CHAPTER I
ALIENATION: STORIES OF CHILDHOOD.

In ‘A Memory’ one of Welty’s best stories, a child on the beach feels alienated from the adult world because of her childhood who hopes to learn the secrets of life by looking at everything, squaring her hands before her eyes to bring the observed thing into a frame. *Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look at everything.* (ACOG—135).

The story begins with a child all by herself on the beach indicating her preference for solitude. Being a weekday she knows the only persons likely to be in the park were either children who had nothing to occupy them, or those older people whose lives are obscure, irregular, and consciously of no worth to anything. (ACOG—135). She is at an age when a person tends to pronounce judgment upon
everyone and everything, she is also easily frightened. When a person or happening is not in keeping with her opinion, hope or expectation, she is terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness. She feels she can foresee everything; she appears to be a clairvoyant person. So, when nothing happens according to what she foresaw, she is terrified. Her parents who are completely ignorant of this side of her would have been worried about her. My father and mother, who believed that I saw nothing in the world would have been badly concerned if they had guessed how frequently the weak and inferior and strangely turned examples of what was to come showed themselves to me. (ACOG—136). She feels convinced that she sees glimpses of future happenings though not the actual events but if whatever happens does not conform to these visions, she becomes terrified. She is not really aware of what she wants to see. She simply feels that whatever she observes, a secret life is being shown to her. She is also obsessed with the notion of
concealment so that even the smallest gesture of a person seems to convey a message to her. This is heightened by the fact that she is in love for the first time, though her love is not reciprocated. She remembers the morning on the stairs at school when she had touched the wrist of the boy she loves. She thinks about this encounter endlessly. This has made her an acute observer and a dreamer. She is always on the alert. One day, when the boy she loved bled through the nose, she fainted because it was unexpected and unforeseen by her. Since then she is doubly anxious for him and her fear for his life increases.

Lying on the beach, remembering this boy she is suddenly aware of other children playing nearby. She notices the presence of adults too. Being a keen observer, a vivid description about these people are given by her beginning from their physique, clothes and their strange and rowdy behaviour.

_Sprawled close to where I was lying, at any rate, appeared_
a group of loud, squirming, ill-assorted people who seemed thrown together only by the most confused accident, and who seemed driven by foolish intent to insult each other, all of which they enjoyed with a hilarity which astonished my heart. (ACOG—139). She is shocked and tries to withdraw to her dreams of touching the boy she loves.

Finally, she emerges from her dream to a deserted beach. The sight of the mess on the beach created by the strangers leads her to tears. It looks like the ravages left by a storm. This being the last morning on the beach, she refuses to let it mar her happiness and continues to lie there squaring her hands before her eyes thinking ahead of her return to school that winter and watching the boy enter the classroom with this hour on the beach accompanying her.

Welty comments looking back on the story:
The tableau discovered through the young girl's framing hands is an unwelcome realism. How can she accommodate the existence of this view to the dream of love, which she carried already inside her? Amorphous and tender, from now on it will have to remain hidden, her own secret imagining. The frame only raises the question of the vision. (OWB).

Inside the 'small frame' there is a form of conflict: between secret visions and unwelcome realities. Her secret visions are those that she forsees and forms opinions upon, whereas the unwelcome realities are when these visions do not conform to her opinions and expectations and when that happens, it results in her feeling abandoned and alone. Being still a child and at an age when everything is viewed with curiosity and expectations, to conform to her wishes or visions, the harsh realities are a shock to her and
these shatter her perfect private world that she creates within her. The reality of the adult world is too much for her to handle. Welty’s story is told by a young girl which indicates the presence of this conflict even in a child’s immature perception.

‘The Winds’ concerns a child’s preoccupations with her memories and also her visions who has yet to adapt herself to the adult world she belongs to.

The story begins at night with a family of four—Josie, her brother Will and her parents—seeking shelter from the storm. It is the equinox—a seasonal change. They gather in the living room waiting for the storm to pass. There is lightening and strong winds rock the house like a boat that has been stepped into. (TWN—352). Lying in a chair, Josie (the main character) drifts back to the summertime, to the past where she hunted for fairies, made
sand-castles, whispered to the imaginary Queen and wished to understand the tongue of birds. While she is indulging in this, she is called by adults. Josie then remembers, after that she went out on her bicycle, the golden Princess. All the children are playing; Josie is also preoccupied with her own activity. She floated rose petal dry in her mouth, and sucked on the spirals of honeysuckle and the knobs of purple clover. She wore crowns. She added flower necklaces as the morning passed, then bracelets, and applied transfer-pictures to her forehead and arms and legs. (TWN—353 & 354). There is a house across the street and it seems to watch the activities of the children. It is a worn-out old house where eight children live, Cornella being the eldest among them. The rest of the children of the neighbourhood are prevented from playing with them. Josie remembers one particular morning, when she was watching Cornella dry her bright yellow hair in the sun, cascading like a waterfall. Between them an old man driving
his cart was singing a sad song. This made Cornella stamp her foot in anger. Perhaps she was expecting someone else for she was particularly watchful that day. At that moment, Josie is called and she feels that she is never going to catch up with Cornella whom she is suddenly beginning to love. Against all restrictions she wants to befriend Cornella who she feels has rebuffed her. At this point, the house stirs because of strong winds blowing. As a result, it wakes Josie up.

The wind seems to change to songs and Josie withdraws again into her memories of the summer. Playing with her friend, going to the park where she never fails to touch the stone dragons before going home. In her remembered past, Cornella was becoming an integral part of Josie’s life. Her every step and each movement is watched by Josie—how Cornella would come out and gaze down the street, as if she could see far, far away, in a little pantomime
of hope and apprehension that would not permit Josie to stir. (TWN—359). Josie envisages how it will happen, yet it is like new always. Then unknowingly, she lifts her hands as if calling Cornella but the latter says something worse than the stamping of her foot, which breaks Josie’s heart. Her estrangement from society and friends makes Cornella unfriendly and hostile. Just then Will who slept throughout wakes up and yells like a wild Indian and brings Josie back to reality.

Learning from her parents that she too, talks in her sleep just like Will, Josie experiences a kind of shock. This fact of sleep-talking has a disturbing effect on her as if a part of her secret self is being revealed to adults. Have they learnt already about her imaginary Queen, her desire to learn the tongue of birds? Will they make fun of her now? As a result, she experiences feelings of detachment. She remembers how in summer, she would go
to Daisy, a cow and release her emotions there alone. Her preference for an animal rather than a human to release her emotions indicates her deep-seated want for secrecy. Perhaps she feels that the thought of shedding tears in front of a person may reveal her weaknesses and her imperfections which she will rather keep within her. That the adults may rebuke and tease her if they see her in tears, frightens her.

Once again she thinks back to the summer evening, the games they played, especially how in the twilight they would bring out their steam-boats made out of shoe-boxes and greet each other dreamily. Suddenly, she sees Cornelia standing still, staring out at them, so undaunted, so filled with hope. At that moment the storm strikes and interrupts Josie’s thoughts. Josie is frightened and for the first time thinks about the future—when the wind calms down and they can indulge in their childhood activities again. She
thinks whether wonders will ever return? All the good times they had, would they ever return? Her father then kisses her which brings back the memory of that very night before the equinox occurred. In the evening, they had gone to watch a musical show at the Chautauqua (a summer school). Of the musicians, the cornetist has a powerful effect on Josie. She feels as if the beauty of the world had come .......... through their town that night .....(TWN—366).

Thunder strikes and pulls Josie back to reality. The waiting is now over, there is now the calm and steady fall of rain. Everyone retires to bed. Lying in her bed, Josie listens to the rain falling. There, outside, was all that was wild and beloved and estranged, and all that would beckon and leave her, and all that was beautiful. (TWN—367). Beckon and leave her, and all that will be left with her will be just memories.
The next morning Josie goes out to inspect the signs left by the equinox. She finds a fragment of a letter. She reads it and at once keeps it in the most secret place in her room. It is a letter for Cornella from her lover. This is the reason why Cornella keeps staring out alone, hoping.

In this story one realises the role of memory in Josie’s life. It is her refuge. She withdraws to her memories away from adults. Even the tiniest bit of her secret thoughts and dreams being revealed to any adult scares her. Her thoughts are her own whether of the past, present or future. Any revelation of these secrets is unthinkable. She feels the outside world beckon her, but she is yet to come out of her cocoon of secret self and face it.

In both ‘A Memory’ and ‘The Winds’, there is a strong play of memory. Welty’s essay, ‘Some Notes on
Time and Fiction (1973) sets forth her attitude towards memory. Remembering is so basic and vital a part of staying alive that it takes on the strength of an instinct of survival and acquires the power of an art ............ It is also life's work. Welty views memory on the one hand, as a necessary mode of survival and on the other, to be the realisation that the survival of the mode of memory itself depends on the passionate self-consciousness with which it is apprehended as a way of life. Both the characters of these two stories use memory as a mode of survival. The child in 'A Memory' uses the memory of the boy she loves to sustain her during her holidays till school begins in winter. There is absolutely no interaction with adults in this story. It deals with only the lonely girl on the beach with her private thoughts and memories. She finds it difficult to balance the reality and her dream of love. Since it is her first love, she expects it to be perfect and also to comply with her expectations. But what she is not prepared
to accept is the reality, for the fact remains that her love is one-sided and not reciprocated. Also, obsessed with concealment her feelings remain hidden, she detaches herself from adults. Normally, children are not so secretive, they share nearly everything with their parents. In the case of this child, even her parents are unaware of the fact that she feels the future happenings and the secrets of life are being revealed to her beforehand. She does not reveal this secret of hers to her parents or anyone in case she is rebuked.

Again, in 'The Winds', the memories of the past summer, have helped Josie spend her time while waiting for the storm to pass. There is communication though, between Josie and her parents but it is only for very brief moments. What is important here too, is her concealed thoughts and memories. Josie keeps her feelings and emotions within her. She does not share it with an adult. She even rejects her mother's offerings of comfort. She is shocked by learning
that she talks in her sleep. Perhaps, she is wondering how many secrets of hers have been revealed through this sleep talking of hers. Have her parents learnt about her obsession with Cornella or about the imaginary world that she lives in? All these thoughts make her detach herself from everyone. Josie is more comfortable releasing her emotions in front of an animal because she feels animals are more patient and richly compassionate and do not judge. Also she can cry in front of an animal because animals cannot speak and so no one will know about her weaknesses.

Thus, we find both the characters withdraw to their memories which as Welty says is not only a mode of survival but also a way of life. The girl on the beach has used memory to sustain during her holidays while Jenny has used memory to pass her time till the storm is over. Both of them lack self-confidence, to come out in the open, to express themselves. Both seem wary
of the adult world to which they belong; they are not responsive to it. The girls feel safe in their own world, the private, perfect place they have created for themselves in their thoughts and memories. They do not share anything with their parents. The girl on the beach could have mentioned to her parents that strange visions of what was to come frequently showed themselves to her. But due to lack of communication, her parents are ignorant of this fact and feel that she sees nothing in the world. In the case of Josie, she finds it difficult to show her emotions in front of her parents or anyone else. And since everyone was prevented from playing with the children of the house across the street she is scared to let her parents know about her feelings for Cornella. Thus, they are alienated and separated from the outside world of adults in that, they prefer to live in their own private world where everything is perfect.