

VOICE AND SILENCE: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS OF
FICTION BY EUDORA WELTY

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents:
Ida Lou and Edgar McCourt
and
Grace and O.P. Lindley

and

To my parents:
Linda and John McCourt
Thank you for giving me the courage to be daring.

“It seems likely to me now that the very element in my character that took possession of me there on top of the mountain, the fierce independence that was suddenly mine, to remain inside me no matter how it scared me when I tumbled, was an inheritance.”

Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*

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ABSTRACT

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In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth discusses the narrative choices an author can make to relate a story to his or her reader. Through point of view and authorial distance, an author can offer a clear and deep insight into the meaning of any story. Booth questions the belief of many modern authors and critics who believe that “showing” a story by deleting all entrances, or “intrusions,” by the author to be far superior to “telling” a story through direct authorial voice or through some form of narrator/s. He believes that by considering the differences between “showing” and “telling” a story, an author forces the reader to “consider closely what happens when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction; [authors thus] lead us to a view of fictional technique which necessarily goes far beyond the reductions that we have sometimes accepted under the concept of ‘point of view’” (Booth 8-9). The use of point of view to control audience sympathy and interpretation of the story and the use of authorial distance to “show” rather than “tell” a story are skillfully employed by Eudora Welty in narrative fiction to present stories which connect to universal truths and emotions in the reader.

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CHAPTER I
A DISCUSSION OF WAYNE BOOTH'S RHETORICAL THEORY OF FICTION AND
MODERN NARRATOLOGICAL THEORY

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth discusses the many ways an author relates a story through his or her narrative choices. He explains that one of the tools at the author's disposal is the ability to go "beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart" (3). However, he states that this technique is an artificial device because this type of knowledge cannot be had – through multiple character viewpoints – in real life:

In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs, and most of us achieve an all too partial view even of ourselves. It is in a way strange, then, that in literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives. (3)

The author, then, according to Booth, can offer the reader a clear and deep insight into the meaning of any story. Booth questions the belief of more modern authors and critics who believe that "showing" a story by deleting all entrances, or "intrusions," by the author to be far superior to "telling" a story through a direct authorial voice or through some form of narrator/s. He believes that by considering the differences between "showing" and "telling" a story, an author forces the reader to "consider closely what

happens when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction; [authors thus] lead us to a view of fictional technique which necessarily goes far beyond the reductions that we have sometimes accepted under the concept of ‘point of view’” (8-9).

Booth’s answer to those who would choose to remove the authorial voice from fiction is clear:

Everything he shows will serve to tell; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one. In short, the author’s judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. Whether its particular forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question, a question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules...., we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. (20)

John Ross Baker, in his article “From Imitation to Rhetoric,” claims that Booth expands the concept of “rhetoric” from the classical idea of persuasion to include the fictional world created by the author and given to the reader. He states that Booth’s “main interest is thus apparently hermeneutic [interpretive] – how the novel is ‘communicated’ to the reader, by what devices and features of the work the reader is able to grasp the novel. Hence anything and everything in a novel – but especially point of view – may become a ‘rhetorical’ element” (203).

Daniel Schwarz, in his book *The Humanistic Heritage*, states that in his work:

Booth demonstrates that the author’s meaning is accessible and provides an alternative to the now fashionable belief that, since there is neither hope nor

purpose in trying to approach the meaning of a text, we can virtually make our own text. For Booth the critic has the more modest task of discovering the author's intended meaning by responding to specific effects created by the author for the reader. (151)

Booth wrote his *Rhetoric of Fiction* in response to those critics who espoused the belief of the purpose of fiction as stated by Henry James in his "The Art of Fiction." James claimed that the "only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does represent life" (46). James describes being shocked when a novelist in any way provides the reader with the knowledge that he is "making believe" and states that this claim "implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth ... than the historian" (46-7). This concept, to James, would be the height of folly for the novelist because he believes that the greatest achievement would be to mirror reality as completely as an historical account would.

Booth, however, believes that Jamesian scholars have too rigidly interpreted James' ideas regarding reality and the author's place in fiction, stating:

James' interest in realism never led him to the notion that all signs of the author's presence are inartistic. Though he might have agreed ... that the reader should feel that he has been "really there," he would never have suggested that the reader must entirely forget the guiding presence of the author. His interest is not negative – how to get rid of the author – put positive: how to achieve an intense illusion of reality, including the complexities of mental and moral reality. He can therefore

“intrude” into his most rigorously composed works – but only to perform certain very limited tasks. (Booth 50)

Booth argues that James leaves room for the author in fiction. James explains that “the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel ... is that it be interesting” (James 49).

James defines a novel as “a personal, a direct impression of life” (50) but explains that the value of that impression lies in the freedom the author has in telling it:

The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author’s choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. (50)

So it would seem that for both James and Booth that the author has a definite place within the story. The difference comes at what point the reader should consider the author.

James describes good writing with the analogy of good painting. One does not necessarily consider the painter immediately when viewing the painting. One views the content of the painting, is moved by the piece and judges it. It is *then* that the viewer might go back and consider the technique and ability of the painter. James disagrees, though, with those who believe that good writing can be learned through a specific

methodology and imitation of other good writing. He believes that the imitation should be of reality, from “subject-matter...stored up likewise in documents and records... [spoken] with assurance, with the tone of the historian” (46). However, James believes that the method of writing cannot be so easily taught as that of painting:

He cannot disclose it [his method of writing] as a general thing if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others. I say this with a due recollection of having insisted on the community of method of the artist who paints a picture and the artist who writes a novel. The painter *is* able to teach the rudiments of his practice, and it is possible, from the study of good work (granted the aptitude), both to learn how to paint and to learn how to write. Yet it remains true ... that the literary artist would be obliged to say to his pupil much more than the other, “Ah, well, you must do it as you can!” It is a question of degree, a matter of delicacy. If there are exact sciences, there are also exact arts, and the grammar of painting is so much more definite that it makes the difference. (50)

Booth agrees that there should be a certain level of realism regarding the author’s subject, stating “He [James] signs an agreement with me *not* to know everything. He reminds me from time to time that he cannot [provide “inside” information] because of the convention he has adopted. I accept this, provided it serves larger ends I can also accept. But in no case do I pretend that I am not reading a novel” (53). For Booth, a realistic approach deters from fiction when it is adhered to so closely that it prevents the author from interacting with the reader through the telling of the story.

So, too, does Booth warn against the overtly neutral position of an author who simply *shows* a story to his audience without any evaluation or distinction. Booth concedes that all readers “would like the novelist somehow to operate on the level of our own passion for truth and right, a passion which by definition is not in the least prejudiced. The argument in favor of neutrality is thus useful in so far as it warns the novelist that he can seldom afford to pour his untransformed biases into his work” (70). However, the author must beware that he does not hold to this neutrality by sacrificing his own individuality. The author, therefore, creates a version of himself within the novel: an implied author.

The implied author, though, is not simply the character who speaks within the story (the “I”), nor is it the overarching meaning or significance of the writing but an encompassing of both and much more:

Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all the characters. It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which is expressed by the total form. (73-74)

In a follow-up article in the journal *Novel*, Booth describes his purpose in writing *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, stating that he wants one to think of writing “not primarily as *meaning* or *being* but as *doing*. In place of analyses of poetic form, descriptions and interpretations of types of action or plot ... I look at effects, at techniques for producing

them, and at readers and their inferences” (113). He describes a difference between poetics – “study of what the work *is*, what it has been made to *be*” – and rhetoric – “what the work is made to *do*” (113).

Stephen Ross, in “Voice’ in Narrative Texts,” states that there are three levels of discourse in a novel in which the author uses voice and that they are “levels distinguished by the postulated origins for the voice or voices discerned: dialogue (characters’ speech acts), narrative (storytelling by identifiable narrators), and authorial discourse (which seems to originate with a ‘speaker’ outside the fictional world)” (300-01).

Booth begins his discussion of voice with commentary (what Ross describes as “authorial discourse”). He names many reasons that an author might choose to make such commentary, such as, “[s]tage setting, explanation of the meaning of an action, summary of thought processes or of events too insignificant to merit being dramatized, description of physical events and details whenever such description cannot spring naturally from a character” (169). He shows the greatest benefit in using commentary:

He [the narrator] *tells* us a good deal about those aspects of the tale which, though necessary, are not entitled to the heightening that would come if they were dramatized. And yet the over-all effect is to make us feel that we have been given a better story, more carefully worked, than would have been possible if he had simply served up his materials raw. The great narrators have always managed to find some way to make such summary interesting. (170)

Booth explains that the main reason to have such a voice, or omniscient portrayal, within the story is so that the author “can do in four lines what any other method would require

far more to do” (172). The author also uses commentary to control dramatic irony and reader expectations, “insuring that he [the reader] will not travel burdened with the false hopes and fears held by the characters” (173).

Mieke Bal, in her book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, explains that, when analyzing narrative texts, the narrator is the central concept within the analysis by stating the “identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character” (19). She goes further to explain the importance of gaining “insight into the complexity of the relationship between the three agents that function in the three layers – the narrator, the focalizer [which is the point of view, or perception, of the story], the actor – and those moments at which they do or do not overlap in the shape of a single ‘person’” (19-20).

For Bal, the analysis of the narration does not simply consist of “first person” or “third person,” but actually how to consider the “I” statement, as evidenced in the following example and explanation by Bal:

b I shall be twenty-one tomorrow.

c Elizabeth will be twenty-one tomorrow.

(I say:) I shall be twenty-one tomorrow.

(I say:) Elizabeth will be twenty-one tomorrow.

Both sentences are uttered by a speaking subject, an ‘I.’ The difference rests in the object of the utterance. In b the ‘I’ speaks about itself. In c the ‘I’ speaks about someone else. When in a text the narrator never refers explicitly to itself as a

character, we may, again, speak of an external narrator (EN). After all, the narrating agent does not figure in the fabula as an actor. On the other hand, if the ‘I’ is to be identified with a character in the fabula it itself narrates, we speak of a character-bound narrator, a CN. The difference between an EN and a CN, a narrator that tells about others and a narrator that tells about him- or herself – such a narrator is personified – entails a difference in the narrative rhetoric of ‘truth.’

(22)

The importance of the “narrative form [is that it] sets up a confrontation between the limits of a sense of humanity confined to the individual and the recognition by others that defines it in poststructuralist thought” (Bal 23). Booth describes what would be Bal’s external narrator as “companions and guides quite distinct from the wonders they have to show. Our admiration or affection or sympathy or fascination or awe ... is more intense just because it has been made personal; the telling is itself a dramatic rendering of a relationship with the author’s ‘second self’” (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 212). Seymour Chatman, in *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, agrees with Booth’s theory of narrator as guide but takes this role one step further, stating, “The implied author is the agency within the narrative fiction itself which guides any reading of it. Every fiction contains such an agency. It is the source – on each reading – of the work’s invention. It is also the locus of the work’s *intent*” (74).

So, how does one account for the reliability or unreliability of the narrator? Is it important that the reader believe everything that the narrator says as the absolute truth?

Are there reasons that the author would allow a story to be told in which the narrator would seek to mislead his audience? For what purpose?

Scholes and Kellogg in their work, *The Nature of Narrative*, explain that narrative writing is filled with irony, more so than any other type of writing. They claim:

Irony is always the result of a disparity of understanding. In any situation in which one person knows or perceives more – or less – than another, irony must be either actually or potentially present. In any example of narrative art there are, broadly speaking, three points of view – those of the characters, the narrator, and the audience. As narrative becomes more sophisticated, a fourth point of view is added by the development of a clear distinction between the narrator and the author. Narrative irony is a function of disparity among these three or four viewpoints. And narrative artists have always been ready to employ this disparity to make effects of various kinds. (240)

Mieke Bal states that there can be a type of disparity of ideology within the narrative of the story:

In some cases it is worthwhile analyzing the alteration between narration and non-narrative comments. Often, it is in such comments that ideological statements are made. This is not to say that the rest of the narrative is ‘innocent’ of ideology, on the contrary. The reason for examining these alterations is precisely to measure the difference between the text’s overt ideology, as stated in such comments, and its more hidden or naturalized ideology as embodied in the narrative representations. (31)

Henry James argued that the novel must be told by a narrator who is within the frame of the story so that he relates a story that to him contains the “air of reality” (James 55). This narrator needs to do no more than to reflect the story as it happens around him. This position is problematic for Booth who puts forward that this idea leaves no room for “stories narrated, whether in the first or third person, by a profoundly confused, basically self-deceived, or even wrong-headed or vicious reflector” (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 340).

Scholes and Kellogg explain that this idea of reliability, or lack thereof, can be central to narrative irony: “In this kind of fiction the author has not disappeared. He is often highly visible behind his surrogate. But by giving himself a fictional shape he has entered the ironic gap, which now lies not between author or narrator and characters but between limited understanding which is real, and an ideal of absolute truth which is itself suspect” (277).

Booth relies on the reader’s response to discover the unreliability of the narrator. “Though the narrator may frequently trip himself up, the reader will know that he has done so only if his own sense of what is sane and sound is better – that is, more nearly like the departed author’s – than is the narrator’s” (240). Therefore, the unreliable narrator must be carefully utilized within the narrative of the story: “A foolish intrusion in a wise work can yield its own delight; a foolish intrusion in a foolish work merely compounds boredom” (234).

In her article “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators,” Greta Olson advances Booth’s theory of the unreliable narrator by dividing this type of narration into two categories: fallible narrators and untrustworthy narrators.

She defines fallible narrators as those who “do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased. Fallible narrators’ perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience ...or...their reports can seem insufficient because their sources of information are biased and incomplete” (101). Her definition of untrustworthy narrators is of those who “strike us as *dispositionally* unreliable. The inconsistencies these narrators demonstrate appear to be caused by ingrained behavioral traits or some current self-interest” (102).

For Olson, as for Booth, the use of an unreliable narrator boils down to the reader’s reaction to or acceptance of the level of unreliability within the narration:

We surmise that other narrators would behave differently (more reliably) in the same narrative situation and that untrustworthiness is a distinct characteristic of the narrator. Hence, the reactions untrustworthy narrators elicit in readers differ significantly from those in response to fallible ones. What the narrator says will be greeted by skepticism and rapidly amended when it is inconsistent. (102)

Because there is a personification of the author within the story and because there is a definite place for the reader’s reaction to the narrative, one can also consider an implied reader to whom the author is writing. “Every stroke implying his second self will help to mold the reader into the kind of person suited to appreciate such a character and the book he is writing” (89). Booth agrees with Aristotle and James, both concerned with rhetoric and form, in moving beyond the simple artistic process of writing for writing’s sake or as a simple act of self-expression. Booth claims that “we are not in the least

shocked when we discover that the author has, in fact, worked to make his subject available to us. We think of the writer as someone who addresses us, who wants to be read, and who does what he can to make himself readable” (105).

While the writing might fulfill a need for self-expression for the writer, the writing process is not complete if there is not an audience to receive the story that is told:

Aristotle claimed that the tragic poet should be able to narrate his plot in simple form and produce, in reduced degree, the tragic emotions True enough, perhaps, if his plot is that of Oedipus or Lear or Othello. But suppose he wants his audience to pity what looks to any external view to be a wicked man, or to love, as in *Emma*, what looks to any external view to be a vain and meddling woman – what then? Why then all the rhetorical resources at his command – every resource of style, of transformed sequence, of manipulated “inside views,” and of commentary if need be – will be called in aid. ... Though some characters and events may speak by themselves their artistic message to the reader ... none will do so with proper clarity and force until the author brings all his powers to bear on the problem of making the reader see what they really are. The author cannot choose whether to use rhetorical heightening. His only choice is of the kind of rhetoric he will use. (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 116)

Wolfgang Iser, in his work *The Implied Reader*, agrees with Booth’s assessment of the importance of the interaction of the reader with the story. “This active participation is fundamental to the novel.... This term [implied reader] incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualization of this

potential through the reading process” (xii). Iser explains that the reading process should be thought of as a journey of discovery. “The reader discovers the meaning of the text...; he discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behavior” (xii).

Iser claims that this discovery “offers the reader two distinct possibilities: first, to free himself – even if only temporarily – from what he is and to escape restrictions of his own social life; second, actively to exercise his faculties – generally the emotional and the cognitive” (xii). The reader cannot simply receive the story at face value but must immerse himself in the story, analyzing it for clues to the reliability or unreliability, fallibility or untrustworthiness.

The final area of authorial discourse is distance. Within this area, the author seeks to remove himself to a certain level from the narrative. He can even make the decision to remain completely silent. Just as Booth’s idea of narrator reliability/unreliability relies upon the reader’s response, so too does the author use distance in order to affect reader response. Booth explains that the author controls the reader’s response by controlling the point of view/s to which the reader has access. Again using *Emma* as the example, Booth describes the effect:

By showing most of the story through Emma’s eyes, the author insures that we shall travel with Emma rather than stand against her. It is not simply that Emma provides, in the unimpeachable evidence of her own conscience, proof that she has many redeeming qualities that do not appear on the surface, such evidence

could be given with authorial commentary, though perhaps not with such force and conviction. Much more important, the sustained inside view leads the reader to hope for good fortune for the character with whom he travels, quite independently of the qualities revealed. (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 245-46)

This response is further affected by controlling the information the reader receives and when he receives it. Booth states:

Every author withholds until later what he “might as well” relate now. The question is always one of desired effects, and the choice of any one effect always bans innumerable other effects. ...[However the] conflict is between two effects both of which she [Austen, the author] cares about a good deal. On the one hand she cares about maintaining some sense of mystery as long as she can. On the other, she works at all points to heighten the reader’s sense of dramatic irony, usually in the form of a contrast between what Emma knows and what the reader knows. (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 255)

This concept connects to Iser’s argument that the reader’s response to a work of fiction is a journey of discovery. Schwarz explains how Booth connects the author and reader through this path of discovery by stating that Booth’s rhetorical theory “stresses the primacy of two questions: ‘Who is speaking to whom?’ and ‘For what purpose?’ That the author creates both a second self and an audience [implied author and implied reader] is central to Booth’s discussion about the importance of rhetoric” (158)

Through Schwarz’s further explanation, one can come to understand the full importance of the concept of authorial distance: “Seeking unity, the reader strives to

locate a coherent presence in the text, a human voice to whom he can respond. Booth goes on to equate the implied author with the artistic whole ... Thus Booth's 'implied author' is a strategy to eliminate the author without sacrificing the artist as a creative figure who speaks to us through the text. The author creates readers through a pattern of effects." (158).

The entire interaction, however, depends on the audience's ability to understand the reliability or unreliability of the narrator, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Greta Olson describes Booth's concept in this way:

Booth applies a communicative model to reading fiction here. This model allows for secret communication between the [implied reader] and the implied author. By emphasizing the "unspoken," Booth anticipates work on conversational implicature...and irony...Detecting irony and narrator unreliability comprises an interpretive strategy that involves reading against the grain of the text and assuming one understands that unspoken message beyond the literal one. Booth's emphasis on the pleasures of exclusion suggests that the reader and implied author belong to an in-group that shares values, judgments, and meanings from which the unreliable narrator is ousted. Those who grasp irony and detect unreliability share the inside joke and enjoy having survived the initiation ritual the text appears to require. (94-95)

Olson goes on to explain that that implied author, on one level, appears to send messages "through the fictional medium" (95) to the reader. However, she also states that the implied author does not always directly point out the narrator's unreliability, describing

that the “implied author does not point her finger at the unreliable narrator or wink at the reader. Rather, this illustrative analogy is used to stress the reading sophistication that detecting unreliability requires” (95).

So, when the author chooses to remain, not only distant, but silent, how does the reader detect the hypothetical winks or finger points of the implied author? Booth discusses the elements the author uses:

With commentary ruled out, hundreds of devices remain for revealing judgment and molding responses. Patterns of imagery and symbol are as effective in modern fiction as they have always been in poetry in controlling our evaluation of details. Decisions about what parts of a story to dramatize and about the sequence and proportion of episodes can be ... effective... In fact all of the old-fashioned dramatic devices of pace and timing can be refurbished for the purposes of a dramatic, impersonal narration. And manipulation of dramatized points of view can ... convey the author’s judgment with great precision. (272)

When the author chooses to remain silent, to defer the use of any direct statement to the reader beyond that of the narrator and characters within the story, he requires a sophistication from both himself, through the ability to manipulate effectively the elements of the story in order to imbed his commentary, and from the reader, to read beyond the surface of the story to receive this “secret” message. “By the kind of silence he maintains, by the manner in which he leaves his characters to work out their own destinies or tell their own stories, the author can achieve effects which would be difficult

or impossible if he allowed himself or a reliable spokesman to speak directly and authoritatively to us" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 273).

This paper will use the concepts of narrator reliability, authorial distance, and authorial silence to analyze several works by American writer, Eudora Welty. Relying on Southern oral tradition and her almost-photographic view of the world around her characters, Welty writes in a subtle, sometimes comedic, way. She often uses first-person narration, allowing her characters to tell their own stories for better or for worse. At other times, she will simply allow a story to unfold, observing as a photographer would, making no judgment.

Welty, however, does not allow the reader to accompany her in the position of non-judgmental observer. Through her skill as a writer, she places the reader firmly in the story-teller's care, forcing the reader to *receive* the tale. In this way, she is able to cut off any emotional distance that the reader might feel toward the characters and their stories. While *she* might be able to remain the observer, the reader is never allowed to do so. The reader must be involved in the story and must come to a decision about all those included in the story, most especially the narrator, by the time the tale is concluded.

CHAPTER II

VOICE: A STUDY OF POINT OF VIEW IN SELECTED WORKS OF FICTION BY EUDORA WELTY

Eudora Welty has been described as “arguably the single most neglected twentieth-century American author” (McWhirter 1). Her writing has been categorized as simple, regional, feminine, or “Southern.” However, her decision to set her stories among common people or in a simple place offers the reader the opportunity to examine her works on a deep level. In her autobiographical work, *One Writer’s Beginnings*, Welty discusses her journey toward becoming a writer. She realized her purpose through the process of writing her first short story. She states that writing it “opened my eyes. And I had received the shock of having touched, for the first time, on my real subject: human relationships. Daydreaming had started me on the way, but short story writing, once I was truly in its grip, took me and shook me awake” (95). Welty, then, seeks to achieve the same effect for her readers – to shake them awake – and she uses the rhetorical vehicle of narrative voice to achieve this objective.

Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, discusses the audience reaction to narrative voice:

Though it is most evident when a narrator tells the story of his own adventures, we react to all narrators as persons. We find their accounts credible or incredible, their opinions wise or foolish, their judgments just or unjust. The gradations and

axes of approval or condemnation are almost as rich as those presented by life itself, but we can distinguish two radically different types of reaction, depending on whether a narrator is reliable or unreliable. At one extreme we find narrators whose every judgment is suspect. At the other are narrators scarcely distinguishable from the omniscient author. In between lies a confused variety of more-or-less reliable narrators, many of them puzzling mixtures of sound and unsound. Though we cannot draw a sharp line between the two types with any great confidence, the distinction is not arbitrary: it is forced upon us by our recognition that we have, in fact, two different kinds of experience, depending on which kind of narrator is in charge. (273-74)

Welty, through her fiction, recognizes this reaction of her audience. She varies her use of narrative voice, sometimes utilizing a narrator who speaks directly, sometimes incorporating complete silence in order to achieve a specific reaction from her audience. She writes, "It was not my intention – it never was – to invent a character who should speak for me, the author, in person. A character is in a story to fill a role there, and the character's life along with its expression of life is defined by that surrounding – indeed is created by his own story" (*OWB* 109). She places the reader in specific designed positions – listener, observer, and reluctant participant – in order for the audience to receive a particular story in a particular way.

Booth sets forth the idea that "Everything he [the author] shows will serve to tell; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one" (Booth 20). For instance, Booth describes the self-conscious narrator – one who is aware of

himself or herself as a writer or teller of the story. Welty incorporates this narrative style in her short story “Why I live at the P.O.” as well as in her novel *The Ponder Heart*.

The narrator in “Why I Live at the P.O.” immediately shows that she understands that she is speaking to an audience outside of her surroundings in her opening statement: “I was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again” (*TCS* 46). The narrator does not identify herself to the reader; she is only addressed as “Sister” by the other characters in the story. The story Sister tells to the reader takes place on July 4th. Sister describes the events of the day that, to her way of thinking, set the entire family against her and drive her to decide to live in the back room of the post office she runs.

The reader does not have the story from any view other than that of Sister. While she does provide us dialog from the other characters, it is dialog and action told through the screen of her emotion. The more the story unfolds, the more the reader grows suspicious of Sister’s complete innocence: “There I was with the whole entire house on Stella-Rondo’s side and turned against me. If I have anything I have my pride” (*TCS* 53). Carol Ann Johnston explains that

It is Sister’s first-person narration that provides much of the story’s comedy; there is no third-person narrator here to offer the reader any mediation or meditation on her predicament. Typical of the stories in *A Curtain of Green*, “Why I Live at the P.O.” leaves the reader to her own devices to determine what is funny, what is serious, and often, what has happened. As narrator, Sister dwells with such

intensity on petty slights ... that the reader soon understands the comic nature of her self-pity. Sister never does. (17)

The story begins with the sudden reappearance of Sister's sister, Stella-Rondo, who comes home with a child after having separated from her husband, Mr. Whitaker. Sister reveals a certain amount of jealousy toward her sister in two statements: "Of course I went with Mr. Whitaker first...and Stella-Rondo broke us up" and "She's always had anything in the world she wanted and then she'd throw it away" (*TCS* 46).

Sister describes several things she says Stella-Rondo does in order to turn each family member against her: she will not own to Shirley T. being her own child (she claims Shirley T. is adopted), and Sister's skepticism of the adoption and implication that Stella-Rondo was pregnant when she ran off with Mr. Whitaker raises the ire of Mama; at dinner, Stella-Rondo then tells Papa-Daddy that Sister said he should cut off the impressive beard of which he is immensely proud, a remark which causes Papa-Daddy to administer a severe dressing down to Sister. Finally, Stella-Rondo tells Uncle Rondo that Sister has claimed he looks foolish in Stella-Rondo's pink kimono (which he appears in suddenly) when it was actually Stella-Rondo who has made this statement.

All this mistreatment of Sister culminates with Uncle Rondo's throwing a lit package of fire crackers into Sister's room while she is sleeping. This act, for Sister, is the last straw. She feels completely usurped by Stella-Rondo's actions and completely disrespected by the other members of the family. She describes the fire cracker incident in this way:

[H]e threw a whole five-cent package of some unsold one-inch firecrackers from the store as hard as he could into my bedroom and they every one went off. Not one bad one in the string. Anybody else, there'd be one that wouldn't go off.

Well, I'm just terribly susceptible to noise of any kind, the doctor has always told me I was the most sensitive person he had ever seen in his whole life, and I was simply prostrated. I couldn't eat! People tell me they heard it as far as the cemetery, and old Aunt Jep Patterson, that had been holding her own so good, thought it was Judgment Day and she was going to meet her whole family. It's usually so quiet here. (*TCS* 53)

Sister attempts to sound completely without fault in the events that cause her to decide to move out of her family home and into the small back room of the P.O. However, the careful reader can see signs of Sister's jealousy of Stella-Rondo and her quick-trigger reactions to the ways in which Stella-Rondo baits her. It is easy to see that Sister's family is a bit high-strung; Sister is as much so as the rest of the family. She has, in the end, "isolated [herself] from her family by her arrogance, meanness, and sense of persecution" (Warren 249).

Ruth Vande Kieft explains how Welty's use of comic monologue works:

Her [Sister's] monologue is comic not only because of the apparent illogic of her logic, but because of her manner of speaking. One can see the fierce indignant gleam in her eye as the stream of natural Southern idiom flows out of her: at once elliptical and baroque, full of irrelevancies, redolent of a way of life, a set of

expressions, of prejudices, interests, problems, and human reactions that swiftly convey to the reader a comic and satiric portrait of this Mississippi family. (55)

Like Sister, Edna Earle, narrator of *The Ponder Heart*, is eager to tell the story of her Uncle Daniel to the reader. Edna Earle gives the story to the reader, represented as the character in the story who has stopped to stay the night at the hotel Edna Earle runs. She states, “You’re only here because your car broke down, and I’m afraid you’re allowing a Bodkin to fix it. And listen: if you read, you’ll put your eyes out. Let’s just talk” (*TPH* 11). She, like Sister understands that she is telling this tale to an outsider, an outsider who she wants to make sure will leave the fictional Clay County in agreement with her side of the story.

Welty makes an interesting decision in creating Edna Earle as a self-conscious storyteller. It follows in the Southern oral tradition that she would be fond of telling tales to visitors to her Beulah Hotel. The reader stands in as just such a visitor. Robert Holland, in his article “Dialogue as a Reflection of Place in *The Ponder Heart*,” explains, “The people of Clay, Mississippi, inheriting a uniform tradition, live in a closed society of intimate relationships. Their integrity is the integrity of knowing and being known. As members of two families, the blood family and the regional family, they are rarely out of hearing of fellow members of either” (353).

Edna Earle is aware that her tale could be interrupted at any moment. One of the first things she does is to declare that her Uncle Daniel might appear if it is discovered that there is a guest: “If he hears our voices, he’ll come right down those stairs, supper ready or no” (*PH* 7). Ruth Vande Kieft explains this very Southern way of storytelling:

The speech of the characters is the beginning of comic interest; the humor is “born in” them because the speech is so accurately *theirs*, yet so colorfully and typically *Southern* folk speech. They are the “born storytellers”: born into the families that make the stories by their living and dying; inheriting and developing the gift to turn the common and uncommon event into a tale almost as soon as it happens; bearing the gift back and forth to and from each other as rapidly as it is born, entertaining and pleasing by talk and response. (53-54)

One can assume that the details of Edna Earle’s tale are accurate; however, her motivation for telling the tale of her Uncle Daniel seems to be connected more to Edna Earle’s desire to describe the importance of the Ponder family’s, and therefore her own, status in this small town rather than simply to detail the story of her uncle and how he comes to be placed on trial for the murder of his young wife. Early in her tale, Edna Earle describes her family’s heritage of good works:

The Beulah Bible Class and the Beulah Hotel are both named after Grandma. And my other grandma was the second-to-longest-living Sunday School teacher they’ve ever had, very highly regarded. My poor little mama got a pageant written before she died, and I still conduct the rummage sales for the Negroes every Saturday afternoon in the corner of the yard and bring in a sum for the missionaries in Africa that I think would surprise you. (*PH* 21)

Edna Earle is not only aware of herself as storyteller, but she is also very aware of her need to place herself within the story: as integral to this story specifically as she is integral to the caretaking of her family and their history. She “seeks to validate the life

she has made...[enchanted] the reader into a world of people and events remade in the telling to hide their dangerous aspects” (Walker and Seaman 65).

Edna Earle also explains that Uncle Daniel himself, although loving to talk, might not be the most reliable of storytellers:

The sight of a stranger was always meat and drink to him. The stranger don’t have to open his mouth. Uncle Daniel is ready to do all the talking. That’s understood. I used to dread he might get hold of one of these occasional travelers that wouldn’t come in unless they had to – the kind that would break in on a story with a set of questions, and wind it up with a list of what Uncle Daniel’s faults were: some Yankee. But Uncle Daniel seemed to have a sixth sense and avoid those, and light on somebody from nearer home always. He’d be crazy about you. (*PH* 17)

Jennifer Lynn Randisi, in *A Tissue of Lies*, explains that a passage such as the one above “establishes ... what Edna Earle thinks is perhaps the most prized Southern characteristic – the ability to listen to, and to appreciate, a story. With the passage, Edna Earle not only evokes the tradition of Southern manners, but also insures herself an audience. If the tradition dictates a certain listener’s etiquette, then crossing the boundaries...defines the listener as a Yankee by association” (58).

In his discussion of reliable and unreliable narrators, Booth states, “For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), the unreliable when he does not” (Booth 158-59). *The Ponder Heart* provides the reader with the example of an unreliable narrator, Edna Earle, who is determined to control the events of

her Uncle Daniel Ponder's life, especially when it comes to his wealth. Her attitude can be seen in the following passage:

He'd belted me into the Ferris Wheel, then vanished, instead of climbing into the next car. And the first thing I made out from the middle of the air was Uncle Daniel's big round hat up on the platform of the Escapades side-show, right in the middle of those ostrich plumes. There he was – passing down the line of those girls doing their come-on dance out front, and handing out ice cream cones, right while they were shaking their heels to the music, not in very good time. He'd got the cream from the Baptist ladies' tent – banana, and melting fast. And I couldn't get off the Ferris Wheel till I'd been around my nine times, no matter how often I told them who I was. When I finally got loose, I flew up to Uncle Daniel and he stood there and hardly knew me, licking away and beside himself with pride and joy. And his sixty cents was gone, too. Well, he would have followed the Fair to Silver City when it left, if I'd turned around good. (*TPH* 22-23)

Randisi explains that:

If we follow Northrop Frye's definition of myth as an imitation of ritual (e.g., plot), then Edna Earle's narrative can be seen as an ironic myth, or romance parody. That is, the events of the story comprise a quest, but one that recounts events leading to isolation rather than reconciliation, revealed through a disparity between what the reader comes to know and what Edna Earle cannot see (that is, what she has edited from her perceptions). For our purposes, then, the ironic myth is the distance between what Edna Earle says and what the reader hears. (57)

By contrast to Sister and Edna Earle's unreliable narration, "Circe" portrays a reliable narrator in that the character Circe, acting as the narrator, follows the implied author's (Welty) norms – following the events of the myth of Odysseus and Circe. Welty places a spin on the myth, however, by telling the story from Circe's viewpoint rather than that of Odysseus.

Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, in their seminal work *The Nature of Narrative*, describe point of view in narrative in this way:

By definition narrative art requires a story and a story-teller. In the relationship between the teller and the tale, and that other relationship between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art. The narrative situation is thus ineluctably ironical. ... Irony is always the result of a disparity of understanding; [a] situation in which one person knows or perceives more – or less – than another... Our pleasure in narrative literature itself, then, can be seen as a function of disparity of viewpoint or irony. Because we are not involved in the action represented, we always enjoy a certain superiority over the characters who are. Simple irony in narrative is often just the exploitation of this superiority... [T]he control of irony [then] is a principal function of point of view. (241-42)

In her short story "Circe," Welty explores her subject of human relationships in a novel way. While she oftentimes incorporates mythological elements in her writing, this is the only story in which she specifically uses mythological characters. In this story she retells the episode from Book Ten of Homer's *Odyssey* from Circe's point of view.

However, in utilizing Circe as the storyteller, Welty establishes irony on two levels – the

superiority that Circe feels over the human characters in the story and the superiority that the audience feels over Circe as the narrator.

Welty's audience is introduced to Circe as she, in the midst of her embroidery, is arrested by the sight of Odysseus and his men disembarking from their ship onto her island. Her view of these men is made immediately apparent. Although she calls them "beautiful strangers," her descriptions suddenly shift to animalistic terms; and no sooner has she described them as animals than she uses her magic to transform them. She describes to the reader her pride in her power:

That moment of transformation – only the gods really like it! Men and beasts almost never take in enough of the wonder to justify the trouble. The floor was swaying like a bridge in battle. "Outside!" I commanded. "No dirt is allowed in this 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 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. What tusks I had given them! (*TCS* 531)

When Circe turns from driving the men out of her home, she finds that one man has been able to withstand her power. Familiar with Homer's work, the audience understands that this is Odysseus. Curiously however, Circe never calls him by name; rather, she refers to him as "the hero" or "him." This could be an attempt by Circe, in her own way, to keep Odysseus at a lower level than herself; to deny him identity as a war

hero and king. In her arrogance she believes that he cannot be her equal because he is merely human.

Circe's arrogance is bruised, however, when she finds that Odysseus is more concerned for his men than entranced by her beauty and power. She is amazed to feel "invisible" in his presence, so she sets out to seduce him. After her successful seduction, Odysseus tells her a story from his adventures. She is uninterested in his stories, however. She has identified that he has a human secret, and this secret has captured her attention. Circe describes those things that make him human: "He must laugh, sleep, ravish, he must, talk and sleep [and finally] die." (*TCS* 533). But she knows there is something deeper, more illusive, that makes them different as well. She states:

Yet I know they keep something from me, asleep and awake. There exists a mortal mystery, that if I knew where it was, I could crush like an island grape. Only frailty, it seems can divine it – and I was not endowed with that property. They live by frailty! By the moment! I tell myself that it is only a mystery, and mystery is only uncertainty. (There is no mystery in magic! Men are swine: let it be said, and no sooner said than done.) Yet mortals alone can divine where it lies in each other, can find it and prick it in all its peril, with an instrument made of air. I swear that only to possess that one, trifling secret, I would willingly turn myself into a harmless dove for the rest of eternity. (*TCS* 533)

As Odysseus sleeps, Circe watches him, hoping that in his sleep he will reveal this mystery to her. Ruth Vande Kieft describes Welty's decision to explore such a human mystery from the point of view of an immortal as "a tour de force because in her attempts

to fathom the nature of Odysseus after she seduces him, Circe begins to look very much like one of the author's human lovers, more than one of whom gaze at the beloved when he is asleep, hoping at that unguarded moment to catch the elusive mystery of his identity" (34). This is the crux of the first level of irony Welty establishes in her story: that, although Circe is far superior to humans on many levels, there is something that humans possess, something they experience that Circe wants very much to understand and experience herself. Vande Kieft explains it in this way: "as a sorceress and magician, though preserved from human frailty and tragedy, and all the uncertainties of time and circumstance (because she can predict the future), Circe envies the human condition" (34).

With Odysseus's entrance into her world, Circe participates in several human experiences. She enters into an intimate relationship with Odysseus – one that at the end of the story it is discovered has resulted in a child. She sees Odysseus' joy when his men are returned to their human form; and she witnesses, along with Odysseus and the other sailors, the accidental death of the youngest member of their company. These experiences should have created for Circe an understanding of human relationships. As the reader proceeds through the story, he or she can at first think that Circe is trying to understand love. It is not, however, until the end of the story that the reader discovers that what she most wishes to understand – and experience – is the antithesis of love: loss.

Andrea Goudie explains that the story that Welty tells from Circe's viewpoint is "ultimately, an incisive commentary on the limitations of power, a reflection of the triumphant pain and poignance of human life, and a reminder of the inevitable doom of

all those who, for one reason or another, find themselves unable to share this pain and poignance. Rather than trying to catch the elusive mystery of Odysseus' identity, Circe seems groping after her own" (481).

Circe can know passion because passion comes from desire, but she does not know – perhaps cannot feel – love, in all its various shades. Therefore she is unable to make the connection to Odysseus or his sailors that might help her to understand. She can identify that it is human frailty that has created this mystery, but she cannot identify that it is the frailty of love – that it can be lost – that would bring the full understanding grief that she so desires.

Throughout the story, the only contradictory emotion to love that she expresses is envy. She balks at the feeling of invisibility she feels when Odysseus ignores her and shows his concern for the transformation of his men into pigs. When she has been convinced to transform them back to human form, her envy causes her to attempt to spoil Odysseus's reunion with his men (this is, coincidentally, the only time that she identifies him by name in the story); and finally, most damningly, her envy drives them all away after the death of young Elpenor:

He knelt and touched Elpenor, and like a lover lifted him; then each in turn held the transformed boy in his arms. They brushed the leaves from his face, and smoothed his red locks, which were still in their tangle from his brief attempts at love-making and from his too sound sleep. I spoke from the door. "When you dig the grave for that one, and bury him in the lonely sand by the shadow of your fleeing ship, write on the stone: 'I died of love.'" I thought I spoke in epitaph – in

the idiom of man. But when they heard me, they left Elpenor where he lay, and ran. ...I slid out of their path. I had no need to see them set sail, knowing as well as if I'd been ahead of them all the way, the far and wide, misty and islanded, bright and indelible and menacing world under which they all must go. But foreknowledge is not the same as the last word. (*TCS* 536).

Circe does not understand that she has missed the fullness of Odysseus's secret. Welty states, "Relationship *is* a pervading and changing mystery; it is not words that make it so in life, but words have to make it so in a story. Brutal or lovely, the mystery waits for people wherever they go, whatever extreme they run to" (*Eye* 114). She goes further to explain that "the greatest mystery is in unsheathed reality itself" (*Eye* 81).

Early in the story, Odysseus attempts to share stories of his life with Circe. Circe misses the idea that this story-telling – this sharing – is at the heart of the human relationship. Goudie explains:

She does not understand that the inevitable presence of death gives time meaning for humanity and that, since time is limited for humanity, stories become as important as direct experience in expanding mankind's knowledge of himself and his universe. Odysseus... is irrevocably tied to temporal existence, uncertain wanderings, and story-telling – that human propensity for preserving past events by retelling them so that they may be probed to find meaning for the present and hope for the future, a future which mortals can never foreknow. Circe with her foreknowledge, however, sees no value in story-telling. (485)

Judith Yarnall explains the implications that Welty presents for Circe's dismissal of the importance of the story stating:

Welty's story is about the evolution of Circe's consciousness, not Odysseus's.

...She focuses almost exclusively on the tension between Circe's arrogance and her yearning. Both these emotions quicken in her as Circe listens to Odysseus tell [his] story...What Circe completely fails to grasp, however, is the relationship between secret and story, between the mystery of mortality and the desire to create and share meaning. Stories, Welty seems to imply, are our light. (185)

At the end of the story Circe again stands alone, touched by her experience but not fully changed. She has intellectually identified aspects of the human mystery she so yearns to understand and experience, but she has failed to identify the fullness of those elements. She has instead discovered the limitation of her vast power, the meaninglessness of her foreknowledge. In the complete control she is able to wield over the world around her, she has missed out on the depths that can be found in love and loss – in the uncontrollable nature of feeling.

Probably the most reliable of Welty's narrators can be encountered in "A Memory." The story is that of a woman, remembering an incident from her past when she lies on a beach lost in the memory of her first love. As described by Zelma Turner Howard, the story:

records the hurt and the temporary disillusion inherent in initiation into life and in real growth into maturity. According to the narrator of the story, such growth involves the tempering of the fantasy and the illusions of overly ordered inner

reality with the knowledge of and acceptance of the natural disorders of outer reality. To portray the experience of everyman who achieves real maturity, Miss Welty chooses a first person, reliable narrator, and adult who from her present safe state of maturity recalls her first step from childhood in early young womanhood. The reliable narrator's own account of her disillusionment in gaining awareness is convincing in its impact; she gives a real account of the emotions involved in experiences that destroy the illusions of the protected and in the gaining of awareness when such protection is no longer effective. (50)

The story opens with the narrator lying on a beach observing the world around her. A self-described artist, she holds her fingers in the shape of a frame through which she observes her world. She is an average teenage girl, wildly emotional with intense reactions to events she experiences. Her reactions are not manifested in action, however, but experienced completely inside herself: "When a person, or a happening, seemed to me not in keeping with my opinion, or even my hope or expectation, I was terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness which tore my heart with a kind of sorrow" (CS 75).

The young girl fantasizes about the school year just ended and the boy with whom she has fallen in love. She obsesses over the moment when, passing each other on the stairs at school, they accidentally touch. She has never declared her feelings and indicates that she knows nothing about him, not even "where this boy lived, or who his parents were" (CS 76). She recalls her worries that the reality of this boy's existence might not meet her expectations and how she waited with unease for something to happen. When

the worst finally happens – the boy has a sudden nosebleed during Latin class – she is incredibly affected by the event.

Into her reverie on the beach intrudes a family of bathers who repulse the narrator with their physical manner and shape. Gary Carson explains that ‘while the girl imagines herself an artist, she fails to establish the point of view of the artist because she fails to accept and assimilate what falls within the purview of her shaping hands. Her failure at inclusiveness is, first of all, an aesthetic failure. It is all the less possible to accommodate the nightmare to the ideal as she presents it because her nightmare seems to spring directly from her disgust with the natural” (426).

This intrusion becomes connected for the narrator to her memories of the young boy she loves; so lost is she in her dream world, she does not notice the bathers’ arrival – they are simply, suddenly, there. The bathers represent “wildness, chaos, abandonment of every description, a total loss of dignity, privateness, and identity. There is destruction of form in the way the bathers protrude from their costumes...; there is terrifying violence in their abuse of each other... [and] there is a hint of a final threat to human existence itself when the man begins to pile sand on the woman’s legs” (Vande Kieft 15). For the narrator, the interaction of this family does not meet with her sheltered, shy, internal existence.

Her description of her love for the boy, obsessing over their touch on the stairs and his sudden nosebleed, even her description of experiencing the memory is sexually aware, perhaps clandestine: “We had never exchanged a word or even a nod of recognition; but it was possible during that entire year for me to think endlessly on this

minute and brief encounter which we endured on the stairs, until it would swell with a sudden and overwhelming beauty, like a rose forced into premature bloom for a great occasion” (CS 76). This innocent sexuality is juxtaposed in the narrator’s memory by the vulgar physicality of the bathers, culminating in the moment when the older woman, whose husband has poured a large amount of sand down the front of her bathing suit, “bent over and in a condescending way pulled down the front of her bathing suit, turning it outward, so that the lumps of mashed and folded sand came emptying out. I felt a peak of horror, as though her breasts themselves had turned to sand, as though they were of no importance at all and she did not care” (CS 79).

Carol Ann Johnston, in her work *Eudora Welty: A Study of the Short Fiction*, argues that this juxtaposition of innocence and experience, purity and vulgarity, virginity and adultery is especially important: “The surprise here is that the adult narrator is as focused on this incident as her young self was; hers is the language of adultery and virginity; she valorizes this incident by infusing it in the retelling with the language of adult sexuality – muted, distant, and symbolic sexuality, but sexuality nonetheless” (55-56). The young narrator is changed by her experience on the beach. After the bathers have suddenly disappeared – quite as suddenly as they had originally appeared – the narrator is struck by the events and begins to weep. However, while she claims to now feel “pity” rather than revulsion for the bathers, her tears are for herself and the changes that have been forced upon her. She explains:

That was my last morning on the beach. I remember continuing to lie there, squaring my vision with my hands, trying to think ahead to the time of my return

to school in winter. I could imagine the boy I loved walking into a classroom, where I would watch him with this hour on the beach accompanying my recovered dream and added to my love. I could even foresee the way he would stare back, speechless and innocent, a medium-sized boy with blond hair, his unconscious eyes looking beyond me and out the window, solitary and unprotected. (*CS* 80)

In her short story, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?,” Welty relates the tragic story of the assassination of Civil Rights leader, Medgar Evers. Welty, however, makes the bold move of using the assassin as the narrator. By taking this approach, she places her reader in the position of reluctant participant. Her narrator’s language is that of a confessional with the reader as recipient of the tale. The reader cannot ignore the horror and tragedy of the event; it must be heard. In the same way that she takes the established story of Odysseus and Circe and gives the reader a different perspective and possibly a deeper understanding of the impact of the interaction between these two characters by imagining the story from Circe’s viewpoint, so does she approach the story of “Where is the Voice Coming From?” Welty states, “Characters take on life sometimes by luck, but I suspect it is when you can write most entirely out of yourself, inside the skin, heart, mind, and soul of a person who is not yourself, that a character becomes in his own right another human being on the page” (*OWB* 109).

Welty describes how she came to write the story in her introduction to *The Collected Stories*:

That hot August night when Medgar Evers, the local civil rights leader, was shot down from behind in Jackson, I thought, with overwhelming directness: Whoever the murder is, I know him: not his identity, but his coming about, in this time and place. That is, I ought to have learned by now, from here, what such a man, intent on such a deed, had going on in his mind. I wrote his story – my fiction – in the first person: about that character’s point of view, I felt, through my shock and revolt, I could make no mistake. (xi)

The assassin’s story is oppressive. The narrator describes the heat of the night of the assassination saying, “it was so hot, all I did was hope and pray one or the other of us wouldn’t melt before it was over” (CS 603). This heat seems to match the racist rage that the assassin feels for Roland Summers (the fictional representation of Evers). Welty layers the description of heat throughout the story: from the last name of the assassinated man (Summers), through the name of the fictional town (Thermopylae), to the rifle that is used in the assassination. When the assassin’s wife questions him upon his return as to the whereabouts of the weapon, he states, “It was scorching! It was scorching! ... It’s laying out on the ground in rank weeds, trying to cool off, that’s what it’s doing now” (CS 605).

The assassin seems to be seeking approval for his deed. He watches the news on television and in the newspapers, looking for stories about himself; but they are all about Roland Summers. When he kills Summers, he approaches the dead man and addresses

him, saying “There was one way left, for me to be ahead of you and stay ahead of you, by Dad, and I just taken it. Now I’m alive and you ain’t. We ain’t never now, never going to be equals and you know why? One of us is dead” (CS 604). He seems surprised to discover that this deed does not seem to have the effect he anticipated:

They know who Roland Summers was without knowing who I am. His face was in front of the public before I got rid of him, and after I got rid of him there it is again – the same picture. And none of me. I ain’t ever had one made. Not ever! The best that newspaper could do for me was offer a five-hundred-dollar reward for finding out who I am. For as long as they don’t know who that is, whoever shot Roland is worth a good deal more right now than Roland is. (CS 606)

By using first person narration, Welty allows the audience to see the narrator for who he is rather than who he tries to convince the reader he is. Charles Clerc states that Welty achieves several advantages by choosing to tell this story through a monologue including “revelation of character,” having a narrator who speaks in a way that “is also suited to the kind of person he is”, and creating “a gain in irony” (390-91).

Because Welty states, “I know him” and because she presents the story through his point of view, she allows the audience to know him - to understand how a man like him could come to be. In her article “Must the Novelist Crusade?”, Welty argues against the idea that a writer of fiction can write a story with the purpose of reform. She claims instead that this writer can simply focus on human relationships as they can be seen in the world around the writer. She explains:

The first act of insight is throw away the labels. In fiction, while we do not necessarily write about ourselves, we write out of ourselves; what we learn from, what we are sensitive to, what we feel strongly about – these become our characters and go to make our plots. Characters in fiction are conceived from within, and they have, accordingly, their own interior life; they are individuals every time. The character we care about in a novel we may not approve of or agree with – that’s beside the point. But he has got to seem alive. Then and only then, when we read, we experience or surmise things about life itself that are deeper and more lasting and less destructive to understanding than approval or disapproval. (*EofS* 150)

This is Welty’s great triumph in a story like “Where is the Voice Coming From?”: that she allows a character who is fully evil to be developed and layered to a point where the audience can understand how he could come to exist, fully consumed by his racist thoughts. Welty, as keen observer of the South as it was at that time, is able to describe this man’s “coming about” without losing the horror and revulsion she - and her audience – feel for his deed. Because she has removed the need for the audience to express its disapproval, because it is a foregone conclusion that the assassin will not receive a hero’s hurrah, Welty can remain focused on the “deeper and more lasting and less destructive” understanding of the human relationships this man experiences that serve to shape him.

The assassin/narrator describes several of his relationships in his story. The reader glimpses his unhappy marriage to a shrewish wife who chastises, humiliates, and

emasculates him at every opportunity. He compares this relationship to the one he perceives between Summers and his wife. Summers' wife leaves the light on for him and waits up for him; she keeps the house and yard neat and clean, and Summers is doing well enough to afford a new car. For the assassin, this is in stark contrast to his own life. His wife does not leave the light on or wait up for him, and he does not own a car at all - he must borrow his brother-in-law's work truck. For all of his feeling of superiority, the assassin lives a much poorer and less happy life than Roland Summers. He is, therefore, very jealous of Summers and feels compelled to bring what he feels is the proper balance back to their relationship, allowing Summers no opportunity for further success. In this way, the assassin's actions are not strictly to push a racist agenda but for his "own pure-D satisfaction" (CS 604).

The relationship that stands at the opposite end to his relationship with Summers is the relationship the assassin shares with his wife. Contentious and unfulfilling, their union is far from supportive and happy. She shares his racist beliefs, showing her callous attitude by stating, "What? Didn't the skeeters get you?" (CS 605) upon his return from the assassination. She further takes the "wind from his sails" by pointing out that there have been those suggesting that someone should assassinate the Civil Rights leaders in the area, thus taking away the "credit" the assassin might claim for coming up with his plan.

She is not finished taunting her husband, however. She goes on to point out to him that the news stories will focus on the assassinated and not the assassin, meaning he will receive no praise for his deed, and furthermore, the news has indicated that a more

well-known leader of the “N. double A.C.P.” was going to make an appearance in Thermopylae and he might “could have got you somebody better” (CS 605). Her final chastisement is over his discarding of the rifle. She asks him, “What did you do with our protection?” – a very pointed choice of words (CS 605).

The final level of the assassin’s relationships is that of his interaction and attitude toward his community. He remains connected to his community through the television and newspapers, through his observations of the events that occur in Thermopylae regarding race relations, and the conversations he overhears among the townsfolk regarding the assassination. He shows contempt for the “babyface cops” who must maintain order during a Civil Rights march, refers to the governor of the state with the derisive moniker “Old Ross,” and even shows contempt for one of the leading political families in the nation, referring to them as “them Kennedys!” All of his relationships are based on jealousy, anger, and control, leaving him, in the final scene of the story, with the only pleasant constant in his unhappy life: his guitar.

Booth discusses extensively the implied narrator. He defines this type of narrator in this way:

Even the novel in which no narrator is dramatized creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails. This implied author is always distinct from the “real man” – whatever we may take him to be – who creates a superior version of himself, a “second self,” as he creates his work. (Booth 151)

Welty includes this type of implied narrator in the short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?” Although the dramatized narrator is the assassin, there is an implied narrator throughout who judges the narrator’s actions and guides the audience to see those actions as the tragic and horrible reality they are, thus insuring that the audience cannot sympathize with the assassin/narrator.

Welty also uses the implied narrator in her novel *Losing Battles*. While the narration passes through several of the characters within the work, there is an implied narrator who stands in to tie the thread of the story together for the reader. In further explaining this type of narration, Booth explains that:

The most important unacknowledged narrators in modern fiction are the third-person “centers of consciousness” through whom authors have filtered their narratives. Whether such “reflectors” ... are highly polished mirrors reflecting complex mental experience, or the rather turbid, sense-bound “camera eyes” ... they fill precisely the function of avowed narrators. (Booth 153)

Welty’s narrator in *Losing Battles* is just such a “camera eyes” narrator – rarely, if ever, making comment on the action or characters involved, but affecting the story by choosing whom to observe. Welty chose to both “show” and “tell” this story: showing it through the lens of the narrator, but allowing the other characters in the novel to tell it.

The occasion of the story is the reunion of the Vaughn-Renfro-Beecham family in celebration of Granny Vaughn’s ninetieth birthday. As she does in many other stories, Welty places a character within the story who is an outsider and, therefore, receives the story. This outsider is Aunt Cleo, newly married to Uncle Noah Webster. Beyond the

celebration of Granny's birthday, the entire family is awaiting the arrival of the eldest Renfro son, Jack, who has spent the past year and a half in prison. This reunion sees the telling and re-telling of favorite family stories each year, and this year will see events that will be the fodder for stories in the years to come.

Rosemary Magee explains that Welty "manages to keep her role as external narrator to a minimum. Most of the novel consists of the characters themselves telling stories through conversation. One rarely catches a glimpse of the characters' internal, emotional life except through their outer words, or in a few cases, actions (69). Unlike unacknowledged narrators utilized by other authors, Welty does not allow her narrator to sneak into the minds of her characters to show the reader what they are thinking. The words of the story are far more important to Welty, as well as the slow unfolding of the deeper meaning within the telling of the shared story: that of the human relationships within the family and the townspeople of Banner.

This family is a group of storytellers who relish their ability to both tell the story as well as the importance of listening to the story. As young Etoile Renfro states, "I love to hear-tell" (*LB* 42). Coming from the collective memory of the family, influenced by the legend developed from the telling and re-telling, the story is not divulged in chronological order, but rather in response to the demands of the conversation. This influences the reader's grasp of the meaning of the story because "Welty presents the external events and the results of prior action in the early pages..., but she delivers the whys and wherefores only gradually" (Magee 68).

Losing Battles is a story of just that: fighting losing battles. The stories that the family tells and the action that happens during the few days the novel covers serve to show the many losing battles these characters fight. The battles occur on every level: from the level of the community group – with religious denominations warring for supremacy in the town; to the family group – the long-standing animosity between the Vaughn/Renfro and Stovall families; to the individual – the rivalry between Granny Vaughn and Miss Julia Mortimer or Miss Mortimer’s battle against ignorance.

These battles interweave and influence one another, however. Probably the most immediate battle is the one the Vaughn/Renfro family fights against poverty. The most recent strike against the family is Jack Renfro’s incarceration. As the oldest son, his are the strongest hands on the farm and they are sorely missed. While he is gone, however, the family has had to sell some of his most treasured possessions – his horse and his truck, both sold to Curly Stovall. Curly is the owner of the town store, which used to be owned by the Renfro family (another cog in the wheel of bad feeling between the two families). An on-going battle between Jack and Curly leads directly to Jack’s prison sentence. These battles – between individuals, between families, and between the family and poverty – all intermingle and affect each other.

Juxtaposed against the family’s struggle to survive their many battles and to hold on to their traditions is the battle of Miss Julia Mortimer. Miss Julia was the Banner town teacher for many years. She taught most of Granny Vaughn’s children and grandchildren. And the Vaughn/Renfro family hated her for it. Her world is a world of books and knowledge and individuality. She never marries and even dies alone: “Nobody with her.

Somebody had to *find* her” (*LB* 157). She is the exact opposite of Granny Vaughn, who is surrounded by family and talk. This difference is brought into light when Judge Moody begins to read Miss Julia’s final letter to the family. Throughout the reading of the letter the family protests:

“I can’t understand it when he reads it to us. Can’t he just tell it?” complained Aunt Birdie.

“Come on, tell us what it says, Judge Moody,” said Aunt Nanny, “Don’t be so bashful.” ...

“Wait,” said Aunt Birdie. “I don’t know what those long words are talking about.”...

“I wish we didn’t have to hear it,” Aunt Beck said, sighing. ...

“Now I know she’s a crazy,” Miss Beulah was interrupting. “We’re getting it right out of her own mouth, by listening long enough.” (*LB* 298-99)

The family has always felt that Miss Julia’s teachings were a waste of time – “I can hear her ...[s]aying the multiplication table or some such rigmarole” – and even strange – “She read in the daytime” (*LB* 294). But Miss Julia’s battle is revealed in her final letter:

All my life I’ve fought a hard war with ignorance. Except in those cases that you can count off on your fingers, I lost every battle. Year in, year out, my children at Banner School took up the cause of the other side and held the fort against me. We both fought faithfully and single-mindedly, bravely, maybe even fairly. Mostly I lost, they won. But as long as I was still young, I always thought if I

could marshal strength enough of body and spirit and push with it, every ounce, I could change the future. (*LB* 298)

Granny Vaughn, along with the rest of the family, believes that because she has outlived Miss Julia she has won the war. Miss Julia, however, has other plans. In her will, also read to the family by Judge Moody, Miss Julia commands that anyone who was ever one of her students should attend her funeral. The entire family debate her authority to command them in such a way.

Though Miss Julia seems to have lost her battle, there are two present at the reunion who symbolize her success. Judge Moody, an enemy of the family who has ended up at the reunion by accident, was a student of hers before she came to Banner; and he has maintained a close connection to her throughout his life. He, through receipt of her letter and will, insists that all the Vaughns and Renfros attend the funeral – “You’d all just better good and well be there” (*LB* 291). When it is demanded of him why he should care so much about Miss Julia when he isn’t even related to her, he simply, enigmatically, states, “there are other ties” (301).

Jack’s wife, Gloria, is also one of Miss Julia’s triumphs; and it is Gloria’s presence in the novel that lends quite a bit to the conversation during the reunion as well as the action of the novel. She is surrounded by mystery, showing her to be different from the rest of the family, from the opening pages: “She likes you to wait as long as you can, then she comes out looking cooler and cleaner than you do” (*LB* 14). Her parentage and birth date are both unknown, She was hand-picked by Miss Julia to take her place as

school teacher when Miss Julia retired. It is in the classroom that Gloria and Jack meet, when he returned to school after taking several years off to work the farm.

She continually holds herself away from the rest of the family, sitting at the end of the road as she waits for Jack to return. She has wanted to separate herself and Jack from the rest of the family since they married, asking him “When will we move to ourselves?” the first moment he returns from prison (*LB* 111). Jack explains his obligations to the family that keep him from allowing her wish:

I’m beholden to the reunion to keep it running on a smooth track today, for Granny’s birthday to be worth her living to see. For Mama’s chickens not to go wasted, and for all of ‘em that’s travelled through dust not to go home disappointed. It’s up to me to meet that Judge, Possum, sing him my name out loud and clear, and leave him in as good a ditch as the one he had before I saved him, That’s all. (*LB* 112)

As the action of the novel progresses however, Jack and Gloria’s attitudes begin to move in opposite directions. They begin to influence each other. For Jack, the change occurs almost immediately when Gloria and their daughter, Lady May, are almost run over by a car in the road. The car, driven by Judge Moody, the man who, by sentencing Jack to his prison term, had become an enemy of the entire family, swerves at just the right moment to miss Gloria and Lady May and ends up running all the way up Banner Top and hanging off a precipice. Because Judge Moody has placed himself in danger in an attempt to prevent causing harm to Jack’s wife and child, Jack instantly “forgives” the

Judge and sets out to save the Judge's car. Jack misses much of the reunion in his several attempts to remove the Judge's car from the top of the hill.

Gloria's changing ideas occur slowly over the rest of the story. She is shocked by the death of Miss Julia, her mentor. She endures an "initiation" by the rest of the family women when they hold her down and shove watermelon in her mouth after having supposed a lineage that makes her a cousin to her own husband. It comes out after this incident that she had received a letter from Miss Julia just before her marriage. Gloria destroyed the letter because Miss Julia has suggested that Gloria really is part of the Vaughn/Renfro family and the letter was sent to prevent her marriage to Jack.

After attending Miss Julia's funeral, Gloria makes her statement revealing her change toward Miss Julia: "Miss Julia Mortimer didn't want anybody left in the dark, not about anything. She wanted everything brought out in the wide open, to see and be known. She wanted people to spread out their minds to other people, so they could be read like books...[but] people don't want to be read like books" (*LB* 432). While Gloria still desires to live away from the family with just Jack and Lady May, she has changed her mind about Miss Julia's approach to the larger world. Gloria is now content to find her existence and meaning through her small family unit.

It is Gloria and Jack's quest for identity – both individually and as a young couple - in this story that lie at the heart of the matter. As explained by Robert Drake, the beauty and meaning in this story can be explained in this way:

Losing Battles is in many ways the Welty "mixture as before": the family, the community – the blood ties of heart and home, and the teasing paradoxes they

pose for those who can see the least bit around or outside them. Here is again what Robert Penn Warren years ago called the love and the separateness in Miss Welty's work: the individualism, the identity which must be cherished – even fought for – in the face of the pre-emptive and often devouring claims of the group, with all its traditional sanctions. And the tension between these two “pulls” – these twin allegiances which may be likened to the two faces of love itself – has constituted one of Miss Welty's principal thematic concerns. (205)

Through much of Eudora Welty's fiction, point of view and the way in which she uses the voice of the narrator to present a story play an important part in the reader's reaction to the text and in the understanding of meaning within the fiction. Her technique is gently, but specifically, applied, sometimes disguised in a comic telling of the story. However, in each story – whether comic, serious, or both – Welty seeks to share what she has come to learn about human relationships. She states it best herself:

I learned quickly enough when to click the shutter, but what I was becoming aware of more slowly was a story-writer's truth: the thing to wait on, to reach there in time for, is the moment in which people reveal themselves. You have to be ready, in yourself; you have to know the moment when you see it. The human face and the human body are eloquent in themselves, and a snapshot is a moment's glimpse (as a story may be a long look, a growing contemplation) into what never stops moving, never ceases to express for itself something of our common feeling. Every feeling waits upon its gesture. Then when it does come, how unpredictable it turns out to be, after all. (*EotS* 354)

CHAPTER III

SILENCE: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES FOR AUTHORIAL DISTANCE

Wayne Booth, in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, explains that there are times when authors may decide to forgo making direct commentary toward the audience, deciding instead to use only the voices of the characters within the story. He discusses other ways in which an author might interact with an audience:

The author's voice is still dominant in a dialogue that is at the heart of all experience with fiction. With commentary ruled out, hundreds of devices remain for revealing judgment and molding responses. Patterns of imagery and symbol are as effective in modern fiction as they have always been in poetry in controlling our evaluation of details. Decisions about what parts of a story to dramatize and about the sequence and proportion of episodes can be...effective.... In fact all of the old-fashioned dramatic devices of pace and timing can be refurbished for the purposes of a dramatic, impersonal narration. And manipulation of dramatized points of view can ... convey the author's judgment with great precision. (272)

He goes on to explain why the author would make a decision to eliminate direct commentary to the audience, stating, "By the kind of silence he maintains, by the manner in which he leaves his characters to work out their own destinies or tell their own stories, the author can achieve effects which would be difficult or impossible if he allowed

himself or a reliable spokesman to speak directly and authoritatively to us” (273). Eudora Welty was greatly skilled in utilizing these dramatic devices to allow a story to unfold for an audience without relying on direct statements to the audience to interpret events or to tell specifically readers what they should think about a character or an event.

This idea of Booth’s surrounding the decision by the author to forgo direct commentary can be seen in Welty’s work alongside the ideas of Henry James regarding the nature of reality in fiction. In his *The Art of Fiction*, James states:

It is still expected, though perhaps people are ashamed to say it, that a production which is after all only a “make-believe” (for what else is a “story”?) shall be in some degree apologetic – shall renounce the pretension of attempting really to represent life. This, of course, any sensible, wide-awake story declines to do, for it quickly perceives that the tolerance granted to it on such a condition is only an attempt to stifle it disguised in the form of generosity. The old evangelical hostility to the novel, which was as explicit as it was narrow, and which regarded it as little less favorable to our immortal part than a stage-play, was in reality far less insulting. The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. (45-46)

Welty embraced both of these ideas in her writing. She understood that her audience would recognize the world in which she placed her characters as well as the stories those characters related to the audience. She did not feel it necessary to tell her audience what to think about the story or what conclusions they needed to reach. She also told stories that hold true to the time in which they were written. She held a mirror up to

the world around her and showed her audience what was in the mirror, making no apology for that world. However, as any good writer would do, she leaves clues for her audience, a trail of bread crumbs to help readers along the way. These clues are placed within the story to connect with the reader in an attempt (together with the writer) to make sense out of the world within the story. In her essay, “Must the Novelist Crusade?,” Welty builds on James’s idea regarding reality in writing, explaining:

The writing of a novel is taking life as it already exists, not to report it but to make an object, toward the end that the finished work might contain this life inside it, and offer it to the reader. The essence will not be, of course, the same thing as the raw material; it is not even of the same family of things. The novel is something that never was before and will not be again. For the mind of one person, its writer, is in it too. What distinguishes it above all from the raw material, and what distinguishes it from journalism, is that inherent in the novel is the possibility of a shared act of the imagination between its writer and its reader. (EoS 147)

One of the best examples of these ideas in Welty’s work is the story “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” This is a fictional depiction of an actual event – the assassination of Medgar Evers. When Welty wrote the story, she did not have the details leading up to the assassination or of the assassin himself – she wrote the story the night the murder happened, and it was some time before the assassin was captured and the details of his life and motivations made public. In the introduction to *The Collected Stories*, Welty describes how the story came to be:

“Where Is the Voice Coming From?” is unique, however, in the way it came about. That hot August night when Medgar Evers, the local civil rights leader, was shot down from behind in Jackson, I thought, with overwhelming directness: Whoever the murderer is, I know him: not his identity, but his coming about, in this time and place. That is, I ought to have learned by now, from here, what such a man, intent on such a deed, had going on in his mind. I wrote his story – my fiction – in the first person: about that character’s point of view, I felt, through my shock and revolt, I could make no mistake. The story pushed its way up through a long novel I was in the middle of writing, and was finished on the same night the shooting had taken place. ... At *The New Yorker*, where it was sent and where it was taken for the immediately forthcoming issue, William Maxwell, who had already known on sight all I could have told him about this story and its reason for being, edited it over the telephone with me. By then, an arrest had been made in Jackson, and the fiction’s outward details had to be changed where by chance they had resembled too closely those of actuality, for the story must not be found prejudicial to the case of a person who might be on trial for his life. (x-xi)

Welty was able, through sharp, unapologetic observation of her community and societal views at that time, to write a story that includes details so accurate that they had to be altered when the full truth was discovered during the investigation of the assassination. Through her use of first-person narration and her allusions to mythology, Welty reaches for that “possibility of the shared act of the imagination” mentioned above.

Welty, quite often, relies on first-person narration for her writing. Mieke Bal, in her work *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, describes narration in this way:

The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. This topic is closely related to the notion of focalization... Narrator and focalization together determine what has been called narration... The focalizer, ..., is an aspect of the story this narrator tells. It is the represented “colouring” of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, the holder of the “point of view.” ... The fact that “narration” has always implied focalization is related to the notion that language shapes vision and world-view, rather than the other way around. As far as it implies that language can be isolated from its object only artificially, for the duration of the analysis, that idea may very well be squared with the practice endorsed here. After all, ..., the separation into several layers is only temporarily meaningful, and has as its purpose a better insight into the functioning of the extremely complex meaning of the narrative text. If one proceeds to layering, one must do so analytically only. *And doing so, one will inevitably arrive at the conclusion that seeing, taken in the widest sense, constitutes the object of narrating.* (19) [italics by this writer]

Booth agrees with this connection between showing and telling of a story in his discussion of reliable and unreliable narrators:

Perhaps the most important effect of traveling with a narrator who is unaccompanied by a helpful author is that of decreasing emotional distance. We have seen that much traditional commentary was used to increase sympathy or to apologize for faults. When an author chooses to forgo such rhetoric, he may do so because he does not care about conventional sympathy... But he may also do so because his central intelligence is of the kind that will seem most sympathetic if presented as an isolated, unaided consciousness, without the support that a reliable narrator or observer would lend. Such an effect is possible, I think, only when the reflected intelligence is so little distant, so close, in effect, to the norms of the work that no complicated deciphering of unreliability required of the reader. So long as what the character thinks and feels can be taken directly as a reliable clue about the circumstances he faces, the reader can experience those circumstances with him even more strongly because of his moral isolation. (274)

Such is the narration of the story “Where Is the Voice Coming From?”: reliable, yet revolting. Welty’s narrator tells the story as a confession, placing the reader in a position that prevents him or her from maintaining emotional distance. The reader must engage in the story. This story was sent to *The New Yorker* magazine, whose audience, while part of the general American public understanding of race relations in the 1960s, would not have grown up in the South and would not have understood what it might have been like to live in the center of the Civil Rights battle. If Welty had not used first-person narration or

if she had included direct commentary, her audience would have been able to maintain their emotional distance and would not have been so affected by the horror of this assassination. Welty understood that the audience needed to be made uncomfortable by this story because, if readers were not uncomfortable, they would be able to ignore it. She begins her story with a contradictory statement that places the reader on edge: "I says to my wife, 'You can reach and turn it off. You don't have to set and look at a black nigger face no longer than you want to, or listen to what you don't want to hear. It's still a free country'" (*TCS* 603) This statement shows the paradox of race relations at that time: the narrator/assassin espouses freedom as a means to ignore a group which is seeking that very thing.

Mieke Bal's idea that narrator and focalization should be should be analyzed together in order to seek layers of meaning within a story is quite interesting when applied to Welty's narration within this story. Bal states that one must look for "those moments at which (the narrator and the focalizer) do or do not overlap in the shape of a single 'person'" (19-20). For Welty, the narrator (he or she who tells the story) and the focalizer (he or she who shows the story) are quite often the same person. Therefore, it is interesting to take Bal's idea of analyzing relationship one step further: if Welty's narrator and focalizer are one and the same, then what is the relationship between narrator/focalizer and focalized object? In her discussion of the focalizer and focalized object, Bal explains "Analysis of such [relationships] matters because the image we receive of the object is determined by the focalizer. Conversely, the image a focalizer presents of an object says something about the focalizer itself" (150).

For this story, the focalizer is, of course, the assassin and the focalized object is the assassinated leader, who is given the fictional name Roland Summers. By analyzing the relationship between these two characters, one comes to the conclusion that it is centered on irony. Charles Clerc, in his essay “Anatomy of Welty’s ‘Where Is the Voice Coming From?’,” connects this irony directly to the use of first-person narration, stating “The reader can discern the discrepancy between what he is told by the narrator and what actually exists. All forms of irony – verbal, dramatic, situational – appear in this story” (391).

Welty’s assassin and assassinated character are at opposite ends of the society but the assassin seems not to understand that he is the one, as one might say, holding the short end of the stick. He believes, simply based upon the color of his skin, that he is superior to Roland Summers; and he is desperate to maintain that superiority. However, throughout his narration, the assassin explains the reality of this relationship. Summers is giving a speech, and it is a note-worthy event because he appears on television. Roland Summers arrives home in “a new white car” (604), while the assassin has to drive “my brother-in-law’s truck” (603). The assassin describes how Summers’s family has left the lights on in the house, awaiting his return, and how, after he has been shot, Summers’s wife immediately runs out of the house as if “she’d been in there keeping awake all along” (605). The assassin, however, arrives home to find no lights on and no one waiting up for him. The assassin discovers the greatest irony the following morning, but still prevails in holding on to a view that would keep him in a superior position to Summers:

On TV and in the paper, they don't know but half of it. They know who Roland Summers was without knowing who I am. His face was in front of the public before I got rid of him, and after I got rid of him there it is again – the same picture. And none of me. I ain't even had one made. Not ever! The best that newspaper could do for me was offer a five-hundred-dollar reward for finding out who I am. For as long as they don't know who that is, whoever shot Roland is worth a good deal more right now than Roland is. (*TCS* 606)

Welty offers many clues, through her use of symbols, to maximize meaning in the story. These symbols offer the reader a way of making connections to other events, people, or things to bring in additional knowledge in an effort to create meaning in the layers of the story. The first is in the name of the fictional town: Thermopylae. There are two connections that can be made through this name. The first connects to heat. Thermo- suggests "heat." The assassin continually describes the unbearable heat of the town and even uses heat as the excuse for leaving behind the rifle he used in the assassination, telling his wife, "It was scorching! It was scorching! ... It's laying out on the ground in the rank weeds, trying to cool off, that's what it's doing now" (*TCS* 605). Clerc describes the significance of this focus on heat by stating, "heat can arouse passion to feverish pitch, to irrationality, to explosiveness...[Welty makes] use of heat by emphasizing the strain and pressure imposed by its unrelenting omnipresence" (392-93).

However, heat is not the only reason that the name Thermopylae is significant. Thermopylae was the name of the narrow pass in Greece where a small Greek force (including 300 Spartans) attempted to stand against an overwhelming Persian force

(Herodotus, Book Seven). This battle continues to be told and has become legend because of the courage of the Greek forces in the face of certain defeat. This stand can be compared to the Civil Rights battle that took place in America in the 1960s. This was the battle Roland Summers was fighting against people like the assassin. To make this connection between a current struggle (current for the time the story was written) and an epic battle such as that of the Spartans is to share that epic nature of the two. By offering this clue, Welty is giving the audience a level of meaning, an understanding of her own thoughts, without making direct commentary and without telling the audience that they must agree with her.

Welty uses mythology in another instance: the assassination itself. After the assassin has taken his shot, he describes the scene: “Something darker than him, like the wings of a bird, spread on his back and pulled him down. He climbed up once, like a man under bad claws, and like just blood could weigh a ton he walked with it on his back to better light. Didn’t get no further than his door. And fell to stay” (*TCS* 604). One might imagine that this bird, called forth in the explosion of a rifle, in heat as consuming as flames, might be the mythological phoenix.

In the aftermath of the assassination, the assassin first utters the assassinated man’s name. Previous to the shooting, he referred to the man only as “nigger,” but after Summers is killed, the assassin goes and speaks directly to him, calling him by his first name. Another level of irony: the assassin himself gives name to the assassinated – the audience does not know his name until after he has been murdered – however, the assassin is never named. By connecting Roland Summers with the phoenix, a bird which

dies in flames but rises again from the ashes, Welty connects Summers himself to mythology and to rejuvenation. His battle is epic, and he is a hero. The morning after the assassination proves this – when Summers is mentioned by both the television and newspaper while the assassin remains in anonymity.

Welty's narrative skills are at their finest when she utilizes her character's story to tell as well as show her audience a specific story which offers the audience an opportunity to reflect on the world and the lessons that might be learned from viewing it in that particular context. Nancy Hargrove, in her essay "Portrait of an Assassin: Eudora Welty's 'Where Is the Voice Coming From?'" states:

Not only does "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" reveal Welty's skill in creating believable characters...but it also serves as an admirable example of how she uses a contemporary historical event to create a work of fiction which both preserves in living form the essence of the moment and conveys the universal human qualities of the incidents and characters involved. (78)

Welty did not require an historical event in order to create such believable characters or to express the human qualities to which her readers could relate. Two Welty works, "Why I Live at the P.O." and *The Ponder Heart*, are dramatic monologues with many similarities. Welty again uses first-person narration in these works in order to utilize the narrator/focalizer theory to narrow the point of view of each story. She also builds on the idea Booth discusses regarding development of sympathy, quoted above. Booth explains that there is a moral isolation that the writer develops in the reader as he or she connects to the narrator and travels through the story with him or her. Booth goes

on to state that such “isolation can be used to create an almost unbearably poignant sense of the hero’s or heroine’s helplessness in a chaotic, friendless world” (274). Welty takes this idea and turns it on its head with her narrators Sister and Edna Earle. While each of them very pointedly seeks the sympathy of their audience, they are so unreliable in their depiction of events, in their attempts to control how their audience should interpret those events, that, instead of creating a “poignant” sense of the narrators’ experience, a comic sense is created. Sister and Edna Earle’s reactions to the events they experience in their stories and their attempts to define their own self-worth through connection to family status in community shape these narratives as well as the audience reaction to the stories.

The main action of “Why I Live at the P.O.” occurs in the reappearance of Stella-Rondo, sister to the narrator. Thomas Loe, in his overview of the story “Why I Live at the P.O.,” explains that:

The story’s opening revelation of Stella-Rondo’s [lie about Sister’s physical shape] immediately establishes both the dominating narrative voice and the highly personal terms which will help escalate its conflict. More misrepresentations from Stella-Rondo follow, and the narrator herself soon begins to distort the effect and importance of what is happening, raising questions about her own reliability. ... How events are revealed is far more important than what happens because the hothouse atmosphere of the extended family consists largely of verbal relationships. This small group of people amuse – and define – themselves primarily by talking and by creating scenes. The stylistic texture of the narrator’s

speech patterns is the story's real essence, and it provides the fabric from which Sister's world is fashioned. (par. 2)

By bringing Sister's reliability into question, showing her increasing desperation for someone to be on her side, Welty goes against Booth's determination that the reader can take the narrator's relating of events as reliable and can, therefore, sympathize with the narrator. The opposite takes place in this story: Sister relates the events of that July 4th day with increasing drama, professing her own innocence louder and louder. The reader can see, however, that it is Sister's reactions to Stella-Rondo that serve to exacerbate the situation. The more dramatically she reacts, the more Stella-Rondo pushes her buttons. It is also Sister, interestingly, who begins the sibling rivalry.

Stella-Rondo arrives back home after separating from her husband, Mr. Whitaker. She brings with her a child, Shirley-T., who she claims is adopted. Sister, however, questions this adoption and intimates that she believes Shirley-T. to be the biological child of Stella-Rondo and Mr. Whitaker, claiming "that whoever Shirley-T, was, she was the spit-image of Papa-Daddy, if he'd cut off his beard, which of course he'd never do in the world" (*TCS* 46). This angers Stella-Rondo who, upon sitting down to lunch with the family, tells Papa-Daddy that Sister thinks he should cut off his beard. He is so offended that he immediately enters the argument between Sister and Stella-Rondo, causing Sister to storm from the table.

Sister next encounters Uncle Rondo, Mama's brother, who is wearing a flesh-colored kimono that he has found in Stella-Rondo's luggage. He is headed outside to lay in the hammock. Shortly after he reclines, Stella-Rondo catches sight of him and, of

course, reacts negatively. She asks Sister if she notices something different about Uncle Rondo, to which Sister replies, “Why, no, except he’s got on some terrible-looking, flesh-colored contraption I wouldn’t be found dead in, is all I can see” (*TCS* 49). Sister’s intention is to disparage Stella-Rondo’s fashion sense, but this too will not turn out as she hopes. Stella-Rondo is unhappy with Uncle Rondo’s wearing her robe, and states that she thinks he looks foolish in it. That evening when Uncle Rondo appears at the dinner table still wearing the kimono, Sister makes another attempt to get the better of Stella-Rondo. She points out to Uncle Rondo that he reconsider wearing the kimono at table, lest it be soiled, but Stella-Rondo claims that she does not mind if he wears it and that Sister told her that she thought he looked foolish wearing it.

This second false statement by Stella-Rondo causes another argument during the meal. Uncle Rondo is as offended as Papa-Daddy had earlier been; however, he decides to do something about it. Early the next morning, he throws a packet of firecrackers into Sister’s room while she is sleeping. Sister is duly upset by this and decides that she must leave the house and move to the P.O. (Post Office). She gathers several items from the house and moves into the back room of the P.O. Her family is unrepentant and decides that they will not go to the P.O. to gather their mail, lest they be required to interact with her. Sister closes her account by stating, “here I am and here I’ll stay. I want the world to know I’m happy. And if Stella-Rondo should come to me this minute, on bended knee and attempt to explain ..., I’d simply put my fingers in both my ears and refuse to listen” (*TCS* 56).

In explaining how this comic series of events can be understood, Charles May states that:

Sister is one who does things subjectively rather than objectively. Welty dramatizes Sister's divided self by splitting her quite neatly into a subjective side, Sister herself, and an objective side, Stella-Rondo ... In this sense Sister is right when she insists throughout the story that she does nothing, that everything is Stella-Rondo's fault. Yet the reader is also right in suspecting that everything that happens is Sister's doing. ... Sister communicates everything in this oblique, cater-cornered way; she does not express her feelings directly, but rather diagonally through Stella-Rondo. Consequently, she can cause a great many events to occur, yet disclaim responsibility for any of them. She can sit in the post office, proclaiming, "I didn't do anything," and thereby believe that she preserves her freedom, her individuality, her blamelessness, and her inviolate self.

(Champion 46)

Sister is different from the assassin/narrator in "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" because she refuses to accept any fault in the course of events in her story. The sympathy she seeks from her audience is the type that will absolve her of any fault, while the assassin/narrator fully claims responsibility for his actions, knowing the unlawfulness of those actions, yet seeking sympathy from the audience as justification for his actions.

Another aspect of Sister's narration is her attempt to establish and maintain her own sense of self-worth through her placement in her family and their status in the community. Charles May explains that "Once we see that Stella-Rondo is the objective

side of Sister's subjective self, the inevitability of Sister's being driven out of the house precisely because she urges the exile of Stella-Rondo becomes clear" (Champion 47). It is not simply a case of sibling rivalry between Sister and Stella-Rondo: Stella-Rondo represents a threat to Sister's placement within the family, and, therefore, a threat to Sister's sense of worth.

Sister immediately makes a bid for the reader's sympathy regarding Stella-Rondo's return by claiming, "I was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again. ... Stella-Rondo is exactly twelve months to the day younger than I am and for that reason she's spoiled" (*TCS* 46). This claim shows how threatened Sister feels by Stella-Rondo's return and how illogical her reasons are for feeling threatened.

Carol Ann Johnston, in her work *Eudora Welty: A Study of the Short Fiction*, explains:

Sister's first-person narration should put the best possible spin on her actions. Instead we get glimpses through her eyes of her jealousy of Stella-Rondo, mixed in with heavy doses of self-pity. Her jealousy seems at least partially responsible for the family's repudiation. ... But, as we see over and over in this story, Sister takes every comment and accusation as an intensely personal attack ... what we learn from this [narrative] is that Sister feels that she is at the bottom of the ladder in every way, and no matter what happens, Stella-Rondo will best her, because she is "spoiled." This is a case of older-younger sibling rivalry achieving its full comic potential. As with most instances of disagreement between sisters,

however, this situation is not comic at all to the participants. Sister takes whatever favoritism there may actually be toward Stella-Rondo and magnifies it in her mind to such a degree that she makes the family, as well as herself, believe that she is the one who doesn't belong. (17-18)

Sister does not fully escape her family, however. She states herself that, "Of course there's not much mail. My family are naturally the main people in China Grove" (TCS 56). Although she protests that she is happy and does not care if other people in the town boycott the P.O. in support of her family. Carol Ann Johnston states, "The story shows how an intensely close family can be not only suffocating but also impossible to escape. In the end, family ties are so powerful that Sister's moving to the P.O. merely intensifies her connection with and dependence on her family" (18) because she cannot earn her living without their patronage.

Similar in narrative style to "Why I Live at the P.O.," *The Ponder Heart* is another comic monologue. The narrator for this story is one Edna Earle Ponder, niece to Daniel Ponder, recently on trial for the murder of his young wife. Edna Earle runs the Beulah Hotel, given to her by her family, and elects herself as caretaker of her Uncle Daniel, a kind and generous, yet mentally slow man. Edna Earle, like Sister, tries to influence a sympathetic response from her audience to her version of events, while establishing her own importance by virtue of her placement within the Ponder family and its status in the town of Clay.

Edna Earle tells her story, actually Uncle Daniel's story, to a Beulah Hotel guest whose car has broken down, necessitating his overnight stay in Clay. Robert Holland, in

his essay “Dialogue as a Reflection of Place in *The Ponder Heart*,” explains Edna Earle’s narrative style:

Edna Earle Ponder naturally assumes that her worn counters, with all their comfortable connotations, are universally used. It would not occur to her that her listener could need any explanation of the allusions which fill her monologue, since it would be astonishing to her that anyone either would not know or would not fill the gaps, as a matter of course. She takes in whoever comes along and establishes intimacy. ... Verbal symmetry and platitude are not only a positive reflection of a culture, but also the particular Southern expression of [nicety]. Miss Welty’s characters color the [details of the story] with a layer of words which is a comforting dike against [reality]. (355-56)

Edna Earle is a master story-teller. She understands that if she tells Uncle Daniel’s life story straight out, that her audience might come to a different conclusion from hers: that possibly Uncle Daniel needs to return to the asylum, or that he needs to be convicted of his wife, Bonnie Dee’s, death, or that he is not the good man she says he is. Ellen Walker, in her piece “‘It’s all in a way of speaking’: a Discussion of *The Ponder Heart*,” explains that:

Welty achieves narrative texture ... by providing, through one narrative voice, a multiplicity of perspectives. ... Her narrative is patterned to show several perspectives on the action, conflicting currents move beneath its surface and become visible because, although she is not an entirely reliable witness to the events she tells, she is in the end an honorable one who reveals them accurately,

often despite her insistence on her own version of the truth. ... Events are defined by the motives of those involved instead of by outcomes. Edna Earle will not allow the reader direct access to others with different assumptions, and, although she does quote them, she manages to discredit their conclusions. ... For Edna Earle, to tell is to be. The events she recounts, the events of Daniel Ponder's life (which include parts of her own life), have a predetermined meaning, one based on Edna Earle's assumption of Daniel's goodness. And so she provides us with her preferred version of Uncle Daniel, partly through direct assertions about his character and personality. (par.3)

Again, Welty relies on mythology in the telling of this story. She relates this story almost as a quest, as described by Jennifer Lynn Randisi:

the events of the story comprise a quest, but one that recounts events leading to isolation rather than reconciliation, revealed through a disparity between what the reader comes to know and what Edna Earle cannot see (that is, what she edited from her perceptions). For our purposes, then, the ironic myth is the distance between what Edna Earle says and what the reader hears. (57)

Consider this bit of the story, hidden within Edna Earle's explanation of Uncle Daniel's first marriage which she and Grandpa – Uncle Daniel's father – arranged:

Grandpa would be a lot more willing to stalk up on a wedding and stop it, than to encourage one to go on. He regarded getting married as a show of weakness of character in nearly every case but his own, because he was smart enough to pick a wife very nearly as smart as he was. ... Poor Grandpa! Suppose I'd even

attempted, over the years, to step off – I dread to think of the lengths Grandpa would have gone to stop it. Of course, I’m intended to look after Uncle Daniel and everybody knows it, but in plenty of marriages there’s three – three all your life. Because nearly everybody’s got somebody. I used to think if I ever did step off with, say, Mr. Springer, Uncle Daniel wouldn’t mind; he always could make Mr. Springer laugh. And I could name the oldest child after Grandpa and win him over quick before he know it. Grandpa adored compliments, though he tried to hide it. Ponder Springer – that sounds perfectly plausible to me, or did at one time. (TPH 26-27)

While Edna Earle intends her story to be a focus on the Ponder family, especially Uncle Daniel and his recent murder trial – the hottest story in town – she reveals, in this one short section, much more about herself than she realizes. This is a time when an unmarried woman of her age might be considered an “old maid.” She subtly inserts reasons why she is not married and should not be considered an old maid: her Grandpa would never have allowed it; and she is meant to take care of Uncle Daniel, even if he is married. She even tries to prevent the listener from getting the idea of confirming her story by asking anyone else in town, because “everyone knows it” already. However, the careful reader will realize her attempts to control the story and will also discover some secrets that she might not have realized that she has uncovered: that she has considered marriage before, with Mr. Springer, to the point that she created a way to gain Grandpa’s forgiveness, and had even dreamed of her married name. Here, one might also discover

the reason why she meddles so thoroughly in Uncle Daniel's marriage with Bonnie Dee, by simply stating that "in plenty of marriages there's three."

Welty makes a shrewd choice in allowing Edna Earle to tell the Ponder story, one that allows her to maintain her authorial silence. She is not required to step in as the author to point out anything to the audience or to explain things. As in the above example, Edna Earle's way of story-telling gives the reader all that is necessary to understand the reality within Edna Earle's story. While one might take the details of the story - Uncle Daniel's two failed marriages, his trip to the asylum, his obvious mental incompetence, Edna Earle's failure at love (and one might wonder about her ability to successfully run the Beulah Hotel), Bonnie Dee's death, and a murder trial – and wonder how Edna Earle could possibly think this narrative is pleasant way to "entertain" a guest while waiting for dinner, one need look no further than the narration itself. Edna Earle's delivery is buoyant: "partly to keep her head up among the neighbors" (Champion 138). This attitude allows the story to come off as more comic than tragic: a very Southern way of refusing to stay down when knocked down. *The New York Times Book Review* by V.S. Pritchett describes Welty's narrative achievement in this way:

Edna Earle's narrative is remarkable for its headlong garrulity and also for its preposterous silences and changes of subject at the crises of the tale. She is a respectable young scold with a long tradition in English sentimental comedy. If it was a shade tricky and arch of Miss Welty to make her tell the tale, she has the advantage of being able to bring a whole town to life in her throwaway lines... Her breathless, backhanded, first person singular has been caught, word by awful

word, in all its affectionate self-importance, by a writer with a wonderful ear.

(Champion 138)

Sharon Deykin Baris, in her article “Welty’s Philosophy of Friendship: Meanings Treasured in *The Ponder Heart*,” explains that Edna Earle’s “aim in telling the Ponder family story is no less than claiming an American house of fiction for her own. Welty’s novel probes the power of laughter as a form of resistance, but shows its better value in uncovering sources of strength within the traditions that Edna Earle, and we, inherit” (43). Edna Earle seeks to understand her world and to control the way her listener understands her world by controlling the telling of the Ponder story.

Welty explains the importance of understanding in her essay “Words into Fiction”:

I am only trying to express what I think the so-called raw material [human life] is *without its interpretation*; without its artist. Without the act of human understanding – and it is a double act through which we make sense to each other – experience is the worst kind of emptiness; it is obliteration, black or prismatic, as meaningless as was indeed that loveless cave. Before there is meaning, there has to occur some personal act of vision. And it is this that is continuously projected as the novelist writes, and again as we, each to ourselves, read. (*EotS* 136-37)

Edna Earle’s personal act of vision occurs during the comical climax of Uncle Daniel’s murder trial when he suddenly stands up and begins walking up and down the aisles of the gallery giving away all the money he has to each and every person in town who is in attendance; and, according to Edna Earle, everyone was there. She breaks from her

recitation of the event to tell her listener, “Now I’ll tell you something: anything Uncle Daniel has left after some future day is supposed to be mine. I’m the inheritor. I’m the last one, isn’t that a scream? The last Ponder. But with one fling of the hand I showed the mayor *my* stand: I’d never stop Uncle Daniel from giving away than you could stop a bird from flying” (146).

Up to this point of the story, Edna Earle described many ways in which she had made attempts to stop Uncle Daniel from giving away the Ponder family fortune, from the time that she was stuck on the Ferris Wheel while he gave away ice cream to the dancing girls at the Fair to attempts to curb Bonnie Dee’s spending on mail-order items and gaudy clothing. However, this is the one time that she makes no attempt to stop him. One wonders if, in a moment of insanity, clarity is revealed. Edna Earle explains what she has learned to her listener:

I don’t think any of those people that day would have ever accepted it from Uncle Daniel – money! – if they’d known what else to do. Not to know how to take what’s offered shows your manners – but there’s a dividing line somewhere. Of course they could have taken it and then given it back to *me*, later. Nobody ever seemed to think of that solution, except Edna Earle Ponder. Surely they’re not beginning to be scared of *me*. ... The worst thing you can give away is money – I learned that, if Uncle Daniel didn’t. You and them are both done for then, somehow; you can’t go on after it, and still be you and them. (148-49)

Edna Earle has learned her lesson too late, however. Uncle Daniel has, essentially, given away all the Ponder money and the town seems to have abandoned the family,

rather than return the money: “Empty house, empty hotel, might as well be an empty town. ... Even the preacher says he has a catch in his back, just temporary” (156). It has been three days since the trial, and no one has been to call. With the family fortune gone, will the family standing be far behind? What then will the Ponders do? Welty further explains in “Words into Fiction”:

There has occurred the experience of the writer in writing the novel, and now there occurs the experience of the reader in reading it. More than one mind and heart go into this. We may even hope to follow into a kind of future with a novel that to us seems good, drawn forward by what the long unfolding has promised and so far revealed. By yielding to what has been, by all his available means, *suggested*, we are able to see for ourselves a certain distance beyond what is possible for him simply to *say*. So that, although nobody else ought to say this, the novelist *has* said, “In other words...” (*EotS* 138)

Most of Welty’s stories are created from her own experience and time in the pre-Civil Rights Era South. One story, however, seems to follow this “In other words...” idea. This is Welty’s short story “Circe,” which retells the experience of Odysseus and his crew when they stop on the island inhabited by the goddess Circe. The story is told from Circe’s point of view, following her intentions and desires, her experiences when she encounters these visitors. Welty does not offer background or attempt to set up the story in any way; she even begins the story in the middle compared to the point that Homer begins; she tells nothing of what Odysseus and his men have experienced prior to their appearance on Circe’s island. This, for Welty, is not important.

Welty does not tell this story in order for it to be compared to the original, but to tell a story by which the reader can see relationship – connection, understanding - to the world. She states in her essay “Writing and Analyzing a Story” that:

It seems likely that all of one writer’s stories do tend to spring from the same source within him. However they differ in theme or approach, however they vary in mood or fluctuate in their strength, their power to reach the mind or heart, all of one writer’s stories carry their signature because of the one impulse most characteristic of his own gift – to praise, to love, to call up into view. But then, what countless stories by what countless authors share a common source! For the source of the short story is usually lyrical. And all writers speak from, and speak to, emotions eternally the same in all of us: love, pity, terror do not show favorites or leave any of us out.

The tracking down of a story might do well to start not in the subjective country but in the world itself. What in this world leads back most directly, makes the clearest connection to these emotions? What is the pull on the line? For some outside signal has startled or moved the story-writing mind to complicity: some certain irresistible, alarming (pleasurable or disturbing), magnetic person, place, or thing. The outside world and the writer’s response to it, the story’s quotients, are always different, always differing in this combining; they are always – or so it seems to me – most intimately connected with each other. (*EotS* 108-09)

Welty has not chosen to tell Circe’s story based on a feeling that Homer might have left out information or because she felt it was more important than Homer’s version.

She did not even choose this story in order to be compared with Homer's story. Circe's story can stand on its own. It can offer to the reader connection to and understanding of the current world. It is a story of longing, love, loss, mystery, and magic. Judith Yarnall in her book *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* explains:

Welty's story is about the evolution of Circe's consciousness, not Odysseus's. He may well get sailing directions from her – she possesses the requisite foreknowledge; he is off to Hades by the end of the narrative – but this kind of guidance is not what Welty cares about. She focuses almost exclusively on the tension between Circe's arrogance and her yearning. (185)

Circe begins telling her story through a display of her control over her environment through domesticity. She is sewing; and Odysseus's men, just disembarked from their ship, are drawn to her home. She initially refers to them as "beautiful strangers," but her attitude quickly changes when their appearance in her home seems to wreak havoc, and she takes quick action to reestablish her control: "They stumbled on my polished floor, strewing sand, crowding on each other, sizing up the household for gifts...In the hope of a bath, they looked in awe at their hands....Each in turn with a pair of black-nailed hands swept up his bowl" (CS 531). In each man's bowl is a magical draught which turns the men into pigs. Circe explains why she uses this trick: "'No dirt is allowed in this house!' In the end, it takes phenomenal neatness of housekeeping to put it through the heads of men that they are swine (CS 531).

However, there is one man who seems to be immune to Circe's magic. She identifies him as "the hero" and seduces him, entranced by the mystery of his mortality.

This push and pull continues throughout the story: mysterious enchantress enchanted by the mystery of mortal life. Joseph Campbell, in his work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, explains the significance of supernatural aid given along the hero's journey:

What such a figure [a supernatural figure who aids the hero] represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. The fantasy is a reassurance – a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was known first within the mother womb, is not to be lost; that it supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past (is omega as well as alpha); that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world. (59)

This might explain why Welty chooses to incorporate domesticity so fully into Circe's character. Ann Romines, in her book *The Home Plot: Women, Writing & Domestic Ritual*, further builds upon this idea, stating:

Odysseus is the prototypical wanderer and perhaps the prototypical protagonist of Western Literature. But his adventures are specifically male; no woman can join his voyaging. By framing her story as a monologue in Circe's voice, Welty puts us inside the other story, that of the fixed woman, who defines herself by domestic ritual. ... To inhabit her immortal self and to exercise her powers, Circe must keep to her island. Her time is very different from Odysseus'; what seems a day to her is a year to him, and time for departure. Circe cannot depart... She exults in her faculty, epitomized in her practical magic, which works through

cooking, cleaning, and laundry and is powerfully seductive to wandering men.

But at moments her endless life seems unbearable. (256)

Welty, herself, explains the mystery that Circe strives to learn:

Above all, I had no wish to sound mystical, but I admit that I did expect to sound mysterious now and then, if I could: this was a circumstantial, realistic story in which the reality *was* mystery. The cry that rose up at the story's end was, I hope unmistakably, the cry of that doomed relationship – personal, mortal, psychic – admitted in order to be denied, a cry that the characters were first able (and prone) to listen to, and then able in part to ignore. The cry was authentic to my story: the end of a journey *can* set up a cry, the shallowest provocation to sympathy and love does hate to give up the ghost. A relationship of the most fleeting kind has the power inherent to loom like a genie – to become vocative at the last, as it has already become present and taken up room; as it has spread out as a destination however unlikely; as it has glimmered and rushed by in the dark and dust outside, showing occasional points of fire. Relationship *is* a pervading and changing mystery; it is not words that make it so in life, but words have to make it so in a story. Brutal or lovely, the mystery waits for people wherever they go, whatever extreme they run to. (*EotS* 114)

Welty describes her story “A Memory” as “a discovery in the making” (*OWB* 95).

The story is introspective on two levels: it is the memory of a mature woman looking back upon her younger self as she lies on a beach, pondering her unrequited love of a boy

in her class. The young girl fancies herself an artist, creating a frame with her fingers, through which she pictures the world around her. She explains her view of life:

I was at an age when I formed a judgment upon every person and every event which came under my eye, although I was easily frightened. When a person, or a happening, seemed to me not in keeping with my opinion, or even my hope or expectation, I was terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness which tore my heart with a kind of sorrow. My father and mother, who believed that I saw nothing in the world which was not strictly coaxed into place like a vine on our garden trellis to be presented to my eyes, would have been badly concerned if they had guessed how frequently the weak and inferior and strangely turned examples of what was to come showed themselves to me. (CS 75)

Welty explains the significance of the story by stating:

This is not, on reaching its end, an observer's story. The tableau discovered through the young girl's framing hands is unwelcome realism. How can she accommodate the existence of this view to the dream of love, which she carried already inside her? Amorphous and tender, from now on it will have to remain hidden, her own secret imagining. ... After that, dreaming or awake, she will be drawn in. (OWB 97)

It is interesting that Welty has the narrator of this story provide what amounts to two narrations: one from her teenage point of view and one from her adult point of view. Each, however, serves to show a distance established between the narrator and the reality of her world. One might think that the focalized object (from Mieke Bal's narrative

theory) is the young boy the narrator loves, but it is actually the narrator herself who is the both focalizer and focalized object. Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, in their work *The Nature of Narrative*, describe some first-person narrators as “eye-witness,” indicating that the story is seen through their eyes – their point of view – and that this eye-witness account can either be focused inward (on the narrator) or outward (to events around the narrator) (256). They go on to discuss the idea of reality presented within the story. They explain that the reader must, in some way, connect to the facts of the story - the reality created – in order to suspend disbelief, if necessary, to connect to the story. They complete this discussion by stating:

The author...who presents his eye-witness narrator as a legitimate memoirist ... can count on an interest [from the reader] which will make mere fact exciting. But this does not prevent many of our memoirists from being singled out as notorious liars ... by which we mean that they tend to give way to fictional impulses in their narratives. The impulse to shape, to improve, to present not what was said or what did happen, inevitably makes itself felt. Narrative art is the art of story-telling, and the more literate and sensitive a man is, the more he feels creative pressures which drive him to seek beauty or truth at the expense of fact. (258)

In “A Memory,” however, Welty does not strictly follow this idea. She finds a way to have it both ways, and, by doing so, she creates her meaning by juxtaposing the imagined ideal against unaltered, and unflattering, reality.

The young narrator lies on the beach, rapt in her remembrance of the boy she adores, and attempting to see the world only through her framed fingers. She is, however,

suddenly aware of a family that has appeared uncomfortably close to her and whose physical comfort with one another coupled with their ignorance of offending the young girl by their nature, disgusts her. Carol Ann Johnson provides a provocative explanation of this juxtaposition of imagination and reality:

Even as we observe this in the story, however, we must pull back and ask ourselves, “Which narrator feels this way; is it the young girl sitting on the beach, or the adult who is telling us of the memory of sitting on the beach?” Because it is a conundrum, an adult remembering herself obsessing over a memory of a child, a memory of a memory, as it were, Welty’s story makes it particularly difficult to locate the source of the loathing toward the bathers. Whether or not we can conclusively identify the source, contempt for the family is distancing in itself, no matter which narrator feels it: we see through narrative eyes no attempt to understand the swimmers, no effort to imagine living as they live. The mind, as well as the physical person, of both narrators stays quite far from these characters... Just as the story is a memory within a memory, the disdain for the group of swimmers serves as a kind of distance within distance: the dislike intensifies because of its uncertain location. (57)

This memory is significant to the adult narrator because it mirrors the continuing experience from youth to adult, the similarities between past and present.

Wayne Booth explains why the use of authorial distance, the author's attempt to create and control sympathy, work so effectively:

The peculiar intensity of such an effect [sentimentality] depends, however, on a static character. The changes which go to make up the story are all changes in fact and circumstance and knowledge, never in the essential worth or rightness of the character herself. She must be accepted at her own estimate from the beginning, and that estimate must, for greatest effect, be as close as possible to the reader's estimate of his own importance. Whether we call this effect identification or not, it is certainly the closest that literature can come to making us feel events as if they were happening to ourselves. As we read, we know only [the narrator's] world and we know only her values. Our only value becomes, in a sense, her well-being, and we accept any threat to her happiness precisely as she accepts it. The slightest suggestion that she is at fault will create too much distance; the slightest sign that author and reader are observing [the narrator] from above rather than alongside will destroy, at least in part, the quality of our concern and hence of our final revelation. To look down on her would make us want to see her either change or be punished; either desire would diminish our pity or require a rewriting of the story to accommodate it. (276-77)

Welty seems to agree with this description as she explains her reasoning for maintaining this silence as the author, this distance from the story: "My temperament and my instinct had told me alike that the author, who writes at his own emergency, remains and needs to remain at his private remove. I wished to be, not effaced, but invisible –

actually a powerful position. Perspective, the line of vision, the frame of vision – these set a distance” (*OWB* 95).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Eudora Welty discusses her evolution from simple, Southern girl into world-renowned writer in her work *One Writer's Beginnings*, the origin of which came from a series of lectures she gave at Harvard University. These separate lectures, and thus the separate sections of the book, are titled very tellingly: "Listening," "Learning to See," and "Finding a Voice." These three ideas can be traced in each and every piece of fiction she has written. Her ear for listening to the oral tradition, the many stories of the Southern city in which she lived her entire life, and her ability to reflect what she heard in the stories she wrote is impeccable. Her ability to show her readers the reality of the world in which her stories are placed is photographic in nature. Finally, the voice she finds in which to tell her stories, while almost always in the first person, is carefully chosen – always the perfect voice to tell the story which needs to be told.

Katherine Anne Porter, in her introduction to Welty's collection of short stories entitled *A Curtain of Green*, describes how she was struck by Welty and her incomparable development as a writer upon their first meeting:

Being the child of her place and time, profiting perhaps without being aware of it by the cluttered experiences, foreign travels, and disorders of the generation immediately preceding her, she will never have to go away and live among the Eskimos, or Mexican Indians; she need not follow a war and smell death to feel

herself alive, she knows about death already. She shall not need even to live in New York in order to feel that she is having the kind of experience, the sense of “life” proper to a serious author. She gets her right nourishment from the source natural to her – her experience so far has been quite enough for her and of precisely the right kind. ... She has never studied the writing craft in any college. She has never belonged to a literary group, and until her first collection was ready to be published she had never discussed with any colleague or older artist any problem of her craft. Nothing else that I know about her could be more satisfactory to me than this; it seems to me immensely right, the very way a young artist should grow, with pride and independence and the courage really to face out the individual struggle; to make and correct mistakes and take the consequences of them, to stand firmly on his own feet in the end. I believe in the rightness of Miss Welty’s instinctive knowledge that writing cannot be taught, but only learned, and learned by the individual in his own way, at his own pace and in his own time, for the process of mastering the medium is part of a cellular growth in a most complex organism; it is a way of life and a mode of being which cannot be divided from the kind of human creature you were the day you were born, and only in obeying the law of this singular being can the artist know his true directions and the right ends for him. (*CoG* xiii-xiv)

This instinctive evolution as a writer might explain why Welty seems to, so often, choose first-person narration for her stories. This control of point of view places the reader in the fixed position of recipient of the story. He cannot stand to the side, in the

place of observer – this place Welty reserves for herself. Wayne Booth explains why this control of point of view works so effectively:

Perhaps the most important effect of traveling with a narrator who is unaccompanied by a helpful author is that of decreasing emotional distance. ...Such an effect is possible, I think, only when the reflected intelligence is so little distant, so close, in effect, to the norms of the work that no complicated deciphering of unreliability is required of the reader. So long as what the character thinks and feels can be taken directly as a reliable clue about the circumstances he faces, the reader can experience those circumstances with him even more strongly because of his moral isolation. Such isolation can be used to create an almost unbearably poignant sense of the hero's or heroine's helplessness in a chaotic, friendless world. (274)

Through such stories as “Why I Live at the P.O.,” “Where Is the Voice Coming From?,” “Circe,” and “A Memory,” and the novels *The Ponder Heart* and *Losing Battles*, Welty presents a beautiful control of the narrative act - sometimes comic, even in the face of tragedy, yet always earnest and honest. While she may choose a narrator who makes the audience uncomfortable, or to whom one might think there is no way the reader will find connection or common ground – such as with the narrator/assassin of “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” – Welty is still able to present the story in such a way that the reader is willing to take the journey with the narrator.

The authors of *The Nature of Narrative* in their discussion of the hero as narrator perhaps provide the reason why the use of the anti-hero as narrator is effective:

In a mechanical universe the ethical hero of Aristotle and of heroic narrative is just another type of person. Together with the obsessed, the perverted, the weak, and the foolish, the hero is a mere passive product of heredity and environment. Like the other types, however, the hero still refuses to admit that he has no control, no hand in the shaping of his own character and his circumstances. But in his case the pretense makes him insufferable in the eyes of others. Unlike them, he bears no burden of guilt, of shame, of despair. To the unthinking, his quick wit, his beautiful body, his physical courage, and his poise still merit praise, as though he made them himself. He is unsympathetic to the dark, inarticulate, passionate underside of human nature, for he does not experience it himself and he cannot believe that it is ever beyond one's ability to control. (Scholes, et al 152)

Welty's reader does not traverse her world with a hero, but usually with a flawed narrator who has no control over his or her environment. The narrators might be small, weak, foolish, evil, or heroic, but each is able to communicate his or her experience to the audience. It is Welty's skill as a writer that bridges the gap between narrator and audience. Her quiet life is no barrier to her ability to tell a tale with great meaning to readers all over the world. She explains this best herself: "As you have seen, I am a writer who came of a sheltered life. A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within" (*OWB* 114).

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