

DELTA WEDDING: The Return of Laura to Jackson

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In "Wandering in the City", Jan Gretlund says that "in interviews Welty has repeatedly expressed great pleasure in big-city life; but this fondness has not found a voice in her heart. On the contrary, her attitude in fiction is unrelentingly critical of the city, in the Agrarian mode." (GRETlund 1994: 78). Although I partly share Gretlund's point of view, I don't totally agree with this critic, who has greatly contributed to the critical appraisal of Welty's work. I think that an understanding of the South in line with what is stated by John Crowe Ransom in "Reconstructed but Unregenerate" emerges from Weltyan fiction. But in my opinion, Eudora Welty is a writer who, and above all in her long fiction seen as a whole, apparently tells simple stories with mainly women (southerners) at their centre. In those stories she revisits the history of the southern frontier, celebrates and recovers a past that was myth and is "old" and she sets it against the present, which is "new" and means change. All this is done with her eyes on the future. She is also the writer whose fiction questions the present of her region as well as its relation with the past. This is the way she thinks of (her) South. Above all, I maintain that Eudora Welty is a writer who follows a path which takes her away from the beliefs of the Agrarians, as she shows signs of embracing the time and the winds of American Progress, which had been invading the South. It is this path that *Delta Wedding* announces in the return of Laura to fictional Jackson. As the writer mentions to Bill Ferris in an interview, Jackson is itself a city that show signs of all the changes that gradually reached the South:

Oh, when I was growing up, [Jackson] had much more of an identity than now because it was smaller. And it was so small that one knew everybody practically. Also, it was a very free and easy life. Children could go out by themselves in the afternoon and play in the park, go to the picture show and move about the city on their bicycles and everything, just as if it were their own front yard. There was no sense of danger or things happening in town. No one had to really take care; so we felt. That was a nice way to grow up. (PRENSHAW 1984: 170)

In her fiction – and I stress again in her long fiction –, Eudora Welty pictures brushstroke by brushstroke the way a Southern identity was built up. An identity which is based on an ideologically fantasised conception of itself. But she also pictures the end of the fantasy of the social imagery. That imagined fantasy of southern superiority and aristocratic singularity, which was defeated in the past and is also defeated in the present by times that announce other worlds, other histories and even other politics. At the same time, Welty is a writer who rethinks the national adamic myth, which Huck Finn embodies. Huck, a masculine hero, travelling through the territory in the search of a "place" which only has an imaginery existence. But if Twain's South is the one that emerges from the celebration of America and from the dream which the writer contemplates and celebrates with nostalgia, Welty's South arises from the recovery and the assimilation of the difference of the South itself. At the same time, Welty's South announces itself as accepting America's values and its notion of Progress, one of the governing principles of American society which settled there, with those who saw their colony in the New Continent as a "city upon a hill".

As Welty develops themes like fertility or those associated with the pastoral world and bucolic life, she also recreates and reorganises the past and southern history, as though she seems to want to recover the South from the ashes of Faulkner's tragedy. Thus, just like Faulkner does in *The Unvanquished* or *Absalom, Absalom!*, she makes use of specific periods of southern history, past or present.

It is precisely within the fact that the writer often celebrates a pastoral and agrarian past rising in opposition to the turmoil of the city that I find ground for Gretlund's thesis. However, it doesn't seem to me that she is too close to the ideals of those responsible for *I'll Take My Stand*, precisely because she does not defend the recovery of the agrarian South as opposed to an industrialised one. On the other hand, neither does she embrace archaic or even reactionary conceptions as the Agrarian's do. What is more, I do not think that what Gretlund says is true of other southern writers, like Thomas Wolfe or William Faulkner, is also true of Welty:

Eugene Gant in Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and The River*, Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*, and Peyton Loftis in William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* are some classic examples. In the impersonal crowds of the North the young Southerners find themselves completely cut off from everybody, and for them the city becomes a nightmare experience. But when they try to

"go home", they find it impossible. If they attempt to function as members of their native communities, they are usually unable to accept the home community as found, for to their surprise the ways of the big cities have been imported there while they were away. (GRETlund 1994: 80-1)

Eudora Welty is a novelist who writes about southern change and modernity on the way to progress and to the acknowledgement of the city as a sign of prosperity of the future, which places her at the centre of institutionalised American values. As is evident, I do not follow those who maintain that Eudora Welty doesn't place her region at the centre of her imagery. In fact, a careful reading, particularly of her long fiction, leads us precisely to the conclusion that Welty places the South and its process of transformation and modernisation, of which the city is a symbol, at the centre of her fiction. And *Delta Wedding* is the text where this aspect begins to show itself.

In *Delta Wedding*, in the celebration and simultaneous rethinking of a lost southern past, in the history of each generation and in the history of each family with its own recounted stories, Welty thinks of the men and women as heirs of a southern past, which in turn conditions their being and their history. In her fiction she thinks of the South as being recreated and recovered by the memory of the past, by the traditions and the myths recreated in the present and in the history which Weltyan fiction ends up by converting into "reality"; the South which is open to change and to the standards of an America that is progress, modernity, but is also chaos and disillusion; the South that by remaking its history and by rethinking itself in its imagery doesn't deny the reaffirmation of its identity and difference in the American context.

Furthermore, Eudora Welty is also the writer who in the tradition of The Southern Literary Renaissance reveals what Harold Bloom called the "anxiety of influence". If this writer is linked to the tradition of the Southern Literary Renaissance, which sees the South as patriarchal and its tradition as problematic, then Welty seems to look for her originality and personalization by writing not exactly about the patriarchal South – as Faulkner did – but about feminine characters. These characters either reaffirm the tradition of the society in which they live or question in an attempt to resist what was built and attributed to them from generation to generation: the "matriarchy", which in fact it never was, and which only served masculine power and discourse.

The work of Eudora Welty provides us, finally, with a celebration of the traditional southern community not as a kind of pastoral fortress, a place of walls built to preserve cherished values and identities belonging to the past, but as a place of windows that must be opened on the wide and mysterious world of the future beyond. (MACKETHAN 1980: 7-8)

As I have already considered elsewhere¹, in these lines of Lucinda Hardwick Mackethan in *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* I find the exact expression of my own reading of Welty, and in particular of *Delta Wedding*. In my opinion, this is the "reality" that the writer has presented us with: a place which, although still looking at its past and tradition, is not paralysed in that past, but is reinventing it and thus opening the windows to the horizons of the future.

Delta Wedding was published in 1946 after Diarmuid Russel's insistence on Welty turning the short story «Delta Cousins» into a chapter of a novel. As Elizabeth Evans states in 1981, it certainly deals with a study of life and of the sense of family (Evans 1981: 97). Most people consider *Delta Wedding* a pastoral hymn of peace and fertility, emerging in the context of the anxieties, horrors and destruction following the second world conflict and in the context of great changes to which the South was subjected in this decade. However, in my opinion, the novel questions the decaying pastoral world.

Delta Wedding finally fulfilled the expectations of those who appreciated Eudora Welty as a writer of short stories. In fact, and despite the critical enthusiasm for *The Robber Bridegroom*, critics and readers in general had for sometime been waiting for what they thought to be the great test - writing a novel - since for the majority of the critics this is the narrative form 'par excellence.' However, the first reactions to *Delta Wedding* weren't particularly enthusiastic or encouraging: some critics, like John Cournous, underlined the fact that Welty seemed to have no story to tell (Cournous 1946: 21); others like Diana Trilling and J. C. Ransom thought the novel was "the narcissistic Southern fantasy", "one of the last novels in the tradition of the Old South" (Trilling 1946: 578 and Ransom 1946: 507) Nevertheless, side by side with these evaluations, other more positive ones drew the readers' attention to the complex subtlety that exists in *Delta Wedding*, to which Paul Engle alluded when he talked about the "slow accumulation of meaning" (ENGLE 1946: 3). One should, indeed, consider the accumulation of meanings worked with subtlety and harmonised with the choice that Welty made of place and time.

¹ See Maria Teresa Castilho, "Delta Wedding: Um lugar de Janelas Abertas Sobre os Horizontes do Devenir" in *Revista da Faculdade de Letras: «Linguas e Literaturas»*, II Série, vol. VII (1990), pp. 165-73.

Delta Wedding is the fictional work where Eudora Welty most clearly manifests the emotion that connects her to the South. She allows us to perceive her recognition of the teachings that her region gave her from her childhood onwards. And it was perhaps the feeling of that emotion, the fact that *Delta Wedding* contains in many pages the true fictional lyric that caused Diana Trilling to talk about this novel as a "narcissistic Southern fantasy". But it was also, no doubt, the inability of Trilling – and also of others, at least until the publication of Vande Kieft's monograph – to understand this text in all its depth that caused her to make that evaluation. In fact, both Trilling and Ransom, as well as others who were disappointed with *Delta Wedding*, were incapable of understanding the novel that «Delta Cousins» had given birth to. Neither did these critics understand that at no time did what Diana Trilling considered as "exacerbation of poeticism" (Trilling 1946: 578) disturb the distance necessary for the writer to make a serious, careful study of life and of the sense of the family in general.

I wanted to write a story that showed the solidity of this family and that went on on a small scale in a world of its own. (PRENSHAW 1984: 509)

These critics were not sensitive to the fact that poetic lyricism is one of the great qualities of Weltyan fiction, as Ruth V. Kieft would underline. And even when contradicting Welty's point of view designating *Delta Wedding* as nothing more than a family story – southern or not – one thinks of this novel in relation to the South and one does not find a narcissistic, fanciful or apologetic vision of the region. On the contrary, I think that together with the thematic multiplicity and the accumulation of meanings one finds a distanced and questioning vision of the region.

Delta Wedding is not, as Ransom suggested, one of the last novels in the tradition of the "Old South". On the contrary, it is one of the first, if not the first novel to announce, in counterpoint to Faulkner, the possibility of the redeeming end of the fantasy of the southern past. This redemption, which in *Delta Wedding* is achieved in the assimilation and rethinking of that "old" fantasy of that "old" past which is in its death throes due to the changes visible on the horizon of the future. And thus, at the end of the novel, the reader is confronted with the episode and the short, conclusive description which is one of the most beautiful and poetic in *Delta Wedding*:

'Oh, beautiful!' Another star fell in the sky. Laura let go and ran forward a step. 'I saw that one too'. 'Did you?' said somebody – Uncle George. 'I saw where it fell', said Laura, bragging and in reassurance. She turned again to them, both arms held out to the radiant night. (WELTY 1982: 247)

Laura appears here with open arms as if she was embracing the glorious universe, which manifests itself before her eyes. At the apocalyptic moment of the novel, the affirmation of the truth arises, which in itself is the whole revelation: the statement of the importance which the awareness of our condition has for each one of us, the awareness of what surrounds us and forms us and which by revealing itself make us uneasy. And because it makes us uneasy it also makes us (re)think ourselves in the continuous recreation of the daily life of our own history, since it is this history that contains our existence and our identity. But this apocalyptic moment of the novel is, also above all, the final image of the metaphor of the South in the horizons of its future.

On the first page of *Delta Wedding* Eudora Welty starts a "Bildungsroman" that narrates the existence of a nine-year-old girl, an orphan who will develop inwardly in a place, in an "old" plantation suspended in the past (of the Old South), but which will not exist for much longer. Shellmound is isolated and closed in on itself and is being shaken by what is external to it, by the change that the winds bring. The presence and threat of what is new and strange to the closed world of the Fairchild clan is symbolised from the beginning by Dabney's marriage, which will cause the young bride to transgress the standards of the family she comes from by bringing to Marmion someone who is socially unequal. Sooner or later, Dabney will abandon the codes of the Fairchilds despite the attempts made by aunts Primrose and Jim Allen to maintain her links with the family clan. This is symbolised in the offering of a porcelain lamp that had been in the family for generations:

The night light! She must have the little night light! (WELTY 1982: 44)

This lamp is a kind of family testimony, a relic which has been passed from generation to generation, which in itself contains the whole history of the Fairchilds and particularly the women's history (in that place, in *Delta*). The gift represents some kind of demand on the past of Dabney's aunts and it simultaneously guarantees that

the young lady will know how to keep everything that made the Fairchilds southern women into faithful repositories of the museum of traditions where that porcelain piece came from. However, Dabney, just like George before her, will get married to someone who isn't accepted for social reasons and this instills doubt and fear in the family. And when she is coming back from the visit to Grove, Dabney drops the gift as she is running home to meet Troy:

"It's all right', Dabney said, coolly enough, and ran up the steps. But they heard it – running, she dropped the little night light, and it broke and its pieces scattered. They heard that but no cry at all – only the opening and closing of the screen door as she went inside. (WELTY 1982: 53 – my underlining)

In this fragmentation of the porcelain lamp and in the insinuation of Dabney's indifference to this, the dismantling of the tradition and of the "old" southern family code which Dabney will not maintain, is symbolised and announced. She will also not feed or perpetuate the traditions and the code that generations of proud southern women, like Ellen, have so far kept. She will not give continuity to the altar of veneration of the southern feminine tradition, she will not follow the dominant discourse of that place, she will not answer affirmatively to everything that surrounds her:

Marmion had been empty since the same year it was completed, 1890 – when its owner and builder, her grandfather James Fairchild, was killed in the duel he fought with Old Ronald McBane, and his wife Laura Allen died broken-hearted very soon, leaving two poor Civil War-widowed sisters to bring up the eight children. They went back, though it crowded them, to the Grove, Marmion was too heart-breaking. Honor, honor, honor, the aunts drummed into their ears, little Denis and Battle and George, Tempe and Annie Laurie, Rowena, Jim Allen and Primrose. To give up your life because you thought that much of your cotton – where was love, even, in that? *Other* people's cotton. Fine glory! Dabney would not have done it. (WELTY 1982: 120 – my underlining)

But this threat is already subtly insinuated at the beginning of the novel when, at the end of the first chapter, Dabney comes into the kitchen, as though she was even challenging the ritual of baking a cake (See ROMINES 1992: 223).

'Smell my cake?' She challenged, as Dabney appeared radiant at the pantry door, then coming through, spreading her pink dress to let her mother see her. Ellen turned a little dizzily. (WELTY 1982: 27 – my underlining)

Ellen will grow old, the aunts will die and with them the Fairchild clan who dependend on those women and which, by being controlled by them, showed itself as being matriarchal in the southern sense, although in fact it wasn't. But I'm going to interrupt my reflections on *Delta Wedding* in order to explain what I mean when I consider Shellmound a matriarchy in the southern sense.

The southern woman of the Old South was the Lady, who was placed on the altar of the cult of the gentleman, from whom the man, his servant and master, expected no more than the maintenance and transmission, in the heart of the family, of the ideology that shaped the grandeur of its society and culture. And thus, in *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash writes about that same character:

She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman – the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid of Astolat and the hunting goddess of the Boeotian hill. And – she was the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears – or shouts. (CASH 1962: 86)

Being a muse of that culture, reigning in a virtual matriarchy, the southern woman of the "Old South" tacitly agreed to ignore that the demands made on her for her immaculate condition were not shared by her companion. He frequently experienced the pleasure of the miscegenation outside that "sanctuary" nurtured by the rituals of that "matriarchy". Thus, as "queen of the home" (and of the plantation) she took the "power" and the hypocrisy of a "matriarchy" resulting from the service rendered up to the ideology, which paradoxically kept the Master on top – the owner of the plantation, of the slaves and of his Ladies and "Belles"; the southern woman contributed to the falseness and configuration of the southern world. In fact, what southern women defended and maintained from generation to generation was the honour of the plantation, of the family and of their Master right up to the violation that the Civil War represented, which in its turn intensified the role of the woman in the organisation and management of her "matriarchy" (See WESTLING 1985: 77). Thus, as

Louise Westling underlines in a chapter of *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor* suitably called "The Blight of Southern Womanhood", "the southern world provided only a dishonest basis for a girl's identity as she grew into a woman, and dishonest grounds for relations with men" (WESTLING 1985: 27).

It is precisely these "old" conceptions around southern women and the relations with the world they built in opposition to others ("new ones") that are being shaped within Shellmound and which Welty so brilliantly works in *Delta Wedding*.

In "Welty's Beginnings: Housekeeping and the Other Way to Live", Ann Romines, after emphasising and discussing the fact that *Delta Wedding* is set in spaces traditionally linked to the woman and that the points of view that were emphasised are those of seven women, says:

Through all these women, *Delta Wedding* expresses the *cost*, as well as the beauties and the strengths, of domestic culture. Ellen, who is mistress of Shellmound and thus deeply implicated in its housekeeping, comprehends this most fully. (ROMINES 1992: 230)

However, although Ann Romines' point of view about Ellen Fairchild might have some pertinence, the truth is that she is the southern matriarch of Shellmound, the Demeter that embodies and symbolises the necessary fertility and stability in the plantation. This role is announced from the beginning not only in the function of fulfilled procreation but also in Laura's moving to the kitchen to bake a cake, which in itself should be understood symbolically: the initiation of the young orphan into the "matriarchy" of Shellmound, which in its turn is also indicative of a gradual awareness of her feminine condition in that place – Shellmound - suspended in time, in the Southern Delta.

In we are faced with Laura's inner development which takes place around traditionally feminine and southern values that inform and greatly dominate the Fairchild "matriarchy" and from which the young lady had been excluded as a consequence of her mother's death. *Delta Wedding* presents us with the celebration of these values which it holds dear. These should mainly be understood as emblematic of a past, which with this novel, Welty suggests has to be assimilated by southerners – as will happen to Laura with her own family past – in the sense of rethinking it in the context of her history, which is the fortress of her existence and of her identity. But this version of the South in *Delta*

Wedding doesn't stop here, just as Laura's inner development also results from the emergence of new values that circulate there (in Shellmound) as well.

Laura finds out that the comforting grandeur of Shellmound is no more than an ephemeral circumstance in a place closed in on itself, lost and isolated by the opaque walls of this suspension of time, which sooner or later mesmerises those who are part of it and condemns them to being unable to see beyond:

When people were at Shellmound it was as if they had never been anywhere else. (WELTY 1982: 134)

This is what the narrator tells us about Shellmound which is an aspect that Laura also gradually discovers. She further discovers the obsession of the Fairchilds for the intensity that characterised a moment occurred in the past in that same place.

Shellmound carries the past, which is evident in the celebration of southern "matriarchal" and agrarian values that circulated in the twenties in the South: "in the Delta it's very much of a matriarchy, especially in those years in the twenties that I was writing about, and really ever since the Civil War when the men were all gone and the women began to take over everything. You know, they really did. I've met families up there where the women just ruled the roost, and I've made that happen in the book because I thought, that's the way it was in those days in the South" (Prenshaw 1984: 156). However, in 1946, the date when the novel was published, these values were practically non-existent. But in Shellmound not all the characters are immobilised in the blind and destructive fortress of the past. Characters like Dabney, Shelley and Robbie turn the place into "a place of windows that must be opened on the wide and mysterious world of the future beyond".

In Shelley and Robbie we find, as opposed to the Fairchilds and what they represent, two different ways of being and understanding that world and themselves. On the one hand, we have Shelley who subtly questions the discourse that arises and that drives the family. On the other hand, we are confronted with Robbie, who opposes the "matriarchy" of Shellmound and the pressure that women exert on George: "the Fairchild women asked a great deal of their men – competitively." (Welty 1982: 144). She doesn't accept the traditional values of the plantation and she even questions them. As Paul Binding stresses "in her beats the pulse of the modern age" (BINDING 1994: 129).

It is mainly due to what has so far been said that *Delta Wedding* shows itself as a vision of the South. But together with the circumstances of the Fairchild "matriarchy" already discussed here, another circumstance assumes particular importance for the understanding of all the intensity and radiance of this vision. The text associates this circumstance with the southern "matriarchy" of Shellmound.

In 1972, in an interview, which served objectives other than my own in this paper, Welty said:

I chose the twenties – when I was more the age of my little girl, which was why I thought best to have a child in it. But in writing about the Delta, I had to pick a year – and this was quite hard to do – in which all the men could be at home and uninvolved. It couldn't be a war year. It couldn't be a year when there was a flood in the Delta because those were the times before the flood control. It had to be a year that would leave my characters all free to have a family story. It meant looking in the almanac – in fact, I did – to find a year that was uneventful and that would allow me to concentrate on the people without any undue outside influences (...). So the date was chosen by necessity. (PRENSHAW 1984:156)

The date of 1923 for *Delta Wedding* is thus justified. It is an uncharacteristic moment of life in the Delta so that all the attention can be drawn to the life of a family and of a plantation like Shellmound and is not distracted by catastrophes or external events. It is precisely because of the distance indicated by the date chosen, that some have insisted on discussing this novel as a pertinent study of family and southern women. Louise Westling and Ann Romines, who have already been mentioned here, are examples of this way of thinking. But following this line of thought, however pertinent it may be, they neglect in their evaluations another circumstance that the text undoubtedly stresses: the fact that the women, the men and even the plantation were above all southern, and that the story is set in 1923. This is a further aspect that I propose to bear in mind in the reading of *Delta Wedding*.

Two attitudes have globally and alternatively characterised the critics of *Delta Wedding*. These critics either consider the problems and/or aspects linked to women as some sort of rather insignificant complement, or emphasise the issues arising for those themes and aspects in a way that neglects every other facet of the novel. And by being so, the reading of *Delta Wedding* has been impoverished as it has not been read as a vision of the South "illuminated" in and by the

metaphor which in this text is the story of the Fairchilds, in general, and of Laura, in particular². Neither has *Delta Wedding* been read as a novel in which Welty announces the inevitability of a future that has the city and not the plantation as a symbol. The plantation and the Fairchilds constitute the metaphor of a region, which in its past was built on a fantasy and which, by being so, didn't have the ability to face the discourse of its own construction. They also constitute the metaphor of the region divided between believing and wanting to perpetuate "ghosts" and fantasies left from the past and the anxiety of wanting to accept changes and conceptions dictated by the nation. Moreover, they constitute the metaphor which is realised in Laura and in her learning and growth process, which transmits the South, calling attention to itself in the horizons of the future.

In *Delta Wedding* all the narrative revolves around the way Laura is introduced and surrounded by the traditionally southern "matriarchy" of the Fairchilds, up to the point where she figuratively jumps into it. This is symbolised in her taking part in the epithalamic ritual when she is the flower girl at her cousin's wedding. On the other hand, this narrative also revolves around the questioning of that same "matriarchy" as well as the other side of the young lady's learning process. This learning process involves the discovery, announced by the narrator, of the fact that the dominant fantasies of that place in Shellmound could make her go forever into the prison of the past and betray the memory of the present forever, which would represent her own condemnation – "if she could not think (...) she was doomed; and she was doomed, for the memory was only a flicker, gone now." (WELTY 1982: 134). Thus, although she had previously accepted with enthusiasm the invitation to stay in Shellmound, young Laura feels that she has to go back to Jackson and to abandon the fatuous warmth of the plantation and return to the urban world which is also her father's world: "Laura felt that in the end she would – go from all this, go back to her father." (Welty 1982: 237). Her return to Jackson should be understood as the result of the awareness and inner development of Laura when she was with her mother's family. It is implicit at the end of the text that although she had to abandon that pastoral and agrarian world nurtured by the cycles of fertility and Nature, Laura will know how to assimilate and rethink the past (her family's and therefore hers), which was gathered in the debris of the hyposthenia of the plantation. What the reader finds on the first reading of *Delta Wedding* is

² See Paul Binding, *The Still Moment*, p. 132 – "Delta Wedding is more overtly metaphorical of the South than any of Eudora Welty's later novels".

the involvement of Laura in Shellmound, the assimilation of a cultural heritage and of the tradition of southern women as a guarantee of her inner development and awareness of her identity. But in the symbolic return of Laura to Jackson and to her father I understand her own return to the future of the South, which was already looming on the horizons of Jackson in 1923.

The date of 1923 is itself linked with the decade after the First World War : a decade which was characterised by the winds of change, which, though not so strongly as in the North, had been blowing more or less intensely in the South since the Reconstruction, making it turn back on itself little by little. But these winds swept through the region in the forties bringing about the most radical changes since the end of the Civil War. Thus the choice of date doesn't seem to be as uncharacteristic as Welty points out, since this date represents in itself the inevitability of the fall and change of all that Shellmound maintains and means. It is this new era that Laura ends up understanding, accepting and embracing, which is symbolically understood in her return to Jackson. Laura abandons the plantation, goes back to Jackson without, nevertheless, rejecting the past, the memory, and the richness of the heritage that her passing through the plantation allowed her to recognise as her own. But after having understood, assimilated and accepted that heritage, Laura tries to answer the call of her times, finally embracing the City and the values of American Progress without, however, endangering (and this is implicit at the end of the novel) the future of her identity.

In Shellmound – a place arrested in time – in the story of Laura's confrontation with the heritage of a young woman and future lady of that place, we have an accumulation of meanings that as a whole and within its limits confronts us with a particularly complex page in Weltyan long fiction. And the South rises. However, which South? Not the South which is numbed by the ghosts and fantasies of its past, but the South that was recovered in imagination, by the assimilation and questioning of its myths and of its past; the South likened to Laura with open arms to the universe, in a festive attitude of supreme freedom, is liberated on the horizons of its future, which it contemplates with enthusiasm.

Delta Wedding is thus Eudora Welty's answer to the strangling that her region was subjected to in the forties, when it embraced, naively and thoughtlessly the Americanisation that America instilled there - an America which, in 1946, the South was more and more part of. It is Welty's answer to her region which never seemed capable of sweep-

ing away the ghosts of its defeat and thus is deprived of looking forward to becoming aware of its present condition; a region which is not allowed to question itself about what surrounded it and surrounds it, of what built it and destroyed it; a region which has been deprived of establishing a dialogue with the nation it is part of, and of being heard.

Delta Wedding is the first Weltyan text where the writer seems to want to announce a South which, by not being blinded by the euphoria of progress, and by recovering itself from the memory of the past, of the traditions and myths reinvented in the present, will open itself to the present, to the change and to the standards of America, of which the City is a symbol, without ever endangering its identity.

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