CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDE OF THE INNISFALLEN:

THE RHYTHM OF THE HUMAN HEART
The Bride of the Innisfallen is an example of Miss Eudora Welty's effort to steadily extend her range. Following upon the success of The Ponder Heart, this collection of short stories presented its first reviewers with a mode of story-telling different from the traditional one the majority of them had expected from southern writers. John Hutchins found the stories in The Bride of the Innisfallen diffuse, imprecise and chilling, though some of the stories in his estimation, could be compared with short fiction by Virginia Woolf. Another critic, William Pedem, noticed the significance of the accomplishment of Welty. But he found a lack of clarity and an undecipherable element in this collection of short stories:

But the story seems too-heavy, overburdened by a mass of detail and obscure or undecipherable symbol. Unnecessarily indirect and self-consciously elliptical, 'The Bride of the Innisfallen'

1John K. Hutchins, 'Miss Welty's Somewhat Puzzling Art,' New York Herald Tribune, 10 April, 1955, p. 2.
seems not so much a story as a highly private
game. Only the initiated are invited to par-
ticipate. The uninitiated can jolly well go
about their own prosaic business. This excru-
ciating perceptive story seems to be almost a
parody of Miss Welty's effectively individualistic
method, even after several readings I could
neither accept it on a realistic level nor under-
stand it on any other level.

The Bride of the Innisfallen is dedicated to
Elizabeth Bowen whose fiction asserts the importance of
the human heart in analysing the mystery and the truth
surrounding human life. The seven stories of the Bride
of the Innisfallen were individually published between 1949
and 1954. They constitute a technical advance upon anything
that Eudora Welty had done up to that time. They assert the
truth in the life of the human heart and how this truth is
often obscured by a prosaic attitude to life. In the
stories of this collection, Welty sheds light on areas of
human experience and consciousness hitherto not explored
sufficiently. In three of the short stories in this

2William Peden, 'The Incomparable Welty,' Saturday
Review, 9 April, 1955, p. 18.
collection, Welty uses the contemporary deep South as the scene. In the fourth one, she uses the setting of the Civil War. In two other stories, she draws upon her European travels. In the remaining short story, there is the depiction of Circe, the sorceress, who is made to give her own version of the visit of Odysseus. In none of these short stories is plot sequentially and logically ordered. The characters in these stories arrive at an understanding of things on the basis of their own observations collected by them but evaluated without strict reference to space and time.

The first story in this collection is, 'No Place for You, My Love.' One element of the story is the theme of the life of the heart. According to Ruth Vanie Kieft's biographical sketch of Welty, she met Bowen in 1949 and had worked on the title story of this collection while in Ireland at Bowen's Court. Thematically some of these short stories have a close kinship with the themes of Bowen as presented in novels such as The Death of the Heart. Place, which is one of the long standing concerns of Eudora Welty's fiction,

also operates in these stories but at a more metaphysical level. The motif of the journey, the division between the sexes as a central dramatic conflict in which the human heart is caught—these are the patterns and the motifs in *The Bride of the Innisfallen* which give it its unity. In "No Place for You, My Love" an unnamed woman from Toledo is found out of place in the steamy world of New Orleans because she possesses a loving and sympathetic heart. This young woman from Toledo who is having an affair with a married man and a married man from Syracuse are the two strangers who figure in this story. The place, New Orleans, is described on a Sunday in summer—"those hours of afternoon that seem Time Out in New Orleans." The two meet by accident in a restaurant, go for a ride southward from the city all the way to the gulf. They move through territory that is unlike anything else in the Southern United States. The geographical division of north and south is part of the important consciousness in this story. If marks a deeper division than a surface boundary division. In the course of their journey, the man and the woman find Cajuns, mosquitoes, Crawfish, snakes and so on. At the end they find a shack where they can buy beer and sandwiches. With the road running through the oppressive

heat like a quivering nerve, they find heat everywhere, but not love. The sympathetic heart of the woman gets embroiled in a territorial dispute with the heart of the man from Syracuse. The story recalls the tale of Alpheus pursuing the nymph Arethusa as recounted by Ovid. As in Ovid's account the man from Syracuse pursues the woman from Toledo. The repeated approaches and retreats, the passages over water, the calls of the heart which go unheeded, all these reveal a deliberate style, a pattern and a rhythm which in general we find in The Bride of the Innis-fallen collection. The heart of the Toledo woman is radiant with its gifts;

It must stick out all over me, she thought, so people think they can love me or hate me just by looking at me. How did it leave us - the old, safe, slow way people used to know of learning how one another feels, and the privilege that went with it of shying away if it seemed best? People in love like me, I suppose, give away the short cuts to everybody's secrets (pp.3-4).

The Toledo woman feels not only exposed but pressed forward like Arethusa. Her memory of a gentler rhythm in
human relations remains just a memory. The man from Syracuse pursues the woman but their relationship is something of a mystery. It is a mystery whether his desire to possess is a vestigial memory of love. The man and the woman, though together, are nevertheless set apart by a radical difference or antipathy. What the short story unfolds is in a sense the rhythm of their estrangement. Their drive down into the bayou is, as Michael Kreyling describes it, "a symbolic pilgrimage." They were always near the water and once they cross the river they come to the "end of the road," the jumping off place."
The margin of the road is alive with the images of a haunted outer dark threatening to the heart. "Back there in the margin were worse - Crawling hides who could not penetrate with bullets or quite believe grins that had come down from the primeval mud" (p. 8). When the woman asks the man from Syracuse a sympathetic question like, "What's your wife like?" (p.14), he dislikes her approach. The man and the woman keep their distance - "Her distance was set"(p.11).

The distance between the man and the woman becomes something of a barrier which both as physical and spiritual. The separateness of the individual hearts leads to impenetrable barriers. As the woman watches an alligator on the deck of a river ferry, she ironically prays for deliverence from the "naked in heart" (pp. 15-16).

The man handles her as if she were an object. Their dance at Baba's place is to be placed against the wilder shrimp dance advertised for a later hour. At dusk they leave Baba's, "still separate hearts," "immune from the world" (p.22), in need of the touch of one another. They both pretend an intimacy to which they were not prepared to lead themselves. Baba's place is for them, a place of danger and possibility, a jumping off place for a more meaningful pilgrimage.

The drive back to New Orleans is the most revealing part of the story. Safely in the city, the man drops the woman at the hotel where in place of an intimacy which ought to have developed, separation and silence enter the field.
Something that must have been with them all along suddenly, then, was not. In a moment, tall as panic, it rose, cried like a human and dropped back (p.26).

The man from Syracuse remembers the youthful years in New York when such possibilities amounted to expectation of love. Both the man and the woman shielded themselves from the possibility of love. From their public selves, they make a journey into the premieval region of the bayou. From there again they beat their retreat and race back along the narrow roads to the lights of the city. It is in the second half of the excursion that the man makes an attempt to come to terms with the woman. But the kissing proves futile. He finally sees where they are - riding across 'a face, a head, far down here in the South - South of South, below it. A whole giant body sprawled downward then, on and on, always, constant as a constellation or an angel. Flaming and perhaps falling, he thought"(p.25). For the man from Syracuse this marks the end of his youthful expectation of romantic love.

In this story, the elements of place and of the heart's beckoning play an important role. Place is not a
mere geographical location. It is the region of the human heart projected into a landscape where there is a to and fro movement between order and darkness. The two hearts on this pilgrimage retreat even before their passage begins. Their pilgrimage ends where it had begun with each one separate and "safe." While the man guards himself, the woman draws back. As Eudora Welty herself has written about this story, the man and the woman have courted "imperviousness in the face of exposure." 

The man and the woman are two characters from whom a third, their relationship, is born. 'No place for You, My Love' traces the process of the growth of this third character growing up between the man and the woman as they meet as strangers. This story makes use of the motifs of the journey, the relationship of the heart threatened by routine and hardship and the marking and withholding of commitment and love. The stories in the collection The Bride of the Innisfallen are elaborations on these motifs.

'The Burning' for which Eudora Welty won a second

place O'Henry award in 1951, is an overtly violent story dealing with the dangers facing the heart and flesh. Often described as an enigmatic story, 'The Burning' tells of a band of Sherman's soldiers forcing their way into a plantation home near Jackson and raping one of the two ladies there. Whereas in 'No Place for you' My Love' the bruise on the Toledo woman is depicted with a touch of the mysterious, the violation of Miss Myra in 'The Burning' is presented more directly. The sensationalism, fire and murder of 'The Burning' are the familiar elements of the southern gothic fiction which the author fits in the pattern of The Bride of the Innisfallen. A Civil War tale presenting some of the traditional concerns of tale-writing, 'The Burning' deals with a world inflicted upon the woman's heart and how that heart reacts in suffering. Miss Myra, violated by the soldier, is comforted by her sister, Miss Theo, who says "Don't mind this old world". Theo is dedicated to keeping her sister "asleep in the heart" (p.31). To this end Miss Theo leads her younger sister into a noose

and then she hangs herself. "Inflicting" that is what what women are for (0.38). Theo says thus before she puts a stop for ever to inflicting. Delilah survives the two sisters. Her race has been enslaved, she has been dishonoured and her child taken from her. Her heart, her sanctity, her offspring all become vulnerable to the world. The mirror which becomes the medium of her vision reveals everything. The point of the story begins to be seen when references are made in the story to a large Venetian mirror into which the ladies stare when the soldiers invade their parlour. The blackened mirror, still usable, lies among the ruins of the place subjected to looting and burning. In the mirror, Delilah sees, as she stoops to gather her bones, not the ruin which has befallen her but the image of a vanished Venetian civilization. It was symbolic of a society of lords and ladies, gorgeous red birds and monkeys in velvet which flourished until recently at that very spot and which also seemed immortal:

The mirror’s cloudy bottom sent minnows of light to the brim where now a face pure as a water-lily shadow was floating. Almost too small and deep down to see, they were quivering, leaping to life, fighting, aping old things
Delilah had seen things done in this world already, sometimes what men had done to Miss Theo and Miss Myra and the peacocks and to slaves, and sometimes what a slave had done and what anybody could now do to anybody. Under the flicker the sun's licks, then under its whole blow and blare, like an unheard scream, like an act of mercy gone, as the wall-less light and July blaze struck through from the opened sky, the mirror felled her flat.

At this moment, Delilah's vision becomes the central vision of the story, for she has a glimpse of the deep over which the pilgrimage is made. The violence of Sherman and the Civil War become symbolic of a world from which mercy and humanity have disappeared. The mirror is a key symbol in this story in terms of the reflection of life seen in it. In the use of the mirror symbol, Eudora Welty reminds one of the Tennysonian treatment of the Elaine Launcelot legend in 'The Lady of Shallot.' Miss Welty makes her mirror appropriately southern by having it set between blackmen. Like the Lady of Shallot, the two sisters, Miss Myra and Miss Theo live in isolation in the parlour of the plantation.

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home which is filled with dusted pictures and sheltered against the heat. When Delilah finds the mirror among the ashes and sees but does not comprehend the mirror's magic size, she uses Miss Myra's conjurations. "Before it she opened and spread her arms; she had seen Miss Myra do that" (p.42). Now the distorted images of the past well up before Delilah from the cracked depths of the mirror - images of Venice, of Africa, of Asian countries and violence of ancient and recent origin and "a face pure as water-lily shadow" (p.44). Miss Myra is untouched by the curse. Delilah gathers up the bones of Phinny, seizes a jubilee cup and a black locust stick, and follows the smell of horses, fire and men until she finds safety from all three at the river's edge. The moment she enters the water to wade across, her knowledge of when it will rain next comes to the surface of her mind. That is the only certainly which remains for her now in the discredited world. Delilah sees that the world does not acknowledge the heart. In the stories, 'No place for you, My Love' and 'The Burning,' place and time which are the co-ordinates of an actual world merge into a symbolic universe in which there is the enactment of the ordeal of the human heart.
In terms of imagery and theme, 'Circe' echoes, 'No Place for you, My Love' and 'The Burning.' Circe received no more respect for her life and labours than Sherman and his men respected Myra, Theo and Delilah. Her life is characterized by routine and devoted to the preservation of the domestic arts. In her portrayal Welty gives only secondary importance to the fact that she is a figure from mythology. She falls in love with Odysseus, conceives his child, but still remains in silence and frustration as he and his men sail off whenever they please. Circe knows that she must stay to preserve the harbour for other way-farers. This story repeats the motif of the halted pilgrimage.

'Ladies in Spring' is a story about a Mississippi spring and a young boy's initiation into it. Miss Hattie Purcell, Mistress of the post-office at Royal's, Mississippi and rain-maker for that community, is an important member of the community. The narration focuses upon the consciousness of the boy Dewey, as he goes fishing with his father (nick-named Blackie). Dewey's father, shouldering two fishing poles, passes his son's school room. While the father and the boy
are on their journey, the father would not catch up
with the rain-maker post-mistress, Hattie Purcell, who
walks ahead of them on the road. After they reach a
secluded fishing spot, a mysterious second lady calling
from the trees flits into Dewey's vision like an apparition. She calls Blackie plaintively but he will not answer.
Then she disappears:

Dewey could easily think she had gone off to
die. Or if she hadn't, she would have had to
die there. It was such a complaint she sent
over, it was so sorrowful. And about what but
death would ladies, anywhere, ever speak with
such soft voices - then turn and run? Before
she'd gone, the lady's face had been white and
still as magic behind the trembling willow boughs
that were the only bright-touched thing.  

The lady calls a second time and Blackie refuses to acknowledge the call. The third-time the lady appears but "she
didn't even have one word to say, this time" (p.89). Dewey's
father knows from this that "the one that lady waited for
was never coming over the bridge to her side, any more than
she would come to his" (pp.89-90). The point of view here,

10 Eudora Welty, 'Ladies in Spring,' The Bride of the
including both Dewey and his father, communicates a sense of what might happen and also of what will not happen. Such a point of view, renews the reader's interest in the world of action by revealing to us, as Mark Schorer points out, the many facets and mysteries associated with action. The division between the father and the lady does not impress Dewey consciously. He is not ready to receive her heart's complaint. Later it occurred to him that the lady could be Opal Purcell, Miss Hattie's niece. Opal, like Circe, represents a restless heart. A force stronger than the restlessness of heart of Opal is the world of social circumstance. 'Ladies in Spring' conveys a sense of distance which the bridge symbolizes. When Dewey and his father return home with the fish, they re-enter the world administered by the ladies. Dewey's mother and sister attend to the chores. Only the women of the Royals appear capable of getting things done. Hattie Purcell makes rain. Dewey offers the fish to his mother. But his gesture belongs to the realm of pain and concealment. The gift becomes an incitement to his mother. She blurts out her anger and frustration by saying 'You and

your Pel. Both of you get the sight of you clear away!"
She strikes with her little green switch and says "Get
in the house. Oh! If I haven't had enough out of you!"
(p.100) Dewey doesn't receive any bruises. His vision
remains intact. He hears the note of the story as follows:
"the lonesome st sound in creation, an unknown bird singing
through the very moment when he was the one that listened
to it" (p.100). Welty succeeds in 'Ladies in Spring' in
placing before us a story of longing and loneliness through
the motifs of pilgrimage, fulfilment of dream, lonely souls
in need of response. Her technique reveals the co-existence
of the world in which there is the primacy of public and
social life and the internal world where the heart plays
with dreams of "crossing," "bridging" and "riding away."
Opal's call and her reappearance in the form of the singing
of the unknown bird come from a private world of loneliness
and dreams.

'Kin' is another initiation story told by a young
woman, Dicey Hastings. She returns to her former home for
visiting her Mississippi relations. Like, 'No place, for
you, My Love', 'Kin' emphasizes place. Mingo, a town in
rural Mississippi, is the setting for this story. Place
is not merely an inert ground in this story. Dicey Hastings and her cousin Kate ride out into the country to visit their ailing uncle Felix at Mingo, the family homestead. They arrive at Mingo to find the home filled with visitors. An old maid-relative, Sister Anne presides over the home. The immediate thought of the two women as they notice things at the family home is that uncle Felix is dead. But soon they learn that sister Anne has loaned out the parlour of Mingo to an itinerant photographer. Uncle Felix has been removed to a back room. Dicey, when she enters the house, glances about:

... I looked and saw the corner clock was wrong. I was deeply aware that all clocks worked in this house, as if they had been keeping time just for me all this while, and I remembered that the bell in the yard was rung everyday at straight-up noon, to bring them in out of the fields at picking time. And I had once supposed they rang it at midnight too. Around us, voices sounded as always did every where, in a house of death, soft and inconsequential, and tidily assertive.  

Uncle Felix clamps Dicey's arm, gropes for a pencil, writes some words on the page of a hymnal and then tears it out. While he is doing so, Dicey sees lying on a barrel nearby an old stereopticon.

It belonged to Sunday and to summertime ... My held hand pained me through the wish to use it and lift that old, beloved, once mysterious contraption to my eyes, and dissolve my sight, all our sights, in that. In that delaying, binding pain, I remembered Uncle Felix. That is, I remembered the real Uncle Felix, and could hear his voice, respectful again, asking the blessing at the table (pp140-41).

The sight of the stereopticon recalls to Dicey the image of her childhood, of family dinners at Mingo on Sundays with her dead parents. The three-dimensional image of the stereopticon used to transport the child Dicey to fabulous faraway lands. Now the vision of the device serves to take the adult Dicey back into the past. For the moment, Mingo ceases to be an old museum of a homestead. Dicey, swiftly and momentarily reaches back to the days when she was a child. People, things and places still persist in the memory and assure her of a self which she seems to possess.
The girls bid goodbye to uncle Felix and watch the photographer preparing to take Sister Anne's picture in the parlour against an artificial backdrop. Dicey and Kate now dwell on what Uncle Felix had written on the paper: "River—Dicey—Midnight—Please" (p.148) Dicey's reverie over this so near but so far away world of her childhood is broken by Kate who cannot understand Uncle Felix's note. While Kate, the literal minded, is just leaving an old farmhouse, Dicey knows that much more is taking place. She is leaving a moment of childhood and of herself which she cannot recapture. Mingo, which was the sound, the smell and the feel of the long ago Sunday of childhood is gone for ever. The knowledge of time, of loss, of a childhood remembered and gone assails Dicey's consciousness.

But the grouping on the porch still held, that last we looked back, posed there along the rail, quiet and obscure and never-known as passengers on a ship already embarked to sea. Their country faces were drawing in even more alike in the dusk, I thought. Their faces were like dark boxes of secrets and desires to me, but locked safely, like old-fashioned caskets for the safe conduct of jewels on a voyage (p.154).
While Dicey and Kate drive away in silence, they
go back into the present world again, into now:

All around, something went on and on.
It was hard without thinking to tell
whether it was a throbbing, a dance,
a rattle, or a ringing - all louder as we
neared the bridge. It was everything in the
grass and trees. Presently Mingo church,
where Uncle Felix had been turned down on
"knick-knack," revolved slowly by, with its
faint churchyard. Then all was April night.
I thought of my sweetheart, riding, and wondered
if he were writing to me (p.155).

For the first time in this long narrative, Dicey thinks
of her present concerns, of the man to whom she is engaged
in the North. Beneath the humour of Sister Anne's rendezvous
with the photographer and beneath a delightful description
of place and a certain delineation of personality, in 'Kin'
Miss Welty explores the nature of memory and the meaning
of time past and time present. In a sense each of the
stories of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* is about time, a
moment, an afternoon, a day. The search for the meaning
of the moment of time provides the structure of the story.
The title story of Miss Welty's collection, 'The Bride of the Innisfallen' concerns an American girl in England who leaves her husband to board a train that will travel to a seaport from where she will journey by boat to Cork. The story records the delightfully inane conversations of the American girl's fellow-travellers. Throughout the conversation, the American girl is inactive and impersonal and merely a listener. Finally, in Cork, she hears the speech of the Irish, and sees the trees and sights. That is everything: "... it was the window itself that could tell her all she had come here to know-- or all she could bear this evening to know, and that was light and rain, light and rain, dark, light, and rain."13

'The Bride of the Innisfallen' is the most complex of the stories in the collection. In its own way it offers a summary of the themes of the remaining stories in this collection. The accent on the story is on the American girl's attempt to embrace the world in its complex rhythm of love and loss. Each moment can be seen to have its own

fulness and at the same time it is the beginning of the next moment's incompleteness. In love and faith the woman consents to be the world's partner, its bride in failed existence. From the outset, a personal and a cultural challenge confront the American wife. Her fellow passengers are a set of reminders of the gravity of her move. The American wife is surrounded by persons, alone or in pairs, emphasizing the bond she has just begun to dissolve by leaving. The man from Connemera tells stories about ghosts, Lord and Lady Beagle "Married Still!" (p.64). His own birds live only in pairs. Through the repeated use of the motif of the married pair, what is traced in the story is the soul's pilgrimage along the edge of the abyss.

The train stopped again, started, stopped, started. Here on the outer edge of Wales it advanced and hesitated as rhythmically and interminably as a needle in a hem. The wheels had taken on that defenseless sound peculiar to running near the open sea. Oil lamps burned in their little boxes at the halts, there was a pull at the heart from the feeling of the trees all being bent the same way (p.73).

As Michael Kreyling says "the rhythm in the stopping
and starting reinforces the rhythm of the story. The "bride" is caught in a crucial and ambivalent progress towards a moment of decision. The American wife placed in the midst of universal married pairs finds her course of pilgrimage to be rough. The world seems to be forcing her to accept the role she has left. A Welshman, a fellow passenger, reads aloud the information in her passport. The man from Connemara is the voice of yet another warning: "Once the man from Connemara sat up out of his sleep and stared at the American girl pinned to her chair across the room, as if he saw somebody desperate who had left her husband once, endangered herself among strangers, been turned back, and was here for the second go-round, asking for a place to stay in Cork" (p.77). In neither instance, however, is the American girl's identity "pinned" upon her. She keeps it a secret. The secret is something that the information upon her passport cannot define. The growing world of her relationships with others, and the world itself, can gradually define her. Her leaving London is the first move to allow access to that world.

After the tedious crossing of the Irish sea and on her arrival at Cork, the woman plunges unafraid and with growing joy into the possibilities of the world. The woman persists beyond a simple escape. She pilgrimages toward the renewal of her heart. The secret life which she brings, cupped like a weak flame, is the most important feature of the ending. The confirmation of the self is the reward of her pilgrimage. Her husband's words, "You hope for too much" (p.82), emphasize how hope is a virtue to be looked for. The American girl, with suggestions of the Easter and new life all about her, tries to compose a message to send to her abandoned husband. But she decides to let the past go. Nothing else matters for her but the moment. The image of the Bride has done its work. This is her Easter, her new land. She is by herself among strangers in a strange land. In the anonymity of her status she finds herself closer to her real self. Upon the precious moment of now nothing else must be allowed to impinge. "The girl let her message go into the stream of the street, and opening the door, walked into the lovely room full of strangers "(p.83). Each of the women of The Bride of the Innisfallen strives towards the stillness and serenity which redeems the heart.
from its hopeless isolation in the corruptible world. 

The Bride of the Innisfallen is a collection of stories in which, by a slow accumulation of nuance, suggestion and image, the stories are all knit together into a pattern of "rhythm and stillness." It is this perhaps which makes a critic like Louis Rubin say that Eudora Welty is "steadily extending her range."15 Ruth Vande Kieft has made a very pertinent observation that apart from range and variety apparent in these stories in The Bride of the Innisfallen, there is a consistency of vision focusing on themes such as love and separateness, the sense of human mystery, the "comprehension of human experience through rare moments of genuine communication with another, or through private, unshared insight."16
