

# FOTOGRAFAR NA ESCRITA O ENIGMA DO REAL

1949

## Photographing in writing the enigma of reality

258 THE COLLECTED STORIES OF EUDORA WELTY

deep in her spirit. About them all and closer to them than their own breath was the smell of trees that had bled to the knives they wore.

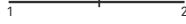
When she called out, she did not call any name; it was a cry with a rising sound, as if she said "Go back," or asked a question, or when at the last protested. A rude laugh covered her cry, and somehow both the harsh human sounds could easily have been heard as rejoicing, going out over the river in the dark night. By the fire, little boys were snappet crossed by their mothers—as if they knew that the original snappet crossed Jenny's face, and hung there no matter what was done to it. Like a bit of color that kindles in the sky after the light has gone.

"Is she asleep? Is she in a spell? Or is she dead?" asked a little out-bright-eyed woman who went and looked in the door, and crept up to the now meditating men outside. She was so precise in her question that she even held up three rheumatic fingers when she asked.

"She's waiting for Billy Floyd," they said.

The old woman nodded, and nodded out to the flowing river, with the firelight following her face and showing its dignity. The younger boys separated and took their turns throwing knives with a dull *pit* at the tree.

diana almeida



**No ensaio “Place in Fiction” (1956), recorrendo a vocabulário oriundo da fotografia, Eudora Welty (1909-2001) atribui ao espaço a capacidade de “focar” o olho do escritor, dotando-o de uma perspectiva restritiva que lhe permite enquadrar um momento significativo. Se o espaço constitui a “moldura” da narrativa, o ponto de vista, ou focalização, é a lente que concentra “o gigantesco e voraz olho do génio” (787) e permite à imaginação trabalhar sobre os dados da memória:**

“Place, to a writer at work, is seen in a frame.

Not an empty frame, a brimming one. Point of view is a sort of burning-glass, a product of personal experience and time; it is burnished with feelings and sensibilities, charged from moment to moment with the sun-points of the imagination. It is an instrument—one of intensification; it acts, it behaves, it is temperamental.” (788-789)

O vocábulo “place” deve ser entendido como “local”, conceito que implica direccionalidade e permite representar o nível físico da experiência, evidente no carácter sensual da prosa da escritora, povoada por corpos (in)disponíveis para acolher as impressões do mundo (Ladd 77-78). A componente espacial surge estruturada por princípios composicionais comuns às artes visuais, em particular a fotografia, cuja prática muito contribuiu para moldar a sensibilidade literária da autora.

De facto, o processo fotográfico surge explicitamente figurado na escrita de Welty, com especial relevo no ciclo de contos *The Golden Apples* (1949), onde a repetida descrição de “molduras” enquadrando o olhar das personagens adquire conotações autoreflexivas e evoca ainda o universo cinematográfico. A imagem da confluência de áreas de luz e sombra cumpre função idêntica, sendo que a ênfase na reversibilidade simbólica de conceitos dicotómicos ilustra a não-dualidade da perspectiva autoral e parece aludir às características da fotografia

In the essay “Place in Fiction” (1956), drawing on photographic vocabulary, Eudora Welty (1909-2001) attributes to space the capacity to “focus” the eye of the writer, granting him the restrictive perspective that allows him to frame a significant moment. If space constitutes the narrative’s “frame”, point of view or focalization is the lens that concentrates “the gigantic, voracious eye of genius” (787) and allows for the imagination to work on memory’s data:

“Place, to a writer at work, is seen in a frame. Not an empty frame, a brimming one. Point of view is a sort of burning-glass, a product of personal experience and time; it is burnished with feelings and sensibilities, charged from moment to moment with the sun-points of the imagination. It is an instrument—one of intensification; it acts, it behaves, it is temperamental.” (788-789)

The term “place” should be understood as “site”, a concept that implies directionality and permits the representation of the physical level of experience, visible in the sensuous quality of the writer’s prose which is inhabited by (un)ready bodies to receive the world’s impressions (Ladd 77-78). The spatial component is structured by compositional principles shared by the visual arts, in particular photography, whose practice has greatly contributed to shaping the author’s literary sensibility.

In fact, the photographic process is explicitly represented in Welty’s writing, with particular emphasis in her short story cycle *The Golden Apples* (1949), where the repeated description

analgica – a transmutação da luminosidade em sombra (quando a película foto-sensível é marcada pela luz) e da sombra em luminosidade (quando o negativo é exposto à luz para a impressão em papel). Note-se que esta peculiaridade técnica subverte um importante paradigma do imaginário judaico-cristão, pelo que a fotografia contém na sua génese uma ambivalência fundamental que a relaciona com o mistério<sup>1</sup>.

Assumindo a herança da estética modernista, Welty confere à “visão fotográfica” capacidade revelatória, para além da superfície que o olhar desatento do quotidiano tende a banalizar e dotar de opacidade<sup>2</sup>. A autora distancia-se, contudo, da perspectiva formalista (advogada por Alfred Stieglitz e posteriormente pelo grupo f.64) e desenvolve nas suas obras literária e fotográfica uma visão humanista centrada no indivíduo, moldado por forças sociais e cósmicas. Assim, na escrita weltiana, a recorrente metáfora da fotografia problematiza os pressupostos da imediatez visual, acentuando a complexidade do processo perceptivo. Tanto mais que os momentos epifânicos parecem por vezes evocar uma imagem fotográfica, constituindo uma pausa no fluxo temporal que permite perceber as ocorrências sob forma de “quadro estático”, figurando o mistério irredutível aos princípios da causalidade.

*June Recital*, o segundo conto de *The Golden*

of “frames” capturing the characters’ gaze acquires self-reflexive connotations, which also evokes the cinematographic universe. The image of the confluence of light and shadow performs an identical function and this emphasis on the symbolic reversibility of dichotomous concepts illustrates the non-duality of the authorial perspective, in a possible allusion to the characteristics of analog photography – the transmutation of light into darkness (when the photosensitive film is marked by light) and of darkness into light (when the negative is exposed to light in order to make the paper print). One should note that this technical peculiarity subverts an important paradigm of the Jewish-Christian imaginary, and so photography contains in its genesis a fundamental ambivalence that relates it to mystery<sup>1</sup>.

Assuming the inheritance of modernist aesthetics, Welty confers a revelatory capacity to “photographic vision” capable of piercing the daily surface of situations or objects trivialized by an inattentive gaze<sup>2</sup>. The author distances herself, however, from the formalist perspective (advocated by Alfred Stieglitz and afterwards by the f.64 group) and develops in her literary and photographic works a humanist vision centered on the individual, shaped by social and cosmic forces. Thus, in Welty’s writing, the recurring metaphor of photography problematizes the presuppositions of visual immediacy and accentuates the complexity of the perceptive process.

<sup>1</sup>Frade lembra que Talbot esteve para “nomear o processo fotogénico como skiográfico (do grego skia, sombra, escuridão). (...) [visto] a fotografia associa[r] real e geneticamente a luz à produção de sombras. Processo perigoso, portanto, em virtude dessa associação aparentemente inusitada que ameaça anular, pela física e pela química, aquela que parece ser uma oposição fundamental do imaginário.” (72-73).

<sup>2</sup>Recordem-se os comentários de Edward Weston sobre as potencialidades revelatórias da imagem fotográfica: “the camera’s innate honesty (...) provides the photographer with a means of looking deeply into the nature of things, and presenting his subjects in terms of their basic reality. It enables him to reveal the essence of what lies before his lens with such clear insight that the beholder may find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual subject.” (174).

<sup>1</sup>Frade reminds us that Talbot was about to “denominate the photogenic process as skiagraphic (from the greek skia, meaning shadow or darkness). (...) [since] photography really and genetically associates light to the production of shadows. A dangerous process, thus, in virtue of that apparently unexpected association that threatens to nullify, through physics and chemistry, that which seems to be a fundamental opposition of the imaginary” (72-73).

<sup>2</sup>Let us recall Edward Weston’s comments on the revealing potentialities of the photographic image: “the camera’s innate honesty (...) provides the photographer with a means of looking deeply into the nature of things, and presenting his subjects in terms of their basic reality. It enables him to reveal the essence of what lies before his lens with such clear insight that the beholder may find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual subject.” (174).

*Apples*, ilustra estas considerações teóricas, pois tematiza o olhar como processo que instaura os limites da percepção, de acordo com códigos narrativos que ordenam os dados visuais e permitem a legibilidade. A nível macro-estrutural, as quatro secções do conto alternam os pontos de vista de duas crianças que observam uma casa meio abandonada no quintal em frente e erguem um palco onde se desenrolam narrativas paralelas, distantes entre si no tempo mas

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envolvendo as mesmas personagens, no que parece um desdobramento fotográfico. Num exercício de rebeldia contra os ditames da família, o jovem Loch Morrison assume a postura de “espião” e relata os eventos que agitam no presente diegético a antiga casa da família MacLain. Em contraponto, Cassie, a irmã adolescente que fora desperta pelos acordes musicais oriundos da casa vizinha, enquadra de modo diverso os motivos das personagens em cena, evocando tempos recentes da cidade de Morgana.

Considerando a tensão e complementaridade entre as visões das duas personagens focalizadoras, diversos críticos acentuam a qualidade visual do conto e a sua proximidade com o processo fotográfico (Appel 210-211; Mortimer 125). Pitavy-Souques, em particular, afirma que o texto é estruturado por um jogo especular que questiona a autenticidade do objecto face ao seu reflexo, fazendo emergir o sentido da combinação dos “instantâneos fotográficos” de Loch, com o “negativo” de Cassie, que for-

So much so that the moments of epiphany seem at times to evoke a photographic image, introducing a break in the temporal flux that leads us to understand the events as a “static painting”, hinting at a mystery irreducible to the principles of causality.

*June Recital*, the second short story in *The Golden Aple*, illustrates these theoretical considerations by thematizing the gaze as a process that installs the limits of perception, in accord with narrative codes that order the visual data and allow for legibility. At the macro-structural level, the four sections of the short story alternate the points of view of two children that observe an almost abandoned house in the front yard and raise a stage where parallel narratives take place – distant among themselves in time but involv-

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ing the same characters in what seems to be a photographic doubling. In a rebellious exercise against the family’s constraints, the young Loch Morrison takes the posture of a “spy” and relates the events that agitate the MacLain family’s old house in the diegetic present. By contrast, Cassie, the adolescent sister who had been awakened by the musical notes coming from the neighboring house, frames the motives of the onstage characters in a different way by evoking the recent past of the city of Morgana.

Considering the tension and complementarity between the visions of the two focalizing characters, several critics have highlighted the visual quality of the short story and its relatedness to the photographic process (Appel 210-211; Mortimer 125). Pitavy-Souques in particular argues that the text is structured by a specular game that questions the authenticity of the object in relation to its reflection. Therefore meaning

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**“O carácter simultaneamente cultural e idiosincrático do olhar encontra-se ainda acentuado pelo recurso à perspectiva infantil”**

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neca um contexto para o registo mais imediato daquele focalizador (266). A leitura resulta, pois, da interacção criativa entre estes dois olhares e a visão do leitor, que deverá decifrar a incógnita além da superfície aparentemente translúcida de cada uma das perspectivas apresentadas. Poder-se-á, portanto, considerar a imagem fotográfica, enquanto metáfora do processo exegetico, como um indício visível que articula o objecto a fotografar e o sujeito que fotografa (ambos incognoscíveis) com a irreversibilidade do acto fotográfico e o potencial de infinitude do negativo fotográfico, na tensão entre singularidade e indeterminação<sup>3</sup>.

O carácter simultaneamente cultural e idiosincrático do olhar encontra-se ainda acentuado pelo recurso à perspectiva infantil, recorrente, aliás, no conto modernista, na obra de escritoras como Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield e Katherine Anne Porter<sup>4</sup>. Para aprofundar estas considerações, centremo-nos na primeira secção de *June Recital* dominada pelo ponto de vista de Loch que, confinado ao quarto pela febre apesar dos seus protestos, se dedica a investigar a casa fronteiriça. Este exercício voyeurístico surge metaforicamente apresentado em termos cinematográficos, segundo a técnica da montagem visual por planos. O cruzamento de

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emerges from the combination of Loch’s “snapshots” with Cassie’s “negatives”, which provide a context for the more immediate descriptions of that focalizer (266). Reading results thus from the creative interaction between these two gazes and the reader’s vision, which must decipher the riddle beyond the apparently translucent surface of each perspective. We may therefore consider the photographic image, as a metaphor of the exegetic process, to be a visible sign that articulates the object to be photographed and the subject who photographs (both incognizable) with the irreversibility of the photographic act and the infinite potential of the photographic negative, in the tension between singularity and indetermination<sup>3</sup>.

The simultaneously cultural and idiosyncratic nature of the gaze is heightened by the adoption of a child’s perspective, a point of view recurrent in the modernist short story, for instance in the works of such writers as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Katherine Anne Porter<sup>4</sup>. To further develop these considerations let us concentrate on the first section of *June Recital*, filtered by Loch who, despite his protests, is confined to his room due to a fever, and starts to spy on the adjacent house. This voyeuristic exercise is metaphorically presented in cinematographic terms, according to the technique

<sup>3</sup> Recorro à definição de fotografia proposta por Soulages (303-309).

<sup>4</sup> Na introdução a *The Secret Self: Short Stories by Women*, Hermione Lee defende que esta estratégia é especialmente produtiva na ficção curta feminina: “The susceptibility and literalness of children, their matter-of-fact but unsocialized behaviour, their imaginative play with what is immediately at hand, seems to be a particularly sympathetic and useful subject for women writers.” (x).

<sup>3</sup> I rephrase the definition of photography suggested by Soulages (303-309).

<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to *The Secret Self: Short Stories by Women*, Hermione Lee defends that this strategy is especially productive in women’s short fiction: “The susceptibility and literalness of children, their matter-of-fact but unsocialized behaviour, their imaginative play with what is immediately at hand, seems to be a particularly sympathetic and useful subject for women writers.” (x).

## JUNE RECITAL

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Loch was in a tempest with his mother. She would keep him in bed and make him take Cocoa-Quinine all summer, if she had her way. He yelled and let her wait holding the brimming spoon, his eyes taking in the whole ironclad pattern, the checkerboard of her apron—until he gave out of breath, and took the swallow. His mother laid her hand on his pompadour cap, wobbled his scalp instead of kissing him, and went off to her nap.

"Louella!" he called faintly, hoping she would come upstairs and he could devil her into running to Loomis's and buying him an ice cream cone out of her pocket, but he heard her righteously bang a pot to him in the kitchen. At last he sighed, stretched his toes—so clean he despised the very sight of his feet—and brought himself up on his elbow to the window.

Next door was the vacant house.

His family would all be glad if it burned down; he wrapped it with the summer's love. Beyond the hackberry leaves of their own tree and the cedar row and the spready yard over there, it stretched its weathered side. He let his eyes rest or go flickering along it, as over something very well known indeed. Its left-alone contour, its careless stretching away into that deep backyard he knew by heart. The house's side was like a person's, if a person or giant would lie sleeping there, always sleeping.

A red and bottle-shaped chimney held up all. The roof spread falling to the front, the porch came around the side leaning on the curve, where it hung with bannisters gone, like a cliff in a serial at the Bijou. Instead of cowboys in danger, Miss Jefferson Moody's chickens wandered over there from across the way, flapped over the edge, and found the shade cooler, the dust fluffier to sit in, and the worms thicker under that blackening floor.

In the side of the house were six windows, two upstairs and four down, and back of the chimney a small stair window shaped like a

fronteiras semióticas acentua-se com o recurso a códigos narrativos de *westerns* e *slapstick comedies*, e ainda com as posteriores referências a uma sala de projecção, a cenas de clássicos do cinema mudo e a actores famosos na América dos anos vinte (366-367).

De facto, à semelhança do que ocorre em diversos outros contos da autora, *June Recital* utiliza como elos coesivos *técnicas de edição filmica* (Kaplansky). Assim, as notas iniciais de *Für Elise* acentuam a simultaneidade das percepções dos focalizadores, entre a primeira

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e a segunda secção; o *fade-in* indica, no início da terceira secção, que o texto volta a centrar-se no jovem (“After a moment of blackness, upside down, Loch opened his eyes”, 382); a quarta secção abre com a moldura da janela. Sublinhe-se que Welty foi ao longo da vida uma apreciadora da sétima arte, tendo reconhecido na sua escrita prováveis influências de estratégias composicionais filmicas, tais como manipulações da temporalidade ou transições de cena com base na valoração simbólica de um detalhe visual (Prenshaw 149, 168-170).

O início de *June Recital* evoca, aliás, uma composição filmica: a moldura da janela enquadra a casa vazia, espécie de tela onde irão ser projectados diversos fragmentos narrativos; segue-se um plano geral do exterior do edifício e do jardim luxuriante; são, depois, apresenta-

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“Indeed the beginning of *June Recital* evokes a film composition: the window’s frame molds the empty house, a canvas where several narrative fragments will be projected; next comes an overview of the building’s exterior and the luxurious garden; afterwards we see several of the rooms;”

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of visual composition by planes. The crossing of semiotic borders becomes more evident with the recourse to narrative codes from westerns and slapstick comedies, and also with the posterior references to a projection room, to scenes from classic silent movies and famous American actors from the twenties (366-367).

In fact, *June Recital* (and some of the author’s other stories) makes use of *film editing techniques* (Kaplansky) as cohesive links. Thus, the initial notes from *Für Elise* accentuate the simultaneity of the focalizers’ perception between the first and second section; the fade-in shows, at the beginning of the third section, that the text becomes again focalized by the youngster (“After a moment of blackness, upside down, Loch opened his eyes” 382); the fourth section opens with the window’s frame. Throughout her life Welty enjoyed the seventh art, and recognized in her writing possible influences of compositional film strategies, such as manipulations of temporality or scene transitions based on the symbolic value of a visual detail (Prenshaw 149, 168-170).

Indeed the beginning of *June Recital* evokes a film composition: the window frames the empty house, a canvas where several narrative fragments will be projected; next comes an overview of the building’s exterior and the luxurious garden; afterwards we see several of the rooms; later on Morgana is composed by a series of visual planes, from Loch’s observation point. On the other hand, the house is personified, associated to the oneiric world of giants and to the sceneries of the cowboy films shown at Bijou,

das as várias divisões no interior; mais à frente Morgana surge composta por uma série de planos visuais, a partir do ponto de observação ocupado por Loch. Por outro lado, assiste-se à personificação da casa, associada ao mundo onírico dos gigantes e aos cenários dos filmes de *cowboys* que passam no Bijou, a sala de cinema de Morgana. Outro detalhe simboliza de forma magistral a postura de *voyeur* ocupada pelo espectador fílmico – a janela em formato de buraco de fechadura inviolável que associa o olhar à transgressão, a um relacionamento desigual entre quem olha e quem é visto: “In the side of the house were six windows (...) and back of the chimney a small stair window shaped like a keyhole—one made never to open; they had one like it.” (333-334)<sup>5</sup>.

Curiosamente, o edifício abandonado parece constituir um duplo da casa habitada pelos Morrison, como atestam a semelhança arquitectónica notada por Loch no final do excerto citado (indicando a reversibilidade do posicionamento de *voyeur*) e ainda as suas observações quanto à organização do espaço e à disposição da mobília, por contraste com o modelo que lhe é familiar<sup>6</sup>. O texto parodia, pois, as convenções da família burguesa, apresentando uma imagem distorcida do espaço matricial da domesticidade, à margem das regras de socialização que definem os parâmetros de comportamento aceitáveis – a sexualidade permissível, por oposição aos jogos eróticos da adolescente Virgie Rainey, cuja rebeldia se associa ao génio musical; os ditames de normalidade, por contraste com a loucura da antiga mestra de piano,

Morgana’s cinema. Another detail symbolizes the posture of the voyeur occupied by the filmic spectator – the window in the format of an inviolable keyhole that associates the gaze to transgression, to an unequal relationship between the onlooker and the figure looked at: “In the side of the house were six windows (...) and back of the chimney a small stair window shaped like a keyhole—one made never to open; they had one like it.” (333-334)<sup>5</sup>.

Curiously enough the abandoned building seems to be a double of the house inhabited by the Morrison family, as the architectural similarities noted by Loch at the end of the cited excerpt illustrate. The reversibility of the voyeur’s positioning is also suggested by his observations regarding the organization of the space and the furniture arrangement, in contrast to the model that he is familiar with<sup>6</sup>. The text therefore parodies the conventions of a bourgeois family by presenting a distorted image of the paradigmatic space of domesticity to the margin of socialization rules that define the parameters of acceptable behavior – the permissible sexuality, in opposition to the adolescent Virgie Rainey’s erotic games, whose rebelliousness is associated to musical genius; the dictates of normality, by contrast to the madness of the old piano teacher, Miss Eckhart, the character with whom Welty later identifies with in her autobiography, *One Writer’s Beginnings* (1984).

That is the reason why Loch, believing to be a cowboy (the model *par excellence* of heroism in American culture), inhabits the abandoned house in dreams “day and night”, since this space allows him to escape the adults’ authoritarianism

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Cavell frisa que a postura de voyeur assumida pelo espectador cinematográfico se prende com o desejo de obter uma visão total do mundo, ou seja, de alcançar “the condition of viewing as such.” (102).

<sup>6</sup> Ao descrever as divisões da casa, Loch recorre a uma estruturação adversativa que evoca as suas expectativas quanto à aparência de uma habitação modelar: “There were green shades rolled up to various levels, but no curtains. A table showed in the dining room, *but no chairs*. (...) *Instead* of a door into the hall there was a curtain” (334, *italics mine*).

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Cavell stresses that the posture of the voyeur assumed by the cinematographic spectator derives from the desire to obtain a complete view of the world, that is, to attain “the condition of viewing as such.” (102).

<sup>6</sup> When describing the divisions of the house, Loch resorts to an adversative structure that elicits his expectations regarding the appearance of an exemplary house: “There were green shades rolled up to various levels, but no curtains. A table showed in the dining room, *but no chairs*. (...) *Instead* of a door into the hall there was a curtain” (334, *italics mine*).



Miss Eckhart, personagem com que Welty se identificará na sua autobiografia, *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984).

Daí que Loch, acreditando-se cowboy (modelo por excelência de heroísmo na cultura americana), habite em sonhos “dia e noite” a casa abandonada, fugindo ao autoritarismo com que os adultos se apropriam do seu corpo, e às intromissões da irmã, que lhe pretende impor narrativas desadequadas ao gênero masculino: “Some whole days at a time, often in his dreams day and night, he would seem to be living next door, wild as a cowboy, absolutely by himself, without his mother and father coming to feel his skin ... And there was where Cassie could never bring him books to read, miserable girls' books and fairy tales.” (335)

No entanto, a casa propicia também o pesadelo, evocado através da floresta – “[the leaky gutter] Splashy as a waterfall in a forest” (335) –, espaço iniciático onde as crianças que povoam os contos populares devem enfrentar os terrores da separação e prestar provas iniciáticas, de modo a poderem assumir a sua individualidade solitária (Bettelheim 94-98; Zipes 65-69, 79). Em *June Recital*, Loch irá ser iniciado nos mistérios do erotismo, como indicia o prazer com que observa os figos do quintal fronteiro, descritos em termos poéticos com claras conotações sexuais (336). A figueira é em várias culturas associada a ritos de fecundação (Chevalier e Gheerbrant 440; Frazer 136) e o texto recupera esse simbolismo para reconstituir em tonalidade lírica a anatomia feminina, sugerindo os devaneios eróticos de Loch através da descrição de um figo aberto à língua (337). A postura de *voyeur* adquire, assim, conotações sexuais, em especial quando Loch enquadra no seu campo de visão, numa das janelas/telas da casa vizinha, o encontro amoroso entre Virgie e um jovem marinheiro<sup>7</sup>. Contudo, a personagem focalizadora possui um “olhar inocente” e, incapaz de decifrar os movimentos eróticos dos amantes, metamorfoseia fantasiosamente

over his body as well as his sister's intromissions, trying to impose on him narratives inappropriate for the male gender:

“Some whole days at a time, often in his dreams day and night, he would seem to be living next door, wild as a cowboy, absolutely by himself, without his mother and father coming to feel his skin ... And there was where Cassie could never bring him books to read, miserable girls' books and fairy tales.” (335)

However, the house also propitiates nightmares which are evoked through the forest – “[the leaky gutter] Splashy as a waterfall in a forest” (335) – the initiation space where the children who inhabit popular short stories must face the terrors of separation and go through the initiation rites which unable them to assume their solitary individuality (Bettelheim 94-98; Zipes 65-69, 79).

In *June Recital*, Loch will be initiated in the mysteries of eroticism, as suggested by the pleasure with which he observes the figs on the bordering garden, described in poetic terms with clear sexual connotations (336). The fig tree is associated to fertilization rites in various cultures (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 440; Frazer 136) and the text recovers that symbolism in order to reconstruct the feminine anatomy in a lyrical tone, suggesting Loch's erotic daydreams through the description of a fig opened to the tongue (337). Like this the posture of the voyeur acquires sexual connotations, especially when Loch frames in his field of vision, on one of the windows/canvases of the neighboring house, the encounter between Virgie and a young sailor<sup>7</sup>. However, the focalizer character has an “innocent gaze” and, incapable of deciphering the lovers' erotic movements, creatively metamorphoses the bodies:

“Sometimes they held pickles stuck in their mouths like cigars, and turned to look at each other. Sometimes they lay just alike, their legs in M and their hands joined between them, exactly like the paper dolls his sister used to cut out of a folded newspaper and unfold to let him see. (...)

os corpos:

“Sometimes they held pickles stuck in their mouths like cigars, and turned to look at each other. Sometimes they lay just alike, their legs in M and their hands joined between them, exactly like the paper dolls his sister used to cut out of a folded newspaper and unfold to let him see. (...)”

And then, like the paper dolls sprung back together, they folded close—the real people. Like a big grasshopper lighting, all their legs and arms drew into a small body, deadlike, with protective coloring.” (341)

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**“A postura de *voyeur* adquire, assim, conotações sexuais, em especial quando Loch enquadra no seu campo de visão, numa das janelas/telas da casa vizinha, o encontro amoroso entre Virgie e um jovem marinheiro.”**

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A incapacidade de leitura do jovem vê-se superada pela imaginação, através de paralelismos com referentes do seu quotidiano que retratam o tumulto harmonioso dos amantes, sendo a componente lúdica do erotismo frisada pela evocação dos brinquedos e pela posterior referência a um ícone do cinema mudo (“the sailor and Virgie (...) were running in circles (...) They went around and around like the policeman and Charlie Chaplin, both intending to fall down”, *idem*).

Loch possui a “visão dupla” que Welty atribui ao artista, combinando a observação objectiva (hiperbolizada pelo recurso ao telescópio) com

<sup>7</sup> Recorde-se o modo como são introduzidas estas personagens: “Loch trained the telescope to the back and caught the sailor and the girl” (336, *italico meu*). Mais à frente, o conto enfatiza a relação de poder do voyeur perante as suas “presas”: “When he saw the door prized open (...) and let the people in, Loch felt the old indignation rise up. But at the same time he felt joy. For while the invaders did not see him, he saw them, both with the naked eye and through the telescope; and each day that he kept them to himself, they were his.” (337).

And then, like the paper dolls sprung back together, they folded close—the real people. Like a big grasshopper lighting, all their legs and arms drew into a small body, deadlike, with protective coloring.” (341)

The youngster’s inability to read is surpassed by imagination through parallelisms with his quotidian that associate the lovers’ harmonious

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“Like this the posture of the voyeur acquires sexual connotations, especially when Loch frames in his field of vision, on one of the windows/canvases of the neighboring house, the encounter between Virgie and a young sailor.”

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tumult with the ludic component of eroticism stressed by the evocation of toys and by the posterior reference to an icon from silent film (“the sailor and Virgie (...) were running in circles (...) They went around and around like the policeman and Charlie Chaplin, both intending to fall down”, *idem*).

Loch has the “double vision” that Welty attributes to the artist, combining the objective observation (hyperbolized by the use of the telescope) with an imaginative transfiguring approach. This character’s “narrative method” points to the above mentioned essay *Place in Fiction*, where the effect of verisimilitude is described as the result of the writer’s capacity to simultaneously consider the surrounding universe and its subjective vision:

“We have seen that *the writer* must accurately choose, combine, superimpose upon, blot out, shake up, alter the outside world for one absolute purpose, the good of his story. To do this,

<sup>7</sup> Let us recollect the way in which these characters are introduced: “Loch trained the telescope to the back and caught the sailor and the girl” (336, *italics mine*). Later on, the text emphasizes the voyeur’s power before his “prey”: “When he saw the door prized open (...) and let the people in, Loch felt the old indignation rise up. But at the same time he felt joy. For while the invaders did not see him, he saw them, both with the naked eye and through the telescope; and each day that he kept them to himself, they were his.” (337).

mattress delightfully bare—where he would love, himself, to lie, on a slant and naked, to let the little cottony tufts annoy him and to feel the mattress like billows bouncing beneath, and to eat pickles lying on his back—the sailor and the piano player lay and ate pickles out of an open sack between them. Because of the down-tilt of the mattress, the girl had to keep watch on the sack, and when it began to slide down out of reach that was when they laughed. Sometimes they held pickles stuck in their mouths like cigars, and turned to look at each other. Sometimes they lay just alike, their legs in an M and their hands joined between them, exactly like the paper dolls his sister used to cut out of folded newspaper and unfold to let him see. If Cassie would come in now, he would point out the window and she would remember.

And then, like the paper dolls sprung back together, they folded close—the real people. Like a big grasshopper lighting, all their legs and arms drew in to one small body, deadlike, with protective coloring.

He leaned back and bent his head against the cool side of the pillow and shut his eyes, and felt tired out. He clasped the cool telescope to his side, and with his fingernail closed its little eye.

“Poor old Telescope,” he said.

When he looked out again, everybody next door was busier.

Upstairs, the sailor and Virgie Rainey were running in circles around the room, each time jumping with outstretched arms over the broken bed. Who chased whom had nothing to do with it because they kept the same distance between them. They went around and around like the policeman and Charlie Chaplin, both intending to fall down.

Downstairs, the sailor’s mother was doing something just as fanciful. She was putting up decorations. (Cassie would be happy to see that.) As if she were giving a party that day, she was dressing up the parlor with ribbons of white stuff. It was newspaper.

The old woman left the parlor time and time again and reappeared—in and out through the beads in the doorway—each time with an armful of old *Bugles* that had lain on the back porch in people’s way for a long time. And from her gestures of eating crumbs or pulling bits of fluff from her bosom, Loch recognized that mother-habit: she had pins there. She pinned long strips of the newspaper together, first tearing them carefully and evenly as a school teacher. She made ribbons of newspaper and was hanging them all over the parlor, starting with the piano, where she weighted down the ends with a statue.

When Loch grew tired of watching one animated room he watched the other. How the two playing would whirl and jump over the old woman’s head! That was the way the bed fell to begin with.

uma abordagem imaginativa transfiguradora. O “método narrativo” desta personagem remete para o já citado ensaio *Place in Fiction*, onde o efeito de verosimilhança é descrito como resultado da capacidade do escritor considerar em simultâneo o universo circundante e a sua visão subjectiva do mesmo:

“We have seen that *the writer* must accurately choose, combine, superimpose upon, blot out, shake up, alter the outside world for one absolute purpose, the good of his story. To do this, he *is always seeing double, two pictures at once in his frame*, his and the world’s; a fact that he constantly comprehends; and he works best in a state of constant and subtle and unfooled reference between the two.” (789, itálico meu)

Os devaneios de Loch constituem, pois, uma *mise-en-abîme* do acto de escrita, visto intersectarem um relato de carácter circunstancial (recriando um contexto espaço-temporal verosímil e reproduzindo com fidelidade alguns dos elementos que cruzam o seu campo visu-

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**“O espaço da casa abandonada representará, então, a folha de papel em branco, a tela cinematográfica e o negativo fotográfico, permitindo a figuração de diversas linguagens artísticas – a escrita, o cinema e a fotografia.**

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al) com uma abordagem marcada pela imaginação (transmutando a realidade a ponto de esta se tornar “irreconhecível”). O espaço da casa abandonada representará, então, a folha de papel em branco, a tela cinematográfica e o negativo fotográfico, permitindo a figuração de diversas linguagens artísticas – a escrita, o cinema e a fotografia. Enquanto suporte das observações fantasiosas do jovem, este espaço abre-se ao mistério, dramatizando a subversão

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“The space of the abandoned house will therefore represent a blank sheet of paper, a cinematographic screen and a photographic negative, figuring diverse artistic languages – writing, cinema and photography.”

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he *is always seeing double, two pictures at once in his frame*, his and the world’s; a fact that he constantly comprehends; and he works best in a state of constant and subtle and unfooled reference between the two.” (789, italics mine)

Loch’s daydreams thus constitute a *mise-en-abîme* of the writing act for they intersect a factual account (recreating a verisimilar space-time context and detailing some of the elements that cross his visual field) with an approach marked by the imagination (metamorphosing reality to the point that it becomes “unrecognizable”). The space of the abandoned house will therefore represent a blank sheet of paper, a cinematographic screen and a photographic negative, figuring diverse artistic languages – writing, cinema and photography. As the basis for the youngster’s fanciful observations, this space opens itself to mystery, hence dramatizing the subversion of chronological sequentiality by both the character’s lyrical impulses and his perception of the site’s phantasmagoric quality.

Furthermore, this figure possesses the quality of compassion that Welty values in the personality of the artist, being characterized by an “amorous sentiment” that transfigures the images observed through the telescope into a synesthetic explosion that amalgamates vision, touch and scent: “He moved the glass *lovingly* toward the house and touched its roof (...) / With the telescope to his eye he even smelled the house strongly” (335, italics mine). This attitude reminds us of Welty’s assertions in the preface to her first photographic album, *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression. A Snapshot Album* (1971), on the feelings that animated her photography – a mixture of curiosity, amazement and affection

da sequencialidade cronológica, tanto pelos impulsos líricos da personagem, como pela sua percepção da qualidade fantasmagórica do local. Para mais, esta figura possui a qualidade de compaixão que Welty valoriza na personalidade do artista, sendo caracterizado por um “sentimento amoroso” que transfigura as imagens observadas através do telescópio, numa exploração sinestésica amalgamando a visão, o tacto e o odor: “He moved the glass *lovingly* toward the house and touched its roof (...) / With the telescope to his eye he even smelled the house strongly” (335, *italico meu*). Tal atitude recorda as asserções de Welty, no prefácio ao seu primeiro álbum fotográfico *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression. A Snapshot Album* (1971), sobre os sentimentos que animaram a sua fotografia – um misto de curiosidade, assombro e simpatia, aliados à paciência para esperar o momento revelador, quando as superfícies tornadas familiares pelo hábito adquirem ressonâncias enigmáticas (11).

Acrescente-se, ainda, que a casa abandonada emerge no início do conto como uma composição de luz e sombra, pois a forte luminosidade do Verão sulista desenha os objectos por contrastes. A imagística que caracteriza este espaço sublinha a natureza tensional da realidade, na medida em que recorre a dualidades – transparência e opacidade (descrições de janelas abertas ou sem cortinados e da porta substituída por cortina de contas); movimento e estatismo (símile entre a casa e um barco). Assim, o campo semântico da visão, com as tradicionais conotações epistemológicas, problematiza os pressupostos da visibilidade, através de superfícies que reflectem e recolhem luminosidade e negrume: “The parlor window was in the shadow (...), clear and dark as a pool he knew in the river.” (334).

Os efeitos de reflexão complexificam-se numa amalgama dos universos exterior e interior, natural e cultural, “objectivo” e onírico, como exemplifica a seguinte passagem: “A framed

allied to the patience in waiting for the revelatory moment, when the surfaces that become familiar through habit acquire enigmatic resonances (11).

It is worth noticing that the abandoned house also emerges at the beginning of the short story as a composition of light and dark, due to the strong summer luminosity of the south that draws objects by contrast. The imagery that characterizes this space emphasizes the tensional quality of reality, since it resorts to dualities – transparency and opacity (descriptions of open or uncurtained windows and of a door which is substituted by a bead curtain); movement and immobility (simile between the house and a boat). Therefore, the semantic field of vision, with its traditional epistemological connotations, problematizes the presuppositions of visibility through the surfaces that reflect and collect luminosity and darkness: “The parlor window was in the shadow (...), clear and dark as a pool he knew in the river.” (334).

The effects of reflection are ramified in a combination of external and internal, natural and cultural universes, of the “objective” and the oneiric realms, as the following passage exemplifies: “A framed picture could be seen hanging on the wall (...). Sometimes the glass in the picture reflected the light outdoors and the flight of birds between branches of trees, and while it reflected Mr. Holifield was having a dream.” (*idem*). With this blurring of boundaries recurrent throughout her fiction, making the animal movement a sign of oneiric activity, Welty suggests that there is permeability between the random orders used by human beings in the effort to structure their worldview. Moreover, this excerpt accentuates the complexity of artistic representation in its oblique relationship to reality, here presented as a reflex of an image in a declared distancing from the classic mimetic posture. The semantic amplitude of “picture” reinforces the intersemiotic parallelisms that have been proposed, for this noun can designate: a painting or a drawing, a photograph or a film, a verbal description or a

picture could be seen hanging on the wall (...). Sometimes the glass in the picture reflected the light outdoors and the flight of birds between branches of trees, and while it reflected Mr. Holifield was having a dream.” (*idem*). Fazendo do movimento animal índice da actividade onírica, Welty sugere a permeabilidade entre as ordens aleatórias com que o ser humano procura estruturar a sua mundividência, num cruzamento de fronteiras comum na sua obra literária. Para mais, este excerto frisa a complexidade da representação artística no seu relacionamento oblíquo com a realidade, aqui apresentada como reflexo de uma imagem, num assumido distanciamento da postura mimética clássica. Note-se ainda que a amplitude semântica de “picture” reforça os paralelismos intersemióticos que têm vindo a ser propostos, pois este substantivo pode designar: uma pintura ou um desenho, uma fotografia ou um filme, uma descrição verbal ou uma imagem mental.

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*Even under his shut eyelids, that  
light and shade stayed divided  
from each other, but reversed.*  
(335).

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Colocando a ênfase nas condições ópticas de percepção, Welty sublinha que a visibilidade advém dos contornos mutáveis dos segmentos de luz e sombra, dado as áreas de luminosidade e negrume, ou as fronteiras entre o visível e o invisível, serem potencialmente reversíveis: “Even under his shut eyelids, that light and shade stayed divided from each other, but reversed.” (335). A problematização da inteligibilidade é, pois, figurada através de paralelismos vários com o campo das artes visuais, nomeadamente através da imagística da luz/sombra que, em infinitos cambiantes, lembra a natureza enigmática do real, acentuando o carácter provisório do conhecimento num universo em constante mutação.

mental image.

By placing emphasis on the optic conditions of perception, Welty highlights that visibility results from the mutable contours of the segments of light and shadow, because the luminous and dark areas, the frontiers between the visible and invisible, are potentially reversible: “Even under his shut eyelids, that light and shade stayed divided from each other, but reversed.” (335). The problematization of intelligibility is therefore represented through several parallelisms with the field of visual arts, namely through the imagery of light/darkness which in infinite shades reminds us of the enigmatic nature of reality, accentuating the provisional character of knowledge in a universe in constant mutation.

Translated by Rui Azevedo

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