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**The Quest for Identity within the Reality of Plantation Memory in Eudora
Welty's Short Fiction**

(Hledání identity v kontextu tzv. plantážnické paměti v povídkách Eudory
Weltyové)

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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0 Preliminaries

0.1 Note on the spelling

The text of the thesis consistently uses AmE spelling, except for the quotations, which are left in their original orthography.

0.2 Forms of citation

The thesis uses footnote citations for both the primary and the secondary sources, despite the fact that it is sometimes customary to use in-text citations for the former lest the footnotes become repetitive. The decision was made for the sake of clarity: all the stories are included in one book, *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*, but it seems logical to list them under their individual titles so that any confusion is avoided; thus, the citations in footnotes appear to be a solution more practicable and more lucid than in-text citations with multiple abbreviations. Some of the cited articles are included in electronic databases, and, therefore, only their uniform resource locators will be listed. Unfortunately, the exact place of the citation within the body of the article cannot be indicated since no page numbering is included. The citation format of the thesis is applied according to the MLA citation style. In accord with that, the cited passages of prose longer than 4 lines are indented.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Aim of the Present Thesis

*The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*¹ presents her short fictional works in their entirety, comprising *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (1941), *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943), *The Golden Apples* (1949), *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories* (1955), and *Uncollected Stories* (1963, 1966). As Peter Schmidt notes in *The Heart of the Story*, his brilliant analysis of Welty's short fiction, this complex assemblage suggests the possibility to read the stories chronologically, to consider them simultaneously, and "to discover hidden connections, affinities, rememberings, and foreshadowings."² Taking Schmidt's claim as a point of departure, I will attempt to trace some of the complex echoes interwoven in Welty's writing by exploring the various ways in which an individual's identity is consolidated under the pressure of the social order and, given the number of the possible relations between the stories, I hope that I will complement Schmidt's research on the subject. In other words, the aim of my thesis is to analyze the incessant textual battle between the personal and the official; between the unique and the uniform; between the authentic self and the oppressive normativity.

The social order within which Welty's protagonists perform³ their identities classifies the individuals into two categories: the empowered gatekeepers and the marginalized dissidents. As for the former, their privilege is upheld by their adherence to the social norms and sustention of the nonconforming other that is excluded from the communal enterprise; as for the latter, their social existence is delimited by the purpose they serve to those in power. The characteristics of the two groups reveal that authenticity of all individuals is restricted, truncated and suppressed by the normative patterns that the order obliges them to enforce, observe or differ from. I will describe the predicament of the individuals falling under both of the categories: I will analyze the impact of the order on their selves and demonstrate that their authenticity was suffocated and eradicated by the normative social pressure; I will trace the failed rebellions against the prescribed coordinates of social existence; I will discuss the strategies of those who created a successful alternative to the artificially constructed social

¹ Eudora Welty, *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

² Peter Schmidt, *The Heart of the Story* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) xv.

³ Butler expresses her theory in *Gender Troubles* (New York: Routledge, 1990), developing it further by drawing on Derrida's concept of iterability in *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

narrative. In short, I will outline the ways in which the oppressive social processes and the acts of individual resistance collide, producing a particular self.

1.2 Plantation Shadow

Before proceeding further, a concrete content should be given to the two aforementioned categories and the social order issuing them as well as to the term “plantation memory” that I see as central to Welty’s literary world. To that end, a brief overview of the contemporaneous state of the Southern society will be presented – without reducing the richness of Welty’s writing by concentrating on the autobiographical aspects of her texts, I believe that the understanding of her engagement with the modes of existence within an oppressive social order can be expanded if an insight into the realities enveloping her own life is provided. In other words, I claim that Welty depicts the workings of the plantation order that continued to govern the South long after the conclusion of the Civil War, and that the discussion of her short stories will benefit from a preface summarizing the social context that informed them and that they seek to transcend.

1.2.1 Prevalence of Antebellum Plantation

Among many other historians and literary critics, both Michael Bibler and Brannon Costello assert that the South and numerous Southern writers were still grappling with the plantation legacy at the time when Welty’s stories appeared. In *Plantation Airs*,⁴ Brannon Costello interprets a wide range of literary texts to demonstrate the prevailing presence of the plantation paternalism⁵ in the postbellum Southern society, and he observes that the adherence to paternalistic code of behavior on the part of a white individual was a sign of social relevance, “an effective and public way for the wealthy to display their power and for less affluent but upwardly mobile white southerners to demonstrate their worthiness for a place higher in the social echelon.”⁶

Costello aligns his claim with James C. Cobb’s analysis of “plantocracy”⁷: In *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South*,⁸ Cobb claims that the polemics

⁴ Brannon Costello, *Plantation Airs : Racial Paternalism and the Transformations of Class in Southern Fiction, 1945-1971* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

⁵ Costello defines paternalism as follows: “‘Paternalism’ encompasses a whole range of racialized social practices stemming from a belief that African Americans are fundamentally inferior, even childlike [...]” In other words, it denotes the master’s seemingly charitable acts targeted at the obedient slaves, and the lack of the slave’s receptiveness of the gifts asserting the master’s status was severely punished.

⁶ Costello 4.

⁷ Costello 8.

between those that regard plantation as triumphing over the subversive effects of postbellum industrialization (W. J. Cash) and those who defend the view that the industrialization terminated its antebellum reign (C. Vann Woodward) miss the fact that “so long as industrial-development initiatives posed no threat to white supremacy, labor control, fiscal conservatism, and political stability, the interests of the region’s planters were in no danger of compromise.”⁹ Since the status quo did not pose any obstacles to the industrial entrepreneurs, the racial binary remained firmly in place and continued to generate white privilege. Drawing on Jack M. Bloom’s *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*, Costello concludes that “paternalism authorized ‘civilized’ whites to define the very terms in which African Americans constructed their communities and their selves.”¹⁰

In *Cotton’s Queer Relations*,¹¹ Michael Bibler explores the enduring plantation rules of sexual difference and sameness in the context of the postbellum society and literature and he argues that both paternalism and patriarchy remained at the core of the Southern order. As for the former, he agrees with Pete Daniels’s thesis that the categories of the master and the slave were translated into employers handing out benefits and their employees receiving them: “paternalism mediated the relations between workers and owners or managers; in exchange for labor, tenants received not only a share of the crop but also housing, fuel, food and other perquisites.”¹² As for the latter, he endorses Valeria Gennaro Lerda’s statement that it “maintained its influence [...], especially in family relations, labor relations, and social relations (based on the codes of sense of honor, protection of women, separation of races).”¹³ Costello’s and Bibler’s assertions clearly show that the two most prominent hierarchical structures – the binary of race and the binary of gender – governed the Southern society “well into the twentieth century”¹⁴ and that they continued to conspire in favor of the white men by securing them the class privilege through subjugation of the racial and the gendered others.

Both Costello and Bibler identify the first crumbling of the plantation with the fifties and sixties when the industrialization reached such a degree that the unqualified work that was

⁸ James C. Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), qtd. in Costello 8.

⁹ Cobb 16, qtd. in Costello 8.

¹⁰ Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 120, qtd. in Costello 10.

¹¹ Michael P. Bibler, *Cotton’s Queer Relations : Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968* (Charlottesville: American Literatures Initiative, 2009).

¹² Bibler 37.

¹³ Bibler 38. First alteration mine, second Bibler’s.

¹⁴ Costello 9.

assigned to African Americans started to be performed by new machines and African Americans, aided by civil rights movements and the impact of The New Deal and the World War II, were able to emancipate themselves by getting a job in the urban environment where “an increasing metropolitan elite was finally becoming aware that its interests might not always align so neatly with those of the planter class (Bartley 143, Bloom 2)”¹⁵ and where the concentration of the region’s inhabitants grew, thus removing the political center from the plantation countryside.

Yet, the two critics equally affirm that the slow demise of the plantation made its tremendous social influence only more painfully evident. Costello underscores that the fact that so many twentieth century writers continue to negotiate the effects of the plantation ideology demonstrates the extent to which the South reposed on the plantation hierarchies. Furthermore, the disintegration of the plantation did not necessary entail the disintegration of its existence in the Southern minds: a number of the privileged “traded their paternalism for a stricter insistence on the rules of the color line”¹⁶ or, as Cobb points out in *Most Southern Place*, “[withdrew] from society [...] to preserve their memories of allegedly simpler racial times.”¹⁷ The situation was improving but the fragmented plantation order continued to wield its power.

In *Dirt and Desire*,¹⁸ Patricia Yeager quotes from Alice Walker’s commentary on her obviously very pleasant encounter with Welty:

[...] this is Mississippi, U.S.A., and black, white, old, young, Southern black and Southern white – all these labels have meaning for a very good reason: they have effectively kept us apart, sometimes brutally. So that, although we live in the same town, we inhabit different worlds. This interview itself is an accidental meeting. Though we are both writers [...] the past will always separate us.¹⁹

¹⁵ Costello 11.

¹⁶ Costello 13.

¹⁷ Cobb 251, qtd. in Costello 13.

¹⁸ Patricia S. Yeager, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970) 131-132, qtd. in *Dirt and Desire* 187.

Walker's words are a concrete example of the ways in which the plantation incessantly inflected lives of the Southern individuals, no matter what their private sentiments towards each other were and what social compartment they were in.

1.2.2 Invention of Plantation Mythology

Costello explains that the postbellum plantation order was upheld by “a mythical but powerful vision of the Old South aristocracy.”²⁰ Drawing on Woodward, Costello characterizes “this nostalgia for a lost sense of order”²¹ as follows: “as the South began to look more like the rest of the United States, many white southerners became invested in a nostalgic, idealistic vision of the Old South, a vision in which the violence, oppression, and cruelty of the plantation system were pushed far to the side and heroism, honor, and chivalry were brought to the fore.”²² Bibler underscores Francis Pedleton Gaines's claim that the plantation myth continued to exist even in its fragmented form and to generate representations of the slaveholders' aristocratic nobleness, just like the fragmented power of the order continued to infect the society.²³

Therefore, a set of contradictory pairings arises in the two critics' vision: the oppressive principles of the plantation and the nostalgic mythology of its glory; the changes invading the Southern physical reality and the immobile nature of the privileged consciousness; some writers' desire “to imagine a potential model of social equality that derives from southern culture”²⁴ and their obligation to create such narratives within the context of the all-embracing plantation shadow, including the literary creations of Margaret Mitchel and her likes, “to reconcile their visions of its influence on the region with their openness to the possibility of social change across the region.”²⁵

1.2.3 Welty and Plantation Reality

Regardless of the writer's possible private motivations and the fact that Welty repeatedly refused to be classified as a female Southern writer – probably feeling the limitations implied

²⁰ Costello 4.

²¹ Bibler 29.

²² Costello 9. (The quotation Costello draws on is from Woodward's *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) 154.)

²³ Bibler 29. The book in question is *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition*. (Francis Pedleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925).)

²⁴ Bibler 16-17.

²⁵ Bibler 16-17.

by such a narrow label imposed upon her by the literary criticism, much in the same way that the order imposes labels on her protagonists —, I believe that this historical summary depicts the situation that Welty writes from and the themes her texts grapple with. Her short stories stage the persistent workings of the plantation order, expose the oppressive undercurrents of the constructed plantation myth, and introduce a large array of protagonists whose lives demonstrate the effects of the social norms on the authenticity of individuals.

The identity of some characters — be it the privileged or the marginalized — disintegrates under the requirements of the official social discourse, some manage to create a supremely personal narrative that is both Southern and liberated. In the former case, Welty unmasks the nostalgic versions of the past and holds a mirror up to the prize that was paid for the elevated status of the glorified aristocracy, both on the part of their social others and themselves; in the latter case, she gives voice to numerous personal myths that rival the powerful mythology of the old South as well as the prescribed doctrine of the plantation that denies individuals the possibility to perform their existence on their own terms.

Despite the fact that Welty’s stories often seem to be suspended beyond time, it may be argued that their historicity is only heightened by this fact: the lack of temporal markers underscores the timeless existence of the plantation in the consciousness of the individuals and in the interpersonal interactions. As Bibler and Costello demonstrate, plantation is not tied with a particular period but rather with the social practices that uphold its structure. Welty’s stories are set in the plantation substratum because their world consists of such rules and of rebellions against them. Throughout the thesis, I use the term “plantation” in the sense of Bibler’s “meta-plantation.”²⁶ As he himself defines it, it is “an abbreviation signifying this vertical system of paternalistic and patriarchal hierarchies that constitutes the core social structure of every individual plantation— whether it be slave or tenant, antebellum or modern.”²⁷

Yeager posits that “the models for examining southern women’s fiction [should] change,”²⁸ and that “instead of sustaining a belief in the belle or female ‘miniature’ as the prototypical southern female figure, [she] want[s] to put in her place a procession of giant women.”²⁹ Her private life aside, I believe that the public figure of Welty is both an embodiment and a

²⁶ Bibler 6.

²⁷ Bibler 6.

²⁸ *Dirt and Desire* xi.

²⁹ *Dirt and Desire* xi.

creator of such a woman. Her powerful narratives revisit and reformulate the predominant representations of the individuals and the illusive version of the past asserted by the plantation myth. In this way, both her literature and her authorial gesture present alternative perspective on an individual's existence in the society. Her writing reveals and affirms a powerful voice of a female writer – a voice that penetrates into the domain that the South associated with the male.

1.2.4 Plantation Memory

To give a definition of the term “plantation memory” that appears in the very title of this thesis and that I see as central to Welty's short stories and their significance in the Southern context, an excerpt from one of Welty's interviews that Yeager quotes provides a convenient point of departure: “We in the South have grown up being narrators. We have lived in a place – that's the word, Place – where storytelling is a way of life.... Our concept of Place isn't just history or philosophy; it's a sensory thing of sights and smells and seasons and earth and water and sky as well.”³⁰ In “Because a Fire Was in My Head: Eudora Welty and the Dialogical Imagination,”³¹ Yeager further elucidates the nature of the narrators' claim on their stories by alluding to Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. Quoting from “Discourse in the Novel,” she asserts that language is not “a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others.”³² Therefore, in the voice of Welty's narrator, be it the omniscient mediator or a first-person account of a particular character, other discourses emerge and the heterogeneous plurivocality interweaves the subjugated voices with those of their oppressors.

Yeager claims that “examining the sensory resonance of place”³³ will result in a disruption of the oppressive, petrified paradigms that the female literature is focalized through. Endorsing her view, I believe that the marginalized, the suppressed, and the invisible manifest itself through everyday stories rooted deeply in the phenomenology of a particular place and a particular narrator that Welty's texts are infused with and anchored in. To make a more explicit statement, I use the term “plantation memory” to describe the following cluster of

³⁰ Eudora Welty, *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, ed. Peggy Prenshaw (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980) 95, qtd. in *Dirt and Desire* 13.

³¹ Patricia S. Yeager. “Because a Fire Was in My Head: Eudora Welty and the Dialogical Imagination” (*PMLA* 99.5, 1984), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462146>.

³² Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 294, qtd. in “Because a Fire Was in My Head” 955.

³³ *Dirt and Desire* 13.

Sothern realities: the prevailing effects of the plantation order and its oppressive normativity on the society; a counterpoint to the nostalgic mythologizing of the antebellum grandeur and its eclipsing of the past tragedies and atrocities; the literary narrative whose firm rootedness in a particular place³⁴ and a particular individual betrays through metaphorical, symbolical, and quotidian language the burdensome presence of the plantation discourse; Welty's engagement with "the nonepic everyday" in whose context the writer "investigates the cognitive mechanisms within white southern culture that might allow [oppressive events] to recur, to be normative;"³⁵ the ability of the texts to stage what was repressed and to transcend what might have been regarded as insurmountable.

1.2.5 Plantation Order

Plantation memory provides a referential frame for the exploration of Welty's subversive perspective on the plantation order. At this point, the general categories and the order itself can be finally given a concrete content. The plantation order is a complex system of racial, ethnical, gender, sexual, class, physiognomic, aesthetic and other normative binary oppositions. The multiple intersections of their axes determine the individuals' position within the social hierarchy and decide whether individuals remain socially significant or whether their otherness reduces them to a negative definition of those in power and, in some cases, banishes them from the human realm altogether.

The situation is further complicated by individuals' attitude towards the compartment they were assigned to. When individuals' behavior does not agree with the verdict issued by the order, new otherness may be created and the existing otherness may be doubled. For instance, as Costello argues, if African-American slaves accept the role of children upon whom the owners bestow acts of kindness to perpetuate the social spectacle, they may retain the condescending mercy of the privileged because such a dutiful performance of the prescribed reactions affirms the owners' power. On the other hand, if African-American slaves refuse to take part in the interactions they are physically and metaphorically punished by being denied any acknowledgement of their humanity on the part of the powerful owners and they are transferred to the category of the brute lusting after white women.³⁶

³⁴ The exact coordinates of the place in question do not have to be stated – it is rather the poignant singularity of the vision that makes it fixed in a geographical point.

³⁵ *Dirt and Desire* xvi, 63.

³⁶ Costello 2-4.

To outline the two categories: the plantation order valorizes the white over the non-white, the male over the female, the heterosexual³⁷ over the homosexual, conforming beauty over differing ugliness, aristocratic upper-class over subordinate working-class. The group endowed with social power contains white, heterosexual men, the descendants of the archetypal plantation owner. As for women, these men see their role as passive, beautiful and confined housewives whose conformity to the social standards affirms their public power, and they keep them on a tight leash by creating an image of the black rapist that will assault them if they leave their place beneath the protective shield of white, aristocratic, and wealthy patriarchy. As for African Americans and other non-white individuals, they regard them as infantile and generally cognitively underdeveloped and they use them to assert their own cultural and intellectual superiority. They impose upon them their guidance so that their inferior impulses do not prevail and when the subjects refuse to be patronized and ridiculed they frame them as degenerate, sexually predatory animals.

As for the heteronormativity, Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" argues that the concept was introduced so that women remained subjugated under the patriarchal power. This institution is being reinforced both economically and politically and affects all key issues of the individual's life, including "mothering, sex roles, relationships and societal prescriptions for women."³⁸ In classifying the male strategies applied on women, Rich draws on "The Origin of the Family"³⁹ by Kathleen Gough which lists eight characteristics of archaic and contemporary societies ruled by men. To summarize them, women cannot acquire social power because they were physically removed from the public sphere, their domestic imprisonment and their absence of education prevents them from acquiring financial resources or knowledge that would help them to fend for themselves in the male world, they are reduced to an object exchanged by those in power as a token of gratitude or affection, and their appearances and conduct are controlled by a set of restrictions.⁴⁰

³⁷ Bibler points out that in the context of the antebellum plantation, "patriarchal paternalism reinforced the already rigid hierarchies of racial, class, and gender differences by defining every relationship between individuals as a familial bond that symbolically implied some form of heterosexual contact" (Bibler 6), and the pairings listed above were coded in "specific roles corresponding to the identities defined within the heterosexual family unit: father, child, heir, wife, mistress, rival, mother, mammy, uncle, aunt, etc." (Bibler 6).

³⁸ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (*Signs* 5.4, 1980) 631-660, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

³⁹ Kathleen Gough, "Origin of the Family" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Ryana R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), qtd. in Rich 638.

⁴⁰ Rich 638-640.

As for the conventional beauty and class nobility, individuals have to evince the socially approved bodily signs and codes of behavior unless they want to be relegated to the category of monstrosity, and such signs and codes are identified with whiteness, gender distinctions, and paternalism: an individual cannot display any physical characteristics that could be associated with the racial other, an individual should display passive female beauty or an active male vigor, and an individual should behave towards the racial other with ostensive kindness and charity but, as Bibler underscores,⁴¹ an individual should never treat the racial other as an equal by engaging in any kind of interactions that would imply such a status.

There are multiple intersections of the outlined axes and multiple mechanisms and specificities that come in the play but a more detailed and particular discussion of the order will be given in the first chapter. For the time being, I will conclude this brief summary by enumerating those who are members of the marginalized group: the racial and ethnical others (in Welty's stories mainly African Americans); gendered others (women); anybody who does not have the body that conforms to the aesthetic standards epitomized by the figure of the white male gatekeeper and anybody whose performance does not fit into the official social schema (those characters labeled by the society as freaks, usually on the basis of their nonconformist approach to the socially prescribed performance of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality class, physiology or any other normative category⁴² because, as Yeager puts it, "[u]nkempt, disorderly, or simply outside their designated territory, these polluting characters must be killed or ritually excluded"⁴³).

However, despite their privileged status, the white male gatekeepers are not immune to the effect of the order that their actions enforce. Paradoxically, while their power stems from the reiterative imposition of racial and gendered markers on the other, they do not perceive themselves as beings endowed with race or gender.⁴⁴ When such a man lets himself linger on the subject of his identity and realizes that he, too, can be described by these axes, he is filled

⁴¹ Bibler 2-4.

⁴² For instance, Michel Foucault's study on the psychological normativity in *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965) comes to mind.

⁴³ *Dirt and Desire* 262.

⁴⁴ Yeager makes a similar observation, arguing that the term "Southern literature" is understood as denoting only the white authors and that African-American authors are relegated into the general category of African-American literature (*Dirt and Desire* xii). Furthermore, she aligns herself with Ann duChille's "The Occult of True Black Womanhood" and its following assertion: "Unless the object of study happens to be the Other, race is placed under erasure as something outside immediate consideration, at once extratextual and extraterrestrial ... 'as a woman' in main stream feminist discourse all too often continues to mean 'as a white woman' (35)" (qtd. in *Dirt and Desire* xv).

with terror. Therefore, he has to readily silence his thoughts on the dangerous subject, reinforce his superiority by enslaving and imprisoning the others and never cast a shadow of doubt on this practice which has to be seen as an inevitable, natural process.

By adhering to the plantation conventions, paradigms, and standards, all involved groups and individuals are gradually losing their authentic mode of existence: the oppressive majority chooses to be blind to the nature of foundation of its self-definition and lives entangled in the fear that its fragile predominance might be disrupted; the oppressed are deprived of any means of fulfilling their independent desires and of voicing their opinions (since the language itself becomes twisted by the group in power) and they either lead double lives to fit in the hostile society or end up completely eradicated from its enterprise. Ultimately, it is the discursive power of the order itself that is the true oppressor.

To some degree, the two categories are circumstantial and each constellation of the socially recognized signs produces a different result in a different context. While a white upper-class woman may have power over a black slave during the time her husband spends outside of the house, the same woman may be powerless in confrontation with the owner of the household. Therefore, the order incessantly scrutinizes the individuals' bodies to ensure that the hierarchy remains intact. Yeager points out that "[t]he South is, after all, a region where race has been at the heart of aesthetic practice."⁴⁵ Her claim can be extended on all the other aforementioned normative binaries as well as on all those that are their ramifications. In *Dirt and Desire*, she formulates her aims as follows: "I want to examine the importance of irregular models of the body within an extremely regulated society and to focus on figures of damaged, incomplete, or extravagant characters described under rubrics peculiarly suited to southern histories in which the body is simultaneously fractioned and overwhelmed."⁴⁶ My thesis will attempt to undertake a similar interpretative voyage.

1.3 Typology and Selection of the Stories

Originally, I intended to explore the plantation memory and the formation of individuals' identity within all Welty's short stories. However, being limited by the formal requirements of the thesis and having realized – with an insightful guidance of Prof. Hana Ulmanová – that such a monumental project would probably generate fragmented discussions rather than establish points of contact and convergence between and within the narratives, I decided to

⁴⁵ *Dirt and Desire* xii.

⁴⁶ *Dirt and Desire* xiii.

abandon my design in favor of a smaller set of stories. To put my new plan into practice, I re-read *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* and, without reducing the supremely particular texts and their protagonists to several types, I created three categories under which the stories could be subsumed on the basis of the resonances with the respective definition and the uniqueness of their voice could still be preserved. The first category contains those stories whose narratives remain petrified by the plantation order; the second category those that stage the tragic demise of attempted rebellions; the third category those that triumph over the oppressive normativity by their authentic alternatives.

Throughout the process of classification, Schmidt's *The Heart of the Story* was my most influential guide because I discovered a similar network of categories to be underlying his interpretations and I was able to consult his reading of a particular story and support my decision with a second opinion. However, the extent of the thesis does not allow for an overview clarifying the reasons that prompted me to see a story as a representative of a particular category. For the sake of clarity, I will now provide the full typology that my efforts produced. I will indicate the names of characters that I focused on and that decided what category the story was attributed to in the brackets following the titles of the stories – had I concentrated on a different protagonist the story might have not fit the definition. In some instances, the incidental pairings in the brackets may seem extremely unjustified because they bring in the close proximity the oppressor and the oppressed. However, the cruel arbitrariness of typographical juxtaposition may also underscore the terrible violence that the order perpetrates on the victims.

The stories of the first category are the following: “Lily Daw and the Three Ladies” (Lily Daw, Mrs. Carson, Mrs. Watts, to some extent Aimee Slocumb), “Petrified Man” (Mrs. Pike, Mrs. Fletcher, Leota), “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” (Steve, Max, Little Lee Roy), “The Hitch-Hikers” (Tom Harris), “Old Mr. Marblehall” (Mr. Marblehall, Mrs. Marblehall, Mrs. Bird), “Flowers for Marjorie” (Howard and, ultimately, also Marjorie), “A Visit of Charity” (Addie, the nameless woman, Marian), “The Purple Hat” (“the fat man”⁴⁷), “At the Landing” (Jenny Lockhart), “Sir Rabbit” (Mattie Will, King MacLain), “The Whole World Knows” (Ran Mac Lain, Jinny Love Stark, Maideen Sumrall), “Music from Spain” (Eugene MacLain), “No Place for You, My Love” (the male and female nameless protagonists), “Kin” (Miss Dicey Hastings, Aunt Ethel, Kate, Anne), “Ladies in Spring” (Miss Hattie Purcell), “A Still

⁴⁷ “The Purple Hat” 222.

Moment” (Lorenzo Daw, James Murell, Audubon), “Where Is the Voice Coming from?” (the nameless narrator), “The Demonstrators” (Dr. Strickland, Ruby Gaddy, Dove Collins).

The stories of the second category are the following: “Why I Live at the P.O.” (Sister), “A Memory” (the female narrator) “Clytie” (Clytie), “A Curtain of Green” (Mrs. Larkin), “Livvie” (Livvie) “Circe” (Circe), “The Bride of Innisfallen” (“[t]he American girl”⁴⁸), “Going to Naples” (Gabriella), “Asphodel” (Cora, Phoebe, Irene), “First Love” (Joel Mayes), “June Recital” (Mrs. Eckhart). The stories of the third category are the following: “A Piece of News” (Ruby Fisher), “Powerhouse” (Powerhouse), “A Worn Path” (Phoenix Jackson), “The Wide Net” (Hazel Jamieson), “The Winds” (Josie), “Shower of Gold” (Mrs. Katie Rainey), “Moon Lake” (Esther/Easter), “The Wanderers” (Virgie), “The Burning” (Delilah). There are three stories that were not included in the typology. These texts deal with men that long for a companionship with the women in their lives and, while in some respects the protagonists fail to attain it, in other respects they arrive at their goals. Therefore, I see “The Key” (Ellie Morgan, Albert Morgan), “The Whistle” (Jason Morton and Sara Morton), and “Death of a Traveling Salesman” (the couple, partly R. J. Bowman) as oscillating between the three categories.

The three categories forged the structural foundations of my thesis because each of them constitutes the theme of one of the three chapters the thesis consists of. I decided that each chapter will contain three stories from the respective category: the symmetry of the chapters will reflect the equal importance of the three categories within the context of Welty’s work and inclusion of three texts will hopefully guarantee that the discovered resonances may be in some way representative of Welty’s work, despite the fact that the immense richness of her writing cannot and should not be in any sense subsumed under reductive generalizations – the discussion of the three stories should both preserve their fierce uniqueness and demonstrate some possible links that can be traced between their particular narratives without claiming that it is anything but a glimpse into the complex negotiations between the voices populating Welty’s universe. I ruled out a higher number of stories for the reasons stated above.

The difficult process of selection was conducted on the basis of several criteria I had formulated for myself. First, the stories should include as many types of otherness as possible and they should include the narratives of both the oppressors and the oppressed because I claim that they are all deprived of their authenticity by the workings of the order. Second, the

⁴⁸ “The Bride of Innisfallen” 495.

thesis should include stories from all four collections (for the spatial reasons, I decided not to include the *Uncollected Stories*). Third, to highlight the loneliness of plantation predicament, the stories with a smaller number of isolated protagonists should be chosen over those focusing on a group of characters. Fourth, while the first chapter should include narratives of both the oppressors and the oppressed, the second and the third chapter should be reserved for the oppressed only because it is in their stories that Welty creates the most powerful alternatives to the order. Fifth, those stories that seem to be – for one reason or another – more experimental, more mysterious or more daring, those stories with more “enigmatic, highly charged figures of speech”⁴⁹ should be given priority over those that seem to be (possibly unwarrantedly) more straightforward because their intricacies constitute more opportunities to contribute at least a little to the brilliant, already existing scholarship.

Having implemented all the criteria and having created numerous charts, I eventually selected the final three triplets: For my first chapter, I chose “Petrified Man,” “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” and “A Visit of Charity”; for my second chapter, I chose “A Curtain of Green,” “Clytie,” and “Circe”; for my third chapter, I chose “Powerhouse,” “The Winds,” and “The Wanderers.” For a long time, I considered expanding the third chapter with “A Worn Path” and “Moon Lake” but, eventually, I decided to preserve the symmetry.

1.4 The Outline of the Present Thesis

The first chapter aims to trace the workings of the plantation order and to outline its system of binaries that divides the individuals into the two categories described above. The three discussed stories were chosen for their variety of engagement with these power struggles between and within the two categories. “Petrified Man,” one of Welty’s most famous stories, recasts the myth of Medusa and Perseus, thus unravelling the ways in which the oppressed are violated by the privileged and their accomplices as well as by their own internalization of the order, and its portrayal of the freak show underscores the discursive erasure of the otherness. “A Visit of Charity” examines the painful schism planted in the self of every oppressed individual, and the horror of the individuals who are confronted with their limited future within the order and its institutionally enforced normativity. “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” depicts the burden of the privileged, the impact of the dominant social discourse on an individual’s conception of reality, and the existence of those whose bodies are not recognized by the official narrative. The chapter is divided in six sections, the first triplet

⁴⁹ Schmidt 4.

focusing on the oppressors and the second triplet on the oppressed, and its ultimate goal is to demonstrate that the real oppressor is the social order and its discourse.

The second chapter concentrates on the failed alternative narratives. The three female protagonists of “A Curtain of Green,” “Clytie,” and “Circe” differ as to their immediate situation, personal traits, and position on the timeline of Welty’s short fiction. Nevertheless, they all seem to share their rebellious attitude to the social order that surrounds them, and the experience they undergo in the course of their attempts to disentangle themselves from the oppressive script they were given can be divided into three largely overlapping stages that coincide with the structure of the chapter. The first section describes the heroines’ social status prior to their awakening to the constructed nature of their social existence and captures the moment in which the recognition of the enveloping illusion took place. The second section traces the various acts through which the protagonists’ nonconformity is being performed and the radical assertion of the three individuals’ authentic difference from their communities. The third section examines what caused the eventual failures of the fiercely pursued alternative existences. The chapter documents the crushing persistence of the normativity.

The third chapter analyzes those narratives that transcended the plantation normativity. The eponymous hero of “Powerhouse” escapes the role of an African-American freak providing entertainment for the privileged white audience. Guided by powerful feminine figures, little Josie of “The Winds” finds an alternative to the fate that so terrifies her peer Marian in “A Visit of Charity.” In “The Wanderers,” Virgie Rainey refuses to be destroyed by the community’s conventions, and she antagonizes them by applying the power of her creativity that was shown to her by Miss Eckhart, her piano teacher, whose tragic fate no longer terrifies her. The chapter is divided in two counterpoint-like sections and a final synthesis of the protagonists’ triumph over the order. The first section maps out what possibilities are the three protagonists given by the communities that surround them and analyzes the gazes that attempt to fix them in the prescribed places. The second section reveals the ways in which the three characters defy the narrow definitions imposed upon them. The third section portrays them as they transcend the prison of normativity and self-doubts.

The conclusion reiterates the points made in the three chapters and systematically summarizes Welty’s multifaceted engagement with the classic mythologies that were broached in the course of the interpretations: it discusses their stance within the plantation order and

postbellum nostalgia; drawing on Zdeněk Neubauer's essay "Mythos,"⁵⁰ it clarifies their relationship to the personal narratives of the protagonists; it demonstrates the opposition between the written and the oral that Walter Ong theorized in *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word*⁵¹ and that Peter Schmidt stresses in *The Heart of the Story*; synthesizing Yeager's previously mentioned discussion of Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," it analyzes the purpose of reproduction and recasting of various mythologies on Welty's part. These closing theoretical passages will underscore the relationship between the formal and the thematic issues negotiated in the thesis as well as in Welty's work.

1.5 Sources of Inspiration and Methodology

My engagement with Eudora Welty's short fiction was initiated by the seminar "Plantation Modernism" that I attended in the summer semester of 2011 and that was taught by Prof. John T. Matthews during his Fulbright scholarship at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. The seminar shaped my present understanding of the plantation memory as well as my reading sensibilities and Prof. Matthews's support and guidance led to the composition of the proposal that outlined the contours of my thesis. As was already stated, the second formative influence was Peter Schmidt's *The Heart of the Story*. The book can be considered a frame of reference for my project: it inspired me to consider the resonances between the stories; it cautioned me against unifying generalizations trampling the uniqueness of the texts; it played the role of the arbiter in my inner struggles concerning the typology of the narratives; it presented close readings of nearly all the stories and I found myself endorsing their interpretations; it put the detailed analysis into a broader perspective, just like I intended to do; it was composed of delicate, refined language whose appropriateness for the context was a goal I was striving to achieve in my own voice, without copying the model.

Having declared my admiration of Schmidt's work, my own contribution to the existing body of criticism needs to be clarified. Given that Welty intentionally leaves her narratives full of blind spots, a close reading that attempts to unearth the hidden details constituting the competing discourses and symbols of the texts' polyphonic structure inevitably stems from and draws on every reader's peculiar sensibility and subjectivity. Therefore, I believe that while some of my observations may be very close to or even identical with those made by

⁵⁰ Zdeněk Neubauer, "Mythos" (*Prostor* IV.15, 1991) 39-57.

⁵¹ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

Schmidt, these observations issue from a different perspective and, in some instances, produce a different network of relations between the interpretative points. Other observations might be based on the analysis of the same passages that Schmidt, along with other critics, focuses on but I read these passages in a different way and I arrive at a different conclusion. In short, however small a shift or a divergence may seem, its significance within Welty's cryptic universe is considerable.

Furthermore, *The Heart of the Story* is not the only secondary source I agree with. When describing the workings of the racial binary, I refer to the essays featured in outstanding *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*.⁵² The book was edited by Prof. Harriet Pollack whom I had the privilege to meet in the fall of 2014 in person and who gave me invaluable advice as to what criticism might be relevant for my research. The first chapter of the thesis draws on Michael Kreyling's, Ruth Vande Kief's, and Laurent Berlant's readings of "Petrified Man," on Suzanne Donaldson's, Suzanne Marrs's, and Donnie McMahan's interpretations⁵³ of "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," and on Joseph's Millichap's insightful analysis of "A Visit of Charity." Apart from the already mentioned Vande Kief and Kreyling, the second chapter supports its claims by Cheryll Burgess's reading of "A Curtain of Green" and Ann Romines's brilliant discussion of "Circe" while the third chapter works with Yeager's reading of "The Wanderers," Rebecca Mark's analysis of "The Winds," and Harriet Pollack's, David McWhirter's,⁵⁴ and Kenneth Bearden's interpretations of "Powerhouse."

Throughout the thesis, I apply an interdisciplinary approach. The whole thesis reposes on Michel Foucault's concept of discourse and Judith Butler's concept of performativity.⁵⁵ The introduction and the conclusion embed the thesis in a historiographical (quotations from Cobb), philosophical (Ong, Neubauer), and literary-theoretical (Costello, Yeager, Bibler) frame. By applying the interdisciplinary approach, I wish to align myself with New Southern Studies. Promoting and implementing the approach, the movement rethinks the claims concerning the constitution of an individual's identity within the plantation memory "by

⁵² *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, And Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

⁵³ The articles are a part of the aforementioned *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*.

⁵⁴ Again, the articles are a part of the aforementioned *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*.

⁵⁵ The spatial limitations of the thesis do not allow for a detailed discussion of the terms. I use them in the sense they were described in *L'Ordre du Discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) and *Bodies That Matter*.

mixing old and new, canonical and non-canonical, black and white.”⁵⁶ I believe that such a project resonates with the aim I have set out for myself.

⁵⁶ Sarah Ford, “Listening to the Ghosts: The ‘New Southern Studies’: A Response to Michael Kreyling” (*South Central Review* 22.1, 2005) 19-25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039841>. She refers in this passage to the method used by Patricia Yeager in *Dirt and Desire*.

2 Chapter 1: Anatomy of the Order

2.1 Surface of a Binary

Schmidt points out that the earlier interpreters of “Petrified Man” do not take into account the interplay between the beauty parlor and the freak show.¹ Michael Kreyling claims that Welty “uses the device of the ‘candid camera’ to surprise a group of human beings in their natural habitat as crude, self-absorbed, and venal.”² He describes the women’s statements concerning their husbands as “belittle[ing]” and “denigrating,” and he refers to them collectively as to “a coven of Medusas.”³ Considering the story to be a portrait of the dichotomy between monstrous women and emasculated men, his interpretation depicts Welty’s text as a representation of the discursive practice of the order. While he perceives that “the story grants that heterosexual pairings in which the male hierarchically entitled to the top position are, in fact, resented by women”⁴ and while he points out the limited space of female existence within compulsory heterosexuality, male inclination towards same-sex intimacy and violence against the gendered other, and general lack of functional sexual relationships, he refrains from investigating the causal links between the phenomena. In his analysis, Welty seems to be emulating a perspective of a perpetrator of the order.

Ruth Vande Kief reads the story in terms of the women’s disempowerment of the men: “The three main characters in the story [...] are the women whose petrifying domination of their respective husbands is exposed.”⁵ In her view, the women’s harsh criticism and their control of the economic power show that “the traditional roles of male and female are ironically reversed.”⁶ Therefore, she sees the women as a mirror in which the male can be exposed, and she removes the female as such altogether. Treating the women as avatars of the socially recognized maleness, she underscores the women’s fascination with the freak show, their obsession with appearances, and their lack of interest in motherhood, and she sees it as a result of the women’s inability to see the gendered other as a partner: “Having destroyed what

¹ Schmidt 80.

² Michael Kreyling, *Understanding Eudora Welty* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 17. As Schmidt points out, many other critics (e.g. Alfred Jr. Appel, *A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965) 93-99, qtd. in Schmidt 81) see the female protagonists as the main villains of the story.

³ Kreyling 18.

⁴ Kreyling 19.

⁵ Ruth Vande Kief, *Eudora Welty* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987) 63.

⁶ Vande Kief 63.

might be natural in marital relations, their taste runs to the sensational and freakish.”⁷ It cannot be determined whether the female monstrosity that lies at the center of the story is the product of the male oppression or the generator of the male subordination but the current state of social relationships is clearly portrayed as bleak, and the petrified man can be perceived “as the symbol of a society in which relations between the sexes have become monstrous.”⁸ Like Kreyling, she characterizes the text as a description of that which is socially visible: “The story, through comic speech and action, presents only what may be taken as symptoms, without exploring causes, or taking any sort of moral position.”⁹

In short, both Kreyling and Vande Kief do not try to determine what processes turned women into Medusas. Applying their approach on another short story analyzed in this chapter, “A Visit of Charity” could be interpreted as Welty’s presentation of the socially shared perspective on the life of a woman whose unpleasant behavior is disturbing the peace of the lady she shares the room with, the collision of the two personalities being purely accidental. Despite the fact that the present work endorses Schmidt’s and Berlant’s opinion that the roots of the phenomena can be traced, the two readings constitute a fitting opening for the passage to the deeper levels of the binary because they aptly demonstrate what the official narrative dominating the surface of the binary would be.

2.2 Normativity and Otherness

Berlant and Schmidt share the view that “while Welty exposes female monstrosity, she clearly sees this condition as an effect of male power and its habitual violation of women.”¹⁰ They both derive the key argument for their claim from Welty’s negotiation of the relation between the freak show and the beauty parlor whose confined space redolent with objects modifying female corporeality corresponds with the limits of female agency within the patriarchal order: “Leota’s beauty parlor is an elegantly appointed torture chamber with the female body as its victim. In order to achieve the physical standards that society sets for beauty, an array of tools and machines in Leota’s shop remake nature.”¹¹ The customers are “being gratified in

⁷ Vande Kief 63.

⁸ Vande Kief 65.

⁹ Vande Kief 65.

¹⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Re-writing the Medusa: Welty’s ‘Petrified Man’ ” (*Studies in Short Fiction* 26.1, 1989) 61. Schmidt expresses the conviction in a similar way (Schmidt 80).

¹¹ Schmidt 81.

[separate] booths”¹² where they receive various treatments under the surveillance of innumerable mirrors¹³ that incessantly confront them with their aesthetic shortcomings and that witness the painful process of beautification in which the women’s bodies are chiseled into the socially prescribed shape. The guidelines for the transformation are provided in the form of *Screen Secrets* and *Life is Like That*, a magazine and a book that seem to move around the beauty parlor, spreading “mass cultural images of perfection [that] become molds that may create endless reproductions of their products in the women and men who are influenced by them.”¹⁴

The resulting dissolution of the women’s integrity is comically epitomized by Thelma’s assertion that “[she] forgot [her] hair finally got combed and thought it was a stranger behind [her].”¹⁵ In pursuit of the socially approved images of womanhood, the women’s identity literally loses its shape: first, the dominant discourse reduces a person to the bodily properties; second, the bodily properties are repeatedly altered to such a degree that the body becomes an unfamiliar prison to the self that inhabits it. A paradoxical conclusion can be drawn: “in the heterosexual economy,”¹⁶ the only social capital women have are their own bodies that can attract an empowered male suitor and associate them with his power; in order to capitalize on their bodies, women need to give them up, and the bodies become “the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions.”¹⁷ In more general terms, the order assigns individuals to a particular category on the basis of the signs it recognizes on their bodies, and the individuals lose touch with the bodies and start to perceive them only as a cell whose walls are pushing them in a particular direction and obscuring their view.

Schmidt points out that the power of the order rests in its ability to persuade the individuals that the violence perpetrated on their bodies is in fact a process in which they exert their own

¹² “Petrified Man” 17. Schmidt points out that overtones of suppressed sexuality are hinted by Welty’s choice to use this particular verb: “Welty first alerts us to this fact when she describes the women at the parlor as ‘customers’ who are being ‘gratified in [their] booths’ (17) a striking verb that suggests sexual pleasure perversely displaced not merely onto consumer objects but onto the narcissistic contemplation of a constructed image that is sold with those products” (Schmidt 82).

¹³ Schmidt describes the process of confrontation with the image reflected by the mirror in detail: “When they view themselves in the mirror, they view not only their own image but the ideal image of what they wish to be. The mirror (like a movie screen) holds the spectacle of infinite examples of Beauty itself yet also cruelly presents an (also infinite) spectacle of monstrous failure [...]” (Schmidt 82).

¹⁴ Schmidt 82.

¹⁵ “Petrified Man” 19.

¹⁶ Berlant 61.

¹⁷ Berlant 62.

will to highlight their particular assets and to overcome the obstacles posed by nature: “The most powerful allure of mass culture in Welty’s view is not that it sells the comforts of conformity but that it promotes them as their opposite, as heroic examples of an individual’s independence and power.”¹⁸ The women in the beauty parlor start to see the outcomes of their weekly wrestling with the threatening stranger as triumphs of their uniqueness: “[...] Leota and Mrs. Fletcher have been conditioned to see what is done to their bodies in the beauty parlor not as acts of violence but as acts of love techniques that affirm their beauty, independence, and importance as women.”¹⁹

Thus, Schmidt does not attribute the role of Medusa to the gossiping customers and beauticians but to the norms issued and enforced by the patriarchal, heteronormative order that engulf them, posing as their personal aspirations: “[i]f there is a Medusa in ‘Petrified Man’ who turns all who gaze on her to stone, therefore, it is the world of commercial culture, not the women who are its victims, and it has done its work not by petrifying its victims with a vision of ugliness but by hypnotizing them with a vision of false beauty.”²⁰ Thinking that they are cultivating their authentic beauty, the women consent to be turned into standardized objects that are intended to be consummated by the privileged male gaze. In “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” a similar fallacy is epitomized by the character of Little Lee Roy who believes that the attention he received in the carnival is preferable to his invisibility outside the circle of the audience.

When Mrs. Fletcher’s pregnancy emerges, it is revealed that the violation of the female bodies entails the stigmatization of their natural sexuality. Leota informs Mrs. Fletcher that her hair is “ ‘fallin’,”²¹ and Mrs. Fletcher insists that there must be an explanation for the sudden deterioration. Upon suggesting dandruff as a possible candidate, she asks Leota whether she could have been infected by her husband. Leota refutes the dandruff hypothesis and timidly reveals her knowledge of Mrs. Fletcher’s being “p-r-e-g.”²² The fact that Leota cannot even

¹⁸ Schmidt 84.

¹⁹ Schmidt 81.

²⁰ Schmidt 84-85.

²¹ “Petrified Man” 18.

²² “Petrified Man” 18.

bring herself to pronounce the adjective in its entirety shows that the women identify pregnancy with a terminal disease that should remain nameless.²³

As both Berlant and Schmidt assert,²⁴ the passage demonstrates that Leota and Mrs. Fletcher's discourse sees the effects that sexuality and illness have on the social status of their bodies as identical: they both threaten to subvert the carefully crafted façade of beauty; the male that penetrates a female body can potentially impregnate it, and both the hormonal changes taking place in the gradually expanding body and the altered shape of the body disempower its inhabitant. Berlant formulates the structural connectedness in the women's minds as follows: "The analogy Welty sets up between pregnancy and dandruff is more complicated than pregnancy-as-pregnancy-infection would be: pregnancy makes a woman's hair fall out. And what is a woman, or a Medusa, without hair?"²⁵

In short, sexual difference (or any other difference) should never be revealed by a sign that is not approved by the order; purity is an inherent component of female beauty. Schmidt formulates the paradoxical demands of asexual beauty as follows: "[A]lthough pop cultural icons purport to portray healthy images of women as wives and mothers, they in fact teach the women to treat their sexuality as threatening and scandalous, an affront to the static image of proper beauty that the beauty parlor mass produces."²⁶ Women need beauty to be valorized by the patriarchal society as suitable accessories²⁷ for men. Yet, the interaction with men may include a penetration of the unstable foundations of the female beauty, and the women may betray the bodily manifestations that inevitable accompany the journey to their socially prescribed destination. Leota stresses that Mrs. Fletcher is not responsible for the loss of her power but the women know that the normative sword cannot be arrested – their eyes are immediately drawn to the mirror which plays the role of the feared gatekeeper, mercilessly revealing the symptoms of Mrs. Fletcher's condition and framing the sum of her shortcomings. The fact that their looks cross in the mirror shows that the two women cannot interact outside of the always vigilant order. The oppressed cannot hide the socially relevant signs of their bodies.

²³ Schmidt makes the same observation: "Leota [...] gingerly spells the first four letters of the word "pregnant" (as if it were something that must never be named aloud) and then asks, "how far gone are you?" implying that Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy is a kind of dying" (Schmidt 82).

²⁴ Schmidt 82-83. Berlant 67.

²⁵ Berlant 67.

²⁶ Schmidt 82.

²⁷ The roles of a mother and a wife are derivative – a woman cannot have an existence that is autonomous.

Leota eventually tells Mrs. Fletcher that the real culprit in spreading the knowledge of Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy is Mrs. Pike. Her subsequent insistence on Mrs. Pike's likable personality overlaps with and develops into a report on their recent visit to the freak show: " 'Aw. Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself.' " ²⁸ Based on this passage, Schmidt ²⁹ makes two important observations: first, the association of Mrs. Pike both with the visit to the freak show and with the diagnosis of Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy underscores that both phenomena belong to the realm of corporeal ugliness; second, while the women construct the freaks as their negative definition, repeatedly referring to the aesthetic abnormalities of the deformed bodies to assert their own adherence to standards, ³⁰ they unwittingly associate the two subjects by juxtaposing them in their utterances. ³¹

For instance, when Leota describes the twins, she stresses that " 'they had these two heads an' two faces an' four legs, all kind of joined *here*' " ³² Schmidt explains that the women's interest in the babies is triggered both by the disturbing discrepancy between Mrs. Fletcher's expectations of giving birth to one baby and the freakish variation that the twins present, and by the monstrous link between the babies that parallels the connection between Mrs. Fletcher and the baby growing inside her: "Part of the women's horror and fascination with this display is that it seems not only to be an example of the frightening disorder of nature (creating two babies instead of one) but also of what they take to be the sickening and unnatural union of mother and child." ³³ The condition of the immobile and suffocating twins and Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy seems to be equated in the women's minds: Mrs. Fletcher has lost her limited social agency, and her bleak future is epitomized by an image featuring babies, the very cause of her removal from the society.

Shortly after the revelation of Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy, the male gains a physical presence in the beauty parlor. Mrs. Fletcher vows to find the denouncer and punish her for the fatal indiscretion when Billy Boy, Mrs. Pike's little son, asks her the following simple question: "

²⁸ "Petrified Man" 20.

²⁹ Schmidt 82-83.

³⁰ Similarly, Leota attempts to cheer Mrs. Fletcher by comparing her appearances favorably to Mrs. Montjoy's advanced pregnancy. Subsequently, Mrs. Fletcher harshly criticizes Mrs. Montjoy for her audacity to enter the beauty parlor only minutes before giving birth in hospital, thus implicitly condemning her future body as well.

³¹ Schmidt concludes the discussion with a poignant formulation that summarizes the nature of Mrs. Pike's interest in the bodies surrounding her: "it is as if Mrs. Pike has as keen an eye for the spectacle that Mrs. Fletcher makes as she does for the freaks" (Schmidt 83).

³² "Petrified Man" 21.

³³ Schmidt 83.

‘What are you gonna do to her?’³⁴ Mrs. Fletcher and Leota become aware of the presence of a child “making tents with aluminum wave pinchers on the floor under the sink.”³⁵ Holding ominously the instruments that regularly violate the woman’s hair, Billy Boy unwittingly captures Mrs. Fletcher’s powerlessness. Leota quickly orders him not to “bother nice ladies,” and “slap[s] him brightly”³⁶ but Billy Boy’s remark remains the conclusion of Mrs. Fletcher’s tirade. Furthermore, Billy Boy explicitly partakes in the constructions of Mrs. Fletcher’s body. Leota tells him to “ ‘go see if Thelma’s got any dry cotton’ ” because “ ‘Mrs. Fletcher’s a-drippin’.”³⁷ The shape of Mrs. Fletcher’s body needs to be consolidated, and the boy is the one who provides the material that prevents its disintegration.

Billy Boy’s interference in the conversation is ominously followed by Mrs. Fletcher’s proclamation that “[she’s] almost tempted not to have this one’.”³⁸ The contiguity of the two events suggests that Mrs. Fletcher intuitively connects the maleness of Billy Boy and her pregnancy in one threat to her existence within society. At this point, Leota’s awareness of patriarchal power prompts her to warn her customer: “ ‘Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn’t have it now’.”³⁹ As Berlant observes, Leota reveals that “[the] power [of Mr. Fletcher] is his maleness.”⁴⁰ She assigns him its universally recognized sign – physical strength –, and it becomes clear that he assumes such kind of power that cannot be rivaled by any act of skillful manipulation on Mrs. Fletcher’s part.

Apart from staging the connection between physical deformity and pregnancy, the treatment of the freak show in the conversations sheds light on the relationship the women have with the men in their life. In the course of Leota’s description of the freaks, the women repeatedly assert that their husbands are nothing like them. When Leota tells Mrs. Fletcher about the pygmies she exclaims: “ ‘Just suppose it was your husband!’ ”⁴¹ As for the petrified man, Leota emphatically remarks the following: “ ‘How’d you like to be married to a guy like that? All he can do, he can move his head just a quarter of an inch. A course he *looks just terrible.*’

³⁴ “Petrified Man” 19.

³⁵ “Petrified Man” 19.

³⁶ “Petrified Man” 19.

³⁷ “Petrified Man” 23.

³⁸ “Petrified Man” 19.

³⁹ “Petrified Man” 19.

⁴⁰ Berlant 66.

⁴¹ “Petrified Man” 21.

”⁴² Nevertheless, their apparent need to address the possible connection betrays that there is a link between the two hidden in their unconscious.

Berlant offers an interesting reading of the women’s fascination with the freaks and their repeated considerations of the hypothetical marriages: “the images of the pygmies and the Petrified Man figure the extremes of deformity that adult male sexuality occupies in this story: like the husbands, these freaks are passive; tall or short, petrified or playful, one might not want to get them moving when we do hear about a Freak act, it’s that the Petrified Man, Mr. Petrie, has raped four women in California.”⁴³ In other words, women see their husbands as a temporarily arrested threat. Petrified man might be immobile in the cage for the moment but he can attack them any minute, claiming their socially sexualized bodies as his rightful trophy, and destroying their cherished beauty, just like seemingly immobile Mr. Fletcher did. Leota and Mrs. Fletcher may endlessly repeat that their husbands do not share any traits with the freaks but their insistence seems to be a wishful thinking of the oppressed.

Yet, despite the norms of female beauty that are imposed on the women so that they could become objects gratifying male appetites and despite the effects of such norms on their self-conception, Welty does not frame the men themselves as the ultimate social villains. Rather, as Berlant clarifies by affiliating with Yaeger’s interpretation,⁴⁴ she blames the discursive practice of the order that assigns the role of the oppressors to men and the role of the oppressed to women, and she sets out “to refuse the nostalgic and sentimental construction of female superiority by creating a scene of embarrassment, to insist that monstrosity is female as well as male, and to explode any discourse of mastery which wants to establish its own authority absolutely – that is, to petrify it.”⁴⁵ The women’s constant bickering that led Kreyling and Vande Kief to see them as Medusas ensures that they are not put on the pedestal of honorable martyrdom. The story exposes the hurtful workings of the binary logic that supports the compartmentalized society. Pregnant Mrs. Fletcher represents all the marginalized individuals whose socialized bodies turn against them, taking away their already insignificant agency that is predicated only on the skillful association with and endorsement of the empowered oppressor, and their observance of the norms. Welty denounces the very idea of the social hierarchy and its tendency to reduce human beings to physical signs devoid of any authentic, free selves.

⁴² “Petrified Man” 22.

⁴³ Berlant 64.

⁴⁴ Berlant 60.

⁴⁵ Berlant 60.

2.3 Required Dominance and Consuming Guilt

As was stated above, Kreyling reads “Petrified Man” as a story of women who ridicule and criticize their husbands.⁴⁶ Following Schmidt’s discussion of the mass culture⁴⁷ and Berlant’s interpretation of Leota’s and Mrs. Fletcher’s discussion of the men,⁴⁸ it may be argued that their behavior reveals the extent to which they were influenced by the popular images of maleness. Their vision petrified by the socially constructed norms of maleness, Leota and Mrs. Fletcher resent that their husbands do not display manly qualities of the decisive, uncompromising breadwinners of the marriage. They belittle them because they feel that while they can never be invested with the male power, they should at least surrender to it. Paradoxically, they are punishing them for not becoming what they fear. As for the husbands, their deviation from the socially prescribed role of the coercive guardian of their gendered other comes at a steep prize – the order labels them as failures. Therefore, the privilege does not entail freedom: unless they want to become completely irrelevant, men need to occupy the position of oppressive gatekeepers and renounce their authenticity. The heteronormativity does not recognize any other roles: “sexual relations are perverted into either utter passivity (as with Leota’s and Mrs. Fletcher’s husbands) or violent aggression (as with Mr. Petrie).”⁴⁹ Both the oppressors and the oppressed are primarily victims of the social binary logic.

As Suzanne Donaldson and Suzanne Marrs persuasively argue, “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” presents another protagonist who is paralyzed by the entanglement with the order.⁵⁰ Steve, “a former carnival barker,”⁵¹ feels guilty over his involvement in perpetrating the dominant social narrative. The job consisted of attracting people to the performance in which Keela would eat live chickens. To that end, the carnival owners provided Steve with a script that he was supposed to adhere to, and he trustingly repeated the lines about Keela being a carnivore, predator Indian woman: “ ‘They gimme a piece of paper with the thing wrote off I had to say. That was easy. ‘Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden!’ I call it out through a pasteboard megaphone. Then ever’ time it was fixin’ to eat a live chicken, I blowed the siren

⁴⁶ Kreyling 17-19.

⁴⁷ Schmidt 81-82.

⁴⁸ Berlant 64-66.

⁴⁹ Schmidt 85.

⁵⁰ Suzanne Donaldson, “Parting the Veil: Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, and the Crying Wounds of Jim Crow”, in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 52-54, Suzanne Marrs, “Welty, Race and the Patterns of a Life”, in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 40-41.

⁵¹ Donaldson 53.

out front’.”⁵² In his privileged position of a white male, he unknowingly contributed to upholding and spreading the narrative defining the position of the other. As Schmidt puts it, during his career of a barker, “[Steve’s] voice is [...] dominated by [...] a series of stereotypes”⁵³ he presents to the audience.

One day, a regular attender of the show approaches Keela, “offers his hand to [her] across the barrier ostensibly protecting the audience,”⁵⁴ thus subverting the barrier placed between the empowered and the oppressed, and an African American man with deformed feet is discovered in Keela’s cage. Donaldson underscores that Welty herself coined the term “‘shock’ of recognition,”⁵⁵ and reads Steve’s life-changing experience as an instance of the phenomenon: Steve’s assumptions about his social status crumble with “a shattering discovery of white privilege based on black powerlessness and exploitation.”⁵⁶ Fundamentally shaken by the revelation, Steve drifts through time and space ever since that day, unable to find an anchor in the reality that proved to be different from what it seemed to be: “‘By that time I felt bad. Been feelin’ bad ever since. Can’t hold on to a job or stay in one place for nothin’ in the world’.”⁵⁷ He cannot believe in the assertions of the order but there is no other narrative that he could rely on and that would prevent him from repeating the fatal mistake: “‘I can’t look at nothin’ an’ be sure what it is. Then afterwards I know. Then I see how it was’.”⁵⁸

Hoping to find a way out of the painful confinement within the memories of the past, Steve searches for Little Lee Roy, and eventually finds himself standing in front of the man’s porch. However, he does not establish any contact with the victim of his misreading of the reality and keeps retelling his story to Max, a man who is assigned the same social privilege as Steve is. In other words, his gaze remains fixed inwards, his visit is essentially an egocentric enterprise, and he longs to establish a homosocial intimacy with an individual that shares his predicament of the gatekeeper. His treatment of Little Lee Roy does not seem to be that different from the one he contributed to in the carnival: in the past, he saw the man as an object of fascination for the privileged; in the present, he sees him as an object that may hold the key to his redemption.

⁵² “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 38.

⁵³ Schmidt 196.

⁵⁴ Donaldson 53.

⁵⁵ Welty, qtd. in Donaldson 52.

⁵⁶ Donaldson 53.

⁵⁷ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 42.

⁵⁸ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 43.

Max remains immune to Steve's insistence on the veracity of the account and on the role he played in it. Usually, he does not venture beyond his "Max's Place" where he serves bootlegged alcohol, shutting off any unpleasant information with music: " 'I don't hear anything. I got a juke box, see, so I don't have to listen'."⁵⁹ Marris describes him as "a [bystander] courting [...] detachment from the horror and guilt Keela represents."⁶⁰ He refuses to be dragged into Steve's narrative of the privilege that reposes on the subjugation of the others and "to recognize [his] own complicity with the evil."⁶¹ When Steve describes Little Lee Roy's state after the removal of the disguise, he disinterestedly remarks that " '[Steve] got a good memory' "⁶² implying that he himself does not dwell on the things that might disturb his life. He responds to Steve's testimony by calling the man mentally ill, and by pointing out that Little Lee Roy's body does not show any signs of previous violation: "See him? Use your eyes. He's O.K., ain't he? Looks O. K. to me. It's just you. You're nuts, is all."⁶³ He dismisses Steve's preoccupation as a distorted perspective of a mad person, much like the nameless woman in "A Visit of Charity" does when confronted with Addie.

The climactic point between the two white men comes when Steve tells Max about his inability to read the reality, and Max attributes it to Steve's insanity. Steve screams that " '[Max] wouldn't of knowed it either' "⁶⁴ revealing that he regards his own state as an universal condition of the privileged within the order. Frustrated with Max's unresponsiveness, he hits his companion in a desperate attempt to make him feel the pain that haunts him. Yet, the fit quickly passes, and the two men return to their world together, leaving Little Lee Roy behind.

Before the departure, Max asks Steve what he planned to "transact with Keela."⁶⁵ Steve replies that "[he] was goin' to give him some money or somethin' "⁶⁶ which is no longer possible because he does not have any finances left. Max's choice of verb, and Steve's idea of compensation demonstrate that they see all interpersonal relationships and social issues chiefly in terms of economic exchange, just like Mrs. Pike does. While Donaldson's claim that he is entirely at loss as to what would be an appropriate consolation for a violation of a

⁵⁹ "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 40.

⁶⁰ Marris 41.

⁶¹ Marris 41.

⁶² "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 43.

⁶³ "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 42.

⁶⁴ "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 43.

⁶⁵ "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 44.

⁶⁶ "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" 44.

person's freedom may be an explication for his insensitivity, the fact that Steve considers the gift of money to be the best option at hand reveals that he regards class ascent as a universally shared goal.

Eventually, it is Max who gives Little Lee Roy little money he himself seems to have no use for, and patronizingly orders him to go inside the house, out of their sight: “ ‘Here's some change for you, boy. Just take it. Go on back in the house. Go on’ .”⁶⁷ Then, he invites Steve to his place so that he could indulge the guest in material comfort, and so that he could resume his blissful ignorance: “ ‘You eat, and I'll listen to the juke box’ .”⁶⁸ Steve accepts the offer, and informs Max that he will leave the town afterwards, to resume his endless journey through the past somewhere else.

A broken man, Steve will never be able to step out of the spiral of guilt and the impotence to mend the past, and he will never recover the faith in his epistemological skills because he has already discovered that the order clouds everybody's judgment by the official narratives, thus irreversibly blurring the line between facts and fiction. Donaldson summarizes Steve's state after “ ‘the shock' of recognition”⁶⁹ as follows: “it is a discovery that traps him in multiple retellings of the incident, as though each retelling is an unsuccessful attempt to purge himself forever of that searing memory when he discovers both his sense of whiteness and his own culpability in the exploitation of a fellow human being.”⁷⁰ While this is certainly true, it may be argued that the implications of the event reach even further – Steve has lost the compass that was guiding him through reality because the knowledge he acquired in the carnival cannot be applied before a new atrocity unravels.

Furthermore, Steve will probably never find solace in the company of somebody who shares his feelings – either he will be confronted with a variation of Max's denial or he will encounter an individual whose equally self-centered sense of guilt will prevent him from listening to Steve repeating that “ ‘[he] was the one was the cause for it goin' on an' on an' not bein' found out’ .”⁷¹ He explains the difference between him and the other privileged individuals as follows: “ ‘I guess I was supposed to feel bad like this, and you wasn't. [...]

⁶⁷ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 44.

⁶⁸ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 44.

⁶⁹ Welty, qtd. in Donaldson 52.

⁷⁰ Donaldson 53.

⁷¹ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 40. Marrs uses the quote to exemplify Steve's recognition of his becoming an agent of the order.

This other had to happen⁷² to me – not you all. Feelin’ responsible. You’ll be O.K., mister, but I won’t’.”⁷³ For a random moment, he perceived the other as a subject and felt compassion for him, and that moment determined his whole life and alienated him irreversibly from the society – his is “a lonely, endless cry of terror and anger, a cry that calls and calls and is never answered.”⁷⁴ However, all the privileged face an alternative analogous to that of the women in “A Visit of Charity” discussed below. There are two options: they can live in conformity with the order and suppress their authenticity or they can refuse to adhere to the artificial normativity; they can accept the dominant position the order requires them to assume or they can discard the script. Either way, they will end up losing their integrity.⁷⁵

2.4 Internalization, Competition and Disloyalty

So far, the analysis concentrated mostly on the ways in which the order oppresses the individuals by dividing them along the axis of the binary and by issuing normative images according to which they must perform their identity. At this point, the internalization of the socially prescribed norms and the mutual policing on the part of the marginalized will be illustrated by Berlant’s reading of the triangle formed by Leota, Mrs. Fletcher, and Mrs. Pike. Berlant observes that the fact that the beauty parlor has exclusively female clientele and personnel creates an illusion that within this environment, the threat of gender difference was temporarily removed from the picture.⁷⁶ As discussed above, the very nature of the beauty parlor business excludes any such state but the women see it primarily as a place where they can share their predicament, the account of pregnancy and freak show being two examples of such intimacies: “Welty authorizes the space of the beauty parlor – which is both a physical and a narrative space – as one within which the women can safely tell the story of the violence of difference which the Perseus-Medusa myth signifies.”⁷⁷ In the course of the socially prescribed procedure of “shampoo-and-set,”⁷⁸ the beautician and the beautified “constitute a real community based on the ritual of mutual gratification.”⁷⁹ The bond creates a pleasant illusion that the women can enjoy their bodies regardless of the fact that they are

⁷² The choice of words echoes Clytie’s confrontation with the reflection in the barrel that ends her life. The other also “happens to [her]” (“Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 40) when completely unexpected.

⁷³ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 42.

⁷⁴ Schmidt 196.

⁷⁵ As will be demonstrated in the respective section, Schmidt discusses the two alternatives in detail (Schmidt 17-19).

⁷⁶ Berlant 62-63.

⁷⁷ Berlant 62.

⁷⁸ “Petrified Man” 17.

⁷⁹ Berlant 63.

socially relevant only in relation the privileged of the patriarchal world: “[t]he women receive pleasure from the telling and hearing of stories about themselves, from the extravagance of touching and talking to each other.”⁸⁰

However, Berlant also stresses that the harmony proves to be extremely fragile, as exemplified by its shattering to pieces after Mrs. Pike’s advent.⁸¹ The devastating consequences of the newcomer’s entrance on the scene are evident from the very moment Leota mentions her name for the first time, informing Mrs. Fletcher that it was the newcomer who purchased some peanuts for her. Feeling that Leota values her new friendship over their relationship, Mrs. Fletcher directs her gaze to showing roots on the traitor’s head, thus subconsciously tracing the flaws discrediting Leota’s social position in the outside world and betraying the extent to which she has internalized the social norms delimitating the space that female bodies can occupy.⁸² The safe space where shared oppression can be discussed crumbles because Mrs. Fletcher reverts to her everyday mode of being, judging her friend in terms of her attractiveness on the heterosexual market. In her attempt to humiliate Leota for her infidelity, she introduces the scale she has known in her life. From that moment on, the women enter the competition arbitrated by the privileged maleness. The intimacy valorizing authentic individual experience is destroyed because the women believe that by attaining a prominent position in the social hierarchy will secure them a triumph over the opponent.

In response to Mrs. Fletcher’s venturing to make a suggestion about her adversary’s looks, Leota describes Mrs. Pike as follows: “ ‘Honey, ‘cute’ ain’t the word for what she is. I’m tellin’ you, Mrs. Pike is attractive. She has her a good time. She’s got a sharp eye out, Mrs. Pike has.’ ”⁸³ Berlant aptly observes that Leota’s term “cute” refers both to Mrs. Pike’s appearances and to her intellect because she uses the word “both in the sense of being a good looking [...] as well as being acute.”⁸⁴ Therefore, Mrs. Fletcher feels threatened on two levels: Mrs. Pike possesses an extraordinary feminine beauty, and Mrs. Pike has analytical skills that she constantly employs to capitalize on that knowledge extracted by them from the reality surrounding her. While the former constitutes a desired female characteristic, the latter

⁸⁰ Berlant 63.

⁸¹ Berlant 66-68.

⁸² “Petrified Man” 17.

⁸³ “Petrified Man” 17.

⁸⁴ Berlant 66.

domain is reserved to men: “Pike’s good looks and perspicaciousness determine the parameters of what is and isn’t appropriate knowledge and aspiration for the women.”⁸⁵

To summarize, Berlant argues that there are two threats posed by Mrs. Pike: first, she may beat Mrs. Fletcher at her own game; second, she has an enormous advantage over both Mrs. Fletcher and Leota because she has discovered the social mechanisms that determine what a relevant sign is, and she uses all the data she can get to secure her social ascent, regardless of her betrayal of her female companions.⁸⁶ Obviously, one instance of such acquisitive employment of information is Mrs. Pike’s outing of Mrs. Fletcher’s pregnancy. In doing so, she attains a privileged position both in the female and in the male world.

As for women, she disempowers Mrs. Fletcher by exposing the inappropriate shape of her body, she destroys Mrs. Fletcher and Leota’s friendship because, “seek[ing] power by contiguity”⁸⁷ the beautician is drawn to Mrs. Pike’s observational skills, and she becomes an empowered figure that is either feared or emulated by other female individuals in her vicinity.⁸⁸ As for men, she is posing as a gatekeeper of the beauty norms that the patriarchal order sanctions, thus operating under the protection of the patriarchal order who sees her as his proxy. Despite the fact that “perspicaciousness”⁸⁹ is coded as a male privilege, she can continue to benefit from her access to information as long as she disguises her personal profit as enforcement of the normativity. To put it simply, Mrs. Pike becomes complicit with the order, and oppresses those whose predicament she used to share.

To elucidate how Mrs. Pike fits into the story of monstrous Medusa who needs to be slayed by Perseus, the guardian of the order, Berlant expands the myth that underlies the gender binary by analyzing the significance of the involvement of a third character – Minerva.⁹⁰ In Ovid’s *Methamorphoses*,⁹¹ Medusa is a young woman whose beauty attracts Neptune to that point that he deflowers her. Minerva witnesses the event because it takes place in her temple.

⁸⁵ Berlant 66.

⁸⁶ Berlant puts it as follows: “Mrs. Pike claims a special ability to read male and female behavior, [and] she uses her knowledge to consolidate her position of superiority over the other women” (Berlant 66).

⁸⁷ Berlant 67.

⁸⁸ It should be also noted that Leota is hypnotized by a skill that is clearly coded as masculine. The women instinctively valorize the male over the female, and, as Berlant points out, Leota quickly becomes a mere copy of Mrs. Pike.

⁸⁹ Berlant 66.

⁹⁰ Berlant 65-66. Similarly, Vande Kief points out Minerva’s involvement in her reading of “The Wanderers” (Vande Kief 116).

⁹¹ Berlant uses the following translation: Ovid, *The Methamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1995) 115.

She “turn[s] her back, hiding her modest face behind her aegis,”⁹² because she regards the act as an illicit display of sexuality, and responds by transforming Medusa into a monster. After the incident, she uses the token of the violence she directed against the sexually active female as a sign of her power: “in order to terrify her enemies and numb them with fear, the goddess wears as a breastplate the snakes that were her own creation.”⁹³

As Berlant argues, when being privy to the coitus between Medusa and Neptune, Minerva feels that Medusa was chosen over her: “Because Minerva punishes the victim by turning her into the snaky sign of her own humiliation, one would say that this myth is a study in female sexual jealousy.”⁹⁴ In “Petriefied Man,” Berlant identifies Minerva with Mrs. Pike and Medusa with Mrs. Fletcher. Like Medusa, Mrs. Fletcher is penetrated by her husband who violates the incessantly guarded surface of her beautiful body, and the resulting unauthorized display of sexuality turns her into a universally condemned monster; like Minerva, Mrs. Pike punishes Mrs. Fletcher for the transgression because she wants to elevate herself above her, and she is rewarded with the favor of the men who value her loyalty to the patriarchal norms. Mr. Fletcher violates Mrs. Fletcher’s body; Mrs. Pike brings the products of the violation into being by naming them.⁹⁵

After Mrs. Pike’s intrusion into her life, Mrs. Fletcher finds herself squeezed between the Scylla of her husband and the Charybdis of the female renegade, and the double appropriation of her body deprives her of the last meaningful relationship: “Mrs. Fletcher, who already feels violated and infected by her husband’s and Mrs. Pike’s respective penetrations of her, suffers even more from Leota’s abandonment of her for Mrs. Pike.”⁹⁶ In this alienated state, she sets out to fend for herself by yet another means she knows from the outside world – “[i]n self-defense, she adopts a tone of class superiority.”⁹⁷

Like the beauty standards, the assertion of class superiority is constructed around male approval because the class hierarchy is inextricably connected with material prosperity, and a woman’s economic power is determined by the wealth of the man she dedicates her body to. Berlant summarizes the link between class and gender that underlies the women’s competition as follows: “The movement towards differentiation takes place in two arenas: one, the

⁹² Ovid 115, qtd in Berlant 65.

⁹³ Ovid 115, qtd in Berlant 65

⁹⁴ Berlant 65.

⁹⁵ Berlant 66.

⁹⁶ Berlant 67.

⁹⁷ Berlant 67.

women's stories about their heterosexual relations; and the other, their reactions to the Freak Show, and especially to the Petrified Man. In short, Mrs. Pike forces the women to rethink their positions in reference to men, thus realigning their consciousness around men, not women."⁹⁸

As for the relationships with men, Mrs. Fletcher tells Leota that she encountered Mr. Fletcher in "the purportedly highclass 'rental' library,"⁹⁹ contrasting thus the character of their courtship with Mrs. Pike's meeting her husband " 'on another train'," and Leota's meeting Fred " 'in a rumble seat'."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, she stresses her own passivity during the interaction: " 'I met Mr. Fletcher, or rather he met me [...]'."¹⁰¹ While the two other women are associated with a linguistic construction that suggests their equal share, Mrs. Fletcher's manner of conveying the information suggests that it was the man who approached the female object of his desire. In this way, Mrs. Fletcher adhered to the rules that the order dictates and maintained the upper class decorum, and Leota and Mrs. Pike are implicitly accused of luring their future husbands with a forbidden display of sexuality.

Both Leota and Mrs. Fletcher insert the discussion of their husbands in every subject they broach, and Leota adopts various strategies to discredit Mrs. Fletcher's arguments. For instance, the description of pygmies, "the teeniest men in the universe," prompts Mrs. Fletcher to boast that her husband is " 'five foot nine and one half'."¹⁰² Leota quickly announces that "Fred is five foot ten [...][but [she] tell[s] him he's still a shrimp, account of [she's] so tall.'" ¹⁰³ In the context of Leota's unimpressed comment on the height of Fred who is taller than Mr. Fletcher, the height of Mr. Fletcher ceases to be a sign of masculine power and privilege.

As for the freaks, Mrs. Fletcher interprets Leota's fascination with them as a product of Mrs. Pike's influence over her treacherous friend, and resolutely dismisses it by explicitly proclaiming her lack of interest in the subject. In reaction to Leota's remark that the pygmies are " '[n]ot bad lookin' for what they are'," she retorts as follows: " 'I wouldn't care for them [...]' What does that Mrs. Pike see in them?' "¹⁰⁴ The statement asserts her superior taste and

⁹⁸ Berlant 67.

⁹⁹ Schmidt 82.

¹⁰⁰ "Petrified Man" 23.

¹⁰¹ "Petrified Man" 23.

¹⁰² "Petrified Man" 21.

¹⁰³ "Petrified Man" 21.

¹⁰⁴ "Petrified Man" 21.

her sexual purity, elevates her above Mrs. Pike's contrasting low attraction to the sensational, and condemns Leota who, "like Mrs. Pike, 'sees every Freak as a potential sexual object.'"¹⁰⁵

Berlant observes that prior to the introduction of class difference, the only trace of the class differentiation reposing on the male the fact that Leota is referred to by her first name while Mrs. Fletcher is referred to by her last name, which marks her association with the social status of her husband.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the asymmetry was compensated by Leota's "access to the purse which is the sign of the beauty parlor enterprise."¹⁰⁷ Being in charge of the beautification process and thus in charge of the space of the beauty parlor, Mrs. Fletcher's class privilege does not hold power over Leota during their weekly reunions. Yet, due to Mrs. Pike's intervention, the fragile equilibrium collapses, and the crumbling of community that started with Mrs. Fletcher's staring at Leota's roots culminates.

Berlant's observation¹⁰⁸ that anything that is not related to the male loses its significance in Mrs. Fletcher's and Leota's discourse is stated almost explicitly when the women discuss Leota's visit of Lady Evangeline. Leota explains that Mrs. Pike had an idea that Leota should ask her about her ancient beau that left her for a richer bride. Mrs. Fletcher is shocked that Mrs. Pike already has such a knowledge of Leota's heterosexual history: " 'Does Mrs. Pike know everything about you already? [...] Mercy!' "¹⁰⁹ Leota replies as follows: " 'Oh, yeah, I tole her ever'thing about ever'thing, from now on back to I don't know when – to when I first started goin' out'."¹¹⁰ Clearly, Leota's "ever'thing about ever'thing" signifies the sum of her relationships with men, as well as the sum of her whole life.

In the course of the second conversation, the old alliances are re-established because Leota finally realizes that Mrs. Pike would use any information for her personal profit. As Berlant observes, Mrs. Pike's former acquisitive use of the women's bodies (outing Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy), and company (a bet with Leota, a visit to the freak show where she saw the petrified man) becomes clear to Leota when her friend secures a betterment of her status by means of an object that belongs to her: "Leota's anger centers on issues of private property and class distinction: she's furious that Mrs. Pike has received \$500, or \$125 for each of the

¹⁰⁵ Berlant 68.

¹⁰⁶ Berlant 63.

¹⁰⁷ Berlant 63.

¹⁰⁸ Berlant 67.

¹⁰⁹ "Petrified Man" 22.

¹¹⁰ "Petrified Man" 22.

women [Mr. Petrie] raped.”¹¹¹ Mrs. Pike’s utilitarian approach that leads to violation of the female community as well as her perspective on her relationships to other individuals is aptly summarized by one of Leota’s bitter remarks: “ ‘Four women. I guess those women didn’t have the faintest notion at the time they’d be worth a hundred an’ twenty-five bucks apiece some day to Mrs. Pike’ .”¹¹²

Having been let down by the person whose powers were supposed to bring her prosperity, Leota returns into the shelter of the beauty parlor community, Mrs. Fletcher regains her friendship, and the two women seal their re-established bond by banishing Billy Boy, a reminder of Mrs. Pike’s presence, beyond the limits of the beauty parlor. As Berlant observes, Billy Boy’s falling out of grace is caused by his reaching for peanuts into Leota’s purse, which is an act both mirroring his mother’s appropriation of Leota’s magazine and explicitly linking the male element to the female intruder: “Like Mrs. Pike, he’s transgressed the boundaries of appropriate curiosity by going into Leota’s purse, the locus of her economic power, such as it is. [...] Billy Boy is the *truth* about Mrs. Pike, which means that her allegiances are with men, not with women, and that her desires are for men, not women.”¹¹³ To punish him for his own misconduct and for his mother’s actions, Mrs. Fletcher gets hold of him and Leota starts “paddling him heartily with the brush,”¹¹⁴ while all the other women present in the beauty parlor are looking on, and Billy Boy focusing his strength on hurting the two female bodies. The text is concluded by the question the boy attacks “the group of wild-haired ladies” with on his departure: “ ‘If you’re so smart, why ain’t you rich?’ ”¹¹⁵

Analyzing the passage, Berlant observes that what might seem as a powerful reinstallation of the community, “a triumphant reassertion of the importance of their private space and their way of being,”¹¹⁶ and a resolute eradication of the male and its accomplice from the space of the shared female existence, is in reality a message about female powerlessness in the order: Billy Boy tells women that no matter what valorization their selves get in the beauty parlor, it will not be translated into the terms intelligible in the real world that lies outside: “Because the ideology of wealth and intelligence is alien to the ideal discursive economy of the beauty parlor, the question he asks petrifies the story; the story ends. Billy Boy’s gesture does *to* the

¹¹¹ Berlant 68.

¹¹² “Petrified Man” 27.

¹¹³ Berlant 68.

¹¹⁴ “Petrified Man” 28.

¹¹⁵ “Petrified Man” 28.

¹¹⁶ Berlant 69.

text what acts of violence do to women *in* the text and in the mythology which accompanies it.”¹¹⁷ Billy Boy turns their act of resistance into a ridiculous display of uncombed hair, and Welty, the Perseus, is arrested in her reflection of the order by its dominant discourse.

Also, the reunion of the women is marred by the lurking presence of the hypothetical situation in which Mrs. Pike kept Leota by her side. Most probably, Leota would not have returned on her own, had her former best friend continued to sustain an illusion that Leota partakes on her power. The renewed membership in the female community constitutes only a consolation prize, and both Leota and Mrs. Fletcher might reject each other in the future should a similar opportunity of social ascent present itself. It seems that the marginalized can always be hypnotized by the vision of social privilege and, in becoming complicit with the oppressors, reject their kind. The order managed to persuade them that its ideology is the absolute truth about themselves and their personal aspirations, and they are unable to support themselves and each other in seeking an alternative mode of being.

2.5 Prison of Frustration and Self-Regulation

“A Visit of Charity” depicts the predicament of those who have recognized that their selves were informed by the internalization of the order, and who are acutely aware of their entrapment within the normativity that has robbed them of their authentic selves. As Schmidt argues,¹¹⁸ in “Petrified Man,” the women maintain their allegiances with the order unconsciously, thinking that the painful process of beautification constitutes an expression of their own will; in this text, Old Addie consciously targets her anger against its discourse, knowing that she can never escape from the bed where the order left her petrified.¹¹⁹ The story’s exposition presents fourteen-year-old Marian who comes to “the Old Ladies’ House,” announcing to the nurse at the reception that “ [she] is a Campfire Girl and [she] ha[s] to pay a visit to some lady’,” and that “ ‘any of them will do’.”¹²⁰ Granting her the wish, the nurse ushers her in a room. The house where the interaction takes place is situated “on the outskirts of town,”¹²¹ and it accommodates exclusively female senior citizens. Geographically, the society assigns the elderly women to a place on the margin of its radius, thus mirroring the eclipsing of the female and the economically unproductive from the social project.

¹¹⁷ Berlant 69.

¹¹⁸ Schmidt 84.

¹¹⁹ Schmidt 18-19.

¹²⁰ “A Visit of Charity” 113. Schmidt also stresses this utterance in the beginning of his analysis (Schmidt 16).

¹²¹ “A Visit of Charity” 113.

The nurse leads Marian through the silent corridors of the building. When a sound that reminds of “a sheep bleating”¹²² issues from one of the rooms, she determines that its inhabitants will be the subjects of Marian’s visit. Even the power of human speech was taken away from the ladies – occasionally, they can break the overwhelming silence with unintelligible animal noises. There are two women in the room. The first one is nameless, engages in communication with the visitor, has a “terrible, square smile (which was a smile of welcome) stamped on her bony face,”¹²³ and seems to be in charge of the room because she opens the door, pulls Marian further inside, and closes the door again. The second one is called Addie, does not acknowledge Marian’s presence, and “[lies] flat in bed with a cap on and a counterpane drawn up to her chin.”¹²⁴ The room is crammed with objects, and Marian finds herself stranded, as if the space was a physical representation of the order that obstructs women’s movement in the society.¹²⁵

The nameless woman begins the conversation with Marian, gets hold of the plant that Marian brought to earn extra Campfire points for the visit, and calls the pot “ ‘[p]retty flowers’.”¹²⁶ At this point, Addie joins in, claiming that they are “[s]tinkweeds,”¹²⁷ and starting a series of violent contradictions of her roommate’s statements. When Addie disagrees with the nameless woman who tells Marian that another girl came to see them last month, the nameless woman attempts to subvert Addie’s credibility by suggesting that an illness has clouded her mind: “ ‘You mustn’t pay any attention to old Addie, [...] She is ailing today’.”¹²⁸ She uses the power of medical discourse to label her difficult roommate as abnormal, and render her utterances socially irrelevant. When she enforces her point by informing Marian about Addie’s “ ‘medicine’,” Addie retorts as follows: “ ‘I’m no more sick than you are. [...] I just got more sense than you have, that’s all’.”¹²⁹ In this sentence, the difference between the two women unravels, the surface of the binary crumbles, and the truth about the women’s mode of being

¹²² “A Visit of Charity” 114. Schmidt underscores that both of the women have animal-like qualities: “one has a hand like a ‘bird claw’ grabbing at her and the other looks and sounds like a sheep” (Schmidt 17).

¹²³ “A Visit of Charity” 114. The smile can be seen as akin to Mrs. Fletcher’s “fixed smile” (“Petrified Man” 28) at the end of “Petrified Man.”

¹²⁴ “A Visit of Charity” 114.

¹²⁵ Schmidt presents a similar set of characteristics: “There are two ‘witches’ in the room that Marian visits, one a woman without a name who moves about the room and another who is confined to her bed and called ‘Old Addie.’ From the very beginning, the unnamed woman is the more sociable. [...] Old Addie, in contrast, speaks in non sequiturs and refuses to be polite, contradicting everything and periodically exploding with rage” (Schmidt 17-18).

¹²⁶ “A Visit of Charity” 114.

¹²⁷ “A Visit of Charity” 115.

¹²⁸ “A Visit of Charity” 115.

¹²⁹ “A Visit of Charity” 116.

surfaces: while the nameless woman has lost her own senses and her only compass are the socially prescribed norms that she has internalized in the outside world, Addie refuses to adhere to them, and sees them for what they are.

As Schmidt and Vande Kief point out,¹³⁰ the full diagnosis of the women's coexistence in the room as well as in the world is given in Addie's tirade that is prompted by the nameless woman's inquiry after " '[w]hat]does Marian] do at school'," ¹³¹ and by her following assertion that she attended school as well:

Hush! [...] You never went to school. You never came and you never went. You never were anything – only here. You never were born! You don't know anything. Your head is empty, your heart and hands and your old black purse are all empty, even that little old box that you brought with you you brought empty – you showed it to me. And yet you talk, talk, talk, talk, talk all the time until I think I am losing my mind! Who are you? You're a stranger – a perfect stranger! Don't you know you're a stranger? Is it possible that they have actually done a thing like this to anyone – sent them in a stranger to talk, and rock, and tell away her whole long rigmarole? Do they seriously suppose that I'll be able to keep it up, day in, day out, night in, night out, living in the same room with a terrible old woman – forever?¹³²

The school and the home are two institutions that frame women's life. While the former marks the beginning of socialization, the latter concludes it by withdrawing a person from the society. In this context, Addie denounces the absence of any content of her roommate's self, and her incessant repetition of the script that the order has given to her to memorize: "[she] names all the things that give a woman an 'identity' in society, her body, her possessions, and her 'talk,' her ability to perform sociably, and then savagely empties all these things of the meanings that society gives them. Social graces and other forms of perfection and power are merely useless activity, 'rigmarole,' nonsensical signs of madness."¹³³ The nurse informed Marian that " '[t]here are two in each room'."¹³⁴ In the light of Addie's speech, it may be argued that a room represents a body of an individual whose integrity was fractured by the

¹³⁰ Schmidt 18-19, Vande Kief 66.

¹³¹ "A Visit of Charity" 115.

¹³² "A Visit of Charity" 116. Both Schmidt and Vande Kief quote the passage in its entirety. Given its centrality to Addie's narrative, I include it unabbreviated as well.

¹³³ Schmidt 18-19.

¹³⁴ "A Visit of Charity" 114.

effects of the order.¹³⁵ This view seems to be present also in Schmidt's interpretation of the women's pairing: "As if to recognize that all women lead double lives, Welty's story contains two old women and two stories."¹³⁶ Addie, the preserved authenticity, is imprisoned by the nameless woman, a jailor who polices her every expression. Her rage cannot set her free because the gatekeeper is a part of her.

Reprimanding her, the nameless woman calls Addie " 'a story' ."¹³⁷ Schmidt argues¹³⁸ that the epithet proves to be very aptly chosen: Addie's is a story of a Leota or a Mrs. Fletcher that has come to realize how her life was shaped by the outside oppression while she believed that she was acting in the only possible way – or even asserting her individuality – when climbing on the social ladder. She battles against the narrative perpetrated by the nameless woman, "[her] cry of despair is her version of the meaning of a woman's life, and, significantly, it is [she] who has a name and a 'story,' not her anonymous companion."¹³⁹ While depicting the prison of frustration wherein her protagonist is sentenced to life, Welty also shows that this part of the woman still retains a sense of individuality.

As for Marian, she flees the room when Addie breaks down in tears. She dodges the nameless woman who follows her to ask her for money, claiming that " ' [they] don't have a thing in the world' ,"¹⁴⁰ runs out of the house, and leaves the lives that are devoid of any kind of personal resources behind her.¹⁴¹ Outside, she manages to stop a bus passing by, boards it, and "t[akes] a big bite out of the apple"¹⁴² she has stashed outside of the house. In this way, she recollects her identity that seemed to be substantially threatened during the visit – Schmidt and Joseph Millichap¹⁴³ point out that the temporal disintegration is exemplified by Marian's inability to present herself to Addie by her name, and her stating the affiliation with the Campfire institution instead. Yet, she cannot regain her innocence. From now on, she knows the terror

¹³⁵ Vande Kief asserts that "[n]o accusing finger is pointed, no one is particularly to blame" (Vande Kief 66). She is right – it is the order that produces such an individual as Addie.

¹³⁶ Schmidt 19.

¹³⁷ "A Visit of Charity" 11.

¹³⁸ Schmidt 19.

¹³⁹ Schmidt 19.

¹⁴⁰ "A Visit of Charity" 117.

¹⁴¹ Schmidt sees Marian's departure as "escaping becoming transformed into an animal and imprisoned" (Schmidt 17).

¹⁴² "A Visit of Charity" 118.

¹⁴³ Schmidt 19. Joseph Millichap, "Eudora Welty's personal epic: autobiography, art, and classical myth" (*The Southern Literary Journal* 38.1, 2005), Literature Resource Center <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA140490324&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=63ea459fbf14316fe16b88eddefa344f>.

that inevitably awaits her. As Schmidt asserts, her biting the apple does not reconnect her with the freshness of “a world of light and freedom”¹⁴⁴ outside of the institution but marks her initiation into her predicament. The gates of childhood paradise¹⁴⁵ have irreversibly closed behind her.

Millichap equates Welty’s role in the text with that of Homer’s Persephone. The goddess allows Odysseus to enter her realm and stages a series of “lessons of death and life”¹⁴⁶ uttered by the shadows of a number of well-known female dead, beginning with Anticleia, the hero’s mother. Like Persephone, Welty has her Odysseus in the character of Marian, and Addie and the nameless woman “likewise represent her possibilities as a woman in her modern world.”¹⁴⁷ During her descent into the underworld of the house, Marian learns that, Campfire girl or no Campfire girl, “the bright and hopeful young woman will become lonely and empty like them.”¹⁴⁸ As was suggested above, the vision of a woman who has to endlessly brace herself against the attacks that the order makes on her from within her self and that is rewarded only with permanent frustration is complementary to that of a man who cannot escape the guilt he feels over assuming his privileged social position that is epitomized by the character of Steve. While Welty centers on the gender binary in this particular case, her analysis applies to any other pairings of the oppressor and the oppressed.

2.6 Invisibility and Privilege

For the most part of the present analysis of “Petrified Man,” the axis of difference was drawn chiefly between the female and the male, treating other social distinctions as secondary criteria. However, Donaldson foregrounds Welty’s engagement with the binary of race and class.¹⁴⁹ She argues that Mrs. Fletcher’s and Leota’s incorrect understanding of the signs surrounding them is caused primarily by their privileged position in the society: the women do not perceive their social others as fellow human beings because they see the freaks as objects that are firmly positioned outside of their world, and that exist only to provide them with a source of entertainment and pleasurable awe they pay for. Despite the substantial time spent looking at and discussing Mr. Petrie, Leota and Mrs. Fletcher “[reveal] themselves to be

¹⁴⁴ Schmidt 19.

¹⁴⁵ Vande Kief stresses the Biblical overtones of the event as well: “[I]n her biting into the apple there is a subtle hint that this little Eve has had her initiation to the knowledge of evil” (Vande Kief 66).

¹⁴⁶ Millichap.

¹⁴⁷ Millichap.

¹⁴⁸ Millichap.

¹⁴⁹ Donaldson 60.

singularly blind to [the danger he poses to them] precisely because it has been curtained off and confined for their viewing pleasure according to the dictates of segregated society.”¹⁵⁰

The otherness suddenly enters the territory that the women considered to be beyond its reach, and it reveals its ability to alter their reality. Billy Boy’s parting remark captures the women’s delusion in terms even Leota and Mrs. Fletcher can understand – he informs them that their limited perspective deprived them of material profit. Ironically, the violence Mr. Petrie perpetrates on the victims’ bodies mirrors the violence that the women do to those who do not belong to the social compartment they themselves were assigned to. Therefore, Donaldson equates the Medusa in the text with the privilege of whiteness and richness that decides what a body can and cannot signify: “It is a story, finally, that slyly satirizes the misplaced faith of white women in Jim Crow’s economies of visibility and invisibility, designating what can be seen and unseen and structured by what Robyn Wiegman has referred to ‘segregation’s tenuous geometry of public gazes.’”¹⁵¹

In “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” the motif of invisibility is further problematized by adding the perspective of the othered in the equation. Having been captured by the carnival owners who “just took it,”¹⁵² seeing in him an object they can make profit on, Little Lee Roy undergoes a metamorphosis from a male African American with deformed body into a carnivore, predator woman of Indian descent. The easiness with which the new social label is invented and maintained by his tormentors demonstrates that the privileged see the categories of otherness as interchangeable and as equally meaningless in their world – the only purpose of the othered individuals is to entertain the gaze of those whose identity reposes on the binary, be it ethnic, gender or physiognomic difference.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Donaldson 60.

¹⁵¹ Donaldson 60. Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), qtd. in Donaldson 60.

¹⁵² “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 43. Importantly, even Steve refers to Little Lee Roy as to “it.” Whatever his motivation for the choice of the inanimate pronoun (his confusion as to the gender he should choose or his opinion that it is in line with the depraved state Little Lee Roy was in can be two plausible explanations), he does sustain the dominant social discourse by using it.

¹⁵³ Schmidt arrives at a similar conclusion, attributing Keela’s eligibility for the carnival to the constructed nature of the other, a social compartment that Keela and Little Lee Roy share: “Keela’s grotesqueness is heightened by the fact that ‘she’ is supposedly Indian and female; her identity as a social outcast is an important component of her fitness to be made into a spectacle. (That the spectacle is a charade for Welty merely emphasizes the artificiality of the social stereotypes the ‘freak show’ capitalizes on.)” (Schmidt 41-42).

Max sarcastically tells Steve that he himself would have been able to see through the trick: “ ‘Bet I could tell a man from a woman and an Indian from a nigger [...]’.”¹⁵⁴ Obviously, he could have read the reality differently if he was willing to look beyond the social construction or if it suited his purposes to stress different characteristics of the individual. However, Max would probably remain under the spell of the official narrative issued by Steve’s mouth: on one occasion, the order may present phenomena as separate categories; on other occasion, it may conflate them in a knot of otherness.

In other words, Little Lee Roy is not just a man in the eyes of the privileged – he is a “little club-footed nigger man.”¹⁵⁵ In the dominant discourse, his blackness and handicap relegates him in the category of the ethnic other that wants to prey on the white women, much like Indian Keela preys on the helpless chickens, and both Roy’s feet and Keela’s aggressive appetite defy female and male norms of beauty and sexuality that Welty stages in “Petrified Man.” Little Lee Roy or Keela, the bodies acquire an identical signification in the context of a show for “white spectators whose avid stares evoke the dehumanizing effects upon those who serve as objects of a racialized gaze.”¹⁵⁶ To use Wiegman’s term, “the public gazes” define the limits of Little Lee Roy’s existence – in the carnival, he *becomes* Keela. At this point, the brilliance of Mr. Petrie’s decision to hide himself in the midst of the freak show can be fully comprehended. As long as he can sustain his narrative of a deformed curiosity, the gazes of the privileged ladies cannot penetrate his disguise.

Having been rescued by the man whose gaze was not petrified by the official narrative, Little Lee Roy returns to his family in “ ‘Cane Springs, Miss’ippi’ ”¹⁵⁷ but one day a character from his past and the character’s guide pay him an unexpected visit. As was argued above, Steve is so preoccupied with his sense of guilt that he does not really see Little Lee Roy. He simply stands in front of the victim he was looking for in order to assuage the feelings that tear him apart, and he keeps explaining to Max the past events. Surprisingly, it is Little Lee Roy who is wanting an initiation of a contact. When Steve and Max approach the house, he does not seem to be disturbed by the return of the white oppressors. Rather, his body shows a high degree of excitement and activation: “Little Lee Roy was looking from one white man to the other,

¹⁵⁴ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 43.

¹⁵⁵ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 38.

¹⁵⁶ Donaldson 53.

¹⁵⁷ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 40.

excited almost beyond respectful silence. He trembled all over, and a look of amazement and sudden life came into his eyes.”¹⁵⁸

Later on, he attempts to make them linger by confirming Steve’s description of the carnival, and by claiming that he knows Steve even though he does not recognize him as the barker, and he betrays signs of distress when Steve tells Max the truth about Keela because he assumes that the two men have reached the end of their mission and “everything was all over.”¹⁵⁹ At one point, he even tries to capture their attention by performing an acrobatic act, stressing the animal-like and abnormal characteristics of his body that the carnival advertised: “Little Lee Roy held up a crutch and turned it about, and then snatched it back like a monkey.”¹⁶⁰

Taking into account the observations made above, Marrs’s conclusion that Little Lee Roy, “notwithstanding the horror of his past, feels nostalgic about the carnival experience, in which he was noticed”¹⁶¹ can be endorsed. Despite the fact that he was violated both physically and psychologically, his body being beaten on regular basis and his identity being replaced by a construct interpreting his corporeality to his tormentors’ economic profit, he did have an attention of the society. Once back with his family, he could have created his own narrative but, as Donaldson and Marrs point out, his children do not want to listen to his story. Their disinterestedness is revealed when he begins to tell them about the visitors, and “ ‘de ole times when I use to be wid de circus’ ,”¹⁶² and they cut him quickly off. As for those beyond his household, his existence does not even register on their sensibilities. When he does not entertain them, they do not have a place for him in their reality. Having no other platform but that given to him by the order, Little Lee Roy longs for its objectifying spotlight. Keela is a Mrs. Fletcher and a Leota in a grotesque, macabre magnifying glass.

Little Lee Roy’s invisibility in the white world is demonstrated also by Welty’s narrative strategy. Donaldson states that “the story is told from [his] perspective”¹⁶³ but the claim seems to be dubious because it is Steve’s voice that sounds throughout the text, demonstrating the self-centeredness of the privileged. Donnie McMahan quotes François Pitavy in order to

¹⁵⁸ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 39.

¹⁵⁹ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 41.

¹⁶⁰ “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 43.

¹⁶¹ Marrs 40-41.

¹⁶² “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden” 45. Interestingly, Donaldson uses the same quote to demonstrate that Little Lee Roy’s removal from the carnival ended “in many respects” (Donaldson 53) his entanglement with the show.

¹⁶³ Donaldson 53.

argue that the scarceness of Little Lee Roy's words is a proof of Welty's unwillingness to join in the false sense of entitlement to tell the stories of those whose experience is fundamentally different from her own: "in his reading of Welty's story 'Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden' [he] remarks on the writer's reluctance 'to explore the black consciousness ... a territory [Welty] does not consider hers. A white woman, she will not tread there'."¹⁶⁴ She refuses to participate in the process in which the privileged petrifies the other, assigning the individual a narrative.

¹⁶⁴ Donnie McMahan, "Bodies on the Brink: Vision, Violence, and Self-Destruction in *Delta Wedding*," in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 165.

3 Chapter 2: Aborted Flights

As the sum of the analyses presented above demonstrated, neither the oppressors nor the oppressed are capable of exerting their own will and affirming their authenticity because they are all trapped in a variation of the alienating spiral of indoctrination, internalization, disloyalty, betrayal, recognition, frustration, and guilt. The following discussion will chronicle the struggles of those who were awakened to this all-encompassing coercion, attempted to create a narrative that would not be governed by any social hierarchy, and were crushed by the prevailing power of normativity.

3.1 Constructions of Social Status Shattered

“A Curtain of Green” portrays Mrs. Larkin, a privileged, white woman whose perspective on life is unexpectedly shattered by the untimely death of her husband. Up to the moment of the tragic accident, the coordinates delimitating her world are defined by her marriage to the patriarch whose father imprinted the family name on the community she is a member of: she exists within the neatly structured space of her heterosexual relationship that relegates her into the private sphere of the house and reduces her to a passive presence awaiting the return of her husband while Mr. Larkin publicly exerts his power over those that, like his wife, inhabit Larkin’s Hill,¹ the hereditary territory that has become his sphere of influence.

Mrs. Larkin has come to believe that as long as she maintains the protective shelter of the love she feels for her husband, the blissful status quo cannot be disrupted by any calamity. Being Mrs. Larkin, she partakes on the social security enjoyed by the privileged gatekeeper of the order, and she mistakes the golden cage upheld by the artificial construct of compartmentalized society for a natural control over the events in world. Like the women of the “Petrified Man,” she ceases to perceive the existence of any phenomenon beyond her social radius. The bond between the spouses may be based on a sincere feeling but her blind faith in the omnipotence of a sentiment that is an inherent part of the socially prescribed institution of heterosexual partnership, and her subsequent identification of the sum of her existence with her position within such institution proves to be fundamentally flawed when nature intervenes, “end[ing] her husband’s life and her own sense of order and security.”²

¹ Schmidt also stresses the fact that the town is named after Mrs. Larkin’s father-in-law (Schmidt 25).

² Donaldson 58.

As Mrs. Larkin mournfully remarks, the moment that awakened her to the illusory character of her safety came with “no warning.”³ When driving towards the house where Mrs. Larkin faithfully looks out for him, Mr. Larkin is hit by a falling tree, and “the most freakish and arbitrary kind of accident”⁴ leads to his demise. Witnessing the tragedy “[f]rom her place on the front porch,”⁵ Mrs. Larkin wants to avert it by assuring her husband that “‘[he] can’t be hurt’.”⁶ As Vande Kief points out, she acts “as though, like God, she can bring order out of chaos.”⁷ Her social privilege instilled in her the belief that as long as she observes the norms, her existence cannot be threatened.

Yet, her incantation proves to be ineffective, and the realization leaves Mrs. Larkin petrified, incredulous, and uncomprehending: “She had waited there on the porch for a time afterward, not moving at all – in a sort of recollection – as if to reach under and bring out from obliteration her protective words and to try them once again. ... so as to change the whole happening. It was accident that was incredible, when her love for her husband was keeping him safe.”⁸ Apart from juxtaposing the helplessness of constructed social power with the unhindered forces of nature, “her experience of [...] random destructiveness”⁹ demonstrates the powerlessness of Mrs. Larkin’s position within the grid of the society – throughout the whole incident, she remains glued to the porch where her role of wife puts her, and she can only look on as the world around her is being changed.

The eponymous protagonist of “Clytie” shares with Mrs. Larkin several characteristics: she lives in “the little town of Farr’s Gin”¹⁰ whose name derives from the surname of her privileged male ancestry, and she used to be a “part of their town’s aristocracy,”¹¹ a white, privileged woman whose only purpose was to play a role of Southern belle – the embodiment of the ideal beauty that was described in the analysis of “Petrified Man,” and that allows as little active participation in the public affairs as Mrs. Larkin’s role of housewife. Furthermore, her perspective on life is also tied to the fate of the male members of her aristocratic family. As Schmidt summarizes,¹² when her father descends into madness, her brother Henry commits

³ “A Curtain of Green” 109.

⁴ Vande Kief 16.

⁵ “A Curtain of Green” 109.

⁶ “A Curtain of Green” 109.

⁷ Vande Kief 16.

⁸ “A Curtain of Green” 109.

⁹ Schmidt 24.

¹⁰ “Clytie” 81.

¹¹ Schmidt 27.

¹² Schmidt 27.

suicide, and her brother Gerald starts to drink excessively to assuage the pain he feels over the violent conclusion of his marriage, the family gradually loses its status in the community. As for Clytie, Schmidt points out¹³ that she fails to adhere to the prescribed script because she does not marry to be a wife on the pedestal, and becomes an “old maid”¹⁴ instead. The precise causal relations between the events cannot be established because the text does not state their sequence. Nonetheless, their joint effect on the family members is clear: they need to find a new definition for their existence under “heavy silver clouds which [look] bigger and wider than cotton fields,”¹⁵ the hovering shadow of the plantation past that gave rise to the likes of their family.

The remaining men of the family sink deeper into desolation. Mr. Farr is both mentally and physically paralyzed, and, as his barber unwittingly describes the disintegration of the patriarch’s identity, “his face [doesn’t] hold.”¹⁶ As his son’s rhetoric question after “how can a man live in the house with women”¹⁷ suggests, Gerald blames his failure on the gendered other and decides to enclose himself in his room. Octavia, Clytie’s equally husbandless sister, is overcome by madness. She keeps “[e]very window [...] closed, and every shade [...] down”¹⁸ because, as Donaldson observes, she “tries to reclaim a small measure of their lost social status by cutting off all ties with the community, including [Lethy,] the former black servant for whom their invalid father cries.”¹⁹ The only visitor allowed into the house is Mr. Bobo, the aforementioned barber shaving Mr. Farr. Being constantly policed by her sister who treats her as a servant, scorned by her brother, and unacknowledged by the father, Clytie starts to look for a mode of existence that would be entirely her own, unrestricted by the family history or by the social norms of privilege, whiteness and womanhood.

The heroine of “Circe” is fundamentally different from both Mrs. Larkin and Clytie. She lives on an isolated island where her only companions seem to be local female servants and a herd of pigs. For that reason, the social compartment that she used to be relegated to must be traced outside of the short story – namely, in Western literary history.²⁰ As is hinted in the very title,

¹³ Schmidt 27.

¹⁴ “Clytie” 82.

¹⁵ “Clytie” 82.

¹⁶ “Clytie” 89.

¹⁷ “Clytie” 88.

¹⁸ “Clytie” 82.

¹⁹ Donaldson 61.

²⁰ Kreyling makes a similar observation when he argues that the story is driven by the intertextuality (Kreyling 168).

Welty's text is a palimpsest of Homer's *Odyssey*, and the shifts between the original epos and, as Schmidt²¹ and Ann Romines²² assert, the revised version shows what Circe's life was and what it has become when the textual cage she was trapped in broke loose: the ancient Circe is depicted as a deceitful woman who uses treachery to trap Odysseus, the valiant hero that is eager to get out of the monstrous grip to return to his faithful Penelope, an emblem of the prescribed feminine conduct and beauty;²³ the new Circe is transformed from an episodic antagonist of the virtuous male hero into the main protagonist of her own narrative and "the willing but abandoned third side of passionate triangle"²⁴ while "the heroic character of Odysseus [becomes] a love- 'em and-leave- 'em cad."²⁵

Selecting Circe's voice as the one who narrates the story, Welty demonstrates that the portrayal of the woman's predecessor as a heartless Medusa was yet another construction of the order. The alternative perspective allows Circe to become the hero, and exposes Odysseus as the predator who uses her affection and her body and leaves her for the image of the womanhood that is less threatening to him because it is tied by the artificial normativity. In short, the interplay between the texts subverts the authority of the masculine worldview, frees the subjugated characters from their age-old social positions, and searches for new ways of the individuals' being in both the literary and the actual world.

3.2 Change of Paradigm

Shaken by a realization that parallels Steve's shock of recognition, Mrs. Larkin steps out of the community, and vigorously pursues her own private project, disregarding the norms of the institutions that encapsulated her previous existence. Her indifferent reception of the condolence calls that the community imposes upon her is the first sign of the withdrawal from the social spectacle: "At first, after the death of Mr. Larkin – after whose father, after all, the town had been named – they called upon the window with decent frequency. But she had not

²¹ Schmidt describes Circe's abilities in terms of the changes she has made in her account: "Circe's wand gives her a power that is not unlike that of Welty's other women artists, the power to revise narratives, to imagine other endings for them" (Schmidt 190).

²² In her article "How Not to Tell a Story," she claims the following: "Circe's tale counters the *Odyssey* version of herself. In Homer's narrative, she was an episode, a stage in a man's quest. Now, like Sister, she seizes centrality; as the title attests, this is *her* story" (Ann Romines, "How not to Tell a Story: Eudora Welty's First-Person Tales", in *Eudora Welty*, ed. Dawn Trouard (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989) 100).

²³ Kreyling also stresses the structural importance of Penelope's normative womanhood in his summary of the story's exposition (Kreyling 167).

²⁴ Kreyling 168.

²⁵ Kreyling 168.

appreciated it, they said to one another.”²⁶ She rightly feels that the niceties are motivated chiefly by the desire to pay respect to the lingering presence of the patriarch rather than by a genuine concern for her emotional state: the trace of his social importance that is projected on her lures everybody into her household to observe the convention; the visitors do not see her private sorrow but a reflection of her husband’s public power, and they want to be associated with it. As Schmidt aptly puts it, “[a]fter her husband’s death Mrs. Larkin realizes apparently for the first time that she cannot step into her husband’s public role in the town.”²⁷

Having been met with Mrs. Larkin’s lack of enthusiasm, the members of the community decide to place Mrs. Larkin in the compartment of the abnormal on the social chart, reducing her to a diverting afterthought that occurs to them during their dutiful performance of the prescribed daily chores: “Now, occasionally, they looked down from their bedroom windows as they brushed studiously at their hair in the morning; they found her place in the garden, as they might have run their fingers toward a city on a map of a foreign country, located her from their distance almost in curiosity, and then forgot her.”²⁸ Like an exotic destination, she represents the difference that can be contemplated from the distance but never embraced.

Apart from the insides of her house, the garden is the only location that Mrs. Larkin frequents in her new life in which she “refus[es] to engage in the town’s prescribed ritual of a widow’s public mourning.”²⁹ As she is entering it, her body is described as follows: “Every morning she might be observed walking slowly, almost timidly, out of the white house, wearing a pair of the untidy overalls, often with her hair streaming and tangled where she had neglected to comb it.”³⁰ The white color of the house she is leaving behind represents her abandonment of the constructed social privilege – her soiled, working class, male clothes and disheveled hair contrasting with the coiffures of all the other ladies in the community embrace the natural that is situated outside of the public sphere, “[w]ithin its border of hedge, high like a wall, and visible only from the upstairs windows of the neighbors.”³¹ In short, she fiercely defies the stereotype of passive female beauty that Welty exposes in “Petrified Man,” and transgresses the borders of the male by taking initiative: “Mrs. Larkin’s decision to retreat from society

²⁶ “A Curtain of Green” 108.

²⁷ Schmidt 26.

²⁸ “A Curtain of Green” 108.

²⁹ Schmidt 23.

³⁰ “A Curtain of Green” 107. Schmidt stresses a similar set of details (Schmidt 26).

³¹ “A Curtain of Green” 107.

and grow an unruly garden is thus an embittered attack on the town's standards of women's behavior."³²

Mrs. Larkin's rebellion against the norms determining the appropriate female roles is apparent also in her initial reluctance to touch the plants and her subsequent plunging in their midst: "She would wander about for a little while at first, uncertainly, deep among the plants and wet with their dew, and yet not quite putting out her hand to touch anything. And then a sort of sturdiness would possess her – stabilize her; she would stand still for a moment, as if a blindfold were being removed; and then she would kneel in the flowers and begin to work."³³ Instead of reproducing a gesture of a mother caressing children whose fate she can influence only by self-destructive act of nurturing, she penetrates the garden with her powerful hands, molding it according to her own imagination.

However, Mrs. Larkin does not merely assume the role that she was previously deprived of – she transforms it. While the garden and its immense mass seems at times overwhelming, she does not want to establish and enforce a set of categories and standards that would help her to cope with its proliferating difference by forming a fixedly posited grid. By contrast, she sets out to preserve and promote its unregimented diversity: "[...] Mrs. Larkin rarely cut, separated, tied back. ... To a certain extent, she seemed not to seek for order, but to allow an over-flowering as if she consciously ventured forever a little farther, a little deeper, into her life in the garden."³⁴

In her own way, she slowly lets herself to be immersed in the unknown, new world where no previously internalized rules apply. Entering the natural procreation, she is intuitively searching for an alternative to the constructions of society. As Schmidt points out,³⁵ the life that her garden triumphantly affirms, promotes, and epitomizes gradually overlays the death inflicted by the falling tree hidden behind the exuberant vegetation. During the process, she allegedly maintains silence, which arguably expresses her refusal to participate in the discourse that turns words like "love" into means of social power struggle, and distorts the meaning of interpersonal relationships. Cheryl Burgess interprets Mrs. Larkin's engagement with the garden in terms of artistic creativity: "In one sense, Mrs. Larkin can be said to author

³² Schmidt 25.

³³ "A Curtain of Green" 107.

³⁴ "A Curtain of Green" 108.

³⁵ Schmidt 24.

her own garden.”³⁶ Taking the claim as a point of departure, Mrs. Larkin can be seen as a person who recognized the artificiality of the social authorship, and decided to become an author who “seems to deliberately [...] allow possibility, in the form of lush vegetation, to multiply and compound.”³⁷

Apart from her attitude to social calls, and her gardening habits, Mrs. Larkin’s dissent from the social uniformity is made apparent in several other situations when the text juxtaposes her behavior with that of the female inhabitants of Larkin’s Hill or presents the official opinion on her activities. In the first paragraphs, the women of the community are described as a homogeneous, immobile, confined mass whose only sense of purpose might be an idle scanning of the sky for signs of changing weather, much like the women of “Petrified Man” spend their lives scanning bodies for aesthetic shortcomings: “Nearly all the women sat in the windows of their houses, fanning and sighing, waiting for the rain.”³⁸

Mrs. Larkin, on the other hand, perseveres in her solitary, active, outdoor work. Assuming the perspective of the community, the narrative voice³⁹ assesses her unorthodox behavior by the following epithets: “over-vigorous, disreputable and heedless.”⁴⁰ Mrs. Larkin’s socially inadmissible disengagement with the institutionalized norms of beauty is explicitly stated in the narrator’s description of her gardening style: “She planted every kind of flower that she could find or order from a catalogue – planted thickly and hastily, without stopping to think, without any regard for the ideas that her neighbors might elect in their club as to what constituted an appropriate vista, or an effect of restfulness, or even harmony of color.”⁴¹ The product of her heretic practice is disturbing the sensibilities shaped by incessant indoctrination: Mrs. Larkin’s garden is “slanting, tangled [...] more and more over-abundant and confusing.”⁴²

³⁶ Cheryl Burgess, “From Metaphor to Manifestation: The Artist in Eudora Welty’s *A Curtain of Green*,” in *Eudora Welty*, ed. Dawn Trouard (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989) 136.

³⁷ Burgess 137.

³⁸ “A Curtain of Green” 107.

³⁹ For the most part of the story, the seemingly omniscient narrator assumes the perspective of the community. In this way, Welty stresses the fact that the official version issued by the normative order seems to be encapsulating the whole universe of the text within which Mrs. Larkin strives to maintain her independence. In the second half of the story, the narrator offers a few passages of introspection into the protagonist’s consciousness, and it is at this time that her crisis takes place. Obviously, the implication can be inverted – the introspection may be the effect, not the cause of the crisis – but it is a noteworthy coincidence.

⁴⁰ “A Curtain of Green” 107.

⁴¹ “A Curtain of Green” 108.

⁴² “A Curtain of Green” 107.

The community also fails to see any point to the endeavors because it can neither conceive of a person who would not perceive the daily activities in terms of their social utility and a potential personal profit nor imagine a beholder who would consider the blatant affront to the aesthetic norms a pleasing view:

Just to what end Mrs. Larkin worked so strenuously in her garden, her neighbors could not see. She certainly never sent a single one of her fine flowers to any of them. They might get sick and die, and she would not sent a flower. And if she thought of *beauty* at all [...], she certainly did not strive for it in her garden. It was impossible to enjoy looking at such a place.⁴³

As Donaldson and Schmidt agree, “she digs, hoes, and plants in frantic haste and confusion without any regard for her own appearances, her unsightly flowerbeds, or her bewildered neighbors.”⁴⁴

Like in the case of Mrs. Larkin and the inhabitants of Larkin’s Hill, the community of Farr’s Gin watches Clytie from a distance, dismissing her as an oddity that provides a suitable subject for gossip and reserving themselves to matter-of-fact acknowledgement of her existence: “ ‘Well, there goes Miss Clytie,’ the ladies said [...].”⁴⁵ The fact that they refer to her by her first name signals that the community sees her primarily as an old maid who lost its social relevance when her family lost its privilege and when she failed to acquire a new surname through a suitable marriage. Interestingly, the narrator demonstrates Clytie’s difference by depicting her reaction to the advent of rain, establishing yet another parallel with Mrs. Larkin’s nonconformity: while everybody retreats to the shelter of the post office, Miss Clytie Farr [stands] still in the road.”⁴⁶

Other evidence of her descent from the social normativity that is imposed on her both by her controlling sister and by the community is given: she moves freely through the town, her visits have no longer any perceptible pretense, as required by the social spectacle, and she does not attempt to interact with anybody; she is careless of her attire, never “com[ing] out in what was called an ‘outfit’ ”⁴⁷ any more and sporting a hat that is compared to “an old bonnet

⁴³ “A Curtain of Green” 108.

⁴⁴ Donaldson 58. Schmidt alludes to the concept of “sweet ordering” that John Ruskin introduces in “Of Queens’ Gardens” (Schmidt 25).

⁴⁵ “Clytie” 82. Schmidt sees the community’s reaction along the same lines: “She is shunned during her trips to town” (Schmidt 27).

⁴⁶ “Clytie” 83.

⁴⁷ “Clytie” 86.

on a horse⁴⁸ when drenched by the rain. In short, she disregards the community's standards of bodily presentation and orthodox conduct, much like Mrs. Larkin does by her vigorous activity and affiliation with signs of masculinity.

For these reasons, the community hypothesizes that Clytie is undergoing the same process that took away Octavia's sanity: "It might be simply that Miss Clytie's wits were all leaving her, said the ladies standing in the door to feel the cool, the way her sister's had left her."⁴⁹ The opinion has two important implications – the community desires to reduce Clytie to a type so that she could be easily fitted into a recognized social category, and the community adopts the same strategy in dealing with the disturbing otherness as the nameless woman in "A Visit of Charity" does when she introduces the issue of her antagonist's mental illness so that the disturbing testimony loses its credibility. Furthermore, Clytie's social irrelevance is enforced by her repeated association with animals, both on the part of the community and the narrator. Clytie is "dart[ing] out into the road with all the horses and trucks,"⁵⁰ her drenched body is "as wet as the little birds,"⁵¹ and she endures the rain "with the patience almost of a beast."⁵² The metaphors and the spatial adjacencies suggest that the community regards her as a manifestation of the otherness that lies beyond their prescribed social mode of being and that lacks the basic human characteristics.

Yet, the perspective can be reversed – like Mrs. Larkin, Clytie enters the sphere of the natural, and joins those creatures whose authenticity was not truncated by social normativity. In this context, the fact that Clytie is referred to by her first name and that her first name constitutes the title of the story signifies that she stands on her own, with no oppressive surname imposed on her. It is under the cloak of such social invisibility that Clytie can labor to re-establish the long-lost contact with her self because her life is no longer wiled away in social power struggle. Her own, seemingly freakish way of asserting her supremely personal space can be seen in the following passage: "The old maid did not look around, but clenched her hands and drew them up under her armpits, and sticking out her elbows like hen wings, she ran out of the street, her poor hat creaking and beating about her ears."⁵³ Performing her unorthodox

⁴⁸ "Clytie" 82.

⁴⁹ "Clytie" 81. Schmidt also points out that Clytie is thought to be on the verge of madness by the community.

⁵⁰ "Clytie" 81.

⁵¹ "Clytie" 83.

⁵² "Clytie" 81-82.

⁵³ "Clytie" 81.

corporeality and using her body to battle for widening of the prescribed limits, she physically fights for a place that would be truly her own.⁵⁴

However, her liberation from the external demands is not complete; as Schmidt observes,⁵⁵ she has not escaped the controlling gaze of her sister whose obsession with sustaining an illusion of the family's privileged past prompts her to police Clytie's every move. She expects Clytie to do all the daily chores, she turns her into the enforcer of her overbearing demands in the neighborhood, and she reaps the fruits of Clytie's diligent housekeeping, as exemplified by her assertion that she will feed their father the supper Clytie prepares whenever she pleases. Clytie is fundamentally frustrated both with Octavia and with other inhabitants of the house whose needs and orders govern her activities. She has fits of rage that resemble Addie's emotional eruptions, and that are targeted on outsiders, be it the neighbors or Lethy who keeps coming to the Farrs' doorstep. Occasionally, she dares to confront her sister but only to be immediately overwhelmed, intimidated, and silenced by her own fear and by her sister's presence, "like a small child who has been pushed by the big boys into the water."⁵⁶ Her fragmented self does not provide her an adult, independent strength to rely on.

Clytie also develops the habit of uncontrollable "cursing"⁵⁷ Yet, as the narrator remarks, it is merely a subdued version of her sister's past practice. While Octavia had a voice that was heard even at the post office, which seems to be the social center of the community because everybody seeks refuge under its roof when the rain comes,⁵⁸ Clytie's expression of rage barely reaches her vigilant sister who petrifies it: "Everybody said, in something like deprecation that she was only imitating her older sister, who used to go out to that same garden and curse in that same way, years ago, but in a remarkably loud, commanding voice that could be heard in the post office. Sometimes in the middle of her words Clytie glanced up to where Octavia, at her window, looked down at her. When she let the curtain drop at last, Clytie would be left there speechless."⁵⁹ As Schmidt aptly summarizes,⁶⁰ once again mirroring Addie and Mrs. Larkin, Clytie remains a powerless receiver of her rival's will.

⁵⁴ Using also a spatial term, Schmidt expresses a similar opinion: "Of all the people in her family, Clytie lives in the widest world" (Schmidt 27).

⁵⁵ Schmidt 27-28.

⁵⁶ "Clytie" 84.

⁵⁷ "Clytie" 87.

⁵⁸ Schmidt comments on the significance of the post office in his analysis of "Why I Live at the P.O." and "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" as follows: "The post office is a major gathering place in any small southern town" (Schmidt 13).

⁵⁹ "Clytie" 87. Schmidt also analyzes the passage (Schmidt 28-29).

Clytie's desire to break away from the confinement of the family house is clearly demonstrated by her unmatched running ability that she applies to flee from the garden, and by her longing looks directed at the natural world that lies beyond the sealed rooms described in the following passage: "Outside the closed window a mockingbird began to sing. Clytie held back the curtain and pressed her ear against the glass. The rain had stopped. The bird's song sounded in liquid drops down through the pitch-black trees and the night."⁶¹ She strives to leave the burden of the endlessly recycled social illusions behind and she searches for a long-lost part of her self in the human faces she encounters: "It was purely for a resemblance to a vision that she examined the secret, mysterious, unrepeated faces she met in the street of Farr's Gin."⁶²

The population of the town consists of "not more than 150 people [...], 'counting Negroes',"⁶³ but, despite the relatively small number of faces, Clytie always discovers a new aspect in those she has already studied:

[...] the number of faces seemed to Clytie almost infinite. She knew now to look slowly and carefully at a face; she was convinced that it was impossible to see it all at once. [...] When she began to look at people's actual countenances there was no more familiarity in the world for her. [...] Was it possible to comprehend the eyes and the mouths of other people, which concealed she knew not what, and secretly asked for still another unknown thing?⁶⁴

She never reduces a face to a certain type, which means that, unlike the order, she never attributes it a static significance. She intuitively perceives the always evolving nature of an individual's authentic existence, "the absolute and inscrutable uniqueness in each one."⁶⁵ As Vande Kief aptly summarizes, "[t]o the people of Farr's Gin, Clytie is ready to give that most generous of all gifts – contemplation: the desire to know without using, the respect for 'otherness,' the awe of what is inviolable."⁶⁶ In short, all human beings retain their visibility under her gaze.

⁶⁰ Schmidt 29.

⁶¹ "Clytie" 84.

⁶² "Clytie" 86.

⁶³ "Clytie" 83.

⁶⁴ "Clytie" 83. Schmidt also quotes this passage to demonstrate that "Clytie has a lively inner life" (Schmidt 28).

⁶⁵ Vande Kief 25.

⁶⁶ Vande Kief 25-26.

The part Clytie hopes to re-discover through her unrelenting scrutiny is described as a “face that had looked back at her”⁶⁷ and whose form she lost from her sight at some point in the past: “And now it was hard to remember the way it looked, or the time when she had seen it first. It must have been when she was young. Yes, in a sort of arbor, hadn’t she laughed, leaned forward ... and that vision of a face – which was a little like all the other faces [...] – and yet different, yet far more – this face had been very close to hers, almost familiar, almost accessible.”⁶⁸ In other words, she wants to reclaim her own authenticity that was trampled by the external pressure of social expectations, and “to recover a vision she once had of a self she might become.”⁶⁹

As the narrator explains, the only faces that do not draw Clytie’s attention are the faces of her relatives – as Schmidt observes,⁷⁰ it is their faces that obscure her view in the present and that have taken away the face she searches for in the past: “It was not necessary for her to look at any of their faces. It was their faces which came between. [...] Their faces came between her face and another. It was their faces which had come pushing in between, long ago [...]”⁷¹ Their assiduous engagement with the social status of the family hindered Clytie’s personal development: in the prosperous time, they obliged Clytie to act according to the script of a Southern belle; in the present, their mixture of madness, obsession and recounting of the past incidents continues to pull her back into the normative spiral.

Being under the constant assault of the agents of stereotype, Clytie flees the social interactions, and contributes to her invisibility by literary covering her body so that she could engage in her endeavor undisturbed and be rewarded with a glimpse of the unconstrained existence, and so that “she [would not] lose her inner life entirely and be perpetually measured against [the other] people’s standards for how the roles of servant or ‘lady’ should be performed.”⁷² She is not interested in the social conversations – she wants to see the people as they stand on their own. Like Mrs. Larkin, she physically withdraws from the compartment that she was given, and she vigorously labors to disentangle herself from the order that has deprived her of an access to a vast number of choices, constructed an artificial ideal that consumed a huge part of her life, and made her dependent, delusional, and incomplete.

⁶⁷ “Clytie” 86.

⁶⁸ “Clytie” 86. Vande Kief also stresses the passage (Vande Kief 26).

⁶⁹ Schmidt 28.

⁷⁰ Schmidt 28.

⁷¹ “Clytie” 85-86. Vande Kief draws the same conclusion from the assertion (Vande Kief 26).

⁷² Schmidt 28.

Circe displays a trait subverting the normative concept of womanhood in the very first sentence of her account in which she describes her reaction upon seeing the approaching men: “Needle in air, I stopped what I was making.”⁷³ Her association with a typical female task is rendered much more complex by its juxtaposition with the verb that suggests an act of creation, a sign of masculine social power. In this gesture, her domesticity is established as radically different from the passive, nurturing, awaiting presence epitomized by the life led by Mrs. Larkin prior to her husband’s tragic death.

Such tendency to convert the suffocating obligation of a confined housewife into a source of empowerment can be seen in Circe’s applying culinary skills to transform the men into helpless pigs.⁷⁴ When the tired sailors arrive, they see the hostess only as a woman that will provide them with food and other domestic comforts. Like Clytie, Circe uses their ignorance as a protective shield, thus turning her invisibility into a power that enables her to “[withdraw] to make the broth,”⁷⁵ to serve it to the unsuspecting intruders, and to punish their matter-of-fact assumption of privilege.

Importantly, Circe’s transformation of the visitors demonstrates that the woman decides what the bodies of men around her look like. While the patriarchal order forces the female corporeality in the molds that please the masculine gaze, Circe playfully assigns them a considerable length of “tusks,”⁷⁶ a travesty of a phallic symbol, and makes their bodies pleasing to her eyes when she returns them their human form: “They were certainly more winsome now than they could ever have been before; I’d made them younger, too, while I was about it.”⁷⁷

Furthermore, “promptly translat[ing] thought into fact,”⁷⁸ it seems that her magic renders physical what was previously only an abstract concept. Once the visitors become pigs, Circe orders them to join their likes outdoors, and she explains how difficult it is to demonstrate to men what they really are: “ ‘Outside!’ I commanded. ‘No dirt allowed in the house!’ In the end, it takes phenomenal neatness of housekeeping to put it through the heads of men that they are swine. With my wand seething in the air like a broom, I drove them all through the

⁷³ “Circe” 531.

⁷⁴ Romines shares the same view: “[Circe’s] magic is expressed through her traditional female role, as domestic woman; it is her delectable broth which subdues and transforms all men, and her magic wand itself is a broom” (Romines 100-101).

⁷⁵ “Circe” 531.

⁷⁶ “Circe” 531.

⁷⁷ “Circe” 534.

⁷⁸ Romines 100.

door – twice as many hooves as there had been feet before – to join their brothers, who rushed forward to meet them now, filthily rivaling, but welcoming.”⁷⁹

The passage suggests that the animal form of the bodies denounces the oppressive behavior that those in power perpetrate on the othered individuals, the atrocious effects of the practice being symbolized by the lingering filth, and it exposes the homoerotic intimacy the empowered share, regardless of their struggles. Their collective objectifying gazes and their appropriation of the space are said to produce filth also in the description of their self-important entrance into Circe’s household: “They stumbled on my polished floor, strewing sand, crowding on each other, sizing up the household for gifts (thinking already of sailing away), and sighted upward where the ladder went, to the sighs of the island girls who peeped from the kitchen door. In the hope of a bath, they looked in awe at their hands.”⁸⁰ In short, by enclosing them in swine bodies, Circe rips of the social mask and reveals the mechanisms upholding the order.

Yet, it seems that Circe longs for something that even her unparalleled powers cannot procure – a companion that would transcend the socially constructed manhood. Despite her initial shock, she seems to be welcoming Odysseus, “the only mortal man on an island in the sea”⁸¹ who may have been made resistant⁸² to her spells by his authenticity that distinguishes him from his companions governed by the predatory drives. Therefore, she does not merely assume the place that was previously reserved for the male oppressors. She searches for a person that would join her outside of the dynamics her broth uncovers.

However, it is highly doubtful that Odysseus makes a suitable candidate for the position because Circe’s account of his arrival is interspersed with signs of the behavior mirroring that of his predecessors: “I whirled back again. The hero stood as before. But his laugh had gone too, after his friends. His gaze was empty, as though I were not in it – I was invisible.”⁸³ In other words, the absence of the men that share his predicament completely obscure his vision. At this point, Circe uses once again the moment of social erasure for her own purposes and remakes the man’s body to her liking: “Still invisibly, I took away his sword. I sent his tunic

⁷⁹ “Circe” 531.

⁸⁰ “Circe” 531.

⁸¹ “Circe” 532. As will become clear in the following section, the fixedness of dry land is associated with the female and the fluidity of water is associated with the male.

⁸² In reality, it is once again Minerva that helps Odysseus to outsmart Circe. Reiterating her cruel punishment of Medusa, she undercuts other women and sides with men.

⁸³ “Circe” 532.

away to the spring for washing, and I, with my own hands, gave him his bath. [...] I rubbed oil on his shadowy shoulders, and on the rope of curls in which his jaw was set. His rapt ears still listened to the human silence there.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the penetration of the walls supported by her magic opens a possibility for the revision of her solitary power.

3.3 The Fatal Twist

Despite all the efforts that Mrs. Larkin puts into creating a new life for herself, the loss of her husband eventually translates into an overwhelming feeling of lonesomeness that her solitary gardening resolve cannot master: “But memory tightened about her easily, without any prelude of warning or even despair. She would see promptly, as if a curtain had been jerked quite unceremoniously away from a little scene, the front porch of the white house, the shady street in front, and the blue automobile in which her husband approached, driving home from work. [...] she could see again the tree that was going to fall.”⁸⁵ In the passage, the meaning of the story’s title unravels: As was hinted above, Schmidt points out that the curtain refers to the vigorous greenery of the garden that Mrs. Larkin cultivates to overlay the social realities and the arboreal momentum of the past lying beyond its limits.⁸⁶ Once the memory breaks through the untamed walls that have become the borders of Mrs. Larkin’s mind, her new world crumbles under the pressure of the knowledge that she wanted to suppress: “She felt all at once terrified, as though her loneliness had been pointed out by some outside force whose finger parted the hedge.”⁸⁷

Interestingly, Schmidt continues in the analysis of Mrs. Larkin’s realization of her limited social existence by pointing out that her memory of the beloved husband is interspersed with the tokens of his public mobility and agency that she herself could only observe and admire from the distance of her domestic confinement.⁸⁸ She remembers her husband as he approaches the house, driving from the outside world where he has a job that enables him to implement his rule-abiding will. She awaits him, immobile and idle as a decorative statue. The fact that she conflates the cherished picture of her love with that of her frustrated existence within the household suggests that Mrs. Larkin suddenly realizes not only that the garden cannot protect her from the sorrow over her husband’s departure but also that her

⁸⁴ “Circe” 532.

⁸⁵ “A Curtain of Green” 109. Donaldson makes a similar observation (Donaldson 58).

⁸⁶ Schmidt 24.

⁸⁷ “A Curtain of Green” 110.

⁸⁸ Schmidt 25.

lonesome toiling does not provide her with an escape route from the social order whose perspective on her life became clear to her after Mr. Larkin's death.

As Schmidt continues, she recognizes that her gardening is merely an illusion that the order allows her to sustain because, after all, the garden is located behind the house, away from the public life: "Mr. Larkin's world belongs to the front of the house [...] whereas the only area in which his wife can imagine living is *behind* the house, slanting away almost obscured from view on the 'other' or 'back' side of the hill on which the town is founded."⁸⁹ She did not manage to create an alternative mode of being within the society – she has left it altogether, the society let her to do so because its uniformity benefits from it, and the lack of a connection with a human being crushes her.

Overcome by the sudden realization, Mrs. Larkin glances purposelessly at her surroundings, spots Jamey, her African-American helper, and "[a] look of docility in the Negro's back [...] [begins] to infuriate her."⁹⁰ As the narrator describes the sentiments issuing from the confrontation, it becomes clear that she sees her own social position reflected in Jamey's alleged subservience.⁹¹ The mirror image of her own powerlessness and servility terrifies her to that extent that she is initially reluctant to establish a contact with it:

She forced herself to look at him, and noticed him closely for the first time – the way he looked like a child. As he turned his head a little to one side and negligently stirred the dirt with his yellow finger, she saw, with a sort of helpless suspicion and hunger, a soft, rather deprecating smile on his face; he was lost in some impossible dream of his own while he was transplanting the little shoots.⁹²

As Schmidt summarizes, when she does inspect him, she recognizes that his infantine defenseless reiterates her own lack of social agency, and his revelry exposes her own illusion of independency, self-assertion, and separation from the order: "The scene [...] can in fact be read [...] as a recognition that her own labors are merely negative and solipsistic: she sees

⁸⁹ Schmidt 26.

⁹⁰ "A Curtain of Green" 110.

⁹¹ Donaldson reads the passage to the same effect: "In that moment of rage she briefly sees in the hapless Jamey not just an object on which to vent her grief and anger but a reminder of her exposure to the tragedies of human life against which the mythology of white southern womanhood was supposedly erected to protect her" (Donaldson 59). Donaldson sees the story chiefly in terms of the white privilege, implicitly making a connection between Mrs. Larkin and the women in "Petrified Man," but her analysis is relevant also for the interpretation endorsed in the present work.

⁹² "A Curtain of Green" 110.

herself in Jamey and despairingly decides to destroy herself through him [...]The dream that Mrs. Larkin wants to destroy is really her own, not Jamey's."⁹³

The second collision with the past brings Mrs. Larkin's rebellion to its climax. She silently lifts the hoe that was her indispensable companion while tending to the garden, and prepares to destroy her imprisoned self by murdering its image in Jamey: "Life and death, she thought, gripping the heavy hoe, life and death, which now meant nothing to her but which she was compelled continually to wield with both her hands, ceaselessly asking, Was it not possible to compensate? to punish? to protest?"⁹⁴ She acknowledges that her efforts to propagate procreation were a futile attempt to assume a position of a demiurge defining herself against the order, and that the attempt led her only back to the traumatic experience of her limited existence. When the rebellion fails, she decides to destroy the inescapable social prison by willfully killing herself in the body of another marginalized human being, making the ultimate gesture to acquire a control over her life.

It is the advent of the long expected rain that averts Mrs. Larkin's hand: the woman puts the hoe in the midst of the vegetation, becomes absorbed in the sounds and light that the rain produces, and does not hear Jamey who addresses her silent and immobile silhouette. The narrator reports on her thoughts concerning the immediate future as follows: "Soon the loud and gentle night of rain would come. It would pound upon the steep roof of the white house. Within, she would lie in her bed, her arms tiered at her sides and in motionless peace: against that which was inexhaustible, there was no defense."⁹⁵ In other words, Mrs. Larkin envisages her imminent descent into the former mode of being: "The white house" represents the domestic confinement of the privileged white women; her "motionless peace" refers to the delusion of individuals who enjoy such comforts while being deprived of their freedom; the adjective "inexhaustible" alludes to the outside pressure of the order that drops on her with the same assiduousness, with the same frustrating regularity, and with the same perfectly calculated doses as the daily rain does, blocking everything else out of her view.

Eventually, Mrs. Larkin's figurative disintegration finds its literary counterpart when Mrs. Larkin collapses among the greenery, and, on the verge of consciousness and sprinkled with

⁹³ Schmidt 26.

⁹⁴ "A Curtain of Green" 110-111.

⁹⁵ "A Curtain of Green" 111.

the rain, “[s]he seem[s] to move slightly, in the sad adjustment of a sleeper.”⁹⁶ Being exhausted by the helpless rage that almost makes her to commit a murder, she returns to the somnambulist state of social conformity. Having recognized her eternal powerlessness, she embraces the former inhibited existence – she does not have the strength to resist the social normativity so she surrenders and picks up the old, uncomplicated, illusory script. Hers is a story of Addie and the nameless woman projected on a time line. First, Mrs. Larkin’s conformity aligns her with the latter, then she asserts her will as Addie does but she also experiences her violent frustration. In the end she finds herself in a room that resembles that in “A Visit of Charity.” She is locked in a prison in which her knowledge of the true state of affairs incessantly battles with her desire to please the order and have some social validation. There is no way out of the entrapment within her mind and within the community. She cannot reclaim her authenticity, and the community merely shuts the windows when confronted with her peculiarities.

As for Jamey, the threatening force of Mrs. Larkin’s despair puts him on the verge of a recognition akin to that of his employer, but he cannot bring himself to face it and he retreats deeper into denial instead: “He remembered how something had filled him with stillness when he felt her standing there behind him looking down at him, and he would not have turned around at that moment for anything in the world.”⁹⁷ When his voice contributes to Mrs. Larkin’s resuscitation, he quickly leaves the place where he had his own predicament reflected on himself.

In Clytie’s story, the turning point comes when she extends her hand to Mr. Bobo, the barber who administers the weekly shaving of Mr. Farr, and “with breathtaking gentleness touche[s] the side of his face.”⁹⁸ Schmidt underscores that the tactile nature of the encounter distinguishes it from Clytie’s preceding visual engagements with the faces in the community, and the incorporation of a new sense in the examination may have been the reason why it has such a profound impact on the two participants whose reaction is described as follows: “[B]oth of them uttered a despairing cry. Mr. Bobo turned and fled [...] down the stairs and out the front door; and Clytie, pale as a ghost, stumbled against the railing. The terrible scent of bay rum, of hair tonic, the horrible moist scratch of an invisible beard, the dense, popping

⁹⁶ “A Curtain of Green” 111-112. Schmidt interprets the passage as Mrs. Larkin’s return to the state of dream; despite its different perspective on the meaning of the sleeper, the reading underscores that Mrs. Larkin cannot escape from the prison that order ruling the community confines her into (Schmidt 26-27).

⁹⁷ “A Curtain of Green” 112.

⁹⁸ “Clytie” 89.

green eyes – what had she got hold of with her hand! She could hardly bear it – the thought of that face.”⁹⁹

The enigmatic passage suggests that the barber’s face yielded a glimpse of the vision Clytie had been searching for, and the event crushed her with the realization that Mr. Bobo’s horrified expression is a product of the confrontation with her shattered self. As Schmidt describes the process, it is “as if Clytie is watching [the long-lost] face emerge in the mysterious depths of a very special mirror, a mirror in which the mirror’s face determines what the watcher looks like, not the reverse.”¹⁰⁰ The hovering presence of “the bronze cast of Hermes,”¹⁰¹ the messenger of gods, symbolizes that the grave authority of the order descends on the rebellious woman. Being immersed in the horror of her beholder, she sees what her self has become over the years she has spent in the society – the terrifying monstrosity that overcomes Mr. Bobo is the truth about her fragmented existence.

Right after the incident, Octavia orders Clytie to fetch the rain water from the barrel outside of the house so that their father could be shaved. Upon approaching the barrel, Clytie “[feels] this object, now, was her friend,”¹⁰² she “sway[s] a little and look[s] into the slightly moving water,”¹⁰³ and she finally finds a more permanent image of the desired face in her own reflection: “She thought she saw a face there. Of course. It was the face she had been looking for, and from which she had been separated. As if to give a sign, the index finger of a hand lifted to touch the dark cheek.”¹⁰⁴ However, as Schmidt asserts,¹⁰⁵ it proves to be as terrifying a sight as the one she was confronted with through the expression of the barber:

It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were drawn together as if in pain. The eyes were large, intent, almost avid, the nose ugly and discolored as if from weeping, the mouth old and closed from any speech. On either side of the head dark hair hung down in a disreputable and wild fashion. Everything

⁹⁹ “Clytie” 89.

¹⁰⁰ Schmidt 28.

¹⁰¹ “Clytie” 82.

¹⁰² “Clytie” 90.

¹⁰³ “Clytie” 90.

¹⁰⁴ “Clytie” 90.

¹⁰⁵ Schmidt 29.

about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of waiting, of suffering.¹⁰⁶

In other words, as Vande Kief puts it,¹⁰⁷ Clytie sees that her missing part was irreversibly altered in the course of the time she was alienated from it – it is a broken, weathered, violated shadow of the vision she has retained from her younger years when the social pressure has not yet eclipsed her authenticity to such a degree. While she thought that the human being she would like to reconnect with is resting intact in the potentiality, it was constantly fighting the effects of the order and the defense did not leave it intact. Like Mrs. Larkin, she suddenly becomes aware of what she has become in the society, and what the society thinks of her: “she has seen the ghastly disparity between what she once was and ought to have been (the loving, laughing creature of her youth) and what she has become (ugly, warped, inverted).”¹⁰⁸

She intuitively flinches from the unbearable revelation, just as she did upon spotting her image in the barber’s face, but she cannot go back: “For the second time that morning, Clytie recoiled, and as she did so, the other recoiled in the same way. Too late, she recognized the face. She stood there completely sick at heart, as though the poor, half-remembered vision had finally betrayed her.”¹⁰⁹ In this “moment of sick recognition,”¹¹⁰ she realizes that there is no image that would correspond with the vision as she remembers it, and she feels let down by her own self. Devastated and clueless as to what course of action to take, she plunges into the water to reclaim once and for all what is left of her, and to join the appealing mass where she will be exempted from the pursuit of a shape: “Clytie did the only thing she could think of to do. She bent her angular body further, and thrust her head into the barrel, under the water, through its glittering surface into the kind, featureless depth, and held it there.”¹¹¹

Schmidt points out that the story features yet another recasting of mythology.¹¹² In the heroine’s tragic emulation of Narcissus, a fundamental shift takes place – instead of being hypnotized by her beauty, Clytie is shocked by her ugliness. Similarly, her subsequent

¹⁰⁶ “Clytie” 90. Seeing it as central to the conclusion of the text, Schmidt quotes the passage as well (Schmidt 30).

¹⁰⁷ Vande Kief 26.

¹⁰⁸ Vande Kief 26.

¹⁰⁹ “Clytie” 90. Schmidt also points out that she will be freed from the image of herself because there will be no mirror in which she could see it: “the water’s ‘featureless’ depths promise release from the image of herself as a madwoman that stares up at her from its surface” (Schmidt 30).

¹¹⁰ Vande Kief 26.

¹¹¹ “Clytie” 90.

¹¹² Schmidt 30.

transformation differs from that of “Clytie’s namesake in Ovid, where she is a young woman whose love for the sun god remained unrequited”¹¹³ much in the same way as Clytie’s looks into the faces of the others. Instead of being turned into a beautifully whole “sunflower whose face followed the sun in its path across the sky,”¹¹⁴ Clytie of Farr’s *Gin* remains irreconcilably divided even after her death: “When Old Lethy found her, she had fallen forward into the barrel, with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongues.”¹¹⁵ While the previously discussed spread elbows symbolize the incessant affirmation of her personal space, her post-mortem split limbs are a painful reminder of the unbridgeable gap between what could have been and what really was, a memento of the dichotomy between the actual and the possible that Vande Kief and Schmidt evoke.

The first crevices in Circe’s power appear even prior to the textual unfolding of her magical abilities. Upon sensing the “men breathing and sandals kicking the stones,”¹¹⁶ she feels a physical presence of an unknown element: “A shaft of light from the zenith struck my brow, and the wind let out my hair. Something else swayed my body. ‘Welcome!’ I said – the most dangerous word in the world.”¹¹⁷ Her bodily response to the proximity of male existence and her ominous comment on her reception of the sailors foreshadow that the patriarchal dominance is entering her world – as her moving hair signals in a comical echo of the women in “Petrified Man,” her beauty is activated to please the approaching male gaze, and she seems to be identifying the moment she greets them as the beginning of her entanglement with Odysseus.

When “Circe’s broth”¹¹⁸ proves to be ineffective and Odysseus unexpectedly appears in the midst of her realm, Circe is terrified that the source of her sovereignty was removed: “I spun round, thinking, O gods, it has failed me, it’s drying up. Before everything, I think of my power.”¹¹⁹ Her outcry demonstrates that she treasures her independence and that she is well aware of its fragility. Subsequently, she reveals that she knew that her spell will eventually meet its match but she could not have prepared herself for the event: “If a man remained, unable to leave that magnificent body of his, then enchantment had met with a hero. Oh, I

¹¹³ Schmidt 30. Schmidt indicates that he is drawing on Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* (Boston: Mentor Books, 1953).

¹¹⁴ Schmidt 30.

¹¹⁵ “Clytie” 90.

¹¹⁶ “Circe” 531.

¹¹⁷ “Circe” 531.

¹¹⁸ “Circe” 532.

¹¹⁹ “Circe” 532.

know those prophecies as well as the back of my hand – only nothing is here to warn me when it is *now*.”¹²⁰ It is at this point that Circe, the speaker, introduces her name¹²¹ for the first time, thus underscoring the importance of gender for her narrative of female power.

Subsequently, naked¹²² Circe enters the embrace of the man’s body, and lets Odysseus to obstruct her movement as his mind dwells in the places well beyond her reach: “His limbs were heavy, braced like a sleep-walker’s who has wandered, alas, to cliffs above the sea. When I passed before him, his arm lifted and barred my way.”¹²³ In other words, she exchanges her supreme power for the intimacy with an elusive mortal that she feels drawn to. Despite the fact that he seems to be weak with sleep, she refrains from imposing her will on him and shows her affection instead: “When I held up the glass he opened his mouth. He fell among the pillows, his still-open eyes two clouds stopped over the sun, and I lifted and kissed his hand.”¹²⁴ As Schmidt points out, in yet another Welty’s recasting of Perseus and Medusa, “the female ‘slays’ the male and violence is transformed into an act of great tenderness, one that belies Circe’s reputation as a witch and a monster.”¹²⁵

The goddess understands that her lover’s experience of a mortal man cannot be accessed by an immortal female: “From the first, he had found some way to resist my power. He must laugh, sleep, ravish, he must talk and sleep. Next it would be he must die.”¹²⁶ She asserts that she longs for the knowledge of human predicament that even her spells cannot impart: “I didn’t want his story, I wanted his secret.”¹²⁷ In short, she discovers that as a powerful goddess she cannot reach into her companion’s soul and find a true intimacy, and she confesses that she would sacrifice her strength for a removal of her acute sense of loneliness: “I swear that only to possess that one, trifling secret, I would willingly turn myself into a

¹²⁰ “Circe” 532.

¹²¹ The knowledge of a person’s name seems to be of extreme importance because Circe informs Odysseus of their mutual familiarity with that fact after she touches his body: “‘I know your name,’ I said in the voice of a woman, ‘and you know mine by now’” (“Circe” 532). In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Humanities press, 1961) Ludwig Wittgenstein claims that “the limits of [an individual’s] language mean the limits of [an individual’s] world” (5.6). Drawing on the famous aphorism, it may be argued that an individual’s knowledge of the other’s name constitutes the foundations of the said individual’s social power. Therefore, Circe and Odysseus assume power over each other.

¹²² Schmidt underscores that Circe’s bodily openness: was developed in Welty’s writing process: “Her eroticism is also not as strong [in the first version]: a crucial phrase suggesting that she strips naked in front of Odysseus, ‘as I came forth’ (532) is not in the draft [...]” (Schmidt 189).

¹²³ “Circe” 532.

¹²⁴ “Circe” 532.

¹²⁵ Schmidt 191.

¹²⁶ “Circe” 533. Romines draws an identical conclusion from the passage (Romines 102).

¹²⁷ “Circe” 533.

harmless dove for the rest of eternity!”¹²⁸ The following conclusion can be drawn from her remarks: a woman can be either powerful and lonely or dependent and accompanied. Circe’s divine nature is a metaphor for her unprecedented empowerment – social display of female power and a physical encounter with a goddess are two phenomena whose existence is equally improbable.

Circe reflects on her father’s unrestrained public movement across the sky, thus implicitly comparing it with her private fixedness on the island, and it becomes clear that, despite their equality in magic, there is a difference between what ways of applying power are opened to godly men and to godly women. Yet, the story seems to be also a meditation on power in general: all individuals who hold it are bound to experience Circe’s loneliness because their status needs to be upheld by those who cannot attain it, just like Circe herself affirms in a comment on her female employees: “Let them learn that unmagical people are put into the world to justify and serve the magical – not to smile at them!”¹²⁹ The irreconcilable nature of power and shared intimacy seems to be confirmed also by Circe’s description of her relationship with Odysseus: “His short life and my long [...] have their ground in common. Passion is our ground, our island – do others exist?”¹³⁰ Their romance consists of a shared solitude that erases the existence of everybody else.

However, the behavior of her lover seems to signal that her feelings remain unrequited because Odysseus demands nothing but that his crew be given back their human form.¹³¹ Once again surrendering her power so that she can keep him by her side, Circe fulfills his wish, he rejoins “their damp embrace”¹³² and they are enjoying the regained intimacy: they are plundering Circe’s resources, engaging in conversations with her female employees in such an assured manner as if they were entitled to have their bodies, and matter-of-factly accepting the food their hostess prepares, and “she is reduced to the position of an unappreciated drudge.”¹³³ In other words, another difference between the male and the female power arises – while Circe finds a person to share her powerful isolation with in her gendered other, Odysseus is loyal to his male sailors because he cannot imagine sharing his

¹²⁸ “Circe” 533.

¹²⁹ “Circe” 532.

¹³⁰ “Circe” 534.

¹³¹ Romines also stresses his lack of interest in anything that does not regard his companions (Romines 101).

¹³² “Circe” 534.

¹³³ Romines 102.

predicament with a woman.¹³⁴ While “a male hero can reverse [female power]”¹³⁵ a powerful woman cannot break a man’s rejection of her existence.

When Odysseus announces his imminent departure, Circe complements the previously discussed image of somnambulist with another type: “I saw in the moonlight the dance of the bones in the willows. ‘Old, displeasing ones!’ I sang to them on the wind. ‘There’s another now more displeasing than you! Your bite would be sweeter to my mouth than the soft kiss of a wanderer’.”¹³⁶ The volatile, unstable and unfaithful nature of the male affection is contrasted with her oppressive confinement whose fixedness parallels that of the stars: “I looked up at Cassiopeia, who sits there and needs nothing, pale in her chair in the stream of heaven. The old Moon was still at work. “Why keep it up, old woman?” I whispered to her [...].”¹³⁷

As Romines comments on her state face to face with her lover’s departure,¹³⁸ Circe reveals that her power will always be limited by her being a woman – even if she sacrifices her magic, she is “tied to [her] island, as Cassiopeia must be to the sticks and stars of her chair.”¹³⁹ Subsequently, she faints, and has a vision that echoes Clytie’s tongue-like legs in the barrel: “I believed that I lay in disgrace and my blood ran green, like the wand that breaks in two.”¹⁴⁰ Having been overwhelmed by the force of self-recognition, her integrity is on the verge of crumbling just like the symbol of her authentic power does. In the morning, she “awoke in the pigsty,”¹⁴¹ once again returning to her practice of turning men into harmless “pets [...] grumbling without meaning.”¹⁴² Unlike Elpenor who “‘died of love’”¹⁴³ and was “like a lover lifted”¹⁴⁴ by Odysseus, Circe must continue in her isolated immortal life. Women cannot escape the implications of their socially unacceptable empowerment. As Kreyling aptly summarizes when commenting on the fact that Odysseus clearly prefers dead Elpenor and

¹³⁴ Kreyling makes a similar observation when he asserts that “[t]he male’s desire is for taking, not for giving” (Kreyling 169) and that “[w]hat there is of love and tenderness in Odysseus is reserved for rituals of male friendship” (Kreyling 169).

¹³⁵ Romines 102.

¹³⁶ “Circe” 536.

¹³⁷ “Circe” 536.

¹³⁸ Romines 103.

¹³⁹ “Circe” 536. Schmidt also stresses that the womanhood depicted in the image of the star is “passive” (Schmidt 191).

¹⁴⁰ “Circe” 536.

¹⁴¹ “Circe” 535.

¹⁴² “Circe” 536.

¹⁴³ “Circe” 536.

¹⁴⁴ “Circe” 536.

“bonding with his crew in mourning”¹⁴⁵ over Circe’s companionship, “[t]here has been passion on Circe’s island, and it has involved the sexes, but it has not been between the sexes.”¹⁴⁶

The conclusion of the story reveals that Circe’s encounter with Odysseus resulted in her pregnancy and, ironically, “she herself is transformed, as the pigs once were.”¹⁴⁷ In her reinstated solitude, she becomes “a homebound nurturer,”¹⁴⁸ a mother who is bearing a child of a man sailing worldwide seas and “hastening with all deliberate speed to Penelope.”¹⁴⁹ Her immortality prevents her from experiencing the human emotion of “grief”¹⁵⁰ because her godly perspective on the events does not allow her to perceive the passing of things and the ensuing nostalgia.

It may be argued that “Circe” does not have a culmination with such a concentrated drama as Clytie’s and Mrs. Larkin’s stories have. Rather, the end of the text presents yet another phase of the heroine’s gradual transition from theoretical understanding of her predicament to a practical experience of its effects. As Vande Kief puts it in her analysis of *The Bride of Innisfallen*, “[t]he climaxes [of the texts] are internal and difficult to locate: they are likely to occur in a series of moments, or realizations, which do not usually effect a turning point in external action or behavior.”¹⁵¹ Circe herself describes the process that her narrative captures as follows: “[...] magic is the tree, and intoxication is just the little bird that flies in it to sing and flies out again.”¹⁵² In other words, she recognizes that her power, unlike the affection of her human lover, does not betray her but her account also stages the burdensome isolation that is enveloping the existence of an empowered woman.

Complementing Vande Kief’s observations, Romines argues¹⁵³ that isolated Circe does not have any audience for her narrative and, furthermore, that Circe’s eternal life cannot be captured in a narrative that would be socially comprehensible because, as Circe herself asserts, such narratives are driven by the perception of limited time: “The little son, I knew,

¹⁴⁵ Kreyling 170.

¹⁴⁶ Kreyling 169-170.

¹⁴⁷ Romines. 103.

¹⁴⁸ Kreyling 168.

¹⁴⁹ Kreyling 168.

¹⁵⁰ “Circe” 537. Romines voices the same opinion: “She ends her story trying to find a human emotion – grief, which would let her express and expel her feelings” (Romines 103).

¹⁵¹ Vande Kief 126.

¹⁵² “Circe” 535.

¹⁵³ Romines 104.

was to follow – follow and slay him. That was the story. For whom is a story enough? For the wanderers who will tell it – it’s where they must find their strange felicity.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, stories are told by mortal men and about mortal men and their key components are travels, life, and death – phenomena that do not apply to Circe’s endless, immutable, detached presence.

Drawing on Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, Romines suggests that the difference between mortal, male Odysseus and immortal, female Circe can be seen as “a battle of feminine versus masculine time”¹⁵⁵ as well as “the collision of male and female storytelling traditions.”¹⁵⁶ While female lives revolve around repetitive domestic chores “taking its rhythms from nature,”¹⁵⁷ male lives are “progressive, quest-based.”¹⁵⁸ In this way, Circe’s predicament epitomizes the innumerable lives of the women that cannot be featured in a text because the society does not have the terms that would describe them. Considering this claim, Welty’s textual gesture seems doubly poignant: by conferring the authorship on a female speaker, she has defied the masculine textual structure; by letting the female narrator fail, she has underscores the tragedy of female existence that is relegated to the territories outside of language, representation, and any sort of acknowledgement and, as Schmidt endorses Romines’s reading, she suggests that “narratives of a woman’s romantic enthrallment to a male rescuer”¹⁵⁹ suffocate the authentic testimonies of women’s experience of being in the world.

¹⁵⁴ “Circe” 537.

¹⁵⁵ Romines 102.

¹⁵⁶ Romines 104.

¹⁵⁷ Romines 104.

¹⁵⁸ Romines 104.

¹⁵⁹ Schmidt 190.

4 Chapter 3: Undaunted Tunes

While the first chapter discussed the protagonists whose complicity with and obedience of the order transformed them into a standardized particle of the uniform social mass, and while the second chapter portrayed the tragic heroines whose combat with the oppressive normativity resulted in their inner disintegration, self-destruction or knowing resignation, the following analysis features three powerful individuals who “[find] a way to escape the either/or choice between conformity and madness.”¹

4.1 Gaze of the Community

As numerous critics point out,² “Powerhouse,” a story inspired by Welty’s encounter with Fats Waller’s performance, opens with a narrative voice that seems to belong to a person in the audience at the eponymous protagonist’s concert. Given that “it’s a white dance,”³ the audience consists of white, privileged inhabitants of the town where the concert is held, and “[e]verybody just stands around the band and watches Powerhouse,”⁴ keeping the distance that allows them to assess his bodily signs and to determine how the racial other fits into their lives within the limited time the musicians are assigned to play: “When any group, any performers, come to town, don’t people always come out and hover near, leaning inward about them, to learn what it is? What it is?”⁵ The social importance of such scrutiny is underscored by the narrator’s insistence that a familiarity with Powerhouse’s music does not constitute a sufficient knowledge of its author: “Of course you know how he sounds – you’ve heard him on records – but still you need to see him.”⁶

The narrator’s abundant characteristics of Powerhouse’s bodily traits and stage acts offer an insight into what Powerhouse comes to signify to the white community. Apparently eluding the desired clear-cut classification, Powerhouse’s appearance is captured by a cluster of adjectives: “You can’t tell what he is. ‘Negro man’? – he looks more Asiatic, monkey, Jewish,

¹ Schmidt 31.

² David McWhirter “Secret Agents: Welty’s African Americans,” in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 114, Harriet Pollack, “Reading Welty on Whiteness and Race”, in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 5, Kenneth Bearden, “Monkeying around: Welty’s ‘Powerhouse’, Blues-Jazz, and the Signifying Connection” (*The Southern Literary Journal* 31.2, 1999) 65, Marrs 37, Donaldson 67, Schmidt 40.

³ “Powerhouse” 133.

⁴ “Powerhouse” 133.

⁵ “Powerhouse” 132.

⁶ “Powerhouse” 131. Pollack makes a similar observation: “a white group who, amused and scandalized, has come to marvel, to see not the artist behind the mask but the mask they expect” (“Reading Welty on Whiteness and Race” 5).

Babylonian, Peruvian, fanatic, devil.”⁷ Despite the narrator’s inability to affiliate the protagonist with a single socially recognized label, Schmidt argues that all the adjectives associate Powerhouse with a category of difference – be it the ethnic, racial, mental, and religious otherness or his non-humanity.⁸ As was demonstrated in the analysis of “Keela, the Outcast Indian Woman,”⁹ the various binaries of difference are readily conflated under the white, petrifying gaze that ultimately recognizes only their identical position with respect to the social privilege.¹⁰ Therefore, establishing the visual contact with his body, the audience uses Powerhouse to construct its negative definition.

Importantly, the definition seems to be numbingly reassuring: “Powerhouse is so monstrous he sends everybody into oblivion.”¹¹ The narrator asserts that Powerhouse’s musical preferences entail “[i]mprovising, coming on a light and childish melody,” that “Powerhouse is not a show-off like the Harlem boys, not drunk, not crazy – he’s in a trance; he’s a person of joy, a fanatic,” and that his skin is not “coal black – beverage colored.”¹² The first claim associates Powerhouse with the paternalistic image of the cognitively inferior but harmlessly obedient African American whose child-like acceptance of the master secures him a place in the social structure; the second claim expands on the first one by defining Powerhouse against those who do not conform to the prescribed stereotype, and it posits that he is enjoying his predicament; the third claim suggests that his skin color does not make his aesthetically displeasing race more prominent than necessary for the purposes of the audience. In short, his non-invasive and non-threatening presence qualifies him for the process of social exploitation. In the eyes of the white community, he is merely another curious abnormality, along with “the testimonial for the mind-reading horse in handwriting magnified five hundred times”¹³ that decorates the venue.

In the course of the story’s exposition, the narrator makes the following declaration: “Is it possible that he could be this! When you have him there performing for you, that’s what you feel. You know people on a stage – and people of a darker race – so likely to be marvelous,

⁷ “Powerhouse” 131.

⁸ Schmidt 41.

⁹ Schmidt also establishes the link between white construction of Keela’s and Powerhouse’s otherness (Schmidt 41-42).

¹⁰ Pollack makes a similar point (“Reading Welty on Whiteness and Race” 5).

¹¹ “Powerhouse” 132.

¹² “Powerhouse” 131.

¹³ “Powerhouse” 131.

frightening.”¹⁴ Projecting on his body numerous stereotypes, the spectators in the audience bask in the image that Powerhouse reflects on them and they remain in denial as to the fact that what they have come to see as the man’s natural self-expression is a product of their own artificial constructions. Imbued with self-satisfaction, they ponder what else he could embody to satisfy their cravings for the freakish. As Schmidt points out, “the second person address”¹⁵ the narrator uses to directly engage with the interlocutor becomes particularly disturbing because it suggests that the reader plays the role of an accomplice in the objectification of the racial other.

Having established the audience’s perspective on Powerhouse, the narrative shifts into a third-person, “more objective narrative.”¹⁶ However, the oppressive discourse of privilege remains present in the form of the written documents that Powerhouse is exposed to and policed by.¹⁷ The audience influences the content of the performance by submitting “written request[s].”¹⁸ Thus, they constrain the free flow of the protagonist’s imagination by imposing their prefabricated musical patterns on him. One of such interruptions prompts Powerhouse and his band to “play the one waltz they will ever consent to play – [...] ‘Pagan Love Song’.”¹⁹ As Schmidt posits,²⁰ the fact that it is the only waltz in their repertoire suggests that the rest of it consists of blues, a genre liberated from the white aesthetic conventions and, therefore, less appealing to the white community.

In the course of the band’s improvisation on the song, Powerhouse reveals to his companions that he has received terrible news: “ ‘I got telegram my wife is dead’ [...] ‘Telegram say – here the words: Your wife is dead’.”²¹ The cruelty of the laconic, absolutistic, petrified message is aptly captured by “the drummer, an unpopular boy named Scoot, a disbelieving maniac”²² who asks a simple rhetorical question: “ ‘Not but four words?’ ”²³ Two conclusions can be drawn from the juxtaposition of the telegram, the epithet given to Scoot, and the form of Scoot’s response: first, punishing Scoot for his criticism by hinting at his insanity, the

¹⁴ “Powerhouse” 131.

¹⁵ Schmidt 41.

¹⁶ Schmidt 45. Quoting Welty who claims that “[the] perspective [is] floating around somewhere in the concert hall (Welty, qtd. in Donaldson 67), Donaldson provides a similar characteristics of the change.

¹⁷ Schmidt 40, 46.

¹⁸ “Powerhouse” 132.

¹⁹ “Powerhouse” 133.

²⁰ Schmidt 42.

²¹ “Powerhouse” 133.

²² “Powerhouse” 133.

²³ “Powerhouse” 133.

third-person narrative betrays its prevailing allegiance with the order; second, the resolute formulation of the written telegram contrasts with the openness of Scoot's oral question. To make a preliminary hypothesis that will be elaborated on in the following sections, Schmidt's claim that the story stages the dichotomy of the official written plantation discourse that delimitates an individual's social existence and the oral performance of an individual's unrestricted authenticity can be endorsed.²⁴

After the improvisation, Powerhouse announces an intermission, gathers his band companions, and they all leave to have a beer outside of the venue reserved for whiteness.²⁵ They cross the segregation line and enter "World Café"²⁶ whose interior, despite its location in "Negrotown,"²⁷ does not seem to be harboring an alternative community welcoming those rejected by the privileged oppressors: the "admonishing 'Not Responsible' signs" signal that nobody will lend a helping hand to the social outcasts; the warning " 'Business Phone, Don't Keep Talking' " underscores the impossibility of self-expression within the dominant plantation discourse; the "exposed light bulb" seems to mirror Powerhouse's vulnerability. Instead of constituting a pulsating point of reunion, "[i]t is a waiting, silent, limp room."²⁸

The waitress approaches the group only upon Powerhouse's direct request and she remains suspicious of the customers: " 'Never seen you before anywhere.' [...] 'How I going to know who you might be? Robbers?' " ²⁹ Her reluctance to welcome the unfamiliar group implies that even African-American community does not accept the unknown and that it readily perpetuates prefabricated labels designed for those who do not conform to the social conventions. Powerhouse replies that they are " '[b]oogers',"³⁰ thus tapping into the stereotypical folklore imagery that the white community might associate with otherness. The waitress's reaction echoes the audience's fascination with what Powerhouse becomes under their gaze: "The girl screams delicately with pleasure. O Lord, she likes talk and scares."³¹ Like the white narrator, she is thrilled to have Powerhouse serve as a projection board for her constructions.

²⁴ Schmidt 40.

²⁵ Bearden comments on the segregation rules and relates Powerhouse's situation to DuBois's concept of "double consciousness" described in *Souls of the Black Folk* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1961), qtd. in Bearden 68.

²⁶ "Powerhouse" 135.

²⁷ "Powerhouse" 135.

²⁸ "Powerhouse" 136.

²⁹ "Powerhouse" 135-136.

³⁰ "Powerhouse" 136.

³¹ "Powerhouse" 136.

Powerhouse learns that the café's nickelodeon does not contain “ ‘Empty Bed Blues’ [by] Bessie Smith’ ”,³² “a part of [African-American] heritage that he most values,”³³ and perplexedly asks his companions about the character of their whereabouts. The response he receives summarizes the oppressive plantation reality of the South in a single poignant sentence sounding as “a title for a blues song that captures their frustration”: “ ‘White dance, week night, raining, Alligator, Mississippi, long ways from home’.”³⁴ In this context, the name of the café assumes a particularly painful significance – just like in the outside world where whiteness rules, Powerhouse and his companions find only loneliness and insistent reminder of their plight within the limits of their own racial compartment. Being separated from both of the races that the society recognizes, Powerhouse's sense of alienation does not stem only from his skin color – it is directly related to his creative drive that threatens all the white and African-American individuals who have already internalized the oppressive rules.

Josie, the protagonist of “The Winds,” differs from Powerhouse in the extent of experience with the oppressive social normativity: while the African-American musician is well versed in the effects of the racial binary, the little girl on the verge of puberty is only beginning to discover the existence of socially constructed gender and the far-reaching effects of her conventional upbringing. The very first paragraph of the story depicts Josie as she is lying in her bed and misattributing the sounds of the equinox storm raging outside of her family's house to the community's tradition of “the big girls of the town [...] having a hay-ride” at the place that “[is] called both things, the Old Natchez Trace and Lover's Lane.”³⁵ The third-person narrator that assumes a perspective largely coinciding with Josie's consciousness reports on Josie's mental picture of the coming-of-age ritual as well as her emotions associated with it: “An excitement touched her and she could see in her imagination the leaning wagon coming, the long white-stockinged legs of the big girls hung down in a fringe on one side of the hay – then as the horses made a turn, the boys' black stockings stuck out the other side.”³⁶

³² “Powerhouse” 136.

³³ Schmidt 43.

³⁴ “Powerhouse” 136.

³⁵ “The Winds” 209.

³⁶ “The Winds” 209.

As Rebecca Mark asserts,³⁷ the passage suggests that once individuals leave the category of unisex childhood, they enter the world where the gendered bodies and their actions are clearly delimited, as symbolized by the two colors and the respective sides of the cart. The double name of the site where the event takes place can be interpreted as a linguistic sign of the process in which the difference is being overwhelmed by the normativity – just like the memory of the Native-American route disappears under the traditions of the white community,³⁸ the sexual fluidity of bodies is petrified by the social gender expectations. The axes of ethnic, racial, sexual, and gender otherness are conflated much in the same way as in the case of Powerhouse’s and Keela’s objectification. However, Josie’s vision is abruptly interrupted by her father who comes to protect her from the dangers of the storm by burying her deeper into the insides of the house, along with the remaining members of the family. At this point, Mark argues,³⁹ Josie’s reaction to her father’s advent reveals that, apart from the thrill of the uncharted territory, the adolescent ritual looming in the storm seems to signify the end of “the originality, the artistic fertility of childhood”⁴⁰ Josie has known so far: “Am I old? Am I invited? she wondered, stricken.”⁴¹

Plunging into the house, both Josie and her brother Will intuitively understand that they are driven by an intangible force that cannot be identified with their parents’ physical guidance during the family exodus: “Then they were all moving in the stirring darkness [...], she and Will being led by their mother and father, and they in turn with their hands out as if they were being led by something invisible.”⁴² Arguably, the unknown force represents the social order that imposes its normativity both on the siblings and on their adult guardians. In this context, the storm they are fleeing from is simultaneously the embodiment and the executor of the natural process of maturation, “the turbulent transition from summer to fall and innocence to experience”⁴³ while the parents’ involvement functions as the regulatory social practice of the order that decides how any event should be experienced.

³⁷ Rebecca Mark, “Ice Picks, Guinea Pigs, and Dead Birds: Dramatic Weltian Possibilities in the ‘Demonstrators’”, in *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*, ed. Harriet Pollack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 111-112.

³⁸ The ethnicity and the race of the community is not described but it can be assumed that the absence indicates their whiteness – as was stated in the introduction, whiteness thinks about itself as devoid of such categories.

³⁹ Mark 112.

⁴⁰ Mark 112.

⁴¹ “The Winds” 209.

⁴² “The Winds” 209.

⁴³ Schmidt 153.

When a particularly strong gust of the storm gets hold of the house, the mother who “understands ‘summer’ as a code for another condition”⁴⁴ sorrowfully captures the transition that Josie is about to undergo: “Her mother sighed. ‘Summer is over.’”⁴⁵ Josie seeks refuge in her mother’s bodily embrace as she herself senses the presence of the change: “[...] summer was turning into the past. The long ago ...”⁴⁶ Mark and Schmidt point out⁴⁷ that the end of the summer of Josie’s life manifests itself also in the description of the living room, the center of the family life. It enumerates multiple changes concerning the objects associated with the season and is passing: “[t]he summer matting was down on the floor,” “[t]he sheet of music open on the piano had caved in while they slept,” and “Josie’s drawing of the plaster-cast of Joan of Arc, which it had taken her all summer to do for her mother, had rolled itself tightly up on the desk like a diploma.”⁴⁸

In other words, the turf of Josie’s feet and the tune of Josie’s speech are about to be revised. As Mark claims, Josie is graduating from her apprenticeship in composing an image of a woman into a world where she herself will be a woman.⁴⁹ Upon seeing that, Josie wonders whether “[they were] all going away to leave that,”⁵⁰ and she seems to be frightened by the imminent disappearance of the childhood treasures. In another passage, Josie hears noises made by her slightly more grown peers and she nostalgically remembers the homogenous childhood community whose voices were not divided by any gender markers: “The calls and laughter of the older children came closer, and Josie thought that at any moment their voices would all come together, and they would sing their favorite round, ‘Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream – merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily –’.”⁵¹

Mark and Kreyling point out that “[f]rom the beginning of the story there is a difference between the masculine and feminine views of the storm,” as well as that “[t]he genders are initially separate.”⁵² Josie’s and Will’s reactions to the unusual situation are very different. Will fears that the storm will result in the disintegration of the world as he knows it, which will entail disintegration of his self as well: “‘Oh boy!’ cried Will, spreading his arms high in

⁴⁴ Kreyling 72.

⁴⁵ “The Winds” 211.

⁴⁶ “The Winds” 211.

⁴⁷ Mark 112, Schmidt 145.

⁴⁸ “The Winds” 210.

⁴⁹ Mark 112. Schmidt also underscores that the diploma is a symbol of transition (Schmidt 145).

⁵⁰ “The Winds” 210. Mark also stresses this question by quoting it.

⁵¹ “The Winds” 209.

⁵² Mark 113. Interpreting the mother’s conduct, Kreyling asserts that “the lines of gender and sex are marked” (Kreyling 72).

his sleep and beginning to whirl about. ‘The house is falling down!’⁵³ Josie, on the other hand, displays a courageous curiosity. When inspecting the domestic noises produced by the storm, she is pleased with her ability to identify their true nature: “Coming out of the guest-room was a sound like a nest of little mice in the hay; in a flash of pride and elation Josie discovered it to be the empty bed rolling around and squeaking on its wheels.”⁵⁴ Therefore, despite her fear of losing her childhood freedom, Josie feels already drawn to the mysteries of her own awakening sexuality that the movement of the bed symbolizes.

As was already suggested in the scene of paternal intervention, Josie’s parents are laboring to protect the children from the exposure to the sweeping change by sheltering them within the prefabricated constructions and ignorance that the house represents. Yet, Mark points out that while they appear to be equally disturbed by the dangerous character of the storm, they differ in their conduct as well as in the guidance they give to Josie and Will.⁵⁵ Josie’s father advocates the approach of the passive endurance. He urges the family “ ‘[not to] turn on the lights’,” and issues a laconic command to go “ ‘[d]ownstairs’.”⁵⁶ As Josie’s remark suggests, his actions envelop her with a sense of confinement: “In her sleep she seemed to have dreamed the sounds of all the windows closing, upstairs and down.”⁵⁷ When Josie asks her father whether the outside noises are generated by “ ‘a moonlight picnic’,”⁵⁸ her father “scientifically”⁵⁹ formulates the purportedly authoritative definition of the event: “ ‘It’s a storm [...] This is the equinox’.”⁶⁰

Josie’s mother, as Mark and Kreyling agree,⁶¹ seems to have a better insight into the concrete gender implications of the storm. She responds to Will’s insecurities by advising him to keep quiet, and, upon seeing him “standing straight up with his eyes closed,”⁶² she makes the following remark to her husband, thus affiliating her children with their adult gender counterparts: “ ‘He’ll sleep through it [...] You take him, and I’ll take the girl.’ With a little

⁵³ “The Winds” 210. Although using it to make a different point, Mark uses the same passage to illustrate the gender binary.

⁵⁴ “The Winds” 210.

⁵⁵ Mark 114.

⁵⁶ “The Winds” 209-210.

⁵⁷ “The Winds” 210.

⁵⁸ “The Winds” 210.

⁵⁹ Mark 114. Similarly, Kreyling describes the father’s response as “declarative” (Kreyling 72).

⁶⁰ “The Winds” 210.

⁶¹ Mark 114. Kreyling 72.

⁶² “The Winds” 210.

push, she divided the children; she was unlike herself.”⁶³ Mark interprets her unusual emotional state as a sign that “she is angry that the children must face the reality of adult sexuality as it is configured in a patriarchal economy,”⁶⁴ thus it may be assumed that she has also been exposed to the equinox, that she feels disturbed by reliving the process that molded her into the conventional womanhood, and that her knowledge allows her to see her son’s exemption from it. As her longing gaze directed at Will “who slept up against his father”⁶⁵ indicates, she wishes that Josie could be spared the transformation that will deprive her of her childhood authenticity.

The following passage encompasses the overbearing patriarchy that envelops her parents’ performance and that Josie grapples with: “ ‘You mustn’t be frightened, Josie,’ said her father again. ‘You have my word that this is a good strong house.’ He had built it before he was born. But in the equinox Josie stayed with her mother, though the lightning stamped the pattern of her father’s dressing gown on the room.”⁶⁶ Drawing on Mark’s readings of several other passages,⁶⁷ the scene may be interpreted as follows: while her father wishes Josie to remain under the protection of the social edifice he erected around her and to live her life as a Southern belle, passively adhering to the plantation conception of the female that both her parents conform to and enforce, Josie joins her mother and defies the dominion of her father’s body imprinted on the walls of the room. Despite her conventionality, the mother’s presence in the scene may symbolize the gender other that Josie affiliates with. Subsequently, despite her lingering desire for her childhood, Josie eventually abandons “both mother and father [who] went all at once silent,” and experiences a series of dreams that are mixing the past events with her waking perception while “[t]he house move[s] softly like a boat that has been stepped into,”⁶⁸ “suggesting forward motion and journeying”⁶⁹ and ushering her future and her own, particular understanding of her childhood and womanhood as “the persistence of illumination seem[s] slowly to be waking something that slept longer than Josie had slept [...]”⁷⁰

⁶³ “The Winds” 210.

⁶⁴ Mark 114.

⁶⁵ “The Winds” 212.

⁶⁶ “The Winds” 212.

⁶⁷ Mark 120.

⁶⁸ “The Winds” 212.

⁶⁹ Schmidt 146.

⁷⁰ “The Winds” 212.

Given her gender, race, and class, Virgie Rainey of “The Wanderers” can be regarded as a potential future version of Josie. Having been introduced as a young, talented pianist in “June Recital,” she is “past forty two now,”⁷¹ she is working as a secretary for Mr. Nesbitt, the owner of the lumbering firm that is exploiting the forests surrounding Morgana, and the story opens with the preparations for the funeral of her recently deceased mother. As Schmidt summarizes, “Virgie’s outer life is a series of blunderings and misunderstandings,”⁷² and the brief outline of Virgie’s life trajectory may suggest that once aspiring, artistic rebel conceded to the everyday normative pressure and passively obeys and implements the orders of those destructing natural creativity epitomized by the trees. However, as the formally omniscient narrator provides multiple details of Virgie’s daily routines, it becomes apparent that, despite the seeming loss of her vigor, Virgie’s existence still does not fit into the prescribed category of the domestic lady.

After work, Virgie goes back to the house she shares with her mother, she travels in an inappropriate “old coupe,”⁷³ and she takes care of her mother’s cows. Like Cornella in “The Winds,” she openly displays her beauty: “Virgie’s long, dark, too heavy hair swung this way and that as she came up in her flowered voile dress, on her high heels through the bearded grass.”⁷⁴ The contrast between such an active enjoyment of one’s body and the conventional, static image of the female domesticity is concentrated in the adjectives describing Virgie’s hair as excessive and somber in quality as well as extravagantly volatile. Furthermore, her provocative attire and the town’s gossip concerning her affair with Mr. Mabry and her previous departures from Morgana signal that the community considers her promiscuous and frivolous, one illustrative example being her public reception of her suitor’s gifts of “ ‘a bag o’ quail every other day’ .”⁷⁵

For these numerous transgressions, the community casts Virgie as the other of the proper womanhood: she is husbandless; she is working as a subordinate of a man she is not married to, thus abandoning the prescribed position of the housewife; she is doing the fieldwork that is reserved for the African-American servants; as Schmidt points out,⁷⁶ she shamelessly parades her nonconformity in a car which, unlike the vehicles of the respectable ladies, seems to be a

⁷¹ “The Wanderers” 428.

⁷² Schmidt 173. Schmidt includes a review of Virgie’s history in the community that is similar to the present one and that structurally inspired it (Schmidt 172-173).

⁷³ “The Wanderers” 430.

⁷⁴ “The Wanderers” 430.

⁷⁵ “The Wanderers” 429.

⁷⁶ Schmidt 179.

mode of transportation intended for solitary outings of heroic men rather than for family trips. The ladies do not miss any opportunity to contrast their conformity with Virgie's inadmissible failures, and, instead of being concerned for the bereaved daughter, they see the funeral as their chance to further their own privileged status by using Virgie as the quintessential opposite of their homemaking and social skills. Discussing Virgie's inheritance, an unknown voice suggests that Virgie will most probably spend the money outside of the domestic sphere, which is both inappropriate and expectable: " 'she'll spend it on something 'sides the house, hm? [...] What does Virgie care about housekeeping and china plates without no husband, hm?' ”⁷⁷ As Schmidt observes,⁷⁸ the women believe that the absence of a man Virgie could tie her life to renders her incapable of performing any chores associated with the space of a home and they do not even consider the possibility that she might create a nice interior for her own pleasure.

Throughout the opening passages of the story, Virgie's own perspective on the community is not provided. Yet, as Schmidt claims,⁷⁹ the narrative suggests that the relationship between Virgie and her mother was the only true companionship Virgie ever experienced; there are no records of a meaningful interaction with any other member of the community. Apart from the ladies, Virgie communicates chiefly with two men and both of them prove to be merely furthering their own goals:⁸⁰ her relationship with Mr. Mabry appears to be only peripheral and altogether unsatisfactory as he sees in her only an object on which he can impose his courtship and as he does not provide her with any emotional support; Mr. Nesbitt, "a loud boor showing off his power to a new employee,"⁸¹ pressures Virgie to acknowledge his kindness to her as if Virgie was bound to eternal gratefulness or even romantic engagement with the self-complacent benefactor. Snowdie Rainey and Cassie Morrison can be regarded as two exceptions from the general female self-righteousness but they are both too immersed in their own private plights to reach out to a fellow sufferer: the former negotiates her renewed partnership with King MacLain⁸² and the latter endlessly relives her mother's unexpected suicide.⁸³

⁷⁷ "The Wanderers" 436.

⁷⁸ Schmidt 174.

⁷⁹ Schmidt 177-178.

⁸⁰ Kreyling makes a similar comment about the men's lack of empathy and support (Kreyling 142, 143-144).

⁸¹ Schmidt 181.

⁸² "The Wanderers" 448.

⁸³ "The Wanderers" 432.

Schmidt points out⁸⁴ that Miss Katie Rainey may seem to be acting out of the same motives as the two men, ordering her daughter around the house and in the fields, pestering her for coming late from work, and commenting on the inappropriateness of her attire as she claims that Virgie is “too dressed up.”⁸⁵ However, soon it becomes apparent that the community regards her lonesome vigils before Virgie’s return to the house as actions mirroring those of Snowdie who used to longingly look out for King. Therefore, it may be argued that Katie’s affection for Virgie parallels other women’s romantic feelings for men and that, like her unmarried daughter, Katie transgresses the heteronormative prescriptions and provides Virgie with “a sustaining sense of [her] own importance that is not necessarily connected to how well they perform the role of married lady or spinster.”⁸⁶

Furthermore, Schmidt stresses⁸⁷ that Katie feels hurt by the aforementioned gossip about Virgie. Interestingly, she empathizes with her daughter to such a degree that she replaces the character of Mr. Mabry with that of her own husband: “It was just that the talk Miss Katie heard was in voices of her girlhood, and some times they slipped.”⁸⁸ While the community’s opinion would probably explain her momentarily misattribution as a sign of her madness, it can be also interpreted as Katie intuitively assuming the place of the person she loves. Countering the community’s allegations, Katie makes the following observation: “ ‘It’s a wonder, though,’ she thought. ‘A blessed wonder to see the child mind.’”⁸⁹ Clearly, she admires her nonconforming daughter whose heretic life is guided by a much steadier moral compass than that of those who occupy the socially prescribed positions. Describing Virgie’s attraction to the difficult cutting assignments, Katie’s ensuing emotion suggests that she intuitively understands what a complicated path Virgie is treading, that she is invested in her combats: “ ‘There’s nothing Virgie Rainey loves better than struggling against a real hard plaid,’ Miss Katie thought, with a thrust of pain from somewhere unexpected.”⁹⁰ Therefore, having lost her mother, it seems that Virgie loses the only person that would feel an affection for her fierce individualism. For some time, Virgie seems to be sinking deeper into resignation but when the narrative voice finally enters her consciousness, it is revealed that

⁸⁴ Schmidt 177.

⁸⁵ “The Wanderers” 428.

⁸⁶ Schmidt 177.

⁸⁷ Schmidt 177.

⁸⁸ “The Wanderers” 429. Vande Kief makes a similar comment, pointing out “[h]er love for Virgie and a subliminal memory of her own youthful independence” (Vande Kief 113).

⁸⁹ “The Wanderers” 430.

⁹⁰ “The Wanderers” 430.

she possesses an unparalleled inner strength, the same one that urges her to wrestle with the unyielding cloth.

4.2 Shifting Forces

Schmidt argues⁹¹ that Powerhouse counters the prescriptivism of white edicts with a series of powerful oral improvisations. As the narrator explains, “Powerhouse has as much a possible done by signals.”⁹² For instance, calling out the songs, “he says, ‘92!’ or some combination of figures – never a name.”⁹³ Refusing to perpetuate the hierarchies that the order inserts into and petrifies in the generally recognized system of signs, he creates a language governed only by the rules that he and his companions understand and share. Instead of replicating the imposing absolutism of statements that delimitate, separate, and fracture individuals’ lives, this language facilitates friendship and creative cooperation and, furthermore, “has the crucial function of disguising whether or not [Powerhouse] has actually followed all of his audience’s requests.”⁹⁴

When an improvisation begins, “they are all down the first note like a waterfall.”⁹⁵ The powerful flux of fluid energy echoes the unregimented diversity of Mrs. Larkin’s garden: “This note marks the end of any known discipline. Powerhouse seems to abandon them all – he himself seems lost – down in the song, yelling up like somebody in a whirlpool – not guiding them – hailing them only.”⁹⁶ The absence of an outside guidance does not lead to the disintegration of the song. Rather, it lets the players’ emotions to surface, evolve and unite in a Bakhtinian polyphonic synthesis that does not suppress any of its voices.⁹⁷ As the performers do not regulate its trajectory by a set of rules, the song and its makers become one: instead of negotiating their feelings by imprinting them into premeditated, prefabricated structures, they discover their meaning by immersing themselves in endless mass of music.

As was stated above, it is in such a song that the terrible telegram and its sender, “Uranus Knockwood,”⁹⁸ are introduced and Schmidt claims that “[i]t is surely not a coincidence.”⁹⁹

⁹¹ Schmidt 46.

⁹² “Powerhouse” 132.

⁹³ “Powerhouse” 132.

⁹⁴ Schmidt 46. Bearden makes a similar assertion (Bearden 73).

⁹⁵ “Powerhouse” 132.

⁹⁶ “Powerhouse” 132.

⁹⁷ Schmidt offers a similar description of such a creative process: “Pain is brought up to the surface and transformed by brute effort into a thing of beauty, a song with a pulse” (Schmidt 45).

⁹⁸ “Powerhouse” 134.

⁹⁹ Schmidt 46.

While initially the form of the white waltz prevails, the multiple choruses within which Powerhouse embeds his conversation with the companions gradually escape its constraints. Powerhouse and the band reiterate the content of the telegram and discuss its implications and “each retelling of the story goes ever deeper into the sources of pain, anger, and black humor that inspired the song.”¹⁰⁰ Schmidt further points out¹⁰¹ that the alterations are accompanied by a transition in rhythmical pattern: “[Powerhouse] puts 4/4 over the 3/4.”¹⁰² Therefore, the oppressive, static whiteness of the waltz is transformed into a dynamic blues. “[K]neading a dough of bass notes,”¹⁰³ Powerhouse is “an artist who makes use of his emotional self in his performance”¹⁰⁴ to express his feelings on his own terms and in his own language and to counter the seemingly impersonal third-person narrative with his own voice.¹⁰⁵

Yet, the first improvisation does not result in the protagonist’s permanent liberation. As Schmidt points out,¹⁰⁶ having started another chorus, Powerhouse seems once again overwhelmed by emotions. He announces the previously discussed intermission and “pulls a big Northern hotel towel out of the deep pocket [...] and pushes his forehead into it.”¹⁰⁷ In this gesture, the powerful “stage persona”¹⁰⁸ consolidated by the authentic energy of his music gives way to a “Medusa figure”¹⁰⁹ that embodies the effects of the white discourse laboring to undercut his independence and fix him in the appropriate category: “He gets to his feet, turning vaguely, wearing the towel on his head. [...] He [...] looks like an East Indian queen, implacable, divine, and full of snakes.”¹¹⁰ Powerhouse’s companions vainly attempt to kindle his energy and re-affirm his narrative by a series of reassuring utterances.¹¹¹ The power of the song has already dissolved.

¹⁰⁰ Schmidt 42.

¹⁰¹ Schmidt 42.

¹⁰² “Powerhouse” 133.

¹⁰³ “Powerhouse” 134.

¹⁰⁴ “Welty on Whiteness and Race” 5. Quoting Ralph Ellison, Bearden makes a similar point: “the blues is ‘an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism’ “ (Bearden 66).

¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Pollack claims that “Powerhouse works a blackface imposed on him, turning it into a medium for expressing his private and individual self” (“Welty on Whiteness and Race” 5).

¹⁰⁶ Schmidt 42-43.

¹⁰⁷ “Powerhouse” 135.

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt 43.

¹⁰⁹ Schmidt 43.

¹¹⁰ “Powerhouse” 135.

¹¹¹ “Powerhouse” 135.

Schmidt's and McWhirter's interpretations demonstrate that such changes in Powerhouse's appearances occur from the very beginning of the narrative, and that they are inextricably connected with the previously discussed white gaze – even the privileged narrator from the audience asserts that Powerhouse has “[a] face which looks like a mask.”¹¹² Having established his freakishness, the text suddenly reveals Powerhouse as a prophetic, self-contained figure of profound knowledge: “Then all quietly he lays his finger on a key with the promise and serenity of a sibyl touching the book.”¹¹³ Such an image subverts the constructions of his animal-like otherness and identifies him as “a sibyl, an interpreter and controller of texts.”¹¹⁴ His Medusa-like head, on the other hand, transcends the limits of the comfortable and socially exploitable difference and, as Schmidt points out,¹¹⁵ its uncanny ugliness prompts the audience to divert their objectifying gaze elsewhere, thus rendering the disturbing body invisible. Therefore, Powerhouse undergoes at least three types of transformations: those that support the identity of the audience and violate Powerhouse's authenticity; those that affirm Powerhouse's authenticity and defy the audience's artificial constructions; those that threaten both the constructed image and Powerhouse's liberated narrative and result in Powerhouse's disappearance from the social landscape.

In World Café, a second improvisation takes place and the previously unwelcoming environment is transformed when a clandestine look recognizes Powerhouse as a celebrity.¹¹⁶ Therefore, rather than by sympathy with Powerhouse's predicament, the audience's interest seems to be triggered by the fascination with the fact that they are encountering a publicly recognized individual, and Powerhouse remains under the scrutiny of the detached, objectifying gaze.¹¹⁷ He performs an account of his wife's tragic suicide and Uranus Knockwood's involvement in it and, like in the first improvisation, each chorus features several alterations in the rendition of the story. Initially, supported by the affirmative responses of his band, Powerhouse stages an almost humorous version of the events. Explaining that Gypsy killed herself in an attempt to escape the villain by “ ‘jump[ing] out the window’,” he describes Uranus Knockwood's reaction to the state of her dead body in highly comical language: “ ‘Ya! Ha! You talking about her brains and insides – old Uranus

¹¹² “Powerhouse” 132.

¹¹³ “Powerhouse” 131.

¹¹⁴ Schmidt 48.

¹¹⁵ Schmidt 43.

¹¹⁶ “Powerhouse” 136

¹¹⁷ Inverting the perspective, Marrs makes a similar observation and underscores the detachment shared by the two audiences: “[...] both Powerhouse's white audience at the dance and his black admirers at the World Café feel separated from him, either by race or by fame” (Marrs 37).

Knockwood [...] look down and say Jesus! He say, Look here what I'm walking round in!' ”

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However, it soon becomes clear that the influence of Uranus Knockwood extends beyond this one isolated tragedy and the tone no longer reminds of that of slapstick. Powerhouse characterizes the villain as “[t]hat no-good pussyfooted crooning creeper, that creeper that follow around after me, coming up like weeds behind me, following around after me everything I do and messing around on the trail I leave’ ” and all the members of the band join in his enumeration of the oppressive acts he perpetrates on them: “ ‘Why, he picks her up and carries her off!’ [...] ‘Carries her *back* around the corner. ...’ [...] ‘He take out wives when we gone!’ ‘He come in when we goes out!’ [...] ‘He go out when we comes in!’ [...] ‘He standing behind the door!’ ‘Old Uranus Knockwood.’ ‘You know him.’ ‘Middle-size man.’ ‘Wears a hat.’ ‘That’s him’.”¹¹⁹

As many critics argue,¹²⁰ the passage demonstrates that Uranus Knockwood proves to be both the originator and the embodiment of all the fears the musicians are afflicted with. In this context, it seems that Gypsy’s suicide was prompted not by “a fit of loneliness”¹²¹ in the absence of her husband but rather by her frustration with the prison of the order. As for Powerhouse, the loss of his wife symbolizes the painful precariousness of every relationship in his life, including that with his own self. Yet, Powerhouse also defies the identified oppressor: “I got him now! I got my eye on him’.”¹²² As Pollack points out, “[n]aming the bringer of the blues becomes a means of chasing them away.”¹²³ In this way, the improvisation exposes the constructed nature of the plantation hierarchies and disrupts their power by enveloping its roots in a stream of fluid speech.

Eventually, as Powerhouse returns to describing Gypsy’s suicide and his companions urge him to stop the painful dissection of their existence, the previously disinterestedly amused waitress empathizes with his sorrow, recognizing, as Schmidt points out,¹²⁴ that the story is the actual narrative of the musician’s life: “ ‘It’s awful [...] I hates that Mr. Knockwoods. [...]

¹¹⁸ “Powerhouse” 137-138.

¹¹⁹ “Powerhouse” 137-138 Vande Kief also underscores the importance of the passage by quoting it (Vande Kief 36).

¹²⁰ Vande Kief 36, “Welty on Whiteness and Race” 6, Schmidt 44, Bearden 72.

¹²¹ Vande Kief 36.

¹²² “Powerhouse” 137-138.

¹²³ “Welty on Whiteness and Race” 6.

¹²⁴ Schmidt describes the process of recognition as follows: “[Powerhouse] pushes his tale to the very edge of tragedy, where tall tale becomes confession and laughter turns into pain” (Schmidt 45).

It must be the real truth.’ ”¹²⁵ Powerhouse surprisingly replies as follows: “ ‘No, babe, it ain’t truth. [...] Truth is something worse, I ain’t said what, yet. It’s something hasn’t come to me, but I ain’t saying it won’t. And when it does, then want me to tell you?’ ”¹²⁶ The truth about the African-American predicament cannot be communicated by a mere enumeration of its symptoms. Powerhouse both suspects that it might not find a listener and “tell[s] [the reader] in the end that he *hasn’t* in fact told.”¹²⁷

Analyzing the scene, McWhirter summarizes the reading that Harriet Pollack presents in “Words Between Strangers” and that he enters in dialogue with. In the essay, Pollack interprets “Welty’s strategies of ‘obstruction’ ”¹²⁸ as her way of “conceptualization of the artist-audience relation.”¹²⁹ The inscrutability of the protagonist’s truth should prompt the audience to join their imaginations with the text, and “[lead] one to read for the sake of encounter rather than appropriation.”¹³⁰ McWhirter claims that the blind spots of the story are a proof of “[Welty’s] acute awareness that the structure of black-white relations in the early-to mid-twentieth century South rendered *any* such encounter, in fact or in language, an all-too-likely scene of appropriation.”¹³¹ Drawing on Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, he further argues that Powerhouse’s response reveals Welty’s unwillingness to write her text from the position of the objectifying white gaze that is ultimately interested only in itself. Like in “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” Welty refuses “to explore and penetrate one’s own body in the guise of the sexuality, vulnerability, and anarchy of the other.”¹³² Therefore, both Pollack and McWhirter suggest the following paradox: it is by refraining from descending into Powerhouse’s consciousness that Welty removes the text from the pressure of the outside normative interpretation and returns its authorship to its protagonist.

Josie’s daydreaming visions offer a further insight into the community’s conception of womanhood: “always oblivious, off in the shade, the big girls reclined or pressed their flowers in a book, or filled whole baking-powder cans with four-leaf clovers they found.”¹³³ Unlike Josie and her best friend, “[t]hey [no longer] [run] through the park and [drink] from the

¹²⁵ “Powerhouse” 139.

¹²⁶ “Powerhouse” 139.

¹²⁷ McWhirter 115

¹²⁸ Harriet Pollack, “Words Between Strangers” (*Mississippi Quarterly* XXXIX.4, 1986), qtd. in McWhirter 114.

¹²⁹ McWhirter 115.

¹³⁰ “Words Between Strangers,” qtd. in McWhirter 115.

¹³¹ McWhirter 115.

¹³² Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), qtd. in McWhirter 115.

¹³³ “The Winds” 213.

fountain.”¹³⁴ Instead, they are cultivating their public image by petrifying the nature into the shape that conforms to the social aesthetic conventions and they give up the movement of their bodies for a passive social decorum. Josie’s own experiments with the womanhood awaking in her body are very different from these still images: “She would take her [bicycle] as early as possible. So as to touch nothing, to make no print on the earliness of the day, she rode with no hands, no feet, touching nowhere but the one place, moving away [...]”¹³⁵ According to Mark, the point of convergence between the body and its means of transport is Josie’s vagina or clitoris.¹³⁶ In this way, her rides towards the world lying beyond the parental house complement the previously discussed ominous movement of the bed: the fact that her first sexual experiences take place on the road while driving her bicycle called “Princess”¹³⁷ suggests that Josie “is paying homage to female sexuality”¹³⁸ devoid of the violent act of male penetration¹³⁹ and that she is headed toward a conception of sexuality that may revise the community’s norms of gender performance. As if intuitively understanding the significance of Josie’s actions, the parents exert their controlling power and “[call] her back.”¹⁴⁰

Josie does not protest against the order to return to the protective house. On the contrary, she seems to be reassured by its familiar, protective embrace that she perceives as a part of her own self: “She ran and jumped, secure that the house was theirs and identical with them – the pale smooth house seeming not to yield to any happening”¹⁴¹ Her willingness to plunge back into the world that her parents carefully delimitate for her can be explained by her prevailing fear of the upcoming change and the even more restrictive regulations that it will bring. These anxieties are epitomized by an object that presides over Josie’s everyday partings from the childhood friends: “[...] never did [the dragon] seem so still, so utterly of stone, as when all the children said good-bye as they always did on that corner, and she was left alone with it. Stone dragons opened their mouths and begged to swallow the day, they loved to eat the

¹³⁴ “The Winds” 215.

¹³⁵ “The Winds” 212-213.

¹³⁶ Mark 118. Kreyling makes a similar point about the sexual implications of Josie’s cycling (Kreyling 73).

¹³⁷ “The Winds” 212.

¹³⁸ Mark 118.

¹³⁹ Mark 107

¹⁴⁰ “The Winds” 213.

¹⁴¹ “The Winds” 213.

summer.”¹⁴² Her friends leaving her, Josie sees the summer of her life disappear and the new, painfully isolated female existence begin.

Both Mark and Schmidt assert that Josie is guided through the difficult transformation by two female role models living beyond the reach of the family and that “[t]he young girl’s task is to interpret the different but equally important calls of these two older women.”¹⁴³ The first woman is Cornella, Josie’s neighbor. Unlike Josie who is under constant parental control, Cornella is an orphan and lives with her foster parents¹⁴⁴ in a building that mirrors her status of the social outcast: “This worn old house was somehow in disgrace, as if it had been born into it and could not help it. Josie was sorry, and sorry that it looked like a face [...] It watched, and by not being what it should have been, the house was inscrutable.”¹⁴⁵ To her parents’ dismay, Josie is scanning the raging calamity to locate her in it and she insists that she has discovered her: “ ‘I see Cornella. She’s on the outside, [...] outside in the storm, and she’s in the equinox’.”¹⁴⁶ As Schmidt points out, Josie’s parents recognize Cornella as the agent of nonconformity¹⁴⁷ and Josie’s father attempts to discourage his daughter from engaging with her by introducing one of the myths perpetuated by the social order: “ ‘Once in an equinoctial storm [...] a man’s little girl was blown away from him into a haystack out in a field’.”¹⁴⁸

Josie’s description of Cornella’s behavior and body reveals the girl to be strikingly different from her passive female peers:

In the morning was Cornella’s time of preparation. [...] Big girls are usually idle, but Cornella, as occupied as a child, vigorously sunned her hair, or else she had always just washed it and came out busily to dry it. It was bright yellow, wonderfully silky and long, and she would bend her neck and toss her

¹⁴² “The Winds” 216.

¹⁴³ Mark 108-109. Schmidt 146.

¹⁴⁴ “The Winds” 216.

¹⁴⁵ “The Winds” 213.

¹⁴⁶ “The Winds” 211.

¹⁴⁷ Marks makes a similar comment and suggests Cornella becomes “the object of Josie’s love [who may be] forbidden because she is of the same sex, because she is poor, because she does not have family” (Mark 114).

¹⁴⁸ “The Winds” 211. Mark also points out that Josie’s father resorts to a mythical horror story to keep Josie under control.

hair over her head before her face like a waterfall. And her hair was as constant a force as a waterfall to Josie, under whose eyes alone it fell.¹⁴⁹

While other girls limit the display of their bodies by motionlessly reproducing the community's standards of beauty, Cornella fiercely asserts her right to openly display and enjoy the power of her female body in a gesture whose lack of regard for the male gaze reminds Josie of the life she has known so far. The beautiful image that Josie creates contrasts with the female monstrosity symbolized by Medusa and the fluidity of her hair mirrors the description of Powerhouse's musical energy.

Josie becomes fascinated with Cornella's unparalleled audacity, and, by means of an incantation whose content and archaic language echoes Josie's pledges to the mysterious childhood queen,¹⁵⁰ she conjures the image of Cornella's womanhood to eradicate the threatening dragon from her consciousness. Yet, Josie also comes to recognize the burden of isolation that Cornella needs to carry as the community's punishment for her independence. One day, she is once again watching her new "queen of heart"¹⁵¹:

Cornella would come, in some kind of secrecy swaying from side to side, her skirts swinging round, and the sidewalk echoing smally to her pumps with the Baby Louis heels. Then, all alone, Cornella would turn her gaze away down the street, as if she could see far, far away down the street, in a little pantomime of hope and apprehension that would not permit Josie to stir.¹⁵²

The moment captures both Cornella's proudly displayed feminine beauty and her clandestine, isolated, wistful exploration of the world lying beyond her house and beyond the suffocating community.

Unable to control her fascination any longer, Josie gestures towards Cornella's powerful presence and she receives a response that is both enigmatic and ominous and that possibly summarizes Cornella's own perspective on existence within the social normativity: "And Cornella – what was it she had called back across the street, the flash of what word, so furious and yet so frail and thin? It was more furious that even the stamping of her foot, only a single

¹⁴⁹ "The Winds" 214. Mark interprets the image differently – she sees it as "the sign of fertility" (Mark 115). Both Schmidt (Schmidt 152) and Mark (Mark 115) see it also as a link to Welty's later characters, mainly Virgie.

¹⁵⁰ "The Winds" 212. Mark points out that Josie reverses a "female power" (Mark 118) already in the course of her childhood and Kreyling asserts that "she calls for female immersion" (Kreyling 73).

¹⁵¹ Vande Kief 51.

¹⁵² "The Winds" 216.

word.”¹⁵³ The previous outburst Josie refers to occurred when Josie empathized with Cornella’s “gaze [fixing] the emptiness of their street.”¹⁵⁴ She is surprised by Cornella’s violent reaction to “this sad moment, in which Josie’s love began to go toward her.”¹⁵⁵ In her helplessness to direct her frustration at a concrete villain and in her confinement outside of the public life, Cornella mirrors old Addie tied to her bed and, as Schmidt points out,¹⁵⁶ Clytie cursing fruitlessly in the garden. After the incident, Josie experiences intensely the confinement of female adulthood: “To see [Cornella] then, oppression touched Josie and held her quite still.”¹⁵⁷ Seeing Cornella’s mesmerizing beauty wilt under the voice of order and under the authority of the foster mother that prevents Cornella from enjoying the little pleasures she finds in musing about a different world,¹⁵⁸ Josie’s dreams revert back to the visions of childhood safety.

Yet, as Schmidt points out,¹⁵⁹ her distant perspective on her physically diminished peers suggests that she cannot arrest the fleeting time: “Under the fiery windows, how small the children were.”¹⁶⁰ Surrounded by the commotion of childhood games and nursery rhymes, her attention is attracted by the moon and its mysterious power that is, as Mark remarks, traditionally associated with “women’s sexuality in a matriarchal sexuality”¹⁶¹: “She felt lonely. [...] The game went on. But I must find out everything about the moon, Josie thought in the solemnity of evening.”¹⁶² Subsequently, as she “bring[s] out her most precious possession, the steamboat she had made from a shoe-box” and joins her childhood friends who are floating their own treasures with “full-moon, half-moon, and new-moon [...] cut out of each side for windows”¹⁶³ through the streets, Josie feels that the unity of their ranks is disrupted by a powerful presence, and she discovers that they are being observed by silent Cornella. The image demonstrates that Josie’s efforts to anchor herself in the most intense childhood memories are futile; the moon tides are drawing her boat in the direction of the womanhood that the isolated figure of her neighbor symbolizes. No matter how strong she

¹⁵³ “The Winds” 216.

¹⁵⁴ “The Winds” 214.

¹⁵⁵ “The Winds” 214.

¹⁵⁶ Schmidt 149.

¹⁵⁷ “The Winds” 214.

¹⁵⁸ “The Winds” 216-217.

¹⁵⁹ Schmidt 146.

¹⁶⁰ “The Winds” 217.

¹⁶¹ Mark 118.

¹⁶² “The Winds” 218.

¹⁶³ “The Winds” 218. Once again, these are “three symbols of women’s sexuality in a matriarchal sexuality” (Mark 118).

grips to the stream of her friends and to the emblems of her childhood that are, as Schmidt points out, epitomized by the removed “ ‘little muff’ ”¹⁶⁴ she longs for, she cannot go against her own instincts that drive her into the new, frightening world.

Overcome by the wave of intense fear, Josie ponders the central question of her evolution: “For the first time in her life she thought, might the same wonders never come again?”¹⁶⁵ In this unsettled state, the second figure whose power forges Josie’s own vision of womanhood comes to her as “ ‘[h]er father came over and kissed her,’ ”¹⁶⁶ once again attempting to impose his protective love upon the workings of her consciousness. It is the recollection of a concert she attended, and she asserts that it “ ‘[is] closest of all’ ”.¹⁶⁷ The concert featured a group of three female musicians “play[ing] a piano, a cornet, and a violin.”¹⁶⁸ Therefore, as Mark repeatedly points out,¹⁶⁹ the description of the scene containing the most personal element of Josie’s life is clearly identified with womanhood that is not defined by the relationship to adjacent men.

Initially, both the audience and Josie are left unimpressed with the performance. However, as the evening progresses, the cornetist unexpectedly takes the floor and the music she produces finally provides Josie with a tune that replaces the crumbling composition in the living room and that resonates with her emerging womanhood: “If morning-glories had come out of the horn instead of those sounds, Josie would not have felt a more astonished delight. She was pierced with pleasure. [...] Between herself and the lifted cornet there was no barrier, there was only the stale, expectant air of the old shelter of the tent.”¹⁷⁰ Josie’s account of her encounter with the cornetist reveals what such a narrative entails. She sees the woman as “beautiful” and the adjective seems to describe both the musician’s body and her experienced, poised, and powerful mode of being; as Schmidt puts it, being identified simultaneously as “Queen” and “the figurehead on a Viking ship,”¹⁷¹ “[t]he musician mixes domestic and heroic images of women, showing Josie that a woman’s life can involve [both].”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ “The Winds” 219.

¹⁶⁵ “The Winds” 218-219.

¹⁶⁶ “The Winds” 219.

¹⁶⁷ “The Winds” 219.

¹⁶⁸ “The Winds” 219.

¹⁶⁹ Mark 109.

¹⁷⁰ “The Winds” 220. Obviously, this is the passage that stands at the center of Mark’s reading.

¹⁷¹ “The Winds” 220.

¹⁷² Schmidt 148.

To put it more explicitly, Josie feels that her maturing body is immersed in and infused by the presence of the individual that subverts the feared normative gender division by performing both the role of a female sovereign and that of a traditionally male sea captain. Importantly, despite the fact that the alternative vision is embodied by and encoded in the music issuing from an instrument that is, as Schmidt points out,¹⁷³ conventionally reserved for male performers, Josie feels that there is no obstacle separating her from it – just like the female musician, she can become one with the cornet. Thus, Mark and Schmidt claim, Josie encounters a real-life counterpart of Joan of Arc, “the crossdressing lesbian icon,”¹⁷⁴ whose representation she was laboring to create throughout the summer of her life, and her power that Josie feels inextricably connected with and mesmerized by signals that the feared womanhood can be “a world of [...] creative power, and women warriors.”¹⁷⁵

In the course of the cornetist’s performance, Josie, her parents, and her two female role models are positioned in a telling constellation. Within Josie’s eyesight, there is “Cornella, listening too, and still alone,”¹⁷⁶ and her state suggests that even the cornetist’s music cannot reverse the process in which she is slowly crumbling under the weight of her struggle with the community’s normativity, commencing a descent into a madness similar to that afflicting Mrs. Larkin and Clytie. Schmidt stresses¹⁷⁷ that, unlike Cornella, Josie’s mother and father are revealed to be separated from her by the audience. Upon discovering that “[s]he was let free,”¹⁷⁸ Josie makes a simple gesture that reconciles her own authenticity with the imminent adulthood: “[t]urning back to the cornetist who was transfixed beneath her instrument, she bent gently forward and closed her hands together over her knees.”¹⁷⁹

Leaving both her parents and Cornella outside of her vision and embracing her own body while listening to the powerful narrative, she refuses both choices¹⁸⁰ that the oppressive community presented to her: she replaces the image of the terribly painful, self-destructive

¹⁷³ Schmidt 148.

¹⁷⁴ Mark 112.

¹⁷⁵ Mark 112. Schmidt uses different terms but his point is essentially identical: he claims that “the musician embodies the revolutionary heroism of Joan of Arc” (Schmidt 149), and that “[b]oth of these images of heroic women stand in striking contrast to the specter of the Medusa” (Schmidt 150).

¹⁷⁶ “The Winds” 220.

¹⁷⁷ Schmidt 149.

¹⁷⁸ “The Winds” 220.

¹⁷⁹ “The Winds” 220.

¹⁸⁰ Mark points out that Gail Mortimer reads the story also in terms of a choice but she sees it as a choice between Cornella’s conformity and the musician’s personal authenticity. (Gail Mortimer, *Daughter of the Swan: Love and Knowledge in Eudora Welty’s Fiction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994) 144, qtd. in Mark 108).

rebellion with a triumphant assertion of harmonious contact with her self. Having returned to the house, she reflects on the closing passage of the cornetist's music and "it seem[s] to her that there would be no more waiting and no more time left for the one who did not take heed and follow."¹⁸¹ If she wants to rejoin the woman, she must take the leap because "the memory [...] demands that she act on her apprenticeship."¹⁸² With this recognition, both Josie's series of dreams and the transformative storm come to an end.

In the course of the story, Virgie gradually assumes a more prominent position in the narration, and the development is paralleled by her inner transformation as her interaction with the social pressure evolves from resignation through frustrated anger to assertion of integrity. Schmidt points out¹⁸³ that Virgie's body is initially enveloped by the ladies who manually navigate her through the space of the house: "They pulled pre-emptorily at Virgie's arms, their voices bright."¹⁸⁴ She protests but it only makes them increase the pressure while fiercely preserving their decorum. At this point, the narrative introduces Virgie's perspective as she fully experiences what she looks like in the eyes of the community: "She was hurting them all, shocking them. They leaned over her, agonized, pleading with the pull of their hands."¹⁸⁵ Overcome by the confrontation, she reverts back to the passive acceptance of their commands: "In that truth, Virgie looked up at them lightheadedly and they lifted her to her feet and drew her into the bedroom and showed her her mother."¹⁸⁶

Subsequently, her body behaves in accord with the ladies' directions but she maintains inscrutable posture and silence: "They watched Virgie, but Virgie gave them no sign now."¹⁸⁷ In this act, "the own, the single and watchful body"¹⁸⁸ formally continues to participate in the social spectacle but it does so in a particularly subversive mode, denying the gatekeepers the recognition of either a docile cooperation or a self-destructive, furious refusal. However, her powerful detachment crumbles when the ladies' present their own narration of Virgie's mother's life. She understands that their appropriation of her mother's life will distort her mother's authenticity into an official version serving the purposes of the order and she feels the weight of her own social insignificance: "She wept because they could not tell it right, and

¹⁸¹ "The Winds" 220.

¹⁸² Mark 118-119.

¹⁸³ Schmidt 174.

¹⁸⁴ "The Wanderers" 434.

¹⁸⁵ "The Wanderers" 435.

¹⁸⁶ "The Wanderers" 435.

¹⁸⁷ "The Wanderers" 435.

¹⁸⁸ "The Wanderers" 435.

they didn't press for her reasons."¹⁸⁹ The ladies seize the opportunity and subjugate the purportedly hysterical woman under the patriarchal control symbolized by her absent suitor: " 'Call Mr. Mabry now. She's let loose' ."¹⁹⁰

In the evening of the preparatory day, Virgie sends everybody away, allowing only Snowdie, her mother's close friend, to sleep in the house, and leaves for a swim in the river. Entering "the reflectionless water,"¹⁹¹ Virgie's naked body sheds all the artificial social signs encoded in her attire and immerses itself in the all-embracing natural fluidity that contrasts with the compartmentalized order of the community and that does not fix the individuals' images in a permanent, easily recognizable form:¹⁹²

All was one warmth, air, water, and her own body. [...] She began to swim in the river, forcing it gently, as she would wish for gentleness to her body. Her breasts around which she felt the water curving were as sensitive at that moment as the tips of wings must feel to birds, or antennae to insects. She felt the sand, rains intricate as little cogged wheels, minute shells of old seas, and the many dark ribbons of grass and mud touch her and leave her, like suggestions and withdrawals of some bondage that might have been dear, now dismembering and losing itself. She moved but like a cloud in skies, aware but only of the nebulous edges of her feeling and the vanishing opacity of her will, the carelessness for the water of the river through which her body had already passed as well as for what was ahead. [...]Memory dappled her like no more than a paler light, which in slight agitation came through leaves, not darkening her for more than an instant.¹⁹³

Schmidt states that Virgie's night swimming constitutes the first of the "three scenes in which Virgie is entirely alone,"¹⁹⁴ and that these scenes "offer a counterpoint to the comic vanity-fair cases, they involve action that is thoroughly unladylike."¹⁹⁵ The water embraces her, her female bodily parts are caressed by its world of "strength and independence,"¹⁹⁶ and she

¹⁸⁹ "The Wanderers" 435.

¹⁹⁰ "The Wanderers" 435.

¹⁹¹ "The Wanderers" 439.

¹⁹² Vande Kief and Kreyling make similar observation (Vande Kief 121, Kreyling 146).

¹⁹³ "The Wanderers" 440.

¹⁹⁴ Schmidt 178. The other two scenes feature "smoking in one's car late at night, and walking in the rain without an umbrella" (Schmidt 178), and they will be discussed on pages 106-107 and 113-116 of the present thesis.

¹⁹⁵ Schmidt 178.

¹⁹⁶ Schmidt 179.

suddenly feels a part of the nature and its sensibilities; the water and all its components are integrated and she experiences a sensation of losing her urges for self-propagation, accepting the natural rhythms that fuse change and constancy; moving further in, she is liberated from the social pressures that condition her existence and informed her past; for the first time in the text, Virgie is described as neither frustrated, angry, and subdued nor as detached and unresponsive – rather, her body simultaneously increases its authentic perceptions and harmoniously merges with its surrounding, and “[s]he [hangs] suspended [...] as she would know to hang suspended in felicity.”¹⁹⁷ The perfect balance is disrupted only when a cloud distracts her and she breaks the calm unity with a sudden movement.

The next day, Virgie is once again engulfed with the various social rituals enforcing and upholding the guests’ social status. However, just before the beginning of the ceremony, Virgie makes a simple gesture that counters the normative remarks of the guests. Having noticed that “[i]n the pink china jar on the mantel shelf, someone had placed her mother’s old stick – like a peach branch, as though it would flower,” Virgie resolutely takes it and, despite the implied protestations of Brother Dampeer, she moves the cane to “the ring on the hatrack.”¹⁹⁸ Only when she resumes her seat, the ceremony begins. In this way, she publicly disrupts the story that the community wants to impose on her mother’s life and, without using their corrupted discourse, she releases her mother from the “tribal rites and clichés”¹⁹⁹ that reduce an individual’s authenticity to a set of codified representations.

As Vande Kief observes,²⁰⁰ Virgie then acutely feels her relatedness to the two male wonderers of the community, despite the absence of an affection for either one of them: like herself, both Ran and King have left the community, traveled through the outside world, and complemented the physical abandonment of Morgana with a disregard for the town’s immutable rhythms. Yet, there is one fundamental difference between the female and the male wonderers – while the latter serve as a foundation for the community’s negative definition of proper female conduct, the former are subjects of the social heroic mythology. Prior to the realization of the union, “[s]he sat up straight and touched her hair, which sprang to her fingers, as always.”²⁰¹ Thus, the image of the obstructing curtain is confronted with a radiant female power that lies dormant, waiting till Virgie gains enough courage to summon it and

¹⁹⁷ “The Wanderers” 440.

¹⁹⁸ “The Wanderers” 446.

¹⁹⁹ Vande Kief 114.

²⁰⁰ Vande Kief 114.

²⁰¹ “The Wanderers” 446.

challenge the gendered normativity dividing her from the other wanderers, affecting individuals' agencies, and casting women in the roles of monstrous Medusa.

After the ceremony, the hands force Virgie into their ranks, the mourners drive to the cemetery and, instead of taking her own car, Virgie is being transported by Ran MacLain's vehicle. Schmidt points out²⁰² that as they approach their destination, Virgie reflects on the fates of three women that are either buried on or associated with its premises: first, she remembers Miss Eckhart, "her old piano teacher whom she hated"²⁰³ that was removed from the community and confined in a mental asylum,²⁰⁴ and she remarks on Miss Eckhart's scandalous attempts to join Mr. Sissum's dead body during her lover's funeral ceremony; second, she learns that the grave bearing "a seated angel"²⁰⁵ belongs to Cassie's suicidal mother, a woman who appeared to lead a cheerful life but who was probably "a failed artist"²⁰⁶; third, she realizes that they are passing the grave of Maiden Sumrall, the girl that committed suicide after she had had an affair with already married Ran.²⁰⁷

Virgie concludes her recollection by expressing her animosity towards Maiden and the place of her eternal sleep, including its inscription that says "Thy Will Be Done"²⁰⁸ and that imposes the church's authority on the defenseless individual: "I hate her, Virgie thought calmly, not turning her head. Hate her grave."²⁰⁹ Given that all the three women represent a variation of otherness and given that they all crumbled under the pressure of the community that condemned them and ostracized them, eventually dying a painfully lonesome death, Schmidt argues that Virgie's repetitive resolute proclamations reveal her deeply rooted fear of sharing their predicament and her frustrated desire to escape her own social existence.²¹⁰

After the mourning feast, Virgie is unexpectedly visited by an unknown elderly woman who claims that she remembers her from the times when Virgie "used to play the pi-anna in the picture show."²¹¹ She informs Virgie that she wishes to give her a particular gift and Virgie is overwhelmed by an emotion similar to that experienced at the cemetery as she discovers an

²⁰² Schmidt 175.

²⁰³ "The Wanderers" 449.

²⁰⁴ Miss Eckhart's story is told in "June Recital."

²⁰⁵ "The Wanderers" 449-

²⁰⁶ "Because a Fire Was in My Head" 965. Mrs. Morrison's story is told in "June Recital."

²⁰⁷ Maiden Sumrall's story is told in "The Whole World Knows."

²⁰⁸ "The Wanderers" 450.

²⁰⁹ "The Wanderers" 450.

²¹⁰ Schmidt 175-176.

²¹¹ "The Wanderers" 454.

object whose unconventional, purely natural beauty mirrors her possible future self should she decide to pursue the difficult path of authenticity: “Virgie looked at the naked, luminous, complicated flower, large and pale as a face on the dark porch. For a moment she felt more afraid than she had coming to the door.”²¹² Furthermore, the woman evokes the image of Virgie’s long-forgotten powerful creativity: “ [...] didn’t suppose anybody make as pretty music as you *ever* have no trouble. – I thought you’s the prettiest thing ever was’.”²¹³ Being reminded of the dichotomy between the former unhindered musical energy and the present state of passive resignation, Virgie feels that she might have lost her integrity, and she destroys the memento of her slow descent into amorphous despair that lacks even the vigor of Miss Eckhart self-destructive rebellion: “Virgie was still trembling. The flower troubled her; she threw it down into the weeds.”²¹⁴

Thus, Virgie’s performance in the following scene echoes that of the night swim in the river, and what Schmidt sees²¹⁵ as the second scene of transformative solitude suggests that the flower does not mark the death of her authentic self but rather the beginning of her self-realization. According to Schmidt,²¹⁶ the following image contains a revision of Virgie’s female existence:

She knew that now at the river, where she had been before on moonlit nights in autumn, drunken and sleepless, mist lay on the water and filled the trees, and from the eyes to the moon would be a cone, a long silent horn, of white light. It was a connection visible as the hair is in air, between the self and the moon, to make the self feel like the child, a daughter far, far back.²¹⁷

As the mist envelops the phenomenal world in a fluid mass, Virgie perceives the existence of “an indestructible umbilical cord”²¹⁸ and describes it in sensual and musical language, thus removing it from the corrupted social discourse and embedding it in the sign system of her particular sensibilities. It ties Virgie to the moon that Josie associated with the mysterious

²¹² “The Wanderers” 453.

²¹³ “The Wanderers” 454.

²¹⁴ “The Wanderers” 454.

²¹⁵ Schmidt 179.

²¹⁶ Schmidt 179.

²¹⁷ “The Wanderers” 454.

²¹⁸ Schmidt 179.

powers and that she identifies, as Schmidt claims,²¹⁹ with her parents and the nature whose daughter she feels to be.

In this way, Virgie presents a very different version of female mode of being: instead of the alternative between lethal protest and uniform conformity, she creates a narrative in which the restrictive, petrifying society seems to be infinitely small in comparison to the all-embracing, nurturing natural world. She steps into her garden and freely enjoys what Schmidt identifies²²⁰ as traditionally male pleasures: “Out in the yard, in the coupe, in the frayed velour pocket next to the pistol, was her cache of cigarettes.”²²¹ While “[a]ll around her the dogs were barking,”²²² alerting their owners to the transgression, Virgie sits in her own mode of transportation, her weapon of defense at hand, and her quiet relishing of the moment contrasts with the aggression of male heroic figures. She replaces the binary of the male, mobile rescuer and the helpless, passive female with an image fusing the two stereotypes into a powerful flux of quiet communication with the self that does not need the other to achieve an integrity. It is in the third section of the story that Virgie finally finds courage to sustain such an identity.

4.3 Triumphant Self-Assertion

Drawing on Henry Louis Gates’s *Signifying Monkey*, Kenneth Bearden posits that Powerhouse displays certain characteristics of “that trickster figure who is capable of causing calamity [...] through his mastery of language.”²²³ First, his statement is supported by the white narrator’s description of the bodily traits that associate Powerhouse with a monkey: “long yellow-sectioned strong big fingers, at rest about the size of bananas” and “vast and obscene [mouth]” that “is going every minute: like a monkey’s when it looks for something.”²²⁴ Second, he bases his interpretation on Powerhouse’s work with signs and the multiple layers of improvisations that remind of the trickster’s habit to “[speak] in an ambiguous, figurative fashion,” and he stresses Powerhouse’s trickster-like “liminal position”²²⁵ between the realms of the two races.

On the way back to the venue, Powerhouse composes a telegram for Uranus Knockwood and he and his companions cheer themselves by transferring the oppressor’s identity from its

²¹⁹ Schmidt 179.

²²⁰ Schmidt 179.

²²¹ “The Wanderers” 454.

²²² “The Wanderers” 454.

²²³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), qtd. in Bearden 70.

²²⁴ “Powerhouse” 131, qtd. in Bearden 69 (Quoting different edition, Bearden uses a different pagination).

²²⁵ Bearden 70.

official, unambiguous version into the dynamic multiplicity of its oral form: “They spell it all the ways it could be spelled. It puts them in a wonderful humor.”²²⁶ There are numerous possibilities as to the pronunciation of the name, depending on the rhythm and the emphasis given to it, and each of these variants allows for one or more spellings. Thus, the oral overwhelms the written. Furthermore, as Bearden’s and Pollack’s readings suggest, a very humorous version emerges and subverts the original pretentious haughtiness: the name of Greek god “(a star – Titan of the sky)”²²⁷ conflated with an allusion to “the folkloric belief of ‘knocking on wood’ ”²²⁸ is substituted by profane “your anus knock wood.”²²⁹ The embodiment of normativity is knocked to the ground by the force of authentic fluidity.

Powerhouse’s telegram consists of the following declaration: “ ‘What in the hell you talking about? Don’t make any difference: I gotcha.’ Name signed: Powerhouse’.”²³⁰ He asserts that the telegram will be delivered to its destination, “and a look of hopeful desire seems to blow [...] over his face.”²³¹ The fact that his telegram will not actually arrive at Uranus Knockwood’s address does not matter – its content is directed at the order as such and the sole act of its utterance confirms Powerhouse’s autonomy. Bearden interprets Powerhouse’s explicitly stated authorship as his final victory over the villain of his life’s narrative: “Once Powerhouse ‘signs’ (reasserts) his name, Knockwood’s name literally disappears from the story.”²³² Emitting the telegram, Powerhouse solidifies his position of the trickster that Uranus Knockwood was usurping.²³³

Powerhouse’s actions are greeted with the band’s supportive responses. Only the drummer makes a seemingly logical suggestion: “ ‘But ain’t you going to back there to call up Gypsy long distance, the way you did last night in that other place? I seen a telephone... Just to see if she there at home?’ ”²³⁴ Powerhouse’s reaction betrays furious frustration: “ ‘No [...] No! How many thousand times tonight I got to say No?’ ”²³⁵ Numerous times, he has refused to play by the rules the order forces on him and the drummer’s words make him painfully aware

²²⁶ “Powerhouse” 139. Bearden also places the quotation in the center of his analysis.

²²⁷ Vande Kief 36. Bearden includes a similar characteristics (Bearden 72).

²²⁸ Bearden 72. Pollack makes a similar observation (“Welly on Whiteness and Race” 6).

²²⁹ Bearden 71. Pollack comes up with the same phrasing (“Welly on Whiteness and Race” 5-6).

²³⁰ “Powerhouse” 140.

²³¹ “Powerhouse” 140.

²³² Bearden 73.

²³³ Bearden 72.

²³⁴ “Powerhouse” 140.

²³⁵ “Powerhouse” 140.

of the ignorance and indoctrination of even those closest to him. Calling Gypsy would imply that he accepts the oppressive message as the truth about his existence.

Back on stage, Powerhouse begins to improvise on “ ‘Somebody Loves Me’ ,”²³⁶ another song “[t]hey have requested. Suspecting that the musician is “no doubt full of beer,”²³⁷ the narrative reverts back to the voice of the white audience²³⁸ and describes Powerhouse’s performance as follows: “Now and then he calls and shouts, ‘ ‘Somebody loves me, I wonder who!’ ’ ”²³⁹ Then, Powerhouse’s whole body plunges into his musical triumph over the objectifying white gaze: “ ‘Maybe...’ He uses all his right hand on a trill. ‘Maybe ...’ He pulls back his spread fingers, and looks out upon the place where he is. A vast, impersonal and yet furious grimace transfigures his wet face. ‘... Maybe it’s you!’ ”²⁴⁰ As Schmidt points out, Powerhouse assumes linguistic construction that was previously reserved for the white privilege and, facing the audience with an expression combining familiar white disinterestedness and a deep emotion, he undermines the audience’s exclusive privilege to observe and judge, “forces the whites to see and accept his act as much more than mere entertainment”²⁴¹ as “they must gaze at his Medusa’s face, the face of his anger and suffering and recognize [the truth of his words].”²⁴²

Donaldson aptly summarizes Powerhouse’s fascinating fusion of the seemingly irreconcilable social opposites as follows:

Crossing the lines in Jim Crow Mississippi between white and black, audience and performer, that last line tells his listeners that he sings them as well as himself, that his cries from the wounds delivered by racism are theirs as well as his, and that his story is as much theirs as his – for he has, after all, made their narrative his own just as their storytelling of listening to his music initially assumes his story to be theirs.²⁴³

Transcending the barriers of the plantation binaries, instead of applying the outcomes of such act to construct a narrative of exclusion, he reveals through the fluidity of his improvisation

²³⁶ “Powerhouse” 141.

²³⁷ “Powerhouse” 140.

²³⁸ Bearden makes the same observation (Bearden 66).

²³⁹ “Powerhouse” 141.

²⁴⁰ “Powerhouse” 141.

²⁴¹ Schmidt 45.

²⁴² Schmidt 46.

²⁴³ Donaldson 67.

something that his listeners are forbidden to do: mesmerized by his simultaneously painful and beautiful blues music, the white individuals experience an affection that the petrified language of the social normativity prevents them from voicing. In this way, Powerhouse escapes the either-or logic of the order that, as Schmidt argues,²⁴⁴ terminated the rebellions described in the previous chapter: neither does he conform to the official prescriptions that would mold him into a passive, docile receiver of the white gaze nor does he let frustration with and hatred of the whiteness and the African-American indoctrinated state crush him.

When Josie's father authoritatively pronounces the storm to be concluded, the mother orders the family to resume their sleep, Will seeks paternal embrace, and "the calm steady falling of rain"²⁴⁵ appears to mark the universal return of the everyday routines. Drifting back into sleep that the equinox interrupted, Josie sees a parade of the characters she has encountered in her visions and she seems to understand that all of them will remain a part of her identity as she answers their entreaties and enters the new phase of her life:

Cornella, sweet, summertime, the little black monkey, poor Biddy Felix, the lady with the horn whose lips were parted? Had they after all asked something of her? There, outside, was all that was wild and beloved and strange, 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 in-all-every one.
...²⁴⁶

The passage demonstrates that Josie's previous fearful lingering on the inevitably disappearing summer is fundamentally transformed: Josie has come to understand that all the elements of the ending era will forge her into the person she herself wishes to become and, thus, they will become a part of the ever-shifting continuum²⁴⁷ whose only unifying principle is her empowered, strong, unhindered self. To achieve that, she needs to perform a paradoxical act: first, she has to embrace the unsheltered world lying beyond the walls of her parental house; then, she has to let go of her desire to petrify the significance of its phenomena by fitting them into a single pattern. Instead, she has to allow them to become a part of the fascinating, unrestricted fluidity that has been revealed to her by the cornetist and

²⁴⁴ Schmidt 31.

²⁴⁵ "The Winds" 221.

²⁴⁶ "The Winds" 221.

²⁴⁷ Linking Josie's ability to simultaneously preserve and transform all the elements of the past to her linguistic creativity, Schmidt reads the passage in a similar way (Schmidt 146).

her tune.²⁴⁸ As Schmidt summarizes, “[t]he woman musician has taught her that any pursuit of the world’s ‘beauty’ requires rebelling against the world’s codes of behavior for what women and men may properly do.”²⁴⁹

The next morning, Josie “[runs] outdoors to see what signs the equinox had left” and she discovers that “[t]he double-house across the street looked as if its old age had come upon it at last.”²⁵⁰ Its deserted and desolate state signals another, painful paradox: while the storm has violently terminated Cornella’s painful, isolated, and fierce rebellion, it has also liberated Josie from its oppressive image and made room for a new vision. Furthermore, the storm delivered a note whose contents was not made completely illegible by the rain thanks to the sender’s choice of “indelible pencil” over the conventional “ink.”²⁵¹ Josie goes through the whole text and the narrator reveals that “[t]he name Cornella was on it,” and that “it said, ‘Oh my darling I have waited so long when are you coming for me? Never a day or a night goes by that I do not ask When? When? When?’ ...”²⁵²

The note may be interpreted in two ways, mainly because “the letter could have been written either by or to Cornella.”²⁵³ First, the note may have been originally intended for Cornella but it was not able to reach its designated recipient because she crumbled under the social pressure before she could have found the path leading to the cornetist and the liberated world the musician inhabits. As for the sender’s identity, it may be the cornetist herself and she may have decided to choose Josie as an eligible successor of hapless Cornella. Second, the note may be Cornella’s longing, desperate appeal to any liberated woman who might come to meet her and set an example that would guide her out of the terrible predicament. Josie whose authentic identity was forged largely thanks to Cornella’s and the cornetist’s performance has an opportunity to return Cornella the favor.

Either way, “the recipient of the letter is definitely Josie,”²⁵⁴ and both her nocturnal contemplation and her discovery of the note clearly signal that she transcended the protective, controlling presence of her parents, her own recessions into the already illusory childhood, the

²⁴⁸ Although in a different context, Mark suggests that the three dots ending the passage make the utterance “[trail] off without closure [which] reveals that this is indeed an open ended be/coming which has no moment of release, relied, or violation” (Mark 120). It seems to be a fitting summary of Josie’s transformation.

²⁴⁹ Schmidt 149.

²⁵⁰ “The Winds” 221.

²⁵¹ “The Winds” 221.

²⁵² “The Winds” 221.

²⁵³ Mark 120.

²⁵⁴ Mark 120.

conforming passivity of the community's young women, and the consuming wrath of Cornella, and that she found a supremely particular narrative that was born out of her intense encounter with the cornetist and her tune showing her "how such a fate may be escaped"²⁵⁵ but that does not merely mechanically reproduce it. Josie hides her new treasure "into her most secret place, the little drawstring bag that held her dancing shoes"²⁵⁶ and the note becomes a physical representation of the tune that Josie dances to into her unfolding authentic womanhood.²⁵⁷ While in "The Visit of Charity" the encounter with the female results in Marian's precipitous flight from its vicinity, Mark and Schmidt assert that Josie escapes the prescriptions of what Rich describes as compulsory heterosexuality by bonding with two women she chooses for her role models. In this way, "[the story] formally negate[s] earlier constructions of sexuality which depend on dominance, violence, and clear metaphoric distinctions between masculinity and femininity."²⁵⁸

It should be also noted that "shifting voices, synaesthetic figures of speech, a dreamlike fluidity of time"²⁵⁹ present in Josie's visions elude any strictly logical, analytical dissection. Therefore, the present discussion scratched only the surface of the protagonist's complex life and Welty does not allow anybody else to invade and structure Josie's narrative. As Mark stresses, this excludes also the insertion of the traditional male perspective on gendered sexuality – instead of "the plot of heroic dominance,"²⁶⁰ the story stages intense scenes of "woman centered [...] 'clitoral' "²⁶¹ resonance and intimacy. Such revisions of the "conventional romance or coming of age narrative"²⁶² are present also in the very signs designating the two siblings: "While Will represents only will, the striving after dominance, Josie, an androgynous name, both male and female, represents an alternative vision."²⁶³

In the morning following the funeral, Virgie acts as she announced, packs all her mother's possessions for the prospective buyers, and drives away through the rain. When she arrives to the courthouse in MacLain, a town situated nearby Morgana, "Virgie [leaves] the car and running through the light drops reache[s] the stile and [sits] down on it in the open shelter of

²⁵⁵ Schmidt 149.

²⁵⁶ "The Winds" 221.

²⁵⁷ Marks makes a similar observation (Mark 120).

²⁵⁸ Mark 108.

²⁵⁹ Schmidt 144.

²⁶⁰ Mark 109.

²⁶¹ Mark 109. Mark clarifies that she introduced the term "clitoral" in *The Dragon's Blood*, her book on *The Golden Apples*.

²⁶² Mark 109.

²⁶³ Mark 113.

trees.”²⁶⁴ Throughout what Schmidt recognizes²⁶⁵ as the third scene of transgression, she remains in this position that defies the standards of proper behavior in public places and that does not lose its symbolic meaning even when unwitnessed. In this scene, as Schmidt argues,²⁶⁶ Virgie contemplates the patriarchal history of the region and of the community populating it as it unfolds in front of her: she commemorates Mr. Virgil MacLain, King MacLain’s ancestor who owned the premises adjacent to the courthouse; she describes the cemetery where all the members of the MacLain family lie and where Snowdie’s family followed them; she summarizes the gossips about Eugene.²⁶⁷

She concludes by a question that demonstrates the masculine privilege in the community’s collective memory: “Didn’t he kill a man, or have to, and what would be the long story behind it, the vaunting and the wandering from it?”²⁶⁸ Virgie knows that whatever Eugene’s deed was, the community preserves it in one of its official narratives that celebrate male heroic movement through the space. Furthermore, as Schmidt points out,²⁶⁹ Virgie’s contemplation demonstrates that the history of Morgana and MacLain is clearly identified with the male owners of the land and with the actions they perform in order to imprint their will on it. Women, on the other hand, are required to follow their footsteps, as epitomized by Snowdie whose family needs to abandon their homeland to be subsumed within her husband’s territory. Likewise, Virgie realizes that Miss Eckhart, one of the tragic casualties of the order, rests side by side with Eugene,²⁷⁰ one of those who were put in the position to wield the power that oppressed her.

Suddenly, Virgie sees Mr. Mabry passing her with a “wretchedly dignified”²⁷¹ air, and the sight prompts her to review her own relationships with “the various men who have dominated her life.”²⁷² Schmidt points out²⁷³ that the trajectory of Virgie’s affairs seems to mirror that of her gradual loss of creative energy: Bucky Moffit, her first lover that was portrayed in “June Recital,” is said to have “wild spirit”²⁷⁴ and Virgie remarks that “[s]he’d have had to come

²⁶⁴ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁶⁵ Schmidt 178.

²⁶⁶ Schmidt 180. Vande Kief also stresses that Virgie ponders the masculine presence (Vande Kief 115).

²⁶⁷ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁶⁸ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁶⁹ Schmidt 180.

²⁷⁰ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁷¹ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁷² Schmidt 180.

²⁷³ Schmidt 181.

²⁷⁴ “The Wanderers” 458.

backward, not simply stand still”²⁷⁵ to entangle herself with Mr. Mabry and Mr. Nesbitt, her self-appointed benefactor “who want[s] to stand up for her.”²⁷⁶ Having finished the recapitulation, Virgie makes a gesture that can be interpreted as her rejection of the heteronormative definitions restricting her identity, casting her either as the subservient, decorative object intended for the male gaze or as the dangerous monster opposing the male hero: “She sat up tall on the stile, feeling that [Mr. Mabry] would look right through her – Virgie Rainey on a stile, bereaved, hatless, unhidden now, in the rain – and he did. She watched him march by – then she was all to herself.”²⁷⁷

Subsequently, Virgie’s thoughts revert back to the tragic figure of Miss Eckhart whose fate haunted Virgie throughout her life and continues to do so even as she sets out for her journey, and she vividly remembers a tableau that was presiding over her piano lessons: “It hung over the dictionary, dark as that book. It showed Perseus with the head of the Medusa.”²⁷⁸ Its juxtaposition with the book containing the codified version of language underscores its authority within individuals’ minds. As Berlant puts it, “[it] forcefully suggests both the oppressiveness of traditional representations and the insidiousness of the way myth repeats itself in other texts, and in life.”²⁷⁹ Yet, both Schmidt²⁸⁰ and Berlant assert that Virgie arrives at an interpretation different from the official narrative of the monstrous transgressor and the valiant man keeping the order intact. In her recasting of the scene, “Medusa [ceases to be] eternally the victim – of Perseus and of her own monstrosity,”²⁸¹ and assumes the role that the oppressors see as reserved for themselves:

The vaunting was what she remembered, that lifted arm. [...] Because Virgie saw things in their time, like hearing them – and perhaps because she must believe in the Medusa equally with Perseus – she saw the stroke of the sword in three moments, not one. In the three was the damnation – no, only the secret, un hurting because not caring in itself – beyond the beauty and the sword’s stroke and the terror lay their existence in time – far out and endless, a constellation which the heart could read over many a night.²⁸²

²⁷⁵ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁷⁶ “The Wanderers” 458.

²⁷⁷ “The Wanderers” 459.

²⁷⁸ “The Wanderers” 459-460.

²⁷⁹ Berlant 60. Yeager interprets the presence of the dictionary to the same effect (“Because a Fire Was in My Head” 964).

²⁸⁰ Schmidt 181.

²⁸¹ Berlant 59.

²⁸² “The Wanderers” 460. Berlant uses the same quotation

As Schmidt's brilliant analysis claims,²⁸³ Virgie recognizes Miss Eckhart not only as "an enraged, insane"²⁸⁴ woman that she feared in "June Recital" and throughout most of "The Wanderers" but also as "vaunting" hero that incessantly refuses to accept such a public image and her own convictions about its verity. To believe both in Medusa and in Perseus means to believe in the women's inner powerful rebellion against the stereotypes that threaten to terminate their independent existence, and to believe that a Medusa can become a Perseus, slaying the universally recognized representations and forging a new identity. Every woman who wants to retain her authenticity needs to invest herself in such a perpetual revision. Only an incessant scrutiny of the official stories by one's supremely particular intuition can eventually lead to an understanding of the meaning hidden beneath the corrupted discourse.

In the light of the recognition, Virgie proclaims that she "had come near to loving"²⁸⁵ her teacher who allowed her to witness her performance stemming from the powerful flux of the two mythic roles: "She had absorbed the hero and the victim and then, stoutly, could sit down to the piano with all Beethoven ahead of her. With her hate, with her love, and with the small gnawing feelings that ate them, she offered Virgie her Beethoven."²⁸⁶ Back then, Virgie intuitively understood the narrative of Miss Eckhart's creative expression and now, after all the years throughout which the voice progressively waned, she finally hears it again: "That was the gift she had touched with her fingers that had drifted and left her. In Virgie's reach of memory a melody softly lifted, lifted of itself. Every time Perseus struck off the Medusa's head, there was the beat of time, and the melody. Endless the Medusa, and Perseus endless."²⁸⁷ Like Josie,²⁸⁸ Virgie found a tune that is stronger than her own fears of Medusa and that gives her the courage to overlay each reiteration of the gender stereotype with a vision of her independent, beautiful self.

Having embraced her teacher's difference, Virgie is joined by a fellow other, "[a]n old wrapped-up Negro woman"²⁸⁹ who assumes a similar position on the stile, and one of them greets the other. Schmidt observes²⁹⁰ that Virgie completes her liberation from the prison of

²⁸³ Schmidt 182-183, 185-186.

²⁸⁴ Schmidt 182

²⁸⁵ "The Wanderers" 460.

²⁸⁶ "The Wanderers" 460.

²⁸⁷ "The Wanderers" 460. Yeager presents a reading that is very similar to Schmidt's interpretation ("Because a Fire Was in My Head" 963).

²⁸⁸ Schmidt also makes a similar connection between the two heroines (Schmidt 186).

²⁸⁹ "The Wanderers" 460.

²⁹⁰ Schmidt 184. Yeager stresses the scene of the women's contiguity as well ("Because a Fire Was in My Head" 969).

the self-hate as she immerses herself in the presence of the woman and in the welcoming nature, and as she and her companion listen to the noises announcing the retreat of the patriarchy oppressing their imagination: “Then she and the old beggar woman, the old black thief, were there alone and together in the shelter of the big public tree, listening to the magical percussion, the world beating in their ears. They heard through falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon’s crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan.”²⁹¹

Schmidt points out that Miss Eckhart attempted to clarify the meaning of the tableau for Virgie by asserting that it is “ ‘the same thing as Siegfried and the Dragon’ ,”²⁹² a tale from her German homeland. Hearing the dragon approach, the swan²⁹³ that used to be “the town’s ugly duckling”²⁹⁴ does not succumb to its power and sings freely and loudly her beautiful song, “[making] her imagination her instrument”²⁹⁵ and “[believing] in that inner music.”²⁹⁶ Having recognized herself as a Perseus, Virgie sheds the socially enforced images that were clouding her inner life, substitutes them with her powerful creative energy, and fearlessly expresses her independent, wandering self that she has come to love.

²⁹¹ “The Wanderers” 461.

²⁹² “The Wanderers” 459.

²⁹³ Schmidt points out that the bird alludes to the myth of Leda and the swan that is negotiated in “Sir Rabbit” (Schmidt 186). In light of the present analysis, it may be claimed that the swan in “The Wanderers” does not symbolize the violent masculine penetration of a body of the other. Rather, it signifies the women’s ability to be the active heroes of their lives.

²⁹⁴ Schmidt 186. The metamorphosis refers to Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale in which the bird child that the duck community regards as ugly eventually turns out to be a beautiful swan when the terrible winter passes and a reflection in the water reveals the bird’s nature.

²⁹⁵ Schmidt 185.

²⁹⁶ Schmidt 184.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Narrative Evolution and Resonances

The large array of the characters and narratives presented in the three analytical chapters exemplified the different ways in which the oppressive plantation order molds individuals' identities and punishes the nonconformist performance as well as demonstrated the various strategies applied by some of the protagonists to either thrive within the order by observing its rules or to create an alternative to the petrifying normativity. The first chapter discussed the fates of those whose entanglement with the order deprived them of their authenticity: the order transformed them into uniform tools enforcing the conventions both in the interpersonal interactions and in relation to their own selves (Mrs. Fletcher, Leota, the nameless woman); it taught them to attain their illusive integrity by exploiting bodies of the other (the men of "Petrified Man") and to promote their own social ascension within the respective communities by policing their peers (Mrs. Pike); it imprisoned them in recognition of the irreversible past errors (Addie, Steve) or of the inevitable course of the future (Marian); it used the unconventional bodies as negative definitions of propriety (Mrs. Fletcher, Little Lee Roy, the freaks of "Petrified Man"); it removed the disturbing forms of the difference from the socially visible sphere altogether (Little Lee Roy, the freaks of "Petrified Man"); it produced the privileged that live in denial as to the origins of their social power (Max); it petrified the doubting by questioning their sanity (Addie).

The second chapter revealed how the order punishes those that dared to defy its prescriptivism: the rebels sink back into the briefly abandoned prefabricated, lobotomized identities (Mrs. Larkin); the order confronts them with their inauthentic, social image and the encounter results in their complete annihilation (Clytie); positioned firmly outside of the society, they are eternally denied any form of equal partnership (Circe). It also demonstrated that those who come in contact with the unconventional acts are forced to negotiate their stance within the order and that they usually flee from the presence of the disturbing performance (Jamey, Mr. Bobo, Odysseus and his sailors).

The third chapter portrayed those whose voices managed to break through the official narrative, to embrace their own difference, and to counter the oppressive images that the society instills in their consciousness to subvert their self-conception. Schmidt points out that all the three characters attain this state by listening to a musical tune, a medium that eludes the corrupted, petrified system of linguistic signs: singing his blues, Powerhouse takes over the

authority of the narrative voice that was attempting to define his existence in respect to its usefulness for the privileged whiteness, and he contains both sides of the normative axes within the polyphonic flux of his oral performance; Josie suffuses the melody of the cornetist's creativity with that of her own life and emerges as a person whose inner music can guide her through her adulthood and, possibly, liberate Cornella and her likes; Virgie immerses herself in the natural sound of the rain and Miss Eckhart's powerful interpretation of Beethoven, thus being transformed from a frightened fugitive into the heroine of her independent life.

In the course of the three chapters, a large number of often unexpected resonances and pairings surfaced and the discoveries proved that Schmidt's claim¹ constituting the foundations of the thesis was supported with substantial textual evidence as well as that the three chapters are not isolated discussions but a tripartite arc that captures what Yeager describes as "the importance of the irregular bodies within an extremely regulated society,"² to reiterate the quotation that has been used in the introduction to characterize the goal of my analysis. One of the most striking examples of such resonances is the evolving imagery of female hair: in the first chapter, Mrs. Fletcher is losing her hair and, as Berlant points out,³ her power as well; in the third chapter, Cornella as if displaying her inner power, publicly enjoys her strong hair, and Virgie, communicating with her extravagant hair, is revealed to possess an inner strength waiting to be awakened so that it could uphold Virgie's beautiful self.

The different significances of the natural imagery are presenting a set of telling contrasts between the protagonists of the second and the third chapter: in the second chapter, Mrs. Larkin is eventually overwhelmed by her self-image in the garden whose natural procreation she cultivated to provide herself with a place where the order does not reign, her eventual descent into the former hollow mode of being is marked by the advent of rain, Clytie's contact with the rain water confronts her with the reflection of her social self, the image prompting her to commit suicide, and the distant, isolated, fixed stars remind Circe of her eternal insular loneliness; in the third chapter, on the other hand, Virgie is liberated from the pressures of the constructed social reality as well as the ensuing emotions obscuring her inner vision by immersing herself in the natural harmony of the river, and the rain at the end of the story accompanies and embodies her self-assertion.

¹ Schmidt XV.

² *Dirt and Desire* xiii.

³ Berlant 67.

The nine stories mapped the following transition: in the beginning, the order plays the Perseus by forcing the privileged gatekeepers to become its proxy and to slay the monstrously different Medusas; in the end, the role of Perseus is attributed to the authentic individuals who valiantly decapitate the oppressive images of Medusa issued by the order, thus countering the petrified, official narratives with their fluid, idiosyncratic imagination, becoming their own heroes, and ceasing to be the victims of the normativity that pressures them to fit into prefabricated categories. The trajectory of the transition can be also identified with Schmidt's discussion of Virgie's evolution.⁴ Such a summary agrees with the motto Schmidt chose for the chapter containing the discussion of "The Wanderers." In this textual gesture, he affiliates himself with the following statement of Reynolds Price's *Things Themselves*: "The central myth of the artist is surely not Narcissus but Perseus, with the artist in all roles, Perseus and Medusa and the mirror-shield."⁵ To fully comprehend Welty's concrete realization of the formulation, to demonstrate the complex flux of the formal, the thematic, the mythic, the official, the personal, the oral, and the written found in her stories, and to summarize Welty's engagement with the plantation memory, a synthesis of Welty's subversive narratives techniques seems to be in order.

5.2 Mythology and Subversion

The analytical chapters demonstrated that Welty engages with the classical mythology because it constitutes an inherent part of the plantation memory: it presents the constructed, arbitrary binaries as natural, primordial patterns, thus petrifying the meaning of the individuals' bodily traits and limiting the individuals' performance of their identities; it contributes to upholding the nostalgic plantation mythology of the ante-bellum past, presenting the privileged gatekeepers as descendants of the honorable, charitable aristocracy grappling with those that threaten their noble world. In his discussion of King McLain, Schmidt aptly summarizes the relation between the order and the mythological narratives as follows: "I will argue that conventionalism in Morgana and Welty's other imaginary towns [...] is often *disguised* as mythological experience. Far from being exempt from historical prejudices, for example, the tales of King's Zeus-like 'heroism' in 'Shower of Gold' and elsewhere embody his society's most ingrained stereotypes about proper male and female behavior."⁶

⁴ Schmidt 182-183, 185-186.

⁵ Reynolds Price, *Things Themselves* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), qtd. in Schmidt 172.

⁶ Schmidt 62.

Myths provide the plantation order with perfect material to support its ideology. Like the order that incessantly scrutinizes the individuals' corporeality to determine what compartment they should be attributed to, the mythical narratives use the body and its manifestations to describe the inner psychological state of the character in question. Therefore, both the order and the mythical narratives are systems in which the discursively recognizable bodily signs determine the nature of the self that inhabits it. Underscoring the presence of the myths in the official discourse, tracing its prevalence in the physical reality surrounding her protagonists, and recasting their narratives, Welty denounces their contingent nature, subverts their authority by repositioning the seemingly immutable patterns to target the oppressive order, and opens a way for new, personal myths that elude the prescribed plantation hierarchy and that are, nonetheless, embedded in the Southern historical and cultural reality, as was argued in the introduction by referring to Bibler's discussion of the plantation nostalgia.⁷

As Zdeněk Neubauer explains, the central themes of myths are the anchoring of individuals in the cosmos and creation of their world by the act of storytelling.⁸ In the context of Welty's short fiction, the statement can be translated into the claim that Schmidt makes in his reading of "Powerhouse": the individuals are able to counter the oppressive, written narratives with the force of oral fluidity and idiosyncratic language.⁹ Powerhouse's improvisation that subverts the authority of the absolutistic telegram being the most explicit demonstration of the strategy, a similar dynamics can be found in the narratives of the two other successful protagonists as well: instead of following her parents' system of values whose prison is symbolized by the house her father has built, Josie aligns herself with the cornetist's creativity; Virgie ceases to read the mythological tableau according to the dictates of the dictionary, and she overlays the patriarchal history imprinted on the land with the vision of freely singing swan that finds her voice while listening to the rain and to Miss Eckhart's Beethoven.

This perspective can be further linked to the theories that Walter Ong expressed in *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word*. In the opening of his introduction, Ong summarizes the relationship between the oral, the written, and the individuals' conceptualization of reality as follows:

⁷ Bibler 16-17.

⁸ Neubauer 39-57.

⁹ Schmidt 41-42, 46. The written character of the official discourse is usually a metaphor for the rigidity of the plantation normativity.

In recent years certain basic differences have been discovered between the ways of managing knowledge and verbalization in primary oral cultures (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing) and in cultures deeply affected by the use of writing. The implications of the new discoveries have been startling. Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. We have had to revise our understanding of human identity.¹⁰

Therefore, by replacing the written with the oral, Welty's protagonists extricate themselves from the seemingly natural patterns that were regulating, hindering, and truncating their thoughts, and they enter the realm where the hierarchy of their performance is dictated only by the flow of their speech.

Welty juxtaposes the oral and the scriptural not only in the voices attributed directly to the characters but also in the voice of the narrator, thus staging the shifting Bakhtinian heteroglossia summarized by Yeager¹¹ and incorporated in the introduction. In "Powerhouse," the oppressive narrator addressing the reader and the purportedly omniscient narrator who is soon identified as a voice of the white discourse are gradually replaced with Powerhouse's blues embracing the whole white audience and subverting the plantation binaries instilled in the community's consciousness.¹² In "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" and "Powerhouse," Welty refuses to reveal the inner life of the eponymous protagonists, thus liberating their otherness from the corrupted language that imposes on their narratives prefabricated mythological patterns.¹³

Furthermore, Welty herself uses the mythological technique that replaces introspection with the images of the individuals' corporeality. Describing particular bodily traits of her characters, Welty draws attention to the realities that the official discourse would not have permitted to be voiced. Clytie's "disheveled hair"¹⁴ signals the desperate character of the heroine's rebelliousness. Yeager asserts that the disintegration of Clytie's body signifies the unsustainability of the ante-bellum mythology that supported the existence of the privileged: "Southern high culture [...] also lacks a working thesis, a mode of synthesis, a place to sustain

¹⁰ Ong 1.

¹¹ Bakhtin 294, qtd. in "Because a Fire Was in My Head" 955.

¹² Schmidt 45-46.

¹³ MacMahand 165, McWhirter 115.

¹⁴ Schmidt 4.

the body. [...] her legs [are] sticking out of the rainwater barrel [...] This is a frightening image of the body made mechanical and robbed of its being, an immobilized body that will fit neither the feminine nor the aristocratic frame invented by high southern culture.”¹⁵ Drawing on Yeager, Berlant argues¹⁶ that in “Petrified Man,” Welty intentionally portrays the exploited women of the beauty parlor in a language that highlights the grotesqueness and absurdity of their conversations so that she would not merely substitute the patriarchal dominance with the ideology of matriarchal martyrdom. In short, by constantly intermingling the voices of the oppressors, the oppressed, and the order, Welty undermines any claim on permanent, fixed meaning of the individuals’ existence and the reality surrounding them.

Given the ample evidence of Welty’s subversive work with the official mythology, it may be claimed that the present discussion of her texts managed to align itself with Yeager’s project in *Dirt and Desire* that was outlined in the introduction, replacing “a belief in the belle or female ‘miniature’ ”¹⁷ with an image of a “giant [woman]”¹⁸: as Schmidt’s quotation of Price’s statement indicated, Welty is the Perseus that slays the oppressive images of conventionality; she is the nonconformist Medusa; she produces texts whose unrestricted plurivocality functions as the shield against the univocal uniformity of the order.

Drawing on Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel,” Yeager concisely characterizes the power of Welty’s artistic performance: “Her prose is, on one level, an exercise in freeing language itself from its previous meanings.”¹⁹ The passage from Bakhtin’s essay that Yeager bases her statement on is worth quoting in its entirety:

By “dissociation” we have in mind here a destruction of any absolute bonding of ideological and magical thought. An absolute fusion of word with concrete ideological meaning is, without doubt, one of the most fundamental constitutive features of myth, on the one hand determining the development of mythological images, and on the other determining a special feeling for the forms, meanings and stylistic combinations of language. Mythological thinking in the power of the language containing it – a language generating out of itself a mythological reality that has its own linguistic connections and interrelationships – then substitutes itself for

¹⁵ *Dirt and Desire* 140.

¹⁶ Berlant 60.

¹⁷ *Dirt and Desire* xi.

¹⁸ *Dirt and Desire* xi.

¹⁹ “Because a Fire Was in My Head” 963.

the connections and interrelationships of reality itself (this is the transposition of language categories and dependences into theogonic and cosmogonic categories).²⁰

I believe that Bakhtin's words present an apt summary of the relationship between the classical mythology, the plantation nostalgia, the discourse of the plantation memory, and the oppressive Southern reality. Linguistic signs denoting bodily traits and human behavior consolidate into a web of normative meanings, thus constituting the foundations of the order's mythology. Facing the authoritative mythological narratives, the individuals do not have any other form in which they could express their nonconforming thoughts, and the nature of the world surrounding them as well as its genesis and the principles governing it become identified with the mythological patterns constructed by the language. Therefore, "[i]f it is mythological thinking that makes language seem absolute in its affirmation and expression of a 'patriarchal' hegemony, then by subverting the seemingly inviolable fusion of word and ideology, by converting 'authoritative discourse' into a new form of metaphor, Welty also challenges the view of reality this language represents."²¹ I believe that Yeager's statement encapsulates the points made by the present analysis.

5.3 Position of the Present Thesis

Summarizing Bibler's, Costello's, and Yeager's claims and Yeager's discussion of Bakhtin, the introduction provided the three analytical chapters with theoretical background. The three analytical chapters featured stories whose selection was based on the typology supported by Schmidt's system of categories and synthesized ideas of numerous critics whose insight I value and endorse (Bearden, Berlant, Burgess, Donaldson, Kreyling, Mark, Marrs, McMahan, McWhirter, Millichap, Pollack, Romines, Schmidt, Vande Kief). Drawing on Neubauer, Ong, Schmidt, Yeager and Yeager's analysis of Bakhtin, the conclusion attempted to fuse the theoretical introduction and the three chapters of close textual analysis by presenting an overview of Welty's textual subversion of the plantation order. Among many other concepts, the conclusion may have applied Gilles Deleuze's theories²² of subversion to characterize Welty's strategies but I decided not to include them because I realized that their successful incorporation would require a thorough introduction to Deleuze's philosophy and that such a long explicative passage could possibly overshadow the concluding points I wish

²⁰ Bakhtin 369, qtd. in "Because a Fire Was in My Head" 963.

²¹ "Because a Fire Was in My Head" 963-964.

²² For instance, Deleuze presents the concepts in *Difference and Repetition* (Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968)).

to make. Importantly, there is one text that I wish to distinguish from the multiple secondary sources I have aligned myself with: it is Schmidt's *The Heart of the Story*, the text that accompanied me in nearly all discussions and that inspired me throughout the process of composition.

I believe that my loyalty to those brilliant interpretations did not prevent me from presenting my own perspective on the stories and from discovering new resonances. Welty's fascinating textual plurivocity still allows for new encounters with the narratives and I include most of the secondary sources retrospectively: prior to reading the story, I read only some of its critical discussions and I proceed with writing until the point that I have recorded all I wish to say on the subject. Only then, I consult the relevant sources, adding those I have not read before, and incorporate the points that might affirm or expand my ideas. When the coincidence between my opinion and the opinion of a critic seems purely accidental, I include the secondary source in footnotes. Obviously, as for *The Heart of the Story* and some other critical texts, the situation is more complex because I did read them before the composition itself started and some of them I re-read just before beginning the respective analysis. Therefore, despite the temporal lapse, my memory may still retain the details of their argumentation. However, I believe that it is ultimately my mind that embraces both the primary and the secondary sources and forges them into the text that follows the design of the thesis.

To situate my thesis explicitly within the body of the existing criticism and to summarize once again its key arguments, I believe that the work achieved the following: it captured the presence of the plantation memory in Welty's writing; analyzing the narratives of Welty's protagonists, it demonstrated that the individuals' identity is consolidated in the process negotiating the confrontation between the plantation discourse and its multiple myths that pose as the absolute truth about the reality, and the individuals' personal narratives that either conform to the official patterns or invent alternative forms; it portrayed Welty's multifaceted subversive textual performance that disrupts the petrified system of signs constituting and upholding the order, reveals the arbitrariness and mutability of the seemingly natural and static representations, and makes the voices of the individuals' heard, either by deconstructing the origins of their hollow existence or by recasting the oppressive myths so that they could be liberated from the structural position of the passive victim and assume that of the active hero.

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Abstract

The present MA thesis discusses Eudora Welty's short fiction and the author's engagement with the plantation memory. The introductory chapter defines the concept of plantation memory as a flux of the normative plantation binaries, the plantation mythology obscuring the ante-bellum Southern reality, the linguistic and phenomenal evidence of the prevailing oppression, and the ability of the text and its creator to subvert the official narratives and to liberate the individuals' silenced voices. Applying an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis examines the processes in which the particular selves are confronted with the plantation order and in which their identities are consolidated, either resisting or crumbling under the social pressure.

The three analytical chapters of the thesis discuss nine of Welty's short stories that were selected from *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* on the basis of the typology and criteria outlined in the introduction. Without claiming that the nine stories present the sum of Welty's artistic achievement, the texts attempt to demonstrate general tendencies and narrative strategies that the author applies in her short fiction, writing about and within the plantation memory. The selection includes as many different texts as possible and contains three stories and three narratives of their protagonists for each of the chapters whose themes coincide with the three categories featured in the typology.

The first chapter focuses on "Petrified Man," "A Visit of Charity," and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden." It characterizes the plantation order, charts the multiple binaries oppressing both the privileged and the marginalized, and argues that the individuals portrayed in the three texts lost their authenticity, replacing it with the rules of social conventionality. The second chapter analyses "A Curtain of Green," "Clytie," and "Circe" and traces their heroines' journey from the inhibited conformity through surge of rebelliousness to the devastating conclusion in which the order prevails. The third chapter interprets "Powerhouse," "The Winds," and "The Wanderers" whose protagonists manage to disentangle themselves from the petrifying social prescriptivism and to create their own, idiosyncratic narratives. The conclusion evaluates the goals stated in the introduction in light of the close readings presented in the three analytical chapters and, establishing a connection between Welty's use of mythology and both the formal and the thematic aspects of her writing, offers a summary of the author's subversive techniques that disrupt the unity of the official discourse.

Key words: identity, New Southern Studies, Eudora Welty, short fiction, plantation memory

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá povídkami Eudory Weltyové a jejich vztahem k plantážnické paměti. Pojem plantážnické paměti je definován v úvodní kapitole jako soubor normativních binárních opozic, mytologií, které pokrývají obraz skutečnosti předválečného Jihu, jazykové a fenomenální evidence útisku a subverzivních schopností textu a autora, které umožňují rozložit oficiální narativ a osvobodit umlčené hlasy utiskovaných jednotlivců. Práce se pokouší o interdisciplinární zkoumání procesů, s nimiž se jednotlivé subjekty v rámci plantážnického společenského řádu musejí potýkat a jejichž prostřednictvím se ustavuje jejich identita, ať už tím, že jim vzdorují, nebo tím, že se jim podřídí.

Tři analytické kapitoly této práce se zabývají devíti povídkami vybranými z knihy *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*, a to na základě typologie a kritérií, které jsou vyloženy v úvodu. Text práce se – bez nároku na úplnou reprezentaci celého literárního díla Weltyové – pokouší ukázat obecné tendence a narativní strategie, jež Weltyová ve svých povídkách užívá, když píše o – a v rámci – plantážnické paměti. Výběr byl veden snahou o co největší rozmanitost a každá kapitola obsahuje tři povídky a tři příběhy jejich protagonistů; témata jednotlivých kapitol odpovídají třem kategoriím určeným typologií výběru.

První kapitola se soustředí na povídky „Petrified Man“, „A Visit of Charity“ a „Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden“.¹ Popisuje plantážnický společenský řád, naznačuje několik základních binárních opozic, které postihují privilegované i marginalizované členy společnosti, a obhájí tezi, dle níž jednotlivé postavy přijetím společenských konvencí ztratily vlastní autenticitu. Druhá kapitola analyzuje povídky „A Curtain of Green“, „Clytie“ a „Circe“, jejichž hrdinky procházejí vývojem od pasivní konformity k rebelii vůči plantážnickému řádu, jemuž však nakonec podlehnou. Třetí kapitola se zabývá povídkami „Powerhouse“, „The Winds“ a „The Wanderers“, jejichž protagonistům se podaří vyvázat se z převažujícího souboru společenských norem a vytvořit si svůj vlastní, jedinečný narativ. Závěr hodnotí, jak bylo dosaženo cílů stanovených v úvodu, spojuje způsob, jakým Weltyová pracuje s mytologií, s formálními a tematickými aspekty jejího psaní, a nabízí shrnutí jejich subverzivních technik, které rozrušují jednotu oficiálního diskurzu.

Klíčová slova: identita, nová jižanská studia, Eudora Weltyová, povídky, plantážnická paměť

¹ Názvy ponechávám v originále, neboť doposud byly do češtiny přeloženy jen některé z povídek. V současné době připravuje překlad *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* nakladatelství Argo, kniha by měla vyjít na podzim roku 2015 v edici *Jiný Jih*.