Eudora Welty's prose style is marked by a typical Southern oratory. Her characters delight in reliving their experience in talk. Edna Earle in *The Ponder Heart*, Kate Rainey in *The Golden Apples*, Sister in "Why I live at the P.Q.,” the three women in "Asphodel", Steve in "Keela", and the jumble of Renfro-Beecham voices in *Losing Battles*, speak of the author's love for dialogue. Miss Welty has explained her preoccupation with this form of narrative:

Southerners...love a good tale. They are born reciters, great memory retainers, diary keepers, letter exchangers and letter savers, history tracers and debaters, and out staying all the rest—great talkers. Southern talk is on the narrative side employing the verbatim conversation. For this plenty of time is needed and is granted. It was still true not so very far back that children grew up listening—listening galvanized. They were naturally prone to be entertained from the first by life as they heard tell of it, and to feel free, encouraged, and then in no time compelled, to pass their pleasure on.1

Not only does a Southerner love to tell a tale, he also rejoices in a spirited response. "I think the Southerner is a talker by nature, but not only a talker— we are used
to an audience. We are used to a listener, I think. I think you could talk to the Rocky Mountains. You wouldn't get anything back but an echo.²

A relaxed mind and plenty of time. This the South has in abundance.³ The South has preserved its cultural temperament despite the continuous onslaughts by the outer world. Growing industrialism and the resulting disintegration of the family structure have created a tremendous urgency about keeping the Southern tradition intact. According to Huffman, the Southern tradition is more oriented toward "history", the "family", "story telling" and "tragedy".⁴ The tradition serves as a great binding force in the South, which keeps it united and strong. The impersonality of the big city has still not touched the interiors of the South, with the result the community in small towns and rural areas is still closely-knit. Miss Welty says:

You know several generations because they all live together. You know what happened to so and so clear through his life. You get a narrative sense of your next door neighbour, instead of someone you just met in the super-market, which you do today, or you just see people in flashes. You get a sense of what happened to them and probably why, because look what happened to her grandmother...⁵

In other words, "there is no lonely crowd in Miss Welty's South, for everybody is quite at home with everybody else."⁶
Her simple Southerners make any excuse to get together and turn even a funeral into a festival. Small-town festivities, such as public-concerts, recitals, court-trials, weddings, funerals are a major part of her scene.

Miss Welty sees her world largely through the feminine eye. It is always the matriarch around whom her society revolves. We see women constantly prattling and narrating tales to any listener they can manage to have. They create a world of their own by interpreting details from their own points of view and adding novel sensations to the story with their pungent verbalizations. With every re-telling some changes are wrought, so that the original incident takes on a mythical dimension. Another aspect of this narrative form is that sometimes it reveals to the reader more about its generator than about the object. For example, from the vindications of the post-mistress of the "P.O." against her family members, one gets an insight into her own neurotic character.

An unforgettable narrator in Miss Welty's fiction is Edna Earle in The Ponder Heart. She is the high-priestess of the Ponders of Clay. She runs a small hotel called Beaulah, and as the scene begins, we find her forcing a travelling salesman to listen to her story. It is not only the story of
Uncle Daniel but one of the entire community — complete its the market-place, its court-rooms, its high-brows and its low-brows — that she tells. In other words, she brings the whole town of Clay to life in her throw-away lines and her endless prattling.

Edna Earle is unmarried. She holds a respectable place in the community. She is independent, somewhat stiff, opinionated, appreciated for her authority and loved for her peculiarities. Even the Judge suspends the court proceedings to let Miss Edna's maid count the heads of those who wish to dine at the Beaulah. She considers herself responsible for Uncle Daniel's well-being, and she looks after him with a fierce possessiveness.

Uncle Daniel is imbedded in the mind of this bustling, boydenish bossy niece — a girl of fierce practical capacity, snooty manners, and possessive temperament, who will scornfully defend the old idiot partly because she passionately loves him, partly to keep her head up among the neighbors. She is the soul of small-town pugnacity and self conceit and has an endless tongue.

Being a woman of the world Edna Earle realizes the limitations of Uncle Daniel who is driven by some inner compulsion to give away everything. She understands the consequences of such a compulsion, and does all in her power to protect him from becoming a butt of the community. She justifies him in the eyes of the world, even if she
has to do that by telling a lie. Her witness in the courtroom is remarkable for its headlong garrulity and also for its preposterous silences and changes of the subject at the moments of crises.

The way Edna Earle makes Uncle Daniel a tragi-comical character is also remarkable. We love the idiot for his tomfoolery, his ridiculousness and his touching need to give. At the end of narrative Uncle Daniel, the Crosus, becomes a pauper. He retires upstairs behind the closed curtains of Beaulah, peeping eagerly for any stray visitor to come.

Critics feel that the character of Edna Earle emerges more powerfully than that of the central character, Uncle Daniel, and that it is her apparent normalcy that sets off his idiocy perfectly. Miss Welty remarked in one of her interviews, however, that the effect of Edna Earle becoming more powerful than Uncle Daniel occurred only in the dramatized version of the novel.

The book existed as a monologue by one of the characters, Edna Earle Ponder. We see everything through her, what we are interested in is how she looks at things. Well, on the stage she was made a character at whom we are looking from the outside, and made subordinate to Uncle Daniel, the one who is the subject of the story.

Edna Earle's narrative is Miss Welty's triumph in the use of monologue as a technique. Another example of the same technique is seen in "Why I live at the P.O." The Post-mistress
of China Grove is an unhappy soul, but she covers up her isolation and intense bitterness under an exposition of rage, revenge and pettiness. Her Monologue is marked by language and gestures that leave the reader with little inclination to support her quarrel. The story consists of one long list of grievances suffered at the hands of her family, brought forth in a tone and idiom which attest to neither intelligence nor refinement on the part of the speaker. However, the incessant flow of Southern idiom from Sister's lips is expressive of the condition of the narrator's mind which is more pitiful than humorous.

The women in The Golden Apples are great talkers, and they do not miss an opportunity to get together and go over all the news of Morgana. Lizzie Morgan is the spider in the midst of the social cobweb of Morgana. She presides over the entire community — deciding on the distribution of public offices, on professions to be taken up, bullying the Negroes, and taking charge of childbirth to funerals. Miss Perdita Mayo, is a seamstress whose profession enables her to get any amount of information right from the horse's mouth and pass it on to others. Kate Rainey, the happy tattler, is the vendor of dairy products. She too keeps track of all that is happening in the town. Mrs. Rainey holds an important position in the story. The opening piece of The Golden Apples entitled "Shower of Gold" is one solid monologue flowing from her ever moving lips as she churns her butter. After a scant introduction of herself, the narrator acquaints her audience,
in a tone of jovial intimacy, with the MacLain Saga. She ambles along at a comfortable pace and her melodious speech habits, typical of the South, carry us through various digressions to the account of King and Snowdie MacLain's lives. The last part of the book "The Wanderers" shows the town of Morgana assembled at Kate Rainey's death. This lends a further roundness to the otherwise separately written stories.

The theme of corrupted self-love at the core of the story "Petrified Man" is primarily developed through the soil-flavored dialogue between Leota, the beautician, and Mrs. Fleteher, her customer, which ironically leads the two women to damn themselves unavoidably. Their dialogue reflects their vanity, deceit, betrayal, envy, jealousy, and their obsession with material things. Not a single line is uttered by either which would redeem their relentless exercise of self-love. The setting of "Petrified Man" is typical of a small-town hair-dressing salon, which is frequented by idle middle-class women. This makes an ideal place for gossip. Like the fashionable ladies from a Restoration comedy, these women spend hours in assassinating characters, mocking their spouses, and ridiculing pregnancy as an evil because it deforms their figures.

In "Asphodel", according to Audrey Hodgins, the three women who narrate Miss Sabina's tale remind us of the Greek Chorus. Miss Welty employs this technique for the first time.
The story opens with Cora, Irene and Phoebe having a picnic at the ruins of Asphodel, once a Southern mansion. Their conversation wanders in the past and centers on Sabina—the wretched old mistress of the house who used her wealth to control the very life of the town. During the course of the story they reminisce over her marriage to Don McInnis, their children and their final separation ending in Sabina's death. The incompatibility between Sabina and Don is not only of temperament but also of values. The contrast between them and their symbolic significance is innocently clarified by the three narrators. The reader is made aware of the character antithesis between husband and wife through the description of their respective houses. Sabina's "...house was a square of marble and stone, the front as dark as pitch..." Mr. Don's house has columns "without a shadow" which support "a frieze of maidens that was saturated with sunlight and seemed to fill with colour."

The second illustration of contrast is the wedding. Sabina wears a stiff gown, carrying hyacinths (symbols of grief) and lilies (flowers of the dead), while Don McInnis roars like a lion, tramples the scattered flowers, and is "led up the aisle". "We were there. The presents were vases of gold, gold cups, statues of Diana... and the bridge.... We had not forgotten it yesterday when we drew it from the chest—the stiff white gown she wore."10

The women narrate the details about Sabina's chasing Don McInnis out of the house, her burning the Asphodel and the death of all their children:
"She bore three children, two boys and a girl, and one by one they died as they reached maturity," says Phoebe in a delicate gentle way. "...who can tell what will happen in the world?"¹²

They further go on to explain about Don's unfaithfulness:
"We told the news," said Cora, "We sent in a body up the hill and into the house, weeping and wailing, hardly daring to name the name or the dead."¹³ Like a Greek Chorus. The three old maids are caught in a labyrinth of events which they do not comprehend. They are swayed as if destined to be a part of a larger force. On hearing the story of her husband's betrayal, Sabina becomes a Medea, the betrayed queen:

She didn't move — she didn't blink an eye. We stood there in our little half-circle, not daring to come closer, then she reached out both her arms, as though she would embrace us all, and made fists with her hands, with the sharp rings cutting into her, and called down the curse of heaven on everybody's head — his, and the woman's, and the dead children's and ours. Then she walked out and the door of her bedroom closed."¹⁴

Sabina's name also has a historical referent. Hodgin points out, "The Sabines were a people absorbed by the barbaric Romans, their daughters taken by force."¹⁵ Sabina's father wished her to yield to the barbaric McInnis which she did not. Finally, she succumbs to the Life-Force by devastating the post-office, including herself. This is the irony. She succumbs when everything is lost.
The gregariousness discussed above which manifests itself in the form of talkativeness may sound contradictory in the light of isolation, the subject of this study. This may be explained in terms of the socio-economic and cultural climate of the place. Moreover, it does not minimize the individual suffering and loneliness because despite the apparent garb of communication with the world, what each person carries under his waist-coat is solely his own business. The extra penchant for verbalization may only be but a defense mechanism.

Myths are chosen as literary symbols for two purposes: to suggest within a secular setting, situation; and to convey a sense of continuity and identification with mankind in general. ... Mythical figures suggest the cyclic reappearance of the same or similar human possibilities and they represent a generic form of human identity.16

Myth can lend not only an aesthetic order to the existence with which a work is concerned but also a structural order to the work itself. In this connection William Tindall points out, "In literature, while uniting the conscious mind with the primitive or the unconscious, Myth may express the inner by the outer, the present by the past."17
Miss Welty has made use of Myth and folklore consistently in her work. Taking the universally acknowledged characters from Greek, Germanic, Celtic and Sanskrit legends she has given them a Southern mould. In fact, so truly Southern her characters become that many critics damn her for her provincial approach to life. In this connection Miss Welty says that Myth "has to be spontaneous, and to belong to the material; to be organic, before it gets to be a symbol or a myth."\textsuperscript{18}

Discussed below are a few stories of Miss Welty in which Myth figures prominently and becomes an organic part of the structure.

Miss Welty's broadest use of myth is found in \textit{The Golden Apples}. Though the seven stories that comprise the book were published separately, their inter-relationship allows them to be read as chapters in a loosely-constructed novel. The action takes place in Morgana, Mississippi, mostly, and its citizens make their appearances frequently to be observed from different points of view. In the backdrop of the entire Morgana community, the book concentrates on its main families. Structurally, the most important are King and Snowdie MaClain and their twin sons Randall and Eugene. At least one member of the family appears in each story. King makes four appearances and even where he is not physically present, he remains an object of speculation
by the community. Into the above design are woven the patterns of Greek myth.

Three Myths appear conspicuously in The Golden Apples: the judgement of Paris, Atlanta's race with Hippomenes and Heracle's eleventh labour. In the Myths the symbolic meaning of the apples is not constant, though in each instance they become highly valued objects of attainment. Eris' apple of discord inscribed "for the fairest", caused in the Paris Myth the dispute between Hera, Athene and Aphrodite which led finally to the Trojan war. In Atlanta's Myth the consequences were less tragic. The apples dropped by Hippomenes during their footrace diverted her from victory and pledged her to marriage. The golden apples of the Hesperides embodied Heracle's hopes for self-fulfillment and immortality. Miss Welty's book comprises all these themes: of discord, of temptation, and self-fulfillment, but the dominant theme is the search of self-fulfillment. There are many wanderers searching blindly for something that would bring meaning to their lives.

The title of the book has been drawn from Yeat's famous poem "The Song of the Wandering Aengus" which concerns with the quest of Aengus for the beautiful girl who having transformed from the silver trout, suddenly beckoned him towards her and vanished. Now, like one possessed, Aengus wanders all over the surface of the earth in search of the beautiful maiden. He is reminded of the lovely apple blossoms she wore in her
hair and longs for the time when he would

"...Pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon
The golden apples of the sun."19

In the first story titled "A Shower of Gold," Miss Welty has used the legendary exploits of Zeus, who was known to have a roving eye, and had involved himself amorously with several mortal women. One of them was Danae, whose father had, according to the Greek Myth, kept her enclosed in a tower well within the sea, so that no man could ever set eyes on her. Zeus visited Danae in the guise of golden rays of the sun and impregnated her. Similarly, when King MacLain who has been absent from Morgana for three years, meets Snowdie in the woods, the meeting results in Snowdie's pregnancy. Kate Rainey describes her appearance in the following words: "It was like a shower of something had struck her, like she'd been caught out in something bright."20

However, the result of Snowdie's pregnancy is not a single son, like Perseus, but the twins Han and Eugene. Han's later exploits connect him with Heracles, and Eugene in "Music at Night" assumes the role of Odysseus who was in no way related to Zeus or Heracles.

In "Moon Lake" Ran arrives at the girl's camp in the guise of a hunter, perhaps tracking the Nemean lion, or another wild creature. When Ran reappears in "The Whole World Knows", he is separated from his wife, Jinny Love, who has been unfaithful. His seduction of the country girl
Maideen, a later suicide, resembles Heracle's dispatch of Orthrus in the tenth labour, or more loosely, his capture of Cerberus in the twelfth. Just as Hera drove Heracles to that state of madness where he killed his wife Megara and their children, Ran, distracted by Jinny's infidelity, acts out her imaginary murder and also that of his rival, Woodrow Spights. By the time of "The Wanderers", about fifteen years later, he seems to have seized the golden apples. As Heracles was finally deified, Ran is elected the Mayor of Morgana. He is also re-united with his wife. Here the similarity ends. Ran's trial falls short of the twelve labours and the numerous other achievements credited to Heracles.

The most sustained evocation of a Greek hero is the wanderings of Ran's brother, Eugene. His journey, like that of Odysseus, takes place in a vague and shadowy region west of the homeland - San Francisco. His marriage to his former landlady has been uneventful except for the death of their younger daughter. On this morning in "Music from Spain", Eugene slaps his wife at the breakfast table for no apparent reason. After that he leaves home to wander in the streets of the city. His first encounter is with a butcher who with a flourishing knife motions him on. There is a faint resemblance with Odysseus' raid on the Cicones in which his men slaughtered cattle and were later driven away by the natives with sharp weapons. Having decided
not to go to work, Eugene then makes a descent to the market street resembling Hades. As he moves among cast-offs from society, his thoughts run to his former life in Morgana, his dead daughter Fan, and his wife in the dead past when she was a desirable woman.

The rest of his Odyssean adventures include a visit to a restaurant accompanied by a Spanish guitarist, who later in the day raises him overhead in anger as they are walking on top of the cliffs overlooking the Pacific. But all ends well with Eugene returning to the faithful Emma (Penelope) who has been waiting in the apartment on Jones street (Ithaca).

It is obvious that Miss Welty has consciously and deliberately made use of the classical mythology in this book. In her interview with the press at Ole Miss, Oxford, Mississippi, she said:

One of my stories has a conscious use of Myth, The Golden Apples. But I try not to let it be, to ride it down. I didn't use them matching one for one, this equals to this, which would be something very boring. But I just made use of them when I could. I think, they (Myths) would lose all their power if it were forced into a story.

It leads to the conclusion that the characters in Miss Welty's stories are not committed to re-enacting their Myths in their totality. This makes them entirely human. The untouched years that separate the stories from each other in The Golden Apples, indicate the void into which people's
lives slip away from them. For example, at the end of "Music from Spain" Eugene is contentedly tilted back in his chair as he watches his wife pop grapes into her mouth. Virgie (Aphrodite) in "The Wanderers" drives to MacLain, Mississippi, to watch the rain fall. She is thinking about King MacLain, who stuck out a tongue at her and Eugene who lies buried in a cemetery beyond the town. Loch, (Perseus) who has an encounter with the Medusa-like Metronome, fails to carry the parallel any further. King MacLain, on the other hand, who stands firmly upon his Myth in bright sunlight, has no effect of light and shade at all. Since he is presented as a fully realized fact beyond analysis, there is no occasion for him to develop beyond his Myth.

The Golden Apples is a strong book. But Myth as symbol is not its source of strength. Its strength lies in Miss Welty's clear comprehension of Myths and her ability to present them in terms of modern times.

William Jones has pointed out that the Mythic method so evident in much of Eudora Welty's fiction is present even in her first published story, "The Death of a travelling salesman". Basing his argument on the Jungian concept of individualism, Jones sees the story's protagonist E.J. Bowman, a travelling shoe salesman, as a sort of modern anti-Hercules, who rejects the example of strength offered him by his mythic counterpart. Running parallel to this is another Myth of Prometheus of Hesoid. These Myths serve to elevate the common-place characters and
incidents to a higher dramatic level by infusing them with timelessness and universality.  

Bowman whose car has fallen into a ravine and is caught by the thick grapevines in a desolate country, asks help from a backwoodsman, Sonny, who like a Mythic Titan, is a big enough man "full of a silence, strong with dignity and heaviness in his way of moving." Sonny is able to reverberate the earth when he walks. Bowman is cowed, inarticulate, almost insulted in Sonny's presence. Like Prometheus, Sonny comes to the aid of the desolate man, pulls his cart out of the ravine, offers him food and drink and refuses to accept any payment in return. His wife even refuses to accept the matchstick he offers to light a fire, (the matchstick standing as a puny symbol of modern civilization) and prefers to send Sonny to get his own fire from the Richmonds. The woman then makes the fire so that they all become visible to each other in the golden light. Sonny offers Bowman with home-made whisky while the woman almost ceremoniously, serves golden corn-bread.

If Sonny resembles Prometheus in restoring the elemental necessities of life to a helpless man, his wife resembles one of the earth goddesses, several of whom have been described in the various Myths as the wife of Prometheus. She is a big woman, wears a "formless garment", is "dignified", her voice is "low and remote" and she "bestows her presence."
Thus, under the garb of the Promethean Myth, Miss Welty is actually bringing about the hollowness of modern civilization. Unless man can accept the primitive cultural values again, Miss Welty seems to say, he will be like Bowman — lost, helpless, delirious, at the dead-end of his road.

The story of Clytie, the water-nymph, appears in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. The Greek Clytie was enamoured by Appollo the Sun-God, but Appollo cared nothing for her. The whole night she stood gazing at the heavens waiting for her lord to appear. All day she followed him with her eyes as he moved slowly from East to West. At last the Gods took pity on her and changed her into the tall slim sun-flower which turns its face toward the sun all day as he moves across the sky. Miss Welty's Clytie's appearance is much the same:

On her head was one of the straw-hats from the furnishing store, with an old black satin ribbon pinned to it to make it a better hat, and tied under the chin. Now under the force of the rain, while the ladies watched, the hat slowly began to sag down on each side until it looked even more absurd and done for.26

It is pretty clear that not only does Miss Welty know her Ovid, she also knows a sun-flower in the rain.

There is another reference to a Greek Myth in "Clytie"—that of old Lethy, the childhood nurse who comes to see the father when she hears he is dying. At Octavia's instigation old Lethy is constantly turned away, and Mr. Farr, instead of dying lingers on. Old Lethy seems to signify the blessed oblivion of death, which
these decadent aristocrats, cursed with their own immortality, cannot accept. In the climax of the story, it is old Lathy who finds Clytie drowned in the rain-barrel.

In a "Visit of Charity" Miss Welty has woven various strands from different myths into a unique artistic whole. A lot of literature has been centered around the mortals visiting the Underworld. *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy* and a number of medieval romances deal with the same subject. But Miss Welty designs a new pattern containing not only the essentials from the three myths of Homer, Virgil and Dante but also introduces incidents from other accounts.

Marian, the little camp-fire girl, who provides a distinct resemblance to Proserpina, and during the course of her journey into the Underworld experiences the horrors of Dantean and Virgilian Hells, nevertheless, first of all, essentially herself throughout the story. Marian is introduced in the process of getting off a bus and entering the old ladies home with a potted plant, which may be suggestive of the Golden Bough. Like Proserpina, Marian has straight yellow hair which relate her to spring and vegetation, she pauses awhile before the 'prickly dark shrubs' that surround the Home, reminding of Dante's wandering in the dark woods before entering the Underworld. She is greeted at the door by a nurse who wears white clothes, has close-cropped hair and speaks in a "voice like a man". She is Charon, the old white
man with ancient hair who rows the dead into the Inferno. The voyage across the Acheron is suggested briefly in the following words. "There was loose, bulging linoleum on the floor. Marian felt as if she were walking on the waves, but the nurse paid no attention to it."27

Marian is conducted to meet two residents of the home. These women speak in a way which sounds like "bleeting". Their lying flat in bed in the darkness and dampness of the room, their antagonistic bleeting noises, all are suggestive of Dante's Inferno, and Homer's Odyssey.28 Little Marian flees in fright. "A Visit of Charity" is a study of loneliness of the older generation in the present times. They are the living dead, who are suffering the agonies of hell in the so called modern civilized charitable world. Their existence is likened to that of the inhabitants of the Underworld which enhances the effect of the theme.

There are various myths and symbols in the journey of Phoenix in "A Worn Path". William Jones sees a deeper meaning in Miss Welty's selection of the very name of the protagonist, Phoenix Jackson. Phoenix is the name of a mythological Egyptian bird, the symbol of immortality and resurrection, which dies so that a new phoenix may emerge from its ashes. Time and again the affinity between birds and Phoenix, and her grandson is suggested. The end of the first paragraph of the story tells the reader that the stick she
carries "made a grave and persistent noise in the still air, that seemed meditative like the chirping of a solitary little bird." 

Phoenix is also remindful of the Egyptian Sun-God. "As the Egyptian Sun-God is guided back to its home very five hundred years to renew itself by being consumed in fire, so the modern Phoenix sees at the end of her journey, a document that had been stumped with the gold seal and framed in the gold frame, which matched the dream that was hung up in her head," says Jones.

The parallel is obvious. The Mississippi Phoenix has returned instinctively to the source of her strength to renew her own youth. In the burning and the rising again the parallel with the Myth becomes complete.

Neil D. Isaacs and Sara Trefman both see the Christ symbol in the story of "A Worn Path." First, because it is a Christmas story, timed in December on a "bright frozen day", the hunter talks about Santa Claus, the white ladies in town are busy buying presents, the hospitals are distributing medicines in charity and secondly, because Phoenix's hallucination about a little boy offering a slice of marble cake is suggestive of communion and Church ritual. Her walking through the fields is like parting of the Red Sea. Phoenix's little grandson lying "all wrapped up in a little patch of quilt" reminds of Childchrist in the manger. Phoenix's very journey is likened to the journey of the Magi, bringing gift to the child.
Sara Trefiman suggests that with her capacity to love and her simplicity of heart, Phoenix reflects the purity and unworlildness of Christ. Like Christ, she has the ability to resurrect herself. There is a radiance that illuminates her head 'like a halo'. Her pains-taking agonizing journey to Natchez recalls the earlier journey of Christ up the hill of calvary. And as she drags herself up the hill, she murmurs painfully that it "seems like there is chains about my feet." And later as she emerges from the darkness of the forest, Natchez is shining, bells ring out and a "Christmas shopper kneels in unconscious adoration as she ties old Phoenix's shoe-laces." "The Burning" reveals striking similarities to the Tennysonian treatment of the Elaine-Lancelot Myth. In both the poem and the story, the key symbol is the magic mirror in which the heroine sees life reflected. Like the lady of the Shallot, the two white southern aristocrat sisters live in a lonely plantation mansion. In their parlour there is a typically Southern mirror set between two black men. Sitting at their embroidery they can watch in the mirror all that is going on outside the house. One day, as they are sewing, a horse appears in the gold mirror over the mantel. It brings two soliders with "red eyes and clawed mosquito racked faces — one the rider and the other walking by his side." However, Miss Welty's red-eyed soliders are not Sir Lancelot, whose shield showed a red-cross knight kneeling to a lady. They are the uncouth men of the Federal army. The unprotected sisters
are raped, while the assault is watched by the slave Delilah through the mirror. After the rape and the devastation Miss Myra is seen roaming aimlessly among the ruins of the town. She pauses to recite a nursery rhyme. Could it be the lady's swan-song? And then she lies down in a hammock, like the lady in her boat. Miss Welty has merely used the scenic similarities between the Myth and her story. Her theme is about the death of traditional values.

In *The Robber Bridegroom* Miss Welty has inter-woven a number of stories from the local folk-lore, fairy-tales and Greek-Myth, and has produced a simple story in Grandma's style. Reference here is to the Hellenic Myth of Cupid and Psyche which has been employed to depict the Rosamond-Jamie relationship on the surface and the doubleness of human nature at the philosophical level.

Rosamond having married Jamie, the robber, does not know his real identity because he always covers his face with blackberry juice. Her step-mother, Solome, gives her a recipe to remove the stain and know the true identity of her husband. The simple girl cannot see the scheme behind this malicious advice. That night when Rosamond applies the formula secretly on Jamie's face, while he sleeps unawares, and gets to know who he is, he cannot stand this: "For you did not trust me, and did not love me, for you wanted only to know who I am. Now I cannot stay in the house with you," he says. Like Cupid, Jamie disappears through the window and like Psyche, who was abandoned by her lover after she had made the mistake of looking on his beauty, Rosamond wanders the earth in his
Eventually, like Psyche, she finds and marries the young god, but only after overcoming many obstacles.

The Robber Bridegroom is different from all other works of Miss Welty. In this the author assumes the pose of a "canny maiden aunt" who is normally a gifted story-teller and who by her excellent diction, asides and puns keeps little children under her spell. In writing The Robber Bridegroom Miss Welty has made use of a lifetime of fairy tale reading. She says: "Everything in it is something I've liked as long as I can remember and have just now put down."  

Miss Welty has borrowed freely from various sources while designing the story of The Robber Bridegroom: She borrows from Grimms The Robber Bridegroom (after which the story takes its name) "The Goose Girl", "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Cinderella", "Rumpelstiltskin" and "The Fisherman and his Wife". She borrows from Raspe (The Baron Manchausen Stories); from Apuleius' "The Cupid and Psyche" Myth; and from Mississippi folklore and legend. All this she blends with the history of the Natchez Trace, particularly with the careers of the infamous Harpe Brothers and Mike Fink and she reconstructs a poetic tale which is set in Old Natchez Trace in the vicinity of Rodney, a town south of Port Gibson. The action takes place in the early part of the nineteenth century. The story is that of a golden-haired young lady, Rosamond; her father, Clement Musgrove; her step-mother, Salome; and her bandit-merchant husband Jamie Lockhart.
The story begins like a fairy tale:

"It was the close of day when a boat touched Rodney's Landing on the Mississippi river, and Clement Misgrove, an innocent planter with a bag of gold and many presents disembarked.  

Clement Misgrove, we learn, has not only been out to sell his tobacco, he is also in the lookout of a suitable husband for his beautiful daughter, Rosamond. Rosamond, though pretty as a picture, has a peculiar penchant for telling lies. Miss Welty describes her in a typical old-aunt style:

Now Rosamond was a great liar, and nobody could believe a word she said. ...She did not mean to tell anything but the truth, but when she opened her mouth in answer to a question, the lies would simply fall out like diamonds and pearls. Her father had tried scolding her and to send her to the Female Academy, and then marching her off without her supper.... Salome, on the other hand, said she could be given a dose of Dr. Peachtree.

Salome's treatment of Rosamond clearly resembles the story of "The Goose Girl". She hates Rosamond for singing romantic ballads, and when Clement is away she sends her to the woods: "Well lazy thing," said she, 'I need fresh herbs for the pot. There are some extra-large ones growing on the other side of the woods at the farthest edge of the indigo fields. Go and pick them and don't come back till your apron is full."  

Rosamond goes out wearing her mother's locket which serves as a talisman against evil. Salome employs Goat, a Rumpelstiltskin like only son of a poor widow, and brother of six "gawky" sisters, to follow her.
One day, as Rosamond is in the woods on her stepmother's errand, Jamie, his face coloured with berry-juice, comes riding on his red stallion. He sees Rosamond, is attracted, and robs her of her green silk dress. The poor girl comes home naked as a "Jay bird". The next morning when Rosamond has finished milking the cows, Jamie again comes and lays her on the ground and robs her of "what he had left the day before.".

In the meanwhile Clement has arranged for Jamie Lockhart, the gentleman, to come and have dinner at his place, so that he may also meet Rosamond. But Salome has made the girl work so hard all day in the kitchen that when Jamie arrives, looking neat and meticulous, she is "as ashy and sooty as Cinderella." Jamie remembers the beautiful girl he met in the woods and regrets that Clement's daughter was not as pretty as her.

Rosamond, in her heart, is so ravished by the black-faced bandit that she sets out with a cake, the next day, in search of him. Deep inside the forest she sees a little house, in which she finds her green silk dress. She recognizes that as her destination. She puts on her dress, tidies up the room, and makes a fire. When the bandits arrive, she appeases them by offering the cake, and starts living with their chief (Jamie) as his mistress. Soon the two are married.

Now there follows an episode from the Harpe's story. One day as Rosamond returns to the house after visiting her father, she finds there a strange bandit with a trunk. He is little Harpe. He is ordering Jamie's bandits to bring him
their chief's girl. Rosamond hides behind a barrel. The bandits bring an Indian girl to appease the stranger. He cuts off her finger which rolls behind the barrel into Rosamond's lap. The Bandit then flings the girl upon the table and throws himself upon her. But the girl is dead. Just then Jamie returns. He chases Little Harpe out of the house.

The climax of the story occurs when all the main character are captured by the Indians. At this point Goat acts as their saviour. He sets Rosamond free for her false promise of marrying him; he frees Harpe who wants to kill Jamie, but tells him that he has already killed Jamie and has collected the award by producing his head before the authorities (the head was actually that of Big Harpe). Now, Jamie and Little Harpe fight a duel in which Little Harpe is killed. Solome infuriates the Indians by insulting their Sun-God. She is ordered by them to dance before the sun till she drops dead. The Indians take pity on Clement for his good conduct and release him.

The famous Mike Fink is introduced into the story when he meets Rosamond as an anonymous mail rider. He tells Rosamond a tale about having killed Jamie and then having spoken to his ghost. He further tells her that the ghost was on its way to taking a boat out of the country. On hearing this, Rosamond rushes to New Orleans and reaches the docks just in time to prevent Jamie from leaving for Zanzibar. The couple then are married again, they beget twins and live happily ever after.
Along with this apparently amusing mixture of realism and fantasy Miss Welty has combined a more serious thought-strand. She deals with the question of identity in marriage, and with the doubleness of human nature. By mixing the rational and the irrational and seasoning it with irony and humour she tells a great deal about the modern man. So, what on the surface looks like a fairy tale is, in fact, an insight into human nature.

The tale can also be read as an allegory of man's stages of development from a hunter, to planter to trader. It marks a transition from innocence to experience, from nature to materialism. Charles Clark points out, "Miss Welty combines in The Robber Bridegroom experiences representative of those people of the Old South with fantasizing and philosophizing to present a picture not only of the frontier but of the world we live in." 5

However, Lionel Trilling finds the author too preoccupied with the simplistic fairy-tale style. Her preoccupation with simplicity, according to him, makes her prose artificial:

But what I find disappointing in the book is not its conception but its manner. ...This is in the fashion of sophisticated Celtic simplicity. ...It is sometimes witty, it is always lucid and graceful and it has the simplicity of structure that is no doubt the virtue of the modern prose. But its lucidity, its simplicity, its grace have a quality that individuates them all - they are too conscious, especially the simplicity, and nothing can be truer, more purple and literary than conscious simplicity. 6

Lionel Trilling's latter observation does not seem convincing. The simplicity of the story is its most attractive feature.
It is amazing that the same author who wrote *The Robber Bridegroom* could write *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter*. It is indeed another feather in Miss Welty's cap that she can write the comical, tragic, satirical and the folk-lore fiction with the same ease and excellence. Clark aptly points out that "Perhaps all we can say about *The Robber Bridegroom* is that it is 'Sui Generis'; that the fairy-tale and the folk-lore and mythic aspects of the novella and the tongue-in-the-cheek humour of the narration combine to create a fiction unlike anything else in literature."47

Not only has Miss Welty employed old Mythology as a means for ordering contemporary history and lending the immense panorama of futility and anarchy, a shape and significance, as Joyce, Pound and Eliot have done, she has the fortune of being a myth-maker herself. Like Yeats she employs her artistic talent on myth-making materials.

R.P. Warren points out in "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty" that Miss Welty intuitively works with mythic elements. Writing about three stories from her second collection "The Wide Net", Warren claims: "Floyd the untamed creature of uncertain origin, is William Wallace dancing with the great cat-fish at his belt, the river-God. But he is also, like the buck in "Livvie", a field God, riding the red-horse in a pasture full of butterflies."48
The river and the field Gods are not any specific deities. They are the raw material of myth. Similarly, Janie Lockhart and the Big and the Little Harpe in *The Robber Bridegroom* are potential characters of the American myth. Even the exploits of George Fairchild in *Delta Wedding* are treated by both, the Fairchild family and Miss Welty herself as material for the formation of myth and legend. For example, Dabney when younger, believed that Uncle George hung the moon up in the sky.

Thus, we find that Miss Welty either takes known legends from history and gives them a mythical stature or creates new myths of her characters who stands out with a universal significance.

Apart from the myths, Miss Welty has made use of innumerable symbols to illustrate the themes of her stories. These symbols are sometimes animate or inanimate objects, elements of nature, seasons, and the manifold activities of man. In a recent interview Miss Welty clarified her use of symbols in her theme of spiritual isolation. The significance of the symbol is that it cuts both ways: as a device to bridge the gap between two characters, or between the isolated individual and his ideal world. It is interesting to note the nature of the inanimate symbols — they can be the most insignificant objects such as a key, a guitar, a toy wind-mill, an apple, a lamp or even a bread-board.
'The Key' provides a clear example of this symbolic pattern in operation. The key symbol clarifies for the reader the material relationship of Albert and Ellie Morgan of Yellow Leaf, Mississippi. To Albert, the key promises a better understanding between him and Ellie, perhaps they will even fall in love at the Niagara Falls. "It is a symbol of something — something that we deserve, and that is happiness," says Albert to Ellie in his language of signs. But then he suddenly puts the key in his breast-pocket, because "Happiness ... is something that appears to you suddenly, that is meant for you, a thing which you reach for and pick up and hide at your breast, a shiny thing that reminds you of something alive and leaping." The key brings to Albert the reassurance that he hopefully sought but never found with Ellie, and he finally decides that it is "a symbol not of happiness with Ellie, but of something else — something which he could have alone, for only himself, in peace, something strange and unlooked for which would come to him."

To Ellie the key is equally important. She attaches no importance to the way it arrives, she has not waited for happiness to lay itself passively at her feet. She has tirelessly sought it out, working harder and hoping harder than Albert. With her determination she has kept the dream alive — the dream of going to the Falls. To her, happiness means possessing even the dreams of her husband.

The young man who dropped the key watches the actions of the deaf-mutes intently and realizes the importance it
holds to them. He takes a second key labeled "Star Hotel, Room 2" from his pocket and slips it into Ellie's hand. But this is a poor substitute. It is too condescending. The key to Room No.2 is not the key to Ellie's happiness.

Tom Harris in the "Hitch Hikers" is an individual who is just becoming aware of the emptiness in his life. In this story he becomes the on-looker of a brief and ghastly episode concerning a different way of life. He picks up two hitch­ hikers from a highway. One of them is a hill-man who plays the traditional hill-ballads on his guitar. The other man is Sobby who is morose and melancholic. Harris recognizes the difference between his own rootless life and theirs, which still has some richness, fullness and meaning. It is more integrated. The guitar-player comments about his people. "We has us owls for chickens and fox for yard dogs but we sung true." Later, when Harris stops the car to go into a small-town hotel, the guitar-player is clubbed by Sobby. The onlookers explain that he was trying to steal the car. However, Sobby who is sober after the deed explains softly to Harris: "I was just tired of him always uppin' and makin' a noise about everything." The reactions of various people to the incident have no bearing upon the significance of the incident. They act in a way which is in harmony with their own past. Mr. Gene, the proprietor of the hotel, thinks that Sobby is a pure and simple "murderer", the guests at the party which Harris attends, see in it only the quaintness; the young woman who
fell in love with him years ago says, "All I hope is that your friend gets well." And the little Negro boy wonders who would get the guitar, the object on which the man played his 'true' song. It is desired by none but the little Black boy who is only interested in its being an object of tangible value. The guitar, thus, becomes a symbol of life, truth, simplicity and spontaneity. The man who sings upon it has been killed and it is of no value to any one in this isolated, artificial world of glamour and glitter.

The theme of "Lily Daw and the three Ladies" is the absence of real understanding between individuals, though each person is positive that he understands the other. This situation is unfolded in a mock-serious manner through different symbols. There is a subtle contrast between the different levels of knowledge that of the ladies, that of Lily Daw, and that of the community that waits to see Lily off at the railroad station — all of which fail to comprehend the reality of the situation despite their firm belief in their knowledge.

Lily has just realized that she wants to marry the deaf xylophone player whom she met the previous night at a side-show. To her this is the reality which must be accepted, yet she is persuaded by the ladies to join the institution because they feel it to be the best thing for her to do. They give her a cake, a new dress and a "hope-chest" with two bars of soap to take along with her. The entire community turns out to see Lily off. Even the civic band is assembled to play. But when the Ladies draw out Lily from the train compartment, upon seeing the xylophone
player who has come to claim her, and the train moves out of the platform, the crowd is never quite sure of what happened to Lily.

Closer attention to the story reveals that the "hope-chest" is left in the train when Lily complainingly is dragged out to marry the xylophone player. Secondly, the throwing of the straw hat into the telephone wire shows that the author is working to the central meaning of the story through another symbol — that of the hat in the telephone wires and of the variance of opinions, a variance that is to go on into the future for ever. Throwing of the hat in the air has no apparent reason, and once thrown it lies suspended in the telephone wires, meaning there by that human actions cannot always be explained or executed according to a logic.

A striking symbol in Delta Wedding is that of a lamp. The two aunts Primrose and Jim Allen give a little night-lamp to Dabney as a wedding gift. When the candle inside is lighted, the chimney reddens and reveals the picture of a city - London-engulfed by flames. The lamp is suggestive of the transformation that comes to people when their interior is lighted with a glow of love and communication. According to Kieft, an illuminated object suggests two things: The isolated individual in an area of surrounding darkness; and the glow of innocence that brightens up a child when he lives in the comforting warmth of a happy family. It represents security from the unknown. When Dabney reaches Shellmound, she runs to meet Troy who stands
waiting for her; the lamp falls from her hands and is shattered into pieces. In doing so, "She (Dabney) is symbolically Shattering not only her innocence and childhood within the family, but a part of the family unity itself, its "Cosiness", one of its legends in a concrete object - all that the two aunts would like to preserve intact, along with their own and their niece's virginity," says Kieft.

The metronome in *The Golden Apples* belongs to Miss Ekhart, the German music teacher in Morgana. It is the symbol of her isolation "beating independently of the time of the community of Morgana." To her it is not only a reminder of times passing, it is the instrument she uses to pursue Virgie to attain excellence and passion beyond the reach of others. Miss Ekhart treats it like the most precious secret in the teaching of music. It is the only object she considers valuable enough to keep in the parlour wall safe each night.

To Virgie Rainey the metronome has a different meaning. It represents discipline. Her whole being rebels at the idea of conforming. She hates to live up to somebody's dreams. One day she refuses to play unless the metronome were removed from the piano. Miss Ekhart yields to the ultimatum. Her willingness to compromise to Virgie's wishes is symptomatic of a misplaced faith that finally brings her grief.

The music lessons come to an end when Snowdie MacLain decides to sell the house and Miss Ekhart is evicted by the new owner, who in turn is struck by lightning. The house then remains vacant, used only by Virgie for her sexual rendezvous.
The action of "June Recital" is unfolded at two levels by different spectators. The first is a young boy, Loch Morrison, who is down with malaria and is given his father's telescope to keep himself busy in bed. The second is his teen-age sister Cassie, who is busy dying a scarf for the hay-ride. Loch sees Virgie and the sailor enter the vacant house by the back door and they make love on a bare mattress. He also sees an old woman enter by the front door and make elaborate preparations to set the house on fire. Just before lighting the fire, she tosses out an odd ticking device through the window. After that she plays a little tune and lights the pyre to her dreams. She is Miss Ekhart.

Loch is neither interested in the sexual activities of Virgie nor the soul-shaking act of Miss Ekhart. His attention is at once captured by the Metronome which he sees falling out of the window. He climbs down from his room and retrieves it. He is intrigued by the object and takes it to be a time-bomb. He asks his Negro nurse:

"Louella, Listen. Do you hear a thing ticking?"
"Hear it plain".
"Reckon it's going to blow up in the night? You can see it. Look, on the wash-stand. All by itself, of its own accord, it might let fly its little door and start up."

Loch greets the prospect with a childlike enthusiasm. On the other hand, earlier, Old Man Moody and Fatty Bowles in their ignorance of and distrust of the metronome represented the community's reaction to art. At first unable to locate the source of ticking sound they visualized 'something ugly' perhaps a nearby rattle-snake. They lifted it up as though
picking a fish with a hook and threw it away. It is finally picked up by Loch and rests on his washstand. Loch goes to sleep listening to the metronome which fills his dreams with a colour the day time summer never held.

The metronome, thus, has different meanings and associations for different persons in the story.

Sometimes small insignificant objects hold a world of meaning in an individual's life, as for instance, the bread-board in *The Optimist's Daughter* which stands for love, care and tenderness. While taking a final look through the kitchen cupboards, just before her departure, Laural finds her mother's bread-board lying obscurely in the junk, its surface inexplicably gouged and grimy. Her composure is shattered once again. The bread-board brings back the memories of the by-gone days with a severer pang in the heart. Laural remembers how Phil had made this board and carved it with his own hands and presented it to Becky, her mother. Becky considered the board as her favourite possession. She kept it's surface smooth and clean and prepared her best bread over it.

Now, years later, when both Becky and Phil are dead and gone, Laural sees the bread-board in its present condition. Something tells her that it is Fay who has ruined it. She is overcome by an uncontrollable rage. And indeed, Fay arrives at that moment. Laural challenges her with the board and demands an explanation:

"It's Just an old board isn't it?" Cried Fay. "She made the best bread in Mount Salus!"
"Alright! Who cares? She's not making it now."
When asked what she was doing with the board, any way, Fay replies that she was using it to crack her nuts on. This is the last straw. Laurel lifts the bread-board in a rage to strike Fay. At that time suddenly a bell rings. Laurel's friends have come to pick her up. "You're supposed to be leaving," says Fay. Weakly, Laurel abandons the weapon and hurries to leave escorted away by her bridesmaids.

It is evident that the bread-board means nothing to Fay. To her it is only an old block of wood. But to Laurel it is a reminder of the sweet past. Whereas the raised hoe of one widow in "A Curtain of Green" came down because of the sudden downpour from the heavens and she dropped unconscious into a state of oblivion, the raised bread-board of the other widow comes down with the call of her friends. She goes back in full awareness of the situation, composed in her realization that the important thing in life is the feeling, the memories, which can be retained and cherished despite the material symbols, which may bring nothing but more pain.

Nature plays a most important role in the early fiction of Eudora Welty. "The Winds" provides an apt illustration of her use of nature as symbol. The winds, as the title suggests, are part of a storm that occurs during the autumnal equinox, and this is the central symbol that parallels Josie's transitional phase from innocence to experience.
The autumnal equinox signals the end of summer. It is as inevitable and predictable as the earth's revolution around the sun. Once the storm comes, its violence may leave permanent scars on what it strikes. And its winds may carry an object to a place far from home and toward an unknown fate. In the story Josie is picked up by her parents as she lies asleep in her room along with her little brother, Will. Josie's intermittent thoughts and dreams between sleep and wakefulness are the chief media of the story which is developed in the backdrop of the equinoxial storm outside.

When Josie first awakes (physical awakening), she thinks the big girls of the town are having a hay-ride. Her father counsels her not to be frightened and mother expresses regret at having to wake her up. Josie drifts back to sleep. Her first dream is about fairies and castles and speaking birds, her second dream about her best friends with whom she sees herself playing. But certain ominous elements intrude into this dream — the chinaberry tree looks like a dark threatening cloud, the stone dragon in the garden opens his mouth to eat the summer, and the soap-box crater shouts that the time flies. Josie is suddenly awakened by the lightning. She tries desperately to capture the lost dream. Josie's third dream drops her into the future. She sees herself running in panic, out of a field with a bouquet of golden-rod, a gift for someone. The storm is still raging outside.
At last the violent storm turns into gentle rain. Josie is put back to bed by her parents. Lying there, she thinks of the past. Her memories have asked her to seek the marvelous beauty that lies loose in the world. "There, outside was all that was wild and beloved and estranged, and all that would beckon and leave her, and all that was beautiful. She wanted to follow, and by some metamorphosis she would take them all in, all everyone."  

The mood of the story is pensive, but it ends on a note of promise. The story strikes a perfect balance between nature as a symbol of the main character's life. Miss Welty approximates Josie's feelings very delicately with the equinox. Moreover, it may be noted, that it is only Josie who is struck by the violence of the night. Her little brother has slept peacefully through out, and her parents, of course, have no reason to be disturbed by it.

"Livvie" is similar to "The Winds" in that an important change in the life of its central character is correlated with a change in season. Similarly, the symbolism parallels and motivates the events of the narrative.

The three main characters of the story are Livvie, Solomon and Cash. Solomon married Livvie when she was sixteen and he was an old man. Nine years later, Livvie was still young, while Solomon slept the whole day in his throne-like bed, too old to move. Before Solomon married Livvie "... he asked her, if she was choosing winter, would
she pine for spring, and she said, 'No Indeed.' But when spring was in the air, Livvie pined for it. She anticipated its nearness as if he were present in the house as a young man would be. It came in the form of Cash McCord, a field-hand working on Solomon's land.

Solomon and Cash personify Winter and Spring. Solomon dies on the first day of Spring, while Cash arrives to take his place with Livvie. The seasonal identification of Solomon and Cash points up their contrasting attitudes toward nature. Solomon is a builder. He constructed an artificial world in the midst of nature. The front room of his house is covered with holly-paper, and palmettos from the swamp are spaced at careful intervals over the walls. The rose bushes, peach trees and pomegranates are dwarfed by a row of little trees coloured green and blue, hanging over the end of each branch.

Cash, on the other hand, belong to the fields. He wears Easter clothes, pointed shoes, peg-top pants, a leaf-green coat, and a shiny baby-pink satin shirt. His hat is the colour of a plum and its emerald green feather blows in the breeze. Cash shows his rebellion to Solomon's authority by entering unbidden with a guinea-pig in his pocket and throwing a stone into the bottle trees. He has the embrace, the force and the abundance of nature. Apart from their personification of Spring and Winter, Cash and Solomon embody the contrasting nature of "... life and death, youth and age, nature and art, rebellion and authority," says Kieft.
Solomon's last gift to Livvie is his watch. This falls on the ground when, after Solomon's death, Cash embraces Livvie. The watch does not stop. It goes on ticking, signifying that the winter may have ended but the spring has just begun, and that the time must move on.

"First Love" also has a season for its setting of action. The opening lines, "All that happened, it happened in extraordinary times in the season of dreams," provide an idea of the extraordinariness of the season as well as of the happening. The time is 1807, the place Mississippi, which has a temperate climate. It is now numbed by a "bitterest winter of them all". The cold seems to have smitten the world out of all proportions. People stay huddled together for warmth, and a poor man is found frozen in a hollow tree. Such an unusual season provides an atmosphere for the appearance of a provocative figure, Aaron Burr, in the territory of Mississippi.

The story is told through the medium of Joel Mayes who is twelve years old, an orphan, and the boot-boy at Natchez Inn. Joel is deaf and dumb. Being cut off from the normal communication with other people, he tries to understand Burr's situation by watching nature. Once Joel enters the story, the reader sees everything through his eyes. Joel associates Aaron Burr with fire. Flames seem to spring from him as he speaks, and light shines in his eyes. His whole personality radicates a warmth and brightness in the snowy dark winter night.
One day, looking upstream for Burr's flotilla, Joel sees a chain of perfect trees floating down the stream like "fallen giants." The river is forceful. None can stand its mighty sweep. The sight of the floating trees in the current is suggestive of man's helplessness in the strong flow of time. Joel trembles at their sight. The river, we notice, provides a variable symbol in Miss Welty's fiction. For example, in "The Wide Net" it is associated with reproduction and birth, in "At the Landing" it represents Life-Force, and here, in "First Love" it stands for destruction, disappointment and death.

In the last scene when Aaron Burr leaves and Joel drops on the snowy road along with the other frozen birds, the reader sees clearly that the little deaf-mute will always be a lonely figure in an icy, indifferent frozen world. Nature, thus, in "First Love" deals with the rise and fall of a private vision. The vision is blurred because it is seen through a character who can neither speak nor hear. Joel sees nature pursuing its natural course, but the natural events become extraordinary when linked in his mind with Burr. The irony is that Burr's radiantly optimistic vision blinds him to the omens foretelling his failure, while Joel who sees the omens clearly cannot communicate their meaning to Burr.

"A Curtain of Green" is built around two symbols: the garden and the rain. Rain is a recurrent symbol which appears
in many stories of Miss Welty, such as "A Piece of News", "At the Landing", and "The Winds"; but "A Curtain of Green" is one of the few stories in which garden has been used as a symbol.

Mr. Larkins lost her husband in a most unusual accident. A chinaberry tree came crashing down upon his car in their own drive-way, as he drove back home from work. After that Mrs. Larkins completely absorbed herself in her garden. The garden provides her a retreat, an escape from bitter loneliness and a center of life and creation. It has become her whole life. She appears there every morning, works all day, not stopping until it is completely dark.

Mrs. Larkins's garden is "a densely grown plot running down-hill behind a small white house". It is enclosed by a tall hedge which bars the view of the onlookers. Her neighbours can see Mrs. Larkins from their windows upstairs as they vaguely look out while brushing their hair. Every available flower has been planted in this plot of rich black soil. With the result there is an utter chaos of growth which seems disorderly in its abundance. "To a certain extent, she seemed not to seek order, but to allow an overflowing as if she consciously ventured forever a little farther, a little deeper, into her life in the garden." In the centre of this garden there is a pear tree which Mrs. Larkins uses for shelter during the summer showers.

What is Mrs. Larkins's motive behind this back-breaking activity? Is she striving to seek oneness with nature with her
hair streaming and tangled like vines and her overals becoming more and more the colour of leaves? Is she accepting nature's challenge by standing as a counter force — growing plants and uprooting them at random, just like nature gives life and destroys it without explanation? Is she trying to find an escape from loneliness by losing herself into the plant life? Is she trying to shut herself from the bitter realities of life behind the curtain of green? All these explanations may be considered appropriate, the last one more so, because by immersing herself in the unconscious life of the garden Mrs. Larkins can isolate herself from the pain of being human. She can trade a world where love is impotent with a world where love does not exist; she can draw the curtain around herself more and more tightly until it becomes a shroud.

The rain is a more mysterious symbol in this story, suggesting a vague higher power that governs both Mrs. Larkins and the garden. It appears each afternoon at two o'clock and compels Mrs. Larkins to make a pause in her labour and take shelter of the pear tree. However, one afternoon the rain does not come till five o'clock. Mrs. Larkins wants Jamey, the black boy, to finish the transplanting before it begins to rain. She herself is busy taking out weeds from the flower beds. But Mrs. Larkins suddenly realises that there is no movement in the atmosphere. The wind, the birds, the sun, the pear tree, including Jamey have come to a stand still. Infuriated by this inactivity, she raises the hoe above her head to strike Jamey, when suddenly the rain starts falling. She stands
motionless for a few moments and then faints on the grass. Like her husband, Mrs. Larkins is struck down by a higher natural force from above, but this time the result is a merciful deliverance into sleep. She has escaped being a sinner. The rain is gentle and soft and Mrs. Larkins feels a tenderness rush through her body. The rain may have signified things to her — her helplessness in the face of nature, a relief from built-up tensions, the value of life. Whatever the actual content of her revelation, at the end of the story Mrs. Larkins is still lying insensible and Jamey has run out of the garden.

The beauty of this story lies in the fact that Miss Welty makes no attempt to amplify or explains her symbols. The reader is left more to the resources of his own fancy, sensitivity and intelligence.

"A Still Moment" is a story about the limits of knowledge and the problems of the artist, depicted through the symbol of a bird. Three men—Lorenzo Dow, the Evenglist preacher; Murrell, the outlaw; and Audobon the natural artist — come face to face at a moment of silence and beauty. They stand to watch a white heron feeding beside the marshes and each man becomes aware of a part of life that is beyond his reach. All the three men are searchers. Lorenzo's desire to transmute sinners into angels has driven him through the world, subjecting him to failure and frustration. But his faith is still strong and his hunger for sinners unsatiated. Murrel is trying to solve the mystery of existence by laying hold of men and murdering
them. But a definite answer is impossible, as each man is different from the other. He has marked Lorenzo as his next victim, only to be frustrated by the arrival of Audobon. The naturalist is trying to discover the truth by a complete examination of the natural world. The sight of the beautiful white heron holds them together for a moment. Then Audobon shoots the bird and the men separate to resume their solitary pursuits.

The heron spells out differently to all the three men. Murrell sees the heron as "whiteness ensconced in darkness." He watches proudly with his vision of power over all men, but the heron stands undisturbed, with no trace of acknowledgement. This injures his pride, and he feels weakened by an unaccountable self-pity. He tries to recapture the integrity of his vision. "Travelers were forever innocent, he believed: that was his faith. He lay in wait; his faith was in innocence and his knowledge was of ruin, and had these things been shaken? Now, what could possibly be outside his grasp?" But he longs for the hour of total darkness when there can be no white speck in the distance to mar his rebellion with doubt.

Lorenzo, on seeing the heron thinks: "Praise god, his love has come visible." His first reaction is to accept the bird as confirmation of his own way of life. But later, while riding through the forest, he thinks that it wasn't love but separateness that he saw.
He could understand gods giving separateness first and then giving love to follow and heal in its wonder; but God had reversed this, and given love first and then separateness, as though it did not matter to him which came first.  

The idea haunts him and he is forced to conclude that God has no knowledge of time and separateness. The beauty of the heron has struck him beyond measure, which would be blasphemous. So with the sweat of rapture pouring down his forehead he shouts into the marshed "Tempter"!  

It is Audobon who can love the bird without a pre-conceived idea. His eye is trained to look into the beauty of nature. Then he closes his eyes to imprint the image of the bird in its totality and fires the gun. This image he would carry in his mind along with the body of the bird. Then upon his canvas the body and the image will become one. But the moment vanishes suddenly. With a heavy heart Audobon realizes that his painting will be, like the bird in his hand, "a dead thing —never the essence, only a sum of parts." Further, when another person sees the painting, it would always be interpreted according to what image he has in his head. This is the irony of the artist's relation to other men. Audobon remains as remote from his observers as before. Like the key in "The Key," the heron embodies the essential meaning of the Story. It is differently comprehended by all the three men.  

Allegorically, the three sharply contrasted characters represent the familiar trilogy of Mind, Body and Soul. Lorenzo is
seeking men's souls, Murrell the bodies and Audobon knowledge. Lorenzo and Murrell try to fit the heron into their scheme of life. Audobon shoots the bird, but even as it falls, he must admit that the thing he hoped to capture has escaped him.

Much of Eudora Welty's fiction revolves around travelling. Her travellers vary from those on horse-backs to those on cars, boats, trains or simply on foot. The journey-motif, as seen by Miss Welty, has a symbolical meaning. It represents the journey of life. Old Phoenix's journey, in "A Worn Path" resembles that of The Pilgrims Progress, a journey through life's difficulties to the celestial city. Phoenix's journey is hazardous. Her path leads her through pine-woods. On her way she meets foxes, owls, beetles, rabbits, coons and wild animals. There are also wild hogs that come her way. These animals of the woods represent the menaces of the 'long way' of life. Her path leads her up the hill, and then goes down through oaks, indicating thereby the rise and fall in life. One likes to stay at the summit for as long as possible but the descent is equally necessary though not so desirable. The young hunter who gives Phoenix a nickel, advises her, "stay home and nothing will happen to you." That Phoenix is not the one to be deterred. Her journey must go on. Matches city suggest the celestial
city which Bunyan's Christian sought. This is where Phoenix finds grace—a lady with presents who stops to tie her laces and charity in the form of a nickel.

Travelling in Miss Welty's fiction always involves an element of hazard and uncertainty. Very few are the blessed ones like Phoenix who have a definite aim for their journey. Many travellers are just wanderers at large roaming in a meaningless quest. For them, travelling is a permanent state, a way of life. Such travellers are the salesman in "The Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitch Hikers", and King MacLain who sells spices to the women of Morgana. Travelling, in their case, is often a flight from reality, an escape into oblivion.

Three stories of The Bride of the Innisfallen present a different kind of travelling. The title story is about a large group of people taking a journey from London to Cork by train, to be followed later by boat. Each passenger is tightly wrapped with in himself like the middle-aged lady wrapped tightly in her extravagantly colored rain-coat, "what she had on under her rain-coat was her business and remained so". She does unbutton the rain-coat in the later part of the story but this is as much as she is prepared to reveal of herself. Similarly, the other passengers in the train, during their conversation, reveal as much as they want to of themselves. Each passenger, having exhausted the fund of his conversation, draws more and more into himself, until by the end of the journey he is completely isolated. The analogy of the passengers
in a boat, and people as co-travellers in life is an age-old one which has been expressed in folk-lore and proverbs in all the languages of the world.

In "No Place for you, My Love" a man and a woman, unknown to each other, undertake a common journey by car from New Orleans to its deeper outskirts and back. They exchange very few words with each other, much of their past, present and future being completely unrevealed. But as they come to the end of their journey, and say good bye to each other, "something arises, tall as panic, it cries like a human, and falls back." This something is that elemental human relationship - that unspoken bond - which sometimes grows between two strangers in their journey of life without their being conscious of it.

"Going to Naples" describes a ship's passengers travelling tourist-class between New York and Naples. It is concerned too with an occasion when one shares a common destiny with strangers. This shared moment, for a time, brings two persons together, which Miss Welty calls the "Time Out". Gabriella, in this story realizes that soon she will have to say good bye to Aldo. And however meaningful the experience between "Hello Aldo" and "Good bye Aldo" may have been, ordinary life may be picked up and continued at the end of the journey. Human relationships are little oases in search of which journeys go on.

There is always an aura of mystery about Miss Welty's travellers. Despite their exposure to the outer world they hide within themselves a secret entirely their own. Often their
arrival brings excitement to the place. "Aaron Burr's arrival in Natchez Trace shakes the people through the lethargy of the snow." He makes things happen when nothing seems likely to take place. The musician in "Powerhouse" brings a world of dream and fantasy wherever he goes. Everybody hastens to listen to him as he talks and plays, be it in a white restaurant or a black pub. He keeps his audience spell-bound while he concocts his wildly romantic stories. It is difficult to know whether these stories are purely fictitious or have an element of reality in them. Nevertheless, Powerhouse is a magnetic figure possessed with a phenomenal charm. The xylophone player in "Lily Daw and the three Ladies" is a small red-haired man, dull of hearing. He performs professionally in a travelling side-show, and yet what a stir he creates wherever he goes! However, a tinge of sadness about the isolated state of these protagonists cannot be ruled out. These travellers sell dreams, they distribute joy, while their own lives remain empty, loveless and deprived.

Whereas the road represents hazard, uncertainty, transition and a vital force; home stands for security, certainty, warmth and life. It is a place where love can blossom and which in Miss Welty's symbolism is often associated with the beautiful and fragrant China-berry tree, so typical of the south. Kieft remarks:
"What a variety of resonances even the word home has in Miss Welty's fiction: a womb, even a tomb to Jenny; a stronghold of love and security for Josie; a gilded cage for Livvie; an enviable resting place for the travelling salesman; now a place to fight, to escape from, now a place to return to in Delta Wedding; now a narrow, stifling prison, now a focus of stability for the wanderers in The Golden Apples."76

IV

One of the outstanding features of Eudora Welty's fiction is its photographic technique. In an interview with Charles Bunting about her interest in painting and photography, she said: "I see things in pictures...I love painting, I have no talent for it. The only talent I have — for writing, I was blessed with it — is visual. And anything I imagine in what I read or write, I see it."77

This, no doubt, is an understatement, because Miss Welty, apart from being an intuitive writer is also a talented photographer. Her interest in photography stretches back to the days when she worked for the Mississippi advertising commission, writing and taking pictures designed to attract industry and tourists to the state. In 1936, a number of her unposed studies of Mississippi Negroes were displayed for a month in a one-man show in a small New York camera shop named the Eugene Gallery. Later, a whole volume of these pictures was published under the title of One Time, One Place: A Mississippi Album (1971). The photographs speak volumes about Miss Welty's understanding and interest in the common and the ordinary.
This photographic talent when applied to the writing of short-stories becomes the mode of comprehending reality. Miss Welty depicts the "arrested moment", the scene, as if caught by the click of a camera, where the very immobility of the scene is essential for its meaning. Her stories are not action oriented, they are just still moments that reveal the essence of life. "A Memory", for example, tells the story of a little girl as she sits on the beach, making a small frame with her finger-tips through which she sees the world around her. "A still Moment" is about three men coming from different directions, and seeing together a heron in the marshes. The story tells about their reactions toward the beautiful bird at a given moment. Similarly, "Petrified Man" captures a few women at a beauty-parlour having a light conversation; "A piece of News" is about a woman lying near the fireplace with an old piece of newspaper in her hands, weaving her fantasies.

Within the frame-work of these vivid scenes, Miss Welty dwells upon what is happening within the minds of the people. She uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to record the inner reality of her characters, with such subtle ramifications as have been developed by masters like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. "The Winds" is a perfect example of this technique. The narration consists of a sequence of dreams with intermittent brief intervals of wakefulness. The free linking of fantasy and fact lends itself admirably to convey the consciousness of Josie. In "Livvie", the heroine is handed a lipstick by a
traveling saleswoman of cosmetics. As she opens the lid and smells the Chinaberry flowers, her mind flies over the clouds and peeps down at the chinaberry tree which stood in the midst of her parent's courtyard. From Solomon's house of authority and discipline, Livvie is transported into her carefree childhood. In the Optimist's Daughter little things like a paperweight, a bread-board, old letters, recipe books are enough to part a veil in the heroine's mind and bring back to her the memories of the distant past.

Miss Welty's concern is with the inner world which is always full of mystery, dreams, uncertainty and vagueness. "The sense of mystery in life we do well to be aware of. And, of course, we do try to suggest that mystery in writing a story, not through the direct or cheap way but by simply presenting the way things happen. Mystery is a real and valid element, both in life and in fiction." She says. Similarly, she admits that day-dreams have an importance in her fiction because of her interest in the interior life, although she does not mean to give an over important place to dreams in the Freudian sense. The dream-like quality in Miss Welty's fiction often brings the effect of haziness in her stories. Her critics have often felt uneasy about it and have even condemned her for her pre-occupation with obscurity as a stylistic device. Kieft writes about the reader's dilemma:
The uneasiness may register for them as a dim sense of not knowing exactly where they are in relation to the "hard facts" of the story; they may feel that the secure centres of gravity have shifted on them almost imperceptibly, as if they had taken a drink too many, or during the course of a smooth plane ride had suddenly hit on air pocket, or as if now and again, they were being mysteriously plunged under-water and treated to a faintly distorted and wavering view of things.  

Critics like Diana Trilling feel disturbed by Miss Welty's use of the oblique and by her keen poetic conception. She calls it "exhibitionism and insincerity". According to Trilling, Miss Welty is too pre-occupied with the rhythms and patterns of language, so that the soul of her stories is lost somewhere between the "ballet" of her words. This, however, is too severe a statement which has been challenged by R.P. Warren in his essay "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty". Warren feels that Miss Welty's subject is abstract, which deals with the spiritual isolation of man and his failure to communicate with others, therefore, the style she chooses is appropriate to the subtlety of the theme.  

The obscurity is explained by Miss Welty as a deliberate technique to portray life as it is, in all its complexity. She agrees with Tennessee Williams when he says "I am not a direct writer, I am always an oblique writer, if I can be, I want to be allusive", because, she says "All fiction writers work by indirection, to show, not to tell; not to make statements about a character, but to demonstrate it in his actions or his
conversations, or by suggesting his thoughts, so that the reader understands for himself. Because fiction accomplishes its ends by using the oblique."

Thus, in Eudora Welty there is a rare combination of the philosopher and the craftsman. Efforts have been made to trace influences of Jane Austen, Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner, upon her works, but so successfully has she assimilated her readings of them that when it comes to evaluating her work, Eudora Welty stands distinct from all others, in dignity and majesty. Comparisons with Southern women writers such as Katherine Anne Porter, Caroline Gordon, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor have also been made very frequently. Being Southern, however, is at once the most important and the least important thing with Miss Welty. As far as the accuracy of the Southern landscape is concerned, she, with her penchant for visual imagination, not only portrays it with photographic clarity, but also does something else to it — she transcends the sensory perceptions and sees the human mind in its stark nakedness. It is indeed fascinating to see how she brings out the loneliness of the isolated soul through a style that is both rich with myth, symbolism, folk-lore, legend and history and lyrical with a soft feminine vision.

-1-
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Neil A. Price, in The Deep States of America, Politics and Power in Seven Deep States (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), points out that one of the reasons the South has not produced any philosophers is because people there do not sit and ponder. They spend more time in talking. This may be an explanation for the Southerner's lack of prowess in the intellectual world, in the realm of philosophy and pure thought. He puts a high value on personality and would rather be a good recounter than a good philosopher.


5. Buckley, p.499.


11. Ibid., p.99.

12. Ibid., p.100.


14. loc.cit.


18. Interview with Eudora Welty by the author, op. cit.

19. Ruth Vande Kieft quotes these lines from W.B. Yeats' "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," in her *Eudora Welty*, p. 112.


21. There can be found many parallels between the Greeks and the people of Morgana. A full-fledged study of these parallels has not been done so far. H.C. Morris has given plausible mythical relationships to the major figures of the book in "Eudora Welty's Use of Mythology," *Shenandoah*, VI (Spring 1955), pp. 34-40.

22. Interview by the author at Oxford, Mississippi, op. cit.


25. Ibid., pp. 236-237.


28. Lodwick Hartley provides parallels from the Butcher and Lang translation of the Odyssey, book XI. It reads: "But when I had besought the tribes of the dead with vows and prayers, I took the sheep and cut their throats over the trench, and the dark blood flowed forth, and to the spirits of the dead that had departed gathered them from out of Erebus. And these many goats flocked together from every side about the trench with a wonderous cry, and pale fear gat behold on me." (Proserpina and the Old Ladies", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (Spring 1957), p. 353.


34. Ibid., p. 276.

35. Trefman, loc. cit.


38. J. A. Bryant, Eudora Welty, p. 17.


41. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

42. Ibid., p. 33.

43. Ibid., p. 65.

44. Ibid., p. 78.


47. Clark, p. 637.


50. Ibid., p. 69.

51. Ibid., p. 73.


53. Ibid., p. 129.
54. Ibid., p.145.
57. Welty, The Golden Apples, p.84.
59. Ibid., p.206.
64. Ibid., p.18.
66. Ibid., p.211.
68. Ibid., p.91.
69. Ibid., p.86.
70. Ibid., p.93.
71. Ibid., p.93.
72. Ibid., p.92.
74. Welty, "No Place for Youn My Love," The Bride of the Innisfallen, p.3.
75. Kieft, Eudora Welty, p.41.
76. Ibid., p.64.
77. Bunting, p.725.
78. Ibid., p.729.