CONCLUSION
All the stories which have been discussed are about characters who live sheltered, secluded lives within a small community. There is little or no meaningful interaction with the world outside the community. Many of the characters live a life of seclusion by choice whereas a few of them have been forced into such a life.

The two children in the first chapter have difficulty in coping with the adult world. They simply shy away and withdraw from it. Both are extremely sensitive, secretive but are keen observers of everything around them specially adult behaviour. They lack self-confidence to share anything with their parents. One spends her days in observation where she feels that things are being revealed to her while the other retreats to her memories of the past. In doing so, they seem to move away from forming any
close ties with their parents, the adults in their immediate world. This distance thus created between the world of the children and the adult world of the parents make them reclusive, and they retreat into their private and intimate worlds of their imagination and memories where they feel comfortable and safe.

In the next chapter the characters suffer alienation from society due to various reasons. Lily of the first story is slightly dim—witted. She therefore depends on the three ladies who represent society. Lily's personal circumstances are left vague and she is portrayed as someone who cannot interact with others in society. Moreover, the ladies feel that Lily does not possess a sound mind because she has become completely dependant of them and cannot decide anything for herself. So they decide to send her to and institution for the feeble—minded where they cannot say with confidence that Lily will be looked after because they themselves do not know anything about the institution. Then again they
change their minds and decide to marry her off to a complete stranger whom she has chosen. By sending her to the institution or getting her married off will mean the end of their responsibility. The interference of the ladies with their show of concern for her actually does nothing to alter Lily’s state of mind or circumstances.

In the next story, a mad streak can be seen in the entire family. This is the cause of Clytie and her family’s seclusion from society. Something drastic has happened to them which makes them extremely eccentric. Pride forces them to lead a life of solitude because they have fallen on bad days. They shut out the rest of the world from their lives. All doors and windows are locked and shades pulled down and no one is allowed to visit nor do they make social calls themselves. It is a case of complete alienation. From such a situation, the only escape for Clytie is in her suicidal death.
In the next two stories the characters detach themselves from society of their own choice. Mrs. Larkin and Sabina prefer to lead solitary lives because of their misfortune. Life has dealt them both a cruel blow. Mrs. Larkin is widowed in her youth and Sabina faces one misfortune after another leading to her insanity. Mrs. Larkin cannot forget the greatest disaster in her life—the accidental death of her husband—and since then dissociates herself from society. She refuses to share her feelings with anyone and even rejects company. Sabina on the other hand becomes aloof and remote since the day she chased her husband away from home. She considers him to be the cause of all her misfortune. Like Mrs. Larkin, Sabina too hides her emotional state from others. Both choose to seclude themselves from their community and bear the pain and sorrow all alone.

In the last two stories of this chapter, both the characters are forced to stay away from their community. The
cause of Livvie’s alienation is the jealousy of her old husband. Though well—provided for, Livvie suffers from boredom and loneliness. Her loyalty towards her husband prevents her from escaping. Whereas the overprotectiveness of her grandfather leads to Jenny’s alienated life. Jenny’s mother had disobeyed her father and went away from a protected life. Unfortunately she died early. Her grandfather fears the same thing happening to Jenny if he let her go. So he feels it necessary to keep her under his watchful eyes always. He did not want to lose out on Jenny too. As a result of such seclusion, they have difficulty in interacting with others and are withdrawn. But whereas Livvie’s liberation is regained without any conscious effort on her part, Jenny’s somehow knows that her alienation will not last forever.

In the last chapter isolation suffered by the characters are circumstantial. In the first story a couple’s disability proves to be the cause of all their problems. They are both deaf and
dumb. They cannot communicate well with others because of which they seem to suffer ill—treatment in society and they become wary and suspicious. There is little or no happiness for people like the Morgans in a world where only the fittest can survive. They are not shown any sympathy or help by society. Left on their own they have only each other to fall back on. The poignancy of their plight is symbolised by the key which somehow seems to hold the promise of a happy future.

A family’s blind love and faith in the youngest daughter compels the eldest sister to leave home permanently and live in the post office where she works. The alienation felt by the protagonist and which prompts her to take such a decision has to do with a family’s attitude towards one of its members. Through the title of the story Why I Live at the P. O., the protagonist seems to explain to the world why she lives at the P.O. and not at home and by doing this she is drawing attention
to the fact that she has not chosen alienation, it has been forced on her by her family.

The two characters in the last story live in an Old Ladies’ Home. Nothing of their earlier lives are shown or hinted at, as though they have been in this home forever. They are not visited by anyone except the likes of the young girl in the story who does so purely for personal gains. Both the ladies lead extremely unhappy lives. They are secluded and even the institute where they live is located away from town. Their physical isolation coupled with the fact that they are abandoned by everyone else adds special pathos to their alienation.

The sense of alienation felt by Welty’s characters emanates from certain inherent weaknesses, either in themselves or their environment like family and society. The children are introverts. Had the parents too much of expectations from them?
Perhaps the girls feel they are incapable of fulfilling those expectations; rather than be a disappointment they isolate themselves from their parents which makes their cause of alienation arise from within the family itself. Same is the cause of Clytie’s alienation. The family’s massive pride and the absence of any real interaction between the family members are the sole reason for Clytie’s alienation ending in her death.

Lily’s and Sabina’s alienation is a result of their weaknesses. Lily’s indecisive nature and Sabina’s submissive nature make them incapable to stand up and fight for their rights. Hence in the end Lily’s physical presence is left unspecified and Sabina’s alienated life culminates in her death.

In Mrs. Larkin’s case it is a self—imposed seclusion. After her husband’s death she purposely secludes herself from the rest of the town. She blames life for the cruel blow in her
young life and virtually stops interacting with everyone, bearing her sorrow alone.

In the case of Livvie, Jenny, the old women, the disabled couple and the narrator who goes to live at the post office, alienation has been forced upon them. If not for her husband’s possessiveness Livvie would never have been isolated. Jenny would have been leading a normal life if not for her grandfather’s over-protectiveness. Old age seems to be the sole reason for the ladies’ unhappy and secluded lives in the Institute. The Morgan’s disability on the other hand is the cause of their problem and the sister who lives at the P.O. has indicated that her family is the cause of her separate life from them. All these characters are unable to do anything about their situation.

In none of the stories Welty talks about love or loving relationships directly. But what is left unsaid gives us the
impression that the characters either receive too much love or not at all.

Jenny and Livvie receive excess love from their grandfather and husband. Such kind of excessive love can sometimes be counter-productive. The power of their (the grandfather and the husband) love obliterates all other considerations like social interaction, so much so that they fail to realise that through their love, they are alienating the girls from society and the community.

Again some of the characters are alienated because of the lack of love in their lives. The absence of love (as they feel) in the children’s life leads to their retreat into their secret selves away from the adult world. Lily, Sabina, Clytie, the sister who lives at the P.O., the ladies and the disabled couple seek love but are denied and ignored, hence their alienation. Again though
Mrs. Larkin was fortunate to experience love it has been only for a temporary period of time and which was so cruelly wrenched away from her that she prefers isolation and seclusion to any social contact.

Again if there is any liberation from alienation for the characters it is seen that death plays an important role in the process. Except in the stories of the children, the narrator who lives in the P.O. and Lily, for some of the characters (Clytie, Sabina) their own death is the ultimate liberation from the alienated selves. For Livvie and Jenny the death of the husband and the grandfather lead to their liberation. However, Welty’s handling of this aspect is very subtle and she leaves it to the reader to decide for herself/himself in the end.

Why does Welty write about such characters? Perhaps her upbringing in a close—knitted family in a sheltered
environment has something to do with it. All her life, Welty has lived in one place; she and her brothers have always been over—protected especially by their mother. *She stood always ready to face the world in our place.* (OWB—39) One of the reasons for the over—protectiveness maybe because Mrs. Welty lost her first born at birth. Perhaps she feels guilty at not being able to save the child. So she is extra careful with her other children. Whenever Welty’s mother wanted her to have something it would be because she never had it as a child. Welty writes; *It took me a long time to manage the independence, for I loved those who protected me .......... (‘The making of a writer: Listening in the dark’—an extract from *One Writer’s Beginnings*, October 9th 1983, before publication, p.5).* Thus living in such an environment perhaps it is but natural for her to write of characters living in similar circumstances—a sheltered life. While the feelings of alienation or being alienated within these stories must be simply her creation with the help of her imaginative
mind, or materials she collected on her travels throughout rural Mississippi.

All the characters in these stories are again female characters. There seems to be a connection between these characters and Welty. Welty is an intensely feminine writer who views human situations with an insightful feminine sensitivity. Perhaps being a woman, she can identify with them and express her feelings better in a female rather than a male character. And like other women writers, Welty writes stories of children where very often the tension is between the child’s perception and the adult world. Though this subject is not a female prerogative it does occur in women’s stories over and over again. The susceptibility and literalness of children, their matter-of-fact but unsocialised behaviour, their imaginative play with what is immediately to hand, seems to be particularly sympathetic and useful subject for women writers. [The Secret Self (Short Stories
by Women) From the introduction by Hermione Lee]. Again the question arises — Does Welty feel the same way as these characters — secluded, alienated? Maybe she does or maybe she does not. But this is not known because she is a private person who does not reveal more than is necessary. Welty simply says there is no explanation outside fiction for her work.

So apart from One Writer's Beginnings, very little is known about Welty and her writing and she instructs her friends even to do the same. She offers no explanation for her work wanting the work to exist as the thing that answers every question about its being. This position establishes careful boundaries around what one can and cannot know about Welty and delimits how one may discuss her work in conjunction with her life. Critical enrichment and revaluation of her work is difficult without such sources as letters or interviews with close friends. In the absence of such materials Welty's critics have
concentrated on her public 'persona' as a point of entry into her work. But again Welty has extraordinary control over this persona. Welty says her stories are gifts from the writer. She continues:

"It is not from criticism but from this world that stories come in the beginning, their origins are living reference plain to the writer's mind and heart, where all this exterior is continually 'becoming' something - the moral, the passionate, the poetic, hence the 'shaping idea—can't be mapped and plotted." (Eye p. 109).

Thus by controlling her public persona so carefully Welty has maintained for her work a certain degree of obscurity. And in all her non-fictional writings and interviews,
Welty tries to focus critical attention only on those aspects of her work she is comfortable in writing and talking about.