

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Roseanne Pascalette Caputi for the degree of  
Master of Arts in  
English presented  
on August 16, 2005.

Title: Cutting Off the Medusa's Head: Mythological Transcendence in Emily Brönte  
and Eudora Welty

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Abstract approved:

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The purpose of this project is to draw a more explicit connection between Eudora Welty and the literary influence Emily Brönte had on her, revealing Welty as a writer who is more integrated into literary tradition and history than many readers and critics have acknowledged. Both writers rely heavily on place and the power of the supernatural and mythological in their storytelling. Comparing these two writers reveals that, while both remain iconoclastic within their own timeframes and genres, their writing complements each other, showing a similarity of thought, style, and emotion. This comparison also establishes a kind of progression, as Welty takes ideas introduced by Brönte and expands upon them, making them her own both literarily and culturally.

Cutting Off the Medusa's Head: Mythological Transcendence in Emily Brönte and  
Eudora Welty

by  
Roseanne Pascalette Caputi

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts

Presented August 16, 2005  
Commencement June 2006

Master of Arts thesis of Roseanne Pascalette Caputi  
presented on August 16, 2005.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Dr. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, Dr. Jon Lewis, Dr. Anita Hall, and especially Dr. David Robinson for their help and understanding during the thesis process. I would also like to extend my thanks to the girls at the Writing Center and to Adèle Johnson, for her professional and expert advice. A special thank you goes to CJC, for being such a dear.

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## Cutting off the Medusa's Head: Mythological Transcendence in Emily Brönte and Eudora Welty

### **Introduction**

I did not read any of Eudora Welty's writing until graduate school. Before taking a class about her I only knew that she was a Southern writer who wrote stories about small Southern communities and their inhabitants. I thought, "Nothing new there." I had been reading William Faulkner and Carson McCullers for years. It seems that's what other readers and critics must have also thought since many view Welty's writing as largely influenced, and therefore subordinate, to Faulkner's. However, I discovered that there was plenty that was new with Welty. She did not write like a second-rate Faulkner. She wrote like a woman who lived in a similar geographical setting but had her own stories to tell.

Reading Welty alongside Emily Brönte's novel, Wuthering Heights, and Virginia Woolf's novel, To the Lighthouse, I began to see a literary relationship between the authors. Each seemed connected to one another through their experimentations with non-linear time and emphasis on place. However, one thing that truly stood out was Welty's similarity to Brönte in her use of the supernatural and her disregard for traditional Gothic conventions, a genre by which both authors are identified. I realized that Welty was not as indebted to Faulkner as people thought because the elements of fiction that Welty both used and improved upon were in place long before Welty became Faulkner's contemporary. Therefore, the goal of this project is to show Welty's unique literary achievement by showing Brönte's influence on her, thereby placing Welty within a literary continuum that precedes those to whom she is usually viewed as subordinate.

In Eudora Welty's essay on place in her collection Eye of the Story, she mentions Emily Brönte's masterpiece Wuthering Heights as a novel that is synonymous with its setting. Welty argues that, "It is by the nature of itself that fiction is all bound up in the local. The internal reason for that is surely that feelings are bound up in place. The human mind is a mass of associations—associations more poetic even than actual. I say 'The Yorkshire Moors' and you will say 'Wuthering Heights'" (Eye of the Story, Welty 118). Welty is precisely right. The mind is a mass of associations and in reading this essay, Welty opens herself up to associations with Brönte. Welty goes on to assert that,

Feelings are bound up in place, and in art, from time to time, place undoubtedly works upon genius. Can anyone well explain otherwise what makes a given dot on a map come passionately alive, for good and all in a novel—like one of those novae that suddenly blaze with inexplicable fire in the heavens? What brought a *Wuthering Heights* out of Yorkshire? (Eye of the Story, Welty 123).

Or what, for that matter, brought Welty's highly evocative short story collection, The Golden Apples, out of Mississippi? Welty does not compare herself to Brönte or the other authors she mentions within the essay, but we can make the comparison for her. Place works upon genius and although Welty, again, does not include herself in this genius group, those of us reading this essay are no doubt aware of Welty's own genius when it comes to creating characters and stories that are indistinguishable from their setting. We do not perhaps know, however, how closely Brönte and Welty compare in their use of place.

As a reader of them both, it is not difficult to make the connection between the vivid and troubled worlds of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* and the

equally vibrant and specific world of Morgana, the visceral, yet mythic setting for Welty's short story collection, Golden Apples. Both authors use their setting not only to firmly place their sometimes larger- than- life characters in a reality that the reader can recognize, but also as a means for us to understand these characters. Brönte and Welty's settings have a great deal of influence on their inhabitants and, in fact, help form not only our understanding of the characters, but of the characters' understanding of themselves. When Heathcliff and Catherine escape into the wild of the moors, we see their urge to escape and rebel, but we also see their deep connection with the rough edges and tangles of the wilderness that sets them apart from the other characters within the novel. Without the setting, we would lose a part of them. Similarly, King MacLain and Virgie Rainey's own rebellions would express little more than overarching generalities about them if we did not first understand the tight-knit, rural, and matriarchal community from which they came. However, place is only the initial point of comparison between these two authors.

Welty mentions Brönte multiple times throughout her essay for a reason: she recognizes Brönte as a predecessor to her own style and emphasis on place, as well as a potential influence on her own writing. Welty does not simply discuss Brönte and place, however. She says that place builds upon genius, thereby acknowledging Brönte's work and literary imagination as genius. Interestingly, despite this acknowledgment, it seems that few tend to read these two writers comprehensively and comparatively, opting instead to read Welty alongside William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter and other Southern American Regionalists whom Welty also mentions throughout her work.



Sometimes it seems as if Welty's associations with Faulkner, Porter and others are used in order to subordinate Welty and classify her in a category to which she does not truly belong. Many books and articles I have read attempt to compare Welty to William Faulkner, as though Welty were not important enough to discuss on her own. For example, critic Gail Mortimer spends a great deal of time delineating the differences between Faulkner and Welty, even though the differences are completely immaterial to her argument. One gets the feeling from reading the chapter that Mortimer felt obliged to mention Faulkner as a touch stone, because without a mention of him, her book would rely solely on interpretations of a tertiary 20<sup>th</sup> century writer. Mortimer even states, "An imaginative placement of the self in another's shoes such as we find in Welty's stories is virtually absent in those of Faulkner" (Mortimer 30). The paragraph ends there, showing that Faulkner is really not that integral to what she is trying to assert about Welty. I do not contend that looking at Faulkner and Welty cannot result in a productive assessment of 20<sup>th</sup> century southern writing, or even more specific comparisons about interpretations of race and community. However, what I am saying is that Welty's writing has deep roots and she does not simply exist in a vacuum of her contemporary American writers.

To be fair, more and more critics are saying that Welty deserves to be read on her own and taught in classrooms just as often as Faulkner. Welty is, after all, a Pulitzer Prize winner and a prolific American artist. However, all of this smacks of posthumous conciliatory claptrap. Welty does not deserve to be taught because she has been overlooked or because she is an American treasure; she needs to be read and taught in order to understand the progression of women's literature from the 18<sup>th</sup> or

19<sup>th</sup> century on. The fact that Welty is a female artist is important for sake of literary classifications. Welty does not leave her femaleness at the door. Many of her stories, like Brönte, address the questions of what it is to be female-- what it is to be a female artist in her specific time and place. Therefore, it seems to me that Welty has much in common with 19<sup>th</sup> century British female novelists, especially Emily Brönte.

When viewed in a continuum, Welty is heavily influenced by Brönte's own use of Gothic conventions and her ability to defy them in favor of more complex and ambiguous characterization and story telling. Welty is also influenced by Brönte's use of community, as Welty also creates a kind of network of frame narrators through which she filters the actions of her primary characters. Welty's stories are especially informed by Brönte's use of the elements of the supernatural. While Brönte uses the physical presence of ghosts in her novel, she also expands on the theme of the supernatural by incorporating local legend and myth. What Welty does is both carry on these traditions and make them her own, as her stories are almost exclusively based on her community's local mythology, which Welty then links to more Classical mythological themes. Ruth D. Weston states:

Because Eudora Welty is a writer immersed in this tradition of British fiction, and because she is conscious of the continuous development from British Gothic thrillers to the serious American Gothic romance and thence to the modern fiction of alienation, I mention the gothic in terms of Welty's fiction in the qualified sense of the Gothic tradition's evolution, through many manifestations, to a fiction that has come to deal in psychological realism....Especially relevant is the tradition as revised by Emily Brönte, who depicted female freedom not as an escape from the dark usurper into marriage...but as a release like that sought by young Cathy in Wuthering Heights: 'to be a girl again, half savage, and hardy and free'(Weston 22).

Therefore, it seems that Welty uses Brönte's Gothic inversions as her own springboard into capturing the limitations and excesses of her own imagined community in both a darkly realistic and magical way.

Through Welty's references to Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and especially Emily Brönte, we can assume Welty had an acute knowledge of the female literary conventions and traditions that preceded her own writing. Welty knows where her art has been and then complicates the form, just as Brönte and those before her did. This solidifies Welty as an artist and not just a good writer because she carries with her the marks of her forbearers. While Welty is a literary talent in her own right, she is also a writer who makes clear her influences. Welty deserves to be seen as a strong link in a chain of transgressive female writers, not subordinated by a male author who has been repeatedly canonized by academia.

## I— Brönte Sets the Stage for Welty

At first blush, Emily Brönte's great work, Wuthering Heights, is the quintessential Gothic novel. Superficially, it includes all of the requisite conventions. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts that, "In the novel it was the function of the Gothic to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions; in a word, to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being"(Sedgwick 3). Sedgwick goes on to discuss in more specificity the conventions we as readers have come to expect from the Gothic novel. Sedgwick states:

You can predict [the novel's] contents with an unnerving certainty. You know the important features of its mise en scene: an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover. You know about the tyrannical older man with the piercing glance who is going to imprison and try to rape or murder them. You also know something about the novel's form: it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories. [Other characteristics] include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleep like and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscure family ties...possibilities of incest...garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame;...apparitions from the past" (Sedgwick 10).

Truly, Wuthering Heights includes almost all of these conventions, in one form or another. Like Welty, Brönte was an avid reader and was heavily influenced by the books she read. However, compared to the other novels of the time, even by her sister Charlotte, who had the same upbringing and was presumably exposed to the same books as she, Wuthering Heights is simply a more rebellious novel. It rebels against all the things the Gothic novel rebels against, such as social patterns, hierarchy, and institutionally approved emotions.

However, it also challenges the Gothic novel itself. Wuthering Heights, unlike Jane Eyre, does not rely on an easy answer, such as marriage, for its conclusion. Instead, the novel has a rather uncertain ending, which has both perplexed readers and kept people interested in the novel for years. The first half of the book leads the reader in one direction, filled with romance and ghosts, while the second half and conclusion deal more with cruelty, regret and death, never recapturing the essence of the first half. Brönte adds many layers to her Gothic conceits by making Wuthering Heights a novel about spiritual, moral, and emotional ambiguity within a confining social and economic framework. The interesting thing about Brönte's novel is that her hero is also one of the villains, and her heroine is not too far behind him on the path to hell. Contrary to one of the main Gothic themes, Brönte, like Welty after her, is not satisfied to simply explore and exploit the confinement and oppression of her characters, thereby fetishizing it. Instead, Brönte is more concerned with showing the consequences of confinement and the possibility of transcendence in human life and death, as shown through her use of place, her sympathy and reproach for both Heathcliff and Catherine, and her use of the metaphysical as a possible solution for her characters.

I was a teenager when I first read Wuthering Heights and even though I found romance in virtually everything I read, heard or even ate, I could not reconcile myself completely with the idea that Heathcliff was a romantic hero. As much as I wanted to squeeze him into the mold of the kind of man who would treat a woman the way a man should treat a woman and yet still be able to express his emotions exquisitely, it was impossible. From the beginning of the book, we are never quite sure why

Heathcliff is the way he is; we just know that he is “other.” Upon Heathcliff’s introduction, Nelly narrates, “I had a peep at the dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk—indeed, its face looked older than Catherine’s—yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand” (Brönte 37). It has been suggested multiple times that a frame narrative is used in order to eventually question the authority of the narrator herself. Nelly is a source of social and moral inhibition and her narrative does act as a means for the reader to apprehend society’s view of the likes of Heathcliff and Catherine.

However, this particular passage acts more as a means of conveying to the reader that there are things about Heathcliff that we will never know, and that there are perhaps things that the author herself does not know. Our acquaintance with Heathcliff begins in this passage, but Brönte conveys to us that there is a whole world in which he lived that we will never have any idea about, as he speaks a different language and looks like a street gypsy. Terry Eagleton writes that, “The effect of Heathcliff is to explode... conflicts in to antagonisms which finally rip the place apart. In particular, he marks the beginnings of that process whereby passion and personal intensity separate out from the social domain and offer an alternative commitment to it” (Eagleton 106). By introducing him in such a way, Brönte is perhaps not setting Heathcliff up to be a hero, since a hero is generally one who sets things right. Heathcliff, however, sets out to dismantle what is “right” in favor of attaining what he wants, which Brönte does not represent as wrong, because that would make him a villain. Instead, Heathcliff is one who represents the antithesis of confinement, thus

bringing a new, and at times, destructive level of awareness to Brönte's other characters.

Each member of the Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange households is affected by Heathcliff in different ways. It is important to establish what Heathcliff represents in order to show effectively how and why his representation of these ideals affect Brönte's characters. As we see from the above passage, Heathcliff represents the outside world, one without the hierarchical structure of either household. The absence of hierarchical structure is obvious as Nelly's narrative continues. She states, "I wondered often what my master saw to admire so much in the sullen boy who never, to my recollection, repaid his indulgence by any sign of gratitude....He was not insolent to his benefactor; he was simply insensible, though knowing perfectly the hold he had on his heart" (Brönte 39). It is clear from Nelly's narrative, unreliable as it may be, that Heathcliff upsets the balance of Wuthering Heights because he does not participate in the rigid structure of it. As opposed to being a grateful orphan, ready to do his master's bidding, withstanding Hindley's blows out of respect for his position and quietly pining for Catherine, Heathcliff takes advantage of his benefactor by playing on whatever goodwill or guilt made him take Heathcliff in and favor him.

Heathcliff's lack of socialization causes him to act as an animal might; he expects this world to conform to his needs and when it does not, he pushes until it does. Heathcliff can suffer when nothing of interest is at stake. Nelly speaks of a time in which he had the fever, but would not complain. "He was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over. The difference between him and the others forced me to be less partial; Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly: he was as uncomplaining as a

lamb, though hardness, not gentleness, make him give little trouble” (Brönte 38). Heathcliff has nothing to gain by complaining on his sick bed; it seems he has a preternatural knowledge of physical suffering. However, he cannot control himself when the attainment of his true desires is jeopardized. Because of this more basic temperament, Heathcliff does not strive to attain riches or position, unlike the other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The only reason he leaves to go make his fortune is because he is convinced that this is Catherine’s wish. Heathcliff’s material attainments are acquired as a means to win Catherine back or exact revenge on her family, never out of monetary greed or desire. By showing us that Heathcliff is ruled by his immediate needs, Brönte sets up a contrast to 19<sup>th</sup> century British social stratification and by creating a man capable of destroying himself and others to get what he wants: Catherine.

In the character of Heathcliff, Brönte simultaneously shows the limitations of social hierarchy as well as the protection that it offers against the immediate and gnawing demands of the heart. Heathcliff represents these demands to the point of destruction, as Brönte seems to assert that such a savage heart cannot survive in society. By saying this, Brönte does not condemn Heathcliff; he simply does not fit into the world. However, she also does not make his behavior particularly heroic either. Heathcliff is too violent and entirely too much himself, too unrelenting in his pursuits, to conform to the structure and conventions of society, as well as the structure and conventions of the Gothic novel. His character does not easily lend itself to a comfortable conclusion within Brönte’s framework. In accordance with Gothic



standards, he is larger than life. However, Brönte makes Heathcliff larger than the novel itself, looming over it like an unrequited specter.

Strangely, the worlds of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange do, temporarily, conform to Heathcliff. For a time, he turns both the worlds into a chaotic scramble, filled with darkness, cold, and want. It seems that those who are dissatisfied with their provincial lives or who are too weak to resist come in line with Heathcliff, as he strives for some kind of ambiguous revenge against the society that took Catherine away from him. As he pursues his revenge, many of the characters begin to orbit around him, once he returns from his long absence. Feeling lonely, guilty, and somewhat disgruntled in his position as heir of Wuthering Heights, Hindley succumbs to drink and lets Heathcliff swindle him out of his estate. Isabella, Edgar Linton's vacuous sister, insists that Heathcliff is a misunderstood, Romantic hero and marries him, only to be crushed under his brutality. She gives birth to a weak and sickly son, whom Heathcliff tries to join with Linton and Catherine's daughter, Cathy.

Contrasted with the world established in the first half of the book, this world of Heathcliff's making reads like some sort of vulcanized nightmare, in which social and moral conventions are so twisted and deformed in order to adhere to Heathcliff's rancor, that the novel almost seems as though it has no choice but to implode. Sedgwick even argues that, "Brönte's final reinterpretation [of the characters] has none of the cursory quality of the Gothic writers'" (Sedgwick 118). Just as the threat of implosion becomes imminent, however, Brönte ends the novel with Heathcliff's death, and the reclamation of the estate by Hareton, son of the deceased Hindley.

Order is restored as if to show that, again, the needs of the heart are not always pure, and even if they are pure, they sometimes manifest themselves in distorted ways. This would be a strange conclusion for Brönte's work if it were just a Gothic novel. However, it seems as though Brönte herself is not concerned with adhering to convention as she tries to show Heathcliff's love as both vital to the novel but, ultimately, out of place in an attempt to create, I think, some kind of social and emotional verisimilitude. Eagleton asserts:

In the end Heathcliff is defeated and the Heights is restored to its rightful owner; yet at the same time the trends he epitomizes triumph in the form of the Grange, to which Hareton and young Catherine move away. Hareton wins and loses the Heights simultaneously; dispossessed by Heathcliff, he repossesses the place only to be in the act assimilated by Thrushcross Grange. And if Hareton both wins and loses, then Heathcliff himself is both ousted and victorious (Eagleton 113).

While Eagleton is speaking in a specifically Marxian context, what he says is accurate in this context, as well. Brönte, in a quest for realism beyond the Gothic, restores order to her characters. However, never does it seem as though this is an image of what should be. Instead, the union of Cathy and Hareton and their repossession of the Heights and the Grange is what would be and what is among those who live their lives in accordance with social rules instead of the rules of the heart. Heathcliff's intrusion was just temporary, a life that brought chaos and disruption to a society that could not admit him. However, Brönte does not end it that easily. Brönte herself does not seem satisfied by the ending that society dictates as acceptable. Heathcliff acts as an instigator, a devil, a hungry lover. Catherine, however, acts as a connection between both society and the world of Heathcliff. Brönte's depiction of Catherine shows us that if the world cannot be home to a man like Heathcliff, it certainly is not yet ready

to house a woman like Catherine—which then results in Brönte’s evocation of the metaphysical/mythic realm as a final resting place for them.

When we first meet Catherine, she is a ghost, haunting Lockwood in the night. She begs Lockwood to let her in. When Lockwood inquires as to who wants in, Catherine replies, “Catherine Linton....I’m come home, I’d lost my way” (Brönte 25). Interestingly, Lockwood notes that she says Linton instead of Earnshaw, her maiden name. The ghost identifies herself by her married name, although she wants back into Wuthering Heights, her girlhood home. Wuthering Heights is also a place marked by her life with Heathcliff, a life that, according to the ghost, she has been trying to get back to for twenty years. Even from this introduction, we see a woman torn between her true self and the life she had to live in order to survive within the confines of a society that determines the placement and behavior of its women.

One of the best qualities of Wuthering Heights is that Catherine is as actualized and filled with contradiction as Heathcliff, making her as much, if not more, of a vital and aggressive force within the novel. According to Sedgwick, the heroine of the Gothic novel has a “trembling sensibility.” Catherine, however, is no trembler. She’s a vindictive little bitch, truth be told. While she does have a couple of different episodes of swooning sickness, these instances are examples of her asserting her childish willfulness, not her delicate or trembling nature. When Brönte introduces Catherine as a child (the episode in which we also are introduced to Heathcliff), we learn that the present she expected from her father was a whip. Brönte writes,

The former had been a boy of fourteen, but when he drew out what had been a fiddle, crushed to morsels, in the great-coat, he blubbered aloud, and Cathy, when she learnt the master had lost her whip in attending on the stranger, showed her humour by grinning and

spitting at the stupid little thing, earning from her pains a sound blow from her father to teach her cleaner manners” (Brönte 37).

One does not usually associate girlhood with a desire for whips. Whips are usually associated with dominance. Since there was really no mention of Catherine’s acute interest in the equestrian arts, the reader is left not knowing exactly what the child wants with the whip. By attributing Catherine with this unexplained desire for dominance, Brönte establishes Catherine as, at the very least, one who does not adhere to her position as subordinate.

In addition to this, her brother Hindley bursts into tears when he finds that his gift has been ruined. She, however, reacts by spitting on Heathcliff, and getting struck for her unbecoming behavior. Brönte seems to have inverted the socialized behavior of the siblings, showing Catherine as more aggressive and, perhaps, even more masculine. In addition to this, however, Catherine doesn’t just tease Heathcliff or pull his hair or some other form of childish bullying. She actually spits on him, an especially undignified gesture, which foreshadows violent and animal instincts of her own. Brönte depicts these qualities in Catherine so that we see her character emerge even before Heathcliff’s. Therefore, we can see that Catherine does not bend to Heathcliff. She really is like him. They are both willful and stubborn and both bridle under the confinement of their status. When Heathcliff leaves, Catherine searches for him, risking her health to find him. Nelly recounts:

It was a very dark evening for summer: the clouds appeared inclined to thunder....Catherine would not be persuaded into tranquility. She kept wandering to and fro, from the gate to the door, in a state of agitation which permitted no repose, and at length took up a permanent situation on one side of the wall, near the road; where, heedless of my expostulations, and the growling

thunder, and the great drops that began to splash around her, she remained, calling at intervals, and then listening, and then crying outright. She beat Hareton, or any child, at a good, passionate fit of crying (Brönte 82).

Catherine Earnshaw rages. She is elemental. She soaks up the rain and wind of the Moors and is powered by it. It influences her temperament, which can be described as nothing less than fierce. In this passage, it seems as though Catherine's mood and her loss of Heathcliff result in the squall that breaks over the Heights. Like Heathcliff's animal rages, Catherine too manifests her internal feelings through intense external displays, firmly linking her with her natural surroundings.

Despite her connection with the wild lands, Catherine cannot fit anywhere comfortably. She knows because of her position as a woman and her desire to be a lady that she must marry shrewdly. However, she also knows that she must leave behind part of herself, divorce herself from her more natural and base instincts, in order to fit well into a marriage. She has a tenuous position, which she relays to Nelly right before Heathcliff disappears. Nelly asks her what obstacles stand in the way of her marrying Edgar Linton. Catherine replies "Here and here...striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast. In which ever place the soul lives, in my soul, and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong" (Brönte 79). She goes on to say that she had dreamt that she would not be happy in heaven. Catherine exclaims:

I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home, and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke up sobbing for joy. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it...Whatever our souls are made of, [Heathcliff] and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost

from fire....But did it never strike you that, if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power (Brönte 80).

Despite her feelings of love and belonging, the passage has a very practical undertone to it. While she talks of heaven, she also mentions that it is God who brought Heathcliff low, which makes God a “wicked man.” She finds no peace in faith or religion and instead sees God and heaven as places altogether removed from her and her earthly home. In her book, author Jill Dix Ghnassia suggests that Brönte had a deep resentment towards those who preach salvation and jealously guard their knowledge. She herself rebels against their smug answers, instead discussing the coldness of God. Ghnassia states, “It is...obvious that in Emily Brönte's mind, the ‘wuthering heights’ are those divine heights from which God looks at people and sees them crawling in the miseries and alienation He imposed upon them” (Ghnassia 208). Brönte creates Catherine outside of a religious framework; therefore, she does not rely on reconciling herself in a peaceful after-life. Catherine exists in the present, and as such she must consider real consequences. She cannot unite the pieces of herself because there is no reconciling the world of love and nature with that of social convention. Within the realm of social convention, the realities and yearning of the human heart are exchanged for the pretense of control and the illusion of safety, which Brönte portrays through her depiction of Thrushcross Grange.

Even when Catherine says that to marry Linton would help Heathcliff rise from his situation as a dependent; it is not seen as some selfless act. Catherine does not want to be a beggar. Brönte does not choose sides, and instead shows Catherine to

be truly a part of both worlds, which is to belong nowhere. To create such a character is to intentionally flout Gothic literary tradition. Instead of creating a character simply confined by the space around her, Brönte creates a character that is so large that every space is confining.

Therefore, to see Catherine tamed is to see the power of confinement and social repression. We see how constricting the society of 19<sup>th</sup> Century England can be if it takes a woman like Catherine and forces her into a specific social role, due to her lack of personal and financial agency. Certainly, we have seen heroines in this kind of predicament before. We have all seen variations of the plucky, intellectually nimble, moderately pretty heroine who wants more than what her situation offers. We have also seen variations on hot house lovers who drive men wild with their mystery and sensuality brought to their knees by the need to establish themselves through social climbing. However, Brönte creates a character that has very little to do with either of these classical heroines, whilst still encompassing the breadth of their experience. Catherine is rare among heroines, classical and otherwise. She is strong in a world where there is no place for her and Brönte does not insult her strength by pretending there is an answer to her earthly dilemma. What Brönte does do is make Catherine immortal, but not in a religious sense. Brönte uses the convention of the Gothic supernatural, but does so in order to address the question of in what world can a woman like Catherine and a man like Heathcliff exist, not as mere titillation of the audience.

Instead of just making Catherine and Heathcliff ghosts, Brönte seems to be hinting at a different kind of transcendence the couple achieves together. One of the

last scenes in the novel has Lockwood running into a little shepherd boy on the Moors. Lockwood recounts the encounter for the reader's benefit, assuming that we agree with his rather supercilious interpretation of the conversation. However, Brönte clearly has other reasons for including this passage:

I was going to the Grange one evening—a dark evening threatening thunder—and, just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him, he was crying terribly, and I supposed the lambs were skittish, and would not be guided. ‘What is the matter, my little man?’ I asked. ‘They’s Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t’Nab,’ he blubbered, ‘un’ Aw darnut pass ‘em.’ I saw nothing; but neither the sheep nor he would go on, so I bid him take the road lower down. He probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense h had heard his parents and companions repeat (Brönte 333).

A couple of interesting things are going on at once. First of all, there is a clear social distinction, as delineated by Lockwood, between those who believe in ghosts and legends and those who do not, although Lockwood himself is the one who initially reports seeing Catherine's ghost. In this passage, however, Lockwood rather smugly asserts that the young boy is simply dwelling on the nonsense he has heard his parents speak. Since the boy is a shepherd, he is of a lower class than Lockwood, and clearly prone to superstition, local folklore, and gossip. However, as a shepherd, the boy has a closer connection to the landscape, a landscape which is at the heart of Heathcliff and Catherine. The shepherd works with the land and does not fear it the way Lockwood does. Therefore, in this context the sheperd, although just a boy, has more authority. In addition, the sheep, natural creatures themselves, will not move, showing that they sense something askew on the moors, as well. The inhabitants of the natural world can feel the presence of Heathcliff and Catherine, and Brönte makes sure we see



this encounter from their point of view, although Lockwood is narrating. The tensions between the civilized world and the natural world live on in the differing interpretations of the afterlife. However, perhaps these tensions do not live on in the afterlife Brönte grants Heathcliff and Catherine.

Another element at play in this passage is the key to Heathcliff and Catherine's immortalization. Brönte never makes explicit what happens to the pair, but they are forever mythologized within the region. The locals and those who work the land know their story and perhaps understand the conflicts that lead to such a story, identifying with the couple's struggles and the strict feudal, hierarchical structure that produced such a tragedy. It would appear that they have some stock in the story; otherwise they would not have chosen to make it the topic of lore and local myth. Terry Eagleton writes that, "the novel projects a condition in which the available social languages are too warped and constrictive to be the bearers of love, freedom, and equality; and it follows that in such a condition those values can be sustained only in the realms of myth and metaphysics" (Eagleton 120). Eagleton continues by arguing that, "It is a function of the metaphysical to preserve those possibilities which a society cancels, to act as its reservoir of unrealized value. This is the history of Heathcliff and Catherine" (Eagleton 120). Essentially Eagleton contends that in a world where society is too restrictive to allow freedom and love, Brönte is required to create a world in which such things can exist. In the case of the novel, Heathcliff and Catherine can only exist harmoniously in the realm of the supernatural and mythic. In addition to giving potential respite to those who have had none in their earthly life, it is also the function

of myth and its believers to immortalize in order to remember those who represent those possibilities.

Perhaps Brönte utilizes the Gothic element of the supernatural in a standard way, initially using Catherine's ghost as a means to tell us that we as readers are entering a haunted world where all is not harmonious. In this way, the convention serves a simple purpose. However, as we become more acquainted with the discord and ambiguity that rule the communities of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, we see Brönte take the convention beyond the realm of literary device and plot point. In striving for more verisimilitude, Brönte uses the realms of the supernatural and mythic as a way to show that the desires and natures of her characters cannot be reconciled. Her authorial realm of the supernatural also takes on a level of ambiguity, as we do not know if it is the actual presence of Catherine and Heathcliff that lives on or just what they represent.

Brönte seems to truly understand the power of representation and uses that as a means for a conclusion that extends beyond the novel. Sedgwick points out that "The disruptive ambitions of Catherine and Heathcliff present themselves to the reader thinking back on the novel not as being defused or healed but rather as being precariously contained....Catherine and Heathcliff...are more threatening in their thrust toward reunification than in all the edginess of their unnatural divorce" (Sedgwick 118). Brönte gives us a temporary peace in the unification of Hareton and young Cathy but shows us that, even in the world of death and the supernatural nothing is ever contained. This takes Wuthering Heights beyond just the Gothic as the imminent restrictions and fears, desires, and longings of the characters transcend the

novel through the ambiguity of myth and become our fears, desires, and longings because, perhaps, they have always been ours. Because of these kind of shared experiences, Eudora Welty counts on the fact that we all share a similar mythology.

## **II—Semblances of Symmetry**

Eudora Welty's view of the restrictions and fears of society juxtaposed with the nature of people are similar to Brönte's. While there are many superficial differences between Brönte and Welty, there are also core similarities that exist beyond coincidence, since both writers share a similar attachment, disdain, and experimental spirit in regards to their respective Gothic traditions. Therefore, it remains interesting to me that critics discuss Welty's similarities with Jane Austen more than they do with Emily Brönte. Austen, in novels such as Northanger Abbey, truly personifies the archetypical female Gothic writer. She puts her heroines in eerie and constrictive situations that suggest social confinement and male domination, but then finds the solution to this confinement within that very social framework. Rich men inevitably marry the poor, but ultimately worthy heroines, thereby relieving their

anxiety about said confinement and domination. As I hope I have proven, Brönte does no such thing, and as I also hope to prove, neither does Eudora Welty. This leads me to believe that while Welty greatly admired Austen and adopted some of her stylistic techniques, especially in the realm of social observation, lightness, and humor, the underlying spirit of Welty's work is much more in tune with Brönte's dark and internally expansive world.

However, in order to make a convincing comparison between the two writers, on the basis of their similar use and disregard for literary convention, one must first place Welty within a Gothic literary tradition. Defining the terms of American Gothic literature is a little difficult. Unlike the list of typical conventions that Sedgwick laid out, it seems that the American Gothic tradition has no such list. Defining, therefore, is a little nebulous and relies heavily on interpretation. It also seems as though American novels can be, in some sense Gothic, even though they just have elements or conventions that are linked to British Gothic tradition. In accordance with Sedgwick's list, American Gothic tales certainly have their fair share of tyrannical older men with piercing glances, impetuous lovers, live burials, obscure family ties, and oppressive religious hierarchies.

Despite these similarities, however, it seems Americans do take significant departures from Gothic conventions, thereby defining Gothic on their own terms. It can be called Dark Romanticism, which includes such authors as Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In his essay, Eric Savoy states that "the gothic tendency in American culture is organized around the imperative to repetition, the return of what is successfully repressed....The failure of repression and forgetting—a failure upon

which the entire tradition of the gothic America is predicated—will be complete in those conscious eyes”(Savoy 4). Therefore, while American Gothic writers do use classic Gothic conventions, they also bring to their tales a unique sense of American history. Poe and Hawthorne exemplify Savoy’s claim, since both writers take a critical look at American life and in doing so, show the horrors that were repressed.

Poe’s characters are not haunted by ghosts, per say, but in stories like “The Cask of Amontillado,” it is the guilt over killing his friend in an attempt to achieve wealth in this country that haunts him. Likewise, after Satan shows Young Goodman Brown the savage cruelties of the Puritans, Goodman Brown is haunted by both these crimes and his ignorance until he is brought to the threshold of despair. In Hawthorne’s story, Satan is not seen as a supernatural entity because he is entirely personified as a man and not appearing as some kind of apparition but as a means to show Goodman Brown (and the audience) the sins of his fathers. Therefore, the Gothic element in American literature does not rely on female confinement or isolated confrontations with ghosts and supernatural elements as its primary conventions; it is conversely male-dominated. Instead, it is our collective past as Americans that haunt us and the American Gothic attempts to conjure these ghosts and revisit them as a means of cultural exorcism. The American Gothic then seems to take on a more broad cultural significance than perhaps the British Gothic implied. History in America is more recent. The ghosts are younger and closer to us. Thus, we are still grappling with history’s meaning and its implications in our daily lives and how it continually defines us.

Working from this framework, we can see both Faulkner and Welty's inclusion into this genre without a genre. Faulkner attempts to show the ugliness of the Post-Civil War South, using stories like "A Rose For Emily" to show what he considers the putrid core of South's genteel manners and customs. Welty also attempts a kind of repetition and revision of history as she delves into showing her readers the everyday lives of possibly familiar archetypes within a rural, Post-Reconstruction, Pre/Post World War I, Southern community. Savoy asserts that,

While gothic narrative emphatically refuses nostalgia, it seems to be the case that nostalgic representations of 'America' veer toward the gothic with remarkable frequency; invariably associated with self-consciously 'late' cultural production, this turn problematizes nostalgia's simplicity by invoking a darker register that, ironically, emerges as the very consequence of nostalgic modes of knowing (Savoy 8).

There are no plantations here. No hoop skirts, no Virginia Reels, and no heroes. There are no Margaret Mitchell strains of the "The South will rise again." There are just the inhabitants of a community, trying to survive with and make room for current and future ghosts. Welty's South does not rise or fall—its existence is enough to insure its vitality.

What Welty does, however, is go beyond the idea of just revisiting the old ghosts in an attempt to eradicate or explain their existence. Welty does not pass any judgment on her characters. She does not sentimentalize them but she does not utterly condemn them, either. She uses the American gothic style of repetition and revision, but she goes beyond just showing horror and the "truth" of what people do not want to know, like Hawthorne and Poe. Welty takes her characters and, despite their projected collective cultural flaws, enables them to transcend their American-ness, their

Southern-ness, even their imperfect humanity. As it was with Emily Brönte, Eudora Welty is ultimately more interested in showing the frailty, despair, and quiet optimism of humanity, while using Gothic conventions old and new as her starting point. These conventions do not, however, have the final say in her work.

It is important to note that Welty does not disregard the conventions of the English Gothic entirely for the looser approach of American gothic. Like Brönte, Welty supplies conflict by showing the natures of her characters clashing with the society around them. Therefore, great attention is paid to both the characters and the community itself. Like *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*, the community of Morgana acts as a character, a Gothic villain perhaps, incarcerating Welty's characters through order. Ruth D. Weston asserts:

Welty's...communities close against exposure to forces operating outside their private rationales....Such serious attempts at maintaining order result from...the myth of social concern which was dramatized as early as the Brönteian novel of manners that Robert B. Heilman calls 'the new Gothic novel.' Unlike the classic Gothic, it depicts not external but internal terror: the discovery and release of new patterns of feelings (Weston 93).

While Welty's community is very provincial and socially stratified, it does house the desires of those who are crushed under the weight of social expectations and decorum and those who are not and yet remain within the community. These characters end up acting as both agitators and reminders of the lost desires of some of the community's members and representing the consequences that come with acting outside of Morgana's social and moral parameters.

The terror is then twofold. There is terror in living within the society. There is also terror in plumbing the depths of the secret desires of each character. Very little is

brought in from the outside and each story within The Golden Apples is narrated by a different member of the community. Therefore, we learn who upholds social boundaries and their view of those who do not, as well as those who live within the community but outside the social boundaries. This is similar in effect to Brönte's use of Nelly and Lockwood as narrators and participates in the Gothic convention of the frame narrative. However, while Brönte's novel hints at the idea of local mythology, Welty takes it further. Welty creates a uniquely American world in which community gossip is at the crux of her collection of short stories. Within the confinement of the community and its reactions, Welty achieves a level of transcendence that Brönte never does. Because her conflicted characters participate differently in the community, due of course to the difference between British and American social structures, the level of confinement perhaps remains the same while the level of mythological transcendence increases due to the importance of the community's shared heritage of story telling and gossip.

While Welty's writing does differ in terms of social structure, per se as well as geographical setting and its implications, Welty's writing does, nonetheless, take a cue from Brönte. In Welty's story, "The Wanderers," we can see strains of Brönte and her Gothic inversions through Welty's own use of place, her characterization of King MacLain and Virgie Rainey, and finally, the mythological transcendence her characters (perhaps fleetingly) achieve.

In many ways, King MacLain is the direct opposite of Heathcliff. He is fun loving. He is impish. He is charming. He has a taste for the ladies, in fact, any lady, that strikes his fancy, despite his marriage to the albino woman, Snowdie. Local



legend has it that he has fathered children all over the county and beyond. King is light as air. He travels from place to place and no one ever knows when he will come back, least of all Snowdie or his children. However, like Heathcliff, King cannot be contained and instead of conforming to the standards of the community, the community conforms to him. Therefore, there is both a sense of dread and trepidation and a sense of excitement that surrounds the community's reaction to King. Also, while King is the opposite of Heathcliff in temperament and characterization, Welty uses King in the exact same capacity that Brönte uses Heathcliff. King is a flouter of convention, both within the context of the collection and within the literary traditions in which Welty participates. More importantly, however, he is an instigator that cyclically brings downfall and regeneration to the community.

Instead of bringing about epic amounts of pain and suffering, as Heathcliff did, King brings about everyday kind of heartache and despair. For example, his behavior renders Snowdie a single mother and a town charity case. In addition to this, King is also responsible for the loss of sexual innocence of many in the community, as well as marital discord among many of the town's couples. However, while King's aftermath may be a little more domestic and mundane than Heathcliff's, his character is no less enormous and the changes he brings about in the community are no less pivotal. King's actions and character are just as opposed to his community's as Heathcliff's. King also acts on his instincts, living out his nature as he sees fit. He pays no mind to social propriety. He follows the paths of nature in order to live out his nature, as we see that he is often associated with the rivers of the forests, just as Heathcliff's true nature is always shown against the backdrop of the moors. The only

time Heathcliff is at ease is when he is gamboling about the countryside with Catherine. Also, when Heathcliff mourns Catherine's death, he bashes his head against a stump and cries out like a beast, his primal wail echoing through the hills, behavior which provides an interesting contrast to the skulking and merciless demeanor he projects indoors. Similarly, when King is outdoors, he is at liberty to act out his desires, whether they be illegally participating in a parade or bedding a newly married girl on the forest floor. However, when he is confined to the indoors, he is nagged and pushed aside, rendered old and useless. King protests this treatment. However, the world of the inside, the world of the domestic sphere, is not his dominion and in it, he is not free.

Welty treats King as though he were a Zeus like figure, dominant, capricious, potent, troubled, and bored by those mortals who do not act of their own accord. Like Heathcliff, King is both a villain and hero. In this way, King is not only a Southern archetype--he is a neo-classical archetype, beset with the failings an immortal would encounter if Olympus was an earthly place. Therefore, through King, Welty revisits the idea of the Southern gentleman, showing the potential fallacy therein, while simultaneously showing the community's folly in their attachment to such a fallacy. King does not fit because he embodies a larger and older idea of masculinity than the community understands. However, Welty does not use King simply as a means to show the quaint simplicity of Morgana's inhabitants. By evoking ancient myth, Welty goes beyond revision/repetition by showing the possibility of transcendence that King generates in various individuals. Using King, Welty shows the limitations of society but also the possibility of the individual. Like Brönte, Welty takes the Gothic anti-

hero and makes him something larger than The Golden Apples as a work of fiction participating within a literary genre, which strangely, does participate in Brönte's re-workings of genre.

While I want to specifically speak about manifestations of otherness in "The Wanderers," it is necessary to go back to the first story in the collection, "Shower of Gold," in order to understand King in context. We are introduced, at least to the concept of King, within the first three sentences of the story. "Shower of Gold" is essentially about King leaving his albino wife, Snowdie. Welty is setting us up for the disappearance and reappearance of King throughout the collection. It also illustrates Snowdie's difficulties with this arrangement. Welty writes "'Her husband walked out of the house one day and left his hat on the banks of the Big Black River....There are some people who consider that he headed West'"(Welty 263). Already we see a couple of key elements at play here. One is that King left his hat on the banks of the Big Black River, showing us that he has a rather unusual way of announcing his departure and that he, presumably follows the path of the river, associating him with a more natural course of behavior. He doesn't speak of leaving or let his wife negotiate with him. He simply leaves, which shows him as one who does not feel beholden to people or the idea of the legality of their bond interfering with his desires and instincts. Like Heathcliff, King is characterized as the antithesis of the confining society from which he comes.

We see through the narrator, Mrs. Katie Rainey, that Welty wants to acquaint us with the town gossip. People consider that King headed West. People speculate about his whereabouts and they attach their own ideas onto his disappearance. There

is certainly no way of knowing where King went—a hat on the bank of the river is not much of an indicator. However, the Romance of the West seems to capture people’s imaginations, and therefore, King, as one who does what he likes, must have gone to the West.. King’s enormity is established automatically, as he acts as the focus of people’s projected desires that they are perhaps too timid or socially conventional to live out.

Despite King’s sweeping character, Mrs. Rainey is determined that we do not see King as particularly Romantic himself, despite other people’s reactions to him. When discussing why it was that King married Snowdie in the first place, Mrs. Rainey says “Some said King figured out that if the babies started coming, he had a chance for a nestful of little albinos, and that swayed him. No, I don’t say it. I say it was just willful. *He* wouldn’t think ahead....Marrying must have been like some of his showing off—like a man never married at all till *he* flung in, then he had to show others how he could go right on acting”(Welty 263). Like Nelly discussing Heathcliff before her, Mrs. Rainey portrays King as “other” without making it an attribute. Some people say that he married Snowdie for the novelty of having albino babies, but Mrs. Rainey puts even that beneath him.

Similar to Heathcliff, when King acts, it is out of willfulness. He disregards convention out of pride, according to Mrs. Rainey. Mrs. Rainey controls how we see King, as she acts as the reader’s introduction to the social morays of Morgana, Mississippi. King is not what the reader might come to expect from a collection of rather domestic Southern stories. It seems that Welty counts on this potential misconception. Mrs. Rainey goes on to discuss King’s character, smearing him as a

man of manners. She states “In the meantime children of his growing up in the County Orphans’, so say several, and children known and unknown, scattered like. When he does come, he just as nice as he can be to Snowdie. Just as courteous. Was from the start....Beware of a man with manners. He never raised his voice to her, but then one day he walked out of the house”(Welty 264). According to Mrs. Rainey, King is not a gentleman. He is apparently a rascal. King’s manners only act as a sham, covering up the truth of his idle, philandering character. In this way, Welty shows us that the southern man of manners is only an illusion. However, Welty faults the community for believing in this myth rather than King himself.

Mrs. Rainey disapproves of King for a couple reasons. First of all, he is a willful, prideful show-off who left his wife. Second of all, he is not utterly detestable. Within the confines of Morgana society, King is a problem. He has absolutely no regard for conventions and for this, like Heathcliff, people resent and fear him. However, in the last few lines of the story, Mrs. Rainey confesses, “With men like King, your thoughts are bottomless” (Welty 274). With this, she acknowledges how captivated and perplexed she is by him, which is why, perhaps, she is even telling this story. Also, through a later revelation by King, we eventually find out that King is quite probably Virgie’s father. This brings us into a potentially chaotic world, wherein even those who uphold convention swell with curiosity about the other side and make forays into it now and then. While it is an equally chaotic world, Wuthering Heights, is perhaps too stratified to allow such a confession. Nelly never quite lets us see this curiosity, as the hierarchical structure is a little more economically and socially enforced. However, her curiosity and fascination is implicit in her re-telling of

Catherine and Heathcliff's story and her intimate knowledge of Heathcliff's life and death, regardless of how unreliable or flawed Nelly's knowledge. In Nelly and Mrs. Rainey we see women who know how men (and all people) should behave within their society, but who are perhaps captivated by their indefinable natures. In turn, we see King as a character who is too large for Morgana society's rules, but not too large for their imaginations.

It is actually quite difficult to pinpoint King's brand of masculinity. He is clearly not Ashley Wilkes, but he is also nothing like the sadistic and fanatical Abner Snopes, either. Welty succeeds in showing the sham behind the Southern man of manners, as such a man would never leave his wife and children in order to wander the earth. However, Welty does not supply an easy answer of what exists in his stead. She does not make King a beastly man in order to assuage any guilt about the South's past or in an attempt to supply readers with a more "accurate" portrayal of Southern masculinity. She also does not use him as a template for what a hero should be. Instead, King encompasses a world of qualities, which make him a rather ambiguous character and an interesting choice for the patriarch of Welty's community. King harkens back to classical literary figures, like those in ancient mythology, who did not represent anything in particular besides the caprice of desire and instinct.

In putting King within such a specific setting and yet attributing him with such qualities shows Welty's own desire to create her literary revision through classical archetypes and realities. Like Brönte's Heathcliff, King neither fits within his own society nor within the literary tradition, in Welty's case, of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American writers. Instead of representing "new" ambiguities, King represents the old

specters of civilization that never went away. Because he does not belong anywhere exactly, King is able to infiltrate and agitate everything, even the rigid Morgana matriarchy. In the story “The Wanderers,” the Morgana matriarchy is in full bloom. After the death of Virgie Rainey’s mother, Mrs. Katie Rainey, the narrator of “Shower Of Gold,” the women of Morgana come together in order to bury their dead. Welty writes:

By mid-afternoon the house was filling with callers and helpers....Coffee was being kept on the stove and iced tea in the pitcher in the hall. Virgie was dressed, the dress she had ironed that morning for Monday, and at the front of the house. Moving around her, a lady watered the ferns and evened the shades in the parlor, and then watered and evened again, as if some obscure sums were being balanced and checked....The steps creaked under the men who stood outside....Food—two banana cakes and a baked ham, a platter of darkly deviled eggs, new rolls—and flowers kept arriving at the back, and the kitchen filled up with women (Welty 433).

The women endeavor to cook, iron, water plants, keep coffee warm and iced tea cold, as the men stand outside, excluded. This is an exemplary moment of Morgana matriarchy, as the women come together in order to feed the living and bury the dead. The women do these deeds without asking and the men let them; they have no choice. The men eat and die, but in this passage it seems as if they have no say in the matter.

True, it seems that the women have control over the domestic sphere and not the economic, but in a community such as Morgana, which does not seem to be booming with financial possibilities, Welty shows the domestic realm taking precedence. This precedence also shows that the women of Morgana seem to encapsulate themselves within a rather strict social structure, as they also determine the structure itself. Morgana’s matriarchy, or perhaps any matriarchy, is slightly

puzzling in the sense that the women take their limited role and then invert it so it is the dominant role in the community; but only if they adhere to the pre-set limitations of wife, mother, native. It is an interesting choice on Welty's part to populate Morgana with dominant females. In this way she differs from Brönte, as Brönte shows the limitations of a religious male-centered patriarchy. However, Welty just as effectively shows the limitations of a female-centered society, showing that no matter who dictates the structure, a stifling society makes no room for the complexities of the human heart, even if the hearts beat within those who define the rules. Therefore, it is very interesting to see King juxtaposed with the women of Morgana, for as he defies their conventions, he seems to further embed himself within their fantasies.

Later in "The Wanderers" it is King MacLain, not her mother's death, which inspires feelings of emotional and existential terror in Virgie. However, before he inspires these feelings, King initially acts as a general disturbance, setting off the whole balance of the funeral by not having a specific place. He does not set up camp with the men and the women cannot mother him out of the way. When we first see King in this story, he is an old man. No longer the transient, youth-clad nature boy, he has limited his wandering to the towns of Morgana and MacLain and finally, in old age, settled down with Snowdie. He still differs from other men. Welty writes "From around the big boxwood Mr. King MacLain, treading so lightly they didn't hear him, came up the steps"(Welty 438). Still associated with nature, King enters the scene by way of the boxwood. Also, unlike the other men that they can hear on the porch, they cannot hear King. He is still light and untraceable, carrying with him that zephyr like quality that he always has.



His arrival acts as an opportunity to show the confusion he continues to wreak on the women of Morgana, even in old age. As he walks into the house, Snowdie gives voice to the confusion. “‘I don’t know what to do with him,’ Miss Snowdie said, in a murmur as quiet as the world around them now....When her flyaway husband had come home a few years ago, at the age of sixty-odd, and stayed, they said she had never gotten over it—first his running away, then his coming back to her”(Welty 438) Apparently, he continues to confuse his own wife with Nellie Loomis. Even in the midst of a burial ritual, a place where the Morgana women flock together and determine the emotional and social register, King’s arrival stops the action and interrupts-- and perhaps even subverts--the moment.

King is one of the few men who seem active within The Golden Apples, even though he is supposedly gone for much of the time. His absence is more palpable than the other men’s presence. Most of the other men are dutiful, though cloddish husbands or vague love interests, perhaps with the exception of Loch Morrison who eventually escapes the community. In “June Recital,” it is King’s homecoming that coincides with Miss Eckhart’s burning of his house. King comes in and out of that story but not without making his presence known. Cassie Morrison narrates, “There was another man Miss Eckhart had been scared of, up until the last. Not Mr. King MacLain. They had always passed without touching, like two stars, perhaps they had some kind of eclipse-effect on each other”(Welty 296). Even though the passage isn’t even about King, he acts as the man all men are measured against in comparison. When Cassie says there was another man, she has to clarify that it is not King, because

he is, essentially, the only man in most everyone's story, experience, and consciousness.

In "Sir Rabbit" Mattie Will goes hunting with her rather rustic husband, Junior, whom she nags and reproaches like a child. "Didn't you hear him ask me a question? Don't be so country" (Welty 336). In the woods they encounter King, blazing in his white suit, looking "preternaturally like the month of June" (Welty 338). Rather magically, Junior falls asleep and Mattie Will and King engage in a jumbled scene of sexuality and submission:

He put on her, with the affront of his body, the affront of his sense, too....She had to put on what he knew with what he did—maybe because he was so grand it was a thorn to him. Like submitting to another way to talk, she could answer to his burden now, his whole blithe, smiling, superior, frantic existence. And no matter what happened to her, she must remember, disappointments are not to be born by Mr. MacLain, or he'll go away (Welty 338).

Women do not want to disappoint King. Welty initially shows us Mattie Will and her demeanor with Junior to act as a contrast with how she treats and willingly submits to King. It is not that Mattie Will—or the other women in Morgana-- are submissive by nature. They are usually in charge, with men coming in and out of their lives in the form of economical and social stability. However, King is quite different. Even Junior knows that, as he states "You heard who he said he was and you done heard what he was, all your life, or you ain't a girl"(Welty 336). All girls have heard of King's irresistibility. However, while King is hunting "birds" in this story, one gets the feeling his gun is not necessary; it acts only as an extended metaphor for King's masculinity. One can hardly be described as predatory when they simply inspire submission. Something about his blithe yet frantic existence captures the women of

Morgana. Mattie Will tells herself that she must not disappoint King or he will go away. Perhaps this feeling of intangibility hints at her true lack of agency within the community, despite its matriarchal structure. While because of social and economic reasons, perhaps the women of Morgana are not at leisure to seek out men like King. They have all learned the lesson of Snowdie MacLain. Women who fall for men like King end up alone and uncared for, which goes against the morality of the community. King seems to personify an intangible ache in these women, a desire for mystery, grand gestures, and impropriety. However, the women alternately seem to know that this sort of behavior is not conducive to a socially acceptable marriage. In King, these women see glimmers of their own unrealized desires. Therefore, he also seems to personify the inherently contradictory aspects of themselves that must be smothered in order to fit in, as desire and social responsibility are often portrayed as mutually exclusive by both Welty and Brönte.

In the end of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff essentially kills himself. He starves himself, waiting for the ghost of Catherine to come take him away. Nelly, of course, views his death as sinful and wicked, although she seemed to think that his existence was equally sinful and wicked, so it does not really stand to reason that she would want him to prolong his life as he was. She has no tolerance for Heathcliff's determination and control over his death--the same intolerance she had for the kind of control that Catherine had over her death. Despite Nelly's efforts, Heathcliff does not eat and dies, unconverted and unchristian. King MacLain seems to have a similar control over death, except that instead of choosing to die, he chooses to live, despite the fact that those around him seems to expect his death and that his existence seems

to make them uncomfortable. Instead of viewing death as a part of life or in any other such pedestrian and euphemistic way, King, as one who has always lived how he wanted, seems to find death too mortal, too conventional, too intolerable for him. Therefore, he rages against it and clashes with it, much like Heathcliff, on his own terms.

In the beginning of “The Wanderers,” when Virgie first sees King after many years, he takes her cup of coffee and starts jabbering about Miss Katie’s younger years. He says “Did you ever hear your mother tell how she never took a dare to put a match to her stockings, girl? Cotton stockings the girls used to wear—fuzzy, God knows they were. Nobody else among the girls would set fire to their legs. She had the neighborhood scared she’d go up in flames at an early age” (Welty 438). This is perhaps a strange story to relay at a funeral, but it does not seem like a story told by a senile old man but one who wants to remember old “Katie Blazes” vividly and without sanctimony. Unlike Mr. Nesbitt who quietly, and almost lasciviously, offers his condolences to Virgie, King chooses instead to tell Virgie something she perhaps didn’t know about her mother. King confronts Katie’s death by giving her memory renewed life. At first, Virgie is mildly disturbed by King. Welty writes “Virgie watched the black coffee beginning to shake in the little cup. There was something vaguely terrifying about the old man—he was too old” (Welty 438). Describing King as too old could encompass a great many things. However, the fact that King relays more information to Virgie seems to denote that King is a man who has been around a very long time. King’s age is vaguely terrifying to Virgie because she recognizes his “oldness” as unusual; she seems to see him as the Zeus like figure he represents.

Instead of dying, he just keeps getting older and filled with more knowledge of the living.

Towards the end of Miss Katie's funeral in "The Wanderers," Virgie peeks out into the hallway during the service to see King eating funeral ham as though no one can see him. His eating does not go unnoticed, just as Virgie's staring does not go unnoticed. "Mr. King pushed out his stained lip. Then he made a hideous face at Virgie, like a silent yell at everything—including death, not leaving it out—and he did not mind taking his present animosity out on Virgie Rainey; indeed, he chose her. Then he cracked the little bone in his teeth" (Welty 446). King's silent yell is not so silent, as the sound of the cracked bone reaches Virgie, bringing her attention to King's protest. King protests against the women of Morgana, against the people at the funeral, against their acceptance, against the funeral itself, and especially against death. He is not satisfied to keep Katie alive through his memory and his stories. He is not that foolish or optimistic. King, with his mouth full of ham, is angry and filled with animosity for the frail human condition. In life King cannot abide by enforced rules and it seems that Welty imbues him with the same disdain for conventions in death. This yell is another way in which we see King fighting the dominant structure. Instead of pacifying death or his own feelings about death, he rages against it while all the others, except for Virgie, listen to Mamie Loomis sing "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go." King will not let go either, although perhaps it is not love but an inherent hatred for mortality that will not let him go.

In contrast, throughout "The Wanderers," King is also described through child imagery. Welty writes "Every now and then Mr. King, his tender-looking old head

cocked sideways, his heels lifted, his right hand pricking at the air, tip-toed down the hall to the table to pick at the ham” (Welty 446). She goes on to write, “Down the hall, with the blue sky at his back, Mr. King MacLain sent for coffee, tasted it, and put out his tongue in the air to cool, a bright pink tongue wagging like a child’s” (Welty 447). Perhaps King is too old in his memories but Welty seems to portray him as both an ancient man and a child, simultaneously. He is constantly eating, which seems to display his underlying vivacity and appetite, another way of striking against death. Also, he is described with a tender head and a bright pink tongue, wagging like a child’s—this mixture of the ancient and childish combines to suggest a kind of immortality, as the cycles of life play out and are present within King at all times. This makes King both indefinable and the perfect non-hero for Welty’s work.

King represents the past because he was there and he remembers and propagates it, but he also represents an infinitely youthful approach to the quotidian detail of every day life. In this way, King carries on the tradition of Poe and Hawthorn in the sense that he represents a potentially unsavory past, as well as a certain level of existential anguish, but he transcends the Dark Romantic or Gothic genre by hinting at what might be beyond the anguish: regeneration. Brönte gave us Heathcliff to show us what happens when those in a restrictive hierarchical society are faced with a raw and primal being that refuses to comply with the rules. We, as readers, are privy to the destruction that results at both ends, which further results in a complexity that goes beyond the realm of 19<sup>th</sup> century English gothic literature. Welty gives us King, who similarly refuses to comply. He brings destruction to Morgana in many ways, but does so with a childish spirit that Heathcliff did not have. This also results in a

complexity that goes beyond the tradition of American gothic literature. Instead of only focusing on the darkness and the damned nature of the American psyche, Welty creates a character whose resistance is as much a life-affirming action as it is an unwelcome one. Actually, Welty creates two characters who affirm life through their resistance: King and Virgie Rainey. It is through Virgie that Welty truly embarks on her discussion of eternal elements in everyday life.

### **III—Transcendence Without Death**

King's funeral compatriot, Virgie Rainey, might represent more of an ambiguity than King himself. Virgie is like Catherine Earnshaw. While she does not, by nature, adhere to the social conventions of Morgana, she ends up living by them. Virgie, like Catherine, is also a wild child, prone to anger, delight, and sensual pleasure in equal, unadulterated measure. However, Virgie is a woman and-- whether she likes it or not-- this implies her membership to the Morgana matriarchy. Also,

Virgie has limited mobility as a single, lower class woman in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Virgie is ultimately more accountable to the community than King, or rather, more is expected of her and she has more social and economical vulnerability than King. Therefore, like Catherine, Virgie must straddle the world of her desires and the world of social duty and in doing so, abnegate an entire part of herself for the sake of taking care of her mother and living in Morgana.

While male characters are perhaps quite different between the genres of English and American gothic literature, the female characters are not, perhaps with the exception of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers' characters. In Poe, Hawthorne, and Faulkner, the women have their trembling sensibility intact and they act as gothic characters, falling victim to whatever fate is preordained for them by gothic conventions. These women, like Faith, Rappaccini's Daughter, Annabel Lee, and Caddy Compson, all fall prey to the typical gothic confinement and oppression. These characters exist in order to further the plot and to flesh out the male characters, as they are rarely given any agency in the conclusions of these works. While they may not get married or convinced that their imaginations just got the better of them, female characters in the American gothic are usually just as malleable and easily explained away as those in the English tradition, and exhibit very little three dimensionality, let alone ambiguity. As I hope I have proven before, Catherine Earnshaw is an exception, as is Virgie Rainey.

We first encounter Virgie as a baby in "Shower of Gold," and the only noticeable thing about her character then is that Snowdie takes a disliking to her, which is, again, because she might be King's daughter. We see her more fully



realized in the story “June Recital,” although we are seeing her through the lens of Loch and Cassie Morrison, two voyeurs looking at Virgie from across the street. Loch narrates as he watches Virgie bring a sailor into Miss Snowdie’s “abandoned” house. “Her name was Virgie Rainey. She had been in Cassie’s room all the way through school, so that made her sixteen; she would ruin any nice idea. She looked like a tomboy but that was not the truth. She had let the sailor pick her up and carry her one day, with her fingers lifting to brush the leaves” (Welty 278). The narrator switches from story to story; therefore, we are privy to the insights and the moral prejudices of a host of characters, rather than just Nelly or Lockwood. While this may be the case, all the narrators initially impose their social judgment of the characters they are discussing before they betray their own curiosity, interest, and sometimes, awe. Loch is no exception.

While he is just a young boy, he still knows and, perhaps because of his age, clings to social propriety even more than an adult narrator who may have lapsed a few times. By introducing the older Virgie to us through Loch, Welty wants us to see how she is both threatening and exciting to all generations of Morgana inhabitants. Loch hints at her conflicting nature as he says that she looks like a tomboy but she also seems sexually mature and permissive because she lets the sailor pick her up. Loch then states “It was she that had showed the sailor the house to begin with, she that started him coming” (Welty 278). He goes on to describe the figs outside the house because he is waiting for the day when the sailor takes the figs. “They were rusty old fig trees but the figs were the little sweet blue. When they cracked open, their pink and golden flesh would show, their inside flower, and golden bubbles of juice would

hang, to touch your tongue” (Welty 278). It seems that Loch is imposing an image of a prelapsarian Eve onto Virgie, as she is tempting the hapless sailor into eating the figs, in this case, of knowledge.

Virgie is the instigator, brushing her hands through the leaves of the tree, both a natural woman and a seductress at play in the Garden of Eden. However, it is Loch’s sensual description of the figs that plays a large part in this passage. The image is rather sexual, as once the figs are cracked open, their pink and golden flesh showing, their flowers are exposed to the tongue. Therefore, it seems that Virgie facilitates both the sailors fall from innocence as well as Loch’s. Virgie’s actions show that she does as she pleases, not hiding from anyone. Her activities represent both her unleashed nature and the projected desires of those who watch her. Though perhaps reviled for her actions, she captures the imagination. Loch seizes on Virgie’s spirit, just as Lockwood sees the spirit of Catherine, and through them we see our heroines both as natural and imaginative beings.

When the narration of “June Recital” switches to Cassie we see similar contradiction, judgment, fascination, and revulsion. Cassie even admits, “Virgie Rainey was a secret love as well as a secret hate” (Welty 292). She goes on to say:

She was full of the airs of wildness, she swayed and gave way to joys and tempers her own and other people’s with equal freedom....School did not lessen Virgie’s vitality....Virgie came with strange kinds of sandwiches—everybody wanted to swap her—stewed peach or perhaps banana. In the other children’s eyes she was exciting as a gypsy would be....She often took the pose of [a] very inventive and persecuted little heroine who coped with people she thought were witches and ogres—feet apart, head aslant, eyes glancing up sideways, ears cocked; but you could not tell whether Virgie would boldly interrupt her enemies or run off to her own devices with a forgetful smile on her lips (Welty 291-92).

Like King, Virgie is wild. She gives way to joy and anger whenever she feels like it and inflicts her will on others, instead of quietly keeping her desires to herself, like Cassie. However, she is not just a spunky little wood sprite. She changes on a whim and can be quite cruel and strange. However, the children of Morgana are fascinated by her. Cassie describes her as a gypsy, always bringing strange and alluring sandwiches to school that the other children did not have, always having a certain kind of capricious bravery that the other children did not have. Virgie is capable of standing up to bullies and teachers and boys. However, she also brings torment to their piano teacher, Miss Eckhart, because she can. Cassie states, “Anybody could tell Virgie was doing something to Miss Eckhart. She was turning her from a teacher into something lesser” (Welty 294). Like Catherine Earnshaw, Virgie is also not a typical Gothic heroine, or a typical heroine at all. She inspires ardor and worship, but also terror and hatred because she cannot be reached. Virgie is not a symbol. She is a literary manifestation of complex femininity. She is a tomboy. She is a seductress. She is a gypsy, an artist, and, herself, a bully. She is associated with the smell of flowers and extracts, linking her to the more natural world. Through Virgie Rainey, Welty shows that not much has changed since Catherine Earnshaw. Despite the power of Virgie’s spirit in all of its caprice and largess, and despite people’s fascination with her, she is not at liberty to live out her nature to its natural conclusion. Virgie is hampered by practical economic and social impediments.

As children, her cohorts did not understand that Virgie brought those sandwiches because she was poor. Her hair was inky and fell loosely because it was dirty. Her wild dress was a result of having to make do with hand-me-downs and

inappropriate clothing. Her behavior was as much a result of having been poorly brought up, because her mother was busy selling goods by the roadside and letting Virgie run free, as it was a result of her temperament. These qualities are forgivable in a child. They are not forgivable in a woman. At the end of the story, Cassie says that “Virgie Rainey [was a ] human being terribly at large, roaming the face of the earth,” (Welty 330) while Cassie must live with only “the fire in her head.” Cassie realizes that she cannot roam as freely as Virgie. However, Cassie seems to realize that in order to roam at large, one cannot fit into the community with ease. Therefore, Cassie’s description provides an interesting contradiction. In order to live free from Morgana’s disapproval, a woman must keep her fire in her head because if one lives externally and freely, one lives beyond containment and beyond the protection and limits of society.

As a woman, Virgie, like Catherine, is not at liberty to live out her life according to her own desires. In childhood, wild behavior is tolerated and even perhaps seen as heroic. In adulthood, there are pragmatic consequences that conspire to confine those within the community. When the children reach adulthood, they now act as perpetuators of the hierarchical social system. Someone must take care of Miss Katie, who has no one left. She cannot live alone and it is her daughter’s job, as deemed by the community’s standards, to stay with her. In order to do so, Virgie must at least superficially conform to the community. Like Catherine, Virgie is in no position to inherit anything and must therefore make decisions based on her position within her family, because despite her enormous spirit, as a woman, her choices are socially and financially limited.

In the beginning of "The Wanderers," Welty illustrates the relationship between Virgie and her mother. The people of Morgana whisper behind their backs, "So long as the old lady's alive, its all behind her back" regarding Virgie's alleged behavior in town and elsewhere with men. They also speculate, "Daughter wouldn't run off and leave her, she's old and crippled" (Welty 429) discussing how even Virgie couldn't be tempted to leave. Miss Katie, sick and semi-paralyzed from her stroke, waits by the road for Virgie to come home from work: "Where's my girl? Have you seen my girl?" (Welty 429). When Virgie does appear, Katie reprimands her. "Look where the sun is....You have to milk before dark, after driving them in, there's four little quails full of shot for you to dress, lying on my kitchen table" (Welty 430). To this, Virgie simply replies, "Come on back in the house, Mama. Come in with me..."(Welty 430). Only after the kissing her and Virgie's requesting that her mother come back with her to the house does Miss Katie feel secure. She realizes Virgie will milk and feed the cows and deliver the milk on the road and come back and cook.

However, Miss Katie remains anxious, as though she thinks Virgie will fail her, despite Virgie's consistent care of her for the last twenty or so years. This is an interesting and complicated exchange because in it we see an older Virgie, compliant to her mother's (and society's) idea of a dutiful daughter, and yet her mother still doubts her, wary of what lurks beneath Virgie's humility. Gail Mortimer maintains that in "The Wanderers,"

Virgie...is shown to be utterly unlike what the town had assumed: she has been taking care of her mother for more than twenty years, holding down a dull job...the enormous disjunction between what Virgie is and what people have come to expect her to be is seen even in her mother's persistent

expectations that Virgie will be late, that she will not 'mind,' that she is unreliable (Mortimer 124).

Mortimer goes on to say that "What becomes evident in the final story is that Virgie is someone her mother has been able to rely on completely....Her neighbors have never seen beyond the categories and labels they have imposed on her so they sense little about the reality of [Virgie's] experience" (Mortimer 125). Here Mortimer attempts to distinguish between the Virgie that Welty wants the reader to see and the Virgie as told to us through various tainted narratives, asserting that Virgie is grossly underestimated by those who seem to know her best. Welty shows the complexity of Virgie while showing her mother's and the community's inability to accept Virgie as anything besides what they perceive of her. Welty gives Virgie levels of compassion and a sense of duty that we as readers had not been previously privy to.

The complexities of Virgie's character are negated by those around her in an unconscious attempt to confine her by minimizing her. Virgie must constantly prove that she is reliable, because Miss Katie and the community cannot grasp the idea that one can be capable of caprice, lust, promiscuity, and also of compassion and responsibility. Virgie is not at liberty to engage all of the aspects of her character. Unlike King, who people seem to have grown accustomed to feeling puzzled and uncomfortable around and who they almost accept as a local aberration, Virgie is allowed no such leniency. Instead, she must entertain the gossip and judgment of those around her and act in such a way as to avoid it.

Like King, Heathcliff could leave and come back to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and act like a complete brute and a madman. While eventually he was subverted, he never deigned to hide his true nature and desires because, upon his

return, he had money and a strong will. People bent to him, despite the chaos that ensued. Catherine, however, had to marry Linton and play the part of the lady, wife, and mother—much to the abnegation of the elemental, dark, and autonomous aspects of herself. In this way, Welty and Brönte both show that confining societies, whether patriarchal or matriarchal, English or American, hold their women more accountable than the men. Women, despite having the same largess of character as the men in these stories, inevitably must sacrifice more of themselves for the sake of social convention. Again, the gothic horrors of confinement and captivity loom around Welty's characters, just as they do Brönte's and like Brönte, Welty has no simple conclusion for her female character. Virgie does not find out she is King's daughter and become ostracized. She does not marry (much to the chagrin of Jinny Love Stark MacLain) in an effort to fit in or solve a problem that is of its own making. There is no conclusion because no matter what plot point Welty inserted, it would not be true to Virgie's roaming nature. She does not succumb to gloom or happiness because that would be picking a side and a choice as such would not perpetuate the kind of complex ambiguity that Welty has set up for Virgie.

Instead, Welty unleashes Virgie again. In Wuthering Heights it takes her own death and Heathcliff's death to set Catherine free. In The Golden Apples, it takes her mother's death to set Virgie free. As Mortimer explains "Katie's childlike nature in her last years has made her virtually a child, needing Virgie's care and patience. Thus Katie's death creates a freedom for her daughter quite like that of women whose children are now older and self-sufficient" (Mortimer 137). Mortimer goes on to say that "Virgie's loss of her mother and her release from any further family ties occasions

her reconceptualization of her place in the world. Her sudden freedom is experienced first as numbness and then as peacefulness and reconnection with the things that matter” (Mortimer 138). While I have often thought that Virgie was always free, Mortimer seems to be saying that Virgie rediscovers her freedom, which was actually lost to her for some time. When Virgie’s familial obligations are gone, she begins to act out the part of herself that lay dormant, although I never really got the impression that this is a rediscovery so much as a reunion with those aspects of herself. Similarly, Catherine spent years as a ghost trying to get back to her true home, not searching for it. Catherine never lost sight of what she was and from whence she came, she just had to wait until her (and Heathcliff’s) earthly bondage no longer existed.

One of the quintessential examples of Virgie reclaiming that which is important and sacred to her is the scene in which she swims in the river by the light of the moon.

It was as bright as mid-afternoon in the openness of the water, quiet and peaceful. She took off her clothes and let herself into the river. She saw her waist disappear into reflectionless water; it was like walking into the sky....All was one warmth, air, water, and her one body. All seemed one weight, one matter—until as she put down her head and closed her eyes and the light slipped under her lids, she felt this matter a translucent one, the river, herself, the sky all vessels which the sun filled. She began to swim in the river, forcing it gently, as she would wish for the gentleness to her body. Her breasts around which she felt the water curving were as sensitive at that moment as the tips of wings must feel to birds, or the antennae to insects. She felt...many dark ribbons of grass and mud touch her and leave her, like suggestions and withdrawals of some bondage that might have been dear, now dismembering and losing itself (Welty 440).

The water is reflectionless, therefore, she really does enter it as though they are one being. Also, the moon is lighting the river, similarly illuminating this passage with a



particularly female overtone. Gone are the limitations of Virgie's fancy but inappropriate clothes and her too heavy hair, both of which mark her as "other" within the community. She is now simply a vessel, no different from the river or the sky. Virgie is integrated back into a state of nature, a state that she was identified with throughout The Golden Apples, but perhaps lost track of during her life of obligatory acts.

In the river, she feels the bondage, however dear it was, dissipate, which seems to imply that her duty to her mother, while not a burden per se, did act as a kind of bind that kept her from the pleasure of a unified self. Virgie observes later that "[She] never saw it differently, never doubted that all the opposites of the earth were close together, love close to hate, living to dying; but of them all, hope and despair were the closest blood"(Welty 452). This passage echoes the passage above as Virgie, without the pressures of societal duty, truly sees the world as a series of close doubles and cycles and not opposites at all as she is more and more conscious of her own ability to reconcile the so called opposites within herself under the sky of both all of humanity and her own individuality. Just as Heathcliff and Catherine are reunited in death, sloughing off their earthly bonds, together they seem to symbolize the possibilities of reconciliation. They are often referred to as doubles of each other, perhaps opposite in social status and gender, but ultimately the same. Here, Virgie reconciles with her own double/opposite: herself.

Another interesting thing is going on in the river passage. Virgie begins to emerge as one who has perhaps transcended what has constricted her. Again, she does not transcend through death but as one who participates in a never ending cycle of

being. The passage is full of sensual description and it seems in it we finally see Virgie's sexuality free from the narrator's social/moral prejudice. Her sexuality has nothing to do with other people but with her surroundings, as though she is Diana or Venus, a sexual and amorous entity unto herself. In this passage, it seems that Welty intentionally portrays her as such because it is in this moment that Virgie truly becomes larger than her socio-economical and gendered context, in addition to becoming larger than herself, assimilating into the natural order of the universe. In this we see that Virgie has truly transcended the society around her while actively participating in her immediate surroundings, thereby making her an inherently omnipresent force in Morgana.

However, while showing Virgie to be a kind of mythological character through imagery and the reactions of other characters, Welty also adds another level. Through Virgie's understanding of the community mythology and the importance of those around her, she essentially admits herself into their immortal world. In this way, Welty gives Virgie more agency than Catherine Earnshaw ever had because Virgie possesses the knowledge of her own power through acknowledging the impact that those of the past have had. In addition to this, through Virgie, Welty establishes a kind of immortal fluidity of time, in an effort to convey that the past and the present exist simultaneously through the power of myth and legend.

After Miss Katie's funeral, Virgie leaves the house, leaving the entire contents to Juba and Minerva, Mrs. Stark's maids. With the promise that she may go far, Virgie gets in her car and drives seven miles to MacLain only to stop there, to rest at

the courthouse. She sits in the rain, uncovered by hat or shelter, and gazes at the town.

Welty writes:

Virgie left the car running and through the light drops reached the stile and sat down on it in the open shelter of the trees. She touched the treads, worn not by feet so much as by their history of warm, spreading seats. At this distance the Confederate soldier on the shaft looked like a chewed on candle, as if old gnashing teeth had made him. On past him, pale as a rainbow, the ancient circus posters clung to their sheds, they no longer the defacing but the defaced (Welty 458).

Through the Confederate soldier, we see a past that is very much still with the community, although perhaps fading or burning out as the statue is likened to a chewed on and time worn candle. The imagery of the statue being fashioned by gnashing teeth is interesting because it recalls the image of King, gnashing his teeth on the ham bone. It seems as though the statue represents the ever present threat of mortality and restriction that King, and perhaps others, resent. This Confederate is the reality of their past that shows the invariable inevitability of being vanquished. The presence of the circus posters seems to represent a similar sentiment to Virgie. As circuses are usually associated with the young, the posters seem to act as reminders of youth, now faded and physically integrated into the municipal landscape, awaiting the next layer of youthful vandalism. By writing this passage through Virgie's perspective, we see that it is her that is marking the passage of time and seeing the cycle of life played out within her immediate environment.

Virgie's recognition of the past as present intensifies as she continues to observe the town by way of the nearby cemetery. Virgie remembers "Here the MacLains buried, and Miss Snowdie's people, the Hudsons. Here lay Eugene, the only MacLain man gone since her memory.... Eugene, for a long interval, had lived in

another part of the world, learning while he was away that people don't have to be answered just because they want to know"(Welty 458). While Eugene is dead, Virgie still remembers what he represented to her. He was a man who had wandered and came back, a man who realized that one could live beyond the conventions of the town if they chose. In remembering this, Virgie shows us her own perceptions of her own local mythological creations. Welty goes on to write "He was never reconciled to his father, they said, was sarcastic to the old man—all he loved was Miss Snowdie and flowers but he bothered no one. 'He never did bother a soul,' they said at the graveside that day, forgetting his childhood"(Welty 458). By including this last passage, it seems that Virgie is juxtaposing her memory of Eugene's history with what the town, or those at his graveside, decided to remember about him, which is less comprehensive.

This juxtaposition also shows that Eugene's small rebellions had more meaning to Virgie than they did, perhaps, to the others, just as Virgie's actions resonated more profoundly through the lives of Cassie and Loch Morrison than they did with others who were content to think of Virgie as an ingrate and a tramp. In this way, Welty creates an unending cycle in which the inhabitants of the town(s), past and present, reflect influence on one another, which results in a pantheon of local mythological figures. While Virgie is certainly part of the pantheon, she also fully and knowingly participates in the cycle of creating it. In order to participate, Virgie must also acknowledge the importance and influence of the past, while also creating a way in which she is not beholden to its restrictions.

Another particularly interesting thing about Eugene MacLain is that he is buried very near Virgie's old piano teacher, Miss Eckhart. It is Virgie's memory of Miss Eckhart that brings about Welty's final discussion of unity in time and thought and the non-conclusion to her collection. Virgie brings Miss Eckhart back to life by remembering the painting on her wall of Perseus and Medusa. "Miss Eckhart had had among the pictures from Europe on her walls a certain threatening one. It hung over the dictionary, dark as that book. It showed Perseus with the head of Medusa"(Welty 460). It is through this painting that Virgie sees life as a battle in which love is horror and hate is love, which reflects her earlier sentiments about life and death and hope and despair being so closely linked. However, instead of simply stating it as her philosophy of life, this passage takes that idea further as Virgie truly applies it to herself and her relationship to Miss Eckhart and King, her fellow wanderers.

Cutting off the Medusa's head was the heroic act, perhaps, that made visible a horror in life, that was at once the horror in love, Virgie thought—the separateness. She might have seen heroism prophetically when she was young and afraid of Miss Eckhart. She might be able to see it now prophetically, but she was never a prophet. Because Virgie saw things in their own time, like hearing them—and perhaps she must believe in the Medusa equally with the Perseus—she saw the stroke of the word in three moments, not one. In the three was the damnation...beyond the beauty and the sword's stroke and the terror lay their existence in time—far out and endless, a constellation which the heart could read over for many a night (Welty 460).

Virgie does not see the act of separateness as heroic. It seems that she can see why one would consider it heroic, but she does not. Welty writes that Virgie saw things in their own time. Later she states "In Virgie's reach of memory a melody softly lifted, lifted of itself. Every time Perseus struck off the Medusa's head, there was the beat of time, and the melody. Endless the Medusa, and Perseus endless"(Welty 460). Virgie

truly does see things in their own time and in her own perception of time. This passage harkens back to Virgie's refusal to play with the metronome, as she would not be influenced by another's measure of time.

Virgie also sees beyond striking at love with separateness in an effort to perhaps spare oneself pain. Instead of focusing on the physical act of love or separation, Virgie sees its existence beyond the action, as a constellation which the heart can read over and over, as though reliving a memory, as we see Virgie and all those in Morgana do. While the physical act exists, it also echoes throughout time, which does not exist linearly because the presence of the past is important now, reverberating endlessly, just as the presence of love must sit side by side with hate, as all bleed into each other's meanings.

Virgie had thought she hated Miss Eckhart, but in retrospect, she sees that it was not hate but closer to love, although they opposed each other, not unlike Perseus and Medusa. However, Perseus and Medusa are linked in immortal, perpetual combat, which makes their existence to one another critical. Virgie and Miss Eckhart are locked in the same battle as teacher and student, both giving and taking endlessly and providing both pain and pleasure to each other as they advance and retreat. King MacLain, as Virgie remembers him in the last paragraph, is also in battle, fighting against his mortality, although his mortality is part of what informs his masculinity. Virgie also engages in this battle with her mother and the community around her, constantly resisting and embracing their importance to her.

Virgie is like Catherine Earnshaw in the sense that she longs to flee her home while she simultaneously tries to find a way in which she can re-enter on her own

terms. Catherine cries, "I am Heathcliff," meaning that really, she is Wuthering Heights. In the last passage of "The Wanderers," Virgie sits on the stile at the MacLain court house with an old black beggar woman "listening to the magical percussion, the world beating in their ears. They heard through falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon's crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan"(Welty 461). We do not know if Virgie will go further, but we do know that right there, in that community, her ears and her heart can read the constellations and that she exists with them. She is one of them. Through the last passages, it seems that Virgie admits herself into this world, a world that she had long felt she did not belong to.

However, by the end, Virgie knows that she is part of this community's mythology. Perhaps it is not an entirely harmonious existence, but it seems that Virgie sees that the world is harmonious even while seemingly inharmonious. In realizing this, it is like Catherine realizing that she is Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights. She runs away, but ultimately knows where she belongs, making her way back as a ghost, as an immortal representation. King and Eugene MacClain come back after they wander and are similarly representative to the community. Whether Virgie leaves or not we do not know. We do know, however, that while Virgie may physically leave, the existence of her wild and roaming spirit will stay behind in Morgana. In creating an immortal bind like Virgie's, in which she is forever engaged in a love/hate relationship with others, it shows that Welty is not only saying that local lore and people become mythological, but also that everyday people are living out mythological acts in a geographic and culturally specific and mundane settings, just as

Brönte's characters epically rage about the country side. Virgie is different from Catherine, however, in that she seems to realize the importance of the community, her place in it, and its effect on her. In this way, she her actions take on an even greater significance because Virgie knows that her actions exist beyond herself, whereas Catherine perhaps sees only the more immediate consequences of her choices.



## **Conclusion**

Brönte and Welty seem to have similar visions for their primary female characters. Instead of using the Gothic female stereotype of plucky but naïve heroine who falls prey to the darkness of men, society, or family, Brönte and Welty create characters that fall prey, primarily, to themselves, making their interactions with men, society, and family much more complicated than previous Gothic heroines. Both Catherine and Virgie know themselves and are not simply informed by the circumstances of the plot. Like their male counterparts, these characters are beholden to their inner natures and outer environments.

However, they have a more limited arena in which to act out their true desires because they do not have the social or economic wherewithal to do so. Therefore, Brönte and Welty create another realm in which they show both the pain of restriction and the possibilities and opportunities of freedom Catherine and Virgie encounter, culminating in an invocation of the supernatural and mythical, perhaps the only realm where opportunities of freedom can occur. In creating this realm, Catherine and Virgie are neither marginalized as characters, nor are they sentimentalized. Instead they are turned loose upon their respective communities, superficially contained. Both characters are representative of the inner desires of the individuals in their communities, although they themselves are social misfits. They are finally made larger than their circumstances through the power of mythological transcendence. These characters cannot be contained by society, and like wise cannot be contained by a prescriptive Gothic conclusion. In creating a relatively intangible realm, Brönte and

Welty seemed determined to show that true complexities arise when the heroines are as actualized and as conflicted as the heroes.

Brönte and Welty also have similar visions for their primary male characters. Heathcliff and King are not dangerous but ultimately good men, written simply to make love interests and readers alike swoon. Good and bad do not apply to them. They are simply men-- in all of their dubious, flawed, erratic, fascinating glory. While Brönte and especially Welty's female characters are allowed to grow beyond the bounds of the novel, the male characters are busy acting as instigators, stirring up the lingering doubts and desires of other characters and the reader. These characters automatically loom large, challenging the rest of us to catch up with them.

Both Virgie and King are mythologized throughout the collection, in the sense that we see the both the community's perceptions of them and the way in which the community members react to and internalize Virgie and King's actions, using them as a justification and an enticing threat to their social norms. King and Virgie do not, perhaps, live in accordance with Morgana's social structure, but they are assumed into the pantheon of local lore based on the importance placed on their comings and goings by those around them. Their importance to the community makes them the stuff of legends and myth in the same way that Heathcliff and Catherine attain a level of mythical importance. It is the triumphant and terrifying possibilities of the human spirit and condition that King and Virgie represent, just like Heathcliff and Catherine, which seem to resonate with the community, despite the community's superficial judgment of the characters.

In this way, both Brönte and Welty truly break free from their respective Gothic sensibilities because in showing that the communities of *Wuthering Height/Thrushcross Grange* and *Morgana* are somehow captivated by their rather disruptive protagonists, they also show the community's desire to consider that which is larger than them. Bondage and release exist simultaneously in both Brönte and Welty, showing both writers commitment to a more integrated and ambiguous literary approach to the issues of class, religion, gender, and social conventions of their own societies than the approaches of other writers more easily identified within the genre. Therefore, reading Welty as one who participates in more rebellious literary ideologies is beneficial because it offers the possibility of a more specific literary counterpoint and origin of influence.

When someone says Mississippi, how can one not think of *The Golden Apples*, just as one associates *Wuthering Heights* with the Yorkshire Moors. The setting is inherent to the characters and the story telling, providing the characters with cultural peccadilloes that make them come to life. Welty understood the importance of place. She knew that when we see someone in a completely different place, from an entirely different social structure or culture go through the same things we do—the validity of our own experience is heightened. That place becomes important to us because its people become important to us. The people become important to us because we can understand them—Welty shows us where they came from. There is no doubt that Welty tells stories of the South, her South. However, Welty, like Brönte, is not only a product of her geographic environment and literary era. Instead of “Southern Gothic,” “regionalist,” and “contemporary of Faulkner,” Welty should be seen as an author

who, like Emily Brönte, defies convention in an attempt not to show the horror or the “reality” of human existence, but perhaps instead to show some truth about the human heart.

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