

A Memory

In her story "A Memory" Eudora Welty recalls one summer: *when I was a child I lay on the sand after swimming in the small lake in the park . . . From my position I was looking at a rectangle brightly lit . . . with sun, sand, water, a little pavilion, a few solitary people in fixed attitudes . . . Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look out at everything.*

She was apparently protecting herself from whatever lay outside her framed fingers – looking at things exclusively or as her father and mother believed: *I saw nothing in the world which was not strictly coaxed into place.* She says she didn't know what she was waiting to see but she expected to see it at every turn. *To watch everything about me I regarded grimly and possessively as a need . . . I was obsessed with notions of concealment.* There was something more to be seen than the random world before her eyes.

This coincided with the fact that she was caught up in adolescent love. And how did this come about? *I remember unadulteratedly a certain morning when I touched my friend's wrist (as if by accident . . .) as we passed on the stairs in school . . . the child was not actually my friend.* They never exchanged a word or nod during the entire school year. But she couldn't shake the impact of that unintended touch. It would continue to swell *like a rose forced into premature bloom . . .* She cared for him so much that when he once had a nosebleed she fainted.

But then outside the frames wherein she captured a world beautiful enough (and bloodless enough) to cherish she had other experiences, like the day at the beach when a rowdy family of overweight adults and frisky boys made such a fuss close to where she lay. Loud, chasing each other, throwing sand. *They wore old and faded bathing suits which did not hide either the energy or the fatigue of their bodies, but showed it exactly . . .* Eudora began to wish they were all dead. She tried to withdraw into her most inner dream, the sweetness of her love, her austere frames of reference, but *the incident on the stairs had vanished . . . When finally I emerged again from the protection of my dream, the undefined austerity of my love, I opened my eyes onto the blur of an empty beach.*

Even as it says of the disciples in today's Gospel after their vision of Christ transfigured, his clothes dazzling white, flanked by Elijah and Moses: *suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone but Jesus . . .* Too often we prize the lovely things we see, the sweet experiences from which we begin to distinguish and expel the cruder, vulgar, nasty, ignorant, even brutal aspects of life. We too operate like Eudora out of a selective world and loves, recoil at what's ordinary, common, uncomfortable. Could today's Gospel be telling us: a transfigured world is wonderful but the real world needs our love as well – a love such as Christ in the flesh and not in dazzling white garments extended to every human being when he allowed himself to be nailed to a cross?