To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ellen McNutt Millsaps, entitled "The Family in Four Novels of Eudora Welty." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Robert Drake, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

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Graduate Studies and Research

THE FAMILY IN FOUR NOVELS OF EUDORA WELTY

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Ellen McNutt Millsaps

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ABSTRACT

It becomes evident from a study of Eudora Welty's writing that the family occupies a very central place. This emphasis is particularly evident in four of her novels: Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, Losing Battles, and The Optimist's Daughter. In her writing, there are two main groups into which these families may be divided based on their attitudes: the traditionalists and the moderns.

The traditionalists, who are bound to a specific location by family ties, stand firm on their loyalty to blood and memory. They are committed to the past and its traditions as the best possible model for living in the present, and they have an extended family organization in which several generations of family members live together or in close proximity. The moderns, on the other hand, are essentially rootless, recognizing no ties to the land, to any people other than their immediate family, or to the past.

These families, who are often engaged in a subtle battle for supremacy in Miss Welty's writings, are presented in direct confrontation in the four novels previously cited. In juxtaposing these two types of families in these novels, Eudora Welty shows both good and

bad aspects of each type; however, the evidence suggests that she favors the traditional type, with its emphasis on blood ties and the past, and is fearful of the effects of the moderns' de-emphasis of or total lack of attention to such values. In spite of Miss Welty's evident partiality for the traditionalists, however, her exposure of their unfavorable aspects as well as her depiction of some favorable characteristics of the moderns indicates a feeling that some of the changes espoused by the moderns may have to be incorporated by the traditionalists before they can survive. Although most of Miss Welty's families are Southern, her observations concerning the traditional and modern families are applicable in any culture based on tradition.

In this study, Chapters II and III are devoted to the traditional and modern families, respectively. Chapter IV explores the beneficial as well as harmful functions of each family type in order to point out those aspects Miss Welty seems to favor in each, and to show her lack of bias in writing about these two family types. Finally, Chapter V completes the study by noting several possible trends in Miss Welty's treatment of the family which are perhaps suggested in an overview of these novels. One such trend is that while the settings of these novels become more modern, the modern type of family increases in

dominance while the traditional type of family weakens. This chapter also explores a possible accommodation between the two conflicting types of families in which a solution may be found in those types of characters able to accept qualities of both family types. Finally, the effect of Miss Welty's concern with the family on her stature as a writer is examined and her place in the novel of manners tradition is noted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As one of our oldest and most important human institutions, the family has played a vital role in our society. Particularly in the American South, the emphasis on family has developed over many years into a major preoccupation which has tended to "transcend all other interests and affections," as Ellington White states.[1] This is not to say that members of families in other parts of the country care any less about one another; it is simply that, as James Dickey says, though a Southerner has lived elsewhere, he "can think of no other region where the family, on out through distant cousins, nephews, great-uncles and aunts, has such actual solidity and warmth as it does in the South."[2]

Since the subject of family is so prominent in this region, it is not surprising that it has occupied a central place in the work of most twentieth-century Southern

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[1]Ellington White, "The View from the Window," in The Lasting South: Fourteen Southerners Look at Their Home, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and James Jackson Kilpatrick (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1957), p. 169.

[2]James Dickey, "Notes on the Decline of Outrage," in South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 86.

writers.[3] One of our leading modern writers for whom the family has served as a major fictional concern is Eudora Welty. From her first published story in 1936, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," concerning a salesman's recognition of the emptiness of his life when confronted with a poor but emotionally complete family, to her latest novel, The Optimist's Daughter, published in 1972, exploring a second marriage and its effects on family members, her focus has centered on the family.

Some of Miss Welty's comments concerning her work illustrate her preoccupation with family matters. In an interview with Charles T. Bunting in 1972, she said that she consciously chose a time for Delta Wedding, 1923, when there were no wars or unusual catastrophes so that her characters would be "free to have a family story . . . I wanted to write a story that showed the solidity of this family and the life that went on on a small scale in a world of its own.[4] Again she commented when asked about The Optimist's Daughter, her latest novel, "It too is a family story."[5] Miss Welty further reveals her interest

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[3]Thomas H. Landess, "More Trouble in Mississippi: Family vs. Antifamily in Miss Welty's Losing Battles," Sewanee Review, 79 (1971), 627.

[4]Charles T. Bunting, "'The Interior World:' An Interview with Eudora Welty," Southern Review, 8 (1972), 721.

[5]Ibid., p. 724.

in family in several comments about one of her favorite authors, Jane Austen. She writes that "Jane Austen was born knowing a great deal--for one thing, that the interesting situations of life can, and notably do, take place at home."[6]

Not surprisingly, most of Miss Welty's novels are set in a home situation and are about family matters. Most of the action in Delta Wedding occurs at or near Shellmound, the plantation home of the Fairchilds, where the family's preparations for a wedding are in progress. The Ponder Heart takes place in the vicinity of the Beulah Hotel, home of Edna Earle Ponder and the occasional home of Uncle Daniel, and is concerned with Edna Earle's efforts to keep the family together and going; Losing Battles is about the annual family reunion at the Renfros' home; and most of The Optimist's Daughter takes place at the McKelva family home, where friends gather to help with the Judge's funeral. In addition, several of Miss Welty's short stories, such as "Why I Live at the P.O." and "Clytie" in A Curtain of Green (1941), "At the Landing" in The Wide Net (1943), and the stories collected in The Golden Apples (1949) are concerned with the influence of

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[6]Eudora Welty, "A Note on Jane Austen," Shenandoah, 20 (1969), 5.

the family on its members. These examples testify to Miss Welty's concurrence with Jane Austen's belief that "the unit of everything worth knowing in life is in the family, that family relationships are the natural basis of every other relationship and the source of understanding all the others."[7]

Further emphasizing the strategic role of family in Miss Welty's writings are the comments of several critics who have seen this concern in her work. Regarding Delta Wedding, Charles Poore states that "the interplay of family life, with a dozen different people saying and doing a dozen different things all at the same time, is wonderfully handled by Miss Welty so that no detail is lost."[8] Concerning the same novel, Hamilton Basso concludes that "the portrait she gives us of a large Southern family is nothing short of wonderful,"[9] while John Crowe Ransom exclaims,

> What a family sense they [the Fairchilds] have! They look at each other with little starts of love and understanding. They stop to be glad for their own happiness, and then for their faults and failures if necessary, confident that

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[7]Ibid., p. 4.

[8]Charles Poore, "A Fine Novel of the Deep South," The New York Times Book Review, 14 April 1946, p. 1.

[9]Hamilton Basso, "Look Away, Look Away, Look Away," The New Yorker, 11 May 1946, p. 86.

> everything is according to the mysterious requirements of the family.[10]

Along the same lines, James Boatwright describes Losing Battles as "the clear-headed, keenly observed, and loving portrayal of a family's life, a community's, in all its variety, quirkiness, energy."[11] Discussing the family solidity in Losing Battles, Robert Griffin writes that "clearly Miss Welty finds this fascinating,"[12] while Jonathan Yardley comments concerning the same family:

> In a country and a region which have romanticized "family," and at a time when the institution is either changing or disintegrating, she simultaneously celebrates it and notes its decline.[13]

And Robert Drake says that the assumption "that the family, with all its rich and complex giving and taking, constitutes the ultimate reality--is fundamental in much of Miss Welty's work."[14]

While other examples of similar comments could be given, these reflect the widespread recognition of Miss

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[10]John Crowe Ransom, "Delta Fiction," Kenyon Review, 8 (1946), 504.

[11]James Boatwright, "'I call this a reunion to remember, all!'" The New York Times Book Review, 12 April 1970, p. 1.

[12]Robert J. Griffin, "The Ballad of Banner, Miss.," Nation, 1 June 1970, p. 663.

[13]Jonathan Yardley, "The Last Good One?" New Republic, 9 May 1970, p. 35.

[14]Robert Y. Drake, Jr., "Comments on Two Eudora Welty Stories," Mississippi Quarterly, 13 (1960), 26-27.

Welty's concern with family. A thorough review of scholarship, however, reveals that such studies of Miss Welty's writings usually are confined to just one particular novel or short story; no in-depth study has been made of the families in her works collectively to examine the implications Miss Welty seems to be making as a whole. It seems then that a need for a study such as this one here exists in view of Miss Welty's stature as a writer[15] and of her open avowal of family as a topic basic to her writing.

It becomes evident from such a study of Miss Welty's writings that there are two main groups into which her families may be divided: the traditionalists and the moderns. The differences between these two groups have nothing to do with class distinctions or wealth, for the traditionalists include not only the comfortably well-off, aristocratic Fairchilds, but also the dirt-poor, lower-middle-class Renfros of Losing Battles. Rather, the basis for distinction between these two types lies in the

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[15]Among the awards and recognition Miss Welty has received are the following: three O. Henry Memorial Prizes, two Guggenheim Fellowships, a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters for the most distinguished work of American fiction for the five-year period between 1950-1955, a Ford Foundation grant, and honorary degrees from the University of Wisconsin and Smith College.

intangible realm of attitudes. The traditionalists, who are bound to a specific location by family ties, stand firm on their loyalty to blood and memory. As this name implies, they are characterized by a firm adherence to the past and its traditions as the best possible model for living in the present. Their family structure in which several generations of family members live together or in close proximity (called an extended family structure by sociologists[16]) goes back to pioneer days when families lived closely together for their mutual protection, economic assistance, and spiritual sustenance. The physical closeness of family members, along with the uncertainties encountered in a sparsely settled environment, encouraged the development of strong bonds between family members, bonds which have tended to become even more strong over the years. In addition, the bonds between a family and its own particular plot of land became a source not only of livelihood but also of pride and identity, as will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The moderns, however, are essentially rootless, recognizing no ties to the land, to any people other than their immediate family, or to the past. Since the past is meaningless to them, and the present is less than

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[16]Mirra Komarovsky, "Sociologists Look at the Family," in Life in Families, ed. Helen MacGill Hughes (Boston: Holbrook Press, Inc., 1971), p. 17.

desirable because their spouses, who are usually of the traditional mold,[17] are thus subject to the practices of their traditional extended families, they eagerly anticipate a future time of complete separation from all extended family attachments. An outgrowth of their attitude toward the past is that they have no reverence for the traditional pieties of loyalty, honor, duty, and responsibility, either to their extended family or to place. Instead, they tend to be committed to themselves and to their immediate families. This limited commitment therefore produces a very small family structure composed only of husband, wife, and children. No ties of kinship are recognized beyond this point.

As might be expected from their contrasting ideologies, these two family types are often engaged in a subtle battle for supremacy in Miss Welty's writings. Usually just one of these types of families is found in Miss Welty's short stories; for example, "Clytie" and "At the Landing" are each concerned with the older, traditional type of family only. However, in four of Miss Welty's novels, the traditional and modern types of families are presented in confrontation: Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, Losing Battles, and The Optimist's Daughter. In

[17]The fact that moderns and traditionalists are intermarrying is significant as an indication that a solution to their conflicts is indeed feasible.

juxtaposing these two types of families in these novels, Eudora Welty shows both good and bad aspects of each type; however, the evidence suggests that she favors the traditional type, with its emphasis on blood ties and the past, and is fearful of the effects of the moderns' de-emphasis of or total lack of attention to such values. One does not find this concern only in her novels; it is present in several of her short stories as well. "Flowers for Marjorie" illustrates the effects of a young couple's total isolation from any familial or cultural identity, while "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitch-hikers" both illustrate the lonely effects of rootlessness on two salesmen who are eternally on the move but who belong nowhere. As Albert J. Griffith suggests concerning "Death of a Traveling Salesman," unless man can accept basic values again, he will be in Bowman's position: "lost, helpless, delirious at the end of his road."[18]

In spite of Miss Welty's evident partiality for the traditionalists, her exposure of their unfavorable aspects as well as her depiction of some favorable characteristics of the moderns indicates a feeling that some of the changes espoused by the moderns may have to be incorporated by the traditionalists before they can survive. It is as if she

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[18]Albert J. Griffith, "Welty's 'Death of a Traveling Salesman,'" The Explicator, 20, No. 5 (1962), Item 38.

is advocating a mean between two extremes which must be adopted before the family can continue as an influential and viable institution. Further, Miss Welty's balanced treatment of these two family types keeps her from writing propaganda. Hers is not a biased presentation as the evidence, particularly in Chapter IV, will indicate.

Although most of Miss Welty's families are Southern (all of those treated in this study are Southerners), her observations concerning the traditional and modern families are applicable in any culture based on tradition. Miss Welty's characters "talk Southern, act Southern, and eat Southern," affirms Hamilton Basso, "just as the people in Gogol's 'Dead Souls' talk Russian, act Russian, and eat Russian, but they have a universal application."[19] Further strengthening the idea of the universality of Miss Welty's views, Peggy Prenshaw notes, "It is characteristic of Miss Welty's works that regardless of however directly they focus on experiences typical of Mississippi, they manage to express those of the human condition as well."[20]

This dissertation, then, will examine these four

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[19]Hamilton Basso, "Morgana, Mississippi," The New Yorker, 3 Sept. 1949, p. 63.

[20]Peggy Prenshaw, "Cultural Patterns in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding and 'The Demonstrators,'" Notes on Mississippi Writers, 3 (1970), 68.

novels in the light of the two types of families and their conflicting ideologies present in each novel. The primary reason for choosing these novels is that they show the two family types in sharp confrontations which reveal the important characteristics of each. For this reason, and also because it is a different type of novel, one built on fantasy and folk-tales and not meant to be a realistic picture of family life, The Robber Bridegroom (1942) has been excluded from this study. In addition, the stories do not offer so complex a view of these two family types as do the novels, for their length usually prohibits the extensive treatment of more than one family type per story. Thus, these stories do not offer the opportunities of in-depth analysis presented by the novels. Therefore, this study will be focused primarily on the four novels, though appropriate short stories will also be considered as aids to further illumination.

The traditional family category is represented in Miss Welty's works mainly by blood relatives[21] in families

[21]Some characters who are not blood-relatives, such as Ellen in Delta Wedding, are still in the traditional mold even though they may be "outsiders" to the particular family traditions into which they have married. For example, Ellen and Robbie are both "outsiders" to the Fairchild traditions; yet Ellen is a traditionalist because of her background in another traditional culture and because of her acceptance of the traditional values. Robbie, however, is a modern because of her lack of a background in which tradition is important and because of her rejection of traditional pieties.

such as the following: the Fairchilds of Delta Wedding; the Ponders in The Ponder Heart; the Renfros in Losing Battles; and the McKelvas in The Optimist's Daughter. Representatives of the modern category[22] include the following characters: Robbie in Delta Wedding; Bonnie Dee in The Ponder Heart; Gloria in Losing Battles; and Fay in The Optimist's Daughter. Chapters II and III will be devoted to a study of the traditional and modern families, respectively. The characteristics of each type based on Miss Welty's depiction of them in her writing will be presented in an effort to define more clearly the basic ideology of each and to show where each places primary emphasis. No effort has been made to give examples from each of the four novels to illustrate every characteristic about a certain family type, although most of the time each point could be illustrated adequately from any one of them. In addition, as previously mentioned, some short stories will be used where applicable for further illustration. The primary aim of each of these chapters will be to delineate both types sufficiently so that their contrasting functions may be treated specifically in Chapter IV.

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[22]Several characters who belong to traditional families have modern leanings, such as George, Shelley, and Dabney in Delta Wedding. These "in-between" types of characters will be discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter IV, then, will explore the beneficial as well as harmful functions of each family type in order to point out those aspects Miss Welty seems to favor in each and to show her lack of bias in writing about these two family types.

The Conclusion, or Chapter V, will complete the study by noting several possible trends which are perhaps suggested in an overview of these novels. Although it is quite tempting to emphasize these trends as conclusive proof of the previously stated thesis, it is realized that more evidence is needed before such a categorical statement can be made. Nevertheless, it is interesting to examine these ideas as possible support for the thesis.

One of the interesting ideas that emerges from a study of these four novels is that as the settings of the novels become more modern, the modern type of family increases in dominance while the traditional type of family weakens. Further, as the moderns become more dominant, their sympathetic qualities decrease, with the culmination of this particular trend in Fay of The Optimist's Daughter. These occurrences would seem to bear out the thesis that Miss Welty, in her depiction of these two types of families, seems to be fearful of the effects of the moderns' de-emphasis of or total lack of attention to the values of the traditionalists.

Regardless of the reliability of my reading of these trends, there is sufficient evidence, as will be seen particularly in Chapter IV, to indicate Miss Welty's evident favoring of the traditionalist stance through her repeated use of such characters, whose actions and attitudes often appear more favorable than those of the moderns.

In addition to these trends, Chapter V will also explore a possible accommodation between the two conflicting types of families in which a solution may be found in those types of characters able to accept qualities of both family types. Finally, the effect of Miss Welty's concern with the family on her stature as a writer will be examined, and her place in the novel of manners tradition will be noted.

A list of primary and secondary material cited in this dissertation will be included at the end.

CHAPTER II

THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

The predominant characteristics of the traditional family stem from its basic structure. As noted in Chapter I, this family structure is an extended one, meaning that several generations of family members live together or in close proximity. In earlier times, this type of structure was necessary for the family's mutual protection and economic assistance in a sparsely-settled country. The more people there were to work together for a common goal, the better were their chances for survival. Since the traditional family tends to look to the past for examples and to follow traditions closely, we find that in the more modern times of Miss Welty's novels (beginning with Delta Wedding, which is set in the 1920's), this type of family still follows the earlier pattern of family organization even though the original reasons for adopting this pattern have ceased to be pressing concerns. In Delta Wedding, for example, the plantation home at Shellmound abounds with several generations of Fairchild relatives: Great-Aunts Mac and Shannon live with Battle and Ellen Fairchild, their eight children, and cousin Maureen. In addition, Battle's two

sisters, Jim Allen and Primrose, live close by at the Grove; and the newlyweds, Dabney and Troy, will live at Marmion, the plantation home of the legendary Denis Fairchild. To this family, closeness is a necessity. As Aunt Jim Allen tells Dabney on the eve of her wedding to Troy, the overseer, "It's not like you were going away, or out of the Delta. Things aren't going to be any different, are they?"[1] In The Ponder Heart, although Edna Earle's family is almost extinct ("Papa . . . left home at an early age, nobody ever makes the mistake of asking about him, and Mama never did hold up--she just had me and quit; she was the last of the Bells."),[2] she had been reared in an extended family situation with her near-contemporary, Uncle Daniel Ponder, by her grandfather and grandmother. In the third novel of this study, Losing Battles, a family of four generations, Granny Vaughn, Beulah and Ralph Renfro, their five children, and Jack and his family, Gloria and Lady May, live together under one roof. The sanctity of family closeness is stressed on several occasions in this novel. For example, Uncle Noah

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[1]Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1946), p. 48. Subsequent references to this work will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

[2]Eudora Welty, The Ponder Heart (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954), p. 13. Subsequent references will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

Webster Beecham's new wife, Cleo, is praised for "keep-[ing] house for him fine except they're . . . living in hers, and it's clear down away from us all in South Mississippi." Miss Beulah adds, "He thinks we've forgiven him for it."[3] In addition, one of the grandchildren, Curtis, apologetically explains why the rest of the grandchildren have left:

> "Too bad we boys had to ever leave Grandpa and Granny and the old farm," Uncle Curtis said. "All we boys had to come away and leave the old place so as to get by. We all tried not to take ourselves too far" (Losing Battles, p. 194).

Giving some measure of assurance, Mr. Renfro says, "Well, . . . we was never going to move, me and Beulah. Granny's got us. And now, Jack and his family--we got them" (Losing Battles, p. 195).

The Optimist's Daughter is the only novel of the four for which the extended family definition does not seem to be applicable. There are only Judge McKelva and his second wife, Fay, who live at the family home in Mount Salus, and Judge McKelva's widowed daughter, Laurel, who lives in Chicago. Yet in this novel, the functions of the family group are performed by the close friends in the town of Mount Salus. When Laurel returns from New Orleans

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[3]Eudora Welty, Losing Battles (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 77. Subsequent references to this work will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

with the Judge's body, she is met at the train by the "bridesmaids," the six girls who had been in her wedding; and several of the oldest friends, Miss Tennyson, Major Bullock, and Miss Adele Courtland, have taken charge of funeral preparations in the house.

As mentioned earlier, the distinguishing characteristics of this traditional type of family (the emphasis on blood, memory, and place) developed from the extended type of family structure and are present in the world of Miss Welty's writings as survivals from earlier times. The first of these main characteristics of this family type is its emphasis on blood ties. This emphasis on strong bonds between relatives, which probably arose from the geographical nearness of several generations of family members living closely together as well as from their dependence on each other for survival, produced several results: the family tended to band together to exclude outsiders; it developed a loyalty to the group and defensiveness in its actions; it encouraged participation by the family group in any undertaking; and it encouraged the love of socializing among family members.

The first result, the exclusion of outsiders from the family, probably began in the early days of sparse population when, in the face of any outside threat, the relatives would band together to ward off the intrusion

from the outside. In Miss Welty's novels, this banding together to keep out intruders is still very much present. Despite the fact that there is no longer the threat of outside attacks from Indians or wild animals, there is still a very real threat from those outside the family relationship who threaten to destroy its values and change its institutions.

Thus the family has room and understanding only for family members: outsiders are excluded. As Louise Gossett observes, Miss Welty's families keep out "the interloper by refusing him his identity."[4] Although some outsiders do enter the family circle, they usually retain their outsider's status by not being taken into the group's confidence. For example, Aunt Tempe's daughter, Mary Denis, has married a Yankee, an outsider, and has moved out of the Delta. For this, Aunt Tempe seems never to have quite forgiven or understood her. In response to questions concerning Mary Denis's condition, Aunt Tempe replies, "She gets along very well considering she's married to a Yankee that wants his windows washed three times a week" (Delta Wedding, p. 99). Also the fact that she always refers to Mary Denis's husband as either "Mr. Buchanan" or "the Yankee" indicates that she has not

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[4]Louise Y. Gossett, "Violence as Revelation: Eudora Welty," in Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1965), pp. 103-104.

accepted him as a family member: "Mr. Buchanan's the same Yankee he ever was, demands the impossible" (Delta Wedding, p. 104).

In the same novel, Dabney reacts strongly against the violation of blood ties. One day in her childhood when she had wandered off by herself, she happened to see George breaking up a fight between two small Negro boys, and "all the Fairchild in her had screamed at his interfering--at his taking part--caring about anything in the world but them" (Delta Wedding, p. 36).

Two particular characters in Delta Wedding are very cognizant of their exclusion from the inner family circle of the Fairchilds. One is Robbie, who has married George, the darling of the family. One day on a family outing, Shelley enforces the ostracism of Robbie by walking on a railroad track too fast for her in her high heels:

> . . . it was right that she should be shown she dressed the wrong way, and should have to keep taking little runs to catch up, and finally be left as haughty as possible at the approach of a trestle (Delta Wedding, p. 88).

Robbie is very much aware of the Fairchilds' lack of acceptance of her as is revealed when she finally returns to George at the Fairchild's house:

> "It's funny. . . . Once I tried to be like the Fairchilds. I thought I knew how. . . . Don't any other people in the world feel like me? . . . Don't any people somewhere love other people so much that they want to be--not like--but the same? I wanted to turn into a Fairchild" (Delta Wedding, p. 165).

There is another person in this novel who has exactly the same feelings of exclusion as Robbie: the motherless Laura. Even though Laura is related to the Fairchilds (her mother was Battle's sister), she still feels a sense of not belonging: when playing hide-and-seek and no one comes to find her, "a feeling of their unawareness of her came over Laura and crushed her more heavily" than Maureen's intentional pushing from the top of the log pile had (Delta Wedding, p. 74). She pictures her dilemma of wanting to be separate for her father's sake and ultimately her own, as she watches a circle game being played:

> It was funny how sometimes you wanted to be in a circle and then you wanted out of it in a rush. Sometimes the circle was for you, sometimes against you, if you were It. . . . It was never a good circle unless you were in it, catching hands, and knowing the song. A circle was ugly without you (Delta Wedding, p. 73).

On another occasion when Dabney's bridesmaid dresses have just been delivered, several family members who grab them and pretend to wear them start dancing and parading between Aunt Ellen and Uncle George. Laura, however, is still on the outside of such family festivities: ". . . somehow she could not go between them like the cousins," so instead she just "waltzed from side to side" (Delta Wedding, p. 102). Throughout the novel, Laura's pathetic attempts to belong are evident: she tries to attract

attention or at least be a part of the news when Shelley and India tell about meeting the family doctor, Dr. Murdock, on a trip into town. They report his meddlesome comments that the Fairchilds had better control their family size before they outgrow the family cemetery. When Troy Flavin, in reaction to their report, emphatically states that Dr. Murdock is "any old fool," Laura, in a bid for attention, quickly imitates his words: "He's a fool, a fool, a fool!" However, calling someone a fool is a breach of family manners[5] that simply cannot be tolerated, as Laura quickly learns. As Battle sternly tells Laura,

> "You could have cussed him out if you wanted to, and we'd all listened. But you call him a fool, or anybody in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta a fool, and I'll blister your behind good for you. . . . Now march in the kitchen and tell Roxie to wash your mouth out with soap" (Delta Wedding, p. 151).

Thus, although Troy is the real culprit, he escapes direct rebuke because he is still an outsider to the family's code and province of control. Laura, however, is squarely in the Fairchild family--at least for this purpose--and thus has no means of escape. The fact that she perceptively recognizes her scapegoat role in the incident is summed up in her recognition that she has to ". . . get her mouth washed out with soap for Troy" (Delta Wedding, p. 152).

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[5]This family code may stem from the Biblical injunction in Matthew 5:22 which states that whoever calls another person a fool will be in danger of hell fire.

On another occasion when the girls are taking baths before the wedding, Laura overhears Dabney giving Bluet her last big-sisterly advice before she is married: "Now, Bluet, you mustn't ever brag" (Delta Wedding, p. 207). After banging on the door to be let in, Laura tries to be one of the group by taking up where Dabney stopped:

> "And, Bluet," said Laura comfortably, "you mustn't ever steal."
>
> "Don't you tell me," said Bluet gently, "just Dabney" (Delta Wedding, p. 208).

Laura's longing for acceptance is nearly fulfilled when Lady Clare develops chicken pox and Laura gets to take her place in the wedding party as a flower girl:

> Laura came in down the little path between people where she was supposed to walk; at last she was out before everybody, one of the wedding party, dressed up like the rest in an identical flower-girl dress, and she scattered rose petals just as quickly as India, just as far as Maureen (Delta Wedding, p. 211).

In connection with this same novel, it also may be mentioned briefly that Troy Flavin, the overseer who is to marry Dabney, is also an outsider whose "foreign" ways cause consternation among the Fairchilds. Yet he is seen as no great threat, for he gives no evidence of wanting to disrupt the family traditions. Although he is an outsider to these traditions as a hill-country Mississippian, he nevertheless is familiar with tradition, although of a different kind, as is apparent when his mother sends him a customary bridal gift of quilts, along with a note expressing her regret that there was no time to make the traditional

bride's quilt. Thus, he, like Ellen, will remain somewhat of an outsider because of different backgrounds; but, again like her, he probably will adapt to the Fairchild ways. As Donald Heiney points out, the family gradually accepts Troy into its circle "only on the assumption that Dabney will go on living in the family as before."[6]

The Ponder Heart also contains numerous examples of the way the Ponders regard everyone who are not of their number as outsiders. Edna Earle states that Grandpa sent Uncle Daniel to the asylum because he was afraid that one day Uncle Daniel would give something to "somebody not kin or responsible at all . . . who might not understand what they had to do" (The Ponder Heart, p. 14). Furthermore, when Bonnie Dee Peacock comes into town, it is immediately apparent to Edna Earle that she is an outsider to the traditions of Clay:

> The Peacocks are the kind of people keep the mirror outside on the front porch, and go out and pick railroad lilies to bring inside the house, and wave at trains till the day they die (The Ponder Heart, p. 29).

The Renfros are faced not only with the problem of outsiders in their family, such as Gloria, but also with those in the community who refuse to acknowledge the

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[6]Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature (Great Neck, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1958), p. 259.

importance of traditions in the continuity of community life. The Comforts fit the latter category in this novel. As Uncle Curtis states, "The Comforts don't know what the word reunion means," and Miss Beulah adds, "Never did I have any use for those Comforts at all, they're the nearest to nothing that ever did come around here. I'm sorry we have 'em" (Losing Battles, p. 60).

When Brother Bethune grabs Judge Moody and brings him up to Granny to wish her a happy birthday, Granny instantly recognizes that he does not belong. She asks, "In whose place? Who are you trying to fool?" and swats with a bunch of dahlias at Judge Moody. As Jack explains, "Granny's jealous of who tries to get in our family" (Losing Battles, p. 210).

Gloria is another outsider in Losing Battles. She has nothing to do with the family, and it makes no demands on her. However, during the reunion Granny divulges some mysterious clues as to Gloria's parentage and the Renfros conclude that Gloria's father was none other than Sam Dale Beecham, thus making her related to everyone there. Now that she is no longer an outsider, the family starts treating her entirely differently. "Get up and join your family, for a change," commands Miss Beulah as she pulls Gloria to her feet. "Go back in the house and wash that face and get rid of some of that tangly hair, then shake

that dress and come out again," she continues (Losing Battles, pp. 270-271). And Jack says comfortingly, "Anyway, they've quit making company out of you, Possum" (Losing Battles, p. 313).

Fay is very definitely the outsider whose entrance into the quiet, traditional life of Mount Salus provokes comment from the residents. Yet she, like Gloria, is an outsider partly by choice, having turned down all offers from the townspeople to make her welcome. When Miss Tennyson had offered to give a sitdown tea for her, Fay had said, "Oh, please don't bother with a big wholesale reception. That kind of thing was for Becky [Judge McKelva's first wife]."[7] No one can understand why the Judge married her; she was just not one of their kind. After the funeral, as the ladies are gathered with Laurel in the garden discussing the future, Miss Adele asks what will be done about Fay.

> ". . . we really lack the first idea of knowing what to do with Clinton's little minx, whom he's left on our hands in such utter disregard for our feelings."
>
> "Short of crowning her over the head with a good solid piece of something," agreed Miss Tennyson (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 115).

Further, besides encouraging the tendency to exclude

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[7]Eudora Welty, The Optimist's Daughter (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 126. Subsequent references to this work will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

outsiders, firm bonds between relatives resulting from living closely together and acting as a group to meet serious threats encouraged the development of strong family loyalty. This spirit of loyalty to the family and defensiveness about its actions are characteristics very evident in Miss Welty's traditional families. An excellent example of this loyalty occurs in "Why I Live at the P.O." Even though Sister is terribly hurt by them, she is still careful to insist that her "family are naturally the main people in China Grove."[8] A further indication of family pride develops in the several references to George's and Dabney's marriages as being "beneath" them. These references emphasize the high opinion with which the Fairchild clan regard themselves. Along the same lines, Tempe further bewails the fact that no one can influence George, but certainly not Robbie, "Old Man Swanson's granddaughter," who is not "fit to take him down" (Delta Wedding, p. 106). Shelley has similar thoughts concerning the conductor of the Yellow Dog, who patronizingly stops his train for her to cross. She thinks, "Who on earth did Old Man Doolittle think he was, that he could even speak to a Fairchild out of that little window!" (Delta Wedding, p. 234). And in the same novel Troy receives a lesson in

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[8]Eudora Welty, "Why I Live at the P.O.," in Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [A Curtain of Green] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 109. Subsequent references to this work will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

family loyalty from Miss Mayo Tucker, who, in response to his statement that the Fairchilds are a close family ("too close, could be") retorts, "A family can't be too close, young man" (Delta Wedding, p. 141).

There is another marriage of social unequals in The Ponder Heart; yet, as Edna Earle determines to tell everybody on the street, "people get married beneath them every day, and I don't see any sign of the world coming to an end. Don't be so small-town" (The Ponder Heart, p. 37).

Ties of blood resulting in family pride so intense that it is "positively irrational"[9] are very evident in Losing Battles. Regardless of the fact that in these Depression times Jack is especially needed at home to help farm, he refuses to offer any explanations or defense of himself in the trial over Curly Stovall's safe. As Miss Beulah says, "We knew full well he wasn't going to stand up in front of the public and tell 'em any of our business. Wasn't going to call his sister's name, even!" (Losing Battles, p. 55). Thus, Jack goes to the penitentiary for a year rather than sacrifice his family's pride. This intense pride is then carried a step further by Mr. Renfro, Jack's father, who decides that to save his family's self-esteem, which is threatened by having a

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[9]Robert J. Griffin, "The Ballad of Banner, Miss.," Nation, 1 June 1970, p. 663.

son in jail, he must put a new tin roof on his house, even if it means giving up things they desperately need:

> "Mr. Renfro give up just about all we had left for that tin top over our heads," said Miss Beulah. "He had to show the reunion single-handed the world don't have to go flying to pieces when the oldest son gives trouble" (Losing Battles, p. 66).

The Renfro family also knows the meaning of family loyalty: one never willfully goes against a member of the family. Even though Homer Champion is the one who arrests Jack, Jack's retaliation is directed only against Curly, who is an outsider. Homer is protected from such action because he married into their family: "Mr. Renfro's and Miss Lexie's sister is his wife. And you know how Jack holds the family," Uncle Percy explains (Losing Battles, p. 41). Likewise, Miss Beulah is scandalized when Homer Champion suggests that Jack would probably vote against him if he could:

> "Homer Champion, my boy would do anything for his family, anything in the world! . . . Look at him! He'd vote for you if that's what's asked of him, and not even stop there!" (Losing Battles, p. 83).

Jack, who thoroughly understands the claims of family, knows that loyalty to his family as well as family pride demand that he leave the reunion, find Judge Moody who is traveling near by, and put him back in the ditch which he helped him out of earlier. After all, it was unthinkable that he, Jack Renfro, had helped the very person who had sent him to prison. The family code demanded that he right

this momentary slip (Losing Battles, p. 103). The intense family pride is shown once again in reaction to Gloria's comment that she is continuing to nurse her baby so that she won't starve. "Dead silence" greets her and finally Miss Beulah comes up to Gloria "in measured steps" and says, "All I'm thankful for this late, Gloria, is that Grandpa Vaughn didn't last long enough to hear that. Has a soul in this household ever been allowed to starve yet?" (Losing Battles, p. 326).

Although pride of family and family loyalty are not so blatantly advertised in The Optimist's Daughter, one nevertheless can see these qualities in Laurel Hand. Her mother's and father's memories are sacred to her, so much so that loyalty to them has made her lock away the bad times they had experienced and remember only the good times, such as hearing their voices reading to each other at night. As was pointed out before, she becomes very defensive when anything is said of either her mother or father that would tend to represent them as less than perfect human beings. The same type of loyalty is present in relation to her husband; this loyalty is evident in the confrontation with Fay over the breadboard Philip had made for her mother. She is horrified at the treatment Fay has given it ("I didn't do anything but crack last year's walnuts on it. With the hammer.") because she sees it,

even if no longer used or useful, as an object to be cherished because of the family associations, while to Fay it is simply an object to be used as she sees fit (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 172).

The ties of blood which were promoted by the family structure in earlier times fostered not only loyalty to the family and pride in its actions, but also encouraged participation by each member in any family undertaking, for the fate of one member was bound up in the fate of the group as a whole. Again, although the original justification is no longer valid, participation as a group in everything that happens is still very much a characteristic of this type of family. As J. A. Bryant remarks, "Family living is participation moment by moment in whatever comes or happens."[10] And in an essay, Miss Welty comments on this quality in Jane Austen's writings, which is very much present in her own work: "Everybody doing everything together--what mastery she has over the scene, the family scene!"[11]

Delta Wedding is a novel of one long group participation--things just aren't done alone, whether it be baking

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[10]J. A. Bryant, Jr., Eudora Welty, Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 66 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1968), p. 25.

[11]Eudora Welty, "A Note on Jane Austen," Shenandoah, 20 (1969), 4.

a cake (the cake recipe of a Fairchild ancestress, Mashula Hines, requires at least Ellen, Roxie, and Laura to make it), or preparing for a wedding, which involves everyone available. Even Ellen's fainting brings all of the Fairchilds together:

> The new screams in the dining room brought in a roomful of Fairchilds with amazing quickness. Robbie backed against the china closet. Orrin was carrying a stunned or dead bird in his cupped hands. The girls, fingers still darting reminiscently to their hair, all fell kneeling, in a stair-steps, around the settee. George was taking off their mother's shoes. Ellen lay with her eyes closed, and with her childlike feet propped shallowly on the inclining end under the fern (Delta Wedding, p. 167).

When the wedding cake comes from Memphis, everyone helps get it from the wagon to the exact middle of the table. Aunt Mac, taking charge, observes: "Now the cake will have to be lifted out by everybody, on the cutting board--there's no two ways about that, if you don't want a ruined toppling thing" (Delta Wedding, p. 200). While Vi'let, Howard, and Little Uncle begin to get the cake on the cutting board, Ellen holds the door open, some of the girls in their nightgowns who are watching proffer suggestions and comments ("It's leaning! It's leaning! . . . It looks like the Leaning Tower of Pisa."), Aunt Tempe threatens ("You watch that cake, Howard! Do you know what'll happen to you if you drop that?"), and India runs in to show them the place on the lace rose that is the

center of Mashula's cloth. Ellen, careful to omit no one who is even distantly related to the Fairchilds from participating in the event, addresses a comment to Mr. Treat, who she remembers is a distant cousin of the Reids (Delta Wedding, pp. 200-201).

A final example of this group participation in Delta Wedding occurs when the wedding pictures are being made for the Memphis newspapers. Normally these pictures are only of the bride and groom, but "Battle wanted the photograph taken of the whole family. . . . Taking absolute charge he grouped his sons and daughters around him the way he wanted them" (Delta Wedding, p. 217).

The characteristic of family participation is evidenced in Edna Earle's active involvement in Uncle Daniel's love life. In fact, she was the main instigator in arranging his first marriage to "Miss" Teacake McGee. Acting on an admiring comment by Uncle Daniel during one of Miss Teacake's church solos ("Miss Teacake's got more breath in her than those [girls] at the Fair, that's what she's got"), Edna Earle adroitly accomplishes their marriage:

> I just asked her for recipes enough times, and told her the real secret of cheese straws--beat it three hundred strokes--and took back a few unimportant things I've said about the Baptists (The Ponder Heart, pp. 25, 27).

Even though Uncle Daniel later manages to marry Bonnie Dee

Peacock without Edna Earle's help, she becomes an active participant in keeping them together. Suggesting that he withhold money from Bonnie Dee in an effort to win her back, Edna Earle, unconsciously assuming her role of co-conspirator, says, "I think we'll try it, Uncle Daniel" (The Ponder Heart, p. 73, italics mine). Later, on the witness stand, Edna Earle testifies that she was present for Uncle Daniel's and Bonnie Dee's reunion: "Would I have missed it for the world?" she asks (The Ponder Heart, p. 112). Edna Earle carries her participation one step further when she tries to shield Uncle Daniel at dinner during the trial's recess. She states,

> I hardly had a chance to swallow my fresh peach pie. When somebody spoke to Uncle Daniel, I tried to answer for him, too, if I could (The Ponder Heart, p. 120).

Family participation in whatever happens is also very evident in Losing Battles. This family does almost everything as a unit. When Ella Fay loses Granny's wedding ring, all of the family look for it; when Jack is called to court, the entire family is present to support him; when Jack is in prison, the family does his work: Miss Beulah explains,

> "Vaughn did Jack's work and some of mine, and I did his, and the girls they scrubbed and hauled and fetched and carried, and did every bit of their own part, and that was the system we used" (Losing Battles, p. 64).

When Jack determines to undo the help he has given the Judge, the family volunteers to help him: "We'll be right behind you to a man," says Uncle Curtis (Losing Battles, p. 84). Furthermore, when Jack is trying to get Judge Moody's car down from Banner Top, the family responds to his need: Elvie comes coasting down the hill, bringing the Banner school bus to haul the car down, Mr. Renfro plants a few charges of dynamite supposedly to blast a tree out of the car's path, and Miss Beulah hangs on to Jack as part of the human chain to keep the Buick from going over the cliff. One distressing part of the family's unit participation, however, occurs to Jack when he learns that Curly Stovall, his old enemy, has intentions of marrying into his family: "With Uncle Homer out of the running, we'll even have to vote for you from now on!" Jack laments. Since the Renfros characteristically vote as a family, "that's a hundred votes right there" as Curly observes (Losing Battles, p. 412).

Although Laurel is an only child, the townspeople of Mount Salus participate as a family with her in all events. When she was married to Philip, her six girl friends served as bridesmaids and these same friends function as a group whenever Laurel is in town. They are especially in evidence when her father dies, when, with

other old family friends, they arrive at Laurel's home to comfort her:

> Half a dozen--a dozen--old family friends had been waiting here in the house. . . . Laurel found herself sitting at her old place at the dinner table, the only one seated, while everybody else was trying to wait on her. Miss Tennyson stood right at her shoulder, to make her eat (The Optimist's Daughter, pp. 51, 53).

These friends provide food, are present to receive guests, and are with Laurel both during and after the funeral. These townspeople act in the same way as those of The Golden Apples: when Kate Rainey dies, Mrs. Lizzie Stark, who usually supervises at such events, is sick, so she sends her maid to help out.

Thus, from these examples, participation as a family unit, as well as the exclusion of outsiders and the development of family loyalty, can be seen as outgrowths of the strong emphasis on blood ties. A final by-product of this early family closeness was the development of the love of socializing.

In earlier times when different families tended to be somewhat isolated from each other, any free time generally was spent with members of one's own family. Thus this type of family enjoyed the company of other family members as well as that of visitors, a trait which is again present in these novels. In Delta Wedding, for example, we are told that "it was hard to ever quite leave

the dining room after supper" (Delta Wedding, p. 17). Enjoying each other's company, the family members sit and talk about the day's events or recount some favorite story. This same love of visiting is shared by Uncle Daniel, who "loves society" so much that if he hears voices, "he'll come right down those stairs, supper ready or no . . . take the other end of the sofa and then move closer up to see what you've got to say for yourself" (The Ponder Heart, p. 7).

The members of the Renfro-Beecham clan enjoy visiting so much that they gather annually for a reunion. As the following description emphasizes, they are not at all bothered by lack of space; with family filling every inch of the house, visiting spills over into the yard:

> Now there was family everywhere, front gallery and back, tracking in and out of the company room, filling the bedrooms and kitchen, breasting the passage. The passageway itself was creaking; sometimes it swayed under the step and sometimes it seemed to tremble of itself. . . . With chairs, beds, windowsills, steps, boxes, kegs, and buckets all taken up and little room left on the floor, they overflowed into the yard, and the men squatted down in the shade (Losing Battles, pp. 17-18).

The same sociable trait can be observed in Mount Salus in The Optimist's Daughter. The older ladies of the town visit Laurel and recount old times, even suggesting that if she would return to Mount Salus, they "could have as tough a bridge foursome" as they had when Laurel's

mother was playing (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 134). The "bridesmaids" also take Laurel in hand, meeting her en masse at the train and taking her to the plane when she leaves.

A close corollary to the traditional family's love of visiting is their continual talking. This talking is yet another manifestation of the sociable characteristic of these people which is fostered by their close daily contact with one another. In The Ponder Heart, Edna Earle Ponder is one of those characters who never stops for breath until the last sentence of the novel. And her Uncle Daniel, who would "just pine and languish" if "he wasn't in the thick of things, and couldn't tell you about them when they did happen" (The Ponder Heart, p. 67), has to "practice" not talking for his appearance at the trial (The Ponder Heart, p. 85). Even so, silence proves too much for his constitution to bear and he is determined to testify. As he says, "I'd rather be up there talking myself than hear you and every one of these other folks put together" (The Ponder Heart, p. 130). Vaughn Renfro is one character who would like to escape this continual talking; he discovers, however, that even when all of the company had gone home,

> as long as he listened, sound prevailed. . . . It was all-present enough to spill over into voices, as everything, he was ready to believe now, threatened to do. . . . Even after people

> gave up each other's company, said good-bye and went home, if there was only one left, Vaughn Renfro, the world around him was still one huge, soul-defying reunion (Losing Battles, p. 363).

And Brother Bethune of the same novel poses a situation almost beyond comprehension to the reunion when he tells them that

> "On the Day of Judgment and at the Sounding of the Trumpet . . . Banner Cemetery is going to be throwed open like a hill of potatoes! . . . You'll all be left without words. Without words! Can you believe it? Think about that!" (Losing Battles, p. 212).

As Josephine Pinckney points out, this fondness for talking can be considered a key to several things in the psychology of a Southerner. Since he usually values a good story-telling ability more than the ability to philosophize, his talk generally is of people and the past, never of truth or progress,[12] and his judgments on issues are personal, based on gossip and his own observations.[13] Allen Tate has also observed the tendency of Southerners to avoid abstractions in their conversation. As he states,

> The Southerner always talks to somebody else, and this somebody else, after varying intervals, is

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[12]Josephine Pinckney, "Bulwarks Against Change," in Culture in the South, ed. W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), p. 43.

[13]Thomas H. Landess, "More Trouble in Mississippi: Family vs. Antifamily in Miss Welty's Losing Battles," Sewanee Review, 79 (1971), 631.

> given his turn; but the conversation is always among rhetoricians; that is to say, the typical Southern conversation is not going anywhere; it is not about anything. It is about the people who are talking, even if they never refer to themselves, which they usually don't, since conversation is only an expression of manners, the purpose of which is to make everybody happy.[14]

He finds that this mode of conversation was probably transmitted to the "accomplished Christian gentleman of the Old South" by his "Renaissance spiritual ancestors, who had been the creation of the rhetorical tradition, out of Aristotle through Cicero, distilled finally by Castiglione."[15] He contrasts this position with that of the New England sage, who tended to regard "the life of the mind" as an "activity a little apart from life."[16]

The Southerner's avoidance of abstractions as well as his love for talking are probably the result of his priorities. The two most important things to Southerners, history and geography, are very tangible concerns. A Southerner would be in daily contact with his past through the stories of family members as well as with his land which has been in his family for several generations and which is a source of pride and sustenance to him.

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[14]Allen Tate, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," in Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. 560.

[15]Ibid., p. 561.

[16]Ibid.

Thus, a Southerner's conversation can be expected to be firmly rooted in people and place.

In Delta Wedding, for example, much of the talk centers around either living or dead relatives (George and Denis in particular) or certain events which have become part of family legend, such as the circumstances of Shelley's birth and the time when the Yellow Dog almost hits George and Maureen. These same types of subjects are found in Losing Battles among the relatives who, as Gloria tells Jack, are "all up there just sitting and listening to 'emselves talk" (Losing Battles, p. 133). Their love of talking is illustrated in the way that they recall with dread the times when the schoolteacher, Miss Julia, would stay with different families in the community, for "she'd stand up and read to 'em!" and they would have "to hush talking, else be called impolite." As Aunt Nanny relates, "Old Mis' Comfort says nobody'd ever know what her and the children suffered, with that teacher cooped in with [them] all winter" (Losing Battles, p. 275).

This continual talking, besides being concerned with people, the past, and place, also becomes a device for covering up or evading reality. Louis Rubin's statement that Miss Welty's characters "can trade gossip and trivia by the hour, but their innermost thoughts are never

shared"[17] is especially true for a character in one of Miss Welty's short stories, Sister of "Why I Live at the P.O." Her continual explanations and rationalizations reveal just how deeply she has been hurt by her family's refusal to side with her. Sister never tells us that she is hurt, but the fact that she has carefully counted the length of time since she has seen her family ("that's the last I've laid eyes on any of my family or my family laid eyes on me for five solid days and nights," - "Why I Live at the P.O.," p. 109), reveals her awareness of their ostracism; and her statement that she would not listen even if Stella-Rondo should come to her and apologize "on bended knee" perhaps betrays a subconscious wish that this very thing might happen.

Evasion of reality by means of talking occurs in several novels as a group phenomenon. In Losing Battles, much of the talking serves to keep attention away from the family's poverty and direct it to the exploits of Jack or other members of the family. In Delta Wedding, Dabney, the bride-to-be, is very conscious that, although there has been a great deal of surface chatter and planning, no one has told her his true feelings concerning her marriage

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[17]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Golden Apples of the Sun," The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South (Seattle, Washington: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 52-53.

to Troy. She sees that her entire family feels impelled to "say one last thing before she waved good-bye"; yet she realizes that "they simply never looked deeper than the flat surface of any tremendous thing, that was all there was to it"; and so she dismisses the hope of any meaningful discussion (Delta Wedding, p. 47). Similarly, Ellen feels the same frustration at the lack of real communication. Seeing George at the wedding reception, she suddenly wishes to talk to him, yet "it was the wrong time--she never actually had time to sit down and fill her eyes with people and hear what they said, in any civilized way." Thus, she concludes that "this was a time for celebration, or regret, not for talk, not ever for talk" (Delta Wedding, p. 221)--and this ironically in a book whose pages are full of conversation, but conversation on a superficial level only.

The constant talking assumes yet another function in the evasion of reality: it tends to neutralize the force of evil by explaining it away.[18] Once an incident has been engulfed by repetition, gossip, and legend, it loses its forcefulness. Thus, the incident in Delta Wedding when the Yellow Dog almost hits George and Maureen becomes not a frightening one (after all, it could

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[18]John W. Aldridge, "Eudora Welty: Metamorphosis of a Southern Lady Writer," The Saturday Review, 11 April 1970, p. 23.

have killed them), but a humorous event for some of the younger Fairchilds and a crucial occurrence demonstrating George's family ties to others. It is told to entertain anyone who hasn't been treated to it before: to Laura when she comes visiting, to Mr. Rondo, the minister who is to perform the wedding ceremony. Similarly it is hard to realize that the subject of murder is being treated in The Ponder Heart because of Edna Earle's humorous description of the events at the trial. With numerous Peacocks wandering up and down the aisles getting water and Edna Earle fabricating her details and the judge interrupting to get a count of how many will be eating at the hotel that day, it is difficult to take the murder trial seriously. Still another incident which is glossed over and explained away occurs in Losing Battles when Jack takes Curly's safe home with him in an attempt to recover his Grandmother's ring, an act which really amounts to stealing. Yet the Renfro family by its constant repetition of the incident and glorification of Jack treat his action not as a crime but as an example of heroism and courage. Further, in The Optimist's Daughter, when the bridesmaids come to visit Laurel the Sunday evening after the funeral, they casually joke about the Judge's surprising marriage to Fay. For them, the ability to talk about this subject shows that they have been able to cope with it; but for Laurel,

it is too soon to be able to think without any pain.

> "Since when have you started laughing at them?" Laurel asked in a trembling voice. "Are they just figures from now on to make a good story?" (The Optimist's Daughter, pp. 126-127).

As has been previously discussed, the Southern mode of conversation allows family members to evade reality through constant talking which may conceal their inner feelings or explain away any unpleasantness. In addition, family members are taught to evade more "vulgar" or "common" topics of conversation by discussing only "proper" subjects. For example, the old-maid Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen are scandalized when nine-year-old India asks Dabney whether she is going to take the night-light on her honeymoon with Troy. Although everyone knew about honeymoons, they kept this knowledge from the level of their awareness by never discussing the subject. When Dabney feels frustrated because the aunts will not ask her about her feelings for Troy, she says purely for shock value, "I hope I have a baby right away"; and India chimes in "I bet you do have, Dabney." At this, "Aunt Primrose took a little sacheted handkerchief from her bosom and touched it to her lips, and a tear began to run down Aunt Jim Allen's dry, rice-powdered cheek. They looked at nothing, as ladies do in church" (Delta Wedding, pp. 48-49). As they ride back to Shellmound, Dabney knew that the aunts might have insisted that they stay for supper, if she

"hadn't said something a little ugly, a little unbecoming for Battle's daughter" (Delta Wedding, p. 49).

An additional subject which is taboo for public discussion concerns personal financial matters. At Uncle Daniel's trial, although everybody in the room knew about the financial arrangement with Bonnie Dee, "nobody wanted to hear it" (The Ponder Heart, p. 133). Other topics of conversation these characters try to avoid are death and tragedy,[19] for too much attention to these subjects brings reality in too closely to their world. When Lexie Renfro graphically demonstrates Miss Julia's dying actions and words, the realism proves too much for Miss Beulah, who declares,

> "Lexie, you're about to ruin this reunion in spite of everything, giving out talk of death and disgrace around here. . . . Take away her needle, if that's what sewing brings on" (Losing Battles, p. 282).

Miss Beulah's troubles are not so easily put aside, however, for Jack later asks his Uncle Nathan why his hand has been cut off and Uncle Nathan obliges him with all the details. Wishing that the sordid tale could have been avoided so as not to disturb the surface calm, Miss Beulah cries, "Now what did you want to tell that for? . . . We could've got through one more reunion without that,

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[19]Marie-Antoinette Manz-Kunz, Eudora Welty: Aspects of Reality in Her Short Fiction, Swiss Studies in English (Bern: Franke, 1971), p. 83.

couldn't we?" (Losing Battles, p. 344).

Thus, the talking of these traditional family members, which reveals so much about them, as well as their love of visiting are manifestations of the sociable nature which is nurtured by the geographical nearness of the family members. This sociable nature along with the exclusion of outsiders, family loyalty, and family group participation are thus by-products of the early necessity of families having to live closely together and depend on one another. In reality, then, these "by-products" contributed to a much more generalized and pervasive belief in the sanctity of blood ties which has been transmitted to succeeding generations. This belief means that, although a person may have relatives for whom he has no great liking, he will still value them as a part of those people to whom he belongs in a family association. As Hodding Carter testifies,

> I was raised to believe that whoever harmed my kinsman was also my enemy and whoever befriended him was friend of mine and that the closer the relationship the greater the obligations and the privilege to stand near.[20]

Thus, from the preceding discussion, one can see the significance of blood ties in formulating the basic philosophy of the traditional family. The second component of this philosophy, the emphasis on history and tradition,

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[20]As quoted by Louise Gossett, pp. 103-104.

is equally important and also stems from the practice of family members of several generations living closely together. The past becomes living history in the presence of several generations of family members who keep it alive by reciting family stories and passing on family traditions. Thus the present and the past are linked inseparably in daily living. This result is again demonstrable in Miss Welty's novels.

Her families do indeed, as M. E. Bradford states, "live by memory," and therefore "recitation of that memory is . . . part of each of their gatherings."[21] Family legends are kept alive by continual references. For example, the legend of Denis is fostered by Battle, who occasionally recites "Denis's poetry" at the dinner table. There are also certain family stories which are enjoyed more each time they are told. The Yellow Dog incident, as previously mentioned, is a favorite, as is the story of Shelley's birth. The latter has been repeated so many times that everyone knows the punch line, much to Shelley's embarrassment:

> "Mama, don't tell how much I weighed," Shelley begged, darting in and out of their circle.
>
> "You weighed ten pounds," said Ellen helplessly,

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[21]M. E. Bradford, "Looking Down From a High Place: The Serenity of Miss Welty's Losing Battles," Recherches Anglaises et Americaine, 4 (1971), 93n.

> for that was the end of the story (Delta Wedding, p. 216).

The complete Ponder Heart is a recitation of family history; Edna Earle covers Uncle Daniel's confinement in the asylum by Grandpa, his two marriages, the death of Bonnie Dee, and Uncle Daniel's trial. And in The Optimist's Daughter, friends relate past incidents involving the Judge and Becky, such as when he bought her an outlandish black beaded dress which she courageously wore for every important occasion. Family history is further recalled by Laurel when she cleans her mother's desk.

Recitation of family history in its entirety is an annual event for the Renfro-Beecham clan. Fearful that Brother Bethune as an outsider might not do the family justice, several members join in to insure coverage of important details. Uncle Curtis, for example, volunteers the legend of the big bois d'arc tree:

> "Yes sir, old-timers used to call that tree Billy Vaughn's Switch. . . . He'd stick it in the ground when he got down from his horse, trotting up here to court Granny, and one night he forgot it. Come up a hard rain, and the next thing they knew, it'd sprouted" (Losing Battles, p. 181).

The family reunion isn't the only time that family history is discussed, however. Sam Dale's legend is as pervasive as Denis's in Delta Wedding; and, when Miss Beulah begins to tell Judge Moody the story of her parents'

courtship, Mr. Renfro interrupts, "I wish I'd had a penny for every time I've listened to this one" (Losing Battles, p. 215).

A further way in which the past is kept alive in the present in the extended family is through the repeated use of ancestral names for family members. This practice continually keeps the past before the eyes of those in the present, for hearing an ancestor's name invariably calls up past associations and forces comparisons of the present holder to the deceased. This practice of repeating the same names from one generation to the next is very evident in Delta Wedding, where almost all of the characters bear an ancestor's name. "George" has been the name of a great-great-grandfather and great-uncle and is the name of the present George and also Mary Denis's new baby. Similarly, Denis is also a popular name: there has been a Great-Uncle Denis; Denis, the late brother of the present Battle; and Mary Denis; in addition, Ellen's unborn baby, if a boy, will be named Denis. Battle is the name given to the brother of Shannon and Mac, the present Battle Fairchild, and his son, little Battle. Great-Great-Grandmother Mary Shannon's name has been given to Great-Aunt Shannon, Mary Denis, and Mary Denis's daughter. Furthermore, Grandmother Laura Allen's name has been passed down to Aunt Jim Allen, Annie Laurie,

and her daughter, Laura. There is also an Aunt Maureen for whom Denis's child has been named; and India's middle name, Primrose, is taken from Aunt Primrose. Other examples from this same novel could be given; however, these are sufficient to indicate the extent to which names are repeated.

Although there is not so much evidence of using the same names in The Ponder Heart, several examples indicate that the Ponders are familiar with this practice. In the Ponders' case, however, the name may be transmitted to other than family members. For example, Edna Earle relates that "the Beulah Bible Class and the Beulah Hotel are both named after Grandma" (The Ponder Heart, p. 21). Edna Earle reasons that if she ever did "step off" with someone, such as Mr. Springer, she could "name the oldest child after Grandpa and win him over quick before he knew it"; after all, "Grandpa adored compliments," and Ponder Springer, as Edna Earle says, "sounds perfectly plausible" (The Ponder Heart, p. 26).

In Losing Battles, Granny's name (Elvira Jordan Vaughn) has been given to Jack (Jack Jordan Renfro), Elvie, and Vaughn. Likewise, Ella Fay is named for Mr. Renfro's sister; and Miss Beulah's deceased daughter was named Beulah after her.

A further result of the emphasis on the past and the

presence of several generations of relatives living closely together is that older generations become models for those living in the present. James Dickey notes that "nowhere else in the country, not even in New England, is the ancestor held in so much real reverence as he is in the South," and "consequently, nowhere else is his spirit, his ghost, so powerful, disturbing, and influential."[22] Francis Simkins and Charles Roland, Southern historians, agree with this idea, stating that Faulkner and Miss Welty are alike "in portraying the influence of successive generations of kinfolk on the behavior of their protagonists."[23] Miss Welty's characters are so surrounded by references to these ancestors that their presence becomes almost a living entity to them. In Delta Wedding, for example, paintings of yellow roses and a watermelon by Mashula Hines (a Fairchild ancestress) hang in the dining room; her recipe for coconut cake is still followed religiously (in fact, Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen "swore by Mashula Hines' cook book"); Dabney uses Mashula's train in her wedding; and Mashula's lace tablecloth covers the table where the

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[22]James Dickey, "Notes on the Decline of Outrage," in South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 88.

[23]Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, A History of the South, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 444.

wedding cake is served. At the Grove, the Aunts periodically read Mary Shannon's diary, which tells them how to make things and the ways to set out cuttings as well as the proper times; and in their parlor where two portraits of Mary Shannon hang, they carefully keep their grandmother's and great-grandmother's cherished items. At Shellmound, the library contains a portrait of Laura's Great-Great-Uncle Battle painted by his brother, Great-Grandfather George Fairchild, and his other brother, Denis. Laura, as she enters the room, wordlessly feels that "in this room where so many dead young Fairchilds, ruined people, were, there seemed to be always consciousness of their gazes" (Delta Wedding, p. 55). Thus, the living Fairchilds are surrounded by ancestors looking down on them from the walls; and these ancestors become not only regular topics of conversation, but are actually spoken to as if they were there.

Further, a character in Miss Welty's novels finds that his ancestors and older living relatives are more than just examples which may be followed at will; their influence requires certain actions and patterns of behavior from their relatives. A prime example of this impingement can be seen in the way that Denis' legend is imposed on George. As Shelley points out, "everybody always said George was a second Denis" (Delta Wedding, p. 196).

Thus, George is expected to be the dashing, unpredictable hero of the family. When he rescues Maureen on the railroad trestle, Aunt Tempe concludes, "Naturally . . . he did it for Denis," for whom no sacrifice was too great (Delta Wedding, p. 115).

In The Ponder Heart, the impingement of relatives' standards and examples is also found. Edna Earle states that Grandpa "wanted people to measure up . . . Uncle Daniel and me in particular" (The Ponder Heart, p. 8). Furthermore, as Edna Earle testifies in court, Uncle Daniel's manner of giving mock verbal threats is a direct result of Grandma's influence:

> "She said 'I'm going to kill you' every other breath to him--she raised him. Gentlest woman on the face of the earth. 'I'll break your neck,' 'I'll skin you alive,' 'I'll beat your brains out'--Mercy! How that does bring Grandma back" (The Ponder Heart, p. 111).

Likewise, when Edna Earle has to lie on the witness stand, she is thankful that she doesn't have to explain her actions to Grandpa Ponder, knowing that she wouldn't "measure up" to the Ponder tradition of honesty.

Jack Renfro has had proper family relationships and duties "drummed . . . into him as a child" by Miss Beulah (Losing Battles, p. 41). And as Uncle Noah Webster adds, "if a boy's brought up in Grandpa Vaughn's house, and knows drinking, dancing, and spot-card playing is a sin, you don't need to rub it into his hide to make him

know there's something a little bit the matter with stealing" (Losing Battles, p. 44). There is a constant reminder of Grandpa's expectations for the family in the nearby view of his church "pointing up its finger at you" (Losing Battles, p. 102). At the reunion, Grandpa Vaughn, although dead, still dominates the meeting. When Brother Bethune, who is trying to take Grandpa's place in delivering the family history, hungrily starts eyeing the food-laden table, Miss Beulah warns, "Grandpa Vaughn made himself wait. He got the blessing said and the history every bit delivered and the lesson of it through our heads before he even looked at the table" (Losing Battles, p. 177). Thus, while the food is disappearing before his eyes, Brother Bethune has to follow Grandpa's example. The most conclusive statement concerning past and present family relationships is made when Granny confusedly directs that a piece of cake be taken to the dead Sam Dale. Aunt Cleo whispers, "Hey, don't she know the difference yet? Who's alive and who's dead?" and Miss Beulah replies, "She knows we're all part of it together, or ought to be!" (Losing Battles, p. 346).

In addition, each extended family in Miss Welty's world has certain long-standing traditions which are constant reminders of the past. The little night light which the aunts give to Dabney as a wedding present is, in

itself, an object of family tradition. Aunt Mashula waited by it for Uncle George to come home from the Civil War, and it kept the aunts company when their mother and father died. Dabney's breaking of the night light very possibly symbolizes her break with tradition as exemplified in her marriage to the overseer. In addition, a Fairchild temper is a traditional characteristic among the men. It is also traditional for the Fairchilds to accept graciously and display prominently Miss Bonnie Hitchcock's fern each time she sends it for weddings and funerals even though it is so big that it takes "four little colored boys" to move it (Delta Wedding, pp. 204-205).

Granny Jordan traditionally keeps her mother's ring in the family Bible, just as she does anything of importance. And the reunion, of course, is replete with tradition: it is always customary to mention "those who have gone before," to forgive any prodigals who have erred during the past year, and to close with "the joining-of-hands" and the singing of "Blest Be the Tie" (Losing Battles, p. 348).

Families in The Optimist's Daughter are certainly no strangers to time-honored traditions. All know that the time to prune roses is on George Washington's birthday. In addition, tradition demands that on any important

occasions, such as weddings and funerals, unsolicited assistance be given, from sending food to running errands.

One outgrowth of tradition stemming from the early organization and functioning of the extended family is the role of the male and female within the family. In early days, it was the role of the woman to stay at home and manage the household affairs, while the men were expected to provide meat by hunting and fishing and to give protection to the family. Even in more modern times when protection from wild animals and Indians was no longer a major concern, and when domestic animals provided most of the family meat, the woman still tended to dominate in the home. Thus, although the men are outwardly held to be the heads of the families, a matriarchal form of family organization has been perpetuated by tradition in which the women are really the dominant ones.

One finds numerous examples of female dominance in Miss Welty's works. Extreme examples of this dominance can be found in "Petrified Man." Mrs. Fletcher says that

> "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me. . . . If he so much as raises his voice against me, he knows good and well I'll have one of my sick headaches, and then I'm just not fit to live with."[24]

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[24]Eudora Welty, "Petrified Man," in Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [A Curtain of Green] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 37.

Her later statements further reveal her dominance:

> "I ask Mr. Fletcher's advice now and then, and he appreciates it, especially on something important, like is it time for a permanent--not that I've told him about the baby" ("Petrified Man," p. 48).

In the same story, Leota decides that she and her husband must move to Vicksburg against his wishes because of a fortune-teller's prediction: "He don't want to go, but I ain't gonna put up with nothin' like that" ("Petrified Man," p. 49). And in The Golden Apples, "Miss" Lizzie Stark is the town matriarch who "hates all men, and is real important."[25]

Although in most of Miss Welty's works the men feel that they are dominant and control the family's fortunes, the women are really the prime movers, managing the family affairs. Charles Poore calls this system a "perpetual matriarchy," noting that while the men go to seed or die in wars, the women hold on to the land and keep the family together.[26] Ellen, who certainly could not be regarded as an overtly dominant wife, nevertheless feels protectively superior to her Fairchild men: "nobody could get tireder, fall sicker and more quickly so, than her men" (Delta

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[25]Eudora Welty, "Shower of Gold," in The Golden Apples (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), p. 8.

[26]Charles Poore, "A Fine Novel of the Deep South," The New York Times Book Review, 14 April 1946, p. 1.

Wedding, p. 23). As a prime illustration of this belief, one has only to observe her husband's actions when she faints: he goes by "with a wild look" and comes in only after being assured by Aunt Tempe that she is not dying (Delta Wedding, p. 167). A similar view of woman's natural superiority in certain realms is shared by Ellen's daughter, Shelley. After witnessing Troy's handling of a quarrel among the hands, "she felt again, but differently, that men were no better than little children. . . . Women, she was glad to think, did know a little better--though everything they knew they would have to keep to themselves" (Delta Wedding, p. 196).

Through the eyes of Robbie, George's wife, we are given an outsider's view of the Fairchild world. She notices that "in their kind of people . . . the women always ruled the roost." They were the ones who "ran the household and had everything at their fingertips--not the men. The women it was who inherited the place--or their brothers, guiltily, handed it over." She further feels that "all the men lived here on a kind of sufferance." Even the paintings of the ancestral Fairchild women contribute to Robbie's impressions of this dominance; in Miss Jim Allen's house at the Grove, there is a painting on the wall of a Fairchild woman whose look "was obviously turned upon her husband, upon a Fairchild, and it was condemning" (Delta Wedding, pp. 144-146).

Edna Earle of The Ponder Heart is one of the husbandless women in Miss Welty's writing who nevertheless still finds men to manage. She has been kept busy by trying to look after Uncle Daniel when he is "on a spree of giving away" and at the same time "trying to hold Grandpa down and account for [the] whole hotel" (The Ponder Heart, p. 10). At Uncle Daniel's trial, she is forced to intervene when he is on the witness stand to keep him from telling the unbelievable truth:

> "That's enough, Uncle Daniel," I says, real firm and real loud. "You can't answer that. You can't tell it to a soul" (The Ponder Heart, p. 144).

Edna Earle, revealing her talents as a female manipulator, concludes that the secret of her successful handling of Uncle Daniel is very simple: ". . . you have to know the way to treat him; he's a man, the same as they all are" (The Ponder Heart, p. 16).

Several characters in Losing Battles attest to their belief in the female's superiority over the males. Miss Lexie Renfro, speaking of her brother Ralph's continual exploits with dynamite, vows: "He'll shortly blow up something else. He won't learn, he's a man" (Losing Battles, p. 376). And later, when Miss Beulah goes to see Judge Moody's car on Banner Top, which has just withstood a dynamite blast but is precariously balanced on Uncle Nathan's sign, ready to drop over the cliff at any moment, she observes:

> "I'll tell you what I think. . . . It's lacking very little. It's a very nearly perfect example."
>
> "What of?" asked Miss Lexie.
>
> "Man-foolishness," said Miss Beulah.

And Gloria whispers to Jack, "One of these days I'm going to have to agree with your mother about something" (Losing Battles, p. 379).

Miss Beulah, following in the matriarchal footsteps of Granny Vaughn, has her family under firm control and takes full credit "for the wonderful children" she has reared (Losing Battles, p. 63). And finally, Mr. Renfro reveals that he knows his place very well when he says to Judge Moody: "Well, sir, we all have to stop doing what our good ladies tells us not to, and try to make out with doing what's left" (Losing Battles, p. 140).

In The Optimist's Daughter, the women of the small town are the dominant characters. The few men who are mentioned are either weak or ineffectual. While Miss Tennyson busily takes charge of funeral preparations at the home, her husband, Major Bullock, stumbles around slightly inebriated, always doing exactly the wrong thing, such as starting a fire in the already stuffy drawing room and bringing Fay's relatives from Texas, whom she had not even acknowledged, to the funeral.

In Miss Welty's writings, family men, in the traditional pattern, generally fall into two categories:

either they are revered, pampered, and can do no wrong; or else they assume a figurehead position as head of the house while their wives in reality have control. As an example of the first type, George in Delta Wedding is known by all of the Fairchild clan as "the best loved" of the living Fairchilds. His reputation assumes almost mythic proportions as the family members eagerly anticipate his arrival for the wedding. Aunt Jim Allen exclaims, "George--wait till I get hold of him! He'll bring all the champagne in Memphis! We'll be tipsy, Primrose! He'll make this little family wedding into a Saturnalian feast!" (Delta Wedding, p. 47). After George's arrival with the news that his wife has left him, Shelley, in quick defense exclaims, "She'd better not try to come here! . . . We wouldn't let her in. To do you like that--you, Uncle George!" (Delta Wedding, p. 51). A feat which further elevates George in the eyes of the Fairchild clan is his heroism in saving Maureen, Denis's child, from being hit by a train. In addition to its effect on George's reputation, the Fairchilds see his action as only appropriate for the memory of yet another pampered Fairchild male, Denis. Death, in fact, has given Denis legendary status that not even the favored Uncle George can attain. George, as Ellen notes, is still capable of rising or falling in the family's estimation,

"whereas even the daily presence of Maureen and the shadowy nearness of Virgie Lee had never taken anything away from the pure, unvarying glory of Denis" (Delta Wedding, p. 63).

Much like George and Denis, Jack Renfro of Losing Battles is another favored male. Granny, whose birthday is being celebrated at the family reunion, is told that "the joy of your life's coming home," referring to Jack who has been in the penitentiary (Losing Battles, p. 5). The family's position about Jack's imprisonment is summed up by Aunt Birdie, who declares: "They locked up the sweetest and hardest-working boy in Banner and Boone County and maybe in all creation!" (Losing Battles, p. 62). Jack's unnecessary labor in taking the safe all the way home instead of opening it in the store is rationalized by Aunt Nanny, who explains: ". . . he's a man! Done it the man's way," with Miss Beulah joining in: "He did his best . . . and it was a heap more trouble! For everybody!" (Losing Battles, p. 63). The family further defends Jack's actions against the semi-intrusive questioning of Aunt Cleo, a newcomer to the clan, who seems to blame him for the trouble. Aunt Nanny exclaims, "Find fault with Jack? I'd hate to see the first one try it," and Aunt Birdie adds, "I'd hate to see anybody in the wide world try it!" (Losing Battles, p. 66).

Again, like George, who is compared to Denis, Jack is compared to the deceased Sam Dale Beecham: "Jack's the nearest thing to Sam Dale we've got today," says Miss Beulah (Losing Battles, p. 221). The legend of Sam Dale rivals even Denis's:

> "Handsome! Handsomer than Dolphus ever was, sunnier than Noah Webster, smarter than Percy, more home-loving than Curtis, more quiet-spoken than Nathan, and could let you have a tune quicker and truer than all the rest put together," said Miss Beulah,

at which Aunt Cleo correctly surmises: "He sounds like he's dead" (Losing Battles, p. 221). A further example of the family's adulation of Sam Dale is seen in their story of the time he and Rachel, the sewing girl, had a race to decide who was "the best and fastest and most furious dewberry picker in the world." Even though the contest ended in a tie, the relatives are quick to point out that it was only called a tie: "Blessed Sam Dale let her tie him," explains Aunt Beck (Losing Battles, p. 259).

Another pampered male is Uncle Daniel of The Ponder Heart. Edna Earle, his niece, who has devoted her life to being the "go-between . . . between [her] family and the world," spends much of her time trying to keep Uncle Daniel out of trouble and protect his self-image (The Ponder Heart, p. 120). Even after Uncle Daniel has given away all of his money at the trial, Edna Earle is still dutifully shielding him. She tells her listener at the

Beulah Hotel, "I'd like to warn you again, he may try to give you something--may think he's got something to give. If he does, do me a favor. Make out like you accept it. Tell him thank you" (The Ponder Heart, p. 156).

A second category of males, those who are relatively insignificant in the stories or who lack any effective voice because of their wife's dominance, can best be represented by Uncle Pinck of Delta Wedding and Ralph Renfro of Losing Battles. Uncle Pinck, who is married to Aunt Tempe, seems to exist solely for his wife to order around. Through all of Aunt Tempe's badgering, Ellen, who is never more tired than by "the spectacle of marital bullying," realizes nonetheless that "it was the breath of life to Tempe, spectacle and all" (Delta Wedding, p. 125). Similarly, the only time one is very much aware of Ralph Renfro's existence is when he sets off another charge of dynamite. His very description emphasizes his obsequiousness:

> He was smaller than Miss Beulah his wife, and walked with a kind of hobble that made him seem to give a little bow with every step. He came to the table bowing to Granny, to his wife, to his children, bowing to the day (Losing Battles, p. 6).

When Jack comes home from the penitentiary, his father doesn't even have a chance to say anything to him ("You haven't even had a word from your father yet!" shrieks Miss Beulah) before Jack is off again avenging the family honor (Losing Battles, p. 94).

Thus, the roles of the male and female in these novels fall into patterns based on tradition. Further, as has been seen, these traditions and memories of the past are kept alive for the traditional family in Miss Welty's novels by the presence and example of the several generations of relatives living either near or with them.

Finally, in addition to the importance given to blood ties and the past, the third main characteristic of the traditional family which probably developed from the early close family structure is its emphasis on place. This attachment to the land and to a particular piece of land has had several effects on the traditional family members.

One such effect is that these people have very definite roots; they usually live in one place all their lives. One gets the impression that the Renfro and Beecham clans in Losing Battles have lived forever in the environs of Banner, Mississippi. Likewise, in The Optimist's Daughter, anyone in Mount Salus would be able to direct a visitor to Judge McKelva's home. In the same novel, Laurel now lives in Chicago, yet the place she considers home is the place where she grew up and where her family and oldest friends live, Mount Salus.

A second effect of this attachment to place is that the family becomes identified with its land or home place.

Ownership is passed from one generation to the next, so that over a period of years, a piece of property is simply identified by a family name. Thus in giving directions, a Southerner might tell a person to go beyond the Renfro place, and turn left past the Comforts' barn. In Delta Wedding, Battle Fairchild is farming the land which his ancestors have bequeathed to him and is living in the house which has been occupied by several generations of Fairchilds before him. In like manner, his children will inherit the family property. Thus the Fairchild name will continue to be perpetuated in the community. Likewise, in The Ponder Heart, Grandpa Ponder gives the family hotel, the Beulah, to his son Daniel, who in turn gives it to Edna Earle, his niece.

One very important result of the traditional family's attachment to a particular place is that through this attachment, the family tends to achieve a stability and permanence which is in definite contrast to the modern family's rootless tendencies. One gets the definite impression that these families will endure and triumph over many hardships, as the Renfros do in Losing Battles, partly because their land means something to them: it is a definite link with their family's past, and it is a source not only of livelihood but of pride and identity in the present. Thus, these traditional family members, for

the most part, know who they are and have few qualms about their future because of their roots in place, which also involve roots in blood and memory.

In summary, a look at the traditional family reveals that its distinguishing characteristics, loyalty to blood, memory, and place, are directly related to the early organization of the family as a unit composed of several generations living and working closely together. Possible results of this strong emphasis on binding together for mutual protection and support can be seen very clearly in Miss Welty's traditional characters: they exhibit a definite group reaction against outsiders, a fierce loyalty and pride in family, a wholehearted participation by the group in family undertakings, and a love of socializing which is evidenced by their continual visiting about and talking. All of these traits are fostered by the daily contact with relatives, who, in turn, hand down their lessons to future generations. Thus, the strong emphasis on the past and its traditions is strengthened by the family members in Miss Welty's works who live by memory through the rehearsal of family stories and through the repeated use of family names. In addition, older generations become the models for those living in the present, and traditions are handed down from one generation to the next and are followed unquestioningly.

Finally, the emphasis on place is seen in Miss Welty's characters for whom one particular location has been "home" not only for ancestors, but also for present and future generations. These people's roots in place give them an inherited identity based on the previous family members who have owned the land, as well as a stability enhanced by their long association with it. Thus the traditional family in Miss Welty's novels is a closely-knit clan with very definite roots in a particular place and in the past, traits which are in distinct contrast to those typical of the modern type of family which will be discussed in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

THE MODERNS

The second distinct type of family which is found in Miss Welty's novels can be described as "modern" in contrast to the traditional family of Chapter II. This modern designation refers primarily to the belief most aptly expressed by Gloria in Losing Battles that "I'm one to myself, and nobody's kin, and my own boss, and nobody knows the one I am or where I came from . . . and all that counts in life is up ahead" (Losing Battles, p. 315). In other words, the moderns are characterized by being committed just to themselves and their immediate families, by being rootless, and by being oriented toward the future. Each of these qualities, which will be treated in more detail later in the chapter, is logically related to the idea of rootlessness, which implies the lack of ties to any people, place, or past. Thus, given this definition, it would logically follow that a modern would place no importance on an extended family relationship with its far-reaching ties or look on any one particular place as home. In addition, since the past holds no meaning for him, anticipating a future time when he can be free of the ties of the present and past is to be expected.

Such characters represent the introduction of change into the established order of the Old South; and some of their challenges to the time-honored traditions and ideals are not altogether inappropriate, as Miss Welty shows. Her artistry does not permit her merely to write propagandistic novels where the scales are unfairly balanced in favor of one type of family over the other. Rather, her writing, while clearly favoring the traditional pieties, nevertheless uses the modern influence to point out needed changes. These beneficial and harmful characteristics of each family type will be dealt with in Chapter IV. In this chapter, the essential characteristics of the modern ideas of family will be explored as well as the possible reasons for these beliefs.

In each of the four novels being studied, at least one main character is representative of the modern ideas: Robbie of Delta Wedding, Bonnie Dee of The Ponder Heart, Gloria of Losing Battles, and Fay of The Optimist's Daughter. Each of these characters has married into a traditional family against whose ties and influence she is rebelling. "Outsider" is a term often used by the traditionalists to describe this type of modern family member. Reynolds Price uses the term "onlooker" to include such types of characters as the outsider, the wanderer, or the

salesman.[1] However, the modern type of character with which this study is concerned is something more than just what Price calls an "onlooker"--"onlooker" signifies a rather passive position which one occupies unwillingly. This term could be correctly applied to Laura in Delta Wedding, for she longs to be an accepted member of the Fairchild clan. She is on the outside, not as a modern, but as a traditionalist who wants to become an accepted member of the group if given the chance and who is willing to conform to its demands. Likewise, Troy, although an outsider to the Delta traditions as a hill-country Mississippian, nevertheless is a product of a traditional culture as is evidenced when his mother sends her quilts as a wedding present with a note saying that she wishes she had had time to make a bride's quilt, a traditional wedding gift. Thus, he can not be considered a modern, for the implication is that, as a kind of traditionalist, he quite agreeably will adapt to the Fairchild world. In the case of Miss Welty's moderns, however, although some in the earlier writings would like to be on the "inside," such as the younger Robbie in Delta Wedding, there is an increasingly active resistance against being drawn into the traditional type of family, with all its demands, as

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[1]Reynolds Price, "The Onlooker, Smiling: An Early Reading of The Optimist's Daughter," Shenandoah, 20, No. 3 (1969), 60.

represented by Gloria in Losing Battles and Fay in The Optimist's Daughter. Even though Robbie at one time wanted to "turn into a Fairchild" (Delta Wedding, p. 165), her later statements reveal her disillusionment with the Fairchild way of life. Thus, as John Edward Hardy correctly points out, although there are characters in Delta Wedding who are different by virtue of background, such as Ellen and Troy, Robbie Reid is wisely regarded by the family as "a far greater threat to the insularity of their world,"[2] for she refuses to conform to the family's demands and is actively trying to get George away from their influence. Therefore, these modern characters are trying, as Gloria says, to get the ones they love "to copy [them]" (Losing Battles, p. 244); they refuse to "copy" the traditional family's ways. Thus, although the moderns may indeed be "outsiders" or "onlookers" of the traditional family, it is because they do not want to conform to its demands.

Other characters in these same novels may be considered moderns also in their concurrence with the modern ideology previously stated, such as Miss Julia Mortimer of Losing Battles who, as Thomas Landess points out, is definitely "anti-family" in her crusade to make the family

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[2]John Edward Hardy, "Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol," Sewanee Review, 60 (1952), 399.

aware of the future and to make them "quit worshipping themselves quite so wholehearted!" (Losing Battles, p. 236).[3] In addition, there are several other characters with combinations of both traditional and modern characteristics who will be discussed in Chapter V. This chapter, however, for greater effectiveness and compression of details, will focus on Robbie, Bonnie Dee, Gloria, and Fay as representative of the modern characteristics.

As previously mentioned, the best descriptive word for the modern type of family is "rootless," for these people have few ties to any people, past, or place. Frederick J. Hoffman describes the type of character who dramatizes the change from the "Old South" to current times in modern Southern literature as "unemotional, unattached, and amoral."[4] Although this entire description might be a bit strong for Miss Welty's moderns, the "unattached" designation certainly fits them. In "June Recital" from The Golden Apples, Cassie Morrison correctly identifies this rootless condition in two of the story's

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[3]Thomas H. Landess, "More Trouble in Mississippi: Family vs. Antifamily in Miss Welty's Losing Battles," Sewanee Review, 79 (1971), 630.

[4]Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Sense of Place," in South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 65.

characters: Miss Eckhart, an unmarried music teacher who is an outsider to Morgana by virtue of her German origin; and Virgie Rainey, a free spirit who feels restricted by the town's traditional codes. Neither of these characters has a meaningful attachment to either the people or place of Morgana, as Cassie perceives:

> 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.[5]

As Louis Rubin and Robert Jacobs point out in their introduction to South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting, the emphasis in much modern Southern literature has shifted from the historical sense and the "idea of community-as-all" to protagonists who are moderns living "in a fluid, changing world."[6] From a sociological standpoint, no doubt the increased mobility of people has contributed to a declining emphasis on one place as the repository of all natural feelings about home. In relation to this trend, it is interesting to notice that in The Optimist's Daughter, the Texas Chisoms live in cars and trailers instead of houses.[7]

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[5]Eudora Welty, "June Recital," The Golden Apples (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), p. 85.

[6]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs, "Introduction," South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 25.

[7]Guy Davenport, "Primal Visions," National Review, 23 June 1972, p. 697.

In addition to increasing mobility, the decreasing economic functions of the home have contributed to this rootless sense; for the home no longer is required to furnish the major portion of food stuffs and clothing that it once did through gardening, farming, baking, canning, and sewing. Many other factors, such as the introduction of movies, television and spectator sports have served to loosen the ties that once bound families so closely together by taking the place of family recreational activities. Thus, in our modern world, the emphasis is shifting away from the family with its closely knit fellowship and ties to one place and toward the individual, who in his mobility is more free of restrictions. Miss Welty doesn't specifically point out the reasons for this shift, only giving a product of it in each of her novels in these four women, but she chooses to concentrate instead on the conflicts of the heart which result when these two opposing ideologies of what Robert Penn Warren has termed "love and separateness"[8] confront each other.

This rootless condition may be seen first of all in the moderns' disregard of extended family attachments. Their ideal family consists of husband, wife, and children.

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[8]Robert Penn Warren, "The Love and the Separateness in Miss Welty," The Kenyon Review, 6 (1944), 249-250.

One sociologist, calling this a "nuclear" family, states that in the 1960 United States census,

> half of all families were made up of married couples living in their own homes with children under eighteen years of age, without other relatives or lodgers in the house. This fifty percent of all households represents our idea of the normal.[9]

This is exactly the family make-up that Robbie, Bonnie Dee, Gloria, and Fay want. Although one certainly can sympathize with Gloria's struggles to have Jack and Lady May, for once, to herself, Thomas Landess' comment that Gloria in this fight is really reaffirming the principle of the family while seeming to renounce it,[10] misses the fact that she is renouncing the extended family concept and embracing the modern one. She desires no association with Jack's relatives and is rather proud of the fact that she has none of her own to contend with. This pride is incomprehensible to the Renfros, who can't understand how Gloria can turn being from an orphanage "into something to be conceited about" (Losing Battles, pp. 60-61), but Gloria has no desire to know anything about her parents:

> "I said it suited me all right kept dark the way it was. I didn't mind being a mystery--I was used to it" (Losing Battles, p. 251).

In fact, some of Gloria's worst moments come when

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[9]William J. Goode, "The Many Forms of the Family," in Life in Families, ed. Helen MacGill Hughes (Boston: Holbrook Press, Inc., 1971), p. 16.

[10]Landess, p. 631.

the Renfros think that she is really a Beecham and is therefore a blood relative of the clan. As all of the Renfros and Beechams press in upon her, shouting "welcome into the family!" Gloria cries, "I don't want to be a Beecham--go back!" (Losing Battles, p. 268). This news about Gloria's possible kinship doesn't startle Jack at all. In fact, nothing could make him happier than for Gloria truly to be his relative; for to him, being part of a large family is the best possible condition. "You're one of the family now," he tells Gloria softly, for the ties of blood are deeper than the marriage bond. Gloria's reaction to this news, however, is one of despair:

> "One way or the other, I'm kin to everybody in Banner. . . . And my baby is kin to everybody," she mourned (Losing Battles, p. 313).

On at least four separate occasions in Losing Battles, Gloria unequivocally states that she would like nothing better than to escape from Jack's family ties and be a separate family where no one will bother them. Jack is no sooner home from the penitentiary than Gloria whispers to him, "When will we move to ourselves?"; and we learn from Jack that this is not the first time he has heard this request: "I believe that's what you was saying to me the last thing before I left home for the courthouse." We find that Gloria has left nothing to chance during Jack's absence; for she replies, "And I wrote you the same

words too, didn't let you forget 'em all the time you were gone" (Losing Battles, p. 111).

Later as Jack consoles Gloria after learning of Miss Julia's disapproval of their marriage, their conflicting ideas about family become apparent. Jack's supposedly reassuring statement that they're still a family with "the whole reunion solid behind us" (Losing Battles, p. 171) fails to deliver any measure of comfort to Gloria. It rather calls to her mind the busybody attempts of the family to get her to conform to their wishes, and to the total lack of privacy in the overcrowded Renfro house. She longs to be rid of all of this family influence:

> "Oh, if we just had a little house to ourselves, no bigger than our reach right now. . . . And nobody could ever find us! But everybody finds us. Living or dead" (Losing Battles, p. 171).

The latter part of this statement reveals Gloria's understanding of the pervasive influence of blood ties, not only from relatives in the present but from those in the past as well.

It is this influence in part that Gloria wants to save Jack from. She sees him as constantly exploited by his family and called on to carry its burdens. The Renfros are counting on Jack to pull them through the Depression times. Understandably, from Gloria's point of view, the more the family demands of Jack, the less time he will have

for her and Lady May. Therefore, Gloria has decided that her mission in life will be to save Jack from his family, and she wastes no opportunities to let the family know her intentions. For example, she takes no credit for her part in putting Judge Moody's car on Banner Top mountain. She was not in the middle of the road to divert the car; as she explains, "I was doing my best to save Jack," who had just fallen down a hill into its path (Losing Battles, p. 198). She then seizes the opportunity to amplify her statement: "I was going to save him! From everybody I see this minute!" (Losing Battles, p. 198).

Toward the end of the novel, Gloria is still determined to get Jack away from his family:

> "I've been trying to save him since the day I saw him first. Protecting his poor head!"
>
> "From what?" Miss Beulah demanded, both hands on hips.
>
> "This mighty family! And you can't make me give up! . . . We'll live to ourselves one day yet, and do wonders" (Losing Battles, p. 320).

Robbie of Delta Wedding is yet another modern who longs for the undisputed possession of husband and home and who also sees her goal as saving George from his family. She reveals her lack of understanding about family ties when she naively asserts, in reply to Troy's statement that it would be harder for a girl than for a boy to marry into the Fairchild family, "I didn't marry into them! I

married George!" (Delta Wedding, p. 141). This statement is merely wishful thinking on her part, for she no sooner marries George than she is engaged in a battle for his attention with his family. He, like Jack, is the family's living hero, and is therefore called upon for help in any situation and is expected to be immediately available. Troy understands family claims much better than Robbie, for he unquestioningly accepts the fact that George has unhesitatingly come from Memphis for the wedding, regardless of the fact that his wife has left him and taken the car.

> ". . . Dabney wanted George here, is why he's here," Troy said, looking down at her in concern. "Dabney sent for him" (Delta Wedding, p. 141).

The idea that George is always available for family demands is very frustrating to Robbie, who wants all of George's attention for herself: "He always goes to you. He always goes when you call him. . . . If Bluet would call him!" (Delta Wedding, p. 164). Ellen's explanation to Robbie for George's action fails to give her any comfort:

> "But George loves us! Of course he comes. . . . Why, George loves countless people."
>
> "No, he doesn't!" Robbie looked at her frantically, as if Ellen had told her just what she feared. "I'm going to l-leave out of here," she said, with a sob like a little stutter in her words. "Mr. Doolittle. He loves him," she said seemingly to herself, to mystify herself (Delta Wedding, p. 164).

Robbie feels that she must continually protect

George, for "when all the golden persuasions of the Fairchilds focused upon him, he would vaunt himself again, if she did not watch him" (Delta Wedding, p. 191). She therefore determines that "for whatever threatened to waste his life, to lead him away, even if he liked it, she was going to go up against if it killed her" (Delta Wedding, p. 192).

Robbie sees George, as Gloria sees Jack, as one who needs saving from the family's grasp. She feels that he must either be for them or for her: there is no middle ground. Insecure as one against the many Fairchilds, she feels threatened, as the following passage reveals:

> She drew her breath in fiercely as always when the fond, teasing, wistful play of the family love for George hung and threatened near. Nothing was worthy of him but the pure gold, a love that could be simply beside him--her love. Only she could hold him against that grasp, that separating thrust of Fairchild love that would go on and on persuading him, comparing him, begging him, crowing over him, slighting him, proving to him, sparing him, comforting him, deceiving him, confessing and yielding to him, tormenting him . . . those smiling and not really mysterious ways of the Fairchilds (Delta Wedding, p. 149).

The irony of the above quotation, however, is that by wanting to protect George from the "separating thrust of Fairchild love" she essentially will be substituting her own brand of separation. Thus, each of these wives places no importance on blood ties and in fact is engaged in a battle with these relatives for the undisputed possession

of husband and home. In addition, each one is essentially self-seeking in that she can understand nothing done for anyone outside of her own immediate family. It should be noted, however, that the modern type of family certainly has no exclusive claim to this characteristic, for it is often shared by the traditionalists.

Robbie is jealous of the demands the family incessantly seems to be making on George. The main reason, in fact, for their temporary separation concerns George's action on the railroad trestle. Robbie evidently feels that in saving Maureen, George has made a choice between her and the Fairchilds: to her, it is as if all the Fairchilds assumed that in any crisis, the final sacrifice should be made unhesitatingly for a blood relative rather than accommodate the feelings of one related only by marriage. Proof of this statement is found in the conclusion of the Fairchilds' recitation of the Yellow Dog incident when Robbie cries, "George Fairchild, you didn't do this for me!" (Delta Wedding, p. 61).

Robbie feels that the Fairchilds have never truly seen George--they "were always seeing him by a gusty lamp--exaggerating, then blinding--by the lamp of their own indulgence" (Delta Wedding, p. 191). Robbie's point about the family's exaggerated picture of George is well taken--it does tend to overlook weaknesses and to emphasize

strengths. Yet, Robbie's own picture of George as "lighted up by his own fire--no one else but himself was there, a solid man, going through the world, a husband" (Delta Wedding, p. 191) is not quite true either; for she is failing to take into account all of the family influences which have helped to mold him into the person he is today, as well as the very real family ties which keep him from being a solitary figure.

In The Ponder Heart, Bonnie Dee exhibits this same selfish attitude which is very definitely a product of the modern's attempt to stay clear of any binding relationship with other people. Essentially, the result of having no one else to depend on is that one has to rely on himself. Bonnie Dee in negotiating a "trial" marriage to Uncle Daniel certainly is looking out for her own best interests. If the marriage does not suit her, she is free to go (which she does) with no binding ties to anyone. A further example of her self-centeredness is seen when Narciss describes the lightning on the day of Bonnie Dee's death and relates Bonnie Dee's words when she sees Uncle Daniel and Edna Earle coming to visit: "Here dey come. Glad to see anybody. If it gits anybody, hope it gits dem, not me" (The Ponder Heart, p. 97).

Likewise, Gloria of Losing Battles can be seen as looking after her own interests. For example, before Jack

has gotten home from the penitentiary, his family tries to think of ways to soften the news of his Grandfather's death and of the sale of Jack's truck. Assuming the typical traditional family's attitude that each member's possessions really belong to the family in general, Aunt Birdie says that "just when he needs it most" they will "bring out that little surprise," referring to Lady May (Losing Battles, p. 69). But Gloria quickly vetoes their plans when she declares, "She's my surprise to bring" (Losing Battles, p. 69). A further example of her egocentricity can be seen when Gloria cries while hearing Miss Julia's final letter which hints of Gloria's origin being read. The Renfros are pleased that Gloria is finally showing some emotion for someone else:

> "Listen at Gloria," Aunt Nanny said. "She's shedding tears."
>
> "That's right, Gloria. Now's a good time," Aunt Beck said lovingly. "A few tears for somebody else, you can spare those."

Yet Gloria clearly is not thinking of Miss Julia: "They're not for somebody else," weeps Gloria (Losing Battles, p. 300).

On another occasion, one feels as if he is hearing Robbie's words to George repeated when Gloria reproaches Jack for risking injury to himself while trying to save the Judge's car. She feels, as does Robbie, that Jack will continue to "vaunt himself" to fulfill the family's

idealized picture of him: ". . . you'll do it again," she cried. "Put me in the same fix! You risked your life for them!" (Losing Battles, pp. 421-422, italics mine).

Finally, after the funeral, Gloria suddenly realizes that she and Jack are by themselves. She once again exhibits the isolationist attitude of the modern type of family:

> "Oh, this is the way it could always be. It's what I've dreamed of," Gloria said, reaching both arms around Jack's neck. "I've got you all by myself, Jack Renfro. Nobody talking, nobody listening, nobody coming--nobody about to call you or walk in on us--there's nobody left but you and me, and nothing to be in our way. . . . If we could stay this way always--build us a little two-room house, where nobody in the world could find us--" (Losing Battles, p. 431).

At these words, however, Jack "drew her close, as if out of sudden danger" (Losing Battles, p. 431), symbolically emphasizing the very real conflict between Gloria's ideas of family and his own. Jack's plans for his family include not just Lady May, but "a string of other little chaps to come along behind her," for "you just can't have too many" in Jack's scheme of family living (Losing Battles, p. 435).

This modern possessive and self-centered attitude reaches its height in Fay of The Optimist's Daughter. While both Robbie and Gloria are possessive, their feelings nevertheless are understandable; for they are fighting the

family's expectations not only for themselves but for the identity of their husbands as husbands and not as the idolized persons that their families regard them as being.[11] Fay's concern for the Judge, however, goes very little beyond what he is able to do for her. When Fay learns that the Judge must have an eye operation, her first thought is "I don't see why this had to happen to me" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 8). Her lack of concern for the Judge is further illustrated in her attitude about the operation. She refuses to take seriously the necessity of such an operation saying, "I vote we just forget about the whole business. Nature's the great healer" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 10). We learn later that perhaps the main reason that she doesn't want the Judge to have the operation now is that it will keep her from attending the Mardi Gras then in progress in New Orleans.

> "What a way to keep his promise," said Fay. "When he told me he'd bring me to New Orleans some day, it was to see the Carnival." She stared out the window. "And the Carnival's going on right now. It looks like this is as close as we'll get to a parade" (The Optimist's Daughter, pp. 12-13).

And all of these comments are made as Fay and Laurel are waiting to hear the results of Judge McKelva's surgery!

Not only does Fay begrudge the operation, but she constantly complains about the amount of time after it

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[11]Louise Y. Gossett, "Eudora Welty's New Novel: The Comedy of Loss," The Southern Literary Journal, 3, No. 1 (1970), 127.

that she has to spend by the Judge's side:

> "Night after night, sitting up there with him, putting the food in his mouth, giving him his straw, letting him use up my cigarettes, keeping him from thinking!" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 35).

Fay's idea about people who are ill is that they should try to get better "for our sakes" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 38), a comment which once again illustrates her totally self-centered attitude.

Along with this self-centeredness and possessiveness, a third probable result of the avoidance of binding relationships outside of the immediate family is the antisociable nature of the moderns. Each of the four women being studied as representative of the modern ideology rarely participates in any kind of family gossip or news-sharing. Each one keeps things to herself and rejects any overtures to tell what is on her mind. As James Boatwright suggests, this silence in a world where talk is continual is very suspicious, even a wonder: "It implies secrecy, guilt, pride, a rejection of communion, an affirmation of individuality."[12] It is probably this "rejection of communion" and "affirmation of individuality" that are at the heart of these four women's refusals to enter into the family conversation. By becoming a part of

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[12]James Boatwright, "'I call this a reunion to remember, all!'" The New York Times Book Review, 12 April 1970, p. 1.

the group, they would be joining forces with the enemy. In Delta Wedding, when Robbie comes to the Fairchild home looking for George, she says little to the family. Later we find that although Robbie felt intensely about what was going on all around her, "she had never stopped for words to feelings--she felt only--with no words" (Delta Wedding, p. 158). However, when Robbie does decide to talk, she, as well as each of the three other women, makes her feelings known with no holds barred. This type of talking is incomprehensible to the traditional type of family, for one of the reasons that it tends to chatter aimlessly is in order to hide feelings too deep to be articulated.

Bonnie Dee of The Ponder Heart similarly refuses to talk. When Uncle Daniel first brings her to meet Edna Earle, "he talked and she just stood there . . . without offering a word" (The Ponder Heart, p. 35). Later after Bonnie Dee decides "No" to the marriage which has lasted five years and six months, she leaves a note telling of her decision, for, as Edna Earle relates, "she was tongue-tied when it came to words" (The Ponder Heart, p. 47).

In Losing Battles when Aunt Cleo asks Gloria how she managed to get a wedding ring in such hard times, Miss Beulah warns, "Mind out, Sister Cleo, Gloria don't like to tell her business" (Losing Battles, p. 48). Later,

however, when Gloria decides to relate Miss Julia's apprehensions about her marriage to Jack, Miss Beulah remarks, "I wonder what Miss Gloria won't decide to tell us. . . . Something's happened somewhere to loosen her tongue" (Losing Battles, p. 250).

Fay in The Optimist's Daughter doesn't remain so silent as the other three, yet she tends to discourage real communication by being evasive. For example, when Laurel questions her about her family, Fay denies having any living relatives. After exactly one paragraph about them, she does not mention them again. Her talk is not a genuine effort to reach out to others but again is wholly self-centered.

In addition to silence as a manifestation of an unwillingness to become part of the group, yet another demonstration of this same unsociable attitude can be seen in the moderns' reluctance to participate in group activities. As previously mentioned, Robbie in Delta Wedding cannot understand George's participating in family events so wholeheartedly: she would much prefer for her and George to be by themselves in their Memphis apartment. In The Ponder Heart, Bonnie Dee, although bored, obviously prefers living by herself, at least for a time, in the old Ponder house which is quite isolated in the country. Of course, Uncle Daniel is there at first, but she soon decides that

he must go, and so she remains with only Narciss for company. As a further example of this unsociable characteristic, Gloria refuses to wait for Jack's return with the family at the house. She instead goes to her regular place on an old fallen cedar log to wait for him by herself. This action is unfathomable to Aunt Cleo, who asks, "What's she want to walk off and leave good company for? . . . She too good for us?" (Losing Battles, p. 19). Gloria's stand-offish attitude is further demonstrated in her words to two little girls who come up close to see her dress: "I rather you stood back a distance" (Losing Battles, pp. 48-49). And later when Jack determines to go after Judge Moody to put him back in the ditch which he had helped him out of earlier, Gloria shuns all offers of help from the family:

> "Let every one of you come back to your seats," came the uplifted voice of Gloria. "I don't want man or boy to leave this house, or budge an inch till Jack gets back. This is Jack Renfro's own business. And nobody's coming with him but me and the baby" (Losing Battles, p. 93).

Likewise, in The Optimist's Daughter, Fay refuses all overtures of friendship by the townspeople. Unlike Becky, the Judge's first wife who took part in the town's events and was a regular member of a bridge-playing foursome, Fay will have nothing to do with this group. She and the Judge quickly fall into a pattern of being isolated; typically each Sunday they eat dinner by themselves at the local hotel.

Just as these holders of modern concepts refuse to form any attachments outside of their immediate family members, they also refuse any connection with the past. In this sense, therefore, they again may be considered rootless. Perhaps one reason why these moderns cannot understand the traditionalists' reverence for the past is that they do not share a common background with them. The lives of the traditionalists have been imbued with the past from their birth; as seen in Chapter II, certain ways of doing things as well as certain family legends based solely on the past have become an integral part of their lives. For the moderns who have no similar past associations, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the claims of the past on the ones whom they are trying to free from family influence. Thus Robbie feels helpless when she senses these pulls of the past on George:

> Sometimes she thought when he was so out of reach, so far away in his mind, that she could blame everything on some old story. . . . For he evidently felt that old stories, family stories, Mississippi stories, were the same as very holy, or very passionate, if stories could be those things. He looked out at the world, at her, sometimes, with that essence of the remote, proud, over-innocent Fairchild look that she suspected, as if an old story had taken hold of him--entered his flesh. And she did not know the story (Delta Wedding, p. 191).

Aunt Mac further points out Robbie's very different background when she lectures:

> "You're in Shellmound, now, Miss Robbie, but I know where you were brought up and who your pa and your ma were, and anything you say don't amount to a row of pins" (Delta Wedding, p. 163).

Thus, as Elmo Howell concludes, Robbie "is never at home with the family, not through any fault of theirs--though they deplore George's marriage--but because Robbie's background is so radically different that she cannot enter the common heritage."[13] In spite of her Delta origin, Robbie's "moorings are no deeper than a rented city flat."[14]

Bonnie Dee Peacock's lack of a similar background is immediately apparent to Edna Earle of The Ponder Heart, who makes the following prediction concerning Bonnie Dee's family:

> The Peacocks are the kind of people keep the mirror outside on the front porch, and go out and pick railroad lilies to bring inside the house, and wave at trains till the day they die. The most they probably hoped for was that somebody'd come find oil in the front yard and fly in the house and tell them about it (The Ponder Heart, p. 29).

Her suspicions concerning Bonnie Dee's background are strengthened when Bonnie Dee buys a washing machine and keeps it on the front porch "just like any Peacock would be bound to do" (The Ponder Heart, p. 68). Later at the funeral, Edna Earle's guesses are confirmed:

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[13]Elmo Howell, "Eudora Welty's Comedy of Manners," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 69, No. 4 (1970), 475.

[14]Ibid.

> Portulaca in pie pans was what they set along the front porch. And the mirror on the front of the house: I told you (The Ponder Heart, p. 76).

Gloria of Losing Battles likewise shares no comparable heritage with the Renfros. In fact, she knows nothing about her parents, for she was found in a shoe box on the porch swing by the county home demonstration agent. Gloria's birthday became April 1 since that was the day she was found, and her name was derived from the fact that it was a glorious day--"Gloria"--and the lady "was sorry she had to cut her visit so short"--"Short" (Losing Battles, p. 255). Thus, Gloria has no ties with any past.

Not possessing a traditional heritage, Fay in The Optimist's Daughter cannot understand why the townspeople are at her house when the Judge's body is brought back to Mount Salus for the funeral. "What's Becky's Garden Club got to do with me?" Fay exclaims; but she fails to understand Miss Tennyson's explanation that they are "here now for--for Laurel's mother's sake" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 53). As a further indication of Fay's different background, her ideas about wifely behavior at a funeral are certainly not in keeping with town traditions. She feels that making a scene is necessary in order to show a wife's bereavement. Everything must be done according to her ideas of what is proper, including leaving the casket open so that she can faint at the sight of her husband's body.

Thus, with no understanding of the past, with its traditions and legends which tend to give patterns for living in the present for the traditionalists, these moderns--Robbie, Bonnie Dee, Gloria, and Fay--are rootless and free to create their own standards of behavior.

As a logical extension of these four characters' lack of understanding or reverence for the past, they for the most part think only of the future. This attitude is really the only thing left for them, since the past has no meaning and the present is undesirable in its traditional emphases. The future, therefore, is their symbol of hope.

Robbie in Delta Wedding is not so outspoken a futurist as Gloria or Fay, but at the first of the novel she definitely is living for the time when she can have George to herself in their apartment in Memphis where "nobody bothered them" (Delta Wedding, p. 139). Her determination to save George from his family is a future-oriented decision, for she will not be able to win the battle in just one skirmish.

Gloria in Losing Battles is the most obviously future-oriented person of the four. In at least seven separate references she mentions "living for the future." Gloria's philosophy is to "have nothing to do with the old dead past" for "all that counts in life is up ahead"

(Losing Battles, p. 315). This continual thinking about the future becomes Gloria's supporting principle through her various trials. When her husband is taken to the penitentiary, what sustains Gloria is the fact that she and Jack have decided "to live for the future" (Losing Battles, p. 60). She endures living with Jack's family in the present, because she plans for her, Jack, and Lady May to move to themselves eventually. As an example of her future orientation, all the time that she rather unwillingly helps Jack in his efforts to save the Judge's car, she "tried to keep [her] mind on the future" (Losing Battles, p. 421). When Jack tries to reassure Gloria toward the end of the novel by saying that he still has all of his family solidly behind him, a fact which is hardly reassuring to Gloria, she answers, "I'll just keep right on thinking about the future, Jack" (Losing Battles, p. 434).

Finally, Fay, too, lives for the future. In her confrontation with Laurel over the breadboard, her feelings about the past and the future become readily apparent:

> "I don't know what you're making such a big fuss over. What do you see in that thing?" asked Fay.
>
> "The whole story, Fay. The whole solid past," said Laurel.
>
> "Whose story? Whose past? Not mine," said Fay. "The past isn't a thing to me. I belong to the future, didn't you know that?" (The Optimist's Daughter, pp. 206-07).

Not only are these moderns rootless in the sense that they advocate no ties to relatives or to the past, but they are also rootless in the sense that they lack any ties to the land. Unlike the traditional family that owns land which has probably been handed down over several generations and which thus has come to be identified with them, the moderns place no particular importance on either the owning of land or in being identified with a certain place. For example, in Delta Wedding, Robbie "had never thought it strange in her life before, having no land or possessions herself--Reids and Swansons had never become planters--but now she did" (Delta Wedding, p. 145). Gloria as an orphan obviously has no ties to the land. Although this point is not specifically made about Bonnie Dee and Fay, there is no evidence to suggest any such ties for them.

Thus, in an overall comparison of the traditional type of family as presented in Chapter II with the modern type of family as described in this chapter, several direct points of conflict are apparent. While the traditional family's characteristics stem from their belief in an extended type of organization, the modern family's characteristics are the result of their closed type of organization. While the traditionals are largely sociable people who participate as a group in any family event, the moderns

are independents with self-directed interests. The traditional family's continual talking is in direct contrast to the modern's silence and reticence about participating in any conversation.

The past for the traditional type of family is very important, for it serves as a model which family members are expected to emulate. It is constantly kept alive by rehearsing family history and by naming members for ancestors.

In contrast, the past is of no importance to the moderns; they live for a future when they hope family ties can be sloughed off. Likewise, the traditionalists' attachment to a particular place finds no corresponding feeling in the moderns, who are a restless and mobile type of people.

Thus, it is to be expected that these two contrasting ideas about family would come into sharp conflict when juxtaposed with each other. These contrasting characteristics are not the only areas of conflict, however; as Chapter IV will show, the basic functions of these two types of families differ also. These points will be studied in order to discover Miss Welty's implications concerning these two groups.

CHAPTER IV

FUNCTIONS OF THE TWO FAMILY TYPES

In addition to surveying some of the more noticeable characteristics of each family type as was done in Chapters II and III, it is necessary to examine the functions which the traditional and modern families perform for their respective members. In examining these basic functions, it will become apparent that neither the traditional nor modern type of family is wholly praiseworthy in its actions; each type has both positive and negative aspects. An examination of the differing functions of both types of families will do several things: it will show that Miss Welty is not biased, for she realistically portrays each family with its good and bad qualities; it will reveal our society's possible future condition if either family's negative functions are carried to extremes and become dominant; and finally, it will help us to determine possible trends in Miss Welty's treatment of the modern and traditional families in four novels, which will be discussed in Chapter V. The beneficial and harmful functions of the traditional family will be examined first, followed by a look at the modern family's functions.

One of the most important beneficial functions that

the traditional family performs for its members is that it encourages a sense of security by giving them a feeling of group acceptance, by offering them protection from the outside world, by not intruding on their privacy, and by presenting a solid front to the world even though misunderstandings may occur within the family. This sense of security is fostered by the feelings of belonging and group acceptance which surround each member. Miss Welty in several of her short stories such as "Flowers for Marjorie," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," and "The Hitch-hikers," has explored the often disastrous consequences to people who are cut off from a familial or cultural identity which gives this sense of belonging. John M. Bradbury in commenting on these short stories finds that what most of these characters lack is "a communion of people to love and to guarantee spiritual protection" such as that found in the Fairchild family in Delta Wedding.[1]

A prominent feature of this group acceptance is that it is extended regardless of how strange a relative's behavior might be. It makes no difference how odd a family member may appear to the outside world, for he is

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[1]John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 108.

safe in his family's tolerance. In Delta Wedding, for example, Troy, an outsider, is amazed to find that Aunt Mac always washes and irons the payroll before it is issued to the workers because "she hates for them to give anything but new bills to a lady, the way they do nowadays" (Delta Wedding, p. 96). The family's attitude toward her activity is effectively summed up by Battle's roaring statement: "If that's what she wants to do, let her do it!" (Delta Wedding, p. 96). This same acceptance includes Cousin Maureen, who is mentally defective, and Aunt Shannon, who converses with the dead as if they were actually present.

The Ponders and the Renfros also have their share of eccentric relatives, and they are just as warmly accepted. No one could be more eccentric than Uncle Daniel in The Ponder Heart, who gives away everything he owns as the mood strikes him. Yet Edna Earle is lovingly tolerant of his actions and tries to protect his feelings by explaining his behavior to people before they meet him. In addition, it is fortunate for Uncle Homer in Losing Battles that he is married to Mr. Renfro's sister, for his actions might not be tolerated otherwise. Even though he arrests Jack and is responsible for sending him to prison, he still

is an accepted part of the family circle and is assured of the Renfro votes in the local elections. Uncle Nathan in the same novel has cut off his hand because he killed a man. Furthermore, he always sleeps in a tent as he roams over the earth distributing signs warning mankind of impending destruction; yet, he, too, is a warmly accepted family member.

Thus, one way the traditional family offers its members security is by accepting them just as they are, regardless of their idiosyncrasies. One condition, however, for a family member to be given this security is that he must conform to family standards and beliefs. Sister in "Why I Live at the P.O.," for example, finds that her entire family turns against her when she refuses to accept Stella-Rondo's story about adopting Shirley-T.

A second way the family provides security is by giving its members protection from the outside world. Although this function may have several distinct disadvantages which will be discussed later in this chapter, this protection can be helpful, if not carried to extremes.

In Delta Wedding, George, although an active participant in life himself, acts as a shield to protect the rest of the family from the intrusion of the outside world. Robbie ruefully acknowledges George's role as family protector:

> He was to be all in one their lover and protector and dreaming, forgetful conscience. From Aunt Shannon on down, he was to be always looking through them as well as to the left and right of them, before them and behind them, watching out for and loving their weaknesses. If anything tried to happen to them, let it happen to him! He took that part, but it was the way he was made, too, to be like that (Delta Wedding, pp. 212-213).

Edna Earle acts as the protective shield for Uncle Daniel in The Ponder Heart. She is constantly guarding him from people unsympathetic to his ways. Before people meet him, she asks them to "go along" with him when he starts giving things away, even though these things may no longer be his to give.

In Losing Battles, the entire Renfro family acts to conceal knowledge from Jack which might be hard to him to accept. When he has just returned from the penitentiary, the family tries as long as it can to keep the news about his grandfather's death from him, as well as the sale of his horse and truck; but this one time, the facts of the real world intrude.

A third advantageous function that the traditional family provides in offering security to its members is that it does not intrude on their privacy. This guarantee is possible because each family member is an accepted part of a group which has a common body of knowledge about that person. Thus, as Louis D. Rubin, Jr., states, "In the family, certain things are known, and so those who are

in the family can deal with each other in terms of the known, thus avoiding inquiry into private matters."[2] The family's community existence, therefore, where certain things are known and accepted about each member, is a way of protecting each member's privacy and of giving each one a feeling of security. Ellen in Delta Wedding realizes this privateness of each family member. As she looks at them as they are gathered for supper, she thinks that "here in the closest intimacy the greatest anonymity lay . . ." (Delta Wedding, p. 188).

Although a person may be a member of a family, he still may experience loneliness in his private self, as Shelley's statement attests: "I think one by one we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient" (Delta Wedding, p. 84). Yet, the attractive rather than the tragic side of separateness is stressed in this novel; for as Ruth Vande Keift notes, this "'separateness' protects the vulnerable and provides a shell against exposure,"[3] so that each individual may develop his full potential while protected by the solid front the family presents to the world.

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[2]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Everything Brought Out in the Open: Eudora Welty's Losing Battles," The Hollins Critic, 7, No. 3 (1970), 6-7.

[3]Ruth M. Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 94-95.

This very privateness of family members which is protected by being a part of a family is evident in Vaughn of Losing Battles and Shelley in Delta Wedding. It is apparent that Vaughn is very much an individualist who resents eternally being compared with his older brother Jack. As he successfully pulls the school bus out of the ditch, he says to himself, "Without Jack, nothing would be no trouble at all" (Losing Battles, p. 364). Yet, since he is a member of the Renfros, as long as he outwardly conforms to the ways of the family, he is free to develop his own individualism, shown in part by his love of geography, an outside interest which is antithetical to his family's concerns. Likewise, Shelley has her own introspective moments as seen in her diary, where she is revealed as a perceptive person, much more self-conscious and sensitive than any Fairchild would outwardly appear; yet she is free to be her own person in her family as long as she outwardly conforms to their requirements.

This same close-knit nature of the traditional family further protects its members by presenting an impenetrable wall to outsiders. Shelley recognizes this characteristic in her family when she writes in her diary,

> . . . all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside. Does the world

> suspect? that we are all very private people? (Delta Wedding, p. 84).

Thus, quarrels or misunderstandings may occur within the family but a solid front is presented to the world, thereby giving the members a fourth means of security. For example, in The Optimist's Daughter, Laurel obviously does not understand or approve of her father's marriage to Fay. Yet, when the bridesmaids start jokingly criticizing the Judge about his second marriage, Laurel instantly defends him. And when the ladies of the town visit Laurel as she works in the garden and begin gossiping about Fay, and the Judge's possible reasons for marrying her, "Laurel stood up" and Miss Adele correctly interprets her action as an invitation for them to leave (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 116). This action is in direct contrast to Fay's conduct at the New Orleans hospital when she tells everyone in the waiting room about the Judge's eye operation. This behavior would never be condoned by a traditionalist; even though there might be disagreements among family members, these quarrels would never be aired to outsiders.

The traditional family not only gives its members security but identity as well. Through the family's emphasis on and reverence for the past, its influence helps to establish a place in the community for each member so that he has no qualms about his future.

Interestingly, this function of defining a person's identity is yet another contribution to his personal security. A member knows who he is (based on family connections), where he has been (judged on the basis of ancestors' past actions), and where he is going (deduced from past ancestral patterns), so that there is no need for apprehension about either his security or his identity.

One way in which the past acts as an identity-giver is through the transmission of the respected family name. In each of the four novels being studied, the traditional families are among the leading families of the community. Their position, however, is primarily the result of their old and respected name based on the past actions and reputation of their ancestors, and not because of great material success in the present that the family may have enjoyed. Robbie shows her lack of understanding of this point in Delta Wedding when she tells the Fairchilds that they have no reason to be proud:

> "You're just one plantation. . . . You're not even rich! You're just medium. Only four gates to get here, and your house needs a coat of paint! You don't even have one of those little painted wooden niggers to hitch horses to!" (Delta Wedding, p. 163).

Thus, it is not necessary for a member of a traditional family to "prove" himself by becoming successful in the modern world's terms in order to have a respected name.

His name with its associations is something which he acquires through no efforts of his own: it is bestowed on him at birth. Such characters might be the ones Alun R. Jones describes in Eudora Welty's work when he states about them:

> while the world is rushing forward into the future looking for purpose and meaning, those who stay still have meaning and purpose conferred on them, an inheritance from the living past.[4]

One reason that the family name endures is that it is usually affixed to a particular place. This practice of calling a farm, for example, "the Boone place," even though the Boones may no longer live there, has further contributed to giving the later descendants a ready-made identity.

The integrity of the traditionalists or their acceptance in the community, as Robert Holland points out, is based on knowing and being known.[5] Thus, the Fairchilds of Delta Wedding never question their position in Fairchilds, Mississippi: for example, it is just accepted that

> any member of the Fairchild family in its widest sense, who wanted to, could go into the store,

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[4]Alun R. Jones, "A Frail Travelling Coincidence: Three Later Stories of Eudora Welty," Shenandoah, 20, No. 3 (1969), 41.

[5]Robert B. Holland, "Dialogue as a Reflection of Place in The Ponder Heart," American Literature, 35, No. 3 (1963), 353.

> walk behind the counter, reach in and take anything on earth, without having to pay or even specify exactly what he took (Delta Wedding, p. 136).

In addition to giving its members an established name in the community, a traditional family through its connections with the past gives its members models for living in the present, models which help them to define clearly their identity by comparison with their ancestors. This influence of the past as a model for the present has been noted by Robert B. Holland, who finds that "Miss Welty's people live in a context of enduring human relationships, in which one act and word are colored by all other acts and words, and in which time past is present in time future."[6]

Thus, through the influence of the past, the traditional family tends to give its members a pattern of living so that they have few apprehensions or worries about their identity in the future. Their tendency is to follow established patterns of living, believing that what has worked in the past will surely continue to work in the future. Thus Battle of Delta Wedding will train his sons to assume the management of the plantation, and Jack will automatically take his position as a farmer in Banner because these are the patterns which have been perpetuated throughout the generations of their families.

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[6]Ibid., pp. 353-354.

In summary, then, the traditional family offers its members two of the things most necessary to mankind: security and identity. This security extends to the most eccentric family member; it also tends to protect each member's private sensibilities from the harsh realities of the outside world. The identity furnished by the family gives each member a place in the present and future based on the past. These positive functions are very much evident in Miss Welty's novels, yet there also may be negative aspects for some of these.

One of the most obvious negative functions of the traditional family is its confining and prescriptive nature. In Delta Wedding, Laura notices the confined state of her relatives living at Shellmound as seen in the following excerpt:

> . . . Laura found herself with a picture in her mind of a great bowerlike cage full of tropical birds her father had shown her in a zoo in a city--the sparkle of motion was like a rainbow, while it was the very thing that broke your heart, for the birds that flew were caged all the time and could not fly out. The Fairchilds' movements were quick and on the instant, and that made you wonder, are they free? (Delta Wedding, p. 15).

In order to be a part of the family group and reap the benefits of security and identity, it is necessary for a person to give up some of his freedoms in order to conform to group sanctions. As Elmo Howell states, each family

member is subservient to the whole: each person must give up "a little of his own angularity to find his step in the measured strain."[7] Thus, in Delta Wedding, Troy must conform to the family's wishes by having George for his best man in the wedding instead of his best friend Buster Daggett, who works at "the ice and coal" (Delta Wedding, p. 141). Likewise, Robbie realizes that her acceptance by the family hinges on her willingness to humble herself to the demands which the family makes of her:

> . . . their smile had said more plainly than words, Bow down, you love our George, enter on your knees and we will pull you up and pet and laugh at you fondly for it--we can! We will bestow your marriage on you, little Robbie, that we sent to high school! (Delta Wedding, p. 158).

In Losing Battles, Vaughn is under constant pressure by his family as the younger brother to follow Jack's example. However, he has not yet bent to the family's wishes, a circumstance which is most perturbing to his family, who expect immediate compliance:

> "He'll never be Jack," says Miss Beulah. "Says the wrong thing, does the wrong thing, doesn't do what I tell him. And perfectly satisfied to have you say so!" (Losing Battles, p. 12).

And Jack's statement that since Uncle Homer has "been married into the family for a good long while . . . he

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[7]Elmo Howell, "Eudora Welty's Comedy of Manners," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 69, No. 4 (1970), 478.

can be expected to improve" (Losing Battles, p. 129), further implies that the family is expected to exert a definite influence on the behavior of its members.

Of course, a certain amount of conformity to group behavior is necessary in any society to prevent total anarchy. Thus, induced conformity is not always a negative function of the family. Indeed, Uncle Homer's conformity might make him easier to get along with for everybody! In addition, Ellen in Delta Wedding has conformed a great deal to the Fairchild standards since her marriage to Battle. As Tempe thinks, "Ellen had come far, had yielded to much, for a Virginian" (Delta Wedding, p. 190); yet she still is an individual with a private self for whom limited conformity has not been harmful. Conformity becomes dangerous when it results in what Peggy Prenshaw calls a "stultification to spiritual and mental independence."[8] This condition occurs when conformity is carried to an extreme and results in situations such as those found in "At the Landing" and "Clytie."

Jennie Lockhart ("At the Landing") has been forced to conform to the Lockhart family pattern of isolation from the world. The Lockharts have indeed "locked their hearts" against any intrusion from the outside. Thus

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[8]Peggy Prenshaw, "Cultural Patterns in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding and 'The Demonstrators,'" Notes on Mississippi Writers, 3 (1970), 55.

Jennie lives with her grandfather in the house high above the town, where life is denied in its museum-like state. As long as she is in the house, she is free to go from room to room; but at the door of the house "her grandfather would call her back, with his little murmur."[9] The loneliness and sterility of her condition induce her to become less than alive herself as she goes about silently, scarcely touching anything. Thus, this extreme conformity and confinement result in Jennie's total inadequacy to meet the real world when her grandfather dies.

Clytie Farr ("Clytie"), too, has been confined to a decaying ancestral mansion her entire life and has been forced to conform to the demands of her decadent family. In this house, too, life is denied as symbolized by the closed windows and drawn shades. Clytie has become a servant for the rest of her family, cooking three different meals at each meal time: one for her mad sister, Octavia; one for her invalid father; and one for her alcoholic brother, Gerald. She has no life of her own; for when she tries to communicate with any people of the outside world, "it was their faces [the faces of her

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[9]Eudora Welty, "At the Landing," Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [The Wide Net] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 182.

family] which came between."[10] Thus, conformity reduces Clytie to a death-in-life state from which death is her only escape. If carried to extremes, then, the conformity demanded by the traditional family of its members can produce deadening effects.

From the preceding examples, especially those of Jennie Lockhart and Clytie Farr, it can be seen that the traditional family in demanding this conformity to its desires often tends to isolate its members from reality, from the outside world, and from any type of progress or change. According to Louis D. Rubin, Jr., families as well as communities in Miss Welty's fictional world are the means by which their members can hide from reality.[11] It is interesting to notice that coping with reality has been a concern in several of Miss Welty's short stories that deal with the older, traditional types of families. These old families are involved in at least three stories, for in both "A Curtain of Green" and "Clytie," the towns are named for the families in the story; and Mr. Marblehall in "Old Mr. Marblehall" is descended from a very old Natchez family. A common factor in these three stories is that each of the main characters

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[10]Eudora Welty, "Clytie," Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [A Curtain of Green] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 168.

[11]Rubin, p. 6.

has difficulty facing reality. Mrs. Larkin cannot cope with the bizarre death of her husband; Clytie searches every face she meets for some escape from her present conditions or for some meaning to her life; and Mr. Marblehall either has a literal second family or a fictional one so real to him that he can no longer distinguish reality from fantasy. Thus, the inability of each of these characters to cope rationally with the real world leads them to indulge in fantasy. As Alfred Appel, Jr., points out, these three pictures may suggest a critical view of the old families' abilities in general to deal with reality,[12] a contention which is partially borne out in an examination of the traditional families in each of the four novels being studied. This isolation from reality takes at least three forms in Miss Welty's novels: certain members of the family may act to shelter others from knowledge of the real world; the family may choose to ignore or avoid reality; or it may keep itself occupied with the minutiae of living as a diversionary tactic.

First of all, the family acts much as a protective agent to shelter its members from reality. Based on her family's past actions, Dabney realizes in Delta Wedding

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[12]Alfred Appel, Jr., A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 90.

that she will never really know her family's feelings about her marriage to Troy, for "nobody had ever told her anything--not anything very true or very bad in life" (Delta Wedding, p. 122). In the same novel, George acts as the main shield for the family between them and the outside world. When Battle comments that George is never there when they need him, "come any conceivable hell or high water," Robbie furiously thinks, "That's always when George is here--holding it off for you . . ." (Delta Wedding, p. 159). We know that George is much more aware of the real world than he outwardly shows as seen, for example, in his sexual encounter with the girl who is later killed by a train. Yet he never exposes the family proper to such outside information (he does tell Ellen, but she is still somewhat of an outsider). The rest of the family also acts together to shield Dabney from the news that Robbie has left George so that her happiness won't be dampened.

This same protection against the hurt or confusion which might result if one were to face reality squarely is found in The Ponder Heart. Edna Earle has devoted her life to shielding Uncle Daniel from reality, and she is still operating in this capacity at Bonnie Dee's funeral. Here she is acting to shield him from the realities of death and funerals, which "he can't abide." The fact that

he "held every eye at the services" she tells us "was the best thing in the world for Uncle Daniel, because it distracted him from what was going on" (The Ponder Heart, p. 41).

Besides acting as a protective agent, the family also tends to avoid unpleasantness by simply ignoring it. In Delta Wedding, for example, Ellen as a perceptive member of the family, yet one who is still an outsider, notices this characteristic in her own family's reactions to Robbie when she comes looking for George. She sees that "there was real trouble in Robbie's face," yet the family does nothing to help or comfort her: they use the entrance of a bird in the house as an excuse to run away from a distasteful scene. Thus, as Ellen concludes, "the Fairchilds simply shied away from trouble as children would do" (Delta Wedding, p. 159). Again in the same novel, when Robbie decides to "tell off" the Fairchilds, saying that "you're all a spoiled, stuck-up family that thinks nobody else is really in the world" (Delta Wedding, p. 163), the only reaction she gets is from Aunt Mac, who calmly tells her to "get yourself a drink of water, child. . . . You'll strangle yourself. And talk louder. Nobody's going to make me wear that hot earphone, not in September!" (Delta Wedding, p. 164).

A third means by which the family manages to avoid

reality is by being eternally occupied in its own day-to-day affairs of living, marrying, and having children. As Francis Simkins and Charles Roland state in reference to The Golden Apples, Miss Welty "demonstrates how Mississippians employ the affairs of family and community to soften the awareness of violence and misery--even of the mortality--of life."[13] Thus the members develop a kind of immunity so that when unpleasantness does occasionally confront them in the form of a death or a train accident, they can avoid it by using diversionary methods.

In Losing Battles, the family's tendency to avoid the truth of their ever-worsening economic condition by diverting themselves with a new roof on the house or by reciting their past glories at the family reunion is yet another illustration of the traditional family's inclination to gloss over unpleasantness. As Louise Gossett states, the Renfros' "boast that they can survive is an empty sentimentality cutting them off from the truth of their condition."[14]

Likewise, in Delta Wedding, the Fairchilds either

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[13]Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, A History of the South, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 443.

[14]Louise Y. Gossett, "Eudora Welty's New Novel: The Comedy of Loss," The Southern Literary Journal, 3, No. 1 (1970), 129.

deny or ignore such things as violence and death, preferring to concentrate instead on the daily ritual of their lives.[15] They refuse to take seriously the train incident which could have killed both George and Maureen. As Ellen realizes,

> . . . the family would forever see the stopping of the Yellow Dog entirely after the fact--as a preposterous diversion of their walk, resulting in lover's complications, for with the fatal chance removed the serious went with it forever, and only the romantic and absurd abided. They would have nothing of the heroic, or the tragic now . . . (Delta Wedding, p. 188).

Later as the wedding pictures are being made, the photographer mentions that he has just taken pictures of a train victim, a girl killed by a train much like the one that had threatened George and Maureen. Yet the family refuses to connect these two incidents or the accompanying implication that a train is indeed capable of killing, for Aunt Tempe immediately commands, "Change the subject" (Delta Wedding, p. 218), and the family is once again diverted from reality.

Again, a certain amount of defense against reality is not unhealthy, for we as vulnerable human beings need some cushioning against the harsh blows of the world. An example of the lack of such defenses can be seen in

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[15]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Five Southerners," The Hopkins Review, 3 (1950), 136-137.

"Flowers for Marjorie,"[16] where Howard and Marjorie are alone in New York with no family or friends to help them contend with Howard's joblessness. When faced with the stark realities of existence, Howard finds himself unable to cope. Isolation from reality becomes harmful when it is carried to extremes as in the cases of Jennie Lockhart and Clytie Farr, so that people become helpless against time and change and are unable to deal with their circumstances when the real world intrudes.

In addition to isolating itself from reality in general, the family also tends to isolate itself from the outside world or events. Their world is a little, protected one where there is no real desire to know how things are on "the outside." This point is made most forcefully in Delta Wedding where Laura as an outsider from Jackson who has been exposed to more than just its confines is greeted with apathy each time she suggests an interest in anything very remote from Fairchilds, Mississippi. For example, when Laura and Roy are discussing the Yazoo River, Roy volunteers that it runs into the Mississippi River and Laura adds that it then runs into the sea, but significantly Roy "would say no more" (Delta Wedding, p. 172). Later at a family picnic, Laura mentions that her

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[16]Eudora Welty, "Flowers for Marjorie," Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [A Curtain of Green] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943).

father has taken her on trips--"I know about geography. . . . But in the great confines of Shellmound, no one listened" (Delta Wedding, p. 249).

The same situation occurs in Losing Battles when Vaughn says that Jack will have the farthest to come to the reunion:

> Etoyle laughed. "How do you know how far it is? You never been out of Banner!"
>
> Vaughn's blue eyes swam suddenly. "I've been to school! I seen a map of the whole world!" (Losing Battles, p. 8).

But no one pays any attention to Vaughn.

The third way in which the family functions to isolate its members is closely related to the preceding one: it refuses to acknowledge the progress or change of the outside world. It is just as if time has stood still in each of these novels. In Delta Wedding, for example, Fairchilds, Mississippi, has been the same little town for as long as Laura can remember. On her way from Jackson to the little town, she remembers several things from her previous visits--one, that there was a notice on the post office wall which warned people "not to be defrauded by the Spanish swindle." Seeing this same notice on the wall during her present visit, she concludes that "the swindle was still going on" (Delta Wedding, p. 127). Likewise, in Losing Battles, Aunt Cleo, after noticing that the three generations of Renfro women all wear their hair in the same

pigtails, comments, "You-all must be a mighty long ways from civilization away up here" (Losing Battles, p. 14). And in a statement that might be more a reflection of Brother Bethune's preaching ability than an indication of Banner's stagnant growth rate, the preacher comments, "I can truthfully say it hasn't growed one inch since I been preaching" (Losing Battles, p. 193). Furthermore, Laurel in The Optimist's Daughter returns to the town of Mount Salus to find it the same sleepy little hamlet, untouched by modernization.

This refusal to be concerned about the future or to try to adapt to new methods of doing things might prove the undoing of the traditional type of family and lead to its eventual extinction. The tendency to be satisfied with the status quo is very apparent among the traditional families. For example, in The Ponder Heart, Edna Earle relates that she has sometimes thought about turning her grandfather's house "into something," maybe even a chinchilla farm, but she characteristically resolves this dilemma by saying,

> But that's the future. Don't think about it, Edna Earle, I say. So I just cut out a little ad about a booklet that you can send off for, and put it away in a drawer--I forget where (The Ponder Heart, p. 44).

An even more serious example of the failure to be aware of changing conditions occurs in Losing Battles.

When Jack comes home from prison, he expects things to be just as they were when he left. Gloria tries to make him realize that this attitude is just not possible, but he refuses to listen. Jack feels, as is common with the traditionalists, that he will succeed in future enterprises because he is using methods which have worked for his ancestors. There is a fallacy in this mode of thinking, however; sometimes changing conditions in the world necessitate different methods to cope with these changes. For example, there are several indications in Losing Battles that the Renfros have gotten about all they can get from their worn-out land; even though Jack is eternally optimistic that he can save the farm in the Depression times and "bring in the sheaves" once again, we find ourselves a bit skeptical. Planting the same crops over and over on the same land has continued to deplete the soil. What is needed now is change in the form of crop rotation, fertilization, and irrigation. Thus a total reliance on the past for ways of living in the present can have its pitfalls as can the refusal to acknowledge progress or change.

In addition to the conformity and isolation from reality which the traditional family imposes on its members, a final negative influence lies in its tendency to exploit one member for the good of the group. This

action can have several harmful effects: it may cause the person exploited to neglect his responsibilities to his own immediate family in favor of answering the extended group's call whenever he is needed, or it may result in each family member's failure to develop any self-reliance because of the dependence on another person as problem-solver for every situation.

There are two main characters who are in the danger of exploitation from their families: George in Delta Wedding, and Jack in Losing Battles. A third character, Edna Earle in The Ponder Heart, could to a lesser extent fit this description. She, however, has actively embraced her martyr-like position in her family and seems to thrive on it. George is continually besieged by the family to perform all sorts of feats. His continual acquiescence to the "golden persuasions of the Fairchilds" (Delta Wedding, p. 191) is what concerns Robbie. Yet she evidently feels that he is a strong enough person to withstand these demands, for at the end of the novel there is a suggestion that they might return to live at the Grove and she gives no violent opposition.

George is quite different from Jack in one respect: George can see reality (Ellen says that "he saw death on its way, if they did not," Delta Wedding, p. 188), while it is doubtful that Jack ever will. Jack, thus, may

continue to be exploited by his family as its champion, much to the dismay of Gloria and Vaughn, an exploitation which could lead to the crippling of his own immediate family life.

Thus, in summary, the traditional family deals its members potential harm by causing them to conform to its demands in exchange for security and identity. Further, this type of family tends to confine its members to an isolated little world, where the realities of sickness, violence and death are ignored, and where progress and change are disregarded, thereby rendering its members helpless when the real world does intrude. Finally, there is a tendency to rely on one member of the family too heavily with detrimental effects to both the immediate and the extended family.

Turning to the modern family, we again find both positive and negative aspects of this family type. However, in this case, it will be seen that there seem to be more unattractive aspects to this family type than attractive ones. Yet there are some very definite advantages to the way this family operates in comparison with the traditional family.

First, an individual has freedom to develop his own interests without having to conform to the examples of several generations of ancestors. Yet complete freedom

is not given, for there is a suggestion that the modernists will have their children follow their own examples. As Gloria tells her child, Lady May, "Just you remember who to copy" (Losing Battles, p. 47).

Secondly, a member of a modern family is free to rise above what might be considered the limitations of family background, especially if the family is not very outstanding. In each of the four novels being studied, the "modern" representative comes from a nondescript background yet manages to better herself through marriage, much like the Snopeses in Faulkner's writing. Robbie, who has grown up wearing Shelley's cast-off dresses and who has been a clerk in the Fairchilds' store, marries George, the living Fairchild hero. Likewise, Bonnie Dee, who has never been more than a clerk in the dime store and whose family has flourished numerically but not financially, marries Uncle Daniel Ponder, one of Clay's richest citizens. Gloria of Losing Battles certainly does not marry into great wealth; but as an orphan with no possessions, she does better her condition, if only slightly, in her marriage to Jack Renfro. And finally, Fay, a legal secretary from a prolific and profane Texas family, marries Judge McKelva, one of Mount Salus' leading citizens.

A third practice of the modern family type is

closely related to the preceding one. Because of their background with no extended family to shelter them from life's realities or to help them if the need arises, this type of family teaches its members to be self-reliant. They learn to depend only on themselves. Gloria of Losing Battles best demonstrates this self-sufficiency; for she gets her wedding ring by teaching, makes her wedding dress herself, and depends on no one but herself for food for her baby. Robbie in Delta Wedding determines to get George back, and rather than accept a ride with Troy to Shellmound, walks all the way herself, hoping that this will make George feel worse. Being dependent on no one, these characters will pursue whatever they want, and they usually are successful.

Further, since they are not bound by any traditional way of doing things, they are more apt to change with the times. This ability to change produces a rather tenacious quality in them. If one way of life doesn't work, they will simply choose another.

Thus, in comparison with a traditional family member, a product of a modern family is tougher, has his eyes wide open, and is determined to get what he wants, regardless. These qualities can be seen as distinct advantages for survival in a rapidly changing world where older methods of doing things may no longer be adequate.

A look on the negative side, however, reveals that some of the modern family's actions appear very damaging. The wholesale rejection of the past may indeed cause some replacement of obsolete methods, yet it may also cause a loss of meaning in the lives of the inhabitants of present as well as future generations. How will one know where he is or how satisfying life may yet be if he has no standards of comparison? Further, such qualities as honor, hospitality, and loyalty to a people and place as perpetuated by traditions need further examination before they are rejected.

In addition, the functioning of the modern family negates any sense of the continuity of love from one generation to the next, or from one family to another. The emphasis becomes more "I" centered with the result that compassion for others is often overlooked in the rush to further one's own interests. Children as well as parents are also robbed of those mysterious bonds of kinship which are extended whenever there is need for help with a problem or simply a joyous occasion to share.

This loss of meaningful relationships with those outside of the immediate family is also involved in the loss of a sense of belonging or of group security. Miss Welty has often shown the disastrous consequences which may result when there is a loss of this sense of belonging,

as in "Flowers for Marjorie," "The Hitch-hikers," and "Death of a Traveling Salesman." In "Flowers for Marjorie," Howard and Marjorie are forced to rely only on themselves in the impersonal city of New York; they are far away from any family who might at least share their burden. When faced with the facts of his joblessness, their penniless condition, and his wife's pregnancy with its constant reminder that there will soon be another person to feed and care for, Howard kills his wife in desperation; for he has no solutions and there is no one to help him.

In "The Hitch-hikers," Tom is strangely adrift with no center of pieties; his car has become his home and it symbolizes his rootless condition as he is forever on the move, an onlooker of life, but certainly no active participant. He belongs nowhere; even at a party in a town which he has traveled through many times, the people refer to him as "he": "I wish they'd call me 'you' when I've got here, he thought tiredly."[17] His loneliness is even more apparent in the following passage:

> . . . there was often rain, there was often a party, and there had been other violence not of his doing--other fights . . . fights, unheralded

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[17]Eudora Welty, "The Hitch-hikers," Selected Stories of Eudora Welty [A Curtain of Green] (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 134. Subsequent references to this work will be taken from this edition and cited in the text.

> confessions, sudden love-making--none of any of this his, not his to keep, but belonging to the people of these towns he passed through, coming out of their rooted pasts and their mock rambles, coming out of their time. He himself had no time. He was free; helpless ("The Hitch-hikers," p. 141).

Thus, Tom Harris possesses total freedom, a condition that other characters of traditional families might long for, such as Cassie who envies Virgie Rainey or Nina who envies Easter in The Golden Apples. Yet even with this freedom, or perhaps because of it, Tom Harris' life has no meaning for him. It has become one endless sales trip through nameless little towns where he has no enduring affections or attachments.

R. J. Bowman in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" experiences the same loneliness, the same lostness, as Tom Harris. And, interestingly, in The Golden Apples, one twin, Eugene MacLain, leaves Morgana to go to San Francisco and becomes lost among the people there, an utter nonentity, who often looks back with longing to his boyhood life in Morgana; while the other twin who stays in Morgana surrounded by family and friends eventually becomes Mayor of the town. Thus, the greatest weakness in the modern family's function is that it fails to provide for the loneliness or lack of meaningful relationships which is often experienced by its members.

A second weakness is that its members often become

calloused and self-centered in their attempts to succeed in life. Fay in The Optimist's Daughter is a prime example of this condition. She denies having a family; yet when they appear at the funeral, she makes use of them to suit her needs. Therefore, the tendency of the modern family is to isolate its members, to teach them to care only for themselves, and to train them to do what is necessary in order to survive, all of which makes for a frightening type of impersonal, meaningless world.

Thus as one can see from a consideration of the practices of both types of families, Miss Welty is very fair in her portrayal of each. She shows both positive and negative characteristics of each type. Although her sympathies often do seem to lie with the traditionalists, she is very sympathetic in her portrayal of modern characters, too. Thus her refusal to load the dice for either side is one reason that she is such a truthful novelist.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

With the four previous chapters as a basis, this chapter will assess the material which has been presented and draw any justifiable conclusions. It will first examine the question of Miss Welty's objectivity as a writer more fully and then present several possible trends in these four novels which support the idea that Miss Welty seems to favor the traditional type of family in these four novels. Even though these trends may not be considered verifiable conclusions because of their basis in only four novels, the facts from the novels presented in this section do constitute evidence in support of the thesis, whether a definite trend is observable or not. This chapter will then focus on possible solutions to the traditionalist-modern conflict and lastly will examine the effects of the subject of family on Miss Welty's stature as a writer.

A review of the first four chapters reveals that Chapters II and III gave a basic definition of each family type in Miss Welty's novels by discussing their peculiar traits as manifestations of their underlying beliefs. The traditionalists' beliefs are based on loyalty to blood and memory, while the modern ideology

is based on rootlessness and change. Chapter IV then pointed out strengths and weaknesses of each family type's functions for its members based on the evidence found in Miss Welty's writing.

It has also been shown that Miss Welty refuses to "stack the cards" for either family type, but she tries through her stories as she says "to part a curtain," so that we may clearly see human relations in all their complexities.[1] Concerning this objective viewpoint, Ruth Vande Kieft points out that in Delta Wedding, "an implied affection for the Fairchild way of life is balanced by an implied criticism of its tendency to self-protective isolation, its snobbery, the piety surrounding its legends."[2] The balanced view found in these novels is facilitated by Miss Welty's technique of evenly juxtaposing the two family types, which, through interaction, reveal certain things about each other. Her inclusion of outsiders' comments further aids in giving this balanced view. For example, in Delta Wedding, Robbie, an adherent of the modern philosophy, exposes the Fairchilds' tendencies to snobbishness through her thoughts and words.

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[1]Eudora Welty, One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression, A Snapshot Album (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 8.

[2]Ruth M. Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), p. 109.

She sees them as unduly proud and as exploiting her husband. This view is further substantiated by several traditional "outsiders" in the novel such as Ellen and Troy. Ellen's stance as an outsider enables her not only to notice her family's strengths, but also its weaknesses. She sees them as unconsciously accepting things the way they are, never questioning their rightness or wrongness. Another outsider to the family heritage is Troy, whose account of having to relinquish his choice for best man because the Fairchilds wanted George unwittingly reveals some more of the Fairchilds' tendencies to exclusiveness. Even Dabney at times adopts the point of view of an outsider, as Ruth Vande Kieft points out, for she questions certain family traditions which are usually adhered to unthinkingly.[3] Thinking about an episode in family history in which a duel over land was fought, she reflects, "Honor, honor, honor, the aunts drummed it into their ears. . . . To give up your life because you thought that much of your cotton--where was the love, even, in that?" (Delta Wedding, p. 120). Yet these rather negative views of the family are balanced by the picture of the family itself. In their daily actions and interactions with one another, we see their adherence to honor, duty, and responsibility, as well as the love that is manifested

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[3]Ibid.

in their dealings with one another.

We also receive a balanced picture of Robbie. From the Fairchilds such as Shelley, Dabney, and the aunts, we see her as threatening to disrupt the family unity in her single-minded attempt to free George from his family ties. Yet Ellen gives us a different view of this character. In the following passage, Ellen recognizes Robbie's actual suffering over her separation from George in contrast with the Fairchilds' uncaring and unsympathetic attitude. In this passage, therefore, Robbie acquires a more sympathetic aspect.

> Ellen saw Shelley look at the girl failing at her peach and say nothing to her. And Robbie was scarcely listening to anything that was being said (Orrin was politely telling her about the longest snake he had ever seen). She would only look down and try to eat her peach. She was suffering. Her eyelids fell and opened tiredly over her just-dried eyes. The intensity of her face affected Ellen like a grimace (Delta Wedding, p. 156).

Likewise, the interactions of the characters in Losing Battles give us a complex picture of the Renfros. At the beginning of the novel, we see the attractive qualities of the family togetherness with nothing particularly disturbing about the family or its ideas; yet with the introduction of Miss Julia's name into the conversation, we begin to see the people as ignorant and as refusing to face reality. As Louise Gossett states, "more directly than heretofore Eudora Welty criticizes the

limitations of her characters. Gloria attacks their domestic complacency and selfishness. The chief critic, however, is Miss Julia. . . ."[4]

Miss Julia as head of the "anti-family" forces[5] has tried to educate the family so that it could "put Banner on the map!" (Losing Battles, p. 275). Just how much the family has resisted her efforts can be seen in the comments of some of the family members:

> "She thought if she told people what they ought to know, and told 'em enough times, and finally beat it into their hides, they wouldn't forget it. Well, some of us still had her licked," said Uncle Dolphus (Losing Battles, p. 240).

And Aunt Birdie volunteers:

> "She'd give out prizes for reading, at the end of school, but what would be the prizes? More books . . . I dreaded to win" (Losing Battles, p. 240).

Miss Julia's efforts appear very praiseworthy; she attempts to educate her pupils, feed them more nutritiously (she keeps some cows for this purpose), and introduce new varieties of plants in the neighborhood, such as the peach trees she mails out one year. Yet we also see her in her last days in contrast to the Renfros

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[4]Louise Y. Gossett, "Eudora Welty's New Novel: The Comedy of Loss," The Southern Literary Journal, 3, No. 1 (1970), 128.

[5]Thomas H. Landess, "More Trouble in Mississippi: Family vs. Antifamily in Miss Welty's Losing Battles," Sewanee Review, 79 (1971), 627.

as a person who has isolated herself from any meaningful relationship with people beyond trying to teach them something. She dies, delirious and isolated, with no family or friends near to help her in her loneliness.

In this novel, the character of Gloria is also shown in its varying aspects. The Renfros see Gloria as one whose ideas are very foreign to theirs. Her standoffish attitude and her efforts to get Jack away from their influence are unfathomable to them. Yet one gets another view of Gloria, a slightly more sympathetic one, when she is being "attacked" by the rest of the family with the watermelons and is being forced to admit that she is indeed a member of the clan. Her longing for privacy is also very understandable since people are continually underfoot in her present situation.

Miss Adele in The Optimist's Daughter likewise acts as a somewhat objective observer of the family from the outside, giving us another view of Fay from the one presented by her crude words and outlandish actions. Although Miss Adele is honestly angry at Fay's behavior and obviously has strong ties to the McKelvas (there is an implication that she may have been romantically interested in the Judge), her sense of fairness makes her insist that Fay's actions can't be condemned by Laurel's standards: Fay is acting the only way she knows how, the way she has

been reared.[6] Thus, the interactions of the family types with each other as well as the comments of outsiders give us a more objective picture of each type in its strengths and weaknesses.

An overview of the four novels being studied in conjunction with the material presented in the previous chapters presents some possible trends in their evolution which might offer some interesting support to the thesis of this study. This thesis, asserting that although Miss Welty shows both good and bad aspects of each family type, she favors the traditional type, with its emphasis on blood ties and the past, and is fearful of the effects of the moderns' de-emphasis or total lack of attention to such values, receives possible support and enlargement in five inter-related trends. Although it is quite tempting to state categorically that these trends offer conclusive proof of the thesis, one realizes that four novels are slender evidence on which to base such a statement. These observations, however, do offer interesting matter for speculation about Miss Welty's possible intentions.

The first trend observable in a survey of the four novels being studied is that the settings of the novels from the first to the last in the order of their

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[6]Elizabeth Janeway, review of The Optimist's Daughter, Saturday Review, 1 July 1972, p. 60.

publication become increasingly more modern. This statement holds true with the possible exception of The Ponder Heart, for which no specific dates are given. Delta Wedding, which was first published in 1945, has the earliest setting of the four. It takes place in the year 1920, because as Miss Welty says, "It had to be a year that would leave my characters all free to have a family story."[7] Thus, it had to be a year when there were no wars so that the men would be home and no floods or other catastrophes so that the people would be under no undue outside influences. The Ponder Heart, published in 1953, contains no explicit time reference; however, several clues such as the fact that dial telephones are still enough of a novelty for Edna Earle to remember who installed them (The Ponder Heart, pp. 24-25), and the mention of the last passenger train in Clay (The Ponder Heart, p. 16) indicate a more modern setting, yet one which is still removed from us in time. Published in 1970, Losing Battles is set in the 1930's because Miss Welty says that

> I wanted to get a year in which I could show people at the rock bottom of their whole lives, which meant the Depression. . . . I wanted a clear stage to bring on this family, to show them when they had really no props to their lives, had only themselves, plus an indomitable will to live

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[7]As quoted in Charles T. Bunting, "'The Interior World': An Interview with Eudora Welty," Southern Review, 8 (1972), 721.

> even with . . . the losing battles of poverty, of any other kind of troubles, family troubles and disasters.[8]

And Miss Welty's latest novel, The Optimist's Daughter, published in book form in 1972, has the most nearly contemporary setting of all the novels. Again, there is no direct time reference, but several clues such as Laurel's flying from Chicago by jet indicate the modern setting.

Secondly, it is interesting to notice that each of these novels, with the exception of The Optimist's Daughter, gives the impression of being removed from us in time, of being set in the misty past. Several scholars have commented that perhaps this choice of time is an indication that the way of life described therein cannot possibly last. Concerning Delta Wedding, John Crowe Ransom remarks, "I feel sure that the pattern of Southern life as Miss Welty has it is doomed. The Delta establishment will be disestablished. . . ."[9] Louis D. Rubin, Jr., agrees, saying that "the closed little world of Shellmound is doomed. The wide world will come in, there will be disorder, change."[10] Concerning the 1930's

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[8]Ibid.

[9]John Crowe Ransom, "Delta Fiction," Kenyon Review, 8 (1946), 507.

[10]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Golden Apples of the Sun," The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 138-139.

setting of Losing Battles, Joyce Carol Oates remarks that "if her world comes to seem familiar to us, we must remember that it has been made familiar . . . by her graceful art; in reality, the community of Banner and its fundamental Christianity is as remote to most of us as an African nation."[11]

Thirdly, in addition to suggesting that a way of life possibly has become closer to extinction, this use of the past as the setting for these novels could be a further indication that the strength of the traditional family is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. The traditional families manage to maintain their position in the face of the modern threat in these first three novels even though they are declining in strength; significantly in the novel with the most modern setting, The Optimist's Daughter, the traditional family is dying out (Laurel is the only true McKelva left in the town of Mount Salus, and she is no longer a permanent resident), and the moderns represented by Fay and her family are advancing steadily. For example, in Delta Wedding, although there is a threat from the modern ideology as represented by Robbie, at the end of the novel the Fairchilds are essentially in the same position of control

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[11]Joyce Carol Oates, "Eudora's Webb," The Atlantic, April 1970, p. 120.

that they enjoyed at the beginning; their way of life has not been disturbed. Several modern tendencies are introduced in this novel, namely George's and Dabney's break with tradition in marrying a social inferior (Dabney's breaking the night light along with her lack of regret about it very possibly symbolizes her proclivity to "break" with tradition). Yet, as Francis Simkins and Charles Roland point out, "when a marriage took place between an old and a new family the standards adopted were, as in Eudora Welty's novel Delta Wedding, those of the old."[12] Thus, although Robbie and Troy have been said to be representative of the forces that would eventually destroy Shellmound, neither is large enough nor important enough to do this if such were his intent. As Elmo Howell asserts, Robbie would like to see the Fairchilds humbled a bit; but since Troy's vocation concerns the land, he probably in time will adjust to the accepted Fairchild pattern, or at least, his children will. Regardless of Troy's actions, however, the future representative of Shellmound will not be Troy but one or more of Battle's sons.[13] Thus, at the close of the novel,

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[12]Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, A History of the South, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 377.

[13]Elmo Howell, "Eudora Welty's Comedy of Manners," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 69, No. 4 (1970), 475.

we leave the Fairchild family with its world still intact. There is no indication that it will remain forever so, yet the modern tendencies have done no more than mildly disturb the Fairchilds' confidence; their essential way of life is never really threatened.[14] The family may even be able to flourish, for it has shown flexibility in admitting Troy Flavin into its ranks; and he, as well as others like him, will serve to introduce new life into the breed.[15]

Similarly, in The Ponder Heart, although Bonnie Dee does get her way for a time, receiving a weekly allowance but refusing to allow Uncle Daniel any visiting privileges, she is defeated ultimately when Edna Earle stops her allowance. Thus, the traditionalists are victorious; yet the Ponder family is clearly declining in strength. Edna Earle and Uncle Daniel are the only two remaining Ponders. And even their circumstances are deteriorating. Uncle Daniel has given away practically all the Ponder money at the trial, and the hotel business has slacked off. As Edna Earle says when she first begins telling her story, "This is like the grave compared" (The Ponder Heart, p. 10).

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[14]John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 108.

[15]Howell, pp. 476-477.

The conclusion of Losing Battles is rather open-ended: there is no clear victory for either side. There is, however, an implication that Jack will be victorious as the representative of the traditional type of family and that Gloria will suffer ultimate defeat in her efforts to wean Jack from his family.[16] In the following passage, Gloria has just told the family, "I'm going to take Jack and Lady May and we're going to get clear away from everybody, move to ourselves," and Miss Beulah demands, "And just how do you think you're going?" "That's still for the future to say," Gloria replies; but significantly as "she looked out to see the distance . . . beyond the bright porch she couldn't see anything at all" (Losing Battles, p. 320). Thus Gloria's hope that "some day yet, we'll move to ourselves" seems destined for defeat in the fact of Jack's optimism that he can "bring in the sheaves" right where he is.[17]

In the first three novels, therefore, the traditionalists manage to maintain their strength, even though it is declining steadily with each later setting. This traditional position, however, finally meets a formidable

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[16]It is interesting to notice in the interview with Charles Bunting previously cited that Miss Welty states that she thinks Gloria is not going to win.

[17]Gossett, p. 30.

opponent over which it cannot claim total victory in The Optimist's Daughter. At the end of this novel, Fay as the modern representative has not been defeated: rather, she is the victor, at least materially; for she has inherited the McKelva house and its furnishings. She has given up nothing but has taken all that she possibly can. Laurel is the spiritual victor, for she realizes that she can live without the "things" of the house; she has her memories of the past and their lessons, while Fay has none of these. Yet, the suggestion is that the traditional type of family is being replaced or supplanted by the moderns. As Michael Wood states, the implication is that "we are a dying breed, that we are to be succeeded by people who live more voraciously than we do, who do not hide behind our masks or take flight in reflection."[18]

Another very interesting trend follows from the previous one: the traditional family's declining strength is paralleled by the increasing strength of the moderns. Thus, as the novels chronologically approach our present times, the modern representatives become increasingly more dominant. This dominance is manifested in several ways: it can be seen in the effect that the moderns have on the

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[18]Michael Wood, "Cunning Time," The New York Review of Books, 29 June 1972, p. 9.

traditional family, and/or it can be seen in the openly defiant behavior of the moderns. This dominance occurs by increasing degrees in each of the four novels in the order of their publication. In Delta Wedding, Robbie, although causing some momentary anxiety when she leaves George, hardly makes a dint in the Fairchilds' way of life. In fact, there is even a suggestion at the end of the novel that George may move to the Grove, close to the rest of the family. Even though Robbie's reaction to this possible move is "I'll probably hate it," she says this "dreamily" and "laughed softly where she lay on her back beside him . . ." (Delta Wedding, pp. 243-244), thereby belying the apparent antagonism of her words.

In The Ponder Heart, Bonnie Dee's more dominant behavior is seen in the way she attempts to manipulate the Ponders. She makes her own terms about the "trial" marriage with Uncle Daniel and is able to enforce those terms, at least for a time, when she decides "No" to the marriage after five years and six months. She leaves Uncle Daniel, but is coaxed to return by an advertisement in the Memphis Commercial Appeal, which promises that "retroactive allowance will be given" (The Ponder Heart, p. 59). All is calm for a while at "Ponder Hill"; then Bonnie Dee ousts Uncle Daniel but still manages to receive her weekly allowance. Even though she is ultimately

defeated, Bonnie Dee has indeed made her presence felt in the Ponder family by arranging situations to her advantage.

In Losing Battles, Gloria is much more outspoken than Robbie or Bonnie Dee. She unhesitatingly relates her feelings on any subject, and practically everything she says is a direct affront to the family. She announces to the entire reunion, for example, that she is going to save Jack "from everybody [she] see[s] this minute!" (Losing Battles, p. 198). Further, her explanation for why she is still nursing Lady May ("What I'm seeing to is she doesn't starve!") carries with it the direct implication that the Renfros can not provide for their own (Losing Battles, p. 326). Although she does everything within her power to win Jack to her way of thinking, there are several indications in the novel that she, too, may lose her battle for supremacy just as Robbie and Bonnie Dee have done. Each time that she makes a statement about moving away to themselves, Jack counters it with the suggestion that their situation is ideal right now, so why change it? Still, Gloria as a representative of the modern forces, along with Miss Julia, whose battle to educate the family has indeed been a losing one, plays a much more vocal role in this novel than have the other moderns.

The culmination of the modern dominance, however, occurs in Fay of The Optimist's Daughter. Fay is

dependent on no one but herself. She takes what she wants and uses her relatives to suit her own purposes. Further, she is very outspoken and blunt, lacking in the finer sensibilities and refining qualities that Laurel possesses. When she comes back from New Orleans with the Judge's body, for example, she loudly asks, "What are all these people doing in my house?" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 53), whereas Laurel would have known immediately that they were there to comfort her.

Fay enters the traditional family on her own terms, by invitation. She gives up nothing by becoming the Judge's wife, but immediately begins to make her presence felt in the staid old house by refurbishing it with peach satin draperies and bedspreads. She makes the final decisions about the funeral preparations and has the open coffin displayed, much to Laurel's displeasure. Further, she inherits the family home and is quite ready to use it in any way she sees fit, as evidenced by her treatment of the breadboard. Thus, in the end, Fay does not lose to the traditional family. Her traits supply a decided contrast to the traditional way of life.

A fifth trend also becomes apparent which is connected with the previous one: the increase in the moderns' dominance is paralleled by a decrease in their

sympathetic qualities. In Delta Wedding, Robbie evokes the most sympathy from the reader of any of the four women. She is a poor girl with no advantages who is pitted against the wealthy Fairchilds with every advantage. The choice of the third-person omniscient narrator to tell the story further adds to a sympathetic portrayal of Robbie, for the reader becomes intimate with her thoughts and feelings and is thus better able to understand her situation. She therefore appears not as an arrogant, cold-hearted person, but as quite human in her fight against the separating thrust of the Fairchild clan. And she does have a case, as Ellen suggests when she upbraids George: "Georgie, you've made this child suffer!" (Delta Wedding, p. 166).

Bonnie Dee in The Ponder Heart is also a poor girl who has had few opportunities, yet she doesn't elicit as much sympathy from the reader as Robbie. One reason for the lack of any empathetic response on the part of the reader is Miss Welty's choice of the first-person narrator to tell the story. This point of view is a distancing technique for we are never admitted to any of Bonnie Dee's feelings; we only see her actions and hear her words. Further, we feel no sympathy for her because we always see her through Edna Earle, who finds few praiseworthy attributes in Bonnie Dee. Thus she appears

to us as a shallow, self-centered, rather brainless kind of creature who nevertheless is smart enough to outwit Uncle Daniel.

Losing Battles, like Delta Wedding, is told by an omniscient narrator, yet in this novel the narrator limits his knowledge of Gloria's thoughts, objectively reporting just her words and actions. This technique thus again serves to remove the reader's tendency to feel sympathy for a character. Further, Gloria's words and actions contribute to her picture as an unsympathetic character. Her blunt statements show no concern for whom they might hurt; and her standoffish actions make it easier to understand the family's treatment of her as an outsider.

Once again, Fay in The Optimist's Daughter represents the epitome of the trait described; she is almost inhuman in her coldly impersonal state. The third-person point of view which explores only Laurel's thoughts again contributes to the totally impersonal picture we receive of Fay. She appears as a completely selfish and unfeeling person whose first and last concern is for herself. It obviously doesn't matter to her what anyone thinks of her actions: she is "one to herself, her own boss," just as Gloria describes herself in Losing Battles. Yet Fay is several degrees lower than Gloria in sympathetic

qualities. Gloria at least is concerned about two people other than herself, Jack and Lady May, while Fay's concern is totally self-centered. Guy Davenport describes her in the following way:

> Had she come to the attention of Faulkner, her name would be Snopes, and if Flannery O'Connor had created her, she would be named Shiflet. She is, in the pecking order of the South, white trash.[19]

James Boatwright further recognizes these unsympathetic qualities in Fay by describing her as "a figure of absolute isolation, totally incapable of love, in panicky flight from blood ties and the wounds of mortality. . . ."[20]

Fay's relatives, whom Reynolds Price has called an "hilarious parody of blood love and loyalty,"[21] are also part of the modern encroachment and contribute to its unsympathetic picture in this novel. Their presence in the novel is in marked contrast to the Dalzell family we meet in the hospital waiting room. The Chisoms' philosophy can be illustrated in the following passage in which Fay discusses her deceased relatives:

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[19]Guy Davenport, "Primal Visions," National Review, 23 June 1972, p. 697.

[20]James Boatwright, "The Continuity of Love," New Republic, 10 June 1972, p. 25.

[21]Reynolds Price, "The Onlooker Smiling: An Early Reading of The Optimist's Daughter," Shenandoah, 20, No. 3 (1969), 65.

> "They died, but not before they did every bit they could to help themselves, and tried all their might to get better, for our sakes" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 38).

In other words, the Chisoms do not concern themselves with helping even members of their own family, but expect the ill ones to take care of themselves.

The Dalzells, in contrast, show their concern for others to the point of forcing attention, if need be, on them:

> "If they don't give your dad no water by next time round, tell you what, we'll go in there all together and pour it down him," promised the old mother. "If he's going to die, I don't want him to die wanting water" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 39).

Thus, as Reynolds Price comments, the Dalzells

> are, for all their coarse jostling proximity, a family of finer feeling and natural grace than whatever is constituted here by Fay and Laurel; and they will soon return to mind in sweet comparison with Fay's Texas kin who swarm for the funeral.[22]

Fay's relatives do, however, make solid claims on life, as Howard Moss points out. Their vitality and endurance have to be weighted against Laurel's tradition and understanding. As Mr. Moss states, "Fay is crude; her family is common as dirt, but they make their point: it takes dirt to make things grow."[23] Thus, in a survey

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[22]Ibid., p. 64.

[23]Howard Moss, review of The Optimist's Daughter, The New York Times Book Review, 21 May 1972, p. 1.

of the four novels, we come from a sympathetic view of Robbie to a totally unsympathetic one of Fay and her relatives, created both by their characterization and the techniques of their presentation.

After making these observations, one is tempted to conclude from the apparently increasing dominance of the moderns along with their decreasing sympathetic qualities that Miss Welty may be using these means to voice her alarm at the idea of domination by the moderns to the exclusion of traditional values.

However, one does not have to rely solely on what might be considered tenuous evidence to support the thesis, for numerous examples offered in this paper suggest that Miss Welty is often on the side of the traditionalists. The evidence also indicates, however, that neither type of family is exclusively satisfactory, as Chapter IV concluded. Fortunately, there are several suggestions in these novels of some possible solutions to this dilemma. Recognizing that change is a fact of life, and that it can be very beneficial, one possible solution is a character who can cope with change and yet retain his traditional pieties. This type of character would be a mean between the extremes of the two family types. There are several of these "in-between" types of characters in Delta Wedding and Losing Battles whose

actions and words to varying extents indicate their ability to survive in a modern world and yet retain time-honored values. The main character who exemplifies these qualities is George in Delta Wedding. George honors his family ties, yet he is very much of an individual also. He includes rather than excludes, a practice Louise Gossett sees as necessary for the traditional family to embrace if it is to survive.[24] As Dabney realizes, "George loved the world. . . . Not them! Not them in particular" (Delta Wedding, p. 37). George also accepts experience wholeheartedly and faces reality with no evasion as seen in his actions on the train trestle. Further, at the end of the novel, George shows that he is not afraid of changes, even suggesting that if he comes back to live at the Grove, "further than cotton" he might try raising fruit trees, horses, cattle, and maybe even a garden (Delta Wedding, p. 243). Yet George is still the standard-bearer for the family of its traditions, a role which he does not try to dodge.

Two younger characters in the novel perceive George's qualities as an embracer of life and each one, to a varying extent, determines to follow his example. Dabney tells us that sometimes she "was not so sure she

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[24]Louise Y. Gossett, "Violence as Revelation: Eudora Welty," Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 104.

was a Fairchild--sometimes she did not care, that was it" (Delta Wedding, p. 32). She recognizes in Uncle George's example an invitation to experience--"It was actually Uncle George who had shown her that there was another way to be--something else" (Delta Wedding, p. 33); and following his bravery on the railroad trestle, she leaps out on her own by accepting Troy's proposal of marriage.

A second character who perceives this different quality in George and who determines, perhaps in a less flamboyant way, similarly to invite or partake in experience is Shelley. As she dances with George after the wedding, thinking about the future which lies behind "the line of trees at Shellmound," she realizes that "she was much like George" (Delta Wedding, p. 220). She understands that she is on the brink of the world (". . . the things had not happened to her yet") and that everything that happens to her will not always be pleasant; yet she determines to accept the risk involved in exposing herself to reality. The reference at the end of the following passage to "weather," a word that connotes change, implies that Shelley will indeed be more open to experience and change in the future:

> Behind the closed door, what? Shelley's desire fled, or danced seriously, to an open place--not from one room to another room with its door, but to an opening wood, with weather--with change, beauty . . . (Delta Wedding, p. 220).

Ellen has already demonstrated her ability to adapt to necessary change by the concessions she has made to the Fairchild way of life. Further, Laura, by living with the family at Shellmound, at least for a while, will bring with her the knowledge of an outside world, knowledge which will perhaps aid her in keeping a more objective perspective on Delta life.

A character very similar to George in Delta Wedding is Jack in Losing Battles. He, too, is one who "includes" rather than "excludes" the world. His stance is readily apparent in the following conversation between Jack and Gloria. Gloria says:

> Miss Julia "stands for all I gave up to marry you. I'd give her up again tonight. And give up all your family too," she whispered, and felt him quiver.

Jack replies:

> "Don't give anybody up. . . . Or leave anybody out. . . . There's room for everything, and time for everybody . . ." (Losing Battles, pp. 361-362).

Further, Jack refuses to be discouraged by his family's economic situation. As he tells Gloria,

> ". . . I've got my strength. I may not have all the time I used to have--but I can provide. Don't you ever fear" (Losing Battles, p. 434).

Vaughn is one member of the Renfro clan whose interests are not confined simply to Banner, Mississippi. His interest in the outside world is seen by his love of

geography, as the following passage illustrates:

> Before he left the bus here, ready and secret till morning, he made sure of the book he had been sitting on, the new geography that he'd traded out of Curly Stovall. He dragged it to his cheek, where he could smell its print, sharper, blacker, dearer than the smell of new shoes (Losing Battles, p. 365).

This interest may serve to keep him from succumbing to the same secluded stance of the rest of the Renfro family. Indeed, this interest in the world beyond Banner may contribute to saving the family from ultimate extinction.

At the end of The Optimist's Daughter, Laurel might be said to have come to a fuller acceptance of reality than she had in the past, and with it the implication that her life may once again have emotional involvements. Thus, this acceptance of reality is yet another modification which might aid in promoting the future existence of the traditional family. Laurel has tended to numb herself to reality, having locked away all thoughts of her brief marriage to Philip Hand. She has also chosen to remember only the good things about her parents' lives together. Late one night after the funeral as she is sorting through her parents' belongings, she suddenly lets herself remember and accept all of the good as well as the bad that has been part of her past:

> She lay there with all that was adamant in her yielding to this night, yielding at last. . . .

> The deepest spring in her heart had uncovered itself, and it began to flow again (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 154).

She realizes that if Philip had lived, their marriage might not have continued in all of its perfectness. She further realizes in her confrontation with Fay that they can't even communicate because Fay is a person "whose own life had not taught her how to feel" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 201). Laurel thus recognizes her superiority over Fay:

> . . . Fay was without any powers of passion or imagination in herself and had no way to see it or reach it in the other person. . . . She could no more fight a feeling person than she could love him (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 178).

At the end of the novel, Laurel leaves the breadboard which her husband had made, symbolically indicating that she no longer needs the past as a crutch to numb herself to the present; rather, she has decided that past memories are useful as reminders of feelings which also need to be part of her present life. She realizes that the past "has been everything and done everything to me, everything for me"; yet she has to learn that it "is no more open to help or hurt than was Father in his coffin" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 179). We leave her with the implication that her heart that was empty can "fill again" (The Optimist's Daughter, p. 179), an optimistic note on which the novel ends. Thus she finds that she

can't totally live in the past or view it unrealistically, but must accept its truths along with those of the present and future.

Yet another optimistic note and a possible solution to the traditional/modern dilemma in these novels is found in the marriages which have taken place between the two family types. These marriages indicate a willingness on the part of at least some of the traditionalists to open their ranks to others. As an example of this tendency, one might suggest that it would be appropriate to change the title of Delta Wedding to Delta Weddings, for this novel involves not only the wedding of Dabney and Troy, but the reunion of George and Robbie. Both of these marriages represent a wedding of the two groups, outsiders and insiders, traditionalists and moderns; and there is every indication at the end of the novel that these will be successful unions. The marriage of Jack and Gloria in Losing Battles is yet another merger which promises a reconciliation of the major differences between the traditional and modern family types.

In summary, then, Miss Welty does indicate through some of her characters a possible accommodation between the characteristics of these two family types which may utilize the best qualities in each. One final question in this study remains to be answered: given Miss Welty's

concern with the family, what effect does it have on her stature as a writer?

One answer is that this concern demonstrates Miss Welty's relevance to the changing world around her. As Louis D. Rubin, Jr., states, "One cannot pick up a novel by a modern Southern writer . . . without constantly encountering the image of change."[25] Living in the South, which has experienced many changes over the last several years, Miss Welty has measured the effects of these changes in terms of the values which have been gained or lost. As Peggy Prenshaw notes, Miss Welty is no social theorist; she has chosen instead to concentrate on the personal conflicts generated by social forces.[26] She is thus dramatizing a modern dilemma, the threatened loss of tradition and stability in a rapidly changing and mobile world.

Further, in our changing society, she is preserving a way of life and its values forever by capturing it in literature. Although one may well question the truth of his statement, along these lines Jonathan Yardley has commented that Losing Battles is probably "the last good

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[25]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Southern Literature: The Historical Image," South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 47.

[26]Peggy Prenshaw, "Cultural Patterns in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding and 'The Demonstrators,'" Notes on Mississippi Writers, 3 (1970), 31.

Southern novel": he finds that

> Eudora Welty's generation is the last to know intimately the Southern land before the highways and quick-food joints took over, to know the Southern myth before it grew stale, to know the Southern family before it disintegrated.27

Even though the traditional Southern family has not yet totally "disintegrated," it has undergone various changes since the times of Delta Wedding. Miss Welty's novels call our attention to these changes in terms of our present society and the universal values gained or lost in the process.

Further, Miss Welty's choice of family as a subject gives her many options as a writer. Because of this subject, she has at her disposal several related thematic concerns which have occupied many of our great writers, such as the individual versus the group, the past versus the present, and change versus the status quo.

In her concern with the "social customs, manners, conventions, and habits of a definite social class at a particular time and place,"28 Miss Welty fits into the mainstream of the novelists of manners. Her admiration for Jane Austen's works becomes particularly significant when one remembers that Miss Austen is considered one of

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27Jonathan Yardley, "The Last Good One?" New Republic, 9 May 1970, p. 36.

28William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, rev. by C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 324.

England's greatest novelists of manners. One can see definite traces of this influence in Miss Welty's faithful reproduction of family life, with its distinction between "good" and "bad" manners, in the South.

Miss Welty further may be considered a main link in the American novel of manners tradition which received its greatest early impetus from the writings of Henry James and Edith Wharton. James, despairing at the lack of a stratified American society comparable to that in Europe, solved his problem in part by pitting Americans against representatives of European society, a technique which he uses in two of his most successful novels of manners, The American and Portrait of a Lady. Edith Wharton modified James' approach to focus on the social classes of New York as seen in The House of Mirth and The Age of Innocence. Later, F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby successfully delineated the social strata in the Jazz Age. Miss Welty, as one who is continuing or indeed perhaps is reviving what has been called a dead form in our literature[29] has focused on the social classes in the South, showing, as the previously mentioned novelists of manners have done, the powerful controls a specific group, such as the family, can exert on characters.

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[29]James W. Tuttleton, The Novel of Manners in America (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 7.

Even more specifically related to the subject of family, Miss Welty as an observer of social life and change follows the tradition of several novelists of manners who wrote about the effects on the individual of a changing world whose institutions, among them the family, were disintegrating. William Dean Howells was especially concerned with the family. As Frank Shelton states,

> When we recall how frequently in Howells' fiction the unity and strength of a family provide needed support to the individual, as in the cases of Silas Lapham and Basil March, and that in his utopian romance, A Traveler from Altruria, the family is the organizational principle upon which the entire society is based, it becomes clear that to Howells the health of the family unit is an indication of the health of society as a whole.[30]

Another author, J. P. Marquand, shows a character in The Late George Apley who rebels against his family but finally comes to understand its value. Apley realizes that although he hasn't been able to develop fully his personal life because of his family's demands for his time and attention, his many superior qualities such as his tolerance and his sense of honor, duty, and responsibility are direct results of his adherence to his family's traditions and conventions.[31] In addition, John P. Marquand

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[30]Frank W. Shelton, "The Family in the Modern American Novel of Manners," South Atlantic Bulletin, 40, No. 2 (1975), 35.

[31]Ibid., pp. 37-38.

"sees the progressive disintegration of the family as personally debilitating and leading to the ultimate isolation of the individual in his own sterile private world."[32]

What makes Miss Welty's achievement singular in the treatment of this topic of family which has also concerned other writers is the comprehensiveness of her vision. While other writers have focused on one or several aspects of the values of the traditional family, Miss Welty has covered this topic in the multiplicity of its facets. She has revealed the greatness of the traditional family as well as its weakness: she has illuminated its values of love, honor, duty, and responsibility by showing the lack of them in the moderns; but she has also indicated needed changes in its practices, again by using the modern representatives. These people, through their conversation and interactions with the traditionalists, make telling comments on the behavior of the traditionalists.

Miss Welty's focus on the subject of family and her treatment of it in the novel of manners tradition have given her several advantages in her writing.[33] This form

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[32]Ibid., p. 38.

[33]James W. Tuttleton has pointed out several advantages of the novel of manners form in general on pp. 272-273 of the work previously cited.

has offered her one of the most flexible and successful means for the analysis and criticism of American society. Secondly, even though the novel of manners form has generally been used to embody a conservative social point of view, Miss Welty has been able to use it in this way and at the same time to criticize the rigidities of such conservatism.

One final point needs to be considered: how does Miss Welty fare artistically as a writer in her use of this theme? Frank Shelton's statement concerning the quality of much of the writing in the novel of manners genre seems a fitting description of Miss Welty's achievements artistically as a writer. He finds that

> the novel of manners has also constituted a body of imaginative literature of a high, and occasionally a very high, artistic quality. Some of our greatest writers have worked within the form, and some of the great works of our literature are expressions of the genre.[34]

Miss Welty's minute descriptions, her carefully controlled point of view, her ear for the reproduction of the idiomatic speech of her characters as well as her convincing characterization, and her insights into human nature are just a few of the reasons that her work attains its high quality in these novels. Therefore, I submit that Miss Welty is a novelist of manners of the first order in her concern with the family as a "stronghold

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[34]Shelton, p. 273.

of important values."[35]

In the four novels of this study plus numerous short stories, Miss Welty has given us a picture of many family relationships, showing us how rich and meaningful these ties can be. At the same time, she has given us an alarming picture of what is happening to the concept of family today. One can only hope that Eudora Welty's kind of family will not become a thing of the past, a world found only in literature, as Joyce Carol Oates has remarked;[36] although it is undergoing changes outwardly, let us hope that it will recognize and fight to keep those intangible values which are so much a part of making us truly responsible and dignified human beings.

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[35]Ibid., p. 39.

[36]Oates, pp. 119-120.

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VITA

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