

EUDORA WELTY'S STILL AND SILENT LIVES

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## Eudora Welty's Still and Silent Lives

Eudora Welty published her first short story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," in 1936 at the age of twenty-six. This story of a lonely traveling man was included in her first collection of short stories, A Curtain of Green and Other Stories, which appeared in 1941. A second collection, The Wide Net, was published in 1943. Nearly all of the stories in these two collections, as Robert Penn Warren has observed, "deal with people who in one way or another, are cut off, alienated, isolated from the world."<sup>1</sup> To portray such people Welty often relies on capturing revealing quiet moments, like a skillful photographer. "The moment crystallized in time and forever removed out of time," writes Ruth M. Vande Kieft, "the still moment, the quiet center, the instant of revelation, the elusive gesture captured--these are all moments in Miss Welty's fiction when a picture is taken, and she has caught for permanent safe-keeping a precious scene or person, an act, a thought, a feeling."<sup>2</sup> Although Welty does not neglect the sound and the action of the world in which her lonely people exist, she is especially adept at capturing the silent, crystallized moment and depicting the revealing scenes of silence and stillness. In A Curtain of Green and The Wide Net, Welty characteristically uses such scenes and

moments to expose the extreme loneliness of her characters, a loneliness often intensified by the intrusion of motion or noise.

The extremely silent world of the twelve-year-old deaf-mute Joel in "First Love" accents the loneliness made more painful when he leaves the only home he knows to follow after his first love. In 1801 Joel Mayes walks through the frozen streets of Natchez which for once shares his silence because of the extreme cold. "The little town of little galleries was all laden roofs and silence. . . .Men were caught by the cold, they dropped in its snare-like silence. . . .Natchez people turned silently to look when a solitary man that no one had ever seen before was found and carried in through the streets, frozen. . . ." <sup>3</sup> Welty brings this freeze on Natchez to reveal Joel's sense of isolation because of his deaf-muteness.

Joel Mayes. . . saw the man brought in and knew it was a dead man, but his eyes were for something else, something wonderful. He saw the breaths coming out of people's mouths, and his dark face, losing just now a little of its softness, showed its secret desire. It was marvelous to him when the infinite designs of speech became visible in formations on the air, and he watched with awe that changed to tenderness whenever people met and passed in the road with an exchange of words. He walked alone, slowly through the silence, with the sturdy and yet dreamlike walk of an orphan, and let his own breath out through his lips, pushed it into the air, and whatever word it was it took the shape of a tower. He was as pleased as if he had had a little conversation with someone (p. 5).

A "little conversation," for Joel, would provide communication with another person. His pleasure in seeing his breath look like the breath exhaled by others when they speak is so great that Joel hardly takes note of a dead man. Welty writes

that this is a revelation of his "secret desire."

At the inn where he earns his keep by boot-blackening, Joel awakens one night to discover Aaron Burr and Harman Blennerhassett talking in his room. Joel feels violated at first, but then Aaron Burr gestures to him: "It was like the first movement he had ever seen, as if the world had been up to that night inanimate. It was like the signal to open some heavy gate or paddock, and it did open to his complete astonishment upon a panorama in his own head, about which he knew first of all that he would never be able to speak. . ." (p. 11). Joel has found his first love in Burr and has learned about himself, but he bears the pain of knowing he can never speak what he has found.

Burr and Blennerhassett continue meeting in Joel's room nightly until one night Burr stays behind to sleep on Joel's table. Until that night Joel had always thought that "talking was Burr's appearance" (p. 16). But now Joel realizes as he looks at the silent sleeping face of Burr that this is the last night Burr will come to talk with Blennerhassett in his room. "Joel stood motionless; he lifted his gaze from Burr's face and stared at nothing" (p. 27). In reference to this silent stillness of Joel's, Alfred Appel in Seasons of Dreams writes, "Joel senses that, even if he could speak, he would not find the words to express his love--its history of sorrow and the dreams it has contemplated."<sup>4</sup> Just as Welty set Natchez in silence to show her reader Joel's secret desire,



she now stands Joel in the silent awareness that his desire will never be realized. He is allowed some communication, however, for when Burr begins to cry out in a dream, Joel shares his love by holding Burr's hand to silence and protect him from revealing whatever secrets he and Blennerhassett had exchanged.

Joel has already determined to follow Burr wherever he goes; so after Burr blacks his face the next night with Joel's boot-black to disguise himself for escape, Joel follows. Even though Burr deserts Joel to escape a posse, Joel's love and the realization that he is very alone because he cannot express his love change him. He leaves Natchez, walking "on in the frozen path into the wilderness, on and on. He did not see how he could ever go back and still be the boot-boy at the Inn" (p. 33). Joel no longer is the innocent he was at the beginning of the story when his secret desire for speech caused him to ignore a frozen man. More mature and aware now, Joel walks out of Natchez into the cold. "He walked on. He saw that the bodies of the frozen birds had fallen out of the trees, and he fell down and wept for his father and mother, to whom he had not said goodbye" (p. 33). Appel gives a valid evaluation of this last scene: "The final image of 'First Love' reasserts that his love is always to remain inarticulate . . . ." <sup>5</sup> Though Joel begins his story as a lonely orphan on whom silence is imposed by a physical handicap, at the end he understands that he is completely isolated

from parents, from Burr, from the inn, from Natchez, in a silence that could not be broken even if he could speak the words.

Joel's story, the first in The Wide Net, introduces the reader to Welty's technique of penetrating the silent, still lives of her characters. Welty's task of showing the loneliness of this deaf-mute, as well as the loneliness of many of her other characters, is a difficult one as is explained by Vande Kieft in Eudora Welty: "Her problem as an artist has been to find the words to convey the mysteries, the elusive and subtle inner states of mind and feeling for which most people (and certainly the people of her fiction) have no words at all: she must be articulate about what cannot be articulated."<sup>6</sup> The technique of the crystallized moment and the silent scene that Welty uses so well to reveal Joel's mysteries she will employ again and again to portray the loneliness of people of all ages.

Welty's young adult women who live in silent loneliness cherish a silent hope to experience communication but the reader finds their hope disappointed and their loneliness intensified by noises.

In "Livvie," the title character was a girl of sixteen when old Solomon married her and carried her away to his orderly house on the Natchez Trace. Though Solomon was good to Livvie, he kept her in his house and forbade her to even look at anyone. Ruth Vande Kieft expresses Livvie's situation

well: "Since the 'nice house' has also been her gilded cage for nine years, she is vaguely restless and discontent, unconsciously oppressed by the wintry atmosphere, by the barren and lonely existence."<sup>7</sup> Welty exposes Livvie's loneliness by stressing her silent life: "She could keep from singing when she ironed, and to sit by a bed and fan away flies, she could be so still she could not hear herself breathe. She could clean up the house and never drop a thing, and wash the dishes without a sound, and she would step outside to churn, for churning sounded too sad to her, like sobbing, and if it made her home-sick and not Solomon, she did not think of that" (p. 161). Noises increase the loneliness Livvie feels in her silent world, the noises of the field workers, "As if at a signal now and then they would all start at once shouting, hollering, cajoling, calling and answering back, running, being leaped on and breaking away, flinging to the earth with a shout . . ." (p. 161).

This noisy outside world intrudes on Livvie's silent life twice. Once Miss Baby Marie comes to sell cosmetics and allows Livvie to apply purple lipstick to her mouth. When she sees herself in the mirror, all her desire for life floods her consciousness. But she cannot afford the lipstick so Miss Baby Marie drives off after one peek at Livvie's "'tiny old, old man'" (p. 167) husband who sleeps through all the days of Livvie's silent need. When Livvie looks at Solomon through Miss Baby Marie's eyes, she realizes, "He's fixin' to

die'" (p. 168). Livvie has no hope for communicating with Solomon.

For the first time, Livvie leaves Solomon's house and yard where there is no hope. She sees a man "looking like a vision" (p. 169) who is the second intruder from the noisy world. The man wears a brightly colored Easter suit, with a hat the same color as Miss Baby Marie's purple lipstick suggesting that he may be the realization of Livvie's hope. He breaks Livvie's silence by saying, "'My name is Cash'" (p. 169). As they walk back to Solomon's house Cash whistles and laughs, violating nine years of silence about the home and with a stone noisily explodes the bottles Solomon had put on his bottle tree to keep away evil spirits. Livvie, as she kisses Cash, realizes that Solomon is dying and runs to the bedroom where her dilemma is epitomized by a moment of silence. "She pulled the quilt away, but there was another one under that, and she fell on her knees beside him. He made no sound except a sigh, and then she could hear in the silence the light springy steps of Cash. . ." (p. 172).

When Solomon's eyes open the mood in the room changes. Solomon realizes Livvie has placed her hope in his field-hand Cash McCord, asks God's forgiveness for carrying off a young girl, and hands Livvie the watch with which he has kept careful track of his days. With dignity then, he dies.

Livvie and Cash, for once "nearly without noise" (p. 177), leave Solomon's death room for the front room where Cash

"seiz[ed] her as deftly as a long black cat" (p. 177). For a moment, she resists Cash's embrace with the hand holding Solomon's watch "stiff and still. Then the fingers softly let go, all of her was limp, and the watch fell somewhere on the floor. It ticked away in the still room, and all at once there began outside the full song of a bird. They moved around and around . . . then he stopped and shook her once. She rested in silence in his trembling arms, unprotesting as a bird on a nest . . . [*italics mine*]" (p. 177). The author's treatment of Livvie's story intensifies Livvie's life of silent loneliness. Though Alfred Appel sees the conclusion as a "joyful ending which represents the culmination of a tissue of sexual symbols,"<sup>8</sup> the ending gives the reader no real assurance that Livvie's sexual gratification in Cash will dispel her loneliness. Welty's characteristic use of silence challenges such a conclusion. The silence and stillness, underscored by the ticking of her dead husband's watch and the singing of a bird outside, only serve to emphasize Livvie's continuing loneliness.

Jenny, of "At the Landing," is another young adult woman who lives in silent loneliness. Like Livvie, Jenny lives in a silent house with her grandfather, an old man who keeps her from leaving to experience life in The Landing. Jenny occupies herself in the lonely house in silence. "In the library she could circle an entirely bare floor and make up a dance to a song she made up, all silently, or gaze at the

backs of the books without titles. . ." (p. 181). As Jenny lives in quiet obedience to her grandfather, the only person who regularly causes her to hope is Billy Floyd. "If in each day a moment of hope must come, in Jenny's day the moment was when the rude wild Floyd walked through The Landing carrying the big fish he had caught" (p. 184). Billy is a symbol to everyone in The Landing, a symbol of one apart from the society, one to be respected and suspected. For Jenny he represents the one way out of her lonely silent life.

One day after visiting her mother's grave in the cemetery, Jenny sees Billy Floyd, "facing her in a tall squared posture of silence and rest" (p. 185). Jenny sits on a stile by the cemetery "in the posture of a child who is appalled at the stillness and unsunder of a still and unsundering world" (p. 185). After that first encounter, they continue to meet each other in the pasture, Jenny very much in silence still. "All over The Landing there was not a sound that she could hear. It could only be that Floyd missed nothing in the world, and could hear innumerable outward things" (p. 188). For Jenny, Billy Floyd represents contact with the world outside her loneliness.

The first realization Jenny has of Billy Floyd's imperfection as a hope-bearer comes when she sees him inside the post office on the day her grandfather dies. "She had never seen the man between walls and under a roof and somehow it made him a different man after the one in the field . . .

there was something close, gathering close, and used and worldly about him" (pp. 193-194). Jenny thinks that if he should lower his head it would be "the same as telling it out, before a third person, that he could be known in time if he were caught and cornered in a little store" (p. 194). A few days later, Jenny and Floyd sit by a spring and Jenny retains her pattern of silence with him, because "nobody can say 'Forgive the heavy heart that loves more than the tongue can say or the hands can do'. . . ." (p. 197). If Billy guesses what she thinks, as an imperfect object of hope, "he never had anything to say to her thought or her guess" (p. 197). Billy Floyd refuses Jenny the communication she wants so much. When the flood comes to The Landing "Jenny had not spoken for a day and a night on the hill when she told someone she was sleepy" (p. 200). Rather than answer her with words, Billy Floyd puts her in his boat and floats her to the cemetery. There Jenny wants to speak something "to make him speak. Communication . . . ." (p. 200). Rather than allow her to speak, Billy Floyd violates her, then kills and cooks food for her. And after the flood, Billy Floyd leaves The Landing, taking Jenny's hope.

After Billy Floyd has been gone for weeks, Jenny begins to think of what more love would be like. "More love would be quiet. She would never be so quiet as she wished until she was quiet with her love" (p. 208). In July, Jenny leaves The Landing to look for Billy Floyd. She comes to a river camp and asks after him there. Billy Floyd, she learns, has already

gone out on the river. All she can do is wait. After a while, the fishermen put her in a houseboat and each takes his turn violating her sexually. As Jenny is violated time after time, "a rude laugh covered her cry, and somehow both the harsh human sounds could easily have been heard as rejoicing . . ." (p. 204). With that raucous noise grating, Welty adds yet one more sound. "The younger boys separated and took their turns throwing knives with a dull pit at the tree" (p. 214). These noises, which intrude upon the quietness Jenny wanted to share with her love, intensify the pain of her lonely silent life.

In the three stories discussed thus far, Welty demonstrates her concern for what she calls "the interior of our lives."<sup>9</sup> Concerned with the interior lives of her reader as well as of her characters, Welty uses silence and stillness to bring us, in the words of J. A. Bryant, Jr., "to a sharper awareness of universal human loneliness and of the universal urge to find some kind of relief for it."<sup>10</sup>

Joel, Livvie, and Jenny serve as three examples of young people whose loneliness drives them to seek relief. As Welty treats older characters, her readers see little evidence of respite from this universal lonely search.

Welty's male characters in their peak years find their unexpressed loneliness thrust to the level of semi-consciousness when exposed to still and silent moments which often end in violent motion.

In "First Love" Aaron Burr is the object of Joel Mayes'



first love. As the reader sees Aaron Burr through Joel's eyes, a picture emerges that shows him a very different man from the one history presents. For Joel, Burr is able to light the world even by a gesture. "It was from Aaron Burr that the flame was springing, and it seemed to pass across the table with certain words and through the sudden nobleness of the gesture. . ." (p. 14). The deaf Joel cannot hear Burr's fiery words, but he can watch them being formed. The talking becomes the symbol for Burr in Joel's mind (and consequently the readers'). "Always he talked, his talking was his appearance, as if there were no eyes, nose or mouth to remember; in his face there was every subtlety and eloquence, and no features. . ." (p. 16). Initially, Joel's first love offers him the hope of communication.

The real key to Aaron Burr's character is revealed to Joel many nights later when, after a long talk with Blennerhassett, Burr lies down to sleep on the table where men who are killed in duels are laid out. Joel stands astonished looking into Burr's sleeping face:

Burr was silent; he demanded nothing, nothing. . . . A boy or a man could be so alone in his heart that he could not even ask a question. In such silence as falls over a lonely man there is childlike supplication, and all arms might wish to open to him, but there is no speech. This was Burr's last night: Joel knew that. This was the moment before he would ride away. Why would the heart break so at absence? Joel knew that it was because nothing had been told. The heart is secret even when the moment it dreamed of has come, a moment when there might have been a revelation . . . (p. 27).

Though Burr himself has not quite realized the extent to which he is alone, Joel has become aware of Burr's final loneliness in this moment of silence. Joel realizes that Burr, his first love and Everyman symbol, cannot reveal with words the secrets of his heart.

Burr's loneliness is made more intense for the reader with the disruption of the still silence by violent motion. "Burr began to toss his head and to cry out. He talked, his face drew into a dreadful set of grimaces, which it followed over and over. He could never stop talking. Joel was afraid of these words, and afraid that eavesdroppers might listen to them. Whatever words they were, they were being taken by some force out of his dream" (p. 28). The awfulness of being unable to express one's heart feelings is worsened for Joel by this fury of words which can only condemn the man Joel loves. Joel has learned the lesson of man's loneliness and will retain that conscious awareness of loneliness even past the end of his story.

In one other story, "A Still Moment," Welty chooses to work with historical figures like Aaron Burr who really rode the Trace. Though they are men in their peak years who are straight out of history, she treats them, as she does Burr, as people whose loneliness is exposed in a snapshot of a still and silent moment.

The three men are Lorenzo Dow, a circuit-riding preacher; James Murrell, a horse thief and murderer; and Audubon a

naturalist and student of science. Speaking of these three, Welty writes in the story "what each of them had wanted was simply all. To save all souls, to destroy all men, to see and to record all life that filled this world--all, all . . . ." (p. 88). Reaching beyond himself, each in his own way, to reach his "all," each man tries to break out of the loneliness and isolation he experiences.

Lorenzo Dow's hope to break his loneliness is expressed in his thoughts and actions regarding love. As he races through the Trace, he sends "thoughts of love with matching speed to his wife Peggy in Massachusetts. He found it effortless to love at a distance. He could look at the flowering trees and love Peggy in fullness, just as he could see his visions and love God" (p. 74). All around him Lorenzo hears the animals on the Trace praising God, Whom he thinks he loves. "Birds especially sang of divine love which was the one ceaseless protection" (p. 76). To be surrounded with such reminders of love might show Lorenzo as one not alone, one would think. But for Lorenzo "it was Death . . . that was the silence the birds did their singing in" (p. 75). In order to keep mankind from death eternal, Lorenzo rides from appointment to appointment to bring his crowds "divine love and sufficient warning of all that could threaten them" (p. 77). As he thinks of those two aspects of his sermon, he cries out to the Trace, "these wild places and these trails of awesome loneliness lie nowhere, nowhere, but in your heart" (p. 78). Lorenzo does not under-

stand this loneliness in himself, however, until he confronts a symbol of love in a still silent moment.

Before Lorenzo reaches that moment, he is joined on the Trace by James Murrell. Somewhat like Lorenzo, "he had the alternately proud and aggrieved look of a man believing himself to be an instrument in the hands of a power, and when he was young he said at once to strangers that he was being used by Evil. . ." (pp. 78-79). To accomplish his evil murders, Murrell would routinely ride out on the Trace, locate his next victim, and tell the victim-to-be tales "all centered about a silent man. In each the silent man would have done a piece of evil . . . and it was all made for the revelation in the end that the silent man was Murrell himself" (p. 79). Murrell's method to arrive at his "all" was to "destroy the present!" (p. 79). This method Murrell chose to help himself out of his loneliness. "Murrell in laying hold of a man meant to solve his mystery of being. It was as if other men, all but himself, would lighten their hold on the secret, upon assault, and let it fly free at death" (p. 80). Only by involving himself with the death of another man did Murrell expect to find meaning in his lonely life. Murrell, like Lorenzo, does not face the essence of his loneliness until the still moment.

Welty emphasizes how much Lorenzo and Murrell are alike in loneliness with the description she chooses for their arrival at the scene of the still moment: Lorenzo "drew rein, and Murrell drew rein, he dismounted and Murrell dismounted, he took

a step, and Murrell was there too; and Lorenzo was not surprised at the closeness, how Murrell in his long dark coat and over it his dark face darkening still, stood beside him like a brother seeking the light" (p. 82). Both men intend to consume the other's individuality by subjecting it to the power they serve in order to extend themselves beyond themselves to give relief to loneliness.

At that instant, the third lonely man of the story, Audubon, steps out from the woods to stand under the tree. Audubon's method of arriving at his "all" is to "remember" (p. 82). To help him remember, he carries a "crayon and paper, a gun, and a small bottle of spirits disposed about his body" (p. 83). But that is all Welty is willing to reveal of Audubon until the still moment.

Lorenzo, in his search for divine love, surely remembers the first chapter of John which records Christ, the revelation of God's Love, as God's Logos or Word. For Lorenzo thinks "All things were speech," and says, "God created the world . . . and it exists to give testimony. Life is the tongue: speak" (p. 84). Lorenzo and Murrell expect Audubon to answer Lorenzo's words.

"But instead of speech there happened a moment of deepest silence" (p. 84).

Vande Kieft writes "In 'A Still Moment,' the triangle of relationships is occasionally pointed up almost diagrammatically when the narrator steps back to take a picture of the scene--for a fleeting moment freezes the relationships into a silently

revealing shape."<sup>11</sup> In this moment of deepest silence, Welty freezes Lorenzo and Murrell, so very much alike in their desire to save all souls and destroy all men, as they look expectantly toward Audubon who might reveal the secrets of life to them empirically. Murrell sees Lorenzo as the victim he's been robbed of; Lorenzo sees Audubon as a man he might be able to make into an angel; and Audubon sees Murrell as a sort of Everyman.

Audubon had examined the Cave-In Rock where one robber had lived his hiding life, and the air in the cave was the cavelike air that enclosed this man, the same odor, flinty and dark. O secret life, he thought--is it true that the secret is withdrawn from the true disclosure, that man is a cave man, and that the openness I see, the ways through forests, the rivers brimming light, the wide arches where the birds fly, are dreams of freedom? If my origin is withheld from me, is my end to be unknown too? (pp. 85-86).

In reflecting on Murrell, Audubon shows his own sense of aloneness.

"In that quiet moment a solitary snowy heron flew down not far away and began to feed beside the marsh water" (p. 86).

The men's reactions to the heron demonstrate part of the essential nature of each. Lorenzo's reaction--"Nearness is near, lighted in a marsh-land, feeding at sunset. Praise God, His love has come visible" (p. 86)--shows his need for a relationship that extends beyond himself. Murrell's reaction is one of wariness at first, but "Yet his whole desire mounted in him toward the end (was this the end--the sight of a bird feeding at dusk? ) toward the instant of confession" (p. 89). Murrell falls to the ground and looks at

Lorenzo and Audubon; "his eyes squinted up to them in pleading, as if to say, 'How soon may I speak, and how soon will you pity me?' Then he looked back to the bird, and he thought if it would look at him a dread penetration would fill and gratify his heart" (p. 89). Murrell's reaction to the bird shows his semi-conscious awareness of his desire to be fathomed by another being, a kind of understanding that would bring an end to loneliness. Audubon sees the heron as an "object in the distance and he could see it as carefully as if he held it in his hand" (p. 87). Welty gives the reader a significant key to Audubon in this silent moment: "if it was his identity that he wished to discover, or if it was what a man had to seize beyond that, the way for him was by endless examination . . ." (pp. 89-90). Out of his need to examine in order to discover himself and beyond himself, Audubon breaks the still and silent moment violently by firing death at the heron.

Lorenzo is horror stricken and rides away, feeling as if "God Himself had, just now, thought of the Idea of Separateness . . . God had . . . given Love first and then Separateness, as though it did not matter to Him which came first" (p. 93). Lorenzo's view of the possibility of a relationship which would extend him beyond himself has been brought to grief, even though he rides away to preach, "In that day when all hearts shall be disclosed" (p. 94). Perhaps Lorenzo has seen more clearly the emptiness in his own heart.

Murrell, who had wanted to destroy, but who had nearly

understood his real loneliness in his need to confess his destruction and be penetrated, finds himself left alone.

"Each must go away alone, each send the other away alone. He himself had purposely kept to the wildest country in the world, and would have sought it out, the loneliest road" (p. 91). Murrell has been semi-conscious of the pain in his loneliness, but allows himself to slip back into a blindness of his own condition.

Audubon, who wants to examine and understand life beyond himself, and as an artist express that life to an audience, realizes "that the best part he could make would be, after [his drawing of the heron] was apart from his hand, a dead thing and not a live thing; never the essence, only a sum of parts; and that it would always meet with a stranger's sight, and never be one with the beauty in any other man's head in the world"(p. 92). Audubon has become consciously aware that he is ultimately unable to discern and communicate that which is beyond himself; his thoughts must remain with him alone.

The last sound of the story is Lorenzo's hurled word, "'Tempter!'" (p. 93). Each man has been tempted with the promise of relief from his semi-realized loneliness, but the violent explosion of Audubon's gun has shown the temptation to hold no relief for the pain in the heart.

Lorenzo Dow, James Murrell, and Audubon (along with Aaron Burr) were partly responsible for establishing the



history and the feel of the Natchez Trace. Although these four men shaped their world, they were also much shaped by it; Welty's picture of what might have been a minor incident shows just how easily people are influenced by outside events.

The focus, however, is not on the external. In "The World of Eudora Welty," Robert Daniel writes, "While her reader is made aware of the forces that change the world surrounding her characters, he is mainly intent upon the sensations that the characters are experiencing. And the foremost of these is loneliness."<sup>12</sup>

Welty shows her concern for the lonely traveling men, also in their peak years, in some of her other stories, notably "The Hitch-Hikers" and "Death of a Traveling Salesman." These men, even more than the historical ones, find their loneliness thrust to a conscious level when they reflect on their lives in still and silent moments.

"The Hitch-Hikers" is presented through the awareness of Tom Harris, a thirty-year-old traveling salesman. Some place in the Delta as he drives toward Memphis, Tom sees two hitch-hikers; "one of them stood still by the side of the pavement, with his foot stuck out like an old root, but the other was playing a yellow guitar . . ." (p.121). Seeing the hitch-hikers reminds Tom of a feeling he used to get as a child: "standing still, with nothing to touch him, feeling tall and having the world come all at once into its round shape under-foot and rush and turn through space and make his stand very

precarious and lonely" (pp. 121-122). Tom is a lonely man, and the sight of a still man forces him to be consciously aware of his own loneliness.

Partly to dispel his loneliness, Tom picks up the two men. Though at first they exchange few words, the man riding with the guitar between his legs begins to talk more and more. And Tom watches even more carefully the one whose stillness had struck him--the one he now identifies as "the silent man" (p. 123). He notices that the silent man "wasn't smoking [the cigarette], but was watching it burn" (p. 123) and feels that he is "bogged in inarticulate anger" (p. 123). Through the talk of the guitar player, Tom learns that the silent man's name is Sobby.

Tom decides to spend the night at Dulcie and offers to find the hitch-hikers a place to stay. It is while he is in the Dulcie Hotel that the violence occurs which forces Tom to realize even more acutely his own loneliness. While he has been inside, the guitar player has tried to steal Tom's car and Sobby has broken a beer bottle over his head. The guitar player is still alive when Tom arrives. "The little ceiling light had been turned on. With blood streaming from his broken head, he was slumped down upon the guitar, his legs bowed around it, his arms at either side, his whole body limp . . ." (pp. 129-130). The once talkative guitar player is now silenced.

After Tom drives the dying man to the hospital, he walks

over to a party. "Walking over to the party . . . making the sounds in the dark wet street, and only partly aware of the indeterminate shapes of houses with their soft-shining fan-lights marking them off, there with the rain falling mist-like through the trees, he almost forgot what town he was in and which house he was bound for" (p. 134). In the conscious awareness of his real aloneness, Tom briefly forgets the dying man. But he is unable to forget him at the party because the incident becomes the source of entertainment. So Tom leaves and goes back to his hotel room where he "lay perfectly still" (p. 141) reflecting on the evening's events:

He could forgive nothing in this evening. But it was too like other evenings, for him to move out of this lying still clothed on the bed, even into comfort or despair. Even the rain--there was often rain, there was often a party, and there had been other violence not of his doing--other fights, not quite so pointless, but fights in his car; fights, unheralded confessions, sudden love-making--none of any of this his, not his to keep, but belonging to the people of these towns he passed through, coming out of their time. He himself had no time. He was free; helpless (p. 141).

Because of his rootlessness, Tom is alone and lonely. The violences of his past, the memories of sudden but transient desire, remind Tom how horribly alone he is. He is like the dead hitch-hiker as described by Sobby: "'He didn't have nothing and he didn't have no folks. No more'n me. Him and me, we took up together two weeks back'" (p. 146). Tom too has no deep-rooted relationships. His handing over "'the po' kilt man's gittar'" (p. 146) to the little boy who asks for it just before he leaves town shows how alone Tom is. Even this

violent murder, Tom feels, really belongs to this little boy who will remember it as part of his own history, his own "rooted past." Tom is unable to claim even this murder as a defining incident in his past.

The hollow emptiness of the life of a traveling salesman is felt even more acutely by R. J. Bowman in "Death of a Traveling Salesman." Bowman is ten years Tom's senior and has been selling shoes for fourteen years in Mississippi. As his story opens, Bowman is lost on the back roads on his way to Beulah and exhausted from a recent bout with influenza. The road he is traveling reaches a dead end, where his car tilts precariously on the edge of a ravine. Though Bowman gets out safely, the car falls, leaving him stranded.

As Bowman walks to a house on a near hill, his heart begins to "behave strangely . . . to leap and expand. . . . But in the scattering and falling it made no noise" (p. 235). Once at the house, Bowman tells the woman there that his car is at the bottom of the ravine and asks for help, explaining that he is sick. Invited inside, Bowman is able to relax a bit until he hears the silence there: "And it was so still. The silence of the fields seemed to enter and move familiarly through the house. The wind used the open hall. He felt that he was in a mysterious, quiet, cool danger. It was necessary to do what? . . . To talk. 'I have a nice line of women's low priced shoes . . .'" (p. 239). Bowman's years on the road have made him dread silence, so he speaks to destroy this dreadful silence..

But his spoken words show him unable to communicate on a personal level, willing only to use words intended to sell, rather than to express his needs.

The woman's only answer is that Sonny will be back soon. When Sonny comes, Bowman thinks the young man is her son. The woman explains Bowman's problem to the man because "Bowman could not even state his case" (p. 241). While the woman and Bowman wait for Sonny to rescue Bowman's car, Bowman's heart leaps again.

He could not move; there was nothing he could do, unless perhaps he might embrace this woman who sat there growing old and shapeless before him. But he wanted to leap up, to say to her, I have been sick and found out then, only then, how lonely I am. Is it too late? My heart puts up a struggle inside me, and you may have heard it, protesting emptiness. . . .It should be flooded with love (p. 243).

Again, instead of telling this woman how lonely he is, they sit in silence: she is as "still as a statue" (p. 244) and he crying pain inside.

When Sonny returns after retrieving the salesman's car, Bowman watches the other two respond to each other. He begins to feel he has been deprived of something. "These people cherished something here that he could not see, they withheld some ancient promise of food and warmth and light" (p. 246). At supper, when Sonny says of the woman, "'She's goin' to have a baby,'" (p. 251), Bowman finally realizes what he has missed. "The only secret was the ancient communication between two people" (p. 251). The knowledge that the woman is young and pregnant, that Sonny and the woman are husband and wife, is so

shocking to Bowman "he could not speak" (p. 251). "He was shocked with knowing what was really in this house. A marriage, a fruitful marriage. That simple thing. Anyone could have that" (p. 251). This silence of Bowman's is especially revealing, because Bowman does not have that kind of fruitfulness, that kind of communication. The reader feels Bowman's sorrow.

After the couple go to bed, Bowman lies by the fire thinking. "How many noises the night had! He heard the stream running, the fire dying, and he was sure now that he heard his heart beating, too, the sound it made under his ribs. He heard breathing, round and deep of the man and his wife in the room across the passage. And that was all. But emotion swelled patiently within him, and he wished that the child were his" (p. 252). In those night-time domestic noises, Bowman's pain in loneliness becomes unbearable.

Feeling he must escape the house full of ancient communication, he leaves all his money for the family and runs toward his car. But just as he reaches the hill, "his heart began to give off tremendous explosions like a rifle, bang bang bang . . . .He covered his heart with both hands to keep anyone from hearing the noise it made. But nobody heard it" (p. 253).

The desolation of the final silence after the last explosion of Bowman's heart is as great as that of Lorenzo's cry "'Tempter!'" (p. 93). Bowman has for so many years cut himself off from sounding out his agony. He dies, alone.

In a passing reference to "Death of a Traveling Salesman"

in a review of Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman,"

Eleanor Clark writes:

Welty succeeded . . . in creating a figure of loneliness and haunting futility that conveys a truly tragic sense, and remains as a clear, echoing symbol in the mind . . . . If one chooses to take it that way, ["Death of a Traveling Salesman"] is as strong a condemnation as one could wish of one of the abnormal, humanly stultifying aspects of our society, as represented by one of its most victimized as well as victimizing characters; and yet the effect, with all its continuing vibrations of meaning, has been achieved by nothing but a simple juxtaposition of a moment of the salesman's life with a pattern of simple, almost primitive love.

In both "The Hitch-Hikers" and "Death of a Traveling Salesman," Welty uses silence interrupted by a violent death to reveal man's utter loneliness.

Unlike Bowman, Welty does not necessarily assume that a marriage which can relieve loneliness can be had by "anyone." Two of Welty's older couples who live in the silent loneliness of their marriages find they are unequal to the demands of the noisy, mobile world.

In "The Key," Albert and Ellie Morgan sit at a quiet little station waiting for their train to Niagara Falls. The only sounds are made by insects: "You could listen to the fat thudding of the light bugs and the hoarse rushing of their big wings against the wooden ceiling. Some of the bugs were clinging heavily to the yellow globe . . . . Under this prickly light two rows of people sat in silence . . . Ellie and Albert Morgan were sitting on a bench like the others waiting for the train and had nothing to say to each other" (pp. 56-57).

Ellie's face expresses "that too-explicit evidence of agony in



the desire to communicate" (p. 57). Albert's expression is that of "silent children who will tell you what they dreamed the night before in sudden, almost hilarious, bursts of confidence" (p. 58). This couple has the right to expect soul sharing, but it is evident that there is little real dispelling of individual loneliness here.

The reader learns about Albert and Ellie through the eyes of a young red-headed stranger who stands watching them from his corner as his nervous energy demonstrates itself in the motion of his hands. "Instead of the craving for communication something of reticence, even of secrecy" (p. 59) is revealed as he tosses a small key back and forth. When he is distracted for a moment, the key drops to the floor, making "a fierce metallic sound" (p. 60). When the key slides toward Albert, who picks it up, the stranger realizes from Albert's reaction that Albert had not heard the key fall and so is quite surprised by its sudden appearance at his feet.

As Albert holds the key, someone (it is unclear whether it is Albert, the stranger, or Welty editorializing) reflects, "How intensified, magnified, really vain all attempt at expression becomes in the afflicted" (p. 61). Albert's affliction is deafness and the loneliness it symbolizes, which must of necessity intensify or magnify attempts at expression. Almost immediately, the stranger realizes "with sudden electrification" (p. 61), that Ellie has begun to sign to her husband with her hands.



Albert's reply to Ellie is that he has found something important. "'From now on we will get along better, have more understanding . . . .Maybe when we reach Niagara Falls we will even fall in love, the way other people have done. Maybe our marriage was really for love, after all, not for the other reason--both of us being afflicted in the same way, unable to speak, lonely because of that'" (p. 62). Even as the reader is learning of Albert and Ellie's self-understanding, they miss their train to Niagara Falls because of the unusual intensity of their talk and concentration on each other's hands.

The stranger comprehends, as he watches Ellie and Albert sign, that Albert "loved the key more than he loved Ellie!" (p. 68). For Albert the key represents "the secret meaning, that powerful sign, that reassurance he so hopefully sought, so assuredly deserved--that had never come. There was something lacking in Ellie." That something is that her hands are "too desperate to speak" (p. 68). For Albert, Ellie's incessant talking ruins his security because, he believes, worrying makes things quit taking care of themselves. "When you pick up your hands and start to talk, if you don't watch carefully, this security will run away and leave you" (p. 69). Those insecurities have been secured for Albert in the key, which symbolizes happiness to him.

Once they realize they have missed their train, the two look at a picture post card of Niagara Falls. Niagara Falls,

to Ellie, represents the same security and happiness that the key represents to Albert. Ellie hopes to learn what hearing is at Niagara Falls. Albert is pointing to the rail that surrounds the falls as he speaks:

"You lean up hard against the rail. Then you can hear Niagara Falls."

"How do you hear it?" begged Ellie, nodding.

"You hear it with your whole self. You listen with your arms and your legs and your whole body.

You'll never forget what hearing is, after that" (p. 70).

Ellie expects to learn what hearing is, perhaps realizing she is unable to hear Albert's heart thoughts when he signs. But they have missed the train; Ellie has lost her "key."

After watching the disappointed woman a little while, the stranger gives Ellie a key that could work just as well if she will only let it--a key marked "Star Hotel, Room 2." The reader does not see how Ellie and Albert react, however, because the stranger abruptly leaves. Outside in the night, "he stood still for a moment and reached for a cigarette. As he held the match close he gazed straight ahead, and in his eyes, all at once wild and searching, there was certainly, besides the simple compassion in his regard, a look both restless and weary, very much used to the comic. You could see that he despised and saw the uselessness of the thing he had done" (p. 73).

Because Welty has led the reader to trust the stranger's evaluation of Albert and Ellie, the reader has no choice but to share the stranger's conclusion at the end. Ellie will continue to demand too much "talk" from Albert; Albert will

continue to be alienated by it and therefore be unable to relieve Ellie's loneliness which will drive her to more talk. "Ellie and Albert are extraordinary," writes Vande Kieft, "but their problem is not. People do not have to be deaf-mutes to be driven together by the felt hostility of the outside world, and the inevitable pattern then is one of a too insistent closeness."<sup>14</sup> Welty successfully exposes Albert and Ellie's inability to cope with the noisy, mobile, outside world because of their loneliness in marriage. Having the Morgans try to communicate with their hands forces the reader to visualize the problem in this marriage, and many others: the inability to communicate. Loneliness makes a couple inadequate to deal not only with the outside world, but with the interior world of marriage as well.

Another marriage that may have once been too full of uncommunicative talk, like that of Albert and Ellie, is examined in "The Whistle." Every night Jason and Sara Morton sleep in front of a tiny fire, lying

trembling with cold, but no more communicative in their misery than a pair of window shutters beaten by a storm. Sometimes many days, weeks went by without words. They were not really old--they were only fifty; still, their lives were filled with tiredness, with a great lack of necessity to speak, with poverty which may have bound them like a disaster too great for any discussion but left them still separate and undesirous of sympathy. Perhaps, years ago, the long habit of silence may have been started in anger or passion. Who could tell now? (pp. 112-113).

Sometime earlier, Jason and Sara resigned themselves to loneliness within marriage, now expressed by the silence

between them which indicates their sense of futility at even trying to talk. In their loneliness, they are unequal to the demands the noisy world makes upon them.

Just before falling asleep, Sara's thinking revolves around the cold and the contrasting heat of the summer in Dexter during the tomato harvest time. Her thoughts warm her enough so that she is able to fall asleep. But the piercing blast of Mr. Perkin's whistle blows to warn of a freeze and awakens Sara. "Without saying a word" she shakes Jason awake who "said nothing either" (p. 117). Outside among the tomato plants and still without speaking, Jason and Sara work quickly to cover their crop to protect it from the freeze. Jason covers the young plants with his coat and, speaking only with his eyes, asks Sara to take off her dress to let it be a covering as well. Then "they bent their shoulders and walked silently back into the house" (p. 118).

The cold inside is even worse than it was earlier, so Jason and Sara "sat down to wait for morning" (p. 118). Jason, quite unexpectedly, pours kerosene over the fire and brings in the cherry log they had hoarded all winter. When that has burned, he knocks their split bottomed chair to pieces for firewood. Finally, he burns their thirty-year-old kitchen table which makes a fire which "seemed wonderful to them--as if what they had never said, and what could not be, had its life, too, after all" (p. 120). But that, too, quickly burns and then "it was colder than ever" (p. 120).

For a while Jason and Sara sit still in the silent cold. Then the only two spoken words in the story are uttered:

"Jason . . ."  
 A silence. But only for a moment.  
 "Listen," said her husband's uncertain voice.  
 They held very still, as before, with bent heads.  
 Outside, as though it would exact something further from their lives, the whistle continued to blow.

Jason and Sara have nothing left to fight the cold. Their very clothes and domestic goods have been exhausted without diminishing its effects. They themselves are exhausted unable any longer to make even a pretense of having the reserve they need to withstand the exacting noisy world. They can only sit. Without motion, without sound. Yet, outside the whistle continues to blow.

Clytie Farr, the title character in "Clytie," is older than either Jason or Sara Morton and suffers from a loneliness more terrible, for her loneliness is, figuratively, a terminal disease. Clytie has lived for years as a silent lonely woman, but realizes her final loneliness in a final struggle to communicate.

The reader first meets Clytie as she "stood still in the road, peering ahead in her near-sighted way, and as wet as the little birds" (p. 159) from the rain that has driven everyone else to seek shelter. With black humor, Welty tells the reader that "Clytie came for nothing. She came every day, and no one spoke to her any more: she would be in such a hurry, and couldn't

see who it was. And every Saturday they expected her to be run over, the way she darted out into the road with all the horses and trucks" (p. 159). The townspeople in Farr's Gin assume Miss Clytie is losing her wits. "'Miss Clytie! Go in out of the rain, Miss Clytie!' someone called. The old maid did not look around, but clenched her hands and drew them up under her armpits, and sticking out her elbows like hen wings, she ran out of the street, her poor hat creaking and beating around her ears" (p. 160). The townspeople pity Miss Clytie, but they seldom speak to her.

Once at home, Clytie is confronted by her loud, rude sister Octavia. Octavia berates Clytie for failing to fix a supper for Gerald, their drunken brother whose wife divorced him for nearly killing her; for Papa, their vegetable father; and for Octavia herself, who insists that the house must be absolutely closed to prevent "prying from without" (p. 164) but refuses ever to leave the upstairs to insure her demand is met. Clytie's only refuge is the kitchen. The family thinks Clytie common and subservient and always makes demands on her. Clytie is unloved. Clytie is alone.

In the kitchen, Clytie ponders what she had thought in the street. "She had been thinking about the face of a child she had just seen. The child, playing with another of the same age, chasing it with a toy pistol, had looked at her with such an open, serene, trusting expression as she passed by! With this small, peaceful face still in her mind, rosy like these

flames, like an inspiration which drives all other thoughts away, Clytie had forgotten herself and had been obliged to stand where she was in the middle of the road . . ." (p. 162). It had been a long time now, since Clytie had first begun to watch faces, an obsession of a lonely old woman trying to understand and be understood.

As she cooks, her mind mulls over Old Lethy who had been their cook, but whom Octavia had run off when their father had his first stroke. "Clytie had stood as usual, speechless in the kitchen, until finally she had repeated after her sister, 'Lethy, go away'" (p. 164). Even so, Old Lethy still comes back, but Octavia admits only the barber whom she summons to shave Papa weekly.

After the supper is ready, Clytie carries up Papa's. When Octavia insists on feeding him, Clytie breaks her silence. "Clytie suddenly began to speak in rapid, bitter words to her sister, the wildest words that came to her head. But soon she began to cry and gasp, like a small child who has been pushed by the big boys into the water" (p. 165). After her outburst, she brings to Octavia and Gerald their individual suppers. When Clytie tries to feed Gerald, he hides his face, but,

it was not necessary for her to look at any of their faces. It was the faces which came between . . . . Their faces came between her face and another. It was their faces which had come pushing in between, long ago, to hide some face that had looked back at her. And now it was hard to remember the way it looked, or the time when she had seen it first. Yes, in a sort of arbor, hadn't she laughed, leaned forward . . .and that vision of a face [like many faces she saw in Farr's Gin] . . .



that face had been very close to hers, almost familiar, almost accessible. And then the face of Octavia was thrust between, and at other times the apoplectic face of her father, the face of her brother Gerald and the face of her brother Henry with the bullet hole through the forehead . . . .It was purely for a resemblance to a vision that she examined the secret, mysterious, unrepeatd faces she met in the street of Farr's Gin (p. 168).

Clytie has recently found a momentary peace from her lonely search for the face, though the peace is always interrupted by her family. She goes to the garden and curses. "Words which at first horrified Clytie poured in a full, light stream from her throat which soon, nevertheless, felt strangely relaxed and rested. She cursed all alone in the peace of the vegetable garden" (p. 170). Even that relief, though, is destroyed by her family when she glances up to see Octavia at the winoww watching her. When Octavia finally lets the curtain drop, "Clytie would be left there speechless" (p. 171). Then she begins her trek through town "in a gentleness compounded of fright and exhaustion and love," moving quicker and quicker, "until her long legs gathered a ridiculous rushing speed" (p. 171).

On the morning the barber, Mr. Bobo, is to come, Octavia accuses Clytie of stealing her thimble and Gerald flees the house in rage. Mr. Bobo finally arrives, quite frightened of the Farris, fascinated with them, imagining "what one of those sisters would do to him if he made one move" (p. 173). Rather than send Mr. Bobo in to shave her father, this morning, in a last struggle for the end of loneliness, the end of ruin, Clytie "put out her hand and with breathtaking gentleness touched the



side of his face" (p. 176). After a moment of silence, both "uttered a despairing cry" (p. 176). "Clytie, pale as a ghost, stumbled against the railing . . . what had she got hold of with her hand! She could hardly bear it--the thought of that face" (p. 176). Octavia's shouting for rain water "to shave Papa," pulls Clytie up from her horror.

To fill Octavia's demand, Clytie moves outside "beside the old rain barrel" (p. 176) which "now, was her friend, just in time" (p. 177). Clytie looks into the rain barrel and thinks she sees a face there.

It was the face she had been looking for, and from which she had been separated. As if to give a sign, the index finger of a hand lifted to touch the dark cheek . . . It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were large, intent, almost avid, the nose ugly and discolored as if from weeping, the mouth old and closed from any speech . . . everything about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of waiting, of suffering (p. 177).

When Clytie recoils, the face in the rain barrel also recoils, bringing her the realization that this is her face: Clytie alone. "Completely sick at heart, as though the poor half-remembered vision had finally betrayed her" (p. 177) and with Octavia screaming for rain water, Clytie suddenly "thrust her head into the kind, featureless depth, and held it there" (p. 178). It is Old Lethy who finds her "with her poor lady-like black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs" (p. 178).

Clytie's final struggle to communicate with the barber forces her, when combined with the disgust she feels at recognizing herself in the rain barrel, to give up all hope of ever

ending her loneliness. "There was no one then to embrace," Vande Kieft writes, "no nature to plunge into but her own, no love possible but narcissistic love, no reality but her own reality, no knowledge possible but the knowledge of death, which is the immersion into oblivion."<sup>15</sup> The awful image of tongs used and carelessly thrown down, of the mouth "old and closed of speech," speechless now eternally, is softened just a bit by the means of her death--the water of forgetfulness. But the torment, the haunted isolation in which Clytie lived in the Farr House is a painful reminder of the loneliness which permeates the work of Eudora Welty.

Not every character in Welty's first two collections of short stories is seen as essentially lonely when exposed to silence and stillness. Phoenix in "A Worn Path," for example, is separate but full of understanding of and communication with the natural world. But most of Welty's people are extremely lonely. With the eye of a professional photographer, she carefully frames them to reveal and intensify their troubled loneliness. "The fascination of a photograph," Eudora Welty writes in "Literature and the Lens," "is that it imprisons a moment in time--and is that really different from stealing its spirit--its soul?"<sup>17</sup> In her later short story collections--The Golden Apples (1949) and The Bride of Innisfallen (1955)--Eudora Welty does not as frequently use moments and scenes of silence and stillness. But in A Curtain of Green and The Wide Net the technique serves her well. For, as she wrote in 1944 in "Some Notes on River

Country," "When a human being becomes still all the impressions that surround him in place and time and memory--some fulfilled some never fulfilled, but projected in dream--can enter his soul then and saturate it with their full original powers."<sup>18</sup> Many of Welty's still and silent lives are indeed saturated with the troubled dream and the terrifying reality of their alienation, isolation, and loneliness.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "The Love and Separateness in Miss Welty," Kenyon Review VI (Spring, 1944), 249.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth M. Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 188. Robert Daniel in "The World of Eudora Welty" in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 309, makes a similar suggestion when he writes, "Eudora Welty often employs a device that may reflect her earlier interest in photography. This is the arrested moment, the scene that is as it were, caught by a click of the camera's shutter, where the very immobility of the scene is essential to its meaning."

<sup>3</sup>Eudora Welty, Selected Stories of Eudora Welty: The Contents of Two Complete Books 'A Curtain of Green' and 'The Wide Net' (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 4. All further page references to the stories in the two collections will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Appel, Jr., A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 185.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 186

<sup>6</sup>Vande Kieft, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>8</sup>Appel, p. 199.

<sup>9</sup>Eudora Welty, "The Eye of the Story," Yale Review, 55, No. 2 (Autumn 1965-Summer 1966), p. 265.

<sup>10</sup>J. A. Bryant, Jr., Eudora Welty (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press--Pamphlet on American Writers, No. 66, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Vande Kieft, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Daniel, "The World of Eudora Welty" in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 314.

<sup>13</sup>Eleanor Clark, "Old Glamour, New Gloom," Partisan Review: Theatre Chronicle XVI (June, 1949), 635.

<sup>14</sup>Vande Kieft, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>16</sup>Vivienne Koch, "The Conservatism of Caroline Gordon," in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 325.

<sup>17</sup>Eudora Welty, "Literature and the Lens," Vogue (August 1, 1944), 102.

<sup>18</sup>Eudora Welty, "Some Notes on River Country," Harper's Bazaar No. 2786 (February, 1944), 156.

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EUDORA WELTY'S STILL AND SILENT LIVES

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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Eudora Welty concentrated on the theme of loneliness in her first two short story collections, A Curtain of Green and Other Stories (1941) and The Wide Net (1943). In these collections she characteristically uses silence and stillness to expose the extreme loneliness of her characters, a loneliness often intensified by the intrusion of noise or motion. The extremely silent world of the twelve-year-old deaf-mute Joel Mayes in "First Love" accents the loneliness he feels as an orphan, a loneliness made more painful when he leaves the only home he knows to follow after his first love. In "Livvie" and "At the Landing," Eudora Welty's young adult women, Livvie and Jenny, who live in silent loneliness, cherish a silent hope to experience communication, but the reader finds their hope disappointed and their loneliness intensified by sounds. Joel, Livvie, and Jenny are examples of young people whose loneliness drives them to seek relief. Eudora Welty's male characters in their peak years are also engaged in a universal lonely search and find their loneliness thrust to the level of semi-consciousness when exposed to still and silent moments, which often end in violent motion. Aaron Burr in "First Love"; Lorenzo Dow, James Murrell, and Audubon in "A Still Moment"; Tom Harris and Sobby in "The Hitch-Hikers"; and R. J. Bowman in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" all must deal with loneliness, which, for all but Burr, is exposed in a silence exploded by a violent death. Nor do Welty's older people escape a lonely fate. Albert and Ellie Morgan in "The Key" and Jason and Sara Morton in "The Whistle" live in the silent loneliness of their marriages and find that they are unequal to the demands of the noisy, mobile



world. Clytie Farr, one of Welty's oldest characters and the title character in "Clytie," has lived for many years as a silent lonely woman, but realizes her final loneliness in a final struggle to communicate. These nine stories of isolation and alienation demonstrate the loneliness which permeates Eudora Welty's work. By framing her characters in moments and scenes of stillness and silence, Welty shows that their lives are indeed saturated with the troubled dreams and the terrifying reality of their alienation, isolation, and loneliness.