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A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Eudora Welty's "A Memory" and the Modern Literary Epiphany

PERHAPS BECAUSE EUDORA WELTY'S SHORT STORY "A MEMORY" WAS initially published in the *Southern Review* in 1937, three years prior to the beginning of her professional relationship with her agent Diarmuid Russell, critics have treated this faintly autobiographical piece as a kind of outlier. Indeed, Michael Kreyling does not address the story in *Author and Agent* since it was composed before Russell agreed to represent Welty in 1940. Diana Pingatore notes that critics have struggled to "detect any strong source of literary influence in the story either," choosing instead to examine the story's markers of Welty's childhood in Jackson (Pingatore 93). Critics agree, however, on the notion that "A Memory," which chronicles a daydreaming adolescent girl's struggle to reconstruct her memory of first love on a noisy beach, depicts the development of an artist—maybe even, as Katherine Anne Porter suggests, the artistic gestation of Welty herself.

In her introduction to the 1941 edition of *A Curtain of Green*, Porter designates "A Memory" as "one of the best stories," singling out the young protagonist's technique of peering through "small frames with [her] fingers" as "the gesture of one born to select, to arrange, to bring apparently disparate elements into harmony within deliberately fixed boundaries" (Porter 16; "A Memory" 92). The young protagonist of "A Memory" refers to herself as an amateur painter, not as a writer, but her "small frames" nevertheless function more as a method of observing "a person, or a happening" as opposed to tableaux for paintings (92). She describes the act of seeing as a means of reaching a "state of exaltation," wherein each observation might stir up "a secret of life":

All through this summer I had lain on the sand beside the small lake, with my hands squared over my eyes, finger tips touching, looking out by this device to see everything: which appeared as a kind of projection. It did not matter to me what I

looked at; from any observation I would conclude that a secret of life had been nearly revealed to me—for I was obsessed with notions about concealment, and from the smallest gesture of a stranger I would wrest what was to me a communication or a presentiment. (92-93)

The young girl's sensitivity to "a communication or a presentiment" through "the smallest gesture," read alongside Welty's lakeside setting, not only evokes a contemplative mode, but it is also reminiscent of the iconic Joycean epiphany exemplified in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. When Stephen Dedalus experiences his epiphanic vision of the young girl bathing on the strand, he recalls "a new wild life singing in his veins" as he muses about his own artistic calling (*Portrait* 170). The artist, James Joyce suggests in an earlier version of *Portrait*, understands epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" (*Stephen Hero* 211). In light of Joyce's definition, Welty's protagonist's desire to "wrest" a "secret of life" from the "smallest gesture of a stranger" certainly strikes an epiphanic tone, perhaps to the extent that this trope is valuable for detecting a potential literary influence for this early story.

Retrospectively, the relationship between these two moments is reflected powerfully in the imagination of literary modernism and its concern for the Romantic epiphany. But the relationship between these moments in *Portrait* and "A Memory" is more complex than shades of allusion: here I argue that Welty's story would appear to revise this modernist myth to suit a view of artistic revelation that not only criticizes the subjectivity of the burgeoning artist, but also questions the idealized art object, replacing what Suzette Henke calls the beautiful "bird-girl" of Stephen Dedalus's epiphany (66) with the vulgar, unruly bathers at Welty's lakeside. Furthermore, a reading of these two moments suggests new queries about Welty's position within literary modernism. Welty's moment of epiphany revises and complicates the forms of literary epiphany established by Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Although the notion of epiphany has long been a part of twentieth-century literary criticism, I should qualify my particular understanding of epiphany—especially as it relates to Welty. Sharon Kim offers an excellent synthesis of the literary epiphany's modern iterations in *Literary Epiphany and the Novel: Constellations of the Soul*, tracing manifestations of the epiphany in the work of Joyce, Woolf, and

Susan Warner. Kim ultimately suggests that we can extract from epiphanic episodes a skeletal definition of the moment of epiphany, but she also stresses the often overlooked spiritual qualities of the charged epiphanic moment. Like Kim, I view an epiphany as an instance where something ordinary—an object, gesture, encounter—suddenly evokes a heightened sense of being in an individual, a moment that usually involves a spiritual component. While more complex definitions exist, such as Robert Langbaum's assertion that the epiphany is "a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life" (46), the simple and individualistic qualities of Joyce's "sudden spiritual manifestation" or Woolf's "moments of being" seem to best resonate with Welty's close-range character study of the developing artist in "A Memory." In light of these various definitions, then, the epiphanic moment is both spiritual and not spiritual, attached to a spiritual state and yet not constrained by any particular religious paradigm.

Comparing the Epiphanies of Welty and Joyce

When Harriet Pollack addresses how Welty's stories are "built on allusions to well-known stories and story patterns—and on literary, more than autobiographical, memory," she concedes that "Source hunting in itself . . . is not an adequate critical response to Welty's allusions" (5). It is not enough, then, to merely notice the similarities between "A Memory" and *Portrait's* Joycean epiphany and to suggest that this trope of literary modernism might have served as an influence on Welty's story; rather, the significance lies in where Welty's "tales diverge" from their allusive source (Pollack 7). This particular story departs not only from the other stories in *A Curtain of Green* with respect to point of view (it is one of two stories employing first-person narration), but it also does not appear to engage with the more traditional fairy tales and myths that are so frequently the subjects of allusive discourse in Welty. The myth that is arguably at stake in "A Memory" is decidedly modern (albeit originally popularized by the Romantics) and the trajectory of the story suggests that Welty is dissatisfied with it.

Both Stephen Dedalus and Welty's young narrator begin their epiphanic episodes with observations about their surroundings. Enjoying a "day of dappled seaborne clouds," Stephen muses that the clouds "were voyaging across the deserts of the sky, a host of nomads on the march,

voyaging over Ireland, westward bound" (*Portrait* 166-67). Describing the enduring quality of his surroundings, Joyce's narrator continues, "old as man's weariness, the image of the seventh city of Christendom was visible to him across the timeless air, no older nor more weary nor less patient of subjection than in the days of thingmote" (167). The "timeless air" that saturates Stephen's surroundings coincides with his deconstruction of the "treasur[ed]" phrase he composes while standing on the strand: "A day of dappled seaborne clouds" (166). Here his observation that the "phrase and the day and the scene harmonised in a chord" anticipates his conclusion that the phrase's poetic efficacy must arise from "the poise and balance of the period itself" (166). Thus, Stephen would appear to view this harmonization of "phrase and . . . day and . . . scene" in light of the historical implications embedded in his surroundings; conversely, Welty's protagonist—who is perhaps much younger than Stephen Dedalus—sees little more than the tame fantasy she struggles to recall.

The young girl likewise takes in her surroundings, albeit through the "small frames" made by her fingers:

From my position I was looking at a rectangle brightly lit, actually glaring at me, with sun, sand, water, a little pavilion, a few solitary people in fixed attitudes, and around it all a border of dark rounded oak trees, like the engraved thunderclouds surrounding illustrations in the Bible. ("A Memory" 92)

These observations are confined to the scope of the "rectangle brightly lit," and her static account of what she perceives indicates resistance to the mobile, "voyaging" images that compose Stephen's scene (*Portrait* 167): the people she sees have "fixed attitudes" and she compares the "border of . . . oak trees" situated in her line of view to an engraved Bible illustration. These static preferences anticipate her remark that "When a person, or a happening, seemed to me not in keeping with my opinion, or even my hope or expectation, I was terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness which tore my heart with a kind of sorrow" ("A Memory" 92). Gary Carson has designated this sentiment as a quality that makes "this character . . . as close as Welty comes to creating a transcendental idealist in the first collection of stories," despite the fact that the young girl's "artistic vision . . . proves to be limited indeed" (422-23).

In light of the artistic boundaries the girl imposes on her surroundings, the physical setting of her vision (if it is an actual vision) is likewise limited. She remains reclined throughout the entire story, fully stationary amidst the “loud, squirming, ill-assorted people” who disrupt her contemplation (“A Memory” 94). Even when she first notices the bathers “so close to [her],” she does not appear to move (94). As Barbara Fialkowski explains, she “prefer[s] her world motionless,” a preference reinforced by her position next to the torpid lake (68). The lake itself is also an insular image, one that Welty presumably reuses in her murky description of Moon Lake in *The Golden Apples*, and it contrasts strongly to the winding and changeable strand that Stephen Dedalus walks alongside.

Even though the young girl’s stationary position seems to be one of privilege in this story, her motionless posture becomes complicated when the objects (the bathers) invite the subject (the young girl) into the scene: “The man smiled, the way panting dogs seem to be smiling, and gazed about carelessly at them all and out over the water. *He even looked at me, and included me.* Looking back, stunned, I wished that they all were dead” (96; emphasis added). Disgusted by the fact that she is “included” in what she perceives as a vulgar scene, the young girl’s coherent memory of love is disrupted and challenged because of her forced participation in her surroundings. No longer simply an observer, she becomes the object of someone else’s gaze, and her self-centeredness is suddenly compromised.

In *Portrait*, we learn that Stephen wishes to see “an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose” (167), and in Welty’s story we hear the same frustration with the disjuncture between one’s interior life and reality: “The truth is that never since has any passion I have felt remained so hopelessly unexpressed within me or appeared so grotesquely altered in the outward world” (“A Memory” 93). Aligning the complexities of an “inner world” with the obstructions of the “outer world,” Porter, in her introduction to *A Curtain of Green*, praises Welty’s collection for moments

where external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end. (16)

The threshold space praised by Porter sets the scene for what Langbaum calls “a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life” (46)—the essence of epiphany—but the tension between these inner and outer worlds becomes complicated when the object or scene that provokes an epiphany does not fit neatly into a particular aesthetic mold. Must the object of an epiphany be as beautiful and surprising as the bird-muse Stephen Dedalus observes bathing in the water?

Welty specifically obstructs the archetypal Joycean epiphany in her own revision of the epiphany’s object: the human body. The girl who “stood before [Stephen] in midstream, alone and still” does not seem fully human (171). As Joyce’s narrator (attached to Stephen) catalogs each segment of the girl’s body, he aestheticizes her by using only avian attributes to describe her appearance:

Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane’s and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. (171)

The “emerald trail of seaweed” attached to her leg, which appears as a sign that this creature is indeed composed of “flesh” as opposed to feathers, registers as the primary humanizing quality of the girl: the rogue piece of seaweed disrupts the artistic image of the “strange and beautiful seabird” (171).

The bodily object of the epiphanic moment in “A Memory,” however, is not so polished. One of the women bathers the narrator describes is “unnaturally white and fatly aware, in a bathing suit which had no relation to the shape of her body” (95). Already aesthetics of proportion are disrupted in the way the woman suits herself, but the narrator continues to criticize her size, relying heavily on earthy imagery:

Fat hung upon her upper arms like an arrested earthslide on a hill. With the first motion she might make, I was afraid that she would slide down upon herself into a terrifying heap. Her breasts hung heavy and widening like pears into her bathing suit. Her legs lay prone one on the other like shadowed bulwarks, uneven and deserted. (95)

While Stephen’s bird-muse appears to spring forth from the river itself, conjuring images of the mythic birth of Venus, this woman rises from the sand, perhaps as “unnaturally white” as the pale granules that

surround her body. But rather than possessing the well-proportioned “slender bare legs” and thighs of the bird woman of Stephen’s vision (*Portrait* 171), the feminine bodily attributes of the larger woman bather fashion her more as an earthy, genderless mound. Welty’s narrator associates this woman’s body with the masculine element of earth instead of the more feminine water, and in doing so anticipates the male bather’s act of pouring sand “down inside her bathing suit between her bulbous descending breasts,” rendering them “brown and shapeless” (“A Memory” 96).

There is a sense that this transfer of clod-like bodily material not only unsexes the rowdy bathers, but also frustrates the young girl’s attempts to recall her own vision of bodies meeting, the memory of “touching the wrist of the boy [she] loved on the stair” (97). The crux of her memory rests on her magnification of her physical contact with the opposite sex (“as if by accident” [93]), framed within the insular setting of the school stairwell. Conversely, the wide-open setting of the lakeside, filled with the sound of “the thud and the fat impact of all their ugly bodies upon one another” (97), characterizes the epiphany’s focus as confrontational and potentially offensive.

The exuberance of Stephen’s bird-muse bathing in the strand and the “peak of horror” induced by the woman bather’s “pull[ing] down the front of her bathing suit, turning it outward, so that the lumps of mashed and folded sand came emptying out” cause both protagonists to cry out, arguably in recognition of the strength of the episode each has just witnessed. In *Portrait*, Stephen’s soul cries “in an outburst of profane joy” (171); in “A Memory,” the young girl “burst[s] into tears,” overwhelmed with pity for herself (97). And yet the “pity” the young protagonist feels is understandable because, for Welty, the experience of epiphany harshly confronts the artist with the ambiguous moment where, for instance, “breasts themselves had turned to sand, as though they were of no importance at all” (97). While scenes and inanimate objects might be arranged safely within the “small frames” of the idealistic artist’s gaze, Welty suggests that bodies, for all of their disproportion and excess, cannot so easily conform to an aesthetic mold.

When we consider these two epiphanic moments alongside one another, the most striking difference is the way each protagonist responds to the figure that prompts a “sudden spiritual manifestation,” as Joyce would say. While Stephen Dedalus watches the young woman

bathing and observes her exuberantly as a beautiful, almost non-human object, Welty's protagonist experiences a horrific epiphany that forces her to recognize the sometimes grotesque realities of the human body. Stephen Dedalus, then, responds with empowerment and excitement to a romanticized vision of the female body; the young girl on the lakeshore in "A Memory" responds with disgust and frustration toward the human body in all of its vulgar potential. This strong difference in responses reveals Welty's de-romanticizing of "sudden spiritual manifestation," for the nameless girl's response to the heightened moment demonstrates that inspiration is not always associated with beauty or idealization. Instead, the moment of inspiration can be harrowing, as well as deeply grounded in a realistic vision of the subject's surrounding world. This is where Welty's depiction of epiphany in "A Memory" distinguishes itself from Joyce's in *Portrait*: epiphanies, for Welty, are not always so pleasurable.

Although these two moments demonstrate a distinct divergence, it is important to note convergences between Joyce and Welty as well. For example, Joyce's short story "Araby," collected in *Dubliners* (1914), describes a young boy's infatuation with a neighbor's sister and his ultimate frustration with mundane surroundings that disrupt his romanticized ideals. Like the young girl in Welty's story who struggles to preserve her memory of first love, Joyce's young male subject in "Araby" strives to protect an idyllic image that he realizes will eventually prove untrue. The young boy's moment of epiphany is also characterized by a confrontation with reality—he understands that mundane human reality will always undermine idealism, just as the young girl in "A Memory" sees that her careful remembrance of first love can never remain separate from the messy, fleshy condition of the human body.

But while Joyce's "Araby" has significant parallels with "A Memory," the traditional image of the modern literary epiphany nonetheless distills to Stephen Dedalus's vision of the young woman bathing in *Portrait*. Stephen's sudden moment of elation upon seeing the "bird-girl" has come to occupy a space within our literary imaginations that announces the epiphanic moment. Thus, the noticeable traces of this modern convention in Welty's short story invite a discussion of Welty's own participation in the literary epiphany tradition.

Welty's Epiphanic Moment

While Welty's representation of the young girl's epiphanic episode is rather different from Joyce's in *Portrait*, the fact that "A Memory" strikes the note of the iconic Joycean epiphany in our own literary memory opens up a conversation about how Welty's fiction engages with the poetics of epiphany—a field primarily occupied by male poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, or, in the twentieth century, Yeats and Eliot. Does Welty offer her own vision of the literary epiphany in fiction? If so, how does it compare to that of her predecessors such as Joyce or Woolf? Might her vision move beyond the Wordsworthian "spots of time" to something unconstrained by heightened moments and instead dependent on retrospection and memory?

Welty's revision of the Joycean moment in "A Memory" carries significance in our understanding of her as an author writing in confluence with literary modernism. Indeed, the theories of the traditional modern epiphany are especially called into question when we consider Welty's oeuvre in conjunction with her own descriptions of fiction writing in *One Writer's Beginnings*. Similarly, the literary parallels between Welty and Woolf, and their potential relationship to Yeats's epiphany of the symbol, suggest other valences of the literary epiphany: is an epiphany limited to a single moment or symbol, or is it a retrospective revelation built upon memory?

Comparisons of Welty with Woolf yield plenty of discussion about how Welty's work exists in confluence with other modern authors, and a glance at heightened moments in both women's novels shows semblances of what Yeats famously describes as the moment where the dance and the dancer become indistinguishable ("Among School Children"). These are instances where, as Ashton Nichols explains in *The Poetics of Epiphany*, something is "caught in time which can point beyond time" (187). Ruth Vande Kieft and Louise Westling have both observed similarities between the two mothers in *Delta Wedding* and *To the Lighthouse*, Ellen Fairchild and Mrs. Ramsay, and it is these two characters who are often associated with the novels' most transcendent, timeless episodes. With respect to the image of the epiphany, Franziska Gygas's comment that "They are mothers, troubled by their daily commitments, yet *intensely susceptible to the meaning of a moment*" is especially relevant (35; emphasis added). Suzan Harrison argues that the two women unite meal preparation and service with "sustaining family

connections and creating hope and love within the family” (25). Harrison rightfully points to the meal at the end of “The Window” segment in *To the Lighthouse* as a moment where these connections are magnified, as Mrs. Ramsay thinks,

Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (105)

Harrison links this passage to Ellen Fairchild’s pensive construction of Mashula’s cake. She explains, “Ellen Fairchild’s cake baking merges with her concerns over her daughter’s approaching marriage and her consideration of George and Robbie Fairchild’s marriage, until the success of the cake and the success of these marriages become one and the same” (Harrison 26). I would add that we see hints of Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of “something . . . immune from change” when the narrator (loosely attached to Laura in this section) of *Delta Wedding* recalls how

Sometimes, as when now [Ellen] stood still for a moment in the room full of talking people, an unaccountable rosinness would jump into her cheeks and a look of merriment would make her eyes grow wide. . . . and it would be as if she had never before seen anything at all of this room with the big breasting china closets and the fruit and cake plates around the rail, had never watered the plants in the window, or encountered till now these absorbed, intent people—ever before in her life, Laura thought. At that moment a whisper might have said Look! to her, and the dining-room curtains might have traveled back on their rings, and there *they* were. (109)

The image of curtains flung open so Ellen might see that “there *they* were” is reminiscent of Peter Walsh’s thoughts in another Woolf novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, when he thinks of Clarissa Dalloway, “there she was” (194). Both Woolf and Welty attach these heightened moments in *To the Lighthouse* and *Delta Wedding* to the novels’ mothers, and both instances privilege a vision of the eternal present: Mrs. Ramsay believes that “Of such moments . . . the thing is made that endures” and Ellen’s experience of “there *they* were” implies that the Fairchilds may never

cease to exist, just as Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a resilient image in and of herself.

Yeats's theory of the modern epiphany, which is built upon the primacy of the symbol and its ability to embody the convergence of all the senses, is useful for understanding Welty's own participation in the epiphanic moment of literary modernism. Welty, in *One Writer's Beginnings*, admits her own love of Yeats as a poet, and certainly her use of "The Song of Wandering Aengus" and "Leda and the Swan" in *The Golden Apples*, as well as "Sailing to Byzantium" in *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, indicates that his poetry was not only inspiring to her, but also a pool of source texts she might use throughout her writing career. Yeats, whose own work was greatly influenced by Arthur Symonds's overview of French Symbolism in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), found his understanding of epiphany grounded in symbol. In "The Symbolism of Poetry," Yeats explains the process of unification in which an effective symbol participates:

All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions . . . and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form. (156-57)

In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty's fixation on the image of the train, taking her on family trips or back and forth to New York during the early years of her career, indicates her preference for images or symbols that are characterized by movement. The Yellow Dog train of *Delta Wedding* is charged with potential, and from the very first pages that potential manifests in carrying Laura McRaven on a mythical journey to her deceased mother's homeplace. Laura's "first journey alone" by the Yellow Dog into Delta country reads like a crossing of a threshold into a world saturated with magical significance (91). While she rides the Dog, the landscape she observes is changed "as if a hand reached along the green ridge and all of a sudden pulled down with a sweep, like a scoop in the bin, the hill and every tree in the world and left cotton fields" (92); this is where the Delta begins, brushed into existence by the hand of a god. The Dog is a symbol of movement and the beginning of adventures, but it is also lethal, able to spare lives and kill. The Dog's function as a framing device throughout *Delta Wedding*, as well as the fluid, continuous narration Welty employs, suggests that she does not

feel constrained to a central image like Woolf's lighthouse or Yeats's dancer. Instead, the image marks the boundaries of revelation rather than the revelation itself, much as in the moment when the narrator imagines Ellen Fairchild seeing the curtains flung open to reveal her large family.

The image of the car or train ride in the second section of *One Writer's Beginnings* functions repeatedly as a frame for revelation. Welty explains,

The trips were wholes unto themselves. They were stories. Not only in form, but in their taking on direction, movement, development, change. They changed something in my life: *each trip made its particular revelation*, though I could not have found words for it. But with the passage of time, I could look back on them and see them bringing me news, discoveries, premonitions, promises—I still can; they still do. (914; emphasis added)

For Welty, the revelatory qualities of these trips are almost entirely retrospective. The “passage of time” brings about these snippets of “news, discoveries, premonitions, [and] promises.” They are not necessarily limited to a particular swatch of time; rather they are components of a “continuous thread of revelation”; they are “a timetable not necessarily—perhaps not possibly—chronological” (914). The heightened moment, then, becomes the memory, long since acquired, of family travels in summer, or the days leading up to a Fairchild wedding, or a strange memory of frustration with bodies and love from girlhood. In all of these cases, our subjects are ultimately asked to participate in these “happening[s]” (as Welty's young protagonist in “A Memory” puts it), not simply to observe them. This is where the notion of passive receptivity in most conceptions of modern epiphany becomes problematic in Welty's work. Stephen Dedalus receives the vision of the bird-girl bathing in the River Liffey, an image that provokes his “profane joy” (171). Mrs. Ramsay sees herself “hover[ing] like a hawk suspended” over her dinner guests while the joy of the moment appears “like a fume rising upwards, holding them together” (Woolf 105). And Yeats, who in the poem “A Memory of Youth” notes that “The moments passed as at a play,” shows how inspiration might be received as opposed to gathered up, fermented, and then revealed after a long passage of time. It seems that Welty's revelations do not come about so easily. Perhaps this is why her description of travel in *One Writer's Beginnings* is attached to her own developing understanding of self:

On the train I saw that world passing my window. It was when I came to see it was *I* who was passing that my self-centered childhood was over. . . . Through travel I first became aware of the outside world; it was through travel that I found my own introspective way into becoming a part of it. (918)

Comparatively, the young woman of “A Memory” seems just barely to have made this transition from “self-centered childhood” to a full awareness of “the outside world.” Only when she is forced to participate in her surroundings, to see herself “passing,” will she make the revelatory transition that Welty favors.

In this early story, the text evokes the common scene of the literary epiphany: a young girl, lost in her imagination, observes a happening on a beach and evidently experiences a heightened moment of revelation that forces her to confront, in this case, the realities of the human body. Like Stephen Dedalus, the young girl, longing for aesthetic order, watches the outside world through her “small frames,” eager to impose artistic boundaries on her scenery. But her artistic stance fails; she becomes the object, harrowed by the gaze of the overweight man and distressed that her romantic memory must now exist in confluence with a harsh, bodily reality. She is the stationary art object, firmly planted by the lakeside.

Whether Welty intended it or not, the archetype of the Joycean epiphany undergoes revision in this story and reveals how the modern epiphanic moment might deceive itself when it dwells in its own subjectivity. Only when the moment itself is conferred through a doubled perspective—that of an older narrator—does it take on the revelatory qualities of retrospection and memory that Welty values. For Welty, epiphany does not allow for one to experience revelation while acting as a silent observer like Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* or even Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Welty’s sense of communal activity distinguishes her from Joyce and Woolf, although it’s fair to say that her epiphanic moments are at least more closely aligned with those of Woolf. Yet Welty’s literary epiphany ultimately resists passivity; it is a participatory gesture grounded in a sense of movement, one that invites the “serious daring” that “starts from within” to join in the scene as a full participant, not a cautious spectator (*One* 948).

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