Cynthia Scott
Dr. Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick
English-L 378
10 November 2015

Pieces of Eudora Welty: Water, Jewelry, Whistle, Laughter, and Dialect

Costello, Brannon. “Swimming Free of the Matriarchy: Sexual Baptism and Feminine Individuality in Eudora Welty’s ‘The Golden Apples’.” *Southern Literary Journal,* 33.1 (2000): 82-93. Print.

After acknowledging that several critics “have often commented upon the strong feminist and sexual implications of Eudora Welty's story-cycle *The Golden Apples*,” Brannon Costello adds to that body of analysis by examining “Welty’s unique and subversive connection of sexuality with water imagery” (82). Of the water in the “Moon Lake” chapter, Costello says “it practically bursts with almost too-obvious phallic imagery” (82). Citing several passages demonstrating how counselors and campers regard the lake and their behaviors when taking a dip, Costello surmises “…the lake serves not merely as a site for refreshment but also as a symbol of dangerous male sexuality” (83). Two characters defy the rules. Easter, a camper at Moon Lake, flirts with sexual encounter figuratively and literally when she dips in the water outside of those limits and suffers a near rape as a result (86-7). In the “The Wanderers” chapter of *The Golden Apples*, Virgie Rainey is a middle-aged prodigal daughter who frequently escapes Morgana matriarchal pressure by secretly swimming in the river at night (90). After discussing these expressions of independence in detailed context, Costello sums her findings: “Welty masterfully uses the recurring images of water and baptism to symbolize a breaking free of the constraints the matriarchal society places upon the citizens of Morgana” (92).

This article makes us aware that power over women can come from other women, not just men. The Morgana matriarchs attempt to protect each other, their children, and even their weak husbands against the perils of sexuality. In my opinion, this is a rather extreme example of the motherhood aspect of feminism. Costello chooses to connect that theme with Welty's water imagery. She quotes Noel Polk's comment about Welty's water as "the matrix, our nourishment, and our source of life; but it is also mysterious and fraught with peril" (82). I skimmed (but did not include on this bibliography) a journal article titled "Eudora Welty's Mississippi River: A View from the Shore," in which Pearl McHaney observes Welty "roots her characters on land. She stays ashore" and notes that Welty's mother had a fear of perilous river crossings (63). It appears to me that Costello could have included some reference to Welty's own cautious respect for powerful bodies of water, apart from the phallic symbolism she used in her stories.

Graham-Bertolini, Alison. "Searching for the Garnet Pin: Confluence as Narrative Technique in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding." *Eudora Welty Review*, 5 (2013): 95-108. Print.

Alison Graham-Bertolini identifies and analyzes examples of confluence and surrealism in Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*. She begins "For Welty, confluence, or the coming together of disparate individuals, experiences, and ideas, is the key to understanding the inner life of her fictional characters" (95). Graham-Bertolini cites Stephen M. Fuller who affirms that Welty was using elements of [yet unnamed] surrealism in her narrative style a year before the publication of André Breton's *Manifestoes of Surrealism* in 1924. Surrealism is a confluence of dreams, memories, and reality (97), a new perspective that "advocates for the suspension of logical reason and the unhampered operation of the deep mind" (98). For her analysis, Graham-Bertolini focuses on the character Ellen Fairchild, "whose search for her missing garnet pin provides particularly strong examples of how Welty distorts the precepts of linear time and space to achieve moments of insight for both Ellen and the reader" (95). Scene by scene, Graham-Bertolini explains each confluence of dream, memory, and action Ellen takes to find her brooch and, unconsciously, reclaim her self-worth, by saying "Welty uses the surrealist suspension of certain laws of time and space and the organizing principle of dream structure to reflect on Ellen's transformation from maiden to mother" (107).

Who has not wondered about their dreams and, when older, wondered whether those dreams are from memories, or if one's memories have been distorted by those dreams? I appreciated Graham-Bertolini's efforts to untangle the interconnecting web of dreams and memories while explaining how surrealistic writing can produce a meaningful story about such chaotic brain activity. She makes plain what some readers of Welty's work might have misunderstood or skipped over. What goes on in our heads obviously influences how we behave and react in stressful situations, real or imagined.

Gretlund, Jan. "Eudora Welty Blows the Whistle on the Landowners." *Southern Quarterly,* 52.2 (2015): 34-46. Print.

Jan Gretlund describes the symbolism found in Eudora Welty's "The Whistle," a story about 1930s Great Depression tenant farmers trying without success to save their tomato crop in very cold spring weather. Gretlund speculates, for example, that "color symbolism of pure *white*, disappearing and distant, and murky *gray*, spreading and obvious…signals hopelessness and depression" (34) and thus reinforces the mood of despair in the story line. Gretlund connects the name of the couple in the story to "[t]he French expression *la petite mort*, notice the word *mort*, the small death…since the Mortons have suffered so many small deaths…" (35). She draws on history in the *Guide to the Magnolia State* when explaining why Sara Morton "dreams in green and red, the primary colors in the life of a tomato" since "… red tomatoes, the *Pommes d'Amour*, were associated with heat, emotions, and passion" (35). She also confirms that Welty calls on a fairy tale theme when describing how Sara Morton's mind wanders to memories of warmer times as a mental escape from cold, a device used earlier by Hans Christian Andersen in "The Little Match Girl" (44). The whistle, a symbol of oppressive power in the story, is used by the landowner to signal when sharecroppers should cover the tomato plants to prevent damage from the cold. This and other symbols in the sad social commentary of "The Whistle" led Gertlund to conclude with a double-meaning play on words, "Eudora Welty met the sharecroppers and blew the whistle on the landowners' exploitation of the poor tomato growers in Copiah County, Mississippi" (46).

"The Whistle" is one of several works by Welty that served as social or political protest about human rights issues. This is feminism at its best, in my opinion; a woman writer uses her skills to push for positive change. If men like Charles Dickens and Upton Sinclair could "blow the whistle" on industrial labor conditions, a woman should be allowed to do it also. I believe Gretlund does an excellent job of revealing the nuances of every part of the story and providing historical background data to flesh out the context. She also points out biblical and Greek mythological connections used by Welty. The story is loaded with symbolism, and none of it escapes Gretlund's examination. She comments on Welty's narrator voice, providing information about the Mortons without passion and in great detail, but giving "no hope that their situation will improve" (39). I found Gretlund's evaluation illuminating and helpful for understanding the story.

Mark, Rebecca. "Why Aren't Middle-Class White Women Laughing in Eudora Welty's Fiction?" *Eudora Welty Review,* 6 (2014): 39-53. Print.

In this ambitious and complicated article, Rebecca Mark offers reasons to explain why the strong middle-aged women in Eudora Welty's stories usually do not laugh. She comments, "Women laugh where we least expect them to and do not always laugh when other characters, or the plot line, or a funny joke, calls upon them to do so" (39). Mark cites critics and analysts who study why most women do laugh, the cultural setting and times when they laugh (if permitted), and how they are regarded by others after laughing. Mark reports, for example, that Lois Welch, another contributor to the *Eudora Welty Review*, "views laughter as a potentially liberating force for women," and that "women characters' laughter is a release, essential to breaking the bonds that keep them subservient in a patriarchal world" (39-40). After offering arguments from two more critics, Mark counters "But Welty's women's laughs are not communal, mythical, or ritualistic. In fact…they are, when possible, personal, and calculated, performative, political, and chosen" (43). With emphasis on the "political and chosen," Mark lists several non-laughing women characters who are "the brunt of the joke" and who "do not laugh because what they know is not funny. In a segregated, patriarchal, racially violent, and sexually violent society, there is too much at stake" (51). She later adds "More precisely they [middle-class white women and African-American women] might be holding on to their laughter to use at the most strategic and important moment so that their laughs mean exactly what they want them to mean and are not 'ragged,' 'mechanical,' 'continuous,' 'repetitive,' or 'unrelieved'"(48).

I find it interesting to see how two critics evaluating the same element (laughter) in the same works could arrive at different conclusions about the meaning and importance of that element. Rebecca Mark's article asks questions that reveal a depth of understanding I might never have grasped on my own. She points to Welty's motivations and shows how, in each story setting, purposeful absence of laughter relates to a woman's control in a stressful situation. Marks talks about not giving in when others are pressuring for laughter as if it were an act of self-preservation (44). Laughing as an aspect of feminist power makes me think about how my laughter might affect others, and conversely, how I might be perceived by others when laughing at inappropriate times.

Russel, Heather. "Eudora Welty's Use of Southern Dialect in 'Why I Live at the P.O.'." *Eudora Welty Review,* 1 (2009): 25-46. Print.

In this article from the *Eudora Welty Review*, Heather Russel explores the linguistic patterns of white Southern dialect used in Welty's short story "Why I Live at the P.O." Russel comments that readers and critics have praised Welty for her expert showcasing of the Southern oral tradition and "take it for granted, assuming that readers can identify her works' Southern features readily" (25). In this study, Russel identifies the specific "lexical, grammatical, and sociolinguistic features" (25) that confirm the American Southern flavor of Welty's work. She compares and contrasts Welty's Standard Formal English in her other works to many idiomatic monologues in this short story. While analyzing selected passages, Russel directly cites seventeen linguistic experts to describe Southern speech traditions such as figurative exaggeration, hyperbolic clichés, repetition patterns, the use of "just" for irony, and the indirect ways women speak their minds. She observes of the story characters that "despite hedging and grasping at formality, their language and actions belie their façade of gentility" (43). Russel concludes "Although she doesn't have training in linguistic field research, Welty relies on her keen ear to capture many features of Southern English documented by linguistic experts" (44).

Fifty years ago, I wrote a paper in high school comparing the Southern dialect in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* against Joel Chandler Harris' *Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby*. Even at that untutored age, I could detect differences and inconsistencies in idiomatic dialog, but did not know enough about the field of linguistics to understand the possible reasons why Twain and Harris wrote the way they did. The Russel article answers those linguistic questions and explains the purpose and history of polite society dialog in other Southern works I have read, such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The article offers insight on how women found ways to use language-based performative acts of gender to their advantage.