Chapter IV

The World of Fantasy
A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes and beckoning shadows due,
And airy tongues, that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.  

Welty's works with a few exceptions are the creation of the 'unrestrained imagination.' Hers is a fiction that evokes wonder, and some of the stories contain a substantial element of the supernatural, thus creating an impossible, strange and unreal world. The incidents and the characters in these works are perfectly in keeping with this strange and unreal world. As for example a talking head in The Robber Bridegroom. The success of a work depends on the writer's ability and skill in using his/her imagination to transform the unreal world, into an acceptable and credible one. Every work of art is the creation of the imagination or fantasy and hence is unreal. A skilled writer makes this figment of his imagination appear credible and real. In fact the reader is made to forget that he is reading fiction, and believes himself in a strange but real world. This is possible when fantasy is powerfully presented or realized, thus producing an impact on the reader's imagination, strong and deep


enough to make him feel what he is reading is credible. Eudora Welty's works belong to this cadre. *Delta Wedding, Losing Battles, The Wide Net* and *A Curtain of Green*, to mention a few, are examples of 'unrestricted creative imagination' at work. Welty's projection of this unreal world is so powerfully executed that the reader tends to accept and believe in them. Welty's characters appear to be people of flesh and blood, and not just make-believe characters. Virgie, Kate Rainey, MacLain, Snowdie, Uncle George, Laura McRaven and Clytie, to mention a few, are people the reader could have encountered somewhere, sometime, in his journey through life.

"Where is The Voice Coming From?, " Keela The Outcast Indian Maiden" and 'The Burning" are a few of the exceptions to this group. They are not mere creations of fantasy; they have their roots in reality but are colored by the author's vivid imagination. "Where is The Voice Coming From? is "based on the 1963 assassination of Medger Evers, the field Secretary for the N.A.A.C.P. in Mississippi . . . narrated by the killer himself is a penetrating and psychologically complex portrayal of the mind of an assassin!" The identity of the assassin was unknown, inspite of which Welty was able to create a character who in many respects resembled the actual killer. This, she was able to do, with just

---


the facts that were then available, which actually, were not much at all. This is one of the instances that clearly emphasises Welty's creative skill and her ability to get into the minds of her characters, thus making them real. The story of 'Keela The Outcast Indian Maiden' was narrated to Welty by a man building a booth at a fair. He told her about a little black man, at a carnival, who was made to eat live chickens. Commenting on this story, Welty has stated "I guess if you read it you must have known that it was true and not made up - it was too horrible to make up." The Burning is historical. It is a short story that focuses on the plantation world and the effects of the Civil War upon it. It portrays "the destruction by the Federal army of a home outside Jackson, where two sisters, living alone with their servant, hang themselves, after the burning and rape of the younger." These stories clearly indicate that in the hands of a great writer fact and fiction are of equal importance.

Literary fantasies have many similarities with dreams - an unreality, vagueness, improbability, etc. Fantasy fiction is not transcendental; it is bound to the world we live in and are familiar with. In a general sense, all imaginary activity, that is, all literary works are fantasies, as they are the creations of the author's imagination, and in this general sense Welty's works can also be regarded as fantasies.


The definition of fantasy as a "fanciful work, especially one dealing with supernatural or unnatural events or characters" perfectly sums up *The Robber Bridegroom*. It is a short novel that teems with stock characters long associated with fairy tales and ballads. The setting of *The Robber Bridegroom* "is both real and imaginary - the timeless land of fairy tales and the changing world of historical and geographical event" Rodney, Mississippi, is the setting of this novel. It was a thriving town on the Mississippi river. Some time after the war between the states, the river changed its course and left Rodney dry, thus rendering it a ghost town. The Indians who make their appearance in this novel, filling the characters with untold fear and dread, are also, like Rodney, real and ghostly.

These Indians of *The Robber Bridegroom* although their tribe is never named are directly modelled on the Natchez. The Natchez were massacred in 1730 in retaliation for a massacre of their own, and the remnants of the tribe were sold into slavery in Santo Domingo by the French in the eighteenth century. Besides their name, the Natchez left behind the vivid memory of their beauty, mystery and pride.


9 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
The Robber Bridegroom is based on one of Grimm's fairy tales. In addition to this, there are also traces and suggestions of other tales such as Rumpel-Stilts-Kin, The Little Goose Girl, Snowwhite, The Fisherman and His Wife, Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella. Moreover a great deal of American folklore and near-folklore gets worked into the narration, the stories of Davy Crockett and Mike Fink, the atrocities of Big Harpe and Little Harpe and tall tales about Indians, frontiers' men and bandits of the Natchez trace, are also woven into this story, thus enhancing its fantastic nature. The Robber Bridegroom - a romance, has all the trappings of a fairy tale including the narrator whose tone is that of a "Canny maiden aunt, whose diction, asides and silly puns are all devices of a naturally gifted teller of tales, who knows how to make children giggle, shiver and sit still." This is clearly illustrated in the following passage:

Now Rosamond was a great liar and nobody could believe a word she said . . . . As for Rosamond, she did not mean to tell anything but the truth, but when she opened her mouth in answer to a question, the lies

-----------------------------
12 Ibid., p. 18.
would simply fall out like diamonds and pearls. Her father had tried scolding her, and threatening to send her away to the female Academy, and then marching her off without her supper. . . . Salome on the other hand, said she should be given a dose of Dr. Peachtree (R.B. 38-39).

And again, an earlier instance: 'And there were the three bags of gold sitting there side by side, like hens on their nests' (R.B.p. 7). These asides and silly puns serve to intensify and sustain the reader's interest throughout this short novel. Though the setting is real—Rodney, Mississippi—the reader is made to forget the realistic setting and is made to believe he is in a world of fantasy where just anything is possible. Clement Musgrove, the father of the heroine, Rosamond, returning home with a bag of gold, after a fruitful business trip in the city, is reminiscent of Beauty's father, who always returned after a business trip laden with money and gifts for his children. Clement Musgrove decides to spend the night at an inn as the way "home through the wilderness was beset with dangers" (R.B.p. 2). The inn that Clement Musgrove enters is lighted up and the sounds of singing and music are wafted to him. Presuming it to be an ideal spot to spend the night in, he enters it, but discovers the landlord with an ear missing. When questioned, the landlord admits it to be pinned to a market cross at Kentucky, for horse stealing. At the second inn, Musgrove encounters a landlord, who had his ear clipped off for the trouble he had got into after a cock fight. Musgrove decides not to try his luck too far,
and hence leaves the inn. Meanwhile the weather worsens, the rain comes down heavier, 'it bounded like the quarrelling of wild cats in the cane' (R.B.p. 4). At the top of the hill Clement Musgrove finds another inn, and an innkeeper, he believes to be honest. He is given a room with the warning, that he might have to share his bed.

The night at the inn is filled with humor and retains the element of fantasy. Mike Fink, the flat boatman, with a raven that could say "Turnback, my bonny,/Turnaway home." (R.B.p. 6) and Jamie Lockhart, a dandy and a bandit are Clement's bedfellows. Mike Fink boasts of his strength and expects immediate recognition. A scuffle ensues between Mike Fink and Jamie Lockhart. Mike recognizes Jamie, but is prevented from divulging the truth by Jamie's threat, that he would kill Mike Fink, if he did so. The three retire for the night, each with his bag of money under his head. In the middle of the night, Clement Musgrove is woken up by Jamie. He places two bundles of sugar-cane in their place on the bed, and they move to a corner and wait. Mike Fink, in due course, wakes up, pulls out a board from the floor and hits at, what he believes to be, the two sleeping forms on the bed. The sugarcane juice is mistaken to be all that remains of the beaten sleepers. In the morning, Mike Fink discovers that Musgrove's bag contains gold. He gloats over his luck. Musgrove and Jamie Lockhart move forward, Fink, who believes he had killed the two men, concludes that they must be 'bogeys' (R.B.p. 17). To Mike's question, if they had slept well, Jamie answers "Yes indeed, . . . except for some
rats which slapped me with their tails, once or twice in the night...
I do believe they were dancing a Natchez cotillion on my chest" (R.B.p. 18).

Poor Mike Fink is now quite sure that the two men are ghosts, and overcome with fear, he jumps out of the window, forgetting the bags of gold and his raven. Incidents like these heighten the fantastic element of *The Robber Bridegroom*. It is only a character in a fairy tale that could have behaved and acted the way Mike Fink did. Mike Fink serves to heighten the interest and humor of this fantastic tale.

Salome's (Rosamond's stepmother) role is typical of the stepmother of the fairy tales. She is cruel, wicked, jealous, envious, hateful and devoid of love for the heroine, as is Cinderella's stepmother, or Snowwhite's stepmother. She wishes some evil to befall Rosamond "perhaps the Indians might kidnap the girl and adopt her into their tribe, and give her another name, or that a leopard might walk out between two trees and carry her off in his teeth before she could say a word," (R.B.p. 33), and so she sends her deep into the forest to fetch her some herbs and Rosamond has no other option, but to obey her stepmother. Later on in the narration, one is again reminded of *Cinderella*, when Salome orders Rosamond, the day Jamie Lockhart is expected to visit them to "wash the floor and polish the row of dishes and candlesticks and put fresh candles in, and sweep the hearth and lay the table and bring the water and clean the fowls and..."
catch the pig and get the loaves to baking in the ashes" (R.B.p. 67). Snowwhite is clearly uppermost in the reader's mind, when he reads of Rosamond's adventure into the forest to find Jamie's lodgings. Rosamond finds the robber's den in a state of disorder and sets about tidying up the place. The dwarfs in SnowWhite and the Seven Dwarfs were at first horrified when they detected signs that clearly indicated the presence of a stranger in their abode, but later accepted SnowWhite. The robbers in The Robber Bridegroom react in a similar way. They were horrified to find their disorderly, and dirty abode transformed into a neat, tidy little place.

As soon as they saw what had happened to the house, they all stopped as dead as if they had been knocked on the head from behind. 'What grandeur is this?' shouted Jamie in anger. 'What bastard has been robbing the place?' cried the others. Then they rushed about turning things over and pulling things down and looking under the table and stools and between the feather beds. Undoing all of Rosamond's work (R.B.p. 80-81).

Like the dwarfs, the robbers argue and debate about what should be done to the intruder. Until, finally, the fact that she can cook for them makes them decide in her favour. Rosamond, once the robbers left, like SnowWhite, busied herself by cooking, baking, scrubbing and in washing the robber's shirts until she wore them out with her washing,
and like Snow White who packed little lunches for the dwarfs, when they left for work in the morning, so too Rosamond packed the robber's lunches "a bucket for each, in case they became separated before they would have their food at noon over the fire of an oak tree" (R.B.p.83).

Clement Musgrove, like the typical father in the fairy tales, is incapable of doing anything to stop his wife. He is perfectly aware of his wife's cruelty, for Rosamond tells him "everyday I go to the farthest edge of the indigo field on the other side of the woods, and gather the herbs that grow there . . . for my step-mother will have no other kind" (R.B.p. 37). Musgrove lacked the courage required to face a Virago. Like Beauty's father, a merchant, who returned laden with gifts, Musgrove returns with a "packet of needles, the paper of pins, length of calico, and muscadine wine, the salt for the table" (R.B.p. 36). Articles especially meant for Salome, and for Rosamond a beautiful silk dress the green of the sugarcane and "hairpins, and the petticoat, stitched all round with golden thread" (R.B.p. 36). There is an echo of Beauty and the Beast in Salome's outburst, later on in the novel. Referring to Rosamond's passion for the outlaw, Salome says "I fear, my dear, that you feel in your bosom, a passion for a low and scandalous being, a beast who would like to let you wait on him and serve him" (R.B.p. 123). Lines that clearly point to Welty's ability to skillfully weave tale after tale into the fabric of her story. In Beauty and the Beast, Beauty served the Beast and waited on him, and in due course loved the Beast. A selfless and pure love that breaks
the spell cast upon the prince and his household by a wicked witch, thus leading to Beauty's wedding to the prince. In a similar manner, it is Rosamond's love that transforms Jamie Lockhart into an honest, respectable and prosperous man.

Salome, wanting to be kept informed of Rosamond's activities, engaged Goat to keep an eye on her. When Rosamond departs for the bandit's hideout, with the idea of discovering Jamie's identity, Goat follows her and hides under her cot. Rosamond removes the berry stains while Jamie is asleep and discovers his true identity, thus enabling Goat to learn the bandit's true identity. Goat later discovers Big Harp's head in the box, setting it atop his own, he skipped off down the hill, kicking his heels to the right and left crying "Jamie Lockhart is the bandit of the woods! and the bandit of the woods is Jamie Lockhart!" (R.B.p. 140). Goat jumping to the right and left, and the manner in which he repeats what he knows, immediately recalls the dwarf in Rumpel-Stilts-Kin, dancing round the fire, repeating his name in a similar fashion, confident the queen would never learn of it. Similarly, when Rosamond, Salome, Jamie and his gang including Clement Musgrove are captured by the Indians and taken to their camp, Goat, who was not captured, strolls into the camp and hearing Rosamond's sobs, enters her tent and says "Good evening why are you crying?" (R.B.p. 150), a question almost identical to the dwarfs' in Rumpel-Stilts-Kin "a droll-looking little man hobbled
in and said, "Good-morrow to you, my good lass, what are you weeping for?".13

The story of The Fisherman and His Wife is clearly evident in Salome's greed and Clement Musgrove's docility. Like the fisherman's wife, Salome is never satisfied with what she has.

"Satisfied!" cried Salome. "Never, until we have got rid of this house, which is little better than a Kentuckian's cabin, with its puncheon floor, and can live in a mansion at least five stories high, with an observatory of the river on top of that, with twenty-two Corinthian Columns to hold up the roof." (R.B.p. 100).

Like the Fisherman, Clement Musgrove, had not the courage to stand up to his wife, and refuse to give into her. The Fisherman had the fish he saved to grant him his wife's demands. Musgrove's magic fish was his land, that yielded as much as was desired, with which Musgrove got all that his wife demanded. Salome's last wish - a five storied mansion, with an observatory, etc. like the old woman's was not granted. The Indians appear and Salome becomes their prisoner, and dances to her death.

These fairy tales form a fraction of The Robber Bridegroom, which is basically a tale based on Grimm's The Robber Bridegroom.

Miss Welty gives all that Grimm gives and considerably more. The latter tells

how a young maiden was bestowed by her father unknowingly upon a murderous bandit and how she eventually succeeded in capturing the bandit by her courage and her wits. 14

Though Welty's The Robber Bridegroom is based on Grimm's, it is not a blind copy of the original. Welty has here clearly depicted her greatness as a writer. Like Shakespeare who borrowed from Plutarch's Lives, yet made the plays entirely his own, so too is Welty's The Robber Bridegroom, though borrowed from Grimm's Fairy Tales, entirely her own, stamped with her immense knowledge of the frontier and of fairy tales. In Grimm's version the heroine, a miller's daughter, goes into the forest in search of her suitor's abode. As she reaches the house, set deep in the forest, a bird whose cage hung on the wall, warns her to "Return, return, thou youthful bride! A murderer's house it is inside!" 15 The miller's daughter pays no heed to the warning and enters the house. Finding no one, she roams through the house hoping to find someone. She finally comes to a room where a very old woman repeats the earlier warning to her. Hearing footsteps, she hides behind a great barrel and watches a victim brought in and made to drink various wines "one of white, 


one of red and one of yellow, and she fell down dead." One of the bandits spying a ring on the dead girl's finger chops it off. The finger drops into the lap of the miller's daughter. The robber unable to find the chopped off finger puts off searching for it to a later moment. The miller's daughter manages to escape undetected. The peas and beans she had scattered on her way to the abode, help her find her way home. The suitor, the chief robber, arrives at the miller's house on the wedding day. The guests are asked to narrate tales, the bridegroom turns to his bride-to-be and asks her to narrate a tale. She does so, and narrates about her narrow escape. As proof of the genuineness of her tale, she shows the chopped off finger with the gold ring on it. The bandit attempts to escape, but is caught and executed with his gang.

Salome took pleasure in sending Rosamond deep into the woods to fetch her the herbs she required, as she wished some harm to befall the girl. Rosamond had no other option but to obey her step-mother. Rosamond had a locket, which was her mother's and she wore it on a silver chain. She always took hold of the locket, while passing beneath the boughs and the locket would seem to speak to her. "What it never failed to say was, 'if your mother could see you now, her heart would break'" (R.B.p. 34). One day while Rosamond was brushing her hair, Salome walked off with the chain and the locket, and Rosamond never missed it. These incidents

---

and the peculiar nature of the locket, calls to mind the story of The Goose Girl. Like Rosamond, she was also a beautiful girl, a princess in fact. She was given a lock of her mother's hair, when she was sent to her betrothed. The maid who accompanied her, had other designs, but was prevented by the charmed lock of hair. The princess, frightened by her maid's attitude, voiced her fear "'Alas! What will become of me?' and the lock answered her and said, 'Alas! alas! if thy mother knew it/Sadly, sadly, would she rue it!' The second time the princess got down to drink water, the lock of hair, fell into the water and the princess, like Rosamond, did not notice its loss. The ever watchful maid, saw it and gloated over it, as, now she knew, the princess was in her power. The first thing she did was to get on to the princess' horse Falada, as it was she who was now the princess on her way to meet her betrothed. The poor princess was relegated to the rank of a maid. The hardships that this princess of The Goose Girl faces, like Rosamond's, are only for a brief span of time. As finally, the maid's true identity is revealed, and the princess is happily united to her betrothed.

Welty in her tale translates the elements of European fairy tales into the lore of the American frontier - its princess is a Mississippi girl who gathers pot herbs at the edge of the indigo field, its mild father king is a

Besides these deviations, Welty has also introduced the cruel stepmother, Goat and his family, Little Harp and the Indians, in addition to a number of fairy tales intricately woven into her tale, thus enriching her tale. Besides these, Welty has also deviated from the main plot. Rosamond felt no inward shudderings whenever she thought of, or saw, Jamie Lockhart. Unlike the miller's daughter, Rosamond, in love with the bandit, voluntarily goes in search of him; and unlike the miller's daughter it is not just her heart and clothes that Rosamond is deprived of, but also her virginity. The miller's daughter does not stay at the robber's house, Rosamond, not only stays but also performs all the household chores for them. Little Harp, and not one of the robbers, chops off the victim's finger. He does this, because he finds the finger repulsive. These and many more deviations, serve to transform The Robber Bridegroom into a tale that is very different from Grimm's The Robber Bridegroom.

Mississippi history and legend serve as a background to Welty's tale. The Harp brothers were bandits noted for their barbarous cruelty "Harp's Head being to this day the name of a place where the decapitated head of one of these bandits was placed as

a warning to other outlaws." This touch of realism adds to the enchantment of the story. Little Harp has the severed head of Big Harp, his brother wrapped up in blue mud in a trunk. The head keeps pestering Little Harp to let it out. Little Harp's answer is "Oh, Big Harp, my brother, please stay in the trunk like a good head, and don't be after me eternally for raiding and murdering, for you give me no rest."(R.B.p. 96) Talking heads are not of this world, and Big Harp's head with its constant plaguing takes The Robber Bridegroom out of the world of reality, into the enchanted world of fairy tales.

Welty, with the introduction of the Indians, and their cruelty - the dropping of Clement Musgrove's son into burning oil, the scalping of the bandits, Salome made to dance until she drops dead, has recreated the horror and fear that goes with the thought of the Indians. The life of the frontier men - a life beset with dangers, as a result of their constant clashes with the Indians, who showed no mercy to the captives and were in fact brutal in their punishment is also recreated for the reader. It is these realistic touches that render The Robber Bridegroom much richer, more enchanting and interesting than her model.

All fairy tales end on a happy note. The good are rewarded and the wicked punished, or they turn over a new leaf. Welty's

The Robber Bridegroom is no exception. Salome, Little Harp, and the bandits are dead. Goat is justly rewarded. Rosamond is happily united to Jamie Lockhart, who is no longer a bandit, but a rich merchant of New Orleans. Clement Musgrove, is relieved by the death of Salome, and happy to see Rosamond in good hands. Mike Fink like Jamie Lockhart, turns over a new leaf. He is no longer a flat boatman, but a mail rider. He helps Rosamond when she is frantically searching for Jamie, an act that is a clear indication of his transformation, from the quarrelsome, blood-thirsty rogue the reader encountered at the inn. The Robber Bridegroom makes the reader aware that human time is finite, in spite of the possibilities of wealth and progress that the future seems to offer. Nothing that man builds or gathers is proof against time, a standing example being Rodney and the Natchez. The tale reveals a child's unashamed pleasure and delight in the world of fantasy and legendary history, and in its exploration of human passions, like jealously, hatred, envy and avarice, the adult's critical intelligence is revealed. Charles C. Clark's words aptly sum up the greatness of Welty's The Robber Bridegroom. "The fairytale and folklore and mythic aspects of the novella and the tongue-in-cheek humor of narration combine to create a fiction unlike anything else in literature."20

Welty's works cannot be contained within set definitions, as is clearly indicated in The Robber Bridegroom. Each is a reflec-

ion upon life, a comment, a mythical tale, a fantasy, in short many things combined in one. This makes one marvel at the skill and imaginative power of the author. The reader is presented a rich storehouse of knowledge and experience. It is left to him to choose what he wants. Take all he can and emerge the richer, take a little and discover that there was much more that he could have taken, or emerge baffled, and confused and be the loser. In a thesis of this sort, it is an impossibility to deal with all aspects of her work. Hence, only those applicable to the topic chosen are dealt with.

"A Worn Path" appears, at one reading, to be a simple tale of an old black woman on her way to procure medicine for her grandson. A second, closer reading clearly reveals that it is a tale of diversified elements. It is, in fact, a tale that includes, in its sweep, myth, fantasy, a reflection on the complexities of life and "traces of an old Norse tale... found in an elementary school reader of the 1930's." Welty's description of Phoenix "her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods" (C.G.p. 275) is suggestive of a red-headed woodpecker ...like the ones usually found in the pinewoods of Mississippi. The Norse tale narrates the story of an old woman who was so selfish and inhuman

that she was turned into a bird. A similar tale of inhumanity, occurs in a common Gloucestershire story, referred to by Ophelia in *Hamlet*. "They say the owl was a baker's daughter." (IV, V, 41-42). The story centers round a baker's daughter, who reprimanded her mother for placing too big a piece of dough to bake for the stranger who requested for some bread to eat. The girl reduced the size of the dough and set it to bake. The dough began to swell, until it became an enormous size. "Where upon the baker's daughter cried out, 'Heugh, heugh, heugh,' which owl like noise probably induced Our Saviour, for her wickedness, to transform her into that bird." 22

The woman in the Norse tale was dressed in black, with a small white apron, and a cap of red. She refused to give an old beggar who had approached her one of the cakes she had baked. She then discovered that no matter how little dough she took, it became bigger and bigger as she rolled them. She had, out of her selfishness, reserved some cakes for herself, and as she ate them, she became smaller and smaller with each bite that she took, until finally, her arms became black wings, her nose a sharp beak, her feet were transformed into sharp talons, in short she became a woodpecker, hopping up and down the pine trees looking for bugs and worms. Thus the woman who would not

be human, was turned into a bird. Welty inverts the legend. Her
description of Phoenix Jackson, as she emerges out of the pine wood
is that of a woodpecker, a woodpecker transformed into a human
being, for her humaneness, and kindness. In this short story, the
reader follows the path Phoenix is traversing and glimpses her
mind, as she overcomes numerous obstacles, not losing her dignity
and sense of humor in her quest. Phoenix's ability to overcome
the obstacles, stems from the earnestness of her quest. It is not
for herself that Phoenix is undertaking the journey, it is for her
grandson. Phoenix Jackson gives of herself, gives all that she can
and is able to give, and thus gains her humanity. The old Norse
woman on the other hand, loses her humanity due to selfishness.
A lesson that needs to be revived and narrated again and again because
humanity tends to be more like the old Norse woman, and the baker's
daughter - selfish and inhuman. Phoenix Jacksons are rare, as
rare as the fabulous bird after whom Phoenix is named. A bird
that is believed to rise from its ashes, and only one of its kind
existing at a time - a situation that should not be duplicated among
men.

The trustworthiness of sight, the confidence
that a person knows when he is asleep
and dreaming and when he is awake,
the distinct difference and comforting
gap between dream and reality, irrational
and rational, illusion or fantasy and fact
are continually being threatened by Miss
Welty's fiction.23

"A Piece of News," "Old Mr. Marblehall," "Death of a Travelling Salesman" are stories that prove Vande Kieft's criticism to be perfectly justified. It is to a different world of fantasy that the reader is carried to in these stories. It is a world created by the character himself, where he visualises, day-dreams or fantasizes. The fantasising appears so real to the character, that he tends to whole heartedly believe in its actually. It is a process of wish fulfilment of "unrestricted pleasure or aggression," when the dreamer is provided, by the fantasies, with an imaginary world where

all factors which troubled him in the world of actuality are either eliminated or converted into their opposites; where he fails in actuality, he triumphs in imagination; the poor man is rich; the prisoner is free; the oppressed rules; the unsuccessful man is envied; and so on . . . . As this imaginary world exists only at the pleasure of the dreamer, and the events of that world are what he chooses to make them, he is in truth the creator, protector, and law-giver of that world. Man's helplessness and impotence are transformed into unlimited power; the restrictions to creative achievement give way to actual omnipotence."  


Thus, fantasies enable the dreamer to create a world or state that is happier and more satisfying than the actual world he lives in—a world that has proved to be incomplete and unsatisfying, and hence emphasising the need and urge to dream. As Michael Kreyling has stated:

Human beings must always dream of what they need but will never accomplish. The dream is always more important than 'ponderous realities.' Irony is the defence of the rational mind. Compassion is the response of the heart; for no matter how unfit man is for living in his dreams, his need for them is vital.26

"A Piece of News" perfectly exemplifies this situation. Ruby Fisher, the protagonist of this story is an uneducated, lonesome and faithless wife. She returns to the cabin, after an afternoon in the loft of the cotton gin, with the driver of a Pontiac car. His payment is a sack of coffee wrapped up in a newspaper. An item in the paper catches Ruby Fisher's attention. The item was about a Mrs Fisher who had the misfortune to be shot in the leg by her husband. Ruby Fisher is taken aback by the news item. Hers was a lonely life, with a husband who just did not seem to have any time for her. Speculating on Clyde's reactions, she realized that he would not go to the extent of shooting her, though he might beat her black and blue, if he heard of her outing with the guy in the Pontiac car.

Rudy Fisher was starved for love and attention, and seeing her name in print, she subconsciously makes herself believe that the news is about herself. So, whole heartedly does she believe in her fantasy of herself shot in the leg, lying at the door of death, and bleeding profusely, that she jumps to her feet in anger shouting "Where are you Clyde Fisher?" (C.G.p. 24). She opens the door, in search of Clyde, a gust of cold wind blows on her, shaking her out of her daydream, and making her aware of reality. The pleasure and satisfaction she enjoyed from her daydreaming, was too good to be just discarded. So she goes back to fantasising, picturing Clyde coming behind her with the gun, but Clyde was actually at the woods, further, it was unlike Clyde to take up a gun and shoot her. Clyde could not be roused to such a passion. Mrs Fisher stretches herself out in front of the fire, growing warmer and sleepier, and continues fantasising, imagining herself dying with a bullet in her heart.

Mrs Fisher's longing for attention finds an outlet in her fantasies. She imagines herself as wearing a brand new nightgown, and her heart aching with every beat. Deeply moved by this fantasy, Mrs Fisher begins to cry softly, as if in extreme pain. She pictures Clyde, not the Clyde of the present, but of the past-handsome and strong, looking down at her and saying "Ruby I done this to you." Her answer would be "That is the truth, Clyde - you done this to me" (C.G.p. 26). She then imagines herself dying. She lay quiet for a moment, composing her face into an expression that would be
"beautiful, desirable and dead" (C.G.p. 26). Thrilling at the attention she receives in her fantasy, Ruby Fisher continues with her fantasy, imagining Clyde buying her a new dress to bury her in. She also fantasises Clyde as digging the grave behind the house, under the cedar tree, and then nailing her in a pine coffin, which he would carry to the grave and bury her in it. Ruby Fisher imagines her husband as being wild with grief, distracted and shouting because he would never be able to touch her again. Her fantasies were so real, that Mrs Fisher even found it difficult to breathe, and thought that "this was the way to fall on her grave" (C.G.p. 27).

Mrs Fisher, is rudely brought down to earth, by Clyde's entrance, and his demand for supper. Ruby Fisher, jumps up and goes about the task of getting Clyde's supper ready, still savouring those few moments of her fantasy, when Clyde was all attention and grief stricken. Still in her world of make-believe, Mrs Fisher is once again brought back to reality by Clyde shouting at her for splashing the hot coffee on his wrist. She hands him the paper, after his meal and expectantly looks at him as he reads, what she points out with her finger. Clyde is taken aback by the news item and declares it must be a lie, but to Mrs Fisher, who is still partially in her world of make-believe the incident is real. Clyde a down-to earth man notices that it is a Tennessee paper. Mrs Fisher, is not so easily convinced. Her dream world appears more real, and is more welcome, than the world of actuality, and so Mrs Fisher passionately declares, "It was Ruby Fisher! .... My name is Ruby Fisher (C.G.p. 30).
The story "A Piece of News" clearly pictures the lonely life Ruby Fisher lives. Tied to a man who only seems concerned about his bare necessities, she seeks companionship and excitement outside her married life. Her name in the paper triggers off her imagination, and so she visualises herself as dying, and thus gaining Clyde's attention and love. Clyde must have been the type of husband who just took his wife for granted, and who never thought of pleasing her, by presenting her with something like a new dress, or nightgown. Hence Ruby Fisher fantasises Clyde as having to buy her a new nightgown, and being distracted and wild with love for her. Mrs. Fisher's longing for attention, for love, and for a new nightgown, are fulfilled in her day-dreaming though it is a short lived fulfilment. The difference between a fantasiser, and one who is not fantasising, is clearly depicted in Ruby Fisher's and Clyde's reaction to the bit of news. Ruby Fisher believes whole heartedly in her fantasy, while to Clyde who is a non-participator in the fantasy, actuality alone counts. Clearly indicated in Clyde's explosive demand "Well, I'd just like to see the place I shot you!" (C.G.p. 29). Whereas Ruby Fisher, who had transformed the leg wound into a heart wound, to make it more fatal, experience the pain of a bullet wound, without the actual wound itself. Thus "A Piece of News" clearly indicates and emphasises that fantasising is as natural as breathing. It is a means by which man is able to fulfil his yearnings and desires. It is a means of transporting him from a world or situation, that seems incapable of
gratifying his desires, into one, where all that he longs for or wants is within his reach. Thus momentarily at least Ruby Fisher has her desires and longings fulfilled.

In Welty's exploration of the inner life, hard and fast lines are not always drawn between the world of fact and fantasy; there are half states, mixtures of dream and reality or rapid shifts between the two worlds. The facts may lie around somewhere to be pieced together by the diligent, but they may not be insisted on, or even particularly interesting or relevant to the meaning of the story. . . . in 'Powerhouse' and 'Old Mr Marblehall'. . . the two worlds of dream and actuality are becoming less clearly distinguishable. Powerhouse not only has his fantasy life, but wields it masterfully; he prods and shapes it and then makes music out of its. 27

Powerhouse is a black Jazz pianist. He has to go on with his public performances, condemned, as it were, by his race and circumstances to play the role of a jester to a middle-class population. At one such performance, the piece he plays is 'Pagan Love Song,' the theme is 'My wife is dead.' He plays the song with elaborate variations, as he debates with Little Brother, Valentine and Scoot.

who respond with appropriate horror, sympathy and scepticism. Powerhouse claims he has a telegram informing him of his wife's death. He adds that Uranus Knockwood has sent him the telegram. Powerhouse gets carried away by the fantasy he has created for himself, and asks his band to listen to him as he luridly describes how it must have happened.

My wife gets missing me. Gypsy. She goes to the window. She looks out and sees you know what. Street. Sign saying Hotel. People walking. Somebody looks up. Old man. She looks down, out the window. Well?... Ssssst! Ploooey! What she do? Jump out and burst her brains all over the world (C.G.p. 266).

Powerhouse fantasies his wife as sitting up at night, waiting for him. He imagines her hearing footsteps and imagining it is him, she is filled with hope and joy. The footsteps go past her door, leaving her disappointed and miserable. Unable to bear her loneliness any longer, Powerhouse imagines her as getting into her nightdress and jumping put the window. He further imagines her as leaving no note behind, and so he is left ignorant of the reason for her death. Powerhouse intensifies the horror of his fantasy by imagining, not only her brains, but also her insides, all scattered around. He even makes himself believe he knows who must have found her "that creep that follow around after me, coming up like weeds behind me. . . . When I going out he just coming in," (C.G.pp.267-268). The man, Powerhouse
has his eyes on, is none other than Uranus Knockwood, a man, who "takes our wives when we gone!" (C.G.p. 269). He visualises him as carrying his dead wife around the corner. Powerhouse's narration, and acting has been so realistic, that not only the waitress and his gang, but also the reader is tempted to believe in the incidents narrated by Powerhouse. Powerhouse's return telegram 'What in the hell you talking about? Don't make any difference: I gotcha." (C.G.p. 271), fills the reader with doubts. The Drummer's suggestion that Powerhouse should use the telephone, as he had done the previous night is coldly ignored. Powerhouse's comment at the suggestion "That is one crazy drummer that's going to get his neck broken some day," (C.G.p. 272), serves to intensify the doubts the reader had.

Powerhouse goes back to the dance hall. The request is for 'Somebody Loves me.' Powerhouse obliges, and "with a vast impersonal and yet furious grimace" that transfigures his face, he concludes with "... May be its you!" (C.G.p. 274). At the close of "Powerhouse" the doubts the reader had are intensified and he wonders whether Gypsy is dead or not. If the reader is as sceptical as the drummer then he, like the drummer, is plagued with doubts, wondering if, Powerhouse had actually received the telegram. If he had received it, he would not recount her death in the heartless fashion that he did. Further, since he was in Alligator Mississippi, he could not have known that she had jumped off the window. The telegram was supposed to have only informed him of her death. The telegram Powerhouse
sends back also enhances the reader's doubts, as Powerhouse could have phoned, as that was the simplest and quickest way of getting in touch. The answer that these doubts lead to is that Gypsy, evidently, is not dead. The telegram and the rest of the details given by Powerhouse, are mere projections of his mind. Projections, that are, maybe, the result of a suspicious mind. He tortures himself with the belief that his wife is faithless to him, and with a man Powerhouse himself has created - Uranus Knockwood, the sender of the telegram. This indicates that there was no telegram, hence no death, which clearly goes to emphasise the power and force of Powerhouse's fantasy; a fantasy so vividly narrated as to make the listeners and the reader believe in its credibility. Powerhouse as his name implies is

a tremendous human dynamo that is capable of taking in any raw fact of nature - even sudden death by violence - and with the energy he generates in the "Powerhouse" of his blood and his imagination, of pouring out the wild order of his music. Fantasy is his product, an important mode of his being, the necessary ingredient, of what he is; 'the facts of the case' have simply ceased to be relevant. The narrator of the story abandons herself to the fantasy observed and created, and we are swept along in that abandonment. . . . Thus both the mode of narration and the subject
of the narrative participate in, or project, the fantasy.  

J.A. Bryant is of the opinion that "this improbable fiction provides creative release for Powerhouse and most of his musicians as they drink beer in a Negro restaurant during the break for inter-

Powerhouse's fantasy, could be the result of a longing for attention.  Unlike Ruby Fisher, who desired and longed for her husband's attention, Powerhouse longs for the attention of a bigger crowd.  His jazz playing is just taken for granted, so he longs for sympathy at least, if not admiration, and he longs to be the focus of attention.  This he achieves by the fantasy he creates, thus satisfying that particular urge and longing, which otherwise might never have found fulfilment.

"Old Mr. Marblehall" exhibits an even more marked ambiguity in the merging of fact and fantasy.  It is a story about an old man's war against public unconcern, boredom and insignificance, he is weighed under.  Old Marbelhall longs to shake the people out of their compla-cency, to startle them to such an extent, "by. . . a great explosion of revelation" (C.G.p. 191), which he is certain, will be too much for them to accept, and the shock would mean their death.

Mr. Marbelhall is a nobody to the town.  He is just an old little man from an ancestral home, who goes out walking or is driven

---

28 Ruth M. Vande Kieft, p. 84.

in his carriage. He is believed to frequent the wells for his health "and drinking the water - exactly like his father," (C.G.p. 189). But Mr. Marblehall is not content to remain unnoticed. He is determined to be noticed. So he takes a wife when he is sixty, and also produces a son, an achievement no doubt, but the expected reaction from the town's people is not forthcoming. Nobody knows that Mr. Marblehall is leading a double life, that he has, in the poorer section of the town, another house, another wife and another son. The second wife "is more solid, fatter, shorter and while not so ugly, funnier looking. She looks like funny furniture. ... or sometimes like a woodcut of a Bavarian witch, forefinger pointing, with scratches in the air all around her" (C.G.p. 186). The first wife is tall with springy hair and hovers nervously. As for the children, they appear identical, with their tantrums and obstinacy, but the second boy has a tooth missing, and has a shrewd monkey look, and is even more cunning than the first boy.

One day Mr. Marblehall imagines, his secret will be discovered. One of the shrewd little boys will trail him across town, or perhaps Mr. Marblehall himself will make a public confession - then what astonishment there will be! He consoles himself by thinking how electrified his two wives and sons will be, "to say nothing, of most men over sixty-six."30

The reader, as in *Powerhouse,* is left in a puzzled frame of mind, wondering whether Marblehall was leading a double life, or if this double life of his was nothing more than a mere figment of his imagination. The title of the story is significant. It calls to mind a Marblehall, in which the sounds of the real world and those of the unreal echo and re-echo, making it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. The title was suggested by Alfred Bunn's *I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls,* which is a romantic, escape poem. As the allusion indicates, Marblehall is a habitual dreamer, as clearly indicated in his dreaming of himself as "a great blazing butterfly stitching up a net" (C.G.p. 191). In his double life, Marblehall goes under the name of Mr. Bird. A name that is suggestive of the bird's ability to soar above man's world, the world of actuality. These are the clues that point to the fact that Old Marblehall is not actually leading a double life. His double life is only a dream, a fantasy. A fantasy he indulges in, not because it affords him pleasure or happiness to think of himself as having two wives, and two sons, but rather to rouse the people from their unconcern, and to get them to notice him. His fantasy centres round the shock and astonishment the people will have, which will serve to wake them and make them take notice of him, thus transforming him from a Nobody into a Somebody.

"Death of a Travelling Salesman," a more powerful and subtle story, demonstrates the same technique, with some variances, and a slightly different resolution. Mr. Bowman comes to terms with reality in an incident which reveals a whole lifetime
of experience to him, the sort of which he feels that he has been cheated. The realization in him of his estrangement from humanity is enormous. It comes with such violence of impact that he is stunned— to death. 31

R.J. Bowman, a salesman for a shoe company, for the past fourteen years is back on the road after a severe attack of influenza. He is on his way to Beulah and suddenly realizes he is on the wrong route. He drives on, not willing to enquire the way, and finds himself on the edge of a ravine. Bowman's reflexes were not dulled. Realizing he could do nothing to stop the car from going over, Bowman gets out of the car. The car rolls over. The awaited crash does not come. Peeping over, Bowman sees his car has fallen into "a tangle of immense grape vine, as thick as his arm, which caught it and held it, rocked it like a grotesque child in a dark cradle and then... released it gently to the ground" (C.G.p. 235). Seeing a house in the distance Bowman approaches it and asks for help. The man of the house, Sonny helps him get his car out, Bowman's request to stay for the night is granted, and then he realizes that the woman, who had answered his knock was pregnant and so concludes that she must be Sonny's wife. Taken aback by this discovery he rushes out, only to realize that his heart was not strong enough even to bear this shock. He dies before reaching his car.

One wonders, if Bowman did really lose his way, especially since he has been on it for the past fourteen years. It does seem an impossibility, all the more since, Beulah was only "fifty miles away from the last town, on a graveled road" (C.G.p. 233). The other alternative is to believe, as Vande Kieft does that:

the salesman's perceptions are influenced by his sick, semi-delirious state, only to reassert itself more strongly when a disturbing suggestion of Mark Schorer is introduced; that all the events of the story may be hallucinatory, taking place in Bowman's mind as he lies on his hospital bed.  

Old Phoenix Jackson, also has her share of fantasy. Attempting to strike at the little black dog that charges her, Phoenix lands herself in the ditch. In the ditch "a dream visited her, and she reached her hand up, but nothing reached down and gave her a pull" (C.G.p. 281). "Old Phoenix is seen to have her little dreams and abstractions, to slip over into the fantasy world and exist there briefly in a mode as simple and natural as in the real world." Phoenix Jackson imagines a little boy offering her a slice of cake on a plate. Phoenix stretches out her hand for the cake exclaiming "that would be acceptable" (C.G.p. 278), but there was neither the plate nor the


33 Ibid., p. 83.
boy, her hand was just stretched out into the empty air. Phoenix Jackson is old and lonely. She is at an age when people do automatically extend a helping hand, as is indicated in the white young man's action, and in the lady laden with presents who placed her presents on the sidewalk and bent and laced Phoenix's shoes, hence her fantasy of the helping hand extended to her; and the little boy with the cake - both helping her out. Phoenix's trip to Jackson, can also be nothing but just a fantasy - a reliving of the journey she must have undertaken, when her grandson was alive. Her resort to fantasising could be her means of getting back what she has lost, with the death of her grandson. Phoenix Jackson, evidently, is a poor, lonely old black woman, but one who realized that the world is still peopled with people who care, and are kind and willing to help. So she relives her journey and by doing so, finds satisfaction, happiness and companionship. These fantasies of Phoenix, could be Welty's way of indicating that in spite of everything evil and cruel that man does to man, courtesy, kindness and humaneness are still alive, and no class or color prejudice can ever kill these traits in man. 

Sarah Morton's fantasy in "The Whistle" is the natural outcome of the disappointing and miserable life led by the Mortons. It was spring, and yet bitterly cold. The Mortons had dame misfortune ruling over their lives, and so time and again their harvest was a failure. With no money coming in, food was short, so too wood and everything else. They did not have enough of warm clothes, and so Sarah lay
trembling, with sleep miles away. Sarah began to think of Summer, concentrating at first only on red and green colors, the smell of the sun on the ground, the touch of warm ripening tomatoes. These thoughts open the door to a world of pleasure, warmth and happiness. Sarah Morton begins to visualise Dexter in the shipping season. She could see smiling farmers leading in wagon loads of the most beautiful tomatoes. "Train after train of empty freight cars stretched away" (C.G.p. 114) and were filled with the ripe tomatoes. Sarah imagines herself and Jason near the first shed handing over their own load of tomatoes, which were then sorted, wrapped, loaded and dispatched. "Sarah could think of the celebration of Dexter and see the vision of ripe tomatoes only in brief snatches" (C.G.p. 115). The cold was too severe to permit Sarah the luxury of enjoying the warmth of the May sun, and of watching her crop being freighted away for long. It was only in brief snatches that Sarah was able to enjoy her fantasy. Her world of fantasy was warm, bright and a happy one - farmers smiling, music box playing in the cafe men getting drunk, children celebrating, cart-loads of bright juicy tomatoes coming in, and above all the bright warm sun shining.

"The Whistle" while clearly underscoring man's need to fantasise, also emphasises the distinction between the actual world and the world of fantasy. The former makes one aware of stock reality, of one's shortcomings and failures, while the latter makes one forget reality and fulfils one's yearnings. The warm sun, a good harvest,
brightness, warmth, happiness, were beyond the Mortons' reach. Sarah Morton's fantasy, besides supplying her with all these, also makes her momentarily forget the bitter cold. So for a few moments at least - a few precious moments, Sarah enjoys a dream, and lives in a world where everything is just perfectly right. The normal dreams, the ones that occur while one is asleep, occur unbidden, while these day-dreams, or fantasies are willingly indulged in. It is man's way of fulfilling some urge, desire or longing of his, thus making his life a lot pleasaner than it would have otherwise been.

"A Memory" is a beautiful portrayal of the fantasies of a young girl in love. The narrator's day dreams on a city beach are interrupted by the appearance of a disquieting group of bathers. The narrator's fantasies revolve around a man, a classmate of hers, whom she believes she loves. Being ignorant of his background, she visualises his home and parents. "It was unbearable to think that his house might be slovenly and unpainted, hidden by tall trees, that his mother and father might be shabby - dishonest - crippled - dead. . . . Sometimes I imagined that his house might catch on fire in the night and that he might die" (C.G.p. 150). The narrator admits to dreaming of this boy, whose wrist her hand had brushed against. She realises that she keeps dreaming about him, solely because it was a source of pleasure to her. It was the thrill she experienced at that accidental touch, and the attraction she felt for him that
make her relive those pleasurable moments. Her common sense warns her that she is being foolish. So she fantasises the house burning down, and his parents as being unpleasant people. It was a means by which she was assuring herself that she was lucky that they were not really in love.

The narrator of Welty's "A Memory" remains nameless and draws attention to the incidents and not to the protagonist. The author's intention, evidently is to focus the reader's attention on the fact that fantasies are a part and parcel of everyman's life, each stage of which has its own desires, aspirations, fears, and doubts, which find expression in his fantasies.

Petrified Man, published in 1939, mainly consists of Leota's stories narrated to Mrs Fletcher, her captive and interested audience. Practically everything under the sun is discussed and narrated including a Mrs and Mr. Pike. Libby F. Jones wonders if "Mrs Pike, Leota's best and most extensive story, be a testimony not to reality but to the imagination - to the fantasies - of this very skilful story teller." Leota's fantasy is very different from that of Old Mr. Marblehall. His life as Mr. Bird is a life visualised for the sole purpose of the thrill and satisfaction in imagining the shocked and dumbfounded townspeople. Mrs Pikes'on the other hand is the natural outcome of Leota's gift for story telling. So gifted a narrator is she that the reader

---

is left wondering where fact ends and fantasy begins. The story of Mrs Pike could be considered more a fabrication than a fantasy. The term 'fantasies' used by Libby F. Jones to Leota's Mrs Pike, could be viewed as referring, mainly, to the narrator's ability to invent and create a make-believe character. The term fantasy as used by Eric Berne on the other hand refers to the use of the imagination to fulfil a longing or an urge in the person, as is clearly defined in "The Whistle," "A Memory" and "Old Mr. Marblehall." Leota is not given to fantasising. Endowed with an active imagination, she is evidently a gifted story teller. Mrs Fletcher's interest and gullibility is the fuel that fires Leota's imagination, enabling her to delicately weave the story about Mrs and Mr Pike.

Howard, in "Flowers for Marjorie" is jobless and disinterested in finding one. He could not also be coaxed into finding a job, and his wife's pregnancy didn't seem to fill him with a desire to find one. Her condition only seemed to fill him with hate for her. She seemed to be in a world of sureness, fruitfulness and of comfort, while he was in world of hunger and weakness. Drawn to the pansy on Marjorie's buttonhole, Howard visualised it as losing its flower size and assuming "the gradual and large curves of a mountain on the horizon of a desert, the veins becoming crevasses, the delicate edges the giant worn lips of a sleeping crater" (C.G.p. 195). Howard snatched the pansy from Marjorie's coat and tearing its petals off scattered them on the floor and jumped on them. Marjorie sat watching him in silence and it gradually dawned on Howard "that he had not
acted at all, that he had only had a terrible vision." (C.G. p. 195).

The pansy that Howard visualised as growing beyond proportion and resembling a crater was nothing other than Marjorie's pregnancy which seemed to fill him with fear, rather than with joy. It was a threat to his lazy life and hence his desire to obliterate anything that threatened his easy going life. So vivid was his fantasy, that he believed he had acted the way he had imagined himself acting. Marjorie's cool glance brought him down to reality, but the threat was no dream, it was real, there before him. Howard could not allow the threat to be a reality, and so he killed Marjorie and with her death, time stands still for Howard. Maybe, that was exactly what Howard wanted. If time stood still, there could be no threat whatsoever to his way of life.

Patricia S. Yaeger is of the opinion that

In "Sir Rabbit," the third story in The Golden Apples, Mattie Will, a young woman bored with her sedentary marriage, imagines making love to King in the forest. As she sits on her front porch, churning and dreaming, she stages his gargantuan approach. 35

Mattie having grown up in Morgana was perfectly aware of King Mac-Lain's reputation - a reputation that seemed to attract her all the

35 "Because a fire was in My Head: Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination," Mississippi Quarterly, 39, No. 4 (Fall 1986), p. 568.
more now as Junior's wife. An actual encounter being impossible, Mattie Will fantasies her encounter with MacLain in the wood, "when she laid eyes on Mr. MacLain close, she staggered, he had such grandeur, and then she 'was caught by the hair and brought down as suddenly to earth as if whacked by an unseen Shillelagh" (G.A.p. 95). Carol Manning, on the other hand, considers this encounter of Mattie Will's with King MacLain as real and not a fantasy. The events of "Sir Rabbit" seem to substantiate Manning's opinion. Mattie and her husband are in the woods poaching, when they encounter MacLain. MacLain was not the man to miss a pretty face, and Mattie was willing to share in the legend. Mattie's husband, blacking out at the shot fired over his head, gives MacLain the chance to prove that he is still Zeus, and willing to father as many children as he possibly can. Characters within a story like Phoebe in Asphodel do fantasise, their fantasies are not the pivots of the stories, and hence they have not been dealt with.

The Ponder Heart published in 1954, introduces the reader to a different world of fantasy. A world, not filled with daydreams and wish fulfilments, but a world of the fantastic - where the things that do occur seem incredible and unreal, and the characters themselves partake of this element of the fantastic. C.N. Manlove's definition of fantasy as "of another order of reality from that in which

---

we exist and form our notions of possibility," perfectly sums up The Ponder Heart. It is a story that centers round Uncle Daniel, a man, Welty conceives as the epitome of generosity. He gives away just anything and everything and is unconcerned about the next day. The story is narrated by Edna Earle, Uncle Daniel's niece, to a visitor who has arrived at the Beulah. Edna Earle, in keeping with the fantastic mode of the novel, does not in the least object to Uncle Daniel's generosity. His gifts range from

a string of hams, a fine suit of clothes, a white-face heifer calf, two trips to Memphis, a pair of fantail pigeons, fine Shetland pony (loves children), brooder and incubator, good nannygoat, bad billy, cypress cistern, field of Dutch Clover, two iron wheels and some laying pullets (they were together), cow pasture during drought (he has everlasting springs), innumerable fresh eggs, a pick-up-truck— even his own cemetery lot (P.H.p. 8).

Grandpa Ponder, finding himself incapable of controlling his son's generosity, in spite of his efforts and prayers decided to commit him to an asylum. This also proved futile, as Uncle Daniel was oftener home than at the asylum. Grandpa tried getting Uncle Daniel married, but marriage also could not put an end to his giving away

sprees. Marriage with Miss Teacake Magee did not work out, and one fine day Uncle Daniel turned up married to Bonnie Dee Peacock, a woman who knew how to extract money from Uncle Daniel. Her shabby treatment of Uncle Daniel did not offend him. He loved her too much for that. Finally his attempts to tickle Bonnie Dee, in an attempt to win her back, landed him in trouble—accused of Bonnie murder. At the trial Uncle Daniel is ordered by his lawyer and Edna to keep quiet. He does so until all the witnesses are questioned and then demands to be heard. He narrates the incidens until Edna once again stops him, when he does the next best thing possible—handing out the whole Ponder account, he had withdrawn that morning, to the people in the court. Uncle Daniel leaves the court acquitted of the murder of Bonnie Dee.

The incidents that give this novel the quality of the fantastic are numerous. The first and most important is Uncle Daniel's weakness for gifting away things. Generosity in any man is a quality to be applauded and adopted. Uncle Daniel's generosity oversteps the bonds of credulity. Further, his action in court, while being tried for murder, is just out of this world. So also is the judge's question, while the case is being tried, of how many would like to have lunch at the Beulah, and asking the people to indicate their answer by putting up their hands. Uncle Daniel being committed to an asylum, not because he is insane, but as a means of trying to cure his generosity, is perfectly unacceptable. The fantastic nature of the novel gains in proportion when Uncle Daniel turns the table...
on Grandpa Ponder. As John Allen states, "Uncle Daniel in a world made safe by fantasy shows no awareness that he is being ignored and humiliated" by Bonnie Dee Peacock. Her return was not instigated by love, but by greed, clearly indicated in the way she furnishes her house, while being ignorant of how to use the latest gadgets.

In Bonnie Dee, Welty could have been ridiculing the Western way of life, where marriages are not binding, and where a marriage that does not seem to go right is acceptable, as long as the purse strings are in the right hands. Money is the key that opens any door, save the door to the heart of Welty's hero, Uncle Daniel, and Edna Earle. It is the lack of the love of money that makes these two characters stand out. They are exceptional beings, exceptional from the worldly point of view, but perfectly in keeping with the fantastic world, Welty has created for them. Wealth is not the criterion for happiness, clearly indicated in the lives of Edna and Uncle Daniel. The happiness denied to the other characters in the novel, is theirs, stemming from their non-attachment to wealth. The Ponder Heart besides being a fantasy, also lays bare certain bitter truths. Position, wealth, and status are not the criteria for happiness. That is a state that depends mainly on man's non-attachment to wealth. Uncle Daniels are a rarity. One need not gift away everything to gain happiness. As long as

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

man can be the master of his desires, so long can he be happy. Once he becomes a slave to his desires, like Bonnie Dee, then happiness goes out the window.

The works dealt with in this chapter, clearly indicate that one of the devices Welty has resorted to in these stories is the interweaving of fantasy and reality.

Reality inevitably collides with the imagination. . . . The imagination has fuller play: there is less of the actual world, except by implication; more of the dream. In no sense are these stories farther from life; on the contrary, they seem to be closer to the very heart of life.39

Welty's skill in portraying her characters - old Marblehall, Bowman, Fisher, etc., as being motivated from within is a clear indication that one need not be a psychologist to learn about these motivations. All that is required are a discerning eye and ear, and Welty 'has simply an eye and an ear sharp, shrewd and true as a tuning fork.'40

The importance given to fantasy in the present day is evident from the numerous books, novels and periodicals which deal with it. An example is McMurphy employing the fantasy principle to arouse chief


Bromden one night.

Although physically Chief Bromden is the biggest, strongest, tallest of the patients. . . . psychologically he is perhaps the shortest, weakest, smallest, McMurphy takes advantage of the influence that the mind exerts over the body and excites Chief Bromden in an attempt to get him to grow — that is, to exercise the imagination to develop a metaphorically manly, muscular image of the true size of the self.  

McMurphy is successful, it is not external reality but 'fantasy — psychical, or psychic, reality — that finally convinces Chief Bromden to grow.'

Welty's love for folktales and legends and her skill and ability to artistically weave them into her stories is depicted in "Sir Rabbit" and The Ponder Heart, not forgetting The Robber Bridegroom. In "Sir Rabbit," King MacLain is associated with a rabbit:

a comic figure from American 'mythology' or folklore. . . . the allusion is to a rabbit, not as a soft, cuddly, graceful creature but as a promiscuous, rapidly multiplying, easily startled woods animal,

42 Ibid., p. 88.
King's propensity for choosing the woods as the setting for his frequent-love making aligns him as easily with a rabbit as with a wooded spirit or satyr figure.  

The fine quality of Welty's writing comes from a dual texture. Beneath the apparent realistic and familiar world of her stories lies the vast territory of the never quite discovered or mapped, the elusive unconscious, which has been the focus of interest and exploration, especially, in the present age. Welty's focus on the unconscious does not spring from a desire to keep abreast with the latest trends, but is rather the natural outcome of her close observation of life and people. These traits clearly point to a writer of par excellence, thus securing for her a niche among the outstanding short story writers of the present age.

---