CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Eudora Welty's work has only in recent decades been approached from a feminist perspective. Most critics in the past have preferred to deal with Welty as Southern, and paid particular attention to her Southern background and status as a Southern writer. According to Harrison in Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf: Gender, Genre and Influence (1997), while numerous readers have described Welty's work as being somehow "feminine" and "pretty surely female", most critics have not examined how this feminine style works (11). In Serious Daring from Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels (1990), Gygax notes that few critical studies on Eudora Welty have observed that she writes fiction reflecting a specifically female appropriation of traditional narrative structures (5). While some have, of course, attempted to analyze her works from this angle, they are still limited, leaving plenty of room for further exploration.

Welty's preference for female protagonists and narrators, and her focus on traditional female activities, roles and ceremonies, prompted critics in the 1970s to begin viewing her work from feminist perspectives. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, one of the first critics who recognized Welty's contribution as a woman writer using gender-determined language, examines the matriarchal order of Welty's fiction. In "Woman's World, Man's Place: The Fiction of Eudora Welty" (1979), she establishes that matriarchy dominates in Welty's fiction and influences Welty's characters more than the masculine principle. Julia L. Demmin and Daniel Curley in "Golden Apples and Silver Apples" (1979) explore Welty's use of classical myths. Their analyses of The Golden Apples (1949) demonstrate how female power expressed by ancient female mysteries gradually replaces male power in

a male-oriented society. While Prenshaw, Demmin and Curley's short studies were a good start to research on Welty as a female writer, they indicated a Weltian strategy that had yet to be further explored (Gygax 6).

During the 1980s, feminist criticism of Welty's fiction increased and became slightly more theoretical. Patricia Yaeger in "Because a Fire was in My Head: Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination" (1984) combines Bakhtin's theories of the novel with French feminism to examine Welty's revision of W.B. Yeats's poetry in The Golden Apples. She focuses on Welty's specifically female appropriation of a male tradition from an explicitly feminist literary critic's perspective. Yaeger's starting point is the assumption that a woman writer uses her own ideas and meanings while still speaking patriarchal language (Gygax 6). Elizabeth Evans's "Eudora Welty and the Dutiful Daughter" further contributes to a feminist reading by examining the complex relationships between mothers and daughters in The Optimist's Daughter (1972) and The Golden Apples. Franziska Gygax's Serious Daring from Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels draws upon a combination of feminist theories and narratology to explore Welty's narrative strategies. Peter Schmidt's The Heart of The Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction (1991) analyzes the influence of nineteenth-century American writers on Welty's fiction. Gail Mortimer's Daughter of the Swan: Love and Knowledge in Eudora Welty's Fiction (1994) uses feminist psychological theories to illuminate patterns of autonomy and connection in Welty's work. In The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty: The Golden Apples (1994), Rebecca Mark demonstrates Welty's critique and revision of the western heroic literary tradition in The Golden Apples (Harrison 12).

Despite these feminist examinations of Welty's works, a large number of critics still prefer to center their research on her Southernness and compare her to other Southern writers. In "Southern Ladies and the Southern Literary Renaissance" (1993), Prenshaw considers Welty in the context of the Southern literary renaissance, while Louise Westling in her book on three Southern women writers, Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fictions of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor (1986) emphasizes the influence of Virginia Woolf on Welty (Gygax 6). Ann Romines devotes two chapters to Welty's fiction in her study of domestic ritual in American fiction. Analyzing Southern women's autobiographies, Will Brantley in Feminine Sense in Southern Memoir: Smith, Glasgow, Welty, Hellman, Porter and Hurston (1993) connects Welty's One Writer's Beginnings (1984) with Ellen Glasgow's The Woman Within: An Autobiography (1994). Donaldson in "Making A Spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern Gothic" (1997) compares Welty to Faulkner and dicusses how her writings are linked to the Southern Gothic. The most recent full-length study dealing exclusively with Welty is by Carol S. Manning's in With Ears Opening Like Morning Glories: Eudora Welty and the Love of Storytelling (1985) where we find various references to gender restrictions regarding female characters in Welty. Yet, as the title indicates, the main focus is on storytelling and its Southern tradition (Gygax 6). Hence, as the list of research shows, there is still ample room for research on Welty's works that can lead to new and different insights (Gygax 1).

Welty's statements about the "woman question" might explain why many critics initially chose other women writers for analyses of *l'écriture féminine*. Welty has never been comfortable with feminism and often resists being labeled as a "woman writer" or "feminist" in the same way she resists being categorized as a Southern or gothic writer,

feeling that such labels are narrow and politically charged (Harrison 13). In several interviews, Welty makes clear that she disbelieves all the issues of the women's movement, and that as a writer she has never suffered any sexual discrimination (Gygax 1). Westling explains in Eudora Welty (1989) that Welty comes from a social world in which clear distinctions have always existed between the roles of men and women and where the Southern tradition of masculine chivalry has offered courtesy and deference to white women of her class (Westling 1). As Anne Goodwyn Jones contends in Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859 - 1936 (1981), early Southern women writers did not experience "the anxiety of authorship" because their works were mostly well received by their male public (Gygax 7).

Prenshaw's Conversations with Eudora Welty (1984) records that interviewers who have tried to press Welty on Women's Liberation or on particular trials encountered by women writers faced resistance: "I'm not interested in any kind of feminine repartee," she told Charles Bunting in 1972 (226). Welty labels feminism as a political movement rather than a theoretical construct or epistemology. In "Must the Novelist Crusade?" (1965), Welty articulates her reasons for disliking any association of her art with political causes, arguing that a political agenda interferes with the quality of a writer's imaginative work: "Passion is the chief ingredient of good fiction [. . .]. But to distort a work of passion for the sake of a cause is to cheat, and the end, far from justifying the means, is fairly sure to be lost with it" (156-57). She feels that all preaching is antithetical to the real work of a novelist, which is to capture human life as it is, not as one might wish it to be according to some general political program. She prefers to consider literary achievement as a human creative endeavor unmarked by sex (Prenshaw, Conversations 226):

> I am a woman. In writing fiction, I think imagination comes ahead of sex. [. . .] [T]here have been not a few great women writers, of course. [. . .] I don't see how anyone could have a greater scope in knowledge of human nature and reveal more of human nature than Jane Austen. Consider Virginia Woolf. The Brontes. Well, you know as many as I do: great women writers. I'm not interested in any kind of a feminine repartee. I don't care what sex people are when they write. I just want the result to be a good book. All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply at all to women writers. We've always been able to do what we've wished. I couldn't feel less deprived as a woman to be writing, and I certainly enjoy all the feelings of any other human being. [. . .] I have the point of view of a woman, but if I'm not able to imagine myself into what [. . .] a man might feel, which I have to do all the time when I write [. . .] it's just from poverty of imagination. It's a matter of imagination, not sex. (Prenshaw, Conversations 54)

Westling comments on the ambivalence of Welty's answer to this question: "First, in response to the questioner's condescension, Welty defends the achievements of women writers; then she backs away, disassociating herself from feminism. Yet all the writers she mentions are distinctively feminine in their own treatment of theme, point of view, and setting" (Westling, Eudora Welty 28).

Welty's refusal to be labeled a feminist writer is a reaction against the radical feminism of her day. According to Manning in The Female Tradition in Southern Literature (1993), the late nineteenth century brought about rapid change and tension to America. With the slaves emancipated and the nation growing more urbanized, the middle class awakened to an increase in reform movements (41). Rubin in "Thinking Sex: Notes for a

Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1993) adds that it was a time of the consolidation of Victorian morality and its apparatus of social, medical, and legal enforcement. Powerful social movements focused on "vices" of all sorts: there were educational and political campaigns to encourage chastity, eliminate prostitution and discourage masturbation. Morality crusaders banned obscene literature, nude paintings, music halls, abortion, birth control information and public dancing (4). For many women, it was a time of organization, action and awakening. These decades saw women getting out of home, taking a more active and personal interest in local and national affairs. Many women were "finding their voices" and becoming less satisfied with traditional values and behaviors expected of them. Carby in Reconstructing Womanhood (1987) states that "[t]hese were the [. . .] flowering [years] of [. . .] women's autonomous organizations and [. . .] intense intellectual activity and productivity [. . .]" (7) while Ammons in Conflicting Stories: American Women at the Turn into the Twentieth Century (1991) mentions that such women "used various means – women's clubs, settlement house work, temperance agitation, antilynching crusades, and the campaign for suffrage – to assert their right to direct, active participation in [national affairs]" (6).

Welty hated this "grotesque quality" of the women's movement, feeling that the extreme behavior of some activists made "comedians of all of us" (Prenshaw, Conversations 250-51). When questioned about her political responsibilities, she replied bluntly, "[t]he real crusader doesn't need to crusade; he writes about human beings in the sense Chekov did. He tries to see a human being whole with all his wrong-headedness and all his right-headedness" (Prenshaw, Conversations 226). This may have led many to conclude that no distinct expression of a female literary identity can thus be detected in

Welty's fiction since explicit female rebellion against patriarchal society with concrete suggestions for alternative ways of life was not expected to occur in her works (Gygax 7). While Welty was no radical feminist and did not explicitly refer to the difficulties she may have faced as a woman writer, this does not mean that she held no personal views about the plight of women in her day. What she preferred was for change to be achieved through quieter ways (Prenshaw, Conversations 250-51). Welty used a strategy common among many Southern women writers then: she masked her criticism behind seemingly trivial topics (Gygax 7). She was therefore subtle in her approach. Her fiction named and embodied the reality she saw, most of which dealt largely with the experiences of Southern womanhood.

This dissertation will discuss how Welty subtly works toward the revision of stereotypical portrayals of women including that of the Southern woman. Using the "Images of Women" critical approach and Gilbert and Gubar's model of the angel and the monster in particular as a key to discussion, this thesis will explain how stereotypical depictions of femininity and Southern womanhood are passed on through generations of patriarchal literary texts. Welty dismantles these depictions and suggests a new interpretation of female identity as opposed to the traditional patriarchal model by converging the oppositional states of the angel and monster. This confluence not only leads to a more realistic depiction of women but also explains the discrepancies found in the mythical image of the Southern lady. Welty's young heroines manifest vividly this fusion which enables them to assert difference, find wholeness and move toward female solidarity within the inhibitions of patriarchal rule. They stand in contrast to women of previous generations who valorized the old patriarchal order.

Although Gilbert and Gubar's model may be considered old compared to more recent feminist critical theories (which tend to focus on lesbianism, pornography, gender and race, feminism and science, feminism and film theory, feminism, postmodernity and so forth), it still remains relevant to the research on Welty's works. Nina Baym in "The Agony of Feminism: Why Feminist Theory is Necessary After All" (1995) mentions the ongoing necessity for feminist critics to study stereotypical female representations as it "remains the single most effective academic tool for bringing about feminist awareness in readers" (5).

The confluence of the opposing female images is significant as it enables Welty to subtly yet effectively critique and revise stereotypical portrayals of women as well as suggest alternative forms of female behavior that can lead women to liberation and the development of a new, independent identity. Johnston in Eudora Welty: A Study of the Short Fiction (1997) explains that the term "confluence" itself brings about the meaning of "the coming together" of various parts into "new wholes" (62). Welty herself in One Writer's Beginnings mentions the importance of "confluence" calling it a "symbol in one" and "the only kind of symbol that [. . .] ha[s] any weight" for her as a writer since it "[testifies] to the pattern [. . .] of human experience" (102), which includes female experience. While some critics have noticed the duality of Welty's female characters, little has been done to explain how she uses this to voice her views on female identity and suggest resolutions to the tensions between male and female relationships. It is therefore important to reconsider the ways in which her works explore how women tap into these traditional sources of power obtained from their association with these oppositional stereotypes or their attempts to fuse the two, and discuss how this association or fusion empowers or weakens, imprisons or changes their lives. This dissertation will limit itself to

a selection of three of Welty's more renowned works, The Robber Bridegroom (1942), "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" from The Golden Apples and The Optimist's Daughter.

Before plunging into a study of Welty's revisions and their effect on female-related issues, a brief elaboration on Gilbert and Gubar's analysis and how this analysis is related to the portrayal of Southern woman is necessary. The preoccupation with women writers, their writing and how women were portrayed in literary works has been a dominant trend since the nineteenth century and has steadily expanded till today. According to Moi in Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (1985), Mary Ellman's book Thinking About Women (1984) became an inspirational source to the study of female images in literary texts by introducing how "thought by sexual analogy" produces a tendency toward stereotypical depictions of women (Moi 32). Ellman postulates that there exists a general tendency to comprehend all phenomena and classify experiences in terms of our sexual differences by means of sexual analogy (6). Since "[a]ll forms are subsumed by our concept of male and female temperament" (Ellman 8), it follows that there exists a reigning perception of what has been regularly considered masculine or feminine. Explaining that we often think in sexual stereotypes of the "male = strong and active" and "female = weak and passive" kind, she lists eleven major stereotypes of femininity often presented by male writers in their literary work: "formless, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy and finally 'the two incorrigible figures' of the Witch and the Shrew" (Moi 34).

Ellman's essay led to the emergence of the "Images of Women" critical approach to literature which centers on the study of female stereotypes or representations of women in

male and female writing. Emphasizing "reality" and "experience" as the highest goals of literature and viewing writing as a more or less faithful reproduction of external reality, it accuses male and female authors of creating "unreal" female characters in their works. The "Images of Women" study soon became a powerful attack on the received patriarchal canon since many great literary works represent women only as objects of male fantasy, or in ways that confirm and inculcate their social subordination.

In 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's illuminating and massive piece of work entitled Madwoman in the Attic (1979) introduced us to an enlightening analysis and understanding of male and female literary creativity. In their book, Gilbert and Gubar address the issue of literary potential for women in a world shaped by and for men. Their inquiry shows that the dominant ideology defines artistic creativity as a fundamentally male quality. The writer, in the image of the Divine Creator, is father to his text; he is a "progenitor", a "procreator" and an "aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). The metaphor of literary paternity leads to the notion of "ownership" whereby the author owns his text, the subjects of his text and his reader's attention.

According to the authors, since creativity is defined as male, it follows that the dominant images of femininity are male fantasies as well. Women have been reduced to mere properties: characters imprisoned and subordinated by male texts since they are generated solely by male expectations and designs:

> As a creation "penned" by man [. . .] woman has been "penned up" or "penned in". As a sort of "sentence" man has spoken, she has herself been "sentenced": fated, jailed, for he has both "indited" and "indicted". As a thought he has "framed", she

has been both "framed" (enclosed) in his texts, glyphs, graphics and "framed up" (found guilty, found wanting) in his cosmologies. (Gilbert and Gubar 13)

Imprisoning his fictive creatures, the male author silences them by depriving them the autonomy of independent speech. Thus, in this world created for them, women were not allowed the power of self-expression. What was missing was a sense of the woman herself.

Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with the nineteenth-century woman and how her role is based on her association with symbols of angels, monsters, or sometimes both. Since the role of angel is ideally passive and the monster naturally evil, both limit a woman's behavior to quiet contentment, with little objections to make. Women in the nineteenth century lived quiet and passive lives, embodying the ideals of the "Eternal Feminine" which was assumed and strongly held on to as a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness. She was submissive, passive, pure and above all selfless. Her virtues of modesty, grace, civility, fragility, compliancy, reticence and affability were modes of mannerliness that contributed to angelic innocence.

However, this embodiment of selflessness is pernicious because selflessness is not only synonymous with being noble but dead. Since passivity led to a belief that women were more spiritual than men, that they were meant to contemplate rather than act, "women [became] defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power [and] numinous to male artists" (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Nineteenth-century women were encouraged to live lives befitting these descriptions, to be the selfless, eternal feminine, content only in pleasing society instead of themselves. It was this celestial quality that separated them from earthly men capable of lives of action, and thus, capable of handling the pen. But lives without action are hardly worth recording, so the passive woman has no story to tell, no

book to write. A woman without her own story therefore, becomes the angel in the house, the one who hears others' stories but never tells her own; as a selfless being, the woman is left voiceless, destined for a life of silence. Completely void of any generative power, she is locked into a perfect image of patriarchal construction which kills her since she becomes merely an artistic symbol that appeals to man. Hence, the ideal of contemplative purity, the surrender of the self, personal comfort, desires and sensual existence as an act of sacrifice, is really a life of death; "[f]or to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead," and the ideal of the contemplative angel-woman "evokes both heaven and the grave" (Gilbert and Gubar 25). This argument applies as pertinently to the nineteenth-century woman of Gilbert and Gubar's deliberations as it does to Welty's more contemporary stories.

Gilbert and Gubar go on to reveal that behind this angelic figure lurks a monster: the embodiment of male fear of femininity and male scorn of female creativity. The monster woman symbolizes danger to a patriarchal society. Freakish and deformed, she is the enraged prisoner, the woman's real self, "her dreadful and bloody link to nature" (15). The monster woman is also the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative and rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her. Her refusal to be fixed or "killed", an attribute which is commonly viewed as her "inconstancy" implies duplicity and suggests that she has the power to recreate herself and react towards the woman trapped in male-inscribed texts. Such a woman therefore possesses powerful, dangerous, diabolical and "duplicitous arts that allow her to seduce and steal male generative energy" (Gilbert and Gubar 34). Among them are Medusa, Medea, Lilith, Scylla, Circe, Kali, Delilah, Salome and the wicked Queen in "Snow White". In some cases, the monster may not only be hidden behind the angel but resides within it.

Heaped with these extreme stereotypes while denied the right and autonomy to create their own images of femininity, women are forced to conform to patriarchal standards. Hence, the woman artist under patriarchy suffers from the "anxiety of authorship" since "[f]or the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). Before the woman writer can move toward literary autonomy, she must first grapple with mythic images that identify her with "eternal types" and "examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' [. . .] by 'killing' the ['angel'] as well as her double' " (Gilbert and Gubar 17). Gilbert and Gubar's analysis therefore prompts us to recognize women's inner struggle for self-identity. Understanding the angel and monster within themselves and in their female characters is crucial in discovering power to transcend beyond the discrimination of society and in creating literature that generates changes in culture.

Gilbert and Gubar's image of the nineteenth-century lady is crucial to an understanding and more comprehensive analysis of twentieth-century Southern female protagonists. The Old South depended strongly on what Carby called "the cult of true womanhood" (2), an archetype created for white women and wives of plantation owners to follow, which required these women to be pious and chaste. The Southern white woman, according to Jones's "Dismantling Stereotypes: Interracial Friendships in Meridian and A Mother and Two Daughters" (1993) was expected "to be a 'lady'- physically pure, socially correct, culturally refined, and dutiful to family" (141). Such ideals were echoed in popular Southern literature; women who enjoyed the status of "true womanhood" and maintained the role well became main characters of popular novels. Even serious journalism then

recreated and reinforced these stereotypes; the Southern Literary Messenger defined Southern women's qualities as "grace, modesty and loveliness [. . .] qualities that delight and fascinate men [. . .] the charms which constitute a woman's power" (Jones 141). Besides keeping this "modesty" and "loveliness" balanced with a perfect measure of charm before marriage, women, according to Scott's The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (1970), were also supposed to be transformed after marriage into "chaste matron[s] residing on a domestic pedestal" (4). "The prime objective of a woman's life" was "to obtain a husband and then to keep him pleased"; her duties "focused entirely on the bearing and rearing of heirs and caring for the household" (Jones 141). Lower class white women, though less refined, were but more hardworking versions of the ideal, dutiful wife. The Southern white woman was thus in every way the angelic figure and shaping symbol of the Old South and heavily exalted by numerous writers. According to Scott, the upper class Southern woman was "[e]xorbitantly praised" and "would have been the happiest and most nearly perfect specimen of womanhood ever seen on this earth" (4). Jones adds that "as an image, Southern womanhood has been the crown of [. . .] the early nineteenth century" and that "[m]ore than just a fragile flower, the image of the [S]outhern lady [represented] her culture's idea of religious, moral, sexual, racial and social perfection" (8-9). Hence, not only was she an inspiration to her family but also the preserver of Southern religion and morality.

The image of the lady not only served as the embodiment of Southern values but also as an impelling pattern of behavior that had exerted immeasurable influence upon the daily lives of actual women (Prenshaw, Southern Ladies 8-9). For many nineteenth-century writers, this image was extolled as ideal and attainable. In countless ways the Southern

woman was encouraged to shape, repress, modify, and monitor her behavior to create her own perfection (Prenshaw, Southern Ladies 74). As Jones notes, "[while] Southern manhood could be demonstrated by obtaining an ideal Southern woman, Southern womanhood had to be shown by becoming one" (22).

Yet it is precisely these virtues of purity, loveliness, and modesty that are shown to be most harmful to the belle and destructive to the portrayal of women in twentieth-century Southern fiction (Seidel 79). Since the typification of the lady controlled female behavior, white women constantly suffered from consequences of living or not living up to Southern definitions of "true womanhood". In examining the coercive power of the cult of the lady, Clinton contends, "[t]hese women were merely prisoners in disguise" (109). According to Haardt in "The Southern Lady Says Grace" (1925), the Southern lady "[was] a slave of [. . .] conventions. [. . .] She [shrank] from the shrillness, the vulgarity, above all, the pettiness of 'taking her own stand.' It [was] easier and more convenient to follow the old order: it [saved] her from thinking" (57).

In The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (1983), Clinton provides the link between slavery, the patriarchal system and the image of the lady. Slavery contributed to the oppression of women: "Patriarchy was the bedrock upon which the slave society was founded, and slavery exaggerated the pattern of subjugation that patriarchy had established" (6). No area of life, from attitudes toward birth control to ideas about women's education to cultural prescriptions concerning sexual conduct, escaped untouched. Gender and race thus emerged as critical factors for understanding Southern social relations. The isolation of plantation life in conjunction with the power of Southern slaveholders "ensured that a woman remained as securely bound to the land as her husband's other property. [. . .]

Every woman was an island, isolated unto herself" (179). Clinton's emphasis on the Southern woman's isolation and lack of autonomy suggests a neglect of some Southern women's efforts to maintain an independent and viable sphere of activity and expression. George Fitzhugh for example, in Sociology for the South (1854) describes the Southern woman precisely in terms of her dependency:

> So long as she [was] nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man [would] worship and adore her. Her weakness [was] her strength, and her true art [was] to cultivate and improve that weakness. [. . .] Woman have but one right [. . .] the right to protection. A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman. [. . .] If she is obedient she stands little danger of maltreatment. (214-15)

Women, like slaves, were expected to recognize their proper subordinate position. Any assertion of independence threatened the whole system (Prenshaw, Southern Ladies 77). According to Wheeler in New Women of the New South (1973), when the traditional role of woman as the ideal of Southern virtue was in danger from the influence of immoral, outspoken women of the North, the United Confederate Veterans took literal measures by placing young, prominent virgins on a pedestal at their annual reunions to eulogize the ideal woman who was loyal, and obedient, trusting solely in the protection of their men (8). Ultimately, the most oppressive and damaging result of the codification of subservience as the lady's essential requisite was the injunction that she be silent. The Southern ideal held that men have public voices while a lady's influence should extend no further than home and church. Closely related in many respects to the anxiety of authorship is the idea that the Southern woman's anxiety of voice arose directly from the prohibition of female self-

expression. To remain silent was to assent to voicelessness and invisibility; to speak on one's own behalf and assert one's conviction was not only to forfeit the respect and attention of powerful men and most women, but also to threaten the foundation of the South itself (Prenshaw, Southern Ladies 77–78). Clearly, the fact that Welty wrote, chose not to remain silent, but voice her opinions regarding the plight of Southern women, qualifies her as a Southern female writer who did experience the anxiety of authorship. Her insistence that she had never encountered any sexism or discrimination is merely a shield for her to avoid from being labelled.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, many Southern women grew dissatisfied with these traditional images of femininity and societal values, and moved toward questioning their inherited culture. Kearney records in Conqueror or Conquered; or the Sex Challenge Answered (1921) that "[m]odern reformations [. . .] gained a foothold in the hearts and lives of Southern women" which caused them to "realize the intense conservation that [had] fettered them" for generations (118). Many women felt intensely the discrepancy of the conventional female role so exaggerated in the South that they eventually protested against the double standard (Manning, Female Tradition 40-41). While some Southern women embraced the image of the good woman as nurturing, sacrificing and angelic, they rejected the other half of that ideal which, according to Cooper in "Zora Neale Hurston Was Always a Southerner Too" (1993), expected Southern women to "stand on pedestals" and be decorative (75). They were torn between the desire for independence and the pressure of gender role expectations. Cooper boldly accuses Southern men of impeding women's progress by requiring them to mould themselves according to the ideal:

> [The men] [. . .] do not seem [. . .] to have outgrown [. . .] the idea that women may stand on pedestals or live in doll houses (if they happen to have them) but they must not furrow their brows with thought or attempt to help men tug at the great questions of the world. I fear the majority of [men] do not yet think it worth while that women aspire to higher education. [. . .] The three R's, a little music and a good deal of dancing, a first-rate dress-maker and a bottle of magnolia balm, are quite enough generally to render charming any women possessed of tact and the capacity for worshipping masculinity. (75)

Throughout the nineteenth century, hundreds of Southern women published fiction and poetry, hinting at their dissatisfaction with culture's values and conventions. Their work revealed the tension between adherence to and defiance of the cult of Southern womanhood and the rebirth Southern women were experiencing as they struggled for freedom and voice (Manning, Female Tradition 40). Seidel in The Southern Belle in the American Novel (1985) argues that by the 1920s, writers had begun to use the Southern belle "not to praise the South but to criticize and [. . .] condemn [it] for its restrictive codes" (26). While there was still the same obsessive veneration of the role as the quintessence of a cherished past, the experiences of these characters inevitably helped to abolish the old ideal: "The belle as a symbol of the South's beauty and purity is parodied and inverted so that she represents many of the worst qualities of the South when she appears in the fiction of the Southern Renaissance" (146). Seidel calls the Southern Renaissance a period of sustained "demythologizing" (26) of the belle, noting the emphasis in the novels of the 1920s on the belle's monstrous qualities: her narcissism, sexual promiscuity, and rebellious deviance. According to Rosenberg's Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian

America (1985), the New Southern Woman "challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power" and became a "sexually freighted metaphor for social disorder and protest" (241).

In the works of Southern women writers such as Welty, the female character reconciled the most extreme contradictions. While she is mysterious, delicate and supine, the woman is also vivacious, mischievous and restless. Page in Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War (1897) extols her as dainty, pure and sweet but then concludes that "she [is] generally a coquette, often an outrageous flirt" (52-57). Much of this is seen in Welty's younger female characters who stand in contrast to their older female relatives (mothers, stepmothers or grandmothers), commonly portrayed as obvious stereotypes. Welty repeatedly couples the heroine's mother with her stepmother, dividing them into the strong-willed protagonist and her dependent foil. While the heroine's mother is typically the submissive, obedient innocent, there is usually a stepmother who in reverse takes on the role of the willful coquette or the efficient manager of worldly affairs. Examples of these paired types in Welty's works are Salome and Amalie of The Robber Bridegroom and Fay and Becky of The Optimist's Daughter.

While Welty's young female protagonists may echo conventional traits of the Southern lady, they deviate from that mould in certain ways. For example, although a young girl's manners are as perfectly formed as her mother's, being patient, shy and tender, she is also more self-possessed, adventurous, sexually curious and indomitable. Most critics do not fully account for the deep ambivalence that writers such as Welty have brought to their characterizations of the young Southern lady. This dissertation suggests such ambivalence as the result of Welty's method of "confluence", the bringing together of the

angelic and the monstrous figures, which she utilized to demythologize the image of the Southern belle and create new Southern female characters beginning to assert a different and independent identity. Her ambivalent characters are essentially female personae experiencing the tension of reconciling their lives with the old ideal as they struggle to outgrow the social archetype and strive for individuality.

This dissertation traces Welty's trajectory in deconstructing traditional images of female representations embedded in most great literary works including Southern literature to create new ones that represent the birth of the New Southern woman. In Chapter Two, "The Robber Bridegroom: Redefining Female Archetypes", we will explore one of Welty's earlier works and observe her initial attempts to deconstruct stereotypical images of women in canonical texts by incorporating them into her own story. Alluding to familiar fairy tales, the writer revises well-known fairy tale female figures from the literary canon and local Mississippian folktales. According to Gygax, fairy tales and myths in works by women authors are frequently "revised" so that they can be retold from a new female perspective (11). Yaeger calls this a useful form of "plagiarism" since women who write are not only capable of appropriating myths, genres, ideas, and images that are "populated" with patriarchal meaning; they are continually endowing a male mythos with their own intentions and meanings (140). This revisionary perspective enables us to read new stories and question old, canonical ones, which are always presented from male perspectives (Gygax 11). Welty's variations in her description of female stereotypes therefore not only deconstruct these portrayals of women and renew her reader's perception of them but also provide her a platform to subtly assert and discuss pertinent female issues such as female sexuality, rape and male/female relationships.

Chapter Three deals with "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" of The Golden Apples, where Welty explores the central myths about women that shaped her generation's expectations of how Southern women should behave. These dictate that women should be passive, beautiful objects of male fantasy while men have the liberty to "wander" and engage in life's fullfilling heroic pursuits. Women who become aggressive and step outside of their prescribed social role are inevitably censured. The stories illustrate how communities punish female heroes who transgress traditional gender roles within the Southern community by labeling them monstrous and insane. They are seen as a threat to society and possess the power to challenge, change and disrupt the community's value systems and social order. Welty, however, revises the essential significance of these myths by creating possibilities for her female protagonists to play the assertive role as hero, thus dissolving the gender exclusivity of patriarchal myths and social stereotyping.

Chapter Four, "The Optimist's Daughter: Redefining Otherness", moves toward demonstrating how the act of dichotomizing women results in the relegation of woman as the Other. It explains how this relegation is a result of masculine binary structures which condition us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a world where good is defined in patriarchal terms, women who conform to patriarchal rule are made to feel valued while women who are deviant occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. While monstrous women are generally sidelined as the Other, Welty transforms their peripheral position into a positive one by proclaiming its advantages rather than interpreting it as a condition to be transcended. The position of the Other is advantageous as it enables women to stand back and criticize the norms, values and practices that dominant patriarchal culture

seeks to impose on women, particularly those who choose to live on its periphery. Hence, Otherness for all its associations with oppression and inferiority is transformed into a way of being that allows for openness, difference, transformation and wholeness.

The final chapter concludes this dissertation by suggesting that Welty uses the notion of confluence as a solution to how women can become liberated without resorting to extreme measures. This chapter also suggests how the findings in this dessertation open doors that lead to further research on Welty's works.