

TECHNIQUE AS REALITY: THE WORLD
OF EUDORA WELTY

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PREFACE

Eudora Welty's novels and stories have been said to possess their own "special" worlds. The word, "special," has been used with good reason. Not only does each work possess its own world which belongs exclusively to that work but, also each world is removed from any relation to a "real" world or to any notion Welty may have about one. She, like many modern writers, permits her stories to emerge from the minds of her characters without authorial omniscience or intervention. In fact, in most of her works, her world is actually comprised of several private visions of her characters complexly intertwined. And this is what is particularly special about her work: that in each example, the situation and very dramatic conflict is rooted in a clash of private visions and the collision of ordinarily separate worlds. There is never any attempt on Welty's part to compare one vision over another, moralistically but, rather, each vision resolves itself existentially through the protagonist's acceptance or betrayal of his own way of seeing the world. Resolution comes not when a character finally sees the real world, objectively, but when he sees some common pattern in the great kalidioscope of visions that surround him--when he sees that pattern, really.

If one assumes that each of Welty's works does possess a special world of its own, one must also assume that those

worlds can only be explained in their formal context, in the work, itself, which is organic and self-contained. Then, in examining her worlds, one must look at them apart from mere "subject"--a well drawn Mississippi swamp or antebellum mansion of a real South--and focus attention on her writing, itself. One must fall back upon Henry James and agree that Welty might have taken any subject; that it is, after all, her writing that intrigues, her techniques and her style.

It is interesting that the most common description of Welty's style is that it is versatile. It is certain that her worlds are varied: that if she creates a "special" world that she must possess special style. In this paper I will attempt to go further and show that the shape her words finally take gives us each work's special world. I will examine in chapter one, past and recent criticism of Welty's work; in chapter two, her treatment of theme and character; in chapter three, her narrative techniques; and, finally, in chapter four, her special world, itself, with my total emphasis upon her novel, The Golden Apples. I will focus always upon her techniques of writing fiction and their pattern of variation as they are adapted to the special problems that the form of each of her works demands.

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CHAPTER I

A RESUMÉ OF WELTY CRITICISM

Since the appearance in 1936 of Eudora Welty's "The Death of a Traveling Salesman," she has published three volumes of short stories; A Curtain of Green (1941), The Wide Net (1943), and The Bride of Innisfallen (1955); three novels, Delta Wedding (1946), The Golden Apples (1949), and The Ponder Heart (1955); one short novel, The Robber Bridegroom (1942); and several uncollected short stories and articles. The critical response to this impressive body of work has been relatively light. There have been only two book length studies of her fiction, Ruth M. Vande Kieft's Eudora Welty (1962) and Alfred Appel's A Season of Dreams (1965); and the numerous short articles concerning Welty have focused frequently upon only very specific symbolic or thematic problems in one or two of her works. Early Welty criticism often treats her essentially as a Southern writer, one who is subject to the limitations of the regionalist; whereas, recent criticism uses the technical and purely formal aspects of her work as a means of interpretation.

Welty criticism really begins with Robert Penn Warren's article, "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty" (1944). Here, Warren considers the stories in A Curtain of Green and The Wide Net and not only gives a credible explanation of her major themes, but also tells something of her "special world" and of what he considers to be its limits.

Warren first emphasizes the great variety of subject matter and method to be found in A Curtain of Green. He writes that Welty " . . . had had to take a new angle each time out of a joy in the pure novelty of the perspective."¹ He mentions, further, the succession of metaphorical surprises in the earlier collection.² In contrast, however, he finds the stories in The Wide Net to be, as a whole, more consistent in tone and " . . . nearly cut to one pattern."³ He finds that the reader enters into a "special world" which he compares to the world in the first story of The Wide Net, "First Love," wherein " . . . whatever happened, it happened in extraordinary times, in a season of dreams. . . ."⁴ He argues, however, that these dream-like worlds, which do not contain "the logic by which we live, or think we live," could have been treated realistically and that they fit into a "season of dreams" by virtue of "their special tone and mood, the special perspective . . . with which they are rendered."⁵ He further shows the interdependence between Welty's special world and her style and techniques when he later writes:

¹Robert Penn Warren, "Love and Separateness in Miss Welty," Selected Essays, p. 156.

²Ibid., p. 156.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Eudora Welty, The Wide Net, p. 3.

⁵Warren, op. cit., p. 158.

If anything, the dreamlike effect in many of the stories seems to result from the author's undertaking to squeeze meaning from the item which, in ordinary realistic fiction, would be passed over with a casual glance.⁶

Previously, Warren had examined an indictment of Welty's style by Diana Trilling, one which failed to consider a relationship between Welty's style and her world and which leads into the regionalist interpretation of her work. Warren cites Trilling as charging Welty's style with being insincere and decorative.⁷ Trilling claims, further, that Welty is not only guilty of "fine writing," but that her writing could be compared to the "psychotic and surrealist."⁸ Trilling, moreover, is particularly concerned with the stories in The Wide Net, and one might conclude that, rather than considering the special requirements of style which Warren thinks are demanded by the world which Welty depicts, Trilling indirectly criticizes that world itself. Or, as Warren suggests, Trilling fails to evaluate the success of Welty's fiction, but, instead, finds fault with the nature of that fiction.⁹ It is interesting, however, that even Warren's last statement in his essay is in the form of warning, rather

⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

⁷ Ibid., p. 158.

⁸ Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review," Nation, CLVII (October 2, 1943), 368.

⁹ Warren, op. cit., p. 158.

than praise:

One more word: It is quite possible that Miss Welty has pushed her method to its most extreme limit. It is also possible that the method, if pursued much further, would lead to monotony and self-imitation and merely decorative elaboration.¹⁰

One may infer from this statement that Warren means that even Welty's habit of "squeezing meaning from every item" might become monotonous or decorative. However, Warren did confess that the special nature of her world resulted from that method, and one proposes that it is this kind of a world which prevades most of Welty's fiction and demands her particular style.

Indeed, the problem which seems to be at the heart of most of the arguments like Trilling's seems to be a reluctance to accept Welty's world as it is on paper. A result of this reluctance is to approach her world as raw subject matter, as an historic vision of the South. It must be noted, here, that Welty is certainly a Southern writer. She was born in Jackson, Mississippi, where she spent most of her life, and most of her work is set in small towns around Jackson, or in the area of the Yazoo River Delta and the Natchez Trace in Southern Mississippi.¹¹ To conclude, however, that she is a Southern writer, only, is to place her work in the narrow

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

¹¹ Alfred Appel, Jr., A Season of Dreams, p. xv.

confines of social and historic interpretation.¹² For example, an early and very unfavorable review of A Curtain of Green in Time (1941) seizes quickly upon a regionalist label for Welty:

. . . like many Southern writers, she [Welty] has a strong taste for melodrama, and is preoccupied with the queer, the highly spiced. Of the seventeen pieces only two [stories] report states of experience which could be called normal, only one uses the abnormal to illuminate any human mystery deeper than its own¹³

Of course, this concept is less purely regionalist criticism than it is open prejudice against southern literature and abnormal behavior in fiction. However, subtler regionalist arguments may be found, particularly in response to her first novel, Delta Wedding.

Trilling's review of the novel is interesting because she has turned from an attack upon Welty's style to an attack upon Welty's southern world:

I find it difficult to determine how much of my dislike for Eudora Welty's new book, Delta Wedding . . . is dislike of its literary manner and how much is the resistance to [its] culture¹⁴

Trilling finds that only a somewhat antiquated Southern setting could produce the style that Welty uses and that

¹²Granville Hicks, "Eudora Welty," College English, XVI (November, 1952), 69.

¹³Time, XXXVIII (November 24, 1941), 110.

¹⁴Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review," Nation, CLXII (May 11, 1946), 578.

" . . . she leaves her honest cultural observations in rosy poetic solution exactly because she does not wish to precipitate them as moral judgment."¹⁵ Here, Trilling concludes that Welty's style and its failures are a result of her writing or an old-fashioned South that is dishonest (according to the critic's conception of the real South). Ransom's review of Delta Wedding poses similar questions and appears, almost, to follow up Warren's warning. Unlike Trilling, he does not condemn the entire world of the novel, but he questions whether the Fairchild family in the work should " . . . live so casually on their sensibilities . . . heedless of the moral and material short-comings of the establishment."¹⁶ He feels that the inclusion of a "political sense" would create "moral and political security" in the novel, since the " . . . pattern of Southern life as Miss Welty has it is doomed."¹⁷ He concludes that, without such an inclusion, the world of Delta Wedding is finally nostalgic, and that Welty has simply run out of subject matter.¹⁸

An extreme result of regionalist criticism, of course, would finally encourage nostalgia in Welty's fiction while

¹⁵Loc. cit.

¹⁶ John Crowe Ransom, "Delta Fiction," Kenyon Review, VIII (Summer, 1946), 506.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 507.

¹⁸Loc. cit.

substituting local color in the place of style, and caricature in the place of character. However, later critics have taken Welty as more than just a Southern writer, agreeing that Delta Wedding, for example, has an implicit sense of "place" in the artistic sense of the word (and as Welty, herself, means it in her essay on "place" in fiction).¹⁹ Hoffman finds the novel " . . . a superb illustration of literary sensibility informing place, and being informed by it."²⁰ It has been noted that any sociological interpretation of Delta Wedding, must ignore the fictional way of life of the novel's characters.²¹ In fact, the real subject of the novel is not the South at all, but, rather, the Fairchild family "and their exclusion of the 'world'."²² In this way, one critic is able to agree that the small world of Shellmound in Delta Wedding is doomed, in a sense, because, at the novel's end, of the suggestion of upheaval and uncertainty in the relationship of the characters, characters whose personalities and consciousness create a vision of "real life."²³

¹⁹Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," South Atlantic Quarterly, LV (January, 1950), 57-72.

²⁰Fredrick J. Hoffman, "The Sense of Place," in South: Modern Literature and its Cultural Setting, p. 69.

²¹Ruth M. Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, pp. 108-109.

²²Appel, op. cit., p. 203.

²³Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South, pp. 152-153, 158-159.

The alternative to regionalist criticism began in the early 1950's. In 1952, Glenn published "Fantasy in Eudora Welty" which defines not only the formal demands of Welty's work, which required a "non-realistic" treatment of her subject, but also clarifies Welty's intentions in regard to her use of the South as a subject:

Somewhere between the prose fiction regarded as "realism" and that, on the other hand, which purports to deal only with the inner life of the mind, is the fiction of Eudora Welty; in its method implicating both tendencies and yet, somehow, transcending each. The kind of reality which is not immediately apparent to the senses is described by the late Virginia Woolf as 'what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge.' Miss Welty takes full account of the 'skin of the day,' even withholding it from the hedge; it is a vital element in her work, for she is not afraid to face and report the harsh, even the brutal reality of everyday life. But . . . she is fully sensitive to 'what remains over.'²⁴

Glenn agrees with Henry James, and in discussing a symbolic relation between the stories in The Wide Net and the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, he quotes James:

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it.²⁵

Glenn's conclusions suggest that

. . . the world as depicted in her fiction that we regard as actual appears . . . irrational; . . . the positions are reversed--the actual world becoming a dream and the one created by the imagination the only reality.²⁶

²⁴Eunice Glenn, "Fantasy in Eudora Welty," in Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951, p. 506.

²⁵Ibid., p. 516.

²⁶Loc. cit.

Glenn's evidence used in reaching his conclusions is formal, based on analogies drawn between Hawthorne's symbolic techniques and Welty's.²⁷ His emphasis on Welty's work, which divorces itself from historic and social considerations, is similar to the point of view taken by Hardy in the same year, regarding Delta Wedding:

. . . for the reader's purposes of understanding, the novel ought almost to cease, to be a social principle at all. It becomes, rather the formal principle, and the principle of sensibility, in a version of the pastoral²⁸

Such totally formal considerations of her work as these were bases for later important studies of American literature in the 1960's which placed Welty in a "main stream" of American literary tradition. For example, Eisinger relates her work to a Gothic tradition in American writing and controls his argument by showing her fiction to be a "triumph of the imagination."²⁹ He writes that, while a "defined social theme" is present in her work, it is not her primary objective. That objective, he insists, is, instead, the "mystery of personality."³⁰ While Fiedler contends that Welty is a "distaff Faulknerian" and loses the "masculine vigor" of a Faulkner

²⁷Ibid., p. 512.

²⁸John Hardy, "Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol," Sewanee Review, LX (Summer, 1962), 400.

²⁹Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, pp. 258-259.

³⁰Ibid., p. 259.

to the "delicate nuances of sensibility" (which he blames on a "Jamesian sensibility"),³¹ Hassen, on the other hand, finds her "richness of surface" (of course, implying technique) superior to Carson McCullers' fiction.³² From the 1950's to the present, the short studies which have emphasized symbolic and thematic organizations in Welty's work, also have provided the basis and approach for the two important studies of her work, as well as a potential basis for the controversy concerning her formal use of mythical and symbolical controls in her writing.

Welty's publication of The Golden Apples (1949) with its obvious titular allusion to Greek mythology (and her reference to Yeat's mythological poem, "The Song of the Wandering Aengus") led to Morris's articles (1952 and 1955) concerning the book's mythological controls. He identifies characters and narrative with Greek mythology,³³ showing, for example, that the first story in the novel, "The Shower of Gold," imitates the mythical visit of Zeus (King MacLain) to Danae (Katie Rainey).³⁴ Morris is uncertain

³¹Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, pp. 450-451.

³²Inhab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, p. 208.

³³H. C. Morris, "Zeus and the Golden Apples of Eudora Welty," Perspective, V (1952), 190.

³⁴Ibid., p. 191.

as to who Perseus becomes in the novel, but he points out that King MacLain's powers of fertility in the first chapter are identified with "a shower of gold" and that Perseus could be either of his twin sons, Ran or Eugene, or more importantly, Virgie Rainey,³⁵ who is technically the protagonist of the novel. He also finds the novel's central symbol, the golden apple, to be that of Greek mythology, "an apple of discord," as well as an apple from Yeats' poem implying a quest for sexual fulfillment (thus, commenting on the novel's form).³⁶ While he shows King MacLain's parallel with Zeus throughout the novel, he also identifies Ran MacLain with Hercules in "Moon Lake,"³⁷ and Eugene MacLain with Ulysses in "Music from Spain," his walk across San Francisco becoming an Odyssey paralleling Ulysses's ancient voyage.³⁸ Morris admits, however, that it is difficult to "integrate" Welty's title, The Golden Apples, with the familiar Greek myths.³⁹

In his second article, Morris compares James Joyce's use of The Odyssey in Ulysses with Welty's use of myth and discovers that

³⁵Ibid., p. 192.

³⁶Ibid., p. 191.

³⁷Ibid., p. 195.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 196-198.

³⁹Ibid., p. 190.

. . . working in the method of Joyce, she has increased the number of myths in the framework. By following Homer's Odyssey, Joyce had the unity of his novel partly worked out for him, but Miss Welty had to fuse previously separate myths into an artistic whole.⁴⁰

He concludes that, rather than using myth as the underlying basis for unity, Welty introduces " . . . classical material into already classical molds."⁴¹ In this way, Morris not only shows what kind of myths Welty uses and how they clarify character and narrative (which, consequently, implies form), but also shows how she uses myth (which gives insight into her technique). It is precisely the lack of emphasis upon how she uses myth, or, for that matter, symbol and theme, which causes some critics of her work to deviate from her writing and venture outside it again.

Jones discusses the symbolic and mythological expansions of the "sun" images used by D. H. Lawrence and Welty. He shows in detail Welty's use of the sun image in her two short stories, "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "Clytie,"⁴² but of more importance here, he notes:

Where Lawrence manipulated the sun obviously and artificially in his own work, Eudora Welty has so submerged the symbol that it is hardly recognizable as a symbol at all.⁴³

⁴⁰H. C. Morris, "Eudora Welty's Use of Mythology," Shenandoah, VI (Spring, 1955), 35.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 39.

⁴²William M. Jones, "Growth of a Symbol," University of Kansas City Review, XXVI (October, 1959), 68-73.

⁴³Ibid., p. 68.

Here, Jones not only points to Welty's writing as the source for an understanding of her imagery, but seems to agree with Morris that Welty's unity is not based on any external organization, such as Greek mythology, as a final system of understanding. Earlier, Jones had traced, in addition to her folk sources from classical lore, her folk sources from Germanic, Celtic, and Sanskrit lore, as well.⁴⁴ However, he makes no attempt to show direct thematic parallels from mythological origins or to relate Welty's fictional worlds to those worlds taken from mythology. Both of these attempts were made in similar studies, however, and serve to show the excesses of the formal criticism of her work. It might be noted, here, that Morris's detailed mythological studies point out her use of Greek myth provides expansion for the novel's narrative structure and a motivation for quest. Otherwise, his considerations are primarily fixed either on her technical rendering of myth, which tells how not to read Welty, or on her choice of actual myths, which does not describe the novel's narrative and form, but merely draws parallels between her work and the other, older, illuminating narratives and their characters. Other critics in similar studies, however, have tried to interpret entirely by mythic or symbolic levels of meaning and often have neglected com-

⁴⁴William M. Jones, "Name and Symbol in the Prose of Eudora Welty," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXII (December, 1958), 173-185.

pletely Welty's stylistic and technical controls. Two studies of "A Visit of Charity," an early Welty story, are characteristic. First, Hartley sets out to show that the story follows the Greek Proserpina myths of journeys into the underworld and similar journeys described by Dante and Virgil.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he maintains that the story, not being an allegory, presents its main character, Marian, as a Proserpina, an Aeneas, or a Dante, without actually becoming any one of them.⁴⁶ He traces the possible conscious or unconscious uses of underworld myths throughout the story, by this means finally reaching a credible resolution for the story. He concludes that the apple Marian bites at the end of the story originates in the ancient French poem, The Lay of Guingamor, in which a magic apple is used to symbolize decay and evil.⁴⁷ From this concept, one would have to assume that the girl emerges from her harrowing experience with two mad, old women, as an innocent, still rejecting the knowledge of her experience for false motives of charity. In fact, Hartley assumes that the apple represents a safe "upper world" with which Marian identifies at the story's end,⁴⁸

⁴⁵Lodwick Hartley, "Proserpina and the Old Ladies," Modern Fiction Studies, III (Winter, 1957-1958), 351.

⁴⁶Loc. cit.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 354.

⁴⁸Loc. cit.

again from a purely mythic basis, while neglecting the fact that the apple is a red one, which would assume all the Christian ambiguities of the Garden of Eden. Of course, Hartley's mythical parallels are illuminating and, no doubt, essential to a complete understanding of the story. They do, however, reveal the conceivable error that may occur when such parallels are not related to the very form of the story.

In the other, later study of "A Visit of Charity," Bradham suggests that the story fits into the generic category of Menippean satire, defined as a work which attacks a particular philosophy and employs grotesque exaggeration and caricature.⁴⁹ As in Hartley's explication, Welty's style and technique are again overlooked, and parallels of subject matter are used as argument. The critic assumes that the world of the story is satirical because of its use of animal and mechanical images, which, he argues, are the animal and mechanical diminutions of Menippean satire.⁵⁰ He argues further, that Marian's membership in the Campfire Girls and the hypocrisy in her act of charity constitute a satirical attack upon "organized charity," and, it would follow, upon Christian charity in general, according to the tradition of satire.⁵¹ What this critic never shows is the levels of irony

⁴⁹Jo A. Bradham, "'A Visit of Charity': Menippean Satire," Studies in Short Fiction, I (Winter, 1964), 258.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 260-261.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 260.

used in the narrative itself that would force an examination of the story's style and narrative technique. These create, at most, a gently satirical tone, nonetheless, with overtones of great dramatic irony.

The faults of the later formal criticism of Welty's fiction are obvious. Welty, herself, has commented on the limitations of such analytical criticism:

Analysis, to speak generally, has to travel backwards; the path it goes, while paved with good intentions, is an ever-narrowing one, whose goal is the vanishing point, beyond which only 'influences' lie. But writing, bound in the opposite direction, works further and further always into the open.⁵²

Similarly, this resumé of Welty criticism points out that, when simple "influences" on her fiction have been too strongly stressed, criticism has moved in an opposite direction from her writing, itself. Although formal criticism, rather than regional approaches, has led to the only attempted definitive studies of the entire range of her work, even these studies can give genuine insight into Welty's special world only when they concentrate on her writing.

The first book-length study of Welty's work by Vande Kieft stands, unfortunately, in the shadow of Appel's slightly later study. Much of Vande Kieft's work is merely appreciative. Her first chapter is concerned only with biographical and regional data,⁵³ and her second, "The Mysteries of Eudora

⁵²Eudora Welty, "How I Write," Understanding Fiction, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (eds), p. 548.

⁵³Ruth Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, pp. 15-25.

Welty," serves as an interesting introduction to Welty's work.⁵⁴ Here in Vande Kieft the reader is warned again against pat analytical judgments.⁵⁵ She concludes with an idea that seems to control and, sometimes, to limit her further critical considerations:

In observing and recording the mysteries, Miss Welty creates responses of wonder, terror, pity, or delight. Her stories teach us nothing directly except, through her vision, how to observe, and wonder, and love, and see the mysteries⁵⁶

Here, Vande Kieft emphasizes her own personal vision of Welty rather than states an aesthetically sound view of a world which is created by the visions of fictional characters. She means that an artist's vision is a mystery; however, that an artist's work must be made explicable if clarity is to be gained through criticism. Vande Kieft's too personal treatment of Welty's work is further revealed in her third chapter in which she compares the "atmosphere" of Welty's stories to impressionist painting.⁵⁷ However, in her next chapter, "Some Modes of Comedy," she makes clear statements about the levels of irony in Welty's short stories.⁵⁸ She also makes explicit statements about the importance of classical form in

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵Loc. cit.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 65-80.

determining Welty's degree of irony, as well as her worlds, by first showing that stories like "The Wide Net" conform to classic comic form,⁵⁹ while others, such as "Why I Live at the P.O.," approach the ironic and even satiric modes⁶⁰ of comedy. Other stories, she maintains, are removed altogether from comedy and approach the ironies of tragedy.⁶¹ In her following chapters, she demonstrates in "The Season of Dreams" the nature of the special dream-like worlds that Warren had described, and stresses throughout that the nature of Welty's fictional worlds seems to indicate her lack of interest in ". . . hard and fast lines . . . drawn between the world of fact and fantasy."⁶² Vande Kieft is, nevertheless, rather concerned with showing a clash, between "actuality" and "dream" in Welty's stories, even though the contrast seems technically impossible.⁶³

In her next three chapters, Vande Kieft deals, respectively, with Delta Wedding, The Golden Apples, and The Bride of Innisfallen, devoted to unraveling the complicated plot structures of the three narratives.⁶⁴ She does not make it

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 60, 65-66.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 65-75.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 77.

⁶²Ibid., p. 82.

⁶³Ibid., p. 83.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 93-106.

clear that Delta Wedding is comic in form when she describes the interwoven love relationships in the novel.⁶⁵ In her treatment of The Golden Apples, she suggests the various levels of symbolic and mythical meaning,⁶⁶ as well as showing some of Welty's technical innovations which gives the reader "a richly multiple, almost cinematic perspective."⁶⁷

Vande Kieft's last chapter is an overall appraisal of Welty's work.⁶⁸ First, she contrasts the work of Welty with that of Faulkner, Warren, and Ransom, concluding that there is a "curious lack of a social or political attitude" in her writing and that she "has no preoccupation with sin."⁶⁹ Similar to early Welty critics, however, she shows a reluctance to accepting her writing entirely as it is:

Miss Welty has a great power to reveal the atmosphere of a place, and a great power to reveal mystery, when the reality itself is mystery. But with a slight shift in emphasis, mystery may become either ambiguity or obscurity--a fact not faced. . . .⁷⁰

What makes Alfred Appel's Season of Dreams a study superior to Vande Kieft's is his chapter on Welty's form and technique. Here, he takes a particular interest in Welty's

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 167-190.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 170.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 184.

language and her use of "verbal metaphors," as well as the general "precision, control, and concreteness of her language"71 He carefully shows that Welty's style is responsible for the world she creates. In discussing "The Key," for example, which concerns two deaf mutes, he shows that Welty's choice of words creates the illusion of a world conceived through deaf ears. The couple sat in the waiting room of a train depot and "sat in silence, their faces stung," and a girl lies there on a bench "as though sleep had struck her with a blow."72

After an intensive technical examination of "The Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitch-Hikers," Appel states

In Welty's best imagery the reader not only sees the moment, but often sees the entire fiction telescoped through that image. But her imagery is not a matter of 'fine writing,' of studding the prose surface with individual rococo constructs to be marveled over. The substantial beauty of her imagery rests on the fact that style and subject are nearly equivalent.⁷³

In taking a chance on this assumption, he is able to treat convincingly Welty's use of character, theme, narration, and irony.

As many of Appel's interpretations and ideas will be explored in other parts of this present study, it is only necessary, here, to summarize the major areas of his argument.

⁷¹Appel, op. cit., p. 105.

⁷²Ibid., p. 106.

⁷³Ibid., p. 107.

His first chapter is devoted to A Curtain of Green which he discusses thematically, using Warren's idea of "separateness" in treating theme and character.⁷⁴ Next, he considers Welty's "comic spirit," showing the formal levels of irony from the ". . . most ancient to the most modern of comic modes."⁷⁵ In two other chapters, he considers her use of the "grotesque and the gothic."⁷⁶ In another, he considers her Negro characters, compared rather closely with those of Faulkner.⁷⁷ In separate chapters on The Wide Net, The Golden Apples, and The Bride of Innisfallen, he examines the novels always in terms of form and technique, and considers their themes and subjects.⁷⁸ Appel's late study is an accomplishment in that he attempts to look at Welty's work as a whole in order to gain a perspective and because he usually considers Welty's work in the light of form and in the context of her style and techniques, avoiding the pitfalls of analysis.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 3-34.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 35, pp. 36-72.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 137-171.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 137-171.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 172-204, pp. 205-237, pp. 238-257.

CHAPTER II

THEME AND CHARACTERIZATION

If it is true that Welty's subject and style are inseparable (as many critics agree), then, it would follow, that theme and character derive dramatically from her work. Her characters reveal themselves through the unconscious action of their minds, and theme emerges from the resolution of that action, as an afterthought and never as a comment or a prescription. One must also remember that Welty's characters are not only actors in a special world, but also a part of the substance of that world. Finally, theme relates to the fictional world from which it springs, rather than from any real one. It should be noted before any thematic discussion of Welty's stories, that Warren has carefully exacted the central, very important, theme of isolation in nearly all of the stories in A Curtain of Green. He finds:

To begin with, almost all the stories deal with people who, in one way or another, are cut off, alienated, isolated from the world.⁷⁹

As it will be shown, the theme of isolation in one early story, "A Piece of News," becomes, finally, an essential device for the story's unity and eventual formal resolution.

"A Piece of News," from A Curtain of Green, demonstrates Welty's treatment of character and two important examples of the kind she handles. The story's action, itself, reveals one phase of a persistent theme that runs through the

⁷⁹Warren, op. cit., p. 160.

heart of her work. Although the story concerns only two characters, Ruby Fisher and her husband Clyde, much of its world is shown through Ruby's eyes and gains depth, because it reflects her own private consciousness. From the outset of the story, Ruby is characterized by natural imagery:

She had been out in the rain. She stood in front of the cabin fireplace, her legs wide apart, bending over, shaking her wet yellow head crossly, like a cat reproaching itself for not knowing better.⁸⁰

The story's conflict begins when Ruby accidentally reads a newspaper article about a woman with her same name who has been shot in the leg by her husband. Ruby slips almost intuitively into the extraordinarily exciting world of the other Ruby Fisher.

An expression of utter timidity came over her flat blue eyes and her soft mouth. Then a look of fright. She stared about--What eye in the world did she feel looking on her . . . ?

As she passed from one word to the next she only whispered; . . . then she said it all over out loud like a conversation.

"That's me," she said softly, with deference, very formally.⁸¹

As Ruby drifts into her day-dream, the little isolated world of the Fisher's cabin descriptively illuminates what Ruby is thinking and seems more and more as if shaped by Ruby's mind.

⁸⁰Eudora Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 21.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 23.

The rain develops into a thunderstorm after she has read the article, and when Ruby says, "That's me," it is her mind which notes that ". . . the fire slipped and suddenly roared in the house already deafening with the rain" ⁸² Just before her husband returns home to break the spell of her fantasy, it is again her perception of the storm which finds it like ". . . a whole tree of lightning . . . in the sky." ⁸³

When Clyde, Ruby's husband, returns home and the story's action is resolved, one obvious thematic interpretation is that dream has been broken, and reality has been restored. Brooks and Warren, for example, make this following explanation:

Ruby's reverie is broken by Clyde's prodding her with the gun. His act is the impingement of common sense, the return to reality. ⁸⁴

This conclusion is dramatically logical, since Ruby is day-dreaming, and Clyde gives her the facts: that the Ruby Fisher she momentarily imagines herself to be is a different woman living in Tennessee. The conclusion certainly parallels Warren's idea of "love and separateness" in Welty's fiction. Ruby's day-dream is motivated by a desire for passion and fulfillment that is absent in her life with Clyde, who, himself, refuses to recognize her desire and removes them, again, to

⁸² Loc. cit.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁴ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction, p. 132.

separate, isolated worlds. Brooks and Warren, however, emphasize that, while Clyde's act returns the story's action to reality,

. . . ironically, the fact that Clyde stands there with a gun in his hand ties the reverie to the reality. For a moment, to the girl, it almost seems that the imagined situation will become real.⁸⁵

The "realness" of the reverie actually influences Clyde, too, for when he first returns and startles Ruby with a gun, the story's point of view shifts from Ruby to Clyde, and he sees her under the influence of her dream:

Once as she knelt at the safe, getting out biscuits she saw Clyde looking at her and she smiled and bent her head tenderly. There was some way she began to move her arms that was mysteriously sweet and yet abrupt and tentative, a delicate and vulnerable manner, as though her breasts gave her pain.⁸⁶

Clyde, also, seems uncertain of the difference between the facts and the fantasy when, after he learns of the newspaper origin of her fantasy, he blurts out, "It's a lie."⁸⁷ Finally, the point of change comes after Clyde has suddenly exclaimed, "Well, I'd just like to see the place I shot you!"⁸⁸ Then, both Ruby and Clyde, for the first time seem to leave their separate worlds, and they look at each other:

The moment filled with their hopelessness. Slowly both flushed, as though with a double shame and a double

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 132.

⁸⁶Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 28.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁸Loc. cit.

pleasure. It was as though Clyde might really have killed Ruby,⁸⁹ though Ruby might really have been dead at his hand.

Here, then, the story's theme must involve not only Clyde's rational response to his wife's obvious fantasy, but also, the contrast of his rational and somewhat literal perception of the world and Ruby's naively intuitive perceptions. Their mutual feelings of helplessness, shame, as well as pleasure emerge as they realize both the mystery and the separateness of their worlds.

The ironic, "A Piece of News," balances near the tragic, for, while the couple's realization is not destructive (life continues as before), it is not constructive, either, for it gives them no insight into coping with their isolation; and the meeting of their separate worlds, like the story's storm, rolls "away like a wagon crossing a bridge."⁹⁰ Warren has concluded that each of Welty's stories develops one of two basic dramatic patterns and, it would follow, resolutions:

. . . first, the attempt of the isolated person to escape into the world; or second, the discovery by the isolated person,⁹¹ or by the reader, of the nature of the predicament.

Of these two patterns, "A Piece of News" obviously follows the first, for whatever the hint of discovery in the story's

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 30

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 31.

⁹¹Warren, op. cit., p. 161.

resolution, it is momentary and soon lost on both Clyde and Ruby Fisher.

In "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," another story from A Curtain of Green, a couple is very similar to Ruby and Clyde. Because the story is written in an "effaced" narrative technique and is pointedly satirical, the theme emerges more emphatically. The three ladies who perpetuate the action represent the type of women characters who stand for the mores and established codes of behavior of small town Southern society which Welty so frequently uses in her writing. Three ladies living in Victory, Mississippi, decide it is time to send a feeble-minded girl (Lily) to an asylum in nearby Ellisville. Of the three--Mrs. Watts, Mrs. Carson, and Aimee Slocum--Mrs. Watts is the leader, although Mrs. Carson mouths her suggestions with greater vehemence and less compassion; and Aimee Slocum, as her name implies, is the sympathizer of the trio and is always a little unsure of the necessity of their mission. The complication arises when they discover that Lily is planning to get married to a xylophone player. It is a complication that is doubly ironic. Not only have the ladies discovered an incentive for their mission after learning that Lily has gone out with the musician after a tent meeting, but Lily's decision seems to suggest that she might, for a moment, be able to live a normal life and be the "lady" whom these three women once hoped she would become. Here, the meaning of the story begins to emerge. The ladies

are, first of all, concerned with Lily's fitting into the modes of behavior prescribed by their world, and, since she cannot, are equally absorbed with her relationships with men and her possible marriage. They are absorbed in the mysteries of Lily's private world, however simplistic they might be. Lily Daw, like Ruby, lives in a private world and is characterized, like Ruby, with natural imagery which further points up the vicarious interest of the three ladies:

When she saw them she put a zinnia in her mouth, and held still.

"Hello, Lily," said Mrs. Carson, reproachfully.

"Hello," said Lily. In a minute she gave a suck on the zinnia stem that sounded exactly like a jay bird. There she sat, wearing a petticoat for a dress, one of the things Mrs. Carson kept after her about.⁹²

The ladies' interest in Lily's prospects as a lover is directly brought out when they ask her whom she is going to marry:

"A man last night."

There was a gasp from each lady. The possible reality of a lover descended suddenly like a summer hail over their heads.⁹³

Lily, however, really is feeble-minded and consents very quickly to go to Ellisville, if she may take with her the hope chest which she has been preparing. Even her consent, however, shocks the ladies. She uses the xylophone player's

⁹²Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 8.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 10-11.

slang and says, "O.K.--Toots!"⁹⁴ suggesting to the ladies even further excitement in Lily's world. The turn in the story, which clearly reveals the theme, comes when Aimee Slo-cum (whom Lily calls "silly") at the last moment sentimentally persuades the group to let Lily marry the xylophone player. The red-haired musician (who is almost deaf) appears at the station just before Lily's train is about to take her to Ellisville; and Aimee rushes to get Lily off in time, leaving Lily's hope chest behind to travel away with the train, symbolically without her. The great practical sense in their original plan is made clear when Lily and the xylophone player are brought together on the platform:

The xylophone player was still there, patting his foot. He came up and said, "Hello, Toots. What's up--tricks?" and kissed Lily with a smack, after which she hung her head.

"So you're the young man we've heard so much about," said Mrs. Watts . . . "Here's your little Lily."

"What say?" asked the xylophone player.⁹⁵

Here, the absolute isolation of the couple's separate worlds, like the worlds of Ruby and Clyde Fisher, shows the futility of the ladies' final "good intentions." Their earlier decision, however, was far less cruel, however hypocritical, than their final action, which, in its attempt to impose a normal world on Lily Daw by permitting her to marry, forces her into

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

a startlingly abnormal relationship. The story, like "A Piece of News," is ironic with even deeper tragic overtones; for Lily Daw and her xylophone player are left, because of the ladies' misunderstanding, in a lost, hopeless situation. In Warren's terms, the story's pattern ends with only the reader's discovery of the attempt of the ladies to "help" Lily escape into the world through a "normal" marriage. Warren has also concluded that in Welty's stories:

What resolution is possible is, if I read the stories with understanding, in terms of the vital effort. The effort is a "mystery," because it is in terms of the effort, doomed to failure but essential, that the human manifests itself as human.⁹⁶

This conclusion is particularly important in considering "Death of a Traveling Salesman," which involves another phase of Welty's themes of isolation and the separateness of human worlds. This story, which has been compared formally to Arthur Miller's tragedy, Death of a Salesman,⁹⁷ shifts its irony to the tragic or near tragic. The suffering and eventual death of the story's protagonist, R. J. Bowman, is balanced with some spiritual fulfillment for him. Although Bowman's life has been isolated and unenlightened and, consequently, flawed in a human sense, he gains insight and identity in his downfall. As in previous stories, Bowman's world of selling on the road, his apparent worldliness, is contrasted

⁹⁶Warren, op. cit., p. 167.

⁹⁷Eleanor Clark, "Old Glamour, New Gloom," Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), 634.

with a new world which he must confront. This new world is the rather primitive, almost cave-like existence of Sonny and his family in their remote little cabin. Bowman must enter this world, because he has wrecked his car (a trademark of his world) and must have assistance; he is also ill with fever. After Bowman tips his car into a ditch on a stretch of road miles from the nearest town, he surveys his situation, and the reader sees Bowman's early anticipation of the new world he is about to enter. Again, much of the story is from Bowman's point of view:

Where am I? he wondered with a shock. Why didn't I do something? . . . There was the house, back on the 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 heavy heaped-up vine that covered the roof, light and green, as though forgotten by summer.⁹⁸

Inside, the dark atmosphere of the cabin establishes the sense of impending doom, while its warmth and primitive domesticity also give the cabin the air of a last resort, or better, a final refuge. When Bowman first sees Sonny's wife (whom he mistakes for Sonny's mother), she seems to suggest symbolically both hope and despair. The mistake even suggests, further, a universal relationship of the Mother and Son:

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.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 235.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 236.

Although the world in the little cabin is very unfamiliar to Bowman, the traveling salesman, and even though he senses "a mysterious, quiet, cool, danger"¹⁰⁰ there, nevertheless, he soon sees similarities in his new surroundings with remembered scenes of childhood, or a kind of made-up childhood. This identification permits his world and the new one to merge, and leads to his final self-realization at the end.

The tragic irony of Bowman's situation is constantly re-enforced by the paradoxical nature of his place of refuge. Not only has Bowman found himself there by accident, but the next nearest town, Beulah, had been his point of destination. One interesting study shows a parallel between Welty's choice of the name, Beulah, and Blake's poetic use of it.¹⁰¹ Vickery notes that Blake used "Beulah" to signify a "middle-ground between spiritual and temporal forms of space,"¹⁰² and that Blake's images concerning Beulah are the moon, the garden, and winter,¹⁰³ all three suggesting the story's narrative, from accident to refuge to death. The study's significance, here, however, is in its further evidence of the important symbolic aspects of the world that Bowman enters and in which

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁰¹John B. Vickery, "William Blake and Eudora Welty's 'Death of a Traveling Salesman,'" Modern Language Notes (LXXVI, 1961), 626.

¹⁰²Loc. cit.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 267.

he lives out the last days of his life.

It is certainly through Bowman's confrontation with this world that he gains insight into his waning life. Having spent the afternoon and part of the night with Sonny and his wife, who, he discovers, is expecting a baby, Bowman is first uncomfortable and, then, finds some remembered familiarity in their world and comfort in their reserved hospitality. When Sonny offers Bowman a drink, they must make "another excursion into the dark" into "a wilderness of thick-
et."¹⁰⁴ Sonny orders him to get down on his knees as they go through a tunnel, and it is Bowman who must make their light with matches while Sonny finds the whiskey which tastes to Bowman "as though he were drinking the hearth."¹⁰⁵ Bowman's ordeal is dramatically presented, here, as another journey into darkness and the underworld. Their "excursion" suggests a journey into hell, and Bowman's prayer-like posture and the hellishly hot whiskey are symbolic of purgation, which Bowman does certainly undergo in his final realization. Finally, he sees in their isolated world (a world very much like the little cabin of the Fisher's in "A Piece of News"), the absolute isolation of his existence.

He lay stretched by the fire until it grew low and dying. He watched every tongue of blaze lick out and vanish

¹⁰⁴Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 249.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 250.

He heard breathing, round and deep, of the man and his wife in the room across the passage. And that was all. But emotion swelled patiently within him, and he wished that the child were his.¹⁰⁶

Here, Bowman gains insight, and certainly tragic insight, when he discovers that his life which has been on the road, has been even more isolated than the sheltered, remote, but productive, existence of Sonny and his wife (as Warren also points out). He clearly discovers his predicament, but dies after sinking "in fright onto the road, his bags falling about him."¹⁰⁷

Bowman's insight into his existence, even in death, and his consequent insight into existence in general are shared by other stories from A Curtain of Green. The young girl in "A Memory," for example, gains maturity and self-knowledge when she finally sees the "memory" of a boy she loved as

. . . speechless and innocent, a medium-sized boy with blond hair, his unconscious eyes looking beyond me and out the window.¹⁰⁸

Even the amazingly unfortunate heroine of "Why I Live at the P.O." gains some insight, at least, into how she likes her world--all "catercornered." The red-haired young man in "The Key," however, in gaining new knowledge, suggests how it may positively change his existence. In this story, he encounters the strange world of a middle-aged couple who are

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 157.

deaf and mute. As it was pointed out earlier, the world of the couple is shown stylistically through sensual images. The young man, himself, is characterized through their eyes, giving him a larger-than-life, heroic vitality:

The color of his hair seemed to jump and move, like the flicker of a match struck in a wind. The ceiling lights were not steady but seemed to pulsate like a living and transient force, and made the young man in his preoccupation appear to tremble in the midst of his size and strength, and to fail to impress his exact outline upon the yellow walls.¹⁰⁹

The young man has accidentally dropped a key in front of the couple who are watching for a train to take them on a long awaited trip to Niagara Falls. Albert, the husband, sees the key as a symbol suggesting that their trip, for which they have saved so long, will make them fall in love. The importance of the theme of "love and separateness" is very clear in this story and becomes even more important when Albert's wife, Ellie, thinks that the key means nothing at all. Albert, then, selfishly hides the key in his coat, keeping the secret separate for himself. The two finally become so intent on the key and the further frustrations it has caused them that they miss their train. The effect of the key, finally, is to estrange the two deaf-mutes by deepening their mutual distrust. The young man, however, is electrified by the couple's reaction, and in a moment of rash good intention, drops a second key in front of them. He

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 59.

quickly realizes his mistake.

He stood still for a moment and reached for a cigarette. As he held the match close he gazed straight ahead, and in his eyes, all at once wild and searching, there was certainly, besides the simple compassion in his regard, a look both restless and weary, very much used to the comic. You could see that he despised and saw the uselessness of the thing he had done.¹¹⁰

Before, the young man, who is shown to be wise and compassionate, was still unaware of the extreme separateness of the couple, of worlds, and unaware of the effect that any imposition from the outside--what the key really symbolizes--can have.

The young man in "The Key," however, gains knowledge of human separateness and of his predicament; and his experience of self-deprecation is illuminating (he lights a match), and, consequently, he is liberated. Here, of course, the poles of freedom and isolation, so important to most modern literature, also become apparent. Many of the characters in A Curtain of Green are able to endure the consequences of separateness and, at the same time, endure their isolation which, paradoxically, makes them free. Phoenix, the ancient Negro woman, makes her long difficult walk to town in "A Worn Path," and, armed with her crusty endurance, she succeeds in getting medicine and even a paper windmill for her grandson at Christmas time. The reason for Phoenix's success is not altogether due to her religious faith, but is also due to her

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 73.

loyalty to her way of seeing things, to her world, which permits her to see things differently. Powerhouse, another Negro and the main character of the story, "Powerhouse," endures through his music which makes him able to sing, impersonally, but also furiously: "'Somebody loves me! Somebody loves me, I wonder who!'" and then--" . . . Maybe it's you!"¹¹¹ Finally, the narrator of the very complex story, "Old Mr. Marblehall," suggests that one must make a life, existentially, and concludes that old Mr. Marblehall (who leads a double life in the story) thinks he has finally caught on . . . to what people are supposed to do. This is it: they endure inwardly--for a time secretly; they establish a past, a memory; thus they store up life.¹¹²

The stories in The Wide Net, as Warren has noted, present special worlds which approach the worlds of dream. This idea suggests further that Welty probes even deeper (if that is possible) into the inner, unconscious world of her character's minds than in her earlier stories. Certainly, the reader is taken into the minds of her characters almost immediately, in most of these stories, and often is confronted with the unconscious, rather than purely conscious, patterns of thought and behavior. In "A Still Moment," for example, which is written from the point of view of three separate characters, it is the unconscious which is presented in the

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 274.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 191.

three men's different impressions of the same white heron. In some parts of the story, however, the point of view seems to present a merging of all three consciousnesses, and at the "still moment," the men's separate worlds meet for a moment:

Fixed in its pure white profile it stood in the precipitous moment, a plumed on its head, its breeding dress extended in rays, eating steadily the little water creatures. There was a little space between each man and the others, there they stood overwhelmed. No one could say the three had ever met, or that this moment of inter-
 sedition had ever come in their lives, or its promise fulfilled.¹¹³

Here, again, theme is found to involve the meeting and eventual re-separation of human worlds (the three men part, going separate directions), while meaning and technique become one. In "The Wide Net," the thread of conscious human action emerges, as Warren notes, to the level of ritual and unconscious activity:

. . . when William Wallace . . . goes out to dredge the river, he is presumably driven by the fear that his wife has jumped in, but the fear is absorbed into the level of the river, and in a saturnalian dance, he prances about with a great catfish hung on his belt.¹¹⁴

The world of the story, a story which is comic in form with overtones of romance (in the long, adventurous river-dredging scene), involves many different characters who also appear in later Welty fiction. During the river trip, the male characters with the net on the raft could be identified with any community of mankind on a quest because of the near-ritualistic

¹¹³Welty, The Wide Net, p. 88.

¹¹⁴Warren, op. cit., p. 164.

pattern of their action. Each person has his own particular motivation for being along. William Wallace is the hero whose quest is to find the body of his wife in the Pearl River. Virgil, like Dante's Virgil, is his best friend and guide; he functions almost as a first mate on the raft. Doc, "the wise old man,"¹¹⁵ is there to provide rationale and to loan his net. The big group of Doyles are interested in telling "how to do it best"¹¹⁶; and the group of Malones are ". . . in it for the fish."¹¹⁷ The mythic quality of the adventure makes possible important symbolic characters like the two toe-heads, Grady and Brucie, whose father had drowned in the Pearl River (suggesting the "full fathom five" sequence in The Tempest) and the two Negro boys, Sam and Bobbie Bell, who intuitively grasp the danger of the tempest the raft actually encounters and of the appearance of the serpent, "The King of the Snakes."

William Wallace must lead the expedition, because his wife, who is expecting a baby, has threatened to drown herself. Although the conscious reasons for the behavior of William Wallace and his wife are well established (he has stayed out all night drinking, and she has retaliated with the suicidal threat), the real motivation for his quest along the Pearl

¹¹⁵Loc. cit.

¹¹⁶Welty, The Wide Net, p. 52.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 54.

River is a dilemma similar to that of other characters in Welty's fiction. William Wallace is concerned with his wife's strange behavior during her pregnancy:

When he came into 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.¹¹⁸

Hazel's world of womanhood and expectant motherhood is as much of a mystery to him as Ruby Fisher's daydream was to Clyde or as Sonny's wife was to Bowman. As Warren points out, part of William Wallace's trial during his quest is an attempt to discover that mystery.¹¹⁹ Warren quotes from the passage where William Wallace dives deep into the river:

Had he suspected down there, like some secret, the real trouble that Hazel had fallen into, about which words in a letter could not speak--how (who knew?)¹²⁰

Although William Wallace cannot fathom the "Mystery" (which Warren has pointed out is always doomed to failure), he completes his quest, returns home (not unlike Ulysses returning, after his adventurous journey, to Penelope), finds her there, and spans her for her suicide prank, thus resuming, unconsciously, his dominant role ("It was as if he had chased her and captured her again"¹²¹). The wedding of the estranged couple at the end completes the comic form of the story.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹¹⁹ Warren, op. cit., p. 164.

¹²⁰ Welty, The Wide Net, p. 61.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 72.

However, unconsciously, his quest for knowledge, knowledge of Hazel's world, has been unsuccessful; he cannot finally escape his world as a man and see into the world of his wife. The quest is like "any other chase in the end,"¹²² but it is Hazel who really and characteristically receives new knowledge at the end and who shows a way to bridge the gap between their two worlds through love. At the very end of the story, it is Hazel who

. . . took him by the hand and lead him into the house smiling as if she were smiling down on him.¹²³

In the much later stories from The Bride of Innisfallen (1955), there is a similar merging of separate worlds and a similar emphasizing of almost unconscious patterns of behavior. The young woman in "Kin" is first amazed at the rediscovery of the strange world in her aunt's house in a tiny Mississippi town. It is certainly a world isolated and caught in the past; yet, the girl is, despite her telling of the story, swept into her past recollections of the house as a child. The effect of her being made a part of a past ends in her turning away from it, although the very effect of world or "place" is reflected in her first impressions of the small town's name, itself, Mingo, which seems "something instead of somewhere."¹²⁴ The impressions of Delilah in "The

¹²²Ibid., p. 70.

¹²³Ibid., p. 72.

¹²⁴Eudora Welty, The Bride of Innisfallen, p. 112.

Burning" are similar. Delilah, a Negro slave, and her two spinster mistresses are driven from their home by Yankee raiders who burn it to the ground. When the two sisters hang themselves and leave Delilah alone, she is forced to face a completely transformed world. She becomes more isolated than she had ever been in her former slave existence, because she is alone and has been evicted from her past world. Ironically, however, and like Phoenix in "A Worn Path," she arms herself with the wisdom of her consciousness, and, carrying a "black locust stick to drive the snakes"¹²⁵, she finally marches to the river, with fire all around her and wades in. Although the story ends with Delilah's walking farther and deeper into the river, dramatically resolving the story's tragic theme of betrayal, the consequence of the act in terms of the slave girl is ambiguous. She has "her treasure stacked on the roof of her head,"¹²⁶ a Jubilee cup which she has taken from her two mistresses, making her submersion into the river also an inverted baptism, with the chalice-like treasure, a final act of self-redemption. She is in the end, more successful in her endurance, in her conduct in a strange world, than the two sisters, equally isolated by their former sheltered life who kill themselves consciously, unable to dream of anything real or imaginative beyond themselves or their

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 46.

¹²⁶Loc. cit.

former existence.

In the story, "Ladies in the Spring," Welty uses the sensitive vision of a young boy to tell a story which finally involves the initiation and celebration of spring. In permitting a child to tell the story, Welty permits less distance between the conscious and unconscious levels of action, while allowing the reader alone to grasp the irony of the story's double plot. The situation involves two courses of action--one concerning the boy, Dewey, and his father, and the other concerning his father and a lover. Dewey mistakes his father's stroll toward the woods with a fishing pole for a real fishing trip, and he joins him, disturbing an intended rendezvous between his father and a lover. On their way to the river, Dewey and his father come upon Miss Hattie " . . . sitting a vigil of the necessary duration beside the nearest body of water"¹²⁷ trying, as she always does in March, to make rain. The rain actually does come when Dewey and his father are on their way home from the river, and they must walk under the safety of Miss Hattie's umbrella for the entire way. As they walk along Royals Street, the Negroes call to Miss Hattie and voice their mutual intuitive understanding that she has really made it rain, suggesting too, that she has started the spring.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 86.

"It's beginning!" Miss Hattie called
 "We're real proud of you, Miss Hattie!"
 "You're still a credit to Royals, Miss Hattie!"
 "Don't drown yourself out there!"
 "Oh, I won't," said Miss Hattie.¹²⁸

Dewey receives new knowledge when he returns home and confronts his mother. He asks her if a new-born calf will be his:

"You have to ask your pa, son."
 "Why do you always tell me the same thing? Mama!"
 Arm straight before him, he extended toward her dear face his fish--still shining a little, held by its tail, its eye and its mouth as agape as any big fish's. She turned.
 "Get away from me!" she shrieked. "You and your pa! Both of you get the sight of you clear away!"¹²⁹

Here Dewey is confronted with a new identity with his father and also with knowledge, similar to William Wallace's, of the separateness of the female world. His mother's rejection of spring, itself, symbolized by the fish, is motivated by his father and the intended spring rendezvous. Dewey is both isolated and liberated simultaneously by his rebellion and its disconcerting consequence. The story ends with his realization of the very problem of spring itself and the human being who must face, as Dewey must, "the beginning of things," when he remembers that Miss Hattie

. . . when she stood in the door of the post office looking out at the rain she'd brought had remarked to the world at large: "Well, I'd say that's right persnickety."¹³⁰

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 94.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 101.

In "Ladies in Spring," as in "The Wide Net," the very private worlds of its characters are brought together in action and knowledge by another kind of quest, the celebration of spring, which approaches ritual. In "No Place For You, My Love," the couple in the story enact another kind of ritual. They take a journey that again parodies a trip to the underworld and ends in their permanent separation. Although the two certainly occupy private worlds, the trip they take far south of New Orleans imposes upon them, through a very special sense of place, a merging of their worlds. At times, the reader is conscious of two different points of view and also of one which, as in "A Still Moment," seems to speak for both characters. As they journey farther south and cross water on a ferry (suggesting a visit to Hell), the importance of the hot, tropical climate and its world affects them both and prepares for their experience at their final destination, "Baba's" at "the jumping off place." Inside Baba's, a beer tavern, the couple dance and for a moment, ritualistically, are brought together, and their conscious and unconscious experience are made one:

Surely even those immune from the world, for the time being, need the touch of one another, or all is lost. Their arms encircling each other, their bodies circling the odorous, just-nailed-down floor, they were, at last, impervious in motion. They had found it: they had had to dance. They were what their separate hearts desired that day, for themselves and each other.¹³¹

¹³¹Ibid., p. 22.

Here, clearly, the ritual of dance momentarily brings two separate persons together by mutual desire, suggesting that love, in this situation, must be exposed to an underworld, a Hell, and consequently, to a knowledge of evil, before it can be fulfilled. However, as the title suggests, both actually reject evil in this story and separate at the story's end.

Welty's novels, as well as her short stories, involve the same themes of separateness and isolation with their alternatives of love and self-knowledge. They also employ the same techniques of revealing character within a private consciousness, with other separate worlds surrounding and affecting it. In each novel, the protagonist is placed in an ironic and usually an estranged position with his world and the other characters around him. In fact, the world of the novel itself, whether it is Shellmound in Delta Wedding, Morgana, Mississippi in The Golden Apples, or Beulah, Mississippi, in The Ponder Heart, or even the old Natchez trace in The Robber Bridegroom (in its fairy-tale-like versimilitude), becomes, in one way or another, a mystery in itself for all concerned. In Delta Wedding, in particular, the mysteries of the Fairchilds and their intense, sometimes frantic, world so detached from "the world outside" is identified with Shellmound, the very house they inhabit. The novel is told from many different points of view, but, in one way or another, every vision is told from the position of an outsider, an outsider to Shellmound and to the Fairchilds

themselves. Even Ellen Fairchild, the protagonist, is from Virginia, and not the Delta Country; as the mistress of Shellmound, and the wife of Battle (one of two living Fairchild brothers and the seeming patriarch of the Fairchild family), she still must view the Fairchilds as potential strangers, and, as usual in Welty's fiction, as eternally separate, even in their love. The smallness of the world at Shellmound is re-enforced by the major and parallel minor conflicts in the novel, which involve marriage and, consequently, love. The use of a parallel sub-plot is justified by the novel's form which, as Hardy has pointed out, resembles the pastoral and has been called a "Comedy of Love."¹³² The major conflict of the story concerns the imminent wedding of Dabney Fairchild and an outsider, Troy Flavin, who is from the hill country of southern Mississippi (rather than the Delta), and has been employed by the Fairchilds as their foreman. This marriage is paralleled in the novel by the separation of George Fairchild (Battle's brother) and Robbie, his wife. Robbie, like Troy, had been employed by the Fairchilds when she worked in their dry goods store where George had first met her. The obvious isolation of the two strangers who have "married into" the Fairchild family lends itself to the isolation of Dabney and George. At the novel's end, the obvious threat of danger at the family picnic introduces the inevitable

¹³²Vande Kieft, op. cit., p. 93.

evidence of the "outside" to the "hopelessly provincial" Fairchild family.¹³³

The Golden Apples is also told from multiple points of view. The reader, however, is introduced, as in the stories of The Wide Net, to the unconscious dream-like worlds of its characters' minds. Although each story of the seven comprising the novel may stand alone, it is Virgie Rainey who undergoes the change in the novel, thus making her of central importance to the work and to the rest of the novel's characters. Just as her separation from Morgana's tight, small-town society is finally enlarged and finally resolved in the last story, "The Wanderers," it is a similar estrangement of a central character in each story which furnishes, by skillful inter-weaving, the action of the novel. The first story of Snowdie MacLain and her Zeus-like, philandering husband, King MacLain, is resolved when Katie Rainey, who tells the story, suddenly, and unconsciously reveals the mythic, life-giving powers of King MacLain (which are represented in the title, "A Shower of Gold"). In "June Recital," the life of an eccentric German piano teacher, Miss Eckhart, is revealed through the consciousness of a small boy and his older sister. The secret of Miss Eckhart and her spring recital (which features her best pupil, Virgie Rainey) is revealed to the sister only in her dreams as the quest for

¹³³Hardy, op. cit., p. 417.

the Golden Apples. "Sir Rabbit" concerns King MacLain and his miraculous love making with Mattie Will, who, later, is coldly turned away when she seeks a closer knowledge of King. "Moon Lake" reveals the world and the rescue of an orphan named Easter (who is Virgie Rainey's shadow). "The Whole World Knows" and "Music from Spain" show the wanderings of King MacLain's sons, Ran and Eugene. The central narrative, that of the quest for golden apples involves all of the main characters of the stories. Appel suggests that the importance of "the wanderers" in the novel, as opposed to those who remain within the social framework of the community, has definite thematic dimensions:

All the major characters in The Golden Apples are conducting the search that is symbolically described in Yeats' poem; like Aengus, they too are wanderers engaged in an endless quest that is at once personal and universal.¹³⁴

Obviously, the quest of the "wanderers" in The Golden Apples, like William Wallace's quest in "The Wide Net," or even the red-haired young man's quest for understanding of the deaf-mute couple in "The Key," cannot be fulfilled. At the end of the novel, Virgie Rainey's understanding comes when she suddenly grasps the meaning of the quest, at which point the action of the novel is resolved.

In The Ponder Heart and in The Robber Bridegroom, similar paradoxes of human existence are established which provide for the action of the characters and the novels'

¹³⁴ Appel, op. cit., p. 206.

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In The Ponder Heart and in The Robber Bridegroom, similar paradoxes of human existence are established which provide for the action of the characters and the novels'

¹³⁴Appel, op. cit., p. 206.

themes. Although The Ponder Heart is told in first person, from the point of view of Edna Earle Ponder, the essential conflict is her story about her Uncle Ponder. Edna Earle is made conscious of her helpless position in trying to understand Uncle Ponder's over-generous heart and, in her bewilderment, reveals again the theme of universal human separateness. Uncle Ponder's special heart, in the way Edna Earle describes it, is even more paradoxical. He gives away, simply for love, almost everything he possesses, only to be accused of murdering his second wife and to be betrayed by his first wife on the witness stand. The novel is resolved, however, when Uncle Ponder breaks up his own trial by passing out money, an action which clears him of the charge, but places him in isolation from his fellow citizens who now distrust him. Finally, the novel's treatment of Uncle Ponder's extreme and unusually high comic situation points again to the theme of "love and separateness," in an example of Welty's most satiric handling of the theme. Uncle Ponder loves so much, it nearly kills him and eventually drives him into isolation.

Even in the short novel, The Robber Bridegroom, the persistence of Welty's major themes and kinds of characterization continues. The novel differs greatly from almost any other Welty work in its blend of fantasy and realism. Characters from American folklore, such as Mike Fink and Jamie Lockhart, are featured. The central theme may serve as a summing up of this examination. The device which is

constantly used and is certainly pertinent to the form of The Robber Bridegroom is that of mistaken identity. Jamie Lockhart, himself, assumes a double role: as bandit and as a friend of Clement Musgrove, a wealthy planter, who suspects him only of possessing a daring soul. Further to complicate the situation, in the woods Jamie comes across Clement's daughter, Roxanna, and sweeps her away without knowing who she is, and takes her for his bride. The situation is straightened out in characteristic fairy-tale fashion, except that Jamie, when he finally wins Roxanna, changes from his bandit role to become "a gentleman of the world in New Orleans, respected by all that knew him."¹³⁵ Jamie's assumption of a new role suggests what has already been said of "Mr. Marblehall"--that characters in Welty's fiction create a life, rather than fall into one; that they choose existentially, to be, as they do to act and to love.

¹³⁵Eudora Welty, The Robber Bridegroom, p. 183.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

It is readily observable that Welty's fiction usually reveals an inner drama of the human consciousness, and that she intensely focuses upon the individual character and reveals his special perceptions by having him, directly or indirectly, unfold the narrative and shape its fictional world. When Welty uses first-person techniques, her narrators usually stand in an ironic relation to the story they tell (these narrators would correspond to Wayne C. Booth's "unreliable" narrators, in a host of variations.¹³⁶). In much of her work a seemingly omniscient third-person narrator indirectly reveals the way each character envisions his surroundings, thus creating an interdependence of world and character, an enveloping atmosphere which seems to spring from the imagination of the character it surrounds. In a story like "A Piece of News," the reader is not concerned with the raging storm outside the Fisher's cabin as merely a bit of background complementing the story's action, but as a mirror of Ruby's consciousness. The reader is finally aware only of Ruby's vision of the story, which reveals her way of seeing things and provides the reader with

¹³⁶Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 339-374.

a meaningful way of "seeing" the story, itself. If there is an intense rendering of individual perceptions in Welty's fiction, or as Daniel has observed, "an emphasis on individual relationships and emotions" rather than "great clashes of opposites" of people in groups,¹³⁷ the narrative techniques of her fiction must be responsible for the degree of intensity and credibility to be found in it. It is, finally, her "way of writing that gives the story," as Welty, herself, has observed.¹³⁸

If one were to compare the methods of narration of a story such as "A Petrified Man," with Welty's later methods in stories from The Golden Apples, (1949) and with other stories from A Curtain of Green (1941), her earlier method would prove less varied. For example, in "A Petrified Man," there is no attempt on Welty's part to enter the minds of her characters. From the beginning of the story, the two ladies in the beauty shop are characterized through their discourse, and the properties of the story are arranged ironically but controlled by the writer with the omniscience of a playwright:

Reach in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder in it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher, honey," said Leota to her ten-o'clock shampoo-and-set customer. "I don't like no perfumed cigarettes."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Robert Daniel, "The World of Eudora Welty," in Southern Renaissance, p. 314.

¹³⁸ Eudora Welty, "How I Write," Understanding Fiction, p. 547.

¹³⁹ Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 32.

In Booth's terms again, the narrator of "A Petrified Man," however effaced, stands morally and intellectually a great distance from the characters he reveals.¹⁴⁰ Even the story's resolution, when Mrs. Pike's little boy asks them, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?",¹⁴¹ never leaves the level of dialogue, and ends the story with an indication of new knowledge for the reader only. In fact, the vulgarity of the world, the unlovely world of the beauty shop, which is treated in high satire, comments morally upon this atypical segment of society and, unlike most of Welty's stories, de-emphasizes the individual character, because of its bare technique. "Retreat," another early, uncollected story, which concerns a young man who has run back to his home and mother after getting into trouble, is handled in a similar fashion. In this case, the need of more intensive characterization is obviously needed for the success of the story. It is necessary for Welty to impose in resolution:

He dreamed that from now on he would lie leisurely, stretched out freely, on the cot in his own cell. He was safe. Even his mother could not get in.¹⁴²

"Retreat" is less successful than "A Petrified Man" because it lacks the dramatic irony and believability of the former, but both are limited by their technique, one which Welty her-

¹⁴⁰Booth, op. cit., pp. 156-158.

¹⁴¹Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 55.

¹⁴²Eudora Welty, "Retreat," River Magazine, I (March, 1937), 12.

self has criticized in Hemingway as "opaque"¹⁴³ and rarely uses in her later works. "The Hitch-Hikers," which has been described as a purely dramatic technique,¹⁴⁴ is spare in style and actually succeeds with Welty's usual inner-penetration of its characters. Its spare style parallels the bleakness of its world; its missing details, the emptiness of its characters.¹⁴⁵ It might be argued that the ugliness of the beauty shop world of "A Petrified Man" achieves the same effect as the "style" used in "The Hitch-Hikers". Certainly, the old theme of "love and separateness" is apparent in each story, yet the "style" of "The Hitch-Hikers" reflects the meaninglessness of the characters' lives while giving an illusion of a world as viewed through disillusioned eyes. The ugliness and lack of moral awareness of the characters in "A Petrified Man," however, are revealed by stylistic manipulation of setting and stage properties. The world is always viewed through the eyes of a morally conscious observer.

There is a narrative device in "A Petrified Man," however, which resembles one which Welty uses in her fiction of first person. It is interesting that, technically, the "story" concerns Leota and Mrs. Fletcher, but their situation

¹⁴³Eudora Welty, "The Reading and Writing of Stories," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXII (February, 1949), 56-57.

¹⁴⁴Appel, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 125.

and center of interest involves another story concerning Mrs. Pike and her exposé of the petrified man. Leota tells the story of Mrs. Pike to Mrs. Fletcher with much the same naive directness as the sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." and Edna Earle in The Ponder Heart tell their stories to unnamed visitors. This technique of a second story within the central narrative becomes even more complex in works like "Powerhouse" and "Old Mr. Marblehall." In each of these works, unlike "Petrified Man," the first person narrator takes on a many-sided nature, and he assumes dramatically two conflicting personalities--one public, one private.

In "Petrified Man," there is a suggestion of two emerging personalities in each of the two women, but this kind of irony does not spring directly from the dialogue. When Leota tells Mrs. Fletcher about the freak show in town, the following dialogue occurs:

" . . . I despise freaks," declared Mrs. Fletcher.

"Aw. Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself."

"What twins?" asked Mrs. Fletcher out of the side of her mouth.

"Well, honey, they got these two twins in a bottle, see? Born joined together--dead a course." Leota dropped her voice into a soft lyrical hum.¹⁴⁶

Here, the different levels of awareness between the narrator

¹⁴⁶Welty, A Curtain of Green, pp. 39-40.

and the characters is very great, indeed. The reader, however, can understand the irony from the tone, the dialect, and the very physical description of the dialogue (out of the side of her mouth, Leota drops her voice and hums), as from the women's observations and words. Yet, this irony concerns only a tension between opposite situations and actions. The women's discussion of the freak-show is more morbid and freakish than the show itself; their presence in a beauty shop, more ugly in its irony. However, as characters, they are rather one-sided; if anything, they represent the vulgarity of purely public personalities, their private ones being almost completely submerged.

The sister in "Why I Live at the P.O." exists in a similarly shabby world, yet it is the world of the sister's mind which comprises the story's true setting. The story begins as follows:

I was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again. Mr. Whitaker! Of course I went with Mr. Whitaker first, when he first appeared here at China Grove, taking "Pose Yourself" photos, and Stella-Rondo broke us up. Told him I was one-sided. Bigger on one side than the other, which is a deliberate, calculated falsehood: I'm the same. Stella-Rondo is exactly twelve months to the ¹⁴⁷day younger than I am and for that reason she's spoiled.

Here, Welty has quickly established an ironic distance between reader and narrator. The reader is immediately aware that the narrator's thoughts and feelings are being influenced by an

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 89.

intense sibling rivalry; he is aware that what may be a falsehood to the narrator may be the truth. However, the sister emerges as a character, one equipped with certain, very particular powers of reasoning (however limited) and even observing. Publicly, in story form the narrator is explaining why she has moved out of her home to live in the tiny post office in which she works. Privately, she is explaining her life situation--that, in a sense, she chooses isolation in retaliation for the many real or imagined injustices she receives from her family. By the end of the story, when she explains how she likes to live in her little post office room, her detailed description brings the private and public characteristics of her personality together:

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.¹⁴⁸

Here, the description of her room is a metaphor representing her mind and her existence. She is filled with unresolved paradoxes--news of war and peace--and her mind is cluttered with irrelevanties and particles of fact, even as her room is cluttered, "cater-cornered," with objects and furniture.

In "P.O.," as in "Petrified Man," there is, again, a suggestion of a story within a story. The story told by the sister is an answer to an unnamed listener at her post office

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

window, embodying her reasons for living at the post office. The fact that she wants "the world to know"¹⁴⁹ that she is happy, is apart from the real narrative which shows the progress of the young woman from complication to isolation presenting the seemingly invisible private world of her mind and heart. In "A Memory," another first person story, the narrator (who has been compared to Welty, herself¹⁵⁰) tells of a childhood experience within the framework of her mature understanding. The story's narrative concerns an older woman's reaction to an early experience, constituting a separate story. There is nothing unusual about this device, except as it emerges in more complicated Welty fiction where it permits the narrative to fall into tension with its internal story line.

In "Powerhouse" and "Old Mr. Marblehall," the point of view shifts to second person, suggesting the same kind of first person technique as seen in "P.O." but without its careful identification of the narrator. When the story begins in present tense--"Powerhouse is playing!"¹⁵¹ there is immediate suggestion of a story teller also involved in the action. Later, the narrator describes Powerhouse:

Powerhouse is so monstrous he sends everybody into oblivion. When any group, any performers come to town,

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁵⁰Appel, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵¹Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 254.

don't people always come out and hover near, leaning inward about them, to learn what it is? What is it? Listen. Remember how it was with acrobats. Watch them carefully, hear the last word, especially what they say to one another, in another language--don't let them escape you; it's the only time for hallucination, the last time. They can't stay. They'll be somewhere else this time tomorrow.¹⁵²

Throughout the story the narrator remains anonymous, yet like the sister in "P.O.," he reacts to his world, in this case to the bar world of the great Negro singer, Powerhouse. The narrator appears to speak for "everybody" and would, therefore, be the spokesman for a public, one who, at the same time, expresses this public's private sentiments. The public is amazed and wants to know what makes Powerhouse "monstrous" and it wants to know what makes him able to speak "in another language" in his singing and playing. Again, the story of Powerhouse remains within the central narrative which, although it is less obvious than the former examples, is the final resolving vision of the narrator who sees Powerhouse, finally, "A vast impersonal and yet furious grimace . . ." ¹⁵³ when he sings "somebody loves me, maybe its you." The narrator is more than simply a witness to action, because, by his vision of the performer, he really perpetuates the central

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 255-256.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 274.

action of the story.

The most complicated presentation of Welty's first person technique is to be found in "Old Mr. Marblehall." As in "Powerhouse," the narrator, here, speaks directly in second person as if there were a single listener present; furthermore, the narrator also remains anonymous. Appel has suggested that the narrative technique in this story (as in "Powerhouse") is really Welty's adaptation of an omniscient third person point of view.¹⁵⁴ He argues that the omniscient narrator finally blends with his subject, Mr. Marblehall, while telling of the old man's double life.¹⁵⁵ It is interesting that Appel further maintains that, despite the narrator's careful feminine concern with detail, the narrator is a man who, apparently because of his sex may more easily identify himself with Mr. Marblehall.¹⁵⁶ However, a more likely conclusion, in view of Welty's other first person techniques, is that "Old Mr. Marblehall" is a further extension of these methods. In this case, the narrator, like his counterpart in "Powerhouse," is a spokesman for a generalized public. Concluding a thorough, detailed account of Mr. Marblehall and his outrageous double life, the narrator suddenly exclaims:

¹⁵⁴ Appel, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 26-28.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

Nobody cares. Not an inhabitant of Natchez, Mississippi cares if he is deceived by Mr. Marblehall.¹⁵⁷

At the same time, the narrator certainly identifies with the characters he speaks of. In referring to Mrs. Marblehall, the narrator imposes his own feelings:

She has spent her life trying to escape from the parlor-like jaws of self-consciousness. Her late marriage has set upon her nerves like a retriever nosing and puffing through old dead leaves out in the woods.¹⁵⁸

Here, the private aspects of the narrator's personae are played against the public context of the story's narration. The reader is suddenly aware, again, that two stories are being told. One is the story of Mr. Marblehall, old and eccentric, who lives in a big mansion and who, as Mr. Bird, deceives the public by living a double life in a different section of Natchez with a second wife. He has also sired two sons by each wife, after having reached the age of sixty. The second story, as in "Powerhouse," concerns the private world of the narrator, indirectly revealed as he tells the story of Mr. Marblehall. It is the private vision of the narrator which learns, at the story's end, Mr. Marblehall's secret: i.e., he stores up life and creates his own past. At the same time, the double life of Mr. Marblehall parallels the narrator's double personality. His life as Mr. Marblehall is shadowed in mystery. He walks as all old people walk, " . . . like

¹⁵⁷Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 191.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 180.

conspirators, bent over a little, filled with protection."¹⁵⁹
 At the same time, he walks "with a big polished stick
 Everybody says to his face, 'So well preserved.'"¹⁶⁰ As Mr.
 Bird, he lives in a little house among "scores of little gal-
 lered houses nearly alike."¹⁶¹ Mr. Marblehall, like the
 narrator, has, finally, two lives--one mysterious and private;
 the other, ordinary and public or as Appel describes the
 story--"a combat between the public and private selves which
 we all wage" ¹⁶² At the very end of the story, Mr.
 Marblehall's and the narrator's double natures are brought
 together ironically in the observation, "if people knew
 about his and also the narrator's double life, they'd
 die."¹⁶³ Because of the facility of the story's technique,
 one comments on and illuminates the other; by the style of
 the narration, one character becomes, momentarily, identified
 with another, so that as completely as possible, the story's
 complicated point of view becomes the story itself.

Another important result of Welty's first person nar-
 ration is that of immediacy. The central narrative of such
 stories takes place in time present ("Powerhouse" is written

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁶⁰ Loc. cit.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁶² Appel, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁶³ Welty, A Curtain of Green, p. 191.

in present tense), even though the telling of the story is really after the fact. Immediacy is understandable in Welty fiction, however, since generally its main object is to present a particular character's private vision of the world. In "Mr. Marblehall," the narrator's vision of the world is, eventually, the true subject of the story, rather than an historic recounting of an eccentric old man's life. Finally, the narrator emerges as a well rounded character empowered with a special way of seeing his world.

As in Welty's other first person works, The Ponder Heart has a direct narrator, Edna Earle Ponder, who with the informal "you" speaks to a listener (in this case a traveling salesman who has stopped at the Beulah Hotel which Edna Earle manages). Edna Earle, also, has a story to tell, the story of her eccentric, ever-generous uncle, but more specifically, of his heart, the Ponder heart. Quickly, the reader notices an eccentricity in the way in which Edna Earle tells her story and realizes that the problem of the Ponder heart and its paradoxes is a problem for Edna Earle, herself. The novel begins paradoxically: "My Uncle Daniel's just like your uncle, if you've got one--only he has one weakness. He loves society and he gets carried away."¹⁶⁴ Immediately, Uncle Daniel is

¹⁶⁴Eudora Welty, The Ponder Heart, p. 7.

described as being completely alike and, at the same time, possibly very different from, all uncles in general. Later, she repeats this paradox: "He's good as gold, but you have to know the way to treat him; he's a man, the same as they all are."¹⁶⁵ Edna Earle blames the Ponder heart for what happens to Uncle Ponder as the result of his extreme generosity. Uncle Ponder does not care about "property," but "he loved being happy."¹⁶⁶ His first marriage to Miss Teacake Magee, a "big" Baptist, is unsuccessful, but his second marriage to Bonnie Dee Peacock is disastrous. Bonnie Dee moves into the big and empty Ponder house to spend her days reading "true confessions" magazines. During a thunderstorm, lightning strikes the house, and, afterward, Bonnie Dee is found dead. Uncle Ponder is charged with murder. An hilarious trial ensues, which parodies a detective-story courtroom melodrama.¹⁶⁷ On the witness stand Edna Earle must lie to the black-mustached prosecuting attorney, Old Gladney. When she states that Bonnie Dee died of fright as the result of the lightning, Uncle Ponder, who cannot bear any untruth, demands that he be taken to the stand. Then, he testifies that, in order to put the bad-tempered girl into a better humor, he had tickled her bare feet and that she had simply

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Appel, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

laughed herself to death. In this realm of high comedy, the central irony of the novel becomes clear. Uncle Ponder, who has gained a reputation for giving everything away, for having a heart "as good as gold," is accused of murdering the wife he loved. Uncle Ponder, who "loves society," is suddenly rejected by it and very nearly "carried away." The final irony is that he killed Bonnie Dee by making her laugh for the first time in her life. At the end he saves himself, however unwittingly, with the only means possible in the world of The Ponder Heart. At the end of the trial, he suddenly begins to pass out money--all of the Ponder fortune--to all of the people in the courtroom, resulting, finally, in his acquittal and creating pandamonium in the court. As usual, even this last act is a pleasure for Uncle Ponder, who really enjoys "giving." Uncle Ponder's last act of generosity, however, results in isolation. After the trial, he comes to live with Edna Earle in the hotel which he had given her in the first place:

But he don't enjoy it any more. Empty house, empty hotel, might as well be an empty town. He don't know what's become of everybody. Even the preacher says he has a catch in his back, just temporary. And if people are going to try being ashamed of Uncle Daniel, he's going to feel it.¹⁶⁸

Certainly, the consequences of Uncle Ponder's extreme altruism are a mystery to both Edna Earle and to Uncle Ponder; yet, he remains, at the end, estranged from the society he loves

¹⁶⁸Welty, The Ponder Heart, p. 154.

because of his last act of generosity: he has nothing more to give away. At the same time, Edna Earle does reach a realization of the paradox involved in a heart like Uncle Ponder's. Her realization is as the narrator of "Mr. Marblehall" when he recognizes Mr. Marblehall's secret--a private insight revealed in the naive, common sense context of public story telling.

Drake gives insight into the importance of Welty's use of paradox in The Ponder Heart and in the character of its narrator, Edna Earle. He shows that a dramatization of The Ponder Heart by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov failed because it tried "to supply . . . adequate rational motivation for Miss Welty's characters."¹⁶⁹ He finds that in the novel the "paradox of the heart" is

. . . the paradox of the heart's reasons, the paradox of human experience, which testifies that we hurt those we love the most that our virtues are sometimes our vices, the paradox of the human predicament itself seems to me Miss Welty's major theme.¹⁷⁰

This reading gives justification for Uncle Ponder's final isolation and change. He does not "enjoy it any more," because his pleasure in giving has been diminished by the final consequences of his love. However, more important, here, is Welty's technical means of achieving the paradox.

¹⁶⁹Robert K. Drake, "The Reasons of the Heart," Georgia Review, II (Winter, 1957), 420.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 421.

Certainly, when Drake writes that the paradox of the human condition is one of Welty's major themes, he refers to her entire range of fiction. It is also clear that her specialized first person technique permits, as it reveals two sides of the narrator, an ironic inner-play of the public and private in the narrator, which is paradoxical in itself. As Drake points out, Edna Earle must finally stop trying to find the reason for Uncle Ponder's actions or his heart.¹⁷¹ When she stops looking for answers, she can conclude with what really resolves the novel's action:

And you know, Bonnie Dee Peacock, ordinary as she was and trial as she was to put up with--she's the kind of person you do miss. I don't know why--deliver me from giving you the reason.¹⁷²

The result of Welty's narrative first person technique is stories which reveal the world and the private (as well as public) vision of this world by a narrator-protagonist. It was pointed out previously that Welty's method of characterization in most of her stories was that of having her characters reveal themselves. The result of this method was shown to be a world which enveloped the story, shaped by the private vision (or visions) of its characters. Most of her third person fiction, which "tells itself," quickly shifts from any omniscient authorial narration to the point of view of its characters. In most of the stories in third person

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 423.

¹⁷²Welty, The Ponder Heart, p. 156.

from A Curtain of Green, there is an emphasis upon only one or two central characters, as in "A Piece of News" and "The Key." It is, however, as a result of her "versatile" style that Welty is able to present with equal facility the conscious and unconscious worlds of so many different kinds of characters. Appel has attributed this facility to her use of language and specifically to her use of "verbal metaphors." Certainly, in the earlier examination of her first person fiction, language--dialect, colloquial figures of speech--worked jointly with point of view in establishing the narrator's character and world. In a story such as "The Wide Net," it is style alone which makes clear her shift from one character to another. The reader sees equally well, at different times, the entire river-dragging from the point of view of William Wallace, as he dives deep into the Pearl River, or of the two little toeheads, or of the two Negro boys. It is accurate, dramatically, that the reader would first see "the King of the Snakes" through Doc's eyes. It is again techniques of style which clarify the narrative shifts between the three different consciousnesses in "A Still Moment" and which also make it possible to merge and focus, momentarily, on a white heron, the central, unifying image of the story.

Welty's third person techniques, which enable the reader to see into the minds of her characters, also provide her works with a carefully woven structure of private visions,

creating the fiction's total world, at the same time commenting, ironically, on each other. Warren points out that the point of view used in "A Still Moment" permits the reader to see each character as he witnesses the white heron for "a still moment." After the bird is shot, Warren notes that each man returns to his personal way of "seeing" it.

Lorenzo sees a beauty greater than he "can account for . . . and with the sweat of rapture pouring down from his forehead shouts into the marshes, 'Tempter!'" He has not been able to escape from his obsession, or in other words, to make his definition of the world accommodate the white heron and the 'Natural' rapture which takes him. Murrel, looking at the bird, sees "only whiteness ensconced in darkness," and thinks that "if it would look at him a dream penetration would fill and gratify his heart"173

Warren concludes that only Audubon can "love" the bird because as artist he must "know" the bird "feather by feather."174

In her novel, Delta Wedding, Welty uses a multiple consciousness technique which, in its shifts from character to character, effects the structure of the novel. It makes good sense, for example, that the first view of the Delta country and of Shellmound and "all those Fairchilds" would be through the eyes of an outsider and, because of the pastoral form of the novel, a child's. The first description of the countryside approaching the Delta country (controlled in alternating colors of yellow and black) seen through the eyes of the newcomer, Laura Mc Raven, is this often quoted passage:

¹⁷³Warren, op. cit., pp. 161-162.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 162.

The land was perfectly flat and level but it shimmered like the wing of a dragonfly. It seemed strummed, as though it were an instrument and something had touched it.¹⁷⁵

When she reaches Shellmound, she anticipates through the excited eyes of a child and the somewhat anxious eyes of a foreigner, the intense activity of the Fairchild Clan:

The sky, the field, the little track, and the bayou, over and over--all that had been bright or dark was now one color. From the warm window sill the endless fields glowed like a hearth in firelight, and Laura, looking out, leaning on her elbows with her head between her hands, felt what an arriver in a land feels--that slow hard pounding breast.

"Fairchilds, Fairchilds!"¹⁷⁶

Throughout the novel, the point of view shifts from one character to another, always capturing his particular vision of the world of Shellmound, as an outsider or as a part of the Shellmound Fairchild family. The particular tension which exists in the Shellmound world and which provides the novel's central conflict is paradoxical. Although the Fairchilds are certainly isolated and choose to remain removed from the "world outside," they are also endowed with a greatly heightened awareness,¹⁷⁷ which is also rendered artistically through the novel's shifting point of view. If the event of Dabney's marriage to Troy "out of the family" is the dramatic complication of the story, then George Fairchild, who is estranged

¹⁷⁵Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷⁷Hardy, op. cit., p. 401.

from his wife, is the character upon whom all must focus their attention. Although he is completely a Fairchild, he has also married outside his family and has even moved to Memphis away from the Delta. Like Uncle Ponder, he is mysterious and "too good," too intense in his love of life, and because of this passion, represents the world of Shellmound as a paradoxical symbol. Technically, he controls the action and the final insights of the characters around him. His niece, Shelly Fairchild (extending Welty's third person technique into the context of a diary) writes that Uncle George

. . . expects things to be more than you think, and to mean something--something--He cherishes our weaknesses because they are just other ways that things are going to come to us.¹⁷⁸

When Ellen Fairchild learns that George has slept with a strange young girl, she suddenly sees George as the only man who

. . . left the world she knew as pure--in spite of his fierce energies, even heresies--as he found it; still real, still bad, still fleeting and mysterious and hopelessly alluring to her.¹⁷⁹

It is no coincidence that Ellen, too, is an outsider, and by permitting her vision to dominate among the interplay of other visions of Shellmound, the paradox of the novel is technically pointed up. Ellen must always view the Shellmound world and even the Fairchild family, to whom she is now

¹⁷⁸Welty, Delta Wedding, p. 86.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 80.

related, with the same intense, anxious reserve that Laura McRaven, her shadow, displays in her reaction to it as an eternal outsider. The final paradox of the novel which involves its constant themes of "love and separateness," of isolation and consumation, is that, by the use of a rapidly shifting point of view, Welty depicts the entire novel in a panorama of private visions indicating the real separateness of all human consciousness in the novel, whether outside or "inside" the Shellmound world.

As there is an easily observable progression of complexity and style in Welty's stories of first person, so there is such a progression in her third person narrative techniques. In her later stories in The Bride of Innisfallen, there is a further extension of her use of a shifting, third person point of view. In "The Bride of Innisfallen," the reader immediately notices a difference in technique; for example, the story begins as follows:

There was something of the pavilion about one raincoat, the way--for some little time out there in the crowd--it stood flowing in its salmonly-pink and yellow stripes down toward the wet floor of the platform, expanding as it went.¹⁸⁰

Although tone and place are immediately established, there is a lack of focus upon a single character. Although the situation of the story involves a train ride and a number of passengers on their way to board The Innisfallen, a ship leaving

¹⁸⁰Welty, The Bride of Innisfallen, p. 47.

for Cork, the small, dimly lit world of the train does not unfold from the point of view of particular passengers. When a mustached Welshman boards the train, his description seems to derive, for a moment, from the collective consciousness of the entire train:

The tall Welshman drove into the compartment through any remarks with great strength . . . His hair was in two corner brushes, and he had a full eye--like that of a horse in the storm in old chromos in the West of America--the kind of eye supposed to attract lightning.¹⁸¹ His hands were powdered over with something black.

The phrase, "like that of a horse in the storm in the old chromos in the West of America," seems, by its being so drawn out, to indicate a lack of familiarity with the romantic American old west on the part of the majority of English and Irish passengers; thus, this vision of the man derives from the passengers' mutual point of view. Even at the story's resolution, when the point of view shifts directly to the Bride herself, the Bride (as Appel points out in his criticism of the story's method) has been so little developed that she remains purely symbolic thus shifting the focus of the story's point of view.¹⁸²

If in Welty's later stories the point of view shifts away from character, then the inevitable problem concerns an identification of the narrator. Fortunately, Welty, herself,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁸² Appel, op. cit., pp. 251-252.

has made very clear the answer to this question by her examination of "No Place for You, My Love," in her essay, "How I Write." She explains that she discovered as she

. . . wrote into the story, where the real point of view belonged. Once I was outside, I saw it was outside--suspended, hung in the air, between the two people, fished alive from the surrounding scene, where it carried the story along it revealed (I hoped) as more real, more essential, than the characters were or had cause to be. In effect there'd come to be a sort of third character present--an identity, rather: the relationship between the two and between the two and the world . . . There are times in the story when I say neither "she felt" nor "he felt" but "they felt." All this is something that doesn't happen all the time. It merely could, or almost could as here.¹⁸³

There is nothing particularly new in this technique. Booth points out effectively, for example, how even Henry James' "central consciousness" technique shifts directly into an authorial first person.¹⁸⁴ The narrative method Welty describes is also easily demonstrable in the story itself. The tone and situation of the story is established in the first paragraph.

They were strangers to each other, both fairly well strangers to the place, now seated side by side at luncheon--a party combined in a free-and-easy way when the friends he and she were with recognized each other across Galatoirés. The time was a Sunday in summer--those hours of afternoon which seem Time Out in New Orleans.¹⁸⁵

Here, the situation is certainly rendered from the point of

¹⁸³Welty, "How I Write," pp. 550-551.

¹⁸⁴Booth, op. cit., pp. 341-344.

¹⁸⁵Welty, The Bride of Innisfallen, p. 3.

character, but from neither the man nor the woman alone, but from both at the same time. Certainly, it is "Time Out" for both of them as they later travel on their hot, southward journey. At the same time, the story's point of view shifts from Welty's "third character" narrator, from time to time, to focus directly on the two characters. When the man first sees the woman, the point of view is his:

The moment he saw her little blunt fair face, he thought that here was a woman who was having an affair

With a married man, most likely, he supposed, slipping quickly into a groove. . . . ¹⁸⁶

Dramatic irony is achieved when the point of view quickly shifts to her, revealing that she understands, by the man's look, something of what he is thinking:

It must stick out all over me, she thought, so people think they can love me or hate me by looking at me. How did it leave us--the old, safe, slow way people used to know of learning how one another feels ¹⁸⁷

However, as they begin their trip which ends at Baba's place, the point of view is above them, again. Their drive through the New Orleans streets also foreshadows their very difficult journey ahead:

The stranger in New Orleans always sets out to leave it as though he were following the clue in a maze. They were threading through the narrow and one-way streets past the pale-violet bloom of tired squares ¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Loc. cit.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

inally, the facility of Welty's third-person technique is shown by the appropriate choice of narrator outside of the action which takes place at Baba's and during their dance. There is an equally successful shift to the man at the very end of the story, where, in isolation, he must remember when he was "young and fresh," and the "lilt and expectation of love" had "its original meaning for him."¹⁸⁹

It might be noted, in conclusion, that, although there is definite progression to be observed in Welty's techniques, later stories such as "No Place for You, My Love" resemble her earlier stories from A Curtain of Green much more than some of her more daring technical experiments. Although The Ponder Heart shows the manifest talents of her early first person stories, it more closely resembles in its techniques "Why I Live at the P.O." than the technical complexity of "Mr. Marblehall." It might be noted, here, that The Ponder Heart even incorporates an historic spinster heroine in the name of Edna Earle who was the "Edna Earle" of a 19th century sentimental novel, St. Elmo.¹⁹⁰ The Golden Apples, however, combines and extends all of the narrative techniques discussed in this chapter and will serve as a means of considering Welty's world as a whole.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁹⁰Warren French, "A Note on Eudora Welty's The Ponder Heart," College English, XV (May, 1954), 474.

CHAPTER IV

THE "SPECIAL" WORLD OF EUDORA WELTY

Welty's techniques and style are responsible for the dramatic immediacy and meaning of her work. The total range of her work can be looked upon as an entire fictional world, of a special kind, in itself. In order to look at Welty's special world as a whole, it would be wise to examine the single work which seems to typify the great range of her fiction and, therefore, represents its world. The Golden Apples embodies nearly all of Welty's levels of characterization, constant themes, ranges of style, and techniques discussed earlier in this paper. Welty has observed, herself, that a "story is a vision,"¹⁹¹ and if that is so, The Golden Apples is comprised of seven separate "visions" which, when taken as a unity in their novel form, would represent, better than any other work, the total vision of her fiction.

As a novel, The Golden Apples, spans forty years in the small Mississippi town of Morgana. Although the novel begins with Katie Rainey's story of King MacLain and ends with Katie Rainey's funeral forty years later, there is no attempt at a chronological organization of time. Although there are major characters, they do not all appear in every

¹⁹¹Welty, "How I Write," in Understanding Fiction, p. 549.

story. At the same time, through the narrative techniques of the work, the seven stories take on the cohesion and development of the novel form.

The first story, "Shower of Gold," establishes the central narrative of quest and the central image of the golden apple for the entire novel. It also suggests the paradoxical theme which involves the condition of the novel's world where quest becomes cyclical and, consequently, endless. The meaning of Katie Rainey's story about King MacLain and his mulatto wife, Snowdie MacLain, parallels the novel's meaning. For King MacLain, whom Snowdie knows is a "scoundrel," showers his surroundings with gold. King is on an endless quest for the golden apple, as are the rest of the novel's wanderers, and possesses part of their secret, unconsciously, because of his search.¹⁹²

The technique of the first story resembles the first-person techniques of "Why I Live at the P.O." and The Ponder Heart. Katie Rainey stands by the roadside selling butter and begins:

That was Miss Snowdie MacLain.

She comes after her butter, won't let me run over with it from just across the road. Her husband walked out of the house one day and left his hat on the banks of the Big Black River.--That could have started something, too.¹⁹³

¹⁹²Vande Kieft, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁹³Welty, The Golden Apples, p. 3.

Here, like Edna Earle, she has a listener to tell her story to. The real story of "Shower of Gold" is implicit in the title, however, and slips out, as it usually does with Welty's first person narrators, unconsciously, revealing the narrator's hidden private consciousness, in juxtaposition with his public one. When she says, "That could have started something, too," she is referring, (the reader gradually sees) unconsciously, to King's prolific sexuality. This slip of Katie's is brought out with great irony at the story's end through this same technique, enabling her last observation to illuminate the entire story's meaning. Katie is describing King's most recent departure from Morgana (he comes in and out of the novel's action throughout) and notes as an afterthought:

But I bet my little Jersey calf King tarried long enough to get him a child some where. .

What makes me say a thing like that? I wouldn't say it to my husband, you mind you forget it.¹⁹⁴

By permitting her unconsciousness to slip through her public reserve, Katie has suddenly revealed an insight about King's life-giving powers and has given shape to a narrative structure and a meaning for the novel in terms of the image of the golden apple.

Although "June Recital" is only the second story, it reveals, more than any of the other stories, the depth and

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 19.

range of the novel's quest narrative. The story has four parts: the first is shown through ten-year-old Loch Morrison's point of view; and the second, through the point of view of his older sister, Cassie; while the last two parts have shifting points of view. This technique, like that of Delta Wedding, enables the situation to be viewed ironically, first through the eyes of Loch as a young boy (he later returns years older in a reversed situation in "Moon Lake"). Loch has been carefully watching an old crumbling house across the street, and from his bedroom window, he envisions it as a kind of fairyland. The situation of the story is established when Loch notices Virgie Rainey and a sailor lying naked on a mattress in one of the empty upstairs rooms of the old house, eating pickles. As he watches without understanding the show in the upstairs room, he notices, at the same time, that an old woman has come into the parlor and is decorating an old piano with colored "maypole" ribbons. When she sets an Obelisk-shaped object that ticks (and to the reader is, obviously, a metronome) on the piano, Loch imagines it to be a box of dynamite. The entire first part becomes clear when the old woman strikes the first notes of Für Elise on the piano, and this action begins the second part of the story with the point of view shifting to Cassie. The old woman is Miss Eckhart, a piano teacher whose star pupil was once Virgie Rainey. Her piano studio, Cassie remembers, was in the old house, and Virgie Rainey's favorite piece was Für Elise. The

dramatic rendering of the first glimpse of the very absurd situation which is developing through Loch's naive, yet childishly sensitive perceptions, is necessary to give the scene immediacy. Cassie, on the other hand, through her memory of the June recital which has taken place years ago in the old house, can lend immediacy to the past story and because she is unaware that either Virgie or Miss Eckhart are in the house, furthers the dramatic irony of the story.

The entire story is contained in the context of the old house. Since the story shifts from past to present, the house becomes a spatial device for ordering time within the story. Loch's vision of the mouldering house, with Virgie upstairs in bed with the sailor and Miss Eckhart in the parlor decorating its ruins, is contrasted with Cassie's memory of the house at the time of Miss Eckhart's earlier June recital when she had passionately decorated and planned for the event and its highlight, the playing of her most devoted and talented student, Virgie Rainey. At that time, the hot studio had been ablaze with lights, and the whole town had witnessed the triumph of Miss Eckhart and Virgie. The use of the house to show the passage of time and change is further paralleled by the metronome. The metronome had once been Miss Eckhart's most important teaching tool and now stands as the story's central symbol, ironically signaling the end of Miss Eckhart's career, much as a bomb exploding signals destruction and the passage of time.

The story's third part makes it clear that Miss Eckhart's presence in her old studio means that the scene is to be a kind of second June recital. This time, however, instead of blazing lights, Miss Eckhart tries to set fire to the old house and, in her madness, lights her own hair. When Old Man Moody, the marshall, and Mr. Fatty Bowles discover the fire on their way to go fishing, an hilarious, Chaplinesque battle ensues:

Old Man Moody and Mr. Fatty, exchanging murderous looks, ran hopping about the parlor, clapping their hats at the skittering flames, working in a team mad at itself, the way two people try to head off chickens in a yard.¹⁹⁵

In the midst of the battle to put out the fire and catch Miss Eckhart, whom the two men now believe to be crazy, a stranger named Mr. Voight wanders through the unlocked front door (the marshall and his friend have pried open windows to gain entry) and asks who is trespassing. Later, it is learned that he is really King MacLain, whose wife, Snowdie, once lived in a room in the old house, and who has come home for a rare visit. The epic finale (the entire world of Morgana, from high to low and including King MacLain is finally included) of this second June recital comes when the two men finally catch Miss Eckhart and drag her out, determined to take her to an asylum. Virgie and her sailor have come downstairs because of the commotion, and Cassie, too, walks down to the street clad only in her slip. At the same time, marching down the street from

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 72.

the opposite direction are all the women in Morgana, returning home from a rock party and forcing the sailor, by their presence, to scamper quickly away. The women, led by Miss Lizzie Stark (the leader of Morgana society, as was Mrs. Watts in "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies"), are the same women who have watched Miss Eckhart's first triumphant recital; they now watch her being led past them. This uproarious finale is similar to the epic endings in "Why I Live at the P.O." and The Ponder Heart. Thematically, of course, Miss Eckhart's isolation seems to indicate the ultimate failure of her quest. At the same time, however, it is Virgie who seems to point up Miss Eckhart's failure. She must pass Miss Eckhart on the sidewalk, and Cassie mistakenly thinks, "She'll stop for Miss Eckhart,"¹⁹⁶ but Virgie acknowledges the complete separateness of both of them by walking past her without a glance and "straight through the middle of the rock party, without a word or the pause of a moment."¹⁹⁷ In this way, Virgie's admission of the truth of separateness gives her freedom, and her quest continues where Miss Eckhart's ends.

Miss Eckhart's downfall and Virgie's exertion of freedom do not, however, resolve the central narrative of the story, but only the story within that narrative which has to do with Miss Eckhart. It is Cassie who has seen both

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 80.

"recitals" and Virgie's refusal to recognize Miss Eckhart. In part four of the story, the point of view shifts again to Cassie who tries to understand the meaning of her experience. Just as she has been wrong about Virgie's reaction to Miss Eckhart, she cannot grasp the full meaning. She does realize that Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey are wanderers, "human beings terribly at large, roaming the face of the earth human beings, roaming like lost beasts."¹⁹⁸ But she awakens in her sleep and says aloud:

"Because a fire was in my head." then she fell back unresisting. She did not see that a face looked in; that it was the grave, unappeased, and radiant face, once more and always, the face that was in the poem.¹⁹⁹

The line is from "The Wandering Aegus." But Cassie can only understand the quest of the wanderers in the unconsciousness of her dreams; she cannot understand her own private consciousness enough to do anything but chose not to be a wanderer. It is, then, not surprising that in the last story, "The Wanderers," Cassie is still unmarried at Katie Rainey's funeral and is very much a permanent part of Morgana. In contrast, after seeing and understanding something of King MacLain (who has, at the time of the funeral, come home to stay), Virgie decides to leave Morgana forever.

The patterns established in the first two stories are repeated throughout the remaining five stories in the novel.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹⁹Loc. cit.

The first story ends in a shower of gold and is a kind of comic monologue. Despite the high comedy of "June Recital," its ironic form ends, unlike "Shower of Gold," in Cassie's denial of the quest; Katie Rainey had affirmed it in King MacLain. In the same way, Mattie Wills in "Sir Rabbit" affirms the quest as she affirms nature: she certainly gets a true taste of human separateness in her pursuit of King MacLain after he has slept with her in the woods. Just before she is told by King to "'Go on! Go on off! Go to Guinea!'"²⁰⁰ she hears a fragment of poetry run through her mind (just as Cassie Morrison has heard in her dream), and the poem ends: "'Tis the habit of Sir Rabbit/To dance in the wood---"²⁰¹ Just as Katie Rainey has discovered King MacLain's natural life-giving powers in "A Shower of Gold," here, Mattie Wills identifies King with a noble king of rabbits suggesting his beknighted fertility. The "Rabbit" symbol has two levels of meaning; one is its suggestive connotation of a rabbit-like promiscuity, and the other symbolizes Easter and rejuvenation. At the end, she is able to understand a little of the quest and its mystery as she considers the twins of King MacLain, Ran and Eugene:

That day, with their brown, bright eyes popping and blinking, and their little aching Adam's apples . . . for the

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 97.

²⁰¹Loc. cit.

first time Mattie Will thought they were mysterious and sweet--gamboling now she knew not where.²⁰²

"Moon Lake" is similar in structure to "June Recital." The story takes place at the Morgana Girl's Summer Camp. Half of the girls are Morgana girls and half are from the county orphanage, providing an immediate contrast between the innocence of the Morgana girls, and the experience of the orphans. The oldest of the orphan girls is named Easter, who has already "started her breasts."²⁰³ She has nerve and daring and greatly resembles Virgie Rainey. When she swims too far into Moon Lake, Loch Morrison, who is a summer life guard at the camp, must rescue her and give her mouth to mouth respiration. In order to "save" Easter, Loch must apply respiration with great violence making his scene with her resemble intense passion and providing the little Morgana girls a very disconcerting entertainment. This glimpse of passion among the two adolescents parodies the earlier passionate behavior of Miss Eckhart and foreshadows Eugene MacLain's experience in "Music from Spain." Although Loch Morrison and Easter dominate the action of part five of the story during Easter's rescue, most of "Moon Lake" is told through the adolescent eyes of two Morgana girls, Jinny Love Stark (daughter of Mrs. Lizzie Stark who appears in "June Recital" as the leader of the rook party) and Nina Carmichael. It is their point of

²⁰²Ibid., p. 98.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 105.

view which ends the story and their decision "not to be wanderers," like Cassie Morrison, which resolves the story's action.

In part three, the two girls take a long walk with Easter into a hot swampy region south of the camp. The importance of the experience for the two younger girls is pointed up by the story's point of view which, when it does not alternate between Jinny and Nina, rises above them in the voice of a "third character" which is the technique used in The Bride of Innisfallen. As they begin their walk with Easter,

Mosquitoes struck at them; Sweet Dreams didn't last. The whining lifted like a voice, saying "I don't want . . ." At the girls' shoulders Queen Anne's lace and elderberry and blackberry thickets, loaded heavily with flower and fruit and smelling with the melony smell of snake, overhung the ditch to touch them. The ditches had dried green or blue bottoms, cracked and glazed--like a dropped vase.²⁰⁴

Through this technique, the world which surrounds the three girls takes on the aura of adolescent sexuality and of the mystery embodied in Easter which the other two girls must confront. Later, the point of view shifts to Nina, and the reader sees through her eyes a sort of half-glimpse of the meaning of Nina's quest and of the flight of time.

It's not the flowers that are fleeting, Nina thought, it's the fruits--it's the time when things are ready that they don't stay. She even went through the rhyme, "Pear tree by the garden gate, How much longer must I wait?"--thinking it was the pears that asked it, not the picker.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 111.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 116.

It is the same paradoxical realization of fulfillment and death (freedom and ultimate isolation) which Virgie Rainey has with full understanding at the novel's end. Nina and Jinny, however, must turn their backs on the understanding of this paradox, and, when the story shifts to their point of view again, in the sixth and final part of the story, Nina suggests,

"We can call like an owl," But Jinny Love thought in terms of the future. "I'll tell on him, in Morgana tomorrow. He's the most conceited Boy Scout in the whole troop [meaning Loch Morrison]; and's bowlegged."

"You and I will always be old maids," she added.

Then they went up and joined the singing.²⁰⁶

In this final decision, the two girls deny the manhood of Loch, who has proved himself a hero, as well as Easter's receptive femininity, and chose to join the singing and become fixtures of Morgana society.

It is fitting that Jinny Love Stark is found in a later story, "The Whole World Knows," unsuccessfully married to one of King MacLain's twin sons, Ran MacLain. Ran works in a bank and represents the masculine side of Morgana society. The story is told by Ran in first person, but unlike most of Welty's first person presentations, reaches near tragic proportions similar to stories such as "Death of a Traveling Salesman." It is apparent that Jinny's decision to "stay home" in Morgana has made her restless. She is characterized

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 138.

as "too full of life," and when she "cheats" on Ran, Ran retaliates by having a meaningless affair of his own which ends in tragedy. While in bed with his lover, he suddenly threatens suicide but in the midst of his passion, makes love to her instead. Later, when his lover accuses him of "cheating," he is hopelessly perplexed and appeals to his father, King:

How was I to know she would go and hurt herself? she cheated, she cheated too.

Father, Eugene! what you went and found, was it better than this?²⁰⁷

Ran's isolation and lack of self-knowledge approaches the tragic. He cannot understand his wandering father and brother, nor, certainly, their quest. It is learned later, in the final story in the novel, "The Wanderers," that Ran's lover has committed suicide, herself, and Ran has become mayor of Morgana.

It should be noted that Ran has always been made to represent the dark side of the Zeus-like King MacLain throughout The Golden Apples. In contrast, Eugene, who has wandered away from Morgana to San Francisco, is positively identified with his father and his father's quest. While Ran, whose name implies escape, becomes hopelessly lost at home, Eugene receives new knowledge in the experience he undergoes in his story, "Music from Spain." Just as the rabbit symbol in "Sir

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 160.

Rabbit" and Easter's name in "Moon Lake" suggest Biblical mythology, Ran and Eugene's contrasting personalities resemble those of Cain and Abel. Ran certainly betrays himself. Even the narrative techniques of the two stories differ to point up the differences of the two brothers. "The Whole World Knows" is told in the matter-of-fact, literal-minded first person of Ran himself, while the point of view in "Music from Spain" is shifting, permitting it to span the greater breadth of Eugene's consciousness. In the story, Eugene begins the day which ends in his "odyssey" across San Francisco by slapping his wife's face before she has a chance to come out with her usual retorts: "'Get-out-of-my-kitchen' and 'Come-here-do-you-realize-what-you've-done . . . '."²⁰⁸ Eugene is supposed to go to work at a clock repair shop (again, a device to represent time) but at the last moment decides, significantly, against it which leads to a half-sexual, half-spiritual²⁰⁹ encounter with a strange, passionate, red-nailed Spaniard (he resembles Miss Eckhart) at "Land's End." Unlike his brother Ran's experience which ends in failure, Eugene's story is resolved at his home coming which ends in his acquisition of new knowledge which is identified symbolically with "music from Spain."

The alternation and juxtaposition of the tragic and

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 162.

²⁰⁹Appel, op. cit., p. 229.

the comic which occurs in the separate stories concerning Ran and Eugene (which would seem to place the novel squarely into the ironic mode) are resolved as is the action in "The Wanderers" in the character of Virgie Rainey. There (at her mother's funeral) she suddenly hears King MacLain, now grown old (Virgie, herself, is forty) crack a bone in his teeth from a ham he has been piecing on throughout the funeral and "she felt refreshed all of a sudden at that tiny but sharp sound."²¹⁰ This final feeling of alliance with King MacLain (who, it is always suggested, may be her father) not only firmly identifies her with the quest, but also foreshadows her final realization and consequent freedom. She can finally leave Morgana. Her realization, however, although reached with her complete understanding, is rendered in the metaphorical language of a dream, as in the examples of Cassie Morrison and Nina Carmichael's perceptions of the quest. At the same time, it is consistent with the usual thematic paradoxes of Welty's fiction:

. . . she heard through the falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon's crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan.²¹¹

As can readily be seen, The Golden Apples, represents at once, the themes and techniques found throughout Welty's range of fiction. This is not to say The Golden Apples is

²¹⁰Welty, The Golden Apples, p. 227.

²¹¹Ibid., p. 244.

necessarily her greatest achievement. It would be very difficult, indeed, to judge between such little masterpieces as "Old Mr. Marblehall," or her novel The Ponder Heart. What certainly can be said as most striking about The Golden Apples, however, is its world, its complex microcosmic universe. It is, of course, through technique that the special world of the Golden Apples is achieved. In every way, this work triumphs in its fusion of form and content. Not only does its shifting narrative techniques fit each character and each separate vision of the world which is presented in its seven unified stories, but in each story Welty's style with its many technical devices, adapts itself to the world vision which each story embodies. The result is a novel which, through its varied windows of vision, creates, finally, a baroque panorama of a private universe, made universal. At the same time, its central narrative of quest provides the novel with an implicit cyclical structure. The quest for the golden apples is never really fulfilled, and becomes the novel's paradoxical theme, where quest affirms life, even in its failure--the quest, and it would follow human action, toward the quest, becomes identified with life itself as well as the Biblical myth of Eden, where loss of innocence (the wanderers are never innocent) becomes new knowledge. Finally, the panorama in The Golden Apples resembles the special world of her total work. And in that entire body of work there is an immediacy and universality which is very much akin to one of

Virgie Rainey's parting thoughts in "The Wanderers":

. . . Virgie was thinking, 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.²¹²

Welty's work accomplishes stories of the "living" through the triumph of her fictional techniques.

²¹²Ibid., p. 210.

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