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## Names and Namings The Thematic and Symbolic Significance of Names in Three Selected Modern American Short Stories\_x000D\_

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# **Names and Namings: The Thematic and Symbolic Significance of Names in Three Selected Modern American Short Stories**

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## **Abstract**

In the modern American short story the name of a character often illuminates certain associations -- symbolic and otherwise. As the title reveals, it is the purpose of this paper to briefly analyze the significance of certain names in three selected American short stories written after World War I to see how, and in what capacity, names of characters contribute to the thematic and symbolic subtlety of the works in which they appear, and simultaneously to see how they help us understand the human characters themselves. I have thus sharply limited myself to a selected aspect of the subject as illustration of my argument.

Referring specifically to Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1930), John Steinbeck's "Flight" (1938), and Eudora Welty's "Livvie" (1942), the ensuing discussion will, therefore, concern itself mainly with specific choice based on individual discretion. The selection of the present works under analysis is, then, subject to individual choice; rather than being general and exhaustive, this paper, it is hoped, is selective in scope. It should, however, be made clear at the very outset that this study is not an historical survey but an indepth analysis of a literary phenomenon, which I deem worthy of critical attention and assessment, even though the works to be considered hereinafter appear in chronological order.

## ملخص

هذا بحث في دلالة الاسماء والتسميات المستخدمة في ثلاث قصص امريكية متخيرة كتبت بعد الحرب العالمية الاولى (١٩١٤) وهي:  
«غدر غراني ويذر أول» (١٩٣٠) للقاصة كاثرين آن بورتر،  
«الهروب» (١٩٣٨) للروائي جون شتينبك،  
«ليففي» (١٩٤٢) للقاصة يدورا ولتي.  
وقد درس البحث الكيفية التي استخدمت فيها اسماء معينة في هذه القصص، وذلك من حيث دلالات الاسماء الرمزية والنفسية والاجتماعية أو المجازية أو الاليحائية، وكذلك ما تثيره من تداعيات.

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In the modern American short story the name of a character often illuminates certain associations -- symbolic and other-wise. As the title reveals, it is the purpose of this paper to briefly analyze the significance of certain names in three selected American short stories written after World War I to see how, and in what capacity, names of characters contribute to the thematic and symbolic subtlety of the works in which they appear, and simultaneously to see how they help us understand the human characters themselves. I have thus sharply limited myself to a selected aspect of the subject as illustration of my argument.

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To begin with, a name is defined as "a word or words by which any entity is designated and distinguished from others [and it is] used to describe, evaluate [or] suggest general reputation," to follow the definition of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*<sup>(1)</sup>. Indeed quite a few of the names which will be looked at in this paper may not usually be popular or be found in the Directory for this matter. But, as we shall see, such names are deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Names of characters are, after all, little more than

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appellations used for distinguishing them, but they are used because they seem appropriate to the social and moral status, or the physical and psychological characteristics of the characters. For naming is also a kind of characterization which brings forth allegorical, symbolic, allusive, and suggestive associations and values.

Katherine Anne porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" which first appeared in *Transition* in 1929 and then in *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* in 1930, serves as a good starting point<sup>(2)</sup>.

The story is primarily concerned with the death of a woman nearly eighty years old, Granny Weatherall, whose passing away proves to be even a harsher betrayal than her jilting. Early in her life Ellen Weatherall had once been betrayed by a certain George, whose betrayal was irremovable on Weatherall's part. Now waiting for death on her sickbed, she pathetically expects George's coming. Granny Weatherall, we are told, had been jilted right at the altar, and the jilting becomes the greatest and most unforgettable pain of the rest of her life until the very last minute of her appointed time. "And now," Harry J. Mooney perceptively observes, "waiting for death one moment and deluding herself into further of life the next, befuddled by the appearance of her sons and daughters and escaping into her interior visions of death, Granny Weatherall feels not the whole of the life within her, but only its greatest pain. It is her lost lover whom she sees most clearly and the awful hurt he caused her which she now [more than ever before] feels so deeply"<sup>(3)</sup>.

In recording Granny Weatherall's stream of consciousness, the narrator recapitulates her past and present tragedies (the jilting and death) reporting the sad emotions, feelings, and ideas of an old woman who falls victim to the faithlessness and is now

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at the mercy of others facing death.

One of the bitterest ironies of the story lies in Weatherall's name and in the title itself, for as her name obviously suggests Weatherall has survived, has endured, and has, at length, withstood all the problems that have faced her, but the jilting she has not! She has simply failed to "weather" the pain of the jilting experience. George's betrayal and faithlessness turn to be the greatest whimsies of her life because they have never been resolved; even worse, they have proved to be not only indelible but chronic as well. The first unpleasant experience in Ellen Weatherall's life (Ellen is her Christian name) comes when she is jilted by her lover. "A Young woman [then] with the peaked spanish comb in her hair and the painted fan"<sup>(4)</sup>. Actually, when we first meet Ellen in the story we meet a lady worthy of admiration and love, who expects that she will be a fine woman -- a woman to be claimed by some fine man like her. But what she hopes for turns to be a most romantic vision utterly based on her infatuation with one man, George. If he loves and claims her she is all well and nice; if he does not, then comes the blast: "A fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts" (p. 83).

Thus, she has never been the same "Since the day the wedding cake [has] not [been] cut, but thrown out and wasted (p. 87).

Weatherall suffers a most terrible tragedy when the man she has been in love with does not turn up, for not only does he fail to declare love, but he also deserts her in the hour of need leaving behind him not a bride -- but a helpless, weak, dishonoured being: "That was hell, she knew hell when she saw it. For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him [George] and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell... nad the thought of him was a

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smoky cloud from hel that moved and crept in her head.." so much so that "the whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away" (pp. 84, 87). To Weatherall, nothing can be more ridiculing, more pathetic, more agonizing, more devastating than her lover's bitter withdrawal from her life, for at this point she had lost "something not given back" (p. 86) -- peace of mind.

Despite all the pain and the suffering of this unhappy episode, Weatherall is able to think that things could change, that "wounded vanity [should not] get the upper hand of [her]. Plenty of girls get jilted" (p. 84). But the lady's nagging awareness of this unhealing wound and lost vanity has doomed her to infirm feelings about the jilting to the furthest extremes that she keeps it a secret from people dearer to her than her own being (her children), so that they will not know "how silly" and inane their mother was once (p. 82). If her memory of George carries anything, it carries disgust. Thoughts of him are, therefore, dismissed as disturbing and unwanted; to remember him is to see herself as morally weak and vulnerable. This is why she has always prayed against remembering him. In fine, George's influence has been both abhorrent and destructive even though Weatherall tries hard to appease her anger: "It was good to be strong enough for everything, even if all you made melted and changed" (p. 83). Weatherall's biggest loss is, then, her dignity and pride and endurance, her ability to withstand and endure or, as her name ironically tells us, weather her lover's disturbing influence and betrayal and, at length, meanness. She swears: "he never harmed me but in that [the jilting]" (p. 84).

How can this happen to a fine woman who has loved a man so much? Whether or not George has actually loved Ellen Weatherall, we do not know, or, to be more exact, have no way of knowing -- what we undoubtedly know and virtually find out is

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that Ellen, even when she is married to a dear and loving husband, spends a lifetime associated with sad memories of a failed love story and chaos.

Weatherall does finally find a man worthy of her love, John, a man she can get married to and in marrying him she hopes she can be given back everything her lost lover has taken away. Indeed, by marrying John, she not only becomes a wife, Mrs. Weatherall, but a mother too. So the jilting is virtually averted by marriage. And as she lies dying on her deathbed, she imagines to have told her daughter, Cornelia: "I want you to find George. Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him. Better than I hoped for even. Tell him I was given back everything he took away and more" (p. 86). Undoubtedly, Weatherall's husband provides her with a name, good house, fine children, and, more importantly, he saves her from George's painful parting in a way. With John's help, Weatherall assumes a new identity, and she begins to develop an awareness of her role as a wife and a mother, a knowledge of self-worth and a sense of achievement.

She recalls: "She had fenced in a hundred acres once, digging the post holes herself and clamping the wires with just a negro boy to help. That changed a woman... Digging post holes changed a woman. Riding country roads in the winter when women had their babies was another thing: sitting up nights with sick horses and sick negroes and sick children and hardly ever losing one" (p.83). Indeed such harsh and demanding responsibilities which weatherall has shouldered and assumed not only have changed her, but have made her a tougher and stronger woman -- more hard - working, more diligent, and more conscientious as she proves herself to be.



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Alas! John dies a young man and he leaves behind a widow. Following the husband's death, Weatherall begins to shoulder even harder responsibilities. She becomes a tougher and harsher woman; she is no longer dependent on anyone but herself. With no man in the house, she becomes more aware of the true value and role of the mother in her. For the death of her husband allows her to learn more about duty and order. She learns: "a person could spread out the span of life and tuck it in the edges orderly. It was good to have everything clean and folded away, with the hair brushes and tonic bottles sitting straight on the white embroidered linen: the day started without fuss and the pantry shelves laid out with rows of jelly glasses and brown jugs and white stone-china jars with blue whirligigs and words painted on them" (p. 81). If the quoted passage shows anything, it shows how neat, well-ordered, and dutiful Weatherall is. After she has been jilted and now widowed, she is left with a feeling that there is "nothing to worry about anymore" (p. 87) -- but her children, of course. The children remind her not of John, but of herself and of the hardships associated with raising and looking after them. "It had been a hard pull, but not too much for her. When she thought of all the food she had cooked, and all the clothes she had cut and sewed, and all the gardens she had made--well, the children showed it. There they were, made out of her, and they could not get away from that" (p.83). After having accepted what marriage to John offers, she now has to accept what his absence leaves her -- pain and hard work.

Quite pathetically, the duty and order Weatherall has so diligently enjoyed will be so keenly gone. Mrs. Weatherall has to encounter yet another problem -- ageing and death. She begins to feel very old and finished, and she feels enraged about the fact that she is ageing:

Well, she could just hear Cornelia [Weatherall's

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daughter] telling her husband that Mother was getting a little childish and they'd have to humor her. The thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought she was deaf, dumb, and blind. Little hasty glances and tiny gestures tossed around her and over her head saying, "Don't cross her, let her have her way, she's "eighty years old," and she sitting there as if she lived in a thin glass cage. Sometime, Granny almost made up her mind to pack up and move back to her own house where nobody could remind her every minute that she was old. (p. 82)

As we see, no longer is Granny Weatherall "Granny" but a child (and she is treated like one). She "wished the old days were back again with the children young and everything to be done over" (p. 83) but, having seen her own children and her grandchildren, she no more enjoys the power and the duty she has enjoyed in their childhood. Sadly, what is left for Granny Weatherall to do is to die!

Expectedly, Weatherall's youth, vitality, agility, and power to function have finally come to an end, have, in the absence of duty and love, *withered* and *contracted*! As she has thoughts of a young woman, those of the jilting, she also has thoughts of an old one, those of death: "So, my dear lord, this is my death and I was not even thinking about it" (p. 86). She more acutely realizes that it is time to die, and she is taken by surprise. However, she does not give to thoughts of death very easily. Shortly before her death, she thinks to herself, "I am not going... I cannot go" (p. 88). What do we do, then, with a woman, with a Weatherall, who has been so restless, so troubled, so agonized, and is now taken by a most distasteful, if not bitter, surprise -- death? Therein lies a death she has not even thought about. And the family doctor, Doctor

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comes to treat her, to have her up on her feet again, calling her, not Granny, but "Missy" instead (p. 80). Nothing can be more belittling.

At any rate, Weatherall's thoughts about parting from life move her all the way back into the jilting, and such thoughts seep into her mind like dark rolling clouds of fog and smoke -- these are thoughts which, at best, bring to her mind an image of hell itself. In other words, the fear of death has been repressed along with her greater secret pain (the jilting) until it ultimately surfaces like endless darkness in her last hours of life. Towards the end of the story, Weatherall's death comes hand in hand with memories of the jilting this way:

Her heart sank down, there was no bottom to death, she could not come to the end of it... Granny lay curled down within herself; her body was now only a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up. God give a sign!

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there is nothing more cruel than this -- I'll never forgive it. (pp. 88-89).

Dying, Weatherall returns to the same point -- the jilting. She is deprived of her bridegroom a second time, and she shows serious grief because she knows she will never be able to see him again. In conclusion, the fear of ongoing betrayal has locked Mrs. Weatherall into one-sided, crippled vision and she becomes blind to any other: that she has been betrayed once more, but by death itself this time. After all, does not Weatherall's name suggest the endurance which has carried her through life and her refusal to

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endurance which has carried her through life and her refusal to give herself up to secret agony which has, albeit, dominated her life until the last minute?

More significantly suggestive is the name of Pepe in John Steinbeck's "Flight," first published in *The Long Valley* (1938)<sup>(5)</sup>. An account of a nineteen-year-old youth, the story records Pepe's growth into a world of social responsibility and human suffering and his ultimate failure to achieve puberty and maturity -- an expression of manhood. Critics have, however, interpreted that it is an allegory of man's emergence from "primeval darkness"<sup>(6)</sup>; another argues that it is at best an "escape from the world into primeval chaos"<sup>(7)</sup>; and Yet another critic believes that it is a tragedy of Steinbeck's "natural"<sup>(8)</sup>. Subtle and intriguing as they are, such views have little to do with my concern here. More pertinent to my purpose at this point is, as I have explained earlier, Pepe's name itself. But the preceding remarks would not be out of place, I believe, because they help illuminate my own discussion of this youngster.

The oldest child of a poor widow, Mama Torres, Pepe is a lazy and not very smart lad who spends much time flicking the knife which he has inherited from his late father. In a series of casual remarks in the story, the mother repeatedly emphasizes her boy's spinelessness and laziness this way: "some lazy cow must have got into thy father's family, else how could I have a son like thee". And she also says, "when I carried thee, a sneaking lazy coyote came out of the brush and looked at me one day. That must have made thee so" (p.4)<sup>(9)</sup>. In fact, she refers to him as "big lazy", "big sheep", a foolish chicken", and "a peanut" (pp. 5,6,7), an idle boy who can hardly be taken for a man, given the father's death, should there be need for one. Pepe is first presented in the story as having "a tall head, pointing at the top, and from its peak, coarse black hair grew down like a thatch all around. Over his

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[and] *his mouth was as sweet and shapely as a girl's mouth*, and his chin was fragile and chiselled. *He was loose and gangling*, all legs and feet and wrists, and he was very lazy" (pp. 8-9)<sup>(10)</sup>. Don't Pepe's sweetness, looseness, and fragility which are clearly referred to in the passage quoted above suggest little more than laziness?

Don't they, in a way, suggest juvenile boyhood? Don't they also, by the same token, suggest ultimate expression of naivety and innocence?

Of all names, Pepe (pronounced as/ pepei/) aptly assonates with *baby*, which he embodies. Fragile, loose, and little, as his name, implies, Pepe does not seem to be able to assume the responsibility to being a man as his mother aspires, and the narrative concerns itself with revealing the lad's boyhood in one way or another. Pepe doesn't look like a brave and tough grown-up, then, and he has nothing to do except "foolish things with the knife, like a toy-baby" (p.5). At best, we are told, "Pepe smiled sheepishly and stabbed at the ground with his knife to keep the blade sharp and free from rust. It was his father's knife. The long heavy blade folded back into the black handle... The knife was with Pepe always, for it had been his father's knife" (p.4). Whether the knife-flicking is an expression of manhood or ignorance on Pepe's part can hardly be discerned at this point. what we know, however, is that as Pepe's life is delicate and fragile, it can end suddenly and without warning. If stabbing at the ground foolishly with the knife fails to satisfy Pepe's feelings of a latent manhood, killing a man who calls Pepe names he cannot allow is an act of manhood! In this regard, Pepe's mother feels that she may at last entrust her growing boy with a mission to town: "You must catch the horse and put on him thy father's saddle. You must ride to Monterey. The medicine bottle is empty. There is no salt. Go thou now, Peanut Catch the horse... I would not send thee alone, thou

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little one, except for the medicine", said she, "It is not good to have no medicine, for who knows when the toothache will come, or, the sadness of the stomach. These things are" (pp.5-6) Even though he assures his doubtful mother and perhaps his own dubious self, "you may send me often alone. I am a man" (p. 6), she seems to be perfectly right in calling him a "toy- baby". In a drunken quarrel in Mrs. Rodriguez's house (Mrs. Rodriguez is a friend of his mother's) in Monterey, he kills a man, and Pepe considers the killing as so brave an act that he has finally become a man. "There was wine to drink. Pepe drank wine", we are told. "The little quarrel -- the man started to - ward Pepe and then the knife -- it went almost by itself. It flew, It darted before Pepe knew it", and Pepe is sure that he is "a man now" (p. 9).

Whether or not Pepe has been obliged to commit an act of violence on a man who has said names to Pepe, names Pepe would not allow (p.9) and consequently whether such names would have been harsher than the names his mother about the killing. Listening, Mama's face grows stern and dry, and she urges him to flee into the mountains and not be "caught like a chicken" (p.11) Leaving the house immediately, Pepe wears his late father's black hat takes with him father's horse and rifle, and he goes away looking "for a little softness, a little weakness in [Mama's face]. But Mama's face remained fierce" (p.11); for he has "a man's thing to do" (p.10). Pepe is evidently on his own going on a journey right into inescapable death. The journey turns out to be a "flight" away from life toward death; from boyhood toward manhood; from immaturity toward experience; from dependence toward self-reliance, more or less. Thus he is forced by the killing of a man to flee in order to save his own life from a possible death. But, quite ironically, he is virtually journeying toward not escape but death instead. As it should now seem, there is no protective home for Pepe any more, and the ensuing hardships,

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protective home for Pepe any more, and the ensuing hardships, pain, suffering, and devastation are far beyond his innocent expectations. As the journey begins, Pepe becomes utterly cut off from human affection and love and tenderness. He is being swallowed up by the mountains: "He was in the open now: he could be seen from a distance. As he ascended the trail the country grew more rough and terrible and dry. The way wound about the basses of great square rocks" (p.14).

Pepe's death is anticipated right at the outset. His younger sister, Rosy, asks softly, "Where goes Pepe? and Mama answers, "Pepe goes on a journey. Pepe is a man now. He has a man's thing to do" (p.10). Following Pepe's departure, Rosy tells her twelve - year - old brother, Emilio, "he [Pepe] has gone on a journey. He will never come back". Emilio then asks quite prophetically, "Is he dead?" and Rosy explains, "he is not dead... Not yet" (p.12). Teleological anticipation or prophecy of Pepes appointed time of death? Be the answer as it may, Pepe has in the meantime been followed, looking suspiciously back every minute or so eventually to see a black figure, a dark watcher tracking him down. Glancing away quickly, Pepe becoms filled with fear as soon as he sees "a dark form against the sky, a man's figure standing on top of a rock" (p. 16) which virtually symbolizes Pepe's awareness of the death that awaits him. The man's figure intentionally remains shrouded in vagueness and darkness because, I would think, it is associated with Pepe's troubled thoughts and agony and despair and distress if not with death itself. Such fear, which is a projection of Pepe's "babyhood", hardly promises manhood on Pepe's part. Rather, this is fear that can best be linked with a desolate child.

Weary and exhausted, Pepe is confronted with the necessity of facing his death. That he has been followed by a dark watcher who wantd to take vengeance on behalf of the late friend of his,

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Pepe knows, and he rides hurriedly up the mountain in quest of escape. Pepe's horse is immediately shot without warning. It "screamed and fell on its side. He was almost down before the rifle crash echoed up from the valley. From a hole behind the struggling shoulder, a stream of bright crimson blood pumped and stopped and pumped and stopped... Pepe lay half stunned beside the horse. He looked slowly down the hill..., and another crash echoed up... Pepe flung himself frantically behind a bush" (pp.18-19). The horse is killed, and Pepe crawls up the hill "with the instinctive care of an animal" (p.19). He struggles hard, desperate and thirsty, up the rugged slope, but he still hears the faraway rifle shots, one of which wounds him indirectly with a sliver of granite cutting through his right hand. The cut which the stone has made between his fingers finally results in the infection of the whole arm, while he is still struggling his way up to the peak of the ridge "with the effort of a hurt beast" (p.24). Tired, he falls asleep this way: "He crawled exhaustedly a last hundred yards to a patch of high sharp manzanita, crawled desperately, and when the patch was reached he wriggled in among the tough gnarly trunks and dropped his head on his left arm..., Pepe squirmed in his sleep and he raised and dropped his wounded hand again" (p.21). Helpless, Pepe is now completely cut off from home, and in the process he loses not only his father's horse, but the rifle, the hat, the coat, and the big black knife as well. Now what more has he to achieve What more has he to do, if he can do anything? He can do nothing! He loses all he has -- so much so that he can go no farther; indeed, it is time for Pepe to face his death all alone, time to share the fate of his horse. At this point Pepe is no longer a man who can talk; he has lost the power of speech and can only make a hissing sound of a heart - broken "baby". He tried to make words "but only thick hissing came from between his lips". (p.24).



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After having struggled part of the night and then slept until dawn, Pepe "sat up and dragged his great arm into his lap and nursed it, rocking his body and moaning in his throat. He threw back his head and looked up into the pale sky" (p.25). What we should be aware of at this point is that Pepe has achieved an ultimate expression not of manhood but of boyhood instead; he has mistakenly thought that he is a man, but what he has just realized is that he is (and behaves like) a hurt child that is, while he seems to die like a man, Pepe never fails to strike our attention as a spineless dying boy. Drawing a shaky cross on his breast with his left hand, one bullet flies by him; then a second hits him right in the chest. "His boy jarred back. His left hand fluttered helpless toward his breast.

The second crash sounded from below. Pepe swung forward and toppled from the rock. His body struck and rolled over and over, starting a little avalanche. And when at last he stopped against a bush, the avalanche slid slowly down and covered up his head"(p.25). As we see, dying Pepe topples from the rock; he is short dead finally. As the world of boyhood which he becomes an embodiment of is protective and guarding, the world of manhood which he experiences proves fatal and destructive. In fine, Pepe's "Manhood" has deserted him in the hour of need, in the moment that he has to stand alone in the face of Nature and Man. When Pepe's head has been gently covered by the avalanche at the end, his dream of wanting to be a man is pathetically set at rest for good.

If Steinbeck's "Flight" is concerned with the life and death of a youngster whose name reveals little manhood, Eudora Welty's "Livvie" is the story of a vibrantly "live" young woman, Livvie, who, as her very old husband, Solomon, lies dying, gives her fidelity to a young fieldhand, Cash, who in turn tempts her even before her husband is actually dead. "Livvie", together with two

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other stories, is collected in *The Wide Net* (1943), and among her stories "Livvie" is considered to be Miss Welty's best<sup>11</sup>. As Louise Westling perceptively argues, "The story is set in black farming community and concerns a maiden in distress who is rescued from imprisonment by a princely young man simply vibrating with colour and the forces of spring. Livvie has married an old man who is rich by the standards of his community. He owns his land and has field - hands working it, but he is a typical miser who hoards his young wife as he does all his other possessions"(12). Livvie's return to life through the death of her very old husband, and her surrender to the fieldhand who, unlike George, turns up to claim her as his beloved and wife, suggest, as we shall see, obvious thematic values of the respective names we have here.

Livvie's husband is first introduced in the story as an old black man aptly associated with winter, and Livvie is his foil. As Solomon is the embodiment of wintertime, Livvie is the embodiment of springtime and youth and vitality and liveliness and vim and fervour, and the story never fails to show the conflict between young Livvie and old Solomon. Right at the outset, old Solomon has asked sixteen-year-old Livvie -- before marrying her "if she was choosing winter, would she pine for spring(p.154)<sup>(13)</sup> Obviously, Livvie is too young to say anything to an old man almost her grandfather's age! And so she accepts him as a husband, regardless of all the consequences associated with her acceptance. Solomon's name and character, however, recall that of the ancient Wise Solomon of the 10th century B.C. His belongings reveal a sense of neatness and order and wisdom and peace of his own character. To see Solomon's house is to see everything in good order and with nothing out of place; indeed, it brings to mind an image of the Temple which belongs to the son of King David himself. "It is a nice house", we are repeatedly reminded (pp.154,155,157). Inside the house there are three

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rooms; in the living room, one sees a three - legged table with a pink top made of marble, and on the table there is a lamp with three gold feet' in th kitchen, there is a big round table with two jelly glasses holding spoons knives, and forks, with a vinegar bottle between them; in Solomon's bedroom, there is an iron bed with polished knobs that look like a "throne", snow-white curtains, two calendars, and a table holding the Bible (pp. 154-155). To say the least, Solomon's house is his kingdom, and each described detail of the house reveals a peaceful, safe, quiet, and well - ordered way of living.

Out front there are rose bushes "with tiny blood - red roses blooming every month [growing] in threes on either side of the steps" (156). Then around the path below there is "a line of bare crape - myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a colored bottle, green or blue. There was no word that fell from Solomon's lips to say what they were for, but Livvie knew that there could be a spell put in trees and she was familiar from the time she was born with the way bottle trees kept evil spirits from coming into the house -- by luring them inside the colored bottles, where they cannot get out again. Solomon had made the bottle trees with his own hands" (p.156). Admittedly, Solomon's way of life is not only kingly and pious, but rigorous to the degree that, to Livvie, he is "such a strict man" (p.159) And his stringency is explicitly associated with his dignity and sense of control. The two doors of the safe, which are always kept shut, and the bottled branches of the crape - myrtle trees speak of the safety and security that characterize Solomon's house, or, to be more exact, his secluded palace.

If Solomon's mansion is his palace, it turns out to be Livvie's cage. For during the nine years of their marriage, Solomon has "kept her in the house" (p.153). Thus the house becomes Livvie's confinement and she is taken captive of the oppressive

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atmosphere and the quiet, lonely life that characterizes Solomon and his place. In marrying Solomon, Livvie is, therefore, buried alive; there is no house near, no house as far as Livvie would have been able to see, and there is nobody at all "not even a white person" (p.159). Despite her obvious associations with life, youth, and vitality, as her name promises, Livvie quite ironically seems to have been cut off from life itself; she has not even seen her people "since her wedding day" (p.162) and she has been living so far away from anywhere in the world. Solomon has "never let [her] go any farther than the chicken house and the well" (p.162). In the meantime, Livvie's husband "got old, and he got so old he gave out. At least he slept the whole day in bed and she was young still" (p.154). Indeed, Livvie no longer acts as a wife in Solomon's house; rather, she acts as a prisoner instead who serves not a loving husband but a fearful master, a master who "even in his sleep seemed to be such a strict man" (p.159):

Livvie knew she made a nice girl to wait on anybody. She fixed things to eat on a tray like a surprise. She could keep from singing when she ironed, and to sit by a bed and fan away the flies, she could be so still she could not hear herself breathe. She could clean up the house and never drop a thing, and wash the dishes without a sound, and she would step outside to churn, for churning sounded too sad to her, like sobbing, and if it made her homesick and not Solomon, she did not think of that (p.158).

Suffice it to say, then, that Solomon's aged, sterile, and dull life has, in one way or another, violated Livvie's girlhood and juvenileness to the furthest extremes, so much so that Livvie has become a restless, dismal, and pensive creature who is not only oppressed by lonely existence but, on top of all, deprived of being

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a mother.

Livvie's return to life and release from confinement come on the first day of spring which is "a true spring day" (p.168) "The whole day, and the whole night before, she had felt the stir of spring close to her". It was as present in the house as a young man would be... At intervals hoarse shouts came through the air and roused her as if she dozed neglectfully in the shade, and they were telling her, jump up!" (pp. 160-161). Livvie could have heard the distant shouts of men and girls plowing in the red fields and the cries of children playing, when all abruptly on the path under the bottle trees appears an outrageously marvelous, red-haired woman, Miss Baby-Marie, who travels around showing "pretty cosmetic things to the white people and the colored people both" (164). The name itself, in its obvious associations with rebirth and regeneration, hardly fails to suggest juvenile delicacy and tenderness. So Miss Marie in turn urges Livvie to use purple lipstick and rub it on freely and "before the mirror [Livvie] put the paint on her mouth. In the wavery surface, her face danced before her like a flame" (p.166). The effect of the point evokes a feeling of excitement, joy, and thrill passing like a wave through Livvie's nerves; it excites her as she never been excited before in her life. At Miss Baby - Marie's hands, Livvie is finally awakened into an awareness of youth and life in her -- "the time people come makes a difference" (p.170). As springtime brings to Livvie's mind an awareness of beauty and life, Miss Baby-Marie brings her some latent desire of having a baby, of being a mother of a baby.

Following Marie's departure, Livvie becomes more acutely aware of the young woman in her. "Livvie stood watching her go, and all the time she felt her heart beating in her left side. She touched the place with her hand. It seemed as if her heart beat and her whole gace flamed from the pulsing color of her lips" (p.168). Later in the day Livvie goes on the first walk she has ever dared to

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take beyond the bounds of Solomon's house and she goes all the way down the path and down to old Natches Trace, not knowing how far down she has gone, when she sees a sight. "It was a man, looking like a vision -- she standing on one side of the old Natches Trace, and he standing on the other" (p.169). Then she sees exactly the young man she has hoped to see approaching in fine Easter colthes purchased with "cash" money stolen from Solomon; this is Solomon's black field hand, cash, dressed in a manner that dazzles Livvie's eyes. He wears pointed shoes, peg-top pants and bright socks. "His coat long and wide and leaf-green he opened like doors to see his high-up tawny pants he smoothed down-ward from the points of his collar, and he wore a luminous baby-pink satin shirt. At the end, he reached gently above his wide platter-shaped round hat, the color of a plum, and one finger touch at the feather, emerald green, blowing up in spring winds" (p.169). Dressed the city way, Cash wears a luminous baby - pink shirt which is the color of Miss Baby-Marie's lipstick, a color which brings to mind the forces of youth and gaudiness which are to break through Solomon's values that have bound Livvie's womanhood for nine years. To Livvie's eyes, such a vision of outrageous charm is certainly appealing. As she walks beside Cash, she has a feeling that "he could break through everything in [their] way and destroy anything in the world" (p.170). This very destructive power of Cash's is simply what Livvie needs to step out of Solomon's preventive and protective world and destroy the values it represents.

Shortly afterwards, Cash throws a stone through the bottle trees, and the sound of broken bottles clatters like cries of fury, thus destroying Solomon's preserve. Cash then follows Livvie as soon as she gets inside the house, and, following her, he enters Solomon's bedroom. Asleep, Solomon neither sees nor hears anybody. When Solomon wakes up, Cash raises his arm to hit

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him; but cash's arm is held in the air as if something has kept it there. Solomon tells his wife and her young lover in words that apologetically sound like an excuse:

"So here come the young man Livvie wait for. was no prevention. No prevention. Now I lay eyes on young man and it come to be somebody I know all the time, and been knowing since he were born in a cotton patch..., Cash MacCord, grewed to size... to come in my house in th end"...

"God forgive Solomon for sins great and small. God forgive Solomon for carrying away too young girl for wife and keeping her away from her people and from all the young people would clamor for her back" (pp. 175-176).

At this moment of utter senility and helplessness Solomon lifts up his hand to give Livvie his silver watch, the emblem of his peaceful and orderly life, and he dies. Embraced by Cash, Livvie leaves dead Solomon behind and goes out of the room moving around and around in circles "into the brightness of the open door"; The triumph of life and youth can hardly go unnoticed here. "Outside the red birds were flying and criss-crossing, the sun was in all the bottles on the prisoned trees, and the young peach was shining in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring" (p. 177). As Solomon's life has finally ceased, Livvie's has begun. With his death, Solomon's grace and dignity disappear. Don't Livvie and Cash in offering themselves to one another at the end arrive at a "cash" deal, deal of new life and merriment and gaiety?

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## NOTES

- ★ I am grateful to two anonymous readers for their sound, intricate, and invaluable comments which helped give this article its final form.
1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978, p. 871) .
  2. For a thorough biographical and bibliographical introduction to Porter, see *American Writers: Collection of Literary Biographies*, ed. Leonard Unger (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), vol. III. Also helpful here is Valmai Kirkham Fenster's *Guide to American Literature* (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1983). No less helpful is Elizabeth Janeway's essay "Women's Literature", in *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, ed. Daniel Hoffman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 342-395).
  3. See *The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter* (The University of Pittsburg Press, 1967, p. 48).
  4. Quotations hereon are from *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968, p. 83, and below).
  5. See on Steinbeck Alexander Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963); Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942).
  6. John Antico, "A Reading of Steinbeck's Flight" *Modern Fiction Studies* 11 (1965): 45.
  7. Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963, p. 63).
  8. Chester F. Chapin, "Pepe Torres: A Steinbeck Natural", *College English* 23 (December, 1962): 676.
  9. Quotations hereon are from *The Portable Steinbeck* (Penguin Books, 1943).
  10. Italics mine.
  11. On Eudora Welty see *American Writers: A Collection of Literary*



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***Biographies***, ed. Leonard Unger (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), vol. Iv. Also helpful here is Louise Westling's book, ***Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson MacCallers, and Flannery O'Connor*** (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1985).

12. See ***Woman Writers: Eudora Welty*** (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989), P. 78.
13. All subsequent quotations hereon follow the ***Selected Stories of Eudora Welty*** (New York: The Modern Library, 1973).