picturesque; she is a serious writer. She deals with some very important aspects of reality, and her art is one of great insight into such matters." It is hoped that the important subject examined in this study—Eudora Welty's characterization of women in her short stories—has indeed shown her "great insight into such matters" as the hearts and minds of the


many women found in her fiction.

Although her depiction of women in the four volumes of short stories may stand alone as a high artistic achievement, the patterns of characterization established in these works may also be regarded as having prepared the way for her portrayal of women in the longer form of the novel, the literary form to which Eudora Welty has turned most frequently in recent years.
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VITA

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