

Adolescent Transformation and the House Motif
in Eudora Welty's Short Fiction
(ユードラ - ウェルティの短編に見る
青春期の変容と『家』のモチーフ)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: アメリカ文学は建造物としての「家」と登場人物の内面との密接な関係を描いてきた。米国南部の女流作家ユードラ - ウェルティ (1909-) もひねりをきかせた比喩や描写を通して、「家」と人物の間に独自の世界を創り上げている。特に「家」を擬人化する手法は最初期の作品から最新作まで一貫してみられ注目に値する。

この論文では、ウェルティの3つの短編“A Memory,” “The Winds” “At the Landing”を取り上げ、3人の主人公が青春期に経験する内的外的変化と、彼女たちが目にする、あるいは心に抱く「家」のイメージとの結び付きを論じる。

各作品に共通してみられるのは、主人公を保護し同時に拘束する、文字通りの「家」、未知の広い外界に対する憧れや恐れを表す比喩としての「家」、そしてこれら二つを統合し主人公が向かう未来を暗示する、象徴的な第三の「家」である。以上三つの「家」のモチーフの分析検討を試みた。

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Eudora Welty (1909-), of course, is part of the lineage of "American writers [who] have generally portrayed the structures an individual inhabits as bearing a direct relationship or resemblance to the structure of his or her psyche and inner life and as constituting a concrete manifestation of specific values" and who have "frequently treated [the house] as a schematic reiteration of the character of the central figure in a story."¹ As in the puritanical and Gothic traditions in American literature, for Welty "the house is invested with far more than literal significance and in varying degrees is personified, animated, or even anthropomorphized."² The house motif in Welty's work is especially significant for an understanding of the characters associated with it.

In particular, house imagery and adolescents are intertwined in Welty's stories of pubescence. In "A Memory" (1937), "The Winds" (1942), and "At the Landing" (1943), Welty describes the shelters for vulnerable teens in puberty and their encounters with the external world in terms of house images allegorically personified in their mental landscapes. Similarly, their adolescent self-images frequently correspond with their literal houses. In the early adolescent stage of life, the awareness that the house is not the entire world makes the teenagers curious as to what lies outside their domain. When the desire of youth to express itself in an outward manner flourishes, Welty's adolescents harbor some antithesis of the literal house, which acts as a catapult to propel them outbound. At the same time adolescents depend on the house for security: their fear of the unknown makes them shrink from the outside world. Their tendency to fantasize, and lack of actual experience, can contribute to their seeking something mysterious in the familiar, domestic scenes.

For Welty's teenagers the tension between the two functions of the house—the cushion of shelter and the springboard to "ventur[ing] forth"³—reaches extreme intensity. The dilemma of having to reside in the construct of the house, while simultaneously finding a way out of it, gives their observations and opinions of themselves and of the world an original twist. As such, the house often transforms from a cozy nest into a horrible trap. For their growth from childhood to maturity to reach fruition, the annihilation, actual or imaginary, of the house and of themselves must also occur in some way or other. The adolescents' reaching out for experience—whether emotional, sexual, social, or intellectual—so far nurtured inside the house, can be so intense that this very desire for experience can sometimes work as a

destructive power. At this point the adolescent undergoes some sort of death. In the final stage of their change, they attain a figurative synthesis of these contrasting dwelling images. Welty recurrently employs a boat image, which provides both motion and security and integrates the above conflict. The house's demise is presented as a consequence of its young inhabitant's desire, or destiny, to be out in the world. The end of each story discussed in this paper marks the "commencement of. . . [a]dulthood."⁴ Whether it is frustrating, torturous or exhilarating, each heroine has experienced some change in herself and her views of the world.

"A Memory" is a recollection of the narrator's first love and an encounter with unwanted reality in her early adolescence. In "A Memory" there is no personification of a house, or even its description, except in one context. The house motif resonates in the psychology of the pubescent protagonist rather than in her social reality. But the story has two counterparts of a house that form thesis and antithesis in her mental picture: her parents' garden and the classmate's house. Even so, the "T" experiences, even more keenly than the other two heroines, the figurative demise of a house as shelter.

The narrator teaches herself "the compositional techniques of focus and framing"⁵ since she took up painting lessons. Her "small frames with [her] fingers, to look out at everything"⁶ decide her attitude toward a life that totally lacks a desire for motion, in contrast to the other two stories. Instead, as Vande Kieft points out, she has a "passion for form, order, control."⁷

The story opens with the description of a lakeside park from the narrator's perspective:

The water shone like steel, motionless except for the feathery curl behind a distant swimmer. From my position I was looking at a rectangle brightly lit, actually glaring at me, with sun, sand, water, a little pavilion, a few solitary people in fixed attitudes, and around it all a border of dark rounded oak trees, like the engraved thunderclouds surrounding illustrations in the Bible. Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look out at everything. (147)

Pitavy-Souques considers this "picture" an "*extremely hostile*" "*conventional representation*," "framed by the Bible."⁸ The critic explains that "a frame is a way of delimiting her subject, of imposing restraint and cutting out all that

might crop up unexpectedly,” and reminds us that “with references to the thunderclouds in the Bible, the frame represents the law, the repressive law of Jehovah” and that “the child . . . in placing and judging people is somehow ‘framed’ herself, i. e., held in a false position by the oppressive prejudice of her parents that makes her feel guilty when she asserts her rights to see and know” (Pitavy-Souques 121). The above picture of the lakeside park represents the relationship of the narrator to the world: the subjective reality in the house of “rectangle” “frames” and the objective reality, which is supposed by her to be bordered in “fixed attitudes.” Naturally, for the narrator to attain adulthood, the picture “will be soon shattered” (Pitavy-Souques 121).

The narrator’s parents’ aesthetic education is represented by their meticulously-tended garden at their literal house, which “symbolizes a way of approaching—and attempting to contain and control—reality”⁹:

My father and mother, who believed that I saw nothing in the world which was not strictly coaxed into place like a vine on our garden trellis to be presented to my eyes, would have been badly concerned if they had guessed how frequently the weak and inferior and strangely turned examples of what was to come showed themselves to me. (148)

Trying to be mature, and poignant as she is in her observation, thrilled to witness what is banned under parental patronage, she fundamentally copies her parents’ attitude toward the “obscure,” “irregular” and “of no worth” (147). As she says “when a person, or a happening, seemed to me not in keeping with my opinion, or even my hope or expectation, I was terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness which tore my heart with a kind of sorrow” (148). A fear of being outcast from domestic asylum underlies her idea of a “frame.”

Her negative view of the effect of outside reality on her fantasy is evident in her remark about her love: “never since has any passion I have felt . . . appeared so grotesquely altered in the outward world” (149). With a small accidental touch of wrists with one classmate, her first love starts budding and it makes her “doubly austere in my [her] observations of what went on about me [her],” in a “dual life, as observer and dreamer” (149). On the occasion of her friend’s nose bleed, which strikes her with a “tremendous shock” (150), her physical

self is unable to accept her friend's deviation from the role of a dream provider. Her reaction to the accident, "unforeseen, but at the same time dreaded" (150), derives from her fear of framelessness or sense of exposure, rather than of unsightliness. What manifests her protectiveness against reality is her imagined picture of her friend's house.

It was unbearable to think that his house might be slovenly and unpainted, hidden by tall trees, that his mother and father might be shabby—dishonest—crippled—dead. I speculated endlessly on the dangers of his home. Sometimes I imagined that his house might catch on fire in the night and that he might die. (150)

The classmate's house is an antithesis of her own house. The deprivation of domestic protection itself, which is now manifested in concern for her friend, is more crucial to her, and the "dangers of his home" seem to her even more impending than the dangers of his body. For her the absence of an appropriate "frame" is the most dreaded matter; in her consciousness "abandonment and wildness" culminate in death. Therefore, she confines and protects the classmate in the "frame" of a "very long story" of "hand brushing" (151) insusceptible to the interference of reality. The simultane[ity] (151) of reality and dream is an ideal state, like a cocoon, that keeps her from any first-hand exposure to the outside.

The sterile opposition of the parents' house and the classmate's "house" is cancelled by what Pitavy-Souques calls the "second picture. . . of violence and distortion" (Pitavy-Souques, 123), of "a group of loud, squirming, ill-assorted people who seemed thrown together only by the most confused accident" (152). The girl watches them in disgust, chasing, cursing, teasing and insulting each other. Their "old and faded bathing suits which did not hide either the energy or the fatigue of their bodies, but showed it exactly" (152) seem to her to have torn down the framework of order to disclose what her parents are afraid might be revealed to her. The narrator's use of an odd corporeal metaphor "lying in *leglike* confusion together" (*italics mine*) (152) suggests her physical abhorrence, particularly of the older woman's body, which is "unnaturally white and fatly aware, in a bathing suit which had no relation to the shape of her body" (153). Pitavy-Souques, who observes the "trim white pavilion is replaced by the shapeless mound of sand built around

the ugly woman," says that the girl has a "painful initiation into the contingency of life as it is" (PitavySouques 123).

Fat hung upon her upper arms like an arrested earthslide on a hill. With the first motion she might make, I was afraid that she would slide down upon herself into a terrifying heap. Her breasts hung heavy and widening like pears into her bathing suit. Her legs lay prone one on the other like shadowed bulwarks, uneven and deserted, upon which, from the man's hand, the sand piled higher like the teasing threat of oblivion. (153)

Pitavy-Souques finds in the narrator's description of the woman a "true vision of death" of "petrified landscape" (Pitavy-Souques 123). The vision intrudes into the narrator's ideal state in the confluence of reality and dream.

The bathers' behavior involves a coexistence of life and death imagery, which the narrator's dualistic conformity has hitherto never admitted. That the "bulwarks," which ought to guard against the erosion of her form and order, are so carelessly brought down by this sight, arouses resentment and hatred in her. She becomes exasperated when she feels that she is being "included" (154) in the vulgar group by the man's smiling at her, to the extent she wished that "they all were dead" (154). Thus her symbolic death comes as a forced inclusion in the world outside her framework. Oblivion, which is opposed to memory, also threatens her as something akin to death.

According to the narrator's aesthetics, she feels a "peak of horror" at the sight of the older woman turning outward the front of her bathing suit to let out the sand the man teasingly put there, as if "her breasts themselves had turned to sand, as though they were of no importance at all and she did not care" (156). Along with the girl's repulsion for physical maturity and her fear of "blood" (150), Schmidt describes her attitude as an "anorexic-like" "matrphobi[a]" (Schmidt 192). For her, the female body is "of . . . [i]mportance" only in that it houses virginal maternity. The nightmarish vision of the breasts turning to inorganic matter paradoxically suggests her dependence on her mother's care and that she is subconsciously afraid of being separated from her own mother, or cast out of the house.

Welty suggests real artistic insight involves a "willingness to include the ugly, the threatening, the painful, the foreign into one's field of vision and into one's heart" (Burgess 136). The narrator of "A Memory," who keeps the alien

from integration into her initial "framed composition" (Burgess 135), tries again, "by a very strong impulse to reestablish order, unity," (Pitavy-Souques 124) to recede into her "most inner dream, that of touching the wrist of the boy I loved on the stair" (155-56). However, though she feels "the heavy weight of sweetness which always accompanies this memory," "the memory itself did not come to me" (156). She has to find that purebred dream is as inorganic as sand without the fertilization of dichotomous elements.

The narrator seems to acknowledge the dialectic of what she hopes to see and what she has to see: the phrase "long narrative" (156) of the wrist touch suggests that even the young narrator knows the incident has been expanded into the symbolic, irrelevant value of a story. She says "when finally I emerged again from the protection of my dream, the undefined austerity of my love, I opened my eyes onto the blur of an empty beach" (156). She has been engrossed in the "protection" of her version of reality only to find that the outside world is "empty": she has to propel herself out of the protecting shell and fill the emptiness of the world by a confrontation with the otherness of reality and her involvement in it. The other side of reality is brought about by her experience of death, though figurative, which apparently disrupts the order and form of the world, yet on a more elevated level renders integrity and substance to life.

Together with "the sight of the unfinished bulwark" (156-57), which has changed the appearance of the beach "like the ravages of a storm," the "small worn white pavilion" (157), in the description of which Pitavy-Souques finds the third picture of the "devastated beach" (Pitavy-Souques 124) and which earlier that morning was crowned with a "clean pointed roof" (151), signals the demise of her childhood home. The change in her observations of the pavilion signifies a "very precarious" (Pitavy-Souques 124) synthesis of her two house images that respectively represent the protected, closed and complacent world and the abandoned, forsaken and death-shadowed world, and shows her reluctant realization that her house, like this beach architecture, is a house that is constantly susceptible to transmutation, exposed to the threat of nature, like the "ravages of a storm," or to the violence, sexuality, or vulgarity of the world. The narrator bursts into tears at the sight of the pavilion. The pavilion image tells her the necessity of the dialectics of two houses, metaphorical and actual. What she experiences on the beach is the demolition of "consciously framed approaches to life" (Kreyling 12), of her figurative house that functions

exclusively as a container. "The challenge to reconcile the opposing demands of inner and outer worlds" (Kreyling 12), although much to her distaste and horror, should not remain a trauma but function as an impetus for her commitment. The narrator faces the fallacy of thinking that she can shun the "danger" (151) of being exposed by projecting order and form onto the world.

There is no hint of what has become of her "adulthood" apart from her sustained fear of "blood"; whether she has obtained her own boat-correlative image of dynamism is left untold. Nevertheless, the closing paragraph suggests that the "last morning on the beach" (157) is the "last" of her childhood, emphasized by her referring to the "time of my return to school" as "winter," though it is only the end of the summer vacation. She senses that in "winter," when the framed summer of childhood's protection, whether it comes from her parents, house, dreams or memories, is gone, her house will no longer protect her and that her fantasized vision will be constantly challenged, altered, or even destroyed altogether. Her preliminary vision of her self is imposed on the image of her classmate "solitary and unprotected" (157). She must undergo the fall of her metaphorical house in order to pass into her own substantiality.

"The Winds" is about pre-adolescent Josie's reminiscences and reveries during one equinoctial night that initiates her into a maturer phase. Josie's confidence in her house, symbolizing its residents, "secure that the house was theirs and identical with them—the pale smooth house seeming not to yield to any happening, with the dreamlike arch of the roof over the entrance exactly like the curve of their upper lips,"¹¹ contrasts with her curiosity about the double-house across the street:

Watching it [children's play] all from the beginning, the morning going by, was the double-house. This worn old house was somehow in disgrace, as if it had been born into it and could not help it. Josie was sorry, and sorry that it looked like a face, with its wide-apart upper windows, the nose-like partition between the two sagging porches, the chimneys rising in listening points at either side, and the roof across which the birds sat. It watched, and by not being what it should have been, the house was inscrutable. There was always some noise of disappointment to be heard coming from within—a sigh, a thud, something dropped. (122-23)

The double-house is an antithesis of Josie's parental house of protection and care, literally forming a "double" in "not being what it should have been," in the sense that it embodies disgrace, disorder, danger and defiance, the existence of which "respectable" people like Josie's parents will not admit, particularly to their children. Josie projects her budding impulse to rebel on the double-house's mysterious atmosphere.

Cornella, a "big girl," kept in what seems a foster home, whom Josie watches in adoration, is "being transformed by age" (123), pretty as "ripe corn" (128). Her avid tending to her long silky hair, reminds Josie of Rapunzel imprisoned in a tower. Josie notices that Cornella is "forever making ready" (123) and expecting something: "always through the hiding hair she would be looking out, steadily out, over the street" (124). But Josie, following her gaze, only felt the "emptiness of their street" (124) and wonders what this big girl awaits, as she vaguely overlaps her yearning on Cornella's.

While Josie is being taken by her father from her bed to the parlor, where the whole family stay together to be safe from the storm, she witnesses a symbolic "demolition" of a house: when she sees "Will's Tinker-Toy tower coming apart and the wooden spools and rods scattering down," Will cries in his sleep, "'The house is falling down!'" (116). Her younger brother's cry registers in Josie's subconscious that she is about to outgrow the childhood house on which she has depended for unconditional asylum. Her mother and father even look "like strangers" (117). The awareness of the otherness of reality moves the child a large step toward her eventual propulsion from the house.

Josie feels she is summoned by the storm to launch herself into the storm: "outside the beseeching cries rose and fell, and drew nearer" (117). Josie finds "the eyes of the double-house seemed to open and shut with it" (118), and even insists she sees "Cornella in the equinox, there in her high-heeled shoes" (118). Her parents consider it sheer nonsense, the mother scolding Josie's sustained concern for the unfavorable Cornella and the father, who "want[s] to keep us [them] close together," threatening her by referring to "a man's little girl" who was blown away by an equinoctial storm until eventually he "called her back" (118). The tension between the adolescent's outbound concerns and the parents' restraint suggests what painful awakenings might be required of both sides to shake off their hitherto inevitable bonds.

Josie's ambivalent attitude toward her parents is observed in her rebellion "with her back to all of them" (118) and yet in her "dr[a]w[ing] closer to her

[mother], with a sense of consolation" when "the house shook as if a big drum were being beaten down the street," "cl[i]ng[ing] to her mother," and "her trembling body [that] turned under her mother's hand" (119). Whereas she senses her imminent entry into adulthood "in the coming of these glittering flashes and the cries and the calling voices of the equinox, summer was turning into the past. The long ago ...," her father's "you have my word that this is a good strong house" encouragingly reminds her that "he had built it before she was born" (119) and assures her of its lasting security. In contrast, the double-house looks all the more alluring for its irregularity,¹² irrelevance and insecurity.

Josie's coming propulsion, in her integration and transcendence of these opposing house images, is manifest in a series of navigable vessel motifs. As she frequently does, Welty uses the symbol of a journeying boat to represent a house where life is fully charged, and a resident of which is about to launch out into the world: "the house moved softly like a boat that has been stepped into" (120). The boat is a vessel that carries Josie into a chain of associations, simultaneously leading her over the threshold into maturity. The dialectic of the impermanence and dynamism of life, both emblemized by the boat imagery, is what she is about to realize.

The double-house arouses Josie's fantasy as a place both where social determinations are suspended and where fairy-tale codes operate, enigmatic and exclusive; even the "nagging odor of cabbage cooking" (128)¹³ strikes her as something exotic:

Between the double-house and the next house was the strongest fence that could be built, and no ball had ever come back that went over it. It reached all the way out to the street. So Cornella could never see if anyone might be coming, unless she came all the way out to the curb and leaned around the corner of the fence. (129)¹⁴

Josie enters into Cornella's thirst for outside experience and sympathizes with the beautiful prisoner, who has to turn back to the house, called by her foster mother with a "voice old and cracked" (130).¹⁵

The paradoxical relationship of propulsion and protection is also revealed in these two adolescents. While Josie "guided her warm boat under the brightening moon" on her own, "Cornella would have turned into a tree if she

could, there in the front yard of the double-house, and that the center of the tree would have to be seen into before her heart was bared, so undaunted and so filled with hope. . .” (133-34). Cornella’s frigid posture serves as a reminder of Ovid’s Daphne in *Metamorphoses*, who, rather than pass into womanhood by being with a man, prefers to stay forever a girl and so asks her father, the river god, to turn her into a tree. Cornella’s association with eternal virginity suggests that she might not attain real womanhood if, instead of cultivating her inner potentialities, Cornella is engrossed in the blind pursuit of a femininity that would appeal to a rescuer. Josie’s feeling that she “will never catch up with” (125) Cornella suggests her unconscious recognition that her path is different from Cornella’s.

What Schmidt calls a potential role model appears as a female cornet player in Josie’s recollection of that summer’s Chautauqua. She vividly recalls that she was so impressed with the performance that she even thinks that “if morning-glories had come out of the horn instead of those sounds, Josie would not have felt a more astonished delight” (136). The novel horizon which the cornetist’s performance conjured up in Josie’s senses now returns to her memory. Schmidt notes that Cornella and the cornetist, phonetically as well, are “paired images of what Josie’s future may be” (Schmidt 150). The image of morning-glories proudly growing outward presents a striking contrast to the immobile arbor image of Cornella-Daphne. The cornet woman’s eloquent self-expression, which leaves Josie sensuously “pierced with pleasure” (136), stands opposed to Cornella’s loss of utterance after being transformed into a dumb tree in Josie’s visual imagination. Moreover, the musician is compared to the most vital of all the nautical images in the story, “looking upward like the figurehead on a Viking ship” (137). Josie feels “as if the performance led in some direction away—as if a destination were being shown her” (137). The contrast of the two older women’s lessons—the cornetist’s to “project” and Cornella’s to “possess”—is echoed in the “lessons” of the house, to propel and to protect.

The musician leads Josie to realize that life may be “but a dream”—when she is woken up by her father she first thinks of the “big girls” going on a hayride singing “row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream,” with the last phrase “life is but a dream” unsung — but that one can make life as beautiful as a dream by creatively propelling one’s boat into the world of wonder. Schmidt, stating that “the musician mixes domestic and heroic

images of women, showing Josie that a woman's life can involve both cultivating morning glories and leading a Viking ship" (Schmidt 148), indicates the possibility of the cornetist's becoming Josie's "surrogate parent," in place of "the other mother figures . . . who are either repressive and monstrous (Cornella's foster mother) or kindly but overprotective (Josie's mother)" (Schmidt 149). Thus, the cornet woman's "ship," which embodies both dynamism and femininity, propulsion and protection, represents the synthesis of Josie's and Cornella's houses.

Now Josie hears in the winds "all that was wild and beloved and estranged, and all that would beckon and leave her, and all that was beautiful" (139), but she does not recklessly give herself to them though "she wanted to follow, and by some metamorphosis she would take them in—all—every one" (139). As she remembers seeing the night after the cornet performance that "the old cotton-seed mill with its fiery smoke-stack and its lights forever seemed an inland boat that waited for the return of the sea" (138), she is aware of her immanent power, which, though sheltered and residing only in potential, will at a proper time burst forth. She senses that the metamorphosis, "effected by a power beyond and prior to the self" (Kreyling 26) is not a blind rushing forth from the house's security into seeming sexuality or femininity. Schmidt maintains that with this "metamorphosis" Josie learns to replenish "the void left by [the] vanishing [of the presences of her childhood]" (Schmidt 146).

The morning after the equinox Josie finds the "residue" (140) of her childhood in the sight of the double-house on the verge of collapse:

The double-house across the street looked as if its old age had come upon it at last. Nobody was to be seen at the windows, and not a child was near. The whole façade drooped and gave way in the soft light, like the face of an old woman fallen asleep in church. (139)

If Josie's death for the sake of maturation occurs when she is "pierced with pleasure" (136) by the sounds of the cornet, her more physical form of death is symbolized by the proxy death of the double-house.

The demise of the house of her childish fancy marks her integration of the domestic and the adventurous—a moving boat, with the cornetist as its figurehead—in her mind. Her outbound impulse is thus securely channeled through the double-house and creatively directed by the musician.

Just as "The Winds" associates a girl's transformation into a grown-up with the turbulent winds of the equinox, "At the Landing" alludes to a heroine's loss of maidenhood with the flooding waters of the season. Jenny Lockhart has been raised by her grandfather, secluded from the world in a hillside house. The pavilion in which she dines with her grandfather is "circled with 'an ancient . . . thorny rose, like the initial letter in a poetry book,'" ¹⁶ "as imprisoning as the roses that keep young maidens inviolate in fairy-tale castles" (Carson 37). Then the seasonal floods bring about a drastic change in her destiny in the form of a personified natural force, Billy Floyd, whose name is a "near rhyme for *flood*" (Kreyling 28).

For parentless Jenny, the house has been her entire world until the day she falls in love with Billy Floyd. Weston sees Jenny's tragic fate in their place of meeting, the cemetery, "a dark shelf above the town" (184), "the fictional neutral ground between Jenny's grandfather's home and the outside world."¹⁷ Weston finds irony in the fact that it is "this place of death," the one place Jenny is allowed to go, that she finds new life in her love for Billy Floyd, but also "finds an introduction to a new kind of death" (Weston 40). The Landing cemetery used to be the old landing place where "the ships docked from across the world a hundred years ago" (184). The Landing has been, however, forlorn of life, hardly a place for Jenny to conjure up a virile boat imagery. Thus Jenny's attempt at integration with life is originally shadowed by death. She seeks to escape from the house of death through her love for Floyd. Her resistance to the "books without titles," "through fire and water" "singled and bleached and swollen and shrunken, and arranged up high and nearly unreachable" (181), may end in vain, for Billy Floyd is characterized by fire and water: he comes on the flood, yet his eyes "glare," and he makes fire to cook his fish. People gossip that he is descended from Natchez Indians who know something "about never letting the last spark of fire go out" (208). It is implied that Jenny might be ruined by Floyd and be reduced to becoming an inert "object of beauty." But she inspires herself with an awareness like "distant lightning" that "one day she would be free to come and go" (182). This story is, after all, about Jenny's refusal to become a house object, but rather raising herself up from the tomb of the house.

If Floyd is characterized by a fiery light, Jenny's dominant image is the dark. As Weston observes (Weston 41), Floyd and Jenny's incompatibility is clear in the metaphor "that could make a strange glow fall over the field where he was,

and the world go black for her, left behind" (188). With all her quest for light, its elusiveness is suggested throughout the story. "Rude wild" (184) and civilization-wise inscrutable is Floyd, alert with beastly instinct to discern the faintest sounds in the field. The only occasion Jenny comes close to defining this character of mysterious identity is when she comes across him in the post office. She senses that Floyd, who seems "unconsumed" (186) out in the field, now looks "handled and used" (194) and she momentarily thinks he is "going to drop his high head at being trapped in the confined place, . . . [and] that he could be known in time if he were caught and cornered in a little store" (194).

"At the Landing" has references to house imagery that may well form a thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure. The first is, of course, the Lockhart house. One noteworthy property of the house which signifies Jenny's seclusion from actuality, is its numerous prisms, which suggest "the multiple possibilities of beauty beneath the staid surface of life" (Carson 38) and her fear of, and yearning for, their "elusive light." The introspective, "framing" nature of the house is emphasized in the facing mirrors with an infinity of virtual images "endlessly rising in front of her" (181). Carson considers that the mirrors suggest "the only hint Jenny has that there is more to life" (Carson 37). Jenny dare not touch these ornaments although it is "not forbidden," reflecting her attitude towards the outside world, light and Floyd. Her tendency to shrink, as into the "great wardrobe in which she ha[s] sometimes longed to hide" (182), or in the "great box-like canopied bed," is encouraged by the house's jailer-grandfather, who "would call her back, with his little murmur" (182) whenever she is "out at the door" (182).

The Lockhart house, seen from Floyd's viewpoint, symbolically reveals the dialectic that has operated between the house and the forces of nature:

The Lockhart house stood between two of the empty stretches along the road. It was wide, low, and twisted. Its roof, held up at the corners by the two chimneys, sagged like a hammock, and was mended with bark and small colored signs. The black high-water mark made a belt around the house and that alone seemed to tighten it and hold it together. (189)

The observation that the house, properly a fortress against the menace of nature, seems to be held up by the very traces of natural violence, ironically suggests its total passivity before nature. In a sense, this is Jenny's fate.

The story opens with Jenny's grandfather's dream of Billy Floyd, a prediction of him as the coming of high water to The Landing. As if his weakened body had been shattered by the fierceness of the dream flood, Jenny's grandfather collapses and dies that night. The metaphors Welty uses to describe the high water when it actually floods The Landing stress the frailty of the organism of a house and of a human being such as Jenny Lockhart: "the storm was laid down on their houses like a burden the day had carried" (198), and the river "did come like a hand and arm" (199). As the sentence that the river "came back only in flood, and boats ran over the houses" (180) suggests, the boat imagery which, as in "The Winds," Welty usually employs to represent dynamic imagination and aspiration to realize oneself, is used here to portray human beings being tossed about by natural forces. As found in the descriptions "one long fence, made of lumber from old boats, built there to delay the river for one moment when it came, the same as they would have delayed a giant bent on destruction by some foolish pretext" (192), or "under the forward-tilting porch the clay-colored hens were sitting in twos in the old rowboat" (190), the boat is an emblem of their life in sheer inertia lived only "because we live here" (195). Jenny, who has taken shelter on the hilltop, is rescued by Floyd in his boat, now fully alive in his element. She knows they "rode over the grave of her grandfather and the grave of her mother" (199) as if realizing that Floyd is a life force defying the deaths in her family. When they have secured themselves on elevated ground, he "violate[s]" (200) her unconcernedly as a natural part of daily conduct, and feeds her with "wild" meat he has prepared himself. Jenny feels benumbed, but she manages to proclaim her small hope "you and I could be far away. I wish for a little house" (201). This "little house" marks clearly the antithesis of the Lockhart house.

The destruction of The Landing houses not only suggests Jenny's ravaged virginity but the town's recurring subordination to nature's savagery:

In The Landing the houses had turned a little, like people whose skirts are pulled. Where the front of the Lockhart house had been pulled away, the furniture, that had been carried out of the corners by the river and rocked about, stood in the middle of the floor and showed down its back the curly yellow grain, like its long hair. (203)

Jenny finds that the Lockhart house itself, after the waters have withdrawn, has

now suffered regression; "it stood as before, except that in the yellow and windy light it seemed to draw its galleries to itself, to return to its cave of night and trees, crouched like a child going backwards to the womb" (203-204). Her tendency to withdraw, desiring ultimate security in the womb, is replaced by her recognition that "when the house was clean again she felt that there was no place to hide in it, not one room" (204). The "whole new ecstasy . . . of cleaning" (204) demonstrates her intentional demolition of the house as a refuge.

This change that has occurred to the Lockhart house also means her social death in the community. The old "ladies" visit Jenny, whom they used to consider "too good . . . to come out" (180), to give admonition about her relationship with Floyd. Jenny's personal rebirth, driven by her feelings for Floyd, is inseparable from her wish to escape from entrapment and her desire for light: "a great radiant energy spread intent upon her whole body and fastened her heart beneath its breath" (205). When Jenny was protected by the fortification of the house, her interior used to be empty and dark, as if "nothing began in her own heart" (183), but now "the radiance touched at her heart and her brain, moving within her," and she realizes that "maybe some day she could become bright and shining all at once, as though at the very touch of another with herself" (205). Furthermore, Jenny's identification of herself with the house "with all its rooms dark from the beginning, and someone would have to go slowly from room to room, slowly and darkly, leaving each one lighted behind, before going to the next" (205-206), suggests the transformation of herself from the huge, gloomy Lockhart house to her own brightly-lit "little house." She desires in Floyd a figurative light in her otherwise lifeless "house."

For Jenny, however, who is by nature introversive and apheliotropic, with a melancholic vision of herself walking down the "dark passage" (191) of the well, Floyd is accessible only in a dream where his heart stays "safe and away from the outside" (209). The discrepancy between what Jenny seeks in Floyd and what she will consequently obtain is suggested by Jenny's metaphor for an amber bead that "nobody could ever know about the difference between the radiance that was the surface and the radiance that was inside. There were the two worlds" (209).

Her choice to leave the Lockhart house for the Mississippi River to join

Floyd, to live “outward” in “the way of the traveler” (206) and propel herself towards “what might lie ahead” (206), is her attempt at the integration of the two worlds. The Lockhart house, as last seen by Jenny, is compared to a construct in the abyss of the sea:

As if it were made of shells and pearls and treasures from the sea, the house glinted in the sunset, tinted with the drops of light that seemed to fall slowly through the vaguely stirring leaves. Tenderly as seaweed the long moss swayed. The chimney branched like coral in the upper blue. (211-12)

This passage serves as a reminder of the postmaster’s words “that’s the way a house is, been under water” (194), and also of “the lost Atlantis” (207) which is believed to have sunk under the sea, and from which, townspeople rumor, Floyd ascended. Jenny’s refusal to be victimized by the house of imprisonment is to surface above the dark water, as Floyd’s fathers are said to have survived their destiny of submersion.

When Jenny comes to the river, instead of finding Floyd, she is raped in one shanty boat by multiple rivermen, who had been throwing knives at a tree. Descriptions of the assault such as “a rude laugh covered her cry, and somehow both the harsh human sounds could easily have been heard as rejoicing, going out over the river in the dark night,” or “the original smile now crossed Jenny’s face, and hung there no matter what was done to her” (214), lead most Welty scholars to see Jenny’s rape in a positive light, as a “necessary part of coming into life” (Vande Kieft 63) or an awareness “of the price exacted for following her lover’s summons” (Kreyling 30) or a “deni[al] of death in a way”¹⁸ or choice of rape between “the two dismal alternatives” “captivity or rape.”¹⁹

However, Schmidt calls into question this established interpretation, comparing Jenny’s despair for the conventional gender roles in her “original smile” to “a bit of color that kindles in the sky after the light has gone” (214). Schmidt’s argument for Jenny’s despair is “one crucial sentence” that “all things, river, sky, fire, and air, seemed the same color that is seen behind the closed eyelids, the color of day when vision and despair are the same thing” (212) (Schmidt 128). Schmidt’s reference to the passage that occurs much earlier in the text is irrelevant to Jenny’s feelings as she is raped. Moreover,

since the text says "vision and despair," it would be unreasonable to emphasize despair alone.

Indeed, the dismal tone of the story, which McKenzie observes starting in the dark with the old man's nightmare and closing in the dark with the old woman's questions,²⁰ is persistent. The closing sentences of the story have too manifest a sexual connotation: "the younger boys separated and took their turns throwing knives with a dull *pit* at the tree" (214). The use of the knife indicates "male violence toward women . . . passed down from one generation to the next" (Schmidt 128) and a "displaced symbol of Billy Floyd's essentially cruel effect on Jenny" (Weston 180). Moreover, pointing out that we do not see Jenny any more in the text, Weston even notes Floyd's oblivion to Jenny and the probability of her living as a riverfront prostitute. From these negative viewpoints, Jenny's travel would be a mere transition from patriarchal confinement to sexual confinement (Schmidt 128, Weston 41).

However, Jenny rather voluntarily, not due to her childish obedience (Weston 41), undertakes sexual violence inflicted on her as an act of integration. Violence and its relationship to sexuality is one factor that shakes the status quo. She knows sexuality is a basic requisite to catapult herself out of the house of death into the world and replenish the house of her flesh, for she responds to the rivermen with "Go back," exactly as she did to Floyd. McKenzie remarks, "the uniformity of color symbolizes the oneness with which Jenny accepts the world and her place in it" (McKenzie 220), and, as Kreyling says, Jenny has plunged into the mystery of "complexity in human consciousness and love, the simultaneity of object and subject" (Kreyling 30). We should be reminded of Jenny's allusion to the agencies that might light dark rooms one by one, as an understated prediction of this multiple rape. The spot of the mass rape—a houseboat—is an uncanny dialectic of the Lockhart house and Jenny's "little house." The fact that it is "grounded" implies that Jenny's "houseboat" has failed to reflect the dynamism and mobility of Floyd's boat. She despairs, but simultaneously she rejoices over the attained synthesis of all opposing elements, including the two house images.

The verification of the positive nature of her experience is the cameo appearance of the old woman. Her three questions, "Is she asleep? Is she in a spell? Or is she dead?" (214) naively epitomize the way Jenny has tread so far: her slumberous obedience, her spellbound love, and her symbolic death. The old woman's "nodd[ing] out to the flowing river, with the firelight following

her face and showing its dignity" (214), signifies her approval of the heroine's unguided commitment to living a life of possible confluence with the "flowing river," as the woman herself has presumably attained "dignity" from her intimate relationship with the workings of nature.

In this way both positive and negative prospects and aspects, commitment and confinement, are juxtaposed for Jenny's future. "At the Landing" is, after all, a desperate attempt at integration of conflicting dimensions—captivity and freedom, protection and propulsion, innocence and experience, settlement and journey, the Lockhart house and the "little house," dark and light, death and life, including "vision and despair."

The three young protagonists in "The Winds," "At the Landing," and "A Memory" respectively harbor two opposing house images. They have their houses of childhood demolished as well as experiencing their own transformation as an essential passage to a life at once autonomous and involved. The extent of the demolition, expansive or extinctive, physical or figurative, welcome or averted, surely vary, but the adolescents symbolically participate in the houses' demise to attain a fuller exposure to the different potentials and values of the world. Part of the experience of adolescence is learning to bring the inside world to the outside, and vice versa, in integration.

Notes

- 1 Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991) 10.
- 2 Chandler 18.
- 3 Dorothy G. Griffin, "The House as Container: Architecture and Myth in *Delta Wedding*," *Welty: A Life in Literature*, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987) 97.
- 4 Peter Schmidt, *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991) 150. All subsequent citations are in the text.
- 5 Cheryl Burgess, "From Metaphor to Manifestation: The Artist in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*," *Eudora Welty: Eye of the Storyteller*, ed. Dawn Trouard (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1989) 134. All subsequent citations are in the text.
- 6 Eudora Welty, "A Memory," *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1941) 147. All subsequent citations are in the text.
- 7 Ruth M. Vande Kieft, *Eudora Welty* (Boston: Twayne, 1962) 27.
- 8 Danièle Pitavy-Souques, "A Blazing Butterfly: The Modernity of Eudora Welty" *Welty: A Life in Literature*,

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- ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987) 120. All subsequent citations are in the text.
- 9 Barbara Harrell Carson, *Eudora Welty: Two Pictures at Once in Her Frame* (Troy, NY: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1992) 48. All subsequent citations are in the text.
 - 10 Michael Kreyling, *Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980) 12. All subsequent citations are in the text.
 - 11 Eudora Welty, "The Winds," *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1943) 122. All subsequent citations are in the text.
 - 12 The children, presumably fostered, of the double-house "in the course of the summer ... would change to an entirely new set" (123).
 - 13 See another "wrong smell of cooked cabbage that suggests a different cultural and social background in a homogenous community in "June Recital," *The Golden Apples* (New York: Harcourt, 1945) 62.
 - 14 Welty also inserts an episode of an unretrieved ball as a signature of a seclusive premise in *The Optimist's Daughter* (New York: Random House, 1972) 61.
 - 15 Schmidt gives a feminist interpretation that an obsessive desire to be a "lady in fashionable pumps" may eventually turn a woman into a repressive old maid like Cornella's foster mother, with a "cracked voice" and unfashionable ribbons in her hair (Schmidt 149-50).
 - 16 Eudora Welty, "At the Landing," *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1943) 182. All subsequent citations are in the text.
 - 17 Ruth D. Weston, *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994) 40. All subsequent citations are in the text.
 - 18 Danièle Pitavy-Souques, "Of Suffering and Joy: Aspects of Storytelling in Welty's Short Fiction," *Eudora Welty: the Eye of the Storyteller*, ed. Dawn Trouard (Kent, OH: Kent State UP) 149.
 - 19 Franziska Gygas, *Serious Daring from Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 60.
 - 20 Barbara Mckenzie, "The Eye of Time: The Photographs of Eudora Welty," *Eudora Welty: Thirteen Essays*, ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1983) 217. All subsequent citations are in the text.