Myths and legends in the stories of Eudora Welty

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MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN THE STORIES

OF SUDORA WELTY

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Wright Morris suggests in *The Territory Ahead* that the American writer's imagination has been crippled by the nostalgia that drives it to a preoccupation with the mythic past. Like any other generalization, there are several glaring exceptions to this statement, and one of the most obvious of these exceptions can be found in the case of Eudora Welty. Miss Welty has continually exhibited a great knowledge of mythology and American folklore, and has utilized this knowledge extensively in her stories. However, it is safe to say that rather than being crippled, Miss Welty's imagination has been greatly enhanced and her stories have incorporated universal truths by her ubiquitous use of myths and legends.

Miss Welty has been one of the premier short story writers in America since 1940 and her work has been internationally acclaimed for both its excellence and variety. No less a critic than Cleanth Brooks has stated

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that her work is "remarkable for the variety of styles she has mastered." 2 The particular style that Miss Welty has best mastered has been that of the symbolic writer, and to develop a comprehensive understanding of her work one must appreciate her most important symbolic genre—the use of mythology and folk legends. However, as Miss Welty stated, "I was very conscious of using myths, ... but my use was a natural and unstrained one." 3 This natural and flexible use of myth is one reason why Eudora Welty's work has withstood the tests of time and endures. Its very unstrained quality is typical of all that is the best in Eudora Welty.

Miss Welty uses myths to serve three major purposes. 4 The first, and most readily apparent use of myth, is that of using the mythic parallels to add depth to her fiction. Certain themes exist in the mythic consciousness of many cultures and have come to represent and suggest universal truths. Miss Welty feels this and says that:


3Letter from Miss Welty to Keith Brower, December 10, 1971—hereafter cited as Letter. See Appendices A and B.

4Hereafter the word "myth" will denote myths and folk legends unless otherwise specifically stated, i.e. "Greek myths."
I think the timelessness or universality of the particular themes of myths is very strongly, as you suggest, a reason for their appeal to me when I touch on them in stories.

Eudora Welty uses these mythic themes to provide a continuity of tradition and belief in her stories and to make them timeless.

Several critics have suggested this particular use of mythology by Miss Welty without expanding on it. Harry C. Morris suggested Miss Welty used myths to link a modern condition with its ancient counterpart. Another critic suggested that her use of myth arises from a conviction that mythic patterns are deeply ingrained in the human consciousness, and, as a result, these myths possess a timeless relevance. However, neither of these critics, nor any others, have gone beyond the obvious acknowledgment of the archetypal significance of Miss Welty's use of myth and explored a number of her stories in the light of this theme.

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5 Letter.

6 Harry C. Morris, "Eudora Welty's Use of Mythology," Shenandoah, VI (Spring, 1955), p. 34.

7 Chester Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (University of Chicago, 1963), p. 262.

8 While a great many writers have explored individual stories in a wide range of publications for archetypal symbolism, none have seemed to be able to "tie together" a number of them to support a comprehensive statement about Eudora Welty's use of myths.
The second major purpose for which Eudora Welty uses myth in her stories is as a means of tempering the violence and sexual ribaldry of the exploits that take place in her stories. By using mythic precedents and folk legends of frontier Mississippi, Miss Welty removes her characters from the real world and softens the severity of their actions. She transforms the settings of her tales and works on the material until it takes on the universality of myth. During this transformation, the action is slowed down and the violence subsides. In an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Gordon Folsom has suggested that Miss Welty's interest in myth results from a modification of two distinctive Southern qualities, humor and violence. The difference between her work and that of other Southern writers of the Faulknerian mode is that she uses myths and legends to temper the negativism that has prevailed in twentieth century Southern literature.

The third major function of myth in the works of Eudora Welty is of a more mechanical nature. She uses

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mythic stories as a frame on which she builds her tales. The myths give order and structural control to her tales. As Miss Welty implies, this is not done in a rigid "one-for-one" manner, but rather in the way in which she would use any other image.\(^{11}\) She does, however, tend to tailor some of her stories to fit into the mythic framework provided.

One of the three functions are found in all of Miss Welty's mythic stories. These functions are:

1. The use of myth to provide universal themes,
2. To temper violence and sexual ribaldry, and
3. As a frame on which she could build and provide order in her tales.

Often two and on occasion all three of these functions are found in a single mythic story.

At this point it is fitting to note that Eudora Welty is an intensely Southern writer and that her very "Southerness"—that quality of mood and subject particular to Southern regional writers—lends itself to the usage of myths in her stories. The use of myths in her stories of Mississippi would indicate that she wishes the tales of her native state to have the high moral purpose of the ancient

\(^{11}\) Letter.
fables. Add to this the fact that the South has always been a land rich in myths and local legends, and that Miss Welty was reared in an area particularly wealthy in legends, and her motivation for using myths and legends is more readily apparent.

Miss Welty's use of myths may be divided into three major areas. The first is an assortment of stories gathered from her collections in *A Curtain of Green*, *The Wide Net and Other Stories*, and *The Bride of Innisfallen*. The second major section in this tripartite division is the collection of seven stories with a common mythic theme, *The Golden Apples*. These stories represent the ultimate achievement of Eudora Welty in the field of classical mythology. The final area is one that is very special to Miss Welty and deals with the folk legends of her native Mississippi.

The first collection of Miss Welty's stories to be compiled was *A Curtain of Green* in 1941. In this work are four stories that have mythic significance—"A Worn Path," "The Death of a Traveling Salesman," "A Visit of Charity," and "Clytie." This volume of thirteen stories was very generously and lavishly introduced by Katherine Anne Porter who said that, among other things, Miss Welty

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loved folk tales, fairy tales, old legends, and listened to the songs and stories of people who live in old communities whose culture is recollected and bequeathed orally. She also stated that Miss Welty had escaped the destructive influence of writer's schools and as a result, her stories have an "extraordinary range of mood, pace, tone and variety of material." This was not a bad introduction for the fledgling effort of an obscure, young authoress, especially by a leading literary figure.

Generally, critical response to A Curtain of Green was good and in some cases, excellent. The New York Times enthusiastically stated that "her talent is of that rare kind which holds, even in its strongest moments, a hidden wealth of still greater strength, unexpressed as yet." And the Saturday Review said "in this first collection she establishes herself as a writer with something to say and with the ability to say it." Not every critic and reviewer liked A Curtain of Green and the unfavorable remarks were generally confined to criticism of the


14 Ibid., pp. xv xix.


grotesqueness and strangeness of some of the situations contained in the thirteen stories. These remarks range from "Miss Welty turns instinctively, it seems, to the odd, the grotesque, or sardonic,"17 to "she is preoccupied with the demented, the deformed, the queer, the highly spiced."18 Despite these twinges of negative criticism, A Curtain of Green was quite successful and the story "A Worn Path" won second prize in the O'Henry Awards for Best Short Story.

There is no better story to begin a study of Miss Welty's use of myth than the one entitled "A Worn Path." Very simply, the story is one of an old Negro woman who must make a long and difficult trip through a forest to Natchez in order to obtain medicine for her grandson who has swallowed lye. Even though the trip is an exceptionally difficult one and filled with obstacles, the old woman presses on because her grandson is patiently waiting for the medicine which will soothe his tortured throat.

Miss Welty once selected this story as her favorite,19 and the reason why it is one of her better stories in terms of mythic treatment is because the mythic precedent is so obvious. In the opening lines she goes so far as

17Idem.

18Time (Unsigned), Review of A Curtain of Green, by Eudora Welty; November 24, 1941, p. 110.

to name the myth to which she has likened the story when she says that

an old Negro woman with her head tied with a red rag, coming along a path through the pine-woods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old . . . .

As the story goes on, it becomes obvious that Phoenix Jackson, like her mythic namesake, the Egyptian bird of eternal life, is ageless.

Some critics have been quick to point out the Christian symbolism, comparing Phoenix's journey to a Christmas pilgrimage (the story is set in December) or else they make the entire story into an elaborate Christmas myth. Almost invariably, these scholars equate the suffering grandchild with the Christ child, but ignore the significance of Phoenix's name and her seeming indifference to age.

She rejects death when she asks a circling buzzard, "Who you watching?" She is further identified with

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the mythical Phoenix which was described as part gold plumed and part crimson.24 Old Phoenix is described as having wrinkled skin "but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumina ted by a yellow burning under the dark."25 At the end of the myth, the ancient Phoenix was to return to its home after five hundred years to be rejuvenated by the flames that would consume it. Phoenix, after receiving the healing medicine (not unlike the myrrh the original Phoenix gathered for its last journey), also turns around and begins her trip back to her home and her waiting grandchild.

The long journey through the forest to Natchez with its many stumbling points is not unlike the entire life span of the Phoenix bird. Both take place as journeys of love—Phoenix Jackson's for her grandson and the mythical Phoenix's as a tribute to its predecessors and successors. Both are journeys of inevitability. As the nurse says of Phoenix Jackson, she is "an obstinate case,"26 while the mythic Phoenix cannot escape its destiny. Several critics


have stated that they felt Phoenix to be a symbol of the immortality of the Negro's spirit of endurance. But it also seems that the devotion of Phoenix must stand also for the immortality of the love that the withered old woman bears for her injured offspring. This is the great single truth that Miss Welty herself suggests when she replied to a question as to whether the child was dead by saying,

The journey to help another is a worn path—it remains indelible even with the frailty of the body and in the mind clouded with age, and even for a cause of little hope... [T]he child is alive and needs help and the old lay is going to get it for him, and the path is worn.

The shadowy presence of the ancient Phoenix is seen in the old woman by her drive to endure and her devotion to the life-force that is found in her grandson's struggle to survive. Into the context of the Phoenix myth and loosely structured around the Egyptian story of irrevocable necessity, Miss Welty has introduced a dimension of eternal love and service, despite the hazards of age, infirmity, and nature.

27 Appeel, p. 166 and William M. Jones, "Welty's 'A Worn Path,'" The Explicator, XV (June, 1957), Notation 57.

28 Burnett, p. 532.
The second major mythic story which Miss Welty included in this first collection is the tale entitled "Death of A Traveling Salesman." This is Miss Welty's first published work, appearing in an obscure journal, Manuscript, in 1936. Basically, the story is about a traveling shoe salesman, R. J. Bowman, who has just recovered from a serious bout with the flu. While journeying to Beulah (a real town in Bolivar County, Mississippi), Bowman becomes lost and runs his car into a ditch. Bowman begins to feel ill and walks to a farmhouse inhabited by Sonny, a taciturn farmer, and his wife, a woman who in the shadows looked old but turned out to be quite young-and pregnant. They help Bowman by getting his car out of the ditch and sheltering him, refusing any offers of payment. In the middle of the night, Bowman becomes restless and leaves the house to run to his car. On the way he suffers a heart attack and dies.

The story is really about human loneliness and the need of the individual to be at peace with the world that surrounds him. Bowman was lonely, nervous, and alienated from people. When he contrasted his state with that of Sonny—who was at ease with himself, secure in his family structure, and totally independent—he felt that his life had been a failure and he tried to run away from the love and security he saw in Sonny's home. In doing so, Bowman died.
The myth that is found in this story has been explored from many angles. One possibility is suggested by William H. Jones who sees Bowman as a Hercules figure. He strains this analogy by pointing out that Hercules was an archer ("Bowman") and likens Bowman's death to one of the Herculean labors. 29 But this seems farfetched. Bowman's primary trait is his weakness, not his strength. He is afraid to face life and unlike Hercules, makes no effort to challenge the forces which opposed him. Another suggests that Bowman is headed for the Blakian Beulah and his journey to Sonny's home is a passage through Hell. 30 This, too, seems strained. As Miss Welty herself suggests, great problems can arise from the too rigid application of myth to her stories, 31 and both of these explanations seem to be a little forced, although they are well stated.

Perhaps a more credible interpretation would relegate Bowman to a "symbol of rootlessness," 32 and explore Sonny from a mythic standpoint. Sonny can be more readily likened to a Prometheus figure. He is a mythic Titan who


31 Letter.

has come to the aid of desolate and rootless man (Bowman). This parallel can be carried further as his wife is like an earth goddess. Bowman sees her as both young and old, and she is fruitful. In addition, when they need to light a fire in the cabin, Sonny refuses Bowman's offer of matches and goes to "borrow some fire" from his employer, Mr. Redmond (possibly, although not necessarily, a Zeus figure). This symbolic bringing of fire to suffering men makes the identification with Prometheus seem to be an obvious one.

Added to this are Miss Welty's descriptions of Sonny as "a big enough man" with "a hot, red face that was yet full of silence." He is ageless as shown by the Confederate coat he wears, and he walks with "dignity and heaviness." He becomes a Titanic figure.

Miss Welty has used the mythical figure and his love for his earth-goddess wife to show a human that his life is empty without love. This is the universal truth that is found in "Death of a Traveling Salesman," that life without love and companionship is empty and not worth living.

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34 Welty, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," in *A Curtain of Green*, pp. 240-244.

35 Idem.
The next story in *A Curtain of Green* which shows the heavy influence of myth is the tale called "A Visit of Charity." This story is one of Miss Welty's simpler ones and involves the visit of Marian, a young campfire girl, to an old ladies' home. She is shown into a room which has two old ladies in it. The two old ladies both scare and fascinate Marian because of their "other-world" qualities and their sense of doom. Eventually, Marian is chased out of the room, and she flees from the home.

Mythically, there have only been two critical interpretations of this story which seem to have any credence. The first is taken from the realm of fairy tales (which can be categorized as a children's myth). The story has been interpreted as a Little Red Riding Hood tale. However, the comparison seems to be a little strained, and, instead, the story should be examined as an example of one of the mythical visitations to Hades. Mythology is full of these stories—Ulysses, Aeneas, Orpheus, Proserpina, and Dante all visit Hades at one time or another. The Proserpina story would most likely lend itself to this particular story because Marian's adventure into the dark recess of the old ladies' room was the journey of an innocent young

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girl into a dreadful experience, just as Proserpina, also an innocent maiden, was kidnapped and abducted to dark and dreary Hades by Pluto.

Lodwick Hartley explored this story extensively in regard to the Proserpina legend, and found several significant parallels between this story and the myth. These included the fact that Marian had yellow hair, not unlike Proserpina (whose yellow hair was a fertility symbol). The nurse who let Marian into the old ladies' room became Charon, the boatman who let the souls of the dead into Hades. The old ladies suggest Dantinean figures in The Inferno, and there are also elements from Spenser and Vergil to be found. The most prominent of these is the potted plant which Marian is taking to the old ladies. The plant seems to serve the same function as the golden bough that Aeneas had to carry with him into Hades in order that he be allowed to enter. The final Proserpinean image would be that of the apple which Marian hid in the bush outside the home. In order to determine how long she would remain in Hades, Pluto made Proserpina eat a pomegranate (a kind of apple) when she was to return to Olympus from the Underworld. Marian's first act on leaving the home was to take a large, eager bite of the apple (a member of the same botanic family as the pomegranate).

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This story seems fairly closely tailored into mythic framework of the Pluto-Proserpina legend. However, Miss Welty's artistic use of mythology becomes very apparent here, because, while suggesting an apparent relationship to the mythic stories, the heroine remains detached from her mythic predecessors, and therefore retains her individuality as a character.

The final story from *A Curtain of Green* that will be explored in this section is the most difficult in terms of both mythic functions and general theme. This is the story entitled "Clytie," which, like "Salesman," is a story about human loneliness and alienation. Unlike Bowman the heroine, Clytie, searches for love but is rejected and ultimately doomed.

The story concerns an old maid who lives with her family of "down on their luck" Southern gentility. The old maid is searching for love in a society that has condemned her as crazy and ugly. She reaches out to the barber who visits her home and is rejected by him. She then rushes from the house, stares into the rain barrel and ponders the hideous image that appears and realizing that she can not change it, she drowns herself.

There are two significant mythic points. The mythical Clytie was in love with an unwilling god, who found nothing to love in her. As a result of this unrequited love, she desired a transformation and was turned
into a sunflower. Like the mythic Clytie, the Clytie of Miss Welty's story yearns for a metamorphosis. Another interpretation of this incident compares Clytie to a Narcissian figure who has been horrified and drawn to suicide by her own image (this particular illusion would be better supported if Miss Welty had named the character anything but Clytie).

The second significant mythic theme in the story is found in the barber Mr. Bobo. Bobo comes to shave Mr. Farr, Clytie's father, and is the family's only link with the outside world. Clytie likens him to the family's statue of Hermes (like Hermes, who was the God of Commerce, Bobo constantly asserts that he visits the Farris only for the money). Clytie takes him for the messenger of a better outside world, but when he rejects her offer of love, she is compelled to commit suicide out of her lonely desperation.

40 Appel, p. 83.
While this story does not readily lend itself to the tripartite function of myth discussed in the introduction, Clytie as the symbol of the mythical figure who yearned for love and received rejection, and Bobo, as the figure of unenlightened and unsympathetic commerce (Hermes) tend to stand for the universal elements of alienation and unfeeling commercial greed.

Miss Welty's next volume of short stories was entitled *The Wide Net and Other Stories* and was published in 1943. Of the eight stories in this work, six made significant use of either myths or local folklore. The four stories that deal primarily with myths are the title story, "The Wide Net," "Asphodel," "At the Landing," and "Livvie."

Reviewers of *The Wide Net and Other Stories* generally greeted its publication with approval. *Time Magazine* stated that "at her best she runs a photofinish with the finest prose artists."42 In *The New York Times*, Miss Welty's abundant use of mythology was hinted at if not actually discussed when the reviewer stated that through them [the stories] runs the twin strains of fantasy and actuality; when the two are blended—as they often are in this book—the stories afford a very genuine pleasure in the reading.43

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In this review the best elements of Miss Welty's use of myth (and fantasy) are strikingly apparent. Unlike some writers who seemed to get bogged down in the mythical aspects, Miss Welty was most often able to blend the myth with the actual to produce the real pleasure the reviewer mentioned.

Negative criticism of *The Wide Net and Other Stories* was generally light and confined to the up-and-down nature of some of the stories.

The title story is one of Miss Welty's best and won the O'Henry Award as the best short story of 1942. This story concerns the search of a comic hero, William Wallace Jameson, for the body of his wife, who he supposes has drowned herself in the Pearl River. Accompanied by his friend, Virgil, William Wallace gathers together a party of companions and secures the use of a wide net to drag the river. During this expedition, the grimness of the situation becomes lost in the holiday atmosphere. William Wallace has to face a series of trials, including a dive to the bottom of the river and a confrontation with a large eel known as "the King of the Snakes." The search ends, unsuccessfully, with a great fish fry, and then everyone returns home, where William Wallace finds his wife who has been hiding from him.

Louise Gossett commented on the mythic nature of this story when she said that the river dragging was a
"chthonian festival." However, from that point on she discusses the story in terms of Olympian development. If, instead, she had seen the search of William Wallace as a search through Hades, not unlike the quest of Orpheus for Eurydice, she might have been more in line with her chthonian remarks. Like Orpheus, he is searching for a dead wife (although in this case, his wife is only thought to be dead). By crossing legends, it is remembered that Virgil was Dante's guide to Hades, just as William Wallace's best friend's name is Virgil. This point further intensifies the Hades motif.

William Wallace's dive into the river has the elements of the descent of Orpheus into the lower world. Miss Welty describes the dive into the deepest region of the river

Where it was so still that nothing stirred, not even a fish, and so dark that it was no longer the muddy world of the upper river but the dark clear world of deepness, and he must have believed this was the deepest place in the whole Pearl River, and if she were not here she would not be anyplace. . . .

Like Orpheus when William Wallace returns, he returns emptyhanded.

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44 Gossett, p. 113.

The Orpheus myth is very obviously present in this story, but also present is a mythic tone. The whole process of river dragging, feasting, fighting, and celebration has the overtones of Dionysian fertility rites (Hazel is pregnant) and marriage celebrations. By taking these characters and placing them in a rural setting with mythic overtones, Miss Welty is able to make their fighting, feasting, and boasting highly comical and the entire story becomes a comic celebration of William Wallace's initiation into a primitive society.

The second mythic story from The Wide Net and Other Stories is a personal favorite, "Asphodel." The story concerns the visit of three old maids to an old rundown plantation, Asphodel. There the three maids tell the story of Miss Sabina, who lived there, and her husband, Mr. Don McInnis. They tell of the McInnis family tragedies (the children all died early and their deaths were violent) and of Mr. Don's popularity. Then they tell how she drove Mr. Don out and burned the plantation. She ruled over the town with an iron hand and died a terrible, bitter, and lonely death. At that moment some goats and a naked man, who is later identified as Mr. Don, step out of the wilderness and chase the old maids away.

The mythic elements are numerous. The title is the word for the flowers found in Hades, as Homer stated:

46Appel, p. 63.
But I said no more
For he had gone off striding the field of Asphodel,
The ghost of our great runner, Akhilleus Aiakides,
Glorying in what I told him of his son.

"Asphodel" is also about the dead and their spirits. The
spirit of Miss Sabina is evident in her description by the
old maids. The old maids serve as a Greek chorus. They
narrate the action and comment on the background. 48 Miss
Sabina is a Southern Sabine woman, who has been taken by
the vigorous Don McInnis almost against her will. 49 Finally,
Mr. Don, who was portrayed as a vigorous and impulsive man
represents the ultimate force of Eros the sensual, pagan,
lifegiving force. 50 Miss Welty describes him as

A great, profane man like all the
McInnis men . . . . He was the last of
his own . . . . The hope was in him,
and he knew it. He had a sudden way
of laughter . . . .
He had the wildness we all
worshipped that first night. 51

On the other hand, his wife was pictured as a cold, destruc-
tive, and ultimately deadly spirit, not unlike Thanatos,
who was not the queen of death, but death itself. 52 When

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47 Homer, The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fitz-
gerald, Book XI, lines 508-511, p. 203.


49 Alfred Appel, Jr., "The Short Fiction of Eudora
Welty," Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1963), p. 120.

50 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 86.

51 Eudora Welty, "Asphodel," in The Wide Net and

52 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 86.
Mr. Don committed the infidelities for which he was run out, the old maids, Phoebe (for Phoebus the god of prophecy,)
Irene, and Cora went Cassandra-like to be the bearer of the bad tidings to Miss Sabina. 53

This entire struggle between the primitive life forces (Mr. Don) and the cold destructive forces of imposed control (Miss Sabina) reaches its conclusion after she has died. We are aware of the ultimate triumph of the life forces when Mr. Don appears naked to the old maids, while surrounded by goats. He becomes a Pan figure and is described as a

bearded man. . . . He was as rude and golden as a lion. . . . But he was naked. 54

The old maids, of course, flee from anything as vital and earthy as this, but the fact that he still lives in the ruins of Asphodel shows the ultimate triumph of his life force over that of Miss Sabina, who is dead and unmourned. His celebration of life triumphed over her coldness.

The last two stories from this collection are very similar in mythic theme. "Livvie" won the O'Henry Short Story Award in 1943 (making it two in a row for Miss Welty

53 Appel, dissertation, p. 120.
as well as a second place award in 1941). It is a story about a young Negro woman who is married to Solomon, a much older man. Although Livvie is a good wife, she is lonely. One day a traveling cosmetics saleswoman comes and gives Livvie a lipstick, but Livvie can not pay for it and the saleslady takes it back. At this point Livvie realizes from a comment the saleslady made that Solomon is soon to die and she goes out of the house. On the road (the Natchez Trace) she meets a dressed up fieldhand named Cash. They become lovers and when Solomon dies, they go off together. It is a simple story and its mythic elements are found primarily in the character of Cash. He is described as a man who was "looking like a vision." To Livvie, who is isolated and starved for dynamic young company, Cash is the height of elegance (dressed up for Easter in his zoot suit) and he possesses the same qualities of vigor and Dionysian vitality that we see in Mr. Don McInnis from "Asphodel." "All of him was young," while


57 "Livvie," p. 170.
Livvie has only Solomon, who is old and sleeps all the time. Her eventual choice of Cash is another triumph for the life forces.

The last story in this collection to have mythic overtones is the story "At The Landing." This story concerns the fate of Jenny, an innocent young girl, who becomes involved with Billy Floyd, a wild, untamed creature of uncertain origins. He brings Jenny into the world, not by his sexual violation of her but more quietly and surely by her adoration of his wild beauty, and through the revelations about herself which she experiences because of her relationship with him. Billy Floyd, like Mr. Don and Cash, is a life force, a Dionysian symbol. He is the one who awakens Jenny to the world. Jenny is imprisoned in her house of pride just as Clytie, Livvie, and to a certain extent hazel from "The Wide Net" are imprisoned, and it is the function of Billy as a life symbol, a young field god, to liberate her. He is described by Miss Welty as a primitive man who eats raw meat and lives an unregimented


59 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 190.

life. He comes when he wants to come and goes when he wants to go. He dares to ride the flooded river when everyone else is afraid, and he is a subject of high regard, bordering on worshipful awe, to the other rivermen.

These last two stories, unlike "Asphodel," do not conveniently lend themselves to mythic study by employing Greek names or having obviously Olympian actions. The presence of myth in "Livvie" and "At the Landing" is found more in the mood than in an actual delineated role. The characters of Cash and Billy Floyd serve the same functions as Mr. Don and therefore tend to lend themselves to mythic study as field gods not unlike Pan or Bacchus.

The last two stories that are to be explored in this section are taken from what has probably been Miss Welty's least popular collection of short stories, The Bride of Innisfallen, published in 1955. Possibly because the stories are set outside of Mississippi, this collection does not have the power of her other works. Reviewers were generally harder on The Bride than on Miss Welty's other books. Typical of the type of reviews it received were the Saturday Review's comments which called it "a disappointment." Later in the review, the same reviewer stated, "In an age of increasing literary sensationalism,

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exhibitionism, commercialism, and vulgarity, her work is something to cherish.”

These stories with mythic elements that are quite different from any of the others previously discussed are "The Burning" and "Circe". "The Burning" is another of Miss Welty's highly praised stories. It, like "The Wide Net," received a second place award as the best short story of its year (1955). The story is about the Civil War. Unlike most Southern writers, Miss Welty does not get a lot of mileage out of "The War," as this is her only story about it to date. Basically, the story is about two old women, Miss Theo and Miss Myra, and their colored maid, Delilah. The Yankees came, rape Miss Myra, and burn down the house. The women leave a baby, Phinny, inside to burn to death. The three women wander into devastated Jackson, where Miss Theo murders Myra and then tries to hang herself, but only partially succeeds and dies a slow, gruesome death. Delilah returns to the burned house and gathers up the bones of Phinny, who was her son by the sisters' brother, Benton.

The mythic motif in this story is unlike any that we have seen in the work of Miss Welty as yet. Instead of being concerned entirely with Grecian or Roman myth, Miss

62 Idem.
Welty utilized Arthurian Legend in this story. "The Burning" is not unlike Lord Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott." At least two critics have pointed out the similarities and their explanations seem plausible. The opening sections of the story (dealing with the rape of Myra and the burning of the house) are seen through a large Venetian mirror in the parlor over the fireplace. The initial arrival of the Yankees was seen by the ladies in the mirror:

and looked into the mirror over the fireplace, one called the Venetian mirror, and there it was... It had brought two soldiers, with red eyes and clawed, mosquito-racked faces...

Contrast this to Tennyson's Lady, who, while weaving, watches the road to Camelot in her enchanted mirror and sees the knights going to Camelot:

And sometimes thro' the mirror blue, The knights came riding two and two.

Once the Yankees arrived, the women protested that they would not have been allowed to stay if it were not for the fact there was

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No man in the house to prevent it. Brother—no word; Father—dead. Mercifully so. 67

While the Lady of Shalott "hath no loyal knight and true," 68 none of the women have a champion to keep the invaders out. 69

Just as the Lady of Shalott was wronged by her Lancelot, Myra was raped by the Yankee trooper. The identification of Myra to the Lady is strengthened by the description of Myra's forehead as "too white," 70 while the Lady of Shalott is described in another poem by Tennyson as "the fair" and "the lilymaid." 71 The paleness of the complexion of the two women, combined with the fact that both were wronged by the men they saw approaching in their mirror seem to link Myra to the Lady of Shalott.


68 Tennyson, p. 37, line 61.

69 Griffith, PH.D, dissertation, p. 42

70 "The Burning," p. 35.

71 Tennyson, "The Idylls of the King." in Complete Poetical Works, p. 380, lines 1-2.
There are other relations to the Arthurian legend and Tennyson's poem in this story. The riddle which Myra shouted at one of the soldiers before her death has been compared to the Lady of Shalott's swan song, the last song, which she sang as the boat carried her down the river to Camelot. The riddle taunts the Yankee in much the same manner as the Lady mocked Sir Lancelot. And the hammock with which Miss Myra was hanged has some of the elements of the boat in which the Lady died. The shape of the hammock is not unlike that of the boat.

As seen, the story is closely related to Arthurian legend and takes its theme from Tennyson's poem. In both cases the fall of the heroine(s) comes when she is no longer able to see the world through a mirror and has to look at it face to face. The sisters have to see how devastated their world has become because of the war, while Tennyson's lady is as cursed if she looks away from the mirror.

The final story in this section deals with Miss Welty's most explicit use of mythology. The story is entitled "Circe" and is based on the Circe episode from The Odyssey. Unlike any other of Miss Welty's mythic stories, "Circe" is told with the mythic characters and is

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72 McBurney.
closely related to the Homeric version in almost all aspects. Only in "Circe" does Miss Welty use named mythical figures acting in their established roles. In its theme, however, it is like many others of Miss Welty's stories. Circe, although she is a daughter of the sun and a great enchantress, is unable to feel the intensity of a human relationship because she is exempt from pain and suffering. While Ulysses sleeps (after she has seduced him) she watches him and tries to find the secret—the mystery of his being. But, she is unable to do so. She is nature—unchanging, serene, and self-explanatory in her beauty—and is envious of humans. She is as isolated and alienated in her way as are R. J. Bowman or, to lesser extent, William Wallace.

This first section has shown that Miss Welty dealt with a great number of mythic themes in a wide variety of stories. It establishes that Miss Welty was acquainted with a great many different myths from several cultures and was able to skillfully incorporate aspects of these myths into her stories. However, all of these isolated mythic stories serve to complement and develop the three-fold use of the mythic themes that were to appear in what

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73 Vande Kieft, p. 354.
has been considered by most critics to be the mythical triumph of Miss Welty's work, *The Golden Apples*.

*The Golden Apples* was originally published in 1949 and contains seven stories. All the stories are closely related in their themes and setting. *The Golden Apples* is much like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* because readers have never really known whether it is a short story collection or an episodic novel. Whatever one considers the work, the episodes all have great mythic significance. Reviewers generally received *The Golden Apples* with mixed feelings. Some felt that the characters were poorly differentiated, while others said they were universal, like Gogol's. Most significantly, it was immediately recognized as a work of mythic importance (something that was generally ignored in earlier reviews of her work). Herschel Brickell stated that "Miss Welty is writing on two levels, of things as they are, and of their relationship to classical and medieval mythology." 

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This insight opened a heretofore unexplored aspect of the criticism of Miss Welty—the mythic approach. Probably, more has been written about *The Golden Apples* than any other single work of Miss Welty's.

The golden apples of the title could be considered as any one of three important Grecian myths. The Golden Apples of the Hesperides were part of the eleventh labor of Hercules. It was his mission to recover these apples, which stood for contentment and the fulfillment of sexual felicity. These apples were on a tree presented to Hera as a wedding gift from Gaea. The golden apples of Atalanta symbolize the persuasiveness of material things in deterring one from a spiritual objective. Melanion won Atalanta as his wife, despite her preferred celibacy, by defeating her in a race during which he used three golden apples to slow her down. The third legend which used golden apples was, of course, the Judgment of Paris which led to the Trojan War. This symbolized the discord that the quest for a material objective could cause. 77

Another possible purpose for entitling the stories *The Golden Apples* could be found in the last two lines of Yeat's poem, "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," 78 which

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78 Complete text of Yeat's poem can be found in Appendix C.
deals with the quest of a Celtic hero to find and possess a beautiful girl. These lines were originally attached to the end of the "June Recital" story and go, "The silver apples of the moon,/The golden apples of the sun." Because the stories basically deal with the wanderings of various protagonists in search of an ideal, this poem and its quest motif have been frequently identified with the story. In latter editions of the story Miss Welty omitted this quote and added another dimension to the tales. Without these lines, it is easier for critics to justify an interpretation of the stories in the light of the symbolic values found in the Grecian myths.

The first story, "A Shower of Gold," introduces the unifying figures of the tales, King MacLain and his sons. One of them appears in each of the seven stories of the collection. The King is introduced by Katie Rainey, a wise and gossipy woman of Morgana—the town in which the stories are set—as a fabulous figure who is obviously opposed to the moral order of small town Southern life. He loves all the women and fathers scores of children. He is a Dionysian figure like Don McInnis and Cash McCord.

79 The seven stories were originally published separately and compiled by Miss Welty with some revision in 1949.

80 W. B. Yeats, "The Song of the Wandering Aengus." See Appendix C.

King MacLain is obviously a Zeus figure. He reigns supreme over the characters of Morgana. Elements of his Zeus-like behavior include his relationship with his wife Snowdie. Snowdie is a Danae figure. Danae was the mother of Perseus, who conquered the Gorgon-Medusa. When she was a young woman, Danae was imprisoned in a tower by her father, who had been alarmed by a prophecy that his grandson would kill him. However, Zeus appeared to Danae in the form of a golden shower of light and impregnated her with Perseus. King impregnated Snowdie when he made a sudden and unexpected appearance. After she married King, he took up traveling and stayed away from his wife for great periods of time. Then at odd intervals, she would get messages to meet King in the woods. After one of these meetings, Snowdie reported to the women that she was pregnant. To the ladies who saw her after the meeting

It was like a shower of something had struck her, like she'd been caught out in something bright.82

She had been with her Zeus, her shower of gold and nine months later the results of this union were the twin brothers Randall and Eugene.

Other factors help make King into an acceptable Zeus-figure. In the story "Sir Rabbitt," King has a sexual liaison with Mattie Will Sojourner, reminiscent of Zeus and Leda, while her husband lies unconscious a few feet away, felled by a Jovian thunderbolt (in this case, he fainted when a round of King's buckshot was fired over his head). Mattie was, like Leda, willingly raped.

When she laid eyes on Mr. MacLain close, she staggered, he had such grandeur, and then she was caught by the hair and brought down as suddenly to earth as if whacked by an unseen shillelagh. Presently she lifted her eyes in a lazy dread and saw those eyes above hers, as keenly bright and unwavering and apart from her life was the flowers on a tree.

And Yeat's Leda was similarly assaulted:

A sudden blow, the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl,
her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape
caught up on his bill . . .

There is the suggestion that Mattie Will now knows the secret of King's powers.

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Like submitting to another way
to talk, she could answer to his
burden now . . . she was Mr. MacLain's
doom, or Mr. MacLain's weakness. . . .

Mattie Will's implied knowledge of King is not unlike the
implication that Yeats makes regarding Leda's union

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the blithe blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop? 87

By investing the sexual exploits of King with Olympian
status, Miss Welty is able to temper their unbelievable
quality and fit them more credibly into the frame of The
Golden Apples. King's sexual exploits are not limited to
Snowdie and Mattie Will. By disappearing and reappearing
over the years King has built up a legend about himself.
The women of Morgana all adore him, and it is implied that
many of their children were actually fathered by him.

In the final tale of the collection, "The Wanderers,"
King returns home to attend the funeral of old Mrs. Rainey.
Further elements of his Jovian appearance and nature are
evident here. When Virgie Rainey first sees him she feels
that "there was something terrifying about that old man—he
was too old." 88 Like the ancient Gods of myth, King

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87 Yeats, p. 1228.
MacLain is ageless. Then, at the supper after the funeral, King looks at Virgie and "made a hideous face ... like a silent yell. It was a yell at everything--including death ... ." In his old age, King still has the god-like defiance that was there in his youth. He defies convention, people, and death itself.

Though I am old and wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone . . .
And pluck till time and time are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

King-Zeus, the wanderer in search of the fulfillment that the golden apples of the Hesperides promise, remains, even in his old age, a god-like man. In the three "King MacLain" stories--"Shower of Gold," "Sir Rabbitt," and "The Wanderers"--Miss Welty creates a Zeus figure and makes the first coordinated step in allowing residents of Mississippi to become members of the Olympian hierarchy. She also uses the myths surrounding Zeus' sexuality to temper the ribaldry of King MacLain's own exploits.

89 Ibid., p. 257.
90 Yeats, "The Song of the Wandering Aengus."
The second significant mythic motif to emerge from *The Golden Apples* is the character of Perseus. As already discussed, Perseus was the son of Zeus by Danae. The Perseus legend is one of Miss Welty's favorites and she says so:

> I suppose Perseus may be my favorite among the Greek myths—and the Minatum [sic], The Labyrinth and Medusa. . . .

At this point, a too rigid application of myth to the stories would tend to confuse the reader. The Perseus figure would have to be one of King's sons by Snowdie (as Perseus was a son of Zeus by Danae). Therefore, either Eugene or Ran, the twin sons of Snowdie, would have to be Perseus. All indications seem to say that another boy, who was fathered by King is Perseus. His name is Loch Morrison. Here it should be remembered that Miss Welty continually cautioned against an inflexible application of myth to her stories. 92

> It becomes obvious that Loch Morrison is both a son of King and is also Perseus. His mother's husband is

91 Letter.

92 Ibid.
the owner of the local paper and ignores her, so it is quite logical that she would turn to King for attention. It is also quite normal that this earthy Zeus figure would impregnate her.

In two separate stories, Loch plays the role of Perseus. In the story "June Recital," he reenacts the most famous Perseus story, the conquest of the Gorgon-Medusa. The recital is to take place in the studio of Miss Eckhart. Shortly after the recital had been given, Virgie Rainey sets fire to the studio. In the confusion, a metronome is thrown out into the grass. Loch, who is observing all the action from a nearby tree, thinks the metronome is a time bomb, but still courageously picks it up and stuffs it in his shirt.

On his hands he circled the tree and the obelisk waited in the weeds, upright. He stood up and looked at it.

He felt charged like a bird, for the ticking stick went like a tail, a tongue, a wand... He opened his shirt and buttoned it in.

"He felt charmed like a bird," there is an old wives' tale that snakes could charm birds in their tracks and hypnotize them so that they could not fly away. Medusa's head was a

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94 Eudora Welty, "June Recital," The Golden Apples, pp. 87-88--hereafter cited as "JR."
head of snakes and the terror of seeing it would turn into stone anyone who looked directly upon it.

Like the mythical Perseus, who could not look directly at the Medusa's head, Loch is very wary of the metronome and when he finally picks it up, he puts it in his shirt rather than risk carrying it in the open, much like Perseus put the severed head of Medusa into a silver wallet.

In the "June Recital" story there is another reference to the golden apples of the title. Throughout the stories there is a battle constantly occurring within the characters. They are struggling for fulfillment, both spiritual and sexual fulfillment, as represented by the Apples of the Hesperides. But often discord and greed lead the people of Morgana away from these ultimate goals. Throughout the story, Loch has kept a constant watch on four fig trees which grow across the street from his home. He plans to visit these trees as soon as the fruit ripens, and

Their . . . golden flesh would show,  
their inside flowers and golden bubbles  
of juice would hang to touch  
your tongue. . . . 95

95 Ibid., p. 24.
Even at his young age, Loch is able to contemplate fulfillment of his desires in his enjoyment of nature. His constant observation of the development of the fig trees gives him a sense of purpose and an awareness of the order in the universe.

Loch's identity as Perseus is further reinforced in the story "Moon Lake." In this story, the character of Easter, another wanderer in search of spiritual fulfillment, is introduced. She is an orphan or a foundling—we are never really sure which—and is probably a child of King’s. She lives in the County Orphans Home. In the opening story "Shower of Gold," Katie Rainey seems to suggest a possible link to King when she speaks of "children of his [King’s] growing up in the County Orphan’s [Home]." And there are other evidences of King’s paternity. She has King’s independence and golden hair and his commanding presence,

but Easter was dominant for what she was in herself—for the way she held still, sometimes.

Her father (the one time she mentions him) has King’s character. She says

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I haven't got no father. I never had, he ran away. I've got a mother.\textsuperscript{99}

King is always running away and continuing his search for spiritual and sexual fulfillment.

Easter has special mythical elements, her eyes. "Easter's eyes could have come from Greece or Rome."\textsuperscript{100}

Armed with her commanding eyes and regal presence, Easter becomes an Andromeda to Loch's Perseus. Loch's mythic image is reinforced by his rescue of Easter, when she has been pushed into Moon Lake. This can be equated to Perseus' rescue of Andromeda from a watery death at the hands of a fearful sea serpent.\textsuperscript{101}

Like Perseus and his epic fight with the sea monster, Loch has a great struggle in finding Easter (who was pushed into the lake and has had her head buried in the silt on the bottom). Only after several attempts and after covering himself with "terrible stuff" is Loch able to rescue Easter and, after further effort, to revive her. The "terrible stuff" which covered Loch might easily represent the blood of the sea monster which Bullfinch reported, spurted all over Perseus.

\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., p. 134.

\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., p. 120.

\textsuperscript{101}Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 221.
His bravery and unselfishness make him the unaffected hero that Perseus was and allows him to occupy a special place in Miss Welty's *Golden Apples*. He is one of the few totally satisfied characters. By virtue of his courage (first with the metronome and later at Moon Lake) and unselfishness, Loch is able to escape his early doubts and left Morgana for New York City, where it is enviously noted that he has "a life of his own." He has grabbed the golden apples of fulfillment for which most of the inhabitants of Morgana can only search.

There are further references to the fleeting quality of the pursuit of fulfillment. Throughout this story, there are references to the fruit that grows in Morgana. The girls are afraid they will miss the day when the figs reach their ripest moment, and Nina, one of the girls, looks at a pear tree and wonders if she will ever eat a pear at just the moment of its greatest ripeness. This concern with the fleeting nature of fruit's perfection seems to mirror the continual pursuit of the one moment of spiritual perfection for which all the characters of Morgana seem to be striving.

The next great mythic hero to appear in *The Golden Apples* is Hercules, who takes his mortal form in the character of Ran, one of King MacLain's twin sons by Snowdie.
Ran's story is entitled "The Whole World Knows." The story is set some years after "Moon Lake" (the story in which Ran made his initial appearance) and deals with the fact that Ran has left his wife, Jinny Love Stark, because she is unfaithful. Because of his confusion and self pity, Ran has an affair with Maideen Sumerall. During the course of this affair, Ran attempts suicide, brutally violates Maideen (who is half Ran's age) and then she kills herself. After this, Ran and Jinny Love reconcile their differences and he ultimately becomes the mayor of Morgana.

The justification of Ran's Herculean aspects can be found in the fact that many of his deeds loesely parallel the Labors of Hercules. His initial introduction in "Moon Lake" takes place while he and his dogs are on a hunting trip. Perhaps this is the quest for the hide of the Nemean Lion, the first labor of Hercules. Then in Ran's story, "The Whole World Knows," he seems to fulfill three other Herculean labors. The first takes place when Ran is asked to kill Miss Francine Murphy's sick dog, Bella. This could parallel the capture of Cerberus, the canine guardian of Hade's gates. Miss Francine asks Ran because he is the most capable man and he does the job. Whenever Bella is mentioned, there are always references

to the summer heat, which lends some credence to the Hades motif associated with her.

The third Herculean labor Ran performs is his conquest of Maideen, who becomes Hippolyta. Like the Queen of the Amazons, Maideen is an innocent, fresh young girl. Like Hippolyta, who offers her all to Hercules and is cruelly abused and ultimately killed, Maideen offers herself and her love to Ran, who uses her body only for his own physical release and without a vestige of love. After his violation of Maideen, Ran ignores her and Maideen, who has lost her illusions and feels greatly wronged, commits suicide.

The final Herculean mission which Ran performs is his most difficult. He secures the Golden Apples of the Hesperides. In Ran's case, it is the golden apples of spiritual and sexual fulfillment, which most of the Morgana characters have sought. He attains this objective when he is able to reconcile his pride and goes back to Jinny Love, his wayward wife. Ran's final achievement, his seizing of the golden apples when they are offered to him, does not take place in his story ("The Whole World Knows"), but is discovered later in "The Wanderers." His contentment is, like Loch's, one of the success stories in The Golden Apples. At the funeral of Katie Rainey, he is seen as a prosperous, happy man--the mayor of his town. He wife is
subdued and caters to him—her youthful rebellion spent. His peace and contentment is reflected in Miss Welty's description:

Ran was smiling—holding onto a countryman now. They had voted for him for that—for his glamour and his story, for being a MacLain and the bad twin, for marrying a Stark and then for ruining a girl and the thing she did.\textsuperscript{103}

Ran alone seemed happy in regaining his wife. His mother did not care for Jinny Love and the other people seemed to begrudge Ran his happiness, but Ran is one of the few characters of Morgana who is able to fully secure the Golden Apples of the Hesperides and whose life seems ultimately to be a qualified success. There are other elements, in addition to the fulfillment of some of the epic tasks, which reinforce Ran's identity with Hercules. At one juncture, he attempts to commit suicide, but fails:

I drew back the pistol, and turned it. I put the pistol's mouth in my own. . . . I made it—made the awful sound. And she said, "Now you see. It didn't go off."\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{103} "The Wanderers," p. 238.

Hercules, too, tried once to kill himself after he had accidentally killed his family in a fit of madness, but because he was a demi-god, he failed. Ran, like Hercules, is immortal. The same gun that will not kill him, kills the mere mortal, Maideen.

Ran is driven toward madness by his frustration that results from the failure of his marriage. He mentally murders his wife:

I was watching Jinny and I saw her pouting childish breasts, excuses for breasts, sprung full of bright holes where my bullets had gone. But Jinny didn't feel it. 105

But, just as Hercules has to perform his twelve labors in atonement for his murder of Megana (his wife), Ran leaves Jinny at this instant full of guilt and begins his quests.

Physically, the only description of Ran is an allusion to his size, he is "a big boy" and capable of feats of strength. In this respect and due to the fact that he is a son of King (Zeus), he is Hercules.

Ran's twin brother, Eugene, has his own story, "Music from Spain," and his own mythic identity, that of Ulysses. His story is the only one not set in Morgana or its environs. Eugene has left Morgana and gone to San Francisco. Unlike Loeb, Ran, and, to a greater extent,

105 Ibid., p. 171.
King—Eugene is not a god or demigod. He never attains the fulfillment for which his father and brothers strive and at least partially attain. He is his father's son, he is a wanderer, but his life never attains the heroic stature that his family seems to crave. He is a pedantic watch repairman. He lives unhappily, with his wife, whom he despises, as a whiner ("she had a waterfall of tears back there")\(^\text{106}\) and as a pig of a woman ("He struck her because she was a fat thing"),\(^\text{107}\) who outweighed him by eleven pounds. He feels trapped and frustrated by his life.

Eugene's story takes place in one day in San Francisco, just as Joyce's Ulysses—Stephen Dedalus' story—takes place on one day in Dublin. Miss Welty's story has seven carefully structured incidents. Eugene unexpectedly and without provocation slaps his wife and walks out of his home, ignoring her cries for him to return. He walks past his job and decides not to work that day. He then goes down on Market Street near the waterfront. He watches the fleet in the bay and observes the Market Street drunks with disgust. He recognizes a Spanish guitar player he has seen perform and saves him from an automobile which

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\(^\text{107}\) Idem.
is about to run him down. The two men then walk together, eat a meal together, and finally after a walk along the seacoast during which they speak about life (although neither understands the other's language) they have a fight. After that, they head their separate ways and Eugene returns home unfulfilled and lonely.

Many critics have seen Eugene as Ulysses, but it is a mocking parallel. Instead of being a shrewd, beautiful, and loyal wife like Penelope, Eugene has fat, unimaginative, and weepy Emma. Eugene's slapping of Emma and storming out of his house represent the futile attempt of a desperate man to break loose from the monotony which seems to strangle him. Unlike Ulysses, Eugene does not return from his day with any wisdom or great knowledge, only the frustrations which had driven him out originally.

When Eugene leaves Emma, the first place he passes by is the butcher shop. There, he watches the butchers hacking up the meat. This section is reminiscent of Ulysses' visit to the land of the Ciconians, where they stop for provisions and are fought off by the Ciconians. The butcher makes a threatening gesture to Eugene which decides his course for the day. When the butcher points his knife at Eugene, it reignites the smoldering resentment that

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108 Harris and Morris among others.

109 Harris, p. 94.
he had felt at breakfast. Eugene proceeds to the jeweler's shop where he works. The watch repair section is in a wire cage—the cave of Polyphemus, and the jeweler, Mr. Butsinger, who has become Eugene's enemy, looks meancing through his jeweler's glass over one eye—the Cyclopean single eye. Warily, Eugene—Ulysses—skirts the cave which will entrap him. He looks out onto the street and sees the flags on the movie houses, those "fluttered streamers and flags as if they were going to sea."\(^{110}\) The fleet of Ulysses was putting to sea and leaving the land of the Cyclops.

Then Eugene walks down to Market Street, the "Skid Row" area of San Francisco. There, among the drunks and bums, Eugene fantasizes a conversation with his dead daughter. As he walks through the fading fog among the real dead (his daughter) and the spiritually dead (the drunks and bums), Eugene is reliving Ulysses' visit to Hades. Memories of the visit to the Cave of Aeolus, the Wind God, are conjured up by Eugene remembering a visit he and Emma had made to the Aeolian Hall to hear a guitar recital. Ulysses' athletic achievements at the Phaecian games are countered by Eugene's graceful actions when he saves the Spaniard.

\(^{110}\)"MFS," p. 190.
Then, Eugene and the Spaniard go to dinner, but while the Spaniard eats unabashedly, Eugene is not able to remember if he has enough money to pay the check. Several times he attempts to reconstruct his finances, but can not remember. He is like Ulysses in the land of the Lotus Eaters.

Finally, Eugene and the Spaniard have their fight. The Spaniard holds Eugene over his head and threatens to throw him into the raging ocean, which is breaking over the rocks. It reminds one of Ulysses' near escape between the twin perils of Scylla and Charybadis. Then the Spaniard puts him down. Having negotiated these perils, Eugene is able, like Ulysses to return home to his wife.

Eugene MacLain's Odyssey, as already noted, does not have the spiritual rewards the Ulysses received, but the parallels between them easily establish Eugene's mythic identity. These parallels are the visits to the isle of the Ciconians, to the Cave of Polyphemus, to Hades, and to the Aeolian cave, plus Eugene's participation in his own Phaecian games, his experiences with the Lotus Eaters, and the perils of Scylla and Charybadis.

Eugene is the only character whose story is set outside of Morgana, but his departure from Mississippi is

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not a constructive one. Although he marries and seeks fulfillment, the only apples this wanderer finds are the apples of discord—marital, personal, and professional discord. Eugene, like Paris, is doomed because he chose the wrong objectives in his search for spiritual fulfillment. In Eugene's story, the mythic parallels serve only to mock and emphasize the futility of the path he has chosen.

Another unfulfilled character in The Golden Apples is Virgie Rainey. Virgie is a frustrated young woman of great possibilities, who comes to naught. Her very name, Virgie, is a mocking reference to Artemis—the Goddess of Chastity. Virgie has several affairs with unknown men. Virgie is driven by her frustrations. She knows she is capable of great things. She is the only one of Miss Eckhart's piano pupils to show promise, yet she rejects Miss Eckhart. She yearns for greater things, and her yearning is symbolized by a picture of Perseus and the Medusa that Miss Eckhart has on her wall. She remembers this picture when she sees King at the funeral in "The Wanderers." She wishes that she had King's style, a style that has:

The vaunting. . . .
Cutting off the Medusa's head was the heroic act, perhaps, that made visible a horror in life, that was once the horror in love, Virgie thought—the separateness.112

What Virgie realizes at this moment is that for every hero, there must be a victim.\textsuperscript{113} The frustrations of her life because of her inability to reach the heights to which she has aspired are made acceptable to her when she realizes that her burden is the tragedy of human life—the separateness. But she knows that there is the glory in her life which allows her to live within this tragedy.

Virgie's realization—that for all the tragedy in life there is glory, for all the frustration there is some fulfillment, and for all the horror there is some beauty—is the realization that all the Morgana characters have to make if they are to function in their world. The ones that do not—Eugene and, to a lesser degree, Miss Eckhart—die; the others, who reconcile themselves to life, live and attain degrees of spiritual fulfillment.

Everyone of the major Morgana characters has an Olympian counterpart. Miss Eckhart, the music teacher, is compared to Circe, "Her hair was as low on her forehead as Circe's."\textsuperscript{114} This is perhaps an ironic comment on the futility of her role. She seeks to bring culture to Morgana, but what she meets are swine, people who are unappreciative of her efforts, and who ultimately reject her and leave her to die lonely and unfilled.

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\textsuperscript{113}Vande Kieft, \textit{Eudora Welty}, p. 142.
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\textsuperscript{114}"JR", p. 75.
\end{flushright}
No work of Miss Welty's has been as thoroughly studied in the light of its mythic content as The Golden Apples. It represents the ultimate mythical achievement of Eudora Welty. In its seven stories, she traces the quest of modern humanity for spiritual, sexual, and social fulfillment in a world whose values have altered traditional standards. She does this with the creation of a mythical world in her native Mississippi. All of the residents of her mythical kingdom function as modern humans, but they assume an epic grandeur by their elevation to Olympian status. At the same time, the Olympian elevation tempers the quality of their actions and makes the squalid reality of their lives into a magical kingdom. Louise Gosset states, "By superimposing the extraordinary on the ordinary, Miss Welty breaks through the commonplace to find unexpected meaning."115

While The Golden Apples represents the culmination of Miss Welty's mythic approach and stands as a masterful example of the effective use of mythology, there is yet another type of myth in modern literature which she uses with comparable success. Miss Welty employs legends and folk tales of her native Mississippi region in two of her best stories and her novella, The Robber Bridegroom. Miss Welty is aware of the continual native mythmaking that is a product of her own Natchez Trace. 116

115 Gossett, p. 98.
Miss Welty makes the Natchez Trace of the early nineteenth century into a Mississippi Eden. She then becomes a legend-maker of the Natchez Trace. Miss Welty's work is obviously affected by her love of the Trace and its environs. She states:

I visited the Trace, itself, and got a strong feeling of the place. 117

Miss Welty regards the Trace as an exceptional area, rich in folklore and legends. In an article in Harper's Bazaar she describes her feelings concerning the undying nature of the Trace:

Indians, Mike Fink, the flatboatmen, Burr and Blennerhassett, John James Audubon, the bandits of the Trace, planters and preachers—the horse fairs, the great fires—the battles of war, the arrival of foreign ships, and the coming of the floods; could not all these things still more with their stature enter into the mind here and their beauty still work upon the heart? Perhaps it is the sense of place that gives us the belief that passionate things, in some essence, endure. Whatever is significant and whatever is tragic live as long as the place does, though they are unseen, and the new life will be built upon these things—regardless of commerce and the way of rivers and roads, and other vagaries.

To Miss Welty, the Natchez Trace is alive and its legends represent a unique branch of American folklore.

117 Letter.

In the opening story of *The Wide Net and Other Stories*, "First Love," Miss Welty plays with one of the great mysteries of American history, the strange case of Aaron Burr and his Southwestern empire scheme. Historians are still baffled by the lack of knowledge concerning the exploits of this man while he was in Natchez during the winter of 1807. It is known that Burr, with the aid of a man named Harman Blennerhassett, attempted to break away the territories of Alabama and Mississippi from the United States and form his own nation. The exact nature of this plan has never been discovered and it is sufficient to say that Burr failed.

On the other hand, Miss Welty succeeds in taking the mystery that surrounds the Natchez exploits of Aaron Burr and working one of her best stories into the story. Miss Welty sets the legendary motif for this story in the opening lines:

> Whatever happened, it happened in extraordinary times, in a season of dreams, and in Natchez it was the bitterest winter of them all.\(^{119}\)

Immediately, the tone of never-never land is set. Miss Welty takes the historical moment and strives to create a wonderland. The story itself concerns a young deaf-mute, Joel Mayes. Joel was orphaned on his trip from Virginia to

Natchez, where he lives and performs odd jobs at an inn. One night, the lonely twelve-year-old, whose human contact is limited, awakens to find two men in his room—Burr and Blennerhassett. Burr makes a gesture to Joel (he is probably the first person in many years to take special notice of the boy) and the boy immediately falls in love with Burr. Thereafter, every night the men gather in Joel’s room to plot. The only way Joel can show his love is to bring Burr food he has saved. One night, after Blennerhassett and his wife leave, Burr lies down on the table, falls asleep, and has a terrible nightmare. Joel comforts him and tries to keep Burr from calling out. The next day, Burr, whose plot has been uncovered, flees from Natchez. The story ends with Joel, who is brokenhearted because he knows Burr will not return, setting out to follow the fugitive.

Miss Welty dramatizes Burr’s fate and plays with history in the sequence during which Burr cries out in his sleep. The Burr conspiracy is one of the blank pages in American history books. Almost nothing is known of the particulars of Burr’s plot. Miss Welty implies that it fell to a deaf-mute boy to be the only individual who was ever exposed to the internal workings of Burr’s mind. She says

Presently 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.  

Miss Welty tantalizes the reader with the suggestion that the mystery of Aaron Burr might have been known, if it were not for the quirk that made his sole confidant a deaf-mute. As Alfred Appel says, "whatever words they were, they went unrecorded, for the legend of his unspoken dream of power was obscured his earlier eminence, relegating him to a shadowy corner of American history."  

Joel adores Burr from afar and, in some respects, his love is unreturned. But, he is able to find an object for his love in Aaron Burr, and, because of this, he is allowed to participate in the mysteries of the heart in a way that is denied to so many of Miss Welty's alienated or separated characters.  

The second story is also from The Wide Net and Other Stories and also deals with the legendary historical figures of the Natchez Trace. The story is called "A Still Moment," and is another of Eudora Welty's very finest efforts. Instead of having as its central character one historical

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120 "First Love," p. 28.

121 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 186.
figure, "A Still Moment" deals with three, and it has them meet on the Trace, an event that has not been recorded in the history books. 122 The three characters are John James Audubon, Lorenzo Dow, and John Murrell.

Audubon is fairly well known. He was a Frenchman, who came to America to paint and made his reputation as a painter of wildlife scenes, particularly wild birds and fowl.

Lorenzo Dow was a circuit riding Evangelist who earned a reputation as a madman obsessed with a monomaniacal vision that he could save the souls of the inhabitants of the Trace area. His specialty was a blood-and-thunder sermon in which he prophesized hellfire and damnation for all who did not accept the tenets of his Methodist faith. 123

The third figure in this story is John Murrell. Murrell is probably an even greater mystery to the historians than Aaron Burr. He was a bloodthirsty highwayman (one of many who "worked" the Trace). Described as an "elegant scoundrel" and a "racy, remarkably comely fellow," 124 Murrell

122 The three histories of the area consulted for this section—The Devil's Backbone, Natchez, and Mississippi—make no mention of any meeting between these celebrated men was ever made.


was the founder of the Council of the Clan of the Mystic Confederacy. The Mystic Confederacy was an organization of several thousand outlaws, who had planned a slave rebellion all along the Mississippi. While the slaves killed and burned, Murrell and his henchmen would loot the great houses of the South. Fortunately, the plan was discovered and Murrell was imprisoned. With the fall of Murrell, the golden days of the outlaws on the Natchez Trace ended. 125

"A Still Moment" is a truly outstanding story. It concerns the attempt of these three men to discern the total meaning of human life. Miss Welty explores the story from each individual's viewpoint. The story opens with Dow frantically riding down the Trace at sunset. He is obviously a man obsessed. He thinks that God is with him and he is constantly guided through the perils of the trail by a mysterious voice. His love for God has become an obsession which dominates his life so totally that he is ashamed of the great love and sexual need he feels for his far-away wife.

Dow is joined by Murrell, who has selected the evangelist for his next victim. The bandit has always made a game of telling his victim a story of a murder committed the day before by Murrell. Throughout the tale Murrell would

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125 Ibid., p. 73.
never look at his victim until the moment of confrontation, when he revealed that he had told the man the story of his own death. Then Murrell would murder him.

It happens that at the very moment Murrell has chosen to murder Dow that Audubon walks out of the forest and joins the men. Audubon recognizes something sinister in Murrell, but takes no action. The three walk together and see a white heron feeding in the marsh. Each man feels a different emotion. To Dow the heron is a manifestation of God's love. Murrell at that moment sees himself as the leader of the Mystic Rebellion spreading fire and death along the River. Audubon sees the bird as a model that he will paint and notes the qualities that make it so alive and beautiful. Then Audubon shoots the bird. After Audubon collects the bird the three men depart and each goes his separate way.

This is Miss Welty's most metaphysical story. Each man is obsessed with one consuming desire. "What each of them had wanted was simply all. To save all souls, to destroy all men, to see and record all life that filled this world—all, all..." As a result of seeing the bird, each of them has experienced a change in their particular obsession. Audubon knows now that no matter how

126 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 177.
faithfully he reproduces the bird, his picture will never have the feeling of life that he saw in the bird. From the time he shot the bird, he felt that his paintings would not be a live thing; it was "never the essence, only a sum of parts." After this, Audubon knows that he will never be able to record all the life that fills the world. Because of this realization, the intensity of his quest is modified and there is the intimation by Miss Welty that he will be a happier man in the future. She says:

He walked on into the deeper woods, noting all the sights, all sounds, and was gentler than they as he went.

Murrell begins to feel the need to confess. He feels that his days are numbered and sees the time when the Trace will be dug up and bodies of all his victims found. He looks to the bird as a symbol of the creation and glory of the world and asks for forgiveness: "How soon will you pity me?" He looks to the bird for an answer, an answer that would free him from the doubt that troubles him. But then Audubon shoots the bird and Murrell sees it

128 Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 36.
130 Idem.
131 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 179.
132 "ASM," p. 89.
as a victim and not as a messenger from God. He goes
to sleep beside the trail and dreams of his next victim.
It is as if the death of the bird has confirmed his destiny.\textsuperscript{133} He dreams of a glorious future.

Lorenzo Dow is deeply affected by the death of the bird. His faith in God is shaken. The death of the bird makes him feel that God is indifferent to men. God created the bird, let him see it and love it, and then let the bird be destroyed. The problem about his wife which had bothered Dow earlier suddenly comes clear to him. He loves beauty in its natural state, more than he loves God.\textsuperscript{134} Like Virgie in "June Recital" he becomes aware that there is a "separateness" which is the source of human tragedy. Like Murrell his faith in his life's mission has been shaken, but Dow rides on to his next tent meeting and his next sermon.

In this story, Miss Welty has used three more shadowy figures from her native state's early history and has effectively woven one of her more meaningful stories upon the framework of their lives. She makes an important comment on humanity and its acceptance of life. Only Audubon, the creative artist, can see through the role he had previously played and accept the insignificance of his own life when

\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., p. 180.

\textsuperscript{134}Vande Kieft, \textit{Sudora Welty}, p. 37.
contrasted to the grandeur of the whole of nature. This acceptance is probably one of the reasons why Audubon died fulfilled and famous, while Dow and Murrell died empty and forgotten.

The final story of Miss Welty's to be explored is her delightful novella of frontier Mississippi, The Robber Bridegroom. This book was published in 1942 and was received by the critical audience with lavish praise. It was called "a miracle of imagination" and compared favorably to Virginia Woolf's Orlando and Elinor Wylie's Venetian Glass Nephew. The story is a mixture of American history and folktale, Germanic fairytales, Greek mythology, and Miss Welty's own fabulous imagination.

The story opens with the introduction of Clement Musgrove, an innocent planter. Clement rooms at an inn with two other travelers, Mike Fink and Jamie Lockhart. During the night Jamie tells Clement that Fink will try to murder them, and they move to the closet. Fink beats the bundles they had put under the sheets and takes their gold from under their pillows. But, the next morning, Jamie confronts Fink and recovers the lost gold. In gratitude,


Clement invites Jamie to visit him and his family at their plantation home.

Later, Clement's beautiful daughter Rosamund is gathering herbs in the woods when Jamie Lockhart, now disguised as a robber of the Trace, chances upon her and takes all her clothing. The next day he returns, kidnaps Rosamund and robs her of her chastity. That night, an elegant Jamie Lockhart visits the Musgrove home to see his friend Clement. Rosamund is working in the kitchen and is so dirty that Jamie does not recognize her as the beautiful girl he raped earlier in the day. She also fails to recognize him.

The next day, Rosamund goes off into the woods, and in the deep forest she finds a small cottage. It is the robber's den. She goes in and finds her clothes. After dressing, she cleans up the cabin and then, when she hears the robbers returning, she hides. When the robbers find her they all want to kill her except "the chief," who is, of course, Jamie Lockhart. She recognizes him as the man who has robbed her of her virtue and decides to live there in the forest with him and his men.

Goat, a neighbor of the Musgroves whose job is to follow Rosamund, decides to return to the robber's cabin (where he had trailed the girl) the next day. However, he meets a bandit, Little Harp, who has a trunk that talks. It turns out that the trunk contains the head of Big Harp,
the brother of Little Harp. Big Harp was killed by a posse and beheaded. Goat tells Little Harp that "the chief" and Jamie Lockhart are one and the same person.

The next day, Rosamund returns to her home and tells her step-mother about her lover. She is anxious to know his true identity, and her step-mother gives her the formula which will remove the berry juice stains from his face. That night, while Jamie sleeps, Rosamund washes his face. When he awakens, he realizes what she has done and leaves her because he feels that he cannot trust her.

Later, Indians capture all of the major characters. They plan to avenge the Indian maiden killed by Little Harp. The Indians are foiled by Goat, who frees Rosamund and, later, Little Harp. Harp and Jamie have a great fight in which Harp is killed.

The story very rapidly closes. Salome, the step-mother, dies in the Indian camp. Clement is freed and goes back home. Jamie and Rosamund meet again and get married. He becomes a respectable merchant, and, to coin a phrase, they live happily ever after.

It is a long involved story. Miss Welty effectively uses a combination of Grecian mythology, Grimm's fairy tales, American folklore, and local history to

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137 For the purposes of this paper, I propose to consider fairy tales as children's myths.
produce this triumph of the imagination. The story becomes a pleasantly frightening one because of the blending of many familiar tales.

The Grecian myth that Miss Welty uses in this tale is the story of Cupid and Psyche. Like Rosamund, Psyche goes into a deep forest and there she finds her husband. But, also like Rosamund, Psyche is kept ignorant of her husband's identity. She enters his chamber one evening, against his instructions, and sees him as the beautiful god, Cupid. He wakes up and sees Psyche, and, much like Jamie Lockhart did, he leaves her because she broke her word and showed her lack of faith. Eventually, Cupid and Psyche are reunited, just as are Jamie and Rosamund.

Another interesting legend connected to The Robber Bridegroom is the Germanic legend of "Der Raubbräutigan." This story is found in the tales of the Brothers Grimm. From this story, Miss Welty took the title and one of the main incidents of the novella. The incident is the one in which Rosamund discovers the forest cottage of the robbers.

At the door a speaking raven warns her, saying,

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138 Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty, p. 47.

139 Translation—"The Robber Bridegroom."

Turn away, my bonny,
Turn away home.141

In the Grimm fairy tale, there is also a talking bird that warns a young maiden, who is wandering in a forest, when it cries,

Turn again, bonny bride!
Turn again home!
Haste from the robbers' den,
Haste away home!142

Like the raven which warns Rosamund, this magic bird chants its warning twice.

There are other similarities between Miss Welty's story and this particular tale of the Grimms. In the story by Miss Welty, the robbers bring an Indian girl to the cottage. There they rape her and she dies. Ultimately, Little Harp cuts off her finger and it rolls over to Rosamund who is hiding. This is an exact parallel to the Grimm tale. In that story the bride is forced to witness the death of another girl from her hiding place. The robbers also cut off this girl's finger and it rolls over to where the bride is hiding.

There are similarities to others of Grimm's fairy tales. Elements of "Snow White" can be found. Salome, Rosamund's stepmother, is jealous of the girl's beauty. She

141 Eudora Welty, The Robber Bridegroom, p. 78.
is the one who sends Rosamund into the woods where there is great danger. It is Salome who cries to the Indians who come searching for the beautiful girl (Rosamund).

What beautiful girl are you looking for? I am the most beautiful.

This echoes the "mirror, mirror on the wall" chant of Snow White's wicked stepmother.

Other legends of the Brothers Grimm which figure into the tales are "The Goose-Girl" and "Rumpelstiltskin." There is a talking head, not unlike Falada from "The Goose-Girl" and Goat, the strange spy who works for Salome, has some of the physical and mental characteristics of Rumpelstiltskin. He is short, misanthropic, and he believes he knows a secret (the secret of Jamie Lockhart's identity) which he can use for his own profit.

Miss Welty admits that she used these stories from the Brothers Grimm for her models. She says that

I had no model for Jamie Lockhart except the universal fair-tale character the Grimm fairy tale called "The Robber Bridegroom" was ready-made model in some respects.

While the mythic and fairy tale antecedents that Miss Welty used are interesting, the real artistry that is

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143The Robber Bridgroom, p. 159
144Griffith, Ph.D. dissertation, p. 38.
145Letter.
found in *The Robber Bridegroom* comes from her skillful employment of native Mississippi legends and folk tales. By employing the history of the Trace and skillfully blending it with fairy tales, Miss Welty is able to "outdo in [The Robber Bridegroom's] fantastic exuberance any of the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. . . ." 146

Miss Welty employs Mike Fink, the bloody Harpe Brothers, and other famous outlaws of the Trace in *The Robber Bridegroom*. Here Mike Fink describes himself in boastful terms,

I'm an alligator . . . I'm a he-hull and a he-rattlesnake and a he-alligator all in one! I've beat up so many flatboatmen and thrown them into the river I haven't kept a count since the flood, and I'm a lover of women like you'll never see again. . . . I can outrun, outhop, outjump, throw down, drag out, and kick any man in the country. 147

The boasts of Mike Fink, the king of the rivermen, may be contrasted with the boasts of the rivermen in Mark Twain's "Frescoes from the Past."

Whoo-cop! I'm the old original iron-jawed, brass-mounted, copper-bellied corpse-maker from the wilds of Arkansaw! Look at me! I'm the man

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147 *The Robber Bridegroom*, p. 10.
they call Sudden Death and General Desolation! Sired by a hurricane, dam'd by an earthquake, half-brother to the châlera, nearly related to the smallpox on the mother's side! Look at me! I take nineteen alligators and a pail of whiskey for breakfast, when I'm in robust health. .....

A comparison shows that Miss Welty has certainly gotten the spirit of the rivermen and has captured the essence of it in Mike Fink.

Alfred Appel points out that Fink remains close to his folkloristic legends when Miss Welty has him brutally attempt to murder Clement Musgrove and Jamie Lockhart at the tavern early in the story. Throughout the entire span of the Mike Fink legend there are continual references to his brutal and violent sense of humor.

When Jamie Lockhart overcomes Mike Fink, he becomes a character of legendary prowess. The humor of the old Southwest provides one or two men who might be able to handle Fink and his brutality. By his continual outwitting of Mike Fink and his other spectacular deeds, Jamie performs the deeds that could have made him a Davey Crockett or Jim Bowie. These two are as famous in the legends of

149 Appel, A Season of Dreams, p. 71
Mississippi as Fink, but they are more sympathetic to the plight of the unwary. Jim Bowie continually came to the aid of unwary planters,151 and there is an entire series of Davey Crockett—Mike Fink tales. By saving Clement from Fink, Jamie can be identified as a Davey Crockett–Jim Bowie figure.

Apart from these colorful characters, there are some historical figures who appear in Miss Welty's version of The Robber Bridegroom. The character of Little Harp is modeled on Wiley Harpe, a bandit who terrorized the Trace between 1798–1804. He and his older brother, Micajah, performed some acts of incredible brutality while they rampaged along the Trace.

Historically, some of their more vicious crimes consisted of the slaughter of innocent women and baby children. Their savagery went beyond mere murder. Big Harpe is thought to have bashed the brains out of his own baby when its crying disturbed him. Eventually, the law caught up with the oldest brother, and he had his head cut off by the husband of one of his victims.152

Miss Welty says that she did not model Jamie Lockhart after any of the robbers of the nineteenth century;

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152 Daniels, pp. 117–124.
they were too brutal to be romantic heroes. However, she gives the villains of her tales some of the viciousness that the real Harps exhibited in their own lives. An example of this can be found when Little Harp (Miss Welty drops the final "e") brutally rapes, murders, and then mutilates the Indian girl. The Harps of history enjoyed mutilation.

There is significance to be found in the fact that Miss Welty has Little Harp carrying a severed head, the head of his older brother. When the historical Big Harpe was killed, he carried on a running, although not too friendly, conversation with the man who was slowly severing his head from his trunk. The legend of the talking head of Big Harpe was then born.

Further realism is added when Miss Welty has Jamie disguise himself by means of covering his face with berry stains. Jonathan Daniels notes that Joseph Thompson Hare, one of the more notorious highwaymen of the day, used to make his gang paint their faces "with bark stains and berry juice like Indians on the warpath." In fact, there are many parallels between Hare and Jamie Lockhart. Both were spectacular horsemen, literate,

153 Letter.
154 Daniels, p. 107.
dandified in their dress, and attractive to the ladies. There, however, the resemblance ends because Hare was a brutal man who could murder with the best of them. Miss Welty feels that Hare was "a vicious man." Miss Welty has "justice" triumph over criminal bestiality when Jamie kills Little Harp and the Indians kill the rest of the bandits. But the story does not have the usual fairy tale ending. True, Jamie and Rosamund get married and live happily ever after, but Jamie becomes a successful and respected merchant. This seems a dull ending for the glamorous hero-bandit. One observer notes that Jamie and Rosamund become the first bourgeois couple in the history of fairy tales.

Miss Welty successfully uses the reality of the outlaw days on the Natchez Trace "as a springboard to fantasy." In doing so, she creates a tale that is a blend of the mythology of Greece, the elfin legends of the Black Forest, and the heroic tales of the early American Southwest. By combining the myths with the fairy tales and folk legends, Miss Welty is once again able to take the spectacular actions of her characters and temper them. One such instance can

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155 Letter.
156 Gossett, p. 114.
157 Letter.
be found in the sexual adventures of Jamie and Rosamund. By making his feats the deeds of a super-hero of the Davey Crockett school, the fantastic abduction (and seduction) of Rosamund is placed in its proper fairy tale perspective.

This effect is further strengthened in the fantastic feats that Jamie performs. He banishes the bully, Mike Fink, by merely telling him to scat. He is a superb horseman to the point where he can pick up Rosamund while galloping in full stride without spilling any of the milk that is in the pail she carries. He is so fantastic that he is not to be believed; and in creating a hero of this mold, Miss Welty is able to make his grand actions into an American fairy tale.

Miss Welty once said:

They make a story a fairy tale by abolishing the present and the place where we are instead of conveying them to us. Of course we shall have some sort of fairy tale with us always. . . .

By setting The Robber Bridegroom in the most mythic time in American history and in one of the most legendary places, the historic Natchez Trace, Miss Welty has effectively abolished the present and the place. She strengthens this effect by giving her characters larger-than-life attributes. The total effect serves to make The Robber Bridegroom one of the most delightful fantasies in American letters.

158 Eudora Welty, Place in Fiction, New York (1957), p. 3.
Eudora Welty's use of mythology and legends has been a consistent trait in her stories. In her earlier stories she generally uses these myths as a means of portraying certain universal truths in her stories. These are truths that the myths suggested from the context of their stories. Another purpose for which Miss Welty uses myths in her early stories is as a framework. Within the context of the myth, Miss Welty is able to write a story generally in a modern setting, that reflects the emphasis of the mythical story.

Her mythical masterpiece is the collection of stories *The Golden Apples*. These stories have a common mythic theme and each major character occupies a place in the Olympian hierarchy. By associating the Olympian character with Miss Welty's modern counterpart, the quest of man for fulfillment is seen in more universal terms.

The final achievement of Eudora Welty in her use of myths and legends is found in her tales of Old Natchez. She incorporates some of the mysteries of American history in two of her tales. In her novella, *The Robber Bridegroom*, she creates a fairyland straight out of the Black Forest and places it in the Mississippi woods. Here she allows the legendary heroes and bandits of America to work themselves into the story. There is room for Miss Welty to write many more stories about the Natchez Trace. It is
an area filled with legends and mysteries--Andrew Jackson, Meriwether Lewis, Phillip "The Man Without a Country" Nolan, Davey Crockett, Jim Bowie, and scores of other outlaws and heroes all lived there and are possible subjects for stories by Miss Welty.

The single distinguishing feature of Eudora Welty's use of mythology and legends stems from the natural and unstrained quality of her stories. She uses myths in a subtle and delightful manner to give her stories dignity and added dimensions.
These questions were asked Miss Welty in a letter to her on December 2, 1971. Her reply may be found in Appendix B.

1. What training did you receive in classical mythology, Norse and Celtic legends, and Arthurian legends in college and public school? Was mythology a particular interest of yours as a child?

2. During your childhood were legends of the Nathhez Trace told to you as "fairy tales?" Did you hear them in oral transmissions or were they collected into a book with which you were acquainted?

3. Do you generally use myths as a means of suggesting the timelessness or universality of the particular themes with which they are associated in the stories?

4. Did you have a particular legendary model for Jamie Lockhart? If so, was it Joseph Thompson Hare?

5. How conscious are you of the myths that you employed as you wrote about them in your stories?

6. What are your favorite mythological stories?

7. Do you believe in archetypal symbols as an expression of a race's "collective unconsciousness?"
Miss Welty's reply to the questions asked in Appendix A.

MISS EUDORA WELTY
1119 PINEHURST STREET
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI 39202

Dear Mr. Brower:

Your letter was dated Dec. 2 but it didn't reach me until Dec. 9--too late to arrange about the phone call. I think now the quickest and simplest thing would be for me to try to answer on paper and return it to you by airmail, this time!

Thank you, to begin with, for your interest and your work given to my stories. If my use of myths and legends is your subject, I guess you may have read some articles and other theses on the subject, some of which I have seen, and I admit I cringe a little. Too much is made of this, in rigid application of story to myth, I would gently suggest. I simply picked up and made use of mythological stories and characters when I needed them, in the lightest way sometimes, never in a one-for-one way--just as I'd use any other sort of metaphor or image that occurred to me. So much in general.

Now your questions. 1. I had no "training in mythology" in college or public school. In childhood I read myths along with fairy tales and everything else, and loved them.
2. No, no legends of the Natchez Trace were told to me as fairy tales or as anything else in childhood—I had never heard of the Natchez Trace until I was grown, and what I read was Clasiborne’s History of Mississippi, which tells of the real facts of the Trace and the history of it—and this is so like fairy tales that I tried to point this out by my use of both facts and fairy tales in The Robber Bridegroom. I looked up the accounts and tales of the outlaws of the day, read about the legendary figures like Mike Fink, and I visited the Trace itself and got a strong feeling of the place. In sum, I didn’t bend the facts to fit the fairy tales so much as recognize the similarity that was already there, inherent in the history, and play with it a little.

3. I think the timelessness or universality of the particular themes of myths is, as you suggest, a reason for their appeal to me when I touch on them in stories.

4. I had no model for Jamie Lockhart except the universal fairy-tale archetypal character—the Grimm fairy tale called "The Robber Bridegroom" was a ready-made model in some respects. Certainly not Hare, who was along with the Harpes and Mason a real outlaw and a vicious man—not a romantic hero of a fairy tale. The villains of my story partake a little of the Harpes, etc., but the hero does not. Reality, in any case in this story, is only a springboard to fantasy.

5. This has been answered already by implication—I was very conscious of using myths, for you can’t write a word without being conscious of what you’re doing and why, but my use was a natural and unstrained one, just using what came to hand.

6. I suppose Perseus may be my favorite among the Greek myths—and the Minotaur, the Labyrinth. But I love all myths and tales of all the countries that I’ve ever read.

7. I don’t understand this question well enough to answer it.

Please give my best wishes and my thanks to Dr. McDill, and accept my best for yourself and your work too. I hope all will go well with you. I know I could answer better on paper than over the phone anyway, so I guess it’s all for the best the postoffice dallied along with your letter.

Sincerely,

December 10, 1971
I went out to the hazel wood
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths wae on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called my by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossoms in her hair
Who called my by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air,

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands:
And walk among the long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and time are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

W. B. Yeats
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VITA

Robert Keith Brower was born in the Republic of South Korea on May 2, 1948. He graduated from Kaiserslautern American High School, Kaiserslautern, Germany in June, 1966. He attended the University of Richmond, Richmond College Division from September, 1966 until June, 1970 graduating with a BA in English. On completion of his MA he will be stationed with the U. S. Army at Fort Wainwright, Alaska. He is married to Kathleen Boswell of Richmond and has one child, Robert, Jr., age 3.