

**Animosity towards Women in Eudora Welty's Literary Canon**

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**Abstract:** *The paper investigates Eudora Welty's concept of animosity towards women in her fiction. Her novels and short stories portray rape, sexual exhibitionism, sexual threats and brutality as inhuman experiences that sarcastically result in a vicious conversion of indignity and humiliation to the female sufferer instead of the male perpetrators. Welty suggests that this context creates a sense of intolerance which acts as a destroyer of women's identity and sense of self. In this paper, the researchers attempt to reveal the mechanisms that subvert women's sense of identity in a world usually controlled by men. Welty's vision, in this sense, is that the social consciousness of the woman does not only evolve from the personal consciousness, but also intricately interacts with it. Welty's works that are central to this study include Delta Wedding, The Robber Bridegroom, and the short fiction, including The Whole World Knows and Sir Rabbit.*

**Keywords:** Animosity, exhibitionism, intimidation, misogyny, oppression, sexual, violence.

## 1. Introduction

Eudora Welty, in her novel *Delta Wedding*, published in 1946, deals with a memorable family, living in the rich Delta land Mississippi in the early 1920s. The novel tells of the experiences of the Fairchilds family, most of whom have been sheltered from any contact with the world outside the Mississippi delta. They do not accept outsiders if they do not want to. As Welty suggests in the novel, the Fairchilds' behaviours are to be understood as a reaction to World War I that separated families. She explores the Fairchild family during a crucial point in the Southern region after World War I, while also exploring the lingering damage from the Civil War. In *Delta Wedding*, the institution of the family is attempting to heal after two wars. In the novel, Welty portrays characters and relationships that are traumatized by both of these wars. The Southern woman remained behind during the war to preserve and protect the family. Women had both male and female responsibilities. Thus, their social consciousness does not only emerge from personal consciousness, but it also seems to accordingly and intricately interact with it. In fact, there are four types of women presented by Welty: wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters. Welty delves into the psychology of these types, and she mainly focuses her attention on the married relationships and the status of woman within the frame of marriage.

## 2. Literature Review

Early critics of Welty have followed the feminist trend of exploring her fiction as a subversion of male dominance in the patriarchal South. Emmeline GROS (2015) considers 'Delta Wedding' a novel about family married life, female consciousness and the *subversion* of southern male heroism. *Delta Wedding* has been praised for its narrative structure which defies "traditional masculine narrative by providing women with a voice," and for "the multiplicity of white Southern femininity [that gives] a voice to several different types of women" (GROS, p. 59). According to GROS, the main aim of this novel is the subversion of male heroism.

Other Welty critics, including Susan Donaldson and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, have pointed out that the world of *Delta Wedding* is "peculiarly female", and that the novel should be read as a "feminist interrogation of history and historical perspective;" because Welty offers a "matriarchal world" (Donaldson p. 5)—a feminine South. In the isolated community of the Fairchilds, the great aunts, war widows like Aunt Shannon and Aunt Mac, have certainly become the "matriarchs of the clan" and "their governance of the Fairchild family has resulted in an interesting internal power structure that privileges females" (Miller p. 55).

In addition, Patricia Yaeger's essay "'Because a Fire Was in My Head': Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination" (in Devlin, 1987) is focused on "woman's language" and particularly on the way women writers appropriate patriarchal language for their own femiocentric purposes (p. 140). For Yaeger, and for other feminist critics, 'The Golden Apples' is replete with the revisions of patriarchal discourse about the cultural roles and relationships of men and women. Yaeger's basic statement is that since patriarchal culture and writing undermine women's creativity, Welty, nonetheless, makes extensive use of the 'Song of Wandering Aengus' and 'Leda and the Swan' by Yeats. A woman writer uses her meanings and ideas while still speaking patriarchal culture and words (Gygax, p. 6).

Yet, although she is known for her feminine approach, Welty is not a feminist, as Philip A. Tapley (1974) points out: "In writing fiction," she says, "I think imagination comes ahead of sex." In *Conversations with Eudora Welty* (1984), by Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, Welty labelled feminism as a political movement "I am not interested in any kind of feminine repartee," she told Charles Bunting in 1972. She feels that all preaching is antithetical to the real work of a novelist. (Prenshaw, *Conversations*, P. 226). The most obvious problem facing feminist scholars of Welty is her adamant assertions that she is not a feminist and has always used harsh words about feminism.

A recurrent issue in her fiction is 'rape.' Nicole Donald, (2001), explores the ways in which Eudora Welty's repeated use of rape in her fiction shows her ambivalence in its treatment as a critique of southern culture. The ambiguity in describing rape reveals 'ambivalence toward the society that Welty may be said at once to protect and to expose.' (Abstract, p. v.) When abuse does occur in her fiction, Welty does not explore it in great detail; but it does occur frequently. In

“Petrified Man,” Mr. Petrie’s crime is raping numerous women; in “At the Landing,” Jenny is raped not once, but multiple times; in “June Recital,” Miss Eckhart is raped and then shamed for being the victim; in “The Burning,” not only is Miss Myra raped, but the black servant Delilah is also offered to the Union soldiers by her mistress; and in Welty’s longer work, *The Robber Bridegroom*, both the young, virginal white girl and the Indian maiden are raped. Moreover, Donald argues that the contrasting scenes (of rape) (Little Harp’s violent rape of the Indian girl is clearly not the romanticized version one sees in the rape by Jamie Lockhart of Rosamond), demonstrate that race determines the way in which these women, these sexual objects, are handled. An interrogation of Welty’s work shows a distinct theme in the area of sexual aggression towards women. In her short fiction, Welty focuses on the response of women to rape. She depicts women who benefit from the brutalization of other women, and women who ignore and even ostracize the victims of rape. In both her short fiction and in her novels, Welty uses rape to reveal cultural norms and expectations in southern society (Donald, p. 3).

Studying the “Southern Rape Complex”, Ineke Bocking, (2016), explains that the “Cult of Southern Womanhood” stresses the purity of the Southern white woman and the need to protect her from all that could “soil” her (p. 28). In ‘June Recital’, from *The Golden Apples*, the rape of Miss Eckhart takes place out of the span of the story, and is mentioned in passing by many characters, even though she herself does not show any sign of change. The German music tutor is attacked by a ‘crazy nigger’, who jumped out of the school hedge and attacked her one dark evening at a time when she was, according to the community of Morganna traditions, not supposed to be. Peter Schmidt, in *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty’s Short Fiction*, highlights this focus on women’s ostracizing one another: “‘June Recital’ brings into focus as none of Welty’s other stories do the social pressures that ostracize a woman” (p. 86). Schmidt, himself a feminist critic, places Welty among the nineteenth and twentieth century women writers to reveal what he sees as a ‘cycle of cultural empowerment and disempowerment of women’ and suggests a new rubric for the writing of women literary history, and a new way of understanding Welty’s mediations of female rebellion’ (Schmidt, p. 87)

Finally, Ruth Weston’s concept of the Gothic fits into Welty’s heroines of ‘enclosure and escape’ as female protagonists dream of a ‘wider latitude in self-determination (pp. 2, 11), but are brought to face the harsh reality that ‘the cost of the female individuation often is self-imposed isolation from life that is merely different in kind from isolation imposed from without’ (p. 11). Welty uses violence within her writing to aid the characters’ search for their identity, since ‘violence does not destroy the central character, but corrects his view of himself.’ (Gossett p. 102)

### 3. Discussion

Eudora Welty is mainly preoccupied with portraying sexuality within marriage; she suggests the physical lavish contentment in the matrimonial life of George Fairchild and Robbie by presenting them as humorous, following each other in

Yazoo river, and then as lying deceitful, dishonest, and false in a cot of flowers and vines on the bank. Their transitory division causes enormous strain and dread of catastrophe even in the minds of the hopeful bride and groom, Dabney and Troy. The picture of the newlywed Dabney, lying in the curve of her husband's arm at the picnic, symbolizes satisfaction in their married life. Both George Fairchild and Troy Flavin in *Delta Wedding*, sexually powerful and valiant, remain outside the control of women. Shelley notices the need for affection and fervor in the love life of her parents that make their life well established and less expansive.

Laura's first experience at Marmion is replete with images of rings and isolated haunts that reverberate with sexuality. Aunt Studney, whose very name is evocative of masculine sexuality, appears at Marmion with her baffling sack, out of which Ellen gets her babies. As Laura and her cousin Roy run 'around and around the round room,' Aunt Studney stands in the center and turns 'herself in the place around and around, arms bent and hovering, like an old bird over her one egg' (Welty, p. 175). Through her fascination in the Yazoo, the river of death, Laura steps into the interior of this mystery:

As though Aunt Studney's sack had opened after all, like a whale's mouth, Laura opening her eyes head down saw its inside all around her—dark water and fearful fishes. A face flanked by receding arms looked at her under water—Roy's, a face strangely indignant and withdrawing. (Welty, p. 178)

Laura's confrontation with a society based on gender relationship takes place when she is discarded without a notice into the river by Roy who thought girls floated. He fishes her out when he recognizes that she would sink into the river and die. Laura's frightening experience under water indicates the sexual inception that she undergoes, an offensive act that comes from a male. Laura catches Roy's foot, yet she is portrayed as the victim: 'He pulled her out, arm by arm and leg by leg, and set her up in the boat' (Welty, p.178). In the "Moon Lake" of Welty's *The Golden Apples*, Easter takes the place of Laura, when she is rescued by Loch: 'She was arm to arm and leg to leg in a long fold.' Loch's trial to save Easter's life looks like a rape, ferociousness toward the woman. The baptism marks a crucial situation in the life of nine-year-old Laura; paradoxically enclosure leads to growth, to a step toward selfhood for Laura.

Laura's inception in sexuality proceeds when she realizes at home that she has missed the pin that belonged to Ellen. In fact, Laura has found the pin, as she has been accompanying Roy in the forest near Marmion. Ellen had got garnet pin in her dream, but being a child, Laura is not yet prepared for the delight and threat of sexuality, and she missed the pin immediately in the Yazoo river. The vision earlier pushes Ellen towards her meeting with the young girl in the stream forest, a defiance in which 'a whole mystery of life opened up' (Welty, p.70). In their brief and ambiguous discussion, the garnet pin turns into a sign of feminine sexuality.

The girl reveals her objection when she says, ‘nobody can say I stole no pin’, and the reader knows about the threat that phallogocentric world represents to women when later this pretty girl whom George faced and had an affair with is killed by the train. Her deformed body is seized by the camera of the wedding photographer, asserting the connection between feminine sexuality and hostility.

Louise Westling points out that “gender is characterized as analogous to drowning in *Delta Wedding*.” (p. 45). On the day before nuptials, Dabney dares to take a courageous step to look into the whirlpool in the thick bayou woods, which is connected with spirits, drowning and sexuality. Welty’s description of Dabney with her husband at the family picnic, after their wedding emphasizes the link between water and sexuality: ‘In catching sight of love she had seen both banks of a river and the river rushing between—she saw everything but the way down. Even now lying in Troy’s bare arm like a drowned girl, she was timid of the element itself’ (Welty, p. 244-45). Welty pictures the bare moonlight swim taken by Virgie Rainey the night after her mother’s burial in *The Golden Apples*. Just as in the case of Laura, the baptism is of erotic significance to Virgie. Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* is portrayed as posing naked under the sky, and then, swimming far out in the sea, recollecting “the hum of the bees and the musky odor of pinks’ (p.189) of her childhood.

Rosamond Musgrove, the protagonist in Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*, stands on the edge of mature sexuality, but the particular innocence of youth still envelopes her. She has never loved or come across any man except her father, Clement Musgrove. Her evil stepmother, Salome, exploits her father and attempts to ruin the daughter. Rosamond goes over her own familial resentments by deciding to turn her love for her father to a suitable partner. Rosamond steps into the forest beyond the border of her father’s farm and thereby depths of her mind. Sexual lust overtakes her and she does not know how to subdue it. She comes across Jamie Lockhart, a good-looking gangster, who has not improved far beyond the infantile expectations of immediate gratification of passions, and he tempts her. She has imagined seduction, before the robber demands her clothes, on the first day. Her behavior on the second day shows more desire; she steps on and on into the woods as if drawn by an irresistible fascination; she permits her mother’s protective locket to be stolen; she finds so much pleasure in the passion aroused by the temptation that she subsequently appears to her father, as if she ‘did not wish to be rescued’ (Welty, p. 70). In response to her aroused lust, she takes even more steps than in her initial journeys into the woods by seeking out the thief’s house to live with him. At first, in the house in the woods, they lead a life of refined wish fulfillment, complete with ‘spice-dreams’, a life of narcissistic pleasure. The only thing ‘that could possibly keep her from being totally happy was that she had never seen her lover’s face’ (Welty, p.88).

Rosamond believes that sex is somehow brutish, and she is curious about it. Just as commented by Mary Anne Ferguson in the "Psyche Myth", Salome succeeds in arousing mysterious fears in Rosamond that her lover must be ‘some kind of monster’ (Welty, 123), and that Rosamond’s ‘time had come to believe her’— a sharp psychological insight indicating that people cannot flee their own

psyches, and that coping with one's emotions necessarily requires stumbling and falling, before one can proceed to maturation. Rosamond is full of worry, and when she returns to the woods after the brief stop over to her father's house, her worries become embodied: she is 'frightened of being followed by a beast which would tear her apart' (Welty, p. 127). She comes back believing the unfavorable of herself and her lover and knowing she must look at his face. A related urge for the desire for knowledge may be a wish to penalize him and herself for his initial and constant robbing of her pureness. Rosamond's washing the face of Jamie shows a more hidden form of the wish of Psyche to cut off Eros' head. Caught by Jamie in the act of discarding the berry stains, Rosamond temporarily forfeits him and has to suffer many attempts and much strolling before her understanding of love can envelope both its physical and spiritual aspects.

In contrast to the crazy jealous and greedy stepmother, Salome, Fay Chisom, the stepmother of Laurel in *The Optimist's Daughter*, is portrayed as a seductress. In her severity and frivolousness, she is like Bonnie Dee Peacock, the second wife of Uncle Ponder in *The Ponder Heart*. There is a competition between Bonnie Dee and her niece Edna Earle in their greedy love toward Uncle Ponder. The unsuccessful marriage and love relationship between Uncle Daniel and his young wife Bonnie Dee result in the accidental but terrifying grotesque murder of Bonnie Dee by him. Fay, who is younger than her stepdaughter, is full of sexual power, but fails in performing the obligations of a faithful, domestic wife. Her discontented sexual life resulting in the troubled relationship with her elderly husband Judge, Mckleva, provokes her to be critical of others, and her harshness precludes the possibility of her growth. Welty portrays the growing struggles in the love life of Laurel's mother, Becky, and her father during her mother's illness and the consequent decadence of their relationship. In *The Optimist's Daughter*, the stepdaughter of Fay, had a brief, but accomplished love life with her husband, Philip, who rejected to foster the traditional nurturing and sheltering qualities which Laurel at first tried to communicate to him, and to whom, marriage was an equal partnership.

Gloria Renfro, quite opposite to the expectations of her tutor Julia Mortimer, tries to find an identity through marriage in *Losing Battles*. After marrying Jack, she respects the dream of 'changing' her husband and saving him from his family. Though she boldly challenges the family and its conventions, she cannot envision an existence apart from that of Jack. She says, 'Jack, the way I love you, I have to hate everybody else' (Welty, p.361). Like Robbie in *Delta Wedding*, Gloria, the intruder in the extended family of Renfros, has to realize that there are aspects of her husband's life which she cannot envision to share, and that she cannot expect his love to be purely for her. Full of carnal desires, Gloria believes her 'place' to be with Jack and baby; once he is at home, she rejects to desert him. Like Robbie, if she could, she would have lived minutes with her husband. She behaves like an irritatingly traditional woman in love, having an infatuated relationship with her man, as described by Simone de Beauvoir: 'All she is, all she has every moment of her life, must be devoted to him and thus again *raison d'être*.'(p. 611) Gloria is fully prepared to illustrate that the physical act of

love unites the couple, excluding others: 'She put her mouth quickly on his, and then she slid in her hand and seized hold on him right at the root' (Welty, p. 362). Gloria, with ravenous sexual energy, tries, as commented by Simone de Beauvoir: 'to find herself, to save herself, that she lost herself in him in the first place; and the fact is that little by little she does lose herself in him wholly' (p. 612).

In 'Flowers for Marjorie' in the collection of stories *A Curtain of Green*, Welty portrays a jobless young husband, Howard, who kills his pregnant wife Marjorie with a butcher knife, angry at her physical joy. Marjorie turns to be a target to the male desire to control women and to use them as objects to entertain the male. Howard reveals his restrained fear of women in his effort to confirm masculine independence. In contrast with the problematic love relationship between Howard and Marjorie, the young couple, Welty portrays in 'The Key' and 'The Whistle' older couples, whose love for each other is unbroken by poverty.

The stories 'The Whole World Knows,' 'Music from Spain,' and 'Sir Rabbit' in *The Golden Apples* are also about fierceness of men towards women. Like Howard, Ran MacLain and his twin brother Eugene try to replace the memories of their real spouse with fantasies of idealized women. As Chodorow points out, 'women's early mothering, then creates specific conscious and unconscious attitude or expectations in children. Girls and boys expect and assume women's unique capacities for sacrifice, caring and mothering, and associate women with their own fears of regression and powerlessness' (p. 83). Ran and Eugene with their nostalgia for a pre-oedipal state, deal with their wives as substitutes for the ever-pleasing mother figure, not as equal partners. Their idea of manliness is associated with physical offence, sexuality, and independence. Chodorow notices that too much of mother results from the relative absence of the father and almost exclusive maternal care 'creates men's resentment and dread of women, and their search for non-threatening, undemanding, dependent, even infantile women' (p. 185). Such a man is forced to suppress the qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself, and to reject and underestimate women and whatever he considers to be feminine.

As a result of immaturity, Ran MacLain in 'The Whole World Knows' fantasizes killing his wife. Instead of trying to understand Ran and help him beat his terror of women, Jinny has an illicit relationship with Woody Spights, an employee of the bank in which Ran works. Enraged by Jinny's betrayal, Ran substitutes Maideen Sumrall, a grocery store-clerk, for his wife. In his monologue, Ran expresses his fear of the sexuality of Maideen: 'She held her bare arms. She was disarrayed. There was blood on her, blood and disgrace. Or perhaps there wasn't. For a minute I saw her double' (Welty, p. 391). He scares her by aiming a revolver at her first, then he turns the gun on himself, and pulls the revolver's mouth to his own. When the gun misfires, in his anger, he turns on Maideen and rapes her and thus makes her a victim in the battle of sexes. After the night, in a basement, Maideen commits suicide as we learn in 'The Wanderers' in *The Heart of The Story* by Schmidt. 'Here Welty pictures rape as

the ultimate form of misogyny and connects it with pre-oedipal rage and oedipal self-hatred.(p. 79).

Like Ran, his twin brother, Eugene replaces Emma, his discontented, careless, snobbish wife, with a chance acquaintance, Bartolome Montalbano, a Spanish guitarist. One morning he smacks his wife 'without the least idea of why he did it' (Welty, p.393) and leaves her. He wanders the city of San Francisco and saves Montalbano's life when he suddenly walks in front of an approaching car. Then they continue their way together through town. And during the day's roaming, Eugene dreams about Montalbano as a perfect form of his own parents, a bisexual figure with the spirit of independence of a male and foster qualities of a female. He then develops feelings for Spaniard. He appears to Eugene as 'the perfect being to catch up with' and Eugene is keen to stay with the stranger. He looks to the Spaniard as a symbolic father. As the sun sets, the two men climb the gravels to the windy cliffs of 'Land's End.' When they get to the edge of the precipice, Eugene suddenly offers Montalbano a hug: 'Eugene clung to the Spaniard now, almost as if he had waited for him a long time with longing, almost as if he loved him, and he had found a lasting refuge. He could have caressed the side of the massive face with the great pores in the loose, hanging cheek. The Spaniard closed his eyes' (Welty, p.421).

Unconsciously, Eugene attempts to replace his wife's lesbianism with the homosexual love for the Spaniard, with female characteristics, who seems as a nurturing mother to him. Alfred Appel observes: 'Eugene's action can be interpreted as the culmination of his search for a father and as part of a ritual of spiritual rebirth (p. 229). As the Spaniard swings him over his head and near the edge of the cliff, the twisting motion fills Eugene with a feeling similar to a sexual exhilaration, and he has a fervent vision of his wife Emma 'sinking upon him' with terrible passion. He wishes to reveal to Emma his vision: 'If he could have spoken! It was out of this restlessness, not out of the gush of tears, that there would be a child again' (Welty, p. 423). After the exhilarating and comforting experience of physical contact with the Spaniard, the horror of woman overcomes Eugene. Critics like VandeKieft feel that Eugene experiences a kind of rebirth in the strong hands of the Spaniard (p. 249). Eugene and the Spaniard leave formally after having coffee, and on reaching home, Eugene finds his wife sitting in the kitchen, talking about others with her friends. Contrary to his imagination, Emma remains unchanged, passive, and the wretched Eugene slopes back in his chair and watches with suppressed feelings of misogyny and dread of women his wife bursting the grapes in her mouth. In 'The Wanderers' The reader learns that Eugene returns to Morgana alone and dies of tuberculosis at quite an early age. Like Ran, Eugene too is defeated by his wife.

In 'Sir Rabbit' in *The Golden Apples*, Mattie Will Sojumer explains that the women of Morgana illustrate their sexuality around the absent King MacLain. When she is out in the woods with her husband, Junior Holfield, a boring countryman, who is unable to maintain his wife to himself, she is seduced by King. As she is desirous of becoming part of King's legend, Mattie Will willingly surrenders to his conquest, though stunned by his erotic force: '. . . 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' (Welty, p. 338). During her sexual engagement, she is far more involved with King's response to the experience than with her own delight, typical of the patriarchal system: 'Like submitting to another way to talk, she could answer to his burden now . . . And no matter what happened to her, she had to remember, disappointments are not to be borne by Mr. MacLain, or he'll go away again' (Welty, p.338). After the seduction, she feels herself as another, separated of self: 'Her arms dropped back to the mossiness, and she was Mr. McLain's Doom, or Mr. MacLain's weakness, like the rest, and neither Mrs. Junior Holified nor Mattie Will Sojourner; now she was something she had always heard of' (Welty, p.338). She strolls in the wood after the rape, and finds King sleeping under a tree snoring, his body 'looking no more driven than her man's now' (Welty, p.340). Ruth M. VandeKieft feels that 'King is more absurdly human than supernaturally heroic.' (p. 91). Mattie Will sees King as a mere human being, in contrast with the established image he has assumed when he seduced her. She remembers her first physical experience with King's twin boys at the age of fifteen. Out of curiosity about sex, instead of escaping from them she waits for the boys when she sees them coming after her in the woods. She associates them with the sexual ventures of their legendary father. After their lustful play, she and the twins share sticks of candy they have got. The legendary glory of King, her discontented sexual life with her fool husband, and her curiosity about sex make her enjoy her sexual relationship with MacLains. Mattie Will rediscovers her pleasure as 'mysterious and sweet.'

Similar to Easter in 'Moon Lake', Virgie Rainey, stands for freedom from parental and collective restraints. Marginalized by sexual and social status, she is free to experience physical pleasure and creativity. She is the epitome of feminine excess that culture tries to repress and subjugate. Unlike Easter, sexuality is a course of pleasure, strength, and rebellion for Virgie. As Elizabeth Messe explains, 'women often play out resistance to authority in sexual terms; as the appropriated objects of men, we seek to disturb the system of patriarchal control through acts of sexual defiance.' (p. 271). Welty uses rich sensational imagery of the ripe figs outside the room in which Virgie and the sailor make love to rejoice Virgie's enjoyment of her sexuality: 'They were rusty old fig trees but the figs were the little sweet blue. When they cracked open, their pink and golden flesh would show, their inside flowers, and golden bubbles of juice would hang, to touch your tongue to first' (Welty, p. 278).

In the talent for music, mood of independence, passion, nonconformity, and poverty Virgie appears like her tutor, Miss Eckhart. Like Gloria Short and Julia Mortimer in *Losing Battles*, both Virgie and Miss Eckhart appear as rivals, and in both novels the momentary winner is the student. There is a constituent of sexuality in Welty's depiction of the teacher-student relationship between Miss Eckhart and Virgie. In addition to the sexual disgraces about Miss Eckhart, her close contact with her female students becomes vaguely misgiving on account of the fact that she is bachelor, and brave enough to show that she wants relationships with her students alone, especially her star student, Virgie. Though

she is teaching the ladylike art of piano-playing, her connection with her students appears too passionate and unladylike. Miss Eckhart's appreciation of Virgie's skill in playing, 'Virgie Rainey *Danke Schon*' is expressive of the special nature of their relationship, her readiness to participate in a part of her language, skill, passion of her art and even life with Virgie. Miss Eckhart's recognition for Virgie's talent is a joyful matter in her otherwise emotionally arid life. Cassie Morrison senses that Miss Eckhart 'gave all her love to Virgie Rainey and none to anybody else' (Welty, p. 307). As a token of her love toward Miss Eckhart, Virgie every day offers the rich white magnolia blossom, traditionally identified with white Southern femininity, to her teacher in the prime of their relationship. Out of her increasing jealousy of Virgie, Cassie cannot prospect to catch up to Virgie's inspired playing or match the power of Virgie's relationship with Miss Eckhart: 'At the exact moment of the hour . . . she would dismiss Cassie and incline her head toward Virgie, as though she was recognizing her only now, when she was ready for her; yet all this time she had held the strong magnolia flower in her hand, and its scent was filling the room' (Welty, p. 290). In the course of the novel, Virgie grows harder, and their love develops more and more to be one-sided.

Virgie's playing the piece 'Fuer Elise' is an unusual way that results in developing a peculiar relationship between her and Miss Eckhart. Virgie's exceptional musical skill prompts Miss Eckhart to say with a smile on her, 'Virgie brings me good luck!' (Welty, p.291), but Virgie discovers that she can utilize Miss Eckhart's dedication to her. Virgie intentionally breaks the rules laid down by Miss Eckhart for her students by arriving late for lessons, hitting her bicycle against the porch and rolling up her music instead of carrying it in a portfolio. She is steadily insulting her teacher; as a starting step she rejects to play to Miss Eckhart's prized metronome, insisting on putting her own rhythms, in front of her face. 'Miss Eckhart had made an exception of Virgie Rainey; she had first respected Virgie Rainey, and now fell humble before her impudence' (Welty, p.293). Day by day, Virgie's behavior develops from bad to worse; she exhibits her ability to scorn Miss Eckhart's rules and thereby gets the upper hand of the other girls. 'Anybody could tell that Virgie was doing something to Miss Eckhart. She was turning her from a teacher into something lesser. And if she was not a teacher, what was Miss Eckhart?' (Welty, p. 294). Virgie's sexuality and challenge discomfit Miss Eckhart's hopes for the fullest development of her talents. The favorite student's perverse treatment is more hurtful to Miss Eckhart than her ostracism by the Morgans. In short, Miss Eckhart's relationship with Virgie is always mixed with 'self-delight' and 'curious anguish.'

Virgie, being a new woman, rejects to accept stereotyped feminine standards, and on her fourteenth birthday she stops her piano lessons and goes straight to play piano in the photo show, to be in the world of 'power and emotion.' Three years after Virgie's final reading, in the meeting between herself and Miss Eckhart, Virgie does not accept her relationship with her teacher, Miss Eckhart, who has gone too far into craziness to feel anything, sets her studio alight. Virgie leaves the house, where she has been dating upstairs with her lover,

and she faces the ladies with characteristic boastfulness. She simply walks as if she were actually free, passes by Miss Eckhart on the sidewalk, where two men are taking Miss Eckhart away. Both of them seem to have a forbidding look; they look at each other neither of whom wishes to speak. 'Both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them—human beings, roaming, like lost beasts' (Welty, p. 330). It is the situation of their lonely wanderings that makes Miss Eckhart and Virgie look terrible in the eyes of Cassie. They have lost the intimacy, the sense of belongingness, and are forced to 'roam,' to search for fulfillment, and love.

In 'The Wanderers,' Virgie is a woman over forty, who remains as disobedient as she has been in childhood, unwilling to succumb herself to anybody, but continuing to please her physical urges outside of marriage with different men, one of whom often leaves a freshly shot bird on her doorstep. On the evening of her mother's death, Virgie goes swimming nude in the Big Black River. Various descriptions of her baptism propose the release of Virgie from the ties to her mother, and the harmony between Virgie and the surroundings of nature. The harmony between her and the sand, the water, the shells, the grass and the mud is like a sexual union: 'She felt the sand, grains intricate as a little cogged wheels, minute shells of old seas, and the many dark ribbons of grass and mud touch her and leave her, like suggestions and withdraws of some bondage that might have been dear, now dismembering and losing itself' (Welty, p. 440). As she starts to swim in the river, Virgie is conscious of her own sensuality: 'Her breast around which she felt the water curving were as sensitive at that moment as the tips of wings must feel to birds, or antennae to insects' (Welty, p. 440). She thinks of her body as a recipient, rather than a giver, of pleasure.

In women's writings, the sexual proposition in the narration of female landscape is a common trait, and Welty is no exception. As Ellen Moers notices, many of the female landscapes illustrate 'emotions ranging from the erotic to the mystical' (p. 261). Welty's depiction of Virgie's bath in the Big Black River, which is a sexual domain, stands for both erotic and mystical experience. While the lustful element concerns Virgie alone, without any male to share it; the mystical part supplies her with a new awareness of herself, a novel power for future wandering. Her mother's death unleashes Virgie from the role of a daughter, whereas her swim in the river like Laura's and Easter's launch her movement toward self-realization. As she feels herself becoming an ingredient of the river, the images of disintegration engender in her a sense of birth, and enchantment as she reaches 'the point where in the next moment she might turn into something without feeling it shock her' (Welty, p. 440). Her awakening is a feminine reconsideration of self, a restoration, a notion of self-similar to Luce Irigaray's description:

A woman's discovery of herself can only signify the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another, of not identifying with anyone in particular, of never being simply one. It is a sort of universe in

expansion for which no limits could be fixed and which for all that would not be incoherency. (p. 104)

'June Recital' pictures Miss Eckhart as a victim of sexual and social oppression, sexual intimidation and violence. Jean Baker Miller's observation, 'in our society, a woman's direct action can result in a combination of economic hardship, social ostracism, and psychological isolation—and even the diagnosis of a personality disorder (p. 10)' proves to be true in the case of Miss Eckhart. She is sexually offended by men and socially isolated and victimized by the Morganan females. As a boarder who takes in pupils in order to eat and pay her bills in Snowdie MacLain's rooming house, Miss Eckhart cannot manage to do anything to put her livelihood in danger; the economic obligations, her persistent sexual intimidation by Mr. Voight is inevitable. Mr. Voight, the sewing machine salesman, another roomer at Snowdie MacLain's house, does not approve of the piano lessons by coming part way downstairs and flapping his bathrobe under which he wears 'no clothes at all' (Welty, p. 294) at Miss Eckhart and the pupils. Being helpless in front of her environment, Miss Eckhart cannot even close a door when faced with Mr. Voight repeatedly exhibiting his private parts. The effect of his exhibitionistic act upon the children is terrifying: 'All the little girls and one little boy were terrified of Mr. Voight's appearance at every lesson and felt nervous until it had happened and got over with' (Welty, p. 295). In addition to their impatience over their music lessons with Miss Eckhart, the children face each lesson frightened of Mr. Voight's appearance.

Mr. Voight continues his exhibitionism regularly and it is obvious that he finds satisfaction in the aroused reaction of dread. Miss Eckhart is powerless to shun herself or her pupils from this scene, or to stop the lessons, even temporarily. Cassie Morrison connects Miss Eckhart's helplessness in dealing with Mr. Voight with her weakness in regard to her favorite student, Virgie: 'Miss Eckhart, who might once have been formidable in particular to any Mr. Voights, was helpless toward him and his antics ... all since she had begun giving in to Virgie Rainey' (Welty, p.295). Unlike Cassie, Virgie makes use of the incident as a means to reinforce her own hold over Miss Eckhart. 'Virgie kept the upper hand over Miss Eckhart even at the moment when Mr. Voight came out to scare them' (Welty, p. 295). By rejecting to live in fear of Mr. Voight's sexual threat, Miss Eckhart's verbal threat, or the humiliation of Morgana Virgie remains a new woman holding the upper hand. Desperately, Miss Eckhart seems to transfer the drastic feelings she might sense toward Mr. Voight to her pupils. 'Tell a soul what you have seen. I'll beat your hands until you scream' (Welty, p. 295). Cassie chooses to narrate the incident to her parents 'only to have her father say he didn't believe it; that Mr. Voight represented a large concern and covered seven states' (Welty, p.295).

Cassie's father favors branding his daughter a bluffer to facing the possibility of eccentric behavior in a man like Mr. Voight. Like Miss Eckhart's, his misplaced anger is directed toward his daughter to threaten her rather than the man who has transgressed her right of privacy. The victim receives his punishment again. Though all the children are scared by Mr. Voight, the one who is most threatened by him, and the final victim of his aggression is Miss Eckhart

herself. Miss Eckhart is exploited by carnal violence, as well as by sexual immodesty. One night she is molested and assaulted by a crazy Negro who appeared from behind a hedge. Cassie remembers that 'she had been walking by herself after dark; nobody had told her any better' (Welty, p. 301). The town reacts by reprimanding the victim and making excuses for the male offender. Miss Eckhart fails to conform with the local people's idea of Southern womanhood; she declines to play the role of the scapegoat and sacrifice who deserves sympathy, as expected by the community. The townspeople consider it a grave fault and disgrace and wish her to leave the town forever, 'as though she considered one thing not so much more terrifying than another' (Welty, p.301). Rejecting to accept their role in Miss Eckhart's fate, the Morgans circulate stories of the teacher's offence, and she is harshly criticized. Miss Eckhart's presence is a constant uncomfortable reminder to the townspeople of the sexual vehemence that always resides beneath the Southern society. The sexual crime tarnishes not only Miss Eckhart, but her mother as well: '. . . Miss Eckhart's *differences* were why shame alone had not killed her and killed her mother too; that differences were reasons' (Welty, p. 302). The 'differences' prohibit her from being remorseful of the rape and affected by it, and it does not happen to her that she has to ask forgiveness. As a Southerner, Cassie feels that '. . . perhaps more than anything it was the nigger in the hedge, the terrible fate that came on her, that people could not forgive Miss Eckhart for' (Welty, p. 302).

The socially isolated Miss Eckhart's love relationship with the shoe salesman, Hal Sissum, is considered funny. Till his untimely death, Miss Eckhart adores him just as Jenny Lockhart initially worships Billy Floyd, but her romance with Mr. Sissum displays an air of the bizarre. He performs the cello in the Bijou theatre and is attracted to Miss Eckhart's surprisingly tiny and lovely ankles, rather than her body. As a token of his admiration, he brings out several pairs of shoes, rather than the one pair he offers to 'most ladies.' At last he offers Miss Eckhart a 'Billikin' doll, which makes her extremely happy. The doll arouses uncontrollable laughter and Miss Eckhart considers it as a symbol of love. Accidentally Mr. Sissum is deluged in the Big Black River, which symbolizes not only sexuality and rebirth but also death. During the funeral, at his tomb, Miss Eckhart expresses her grief by a strange, sturdy rocking back and forth, as if she were a living timepiece. Miss Eckhart's way of 'crying' moves many ladies to stop their little girls from learning piano.

All the repressed feelings resulting from Miss Eckhart's disappointment as a sexual and social victim are revealed in her music. Miss Eckhart is unrelenting in performing: 'Even when the worst of the piece was over, her fingers like foam on rocks pulled at the spent-out part with unstilled persistence, insolence, violence' (Welty, p.302). Music, to Welty, is a powerful means of communication along with its function of exploiting energy in the performer. One afternoon during a thunderstorm when, for the first time Miss Eckhart plays a sonata by Beethoven with sentiment and rage, Virgie and Cassie perceive the vulnerability and romantic temperament of Miss Eckhart, whose body wobbles from one side to another like a tree trunk. The females are transfixed by the joint power of art and

nature which transforms their teacher. The storm compresses the performance, in which there is a strong aspect of shock. The music coming from their teacher makes the pupils uneasy, almost alarmed and frightened. Cassie notices that the music seems to flow 'like the red blood under the scab of a forgotten fall' (Welty, p. 301); her performance is noteworthy by blood just as that of Virgie. Miss Eckhart's life seems hollow because of the lost talent and proficiency which her playing discloses to the children, especially Cassie. Moreover, Miss Eckhart endures sexual ennoblement through the erotic overtones in her fervent playing of Beethoven; the suppressed artist expresses music as a robust means of communication of the female psyche's suppression, disappointment, and helplessness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The term violence against women has been used to describe a wide range of acts, including murder, rape and sexual assault, emotional abuse, sexual harassment, and exhibitionism. In her fiction, Eudora Welty used this concept to denote aggressive behaviours that adversely and disproportionately affect women's psychology. Thus, in the afore-mentioned narratives by Welty, the psychological trauma was the sole harm to the victim. Welty, in particular, suggested that such kind of violence had covered a wide range of animosity towards women. The perpetrators of this animosity were contributors to the southern culture and the roles of women in it. Eudora Welty's repeated inclusion of sexual violence and rape in her fiction reveals and questions Southern society and women's place in it. Welty, in her fiction, was never normalizing sexual violence against women despite the fact that the language she used to describe these violations was ambivalent. These repetitive scenes in Welty's fiction not only indicate her assessment of gender roles in the south, but also reveal cultural norms and expectations of women in Southern society.

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