

CHARACTERIZATION IN THE FICTION  
OF EUDORA WELTY .

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1958

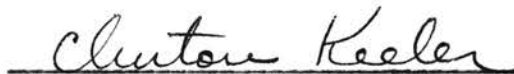
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
the Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 1961

OCT 10 1961

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## PREFACE

The author whom this paper treats, Eudora Welty, was suggested to me by Dr. D. J. Milburn. After reading several of her early short stories, I felt that here was an outstanding contemporary writer. I was especially impressed by the remarkable variety of subject matter and manner of treatment.

Miss Welty's work has been commended for excellent craftsmanship and ability to create mood and atmosphere. In this paper, I shall attempt a study of only one aspect of this craftsmanship, creation of characters, and shall attempt to assess her ability in relation to the total effect of her fiction.

Because the work of Miss Welty has been published nationally only since 1941 and because her work exhibits such wide diversities in style and subject, there has been no study which attempts to find the "heart" of all of her fiction or points out the relative value of each of her works. Therefore, since the body of work is relatively small, I have chosen for analysis characters from each of her four collections of short stories, her one novel, and her two novelettes.

For their guidance in the preparation of this thesis, I should like to thank my advisers. I should also like to express my appreciation to Mr. Alton Juhlin of the Oklahoma State University Library who helped me to secure material from other libraries. Acknowledgement is also due to Miss Katherine H. Smythe, whose bibliography "Eudora Welty: A Checklist," published in Bulletin of Bibliography (XXI, 207-208), I found most helpful, and to my sister, Miss Joe Ann Dean, for her understanding and encouragement.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

Eudora Welty is considered to be one of the most noteworthy of contemporary writers. Various short stories from her collections have been included in quality anthologies since her first publication. American literature survey volumes of recent date mention her as an outstanding writer of the short story. Ray B. West, although classifying her with such writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and Katherine Anne Porter as writers of second rank to Hemingway and Faulkner, stated that her most interesting and competent work was to be found in her first two collections, A Curtain of Green and The Wide Net. Her attempts at longer forms were serious breaks in a promising literary career, and subsequent fiction failed to equal the quality of her first efforts, which alone, however, established her high reputation.<sup>1</sup> A survey of the criticisms of each of her books shows that most critics agree with this evaluation.

Eudora Welty's first volume of short stories, A Curtain of Green and Other Stories, was published in 1941 with an introduction by Katherine Anne Porter, in which Miss Porter said:

She can very well become a master of the short story, there are almost perfect stories in this book .... These stories offer an extraordinary range of mood, pace, tone, and variety of material .... the author is freed

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<sup>1</sup>The Short Story in America, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1952), p. 26 and pp. 111-112.

from self-love, self-pity, self-preoccupation, that triple damnation of too many of the young and gifted, and has reached an admirable objectivity .... In all of these stories, varying as they do in excellence, I find nothing false or labored, no diffusion of interest, no wavering of mood -- the approach is direct and simple in method, though the themes and moods are anything but simple, and there is even in the smallest story a sense of power in reserve which makes me believe firmly that splendid beginning that this is, it is only the beginning.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, some reviewers felt that the choice of subject matter in this first publication revealed that the author was too preoccupied with the eccentric and grotesque.<sup>3</sup> Louise Bogan commented on her "gothic" manner and likened her to Gogol in choice of subject matter and style -- tramp musicians, mad, drunk, or senile aristocrats, "peasant" types, all treated with "humorous detachment, tenderness, or roaring farce."<sup>4</sup> R. W. Daniel felt that some of the stories owed their conceptual background to Faulkner, but that the foreground was her own; "Indeed she affords an instructive study in the proper use of an influence."<sup>5</sup> Individual stories, such as "A Worn Path" ("...human fortitude that is almost unbearable in its sad intensity ...") were praised by Granville Hicks.<sup>6</sup> Robert Penn Warren pointed out the variety of subjects, moods, and methods -- vindictive farce, nightmare fantasy, witty fantasy, irony, "straight" realism, macabre comedy and pathos -- and commented that the book was exhilarating,

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<sup>2</sup>"Introduction," Selected Stories of Eudora Welty, Containing All of A Curtain of Green and Other Stories and The Wide Net and Other Stories (New York, 1954), pp. xviii-xxiii.

<sup>3</sup>Gladys Graham Bates, "Two Southerners," Saturday Review, November 22, 1941, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>"Gothic South," Selected Criticism: Prose, Poetry (New York, 1955), p. 208.

<sup>5</sup>"The World of Eudora Welty," Southern Renaissance, ed. L. D. Rubin and R. D. Jacobs (Baltimore, 1953), p. 307.

<sup>6</sup>"Eudora Welty," English Journal, XLI (November, 1952), 464.

revealing an "innocent delight" in the variety of the world, the "innocent delight of the craftsman and of the admirer of the world."<sup>7</sup>

A Curtain of Green and Other Stories contained such well-known and frequently reprinted items as "A Piece of News," "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," "Powerhouse," "A Worn Path," and "Death of a Traveling Salesman," this last being the subject of a provocative article contrasting Miss Welty's story of R. J. Bowman, the traveling shoe salesman, with Arthur Miller's later creation of Willie Loman in his Death of a Salesman.<sup>8</sup>

Miss Welty followed A Curtain of Green with a novelette, The Robber Bridegroom, published in 1942, which drew mixed critical reaction. John Peale Bishop felt it to be a failure; her fairy-tale reworking of a Grimm Brothers story combined with frontier tall tales against a Louisiana background was incongruous to him.<sup>9</sup> R. W. Daniel stated that it was only for her "special admirers."<sup>10</sup> It was dismissed by Granville Hicks as an experimental novella filled with passages of great descriptive beauty.<sup>11</sup> However, W. M. Jones found it to be an allegory on the power of love to regenerate good and emerge triumphant in the conflict with evil.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," Selected Essays (New York, 1951), pp. 156-157.

<sup>8</sup>Eleanor Clark, "Old Glamour, New Gloom," Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), 631-636.

<sup>9</sup>"Violent Country," Collected Essays, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, 1948), p. 259.

<sup>10</sup>"The World of Eudora Welty," p. 307.

<sup>11</sup>"Eudora Welty," p. 465.

<sup>12</sup>"Name and Symbol in the Prose of Eudora Welty," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXII (December, 1958), 176.

As an allegory, Eunice Glenn compared it favorably to The House of the Seven Gables, Pilgrim's Progress, and Gulliver's Travels.<sup>13</sup>

In 1943, her second volume of short stories, The Wide Net and Other Stories, was published. These stories drew sharp criticism from Diana Trilling: "Eudora Welty has developed her technical virtuosity to the point where it outweighs the uses to which it is put .... When an author says 'look at me' instead of 'look at it' there is insincerity ..."<sup>14</sup> Robert Penn Warren agreed somewhat with Miss Trilling. In his comments on The Wide Net, he stated that there were indeed such flaws as irrelevant metaphors and sometimes "a blurred effect." He said:

... it is quite possible that Miss Welty has pushed her method to its most extreme limit. It is also possible that the method, if pursued much farther, would lead to monotony, and self imitation and merely decorative elaboration.<sup>15</sup>

However, he found in this volume an intensification of themes presented in A Curtain of Green and concluded that these stories did not detract from the author's reputation as a writer of "great resourcefulness, sensitivity, and intelligence."<sup>16</sup>

Eunice Glenn and R. W. Daniel pointed out the poetic quality of these stories. The latter praised particularly those stories with historical backgrounds ("... the best things in it [the collection] are those exquisite scenes laid in the great forest at the beginning of the 19th century").

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<sup>13</sup>"Fantasy in the Fiction of Eudora Welty," A Southern Vanguard: The John Peale Bishop Memorial Volume, ed. Allen Tate (New York, 1947), pp. 85-86.

<sup>14</sup>"Fiction in Review," Nation, CLVII (October 2, 1943), 386.

<sup>15</sup>"Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," pp. 159 and 169.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>17</sup>"Fantasy in the Fiction of Eudora Welty," p. 83, and "The World of Eudora Welty," p. 308.



Miss Welty's first full-length novel, Delta Wedding, was published in 1946. This rambling, plotless account of a large Southern plantation family, the Fairchilds of Shellmound, preparing for the marriage of one of the daughters to the overseer, presented the reactions of three generations to this event, viewed as a disruption in the life of the Delta aristocracy. Much of the novel was told through the point of view of a nine-year-old cousin. Critical reaction was mixed. A reviewer for the Christian Century thought it was too "delicate" and thin.<sup>18</sup> Another reviewer pointed out the technical virtuosity of the interweaving of direct exposition, dramatic dialogue, and silent soliloquies.<sup>19</sup> Diana Trilling criticized the author's attitude toward the sense of values of the family and remarked that the novel seemed to have been written "on tiptoe."<sup>20</sup> Isaac Rosenfield stated that it was "dull."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, another reviewer entitled his comments "A Fine Novel of the Deep South."<sup>22</sup>

In a journal article devoted exclusively to this novel, John Edward Hardy stated that its most conspicuous flaw was the complacent acceptance of the negro's place in Southern society and remarked that there were "a few distressing lapses into an over-precious style."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>"Books Received," LXIII (May 22, 1946), 657.

<sup>19</sup>Louis Collins, "Books of the Week," Commonweal, XLIV (June 21, 1946), 242.

<sup>20</sup>"Fiction in Review," Nation, CLXII (May 11, 1946), 578.

<sup>21</sup>"Double Standard," New Republic, CXIV (April 29, 1946), 633.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Poore, New York Times Book Review, April 14, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>"Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol," Sewanee Review, LX (July, 1952), 398 and 401.

He felt that the novel excelled in the presentation of the "single, illuminating, still act of private perception," and, in his opinion, other critics failed to grasp the author's ironic attitude toward the narrow complacency and the "childish retreat from reality" of the family.<sup>24</sup>

To Granville Hicks, Delta Wedding was "a triumph of sensitivity" and "a technical triumph too: the constant, subtle shifting of the point of view to render the most that can be rendered."<sup>25</sup>

Miss Welty returned to the short story form in The Golden Apples (1949), but these **stories** were interrelated much in the manner of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. The title indicates the presence of mythical allusion and parallel, interwoven into the account of a group of middle-class families in the imaginary town of Morgana, Mississippi. Earlier criticism was echoed in the comment that the "style runs past its world."<sup>26</sup> Margaret Marshall believed that there were too many "details of observation and sensibility which served no dynamic function."<sup>27</sup> But to Edward Weeks, the book presented a "cumulative understanding of human nature."<sup>28</sup> And R. W. Daniel commended the achievement of an atmosphere of "delicate, pervasive melancholy" in the account of the loss of innocence from childhood to maturity, the loss of the Golden Age.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 404 and 414.

<sup>25</sup>"Eudora Welty," p. 465.

<sup>26</sup>John Hay, "Books," Commonweal, I (September 30, 1949), 609.

<sup>27</sup>"Notes by the Way," Nation, CLXIX (September 10, 1949), 256.

<sup>28</sup>"Eudora Welty of the Delta," Atlantic, September, 1949, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup>"The World of Eudora Welty," pp. 308 and 311-312.

The Ponder Heart, a novelette, followed in 1954. This study of Southern eccentricity was dismissed by one critic as distinguished only by preciousness and "the handsome glitter of technique."<sup>30</sup> A reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement found it very minor.<sup>31</sup> But William Feden in the Saturday Review stated that it was an example of Eudora Welty at her best.<sup>32</sup> The novelette was almost universally praised, however, for the accurate and humorous rendering of Southern speech in the first person narrative of Miss Edna Earle Ponder and was soon dramatized and presented on Broadway.

Miss Welty's latest volume of short stories, The Bride of the Innisfallen (1955), goes outside Mississippi for the setting of several stories. Again the comments echoed previous criticisms. To Jean Holzhauer, the stories were overly precious, and there was a need for bolder, larger themes.<sup>33</sup> The prevalent opinion seemed to be that there was too much atmosphere "at the expense of substance."<sup>34</sup>

A few attempts at examination and evaluation of several of Miss Welty's works have been made. These are concerned primarily with finding a theme which is consistent in her stories and novels. R. W. Daniel in his examination of her work up to and including The Golden Apples determined that the main themes were the growth from innocence to experience and the

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<sup>30</sup>Edward Kennebeck, "People of Clay," Commonweal, LIX (January 22, 1954), 410.

<sup>31</sup>"The Human Comedy," October 29, 1954, p. 685.

<sup>32</sup>"A Trial with No Verdict," January 16, 1954, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>"Seven Stories," Commonweal, LXII (April 20, 1955), 109.

<sup>34</sup>H. H. Wilson, "Selected New Books," Nation, CLXXXI (July 16, 1955), 62.

tragedy of human isolation.<sup>35</sup> In his consideration of her first short stories, Robert Penn Warren stated that the basic situation of her fiction was isolation, presented as either an attempt to escape into the world or the discovery of the nature of the predicament.<sup>36</sup> Granville Hicks' article was concerned primarily with denying that she is merely a regional writer.<sup>37</sup> Eunice Glenn's "Fantasy in the Fiction of Eudora Welty" pointed out the universality of her regional characters and the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality in her fiction.<sup>38</sup>

Other secondary sources deal primarily with a specific aspect of her fiction or one particular work. Noteworthy are J. E. Hardy's previously mentioned "Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol" and Arthur Hodgins' "The Narrator as Ironic Device in a Short Story of Eudora Welty," which discusses her story "Asphodel" in terms of the narrators' unwitting revelation of their own predicament and the true and deeper nature of the situation they discuss.<sup>39</sup> W. M. Jones' articles, "Growth of a Symbol: The Sun in Lawrence and Eudora Welty" and "Name and Symbol in the Prose of Eudora Welty," present mythical interpretations of various works, pointing out allusions to such sources as Greek mythology, folklore, and Arthurian legends.<sup>40</sup> Ray B. West's "Three Methods of Modern Fiction,

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<sup>35</sup>"The World of Eudora Welty," pp. 306-15.

<sup>36</sup>"Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," p. 161.

<sup>37</sup>"Eudora Welty," pp. 69-76.

<sup>38</sup>Op. cit., pp. 78-91.

<sup>39</sup>Twentieth Century Literature, I (January, 1956), 215-219.

<sup>40</sup>University of Kansas City Review, XXVI (October, 1959), 68-73, and Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXII (December, 1958), 173-85.

Hemingway, Mann, Welty," contrasts three methods of presenting theme and explicates the short story "Powerhouse."<sup>41</sup>

The author has replied to various criticisms in the articles on writing she occasionally does. Of her own work, Miss Welty has said that it has been suggested to her by the concrete, " ... the outside signal ... the irresistible, the magnetic, the alarming (pleasurable or disturbing), the overwhelming person, place or thing .... The dark changes of the mind and heart, poetic, moral and passionate, are not plotted yet."<sup>42</sup> She feels that each of her stories is unique and individual, and she does not believe that a writer's work is a unifying whole, written in any typical "predictable, logically developing, or even chronological way."<sup>43</sup> She wishes each of her works to be approached with no preconceptions: "By reading secondhandedly, or obediently as taught, or by approaching a story without an open mind, we wrong its very first attribute, its uniqueness, with its sister attribute of freshness."<sup>44</sup> She has replied to some criticisms by stating that " ... it is of course the way of writing that gives a story, however humble, its whole distinction and glory."<sup>45</sup> Defending herself and other Southern writers from charges of regionalism, she said: " ... the novel from the start has been bound up in the local, the real, the present,

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<sup>41</sup>College English, XII (January, 1951), 193-203.

<sup>42</sup>"How I Write," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXI (Spring, 1955), 241-42.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>"The Reading and Writing of Short Stories." (First Installment), Atlantic, February, 1949, p. 55.

<sup>45</sup>"How I Write," p. 242.

the ordinary day-to-day of human experience."<sup>46</sup> The character must be set to scale in his world in order for the reader to know his size. Of some of the criticism written about her work, she has stated, "... I have been baffled by analysis and criticism of some of my stories. When I see them analyzed -- most usually 'reduced to elements' -- sometimes I think 'this is none of me.'"<sup>47</sup>

From this survey of criticism, it is evident that one of the most controversial aspects of her art is her technique. To some critics, it is the instrument with which she creates "moods as powerful as the moods developed by good poetry."<sup>48</sup> But others feel that it has become too elaborate, ingenious, clever, obtrusive, "precious," or "glittering," so obvious that it is not integrated with theme.

A thorough study of her technique in all its aspects -- imagery, diction, allusion, point of view, chronological presentation, and many other elements -- is not within the scope of this research paper. However, one of the most important elements of technique is the manner in which the author chooses to present his characters. Joseph Warren Beach, in his The Twentieth Century Novel, said that characterization was "three fourths of fiction."<sup>49</sup>

Essentially there are two methods of characterization. When the author utilizes the explicit, direct, "expository" method ("either in an

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<sup>46</sup>"Place in Fiction," South Atlantic Quarterly, LV (January, 1956), 58.

<sup>47</sup>"The Reading and Writing of Short Stories," (First Installment), p. 55.

<sup>48</sup>Robert Van Gelder, "An Interview with Miss Eudora Welty," New York Times Book Review, June 14, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>(New York, 1932), p. 13.

introductory block or more often piece-meal throughout the work, illustrated by action"<sup>50</sup>), he takes an omniscient point of view toward the traits and attitudes which constitute the inner and outer life of the character. When the author uses the implicit, indirect, "dramatic" method of characterization, he takes the point of view of the spectator, who sees not the whole nature of a character, but who arrives at a gradual awareness through speech and action observed. The author may employ one method solely, or he may vary or combine techniques as they serve his purpose. He may unite both the expository and dramatic techniques when he explains or allows one character to explain his inner self and observes through the consciousness of this character the actions and speech of the other characters in a dramatic fashion. Although other sources on the methods of characterization present more divisions of methods, all are drawn from these two basic view points.<sup>51</sup>

Miss Welty's characterizations have been commented on in passing and in a general way in several reviews and articles. In a comparison of her characterization with Faulkner's, it was stated:

Faulkner of course possesses a masterly ability to depict character, but his readers seldom think of Faulkner's characters apart from the groups to which they belong. Attention is therefore centered on the clash of mighty opposites, rather than on the innermost feelings of individuals who come between their fell-incensed points. Here lay Eudora Welty's opportunity,

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<sup>50</sup>William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, revised and enlarged by C. Hugh Holman (New York, 1960), pp. 79-80.

<sup>51</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, A Preface to Literature (New York, 1954), pp. 170-181. This critic lists four methods of characterization, but the first two, physical description and analysis, may be considered kinds of expository characterization. The other two, creation of character in terms of what other characters say and feel about a certain person and creation of character as the dramatist does, may be considered as the use of one or both of the two basic methods of characterization.

which she has magnificently seized. While her reader is made aware of the forces that change the world surrounding her characters, he is mainly intent upon the sensations that the characters as individuals are experiencing, and the foremost of these is loneliness. Faulkner's people are frequently wretched; in his crowded, seething world, they are seldom lonely.<sup>52</sup>

Eunice Glenn pointed out the objective presentation of Miss Welty's characters. Moral convictions are presented in the process of each story, rather than by the author's leading the reader directly to a conclusion.<sup>53</sup>

While one critic commented that "her partially revealed characters are far more convincing than the most elaborate character studies of many another author . . .,"<sup>54</sup> another felt that her objectivity was carried so far that her characters lost their human proportions.<sup>55</sup>

Miss Welty has utilized both expository and dramatic characterization or combinations of both in her fiction. For example, such short stories as "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" and "A Worn Path" are primarily dramatic in presentation of character. On the other hand, her novelette of fantasy, The Robber Bridegroom, presents simple characters in an expository manner, much in the manner of any fairy tale. Delta Wedding alternates and combines both methods.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the author's characterization and to attempt to determine whether this aspect of her technique enhances her work or whether it fails to integrate with the other elements of her fiction and detracts from its worth. Representative characters chosen for

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<sup>52</sup>Daniel, p. 314.

<sup>53</sup>"Fantasy in the Fiction of Eudora Welty," p. 88.

<sup>54</sup>Edward Wee's, "Miss Welty's World," Atlantic, May, 1955, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup>Kay Boyle, "Full Length Portrait," New Republic, CV (November 24, 1941), 707.



examination will be drawn from her four collections of short stories, two novelettes, and one novel. These works will be considered chronologically, first with regard to expository characterization and then with regard to dramatic characterization.

## CHAPTER II

## EXPOSITORY CHARACTERIZATION

In her first stories, collected as A Curtain of Green and Other Stories and published in 1941, Eudora Welty used predominantly a combination of the expository and the dramatic methods of characterization. In a majority of these first stories, one central character is presented with expository analysis; other persons in these stories are revealed in speech and action the central character observes. In only a few instances does the author use the less disciplined, more completely omniscient point of view, with expository analysis of several characters.

A typical example of the latter type of story, exhibiting a more completely omniscient point of view, is "Clytie," which tells of the senile, insane, and alcoholic members of a Southern family -- particularly of Clytie, the sister who represents the last tie with the normal world.<sup>1</sup> The characters are analyzed by the author and described from the point of view of the spectator also. For example, in describing the sister Octavia, the author tells us that Octavia would never forgive Clytie for leaving windows open:

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<sup>1</sup>Selected Stories of Eudora Welty, Containing All of A Curtain of Green and Other Stories and The Wide Net and Other Stories, part 1, pp. 158-178. Because A Curtain of Green and The Wide Net are paged independently, this source will henceforth be referred to as Selected Stories, parts 1 or 2.

Rain and sun signified ruin, in Octavia's mind .... It was not that rain in itself could distress Octavia. Ruin or **encroachment**, even upon priceless treasures and even in poverty, held no terror for her; it was simply some form of prying from without, and this she would not forgive. All of that was to be seen in her face.<sup>2</sup>

The reader sees not only this inner view of Octavia but also an outer view . The townspeople speak of how she used to "go out to that same garden and curse in that same way, years ago, but in a remarkably loud, commanding voice, that could be heard in the post office."<sup>3</sup>

Clytie is presented from the same double viewpoint. To the spectator she is the eccentric spinster who stands in the road peering ahead "in her near-sighted way, and as wet as the little birds,"<sup>4</sup> who charges bills which the postmistress declares will never be paid, and who has been known to hide behind **shrubbery** from a passerby:

Once in a while when a neighbor, trying to be kind or only being curious, would ask her opinion about anything -- such as a pattern of crochet -- she would not run away; but giving a thin trapped smile, she would say in a childish voice, "It's nice." But, the ladies always added, nothing that came anywhere close to the FARRS' house was nice for long.<sup>5</sup>

The reader also is told of Clytie's inner life in such an expository passage as this. Clytie has developed the habit of staring intently into the faces of others, searching for a remembered face which symbolizes to her the world of reality:

And now it was hard to remember the way it looked, or the time she had seen it first. It **must** have been when she was young. Yes, in a sort of arbor, hadn't she laughed, leaned forward .. and that vision of a face which was a little like all the other faces, the trusting face of the child,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 163-164.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-171.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-159.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

the innocent old traveler's, even the greedy barber's and Lethy's and the wandering peddlers who one by one knocked and went unanswered at the door -- and yet different, yet far more -- this face had been very close to hers, almost familiar, almost inaccessible. And then the face of Octavia was thrust between and at other times the apoplectic face of her father, the face of her brother Gerald, and the face of her brother Henry with the bullet hole through the forehead .... It was purely for a resemblance to a vision that she examined the secret, mysterious, unrepeated faces she met in the street of Farr's Gin.<sup>6</sup>

When Clytie looks into a rain barrel and catches an unexpected and unvarnished glimpse of herself, she grasps the reality of her situation:

Clytie swayed a little and looked into the slightly moving water. She thought she saw a face there.

Of course. It was the face she had been looking for, and from which she had been separated ...

It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were drawn together as if in pain .... Everything about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of suffering.<sup>7</sup>

When her body is found later, "she had fallen forward into the barrel, with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs."<sup>8</sup>

Other persons are not uniformly characterized. The brother Gerald is presented in an entirely dramatic fashion: he barricades himself in his room, drinks, and wonders out loud about the failure of his marriage. However, the barber, Mr. Bobo, who comes once a week to the house to tend to the senile father, is explained by the author:

Mr. Bobo was short and had never been anything but proud of it, until he had started coming to this house once a week. But he did not enjoy looking up from below at the soft, long throats, the cold, repelled, high-relieved faces of those Farrs.... "I'll never go back," Mr. Bobo

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

always ended to his customers. "Not even if they paid me. I've seen enough."

Yet here he was again, waiting before the sickroom door.<sup>9</sup>

The characterization is uneven and inconsistent. The author chooses to treat in an expository fashion such characters as the barber, Octavia, and sometimes Clytie; the father, the brother, some of the townspeople, and at other times Clytie are presented dramatically. Although there is a measure of success in the juxtaposition of the ridiculous, eccentric appearance of Clytie with her pathetic and desolate inner life, the short story as a whole suffers from the lack of any consistent center of interest or viewpoint. This point of view is not uniformly dramatic or omniscient, but is rather a constant alternation of the two. Taking also into consideration that the characters are stereotypes of decadent Southern aristocracy and plebeian townspeople, one may conclude that this is the type of story which shows the Faulknerian influence used ineffectively.

An example of the second type of story in which Miss Welty uses expository characterization is "Death of a Traveling Salesman."<sup>10</sup> The center of interest in this story is R. J. Bowman, a traveling shoe salesman. "Death of a Traveling Salesman" was the first published story of Miss Welty and remains one of her best known and most highly praised. One critic stated that Miss Welty succeeded in creating "a figure of loneliness and futility that conveys a truly tragic sense, and remains a clear, echoing symbol in the mind":

... If one chooses to take it that way, this is as strong a condemnation as one could wish of one of the abnormal, humanly stultifying aspects of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-175.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 231-253.

our society as represented by one of its most victimized as well as victimizing characters.<sup>11</sup>

After a long illness, Bowman is back on the road which he had traveled for fourteen years. During his illness, he has had an opportunity to think of himself and of the life and goals he had found satisfactory for all those years:

But now -- what if in fourteen years on the road he had never been ill before and never had an accident? His record was broken, and he had even begun almost to question it ... He had gradually put up at better hotels, in the bigger towns, but weren't they all, eternally, stuffy in winter? Women? He could only remember little rooms within little rooms, like a nest of Chinese paper boxes, and if he thought of one woman, he saw the worn loneliness that the furniture of that room seemed built of. And he himself -- he was a man who always wore rather wide-brimmed black hats, and in the wavy hotel mirror had looked something like a bullfighter, as he paused for that inevitable instant on the landing, walking downstairs to supper.<sup>12</sup>

Bowman notices that he is lost and begins to realize a spiritual as well as physical isolation:

He was not in the habit of asking the way of strangers, and these people never knew where the **very** roads they lived on went to; but then he had not even been close enough to anyone to call out.<sup>13</sup>

After an accident, he goes to a cabin to ask for help in getting his car out of a ditch. Here he encounters a life of primitive simplicity. At first, he has a condescending attitude toward the couple, the woman who answers the door ("He looked at her shoes, which were like bundles. If it were summer she would be barefoot ... Bowman, who automatically judged a woman's age on sight, set her age at fifty .... Bowman saw that she was stupid."<sup>14</sup>) and the man who comes in from the fields ("World War?" Bowman

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<sup>11</sup>Clark, pp. 634-635.

<sup>12</sup>"Death of a Traveling Salesman," Selected Stories, part 1, pp. 232-33.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 236-237.

wonders as he observes the man is wearing an old stained and patched military coat. "Great God, it was a Confederate coat."<sup>15</sup>).

As Bowman waits, he gradually becomes aware of an atmosphere of dignity and mutual esteem, and this strengthens his realization of his loneliness:

These people cherished something here that he could not see, .... Between them they had a conspiracy. He thought of the way she had moved away from him and gone to Sonny, she had flowed toward him. He was shaking with cold, he was tired, and it was not fair.<sup>16</sup>

They refuse proudly his offer of money and even his offer of matches to relight their fire, but they offer him food and homemade whiskey. As Bowman observes their pride and independence, he finally comes to a knowledge that his values and goals, the unbroken records and better hotels in bigger towns, have been the wrong ones:

He was shocked with knowing what was really in this house. A marriage, a fruitful marriage. That simple thing. Anyone could have had that .... The only secret was the ancient communication between two people. But the memory of ... how they ... brought out their food and drink and filled the room proudly with all they had to show was suddenly too clear and enormous within him for response.<sup>17</sup>

Bowman then leaves, after taking all of the money from his wallet and leaving it under the base of the lamp.

The author has recorded a gradual awareness of the true nature of his existence by the central character. Bowman changes from impatience, irritation, and condescension to envy and then despair. The development of insight is achieved by a contrast of his shallow, materialistic existence with one of independence, simplicity, and dignity. The author is objective in her characterization of Bowman; she neither sympathizes with him nor

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

condemns him. Her portrayal of the country people is equally objective. They are not paragons of primitive virtue but simply proud, suspicious mountaineers. The objective, understated characterization may be a contributing factor to the critical success of this story.

In Miss Welty's next work, the novelette The Robber Bridegroom, characterization is almost entirely expository. Events also are described in condensed narrative as often as they are presented dramatically, in the manner of a fairy tale. Almost all the characters are flat, allegorical representations of vices or virtues. For example, Clement Musgrove, the planter, is introduced as an "innocent planter."<sup>18</sup> He also represents generosity and kindness. His second wife, Salome, is greedy, ambitious, ugly, proud, and envious of her beautiful stepdaughter.<sup>19</sup> Rosamund, the stepdaughter, is a child of nature. Minor characters such as the agent of Salome, the bandit Little Harp, and Mike Fink, the riverboatman, represent various vices such as greed and pride. In the progress of the story good triumphs; all of the evil characters fall into the hands of the Indians, and the virtuous ones escape. Jamie Lockhart, the bandit, becomes a respectable New Orleans merchant and the husband of Rosamund.<sup>20</sup> The characters have no realistic individuality or complexity and do not appear to be anything more than objectifications of the opposing forces in the wilderness.

The method of characterization is the one most logically suited to the intent of the narrative; it re-inforces the impression of the fairy tale

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<sup>18</sup>The Robber Bridegroom (New York, 1942), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.



and allegory. The novelette contains also examples of striking description of the early Natchez Trace, with its bandits preying on rich planters and Indians preying on both. Rather interesting parallels can be drawn to the Biblical account of Salome, the Cupid and Psyche myth, and the Grimm brothers' tale of the same name, but the work as a whole has had indifferent success, both critical and popular, and is generally dismissed as interesting but minor.

In Miss Welty's next collection, The Wide Net and Other Stories, she created with exposition allegorical figures in the short story, "A **Still Moment**."<sup>21</sup> Three men, each representing one aspect of human nature, observe a solitary white heron feeding in marsh water. One is Lorenzo, an "itinerant Man of God," who preaches of Divine Love, **but** who relies on cunning and trickery to survive in the wilderness:

Turning half-beast and half-divine, dividing himself like a heathen Centaur, he had escaped his death once more. But was it to be always by some metamorphosis of himself that he escaped, some humiliation of his faith, some admission to strength and argumentation and not frailty? Each time when he acted so, it was at the command of an instinct that he took at once as the word of an angel, until too late, when he knew it was the word of the devil. He had roared like a tiger at the Indians, he had submerged himself in water blowing the savage bubbles of the alligators, and they skirted him by .... But all the time God would have protected him in His own way, less hurried, more divine.<sup>22</sup>

Lorenzo had been a failure in his mission to Ireland to convert Catholics; he had never seen the "accumulated radiance" of the souls he had saved. He feels in his own spirit something akin to the savage wilderness:

He peered ahead. "Inhabitants of Time! The wilderness is your souls on earth .... Look about you, if you would view the conditions of your

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<sup>21</sup>Selected Stories, part 2, pp. 73-94.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76.

spirit, put here by the Good Lord to show you and afright you. These wild places and these trails of awesome loneliness lie nowhere, nowhere, but in your heart."<sup>23</sup>

The second man is the outlaw James Murrell. He is a "dark man" with the "alternately proud and aggrieved look of a man believing himself to be an instrument in the hands of a power, and when he was young he said once to strangers that he was being used by Evil."<sup>24</sup> As Lorenzo symbolizes one who seeks the answer to the enigma of life through conventional religious belief, Murrell represents an equally futile seeker of the same answer through destruction:

Lorenzo might have understood, if he had not been in haste, that Murrell in laying hold of a man meant to solve his mystery of being. It was as if other men, all but himself, would lighten their hold on the secret, upon assault, and let it fly free at death. In his violence he was only treating of enigma.<sup>25</sup>

The third man is the student, painter, and naturalist, Audubon, a man "very sure and tender, as if the touch of all the earth rubbed upon him and the stains of the flowery swamp had made him so."<sup>26</sup> He has left the "hard and glittering outer parlors" of Natchez, "where if an artist were humble enough to wait, some idle hand held up promised money" for an "excursion into the reality of Nature."<sup>27</sup> Audubon is also seeking an answer: "Is the radiance I see closed into an interval between two darks, or can it not illuminate them both and discover at last, though it cannot be spoken, what was thought hidden and lost?"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

When the white heron flies down and begins to feed in the marsh water at sunset, each man reacts characteristically. Its beauty makes Lorenzo think, "Praise God, His love has come visible."<sup>29</sup> Its solitary grandeur reminds Murrell of his ambitions to lead a Slave Rebellion:

... he looked at the bird with the whole plan of the Mystic Rebellion darting from him ... he stood looking proudly, leader as he was bound to become of the slaves, the brigands, and outcasts of the entire Natchez country, ...<sup>30</sup>

But he experiences a moment of doubt. "Then he looked back at the bird, and he thought if it would look at him, a dread penetration would fill and gratify his heart."<sup>31</sup> Audubon sees the bird with the realistic eye of the naturalist who knows that the bird must be killed so that its appearance may be observed and recorded in detail.

The reaction of each to the shooting is also characteristic. Lorenzo is horrified that his vision of Divine Love is destroyed. As he rides onward, he begins again to doubt his conventional concepts: "Perhaps it was that God never counted the moments of time ... Time did not occur to God .... Who could let the whole world come to grief in a scattering moment."<sup>32</sup> But Lorenzo hurries on to the camp ground and the waiting multitudes. Murrell is satisfied that his faith in the destructibility of the innocent has not been shaken.<sup>33</sup> Audubon carries the bird away to study, realizing that what he has seen and what he can draw will be the same to him for only a moment:

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

... never could any vision, even any simple sight, belong to him or to any man. He knew that the best he could make would be, after it was apart from his hand, a dead thing and not a live thing, never the essence, only a sum of parts; and that it would never be **one** with the beauty in any other man's head in the world.<sup>34</sup>

Although these three persons were actual figures in the history of the Natchez Trace, the author has chosen to portray them as symbols rather than as realistic figures. In this manner, they have a universality rather than a specific regional and historical orientation which makes the story the author's single deepest and most significant comment on man's search for reality and identification. "A Still Moment" has been compared favorably to the tales of Hawthorne in spirit and style.<sup>35</sup>

The use of expository characterization in a different manner may be seen in the short story "Livvie," also in this second collection.<sup>36</sup> Solomon, an elderly Negro man, has married Livvie, a sixteen-year-old servant girl from Natchez, and has taken her to his home deep in the country. Solomon is "very dignified, for he was a colored man that owned his land and had it written down in the court house"<sup>37</sup>:

... all his life he had built respect, little scrap by little scrap. A beetle could not have been more laborious or more ingenious in the task of its destiny. When Solomon was young, as he was in his picture overhead, it was the infinite thing with him, and he could see no end to the respect he would contrive and keep in a house. He had built a lonely home ....<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>35</sup>Glenn, pp. 506-517.

<sup>36</sup>Selected Stories, part 2, pp. 153-177.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

Everything about the house which symbolizes Solomon's character is careful and orderly, but barren and lifeless. The wallpaper is a pattern of "careful intervals," the photographs are yellowed:

The churn sat in the sun, the doors of the safe were always both shut, and there were four baited mouse traps in the kitchen, one in every corner .... Out front was a clean dirt yard with every vestige of grass patiently uprooted and the ground scarred in deep whorls from the strike of Livvie's broom .... Then coming around up the path from the deep cut of the Natchez Trace below was a line of crape myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a colored bottle, green or blue.<sup>39</sup>

Solomon's elevation above his field hands and tenants, and his pride in his station and possessions, is symbolized by his silver watch "that he never let go."<sup>40</sup>

Livvie, the young wife who has been forbidden to associate with the tenants, longs secretly to enter the life she can only observe from the door:

The moon was in the last quarter and outside they were turning the sod and planting peas and beans .... She could see how over each ribbon of field were moving men and girls, .... shouting, hollering, cajoling, calling, and answering back .... The little children came too, like a bouncing stream overflowing the fields .... And ... while all this went around him that was his, Solomon was like a little still spot in the middle.<sup>41</sup>

Livvie is meek and obedient and remains in the house doing her work ("churning sounded too sad to her, like sobbing and ... it made her home-sick"<sup>42</sup>), although she wants to go out to the fields and "take a hoe and work until she fell stretched out and drenched with her efforts, like other girls."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 155-156.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-162.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

Occasionally she steals away for a walk under the trees "shining like burning flames through the great caterpillar nets which enclosed them .... Oh, for a stirring of the leaves, and a breaking of the nets."<sup>44</sup>

On one such walk, she encounters one of Solomon's former field hands,

Cash:

As soon as the man caught sight of her, he began to look himself over. Starting at the bottom with his pointed shoes, he began to look up, lifting his peg-top pants the higher to see fully his bright socks. His coat long and wide and leaf-green he opened like doors -- to see his high-up tawny pants and his pants he smoothed downward from the points of his collar, and he wore a luminous baby-pink satin shirt. At the end, he reached gently above his wide platter-shaped round hat, the color of a plum, and one finger touched at the feather, emerald green, blowing in the spring winds.<sup>45</sup>

When Livvie and Cash return to Solomon's house, he is dying. He gives Livvie his silver watch, but it is forgotten by the two when they leave the house . There is no atmosphere of fantasy or allegory in "Livvie," as there was in The Robber Bridegroom or "A Still Moment." The story is a richly-detailed, realistic portrayal of modern Negro life on the Natchez Trace, relying for its verisimilitude on thorough description of environment and expository description and analysis of rounded characters.

In Miss Welty's first and only full-length novel, Delta Wedding, she has attempted this same type of verisimilitude, recording countless minute details of description and character analysis in her account of the week of preparations for a wedding of the daughter of a plantation owner to an overseer. The novel has no plot; it is rather a record of the internal tensions and reactions to a disrupting event. The author has chosen for

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 157-158.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

her portrait of a closely-knit baronial family of the Delta mainly an omniscient point of view and brief expository characterizations of almost all of the numerous children, cousins, spinster aunts and great aunts, uncles, Negro servants, and neighbors; she has analyzed more thoroughly those members of the family who are able to see it from the position of both member and outsider and to realize its weaknesses and merits -- the complacency and possessiveness and the individualism and noblesse oblige. Such characters are Laura, the nine-year-old orphaned cousin who comes to live at the plantation; the mother, Ellen, who came from Virginia; the bride, Dabney, who is marrying against the wishes of the family; and Robbie Reid, the store clerk, whom the family favorite, George, has inconveniently married.

Laura is a shy, awkward, plain child, who longs to be accepted by the ebullient Fairchilds:

Laura generally hesitated just a little in every doorway. Jackson was a big town, with twenty-five thousand people, and Fairchilds was just a store and a gin and a bridge and one big house, yet she was the one who felt like a little country cousin when she arrived, appreciating that she had come to where everything was dressy, splendid and over her head. Demonically she tried to be a part of it -- she took a breath and whirled, went ahead of herself everywhere, then would fall down a humiliated little girl whose grief people never seemed to remember.<sup>46</sup>

Ellen, the mother, is the center of the family:

...a slight delicate lady, seeming exactly strong enough for what was needed of her life .... She was more restful than the Fairchilds ... her Virginia voice, while no softer or lighter than theirs, was a less questioning, a never teasing one. It was a voice to speak to the one child or the one man her eyes would go to .... She herself, it occurred to Ellen ... was an anomaly, though no one would point at a lady for the things

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<sup>46</sup>Delta Wedding (New York, 1946), p. 54.

that made her one -- or for living on a plantation when she was in her original heart she believed, a town-loving, book-loving young lady....<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps better than any other person in the family, she understands "how deep were the complexities of the everyday, of the family, what caves were in the mountains, what blocked chambers, and what crystal rivers that had not yet seen light."<sup>48</sup>

Dabney, the bride, has none of the family's reverence for name and tradition:

Sometimes Dabney was not so sure she was a Fairchild -- sometimes she did not care, that was it. There were moments of life when it did not matter who she was -- even where. Something, happiness -- with Troy, but not necessarily, even the happiness of a fine day -- seemed to leap away from identity as if it were an old skin, and that she was one of the Fairchilds was of no more need to her than the locust shells now hanging to the trees everywhere were to the singing locusts.<sup>49</sup>

One of the family's stories is of how the grandfather was killed in a duel over a quarrel about cotton:

Fine glory! Dabney would have none of it.

The eagerness with which she was now going to Marmion, entering her real life there with Troy, told her enough -- all the cotton in the world was not worth one moment of life! It made her know that nothing could ever defy her enough to make her leave it.<sup>50</sup>

Robbie, the unsuitable wife, has been accepted into the family, but she is aware of the silent disapproval and is jealous of the mutual dependence of George and his family:

Robbie was not afraid of them. She felt first -- or perhaps she was all one thing, not divided that way .... She had never stopped for words to feelings. She felt only -- with no words. But their smile said more plainly than words, Bow down, you love our George, enter on your knees and we will pull you up and pet and laugh at you fondly for it -- we can.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 20 and 217.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 121.



We will bestow your marriage on you, little Robbie that we sent to high school.<sup>51</sup>

Parts of the action are presented through the consciousness of these four characters. Although the author succeeds with this technique in achieving a vivid picture of a large Southern family in the early 1920's, the novel as a whole suffers at times from what appears to be a lack of objectivity on the author's part. There is a tendency to be somewhat ~~maudlin~~ and sentimental in such a description as this one, of one of the great-aunts:

Aunt Mac was three years younger than Aunt Shannon .... She was little with age. Somewhere in mastering her dignity over life, she had acquired the exaggerated walk of a little boy, under her long black skirt, and went around Shellmound with her old wine-colored lip stuck out as if she invited a dare .... She watched out; but very exactly she dressed herself in mourning for her husband Duncan Laws, killed in the Battle of Corinth sixty years ago .... Her smile, when it came -- often for India -- was soft. She gave a trifling hobble sometimes now when she walked, but it seemed to be a flourish, just to look busy. Her eyes were remarkable, stone-blue now, and with all she had to do, she had read the Bible through nine times before she ever came to Shellmound and started it there. She and her sister Shannon had brought up all James's and Laura Allen's children, when they had been left, from Denis aged twelve to George aged three, after their dreadful trouble; were glad to do it -- widows! And though Shannon drifted away sometimes in her mind and would forget where she was, ... she, Mac, had never let go, never asked relenting from the present hour, and if anything should, God prevent it, happen to Ellen, she was prepared to do it again, start in with young Battle's children, and bring them up.<sup>52</sup>

Miss Welty returned to a more objective and understated type of characterization in The Golden Apples. Each of these stories may be read independently, but they all treat of the families of the mythical town of Morgana, Mississippi, and are arranged in a chronological sequence. The generation described in the first stories is supplanted

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67.

by its offspring in the last. This group, which might be considered a loosely written novel, tells of the maturing of this generation in a time of change, as the loggers come to cut down Morgan's Woods:

... the road still went the same, from Morgana to MacLain, from Morgana to Vicksburg and Jackson of course. Only now the wrong people went by on it. They were all riding trucks, very fast or heavily loaded, and carrying blades and chains to chop and haul the big trees to the mill. They were not eaters of muscadines, and did not stop to pass words on the season and what grew. And the vines had dried.<sup>53</sup>

The older houses now have "fly-like clusters of black mailboxes" at their doors; they have been "cut up for road workers and timber people."<sup>54</sup>

The children mature from innocence to experience, pursue their various goals, wander from Morgana, and return. In the final story, "The Wanderers," all of the characters are accounted for in the conversation or reverie of people gathered for a funeral.

The author has attempted to give her town and its people universality by numerous allusions to classical mythology. For example, King MacLain, with his many illegitimate children, is a modern Zeus. This parallel is reinforced by the title of a story that describes him, "Shower of Gold."<sup>55</sup>

In these stories, the author has used a third-person point of view with psychological analysis of a central character. In "Moon Lake," this central character is Nina Carmichael, an adolescent girl with a

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<sup>53</sup>"The Wanderers," The Golden Apples (New York, 1949), pp. 213-214.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>55</sup>The daughter of Acrisius was Danae, of surpassing loveliness. In consequence of an oracle which had prophesied that the son of Danae would be the means of his grandfather's death, the hapless girl was shut in an underground chamber .... But Jupiter, distilling himself into a shower of gold, flooded the girl's prison .... Their son was Perseus. The Classic Myths in English Literature and Art (Boston, 1911), p. 208. These parallels are fully discussed in Harry C. Morris's "Zeus and the Golden Apples: Eudora Welty," Perspective, V (1952-53), 190-199.

gradually developing awareness of the fleeting nature of life:

Again she thought of a pear -- not the everyday gritty kind that hung on the tree in the backyard, but the fine kind sold on trains and at high prices, each pear with a paper cone wrapping it alone -- beautiful, symmetrical, clean pears with thin skins, with snow-white flesh so juicy and tender that to eat one baptized the whole face, and so delicate that while you urgently ate the first half, the second half was already beginning to turn brown. To all fruits, and especially to those fine pears, something happened -- the process was so swift, you were never in time for them. It's not the flowers that are fleeting, Nina thought, it's the fruits -- it's the time when things are ready that they don't stay.<sup>56</sup>

In "Music from Spain," this central character is Eugene MacLain, who has left Morgana and become a watch repairman in San Francisco. He has become a timid little creature of habit caught in an unsatisfactory marriage and unrewarding work:

Eugene was walking down the habitual hills to Bertsingers', Jewelers, and with sharp sniffs that as always rather pained him after breakfast, he was taking note of the day, its temperature, fog conditions, and prospects of clearing and warming up, all of which would be asked him by Mr. Bertsinger Senior, who would then tell him if he was right.... Just on the other side of Bertsinger's there was a crowded market. Eugene could hear all day as he worked at his meticulous watches the glad mallet of the man who cracked crabs. He could hear it more plainly now, mixed with the street noises, like the click and caw of a tropical bird, and the doorway there shimmered with the blue of Dutch iris and the mixed pink and white of carnations in tubs, and the bright clash of the pink, red, and orange azaleas lined up in pots. Oh, to have been one step further on, and grown flowers.<sup>57</sup>

In "The Wanderers," Virgie Rainey, who had been a young girl with great musical talent, observes the life of Morgana. She has failed to develop this talent; she became the accompanist for the silent movies in the town movie theatre. She also has had a succession of unsatisfactory and somewhat sordid affairs. As she prepares to leave Morgana, her

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<sup>56</sup>"Moon Lake," The Golden Apples, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup>"Music from Spain," The Golden Apples, pp. 163-166.

realization of the sterility and decay of life in Morgana and her continuing search for fulfillment are suggested in the conclusion of "The Wanderers." This quest for self-identification the author relates to the universal in the final mythical allusion:

October rain on Mississippi fields. The rain of fall, maybe on the whole South, for all she knew on the everywhere. She stared into its magnitude .... She smiled once seeing before her, screen-like, the hideous and delectable face Mr. King MacLain had made at the funeral, and when they all knew he was next -- even he. 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. They heard through falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon's crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan.<sup>51</sup>

In The Golden Apples, with the exception of a few rounded characters such as Virgie, Nina, and Eugene, the author has generally sacrificed realism in character depiction for caricatures and stereotypes of Southern small-town life (such as Mrs. Comus Stark, a Southern "Lady Bountiful" and her daughter Jennie Love, the typical beautiful, hard-hearted Southern belle) and stylized modern renderings of various Greek mythical figures that seem to be clever rather than significant. The combination of well-defined characters with these others, less realistic, more symbolic and unindividualized, within individual stories and within the group as a whole gives the book its uneven, "patch-work" quality, which is perhaps the factor most detrimental to its effectiveness.

In Miss Welty's most recent collection of short stories, The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories, expository characterization is used seldom. Although there are occasional small lapses into an omniscient point of view, almost all of the stories but "Circe" are told from the point of view of the spectator. "Circe" is not a typical story; it is the

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<sup>58</sup>"The Wanderers," The Golden Apples, p. 244.

author's most direct use of classical literature, being a first-person narrative by the enchantress of the coming of Ulysses and his crew to her island. From an internal monologue which borders on stream-of-consciousness, the reader learns of her longing to feel human emotion, and of the paradox of her feelings of both superiority and inferiority to humans:

I thought of my father the Sun, who went on his divine way untroubled, ambitionless -- unconsumed; suffering no loss, no heroic fear of corruption through his constant shedding of light, needing no story, no retinue to vouch for where he had been -- even heroes could learn of the Gods!

Yet I know they keep something from me, asleep and awake. There exists a mortal mystery, that, if I knew where it was, I could crush like an island grape. Only frailty, it seems, can divine it -- and I was not endowed with that property. They live by frailty! By the moment! I tell myself that it is only a mystery, and mystery is only uncertainty. (There is no mystery in magic! Men are swine: let it be said, and no sooner said than done.) Yet mortals alone can divine where it lies in each other, can find it and prick it in all its peril, with an instrument made of air. I swear that only to possess that one, trifling secret, I would willingly turn myself into a harmless dove for the rest of eternity.<sup>59</sup>

It is not readily understandable why the author who writes in a stylized poetic manner ("The sea the color of honey looked sweet even to the tongue, the salt and vengeful sea.") changes to the realistic, prosaic, modern expressions of a fastidious, petty housewife in some of Circe's remarks. For example, she speaks of "those servants I support" and of the ungratefulness of Ulysses' men ("But tell me of one that appreciated it! Tell me one now ...."). Circe is not the only one who speaks in this manner. Even Ulysses is made to say as he leaves, "You've put yourself to great trouble for us."<sup>60</sup> The effect is incongruous, and the atmosphere of unreality is shattered.

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<sup>59</sup>"Circe," The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories (New York, 1955), pp. 105-106.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

The expository method of characterization has been used with less frequency since Delta Wedding and The Golden Apples. The dramatic method, which appeared occasionally in her earliest collections, has increased perceptibly in her latest works.

## CHAPTER III

## DRAMATIC CHARACTERIZATION

Miss Welty does not often use the dramatic method of characterization only, that is, a method by which characters are created entirely in terms of speech and action. The type of characterization used in such a story as Hemingway's "The Killers" can be seen only in such stories as "Petrified Man" and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" in A Curtain of Green. However, in many stories such as "A Worn Path" from the same collection and "The Wide Net" from The Wide Net and Other Stories, the author characterizes predominantly in a dramatic fashion with intermittent uses of an omniscient point of view or brief expository descriptions. The burden of characterization, the illustration of definite characteristics of a particular individual, is done by the use of the dramatic method.

In A Curtain of Green and Other Stories, Miss Welty used completely dramatic characterization in one of her most satiric stories, "Petrified Man."<sup>1</sup> Katherine Anne Porter singled this story out in her introduction as a "fine clinical study of vulgarity -- vulgarity absolute, chemically pure, exposed mercilessly to its final subhuman depths."<sup>2</sup> The situation which the reader observes as a spectator is conveyed through two conversations between a beautician and her weekly customer, which record the dissolving of a friendship over a matter of sharing a five hundred dollar reward for information leading to the capture of a criminal.

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<sup>1</sup>Selected Stories, part 1, pp. 32-55.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xx.

Leota, the beautician, is a common, uneducated person who calls customers and fellow workers "Honey," gossips indiscriminately, refers bitinglly to other customers by such names as "Old Horse Face," entertains herself by going to traveling freak shows and reading Startling G-Man magazines, and speaks in a substandard language "ornamented" with slang and trite expressions:

"Well, honey," said Leota, but in a weary voice, "she come in here not the week before and not the day before she had her baby -- she come in here the very selfsame day, I mean to tell you. Child, we was all plumb scared to death .... It was that close a shave."<sup>3</sup>

Leota's complete vulgarity, insincerity, materialism, and pettiness are best revealed in her change in attitude toward a friend. In the first conversation between the beautician and her customer, Leota describes her new friend, a Mrs. Pike, in glowing terms. She describes their going to a traveling freak show. One week later, Mrs. Pike is no longer a friend. Leota's sudden change in attitude and the reason for it are shown in the second conversation with her customer:

"I ain't told you the awful luck we had, me and Fred? .... come night 'fore last, Fred and this Mr. Pike, who Fred just took up with, was back from they said they was fishin', bein' as neither one of 'em has got a job to his name, and we was all settin' there, readin' a old Startling G-Man that was mine, mind you, I'd bought it myself, and all of a sudden she jumps! Into the air -- you'd a' thought she'd set on a spider -- an' says, 'Canfield' ... ain't that silly, that's Mr. Pike -- 'Canfield, my God A'mighty,' she says, 'honey,' she says, 'we're rich, and you won't have to work.' Not that he turned one hand anyway. Well, me and Fred rushes over to her, and Mr. Pike, too, and there she sets, pointin' her finger at a photo in my copy of Startling G-Man .... that magazine was layin' around the house for a month, and there was the freak show runnin' night and day, not two steps away from my own beauty parlor, with Mr. Petrie just settin' there waitin'. An' it had to be Mr. and Mrs. Pike, almost perfect strangers."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-52.



The author allows the central character to reveal her commonness gradually and thoroughly. This same spirit of satire and grim comedy may be found in two other early stories also written in an almost entirely objective style, "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden."

Predominantly dramatic characterization is used in achieving an effect far removed from satire and comedy in another notable early story, "A Worn Path."<sup>5</sup> This is a straightforward, realistic, descriptive account of an old Negro woman's persistent, difficult journey on foot across miles of countryside to the city. Phoenix Jackson is introduced to the reader by an objective description:

It was December -- a bright frozen day in the early morning. Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side ....<sup>6</sup>

She has to walk for several miles up hills, across logs over creeks, through barbed-wire fences, and through fields of old cotton and dead corn. During this journey, she cheers herself by talking:

...before she got to the bottom of the hill a bush caught her dress.

Her fingers were busy and intent, but her skirts were full and long, so that before she could pull them free in one place they were caught in another .... "I in the thorny bush," she said. "Thorns, you doing your appointed work. Never want to let folks pass, no sir. Old eyes thought you was a pretty little green bush."<sup>7</sup>

Her pride and self-reliance are revealed in her conversation with a hunter she meets; she will not explain to him her motives for making

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<sup>5</sup>Selected Stories, part 1, pp. 275-289.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

such a difficult journey:

"Where do you live, Granny?" he asked, while the two dogs were growling at each other.

"Away back yonder, sir, behind the ridge. You can't even see it from here."

"On your way home?"

"No sir, I going to town."

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He gave another laugh, filling the whole landscape. "I know you old colored people. Wouldn't miss going to town to see Santa Claus!"<sup>8</sup>

At this point, Phoenix sees a nickel that has dropped from the man's pocket, and diverting his attention to the dogs, she steals it. She refuses to be frightened or apologetic when she thinks the man has discovered the theft:

...then he laughed and lifted his gun and pointed it at Phoenix.

She stood straight and faced him.

"Doesn't the gun scare you?" he said, still pointing it.

"No, sir, I seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what I done," she said, holding utterly still.<sup>9</sup>

The reason for this journey is not revealed until she reaches the city and goes to a welfare clinic, where a nurse remarks:

"Oh, that's just old Aunt Phoenix, ... she doesn't come for herself -- she has a little grandson. She makes these trips just as regular as clockwork. She lives away back off the Old Natchez Trace .... Throat never heals, does it?" said the nurse, speaking in a loud sure voice to old Phoenix. By now she had a card with something written on it, a little list. "Yes, swallowed lye. When was it? -- January -- two-three years ago --"<sup>10</sup>

When the attendant offers her some money, Phoenix exhibits dignity in the fact that she asks only for what she needs to buy a toy for her grandson, nothing for herself:

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 281-282.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 286-287.

"I going to the store and buy my child a little windmill they sells, made out of paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world. I'll march myself back where he waiting, holding it straight up in this hand."<sup>11</sup>

The old woman's dignity, fortitude, and self-reliance are revealed in these actions and speeches. The elements of the situation are such that without an objective, dramatic treatment, the narrative could have become bathetic and sentimental.

In her second collection of short stories, The Wide Net and Other Stories, the author used dramatic character presentation in the title story.<sup>12</sup> Rather than attempting a single, well-defined portrait of one character, she essayed a portrait of a way of life, dealing with a group of somewhat unindividualized country people, whose childlike simplicity and carefree humor can be perceived in their conversations and actions.

The spirit of "The Wide Net" is a sympathetic satire. When he returns from a night out with his friends, William Wallace Jameson finds a letter from his bride Hazel, saying that she has left, intending to drown herself in the river. An indication of the relaxed tempo of such a life may be perceived in this conversation:

"I've lost Hazel, she's vanished, she went to drown herself."  
 "Why, that ain't like Hazel," said Virgil.  
 William Wallace reached out and shook him. "You heard me. Don't you know we have to drag the river?"  
 "Right this minute?"  
 "You ain't got nothing to do till spring."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>12</sup>Selected Stories, part 2, pp. 34-72.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.

Although the reader infers that no one actually believes that Hazel has done anything more than probably gone home to her mother, the occasion is eagerly seized upon to drag the river with the wide net, catch fish, have a fish-fry, and exchange gossip. In the gossip and conversations are revealed the fears ("She was always scared of the Gypsies .... She'd sure turn her ring around on her finger if she passed one."<sup>14</sup>) and the humor of the country people ("Many's been saved at a revival, twenty-two last Sunday, including a Doyle, ought to counted two."<sup>15</sup>). At the end of the day, the river-draggers return to their homes with large catches of fish; William Wallace returns to find Hazel waiting with supper.

The primitive, unstudied, unsophisticated attitudes and behavior of these people and the slow movement of their way of life with its relation to the earth and changing seasons are presented dramatically through such a speech as this one:

"We're walking along in the changing-time," said Doc. "Any day now the change will come. It's going to turn from hot to cold, and we can kill the hog that 's ripe and have fresh meat to eat. Come one of these nights and we can wander down here and tree a nice possum. Old Jack Frost will be pinching things up .... Persimmons will all get fit to eat, and the nuts will be dropping like rain all through the woods here ...."<sup>16</sup>

The satire is gentle, and the comedy is not grim.

In Delta Wedding, which marks the author's greatest use of expository characterization, and The Golden Apples, there are few characters developed through dramatic methods. In Delta Wedding, one is Troy Flavin, the bride-

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

groom. A consistent contrast is shown between Troy, practical, laconic, and proud, and the Fairchild family, unrealistic, voluble, and self-complacent. For example, when his future mother-in-law asks him what he thinks about life in the Delta in contrast to the hills where he lived before, he remarks, " ... I can't tell a bit of difference between me and any Delta people you name .... it's just a matter of knowing how to handle your Negroes."<sup>17</sup> Another instance which points out the contrast between the personality of Troy and the Fairchild family is the scene in which Shelley, the sister of the bride, goes to the overseer's house to tell him that the family is ready for the wedding rehearsal:

The green-shaded light fell over the desk. It shone on that bright-red head. Troy was setting there -- bathed and dressed in a stiff white suit, but having trouble with some of the hands ....

Root M'Hook, afield Negro, held the knife drawn; it was not actually a knife, it was an ice pick ....<sup>18</sup>

When Troy is forced to shoot and injure the field hand, he tells Shelley to return to the house:

" I can't get past -- there's blood on the door," said Shelley, her voice like ice.

"Then you'll have to jump over it ...," said Troy ....<sup>19</sup>

One scene which particularly reveals Troy's pride and indifference to certain older members of the family and their opinion of him occurs when Troy's family in the hills sends him and his bride several hand-made quilts. He brings them proudly to the plantation house and tells the family to display them with the other wedding presents of crystal, silver,

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<sup>17</sup>Delta Wedding, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

etc. ("... lay them on a long table with that other conglomeration for folks to come see."<sup>20</sup>). As in "The Wide Net," Troy is presented with sympathetic satire.

In The Golden Apples, a character who may be a central consciousness in one story may appear in another in a brief dramatic portrait, perhaps years later. One such character is Cassie Morrison, who in "June Recital" is an adolescent girl discovering that people are "roaming on the face of the earth .... roaming, like lost beasts."<sup>21</sup> In the final story, "The Wanderers," she is shown primarily in a dramatic fashion as a conventional small - town eccentric spinster whose eyes are trained on the past, but who sometimes reveals in a chance remark an awareness of the desolateness of her life in Morgana. She is introduced at the funeral of Virgie Rainey's mother with a brief expository verbal picture:

Cassie Morrison, her black-stockinged legs seeming to wade among the impeding legs of the other women, crossed the parlor to where Virgie sat in the chair at the closed sewing machine. Cassie had chosen the one thin gold-rimmed coffee cup for herself, and balanced it serenely.

"Papa sent his sympathy. Let me sit by you, Virgie." She kissed her. "You know I know what it's like."<sup>22</sup>

Cassie thrives on taking an important part among the mourners at funerals. This same morbidity is exhibited in the conversation which reveals that she keeps the memory of her dead mother alive in the form of a flower garden which spells out her mother's name in different colors at different seasons:

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>21</sup>The Golden Apples, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

"I want you to come see Mama's Name in the spring, Virgie. This morning before it rained I divided all the bulbs again, and it ought to be prettier than ever! .... I know how you feel. You'll never get over it, never!"<sup>23</sup>

But Cassie has not deceived herself about the barren, convention-ridden life of Morgana, Mississippi. This knowledge and the quiet desperation of her existence are evident in the remark she makes to Virgie as the latter prepares to leave Morgana as Cassie's brother did:

"You'll go away like Loch," Cassie called from the steps. "A life of your own, away -- I'm so glad for people like you and Loch, I am really."<sup>24</sup>

Cassie is typical of those who succumbed to the demands of Morgana society and never achieved self-realization. Although she is introduced by exposition, her eccentricity and anguish are gradually revealed to the reader dramatically.

The spirit of The Ponder Heart, a novelette, is satire.<sup>25</sup> The reader is placed in the position of a traveler who stops at the Beulah Hotel in Clay, Mississippi, and is treated to a dramatic monologue by Edna Earle Ponder about Clay's most outstanding recent event, the trial of her Uncle Daniel Ponder for the death of his wife, Bonnie Dee. One of the most delightful aspects of the novel is Edna Earle's unwitting revelation of her own narrowness, provincialism, complacency, vanity, snobbery, and bigotry. Not only is Edna Earle as a type satirized in this way, but also the whole town of Clay, of which she is a leading citizen, and the type of society it represents. An example of the revelation of such traits

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>25</sup>(New York, 1954).

may be seen in the following account of her Uncle Daniel's first marriage. Here Edna Earle exhibits self-importance, in taking all of the credit for the marriage, and also religious bias:

At any rate, Uncle Daniel and Miss Teacake got married. I just asked her for recipes enough times, and told her the real secret of cheese straws -- beat it three hundred strokes -- and took back a few unimportant things I've said about the Baptists.<sup>26</sup>

Snobbery and provincialism are evident in her evaluation of Uncle Daniel's second wife and her background:

Meantime! Here traipsed into town a little thing from away off down in the country. Near Polk: you wouldn't have ever heard of Polk -- I hadn't. Bonnie Dee Peacock. A little thing with yellow, fluffy hair.

The Peacocks are the kind of people who keep the mirror outside on the front porch, and go out and pick railroad lilies to bring inside the house, and wave at trains till the day they die. The most they probably hoped for was that somebody'd come find oil in the front yard and fly in the house and tell them about it.<sup>27</sup>

The same sense of superiority is obvious in her account of the little country funeral for Bonnie Dee:

The funeral was what you'd expect if you'd ever seen Polk -- crowded. It was hot as fluzions in that little front room. A lot of Jacobs Ladder Tops and althea blooms sewed on cardboard, and a salvia wreath with a bee in it. A lot of ferns hauled out of creek bottoms and drooped by the time they got ready for them .... Mrs. Peacock was big and fat as a row of pigs and wore tennis shoes to her daughter's funeral -- I guess she couldn't help it.<sup>28</sup>

Southern small-town life and its oddities are heightened in this novelette for purposes of satire and comedy. Characters are caricatures rather than rounded individuals.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 29

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 76.



In Miss Welty's last collection, The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories, the majority of the stories are almost completely dramatic in presentation of character. None of the stories, with the exception of "Kin" and "Going to Naples," attempts a rounded portrait of an individual. Typical of these last stories is "The Bride of the Innisfallen," which tells of several people traveling in the same compartment on a boat-train to Ireland.<sup>29</sup> Hardly anything happens in this story other than conversations recorded dramatically. Although there are occasional brief lapses into an omniscient, expository style, the characters are not revealed completely, but rather seem to wander in and out of the story. Each is tagged by a mannerism or typical remark, but other than this, he is not developed. There are a middle-aged woman returning to her family in Ireland, an American girl leaving her husband, an angry-looking young man who talks chiefly about the parrakeets he raises and of a prize bird that died ("There've been times when I've dreamed of a certain person who may have had more to do with it!.... That I've never mentioned till now. But women are jealous and uncertain creatures...."<sup>30</sup>), a little boy and a young woman who is taking him home from his brother's wedding in England ("Ah, it has driven his poor mother to her bed, it was that grand a wedding ...."<sup>31</sup>), a pair of lovers, a schoolgirl reading Black Stallion of the Downs, and an inquisitive Welshman ("Suppose it's Sunday -- ... and you don't go to church. Would you have to pay a fine to

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<sup>29</sup>The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories, pp. 47-83.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

the priest?"<sup>32</sup>). Although the story displays the author's ability to create the feeling of any trip and its brief encounters, it seems to lack conviction and purpose because of lack of plot or character development.

"Ladies in Spring" records an escapade of a father and son when they slip away from work and school to go fishing.<sup>33</sup> Although there are small lapses into an omniscient style, when the author wishes to describe something as seen through the eyes of the child, such as a small town after an early spring shower, the father and son are objectively and dramatically presented:

The pair moved through that gray landscape as though no one would see them -- dressed alike in overalls and faded coats, one big, one little, one black-headed, one tow-headed, father and son. Each carried a cane fishing pole over his shoulder, and Dewey carried the bucket in his other hand. It was a soft, gray, changeable day overhead -- the first like that, here in the month of March.<sup>34</sup>

The father and son are given no definite and individual characteristics other than that the reader infers that the father is a philanderer from the fact that a girl comes to the edge of the river and calls his name:

She cupped her hands to her silent lips. She meant "Blackie."

"Blackie!" There it was.

"You hold still," said his father. "She ain't calling you."

Nobody could hold so still as a man named Blackie.

That mysterious lady never breathed anything but the one word, and so softly then that it was all the word could do to travel over the water; still his father never said anything back, until she disappeared. Then he said, "Blackie yourself."<sup>35</sup>

The use of dramatic characterization has become more prominent in recent works; with this increase are evident other shifts in tone and emphasis which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-101.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

From a survey of criticisms of Miss Welty's fiction set forth in the first chapter, it may be seen that her most recent works have failed to receive the praise that her earlier works received. It is also noteworthy that no works published during the last ten years have received attention in the form of scholarly articles, although there have been several recent explications of her earlier publications.

This study presents certain explanations for these developments -- explanations which are based upon her developing techniques of characterization. Assessing the relationship of Miss Welty's methods of characterization to the total effect of her fiction, one must consider the gradual shift from the fully realized characters of her earlier fiction to objectively presented caricatures and types in her recent fiction. This has been a change in proportion only, for a few of the latter occurred in her first stories ("Clytie" and "A Visit of Charity"), and characters representative of the former are found in her latest fiction to a small extent (Gabriella in "Going to Naples" and Sister Anne in "Kin"). With the lack of emphasis on character development, the author's sometimes formless short story structure and her interest in details of environment and atmosphere become ends in themselves. The reader feels no personal involvement or identification with her flat, incompletely revealed recent characters, objectively presented. Coincidental to these developments has been her change in the technique of presenting characters, a change from expository to dramatic characterization.

The change to a preponderance of dramatic characterization has been gradual, as indicated by an analysis of her writings in chronological order. Expository characterization predominated in her first publications. It was used in all but a third of the stories in her first collection (1941); it was used consistently in The Robber Bridegroom (1942) and predominantly in all but one of the stories in her second collection (1943). Then it was used to its greatest extent in Delta Wedding (1946) and primarily in The Golden Apples (1949). Dramatic characterization, which appeared in few of the short stories of her earlier collections and in presentation of less important characters in Delta Wedding and The Golden Apples, was used for the central character in The Ponder Heart (1954) and almost exclusively for the characters in each of the stories of The Bride of the Innisfallen (1955).

With the increase in the use of dramatic characterization, the author's attitude toward characters as types rather than individuals has become increasingly objective and sometimes satiric. This objective and satiric attitude is especially noticeable in the author's most recent efforts, The Ponder Heart and The Bride of the Innisfallen. The characters of the former are primarily caricatures of small-town types and poor whites, and many in the latter are incompletely revealed, unindividualized figures, such as the travelers in "The Bride of the Innisfallen," the father and son in "Ladies in Spring," or the man and woman in "No Place for You, My Love." The satire is based on regional characteristics and foibles. The presentation of people as types may be noted even in two short stories in the last collection which go outside of Mississippi for their settings, "The Bride of the Innisfallen" and "Going to Naples." In the former story, much is made of Irish sentimentality, and in the latter, the emphasis is

on portraying the characters as second-generation Italian-Americans, with the exception of Gabriella, rather than simply as individual figures.

The increased use of dramatic characterization has also influenced indirectly the element of plot. Although the author has never used the rigidly organized plot structure of a Wilbur Daniel Steele or O. Henry, the focus of attention in earlier stories was upon a moment of individual insight or change, such as may be found in "The Key," "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," "The Hitch-Hikers," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," or "First Love." However, more recent stories such as "The Burning," "Ladies in Spring," and "The Bride of the Innisfallen" are more formless, impressionistic, and descriptive. Each of these stories is predominantly dramatic in characterization and lacks a fully developed central character.

With the lack of emphasis on well-rounded characters has seemed to come a reciprocal interest in the presentation of details of atmosphere and environment. Always important to Miss Welty, they now seem to be ends in themselves, rather than factors which enhance the themes of her stories. This may be seen in a contrast of two stories, the early story "First Love" from The Wide Net and Other Stories and the recent "Kin" from The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories. In the former, the details of atmosphere and environment enhance the feelings and attitudes of the central, well-developed character, a deaf-mute, orphaned boy who works as a bootblack in a Natchez tavern.<sup>1</sup> The bitter winter described in the opening paragraphs emphasizes the boy's cheerless, drudging existence:

The Mississippi shuddered and lifted from its bed, reaching like a somnambulist driven to go in new places; the ice stretched far out over the waves. Flatboats and rafts continued to float down stream, but with

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<sup>1</sup>Selected Stories, part 2, pp. 3-33.

unsignalling passengers submissive and huddled, mere bundles of sticks; bets were laid on shore as to whether they were alive or dead, but it was impossible to prove it either way.<sup>2</sup>

Aaron Burr, the conspirator, comes to the tavern; he uses it as his headquarters in his plot to separate the West from the United States.

Now the descriptions of the activity and excitement emphasize the boy's admiration of the flamboyant Burr:

The month wore on, and now it was full moonlight .... People now lighted their houses in entertainment as if they copied after the sky, with Burr in the center of them always, dancing with the women, talking with the men .... their minuets skimmed across the nights like a pebble expertly skipped across the water.<sup>3</sup>

After Burr's arrest, the boy next observes him in a humiliating attempt at an escape, disguised as an Indian with boot polish on his face. The boy is left more desolate than before:

He did not know how far he had gone on the Liberty Road, when the posse came riding up behind and passed him. He walked on. He saw the bodies of the frozen birds had fallen out of the trees ....<sup>4</sup>

The theme of the story, the somewhat painful development of mature understanding, is accentuated by the details of atmosphere.

In the later story, "Kin," one perceives the development of atmosphere as an esthetic pleasure devoid of significant theme.<sup>5</sup> The reader is treated to a reverie of the central character shortly before her marriage to a Northerner when she returns to visit relatives in the South and revisits scenes of her childhood. She and the other characters are given few definite characteristics, with the exception of a secondary character, the typical exploited Southern spinster who must make a

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>The Bride of the Innisfallen, pp. 112-155.

life for herself by serving more fortunate relatives. Because the story has no character with depth and conviction and presents no situation with universal implications, the primary purpose seems to be the creation of a picture of rural Southern life:

I remembered the house, the real house, always silvery, as now, but then cypressy and sweet, cool, reflecting, dustless. Sunday dinner was eaten from the table pulled to the very head of the breezeway, almost in the open door. The Sunday air pouted in through it, and through the frail-ribbed fanlight and side lights, down on the island we made, our cloth and our food and our flowers and jelly and ourselves, so lightly enclosed there -- as though we ate in running water.<sup>6</sup>

The most memorable qualities of her more recent stories are such elements as mood and creation of the "physical texture"<sup>7</sup> of an environment. Since these qualities are not combined with characters of conviction or themes of depth, perhaps this is the reason critics have felt that her work has declined in quality, that it lacks significance and purpose, that it is delicate, thin, and without substance. However, individual stories such as "A Worn Path," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," and many more assure her a place among the most highly respected contemporary writers. Miss Welty has said that each of her stories is unique and individual; she does not believe that her work has developed in any predictable, logical, or "even chronological" way.<sup>8</sup> Her later stories excel in the vivid depiction of a region, and her satiric examination of the society in which she lives is true and delightful in these recent efforts. Her style, always original, individual, and sensitive, lends fascination even to her less significant stories.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>7</sup>Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>"How I Write," p. 242.

It is only by a contrast of these later works with her earlier fiction, with its more profound and universal qualities, that they fail to fulfill the promise of her first two collections. Judged on their own merits, as Miss Welty would have us do, they still show evidence of the "resourcefulness, sensitivity, and intelligence" commended by Robert Penn Warren.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>"Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," p. 169.



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