Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf

Gender, Genre, and Influence

SUZAN HARRISON

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To Sterling Judd McKean

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ABBREVIATIONS

C	*Conversations with Eudora Welty*
CE	*Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*
DW	*Delta Wedding*
E	*The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews*
GA	*The Golden Apples*
LB	*Losing Battles*
O	*Orlando*
OD	*The Optimist's Daughter*
OWB	*One Writer's Beginnings*
RB	*The Robber Bridegroom*
ROO	*A Room of One's Own*
TL	*To the Lighthouse*
W	*The Waves*
WD	*A Writer's Diary*

INTRODUCTION

"A Sweet Devouring"

THE pleasures of reading," writes Eudora Welty, are "like those of a Christmas cake, a sweet devouring" (*E,* 281). In "A Sweet Devouring," an essay in *The Eye of the Story,* Welty describes her childhood reading, and what impresses the reader most is her vivid memory of these works: she describes plot details from *Five Little Peppers* and names the characters from "The Camp Fire Girls" series as vividly as if she had read them last week. Almost every page of her literary autobiography, *One Writer's Beginnings,* testifies to Welty's insatiable appetite, her "devouring wish to read" (*OWB,* 30). That Welty loves to read, that she remembers in detail what she reads, and that what she reads is transformed by her imagination and colors her writing, is obvious in such works as *The Robber Bridegroom,* with its mixture of fairy tale and legend, and *The Golden Apples,* permeated with classical mythology and the poetry of W. B. Yeats.

Virginia Woolf is one of the authors whose writing Welty has devoured with obvious pleasure. Though Welty does not mention Woolf in "A Sweet Devouring," two other essays in *The Eye of the Story*—a review of Woolf's essay collection *Granite and Rainbow,* and a review of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf,* Volume II—illustrate Welty's keen, perceptive, and lifelong interest in Woolf's writing, as do her 1944 review of Woolf's *"A Haunted House" and Other Short Stories* and the foreword she wrote for a 1981 edition of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse.*[1] Woolf is one of

1. Welty's review of *Granite and Rainbow* was published originally in the *New York*

the writers—along with William Faulkner, Elizabeth Bowen, Jane Austen, and Anton Chekhov—whom Welty mentions often in essays and interviews, and whom she identifies as important to her own development as a writer. In a 1972 *Paris Review* interview, Welty describes the excitement and enchantment she experienced in her first encounter with Woolf's fiction: "[Virginia Woolf] was the one who opened the door. When I read *To the Lighthouse,* I felt, Heavens, *what is this?* I was so excited by the experience I couldn't sleep or eat. I've read it many times since" (*C,* 75).

In her review of *Granite and Rainbow,* Welty describes Woolf's importance to the novel as a genre: "The novel, of course, was never to be the same after the day she started work on it. As novel succeeded novel she proceeded to break, in turn, each mold of her own" (*E,* 192). More specifically, Welty's novels would not be the same had Woolf not "opened the door." If, as Woolf claims, "books continue each other" (*ROO,* 84), then Welty's books have continued Woolf's imaginative experiments in narrative structure and content. Indeed, Welty has, in turn, broken each mold of *her* own.

When I first read Eudora Welty's fiction, I was struck immediately by her works' affinity with Woolf's novels. The famous passage from *To the Lighthouse* used so often to describe Woolf's narrative voice and vision applies equally well to Welty's: "Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses" (*TL,* 255). Welty herself, in a foreword to *To the Lighthouse,* compares this description of Lily Briscoe's ideal painting to Woolf's own art: "By no coincidence [these words] come as close as we could ask to a description of the novel." This description is, in fact, very similar to the qualities of Welty's style that Louis D. Rubin, Jr., describes in *The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South:* "Shimmering, hovering, elusive, fanciful, fastening on little things. . . . Like the hummingbirds that appear frequently in her stories, it darts here and there, never quite coming to rest, tirelessly invoking light, color, the variety of experience. . . . [It] is also quite muscular, and its elusive, hovering quality is never vague or soft."[2]

As I read more of Welty's fiction, I discovered that the resemblance went beyond a similarity of temperament and surfaces. The two writers share central symbols and motifs: butterflies, water, sun, trees, houses, birds. They experiment with narrative structures and with the novel as a genre in related ways, often to explore similar situations and ideas. Robert Penn Warren's often-quoted description of Welty's primary theme as "love and separateness" could also describe the central issue in many of Virginia Woolf's works; death and absence lie at the center of many Woolf and Welty novels that ostensibly explore the connections—familial, sexual, social—among human beings.[3] Their novels seek out the private realities lying beneath the social fabric and foreground the tension between the two realms. Both writers explore the social and private worlds of women, and both have created female characters—mothers, widows, spinsters—who are artists of one sort or another struggling to find some outlet for their artistic impulses in the circumscribed world permitted to women. The strategies these characters use to construct and order meaning, as well as the ways these two authors' novels construct and order meaning, suggest a shared epistemology as well.

Other readers have noticed the qualities Eudora Welty's fiction shares with Virginia Woolf's. As early as 1946 John Crowe Ransom mentioned this resemblance in his review of *Delta Wedding:* "Miss Welty in her present phase resembles Virginia Woolf more than does any novelist of my acquaintance; the Fairchilds' wedding is the perfect analogue for *Mrs. Dalloway*'s party." But Ransom does not pursue this connection, saying, "I am sure the resemblance is fortuitous. Miss Welty's prose, like her people, is her own." Discussing *Delta Wedding,* two of the most sensitive and valuable book-length studies of Welty's fiction mention Woolf's *To the Lighthouse.* Ruth Vande Kieft notes Ellen Fairchild's similarity to

Times Book Review, September 21, 1958. The review of Volume II of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* appeared in the *New York Times Book Review,* November 14, 1976.

2. Eudora Welty, Foreword to *To the Lighthouse,* by Virginia Woolf (New York, 1981), xii; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South* (Seattle, 1963), 133–34.

3. Robert Penn Warren, "The Love and Separateness in Miss Welty," *Kenyon Review,* VI (1944), 245.

Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay but does not elaborate upon the resemblance between the two characters. Michael Kreyling discusses themes and concerns shared by *To the Lighthouse* and *The Optimist's Daughter,* focusing on the importance in each novel of "the idea of distance, whether the distance is created by the passing of time or by the gulf between the self and the public role, self and society, self and loved one, and self and the truth." Although his discussion is illuminating, Kreyling does not examine the nature of the relationship between the two works, claiming merely, "The notion of affinity between writers [is] too deeply rooted and complex for the term *influence.*"[4]

In *Author and Agent,* his study of the correspondence between Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell, Kreyling is more specific about the form of influence that Woolf's fiction had on Welty's development of her talents as a novelist. He notes that Welty reviewed Woolf's posthumous collection of stories, *"A Haunted House" and Other Stories,* in the spring of 1944, while she was in the process of transforming her short story "The Delta Cousins" into her first full novel, *Delta Wedding.* Kreyling comments, "Welty's review of the posthumous work is significant for its timing; just in the hiatus between the completion of a long story that seemed to require either serious cutting or recasting as a novel, Welty was brought back to a writer whose fiction had 'opened the door.' . . . When 'The Delta Cousins' next appears, it is already in the process of becoming a particular kind of novel, one connected coincidentally as well as substantially to Welty's rereading of Woolf in the spring of 1944."[5]

Kreyling goes on to speculate that Woolf's work offered Welty both an imaginative model and a justification for her own "obscurity." He says, "The obscurity that Welty had been exploring and exploiting in her own work seemed to find its counterpart in Woolf's successful use of the 'remove,' the technical means by which she achieved the essential relationship between reader and author in her fiction."[6]

4. John Crowe Ransom, "Delta Fiction," *Kenyon Review,* VIII (1946), 504; Ruth Vande Kieft, *Eudora Welty* (rev. ed.; Boston, 1987), 76; Michael Kreyling, *Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order* (Baton Rouge, 1980), 153, xviii.

5. Michael Kreyling, *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell* (New York, 1991), 108.

6. *Ibid.*

In *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor,* Louise Westling examines specifically the influence of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* on Welty's expansion of "The Delta Cousins" into *Delta Wedding.* According to Westling, "As we explore the elements of *To the Lighthouse* which reappear in *Delta Wedding,* we . . . begin to see how only another woman could have helped Welty develop the celebration of distinctly feminine fertility and community which existed merely as germs in 'The Delta Cousins.'"[7] Westling's chapter perceptively illuminates similarities in the two novels' plots, characters, and themes. But I wish to argue that the relationship between these two novels does not depend as much on the fact that Woolf is a woman as it does on Woolf's interest in the novel as a field for consciously exploring gender constructions and the relationship between gender and genre.

Although Kreyling and Westling have provided the groundwork for a study of Woolf's influence upon Welty's development as a novelist, much remains to be said about this important literary relationship. This study explores the ways in which Welty incorporates and transforms in each of her major novels the concerns she inherited from Woolf and the ways in which this process helped Welty to define her own stance as an artist. Because Woolf is so central a figure in the development of the modern novel, this study locates Welty's fiction in the tradition of modernism. It examines Welty's interest in extending the boundaries of the novel as a genre and elements of her fiction that are sometimes neglected in an emphasis on local color or the southern grotesque, an emphasis to which Welty objects strongly.[8] The southern qualities of Welty's fiction, her participation in (and differences from) the techniques and concerns

7. Louise Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor* (Athens, Ga., 1985), 68.

8. Asked by Alice Walker in a 1973 interview, "Have you been called a Gothic Writer?" Welty responds energetically, "They better not call me that!" She continues, "Yes, I have been, though. Inevitably, because I'm a Southerner" (*C,* 137). See also Ruth Weston, *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge, 1994), 1–3. Weston persuasively demonstrates that Welty is rejecting an association with "the popular Gothic (upper case) genre of 'escape' fiction" rather than the tradition Weston traces back through Hawthorne, Byron, and others.

of other southern writers, have been the subject of much excellent critical attention.[9] Much less attention has been paid, however, to placing Welty's work in a context of writers and literary trends outside the South.[10] This study seeks to create a new context in which to read Welty's works.

The term *influence* does not necessarily imply that Welty's work is derivative of Woolf's or less than original and stamped with her own characteristic voice and vision. But a discussion of influence, of the ways that one writer makes use of his/her predecessors' works, is fraught with problems because, all too often, the term *influence* is read as synonymous with *imitation* and is used to slight an author's originality and creative powers. For instance, the question of James Joyce's influence on Woolf has been used by several critics to suggest that Woolf is not as significant an innovator as Joyce and is, somehow, a second- rather than first-rate artist.[11] John Crowe Ransom, after merely mentioning a resemblance to Woolf's work he believes to be fortuitous, is quick to defend Welty's "artistic integrity," as though his comment might be misconstrued as an insult to Welty's work: "Miss Welty's prose, like her people, is her own."[12]

9. See Rubin, *The Faraway Country*, 131–54; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *A Gallery of Southerners* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 49–65; Albert J. Devlin, *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life* (Jackson, 1983), *passim;* Carol S. Manning, *With Ears Opening Like Morning Glories: Eudora Welty and the Love of Storytelling* (Westport, Conn., 1985), *passim;* Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens*, 65–109; Will Brantley, *Feminine Sense in Southern Memoir: Smith, Glasgow, Welty, Hellman, Porter, and Hurston* (Jackson, 1993), 36–132; Louise Westling, "Fathers and Daughters in Welty and O'Connor," in *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*, ed. Carol S. Manning (Urbana, 1993), 110–24; Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, "Southern Ladies and the Southern Literary Renaissance," in *The Female Tradition*, ed. Manning, 73–88.

10. See Rubin, *A Gallery of Southerners*, 52; Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, "The Antiphonies of Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* and Elizabeth Bowen's *Pictures and Conversations*," in *Welty: A Life in Literature*, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, 1987), 225–37; Chester E. Eisinger, "Traditionalism and Modernism in Eudora Welty," in *Eudora Welty: Critical Essays*, ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson, 1979), 3–25; Jan Nordby Gretlund, "The Terrible and the Marvelous: Eudora Welty's Chekhov," in *Eudora Welty: The Eye of the Storyteller*, ed. Dawn Trouard (Kent, Ohio, 1989), 107–18.

11. Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York, 1976), 241–47. Guiguet devotes six pages to defending Virginia Woolf against charges that her work is derivative of Joyce's and Proust's.

12. Ransom, "Delta Fiction," 504.

If Welty herself often reacts strongly to suggestions of influence, it is because the term does carry these suggestions of imitation, of inappropriate and inartistic reliance on the creativity of another. Like every contemporary southern novelist, Welty has been asked time and time again about Faulkner's influence upon her writing. While acknowledging that she learned from Faulkner "that a writer did not have to represent a dialect orthographically in order to create the sound of the dialect of a character's speech" (*C*, 280) and asserting that "his existence and his works mean a great deal to me" (*C*, 220), Welty resists the suggestion that her fiction is in any way indebted to his example: "Nobody can help you but yourself. So often I'm asked how I could have written a word with William Faulkner living in Mississippi, and this question amazes me. It was like living near a big mountain, something majestic—it made me happy to know it was there, all that work of his life. But it wasn't a helping or hindering presence. Its magnitude, all by itself, made it something remote in my own working life. When I thought of Faulkner was when I *read*" (*C*, 80). Elsewhere, discussing how she thinks literary influence operates, Welty says, "I think any influence would have to be indirect. . . . While I'm really in the process of working, I am not thinking about how anyone else does it or even how I ought to do it. . . . It would be a good thing if you could just go and influence yourself by the right person each time you find something wrong. But that's not the way it's done" (*C*, 19). Thus, while openly acknowledging Virginia Woolf's influence on her writing, Welty remains necessarily vague: "I know, even though I couldn't show in my work, heavens, the sense of what she has done certainly influenced me as an artist" (*C*, 325).

Certain theorists do, however, offer avenues of thinking about one writer's influence on another that illuminate the ways one text can incorporate others while avoiding the implication of direct imitation that Welty objects to in the term *influence*. Harold Bloom is one such theorist whose ideas, though widely recognized, are ill adapted for examining the influence of one woman writer on another. In *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Bloom asserts that "poetic history . . . is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves." Bloom's theory, which portrays literary influence as an Oedipal struggle between father and son, neglects women writers, and

his assumption of a fixed, shared literary tradition ignores the significance of gender in the construction of such a canon and in a writer's perception of and relation to such a tradition. But Welty's concept of "sweet devouring" and Woolf's claim, "For we think back through our mothers if we are women" (*ROO*, 79), suggest a markedly different model of influence for women. As Jane Marcus notes, "Woolf knew by experience how women influence each other. Far from Harold Bloom's concept of the 'anxiety of influence,' it is rather the opposite, affording the woman writer relief from anxiety." In "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," Patrocinio P. Schweickart repositions the struggle for feminist writers and critics; she finds it in their relationship to the sort of patriarchal literary tradition that Bloom takes for granted: "Feminist critics may well say with Harold Bloom that reading always involves the 'art of defensive warfare.' What they mean by this, however, would not be Bloom's individualistic, agonistic encounter between 'strong poet' and 'strong reader,' but something more akin to 'class struggle.' Whether concerned with male or female texts, feminist criticism is situated in the larger struggle against patriarchy." [13]

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the novel and his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia provide a more appropriate and useful way of perceiving and talking about relationships among works of literary art. As Bakhtin explains in *The Dialogic Imagination*, every writer is influenced, not only by the literary accomplishments of previous writers, but also by the various, conflicting ideologies and languages of his or her social and cultural milieu: "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is popu-

13. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford, 1973), 5; Jane Marcus, "Thinking Back through Our Mothers," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln, Nebr., 1981), 8; Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward A Feminist Theory of Reading," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, N.J., 1991), 542. See also Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," in *New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York, 1985), 46–62; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven, 1979), 46–53.

lated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process." He argues that "the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages.'" One way this expropriation of another's language takes place is through a dialogue among varying or conflicting styles, themes, ideologies: "The whole matter consists in the fact that there may be, between 'languages,' highly specific dialogic relations; no matter how these languages are conceived, they may all be taken as particular points of view on the world." [14]

One intention, one voice and language populating the form, structure, and thematic concerns of Welty's fiction is that of Virginia Woolf. Rather than a fixed, static object to be imitated, Woolf's fiction provides for Welty what Bakhtin calls an "internally persuasive discourse—as opposed to one that is externally authoritative," a discourse that is "half-ours and half-someone else's." This "internally persuasive discourse" acts as a creative, awakening force: "Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word *awakens new and independent words*, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. *It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts.*" [15]

Bakhtin uses the concept of the "internally persuasive word" to theorize about "instances of powerful influence exercised by another's discourse on a given author." He explains that "when such influences are laid bare, the half-concealed life lived by another's discourse is revealed within the new context of the given author. *When such an influence is deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development of another's (more precisely, half-other) discourse in a new context and under new conditions.*" Thus, through this dialogic engagement with another's discourse, the author develops his/her voice(s) and discourse(s): "The importance of struggling with another's

14. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 294, 262, 293.

15. *Ibid.*, 345–46 (emphasis added).

discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse."[16]

The dynamic that Bakhtin describes in these passages is similar to the feminist paradigm of reading that Schweickart outlines. Schweickart describes the relationship between the feminist reader and the woman writer as "dialogic." She argues that although "in all stories of reading, the drama revolves around the subject-object relationship between text and reader," in the feminist "story of reading" this relationship is "an intersubjective construction. . . . The reader encounters not simply a text, but . . . comes into close contact with an interiority—a power, a creativity, a suffering, a vision—that is *not* identical with her own." Schweickart, however, offers an alternative to the Bakhtinian notion of *struggle* and his use of battle metaphors to describe the relationship between the author and the "internally persuasive voice." In Schweickart's description of "the dialectic of communication informing the relationship between the feminist reader and the female author/text, the central issue is not of control or partition, but of managing the contradictory implications of the desire for relationship (one must maintain a minimal distance from the other) and the desire for intimacy, up to and including a symbiotic merger with the other."[17]

Seen in light of Bakhtin's and Schweickart's ideas, Welty's creative engagement and imaginative dialogue with Woolf's fiction becomes one of the forces leading to Welty's development as a novelist. Examining and reconsidering Woolf's (re)conception of the novel's form and exploration of gender issues, Welty has defined her creative language and vision. Exploring Welty's appropriation of and response to Woolf's fiction within the context of these theoretical perspectives allows us to study Welty's development as a writer and brings to our attention features of her work obscured by her categorization as a southern writer. Reading these two

16. *Ibid.*, 347 (emphasis added), 348.

17. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," 542, 544.

writers in tandem provides as well a new context or perspective from which to consider Woolf's artistic achievement.

One important dialogue between Virginia Woolf's and Eudora Welty's novels concerns the portrayal of women. That Woolf considered herself a feminist and was concerned with women's issues, especially with problems confronting women artists, is obvious from her essays and novels, and her fiction has been the focus of much feminist criticism.[18] Numerous readers have described Welty's work as also being somehow "feminine." Ransom says of *Delta Wedding,* "It is needless to remark that this is a woman's book." J. A. Bryant, Jr., describes Welty's narrative voice in *Losing Battles* as "pretty surely female."[19]

Welty's preference for female protagonists and narrators, and her attention to traditionally female activities, roles, and ceremonies—mothering, cooking, housekeeping, weddings, reunions—prompted critics in the 1970s to begin viewing her work from feminist perspectives. For example, Elizabeth M. Kerr compares the initiation rituals of Welty's young women to those of Faulkner's young men. Margaret Jones Bosterli argues that Welty's "novels are about the women's culture" and that "the interactions of these women, their relationship with each other, and their visions of life . . . form the fabric of the novels." Peggy Whitman Prenshaw extends this argument, examining what she sees as the matriarchal order of Welty's fiction.[20]

18. See Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York, 1973), 151–67; all of the essays in Marcus, ed., *New Feminist Essays;* Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York, 1985), 1–18; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985), 162–77; Elizabeth A. Meese, *Crossing the Double Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism* (Chapel Hill, 1986), 89–114; Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington, 1987); Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago, 1989), 1–29; Pamela L. Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism* (Urbana, 1991), 1–27; Elizabeth Abel, "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development," in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Margaret Homans (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1993), 93–114; Marianne Hirsch, "The Darkest Plots: Narration and Compulsory Heterosexuality," in *Virginia Woolf,* ed. Homans, 196–209.

19. Ransom, "Delta Fiction," 504; J. A. Bryant, Jr., "The Recovery of the Confident Narrator: *A Curtain of Green* to *Losing Battles,*" in *Critical Essays,* ed. Prenshaw, 77.

20. Elizabeth M. Kerr, "The World of Eudora Welty's Women," in *Critical Essays,*

During the 1980s and 1990s, feminist criticism of Welty's fiction became even more popular and more theoretical. Patricia Yaeger combines Bakhtin's theories of the novel with the critical thought of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray to examine Welty's incorporation and revision of W. B. Yeats's poetry in *The Golden Apples*. Elizabeth Evans' "Eudora Welty and the Dutiful Daughter" examines the complex relationships between mothers and daughters in *The Optimist's Daughter* and *The Golden Apples;* Marilyn Arnold offers a feminist rereading of *The Ponder Heart*. Franziska Gygax's book-length study, *Serious Daring from Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels,* draws upon a combination of feminist theories and narratology to explore Welty's narrative strategies. Peter Schmidt's *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction* analyzes the influence of nineteenth-century American women writers on Welty's fiction. Ann Romines devotes two chapters to Welty's fiction in her study of domestic ritual in American fiction. In his study of southern women's autobiographies, Will Brantley links Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* with Ellen Glasgow's *The Woman Within,* arguing that both writers demonstrate "that a sheltered existence need not stifle one's sense of self." In *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature,* Peggy Whitman Prenshaw's essay considers Welty in the context of the southern literary renaissance, while Louise Westling's essay on fathers and daughters contrasts "Welty's comic vision of daughters and their fathers" to Flannery O'Connor's "tragic one." Gail Mortimer's *Daughter of the Swan: Love and Knowledge in Eudora Welty's Fiction* uses feminist psychological theories to illuminate patterns of autonomy and connection in Welty's work. In *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's "The Golden Apples,"* Rebecca Mark demonstrates Welty's critique and revision of the Western heroic literary tradition in *The Golden Apples.*[21]

ed. Prenshaw, 132–48; Margaret Jones Bosterli, "Woman's Vision: The Worlds of Women in *Delta Wedding, Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter,*" in *Critical Essays,* ed. Prenshaw, 149; Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, "Woman's World, Man's Place: The Fiction of Eudora Welty," in *Eudora Welty: A Form of Thanks,* ed. Louis Dollarhide and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson, 1979), 46–77.

21. Patricia Yaeger, "Because a Fire Was in My Head: Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination," in *Welty,* ed. Devlin, 136–67; Elizabeth Evans, "Eudora Welty and the Dutiful Daughter," in *Eye of the Storyteller,* ed. Trouard, 57–68; Marilyn Arnold, "The Strategy of Edna Earle Ponder," in *Eye of the Storyteller,* ed. Trouard, 69–77; Franziska Gygax, *Serious Daring from Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels* (Westport, Conn., 1990), *passim;* Peter Schmidt, *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction* (Jackson, 1991), 204–65; Ann Romines, *The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual* (Amherst, 1992), 192–291; Brantley, *Feminine Sense in Southern Memoir,* 87; Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, "Southern Ladies and the Southern Literary Renaissance," in *The Female Tradition,* ed. Manning, 73–88; Louise Westling, "Fathers and Daughters in Welty and O'Connor," in *The Female Tradition,* ed. Manning, 111; Gail Mortimer, *Daughter of the Swan: Love and Knowledge in Eudora Welty's Fiction* (Athens, Ga., 1994); Rebecca Mark, *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Interextuality in Eudora Welty's "The Golden Apples"* (Jackson, 1994).

Despite this wealth of feminist criticism of her works, Welty often resists being labeled a "woman writer" in the same way she resists being categorized as a southern or gothic writer. In most of her comments about feminism, Welty defines it as a political movement rather than a theoretical construct or an epistemology. Welty articulates her reasons for disliking any association of her art with political causes in "Must the Novelist Crusade?" In this essay she argues that a political agenda interferes with the quality of a writer's imaginative work: "Passion is the chief ingredient of good fiction. . . . But to distort a work of passion for the sake of a cause is to cheat, and the end, far from justifying the means, is fairly sure to be lost with it" (*E,* 156–57). When asked by Charles T. Bunting in a 1972 interview, "Why have there been so few really great women writers?" Welty replies at length:

> I am a woman. In writing fiction, I think imagination comes ahead of sex. . . . Well, I think there have been not a few great women writers, of course. Jane Austen. I don't see how anyone could have a greater scope in knowledge of human nature and reveal more of human nature than Jane Austen. Consider Virginia Woolf. The Brontës. Well, you know as many as I do: great women writers. I'm not interested in any kind of a feminine repartee. I don't care what sex people are when they write. I just want the result to be a good book. All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply *at all* to women writers. We've always been able to do what we've wished. I couldn't feel less deprived as a woman to be writing, and I certainly enjoy all the feelings of any other

> human being. The full complement is available. I have the point of view of a woman, but if I'm not able to imagine myself into what another human being who is a man might feel, which I have to do all the time when I write, well, it's just from poverty of imagination. It's a matter of imagination, not sex. (*C*, 54)

Louise Westling comments perceptively on the ambivalence of Welty's answer to this question: "First, in response to the questioner's condescension, Welty defends the achievements of women writers; then she backs away, dissociating herself from feminism. Yet all the writers she mentions are distinctively feminine in their treatment of theme, point of view, and setting."[22]

Virginia Woolf is actually no less ambivalent than Welty on the question of the relationship of sex to writing. The following passage from the concluding pages of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's extended essay devoted to the topic "Women and Fiction," expresses a similar attitude: "Even so, the very first sentence that I would write here, I said, crossing over to the writing-table and taking up the page headed Women and Fiction, is that it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple. One must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (*ROO*, 108).

At the heart of Woolf's and Welty's ambivalence lies a debate that has been central to discussions of women's writing from before Woolf's time to the present: When we talk about "women's writing" and "men's writing," are we referring to biological or sociocultural differences? Both writers reject an essentialist stance, the suggestion that the way they write is biologically determined and limited by their sex. Certainly, recent literary theory suggests that biological definitions do not help us much in discussions of women's writing. It is more useful (but no less problematic) in a study that examines the works of two women writers, one English and one American, to consider questions of women's (or feminine or feminist) writing in the context of English and American literary and philosophical traditions, in the context of Western discourse. This discourse is dominated, argues Shoshana Felman, by "the metaphysical

22. Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens*, 67.

logic of dichotomous oppositions . . . (Presence/Absence, Being/Nothingness, Truth/Error, Same/Other, Identity/Difference, etc.)." Man/Woman and Masculine/Feminine follow in this pattern of opposition. The terms of each dichotomy are not equal; instead, they form a hierarchy in which *man* and *self* are primary and *woman* and *other* are secondary and dependent. Woman, claims Simone de Beauvoir, "is defined and differentiated with reference to man, and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other."[23]

To define woman solely in terms of her relationship to and difference from man is to define woman not just as other, but as absence, negation, and lack, and as silent, excluded from language. But, as Diane Price Herndl asks, "When woman is in a position analogous to Silence, Absence, and Madness in the paradigm of Western thought (Speech/Silence, Presence/Absence, Logic/Madness) . . . what happens to her language?" Or, in Felman's words, "How can the woman be thought about outside of the Masculine/Feminine framework, other than as opposed to man, without being subordinated to a primordial masculine mold? . . . How can difference as such be thought out as non-subordinate to identity? In other words, how can thought [and writing] break away from the logic of polar opposites?"[24]

Toril Moi argues that removing identity from this traditional gender hierarchy is one of the primary features and goals of Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. Moi claims that Woolf rejects traditional gender identities "because she has seen them for what they are. She has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity."[25] I wish to argue that Welty's fiction shares this passion, seeking radically new character and textual identities that are neither repressive nor limiting.

23. Shoshana Felman, "Woman and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics*, V (Winter, 1975), 7; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (1953; rpr. New York, 1974), xvi.

24. Diane Price Herndl, "The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic," in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry (Albany, 1991), 19; Felman, "Woman and Madness," 4.

25. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 13.

Both writers use the novel as a ground for exploring alternatives to the rigid and limiting dualism of the binary oppositions.

Mary Jacobus explains that when female difference is removed from this hierarchical opposition, when Otherness is defined as multiplicity rather than lack, the result in terms of feminist criticism is significant: "*Difference* is redefined, not as male *versus* female—not as biologically constituted—but as a multiplicity, ambiguity and heterogeneity which is that of textuality itself. Writing, the production of meaning, becomes the site both of challenge and otherness; rather than (as in more traditional approaches) simply yielding the themes and representation of female oppression."[26] When the duality of the monologic, authoritarian hierarchy is replaced by a dialogic multiplicity, the feminine stance becomes one of freedom, creativity, and power instead of remaining a position of powerlessness and dependency. Virginia Woolf's fiction provided Welty with a model of just this sort of feminist narrative practice.

Here again, Bakhtin's theories are useful to this study. The novel, he claims, is the genre most suited to this multiplicity because its inherent dialogism resists these traditional hierarchies and oppositions. In his preface to *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, Gary Saul Morson argues that "perhaps Bakhtin's most radical contribution lies in his rethinking of traditional oppositions: of the individual to society, of self to other, of the specific utterance to the totality of language, and of particular actions to the world of norms and conventions."[27] As, in Bakhtin's terms, "the only developing genre," existing in "a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)," the novel becomes the site for *heteroglossia*—language's conflicting, interacting voices—the voices of narrators, characters, other genres, social structures, and ideologies.[28]

26. Mary Jacobus, *Reading Women: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York, 1986), 30.

27. Gary Saul Morson, "Preface: Perhaps Bakhtin," in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago, 1986), xi.

28. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 4, 7. Bakhtin's comments about the novel's close contact with contemporary reality are similar to Welty's ideas about the novel that she explains in her essay "Place in Fiction." The novel, says Welty, is the genre that "speaks [the truth] most unmistakably, most directly, most variously, most fully. . . . Why? Because the novel from the start has been bound up in the local, the 'real,' the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience. . . . Fiction is properly at work on the here and now, or the past made here and now; for in the novels we have to be there" (*E*, 117).

Though Bakhtin employs language and concepts similar to those used by many feminist critics, he ignores the issue of gender in his discussions of the novel. However, critics such as Wayne C. Booth, Diane Price Herndl, Dale M. Bauer, and Patricia Yaeger have examined the intersection of Bakhtin's ideas with issues raised by feminist theory. In "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," Booth asks, "Is it not remarkable to discover no hint in such a penetrating and exhaustive inquiry into how our various dialects are constituted, no shadow of a suggestion in the lists and the 'and so forths' of the influence of sexual differences, no hint that women now talk or have ever talked in ways different from men's? . . . The omission is so glaring that it makes one long for the skill to make up for it."[29]

Current theorists are attempting to make up for this omission. For example, Price Herndl explains that "like Bakhtin's theory of novelistic discourse, theories of feminine language describe a multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies and laughter at authority. Furthermore, in the hierarchies Bakhtin mentions, the novel always takes the woman's structural place as the excluded other: masculine/feminine, epic/novel, poetry/novel." Dale M. Bauer defines a "feminist dialogics [as] a paradigm which acknowledges individual acts of reading as an experience of otherness and challenges the cultural powers which often force us to contain or restrict the otherness of textual voices." She asserts that "for feminists, Bakhtin's theories of the social nature of the utterance—both the inner and outer words—provide a critical language that allows us to pinpoint and foreground the moments when the patriarchal work and the persuasive resistance to it come into conflict. By highlighting these contradictions, a feminist dialogics produces occasions for the disruption and critique of dominant and oppressive ideologies." Patricia Yaeger's combination of Bakhtin's theories and feminist theories in "Because a Fire Was in My Head" provides an early illustration of the value of a

29. Wayne C. Booth, "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," *Critical Inquiry*, IX (1982), 60.

feminist Bakhtinian perspective in reading Welty's fiction. Yaeger concludes that although Bakhtin does not address gender issues in his own work, his "theories of linguistic evolution, of dialogism, and of heteroglossia will give us a useful vocabulary and a new perspective from which to examine the central tensions between men's and women's writing."[30]

In their experiments with narrative voice and structure, Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty create such a feminist dialogics, exploiting the heteroglossia inherent in language, decentering the authority of the narrator or author, and giving full play to the novel's many voices. Their works gain energy from the multiplicity of their many-voiced narrative structures. In novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931), *Delta Wedding* (1946), and *Losing Battles* (1970), narrative perspective and voice are distributed among characters with varied and distinctive views. In fact, the difference among these characters' varying orientations to reality becomes one subject these novels examine. *Orlando* (1928), *Between the Acts* (1941), *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), *The Golden Apples* (1949), and *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972) add to the dialogue among characters and narrators an intertextual dialogue among varying genres.

Woolf and Welty incorporate different genres into the context of their novels and thus feminize or novelize them. Such feminization/novelization explores and calls into question the underlying assumptions of the genres. The dialogue created by Welty's reconsideration of Woolf's narrative techniques, structures, and thematic concerns illustrates the ways in which Woolf's fiction modeled for Welty the varied strategies a writer can use to appropriate, transgress, and transform patriarchal discourse.

Each chapter of this study examines a pair of novels, one by Virginia Woolf and one by Eudora Welty. In addition to exploring the dialogue between the works and the ways in which Welty's fiction is marked by her "devouring" of Woolf's works, each chapter also illustrates one of the strategies these two women writers use as they seek to appropriate

30. Price Herndl, "The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic," in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Bauer and McKinstry, 8; Dale M. Bauer, *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community* (Albany, 1988), 673; Dale M. Bauer, "Introduction," in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Bauer and McKinstry, 3; Yaeger, "Because a Fire Was in My Head," in *Welty*, ed. Devlin, 142.

traditional masculine narrative forms and languages. As Bakhtin says, "This process—experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons—becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, where someone is striving to liberate himself [in this case, herself] from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitations of both image and discourse."[31] In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf uses this strategy to dramatize the tension between traditional gender roles in romance through the interplay of attraction and antagonism between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. At the same time, other characters voice various cultural perspectives on gender and romance. As these views interrogate one another, the "naturalness" of traditional gender roles is called into question. In the same way, *Delta Wedding* questions gender-based familial roles as well as romantic roles. By using the novel as a site for the expression of women's views—oftentimes marginalized and silenced in the patriarchal plantation society represented in the novel—Welty draws the southern patriarchal constructs of family and society into dialogue with alternative views.

Intertextuality is another strategy that women writers use to appropriate and revise cultural narratives that seek to marginalize and silence women. Woolf and Welty incorporate a variety of different genres—pastoral, history, biography, fairy tale, epic, and elegy—into their works as well as make intertextual use of specific texts. In novelizing or feminizing these various genres, making them part of each work's internal dialogue, Woolf and Welty question the different genres' cultural assumptions, assumptions that often have a masculine bias. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, "Narrative structures and subjects are like working apparatuses of ideology, factories for the 'natural' and 'fantastic' meanings by which we live. Here are produced and disseminated the assumptions, the conflicts, the patterns that create fictional boundaries for experience. . . . To compose a work is to negotiate with these questions: What stories can be told? How can plots be resolved? What is felt to be narratable by both literary and social standards?"[32]

31. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 348.

32. DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, 3; see also Mark, *The Dragon's Blood*, 3–30.

Intertextuality provides Woolf and Welty with a way of appropriating "masculine" genres and raising questions about the ideologies implicit in those forms. Thus speculation about the questions DuPlessis asks becomes a subtext of the novels in this study. *Orlando* poses questions about the purposes of biography and explores the assumptions that have determined the types of behavior deemed appropriate to biographical writing. *The Robber Bridegroom* poses similar questions about historical discourse and the assumptions encoded in traditional historical narrative forms. Thus Woolf and Welty use the novel's multivoiced form to examine the construction of cultural narratives in two exuberantly comic novels that transgress boundaries and challenge expectations at every turn. Central to *The Waves* and *Losing Battles* is a struggle between an idealized, final epic past and the open-ended, incomplete present of the novel. Participating in this struggle, a communal chorus battles against the emergence of individual voices seeking self-definition. Both novels use a circular and multivoiced narrative to undermine the authority of a central, unified narrator. In the works throughout this study Woolf and Welty use the novel as a ground for exploring alternative narrative forms.

Constructing new images of female artists and seeking to redefine and revalue art outside of a phallocentric paradigm is the final strategy this study explores in the works of Woolf and Welty. Woolf has created a variety of female artists: Lily Briscoe is a painter; Orlando is a writer; and Mrs. Ramsay is an artist of social situations and domestic settings. All struggle to reconcile their artistic impulses with their social roles as women. In Welty's fiction, we see a progression in the development of female artists. The women of *The Robber Bridegroom* use lies and plotting—consciously constructed narratives—as a means of artistically manipulating and gaining control of their lives. *Delta Wedding*'s Laura McRaven shows promise of both artistic ability and the determination to pattern her own life. *Losing Battles* offers a more positive portrait of women and art, as the Beecham and Renfro women pattern the family's life through their continuous storytelling. Finally, in *The Optimist's Daughter,* Welty creates a protagonist who is an artist by vocation as well as avocation. Laurel McKelva Hand's medium is graphic design, and she works to discover and fulfill the patterns in her life. For Welty, as for Woolf, the successful woman artist is one who can bring her vision to

bear upon her life as well as her art. Being an artist, in the fiction of these two writers, involves more than producing works of art. To be an artist is to engage in a process of patterning and of situating oneself in relation to others.