



Strange Felicity: Eudora Welty's Subtexts on Fiction and Society

Naoko F. Thornton

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Thornton identifies two kinds of metafiction in Welty's works that testify to the author's confidence in the power of that particular form of fiction to achieve the results she desires. The first deals with literary issues such as language, fiction, readership, and authorship as they are embodied in the particular fiction. The other addresses the social subtexts, which carry the author's social message, or observations, buried beneath the surface story for the reader to excavate. By taking up major works from different stages of Welty's literary career, Thornton reveals the subtexts and, therefore, the author's ideas about the literary and social role of her own fiction.

The postmodernist idea that all literary texts are inherently self-reflexive derives from the assumption that a text consists of the surface story and various buried subtexts. Through one or more of those subtexts, the work is considered to be speaking in the author's behalf about itself, or about the fiction or literature of which it is an example. Thornton identifies two kinds of metafiction in Welty's works that testify to the author's confidence in the power of that particular form of fiction to achieve the results she desires. The first deals with literary issues such as language, fiction, readership, and authorship as they are embodied in the particular fiction. The other addresses the social subtexts, which carry the author's social message, or observations, buried beneath the surface story for the reader to excavate. By taking up major works from different stages of Welty's literary career, Thornton reveals the subtexts and, therefore, the author's ideas about the literary and social role of her own fiction.

Through a careful examination of the subtexts found in Welty's fiction, the author challenges the notion that Welty was the apolitical, asocial writer that many have thought her to be. Instead, this book reveals how many of the political messages about society, and about different aspects of literature, have been camouflaged by the surface stories that mask Welty's ideas about the social and institutional immorality and unhappiness of the real world. Broken into four parts, Thornton draws on the theories of Bakhtin, Barthes, Bourdieu, Derrida, and Macherey in order to place Welty, and her work, in a new position in the history of American literature.

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