CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Eudora Welty is a southern writer of the new fiction between whom and Carson McCullers similarities are often drawn. Like Carson McCullers she is on familiar terms with gothic abnormality but she is not deeply possessed by it. She uses her characters — her deaf mutes or mad, decadent aristocrats — out of the same preoccupation with the themes of isolation, love and separateness, and communication. Like Carson McCullers, she probes the problem of identity or of separateness which leads to isolation. There is a recognition which Miss Welty forces upon her characters relating to the demands of love which can be fulfilled only through communication. Like Carson McCullers again, Miss Welty shares in the southern tradition of the neo-conservatives. But an uncomfortable view of femininity prevails in McCuller's work. She writes about adolescents and cripples in a disturbed response to the strictures of Southern ladyhood. Her androgynously-named, sexually-undefined and unhappy young girls like Mick Kelly in The Heart of a Lonely Hunter and Frankie Adams in The Member of the Wedding make a pathetic attempt to capture some identity. Trapped between the poles of conformity and freakdom, McCullers is a poet of the female revolution that
always fails. Eudora Welty does not show the diseased femininity that obtains in McCullers and Flannery O'Connor. Her fiction shows the often-successful struggle of women defining themselves on their own terms rather than in terms of the futile revolution of women trying to be like men. Further, in Miss Welty's fiction there are fewer grotesque types of persons and fewer images of human perversion or brutality than in the work of Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor. Her presentation of loneliness, unlike that of Carson McCullers, is counterbalanced by her view of the beneficent effects of human separateness. The alliance of the comic and the grotesque in Eudora Welty's fiction and her rapid shifts of tone and feeling redeem her preoccupations from being gothic in character.

Despite Welty's demonstrable affinities with the south and with southern writers which a number of critics including Louise Westling have seen, being a southern is at once the most important and the least important thing about Eudora Welty. She possesses the southern writer's sense of the past or feeling for the metaphysical, but her writing is never parochial. Her one story about the Civil War, 'The Burning,'
forces the same truth almost about any war. That is, Eudora Welty is historically minded without being antiquarian. The centre of her work is an absorption with the mystery of personality.

In the exercise of her fiction, Welty lives in close proximity to the past. This is what one would no doubt expect of a southern regionalist. Her effort is to re-possess the past in order to make it meaningful for the contemporary experiences of her characters. Thus her treatment of the past, of the Natches Trace country, is not confined to history in any ordinary sense. Myth and legend add colour to her treatment of the past. Her use of the myth is another dimension of her preoccupation with the past. She uses it out of a conviction that its patterns are deeply ingrained in human consciousness and thus have a perennial relevance. The Zeus-Danaë-Leda myth, the Perseus-Medusa myth have all been identified in The Golden Apples. In her use of myth, Welty does not take over whole any single myth. She essentially works by indirection, and thus in place of completed analogues one finds hints. 'Keela, the Outcaste Indian Maiden' (A Curtain of Green) is a story which derives its tone and meaning from the memory it evokes of the Ancient Mariner. Old phoenix, the
ancient Negro woman in 'A Worn Path' (A Curtain of Green) rises periodically like the mythical bird of old. She makes her pilgrimage of love, displaying a sense of endurance, devotion and self-sacrifice, to get the medicine that keeps her grandson alive. The eternal truths the old woman has absorbed -- the need for endurance and the sacred force of the life-drive-- are the qualities symbolized by the ancient phoenix. By juxtaposing the two phoenixes in the reader's imagination, Eudora Welty employs a technique of simultaneity which reinforces the suggestion of a thematic preoccupation seen in a universalized, timeless context. The idea or the spirit of myth lends authority and timelessness to some of Welty's stories. The Golden Apples are individual stories whose unifying factors are not so much character, plot and theme as the use of the mythological allusions which Welty herself considers only "peripheral." With a plot based on the idea of fascination, the mirror image and its implications, and separateness constituting the three elements of the myth of Perseus, The Golden Apples reveals the immutable patterns of life in Morgana repeated again and again. King and Virgie, among all the characters in this collection, most pointedly typify man's lot. At the
end of the story, Virgie, who has always hated Miss Eckhart turns her hatred into love. She remembers a picture Miss Eckhart had of Perseus holding the head of Medusa. This memory leads her to see the need for absorbing the past into one's experience. This meaning absorbed, Virgie is ready to meet the challenge of life which she had faced as a young girl when she ran away from Morgana. The technique that Welty employs is to take characters common to several mythological systems and translate them into the present-day Mississippians. There is thus a fusion of myth, fantasy and everyday Mississippi. The result is that Welty has absorbed myth more fully into her own meaning. The sense of the concrete interacts fruitfully with the sense of the representative.

Eudora Welty's use of myth and fantasy in her fiction has always fascinated her readers. But an interesting feature of her use of these two tools of technique is that they lead to a depiction of the real world. The novel or the short story for Welty is bound up in the local, the real, the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience. It is significant, however, that she does not espouse allegiance to the photographic depiction of surfaces
or appearances. Place, for Welty, is associated with feeling and her rendering of place shows a blend of the objective and the subjective, the precise and the atmospheric. A story like 'A Still Moment' in which the naturalist Audubon, the brigand James Murrell, and the evangelist Lorenzo Dow converge on a remote part of the Natches Trace shows Welty's historical consciousness which partakes of personal visions and Southern-rooted universal myths. Fiction, according to Welty, penetrates chronological time to reach our deeper version of time that is given to us by the way we think and feel. Miss Welty is concerned with time and place because they reveal character. She is engaged in an exploration of the mystery of personality in a territory showing the tenuous difference between dream and reality, irrational and rational, fantasy and fact.

In a story like 'Powerhouse,' the fantasy image which Welty evokes raises a heated argument about whether Powerhouse's wife Gypsy positively is or positively is not dead. The reader is not supposed to trust the mysterious assertions and denials of Powerhouse, a tremendous human dynamo whose mode of being itself is fantasy. The facts of the case simply cease to exist. The narrator of the story, assuming
the point of view of white people towards the Negro Jazz musician, gives the impression of abandoning herself to the fantasy observed and created. In 'Old Mr. Marblehall,' through subtle manoeuvres in point of view, Welty shows the public attitude of Natchez, the "little party-giving town" to Mr. Marblehall suffering from a sense of boredom and insignificance. The attitude of indifference on the part of the town and Mr. Marblehall's rebellious reaction to this attitude of unconcern are the theme of the story which builds up a series of fantasy images of Mr. Marblehall making an effort to overcome his isolation. In fact, one of the salient features of the use of fantasy in Eudora Welty's short stories is that her accounts, which are essentially regional, are redeemed from provinciality by her talent for fantasy and the grotesque. Fantasy is further a mode by which Welty creates the interior of a mind or a landscape in order to investigate the truth of the human heart. Welty's distinction lies in her method by means of which she effects a reconciliation between the inner and outer worlds in a particular way. For Welty fantasy implies much of the factual and she employs it in
order to reveal the heightened consciousness of man. For all her strange and dream-like settings, Welty never strays from the Natchez Trace which is in itself evidence of the sense of reality she conveys.

The Bride of the Innisfallen, which is an example of Eudora Welty's effort to steadily extend her range, asserts the importance of the human heart in analysing the mystery and the truth surrounding human life. Thematically some of the short stories in this collection have a close kinship with the themes of Elizabeth Bowen as presented in novels such as The Death of the Heart. The significance of place in these short stories is that it operates at a more metaphysical level. Knit together into a pattern of "rhythm in stillness," these stories, depicting the striving for stillness and serenity which redeem the heart from its hopeless isolation in the corruptible world, focus on the comprehension of human experience through rare moments of genuine communication with another, or through private insight. A "descriptive impressionism" is seen in these stories which create a vivid sense of place, mood and atmosphere.

In her projection of the inner life, in conveying subtle nuances of thought, feeling, and an inward atmosphere,
and in the use of point of view, Eudora Welty may be said to owe a debt to Henry James, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. She works by means of a deep penetration of the minds and feelings of her characters. Nina in 'Moon Lake' reflects upon changing for a moment into - or slipping into - a Gertrude or a Mrs. Gruenwald. "To have been an orphan" is one of her thoughts. Welty does not employ the stream of consciousness style as such, but in 'The Winds' she approaches it in conveying the content of Josie's dreams during the storm. She achieves a blend of interior monologue and dialogue, objective and subjective description, and fact and fantasy. Even such primitive characters as Lívvie and Albert are found interesting character sketches. Ruby Fisher, Lívvie, Old Mr. Marblehall, Phoenix, Clytie are all "vessels of consciousness" in their own limited way. The world of Eudora Welty's fiction shows how the deaf and the dumb, the old Negro hero, the travelling salesman are all "vessels of consciousness" because of their common humanity. Springing from a lyrical impulse, her stories reveal the display of a visual imagination and a penchant for seeing things in their connectedness. It is these characteristics of Eudora Welty's writing which mark
her out as one of the most prominent American short-story writers.

In her presentation of the interior landscape of the mind, Welty creates moods as powerful as those developed by good poetry. Each story appears so distinctive that what is often ignored in her work is the formation of a larger social vision emphasized by the "closely interconnected stories" that possess the amplitude of the cultural history of the South but nevertheless depicting universal human experience and emotions. While Faulkner portrayed the large outer world of historical action, Welty would poetically evoke the inner world of psychological nuance. Though historical personages occasionally figure in Eudora Welty's short stories and though a view of the cultural history of the South emerges from her writing, history more suitably performs in her writing the function of providing atmospheric verisimilitude. Thus we find Eudora Welty assuming what Henry James termed "the tone of the historian."