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Ordinary Genius in Eudora Welty's "No Place for You, My Love"

IN "WRITING AND ANALYZING A STORY," THE ESSAY EUDORA WELTY WROTE about writing "No Place for You, My Love," she states, "This third character's role was that of hypnosis—it was what a relationship *can do*, be it however brief, tentative, potential, happy or sinister, ordinary or extraordinary" (777). In other words, a relationship does develop between the two central characters, and the relationship is active. In fact, the couple-for-half-a-dozen-hours in "No Place" act together very successfully. They quickly feel their fellowship in love-suffering; they are both bogged down in useless but unended personal relationships, she seemingly in a relationship to a married man, he in a worn-out marriage. Inspired by sharing the condition, they take their roles in a ritual of renewal, the kind of ritual that Welty's characters successfully enact in many of her stories, the kind that reveals the characters' drive for life, their ordinary genius at turning the flow of their lives from stagnation into a flow into the future (Wall, "June," "Ritual," "Burning," "Eudora"). The woman from Toledo, performing, works up the love-suffering so that it can be handled. The man, taking the lead as a man of that time should do, drives them into the place of yet greater generative heat—light and strong impressions that instigate the woman's work and later draw the two of them, in dancing, together. When they kiss, the woman passes the worked-up, dilated love-suffering to the man, then falls asleep, her work done and her trust in him to complete the action firm. They are a team and he will do his part, as he does. (Perhaps she senses that if he is alone, with her asleep, he will have greater occasion to do his envisioning.) The man, driving, sees the smudge fires for mosquitoes, and acting with a mind primed for symbolic transformation, casts the augmented love-suffering out of the two of them and back into the world. He sees the great face that they seem to be driving over and the great flaming figure in the sky. We barely glimpse the relief the couple's trip, their time together, and their action may afford the woman, but we do see the man's renewal of his youthful expectation of life and love in the story's final paragraph. He is not reminiscing; he is restored to the capacity for that feeling.

“No Place” and “Writing and Analyzing” have puzzled Welty critics, seeming at odds with one another, leaving many silent on the story. Most of the relatively few critics to address the story allow their everyday social knowledge to determine that the man and woman do not make a connection. Noel Polk praises the story highly, acknowledges its mystery, but cannot see the relationship because, he notices, the man and woman do not even try to get to know one another: “Returning to New Orleans he stops the car and kisses her, but it is as though he feels obliged to; it is a meaningless, perfunctory gesture; he doesn’t even know whether he kisses her ‘gently or harshly’” (108). Ruth M. Vande Kieft argues,

Miss Welty accomplished what she set out to do, but it was a perilous undertaking. She took a human feeling—a panicky, raw-nerved sense of exposure—and invested an entire landscape and journey with that feeling; she rendered a strong emotional effect without supplying much information about its cause. The vivid impressionism of this method is strangely exciting, but the story is not as fully and solidly alive as is a story like “A Worn Path.” (154)

Michael Kreyling sees the man refusing to respond to “important calls of the heart” and argues, “Together, the man and woman are nevertheless separate; a radical difference or antipathy keeps them apart” (*Eudora* 121). They have “pretended an intimacy but never released themselves to it” (122). In a second approach to the story, as he reads “No Place” for thematic continuity with other stories in *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, Kreyling reveals one of his orienting assumptions: “But there is no permanence in consummation in ‘No Place for You, My Love,’ as there was none in ‘Circe’ nor in ‘The Bride of the Innisfallen’” (*Understanding* 182). Yet that lack of consummation in “No Place” would seem to be a good thing because he sees the relationship as devouring, “so strong and insistent that it can be personified” as it “seeks to swallow the couple in a hunger that is both spiritual and sexual” (*Understanding* 181).

Gail Mortimer judges that “the couple has chosen not to act on the possibility for connection and exposure, for a relationship, that each of them has glimpsed in the other. They part as strangers, masks still in place. Like Welty’s other wanderers, they seem free—and lost” (123). Ruth Weston sees the couple in a “dream world somehow threatening to their more ‘real’ worlds” and reads the man’s thought that neither of them will later volunteer a story of this trip to indicate they will deny this trip. She speaks of “the terror of their helpless exposure to each

other” and the landscape’s holding “them in thrall” (38-39). Weston adds: “In Welty’s fiction, this functional, ghostly, ‘third character,’ which itself operates on the margins of culture and consciousness, is Welty’s adaptation of a classic gothic attribute to depict modern alienation and miraculous, fragile, and potentially dangerous human connection” (39). Stephen Fuller speaks of “No Place” as a “surrealist lament” (43) and of the woman and man as “classic modern misfits” (40). He argues,

Neither of these wanderers manages to connect with anything or anyone, perhaps least themselves, and by the close, Welty leaves her readers aghast at these two, whose obsessions the surreal narrative attitude has so fully externalized that only with time can understanding displace astonishment. (42)

Suzanne Marrs and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, on the other hand, see the characters fulfill a positive relationship and will later be quoted. Albert Devlin argues that the essay and story together constitute “a fable of creativity” (164).

Difference of assumptions and lenses creates the variance between the majority reading and my own. I quite agree that the man and woman do not connect with one another personally. Another way of connection, however, happily enables Welty’s woman and man to learn swiftly upon the impact of their particular meeting even if they have not previously experienced this sort of connection as central actors. The no-connection commentators assume that people can relate to one another, or not, in only one sphere of action—in society—and only in their personal characters. Alternatively, cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, a theorist of actual, non-fictive ritual action, posits two modes of people’s social interaction. What is commonly recognized as society, full of oppositions that separate people, he calls structure (*Dramas* 47). In the other mode, *communitas*, people put their common humanity above individual difference, and thereby access what Turner calls “deep knowledge” (*Dramas* 239, 258; see also 36, 123, 241). For Turner, society consists of structure and *communitas* in interrelationship (*Dramas* 251, 253-54). People commonly set structure aside and enter *communitas* when they are confronted with crisis. The couple in “No Place” act in *communitas*, not only deeply connected for the duration of their action with one another as fellow love-sufferers but with the love-sufferings of friends, relatives, celebrities, and the people in the popular music played on jukeboxes and on the radio. The weight of the common ailment motivates the couple. It carries them through an entire plot action.

Welty also says that in revising an earlier unfinishable story into “No Place,” “in the end I tried to make the story’s inside outside” (“Writing” 778). Such a reversal is endemic to ritual action, and it transforms the character and meaning of what is no longer everyday, ordinary structural behavior (Babcock). The woman and man have no names because they are acting not personally but in the awareness of a common human crisis, with the collective parts of themselves.

The weight, the size of the human problem, has evoked Welty’s third character: “As I wrote further into the story, something *more real, more essential, than the characters were on their own* was revealing itself. In effect, though the characters numbered only two, there had come to be a sort of third character along on the ride—the presence of a relationship between the two” (“Writing” 777, emphasis added). Welty’s language differs from Turner’s, but here and in the rest of the passage she is talking about the same thing that Turner later defined as *communitas*. Again, Welty states that the man and woman “go along aware, from moment to moment, as one: as my third character, the straining, hallucinatory eyes and ears, the roused-up sentient being of that place” (778). In “the roused-up sentient being of that place,” Welty gets at the power of people in *communitas*; their connection causes an arousal in their surroundings, a leap to changeability, to transformation. Welty also speaks of “this little story’s plot” as the “vain courting of imperviousness in the face of exposure” (778). Because they have shifted into *communitas*, the couple are exposed to dimensions of themselves and the other person and the landscape in which they are traveling and to which they are mostly unaccustomed. The rapport between the two is so exposing to both that they interpret the place, inflating its natural elements, in terms of exposure and threat. In Welty’s world, as in those created by the practice of living ritual, living opens hugely when people are with many others of their kind, her love-sufferers in crisis. They are receiving the imminence of the world in the way Jenny Lockhart does in Welty’s “At the Landing,” as she comes to understand that feelings, such as love, exist not alone in herself but “*in the world*” (303). Experiences and feelings come, then, from the world, and people in *communitas* can, as the man does here, put them back out into the world.

In this other deeply connected dimension of experience, the woman can take in its heat and the man can propel the love-suffering into which the mere heat and exposure have transformed out into the world (as

dancers can dance for extended hours in the Arizona Yaquis' Waehma, for instance, or the African Mbuti men can sing all night after working all day, day after day), thus unloading the useless structural relationships and leaving the man and woman open to the creation of new structural relationships. Welty calls relationships "a pervading and changing mystery" ("Writing" 779). In much of her fiction social reality serves this mystery as a vehicle engendering liminality and *communitas*. From a Turnerian viewpoint, that mystery turns into the duality of structure and *communitas* and the transformation of actions and their effects within this duality. What is wrong in structure becomes right, correct, in an action of people in *communitas*.

The realm of the characters' actions in "No Place" is overtly other, "Time out" and the setting aside of structural time accompanying a multitude of similar changes. Other realms differ from the realm of structure, turn structure's constants and assumptions inside out. Another title for this discussion might be "the effective impersonality of strangers." The couple here have some difficulty maintaining their impersonality, but they clearly know that once the "impact" of their meeting and recognizing one another as fellow love-sufferers has jolted them into connection, they must maintain that impersonality to carry out their obligation to the collective to which they belong. Both Durkheim and Turner speak of that obligation (Durkheim 237; Turner, *From Ritual* 81). With deep knowledge people know that their lives derive not just from their parents and larger family but from collective life, and that when life presents them with an opportunity to contribute to putting vibrant living over the force of death, they must take that opportunity. People so provisioned are likely to rise to the occasion.

In the phrase "the effective impersonality of strangers," the emphasis falls on "effective." "[R]itual *transforms*" (Turner, *From Ritual* 80). Welty arranges for her characters' impersonality not to dissipate too soon. She reports that she "brought [the man] into the story *to be a stranger*" ("Writing" 776). Strangers are people with structural obligations in different places; they meet for brief durations. The story's title announces that the man and woman have no opportunity to form a lasting personal relationship. There is regret in the title, acknowledging the personal, but also the choice to privilege the unusual, transformative mystery. The woman and man must remain impersonal with one another not only because the condition of strangers itself gives them access to *communitas* but also so that they will continue not to fall into a personal

relationship on this day, and so, in going their separate ways, preserve even later some of the impact and the mystery of their effective time together. In the end the narrator says, “A thing is incredible, if ever, only after it is told—returned to the world it came out of.” Here “world” refers to the social realm we regularly live in. “For their different reasons,” the man thinks, “neither of them would tell this (unless something was dragged out of them)” (“No Place” 578-79). They will not tell because people in structure, listeners, cannot make sense of otherness and mystery, out of what can be felt in a relationship such as that of the woman and man in “No Place”—unless, of course, they have had such experiences themselves.

Mortality, as many Welty critics agree, forms the instigating reality of Welty’s characters’ actions throughout her fiction: mortality not as the end of individual lives, death, but as a force countering life everywhere at all times. Among the world’s people, those in Siena, Italy (Handelman), in Rio de Janeiro (Da Matta), in the Congo (Turnbull), in New Pascua, Arizona (Schechner), and in Sri Lanka (Kapferer) schedule and conduct rituals of renewal regularly because they know destruction and mortality are evermore active and are best addressed and managed periodically rather than only in crisis. Welty’s people, living in secular modernity, have to develop one-off rituals of renewal out of their deep knowledge when opportunity arises. They usually conduct rituals by expanding on ordinary celebrations such as the Fourth of July (“Why I Live at the P. O.”), Halloween (“Shower of Gold”), a family wedding (*Delta Wedding*), a community funeral (“The Wanderers”), a family reunion (*Losing Battles*), a children’s piano recital (“June Recital”), a summer vacation at the lake (“Moon Lake”), and so forth. Welty puts meetings with strangers in this same list of special days. When viewed in Turner’s terms, “No Place” ultimately makes a lot more of meetings with strangers, brief and without social future, than we are apt to award them. They occur not infrequently in Welty’s fiction.

The man from Syracuse pays close attention to the woman from Toledo, and she feels this attention: “It must stick out all over me” (“No Place” 561). This response and her acceptance of his invitation to the drive south suggest she knows it takes one member of a group to recognize another. As soon as they recognize one another’s being in the same condition of love-suffering, an instance of Turner’s “spontaneous communitas” (*From Ritual* 47-48), they begin to notice and perceive things differently. A sign of this shift in perception comes in the man’s

awareness, unusual for him, of the woman's hat. Once the two are in *communitas*, everything in the ordinary world around them takes on a different changed and charged look and significance. People with access to collective thought see doubly—the ordinary appearance plus the symbolic effects that the shared *communitas* makes visible. Turner reports of ritual performers: “All the senses of participants and performers may be engaged; they *hear* music and prayers, *see* visual symbols, *taste* consecrated foods, *smell* incense, and *touch* sacred persons and objects” (*From Ritual*81). Adjust the sensory experiences to those created by south of South, and you have all the intense sensory experience for Northerners in “No Place.” Thus the visions Fuller calls surreal. Place, in this instance, contributes to the otherness: “It's never anything like this in Syracuse,’ he said. ‘Or in Toledo, either,’ she replied” (568). Sheer difference magnifies.

The shock (impact) of their connection and the shock of the suddenly expanded world as they receive it in *communitas* do a lot to intensify both the woman's and the man's ordinary level of alertness. Another source of the intensity of the woman's experience—and also the intensity of the man's awareness of the woman as well as his culminating visions (probably also unusual for him and thus startling)—lies in the riskiness of conducting rituals. Turner suggests, “there is often some element of risk or danger in the atmosphere of living ritual. And something numinous” (*From Ritual*95). Ritual performances by people so caught up in intensity as Welty's couple in “No Place” involve risk because “living rituals” require invention (*From Ritual*81-82). Surely the risk expands when secular modern people, without a seasonal round of overt rituals that teach the member of the culture how to act in ritual over a long period, have to invent on the spot. The woman's thought about the “old”—familiar in social structure—way of getting to know someone shows how different this propelled experience feels to her. Invention may produce mistakes one hasn't anticipated how to rectify or emerge from. Performing an intense action for the first time in itself leads to anxiety; one hasn't the assurance of having completed such an action before. Welty has both the woman and the man feel risk—the woman while they are in the car driving into the unknown and the man when he feels towards the end of their time together that they may not get back to New Orleans in time. In “Writing” Welty herself specifies the major risk—“the danger of an easy or conventionally tempting

sympathy" (778), a merely personal relationship that will end their chance of working a shift from stagnation to onflowing living.

The couple's journey demands a great deal of them because although tradition provides the route—the storied journeyer goes down into the unknown before coming back up—it does not supply all the means of getting to the end. Requiring invention, the actions they must take are not fully scripted. This couple has to connect the goal with the time, place, circumstances, and contexts and with all the immediate sharing of the otherness and differences in perception. The work of connecting contributes to the intensity that will transform their experiences of love-suffering and the fieriness of the demon the man will expel. Intense looking and responding are in order, and the woman and man look and see and feel. They notice the traffic going the other way (in and to more ordinary structural life), the red sleeping men in trucks going by (these men are sleeping while this pair is conversely wide awake), the rife aquatic life that pours over the road they are taking, the people in their yards or walking, the insect life, the tangled jungle, the tracks leading off the main road—in short, the maze of vital life going on down here, so different from the merely flat urban maze of New Orleans, as well as from Syracuse and Toledo. New Orleans was different enough to begin to align them with one another; south of somnolent South enhances the oddity and arousal. All this seeing and feeling constitutes action: receiving exposure, the man participating with the woman. The action constitutes work. The woman from Toledo and the man from Syracuse are not mentally disturbed, neurotic, or worse. They are carrying out ritual work—with ordinary genius.

The woman's role in the area of exposure outweighs the man's. She pursues it with obliqueness in acting on deep knowledge rather than structural prompts to action. As soon as they are on the ferry, the woman gets out of the car with its bit of protection and climbs a stairway into the sun and wind, where her hat blows off. A crowd on the ferry watches her. Physical discomfort and love-suffering progress:

The heat was like something falling on her head. She held the hot rail before her. It was like riding a stove. . . . she stood there, thinking they all must see that with her entire self all she did was wait. Her set hands, with the bag that hung from her wrist . . . all three seemed objects bleaching there, belonging to no one; she could not feel a thing in the skin of her face; perhaps she was crying, and not knowing it. ("No Place" 566)

Ritual actors perform (Turner, *From Ritual* 79, 81, 91). Rather than personally suffering here, the woman is performing suffering. Detached from her personal self, she is gone into her work in performing. She cannot feel a thing in the skin of her face because her face is now a performer's mask. The passengers on the ferry have just seemed to her "oddly amateurish, too—amateur travelers" (565); they are just going along in structural reality while she, with responsibility laid on her, is doing serious, committed traveling.

Despite her concentrated work on battering exposure, the woman remains strong. The man sees her not flinching but carefully measuring her distance from the small alligator that boys have jokingly brought onto the ferry—giving a water creature a ride in non-aquatic creatures' means of getting over the water. The sentient being of this place keeps giving the woman—and the man—evidence of the possibility of reversal that they will take in and ultimately use to reverse the location of love-suffering. Much earlier in the trip, they have seen the bodies of creatures killed on the road but also an abundance of the same sorts of creatures coming up over the edges, out of the swamps. As the passengers disembark the little ferry, the woman shifts her earlier focus on the alligator. She forces herself to look at the alligator again. Having earlier focused on its jaws, she now looks at its hide, which she concedes to be "Both respectable and merciful." This other aspect of the beast reminds her she has been told, "Deliver us all from the naked in heart" ("No Place" 568).

Uprooted trees are drawn across the ferry's path as "if in memory of the size of things" ("No Place" 567), the magnitude ritual traveling can assume. The woman's ritual work is sizable. A little earlier a "vortex of light drove through and over the brown waves" (566), and light will accumulate for her, fusing with the heat and intensifying it. Back on the land again, "On this side of the river, the road ran beneath the brow of the levee and followed it. Here was a heat that ran deeper and brighter and more intense than all the rest—its nerve. The road grew one with the heat as it was one with the unseen river" (568), indicating the continuing joining of intensifying agents and the accumulating presence of the unseen but felt. But this is not the apex after all: "No, the heat faced them—it was ahead" (568). Durkheim also argues that people are stronger while in the collective than when they act as individuals (240). Such strength may enable someone, like the woman here, to absorb or take on some of the collective's experience—here, love-suffering—to

employ it in performance, and also to endure and persist in a way we may find unusual for an individual. She is very much, as she performs, among and acting for the group of love-sufferers from actuality, publicity, and song gathered as a collective in her mind.

As the journey and the heat and light continue, however, and it is unclear how far they will go and how far the intensity will increase, the woman panics for a moment: “Her eyes overcome with brightness and size, she felt a panic rise, as sudden as nausea. Just how far below questions and answers, concealment and revelation, they were running now—that was still a new question, with a power of its own, waiting. How dear—how costly—could this ride be?” (569). The numinous may dislodge a person’s structural equilibrium, and intense performance leads into some dimension of death: “All further growth requires the immolation of that which was fundamental to an earlier stage” (Turner, *From Ritual* 84). Much before a performer of living ritual feels some presence of death, he or she must experience displacement from the everyday, structural self, which in turn leads to instances of not knowing one’s present self, not knowing what one will find oneself doing. Such an experience seems to bring on the woman’s panic.

The man continues to observe the woman closely and senses the panic. He quickly announces “time out” and drives into the cemetery. There the couple is distantly but closely, too, face to face with the dead as he drives between rows of raised graves signaling that mortality has its victories. Nevertheless, the graves rise near a church, and heat and light and the resident priest’s fish on the steps and gown airing on a clothesline, as well as the brief presence of priest himself, incorporate the dead into a scene of ongoing life. There in the cemetery the woman tests the man. That the man and woman are having to invent, that they do not fully know how they can respond to one another, strangers as they are, and that their inspiration may at moments flag show up when the woman asks the man, “What is your wife like?” (570). Her question seems to work against their mutual project in that it is personal, ground they are not to stand on because the personal distracts people’s attention from the world. Later, when she is tired, the woman will think she was being sympathetic when she offered her question—Welty’s “easy or conventionally tempting sympathy” or, in other words, a lapse into the personal and structural. At the moment when the woman asks the man the question, however, she is not being personal. When the man holds up his hand as a stop sign, the woman is unaffected and smiles. Working

hard herself, she is testing the man's commitment to their project. He gives the right response, a "we won't go there," and they continue on.

The woman's panic has apparently subsided by the time they return to the road they've chosen to follow, wherever it may lead. Not much later, when they arrive at the end of the road and at loads of shrimp coming in at Baba's, the woman is saturated with heat and light: "She drew her hands up to her face under the brim of her hat; her own cheeks felt like the hyacinths to her, all her skin still full of too much light and sky, exposed" (571). The woman's strenuous work of the ritual action, collecting exposure, is almost completed; she is in possession of, feeling, her own face again.

The road ends in the shape of a spoon, the conveyor of food, nourishment. Baba's Place will nourish the next section of the couple's action. Their subsequent push to complete their mission begins suitably with a new overt acknowledgment of something to be fixed: "I believe there must be something wrong with me, that I came on this excursion to begin with,' she said, as if he had already said this and she were merely in hopeful, willing, maddening agreement with him" (572). She puts the emphasis on "must." When the couple's action moves into Baba's, it moves on in a setting of community in a happy place, where people of various ages gather for games, food and drink, news delivered orally and in newspapers, music via the jukebox, and dancing. In this setting the sting of love-suffering mellows. In human experience, in Baba's as in the cemetery, enjoyment of life goes on despite love-suffering and other brutalities recognized in the bar's pinned up clippings.

The people at Baba's validate the woman from Toledo and the man from Syracuse and their action by taking notice of them and recognizing them as the two have earlier recognized one another: "In a far-off way, like accepting the light from Arcturus, she accepted it that she was more beautiful or perhaps more fragile than the women they saw every day of their lives. It was just this thought coming into a woman's face, and at this hour, that seemed familiar to them" (574). There's another sort of recognition of the woman's beauty or fragility when one male patron chides another for coming in with a ribald remark when there is a lady present. A local man fetches the man from Syracuse to have the chidden one extend an apology. With these acknowledgments, the community people absorb the strangers and contribute collectivity and sustaining background action, ordinary structural time out, for the couple's work.

After a little time there, the woman moves to turn over the dominant action to the man. When she starts to slide down from her stool, “just as she had had the look of being about to give up, faint” (575), she is decompressing, the man taking her hand to dance. A little overt articulation of their ritual action, what it should lead to, emerges when she says, “I get to thinking this is what we get—what you and I deserve And all the time, it’s real. It’s a real place—away off down here” (575). The reality of a happy ordinary life their ritual will evoke if they complete the action is “away off” because they have work yet to do. The woman’s recognition of this pleasant life’s reality, amazing from the perspective of love-suffering, amounts to a breakthrough and a turning towards their completing the action. At the same time the woman’s speech moves the ritual action forward, her particular phrasing—“you and I deserve”—seems to indicate another near lapse into the personal that develops a bit and intervenes in the ritual action. As they dance, they begin “moving together too well” and if “they had ever been going to overstep themselves, it would be now as he held her closer and turned her” (575). But in dancing they become “imperviousness in motion” (576), “in motion” indicating they are still actively working on their task.

In the event, in this critical section of the action, the couple achieve a finally accomplished coming together that gives necessary power to their action. The connection between the two comes on abruptly and powerfully as the story begins, but it takes a longish time to develop fully. Welty maintains realism even as she writes herself into uncommonly portrayed psychology. Turner argues that “individual distinctiveness” continues in *communitas* (*From Ritual* 45). The statement requires one to distinguish between personality, or structural selfhood, and individuality. It is the individuality separated from the personal that the man and woman attain in dancing (possibly assisted by the music). Welty notes the pull of the individual when the text reads, “Surely even those immune from the world, for the time being, need the touch of one another, or all is lost” (576). The passage continues:

Their arms encircling each other, their bodies circling the . . . floor, they were, at last, imperviousness in motion. They had found it, and had almost missed it: they had had to dance. They were what their separate hearts desired that day, for themselves and each other.

. . . *Like* people in love, they had a superstition about themselves almost as soon as they came out on the floor, and dared not think the words “happy” or “unhappy,”

which [because these are conditions of personal people in structural relationships] might strike them, one or the other, like lightning. (576, emphasis added)

That Welty puts the crucial action into dancing is persuasive. Ritual is conducted more by action than by words (Turner, *From Ritual* 78-82), and dancing is highly focused acting.

The pair leaves Baba's in a frame of mind turned towards not New Orleans but rather "home," a place of comfort with oneself and others, a place in which one feels oneself right with life. They have *heard* all the songs on the jukebox: "This was the music you heard out of the distance at night—out of the roadside taverns you fled past, around the late corners in cities half asleep, drifting up from the carnival over the hill, with one odd little strain always managing to repeat itself. This seemed a homey place" (577). Many of the songs may tell of love-suffering, but the music within the grace of the place's pleasant community eases and transforms the pain.

As they drive back, the man finds further impetus in the landscape, now in its night mode. Having retaken the lead in the couple's action when he led the woman onto the dance floor, he has action yet to complete and actively envisions, or rather recognizes, the place's emptiness, loneliness, and extremity: "Standing out in the night alone, he was struck as powerfully with recognition of the extremity of this place as if all other bearings had vanished" (577). It is a place in need of humanity, of figures. Then in peopleless open places he sees "fires burning at their hearts." His inspiration mounts. He stops the car and kisses the woman, "not knowing ever whether gently or harshly. It was the loss of that distinction that told him this was now" (578). They have arrived at the moment of power; opposites have conjoined, dissolved. Times before and after converge into now, the time for action. In *this* kiss, in this context of their joint action, he takes all the love-suffering she has worked up. It is an appropriately odd kiss to suit the odd, different from structure, context: "Then their faces touched unkissing, unmoving, dark, for a length of time" (578).

He drives on until the landscape again gives him fires that suggest facial features:

Later, crossing a large open distance, he saw at the same time two fires. He had the feeling that they had been riding for a long time across a face—great, wide, and upturned. In its eyes and open mouth were those fires they had had glimpses of, where the cattle had drawn together: a face, a head, far down here in the

South—south of South, below it. A whole giant body sprawled downward then, on and on, always, constant as a constellation or an angel. Flaming and perhaps falling, he thought. (578)

With this vision, the man projects the love-suffering the couple have been working on. Turner cites William Blake in speaking of the kind of action the man from Syracuse takes: “In apotropaic [intended to ward off evil] sacrifice the negative, polluting, or evil outcomes of social action in social structure are ‘given a body,’ as William Blake said of error, ‘in order that it may be cast off’” (“Sacrifice” 197).

Notably, the feeling of risk becomes the man’s when he is the dominant actor. “[S]trangers, they had ridden down into a strange land together and were getting safely back—by a slight margin, perhaps, but margin enough” (579). The latter part of his vision explains the risk he feels. The giant is constant, non-expugnable. This woman and man have conquered him for the moment: he is in the world, to be ingested or cast out. This couple’s success at exorcism is significant, contributing to the effect of multitudes of strangers meeting as this couple has, dissolving old mental states and preparing for the development of new ones. But it is also possible to absorb love-suffering once again into the self, so the man feels it is important that they end the trip now quickly. The man drives at a speed “demoniac” (578) for the little rented car. Such re-absorption would occur if the two were to become personal before they separated. His sense of risk is accurate: “Indeed, had she waked in time from a deep sleep, she would have told him her story” (579).

When they reenter New Orleans, the special moment of *communitas* and powerful relationship lies behind them. The relationship breaks: “Something that must have been with them all along [“the sentient being of the place”] suddenly, then, was not. In a moment, tall as panic, it rose, cried like a human, and dropped back” (579). What follows the parting announced by the cry is the return to structure, in which we live most of our lives. When the woman says, “I never got my water” (579), she seems to complain as one complains in structure, but she did not get her water because she did not insist on getting it. She did not insist on getting it because she still had not quite finished working on dilating the love-suffering; she was supposed to be dry. Possibly, in this moment after structure has opened into a dual reality with *communitas* and has then almost closed into structure alone again, she may be still sufficiently in the spell of the action the two have taken to admire what she has

done—played out her role with stamina and without getting the water. Then her tone expresses not complaint but wonder.

When the woman wakes in New Orleans, she is fully back in structure. The man sees she expects an apology—for his being impersonal for so long? Or for the kiss that now seems to her personal and impertinent? Or for taking her into all that heat? The narrative specifies that the ritual action has been effective, bringing a change into structure at least for the man, as the story ends: “As he drove the little Ford safely to its garage, he remembered for the first time in years when he was young and brash, a student in New York, and the shriek and horror and unholy smother of the subway had its original meaning for him as the lilt and expectation of love” (580). Through his own and the woman’s effort and creativity, he has been re-membered, renewed, returned in middle age to the orientation with which one pursues love. Marrs has understood; she says as the couple get back to New Orleans, “their attitudes toward their lives have been altered. The woman seems to walk confidently toward the lover who has mistreated her, and the man is able to recall ‘the lilt and expectation of love’ he had felt as a young man” (663). Prenshaw has recently explained the connection between the woman from Toledo and the man from Syracuse as a characteristic Weltyan intrusion of nonstructural force. In the essay Welty “describes the composition of the story as a struggle, the search for a way to make manifest the feeling of regeneration, a change of emotional compass precipitated by an unexpected connection to a fellow traveler in a strange land.” Prenshaw continues, “It is a narrative of salvation, clearly not religious so much as psychological, but somehow suggesting nonetheless a visitation of spirit” (21).

What does the couple’s action in “No Place for You, My Love” present? Welty’s story offers for our consideration her perception that strangers can conduct an act of curing and restoration of readiness to move forward between, in their personal lives, episodes of intimate love, or failure of love, between familiars. Welty’s momentary couple’s action, far from being a failure to connect, works as might a crucial part of any person’s lifelong series of relationships. This action between strangers acknowledges the long term of most lifetimes and the long repeated process of endings and new beginnings that commonly make up lifetimes even when couples stay together. Mortality produces the endings of relationships or segments of relationships. The endings produce the need for renewal. The ritual process lives. As “No Place” reveals, even people

apparently thoroughly secular know enough of *communitas* to develop an act of transformation. Meetings with strangers offer the clean slate, the lack of established interaction with a known person, that can set off the journey into transformative being.

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