

THE MEDUSA AS ARTIST-HERO FIGURE IN EUDORA WELTY'S
"JUNE RECITAL"

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For my husband

GARY

and our children

EMILY, NATHAN, AND JOSHUA

because

"the interesting situations of life can take place, and notably do, at home."

Eudora Welty, "The Radiance of Jane Austen"

And

for my teacher

DR. PHYLLIS BRIDGES

who helped me to understand that "all serious daring starts from within."

Eudora Welty, One Writer's Beginnings

ABSTRACT

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The duality of the nature of the Medusa, as both victim and destroyer, is evident in literature from antiquity to the present. Although some sympathetic representations of her emerge in a few examples of Romantic and Victorian poetry, it is the figure of Medusa as monstrous female destroyer that dominates literature through the ages. In the twentieth century, women writers, engaging in what Alicia Ostriker terms "revisionist mythmaking," have appropriated and adapted the image of the Medusa as a symbol of the plight of modern woman--particularly the female artist.

In "June Recital," Eudora Welty employs a variety of mythical motifs which she alters to meet the needs of her fiction; this study examines Welty's implementation of the Medusa image in this story. Welty creates, in the character of Miss Eckhart, a revisionist Medusa who functions in all three roles of the traditional myth--victim, artist, and hero.

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Chapter I

THE MEDUSA IN LITERARY TRADITION

Mythic images and allusions permeate the work of Eudora Welty; "she has stretched the canvas of [her] work over a framework of the classic myths" (Morris 34). Her stories, firmly grounded in the setting and culture of small-town Southern life, are so subtly textured with threads of Graeco-Roman and Celtic mythology that readers may easily overlook them as they become engaged in the textual drama and dialogue. Commenting upon this characteristic of her work, William M. Jones, in his essay "Name and Symbol in the Prose of Eudora Welty," states that as Welty implements a variety of mythic materials in her stories, she absorbs it "more and more fully into her own meaning, so that...it is impossible to say that here is Cassiopeia and here Andromeda" (173). Welty often uses several mythic sources in a single story and draws oblique rather than pedantic parallels, maintaining that "symbolic meaning should be suggestive rather than analogous in effect" (Howard 56). Describing the manner in which she appropriates and implements mythic materials in her stories, Welty states:

I will use anything...that I think truly expresses what I see in life around me. I have used not

only Mississippi folklore but Greek and Roman myths...Irish stories...It's just there to be plucked. (Prenshaw 107-08)

Welty captures the essence of a regional ethos through skillful crafting of dialect and characterization; she merges myth with Southern life, endowing realistically cast Mississippians with legendary characteristics: "Her achievement is to make us see these small-town southerners from the perspective of...the long shadow of myth extending far out from each mundane, wandering heel" (Vande Keift 88). Jones proposes that even in stories where the regional quality of the work seems overwhelming, the "unrecognized presence [of myth] still gives a weight to the story that it might not otherwise have had...and even if the reader misses its presence, its availability may well be felt" (175). Readers immersed in the dialogue and action of one of Welty's stories may fail to make associations with the classic story of Perseus and Medusa or the Celtic story of the Wandering Aengus, yet the universality of the theme imbedded in the mythic images and allusions is apparent. In an assessment of the benefits of a less overt implementation of literary allusion, Welty states:

Most symbols...today are probably as swiftly spotted by [the] reader as the smoke signals that once crossed our plains from Indian to

Indian...too little comes to be suggested, and this, as can never be affirmed often enough, is the purpose of every word that goes into a piece of fiction. The imagination has to be involved, and more--ignited. ("Words into Fiction" 139)

Several critics suggest that Welty's subtle texturing of myth into realistic stories of twentieth-century Mississippi implements (perhaps emulates) a "mythical method" similar to that exhibited in the works of Eliot, Joyce, and Yeats (Morris 38, Phillips 56, Pitavy-Souques 259). Eliot coined the term "mythical method" in his review of Joyce's Ulysses in 1923 and defined it as an ordering device, an attempt to impose structure and significance upon the chaos of contemporary life (Pitavy-Souques 259). Events from the ancient, archetypal past are summoned to give shape and definition to the complexity of human behavior. From this perspective, Welty is able to shape "the ways by which men have come to understand their relationships to nature, each other, and the universe" through their unconscious understanding and acceptance of myth (Phillips 57). She is able to describe both the richness and the shallowness of human existence in the universal vocabulary of myth.

In The Golden Apples, Welty employs a variety of tales from classical and Celtic mythology; most intriguing is the manner in which she interweaves allusions to the myth of

Perseus and Medusa into her cyclical drama of modern Mississippians in the fictional town of Morgana. The image of the Medusa is at the core of "June Recital," the pivotal story in the collection. The character of Miss Eckhart, a piano teacher who provides music lessons to the children of Morgana, is endowed with qualities and characteristics that recall the Medusa of classic mythology and literary tradition. The importance of this myth to literature is underscored by the novelist Reynolds Price, who in an assessment of his ideas concerning art and literary creation asserts: "The central myth of the artist is surely not Narcissus but Perseus--with the artist in all roles, Perseus and Medusa and the mirror-shield" (8).

The story of the Gorgon Medusa and the hero Perseus is recounted in the works of many of the ancient poets including Ovid, Hesiod, Pindar, and Appolodorus. Edith Hamilton, in Mythology, relies on all these accounts, but most closely follows the "simple and straightforward" narrative of Appolodorus which was probably written one hundred years after Ovid's Metamorphoses (141). The chronicle of Medusa is inextricably bound to that of her executioner, Perseus; and Hamilton devotes an entire chapter to his history (141-48), opening with the story of his miraculous birth.

King Acrisius of Argos, terrified by the Oracle of

Delphi's warning that he would die at the hand of his grandson, seeks to waylay that eventuality by imprisoning his daughter Danae in a sunken chamber completely sealed off from the outside world, save for an opening in the roof that affords her light and air, and a view of the sky. Ever impervious to the machinations of mortals, Zeus visits Danae in a shower of gold from the sky, resulting in the birth of Perseus. Acrisius, fearful of the retribution of the gods against one who sheds the blood of kindred, yet eager to rid himself of the danger to his own life, seeks to allow the natural elements to solve his problem. He seals Danae and Perseus in a wooden chest and casts them into the sea.

Protected by fate, or perhaps by the will of Zeus, Danae and Perseus are rescued by a kind fisherman and his wife who care for them through the years as Perseus grows to maturity. Still beautiful, Danae attracts the attention of Polydectes, the ruler of the island, who wants her as his wife. However, Polydectes schemes to rid himself of Perseus. Manipulating a situation such that the young Perseus, motivated by pride and embarrassment, boasts that he will kill the Gorgon Medusa and return with her head, Polydectes is assured that Danae's son will not return.

Winged monsters with bodies covered with golden scales and hair a mass of writhing serpents, the Gorgons were fearsome creatures whose gaze turned men to stone. Perseus'

quest would have been folly but for the intervention of Hermes and Athena, who insure his success. Hermes guides Perseus to the Nymphs of the North, who provide him with essential equipment for his quest: winged sandals which allow him to travel in flight, a magic wallet that accommodates any sized contents to carry (away from view) the severed head of Medusa, and a cap that renders the wearer invisible to hide him from the wrath of the remaining two Gorgons. Hamilton indicates that this myth is the only one "in which magic plays a decisive part" (141). Hermes gives Perseus a sword strong enough to penetrate the Gorgon's scales, and Athena presents him with her shield of polished bronze to serve as a reflecting device so that the hero can avoid Medusa's deadly gaze.

Hermes and Athena accompany Perseus to the abode of the Gorgons where they identify the sleeping Medusa for him; she alone of the three Gorgons is mortal, and Athena guides his hand as he beheads her. The act complete, Perseus flees with the aid of his magical equipment to his final confrontations with Polydectes and Acrisius. Along the way, he rescues Andromeda and takes her as his wife. Hamilton's history of Perseus concludes with a notation that he and Andromeda "lived happily ever after." Hamilton adds almost as a postscript: "Medusa's head was given to Athena, who bore it always upon the aegis, Zeus' shield, which she

carried for him" (148).

Ovid's version of the myth in the Metamorphoses provides a slightly more detailed history of Medusa--through Perseus' voice as he engages in a storytelling session at his marriage feast. As the hero recounts his past adventures to a group of guests, one asks "why Medusa, / ...was snaky-haired" (IV.791-92). Perseus responds that her story is also a "tale worth telling," (IV.793) and proceeds with a brief narration that endows the marginal figure of Appolodorus' account with a complexity of character that has generated interest in the Medusa as an artistic and literary symbol through the centuries:

She was lovely once, the hope of many
An envious suitor, and of all her beauties
Her hair most beautiful...One day Neptune
Found her and raped her, in Minerva's temple,
And the goddess turned away, and hid her eyes
Behind her shield, and, punishing the outrage
As it deserved, she changed her hair to serpents,
And even now, to frighten evil doers,
She carries on her breastplate metal vipers
To serve as awful warning of her vengeance.
(IV.794-803)

From earliest times, the Medusa has embodied the image of female monstrosity. Filled with rage against men, she

petrifies them with her deadly gaze. Yet imbedded within the myth that cloaks her with horror is the seed of sympathy--the image of a beautiful maiden victimized and betrayed by the gods. In his essay, "The Beautiful Gorgon and Indo-European Parallels," Daniel Gershenson examines this dual image of the Medusa, with "alternately ugly and beautiful female form" and proposes that representations of the beautiful Medusa have existed from antiquity alongside those of the monstrous Gorgon. He notes that the Gorgon Medusa (the horrific image) flourished in art, particularly during the Archaic period, and "provided the prototype of the evil eye;" whereas the beautiful Gorgon emerged first in literature in the works of such poets as Hesiod and Pindar, who referred to her as "Medusa of the beautiful cheeks" (373-74). Gershenson concludes that "the beautiful face of the Gorgon, which is extremely ancient in Greek literature," is most likely an "alternate expression of the Gorgoneion, with...the horrifying monstrous Gorgon's head" (377).

In citing Ovid's rendition of the myth, Gershenson draws a parallel between the betrayed maiden of the Metamorphoses and Cellini's sixteenth-century sculpture of Perseus holding the head of the Medusa. Cellini's Medusa is a "comely young woman" even though her head is wreathed with snakes. However, Gershenson states that:

most modern treatments have seen the essence of

the Gorgon in the frightening Gorgoneion, rather than in the pitiful story of the lovely girl metamorphosed into a monster. (375)

Indeed, the image of the Medusa has traditionally been associated with terror and death. In epic poetry her petrifying image is often presented as a barrier to the hero or pilgrim as he journeys to the underworld. In Hades, Odysseus fears that he may encounter the Gorgon's head: "green fear took hold of me/ with the thought that proud Persephone might send up against me/ some gorgonish head of a terrible monster up out of Hades'" (XI.633-35). As Dante and Virgil approach the walls of the city of Dis in the Inferno, the Furies summon the Medusa to bar their entrance. Virgil covers the eyes of the pilgrim with his own hands, certain that "if the Gorgon comes and you should see her,/ there would be no returning to the world" (IX.52-60). And in Paradise Lost, as the newly fallen angels explore the topography of hell, they discover that the "Medusa with Gorgonian terror guards/ The Ford" of the Lethean Sound, prohibiting them from partaking of the waters of the Lake of Forgetfulness (II.610-14).

In addition to (and often in conjunction with) the traditional symbolic presentation of the Medusa as female monstrosity, there occur more sympathetically drawn examples of her in art and literature. These examples, rooted in the

duality of her character, as both victim and destroyer, which is at the heart of the myth, often relate her image to the creative process itself.

The association of the Medusan image with art and literature, the creative impulse, is underscored in the myth by the remarkable event that occurs at the moment of her death. Ovid reports that Perseus struck "While snakes and Gorgon both lay sunk in slumber,/ Severed the head, and from that mother's bleeding/ Were born swift-winged Pegasus and his brother" (IV.785-87). Various myths picture Pegasus involved in wondrous deeds in service to the gods; but he is consistently portrayed as the horse of the Muses, particularly dear to poets. Hamilton relates that "The spring beloved of poets, Hippocrene, on Helican [the Muses' mountain], had sprung up where [Pegasus'] hoof had struck the earth" (135). Consequently, the mythical winged steed that springs from the blood of the dying Medusa has come to symbolize artistic creativity.

In this vein, Jerome McGann asserts in his study of Romantic literary iconography that Medusa's "various transformations in Romantic and post-Romantic literature make up a set of coherent and interrelated notions about art and its function in the world" (4). He attempts to refute the accepted maxim (as articulated by Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony) that Medusa as a universal symbol of evil

reflects the preoccupation with pain and abnormality in the Romantic Age. Agreeably, the classical concept of beauty described by both Aristotle and Aquinas as *claritas*, *unitas*, and *simplicitas* (clarity, unity, and proportion) had altered by 1800 to embrace as beautiful those things that "produced the most horror, the most sadness, and the most pain." And the Medusa was an appropriate symbol of this new aesthetic theory which subtly shifted away "from the beautifully horrid toward the horribly beautiful" (Hyles 145-46). Yet McGann perceives another dimension to this mythic talisman of the Romantic age.

Using Shelley's unfinished poem "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" as a touchstone, McGann presents his interpretation of the Romantic Medusa as symbolic of the relationship between death and life and the transcendent power of the creative imagination. In the painting, the severed head of the Medusa lies inverted at the center of the piece with her writhing mass of serpentine hair in the foreground. She is surrounded by a collection of unsavory creatures including bats, mice, and toads. Her eyes, half-closed, seem to focus on some point above her; and a misty cloud of vapor emanates from her mouth.

Shelley's poem combines a physical description of the painting along with his personal interpretation. He

constructs a sympathetic vision of the Medusa as the "victim of the tyranny and cowardice of established power"

(McGann 7). And in the second stanza, the poet likens the gazer's encounter with her to artistic inspiration:

Yet it is less the horror than the grace
Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone,
Whereon the lineaments of that dead face
Are graven, till the characters be grown
Into itself, and thought no more can trace;
'Tis the melodious hue of beauty thrown
Athwart the darkness and the glare of pain
Which humanize and harmonize the strain.

(9-16)

Shelley's Medusa is innocent and cursed through no fault of her own. She stuns the gazer with her tragic grace; her image is chiseled into his memory and absorbed into his psyche. This fusing of the image and the gazer is equated to music--"the melodious hue," which like all art lends harmony to the human experience. Likewise, this merging of her essence with the gazer leads him to a greater self-knowledge through the process of art (McGann 22). McGann concludes that with this poem, Shelley pictures the "transference of the creative power of the imagination from the Medusa to the sympathizing gazer" (8).

While both painter and poet appear to focus upon that

seed of sympathy imbedded in the myth, neither overlooks the destructive power Medusa retains even in death. In the fourth stanza Shelley describes a scene from the painting: "Whilst in the air a ghastly bat, bereft/ Of sense, has flitted with a mad surprise/...And he comes hastening like a moth that hies/ After a taper" (27-28, 30-31). The creature's senseless flight within range of the Medusa's glassy-eyed stare means certain death.

Shelley highlights the duality of the Gorgon's nature as Appolodorus does when he relates that Medusa had two separate blood systems. Asclepius, the physician, collected samples of each after her death and used one to cure patients and revive the dead; the other he used to kill his enemies. McGann likens this dual nature of the Medusa to the dual quality of the imagination which is equally capable of destruction or creativity (8).

The central image of Shelley's poem, revealed in the fifth stanza, emphasizes this mythic link to the creative impulse. The "thrilling vapour of the air" which escapes from the dying Medusa's mouth is perceived by the poet to be an "ever-shifting mirror/ Of all the beauty and the terror there" (36-38). On a literal level, the escaping air is certainly evocative of the departure of the life force at death, but the clear allusion to the mirror of Perseus (Athena's shield) calls into question the "ever-shifting"

perspective of the reader/gazer. Unlike many representations of this myth, the hero/executioner Perseus is absent from the painting Shelley meditates upon. Yet his presence is surely felt; at some level he may even function as the unnamed gazer.

In line with the poem's theme of duality, McGann equates the "thrilling vapour" to Pegasus, the new life force born of the dying Medusa which results in the "beauty" of artistic expression, as well as the undying destructive force of "terror" symbolized by the powerful aegis upon which Athena mounted the head of Medusa (10). Thus, the Medusa's ability both to petrify and attract becomes a metaphor for the creative process which can be ignited (in characteristically Romantic terms) by the horrific as well as the beautiful. Romantic artists turned to the Medusa time and again as the image of primal betrayal and as a metaphor for redemption--through their art (McGann 23).

Mistakenly believed to be the work of the Renaissance master Leonardo, the painting that Shelley was so taken with on his visit to the Uffizi Gallery in 1819 is now accepted as the work of an unknown Flemish painter of the seventeenth century (McGann 7, Hughes 195-96). But Leonardo who "shows throughout his literary and visual work an intense interest in the distorted and extreme" is reported to have painted at least one and perhaps several

representations of the Medusa which may have served as prototypes for the Uffizi painting (Hughes 197, 198). In his essay "Shelley, Leonardo, and the Monsters of Thought," Daniel Hughes presents an excerpt from Leonardo's notebooks wherein the master recounts an epiphanic experience as he walks outdoors "anxious to behold the great abundance of the varied and strange forms created by the artificer Nature" (199). Coming upon the dark opening to a cavern beneath overhanging rock, Leonardo reports that he spent much time peering inside from varying angles when "suddenly there was wakened within me two emotions, fear and desire, fear of the dark threatening cavern, desire to see whether there might be any marvellous thing within" (199). Hughes seizes the image of the dark cavern as a metaphor for creative inspiration and declares:

To position oneself at the cave-mouth in a state expectant yet undefined is the first requirement of the profoundest work; and this labor is worked initially and finally upon the essential self...upon the being that is at once Perseus and Medusa, hero and stony cancellation of itself.
(201)

He seems to suggest that the dynamic relationship Shelley implies between Perseus and Medusa is evocative of the creative process itself. The polar forces of fear and

desire--manifested in the Medusa's dual ability to attract and repel--ignite the flame of artistic inspiration.

Fascination with the image of the Medusa as feminine power proliferates in the literature of the Victorian age. Nina Auerbach, in Woman and the Demon, isolates, examines, and describes elements of the popular myth of the "disobedient woman," the "empowered outcast" that flourished below the surface of that age's idealization of woman as the angel of hearth and home. In relating the frequently occurring female images of the time to their mythic antecedent, she states:

The mermaids, serpent-women, and lamias who proliferate the Victorian imagination suggest a triumph larger than themselves, whose roots lie in the antiquity so dear to the nineteenth-century classicists. These creatures' iconographic invasion may typify the restoration of an earlier serpent-woman, the Greek Medusa...[who embodies] the mystery of a power, endlessly mutilated and restored, of a woman with a demon's gifts. (9)

The power of these Victorian Medusan images is most closely associated with their serpentine hair. Thus, the golden-haired heroines of Victorian literature exhibit a range of identities based upon the symbolic value of their hair. In "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian

Imagination," Elisabeth G. Gitter states: "If the woman was benign, her hair might be a nest, warm and sheltering, but if she was a treacherous mermaid, it could be an alluring but deadly snare," and "When not woven into a web or noose, the hair of the Victorian femme fatale may be braided into a serpent" (943, 950).

A variety of Medusan characters appears in the works of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. These writers seem to explore the ambiguity of this image and the multiple shades of meaning it evokes--"her gaze may be deadly, thrilling, or pathetic; her powers may be redemptive or murderous," her role seems to shift "with the perceptions of each Perseus who approached her" (Gitter 951). And as the role of the Medusa shifts and blurs, so does that of Perseus, who may or may not be the poet describing her.

In "Eden Bower," Dante Gabriel Rossetti constructs a Medusan figure in the traditional mold--what Gershenson terms the "frightening Gorgoneion" (375)--in the character of Lilith, the legendary first wife of Adam. An inhuman enchantress in the guise of "a soft sweet woman," Lilith is endowed with the golden tresses favored by the Victorians, but they here suggest the sinister quality of her nature: "O but Adam was thrall to Lilith!...All the threads of my hair are golden,/ And there in a net his heart was holden" (4, 21, 23-24). In tandem with the portrayal of her hair as

both alluring and constricting, Rossetti consistently describes Lilith in terms of serpent imagery, clearly associating her with the ancient Medusa:

What great joys had Adam and Lilith!--

(And O the bower and the hour!)

Sweet close rings of the serpent's twining,

As heart in heart lay sighing and pining.

What bright babes had Lilith and Adam!--

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,

Glittering sons and radiant daughters. (29-36)

Lilith's enthrallment of Adam may be likened to the Medusa's destructive petrifying powers. Willingly entangled in her serpentine embrace, Adam loses sight of his own purpose and identity (Gitter 950).

Supplanted by Eve, Lilith is provoked by Medusan rage to seek the aid of her former lover, "the King-snake of Eden," (41) for assistance in the destruction of Adam and Eve. She assumes her serpent-lover's shape through sexual coupling with him that intensifies her powers of entrapment:

Then bring thou close thine head till it glisten

Along my breast, and lip me and listen...

In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,

And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me...

Wreathe thy neck with my hair's bright tether...

How shall we mingle our love's caresses,
 I in thy coils and thou in my tresses
 (75-76, 91-92, 139, 151-152)

There is no duality expressed in Rossetti's Medusan figure; Lilith is the embodiment of the terrifying and deadly powers of the mythic serpent-haired monster. She represents what Gitter calls the "phallic female" of late nineteenth-century art--powerful femme fatales endowed with reptilian, phallic-like hair who are deadly and dangerous to men (950). The poem concludes with Lilith's victorious assessment of Adam's fall and her gleeful prophecy of the tragic end of Cain and Abel: "The soul of one shall be made [the King-snake's] brother,/ And thy tongue shall lap the blood of the other" (195-96).

In absolute counterpoint to Rossetti's Lilith, William Morris creates a Medusa who is completely sympathetic. In "The Doom of King Acrisius," a narrative of The Earthly Paradise, Morris recounts the classic myth. Unlike many of her antecedents, Morris' Medusa is far from threatening; she is a victim abandoned by Neptune and cursed by Minerva. McGann asserts that "Medusa's misery stands at the symbolic center of the narrative because of its peculiar character ...not Medusa herself but Medusa's circumstances are the focus of our horror" (19). As Perseus sets out on his quest, he is told that Medusa is "fair/ As any Goddess, but

with snaky hair" (200). Yet he is unprepared for the emotional impact of his encounter with her, for this Perseus gazes directly into the face of Medusa.

Morris' pathetic Medusa retains the golden hair enamored of the Victorian poets (Gitter 936), but Minerva has caused it to be infested with serpents that torment her with the memory of Neptune's violation:

the golden tresses of her hair
 Were moved by writhing snakes from side to side,
 That in their writhing oftentimes would glide
 On to her breast, or shuddering shoulders white;
 Or, falling down, the hideous things would light
 Upon her feet, and crawling thence would twine
 Their slimy folds about her ankles fine (203)

Her grotesque appearance and her exile by Minerva to a dreary, desolate land have left her isolated and in despair.

It is intriguing to note that Morris is the first to present the Medusa speaking on her own behalf (McGann 17); not till the advent of twentieth-century feminist poetry and prose would she again emerge with a voice of her own to relate the events of her personal tragedy. Perseus is overcome with pity as he listens to her lament:

O was it not enough to take away
 The flowery meadows and the light of day?
 Or not enough to take away from me

The once-loved faces that I used to see;
 To take away sweet sounds and melodies,
 The song of birds, the rustle of the trees (204)

The heroic struggle dramatized in this version of the myth takes place within Perseus himself. Without the aid of a mirror-shield, Perseus looks directly into the face of the Medusa, and the result is a stirring of sympathy within his heart that chips away at the resolve to fulfill his quest: "With softening heart, and doubtful trembling hand/ Laid on his sword-hilt, muttering: 'Would that she/ Had never turned her woeful face to me'" (203). Perseus is not physically turned to stone by the Medusa's gaze, but rather a dramatic converse metamorphosis occurs--his heart is softened toward her. The power of this Medusa's gaze alters Perseus' conception of her; in essence, she has destroyed one idea and replaced it with another--a corollary to Shelley's idea of the Medusa as creative energy--that which often must destroy in order to create. This direct encounter causes Perseus to falter, possibly to reconsider the relative importance of his mission; but her plea to the gods for "That which all men fear more than all distress,/ The rest of Death, and dull forgetfulness" (205) motivates him. This Perseus is moved to kill the Medusa not from fear or loathing, but from mercy; his act serves as a foil to the cruel disregard of Neptune.

McGann proposes that most of Algernon Charles Swinburne's female characters emulate Medusan qualities (15), and they clearly reflect the Victorian's ambiguous ideas about women. Like Rossetti's *Lilith*, Swinburne portrays cruel and powerful women whose vitality and strength seems to emanate from "serpentine hair that burns or strangles or stings" (Gitter 952). The sinister element of their characters, the horror of the Medusa, is always present; yet it is tempered by Swinburne's sympathetic, laudatory attitude. He celebrates their erotic power and praises their "contempt or indifference for all human and divine values" (McGann 15).

Swinburne's Venus of the poem "*Laus Veneris*," whose lovers "sleeping with her lips upon their eyes,/ Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair," (115-16) exemplifies these qualities. The hypnotic quality of this Medusan figure fascinates rather than repels the poet/lover. She is a counterpoint to Morris' pathetic, victimized Medusa; Swinburne is captivated by the horrific element of the Medusa's dual nature, translating it into her ability to ensnare and petrify into enthrallment:

And I forgot fear and all weary things,
 All ended prayers and perished thanksgivings,
 Feeling her face with all her eager hair
 Cleave to me, clinging as a fire that clings

To the body and raiment, burning them (395-99)

Focusing upon the horror, Swinburne appears to recall "the beauty and the terror" of Shelley's Medusa (38), which McGann (15) proposes influenced this later, more stylized portrayal of the mythic character. Swinburne applauds the terrible power of the Venus figure he endows with Medusan qualities, whose "hair is at once beautiful, evil, erotic, and heroic" (Gitter 952). And like Shelley's Medusa, this one inspires artistic creation; she "weaves and multiplies/ Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain" (119-20).

The deadly, thrilling, and pathetic characteristics of the Victorian Medusan image are exemplified in Rossetti's Lilith, Swinburne's Venus, and Morris' Medusa. They represent the ambiguous ideas about women in their age as well as the artists' creative implementation of mythic material.

While the seed of sympathy imbedded in Ovid's rendition of the myth at times germinated into works that metaphorically explore the beauty and duality of the character of the Medusa--as with Shelley, Swinburne, and Morris--it is the figure of the Medusa as monstrous female destroyer, represented by Rossetti's Lilith, that is dominant in art and literature. Into the twentieth-century, it is Gershenson's "frightening Gorgoneion" (375) that is most often and directly associated with any allusion to the

Medusa.

Therefore, the utilization of the image of the Medusa by contemporary women writers seems, at first glance, an apparent paradox. In "The Beauty of the Medusa: Twentieth Century," Joan Coldwell examines this ambiguity, noting the surprising fact that "many contemporary women writers present either themselves or their characters as Medusae" (422). But their treatment of the image is markedly different, deviating from the traditional interpretation whereby the demonstrated fascination with the Medusa is exclusively male. Women writers' fascination with and modification of the traditional image of the Medusa is representative of what Alicia Ostriker terms "revisionist mythmaking," a process by which the writer implements a figure or story accepted as myth and appropriates it "for altered ends" (72). As a result, new stories based on established myth are created; and Ostriker describes them as:

...familiar figures from male tradition emerge altered...the old stories are changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience...they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some

cases they are instructions for survival (73)

Thus, female writers of the twentieth-century engage in revisionist mythmaking in an "attempt to correct the gender stereotypes embodied in the old stories" (Coldwell 422).

Since the manipulation of mythic material in any age demonstrates the concerns and interests of that period, Coldwell asserts: "adaptations of the Medusa image in this century...reflect changing attitudes to women and their role in society," and "The beauty of the Medusa is now seen as an image, not of decadent eroticism, but of spiritual power" (423). The Medusa emerges again and again in the writings of twentieth-century women as a symbol of the plight of modern woman, particularly the female artist. In this light, it is not surprising to find that modern adaptations of this image focus upon that pivotal moment in the Medusa's life that preceded her metamorphosis: her rape by Poseidon.

The ancient account in which Medusa's rape is handled almost as an aside is amplified by Ann Stanford in "Medusa," a segment of her poetic sequence, "Women of Perseus." She details the incident from the perspective of the victim:

no consent on my part, no wooing...

I'd like to wake up in another place,

look for my self again, but there recur

thoughts of the god and his misdeed always--

the iron arm, the fall, the marble floor
the stinking breath, the sweaty weight, the pain,
and the quickening thrust (10, 29-37)

And she examines the psychological implications of rape upon
the victim, the resultant rage and isolation:

My hair coiled in fury; my mind held hate alone.
I thought of revenge, began to live on it.
My hair turned to serpents, my eyes saw the world
in stone.

Whatever I looked at became wasteland...

I was alone. I am alone. My ways
divide me from the world, imprison me in a stare.
The prisoner of myself, I long to lose
the serpent hair, the baleful eyes, the face
twisted by fury that I did not choose. (12-15,
27-31)

Clearly a variation from the traditional story that focuses
upon the hero Perseus and his quest, this version shifts
from the perspective of the ancient story and creates a
complex Medusan persona from the flat, stock character of
the myth. Here even Ovid's once beautiful maiden takes on
dimension and reality to present a universal message.
Stanford reworks the old story to emphasize the horror of
the Medusa as victim, one who suffers even as she involun-
tarily destroys.

This revised perspective of the Medusan figure has led some women writers of the twentieth-century to embrace her as their muse. They draw parallels between their own experiences and the tragedy of this mythic character's story: her victimization, her enforced silence and isolation, and finally, her destruction at the hand of a male hero-figure. The literary appeal of the Medusa is intensified by her mythic link to the power of the creative imagination through her remarkable offspring, Pegasus, the winged horse of the Muses.

In "The Muse as Medusa," May Sarton opens with a strikingly revised allusion to the myth; her poet/persona boldly looks into the face of the Medusa:

I saw you once, Medusa, we were alone.

I looked you straight in the cold eye, cold.

I was not punished, was not turned to stone--

How to believe the legends I am told? (1-4)

She succinctly alters the story and the image and subtly comments upon the applicability of a male quest story to female experience. Yet the central element of the myth, Medusa's power to transform the gazer, is retained, but changed from the power to destroy, to the power to inspire: "And when I left you I was clothed in thought" (8).

In an interpretation of Sarton's revisionist treatment of the myth, Coldwell suggests that it is in "looking

straight at the tragic Medusa, accepting Medusa as muse, that the petrification in art" occurs (431). Petrification here implies the universal and timeless qualities of art, much in the same way that Shelley's "melodious hue of beauty" (14) which symbolizes the transfer of creative power from Medusa to the gazer was likened to the chiseling of the image of the Medusa's countenance upon the gazer's stone-like spirit. And finally, Sarton reiterates from a feminist perspective, the concept of self-knowledge acquired through the process of artistic creation:

I turn your face around! It is my face.

That frozen rage is what I must explore--

Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place!

This is the gift I thank Medusa for. (25-28)

This concept of desirable petrification in art which results in self-knowledge is at the heart of Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples. In "June Recital," Miss Eckhart, a character associated with the artistry of music, is portrayed as a wanderer in search of this essential, often intangible, objective. Just as the hero Aengus of Celtic mythology (an equally important element of Welty's mythic layering in The Golden Apples) spends his life pursuing the illusory "glimmering girl," Miss Eckhart is dauntless in her pursuit of transcendence and truth through art; but her quest is frustrated by the Medusan qualities imposed upon

her by the people of Morgana.

Miss Eckhart endures the scorn and ridicule of the community because she is either unwilling or unable to meet its demands for social acceptance. Ostracized by the townspeople, Miss Eckhart is isolated and silenced; her behavior often is regarded with horror. In an overview of Welty's work, Chester E. Eisinger notes that she avoids appropriating any single myth as a whole into a story, but rather works by "indirection," giving "out hints rather than fully completed analogues" (263). Welty explores contemporary issues through subtle evocation and recasting of the ancient models, resulting in characters, like Miss Eckhart, who recall rather than parallel the mythic personas of Perseus and Medusa.

Pitavy-Souques examines the significance of the myth of Perseus and Medusa in literature. She also associates the writer/artist with Perseus and notes that Perseus' role as hero is substantially different from others such as Heracles and Prometheus in Greek mythology. While the others engage in public acts of heroism in service to mankind, "Perseus' victory is of a more private kind and concerns the terrors of the soul and the agony of the heart rather than the ordering of chaos" (262-64). In this sense, he becomes a fit corollary to the artist who holds up the mirror of his art to the world. Likewise, the terror and the horror of

the Medusa result from a private rather than a public tragedy.

Pitavy-Souques proposes that Welty employs mythology in her stories deliberately, as a technical device, in order to underscore the authenticity of her fiction, that she may express something about "the universal passions" of humanity which are "as eternal as art and the created world itself" (262). She links the major elements of the myth--Perseus, Medusa, and the mirror-shield--to the role of the artist (262). This perspective seems fitting in that the artist, endeavoring to reveal or express something concerning the universal truths of life, death, or art, must plumb the very private domains of the heart and soul. Therefore, the two major figures in tandem--Medusa who inspires the creative imagination and Perseus who wields the mirror-shield that it may be reflected to the world--effect a type for the artist. This idea of a Perseus-Medusa composite becomes critical to an understanding of the interior conflict experienced by the character of Miss Eckhart in The Golden Apples.

Critics like Patricia Yaeger and Leslie Kathleen Hankins have examined Welty's work as indicative of the dilemma of the female artist in the twentieth-century. In line with Ostriker's theory of revisionist mythmaking, Yaeger declares that Welty "expropriates and redefines images from the masculine tradition," inscribing them with

her own "prose intentions" (969). Like other female writer artists of this century, Welty utilizes traditional images "populated with patriarchal meaning" (Yaeger 955) and effectively alters them to enhance her own literary needs. Her manipulation of the Medusa myth exemplifies this practice. While avoiding direct labeling of the mythic figures in The Golden Apples, Welty's Medusa emerges as terror-ridden, but destructive only to herself, and Perseus is sublimated to a conceptual idea rather than a specific character.

Welty's craftsmanship results in a Medusa figure like Miss Eckhart who "openly rather than covertly insist[s] on alternative visions" (Harrison 57). Yaeger develops this idea with examples of Welty's incorporation of allusions to Yeats' poem "The Song of the Wandering Aengus" in The Golden Apples (969-70). Yeats' central image of the wanderer inspired by the "fire in [his] head" to spend his life pursuing the ideal experience of one bright visionary moment emerges intact in the experience of Miss Eckhart. Yet the gender-based limitations of Yeats' version of the Celtic myth are expanded in Welty's stories to encompass the traditionally perceived unheroic experiences and restricted imaginations of women. Such "alternative visions" exist in these stories in relation to Welty's treatment of elements of the myth of Medusa as well. Adequate markers, such as

victimization and isolation, exist within the stories to relate clearly the character of Miss Eckhart to her mythical antecedent. Yet, Welty endows Miss Eckhart with sufficient voice, imagination, and experience to expand the boundaries of the models of the masculine tradition. She effectively alters traditional models to render her story unique while the message remains universal.

Hankins declares: "All of Eudora Welty's writings interrogate the possibilities of art...probing again and again the complex web of relationships between women and art" (391). She argues that The Golden Apples in particular exhibits elements of the kunstlerroman genre, even though the female artist figure, Miss Eckhart, seems to "miss the mark" when compared to established models like Stephen Dedalus of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Eugene Gant of Look Homeward, Angel? who embark on linear male quests. Terming Welty's literary achievement "revisionist kunstlerroman," Hankins proposes that the author re-worked the genre from a feminist perspective, emphasizing "artistic process rather than product...relation rather than identity" (397). The journey toward self-knowledge becomes the objective, with artistic expression the vehicle by which it is achieved. Hankins further refines her assertion by calling Welty's re-working of the genre a "process of relating" (397), one which replaces the

male linear quest in which the artist figure Miss Eckhart engages in a drama of orientation as she balances and orients herself to art and to life (404).

Thus, Welty implements myth in her stories as a vehicle to deliver a layered contextual message. In "June Recital," Miss Eckhart functions as a Medusa figure whose individual experiences emerge as central to this narrative examination of the pursuit of artistic potential (Howard 87) and the exercise of a "disruptive voice" to relay the unspoken experience of women (Harrison 57).

Chapter II

"MORE THAN THE EAR COULD BEAR TO HEAR OR THE EYE TO SEE": MEDUSA AS VICTIM-ARTIST

In One Writer's Beginnings, Eudora Welty discusses the evolution of her work, The Golden Apples, and the manner in which she became aware of the connections between several apparently unrelated stories that she had written:

I had been writing a number of stories, more or less one after the other, before it belatedly dawned on me that some of the characters in one story were, and had been all the time, the same characters who had appeared already in another story. Only I'd written about them originally under different names, at different periods in their lives, in situations not yet interlocking but ready for it. They touched on every side ...Now the whole assembly--some of it still in the future--fell, by stages, into place in one location already evoked, which I saw now was a focusing point for all the stories. (98-99)

In light of the emphasis Welty consistently applies to setting in fiction, the reader might conclude that Morgana itself, Welty's imaginary Mississippi delta community, to be

that "one location" and "focusing point" of The Golden Apples. By way of clarification, Welty immediately proceeds to present and explain the unifying thread that links the stories and the characters of The Golden Apples together:

What had drawn the characters together there was one strong strand in them all: they lived in one way or another in a dream or in romantic aspiration, or under an illusion of what their lives were coming to, about the meaning of their (now) related lives. (99)

Thus, however critical the physical setting is to this collection of stories, it is the territory of the character's souls and imaginations, their parallel emotional and artistic journeys that unifies the work.

And Welty establishes that it is through the universal language of myth that she communicates her characters' stories:

The stories were connected most provocatively of all to me, perhaps, through the entry into my story-telling mind of another sort of tie--a shadowing of Greek mythological figures, gods and heroes that wander in various guises, at various times, in and out, emblems of the characters' heady dreams. (Welty, One Writer's Beginnings 99)

The Golden Apples, in particular, is peopled with the

wanderer-hero figures for which Welty's work is noted; displaced figures without social or cultural roots, these often tragic characters "wander" in search of human connections that will satisfy their need for love and respect. "Driven by fierce hungers and yearnings," the wanderers are "expressive in action, wild, rebellious... self-determining" (Vande Kieft 98). Both male and female wanderer figures appear in Welty's stories, but certain gender-based differences relating to the nature of their isolation can be identified. Her male heroes do literally wander; an example is King MacLain, the Zeus-like character of The Golden Apples, whose legendary status in Morgana is built upon his long, frequent, and mysterious absences from that community. Her heroines, on the other hand, "tend to be confined within a domestic sphere of some sort and are unable to wander" (Schmidt 52). Their potential for wandering is thwarted not only by the rigidity of social convention, but also by what Peter Schmidt calls the "Medusa's gaze," a perception of themselves (sanctioned by the community) as monstrous, a view which often results in madness and/ or self-violence (52-53).

The stories in this collection are structured around confrontation scenes between these eccentric wanderer figures and their conventional neighbors in Morgana. Welty's thematic implementation of the wanderer character--

who is often an artist and/ or a foreigner--is also "decisively linked with the question of gender and its social implications" (Gyax 47). Welty's female wanderers are Medusan figures; they exemplify her utilization of the "mythical method" (Pitavy-Souques 259) and "revisionist mythmaking" (Ostriker 72) discussed earlier. Exiled from the community, perceived as monstrous, they nonetheless persist in their personal quests toward self-knowledge and fulfillment; and art is generally the vehicle by which they endeavor to achieve their goals. Welty's propensity for creating such figures is compellingly manifest in "June Recital" with the character of Miss Eckhart, Morgana's German piano teacher.

During all her years of residence in Morgana, Miss Eckhart is perceived as an outsider by her neighbors. She lives with her invalid mother in rooms rented from Miss Snowdie MacLain and earns a meager living by providing piano lessons to the children of Morgana. Her mannerisms, her demeanor, and her way of life appear foreign and puzzling to them. She performs all her own household duties without the assistance of a Negro and prepares strange kinds of food: "Cabbage was cooked there by no Negro and by no way it was ever cooked in Morgana. With wine...it was known from Mr. Wiley Bowles, the grocer, that Miss Eckhart and her mother...ate pig's brains" (Welty, "June Recital" 305).

Although her speech and name indicate her German ancestry and heritage, her neighbors remain ignorant of her personal history prior to her arrival in Morgana. Such mysterious origins constitute Miss Eckhart as seriously flawed by members of a closed, Southern community wherein family history and pedigree are of supreme social importance:

Where did Miss Eckhart come from...In Morgana most destinies were known to everybody and seemed to go without saying. It was unlikely that anybody except Miss Perdita Mayo had asked Miss Eckhart where the Eckharts came from, where exactly in the world...And Miss Perdita was so undependable: she couldn't tell you now to save her soul. (Welty, "June Recital" 308)

For whatever reason, Miss Eckhart fails to share details of her private life with her neighbors; consequently, their suspicion of her grows: "The war came and all through it and even after 1918 people said Miss Eckhart was a German and still wanted the Kaiser to win" (Welty, "June Recital" 305).

Her failure to embrace and participate in certain customs and standards of the community brands Miss Eckhart an outsider in Morgana forever. Her foreignness is underscored by the church she belongs to--a Lutheran in the midst of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists--"if Miss

Eckhart had belonged to a church that had ever been heard of...the ladies would have had something to invite her to belong to" (Welty, "June Recital" 308).

Her very name sets her apart from the rest of Morgana society: "if Miss Eckhart had allowed herself to be called by her first name, then she would have been like other ladies" (Welty, "June Recital" 308). She fails to participate in the customary practice of using her first name along with her last name and the courtesy title of "Miss." All the proper ladies of the town subscribe to this informal naming system, thus Mrs. King MacLain and Mrs. Felix Spights are referred to by their friends as Miss Snowdie MacLain and Miss Billie Texas Spights.

In The Golden Apples, Miss Eckhart is never addressed by her first name--apparently at her own request--but the citizens of Morgana know her name because it is prominently displayed on the programs she arranges to have printed each year for her students' recital: "There were programs...and flowing across the top in a script...as if for a purpose ...the full name of Miss Lotte Elisabeth Eckhart" (Welty, "June Recital" 310). Far from establishing an informal rapport with her neighbors, this single annual exposure to her first name advances her separateness from the community. She persists in using a formal appellation for herself as she associates with the townspeople. Consequently:

Such a procedure immortalizes her foreignness and her spinsterhood, and it also signifies her permanent social exile: she must always be addressed formally, never intimately...Her name, like her church, is 'unheard of' in Morgana; it represents...a violation of the town's rules of speech. (Schmidt 90, 91)

In the absence of other social connections, Miss Eckhart might still have acquired some semblance of acceptance into the community had she been married: "if she had been married to anybody at all, just the awfulest man--like Miss Snowdie MacLain, that everybody could feel sorry for" (Welty, "June Recital" 308). Status as a married woman might have provided enough commonality to allow her some share in the circle of Morgana society, regardless of the stature or virtue of her husband. Indeed, had Miss Eckhart's life mirrored that of Miss Snowdie MacLain--a long-suffering martyr, married to a philanderer--her position in the community would have been insured.

Because Miss Eckhart is without a known (and acceptable) family history, because she lacks proper social affiliations, and because she fails to emulate established customs and practices, her status as a spinster leaves her vulnerable to the community's deepest contempt. Unmarried status alone does not appear to enlist automatically the

disdain of the community in The Golden Apples; other single women function comfortably in Morgana as respected, active members of society. But in the rigidly defined social structure of Morgana, women who lack independent or family-based financial support are unable to elude the "stigma of spinsterhood" even though they engage in respectable work (Kerr 134).

Thus, the social reality for Miss Eckhart is that she is despised "just for living, a poor unwanted teacher and unmarried" (Welty, "June Recital" 306); she would have been more accepted in the community had she been married to a scoundrel. Peter Schmidt asserts that in "June Recital," the story of Miss Eckhart:

brings into focus as none of Welty's other stories do the social pressures that ostracize a woman, forcing her to choose between marriage and monstrosity, being a lady in the parlor or a madwoman in the attic. (86)

Without cultural common ground upon which to meet others, Miss Eckhart lives the life of the outcast; and, typically, the community blames and censures her for her own dilemma.

Morgana's responses to her involvement in a couple of sexually charged incidents is expletive of their penchant to blame Miss Eckhart for her own misfortune. One evening she is attacked and raped by a "crazy Negro" as she walks

along the street: "She had been walking by herself after dark; nobody had told her any better" (Welty, "June Recital" 301). There is little evidence of sympathy or concern for Miss Eckhart as a victim of violence; rather her position outside the circle of the community is underscored by the implication that her ignorance of convention resulted in the attack. And once she recovers, people are perplexed that she continues to live in Morgana; she resumes her daily activity as if nothing had happened. Her continued presence is a specter of unpleasantness--something the townsfolk would rather forget:

They wished she had moved away...then they wouldn't always have to remember that a terrible thing once happened to her. But Miss Eckhart stayed, as though she considered one thing not so much more terrifying than another. (After all, nobody knew why she came!) It was because she was from so far away...people said to excuse her, that she couldn't comprehend...Miss Eckhart's *differences* were why shame alone had not killed her. (Welty, "June Recital" 301-02)

Because of her differences, Miss Eckhart is consistently held at arms length and often ridiculed by the people around her.

The power of the communal voice to establish outsiders

and victims is further demonstrated in the account of her unrequited romance with Mr. Hal Sissum, a shoe clerk at the local department store. Miss Eckhart is "sweet" on Mr. Sissum, probably because he speaks "very nicely to her about her feet and treated them as a real concern," and he notices her pretty ankles--her one striking feature (Welty, "June Recital" 296). But Miss Eckhart's awkwardness and reticence in expressing her feelings are compounded by her alienation from the town's inner social circle. Mr. Sissum plays the cello with the band at local "political speakings" that are periodically held on the lawn of the home of the prominent Stark family, and Miss Eckhart is always in attendance: "Nobody ever saw them really together any more than that" (Welty, "June Recital" 297).

When Mr. Sissum drowns in the Big Black River, Miss Eckhart attends the funeral and is accorded a brief admittance into Morgana's circle. The Loomis family offers her a ride, and she stands with them and other townspeople at the cemetery even though her appearance in a "dress that was the wrong season's length and her same hat...[and] her unstylish, winter purse" set her, as always, apart from them (Welty, "June Recital" 299). While her frumpy manner of dress might be overlooked, her unconventional, almost bizarre expression of grief at the grave side ensures her permanent alienation:

Miss Eckhart broke out of the circle...a stranger to their cemetery, where none of her people lay, [she] pushed forward...and began to nod her head--sharply, to one side and then the other...her vigorous nods...increasing in urgency...It was strange that in Mr. Sissum's life Miss Eckhart, as everybody said, had never known what to do; and now she did this. (Welty, "June Recital" 299-300)

As she "breaks out of the circle," it appears that she might throw herself upon the coffin if not restrained. Miss Eckhart's behavior shocks and further alienates the Morgana community from her: "After the way she cried in the cemetery--for they decided it must have been crying she did--some ladies stopped their little girls from learning any more music" (Welty, "June Recital" 300).

Miss Eckhart's history in Morgana from this point on becomes a chronicle of decline and misfortune. As her company of students diminishes, her economic situation spirals toward desperation. Then Miss Snowdie sells the house, and Miss Eckhart is put out by the new owner who keeps the piano and Miss Eckhart's other belongings. The power of the communal voice to isolate her intensifies as malicious stories circulate: "Some people said Miss Eckhart killed her mother with opium" (Welty, "June Recital" 307). She takes a room at the Holifield farm on the edge of town

where she "got older and weaker" (Welty, "June Recital" 307), and her occasional trips into town are marked by increasingly irrational behavior: "People said you could look at her and see she had broken" (Welty, "June Recital" 307). Before long, she is reported to have been seen "hoeing peas out there on the county farm" (Welty, "June Recital" 308). Her final appearance in Morgana is marked by a desperate, climactic act of self-violence which results in her removal to the state asylum for the insane in Jackson, where she passes the rest of her days.

Welty consistently emphasizes Miss Eckhart's isolation from the mainstream of Morgana society in "June Recital." Like the Medusa, she is a pariah, an outcast. Yet Welty underscores Miss Eckhart's pathetic situation through persistent enumeration of instances of her unwarranted victimization. Thus, Miss Eckhart evolves as a Medusa figure much like that of William Morris in "The Doom of King Acrisius;" she is cursed and abandoned through no fault of her own. Morris' Medusa suffers due to the caprice of a powerful goddess, and Miss Eckhart is scorned because of the narrow inclinations of the social powers that reign in Morgana. Miss Eckhart might easily have cried out in the voice of Ann Stanford's Medusa: "I was alone. I am alone. My ways/ divide me from the world" (27-28).

The character of Miss Eckhart is further endowed by

Welty with Medusan qualities that harken to both traditional and revisionist interpretations of the mythic figure through her association to art. Music serves as an important motif in The Golden Apples and is especially significant to the thematic unity of "June Recital." Welty's implementation of music as a literary device is: "all-encompassing in its multiple, positively affective functions" (Howard 77), and the recurrence of musical themes and vocabulary "provides insight into the meaning of beauty, love, suffering, and loss, and it has the power to suspend, compress, or protract time and experience" (Vande Kieft 123).

Like most of Welty's wanderer figures, Miss Eckhart is a musician (Vande Kieft 122). She is passionate about music and with a teacher's fervor hopes to translate that passion to her students. However, the reality of her situation is that she must earn a living by providing piano lessons to the children of Morgana whose mothers view the skill as of great social rather than artistic consequence. Thus, Miss Eckhart's quandary is that:

Music could have been an equivalent of the
 'glimmering boy,' but, as it turns out--as with
 many other single women of her time--teaching
 piano lessons to mostly untalented children does
 not make for fulfillment and self-realization
 ...[she exemplifies] the single woman who yearns

for artistic fulfillment but must recognize the limits of her aspirations. (Gyax 52-53)

The social isolation she experiences is, therefore, intensified by her frustrated artistic aspirations. In "June Recital," Miss Eckhart becomes a type of the repressed female artist (Harrison 63-64). She endures what Pitavy-Souques describes as "The agony of separateness...the unbreachable gulf" between her hopes and dreams and the reality of her life (264-65).

The tragedy of Miss Eckhart's "agony of separateness" relative to her art is poignantly revealed in her foiled attempt to achieve vicarious fulfillment through her most gifted pupil, Virgie Rainey (Vande Kieft 94). Also a wanderer figure, Virgie is wild, rebellious, headstrong, and apparently without knowledge or appreciation of the gift she possesses. But Miss Eckhart quickly assesses Virgie's potential and determines to nurture and advance it. She demonstrates her appreciation--almost reverence--for Virgie's skill each time the child plays:

Virgie would drift over to the piano, spread out her music, and make sure she was sitting just the way she wanted to be upon the stool...Then without a word from Miss Eckhart she would start to play. She played firmly, smoothly, her face at rest...She went now gently, now forcibly, never

loudly.

And when she was finished, Miss Eckhart would say, 'Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen.*' (Welty, "June Recital" 290)

Virgie, like Miss Eckhart, exists on the periphery of Morgana society. Her family is poor; her parents, Mr. Fate Rainey and Miss Katie Rainey, earn a tenuous living from their small homestead. He peddles buttermilk and other dairy products from his wagon in the streets of Morgana, and she sells produce along a country roadside. The Raineys do not even own a piano, so Virgie must practice her lessons on Miss Eckhart's piano.

The piano teacher and her star pupil are consistently linked together as outsiders. Cassie Morrison, one of Virgie's fellow students and the narrator of most of "June Recital," serves as spokesperson for the community, voicing Morgana's views and opinions of Miss Eckhart and Virgie. Despite Virgie's often rebellious and insolent behavior toward Miss Eckhart, her habit of bringing the teacher a magnolia bloom (stolen from a neighbor's tree) as she arrives for morning lessons, demonstrates the complexity of their relationship. And the event is recorded by the narrator as evidence of their shared social ignorance: "Virgie carried the magnolia bloom like a hot tureen, and offered it to Miss Eckhart, neither of them knowing any

better; magnolias smelled too sweet and heavy for right after breakfast" (Welty, "June Recital" 290).

Fur Elise becomes Virgie's signature piece: "Virgie Rainey played *Fur Elise* all the time. And Miss Eckhart used to say, 'Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen*'" (Welty, "June Recital" 287). Long after she is able to master more difficult compositions, she continues to play the Beethoven piece. Miss Eckhart persists in her efforts to insure Virgie's development as a musician; each June at the recital, Virgie is featured "playing better and better something that was harder and harder" (Welty, "June Recital" 303-04). When she masters the difficult opening movement from a Liszt concerto, something Cassie declares "none of the rest of them could ever hope to play," (Welty, "June Recital" 303) Miss Eckhart rejoices in Virgie's accomplishment with the prediction of a grand future for the girl:

Virgie would be heard from in the world, playing that, Miss Eckhart said...Virgie Rainey, she repeated over and over, had a gift, and she must go away from Morgana...In the world, she must study and practice her music for the rest of her life. (Welty, "June Recital" 303)

Leslie Kathleen Hankins proposes that Welty here depicts Miss Eckhart as caught up in "Romantic presuppositions, [wishing] to assign to Virgie the role of

the artist, the genius, to turn the text of Virgie into a *Kunstlerroman* in the traditional style" (399). But she is thwarted in this endeavor by the same forces that have set her apart from the social mainstream. Forces which are determined to do the same to Virgie. All of Morgana is convinced that Virgie will never become a world renowned musician, and Miss Eckhart's naivete in this matter is evident even to her young pupils. Her insistence that "Virgie would be heard from in the world" reveals in

one ardent cry her lack of knowledge of the world. How could Virgie be heard from, in the world? And 'the world'! Where did Miss Eckhart think she was now?...they had all known Virgie would never go, or study, or practice anywhere, never would even have her own piano, because it wouldn't be like her...The very place to prove Miss Eckhart crazy was on her own subject, piano playing: she didn't know what she was talking about. (Welty, "June Recital" 303-04)

Miss Eckhart is painfully aware of the power of the town's ability to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the shadow of despair clouds her joy in Virgie's accomplishments: "in repeating all this [that Virgie will advance in the world], Miss Eckhart suffered" (Welty, "June Recital" 303). The stratified social construct of Morgana

does not accept or allow for a Virgie Rainey as artist in the Romantically defined concept of the role, and Miss Eckhart's despair evolves from her struggle to deter this destiny (Hankins 399-400).

But she persists in her devotion to Virgie and to music. When the Raineys lose their barn and have no more money "to throw away on piano lessons," Miss Eckhart teaches the girl free of charge "because she must not stop learning" (Welty, "June Recital" 304). The emergence of such a talent, after years of bleak monotony, seems to have rekindled Miss Eckhart's dormant passion for art, thus she endures Virgie's disrespect and bad manners.

And Virgie effectively manipulates her teacher's passionate devotion to art: "Miss Eckhart, for all her being so strict and inexorable...[had] a little weak place in her, vulnerable, and Virgie Rainey found it" (Welty, "June Recital" 293). The girl's sudden refusal to use Miss Eckhart's beloved metronome signals a shift in their relationship that is irrevocable. The metronome, Miss Eckhart's most prized possession, is kept in a wall safe in her studio and is ceremoniously brought to the piano at the beginning of each day's lesson. Symbolic of the discipline of music and her authority as teacher, Miss Eckhart requires all her students to submit to its order. However, one day, Virgie simply announces that "she would not play another

note with that thing in her face," and Miss Eckhart immediately removes it (Welty, "June Recital" 293). Virgie acquires a power over Miss Eckhart that is apparent to all:

Miss Eckhart had made an exception of Virgie Rainey; she had first respected Virgie Rainey, and now fell humble before her impudence...Before some caprice of Virgie's, her spirit drooped its head. The child had it by the lead. (Welty, "June Recital" 293, 94)

Virgie Rainey becomes the joy and the torment of Miss Eckhart's life; the child continues to be callously indifferent to her teacher's solicitous attention and to her art. Virgie effectively victimizes Miss Eckhart as she spurns what the older woman freely offers. Despite Miss Eckhart's delight in Virgie's continued musical progress, her unhappy association with the child further establishes her as a Medusa figure--a pathetic victim, monstrous in her almost total alienation from the world around her. Miss Eckhart's suffering is apparent as she contemplates Virgie's continued musical progress: "Miss Eckhart [is filled] with stiff delight, curious anguish" (Welty, "June Recital" 304).

"June Recital" chronicles the events of Miss Eckhart's role as teacher--her determination to impress upon her students some semblance of the discipline necessary to acquire the skill of piano playing. In her obsessive

devotion to Virgie, Miss Eckhart exceeds the customary limits of this role as she attempts to launch the child into the world of professional music. But in this endeavor, she continues to function as the teacher, regardless of (perhaps because of) the implication that she is seeking vicarious artistic fulfillment through Virgie's achievements.

However, Welty weaves into the narrative a pivotal scene that establishes Miss Eckhart indisputably in the role of the artist. One summer morning, an unexpected thunderstorm detains three of Miss Eckhart's students--Virgie Rainey, Cassie Morrison, and Jinny Love Stark--from leaving the studio. Unexpectedly, their teacher sits down to play at the piano; Cassie, the narrator, declares that Miss Eckhart never performed in the presence of her pupils except "when she took the other half in duets" (Welty, "June Recital" 300). A surprising transformation occurs as Miss Eckhart descends into the music:

The thunder rolled and Miss Eckhart frowned and bent forward or she leaned back to play; at moments her solid body swayed from side to side like a tree trunk...in playing it Miss Eckhart assumed an entirely different face...There in the rainy light it was a sightless face, one for music only...Performing, Miss Eckhart was unrelenting. Even when the worst of the piece was over, her

fingers like foam on rocks pulled at the spent-out part with unstilled persistence, insolence, violence. (Welty, "June Recital" 300-02)

Clearly, Welty here portrays Miss Eckhart as an artist with the ability to immerse herself in her art to the point of transcendence. Fleetinglly, as she plays, Miss Eckhart leaves behind students and the harsh realities of her existence in Morgana; through the vehicle of music, she achieves an intensity of existence without parallel. Miss Eckhart's students witness an artistic passion unrelated to their experience in Morgana, it is "of primal nature, absolute and uncaring" (Rubin 108).

Her demeanor, even her physical appearance is indicative of this transcendence through art. The three young girls who witness Miss Eckhart's performance are both mesmerized and confused by the change it evokes in their teacher:

Her skin flattened and drew across her cheeks, her lips changed. The face could have belonged to someone else--not even to a woman, necessarily. It was the face a mountain could have, or what might be seen behind a waterfall. (Welty, "June Recital" 300)

The girls, unable to absorb the full meaning of what they have witnessed, are simultaneously horrified and fascinated

by the transformation of Miss Eckhart. They are, in a sense, momentarily petrified by what they see and hear.

Welty's description of Miss Eckhart's transformation as she plays that stormy morning may be compared to Shelley's poetic interpretation of the painting of the Medusa at the Florentine Gallery: "it is less the horror than the grace/ Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone,/ Whereon the lineaments of that dead face/ Are graven" (9-12). The girls, like the poet who gazes upon the painting, are forever marked by the experience of seeing and hearing Miss Eckhart play. Virgie, in particular, will later recall the incident and ponder its significance. Like Shelley's Medusa, Miss Eckhart stuns Virgie with the power and the grace of her creative impulse.

The power of art is reflected in the face Miss Eckhart assumes as she immerses herself in the music; it is genderless, timeless, with the beauty and enduring quality of mountains and waterfalls. This physical transformation signifies "an absolute, unreserved response...to the controlled expression of the violence of passion, desire, heroism...the vocation and discipline of the artist" (Rubin 108). For Miss Eckhart, the language of music incites "transformations that can erase the boundaries of gender, social status, even self and other" (Harrison 63); it is the vehicle by which she realizes a Medusan "petrification"

through the timeless and universal properties of art (Coldwell 431).

Yet she is bound by the social and cultural limitations imposed upon her; her experience chronicles the plight of the female artist. The chaotic, uncontrolled quality of Miss Eckhart's behavior (both inside and outside the music studio) threatens the social order of Morgana (Rubin 111); she is further shunned, and slowly children cease taking lessons from her. Miss Eckhart's transformation is Medusan in nature--at once beautiful and horrible. The ecstasy of her transcendence only results in further alienation from those who see but cannot understand.

This passionate creature with a face "for music only" who wrenches an inexpressible harmony from the mundane studio piano bears little resemblance to the victimized outcast her students know as Miss Eckhart:

Coming from Miss Eckhart, the music made all the pupils uneasy, almost alarmed; something had burst out, unwanted, exciting, from the wrong person's life. This was some brilliant thing too splendid for Miss Eckhart. (Welty, "June Recital" 301)

Miss Eckhart's complete submission to the creative impulse is a powerful and frightening act. And Welty clearly articulates that the creative imagination and the sensitivity of the artist often emerge from an unexpected

and surprising source: "What Miss Eckhart might have told them a long time ago was that there was more than the ear could bear to hear or the eye to see, even in her" (Welty, "June Recital" 301).

Noting her affinity for the character of Miss Eckhart, Welty writes:

It was not my intention--it never was--to invent a character who should speak for me, the author in person...Yet, it seems to me now, years after I wrote The Golden Apples, that I did bring forth a character with whom I came to feel oddly in touch. This is Miss Eckhart, a woman who came from far away to give piano lessons to the young of Morgana. She is formidable and eccentric in the eyes of everyone, is scarcely accepted in the town. But she persisted with me, as she persisted in spite of herself with the other characters in the stories. (Welty, One Writer's Beginnings 100)

Recalling superficial similarities to her own childhood piano teacher, who like Miss Eckhart, hit students' hands with a fly swatter, held an annual recital every June, and wrote "Practice" on sheet music with a "P" with a cat's face and a long tail, Welty insists that "the character of Miss Eckhart was miles away" from her own teacher, indeed from

any of the other teacher/ characters she has created. As she proceeds to determine the basis of the bond that exists between herself as writer and Miss Eckhart as character, Welty asserts:

As I looked longer and longer for the origins of this passionate and strange character, at last, I realized that Miss Eckhart came from me. There wasn't any resemblance to her outward identity: I am not musical, nor a teacher, nor foreign in birth; not humorless or ridiculed or missing out in love; nor have I yet let the world around me slip from my recognition. But none of that counts. What counts is only what lies at the solitary core...What I have put into her is my passion for my own life work, my own art.

Exposing yourself to risk is a truth Miss Eckhart and I had in common. What animates and possesses me is what drives Miss Eckhart, the love of her art and the love of giving it, the desire to give it until there is no more left...Not in Miss Eckhart as she stands solidly and almost opaquely in the surround of her story, but in the making of her character out of my most inward and deeply feeling self, I would say I have found my voice in fiction. (Welty, One Writer's Beginnings 100)

Thus Miss Eckhart emerges as the preeminent artist figure of "June Recital." Welty endows this character with an exceptional passion and commitment to art that is never understood nor accepted in Morgana. Yet her performance on that rainy morning reveals her connection to something mysterious, powerful, even beautiful: "And if the sonata had an origin in a place on earth, it was the place where Virgie, even, had never been and was not likely to go" (Welty, "June Recital" 301). That "place," the province of the creative imagination, where even the most talented of Miss Eckhart's students "was not likely to go," allows her, fleetingly, to participate in "the melodious hue of beauty" (Shelley 13) that gives meaning to her otherwise tragic existence. Miss Eckhart remains a Medusan outcast in Morgana, viewed as monstrous by all, even her beloved protege; yet she alone provides Virgie with a fleeting vision of the petrifying power of art. Much like the Medusa of Shelley's poem, Miss Eckhart becomes the unexpected agent of something "brilliant" and "splendid."

Chapter III

"BEYOND THE BEAUTY AND THE SWORD'S STROKE AND THE TERROR": MEDUSA AS ARTIST-HERO

Miss Eckhart's fervent performance that stormy morning places her in the role of the artist as a "maker of meaning" (Harrison 63; Rubin 102). This brief scene exemplifies an important theme in much of Welty's work: "The quest for truth and beauty in the mystery of the fleeting moment" (Neault 35). This important thematic focus in The Golden Apples poignantly addresses Welty's ideas concerning time and the perception of time relative to the artistic quest for meaning:

In going in the direction of meaning, time has to move through a mind. What it will bring about is an awakening there. Through whatever motions it goes through, it will call forth, in mind or heart, some crucial recognition. (Welty, "Some Notes on Time in Fiction" 166)

Welty's work, particularly in The Golden Apples, reflects her fascination with individual rather than social perceptions of time. She accords special significance to certain characters' perspectives concerning "each unique moment of passing time" (Neault 35). Welty constructs a

scene that depicts the powerful impact of a moment suspended in time with her portrayal of Miss Eckhart playing the Beethoven sonata during the storm. The intensity of that brief experience solidifies in the consciousness of all present as a living "still moment" that is physically manifest in Miss Eckhart's transformation (which recalls the timeless quality of such natural entities as mountains and waterfalls) and the stunned responses of her students. As if crystallized in time, the moment survives intact in the memories of all who experience it.

In The Golden Apples Welty explores the significance of such still moments to characters, like Miss Eckhart, who are sensitive to the creative power of memory and the imagination. Welty asserts that the elusive mysteries of human existence are revealed in these still moments suspended in time:

perhaps time, unpleaded with, does stand
still...when a human being becomes still can all
the impressions that surround him in place and
time and memory--some fulfilled, some never
fulfilled, but projected in dreams--enter his soul
then and saturate it with their full original
powers. (Welty, "Some Notes on River Country"

156)

Thus, Welty suggests that the mystery of life is

inextricably bound to the mystery of time--finite humanity's (in)ability to define itself relative to the eternal strain of time--to seek to situate meaningfully its (mortal) existence against the grid of eternity. Such mystical revelations manifest themselves in the fleetingly still moments of "the here and now, or the past made here and now" (Welty, "Place in Fiction" 117). Her conceptualization of the "still moment" does not negate the existence of the past and the future; it rather represents the human ability to consolidate multiple impressions of the past, the present, and the future in human memory (Neault 43).

Douglas Messerli examines the structure of The Golden Apples as outlined according to conflicting perceptions of the pattern(s) of time (82). He defines these differing orders of time as linear and cyclical, which correspond to history and myth. Linear time corresponds to history; it is chronological--the reality of the community. Cyclical time corresponds to myth--the capacity to perceive past, present, and future simultaneously. Welty presents the collision of these polar forces: history and myth, the community and the individual in "June Recital."

The linear time of history becomes the truth as Morgana sees it; characters like Cassie Morrison, the narrator of "June Recital," are incapable of perceiving the meaning of events outside the regulated strictures of community

sanctions and interpretations. Thus history, even memory, is interpreted by these characters in a communal rather than a personal sense:

In Morgana, as in any small town, because of this shared experience in linear time, the individual's life is inextricably connected with, is even defined by the lives of the others in the community...individual lives become community property and individual acts lose meaning or, because they are seen as a threat to the homogeneity of the community, are outrightly opposed. (Messerli 83-84)

Consequently, the "community historians" of Morgana interpret events according to a linear/ historical vision and attempt to control their environment by impressing this interpretation of reality upon the whole community. Individuals like Miss Eckhart fail to "fit" into the historical mold. The personal histories of the individuals living in Morgana, like the Morrisons, the MacLains, and the Starks, are absorbed and converted into a communal history that adheres to the community's values and standards. Any blatant deviation from this vision of reality cannot be tolerated. Thus those who do not conform become outcasts.

Characters who perceive the mythic reality of cyclical time actively engage their creative imaginations in such a

way that they are able to transcend the fixed parameters of linear time. Usually artists, these characters endeavor "to be conscious of the deep roots of the past, to enrich the fleeting present, and to face the uncertain future with courage and purpose" so that they may achieve an "ultimate reality" (McHaney 137). And it is often music that provides the "portal" through which these artist figures enter "this dimension of other time" (Phillips 64). Miss Eckhart briefly experiences the mythic reality of cyclical time--a "still moment"--as she plays during the storm: "the kind of time...which like the music itself, is new and old at the same moment...it is the time of myth" (Messerli 87).

Welty portrays Miss Eckhart as a character caught in the juncture of linear and cyclical time; she embodies "both rebellion and restriction, music's freedom and metronomic regularity" (Schmidt 60). Utilizing Miss Eckhart's metronome as a symbol of the rigid imposition of linear time, Welty presents her as one desperately trying to capture and control time: "The metronome is symbolic of Miss Eckhart's attempted tyranny over time...[her] action [is] the ritualistic immobilization of time," she submits to it in "an attempt to avoid frustration and suffering by the ordering of existence" (Neault 39). The piano teacher's mysterious origin could indicate that as a wanderer, she adhered to a cyclical perception of reality prior to her

coming to Morgana and that she embraces the order of the metronome as a survival mechanism as a result of the community's opposition and distrust of her (Messerli 88).

Miss Eckhart falls victim to the assault of linear time upon her life and work; yet she possesses the artist's vision of the elusive "glimmering girl"--that "still moment" which encompasses the past, the present, and the future. Her ardent playing that rainy summer morning illustrates her propensity for as well as her desire to become involved in cyclical/ mythic time. As Miss Eckhart immerses herself in the music, she is momentarily freed of the constraints of linear/ historical time; art becomes the vehicle by which she transcends the reality of Morgana to engage in the mythic quality of time with its simultaneous interconnections of the past, the present, and the future. However, she is crippled by communal restrictions and has little opportunity to sustain the vision and express her artistry. Miss Eckhart's ultimate descent into madness results from the repression of her own artistic expression as well as her failed attempt to acquire it vicariously through Virgie Rainey; she "is made vulnerable by her involuntary confrontation with the reality of the moment" (Neault 39). Miss Eckhart recognizes her relationship to time and struggles against the constraints of historical time, but she is ultimately crushed by it.

Myth and mythic allusion are often the techniques Welty utilizes to create a "still moment" in her fiction. She asserts that: "The all-withstanding devices of myth and legend (the riddle of the Sphinx, Penelope's web, the Thousand and One Nights) are constructed of time" (Welty, "Some Notes on Time in Fiction" 164). In the tradition of Flaubert, Joyce, and Faulkner, she uses myth to coalesce "all time into the present of the story so as to symbolically unite disparate chronological periods; and by rendering symbolic character [sic] in myth-related backgrounds, she is able to make them timeless" (Neault 45).

Welty's implementation of mythic themes is reflected in the recurrent appearance of hero figures in her fiction. But her heroes, who are often women, are not always easily recognizable to the reader accustomed to the traditional male model. Welty's female heroes are not usually victorious in the traditional sense; they do not always "slay the dragon" or fulfill their quests in a conventionally accepted manner. They emerge as heroes precisely because Welty "radically revise[s] our ideas of what heroism may involve" (Schmidt 62). She constructs a new concept of heroism with possibilities for both male and female participants and presents it in the familiar and universal language of myth by altering the familiar myths to suit and communicate her purpose.

Consequently, Welty's fiction is at times described as "anti-heroic" because she often satirizes the conventionally drawn "posturing male hero-adventurer" as she effects not the

attacking of the male sex and its image of itself but of clearing the way for a conception of heroic action which does further justice to the actual potentialities for heroism in men and women.

(Allen 13)

Her treatment of the character of King MacLain in The Golden Apples exemplifies this pattern. A Zeus-like figure, King is the most obvious wanderer in the narrative because his absences from Morgana are long and frequent. He returns periodically to sire offspring, legitimate and illegitimate (Welty subtly implies that Virgie Rainey and other wanderer figures in Morgana are actually his children), and to witness pivotal moments in Morgana's history (he is present when Miss Eckhart and Virgie meet for the last time). King achieves legendary status in Morgana. Accounts of his conquests and adventures are relished and circulated, particularly by the women in town. Yet he fails to emerge as a true heroic figure in the mythic sense; no evidence is provided in the narrative to indicate that King engages in any type of quest or search for self-fulfillment. Welty clearly undercuts his superficial Zeus-like endowments to

portray him as self-indulgent and irresponsible; his sole purpose appears to be self-gratification. When he returns to Morgana to stay, King MacLain is a clearly unheroic figure--old and infirm, deficient in the knowledge and wisdom which a lifetime of heroic wandering should provide; he must be cared for as a child by his wife, the long-suffering Miss Snowdie.

By way of contrast, Miss Eckhart hardly appears as an appropriate subject for a traditional male quest. An outsider and a foreigner, misunderstood and unappreciated, she is unable to communicate the depths of her artistry to the citizens of Morgana. Even Virgie, whom Miss Eckhart had loved, believes that she hates the eccentric music teacher and ignores her as they meet for the last time on the streets of Morgana. Miss Eckhart fails to inspire and motivate Virgie toward a career in music; her most talented student ultimately uses her skill merely to play background music at the local picture show.

Thus Welty manipulates and reworks conventional types and constructs revised characters and narrative situations that reflect techniques examined and described by contemporary feminist critics (Coldwell 422, Hankins 397, Harrison 57, Ostriker 72). Welty expands the boundaries of the conventional male model to create a new type of hero, a character like Miss Eckhart, who enjoys only a momentary

vision of artistic fulfillment, who plants the seed of her vision, never to see it blossom. In The Golden Apples Welty constructs "a unique glimpse of life, a new myth fashioned out of the old" (McHaney 137). From a revisionist feminist perspective, Miss Eckhart can be perceived as heroic; she achieves (although fleetingly) her objective of self realization via the journey, the "artistic process" itself rather than the acquisition of some valued object or the completion of a prescribed test as in conventional male quests (Hankins 397).

Years after Miss Eckhart's death, Virgie acknowledges this quality in her teacher: "[Virgie] might have seen heroism prophetically when she was young and afraid of Miss Eckhart" (Welty, "The Wanderers" 458). Virgie recalls Miss Eckhart as exhibiting characteristics of both the hero and the victim. Unlike the male model, Miss Eckhart fails to "slay the dragon." Instead, her journey is uniquely feminine and encompasses a composite range of experiences, feelings, and emotions that recall the qualities of both mythic hero and victim; these qualities also parallel the dual concept of the Medusa as both destroyer and victim.

Certainly, it is Miss Eckhart's role as victim that is readily apparent and at the surface throughout The Golden Apples. Welty emphasizes her alienation from the community of Morgana in numerous painfully explicit scenes and endows

her with the monstrosity of a Medusa mirrored in the townspeople's perceptions of her. In "June Recital," Welty juxtaposes two incidents in the life of Miss Eckhart which underscore the terror she feels and the horror she projects as a Medusan figure.

Mr. Sissum gives Miss Eckhart a small doll that she displays on a table in her studio "as if it were a vase of fresh red roses" (Welty, "June Recital" 299). It is an ugly, promotional token that Spight's department store gives to children with the purchase of each pair of Bilikin shoes. Miss Eckhart's affection for Mr. Sissum compels her to keep, even treasure, a gift that might otherwise be construed as insulting. She responds to the doll in a bizarre manner:

Never had Miss Eckhart laughed so hard, and with such an unfamiliar sound, as she laughed to see Mr. Sissum's favor. Tears ran down her bright, distorted cheeks every time one of the children coming into the studio picked the Bilikin up.

(Welty, "June Recital" 299)

Miss Eckhart cannot help but see in the Bilikin doll a tangible representation of the town's view of her as pathetic and ugly (Schmidt 102). All of Morgana seems to have absorbed an image of her as monstrous; even the kindly Mr. Sissum appears to adhere (perhaps unconsciously) to this perception of Miss Eckhart. She suffers the torment of the

Medusa who is ever mindful of the repugnance of all who behold her. The "unfamiliar sound" of her tortured laughter that turns to tears and a "distorted" expression arouses a Medusa-like horror in those who witness her outburst.

Welty's presentation of Miss Eckhart as a Medusa in Morgana is further confirmed as the narrator recounts an incident that occurred at one of the summer political "speakings" where Mr. Sissum plays his cello with the band and Miss Eckhart sits passively in the grass listening. Virgie, who runs amidst the collected citizenry of Morgana with wild abandon, proceeds to make a monstrous spectacle of her music teacher:

Virgie would run closer and closer circles around Miss Eckhart, who sat alone...[she] put a loop of clover chain down over Miss Eckhart's head, her hat--her one hat--and all. She hung Miss Eckhart with flowers, while Mr. Sissum plucked the strings up above her. Miss Eckhart sat on, perfectly still and submissive...Virgie laughed delightedly and with her long chain in her hand ran around and around her, binding her up with clovers. Miss Eckhart let her head roll back, and then Cassie felt that the teacher was filled with terror, perhaps with pain. (Welty, "June Recital" 298)

Virgie's actions make a public mockery of Miss

Eckhart's unexpressed feelings about Mr. Sissum. But Welty also uses this scene to demonstrate powerfully not only the isolation but the terror Miss Eckhart experiences even in the presence of the two people she loves in Morgana. Her misery is palpable in this scene and inescapable; she will forever be the brunt of community jokes, the pathetic outsider: "Virgie's seemingly innocent ritual acts out what Morgana has been doing to Miss Eckhart over many years and would continue with even more intensity...Virgie freezes her into an image of Medusa's terror, pain and monstrosity" (Schmidt 101). Miss Eckhart's predicament in Morgana recalls that of William Morris' victimized Medusa who becomes an object of horror through no fault of her own. The reader, unlike the citizens of Morgana, becomes filled with horror, not at Miss Eckhart (Medusa) herself, but at the monstrous conditions in which she must exist (McGann 19).

Miss Eckhart's role as the victimized Medusa is further expressed in the events of her last day in Morgana. The recounting of these events by each of the two narrators serves as a frame for "June Recital." The story opens as Loch Morrison, confined to a sickbed, naively discloses the activity he observes taking place through two separate windows of the vacant MacLain house next door. Sixteen-year-old Virgie Rainey frolics and makes love with a sailor

in an upstairs room while an "unsteady-looking" Miss Eckhart, whom Loch believes to be the sailor's elderly mother, enters the downstairs parlor (her old studio) and begins methodically to "decorate" it with streamers of newspaper.

She arrays the still present piano with "maypole ribbons of newspaper," then retrieves a magnolia blossom from the neighbor's tree and places it on the piano. Once the room is filled with newspaper "decorations," she continues to stuff cracks in the walls and windows and tosses other collected debris into the fireplace. Loch realizes that she intends to burn the house down and that she will fail for lack of a draft. Unaware of her true identity, Loch nonetheless accurately assesses her pathetic situation: "in the splendor she fixed and pinned together she was all alone. She was not connected with anything else, with anybody" (Welty, "June Recital" 283).

Her task completed, Miss Eckhart disappears into "the blind corner of the parlor" and returns with a mysterious ticking object--the metronome--that Loch believes to be a bomb. She places it on the piano and reaches out to play a tune--*Fur Elise*. At this point the narration shifts to Cassie's point of view. In a room of the Morrison house without visual access to the abandoned MacLain homestead, Cassie hears the musical phrase and whispers an immediate

response: "Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen*" (Welty, "June Recital" 285). For Cassie, the strains of *Fur Elise* which drift to her window in a "labored, foolish way" (Welty, "June Recital" 302) trigger a flood of memories about Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey that comprise the narrative body of "June Recital."

In her dementia, Miss Eckhart prepares to destroy the site that represents both the emotional and professional highs and lows of her life in Morgana. Perhaps in her tormented rage, Miss Eckhart sees the old MacLain house as both a fitting symbol of the social structure of Morgana that ostracized her, as well as her own and Virgie's frustrated artistic careers. This final desperate act is illustrative of the Medusan rage she directs inward as well as outward, because her attempt to destroy the MacLain house is also an attempt at suicide, for "the fire caught her own hair. The little short white frill turned to flame" (Welty, "June Recital" 322). Miss Eckhart struggles with the image imposed upon her by society and directs the resultant rage and fury inward--Medusa attempts self-destruction because she has internalized Morgana's image of herself as monstrous (Schmidt 99-100).

Similarly, Pitavy-Souques examines the Medusa's penchant toward self destruction as she relates Jean Paul Sartre's phenomenological study of gaze (L'Etre et le Neant)

to the myth of Medusa and to Welty's The Golden Apples. She defines the concept of fascination as a spell-like human dynamic in which the human identity of one being collapses and is totally objectified by another, thus fascination symbolizes death, and

All the complexities of feelings based on fascination, tearing man between attraction and repulsion, loving and loathing, fulfillment and destruction inform the treatment of human relations in The Golden Apples. (Pitavy-Souques 263)

Pitavy-Souques proposes that fascination is central to the myth wherein "Medusa's deadly gaze, or rather fascination defeated, [is] overcome by another gaze--Perseus in the mirror" (263). She notes that Sartre demonstrates that "Nearly every form of meaningful relation to the other derives from fascination" (263). Consequently, fascination assumes various forms relative to the diversity of human relationships, as in prestige, the reversal of the phenomenon, in which the identity of the contemplator is lost as a consequence of identification with the object of admiration, and shame, the devastating inverse of fascination which results in self-loathing (Pitavy-Souques 263). Miss Eckhart's attempted suicide can be viewed as the product of shame; utilizing the communal "mirror" of Morgana's

perceptions of her, she constructs an image of herself as monstrous and repulsive, and her consequent despair leads her to self destruction.

Messerli interprets Miss Eckhart's ceremonial attempt to burn the MacLain house as an endeavor to "freeze" linear time, to terminate the flow of history that has reduced her to despair (90). In Myth and Reality, Mircea Eliade examines the ritual of the "perfection of the beginnings," which from a mythological perspective, views the flow of chronological (historical) time as a hindrance, a distancing factor from the knowledge and wisdom of the mythological "beginnings;" thus, "for something genuinely new to begin, the vestiges and the ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed" (50-53). With the destruction of the site that is most symbolic of her emotional and artistic losses, Miss Eckhart attempts to recover the transcendent experience of mythological time she enjoyed only fleetingly.

She is deterred from her enterprise by two clownish figures--Old Man Moody and Mr Fatty Bowles--who happen upon the scene and wait quietly till the fire takes hold so that they can show off by effecting an elaborate rescue. King MacLain, just returned from one of his longest absences, approaches the house in search of his family and witnesses the comic scene within as Moody and Bowles make exaggerated efforts to smother the flames and restrain Miss Eckhart.

Welty utilizes Medusan imagery here with references to Miss Eckhart's glassy-eyed, lifeless expression: "he could see how bright her big eyes were under their black circling brows, and how seldom they blinked" (Welty, "June Recital" 317). Furthermore, the terror and the horror Miss Eckhart experiences--reflected in her gaze--are reminiscent of the Medusa: "Her eyesight returned from far to close by. Then she stood looking at the three people fixedly, as if she showed them her insides, her live heart" (Welty, "June Recital" 322).

The misery of social isolation and thwarted artistic expression result in madness and despair for Miss Eckhart. Much like the Medusan figures of twentieth century feminist poetry, Miss Eckhart exemplifies the horror of the victimized character who suffers as she destroys. Welty creates in Miss Eckhart a character akin to the Medusa of Ann Stanford's poem, a woman transformed and destroyed by fury and rage: "...my eyes saw the world in stone.../I long to lose...the face twisted by fury that I did not choose" (14, 29-31).

The tragedy of Miss Eckhart's history in Morgana reaches a painful climax as she encounters Virgie for the last time. Pathetic and defeated, Miss Eckhart is lead from the MacLain house with her head covered in a scorched kitchen rag; at the same time, Virgie, alerted by all the

commotion, races out of the house and on to the street. Cassie and others who witness the meeting anticipate an emotional recognition scene, but "The meeting amounted only to Virgie Rainey's passing by...without a word or the pause of a moment" (Welty, "June Recital" 325-26).

Later that evening as Cassie reviews the spectacular events of the afternoon, she muses upon the complexity and the peculiar nature of the relationship between Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey; Cassie instinctively recognizes the separate yet merging quality of these two women's journeys:

What she was certain of was the distance those two had gone, as if all along they had been making a trip...It had changed them. They were deliberately terrible. They looked at each other and neither wished to speak. They did not even horrify each other. (Welty, "June Recital" 330)

The terror and the horror of the Medusa permeates Miss Eckhart's life in Morgana; the agony of isolation and the despair of frustrated dreams marks her. Retreat into madness becomes her only recourse:

"*Danke schoen*...that much was out in the open. Gratitude--like rescue--was simply no more... Both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth...like lost beasts." (Welty, "June

Recital" 330)

As Miss Eckhart's journey nears its conclusion; Welty's portrayal of a lonely and isolated quest is certainly charged with despair. Yet the chronicle of Miss Eckhart's history in Morgana is more than a story of victimization; her pursuit of an ideal visionary experience is characteristic of the heroic quest, for the narrative of "June Recital" reveals that at least once she engaged in a still moment of artistic transcendence. Leaving behind the burden of historical time, as Miss Eckhart played the Beethoven that stormy morning, she was able "to roam free in the world of music" (Demmin and Curley 244). From a revisionist feminist perspective, Miss Eckhart emerges as a heroic figure, one who employs artistic expression as a vehicle toward self-knowledge, a feminine hero for whom the desire and the seeking--the artistic process itself--rather than the product or the outcome, results in fulfillment (Gyax 73, Hankins 397).

Miss Eckhart spends her life as a wanderer seeking truth and self-knowledge through art; the social alienation she experiences in Morgana hinders but does not completely prevent this endeavor. Deviating from the traditional formula, Welty creates a heroic character in Miss Eckhart; she reconfigures the schema of heroic action, linking it to feeling and perceptions of reality, crafting a character who

triumphs through her "capacity to feel, and through feeling, to know" (Allen 16, 25). On the stormy morning that she plays the Beethoven, Miss Eckhart achieves a corollary to the heroic quest--desirable petrification in art (Coldwell 431)--through a symbolic transfer of the Medusan creative power to the trio of students who function as the gazer. Significantly, Virgie Rainey is one of the students who witnesses and engages in this event.

Virgie walks past her music teacher without a glance or a word that afternoon in Morgana, and Miss Eckhart spends her final days in the state institution for the insane in Jackson. Twenty-five years elapse before Virgie, who engages in her own heroic journey, realizes the value of Miss Eckhart's lessons. In "The Wanderers," the final story of The Golden Apples, Virgie experiences her own "still moment" of insight and recognition; a moment suffused with memories of Miss Eckhart, whom Virgie suddenly realizes she "had not, after all, hated--had come near to loving" (Welty, "The Wanderers" 460). Virgie recalls a "certain threatening" picture that hung on the wall of Miss Eckhart's studio--a picture of Perseus and the head of Medusa; the "vaunting" stance and "lifted arm" of the hero triggers her epiphany:

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...Virgie saw things in their time, like hearing them--and perhaps because she must believe in the Medusa equally with Perseus-- she saw the stroke of the sword in three moments, not one...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 many a night." (Welty, "The Wanderers" 460)

Virgie's bright visionary moment, like Miss Eckhart's, relates to her perception of time; she transcends the linear time of history and engages in the cyclical time of myth. Like other wanderer figures in Welty's work, Virgie comes to understand the interconnectedness of all things by looking beyond the surface reality (Bryant 151). Seeing the sword stroke in three moments rather than one indicates that she, like her teacher before her, is able to comprehend the pattern of reality in the past, the present, and the future simultaneously: "The very structure of time is revealed to her; it is...cyclical...a world where history is embraced by myth" (Messerli 100).

With this passage, Welty underscores the power of myth to generate an individual's comprehension of universal relationships, for Virgie "comes to understand her own

experience in terms of the myth" (Phillips 66). As she meditates upon her old music teacher's "threatening" picture of Perseus and Medusa, Virgie experiences a visionary moment in which she recognizes that in the great pattern of cyclical time, both she and Miss Eckhart have a role in "the history of the imagination" (Phillips 66). Critical interpretations of Welty's passage concerning "the stroke of the sword in three moments, not one" abound; all relate in various ways to the mythical perception of time. The three moments which correspond to the past, the present, and the future may signify the integration of memory, sensation and insight, and preparation and action in the range of human experience (Fritz-Piggott 39). The image of the slaying of the Medusa impacts the gazer (Virgie) by means of her exposure to the Greek imagination of the past, her own present condition, and the eternal condition of human existence that frames the future (Phillips 67).

Despite the fact that Virgie had long since abandoned the pursuit of a music career (she ceased taking lessons from Miss Eckhart when she was fourteen), and that her hands have been ruined with many years of typing and milking cows, Welty associates her visionary moment with music:

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, "The Wanderers" 460)

As in Miss Eckhart's experience, art, particularly music, emerges as an effective vehicle of not only self expression, but also of the heroic journey toward self knowledge. Art provides a medium through which an individual might comprehend the mysteries of human life. Confronting the mystery of the moment against the grid of eternity will result in a vision of the horror as well as the beauty in life: "to those who will face reality the world is appalling, but it is only in the confrontation of the appalling that beauty is likewise revealed" (Neault 48).

Because in this moment, Virgie is able to accept life's horror along with its beauty and to understand their intricate connections, she achieves resolution concerning her relationship with Miss Eckhart: "Virgie's ability to accept the terror, the beauty, and the sword which connects them allows her to accept her love and her hate for Miss Eckhart" (Fritz-Piggott 38). Virgie comes to understand the essence of Miss Eckhart's existence beyond the cultural and societal constraints of Morgana. Even more significantly, Virgie recognizes the impact of her music teacher in an intangible way upon her own life, her own journey toward self knowledge. Unconsciously perhaps, Virgie "had taken Miss Eckhart's hate, and then her love, extracted them, the thorn

and then the overflow" (Welty, "The Wanderers" 460) and kept them to herself, in reserve for the journey that lay ahead of her.

In her maturity, Virgie sees Miss Eckhart as a fitting example of the artist-hero figure because she

had hung the picture on the wall for herself. She had absorbed the hero and the victim and then, stoutly, could sit down to the piano with all Beethoven ahead of her. With her hate, with her love, and with the small gnawing feelings that ate them, she offered Virgie her Beethoven. She offered, offered, offered--and when Virgie was young, in the strange wisdom of youth that is accepting of more than is given, she had accepted *the* Beethoven, as with the dragon's blood. That was the gift she had touched with her fingers that had drifted and left her. (Welty, "The Wanderers" 460)

Virgie recognizes that Miss Eckhart exhibited qualities of both the hero and the victim, and that this dual nature endowed her with the strength and the vision to immerse herself in an artistic-heroic pursuit that results in self-renewal despite her victimization. The student acquires a belated respect, even awe, for her now deceased teacher.

Welty clearly presents Miss Eckhart as a type of heroic

artist, a Perseus-Medusa composite who at once attracts and repels, who motivated by both fear and desire, generates artistic expression. The three major components of the myth--Perseus, Medusa, and the mirror shield--are fused in this composite type: Medusa inspires the creative imagination, and Perseus wields the mirror shield in order to reflect her artistry to the world. Arranged thus, this composite type of the artist focuses toward a single purpose--to reveal universal truths concerning life, death, or art (Pitavy-Souques 262).

With the character of Miss Eckhart, Welty effectively alters the traditional heroic image to suit the requirements of a feminine heroic quest. The traditional heroic act is transformed; "the stroke of the sword in three moments" functions as an act of creation rather than destruction; just as the separate components of the act, "the beauty and the sword's stroke and the terror" represent the elements that are simultaneously engaged in the creative process. The repetitive quality of the act, "Endless the Medusa, and Perseus endless," echoes "the necessity of repetition and the ever-beginning search of the artist for creativity" (Gyax 71); much like the undaunted wandering Aengus of Celtic myth who remains committed to his quest even though the "glimmering girl" vanishes, Miss Eckhart persists in her search for artistic fulfillment even though her art is

scorned and she has little expectation that her dreams will reach fruition. Consequently, Miss Eckhart, the victimized outcast, emerges as the preeminent artist-hero of "June Recital."

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