A study of Eudora Welty's fiction reveals her pre-occupation with the theme of Love and Isolation which has been repeatedly articulated in her work. Miss Welty sees isolation not as a social question but a human one, a problem not of income and status but of love and loneliness. Her early works, as stated before, are about those isolates who suffer due to a physical or mental deprivation and end up in suicide, cynicism, insanity or withdrawal. The intensity of their suffering is played at a high key without any respite or relief. The explanation for this tense and high-strung emotional drama is offered by Miss Welty herself in an essay. She says that her early works were written in the form of short stories and, "In the case of a short story you can't ever let the tautness of the line relax. It has to be all strung very tight upon its single thread usually, and every thing is subordinated to the theme of the story." Therefore, the isolation in them was painful, and since the short story offers little scope for the elaboration of social interaction, the isolate was often led toward extreme reactions.
The later works are written in the form of novels which according to Miss Welty, have "... so much wider scope, greater looseness of texture and so much room to expand... in a novel there is time to shade a character and allow him his growth." The characters are seen in the context of a community which is well organized, all-pervading and all-absorbing. It provides a niche for every peg, formulates a code of social conduct, looks after its have-nots, and acts as a "buffer" between the individual and the assaults of the outer world. An unsuspecting reader would find no scope for isolation in such a benign framework, but what he finds instead is that the relationship between the community and the individual is somewhat akin to a string of beds — standing next to each other, yet apart. Each individual, whether living in a family or wedlock, carries with him the burden of his own isolation. Any attempt to communicate only leads to greater opacity in the other. Thus, isolation is present in both, the early and the later works of Miss Welty. It is viewed as a necessary human condition. The only difference being that in the early stories there was a despair toward man's condition, in the later and longer works there is an understanding toward it. The tone changes from anguish to a acceptance. One sees a matured world of innumerable isolates, bearing their condition with dignity, pride and courage.
"The tragedy of man is to be separate and lonely, his glory is to be capable of dissolving his loneliness in love," says Alun Jones. Love is that force which provides momentum to man's feeble existence. Miss Welty makes heliedoscopic patterns with her love-relationships by seeing them in various contexts. In some early stories she contrasted the states of love and lovelessness in almost the same pattern as followed by Carson McCullers, that is, loneliness leading toward the need of love, a lack of reciprocity by the beloved, lover's despair, resulting in retreat, oblivion or death. "The Death of Traveling Salesman," "Hitchhikers," "First Love," "Clytie" et al. follow the same pattern. But in the later works there is again a change of tonality. It is not always true that love leads to painful isolation, it may also bring enlightenment and a greater awareness about self and others. Mrs. Larkins, for example, learns to love trees and plants after the death of her husband, and Uncle Daniel showers his wealth upon the whole world. Love, thus, is no longer a narrow possessive, ego-centric feeling but a phenomenon which, when it occurs, opens all the gates of a man's heart and a supreme feeling pours itself into the entire universe.

Secondly, love according to Miss Welty, knows no reason. One can never explain by logic as to why one person
loves another. Bonnie Dee is stupid, unresponsive and beneath the Ponders in social status, and yet Uncle Daniel loves her to a point which makes him look ridiculous in the society. Similarly, Ran MacLain loves his wife Jinny Love despite her total indifference toward him. The heart obviously has no other reasons than its own.

Thirdly, though love and isolation are both facts of life, there is no consistent pattern about their appearance. One of Miss Welty's stories "A still Moment" depicts this theory with much conviction and artistic delicacy. The story is about three men who find themselves face to face with a snowy white heron feeding blissfully on the marshes, and for a moment all of them fall in love with this beautiful object of nature. The next moment Audobon, the artist, shoots down the bird so that he may examine it closely, "feather by feather", and leave its painting for the pleasure of posterity. The person most perplexed and shocked by this untoward incident is Lorenzo Dow who sees in it nature's erratic pattern of love and separateness. Miss Welty says, "He could understand God's 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." Thus, according to her, there is no logical explanation to the sequence of Love and Separateness. The idea is also repeated in "A Curtain of Green", "The Death of a Traveling Salesman," "First Love," The Ponder Heart and The Optimist's Daughter.
Further, Eudora Welty considers the span of love also to be erratic. It is a phenomenon which occurs when two people find that peaceful belonging together, may it be only for a moment. This moment serves as a life-saving, rejuvenating power which enables an individual to face adversity. It is that force which provides sanity and meaning to a chaotic human existence. "The Bride of the Innisfallen", "No place for you, My Love", "Going to Naples" and The Optimist's Daughter clearly underline the erratic duration of love in human-life.

To sum up Miss Welty's idea about love and isolation, one may say that she considers love to be that supreme emotion which can minimise the pain of isolation. Therefore, it must be carefully cultivated and delicately preserved by respecting the privacy of the loved one.

How is that to be done?

(III)

The individual in Eudora Welty's novels is seen fighting his battles at two fronts: against his own isolation which gnaws into the core of his being, and against the community which provides a threat to his privacy. In other words, on the one hand he makes desperate efforts to reach out and establish communication with the world, and on the other, he tries hard to preserve his privacy in the face of undesirable intrusion. Both: privacy and communication, though paradoxical,
are man's essential needs. But in the context of the world both are frustrated, or in the desperate attempt to satisfy one, the other is thwarted. Society (especially the Southern Society which is the forte of Eudora Welty's novels) is suspicious of man's desire to privacy. It jeopardises his any attempt to be himself. Man too is suspicious of society and would rather invest his emotions with one individual than with a crowd.

The question arises, does love mean a total dissolution of one personality into another? Eudora Welty's answer is a categorical 'No'. Unlike the romantic writers who eulogize a love which involves a total surrender, Miss Welty's ideas offer a breath of fresh air. According to her, love which violates the privacy of the loved one is not love but selfishness. Like Virginia Woolf who in one of her long essays advocated the necessity of a room to one's self, Miss Welty suggests that it is not only desirable but essential to keep a corner of the mind all to one's self where one may retire from time to time in order to return and love more. Love and understanding might be more completely realized if men and women would willingly accept the discipline and mutual consideration necessary. In this connection Kieft rightly remarks:

'It is good to be 'apart' - to know and feel one's own mystery and that of others. This knowledge evokes gentleness, respect for dignity and privacy. It develops poise and encourages freedom, it provides protection for inner development, delight in the perception of human variety and individuality, and a boundless potential for love and insight.'
Given below are a few brief examples to underline the importance of privacy in love:

In *The Robber Bridegroom* the fact that Rosamond's attempt to know the identity of her husband by wiping his face with a lotion is considered by him as a violation of his privacy, is an indication how dearly he holds his freedom to be himself. Similarly, Albert's not sharing the key with Ellie, George Fairchild's not yielding to Robbies's threat of desertion, King Maclain's and Billy Floyd's constantly eluding the community, the American girls' repeated escapades abroad, Gloria Short's continuous dreaming about a little house with just Jack, Lady May and herself in it, are clearly indicative of Miss Welty's strong sympathies for those protagonists who hold on possessively to their privacy. Trouble arises when this fundamental need is challenged.

(IV)

Another theme which runs parallel to the problem of privacy in love is that of the doubleness of human nature. Man is made up of contradictory elements which render him unpredictable, enigmatic and illusive — in other words, human. Unless a person is comprehended in his totality, a true understanding of him is not possible. Clement Mustrove, in *The Robber Bridegroom*, voices the author's views when he
advises Rosamond that love must involve the acceptance of the other in his totality. He says:

"If being a bandit were his breadth and scope, I should find him and kill him. ... But since in addition he loves my daughter, he must be not the one man, but two, and I should be afraid of killing the second. For all things are double, and this should keep us from taking liberties with the outside world, and acting too quickly to finish things off. All things are divided in half-night and day, the soul and body, and sorrow and joy and youth and age. ... And perhaps after the riding and robbing and burning and assault is over with this man you love, he will step out of it all like a beastly skin, and surprise with his gentleness."

Clement, in other words, says that since everything in creation is dual, the worth of one cannot be appreciated without the other. To doubly impress her point, Eudora Welty has conceived all the main characters in this novel to be in some way double: Clement Misgrove is a wanderer and a planter (both attached and detached to the soil); Rosamond is "beautiful as truth" but when she opens her mouth in answer to a question, "lies would fall out like diamonds and pearls," and Jamie is a respectable citizen and a romantic bandit. Moreover, when Rosamond and Jamie get married, they beget twins.

The theme of doubleness is repeated in "The Wanderers" when Virgie Rainey returning home from the cemetery after her mother's death feels an impulse of joy rush through her being. Virgie "... never doubted that all the opposites on earth were close together, love close to hate, living to
dying; but of them all, hope and despair were the closest blood - unrecognizable one from the other sometimes, making moments double upon themselves, and in the doubling double again, amending but never taking back. 9

Another story which underlines the fact of people living simultaneously at different plains of reality is "Old Mr. Marblehall". Mr. Marblehall leads to a double life with two wives and a son from each, living in the same town. Miss Welty stresses the fact that contradictory elements are present in all human beings, and that one of the main requirements of true and lasting love is to recognize them and accept a person for what he is. Once this diversity of human nature is realized, life ceases to be a burden.

(V)

Eudora Welty's works end largely on a note of affirmation. In her interview for The Paris Review she claimed, "My natural temperament is one of positive feeling and I really do work for resolution in a story." 10 Even the most complex problems of human existence take on an aura of positive feeling with Eudora Welty. Rupp Richard in his searching study of Celebration in American fiction points out that Eudora Welty's fiction presents a continual feast of reality. 11 First, she celebrates the place
by depicting her locale so vividly that the landscape itself becomes a world of love, mystery and wonder, and provides the fittest scene for the interior action. The Old Natchez in *The Robber Bridegroom*, Shellmound in *Delta Wedding*, Morgana in *Golden Apples*, Clay in *The Ponder Heart* and the other settings of Miss Welty's stories are as vibrating and throbbing as life itself. The human action that takes place on this soil, such as marriage, childbirth, love, hate, sex, death also takes a look of festivity. This is made possible because of the active participation of community in the individual's life. Marriage, for example, has a double significance, social and personal. At the personal level Robbie Ried's insight — that no love can bridge the uniqueness of personality and that marriage is, at best, an intimate relation of two strangers — sums up the relationship. At the social level, marriage is a matter of public interest because it involves not only the participation but the merger of two families into one another. Wedding itself, according to Miss Welty, is a small event in life. The important thing is that which follows, namely, the re-adjustments of family relations, motherhood, and the problems that arise from it. Miss Welty writes repeatedly about the ups and downs, tragedy and comedy, love and isolation of married life.

Childbirth, as viewed by her, is anticlimatic to love and marriage. One sees a large number of pregnant women spread over the entire range of her work, rejoicing, cursing,
Indulging or day dreaming in their unique state, often arousing misunderstanding, jealousy and indignation in the hearts of their neglected spouses. Eudora Welty considers pregnancy both as hilarious and dignified. The child represents a continuity of love on one hand, and a realization of separateness on the other.

If love is manifested in marriage and union, hatred is reflected in court combats which also take on an atmosphere of festivity. The court trial in *The Ponder Heart*, for example, becomes a "liturgical celebrations" when Uncle Daniel, the prophet of love and kindness, distributes his wealth to the very people who gather to witness his trial for murder. Despite the irony that his spirit of love is lost upon the avaricious crowd it, nevertheless, becomes clear that the modern man is altogether dehumanized. The dark picture of the corrupted human mind is contrasted with the informal atmosphere in the room, the genuine faces of the Judge, Edna Earle and Uncle Daniel, and while Uncle Daniel creates a wild flutter in the courtroom, the seriousness gives way to an atmosphere of gaiety and celebration.

Death, in Miss Welty's World, is not a painful event. Her attitude toward this ultimate end of human journey is that of acceptance and affirmation. This can be best understood in the light of her ideas about Time.
Time, according to her, is "like the wind of the abstract... Man can feel love for place" she says, but "he is prone to regard time as something of an enemy." The reason being that it is associated with movement and speed and thus considered an enemy of life and love. Carson McCullers describes the fleeting and irreversible nature of time in the following words:

'I wonder if you have ever thought about time. Here we are right now. This very minute, now. But while we are talking right now, this minute is passing. And it will never come again. Never in all the world. When it is gone, it is gone. No power on earth can bring it back again. It is gone.'

Not so with Eudora Welty. According to her, apart from the clock time there is something else called "human time" by which a person can recall and relive the past. She agrees with William Faulkner whose answer to a student she quotes in the same essay:

'To me, no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is the part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment in action is just not himself as he is then, he is all that made him.'

Thus, past according to Miss Welty, for ever lives in human mind and deed. This is the subject of three of her
major works, namely, Delta Wedding, Losing Battles and The Optimist's Daughter. Delta Wedding, for example, is a story of four generations covering a span of a hundred years, but all the generations seem to exist simultaneously in the present. Their deeds are talked about as if they happened only yesterday. George Fairchild, the founder, who cleared the wilderness and built the first house, Aunt Shannon, his wife, whose portrait hangs in the Grove, Denis who died in the World War I, Annie Laurie (Laura's mother) who is spoken of as casually as if she were still alive, are some of the many figures of the past who never seem to have died. One is struck by the strong presence of the past in the present. Similarly, Losing Battles is constructed entirely through the memories of the Renfro-Beecham families who have gathered to celebrate Granny Vaughn's ninetieth birthday. The Optimist's Daughter is a mature depiction of the theme of time. When Laurel comes to terms with reality after her night long baptism amidst her dead parent's belongings, she realizes that though man cannot hold the ticking of the clock-time, he can always preserve it in the reservoirs of his mind. His past thus, makes him a richer and fuller human being.

A common reservoir of experience is what binds a family or a community together. Common suffering mellows the pain of outer assault. Therefore, Eudora Welty's novels present
even funerals as festivals. They are not only a binding force in the face of adversity but also useful for dulling the pain of death. Her funerals are often marked by comical situations. On Kate Rainey's funeral, for example, King MacLain is seen making a hideous face at Virgie. The funeral of Miss Julia, though shown only by report, tells about the stupid tributes paid to her by her so called worldly successful pupils. Bonnie Dee's funeral is marked by an atmosphere which is far from sobriety. Judge McKelva's funeral looks more like an event of celebration than sorrow. Whereas marriages are marked by the pain of isolation, funerals, one notices, are marked by hilarious situations, indicating thereby that reality is not just black or white; it is grey.

Eudora Welty celebrates reality in its totality. She depicts not just the anguish of isolation but the glory of it, not just the pleasure of love but the pain of it, and Time, according to her, is that great leveller which mellows both the pleasure and pain of love and isolation. Her novels end on a note of affirmation. "Into the world" is the direction of her protagonists who move steadfastly on carrying with them the burden of their isolation.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. loc. cit.
8. Ibid., p. 39.
12. Ibid., p. 70.