CHAPTER 2

EUDORA WELTY: SNAPSHOTS INTO FEMININE AWARENESS

> "Our knowledge depends upon the living relationship between what we see going on and ourselves. Insight doesn't happen often on the click of the moment, like a lucky snapshot, but comes in its own time . . . from nowhere but within."
>
> Eudora Welty, *One Time, One Place*

Eudora Welty lived a sheltered, modest, wholesome life. Her family was middle-class, church-going, respected, and well-known in their hometown of Jackson, Mississippi. Because of this, as Carol Ann Johnston explains in "Sex and the Southern Girl: Eudora Welty's Critical Legacy," there is a tendency to dismiss her work as benign, polite, or simple. What could someone so unexposed have to say? Johnston finds Welty to be a writer placed in a dangerous zone of under-reading (269). But Welty has not been dismissed. In fact, in recent scholarship, she has been re-analyzed as a political writer, a modernist, a feminist, and even a sexually-charged writer. She continues to gain respect and the complexities of her fiction continue to be uncovered. The more likely mistake of the critic today is *mis*reading, not under-reading. Yet, the deceptive simplicity of her work should

not be surprising. Welty quietly stated all along that "all serious daring starts from within" (*Selected Stories* Preface), a witty and teasing statement that draws one toward investigation and suggests there are scandalous thoughts beneath the surface of the fiction. This comment almost pushes the critic to over-analyze. In reality, Welty is only asserting that those in sheltered situations feel a sense of safety that gives them the confidence to step outside their comfort zones. It is what she felt and did herself.

The oldest of three children, and the only female, Welty stepped out of her comfort zone to become a documentary photographer for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. Graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1929, she worked for the WPA as a photographer and journalist before enrolling at Columbia University as a graduate student. After spending time in the North, she found exploration of the rural areas of the Deep South to be startling, but foundational, both professionally and personally. Through her travels, she was exposed to a world starkly different from the protected family circumstances of her childhood, and she saw and learned much about the realities of life in the South during the Depression. She later reflected in her essay "Place in Fiction" (1956), "It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are. Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth of

experience inside it" (54). Welty's primary awareness was one of security and as she explored different cultures and classes that had previously been unknown to her, she developed an interminable awareness of the temporality of others.

Through photographs, Welty began focused study of the rural classes of Mississippi. She writes, "The act of focusing itself has beauty and meaning; it is the act, continued in, turns into mediation, into poetry. Indeed, as soon as the least of us stands still, that is the moment something extraordinary is seen to be going on in the world" ("Place" 48). Welty developed a unique, extra-sensory understanding of the relationship of perspective to the subjects being studied. Her intent was not to be a photojournalist of poverty during the Depression. Instead, she used her camera to delve deeper, to capture and understand the silent "daring" she found in people. As Jean Kempf explains in "Eudora Welty, Photographer: The Photograph as Revelation," the photographs became a process of discovery. He writes, "Her photographs were made neither strictly for documentary nor artistic purposes; they were perhaps more like sketchbook images, notes toward understanding form or forms . . . a sort of bildungsroman" (33). Kempf recognizes the human understanding the photographs provided and how they helped develop Welty as an artist. Nearly 60 years later, in 1987, Welty was to reflect to a BBC reporter, that her "instinct and knowledge was to take a group of people whose being together shows something" (Wheatley); her photographs during this time

appropriately revealed not only a tragic snapshot of the lives of rural Mississippians in a racially-charged, poverty-stricken time but also pride in their ability to still find human dignity and live a happy life. Eventually, fiction replaced her camera's lens, and that fictional lens focused more intently on what it saw, but Welty's photographic mind sets her up to be a unique, image-based writer whose honesty nags at the reader to understand the human story behind the picture. This chapter traces Welty's development as she moves from telling her stories through photography to telling stories through exploiting grotesque images, and finally, to allowing her characters to tell their own stories through their emotional suffering.

2.1 The Photography and Its Recurring Theme

Welty developed an interest in photography as a child through her father's ritual of bringing out the family camera for special occasions and on vacations. Christian Webb Welty was no novice; he developed his own prints and was involved in establishing the first photography business in Jackson, Mississippi. The knowledge Christian Welty passed along to his daughter was instrumental throughout her life and established within her a unique method of capturing images which she never abandoned. Later in life, Welty explains in *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984) that "photography taught me that to be able to capture transience, by being ready to click the shutter at the crucial moment, was the

greatest need I had" (84). From being exposed to photography at such an early age, Welty has particular insight into her subjects at their moment of vulnerability. Consequently, the notion of a "snapshot," the idea of capturing a unique gesture, is vital to understanding Welty's artistic development.

Studying a particular moment in time by framing it with her camera from un-staged angles (initially a literal camera and later a fictional parallel), Welty used the camera differently from other photographers of her time. She chose to capture subjects in everyday settings, often from the side or rear instead of posed, direct angles. In doing so, she framed "still moments" (Corrigan 84) in the lives of her female subjects. Many stereotype the image of the Southern woman as a privileged "lady," yet Welty captured their reality, such as the photo entitled "Chopping in the Field" (*OTOP* 15). By photographing people unaware in their natural environments, she captured honest and revealing portraits. Though the women have dignity, and Welty presented them in a way that preserved their fortitude, many were, as will be discussed later in this study, grotesques that revealed the distortion and incongruity she found in the rural South. As Frances Connelly explains in *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, "photography created a whole new vehicle for exploring the grotesque in the real, not only broadening the field, but fixing moments, places, and events that were rarely seen before and

exposing them to a mass audience" (2). The photographs were the basis for the fiction that came.

In "The Loving Observer of *One Time, One Place*," Louise Westling writes that Welty "learned through photography how to wait for the moment of revelation and to recognize the telling gesture when it came" (603). In comments related to the photograph entitled "Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord/Holiness Church,"(*OTOP* 88) Welty noted that the participants in the service at the Holiness Church quickly forgot she was there. The women's actions revealed a fascinating joy incongruent with their economic and social conditions. The moment of revelation Westling refers to is assuredly based upon Welty's own stated need in *One Writer's Beginnings* to capture transience (84). Interestingly, I find that Welty's ability to observe, her sense of waiting for the right moment, was not necessarily learned through her experience with the camera. More likely it was an ability learned through listening to and observing her family and surroundings.

Welty explains through childhood episodes how her senses became sharpened in "Listening," a written transcript of a lecture she delivered at Harvard University in April 1983 and eventually part of *One Writer's Beginnings*. She describes the family's grandfather clock with its steady ticking, her mother's singing of lullabies, and her parents' regular reading to all of their children. Learning to listen taught her how to "see" and, of course, the "seeing" later led her

to a visually focused fiction. She says, "Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't *hear*" (11). Early on, she simply transmuted her sensory adeptness to take photographs. Relating an episode of being a young child ill in bed with her parents sitting at her bedside talking (thinking she is asleep), she explains the importance of having the right perspective. She describes her feeling of inclusion in that sublime moment and explains that she needed this exact perspective to justly capture the photograph. For Welty, the best photograph (and hence, the best story) unfolds from that position which offers not only the best perspective, but the trust of those being observed. She explains, "Getting my distance, a prerequisite of my understanding of human events, is the way I begin to work," (*OWB* 21). That distance is neither too close nor too far; she becomes what she calls a sort of "privileged observer . . . the loving kind" (*OWB* 21). She focuses upon creating an unspoken bond with those photographed, and they, in turn, bare their situations and themselves to her openly.

Photographs taken from the time of Welty's college graduation through the 1930s encompass her most prolific period and predominately feature Southern people—both black and white. Some two-thirds of the 1200 photos in the Welty Collection found in the Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi, are portraits. Noting the quantity of Welty's photographs does not

indicate that Welty was necessarily a good photographer, however. As Elizabeth Meese explains in "Constructing Time and Place: Eudora Welty in the Thirties," her style did not distinguish her from other photographers. The subjects of her photographs are her identifying mark; they endure as a factual record of the South in the 1930s (410). For this reason, the photographs were sought after and exhibited. *Life Magazine* published seven photos in 1937. Additionally, two New York shows exhibited her work. Lugene, Inc., hosted a showing of forty-five photos in 1936, mostly of black life during the Great Depression (Marrs 15). The following year, Samuel Robbins selected photos featuring churches, graveyards, and other photos that depicted Depression life for white Mississippians to be displayed at The Camera House. Robbins had been involved with her 1936 showing as well. Renewed interest in the author's photography continues to resurface. In March 2004, the R.W. Norton Art Gallery opened an exhibit of works by American artists of the 1930s; the exhibit included *Passionate Observer: Eudora Welty among Artists of the Thirties* which had its initial showing at the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, Mississippi, in early 2002.

Welty's observations are most memorably collected in *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression: A Snapshot Album* (1971), her own careful selection of 100 snapshots of rural Mississippians in the mid-1930s. Welty herself writes of the collection: "A better and less ignorant photographer would certainly

have come up with better pictures, but not these pictures; for he could hardly have been as well positioned as I was, moving through the scene openly and yet invisibly because I was part of it, born into it, taken for granted" (Preface). Welty believes that these photographs are significant because she blends into the environment, approaching each subject in this collection in her characteristic unobtrusive style. She brings out their own joyful spirit though (and probably because) there is hardly a reason for it, considering the circumstances. Further, she moves beyond just capturing their historic situations to celebrating them.

Significantly, most of *One Time, One Place* consists of portraits of women—raw expressions of women's lives in the Depression South. Most often, she captures each woman in a moment of "communicative innocence" (Kempf 33), depicting everyday life at a time when subjects were generally staged into formulaic poses. The photos of solitary female figures show spiritual strength, quiet confidence, stubborn independence; they also "bear testimony to the need for love" (Marrs 284). Welty explains her experience with the photo of one particular black woman ("Button Sweater"), noting that "her face to me is full of meaning more truthful and more terrible and, I think, more noble than any generalization about people could have prepared me for" (*OTOP* 7). She believes the woman has the story of her life in her face.

Welty's technique of framing and the tension she captures in the subject's gaze show her artistry in capturing this moment of "communicative innocence." It is only through Welty's unique perspective that the photographer can snap this particular moment. She explains that "anything lighted up from the side, you know, shows things in a relief that you can't get with a direct beam of the sun. And the imagination works all around the subject to light it up and reveal it in all its complications" (Bunting 725). The overall inventory of the Welty Collection of photographs reveals that Welty's stated need of capturing and framing life at its transient moments—fleeting moments that cannot be recreated—of capturing "still moments," and of showing "communicative innocence" is intensely focused on the "complications" of women.

Along these lines, I believe that Welty's photography is intricately tied to her fiction. Photography allowed Welty to explore relationships between people through framing their experiences. The tie between Welty's photography and fiction is strongest in her early fiction when one art was just beginning to burgeon from the other. For Welty, photography became an apprentice tool, enabling revelations of Southern people that she later developed through fiction. In her first story collection, *A Curtain of Green (1941)*, believed to be a transmutation of her travels through rural Mississippi for the WPA between 1935 and 1936, Welty developed her fictional craft by presenting stories that readers will perceive as she

saw them: *photographically*. She created images that emphasize the grotesque and focus on the lack of basic communication within the multifarious relationships in the human experience. She says, "I learned from my own pictures, one by one, and had to; for I think we are the breakers of our own hearts" (*OTOP* 7). Whereas a snapshot provides a moment's glimpse, a story provides "a long look, a growing contemplation" (8). This is not to say that a story freezes time, but simply that, as Barbara McKenzie explains in "The Eye of Time: The Photographs of Eudora Welty," the way of seeing represented in Welty's photographs has an analogue in the prose style and that a story requires "duration, the unfolding of meaning" (392, 398). Welty writes, "I learned quickly enough when to click the shutter, but what I was becoming aware of more slowly was a story-writer's truth: the thing to wait on, to reach there in time for, is the moment in which people reveal themselves" (*OTOP* Preface).The story allows for a deepening reflection as the author can focus upon significant details. McKenzie further explains, "The camera's vision is inclusive; the photographer's vision, no matter how accommodating he or she wants it to be, is exclusive . . . the photographer's vision and not the photograph itself is closer to the writer's way of seeing" (388).

Louise Westling, Jean Kempf, Barbara McKenzie, and even Robert Penn Warren have studied Welty's photography and fiction in side by side thematic comparison. The dynamic relationship existing between the two media, however,

is best delineated by Suzanne Marrs, an established Welty scholar and biographer. While Marrs chronologically details the intricate similarities between the photos and the fiction in "Eudora Welty's Photography: Images into Fiction," she goes further to recognize the manner in which one medium fertilizes the development of another, specifically, the method of vision the camera lends to the photographer. But Welty noted the temporal difference between the camera and the photographer (and hence, the fiction writer). Welty's *photographic* vision drives her perspective. Marrs recognizes the progressive nature of the author's development: Welty's first two short story collections are photographic in nature. They are structured by her techniques of "showing" instead of "telling." Her subsequent fiction is much more expansive in scope (291). Marrs' work is important because it establishes Welty's artistic evolution, understanding her early dependence upon the image and her later reliance upon photography and the image only as germinating idea.

2.2 Early Welty: Snapshots of the Female Grotesque

In *A Curtain of Green*, the recurring image depicted is that of the female struggling with her own particularly Southern sense of isolation, her loss of identity, her need to form human bonds. Many of the stories are set within small, stifling communities, and Welty presents "types" of women who feel entrapped by their roles either as daughter, sister, mother, or wife—or as all of these. But within

these stories, there are defining moments. The female characters face some experience or endure some sort of suffering in order to gain greater understanding of themselves. Often, there is an observer of this experience (or suffering) who gains new insight as well. It is a mixture of comedy and freakishness that is quite unique; the grotesque found within these stories generates an awareness of the female predicament.

In "Making a Spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and the Southern Gothic," Susan Donaldson writes that *A Curtain of Green* is "full of figures—the poor, the black, the marginal, the deformed, but especially women . . . who make spectacles of themselves, and they do so in a strikingly panoptic world defined by a merciless collective gaze surveying the odd, the bizarre, and the marvelous" (570). Knowingly in a 'panoptic' world, where everything can be seen, it is significant that Welty's women characters act of their own will; often, they make spectacles *of themselves*. Like Mary Russo, Donaldson finds that there is something peculiarly feminine about a woman choosing to make a spectacle of herself. The actions of women such as Welty's character, Sister, who decides to live at the post office ("Why I Live at the P.O."), reveal a desperation often overlooked. Hence, the female freaks in the *A Curtain of Green* collection are haggard, bizarre, and outlandish; the reader's gaze is drawn to them—just as one's eyes are unwillingly drawn to the scene of an accident. While the observer may feel like a voyeur, the

female freaks need the observer to accomplish any sort of personal revelation. Conversely, the observer is also deeply affected by the distorted experiences he witnesses; Welty uses her photographic experience to position the observer from a vantage point that will yield the most intimate experience. She places equal emphasis on the picture and the habit of seeing. Perhaps this balance is required because, as Bakhtin outlines in *Art and Answerability* (1919), the characters need the observer to mirror their own image to them, thinking that they can see an objective portrait of themselves. They never realize the elusiveness of their own image. The female grotesques in this collection are, indeed, both observers *and* the observed, both sufferers and inflictors of suffering.

Welty admits that, in these first stories, differentiating characters by their physical qualities helped her show what they were like inside, that she "needed the device" of the grotesque (*Conversations* 93). Early on, she deeply related an outwardly grotesque physical characteristic to an internal parallel; the description of Phoenix Jackson's skin with its "numberless branching wrinkles as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead," for example, goes a long way toward establishing the matriarch's weathered strength (*CS* 142). Still, while grotesque images are found throughout *A Curtain of Green*, Welty's intent is not just upon presenting a startling fictional portrait. Donaldson writes that:

> The stories of *A Curtain of Green* explore this sort of reversal between grotesque and norm, between gazers and gazed upon, again and again, and the result is a world in which the politics of the gaze and spectacle is problematicized and boundaries between binary oppositions, between normal and abnormal, classic and grotesque, insider and outsider, community and outcast, are thoroughly disrupted. ("Making a Spectacle" 574)

Welty moves back in forth between "grotesque and norm" in such a way that, by the end of the volume, the reader is unsure of the rightful order; it is as if spectacle and spectator have merged, forming binary objects and offering a raw and often disturbingly close look at the human condition. Strange, exaggerated, and violent, Welty's women characters in this volume showcase movement away from the feminine ideal and toward a more basic human understanding.

Welty uses her photographic technique of framing to show both her most disgusting female freak, an obese woman on the beach, and to reinforce the importance of the observer's perspective in "A Memory," the ninth story of *A Curtain of Green*. The narrator, a young girl, literally frames her vision of the events with her hands by joining her fingers to form a box through which to photograph the scene she sees. Though the real scene she observes is that of an

"ill-assorted" group of friends on the beach, there is a seemingly unrelated internal parallel narrative that she relates simultaneously—the story of her "love" of a boy at school. Welty is using the device of the grotesque to bring forth her core narrative as she describes in vivid detail the obese woman. Yet, as the narrator zooms in closer on the friends frolicking on the beach, she also dives deeper into her feelings of the boy at school. Alternating back to the beach scene, she has an abrupt internal realization; her focus becomes very pointed and enraged. Focusing literally upon the "Southern gargantua," as Yaeger terms the giant female bodies often found in Southern literature, the narrator is suddenly callous and jaded. She introduces the woman in disgust simply with "She" as if in resentment of some harm the obese woman has inflicted upon her:

> She was unnaturally white and fatly aware, in a bathing suit which had no relation to the shape of her body. Fat hung upon her upper arms like an arrested earthslide on a hill. With the first motion she might make, I was afraid that she would slide down upon herself into a terrifying heap. Her breasts hung heavy and widening like pears into her bathing suit. Her legs lay prone one on the other like shadowed bulwarks, uneven and deserted, upon which, from the man's hand, the sand piled higher like the teasing threat of oblivion. A slow, repetitious sound I had been hearing for a long time

> unconsciously, I identified as a continuous laugh which came through the motionless open pouched mouth of the woman. (*CS* 78)

Because of the shock of the raw image she observes, the narrator is drawn out of the dreamy world of her mind. She internalizes these feelings, suddenly visualizing herself and her "love" in similar harshness, and when the man accompanying the obese woman makes eye contact with her, as if to include her in their carnal world, she angrily wishes "that they were all dead" (*CS* 78). The reverie and innocent romance are gone. It is Welty's intent to exaggerate the description of the obese woman's physical body so that she can highlight the narrator's juxtaposition of the visual scene she sees with the abstract story playing in her mind. However, Welty uses the raw descriptors of obesity to transform the narrator into a grotesque as well. By amplifying the imperfections of the obese woman and exaggerating those characteristics that violate all traditional principles of beauty, the narrator suddenly embodies a clash of opposites: the callous, middle-aged woman/the young, naïve narrator; the carelessness of known physicality/the mystery of young romance; obesity/beauty, and so on. The narrator tries to grasp man as both powerful and vulnerable, both shrewd and innocent simultaneously, but one image displaces the other, or at least distorts the other until its purity is lost. When the woman on the beach turns her suit out to dump the sand, she exposes her breasts and the narrator is horrified. She can no longer

visualize the cherished memory of her "love" which had been her ideal and her future. Welty's use of the grotesque is generative in that it serves to transform the observer, awaken her to a new world. Subsequently, though the narrator does not "want" to be awakened, she needs the raw images to bring her out of the mythical and idealistic world into reality.

Welty herself explains this story as that of the young girl facing "unwanted realism" (*OWB* 89). Perhaps it is most simply explained as allowing what one sees to usurp what one inherently knows. The crude familiar way the obese woman treats her own body as blasé affects the young girl. She thinks, "I felt the heavy weight of sweetness which always accompanied this memory; but the memory itself did not come to me . . . . I did not know, any longer, the meaning of my happiness; it held me unexplained" (*CS* 79). Much of the story hinges upon this "it," the narrator's evolving understanding of her world. In the end, the narrative is driven by the doubling of sharply contrasting worlds.

"A Memory" may be representative of Welty's own prescriptive view of life in the South during the 1930s and 1940s. The morbidly obese woman becomes a graphic embodiment of the female condition at the time and shows the warring contrasts between the realistically human and the mythically ideal. The story's anonymity allows such generalizations. The man in the story, who contributes to the grotesqueness of the woman, even intensifying it by putting dirt into her and

allowing her body to be exposed, becomes representative of all patriarchal constraints. The bloated female body houses the distorted (or inflated) expectations of women Welty finds. Though not her first short story, "A Memory" provides vital insight into her juxtaposition of the visual and the textual and her need to "frame" or understand the perspective and context from which she views the world.

Opening *A Curtain of Green* is "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," a story in which Welty takes a snapshot of one bizarre woman and reveals her from multiple perspectives. Originally published in *Prairie Schooner* (Winter 1937), the story is among a select few that Welty revised before publication in *A Curtain of Green*, creating a more ironic tone for certain women characters. Lily Daw is a young woman who "wasn't bright" (*CS* 3) and who has decided to marry a xylophone player she watches perform at a traveling tent show. The ladies of the town have a different plan, however, and scheme to manipulate Lily, who is mildly retarded, into moving to the Ellisville Institute for the Feeble-Minded of Mississippi.

The "three ladies" of "Lily Daw"—Mrs. Watts, Mrs. Carson, and Aimee Slocum—provide both comic relief and social context. Welty parodies the Southern ideas of womanhood that the ladies insist upon and though, together, they function as a group, they also represent a social hierarchy. For instance, the

reader is never provided with the first names of Mrs. Watts (the widow) or Mrs. Carson (the pastor's wife); both are always addressed with courtesy titles. Aimee Slocum, the unmarried postmistress, and Lily Daw, the point of convergence are, conversely, always addressed by first name. Accordingly, Mrs. Watts speaks more than any other character, with lesser lines spoken by Mrs. Carson, only a few lines by Aimee Slocum, and almost none by Lily Daw. The dynamics within the female hierarchy lead the reader through the different perspectives from which Lily can be viewed.

The story opens with the trio receiving a letter of notification that Lily has been accepted at Ellisville. Mrs. Watts has felt it her duty to intervene in Lily's life since Lily was a child because as a young girl her mother died and her father beat her and "tried to cut her head off with a butcher knife" (the scar of which still remains on her neck) (*CS* 5*)*. Now that Lily is grown, Mrs. Watts and the other ladies of Victory, Mississippi, continue to guide Lily because she "lets people walk over her so" (*CS* 3); they feel she needs to be forced into what is best for her because she would not recognize what is right for herself. The ladies believe it is their duty to lead Lily in the proper path for ladies, a path similar to their own. It is, then, a shock when the ladies hear that Lily is marrying a xylophone player. In the most comical scene of the story, the ladies rush to Lily's home to bargain with

her and convince her that at Ellisville she will be "protected" from men and she won't "have" to marry.

Similar to "A Memory," "Lily Daw" embodies the reversal between the "grotesque and the norm, the gazers and the gazed upon" that Susan Donaldson writes of, but this particular story also goes further ("Making a Spectacle" 574). With the sense of massed spectators, there is the more salacious situation of "a triangular relationship between the woman who is beaten, the figure or figures who do the beating, and the spectators who stand aside and watch" (570). The reader is in the uncomfortable position of not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, whether to support Lily or to support the women who want to guide her. Donaldson writes, "Reading *A Curtain of Green* is roughly akin to looking at an exhibit and being vaguely uneasy about the possibility of being on exhibit oneself" (573). The snapshot of Lily Daw, the spectacle, with a zinnia in her mouth is certainly comic, and, as Bakhtin explains of the comic spectacle during a time of carnival, those around her perform out of ritual. As the women converge upon Lily, as a group, to direct her life path, the reader senses an underlying disagreement among the opinions of the pack of women, and yet none of the women want to voice their dissent publicly in front of their peers.

Lily, in essence, becomes a caricature of the Southern woman. Welty describes her with ironic habits of femininity that show her ridiculousness: she

wears a dress made from a remnant of Mrs. Watts' mourning dress, a pink crepe de Chine bra (that shows through the dress), and a blue hat, and she carries a purse, a Bible, and a cake in her lap. Each of the well-meaning ladies has her own mental snapshot of what Lily ought to be and work to manipulate her into that condition. It is as if, in absence of the appropriate language to express the situation of women, or perhaps because a picture is a clearer descriptor, Lily becomes representative of the predicament of the Southern woman of the early twentieth century. The "three ladies" mimic the gendered traditions imposed upon women—such as marriage. While these ladies see Lily as something to be protected and developed, the younger, unmarried Aimee Slocum does begin to have a new perspective—Welty is hinting at new possibilities for Lily and for Southern women—still, Aimee is unable to vocalize her opinion. As Donaldson writes, Welty offers "the possibility of alternative gazes, alternative perspectives, alternative narratives" (580). By underscoring the limitations of Lily's imposed life alternatives, and by making the reader slightly uncomfortable with what is seen, Welty raises serious questions about life expectations of Southern women in general. Lily Daw appears to be an early representation of Welty's dissent toward the forced meeting of female expectations, an idea she develops more fully in later fiction.

Both "A Memory" and "Lily Daw" are stories of female grotesques that feature observers who are affected by the struggles they witness. The stories give insight into particularly female situations as well as insight into how one's perspective of any presented image can change depending upon one's vantage point and how viewing the grotesque can meld the observer into what he experiences. In other stories, the grotesque female character must come to terms with her own reflection, sometimes literally. To Clytie Farr of "Clytie," the most important human identifier is the face. Though she studies the faces she sees, she never makes a connection: "She knew now to look slowly and carefully at a face: she was convinced that it was impossible to see it all at once. The first thing she discovered about a face was always that she had never seen it before" (*CS* 83). In the end, her desperation is such that she drowns in a barrel while trying to reconnect with her own reflection in the water. Similarly, Welty's generative grotesque in two stories especially, "Petrified Man" and "A Worn Path," moves beyond development of the external woman spectator to that of the female grotesque herself, and even the reader. Congruent with Bakhtin's principles related to mirroring, she finds even more intimate ways to reflect the female character's identity. As Bakhtin explains:

> Indeed, our position before a mirror is always somewhat spurious, for since we lack any approach to ourselves from outside, in this

> case, as in the other, we project ourselves into a peculiarly indeterminate possible other, with whose help we then try to find an axiological position in relation to ourselves, in this case, too, we try to vivify ourselves and give form to ourselves-out of the other. (*Art and Answerability* 32-33)

Through seeing their own reflections, the women in these stories are given the opportunity to see themselves as others see them and, sometimes tragically, to try to come to terms with the gap.

In "Petrified Man," published for the first time in *A Curtain of Green*, grotesque characters—women and men—abound. Welty's most obvious use of the grotesque is phallic-centered, evidenced by the title character that is slowly being turned to stone (or to a phallus). The petrified man is part of a "travelin' freak show" that has come to town and is temporarily renting the space next door to the beauty parlor where the local women congregate. Three of the four exhibits in the show are various distortions of men: pygmies, "the teeniest men in the universe," the petrified man, and a set of Siamese twins (*CS* 21). The initial tendency of critics is to focus upon these visually grotesque exhibits and the morbid details of them and stop there. Just one descriptive example, such as of the Siamese twins, would, after all, seem enough: "Well, honey, they got these two twins in a bottle,

see? Born joined plumb together—dead a course . . . an' they had these two heads an' two faces . . . this face looked this-a-way, and the other face looked that-a-way, over their shoulder, see" (*CS* 21). The distorted men of the traveling freak show personify the men in the lives of Mrs. Fletcher, Leota the hairdresser, and Mrs. Pike.

Often overlooked in "Petrified Man," however, are the women. Welty could not be any more blatant with her Bakhtinian use of the carnival (the "travelin' freak show") and the spectacle (where does one start?); however, the images she spotlights in this circus are less obvious. In "Petrified Man," Welty takes a photograph of three different marriages. Mrs. Fletcher, Leota, and Mrs. Pike evaluate themselves in relation to one another and in relation to their level of control over the men in their lives. While a parallel can be drawn between the physically grotesque freaks of the traveling show and the women's husbands, another layer of grotesque imagery—the mirroring of the other—is exposed as the women compare their marriages. Instead of physical distortion, each of the women is engaged in some stage of traducement of her husband and believes she can fix her marriage through gaining insight when another woman mirrors the reflection of herself back to her. She is unaware that any image she sees is not her true self, but a reflection of her as presented by the other (which, of course, allows for distortion). A sense of lack is felt by each of the women as she misunderstands

what she sees. Rather than a true mirror image, each sees an empty space as the person they are and the person that is reflected in the mirror of the "other" can never converge. Bakhtin writes:

> A very special case of seeing my exterior is looking at myself in a mirror. It would appear that in this case we see ourselves directly. But this is not so. We remain within ourselves and we see only our own reflection, which is not able of becoming an immediate moment in our seeing and experiencing of the world. We see the *reflection* of our exterior, but not *ourselves* in terms of our exterior . . . . I am in front of the mirror and not in it. The mirror can do no more than provide the material for self-objectification, and even that not in its pure form. (*Art and Answerability* 32)

The women do not recognize that the image they see in the "mirror" is not static; it is only a snapshot of a specific point and time. There is no true way to capture one's image in a mirror because, as Bakhtin indicates, not only is the image in the mirror inaccurate, but the mirror freezes the image. It is no wonder then that when peers gather together in effort to forge common bonds and help one another, they only find themselves more alienated. Each is never fully understood by the other; there is a chasm between what they are and what the other sees.

The beauty parlor becomes the frame for the photograph Welty takes of these women, holding the disingenuous alter-egos they become once inside; the beauty parlor is also a place of carnival where women feel free to show their subversive attitudes toward their marital relationships. In a group setting, the women often gossip or call one another names like "old horse face" whereas in one-on-one conversation they behave seemingly as genuine friends (*CS* 18). The beauty parlor provides a setting in which the women feel what Bakhtin calls "a temporary suspension" (*Rabelais* 10); it is place where some of the women feel the freedom to be honest about their marriage among their peers, while others feel the need for pretense in exaggerating the state of their marital happiness. This type of atmosphere where there is increased freedom, a freedom that intensifies emotions both real and supposed, creates human monsters of these women, exaggerating either their male deprecation or their sense of helplessness. If one considers the many stations in a salon, it is as if at each station, there is a different emotional rally. Whatever opinion one asserts, the other mirrors, though in truth, they may disagree entirely. In layman's terms, they "egg each other on," but lack consistency with their support. Knowing this, uncovering each woman's authenticity is impossible. Welty's title may have been ironic as the women become more "petrified" than the men on exhibit.

The snapshots of these marriages, and the women's shifting responses to one another is developed through dialogue. As an example, Mrs. Fletcher, the central character, is at the beauty parlor when she learns that she has become the subject of speculation by a total stranger. Leota tells her, "You know what I heard in here yestiddy . . . that you was p-r-e-g, and lots of times that'll make your hair do awful funny, fall out and God knows what all" (*CS* 18). Mrs. Fletcher is initially angry as she had been trying to hide her pregnancy; she has not herself decided how she feels about it. "I don't like children that much . . . I'm almost tempted not to have this one," she admits to Leota (*CS* 19). But quickly it is clear that Mrs. Fletcher's reservations about having the child only surface because of the other women gossiping about her. When Leota reasons, "Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn't have it now . . . after going this far," Mrs. Fletcher straightens and tries to show that she has the upper hand with her husband, "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me. If he so much as raises his voice against me I'll have one of my sick headaches, and then I'm just not fit to live with" (*CS* 19).

Mrs. Fletcher wants to impress Leota and show her that she holds the power in her marriage; Leota, on the other hand, wants to appear cavalier, driven only by sexual desire. She says, "Me an' Fred, we met in a rumble seat eight months ago and we was practically on what you might call the way to the altar inside of half

an hour" (*CS* 23). Neither reveals any authenticity. While in the beauty parlor, Mrs. Fletcher pretends that marriage to her is about control while Leota pretends that she is happy with her imperfect, sexually-based relationship. Each woman puts on a front for the other, revealing what Price Caldwell refers to in "Sexual Politics in Welty's 'Moon Lake' and 'Petrified Man'" (1990) as "the sexo-political impositions of human beings" (179). When characters step outside of their private, balanced worlds into a carnival atmosphere, they feel the need to become larger than life. They shift, change, and exaggerate based upon the response they receive from "the other"; their identity is distorted. In this story especially, Welty reveals how easily the grotesque can be an extension of entirely "normal" humanity, as a side of the human psyche that comes out in order to survive in social relationships with others.

"A Worn Path" was written in 1940, quite later than the other stories in the volume, and was Welty's first published story based in the Natchez Trace. A well-known account of the old matriarch Phoenix Jackson's long walk to town to obtain medicine for her grandson who had swallowed lye two or three years previously, it is an example of Welty using the reflection of a grotesque character to affect the reader. Phoenix is a grotesque not just because of physical characteristics but because she embodies contradictions to the extent that her image is distorted.

However, one never directly sees an image, but must piece together his own snapshot as it refracts to him in his mind. Analogous with Bakhtin's concepts, the mirroring in this story evidences the "in-between" event that occurs in the observer; it is a complicated and self-developing process. Once again, Welty drives home the importance of understanding how really to "see"; she also uses the grotesque generatively as she leads the reader through a period of isolation and eventual renewal.

Many critics take issue with this story, noting its overuse of descriptive language. In fact, some question if Phoenix ever really goes on a journey at all and if the story has any plot, any point. In the *Nation* (1943), Diana Trilling faults Welty for not developing a traditional plot in stories such as "A Worn Path." Similarly, in "The Focus of Mystery: Eudora Welty's Prose Style" (1973), John Fleischauer discredits Welty, speaking of her "vagueness contrasting with or containing delightful and colloquial concentrations of detail" (Pollack 16). Fleischauer's article argues that Welty's overuse of detail "is so pronounced . . . as to lead to complaints" and gets in the way of telling the story (Pollack 16). Yet, others quickly come to Welty's defense. Harriet Pollack responds in "Photographic Convention and Story Composition: Eudora Welty's Uses of Detail, Plot, Genre, and Expectation from 'A Worn Path' through *The Bride of the Innisfallen*" (1997) that, in this case, the details *are* the story. She writes,

"Revelation and meaning are related to details that may be random and that are not in themselves portentous but become interesting once they are framed" (17). Pollack, writing much later than the others, views Welty's narrative technique as innovative, not inept. Welty photographically frames details, such as the simple description of a road –"Deep, deep the road went down between the high green-colored banks. Overhead the live-oaks met, and it was as dark as a cave" (*CS* 145)—not only privileging them, but highlighting them to make the picture appear more vivid. She also gives the story a poetic rhythm that keeps the reader on the journey with Phoenix. Welty is breaking from the traditional story structure in lieu of her photographic method, complete with increased emphasis on light, color, and all other visual elements; she asks the reader to see because, at least literally, her character cannot.

I find that two points are key to understanding Welty's emphasis on the reader creating his own collage of Phoenix and her journey as the point of the story. The story has no ending; Phoenix simply begins walking again after she obtains the medicine. Second, there are contradictions throughout which suggest that the reader should invent alternate images of the path itself. Welty herself confirms that "the path is the thing that matters" in "Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?" (162), an article in which she tackles her reader's most common question about the story. Welty expresses frustration that so many

readers seem to miss the point and take the story at face value. Again, Phoenix is nearly blind, yet she is able to spot a nickel (specifically identifying the type of coin) that falls out of a hunter's pocket. She also clearly describes a black dog and its lolling tongue. Why else would Welty allow the contradiction of a near-blind woman with perfect sight? In this story, instead of reading symbolic meaning into each detail, the reader must associate the bits of information given to form a complete composition. Pollack explains that as Phoenix speaks to herself about the landscape and her progress, the accumulation of the detail affects the reader's anticipation (21). Then, ironically, the worn path Phoenix travels is not worn at all; it is new to every reader, and possibly every time that reader reads it because the details of the journey can be assimilated in different ways. Pollack writes, "Readers who are uncomfortable with Welty's 'photographic' composition—a story framing details in a way to produce slow 'exposure'—produce reading strategies that transform the story into a type more readily readable. But the details of this story expose . . . a woman whom we see in detail" (22).

It is deceptively easy to stereotype the old black woman's journey as a sort of "Young Goodman Brown" experience in the dark wood, but one cannot overlook Welty's striking imagery which forces the reader to create his own visual picture in the midst of glaring contradictions. Phoenix is "neat and tidy," yet she walks to Natchez with her shoe untied (*CS* 147). Her attitude is one of playfulness,

far removed from actual circumstance. Instead of viewing the hazards of the landscape as hindrances, she acknowledges their place in the natural world. The thorns that ensnare her and threaten to tear her skirts, for example, are just doing their "appointed work" (*CS* 143). She is unworried and fearless. When she mistakes a scarecrow for a man, she says to herself with laughter, "I ought to be shut up for good . . . Dance, old scarecrow, while I dancing with you" (*CS* 144). And later, when she falls, she exhibits no sense of care, only saying that she's lying on her back "like a June-bug waiting to be turned over" (*CS* 145). Elaine Orr describes additional contradictions in "'Unsettling Every Definition of Otherness': Another Reading of Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path,'" noting that "She [Phoenix] appears dominated by time, yet she often dreams . . . she is both simple and wise, marginalized within the social fields she traverses and yet mysteriously beyond the boundaries drawn by her social superiors. She is poor, but her face is superior to jewels" (61). This extended series of contradictions provokes surprise in the reader, obstructing his expectations, and creating a sense of disorientation that he must navigate his way through.

Orr explains, "Welty affirms a knowledge of uncertainties, a revisionist practice of looking at the 'other' in order to rename and expand the self, not to rename and de-limit those 'others'" (65). Phoenix's character prompts self-evaluation; it is, in fact, the reader that this particular female grotesque affects

most. Phoenix mirrors the reader in the Bakhtinian sense and causes him to want to "rewrite the story" (Pollack 20). I would contend that the reader wants to rewrite the story as his own. As in "Petrified Man," mirroring or reflecting another only serves to highlight the self, and as James Walter suggests in "Love's Habit of Vision" (1986) it spurs a "revaluation of interpretive assumptions and mental habits" (83). If we follow Phoenix's path, we are able to "see meaning in what previously has been empty space" (Showalter 75). Moreover, in the act of creating the photograph of Phoenix, we find greater awareness about ourselves. As Harriet Pollack concludes in "Words Between Strangers: On Welty, Her Style, and Her Audience" (1986), "Welty's obstruction of the reader's expectations more than reflects . . . it leads the reader to experience isolation and to discover communion" (505). Phoenix is a contraction of inner joy in the midst of suffering on multiple levels, and for multiple observers she is a grotesque that serves as a vehicle of communication and change.

The women of *A Curtain of Green*, Susan Donaldson explains, "are all figures that Bakhtin would group with the folk tradition of carnival and humor, with ritual spectacles, and verbal comedy . . . but in particular, he would link these figures with the grotesque, with material bodies that have become, in Bakhtin's words, 'grandiose,' exaggerated, immeasurable" (572). These stories are very funny at times, and I believe that Welty intended for her readers to laugh, but these

grotesque female characters repeatedly serve to show the incompleteness the Southern woman feels. In each of the stories, a grotesque female figure serves to develop the identity of another woman, or perhaps herself, and even the reader. The epitome of incompleteness, according to Bakhtin, "is precisely the grotesque concept of the body" (Donaldson 572). It is significant that these stories are set in interiors, such as beauty parlors, post offices, homes—settings that women predominately inhabit. The settings reinforce the only life paths available to the women; they highlight what Peter Schmidt in *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction* (1991) calls "the either/or choice between conformity and madness" (4). In story after story of *A Curtain of Green*, Welty's female grotesques "serve as potent figures of women's anger protesting constrictions and limits . . . these are bodies that serve as half-formed articulation, protests that find tentative expression not in language, but in the body itself (Donaldson 573, 574). Welty explores this anger more fully in *The Golden Apples*. In this first collection, Welty's observers are much like Clytie in that as they observe they look "purely for a resemblance to a vision"; they expect to recognize what they see. They are looking for the vision they have of themselves; but, as discussed, the mirror or the "other" does not reflect the identity that one considers herself to be. The shock of this realization and the questions that come as a result of it are the subject of *The Golden Apples*.

2.3 The Influence of Virginia Woolf

Welty has repeatedly expressed her interest in the writing of English novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf. Though the two never personally met (Woolf committed suicide in 1941, the same year that Welty published her first volume), Welty reviewed much of Woolf's work for publication, even providing the foreword to the 1981 edition of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Welty explains in a 1972 *Paris Review* interview that "Virginia Woolf was the one who opened the door. When I read *To the Lighthouse*, I felt, Heavens, what is this? I was so excited by the experience I couldn't sleep or eat. I've read it many times since" (*Conversations with Eudora Welty* 75). For Welty, *To the Lighthouse* is a text that continued to deepen and renew itself in each reading, much like her overall study of Woolf's artistry.

While Welty vehemently denied the direct influence of any author upon her own writing, believing the word *influence* suggested *imitation*, after reading Woolf, she began writing much more sophisticated, theme-based, and often interrelated stories. She admits, "I know, even though I couldn't show in my work, heavens, the sense of what she [Virginia Woolf] has done certainly influenced me as an artist" (*Conversations* 325). Certainly, some of Welty's mid-career narratives do appear to mimic Woolf's, in technique if not theme. In *Losing Battles* (1970), for example, Welty uses literal darkness as part of her

characteristic framing technique in order to foreground her characters. By casting them against such utter darkness, the reader's eye is focused upon them just as the eye is drawn to a yellow dot on a black page. In fact, Larry Reynolds notes in "Enlightening Darkness: Theme and Structure in Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*," that the opening paragraphs of Welty's novel are, line by line, strikingly similar to Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), which in setting begins with the creation of day out of darkness (219). Whether Welty's intent was to mimic or not, similarities such as this cannot be denied.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to recognize that Woolf's many portraits of the female artist fostered Welty's own interest in the development of women. Suzan Harrison explains in *Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf: Gender, Genre, and Influence* (1997) that "both writers explore the social and private worlds of women, and both have created female characters—mothers, widows, spinsters—who are artists of one sort or another struggling to find some outlet for their artistic impulses in the circumscribed world permitted to women" (3). Harrison, who has extensively compared the two authors in multiple published works, believes that Welty's goal was not simply to produce art, but to develop her identity in relation to other artists. She also reports that Woolf served as a dynamic to help Welty define her stance (21). In the artist's process of discovery, both Welty and Wolf find a distinct relationship between the development of the female

and the development of the female artist. Harrison writes, "The influence of Virginia Woolf's writing on Eudora Welty's fiction has been profound and enriching; in particular, it has contributed to Welty's fictional consideration of female artistry and the possibilities of intertextuality as a vehicle for those subversive narrative strategies of obstruction, appropriation, rewriting, and de-centering" (293). In this one statement, Harrison summarizes the techniques that critics continue to study as vehicles toward development of the female artist in both authors' works. To be sure, an entire dissertation could be developed around the intertextuality at play between *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Golden Apples (1949)*.

Moreover, beyond intertextuality between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Apples*, there is intertextuality between each author's individual work and other texts. Through intertextuality, the characters have a conversation with the male-authored texts they reference. Clarissa Dalloway quotes from both Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Cymbeline* extensively. Welty references Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Music from Spain"), Yeats's poetry ("June Recital," "Sir Rabbit"), Beethoven's "Für Elise," Greek mythology ("Clytie"), among others. In "'Too Positive a Shape Not to Be Hurt': *Go Down, Moses,* History, and the Woman Artist in Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*," Barbara Ladd even cites Welty's collection as a response to

Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, specifically in regards to form and the woman artist's relationship to history (Harrison 294).

The most in-depth study of Welty's use of intertextuality may be Rebecca Mark's *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty* (1994). Mark positions Welty within the world of gender studies, noting that, in many ways, her work "transforms the traditional boundaries between genders into locations of exchange" (qtd. in Johnston 272). Welty sets this exchange within the community of Morgana. The conversation that ensues—that between the women within its boundaries and the male-authored texts outside—actually spurs *intra*textuality or conversations between the women of the story cycle and provides commentary on traditionally accepted male heroic standards. Further, Yaeger finds that the intertextuality between *The Golden Apples* and the poetry of Yeats is, appropriately, congruent with the ideas of Bakhtin. Referencing Bakhtin's ideas of language in "Discourse in the Novel" where he writes that "it is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature" (368), Yaeger questions the way women talk, specifically revealing the multiplicity in the voices of the Morgana women. The way these women talk and act reveals what Bakhtin calls "dialogic heteroglossia" (261). It reveals the inherent filter Welty's Southern women use to temper their

language to their audience, knowing what is acceptable in every case. It is a conceptual system in which the spoken word is inseparable from the listener's response, or as Yaeger further explains, "the reciprocal action or play that occurs among a novel's collective and heterogeneous systems of language" ("Because a Fire" 964). The "systems of language" in Welty's text are those different socio-ideological levels at play at the same time: the language of the local ladies who are content with their limited social freedom, the language of the male-dominated artistic world, and the language of those seeking liberation. Through their actions, reactions, and expectations, but most especially through what they say and do not say the women are providing commentary, stating their individual opinions about their gender roles, their social predicament, and their repression.

Welty presents a microcosm in which women (wives or mothers) hold power over men if only because so much of life resides within the female. Mark, as well as Prenshaw and Yaeger, cast this power as a type of feminine heroism. Each woman's power is developed through what Prenshaw identifies as the pattern of "heroic risk, death, and restoration," found within Welty's work as part of the natural flow of life ("Woman's World, Man's Place" 65). Interestingly, the feminine heroes Welty portrays often use their bodies to accomplish this pattern. Donaldson writes that "Welty's gothic heroines . . . provide expression in the absence of appropriate language" ("Making a Spectacle" 569). And, while the

women face the same predicament, they each react differently to it and speak differently about it, creating a dizzying sense of conflicting voices who speak all at once. The narrator becomes de-centered, and the reader defamiliarized because of the co-mingled voices. The identity of the true narrator becomes uncertain. In addition, an analysis of the women's voices reveals the domination of male discourse or simply the impact of the male presence upon the women, complicating the narrative by introducing different linguistic forms. As Bakhtin writes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, "language is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (294). With so many outside influencers, these texts clearly are not unitary and serve to develop discourse related to women—their voice, their artistic freedom, and their historical position.

Development of the Female Artist

It is commonly agreed upon that the seven stories of *The Golden Apples* parallel the development of the female artist in the first half of the twentieth century in a manner very similar to *Mrs. Dalloway*. The dominant artist figures become Virgie, Cassie, Miss Eckhart, and Easter, as compared to Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway. But, presenting a female protagonist as a hindered, potential artist is just the starting point. In "Playing with Fire: Women's Sexuality and Artistry in

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples,*" Harrison explains:

> While both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Apples* do concern themselves with the struggle of the woman artist to resist and redefine the culture's exclusion and silencing of her, they also question the possibility of sustaining this resistance in a culture that works to re-inscribe them continually as victim or object. These are works that explore the pleasure and the costs of a woman's art. In both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Apples*, female creativity runs the risk of madness, as, indeed, it did for Virginia Woolf herself. (296)

In other words, there is much more going on than the female characters' pursuit of artistic freedom as any type of questioned freedom can represent the condition of the female more generally. Both texts pose inflammatory questions regarding gender expectations in the first half of the twentieth century.

In order to test the boundaries of women's artistic freedom, each author explores sexual relationships or the awakening to sexuality. Woolf does so in multiple works, including *A Room of One's Own*, where she explores sexuality between women. She writes: "Chloe loved Olivia . . . . Sometimes women do like women" (86). Likewise, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa refers to her relationship with

Sally Seton as "falling in love with women" (48). Using sexuality as a direct correlation, Woolf shows what happens when one is allowed to explore forbidden sexuality. On a deeper level, she explores what happens when one opens the door to artistic freedom. Likewise, she shows what happens when that door is closed: Clarissa finds that Sally's "death, her martyrdom" comes when she marries (277). If the woman artist can escape from a male prescribed paradigm, she suddenly finds a landscape in which to write and say new things.

Similarly, Welty most graphically considers woman's positioning in the face of aggressive male sexuality in "Moon Lake," the fourth story of *The Golden Apples* where women are not in control of their decisions, much less their bodies. Through Easter's sexualized near-drowning experience where Loch pumps her lifeless form until their "bodies were one" (150), and the horrified on-looking girls think "life-saving was much worse than they had dreamed" (145), Welty explores gender and experience. By de-centering the narrative, she creates multiple layers of meaning. As Joel Peckham writes in "Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*: Abjection and the Maternal South" (2001), "Easter takes the ultimate abject act, moving too far away from the women's sphere to be of any use at all" (Peckham 208). In fact, Patricia Yaeger believes that Welty "explores the ways in which the dominant sex/gender system erases woman's past and endangers her future"; she explains in "The Case of the Dangling Signifier: Phallic Imagery in Eudora

Welty's Moon Lake" that the story "describes the ways in which these young women, barely aware of their own sexuality, begin to adjust to even before they can react against a male-dominated world" (431). It is, in fact, an abrupt jolt into sexual awareness for the young girls at the camp.

After the life saving incident, Suzan Harrison writes, "Hers [Easter] is a 'betrayed figure,' and the betrayal in the story is the loss of autonomy, creativity, and even identity that follows the initiation to heterosexuality. Easter remains a passive figure throughout the remainder of the story, her voice robbed of inflection, her movements halting and clumsy" ("Playing with Fire" 305). Nina sees Easter's rescue as "hard and cruel" and "murderous" (*CS* 372), and Harrison believes there is a symbolic transfer of both sexual and artistic power from girl to boy when Loch Morrison successfully saves her (305). Yaeger writes, "It is as if she has traveled too far into masculine territory and must learn 'feminine' passivity through the violence of a ritual rape" ("Dangling Signifier" 438). Peckham explains it only slightly differently:

> No Southern woman, at this point in history can remain outside of marriage and still be an integral part of the community. She can't have it both ways. Ultimately, the girls are left without any possibilities of autonomy or freedom, having been taught that separation from the matriarchal community is dangerous. (210)

As Woolf and Welty consider the possibilities for women, they focus specifically upon periods in women's lives when their paths are determined more by circumstances than by choice. Clarissa Dalloway, for instance, dreams of the time before she became *Mrs.* Dalloway. Cassie Morrison longs to step outside of the boundaries of Morgana, but the pulls of her family are too strong. Through the analysis of women in relationship to the expectations of marriage, of family, and of their communities, both authors ask what it costs women to become individuals, instead of quasi-developed zombies whose actions are automated and whose emotions are wooden. Additionally, they question how the female artist finds legitimacy, any artistic outlet really, when her art is prescribed by Southern patriarchal culture. Is the door even open for her at all? Both authors write at a time when women were not thought to have serious artistic feelings, but as Jacob Littleton writes in "*Mrs. Dalloway*: Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-Aged Woman" (1995), their characters make public specific mindsets that change their cultural realm: "If the nature of the artist is to transmute personal experience and feeling into a public act, Clarissa Dalloway is certainly an artist" (36).

Though Welty poses the same questions about the place of women, her world does differ from Woolf's in that love between women is not specifically erotic. For instance, Virgie, Cassie, and Miss Eckhart may be seen as a triangle of women in a relationship, but it does not have to be read homoerotically. Cassie

admires Virgie's defiance and sexual freedom. She also admires the relationship between Virgie and Miss Eckhart, noting that the two have been on a sort of journey together, that they have helped determine one another's identity. Whereas Woolf directly ties the freedom of homoerotic love between women to their ability to create (Clarissa's marital bed is symbolized by a coffin), I find that Welty explores women's relationships more in relation to an "other"—whether male or female. Katie Rainey, for example, rethinks her words based upon how her husband might react. She says, "What makes me say a thing like that? I wouldn't say it to my husband, you mind you forget it" (274). Katie's words remind us that linguistic constraints are social constraints. In "Emancipatory Discourse," Yaeger extends this idea, noting that, "If, as Bakhtin asserts, 'meaning is always a function of at least two consciousnesses,'" one must have the other, or multiple others to work out varying degrees of liberation (251). In other words, the female characters speech is tempered, if not stunted, by her assumption of the reaction of an "other," especially a male other. The women are aware of standard expected responses and it drives their thoughts and actions; in essence, it changes and limits them. They are also aware of the limitations of language to express adequately their honest desires. Still, I do not find that any of these themes are played out in metaphors of homoerotic love as it is in Woolf's works. In the end, it can be read that both Woolf and Welty "play with fire" as Clarissa fears that her party might

"consume her anyhow! burn her to cinders!" (255) and Miss Eckhart is literally set on fire, but each plays with different kinds of fire.

Feminist Readings

Because Welty's ideas surrounding artistry and femininity mimic those of Woolf, feminist readings of her work abound. However, Peggy W. Prenshaw, Rebecca Mark, Joel Peckham, Leslie Kathleen Hankins, and others find that Welty is not merely re-asking Woolf's sexually-charged questions, but progressing the older author's ideas even further. Indeed, Woolf dies around the time that Welty's career begins to gain momentum; it makes for a great story to have someone poised to accept the baton and run. But Welty ardently denies furthering Woolf's feminist ideas. She separates herself, saying "I'm not interested in any kind of feminine repartee . . . . I couldn't feel less deprived as a woman to be writing" (*Conversations* 54). It is a denial that is backed with fiction that can be read either way. I find that it is easy to argue both sides of the feminist argument when reading Welty. In reality, it may be that assumptions of staunch feminism have distracted readers from finding more complex issues in both of the authors' works and have changed the critical perspective from which their works are considered.

So many of Woolf's works are portraits of female artists—*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *Between the Acts* (1941) explore painting a picture, writing a poem, preparing

a lecture, and producing a play—but they do not mandate a particular place for the female artist or even simply the female. As Pamela Caughie writes in "'I Must Not Settle into a Figure': The Woman Artist in Virginia Woolf's Writings," "we can read them [Woolf's works] differently, as changing strategies and motives that resist any consistent or consummate portrait of the artist" (374). Caughie believes that when the prescriptive nature is removed from Woolf's generalized feminist theme, one finds her truer purpose; Woolf's point is not to define the female artist but to allow her to redefine herself through having the freedom to create with varied narrative methods. Caughie writes, "What Woolf defies in her novels and essays, is any attempt to define fiction by standards to which it conforms or from which it deviates" (373). Caughie emphasizes that none of Woolf's fictional artists are confident, skillful, successful, or even very productive. She views this as evidence that Woolf was interested in developing fictional forms not female artists (371). Yet, if Woolf's point is to define a female aesthetic, why then, do all of her female artists fail?

Though Welty's female artist characters fail also, I find that her intent is inherently different. While the most recent conclusion among scholars is that within Welty's works there are many political subtexts (a collection of essays regarding Welty's political thought was published by Harriet Pollack and Suzanne Marrs in 2001, *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade*?), Welty

herself denies that her purpose, or that of her characters, is political just as she denied that her purpose was feminist. Both old and new school critics, such as Diana Trilling (*The Nation* 1943) and Claudia Roth Pierpont (*The New Yorker* 1998), have written that they believe Welty avoids any political, historical, or cultural engagement in her work. Still, scores of scholars continue to reassess Welty as a political writer on a myriad of subjects including apartheid, poverty, McCarthyism and even the Rosenburg trials when there are no discussions of social or cultural issues—or of anything that might be considered political—in her autobiographical or non-fiction works. She even writes the well-known essay "Must a Novelist Crusade?" (1961) as a defense against writers politicking. Any implied political stance has been inferred by her readers. She writes that "to distort a work of passion for the sake of a cause is to cheat, and the end, far from justifying the means, is fairly sure to be lost in it" (*Eye of the Story* 156). In fact, it may not have even been about artistic success.

Caughie also writes that "Woolf creates no ultimate portrait of the woman artist because no one portrait will suffice . . . . In her writings on the artist figure, Woolf is clearly concerned with how to write as a woman, yet for her, this concern meant not prescribing aesthetics for women artists" (392). Woolf explores women's creative process but does not prescribe a female artistic standard. I find that Welty, on the other hand, is less interested in form and more interested in

freeing her women and women artists from their stifling male-dominated surroundings. Welty transgresses the boundaries of patriarchal discourse. Knowing that women writers face certain expectations from their Southern literary male peers, if she can establish the female voice, at least female works will be regarded in their own right instead of compared to those of the established male literary giants. Welty is known for saying that "writing in proximity to Faulkner is like writing in the shadow of a mountain" (Johnston 276), but she is also known for her acumen in explaining the difference between the literature of Southern male writers and Southern female writers. When asked about the kinds of stories she writes, Welty explains that she writes down what people talk about in real conversation in Jackson, not like "Faulkner and his drunk buddies make up or embellish about the abnormal (mythical) Mississippi" (paraphrased by Johnston 276). I find this anecdote directly related to Welty's themes in more serious ways than usually considered. Welty writes about what people "talk" about—their conversations become the place to develop the aesthetic.

Woolf's interest, then, is in the female artist's experimentation with form while Welty's interest is in the conversations of women and in the Southern female's social circumstances, both of which Welty relates directly to the place of the female artist. Harriet Pollack explains that some readers "fail to recognize the degree to which women writers, and Welty in particular, have often approached

the public and historical through the private" (3). Pollack believes that the broader meaning of women writers is often missed. When Welty portrays the tragedy of an existence based solely on the feminine milestones of having a husband and children and meeting other family or domestic obligations, she ultimately enables generations of women to have conversations about how they feel about their predestined condition. *The Golden Apples* is a text in which Welty uses different generations to provide point-of-view shifts—voices offer varying perspectives to express the process of relating between women in similar circumstances.

Harrison goes as far as to say that "Woolf's fiction modeled for Welty the varied strategies a writer can use to appropriate, transgress, and transform patriarchal discourse" (18), yet there are limits to this grand statement. The word "transform" is all-encompassing; Welty only transgresses these boundaries to a point. Although Welty de-centers the male voice, making it one of many instead of the voice of authority, there is no lasting re-visioning of the world of women. Morgana remains a place where "most destinies were known to everybody and seemed to go without saying" (*CS* 308). Virgie Rainey, the most emboldened of Welty's protagonists, *appears* to escape her world's patriarchal constraints, but the reader never knows that definitively. The reader's last image of Virgie is that of her trying to decide which path will lead to the best future for her. She does not achieve autonomy and only rides the fence of true independence. As Leslie

Hankins writes, “The preferable site for Welty seems to be on the boundary between inside and outside. This vital image is reinscribed repeatedly through dramas of orientation of the individual in space” (408). The reader never clearly hears the singular voice of Virgie Rainey. Westling explains further that “Welty does not seem able to dramatize their independent life at all. We leave Virgie Rainey literally sitting on a fence after her mother’s death, musing about the meaning of her life” (*Sacred Groves* 175). In fact, “The Wanderers,” the last story of *The Golden Apples,* ends near a cemetery wherein lies the body of the unmarried teacher who failed to inspire the next generation of Morgana women to step outside their expected life pattern. The manner in which Welty chooses to capture female reality through the women of Morgana, Mississippi, and situate it against male-authored authoritative texts reveals a particular historical situation. And it creates the most sophisticated grotesque of her career. In fact, following *The Golden Apples*, Welty’s writing moves away from the grotesque toward new forms.

2.4 *The Golden Apples* and a New Grotesque

Within the intertwined stories of *The Golden Apples*, Welty uses a more nuanced and internalized grotesque that highlights cultural and social situations through the eyes of women—and questions the natural laws of the rural South in

the 1930s and 40s. Though Welty has other mature collections, I would like to look specifically at *The Golden Apples* because it showcases Welty's culmination of the female grotesque as a freak that is more psychologically damaged than physically distorted. While they may not appear visually freakish, the female characters of these stories face an internal warring of wills as they struggle with their desires in competition with those imposed upon them. The Southern woman morphs into a chimeric combination of half self/half other in order to try to please everyone. Often, the female characters are forced into decisions that drastically impact their lives. In "The World of Eudora Welty's Women," Elizabeth Kerr explains, "For women without independent means and with no family able and willing to support them, the stigma of spinsterhood cannot be removed by a respectable occupation or even by a successful career" (134). What Kerr does not say is that there is also a stigma in pursuing a respectable occupation or successful career. Women appear to be damned if they quietly do what is expected, but equally damned if they pursue their dreams.

In *The Golden Apples*, Welty looks at individuals within families and also families within communities, particularly focusing upon females within relationships. The work illustrates a Southern culture where, as Joel Peckham writes, "lines between paternal and maternal cultures are both ferociously distinct and transparent, both rigid and malleable" (194). Containing seven stories, six of

which are based in Morgana, Mississippi, the cycle covers a span of 40 years and the lives of eight main families who are listed as a preface to the book. These stories, Peckham writes, "show a maternal world dependent on, corrupted by, and resistant to men's culture and masculine sexuality" (195). Additionally compounding and complicating these stories is the thesis that "the most ferocious defenders of women's society—the maternal leaders of the community—become the strongest enforcers of their own imprisonment" (195). The women of Morgana, in essence, form a carceral network balancing cultural obligations and their disparate personal desires. Throughout the collection, Welty uses both intertextuality and intratextuality to facilitate conversations about this imprisonment. In the end, the conversations between the text and external works and within the text itself together produce the truest snapshot of women Welty has ever developed—it is a dynamic, talking photograph.

On the most basic level, one might say that the women of Morgana are in a conversation about their lives; nevertheless, that conversation is not held with everyday speech, or even speech at all. Often, the women's actions, their decisions, and their painful emotional dilemmas must represent their voices. The women become representative of other women in similar predicaments to themselves. When Bakhtin explains that "Heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and

oppositions individualized," he highlights this physicality of language (*Dialogic Imagination* 326). For example, when Miss Snowdie inwardly celebrates her widowhood, others find her response inappropriate and shun her; both sides use a language much more understandable than words. Miss Snowdie is marginalized because she expresses a genuine emotion (though never spoken) that is out of character for one in her position. Because of her lack of grief, she becomes a grotesque according to the new definitions prescribed by Yaeger, Russo, and Connelly—anyone pushed outside of his or her normal expected persona becomes an unrecognizable combination of parts and not a whole. I have termed this section "*The Golden Apples* and a New Grotesque" because I find that in using intertextuality and intratextuality as well as the heteroglossia inherent in the story cycle to reveal the women's marginalization and isolation, Welty is using the grotesque as a dynamic vehicle as never before. She creates female grotesques that defy all previous definitions of the term, employing the mode differently than most foundational male Southern writers in whose works it is revered. She is emphasizing that one's body does not have to become enlarged, out of proportion, or freakish in any other way for the author to depict the human monster inside.

It should be noted early on that *The Golden Apples* is the book which Welty described as "closest to her heart" (Mann 141). She considered it novelistic,

believing that the novel speaks the truth "most unmistakably, most directly, most variously, most fully" (*Eye of the Story* 117). She writes in *One Writer's Beginnings*:

> They [the characters] touched on every side. These stories were all related (and the fact was buried in their inceptions) by the strongest ties—identities, kinships, relationships, or affinities already known or remembered or foreshadowed. From story to story, connections between characters' lives, through their motives and actions, sometimes their dreams, already existed: there to be found. (107)

These relationships and the small Southern town depicted are clannish. From the beginning, one understands the unspoken community codes—Miss Eckhart is an outsider simply because she is unmarried and has no local relatives; Virgie Rainey, on the other hand, though she acts out, is never abandoned because her family is among the "main" families. Even Jinny Love Stark, one of the younger generation who one might think would have a different perspective, has accepted these codes, and even pleads with Virgie Rainey to marry: "'Don't put it off any longer.' She was grimacing out of the iron mask of the married lady. It appeared urgent to her to drive everybody, even Virgie for whom she cared nothing, into the state of marriage along with her" (*CS* 444). Perhaps the work is closest to Welty's heart because she is able to probe the invisible boundary lines of small Southern

towns, like the one in which she grew up, as much as she is able to explore human relationships. As Yaeger explains, the invisible boundaries determine not only each woman's acceptance, but her voice. She writes, "Those women in Morgana who step outside traditional roles, who attempt to speak in the culture's excluded heteroglossia, either are denied scripts altogether or have scripts foisted on them," ("Because a Fire" 968). The stories analyze the roles, professions, and relationships forced upon women, but they also analyze those who are not allowed a role at all. A key tension in the collection is whether or not it is even possible for Miss Eckhart, the unmarried outsider, to gain admittance into the community of Morgana.

Since *The Golden Apples* is a collection of interrelated stories, the reader must be willing to participate and to tie together the lives of the main female characters to see Morgana as a community of women at different stages in their lives. Welty's approach to each woman is indirect; segmenting the characters among the stories helps to show their incompleteness. It is an approach similar to that of Faulkner in his story collection *Go Down, Moses*. Like the story of Miss Eckhart, which is told by both Cassie and Loch, each woman is seen from the *other* or multiple others; the reader must be willing to accept conflicting voices and listen for multivocality. Welty believed that this technique would help to foreground the lives of women in her text. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw writes, "For

Welty . . . the site where such speech is most likely to occur is a local, even private habitation" ("Political Thought" 619). Welty's private habitation is a closed community of women in which she questions the possibility of freedom from any forced singularity of truth. Though she offers each character the opportunity to sound off in polyphonic restlessness—characters change their minds and express their varied opinions multiple times and in multiple ways—their voices only reverberate as if there is a vast invisible ceiling upon their world.

Morgana, then, not only becomes the world of women but a site from which to study the politics of female sexuality; it is also a very lonely world. The isolation felt by Welty's early female characters pales in comparison to the emotional bankruptcy felt by the women of Morgana. Robert Penn Warren, in "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," explains that "the nature of the isolation may be different from case to case, but the fact of the isolation, whatever its nature, provides the basic situation of Miss Welty's fiction" (199). Warren explains that, in Welty's short stories, characters find themselves in one of two situations: either as the isolated person trying to escape into the world or the isolated person facing the acknowledgement of her own predicament. Certainly, every woman in Morgana can be divided accordingly. As Suzan Harrison writes in "The Other Way to Live: Gender and Selfhood in *Delta Wedding* and *The Golden Apples*," *The Golden Apples* gives a voice to women's speculations and fantasies

that cannot be spoken in Morgana and thereby brings the masculine authority of Morgana into dialogue" (58). Welty, she writes, "constructs an alternative definition of selfhood and its relationship to other, one of connection and equality rather than opposition and hierarchy, of process rather than stasis" (66). As outlined in the following sections, the stories of *The Golden Apples* present women who either unequivocally accept, tentatively question, or angrily reject imposed boundaries.

Intertextuality and the Female Artist Figure

With the first story of *The Golden Apples*, the reader knows he is in for a work entirely different from anything Welty has previously written. "Shower of Gold" opens the collection with the account of Miss Snowdie and her wayward husband, King MacLain who leaves and returns at will. Like many of the volume's stories, "Shower of Gold" is intricately based in Greek mythology. Narrated by Mrs. Katie Rainey, one of the most loyal women to the town's doctrine for women, the story parallels the classical story of Zeus impregnating Danäe in a shower of golden coins. Although Welty clearly has mythic origins in mind, all of the characters are supremely human. She places mythical characters in an everyday world, distorting any assumed allegory and using intertextuality between the mythical and the real to open a conversation about power in

relationships as well as the tradition of the male hero and the female muse. Like Zeus, King is known for his sexual conquests and even impregnates Snowdie when he asks her to meet him "in the woods" (*CS* 264) instead of having a traditional marriage relationship with her. Snowdie is meek and submissive. Welty juxtaposes her story to myth to explore the dichotomy between dream and reality, sex and marriage, self and other. Most poignantly, she introduces the subject of the potentiality of the female artist in Miss Snowdie that she will continue throughout the volume.

As previously discussed, Easter, an orphan, is at the center of others' questioning of gender roles and sexual initiation in "Moon Lake," a story of young girls—some orphaned, some privileged—at a week-long summer camp. The story also considers the possibility for female artistic freedom and uses Biblical imagery to do so. Nina Carmichael, whose name incidentally is reminiscent of the fictional novelist from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, is one of the most privileged girls at the camp, and she and her friends spend their week rationalizing how they feel about Easter and her group of fellow orphans. Easter immediately comes to represent renewal and rebirth to the sheltered upper class girls. Nina is fascinated by Easter who appears to be the leader among the orphans as, ironically, Nina feels the insignificance of being generic, "as if girlhood itself were not an infinity,

but a commodity" (*CS* 360). She sees Easter emerge free from the social conventions that govern the rest of the Morgana girls: "The reason orphans were the way they were lay first in nobody's watching them, Nina thought, for she felt obscurely like a trespasser. They, they were not answerable" (*CS* 352). Nina sees adventure and freedom in the "unwatched" girls and envies the sense of abandon Easter flaunts by carrying a knife, playing mumblety-peg (a game traditionally for boys), and wearing a "ring of pure dirt" around her neck (*CS* 347). Nina thinks it is "wonderful to have with them someone dangerous but not, so far, or provenly, bad" (*CS* 347).

The lines between the two groups of girls are almost visibly drawn upon their differences in class. Even in play, there is separation and the sense that one must identify with one group or the other, yet Easter's spirit will not be squelched. Upon finding a boat that is tethered to shore, almost in Biblical parable, she assumes the position of captain of the ship: "Easter only waited in her end of the boat, not seeming to care about the disappointment either. If this was their ship, she was their figurehead, turned on its back, sky-facing. She wouldn't be their passenger" (*CS* 356). Only willing to associate with the other group if she is allowed to retain her role as leader, Easter shows her unwillingness to accept them though, surprisingly, they have begun to accept and even respect her, Nina especially. When Nina writes both of their names in the sand with a stick in a

gesture of acceptance (again a Biblical allusion), Easter wipes her name clean. In front of Nina's stunned friends, she quickly writes "Esther" instead, insisting upon an aberrant spelling (although she continues to pronounce her name as Easter) and perhaps foreshadowing her future after the Biblical heroine. In the book of Esther in the Old Testament, Esther influences the King. This results in the Jews' permission to live safely in Persia for another 2000 years. However, like Esther, Easter/Esther's assertion is initially rejected. The girls have begun to accept her, but still do not accept her stepping outside the lines of class. They question her spelling and make her defensive to the extent that she proclaims, "I let myself name myself" (*CS* 357). But for the other girls, there is only right and wrong; there is only one correct spelling.

Through Easter's tenacity and courage, Welty explores the possibility of the female artist. Easter announces, "I'm going to be a singer" (*CS* 358)—something completely out of touch with her social position and reminiscent of her Biblical counterpart, Esther, who charged forward without regard for her life, noting, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). Harrison explains that Easter's brazen courage to follow her artistic desires affects the other girls. She writes, "Nina begins to re-imagine herself as an artist, writing her name in the sand: 'Nina, Nina, Nina. Writing, she could dream that her self might get away from her—that here in this faraway place she could tell her self, by name, to go or stay'" ("Playing with

Fire" 304). Easter inspires Nina, and, as she does in other stories, Welty enjoys the viewpoint of the privileged admiring the outcast. "The orphan! she thought exultantly. The other way to live. There were secret ways. She thought. Time's really short, I've been only thinking like the others. It's only interesting, only worthy, to try for the fiercest secrets. To slip into them all—to change" (*CS* 361).

The longest and most pivotal story of the collection is "June Recital." Not only does the story introduce Miss Eckhart, the town's piano teacher, but also the other two most important women in the story cycle, her pupils Cassie Morrison and Virgie Rainey. These three women represent distinct positions in the town's invisible boundary lines of acceptance. Situating Virgie, who has "airs of wildness" (*CS* 291) in between Cassie (the loyal) and Miss Eckhart (the outcast) Welty emphasizes Virgie's marginal status and puts her "on the fence." As Leslie Hankins explains ("Alas, Alack! Or a Lass, a Lack?), this positioning further "highlights the balancing act between artist figures, art, life, and community" (404). Virgie oscillates between her desire to leave Morgana to be free as a woman/artist and her desire to belong to a community throughout. And, if Virgie is the thing tugged upon by opposing poles and Cassie is the voice of the community's ritualistic social code, Miss Eckhart becomes the unfortunate, martyred free spirit. She embodies the punishment dealt to those who go against

community rites and are slowly overcome by madness. Hankins writes that, together, these three women "form a powerful triad of shifting relations, a constellation of women artist figures relating to each other and to the community" (404). Hankins uses the term Künstlerroman to describe each woman's artistic development.

Miss Eckhart is, appropriately, the boarder of Miss Snowdie MacLain, the newly ostracized Morgana woman from the previous story. It is clear that Miss Eckhart is unhappy and is not at peace with her life, but this unrest could have many sources. There are allusions to a relationship with a local man who drowned and Miss Eckhart's subsequent devastating grief. With the death of Hal Sissum, Miss Eckhart has no possible vehicle to be adopted into the family of Morgana as there is no other man to marry. There is gossip about town regarding the loneliness of her life as well as the brutal abuse she quietly inflicts upon her elderly mother who lives with her. Miss Eckhart also is frustrated with her piano student, Virgie, whom she believes has a rare artistic gift and "would be heard from in the world" (*CS* 302). Whatever the cause though, any possibility of truth is quickly lost in the glass house the town becomes for Miss Eckhart. Instead of a passionate musician who desires to teach children, in the community of Morgana, the piano teacher is viewed only as a bitter spinster whose "love never did anybody any good" (*CS*

307). The eyes of Morgana magnify and distort until Miss Eckhart is completely alienated: "Then one day, Miss Eckhart had to move out" (*CS* 307).

Under the circumstances, Miss Eckhart never had a chance. The community is unkind to her; she is despised "just for living, a poor unwanted teacher and unmarried" (*CS* 306). One of the elderly ladies, Miss Spights explains, "if she had been married to anybody at all, just the awfullest man—like Miss Snowdie MacLain, that everybody could feel sorry for" (308) her life would have been better as then people would have been "allowed" to feel sorry for her. And yet, Miss Eckhart's only crime is to push Virgie, someone with whom she shares an artistic kinship, into the aesthetic world she herself cherishes.

Miss Eckhart does have a personal bond with Virgie as well because of they share similar scrutiny by the community: Her star pupil is mocked by the local girls because of her poverty and ridiculed for her tomboyishness. Miss Eckhart tries to "save" Virgie; she goes out of her way to give her free piano lessons, lends her music books, and even extends a sort of motherly love toward her because she recognizes and wishes to cultivate the gift Virgie possesses. But perhaps Miss Eckhart knows the hopelessness of her plight. Welty thus undercuts this passionate idea of artist begetting artist in the small Southern town:

> How could Virgie be heard from in the world? And 'the world'! Where did Miss Eckhart think she was now? Virgie Rainey, she

> repeated over and over, had a gift, and she must go away from Morgana. From them all. From her studio. In the world, she must study and practice her music for the rest of her life. In repeating all this, Miss Eckhart suffered. (*CS* 303)

Welty thwarts Miss Eckhart's hope for Virgie because it is unrealistic; Miss Eckhart understands the rigidity of the social codes in which she is entrapped. "Because she does not fit in the town's script for women," Harrison writes, "Miss Eckhart is gradually erased and displaced until she is reduced to a safe, knowable text in the town's eyes, merely 'old lady Eckhart' hoeing peas out there on the Country Farm" ("Playing with Fire" 310). Miss Eckhart's suffering and her hopelessness turn into madness by the end of the story as she returns to burn the site of her own creativity, her music studio. Ironically, she is unsuccessful in negating her art— literally in her studio with no oxygen to kindle the fire, she is stopped by the men in town from burning the building and only succeeds in catching fire to her own hair. In this state of being consumed by her own artistic desire, she dies alone in a mental institution in Jackson, Mississippi.

Suzan Harrison explains that music is "a subversive force in 'June Recital.' It is primarily a feminine art, as it would have been in a small Southern town . . . the recital was, after all, a ceremony" ("Playing with Fire" 306). Each one of the girls evolved into someone else during the recital, just as Miss Eckhart changed

when she played. Welty gives one of her characteristic snapshots: "Miss Eckhart assumed an entirely different face. Her skin flattened and drew across her cheeks, her lips changed. The face could have belonged to someone else—not even to a woman necessarily. It was the face a mountain could have or what might be seen behind the veil of a waterfall" (*CS* 300). Music was life to Miss Eckhart; it was transformative. As she and Virgie act and react to one another, they begin to tell a story about the possibilities for their futures. Together, Miss Eckhart's and Virgie's stories are told in spurts, in spaces between the lines, by indirect narration. The two characters' actions speak to one another intratextuality, or across the boundaries of the separate stories within the collection. Music serves only as the conversation medium and represents much more.

But Cassie, always the loyal Morganian, feels the artistic impulse as well; she sees a brief glimpse of who she could be. Upon hearing just a few notes of "Für Elise," Cassie is drawn immediately back to her time as a piano student and recalls several lines of a poem: "Though I am old with wandering/Through hollow lands and hilly lands/I will find out where she has gone" (*CS* 287). It is William Butler Yeats's "Song of the Wandering Aengus" which tells the story of a man driven by a "fire" in his head to find the unknown thing his heart desires. The man eventually finds his desire in "a glimmering girl" who calls his name and then disappears. Though he does not capture the girl, he is changed, empowered

because he knows now what he seeks and that it exists. Cassie, at this point, does not understand what the lines of the poem mean to her and does not realize that this poem is pulling at her artistic desire, her desire to escape Morgana. However, she is beginning to understand that this desire exists in Virgie and refers to both the desire and Virgie herself as "her secret love, as well as her secret hate" (*CS* 292). The intertextuality brought about through the references to both the Yeats poem and to "Für Elise" reveals Cassie's pull between two very different worlds—one in which there is freedom to pursue the thing one's 'heart desires,' and the other which is much more structured and mandated. After all, the notes of "Für Elise," a steady rocking back of forth of two notes and then a somber diminution, suggest a pre-determined path.

Cassie envies Virgie's 'air of abandon'—the way she rides a boy's bicycle and carries her sheet music 'rolled naked' (*CS* 291, 289). She begins to understand Virgie's relationship with Miss Eckhart, thinking that "there was a little weak place in her [Miss Eckhart], vulnerable, and Virgie Rainey found it and showed it to people" (*CS* 293). As many believe that Miss Eckhart had hardened because of the town's rejection, Cassie understands that Virgie has the ability to expose the real person. At the end of the story, Cassie notes that "what she was certain of was the distance those two had gone, as if all along they had been making a trip. It had changed them" (*CS* 330). Though Cassie becomes aware of the opportunities

outside of Morgana to follow her own passions, she feels as though someone needs to be a patriot to the culture they represent. Harrison writes that "Feminine creativity puts women at risk in a particular setting. 'June Recital' chronicles the restraint and suffering of the female artist" ("Playing with Fire" 308). Still, Cassie undergoes understated change that is arguably the most significant of all, and her importance in the story is often overlooked.

Cassie realizes that "both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them—human beings, roaming, like lost beasts," which leads her to realize that she is one of the *others* (CS 330). She tries to sleep, but the poem in its entirety is before her eyes. She sits up in bed, saying aloud "'Because a Fire was in my head'" (CS 330). Cassie is unresisting and sees her own face in her dreams. Early on, she does not envision herself as having the strength to be among those who questioned and searched. She only envies Virgie and Miss Eckhart, thinking:

> She could never go for herself, never creep out on the shimmering bridge of the tree, or reach the dark magnet there that drew you inside, kept drawing you in. She could not see herself do an unknown thing. She was not Loch, she was not Virgie Rainey; she was not her mother. She was Cassie in her room, seeing the knowledge and torment beyond her reach, standing at her window

> singing—in a voice soft, rather full today, and halfway thinking it was pretty. (*CS* 316)

In the end, Cassie cannot escape her ties to Morgana, understanding the punishment of one who does not conform. She concludes, "she thought that somewhere, even up to the last, there could have been for Miss Eckhart a little opening wedge—a crack in the door . . . . But if I had been the one to see it open, she thought slowly, I might have slammed it tight forever" (*CS* 308). Cassie's thoughts are startlingly abrupt and vicious. Though Cassie momentarily questions new possibilities, she cannot see any life for herself outside of what she has been taught in Morgana.

The fate of Cassie, Virgie, and Miss Eckhart is revealed in "The Wanderers," the last story of *The Golden Apples*. It is a bittersweet story in that while the reader wants to elevate Virgie to a state of victory, there is no realistic expectation that she can escape Morgana or that she wants to. Returning for her mother's funeral, she busies herself with "practical changes," including, "no music, no picture show job any more, no piano" (*CS* 452). She has forsaken her art and the reader does not know whether to applaud her bravery or bemoan her selfishness. Virgie does not live up to traditional heroic standards, yet she holds the reader's sympathy as every decision she has made has been forced by

undesirable circumstances. Now, Virgie's mother has died and the town tries to reach out to her, but Virgie suffers from too many private demons: "Always in a house of death, Virgie was thinking, all the stories become evident, show forth from the person, become a part of the public domain. Not the dead's story, but the living's") (*CS* 238). Virgie finds the support of the townspeople to be too little too late. She thinks, "They were all people who had never touched her before who tried now to struggle with her, their faces hurt. She was hurting them all, shocking them" (*CS* 435). Virgie had tried to break all ties with Morgana, selling the cattle and packing up to leave town forever. She asks herself, "Could she ever be, would she be, where she was going?" (*CS* 459). Virgie understands that her decision is not just about leaving her hometown. Cassie, especially, struggles with the idea of Virgie leaving, because she could never leave herself and her own recalcitrance seems to haunt her. She weakly says, "A life of your own, away—I'm so glad for people like you . . . I am really" (*CS* 457). Cassie is an isolated one who, as Robert Penn Warren identifies, has faced the acknowledgement of her own predicament.

Critics often posit Virgie as the heroine among these women because she represents the female artist who has avoided the prescribed expectations set for her; nevertheless, she has been so influenced by so many others that she has no ideas of her own. She has also made unsavory compromises that show her

willingness to forsake her art in times of conflict. While the reader sympathizes with Virgie, the reader feels that the story ends justyly in that she has not lived up to heroic standards. She has learned that she can make her own choices, as when she notes that if she wants to exchange her piano for a milking cow it would be "by her own desire" (*CS* 453). Still, she has not learned the proper choices to make. The reader last sees Virgie side by side with an old beggar woman: "Then she and the old beggar woman, the old black thief, were there alone and together in the shelter of the big public tree, listening to the magical percussion, the world beating in their ears" (*CS* 461). Similar to Welty's very first stories, these two opposing female figures merge to show both sides of the picture. More specifically, Welty shows the tragedy of the grotesque Manichean figure Virgie has become; she does not look monstrous, but psychologically she has morphed into so many different personas that she no longer recognizes herself. Appropriately, Welty characterizes the old beggar woman as a thief to personify the identity that has been stolen from Virgie. It is a bittersweet end for Virgie who, with the world beating in her ears like the music she expertly learned to play, never really understood how to hear herself. Though she is the central character of *The Golden Apples*, she is never given her own voice or allowed to tell her own story; it is told by multiple others who have tried to direct her life. Our thoughts of Virgie only exist through the dialogue and thoughts of other characters, and, as

Bakhtin reminds us, there is no unitary language (*Dialogic Imagination* xix). Thus, her story becomes one of complete disorientation, interruption, and distorted truths.

Interestingly, *The Golden Apples* has been often compared to Sherwood Anderson's story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio*. Yet, *Winesburg* offers a protagonist to unite the disparate voices and lead the way out. Welty offers more of a community of women in the same social and historical predicament ("a group of people whose being together means something") with no clear method of escape. Virgie Rainey does break new ground, both for Welty as artist and for the South, as she takes a first step in setting new social norms. She should not, however, be praised as a celebrated hero as, ensnared by the limitations of language and communication, she questions the possibility of any real liberation in the rural Mississippi of the 1940s. Yaeger explains, "Though Welty asks her readers to witness and to mourn the disempowerment of woman within phallocentric society, she also seems to accept the necessity of such disempowerment" ("Dangling Signifier" 441).

Perhaps Welty refuses to assume the possibility of radical change at a time when it was still unfeasible. Summarily, she shows through the women in Morgana what it meant to be female in the mid-twentieth century. Suzan Harrison writes, "Welty creates female characters who openly rather than covertly insist on alternative visions and who voice their own feminine pleasure. Furthermore,

Welty uses music and myth as disruptive voices that engage the dominant discourse in dialogue in order to speak the unspoken experience of women" ("The Other Way to Live" 57). The quest is not so much about complete freedom as it is about identifying the thing sought, as in the lines of Yeats's referenced poem "Song of the Wandering Aengus": "I will find out where she has gone/And kiss her lips and take her hands/And walk among long dappled grass/And pluck till time and times are done/The silver apples of the moon/The Golden Apples of the sun."

In the end, Virgie's success may simply be that she survives in an artistic world dominated by men. She learns to co-exist. As she studies a picture of Perseus with the head of Medusa which hung above the piano in Miss Eckhart's studio, she thinks:

> Cutting off the Medusa's head was the heroic act, perhaps, that made visible a horror in life, that was at once the horror in love, Virgie thought—the separateness. She might have seen heroism prophetically when she was young and afraid of Miss Eckhart. She might be able to see it now prophetically, but she was never a prophet. Because Virgie saw things in their time, like hearing them—and perhaps because she must believe in the Medusa equally with Perseus—she saw the stroke of the sword in three moments, not

> one. In the three was the damnation—no, only the secret, unhurting because not caring in itself—beyond the beauty and the sword's stroke and the terror lay their existence in time—far out and endless, a constellation which the heart could read over many a night. (*CS* 460)

Carol Ann Johnston explains that by dissecting the myth of Perseus and Medusa, "Virgie is in the unique position potentially to revise it, moving the focus onto the beauty and necessity of a woman's passion, rather than upon its threat to and annihilation by male-dominated society" ("Sex and the Southern Girl" 284). Welty's allegorizes the plight of the female artist by creating women who not only have artistic impulses and seek an outlet but who question possibilities for themselves through interaction with male-authored texts. On the most basic level, her female characters become grotesques because of the many warring spirits they simultaneously embody. As Patricia Yaeger concedes, "the Southern grotesque as used by Welty may have transforming power, and indeed Welty uses the grotesque, not to reinforce but to question southern perimeters of normalcy" (Martin 3).

"Finding a Voice," the final of three 1983 Harvard lectures of *One Writer's Beginnings*, concludes with a section on *The Golden Apples*. Welty admits that

though her intention was never to invent a character who speaks for her as the author, she feels oddly in touch with Miss Eckhart. She adds that Miss Eckhart has persisted with her in spite of her many other characters (*OWB* 100). She says:

> As I looked longer and longer for the origins of this passionate and strange character, at last I realized that Miss Eckhart came from me. There wasn't any resemblance in her outward identity: I am not musical, not a teacher, nor foreign in birth; not humorless or ridiculed or missing out in love; nor have I yet let the world around me slip from my recognition. But none of that counts. What counts is only what lies at the solitary core. She derived from what I already knew for myself, even felt I had always known. What I have put into her is my passion for my own life work, my own art. Exposing yourself to risk is a truth Miss Eckhart and I had in common. What animates and possesses me is what drives Miss Eckhart, the love of her art and the love of giving it, the desire to give it until there is no more left. Even in the small and literal way, what I had done in assembling and connecting all the stories in *The Golden Apples*, and bringing them off as one, was not too unlike the June recital itself. (101)

Welty believes she found her truest voice in Miss Eckhart and in Miss Eckhart's struggles with Virgie Rainey. In reality, seeing Virgie as something outside herself that is wholly equal to Miss Eckhart in stubbornness and passion, yet more expressive, Welty finds that Virgie has been her subject all along (101). As Welty explains, "Passionate, recalcitrant, stubbornly undefeated by failure or hurt or disgrace or bereavement, all the while heedlessly wasting of her gifts, she knows to the last that there is a world that remains out there, a world living and mysterious, and that she is of it" (*OWB* 102). Understanding this, the teacher-student relationship becomes wonderfully authentic, and the revelation of the grotesque becomes stunning and concentric.