

## A Study of the Space Images in *the Golden Apples*

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### Abstract

Eudora Welty is one of the most representative Southern American writers. *The Golden Apples* is her 1949 short-story sequence. In this book, Welty gives readers a vivid picture of Southern American society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Being a typical Southern American writer, Welty has a strong sense of place. As a novelist with strong sense of place and a photographer, Welty makes full use of space images in *The Golden Apples* and many of her works. In this essay, the space theory is used to analyze the implications of space images in *The Golden Apples*. By analyzing the space images in Welty's works, the essay tries to further explore Welty's sense of place, and interpret Southern American culture from the spatial perspective.

**Key words:** Eudora Welty; *The Golden Apple*; Space images; Southern American culture

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### INTRODUCTION

Spatial criticism is an important method in literary

criticism. It originates from the development and combination of cultural geography and postmodern cultural theory, and takes the western contemporary space theory as the basis of the main theory. "Time and space are two complimentary aspects that constitute all the dimensions of human existence. Time emphasizes the continuity and sequentiality of the empirical world while space displays the discontinuity and simultaneity of the world." (Chen, 2017, p.1) In literary creation and criticism, time has played the dominant role for a long time.

According to W. J. T. Mitchell, "Indeed, the consistent goal of natural and human science in the twentieth century has been the discovery and /or the construction of synchronic structural models to account for concrete phenomena." (Mitchell, 1980, p.539) With the fast development of the modern industrial world and the spiritual crisis of human beings, the unidimensional factor of "time" can no longer manage to reveal the simultaneity and complexity of the real world. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the western academia has been through a "spatial turn", which has been regarded as one of the most vital events in academia and political field in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. The spatial tendency emerges both in literary practice and theory. The emergence of spatial criticism has a lot to do with modern novels which highlight the space. Compared with traditional novels, modern novels often make use of the shuttle overlapping and juxtaposed space narrative methods to reveal the trend of spatial effect. As a result, the importance of the space began to emerge, and became an important element in constructing fictional texts and the image of characters. Space narrative focuses on spatial factors. Scholars begin to investigate the characteristics and functions of space narrative and pay more attention to the influence of spatial narrative elements on characterization, development of plot, and meaning construction.

Spatial critics believe that the space is an abstraction

with deep social and cultural connotations. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* make great contribution to the development of space theory. Joseph Frank put forward the concept of "spatial forms", which lays foundation for the academic study of space. Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin defines his concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism and chronotope in *The Dialogic Imagination*, which consists of four essays - "Epic and Novel" (1941), "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" (1940), "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1937-1938), and "Discourse in the Novel" (1934-1935). The space in many literary works is also a system of refraction, containing the extremely profound multi-level spatial connotations. Therefore, the study of space in literary works can help explore the social, cultural and identity attributes and reveal the deep cultural connotations behind the space.

Eudora Welty is an award-winning Southern American writer. She is the first living author to have her works published by the Library of America. Eudora Welty was born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1909. Welty describes the daily life of Southern people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since their publications, the works of Eudora Welty have been studied by various scholars abroad and at home. The foreign critics mainly interpret Welty's works in terms of writing techniques, myth archetypes, feminism, structuralism, and psychoanalysis, etc. As an outstanding photographer, Welty is good at utilizing spatial images and spatial descriptions in her literary creation. Through analyzing the space images in Welty's representative work *The Golden Apples*, a new perspective of studying the Southern American society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Welty's sense of place can be found.

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## 1. ANALYSIS OF SPACE IMAGES

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In *The Golden Apples*, several space images are utilized by Eudora Welty to contribute to the sense of place of the South. Two space images are chosen to be analyzed in this essay. They are the road and waters. Through interpreting the two space images, the past, present, and future of Southern America can be revealed.

### 1.1 Analysis of the Space Image of the Road

As a space full of metaphorical meanings, the road often plays an important role in literary works. "The chronotope of the road associated with encounter is characterized by a broader scope, but by a somewhat lesser degree of emotional and evaluative intensity. Encounters in a novel usually take place 'on the road.' The road is a particularly good place for random encounters." (Bakhtin, 1981, p.243)

Sometimes, the road can be a witness of the time and history. In other words, the changes and revolutions of the time could be reflected through the road in literary works. According to Bakhtin, "the road had been profoundly,

intensely etched by the flow of historical time, by the traces and signs of time's passage, by markers of the era." (Bakhtin, 1981, p.244) In the short story "The Wanderers" from *The Golden Apples*, Miss Katie Rainey used to sell some farm products and fruits by the road. Katie Rainey and this road have altogether witnessed the revolutions of the Southern society in face of the American Industrial Revolution. "She used to set out yonder and sell muscadines, see out there? There's where she got rid of all her plums, the early and late, blackberries and dewberries, and the little peanuts you boil." (Welty, 1956, p. 242) However, things on the road and Katie's situation have changed, "Now the road goes the wrong way... Only now the wrong people went by on it. They were all riding trucks, very fast or heavily loaded, and carrying blades and chains, to chop and haul the big trees to mill." (Welty, 1956, p.242) The trucks on the road and the fast development of lumbering indicate the industrialization of the Southern society. Besides, "the vines had dried" (Welty, 1956, p.242), in which the vines represent the agriculture in the South, and the death of the vines indicate the decline of Southern agriculture. People on the road "did not stop to pass words on the season and what grew" (Welty, 1956, p.242), which also implies the traditional agriculture without mechanization has already been out-of-date. With the strike of the American Industrial Revolution, the traditional Southern productive mode could not keep up with the development of Southern society. At that time, Southern America is going through a transition period from the agricultural society to industrial society. Moreover, besides the productive mode, the lifestyle is also changed in Southern America. In Katie Rainey's eyes, "They were not eaters of muscadines, and did not stop to pass words on the season and what grew. She wept because they could not tell it right, and they didn't press for her reasons." (Welty, 1956, p.242) In traditional Southern society, Southerners have close interpersonal relations with each other. People passing the road used to buy Katie's fruits, and talk to her. But, people on the road have changed, who neither talk to her nor care about why she weeps. The sincere and close relations between people have been alienated by industrialization. The interpersonal relationship has become indifferent for the fast-developing industrialization calls for efficiency and profit. The road Katie Rainey used to sell fruits is utilized by the author Welty to narrate indirectly the changes in Southern America during the American Industrial Revolution. The industrialization strikes traditional Southern agriculture, and alienates the close Southern interpersonal relationship.

### 1.2 Analysis of the Space Image of Waters

The most prominent space image of waters in *The Golden Apples* is the Moon Lake. By utilizing this space image of waters, the Southern gender culture is fully revealed.

In the story "Moon Lake", the space image of Moon Lake is portrayed as a battlefield of power between

the female and the male gender. In Greek mythology, Artemis (the Roman equivalent is Diana) is the Goddess of the moon, and the twin sister of Apollo the Sun-God. She is also “the goddess of wild animals, the hunt, and vegetation, and of chastity and childbirth.”<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, the moon is a symbol of feminine quality. “Artemis supervised waters and lush wild growth, attended by nymphs of wells and springs (naiads).”<sup>2</sup> As Artemis supervises waters, which means she is the governor of the waters, the Moon Lake can be regarded as the liegeance of Artemis and a space of femininity. The Moon Lake is a spatial carrier of femininity. In “Moon Lake”, a group of girls are on a week’s camp on Moon Lake with a Boy Scout and Life Saver named Loch Morrison. The girls are composed of county orphans and Morgana girls. The relationship between Loch and the camp girls are somehow antagonistic and odd. Loch considers his being with the girls a kind of suffering, “from the beginning his martyred presence seriously affected them”(Welty, 1956, p.112), “he was hating every day of the seven”(Welty, 1956, p.112). Loch despises the girls, “hearing the spit of his despising that went into his bugle” (Welty, 1956, p.112), “He despised their predicaments, most of all their not being able to swim.” (Welty, 1956, p.112) In his mind, as a male, he is superior to the girls. As for the camp girls, they dislike Loch for his arrogance, “they felt his insult” (Welty, 1956, p.142), “they hated him” (Welty, 1956, p.150) The girls are even afraid of Loch for they have sensed the patriarchal oppression from him. They are afraid of Loch’s horn which he uses to issue orders, “Off in the thick of the woods came a fairy sound, followed by a tremulous silence, a holding apart of the air.....The woods seemed to be moving after it, running -- the world pellmell.” (Welty, 1956, p.135) The horn, which has the similar shape to penis, is a symbol of Loch’s male power.

The Moon Lake is of typical Southern geographical conditions. In the area of the Moon Lake, the trees at the high position and the lake at the low position forms a sharp contrast. What is notable here is that Loch, as the only male on the camp, is often at a higher position than the girls. Loch often swings in the trees, and he “stood against a tree with his arms folded” (Welty, 1956, p.112) when the girls are in the lake. Loch is at a higher position to “gaze” the girls, which makes the girls “the other.” Loch’s “gaze” forms a kind of panopticon for the girls, which is a kind of objectification of the girls. Loch utilizes his horn to give orders to the camp girls. The girls are at the charge of Loch the patriarchal authority, “reveille was his” (Welty, 1956, p.113), “they had to keep waiting till Loch Morrison blew his horn before they could come out of Moon Lake.” (Welty, 1956, p.117) The Southern patriarchy maintains its dominion by generating a sense

of mystery. As for Loch, he keeps himself from the girls by not talking to them and doing things alone, “he hardly spoke; he never spoke first” (Welty, 1956, p.112), “He came and got his food and turned his back and ate it all alone like a dog and lived in a tent by himself, apart like a nigger, and dived alone when the lake was clear of girls.” (Welty, 1956, p.113)

The interaction between Loch and the Moon Lake is interesting -- the way he enters the lake is diving into it from high above, “He dived high off the crosspiece nailed up in the big oak, where the American Legion dived. He went through the air rocking and jerking like an engine, splashed in, climbed out, spat, climbed up again, dived off.” (Welty, 1956, p.113) This brutal movement indicates the way that Southern American patriarchy gets involved in the females’ world.

Although the Southern patriarchy oppresses the female, the male authority of Loch is deconstructed by the female. Among the camp girls, there is an orphan named Easter. Easter is the representative of the female power. Easter herself is an authority among the girls, especially the orphans. Easter is the existence which surpasses both the male and female genders, for she has the hegemonic masculinity of the male, “The one named Easter could fall flat as a boy, elbows cocked, and drink from the cup of her hand with her face in the spring” (Welty, 1956, p.117), “Easter was dominant among the orphans..... but Easter was dominant for what she was in herself — for the way she held still, sometimes.” (Welty, 1956, p. 118) She is the queen of the orphans, and leads the other orphans. She gives orders to other orphans, “The orphan named Easter appeared in charge. She handed her dress wrong-side-out to a friend, who turned it and hung it up for her, and waited standing very still, her little fingers locked.” (Welty, 1956, p.115)

What is notable here is Morgana girls’ attitude towards Easter. The Morgana girls who are going through the patriarchal oppression from Loch hold a strange resentment against Easter who stands up to fight against this oppression, “Almost, they hated Easter” (Welty, 1956, p.150), “Her secret voice, if soundless then possibly visible, might work out of her terrible mouth like a vine, preening and sprung with flowers. Or a snake would come out.” (Welty, 1956, p.150) The existence of Easter is a kind of threat to the Southern patriarchal order. The Morgana girls are not only the victims of the Southern patriarchy, but also the vindicators of it to some extent. Easter also stops the sexual assault from Mr. Nesbitt, “Mr. Nesbitt, from the Bible Class, took Easter by the wrist and turned her around to him and looked just as hard at her front. She had started her breasts. What Easter did was to bite his right hand, his collection hand.” (Welty, 1956, p.119) The Morgana girls have already been disciplined by the Southern American Belle culture. As a result, they examine the behaviour of Easter with the standards of Southern ladies. In other words, the discipline for

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Artemis-Greek-goddess>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Artemis-Greek-goddess>

Southern females from the Southern males works out. This story of Welty describes the plight of Southern females in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before they gain the ability to fight against the patriarchal oppression, they have already been disciplined by the Southern patriarchal culture. The female who revolts against the patriarchal power faces the dual repression from both the Southern males and females.

According to Zhao Huihui, the process of Loch's saving Easter is like a rape. It is not hard to draw that from the Welty's descriptions of Loch's and Easter's bodies and movement, "He pulled Easter his way... with a spread of his hand, had her lying there before him on the table top." (Welty, 1956, p.144) "Astride Easter the Boy Scout lifted her up between his legs and dropped her. He did it again, and she fell on one arm." (Welty, 1956, p.145) "Easter's body lay up on the table to receive anything that was done to it... While the Boy Scout as if he rode a runaway horse clung momentarily to her and arched himself off her back, dug his knees and fists into her..." (Welty, 1956, pp.145-146) It is ironic to see Loch's deeds from this perspective. Southern males' saving females also contains a kind of menace and punishment. Loch intends to control the rebellious Southern female by controlling her body.

In the story, Easter's drowning into the Moon Lake is like a warning to the females who revolt against the Southern patriarchy. Easter has been saved by Loch, the Life Saver. Her drowning seems to be an epiphany. This drowning does not kill the rebellious spirit of Easter. The first thing Easter does when she comes to herself is to kick Loch, "She fell, but she kicked the Boy Scout. Ridiculously, he tumbled backwards off the table. He fell almost into Miss Lizzie's skirt." (Welty, 1956, p.152) This movement of Easter makes Loch awkward and ridiculous. The masculine power Loch gained by saving Easter brutally is deconstructed by this kick of Easter. At the end of the story, Loch becomes the object which the camp girls laugh at, "I'll tell on him, in Morgana tomorrow. He's the most conceited Boy Scout in the whole troop; and's bowlegged." (Welty, 1956, p.156) To some extent, the authority of Southern males is deconstructed by the female power.

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## 2. WELTY'S SENSE OF PLACE AND SOUTHERN AMERICAN CULTURE

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Eudora Welty is one of the most representative writers during the Southern Renaissance. The Southern Renaissance begins in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is the reinvigoration of American Southern literature. The "Lost Cause" and the shock of industrialization and urbanization have all accelerated this literary renaissance. Southern American writers during this event have some common

features in their literary works. They not only reveal the historical romances and idyllic culture of the South in their works, but also shift their focus on the changes and revolutions in the Southern society. The popular themes among these writers are the burden of history, the conservative culture of the South, and racial issues in the South.

Eudora Welty has spent most of her years in her hometown Jackson, Mississippi. She has a strong sense of place. Her attitude towards the Southern social revolution is paradoxical to some extent. Welty cherishes and misses the traditions of the Old South, but she also holds hopes for the coming New South. She worried about the impact of industrialization, but she realizes that it is an unstoppable tendency for the Southern society. As a female writer, Welty also realizes Southern Bell culture's oppression on Southern females. Industrialization and urbanization may be a way to improve the situations of Southern females. In a 1965 interview, Welty was asked "Do you think it is disappearing in the South today?" Welty answered, "Our life here is a great deal like life all the way up the Central Illinois line to Chicago, as far as I can tell. What is really the difference between Jackson, Mississippi, and Springfield, Illinois? Maybe Tuscaloosa is different but it looked a great deal like Jackson to me. I don't have any wish for a return of the old days. I think you have to be alive to what is happening today. All the same, I think there still is in the South a great respect for, even reverence for, this life of the family, and the sense of history. I treasure that. I think we should treasure that, and keep it in our work." (Prenshaw, 1984, p.21)

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## CONCLUSION

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Through analyzing the space images in Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* from the perspective of spatial criticism, some features of Southern American culture are explored. The road has witnessed the historical and social changes in Southern America; the Moon Lake is utilized as a stage for presenting Southern America's patriarchal culture and Southern females' revolting. During the transitional period of Southern America, some old traditions are vanishing, but there are chances to smash the negative parts of Southern culture. Welty's sense of place makes her see the Southern social revolution at an objective stance.

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