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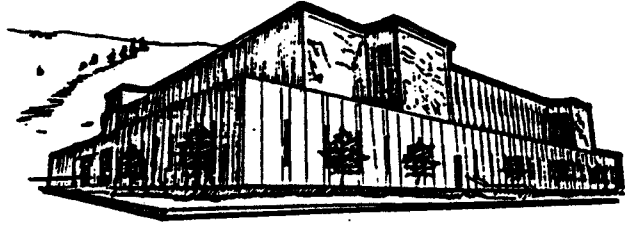
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University of
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"Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go":
An Examination of Welty's Fictional Mothers

by


Kelly Lee Barth

B.A., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1986

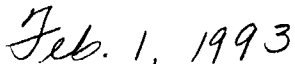
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English

"Oh Love that Will Not Let Me Go": An Examination of Welty's Fictional Mothers

Director: Dr. Lois M. Welch *lmw*

While reading Welty's short stories, novels and essays, I found the theme of mothering to be quite dominant and thus crucial to understanding the body of her work. Welty is primarily concerned with mothers as they relate to other women and particularly how they relate their daughters.

This larger theme seems to branch into three distinct and yet related parts that lend themselves to a more detailed examination: the community matriachal response to the "poor, motherless child;" the matriarchy's treatment of women who never marry and the related theme of the tendency for the strongest of these single women to become surrogate mothers of young women; and the underlying reasons for the matriarchy's need to manipulate their families and communities.

The last of the three listed above unites all of the parts in that it illuminates the sources of the matriarchy's power over each individual in Welty's fictional societies (especially motherless girls and spinsters) and the underlying reasons these mothers feel compelled to maintain this power.

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Introduction

In Eudora Welty's fictional communities, the matriarchy is alternately revered and hated. This is hardly surprising considering that the power mothers wield, especially over their daughters, is little short of phenomenal. Certainly, the community also plays a part in controlling its members, however, no one else besides the mothers holds any real authority within that community. Welty's matriarchies represent a life force struggling for perpetuity. Leaders of a community must not lose the hearts of its members, must continue to recognize themselves within their offspring. Consequently, most of Welty's mothers would prefer to see their adventurous daughters--most of whom are willing to accept the risks that change brings--struggle within traditions, unfulfilled. Only those mothers who have themselves strayed from longheld expectations or have yearned to do so have the understanding necessary to urge their daughters forward. Welty herself identifies with this

willingness to walk apart from the others:

What I have put into her [Miss Eckhart] 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. (One Writer's Beginnings 110)

Ironically, the women who do encourage their daughters to take the risks of difference are, like Miss Eckhart, surrogate mothers; the "giving" that Welty speaks of becomes the way these women pass on to their surrogate daughters a means of reproducing. Their giving--like that of many of Welty's matriarchs--does create in the daughter of feeling of indebtedness. However, it is not designed to control and manipulate. These women teach, nurture and, at times, reprove their daughters to prepare them for the eventuality of living independent of their mothers, in another place. In most cases, these surrogate daughters encounter opposition from the matriarchal community similar to that described by Annie Dillard as she left the Midwest to pursue her career: "And so we leave it sorrowfully, having grown restless by opposing with all our will and mind and muscle its simple, loving, single will for us: that we stay, that we stay and find a place among its familiar possibilities" (An American Childhood 214). However, Welty's surrogate daughters can also say, as did Dillard, "Mother knew we would go; she encouraged us" (214).

If this is nature's design, then for all creatures--

that they should raise their young to carry on without them--then why do most of Welty's fictional mothers foster, within their daughters, the opposite--dependency? Understanding the answer requires an examination of the community-threatening outcome of a child's independence: mothers who encourage daughters to know something that they do not must also face the fact that this knowledge will remove those daughter, both in body and mind, from their mother's reach. A woman wants her daughter to resemble her in motivations, desires and ambitions as well as physical appearance. To watch her daughter become someone unrecognizable to everyone is something the majority of Welty's mothers cannot endure. Rather than present options, then, they limit them.

Critics have focused made much of Welty's matriarchies and the way they operate within her fictional communities. Most are concerned with accepting these matriarchies as a source of power that upholds a society of people. The parallel concern, then, involves how Welty's matriarchies resemble most other power structures in their treatment of those who will not live by its dictates. The bulk of the criticism does not, primarily, examine the power but its effects. Perhaps for fear of judging characters Welty so clearly loves, most do not identify tyranny within such control, nor do they examine the motivations of individual members who possess it. Understandably, neither have most

critics seen the real needs fueling this urge to control, nor sympathized with the matriarchy's individual members.

To Welty's matriarchs, loosening the reins on a daughter leads to losing a companion who understands her mother's life. She finds in the obedient daughter's place, one who has neither the facility nor the desire to share in her mother's way of life. Those women, then, who find fulfillment only in their position as mother--who believe that to lose their daughters is to lose themselves--must ration encouragement to ensure that their daughters remain dependent. Though not entirely successful in their efforts to control their daughters, most of Welty's mothers do manage at least to defend a garrison of watchfulness they have erected within the territory of their daughters' lives. And from this place, they struggle to preserve their very lives. The following discussion will examine several of Welty's matriarchies and assess the effects their power has on those of her characters who cannot or will not submit to it. Chapter one looks at spinsters and the various rewards and sorrows they face because they will never be absorbed into the matriarchy. The chapter also explores the alternative opportunities for fulfillment offered to daughters by surrogate mothers. In chapter two, an examination of the motherless child theme in Welty's fiction reveals the extent to which the matriarchy feels responsible either to shape or ostracise orphan girls within the

community. Chapter three reveals the profound need enlivening this matriarchal urge to manipulate. Each chapter illuminates a portion of this often dark theme in Welty's work, that has remained, for the most part, unapproached. The discussion lies neither entirely within or without the circumference of feminism. Neither can Welty's women be contained in psycho-social boxes with tidy labels explaining their behavior. But these women do follow patterns--patterns that by their proliferation, demand our reflection. In her fiction and non-fiction, Welty has offered little direct commentary on the relationships between mothers and daughters. What she has done is fill her books with the wonderfully absurd and terrible things that happen in families--in many families.

Chapter 1

Based on the overall understanding that a near religious fervor protects mothering itself, it should present no real shock that Welty's characters who do not marry or become biological mothers are considered to have basically failed to fulfill their function as women. They must be set apart from the rest of the women as either failures or rebels. With respect to the community, they are indeed dangerous because, though they live outside of the safety of the matriarchal circle, they live outside of its control as well. If the community is to remain intact, the women who do not fit within its majority must remain within a less accepted circle that the others can carefully watch over. In her book, Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich traces this societal fear of such women back to the earliest recorded histories:

'Childless' women have been burned as witches. . . . They have been seen as embodiments of the great threat to male hegemony: the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of heterosexual

pairing and bearing. These women have nonetheless been expected to serve their term for society as missionaries, nuns, teachers, nurses, maiden aunts; to give, rather than sell their labor if they were middle-class . . . (251-252)

However, in Welty's fiction, these unattached women seem not to threaten male hegemony but rather the stability of the matriarchal structure. The laws remain the same; but the keepers of the law are those the laws were originally designed to control. Welty herself is quick to identify the real authority in the South:

. In the Delta it's very much of a matriarchy, especially in those years in the twenties that I was writing about, and really ever since the Civil War when the men were all gone and the women began to take over everything. You know, they really did. I've met families up there where the women just ruled the roost, and I've made that happen in the book because I thought, that's the way it was in those days in the South . . . (Conversations 339)

The matriarchy's isolation of spinsters, even of those who follow the 'expected' alternative paths Rich describes, reaches frightening proportions in Losing Battles. The matriarchy need only point to Miss Julia Moody, the representative spinster, to strike fear in the heart of any woman who might have taken it into her head to avoid marriage: 'Well, Gloria, if you hadn't changed your ways, an end like that was what might've been in store for you,' said Aunt Birdie. 'Glad you're married now?'" (233) The end Aunt Birdie mentions is one designed for Miss Julia as final punishment for proudly remaining an outsider and for providing a threateningly viable expansion of the

traditional roles of women.

Unlike Miss Julia, Gloria is unable to withstand the certain ostracism she would have experienced had she chosen a schoolteacher's life. She has retreated into marriage, the one option she understands, the one option available to her if she is to keep her love, Jack--who still prefers to live among a dictatorial community of women. To escape the increasingly vicious attacks of the mothers, who have already excluded her because she is an unashamed orphan, Gloria triumphs by naming herself one of them. The orphan adopts the mothers' language and gains 'shouts of appreciation':

'And if I was an unmarried Banner girl's child . . . all I had to do was take one look around the church at my own wedding and see the whole population gathered to know what family I was safe with. There was just one unmarried lady.' (302)

With this one phrase 'unmarried lady,' Gloria shifts the disapproval from herself toward the only defective woman in the bunch. Unlike Gloria, Miss Lexie has no safe role to play within the Vaughn and Beecham clan. She isn't one of a pair and consequently has little hope of bearing children. While she will never be fully accepted within society, Lexie is still expected to serve it in specific ways if she is to be allowed even to live in it. Failing to win the support of the local schoolteacher Miss Julia, Lexie will not inherit the only other respectable position available to women. Her abnormality exposes her to the cruelty of the group. Welty's

readers have every reason to believe that Lexie agrees she is basically lacking as a woman because she remains unmarried. She would happily have taken a husband if someone would have taken her. Hoping to find some small slot within her community, Lexie chooses nursing. Wouldn't she, by caring for others in their later years, earn herself the same care? As indicated by the following passage, the answer is no:

'Who's going to wait on me like that when I get old?' crowed Miss Lexie . . .

'Not a soul, not a blessed soul!'

'You'll have to go to the poor farm,' Aunt Cleo told her without taking her eyes from the ceiling. 'If they still got room for you' (318).

Though Miss Julia did gain some respect in Banner, she could not think herself better than Lexie. As Elizabeth Kerr says in her article "The World of Eudora Welty's Women," though Miss Julia and Miss Lexie spend their last days together in mutual hatred, they are more kin in behavior than either would have liked to admit:

Miss Lexie Renfro's account of her sadistic treatment of Miss Julia in her last days is heartrending to the reader. But even if, as Miss Beulah says, Miss Julia 'never did learn to please' (p. 283), neither does Miss Lexie; none of her family will give her a houseroom. Perhaps both Miss Julia and Miss Lexie become embittered by living in a community which respects only married women (143).

'Perhaps' is too timid a word. Though Miss Lexie tries desperately to save her own skin by following the rules, she does so with anger and bitterness. Her attitude reveals her

rebellion against a system that has refused to make room for her. When she tells the story of how she came to tend to Miss Julia, Lexie is once again reminded of what everyone sees when they look at her:

'The Presbyterian sisterhood in Alliance sent out a call on both sides of the river for a settled white Christian lady with no home ties.'

'Oh those are the scum of the earth!' Miss Moody burst out. 'We had one of those for our preacher's widow! Got her the same way!'

'And I presented myself' (266).

Miss Moody is not unusually cruel. Her response is the knee-jerk reaction of her society to women who do not walk traditional paths. Those who have no families cannot be trusted because they live without the pretense of being protected by fathers, brothers or husbands.

More of a real threat than women like Lexie who try but fail to fit within the structure, are those women who make a conscious choice to go their own way even though it conflicts with the patriarchy's prescriptions. In the days before her younger daughter Dabney's wedding, Ellen Fairchild of Delta Wedding laments that her oldest daughter Shelley has rejected marrying and mothering. Rather than consider the possibility that the life she chose without question might not be attractive, Ellen believes she has failed somehow to communicate its wonder to her daughter. At the wedding rehearsal, Ellen thinks:

[Shelley is] practicing, rather consciously, a kind of ragamuffinism. Or else she drew up, like an old maid.

What could be so wrong in everything to her sensitive and delicate mind? There was something not quite warm about Shelley, her first child. Could it have been in some way her fault? Ellen watched her anxiously, almost tensely, as if she might not get through the wedding very well. Primrose was whispering in Ellen's ear. Shelley would not hold her shepherdess crook right--it should be straight in line with all the other girls' crooks--look how her bouquet leaned over (212).

Ellen's anxiety raises many questions. Could it be that she could not hide her unhappiness from Shelley? Is there something not quite 'warm' in Ellen that she passed on to her daughter? By being mother to everyone, she has had little time for Shelley and left her in need first of mother love before she can give love to a man. Did Ellen plant in her daughter the seed of disdain for marriage that has blossomed and borne fruit? Ellen's thoughts and actions indicate that she is not entirely sure of the blessings of the inheritance most mother's pass on their daughters. Suzan Harriso, in her article, "The Other Way to Live" sees paternal domination as the sole enemy against which Shelley fights:

Through her diary entries, Shelley challenges the patriarchal discourse of Shellmound and resists its insistence on marriage as she watches her sister Dabney 'walk into something you dread and you cannot speak to her' (p 85). Not surprisingly Shelley's liberating engagement with language and the private pleasure she finds in the word are restricted by her father ("The Other Way to Live" (53).

Yet it is Ellen Fairchild who expresses the most concern over Dabney's rejection of the traditional path of marriage and motherhood. Rich says, "The woman activist or artist born of a family-centered mother may in any case feel that

her mother cannot understand or sympathize with the imperatives of her life; or that her mother has preferred and valued a more conventional daughter, or a son" (229). Evidenced by her mental wrestlings with Shelley's seeming deficiencies, Ellen is herself a willing participant in and perpetuator of the system that Shelley rejects.

In another passage of Of Woman Born, Rich indicts both women and men for participating in the struggle to direct all women down one path:

The 'unchilded' woman, if such a term makes any sense, is still affected by centuries-long attitudes--on the part of both women and men--toward the birthing, child-rearing function of women. Any woman who believes that the institution of mothering has nothing to do with her is closing her eyes to crucial aspects of her situation (252).

Elizabeth Kerr says, "For Shelley, the wedding is the prelude to initiation into adult life outside her family and her country . . . she shows no desire to marry." (137) Clearly, Shelley is not ready for this 'adult life.' She still struggles with unresolved relationships within her existing family. Nor is she ready to be shuttled out of the family circle on a trip to Europe with her maiden Aunt Tempe. Harrison marvels that even though "Shelley has a generous and prosperous family who offer her an opportunity to extend her horizons . . . she reveals no pleasure in the thought of discovering herself and the wide world." (137) Might she still feel angry that the family refuses to encompass her until she is of the age and attitude

appropriate to an old maid, like her aunts Tempe and Shannon? Apparently, she prefers to remain in the family unharrassed, as one who has chosen to live among them with no other definition than the one she gives herself, "a young, unmarried, unengaged girl." (88) She does not want, as Rich said of spinsters, "to serve . . . [her] term for society as . . . [had her] maiden aunts" (252). Given that Shelley prefers to live among her family and write, she could be like many women, who because they were "not bound to the cycle of hourly existence with children, because they could reflect, observe, write . . . [could give] us some of the few available strong insights into the experience of women in general" (Of Woman Born 252). Ellen cannot encourage Shelley's writing ambitions because they threaten to reveal family weakness and because they distract Shelley away from her mother's plan for her. Ambitions other than child-rearing and marriage are not as easily monitored, their results not as readily shared.

As is apparent from Welty's honest and often admiring portrayal of the 'spinsters' in her fiction, among whom Shelley's maiden aunts are no exception, she herself did not view their lives as handicapped, but often as refreshingly different. Though they are smiled upon and silently pitied by other family members, Aunt Tempe and Aunt Shannon live lives that, as the narrator describes them, are far from unpleasant or regretful:

It was eternally cool in summer in this house; like the air of a dense little velvet-green wood it touched your forehead with stillness. Even the phone had a ring like a tiny silver bell . . . Matting lay along the halls, and the silver doorknobs were not quite round but the shape of little muffins, not perfect. Dabney went into the parlor. How softly all the doors shut, in this house by the river--a soft wind always pressed very gently against your closing. How quiet it was, without the loud driving noise of a big fan in every corner as there was at home, even when at moments people sighed and fell silent (Delta Wedding 40).

In contrast to the their family who live together in a chaotic tangle, these maiden aunts live in quiet, in preservation. Their job is to preserve the family in their memories and in their storage rooms: "Grandmothers and Great-Grandmother's cherished things were so carefully kept here . . ." (Delta Wedding 40) Rather than procreate, they preserve life, even those things that inevitably slip through the preoccupied fingers of the others.

Still, messengers from the matriarchy invade the spinsters' quiet to remind them that they do not serve a purpose, that they do not fit within its narrow confines. Its newest member, Dabney, flaunts her pre-nuptial joy before them. She revels in her membership in the matriarchy and convinces herself how valuable that membership is by reminding them that they will never be a part of it:

'I've done enough,' Dabney thought, frightened, not quite understanding things any longer. 'I've done enough to them.' They all kissed good-bye again, while the green and gold shadows burned from the river--the sun was going down. . . .'

Does happiness seek out, go to visit, the ones it can humble when it comes at last to show itself? The roses for their mother glimmered faintly on the steps of the

aunts' house, left behind, and they couldn't go back (Delta Wedding 49).

Because Dabney's aunts love her, she has the power to make them both jealous of her belonging and sad because they are losing her. Dabney, especially, can't 'go back' to their house because they stir up within her a mixture of pity and fear--pity because she has participated in their ostracism and fear because they represent a strangely alluring life that she is leaving behind. In order to reassure herself of her decision to marry, she must keep reminding herself that she has chosen the 'normal' route, that she is 'normal' whereas spinsters aunts are not. She must protect herself from them.

Welty's fictional societies contain no provision for spinsters, for women who by choice or because of their circumstances never marry and never have children. Even those, like Shelley, who have interests and skills to engage their minds, are never allowed to forget that the community's acceptance is conditional--that they must serve an acceptable purpose. Still, to find joy, fulfillment and even passion from tasks other than child-rearing and marriage is considered unnatural. Kerr says, "For women without independent means and with no family able and willing to support them, the stigma of spinsterhood cannot be removed by a respectable occupation or even by a successful career" (134). Therefore, both the women and their services must remain under the close scrutiny of the

matriarchy. Those like Miss Julia and Miss Eckhart, who are intelligent enough to use teaching as an outlet to express their creativity, are tolerated, in part, because their task resembles mothering.

Miss Julia even gains a measure of respect within the community because, as a teacher, she has been a mother and a strict one, to nearly three generations of Banner residents. So much power has she gleaned from her 'service' occupation that she sparks fear of an intensity equal to that inspired by the family matriarch, Granny Vaughn. But only by willingly working within community's established confines has she been able to place herself in a position to effect change. Because education threatens tradition by encouraging alteration, only her students fear of Miss Julia was strong enough to keep them in their desks, only fear kept them from restraining its force in their lives. As they rehash memories of the only teacher most of them had known, the reunion members' voices are full of the respect usually reserved for a mother. She has forced even fathers to kowtow: "'Now. If any of these fathers who were so brave as to come to school this morning, feel prompted to step up too, I'm ready for them now. Otherwise, they can all stay right there on the back bench and learn something'" (264). Within the walls of the classroom, she was the one with knowledge, thus Banner society was kept in check. Their rules about what women should and would do did not apply.

Even after death, she has the ability to make them feel guilty for not coming to her funeral. The men especially proclaim too fiercely that they are no longer bound by her discipline:

'Why do we have to go back to school? We've done with all that,' said Uncle Curtis.

'And at the signal, we all go marching over the bridge in a long, long line to Alliance?' cried Uncle Dolphus. 'She's not asking much!'

'As for me, I'm not a child,' said Uncle Percy, whittling. 'To be told' (282).

These men sound like little boys refusing to obey their mother's command that they wash behind their ears. indeed, Miss Julia seems to have viewed her own task as one of nurture, for who but a mother would stay and pour herself into generation after generation of children who resist her offerings.

That Miss Julia could have found fulfillment through learning even when she was not teaching is incomprehensible to the Banner matriarchy in large part because it suggests what might be a deficit in the lives of its members. They review her life with pitying speeches: "'She once was needed and could tell herself that,' Aunt Beck said. 'She had that.'" (283) Being needed, creating needs that must be continually met, is essential if the Banner matriarchy is to succeed and flourish. Thus, the only joy these women can imagine that Miss Julia could have gained from her life is that resulting from the students' need of her. To the women

at the reunion, her life was unfathomable. How could she have been fulfilled all alone, merely writing and reading?:

'Every day, Miss Julia there in her bed called me to bring her a book. 'Which book?' I ask her. She said just bring her a book. I wouldn't do that, I told her, because I don't know which book you mean . . . '

'Book! It looks like of all things she'd have been glad she was through with and thankful not to have brought her!' exclaimed Aunt Birdie (269).

Because Miss Julia had not followed traditional patterns for women, she was not invited into the circle of married women and mothers. They not only feared her strange ambitions but also could find no common ground. Yet Welty's readers would be hard pressed to find any clues within the novel, Losing Battles, to indicate Miss Julia felt deprived or regretful.

Like Miss Julia, Miss Eckhart finds a place within her community only because she teaches piano. Her willful strangeness is a subject of much interest and attention:

It was because she was from so far away, at any rate, people said to excuse her, that she couldn't comprehend; Miss Perdita Mayo, who took in sewing and made everybody's trousseaux, said Miss Eckhart's differences were why shame alone had not killed her and killed her mother too; that differences were reasons. (301-302)

In other words, only her strangeness explains her persistent independence from community patterns:

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, piercing and striking the air around her the way a Christmas firework might almost jump out of the hand that was, each year, inexperienced anew. (301)

Indeed, even Miss Eckhart's students, true children of their

community, are shocked to find something other than ugliness in their spinster teacher. In order for others to have understood her and to have avoided questioning their own lives, Miss Eckhart would have had to be unhappy, staid. Passion should have been completely foreign to her; by Morgana prescription, passion should find its proper expression only within a marriage. Miss Eckhart's passion is not of the right sort; it is inspired, and not by traditional women's activities, but by music. It seems to remind the matriarchy of just how small is the circle around their lives, how thin are its walls. Here, in plain view of their children, is a dowdy, spinster piano teacher in ecstasy.

In her article "Virgie Rainey Saved," Carey Wall assesses Morgana fear of Miss Eckhart's 'differences':

They cite these differences as reasons for staying away from Miss Eckhart: she is unmarried, she belongs to a religion no one has heard of--the Lutheran, she does not allow herself to be called by her first name, she is German and cooks food in strange ways--cabbage with wine. But these stated reasons are not to be taken at face value; they are, rather, the usual sorts of acceptable, speakable covers for other unspeakable reasons. The stated reasons are to be taken as the type of relatively polite excuses for people's declining. In fact, 'June Recital' pretty much validates the Morganans' only apparent ignorance. Below it, and unspoken, at least publicly, is a quite legitimate recognition of disorder in Miss Eckhart and an associated desire for self-preservation through distance (21).

But just what is this disorder? More importantly, what is its source? Wall is right in concluding that the surface things are not what urges the community to shun Miss

Eckhart. It is not enough, however, simply to say that Miss Eckhart's suffered from a 'disorder.' Obviously, she cannot relate to others. But why? A substantial reason for Miss Eckhart's inability to fully integrate herself into the community is that mother wields excessive control over her. Miss Eckhart's real strangeness lies in her passion, in her expression through music of the joy she finds and of the pain she feels living among people whose expectations she cannot fulfill. This passion does not originate entirely in the community's rejection of her. Furthermore, the passion itself is not a disorder. It is, however, the thing that drives people from her. Miss Eckhart cannot follow the rules set out for women of her situation, and like Miss Julia, she finds joy outside of the community's prescriptions. We learn that Cassie's mother despises Miss Eckhart for these very reasons:

For living so close to her, or maybe just for living, a poor unwanted teacher and unmarried. And Cassie's instinct told her her mother despised herself for despising. That was why she kept Cassie taking just a little longer after Miss Eckhart had been deserted by all the other mothers The child had to make up for her mother's abhorrence, to keep her mother as kind as she really was. (306)

Miss Eckhart's 'disorder' is less a personal affliction than a community one; she cannot live in harmony with others and they refuse to expand their confines to contain her. As Wall says: "The Morgana people get rid of Miss Eckhart by keeping her at a distance during the years she is teaching." (20) But what are they to do with her when she steps outside the

one role they would allow her to play? Wall's term 'disorder' takes on a clearer meaning in the following quote:

. . . they get permanently rid of her by denying her old identity and assigning her a new one. Their action is not merely cruel because the Morganans are faced with a real problem that normative prescription ignores as they live with and beside and at a careful remove from Miss Eckhart. (20)

Welty's fictional communities cannot tolerate spinsters because they force all women to question, on a dangerous level, the 'normative prescription' ruling their own lives. Though at times Morgana seems to have given Virgie up as a lost cause, she is still, occasionally, the intended audience of a recruiting speech.

'Listen. You should marry now, Virgie. Don't put it off any longer,' she said, making a face, any face, at her own words. She was grimacing out of the iron mask of the married lady. It appeared urgent with her to drive everybody, even Virgie for whom she cared nothing, into the state of marriage along with her. Only then could she resume as Jinny Love Stark, her true self (445).

The matriarchy tries to force all women into the same mold so none will live without the expected communal joys and suffering. Virgie, Miss Eckhart, Miss Julia and all spinsters like them represent something other, perhaps additional to what the matriarchy upholds as complete. The matriarchy has no idea how to comfort or befriend these women. Miss Julia and Miss Eckhart, in particular, must finally be controlled and punished because they try to remain within the community, unaffected by others' approval or disapproval.

Once a year, the Morgana matriarchy allows Miss Eckhart to think she has control over them and their daughters, but only because the recitals she organizes enable them to display themselves. Yet, as Wall says, "No doubt social structure holds sway in the recitals as elsewhere" (22). They never grant her permission to stray beyond community bounds. By allowing Miss Eckhart to participate in an event so integral to the community, so familiar to its own gentility and tradition, the matriarchy assures that she is "transformed again each year from outcast to member of the community--so much an insider that it is she who produces the hospitality, glowingly." (22-23) When the authorities finally capture Miss Eckhart the community is relieved because she has finally displayed, in her pyromaniacal party what they see as an appropriate response to her life of spinsterly isolation. She becomes what Wall calls "just a little old mad lady who belongs in Jackson [home of the state lunatic asylum]" (23).

Like the Morganans, the Banner matriarchy feels great relief to hear of the capture of their own threatening spinster. Though the Banner women withhold approval from both unmarried women, they heartily enjoy hearing how Miss Lexie tried to harness the strange schoolteacher, who, by finding satisfaction outside of conformity, indirectly threatened their way of life. Miss Lexie directs the anger she feels at the women, who would not make provision for her

and, though for different reasons, toward Miss Julia. One of Miss Julia's offenses was failing to see anything other than Lexie's singleness to qualify her as a schoolteacher: "'I tied her, that was the upshoot,' said Miss Lexie. 'Tied her in bed. I didn't want to, but anybody you'd ask could tell you the same: you may have to.'" (269)

Throughout her battle with Miss Lexie, one of the few things Miss Julia would admit she needed was a pencil: "'Wrote with her tongue spreading out?' Miss Lexie spread her lips at them. 'Like words, just words, was getting to be something good enough to eat. And nothing else was!'" (272) Indeed, words had been and were what finally gave Miss Julia control over her situation. Through the letters she scribbled, she could finally express her pain. To Miss Lexie's dismay, once Miss Julia had the pencil, she no longer needed Miss Lexie. Unsuccessful at making Miss Julia sufficiently suffer for denying her a chance to teach school, Lexie recounts to the Banner women how she took Miss Julia's pencil away. The group finds the schoolteacher's response nothing short of amazing:

'She just wrote with her finger.'

'What'd she use for ink, a little licking?'

'Yes'm, and wrote away on the bedsheet.'

' . . . And I pulled off the hot sheet and she wrote on, in the palm of her hand' (274).

After the group learns of Miss Julia's tenacious battle to withstand sickness and of Lexie's attempts to make her

miserable, they admit that the schoolteacher held power in their community. Instead of coming out the victor, Miss Lexie is, once again, reminded of her weakness: "'How late in the game was it, Lexie, when Miss Julia took it in she'd met her match?' asked Aunt Nanny." (271) Miss Beulah says 'with reluctant admiration' of Miss Julia, "'My, she was vain! Was vain!'" (273) Indeed she was, if vanity meant conducted herself without undue regard for Banner opinion. She knew the kind life that pleased her and was willing to risk isolation to achieve it. Even Granny wrapped her sharp tongue around words of praise for Miss Julia, who offered the only real challenge to her authority: "'She's a scrapper alright . . . Knew it the minute I got my first look at the girl, teaching her elders'" (268).

Within this community that pretends to be generous with its hospitality, thrives an existing matriarchal power structure so afraid of losing power that all who deviate are finally smoothed into place. In order to have the freedom to effect the changes she felt necessary, Miss Julia, avoided the attachments to husband and child and community. Unlike the other women, she refused to make a pretense of obeying men: "'She ought to have married somebody,' said Aunt Birdie. 'Then what she wanted wouldn't mean a thing. She would be buried with him, and no questions asked'" (286). Miss Julia did not strive to earn people's approval; instead, she took it. She may have loved but never allowed

herself to be restrained by it, as others did of necessity. Miss Julia was unmarried, yes, but she was not an old maid-- not unattractive even though she didn't follow the traditional path. That she may have had the option of marrying and chose not to shocks the reunion:

'You and a poor, lonesome, old maid schoolteacher?' asked Mrs. Moody.

'Not alway--' He stared down at her. 'Why every young blade in Ludlow was wild about Miss Julia Mortimer at one time.' (293)

Mrs. Moody and the other women either have had to believe that Miss Julia's life was pathetic in order to avoid questioning what they have held to be infallibly true: theirs is the only acceptable path for women. Although many Banner women probably have unfulfilled dreams and ambitions, when they see a woman take the difficult steps necessary to pursue her own similar dreams, they ridicule her, in part, because she makes them feel ashamed of their own lack of courage.

The matriarchy of Morgana is similarly disturbed by Miss Eckhart's surprising portion of feminine beauty: "Miss Eckhart had pretty ankles for a heavy lady like herself. Mrs. Stark said what a surprise it was for Miss Eckhart, of all people to turn up with such pretty ankles, which made it the same as if she didn't have them" (296). It's as if the ankles were going to waste on a woman who will never have a husband to stroke them or a child to admire and be proud of them. She hasn't followed the rules and thus shouldn't

benefit from womanhood.

The only victory the Banner community wins over Miss Julia is their resistance of her indoctrinations. Though she threatened the power structure, she wasn't able to completely destroy it. As Miss Julia says in her final letter: "A teacher teaches and a pupil learns or fights against learning with the same force behind him. It's the survival instinct. It's a might power . . . it's an iron weapon while it lasts. It's the desperation of staying alive against all odds that keeps both sides encouraged" (287).

Just what does Miss Julia mean by the words "staying alive against all odds"? In one respect, it certainly speaks of the frantic urge of all members of a species to reproduce themselves. Although the patriarchy would insist that since Miss Julia never married nor gave birth to children, she can never fulfill her basic reproductive role, she does indeed act as a mother to many children. Judge Moody testifies to the fact: "'She's made her a Superior court judge, the best eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist in Kansas City, and a history professor somewhere--they're all scattered wide, of course. She could get them started, lick 'em into shape, but she couldn't get 'em to stay!'" (294) Miss Julia experiences the same maternal pull Granny Vaughn feels while watching her own children scatter into the dust toward their own homes. In a very literal way, Miss Julia mothers one of the community's 'motherless children,' Gloria. By pouring her

knowledge into this 'adopted' daughter, she responded in a literal way to her maternal urge, the need to find someone to carry on her renegade life. Given the matriarchy's strength within the community, her success with Gloria is, understandably, only partial. Finally, Miss Julia is confident and thus unsilenceable--the very thing that distinguishes her from her preferred successor, Gloria.

Unlike the Banner matriarchy, who discourage Gloria from stretching beyond what she and other women before her have done for centuries, Miss Julia has "combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward further horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on . . . buried strengths" (252). Adrienne Rich further praises such non-traditional mothers:

Many of the great mothers have not been biological. The novel Jane Eyre . . . can be read as a woman-pilgrim's progress along a path of classic female temptation, in which the motherless Jane time after time finds women who protect, solace, teach, challenge, and nourish her in self-respect. For centuries, daughters have been strengthened and energized by non-biological mothers (252).

Like one child challenging another because she resemble her mother, Aunt Birdie says to Gloria, "'You was trying to keep on like Miss Julia herself? With those dreamy eyes? Honest?'" (235) Gloria responds with the understanding of a daughter who is confident of her 'mother's' intentions:

'Miss Julia undertook it, and she wanted me to undertake it after her--a teacher's life,' said Gloria. She sat up as tall as she could in the middle of them, her face solemn as a tear drop, her head well aflame in the western light. 'Her dearest wish was to pass on the

torch to me' (235).

To fend off the matriarchy's attacks on her desire to teach and to be different, to show that she did not come up with this silly idea on her own and that another exerted some influence, "Gloria said, 'Miss Julia saw promise in me,' and opened her bodice" (313). Miss Julia did want to "pass on her own torch to another," this is what a mother strives for. Therefore, Gloria is, in essence, her daughter.

Though the Banner matriarchy labels Gloria an orphan, they are also quick to concede that Miss Julia mothered her: "'Gloria, I think it was really you that must have disappointed her the most,' said Aunt Beck, as though she offered a compliment. 'She hoped so hard for something out of you.'" (269) Aunt Beck and the other women take every opportunity to remind Gloria that she has failed Miss Julias.

Miss Eckhart felt this same desperate urge to 'pass on the torch' when she realized she didn't have the opportunity to direct these energies toward a biological daughter: ". . . she gave all her love to Virgie Rainey and none to anybody else, the way she was strict in music, and for Miss Eckhart love was just as arbitrary and one-sided as music teaching" (307). Much of the text of both "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" protests that, although the Morgana matriachy osticized Miss Eckhart because she would never have a child, she was in fact, Virgie's mother: "Wherever

she was, she had no people. Surely, by this time, she had nobody at all. The only one she had ever wanted to have for 'people' was Virgie Rainey Danke schoen" (308).

At the beginning of "June Recital," we witness, through the mother-familiar eyes of a small boy, the last act of a mother, directed toward the only daughter she ever wished to have:

And from her gestures of eating crumbs or pulling bits of fluff from her bosom, Loch recognized that mother-habit: she had pins there. She pinned long strips of the newspaper together, first tearing them carefully and evenly as a school teacher (282).

She is both mother and teacher, but finally a mother.

Unlike Miss Julia, however, who reserved at least some of her mothering for all her students, Miss Eckhart directs everything toward Virgie. Clearly, Miss Eckhart's selection of a daughter is not arbitrary. She sees herself in Virgie, both the giftedness and the strangeness. They were two misfits, two non-traditional women, more mother and daughter than Virgie and her biological mother could ever hope to be. As Joan Coldwell says in "The Beauty of the Medusa:

Twentieth Century":

One pupil redeems life for Miss Eckhart Even as a child, she is aware of the power her talent gives her over Miss Eckhart and she tries to play the role of Perseus, to humble and defeat her teacher But in the eyes of the other students, Virgie is also a Medusa, an outsider because she comes from a poor and eccentric family, acts according to her own wild promptings . . (433).

The text itself reveals the truth of this statement:

"Perhaps nobody wanted Virgie Rainey to be anything in

Morgana any more than they had wanted Miss Eckhart to be, and they were the two of them still linked together by people's saying that" (306). Coldwell continues: "In the final story . . . Virgie is now forty . . . and has given up all hope of a classical career, details that make a clear parallel with 'Medusa' Eckhart's life" (433-434). Despite her hopes for Virgie's success beyond any she herself could have hoped for, Miss Eckhart does, in that most important respect, reproduce herself--Virgie becomes, like Miss Eckhart, a woman threatened by the community's need to control.

Though as a child and even as a young adult, Virgie shunned any association with Miss Eckhart, the adult Virgie cannot dispute her piano teacher's motherly influence on her life. Her stroll through the cemetery is particularly revealing:

And Miss Eckhart was over there. When Miss Eckhart died, up in Jackson, Miss Snowdie had her brought and buried in her lot. Her grave was there near to Eugene's. There was the dark squat stone Virgie had looked for yesterday, confusing her dead (459).

Why at the time of her real mother's death does she grieve for Miss Eckhart? Because she did indeed 'confuse' her mothers. In "Virgie Rainey Saved," Carey Wall says their days of piano lessons "must have kept Miss Eckhart sane" (31). They also kept her daughter under the same roof with her it only for one hour a week. They fanned the flames of hope that she would one day see her own success in Virgie's.

Another love-starved daughter in search of a mother, Cassie Morrison insightfully reveals all that Virgie meant to her surrogate mother:

But Miss Eckhart sent for Virgie and gave her a present that Cassie for many days could close her eyes and see. It was a little butterfly pin made of cut-out silver, like silver lace, to wear on her shoulder; the safety catch wasn't any good (306).

The inheritance belonged only to Virgie: "Miss Eckhart gave Virgie an armful of books that were written in German about the lives of the masters, and Virgie couldn't read a word . . ." (307). Better than the music scholarship that Cassie ultimately wins, Miss Eckhart's broken pin and the German books make up an inheritance, some of the few things she has valued and that she naturally gives to the one she felt to be her daughter. Appropriately, in light of both giver and receiver, the pin and books are imperfect. What a bitter realization Cassie has made over the years: Not only was her biological mother indifferent to her, but so also was the woman she would have chosen as a surrogate mother. Miss Eckhart does not offer to nurture Cassie, sees nothing in her that resembles herself. Most of Cassie's pain revolves around Mrs. Rainey's a moment of praise Mrs. Rainey offers Virgie: "Cassie, who had slipped around to the front, was spellbound still when Miss Katie Rainey put a hand on her sash and to her pure terror said, 'Oh, but I wish Virgie had a sister!'" (313) Neither Cassie's mother nor Miss Eckhart would ever say such a thing about Cassie. Knowing

Virgie is in large part Miss Eckhart's daughter, Cassie would have give almost anything to have been the talented Virgie's sister and, thus, Miss Eckhart's second daughter. Again, Carey Wall touches on this connection:

Cassie's feeling for Miss Eckhart may itself be double, too--one part genuine generosity . . . and another part self-concerned Cassie is specially concerned about Miss Eckhart because she knows what she owes Miss Eckhart, what she has taken from Miss Eckhart personally--life. Cassie, in inheriting, has stolen Miss Eckhart's job and livelihood; she has found that growing up means in some fashion displacing the people who came before you . . . (30).

Inheritance is the operative issue here. For like Jacob, Cassie has stolen the birthright that rightly belonged to another. Like Esau, the child Miss Eckhart has prepared to carry on her life and livelihood sold the opportunity.

Miss Lexie, of Losing Battles certainly would understand Cassie's situation and realizes with bitterness how far short she came of providing a suitable daughter/torch bearer for Miss Julia: "'She was claiming you,' [Gloria] said Miss Lexie. 'Taking the credit for you'" (287). Lexie must feel, in her own way, an orphan, or worse, a child not wanted and neglected by the one she would have for a mother:

'I worshiped her! Worshipped Miss Julia Mortimer! . . . She encouraged me too, when I was coming up. For all anybody knows, I might have had my sights set too on stepping into her shoes . . . But they die . . . the ones who think highly of you. Or they change, or leave you behind, get married, flit, go crazy--' (262).

Can't we permit Lexie's to express such anger? Without proper nourishment and encouragement from either a mother or

a woman after whom she has tried to pattern her life, a little girl does begin to feel abandoned and ugly; she does wither.

Rich speaks of the non-biological mothers who "combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward further horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on . . . buried strengths," (252). In just this way, Miss Julia's hopes and expectations for Gloria are as high as those she set for herself. She did not just praise Gloria's teaching abilities or protect her from working hard:

'She expected me to do my part,' Gloria replied. 'I hoed and dug and divided her flowers and saved the seed, measured it in the old spotted spoon . . .'

'You sound homesick,' said Aunt Beck. 'Or something like it'" (235).

Gloria is "homesick" for the only home and the only nurture she had ever known. Miss Julia had seen to it that Gloria was stranger neither to hard work nor to the harsher, more difficult facts about life. Gloria recounts one conversation with Miss Julia which reveals the straightforward way they dealt with each other. It also reveals that Gloria is unprepared to accept the ostracism she would have to face if she were to tap into those 'buried strengths':

'And I spilled her ink,' said Gloria. 'And after we rescued the reports and mopped the table, I said, 'Miss Julia, listen. Before I go back to Banner, I've got something to tell you that'll bring you pain, and here it is. I may not ever be the wonderful teacher and lasting influence you are. There's a boy pretty well keeping after me.' And she said. 'A Banner boy? Well,

give me his name and age and the year I taught him, and I'll see if I can point out an answer for you' (239).

Miss Julia makes sure that Gloria understands that if she is to 'carry on the torch' she must not absorb the opposition, must view the students as forces to be changed but not to be changed by:

'She said, 'It's a thoroughly unteacherlike thing to do,' 'Gloria went on 'She said, 'instead of marrying your pupil, why can't you stick to your guns and turn yourself into a better teacher and do him and the world some good' ' (241).

The argument continues:

'I argued as good as she did,' Gloria said. 'I asked her if she could give me just three good reasons right quick why I couldn't give up my teaching and marry that minute if I wanted to.' . . . 'Use your head,' she said. 'Find out who you are. And don't get married first,' she said. 'That's putting the cart before the horse.' ' (241)

Miss Julia learns that the daughter she has chosen for herself finds her love for Jack, and thus, for his family matriarchy, stronger than the hopes and dreams of her surrogate mother. Gloria expresses the closeness she had with Miss Julia: "'She stands for all I gave up to marry you. I'd give her up again tonight. And give up all your family too,' she whispered, and felt him quiver" (347).

At the center of her conflicts with Miss Julia, has been Gloria's unwillingness to become the Medusa. Suffering guilt over her decision to reject Miss Julia's way of life, Gloria never visits her teacher/mother, even when Miss Julia's health appears to have irreversibly deteriorated. So, afraid of her Miss Julia's disapproval, Gloria decides

she must wait until Lady May can reflect well on her mothering abilities, until she can prove a sufficient reason for leaving her teaching career: "'She only needed to see my baby. And I was going to carry her over there!'" said Gloria. 'I was only waiting till she could talk'" (309). But this need to defend her actions indicates she is not entirely convinced she made the right choice. She cannot visit the 'mother' who wanted, not what was most comfortable, but what was the best for her--who wasn't tender or conciliatory. One of Gloria's excuses for not visiting seems particularly metaphoric: 'Hiding? I was having a baby,' Gloria broke out. 'That's what I was doing and you can die from that' (269). If not kept in check, mothering can prove intellectually as well as physically life-threatening. Though giving birth to Lady May may have given Gloria the opportunity to explore her strengths as mother, it seems to have meant death to the dreams of teaching.

Gloria does not want to pretend she does not love Jack and resents the expectation associated with Miss Julia's 'sacrificial' giving: "The time came and I didn't want her sacrifice," Gloria said. 'I'd rather have gone without it. And when the torch was about to be handed on to me for good, I didn't want to take it after all'" (236). Gloria tells Jack all that she both loved and detested about Miss Julia:

'Don't marry in too big a hurry,' she said.'

'Possum, then what would she have had you do?'

'Teach, teach, teach!' Gloria cried. 'Will I dropped in harness! Like the rest of 'em!' (167).

Lacking the strength to defend her own wishes against either power structure seeking to control--the patriarchy or Miss Julia--Gloria has chosen the side which could offer her the most safety given her choice of marriage and motherhood. Miss Beulah, as usual, has one of the last words on the matter of Gloria and Miss Julia:

'And you don't want to be another one any longer, not another schoolteacher, do you, Gloria? And change the world?'

'No ma'am, just my husband. I still believe I can do it, if I live long enough,' Gloria said (342).

Revealed here is Gloria's deep desire for change. Though scaled down from Miss Julia's attempts to improve her community, Gloria will begin with Jack, will raise her own family to live differently from his. She hasn't given up on change but has chosen a task suitable to her abilities as Julia had chosen one suitable to hers. If her community had been more amenable to the idea, Gloria would have chosen both to teach and mother. She resents the voice that says, 'You must choose--one or the other.'

Though for different reasons than Gloria, Virgie is, in the final analysis, incapable of embracing Miss Eckhart for the mother she is. Because she has received little love from her biological mother, Virgie finds Miss Eckhart's offerings inordinately intimate. Miss Eckhart has no control over her child, in large part because the community allows, even

approves of Virgie's persistent badgering of her teacher. Virgie has been sent as an emissary from the matriarchy to control Miss Eckhart, to remind her she will always be ostracized:

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 (298).

Or is it with something like passion? Whatever the emotion it inspires, Virgie's playfulness is what a mother endures for her child--allowing herself to be toyed with. Miss Eckhart is not the adult in charge: "Virgie would run closer and closer circles around Miss Eckhart, who sat alone [her mother never came out that far] on a Bugle, all four pages unfolded on the grass, listening" (298). Once again, we see Miss Eckhart offer Virgie the attention that her biological mother withholds, and sit 'farther out' than the circle of mothers who would scrutinize her behavior. Virgie remains the bully in the relationship because Miss Eckhart is afraid of losing her. To fend off this woman whom she knows wants to mold and control her, Virgie must maintain power:

Then Virgie, one day when the metronome was set going in front of her. . . announced simply that she would not play another note with that thing going in her face . . . At Virgie's words, Miss Eckhart quickly--it almost seemed that was what she'd wanted to hear--stopped the hand and slammed the little door, bang. The metronome was never set before Virgie again . . . Miss Eckhart had made an exception of Virgie Rainey; she had first respected Virgie Rainey, and now fell humble before her impudence (293).

Miss Eckhart made an exception of Virgie as she would have a

daughter. The passage above gives us a glimpse of the excessive care a mother is tempted to give to her own child above that for other children. She wants to pour and direct her energies into a creation; she didn't want to diffuse her energies by giving them to the others. Virgie rejected the things most prized by Miss Eckhart, the metronome, the recitals and the music. Such rejection was the one way to retain her own power in the face of this ultimate giver. Virgie thereby undercuts her mother and enemy, the one seeking both to love and shape her.

Like Gloria, Virgie disassociates herself both from her mother and from Miss Eckhart. Though her own mother offered her very little and Miss Eckhart offered everything she had, Virgie rejected both gifts. Yet, in the end, who does she return to care for but her biological mother, the one who demands more care than she gives. Perhaps this sacrificial giving is the very aspect of Miss Eckhart's character repugnant to Virgie, she offers gives, and, in the process, creates formidable debts. Miss Eckhart creates expectations, even though they remain unspoken; she limits Virgie's options at the same time she expands them. Just as the Morgana matriarchy would set every woman on a track toward motherhood, Miss Eckhart tries to see to it that music so overwhelms all of Virgie's other options that she will have no power to choose. To realize Miss Eckhart's own dream of success, Virgie would have had to give up her freedom, her

self.

At the time of Miss Eckhart's departure from Morgana, both Virgie and Miss Eckhart have given up their struggle. Miss Eckhart will no longer be able to give nor will Virgie be grateful.

Danke schoen . . . That much was out in the open. Gratitude--like rescue--was simply no more. It was not only past; it was outworn and cast away. Both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them--human beings, roaming, like lost beasts (330).

Both have and will continue to suffer from the failed connection. Like Miss Eckhart, Virgie will return to the tyranny of a selfish mother who hopes and prays she will not succeed in fulfilling her dreams. We see Mrs. Rainey's disgust at her daughter's failure to conform:

While she lived, she was going to wait--and she did wait, standing up--until Virgie her daughter, past forty now and too dressed up, came home to milk Bossy and Juliette the way she should. Virgie worked for the very people that were out depleting the woods, Mr. Nesbitt's company. (428)

To her mother, Virgie is a spinster or worse, a loose girl who should be at home tending cattle. Mrs. Rainey will never accept the fact that Virgie will never conform as all Morgana women are encouraged to do.

Even at her mother's death, when Virgie stands to receive the inheritance--the only thing her mother had ever offered her, she rejects the gift:

'Virgie might get a little bit of dairyfood savings now, bet she'll spend it on something 'sides the house, hm?' A lady Virgie couldn't place said it halfway in

her direction, leaning toward her now and then as she had been doing, with her full weight. 'Her pretty quilts, she can ship those to the Fair no more. What does Virgie care about housekeeping and china plates without no husband, hm?' (436).

Perhaps Virgie does not want anything from either mother because needing and never receiving was too painful to repeat. The text reveals the depth of the neglect:

'You're back at the right time to milk for me,' her mother said when she got there, and untied her bonnet and dashed it to the floor between them, looking up at her daughter. Nobody was allowed weeping over hurts at her house, unless it was Mrs. Rainey herself first, for son and husband, both her men, were gone (452).

Denying her need of anyone or anything will momentarily free Virgie from pain and from the community's scorn as well.

We have seen that instead of the nurture unmarried women often need from other women and their communities, those in Welty's fiction receive instead, suspicion and even rejection. Those, who for whatever reasons, reside outside of the matriarchy's prescriptions must be shunned because they threaten community perpetuity. This problem has little to do with 'male hegemony' or 'patriarchal domination' and much more to do with the refusal of the matriarchy to make provision for those women who will not bend to its will. Victorious over the males that once oppressed them, the matriarchy's women have taken on the crown of power and begun to oppress one another. Those unmarried women who chose to exist within Welty's fictional communities learn to find fulfillment in their talents, ambitions and in the nurture of young women whom they hope will, through their

help, break the cycle of domination. None has been entirely successful.

Chapter 2

The words of the spiritual, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child," aptly express the community's fear of losing a mother and the desolation set aside for children without a mother in Welty's fiction. Given that the matriarchy is so powerful, it stands to reason that those of Welty's characters who were deprived of a mother's care would also be the focus of significant attention. For Welty's fictional daughters, this loss seems especially poignant and often crippling. Indeed, they do attract much pity from those around them. Through no action of their own, they are forced by the governing societal structure, namely intricately woven extended families, to wear a label "little motherless child" that is just as potentially limiting as a

scarlet letter. They are set apart, even ostracized, because of their mother lack. Non-traditional ambitions are perceived as the result of a lack of motherly nurture and example.

The motherless child theme is decidedly prominent in Welty's two novels in which the power of the family structure is overwhelming: Losing Battles and Delta Wedding. Indeed the daughters' ostracism seems part of a larger plot fabricated chiefly by the matriarchy. Perhaps plot is too harsh a word. Better--it's the matriarchy's attempt to build a thick, protective wall around mothering itself, to ensure that it retains its importance, its status and its power. In Welty's fictional communities, people must have 'people.' Daughters must have mothers, even dead ones. Without them women cannot be understood by their community, have no tethers to restrain them, no family reputation to uphold, or live down. And so women without mothers, like Gloria, define themselves rather than step into the often ill-fitting shoes worn by their mothers before them. Self-definition is threatening to the roles set up by the community. As alternatives widen, insecurities deepen and boundaries blur. Thus, the matriarchy must establish means of convincing these "tetherless" women that without a mother they are basically disadvantaged.

Lest these unfortunate motherless daughters forget, even for one moment, their handicap--that they will always

be different and somehow never quite women--the others remind them rhythmically throughout conversation. A ring of triumphal voices circling the Vaughn reunion table delights in retelling individual renditions of Gloria's pathetic past. Throughout the day, the word "orphan" jangles like a bell in her ears:

'Mis' Hank carried you straight to the orphan asylum and handed you in. 'Here's a treat for you,' she says to 'em. 'It's a girl. I even brought her named.' She named you after her trip to Ludlow. It was a glorious day and she was sorry she had to cut her visit so short. Gloria Short.' . . . 'It wasn't a bad name for you either, Gloria--you was born with a glorious head of hair and you was short a father and a mother,' said Aunt Birdie.

'It might be a sweeter name that you'd gotten from either one of them, for all you know, Gloria,' said Aunt Beck (246).

Likewise, in Delta Wedding's, Laura disembarks from the train to visit her relatives and is called, not by her name alone, but also by her circumstances:

When she got there, 'Poor Laura, little motherless girl,' they would all run out and say, for her mother had died in the winter and they had not seen Laura since the funeral . . . Her cousin Dabney Fairchild, who was seventeen, was going to be married, but Laura could not be in the wedding for the reason that her mother was dead (3).

Delta Wedding opens with an oration concerning Laura's doomed future. She's excluded from life's events, treated with kid gloves, as if everyone were in mourning for her rather than her mother whose grave is an integral part of the tour of Laura's new home conducted by her mother's family. She memorizes the map of her new surroundings which

importantly features this grave--a reminder, again, of her lack:

There was no use in Laura and Orrin talking any more about what anything was. On this side of the river were the gin and compress, the railroad track, the forest-filled cemetery where her mother was buried in the Fairchild lot the Old Methodist Church . . . (6)

In the middle of an unrelated conversation, Laura bursts out "My mother is dead!" (9-10). With the constant reminders of the Fairchild women, Laura is so preoccupied with her mother's death that she begins to define herself by it.

Older than Laura and wiser, Gloria in Losing Battles chooses to live a life repugnant to any decent Banner mother rather than internalize their own definition of her as a motherless child. In so doing, she challenges the mothers' understanding of themselves. Gloria, however, plants the seeds of the battle that will come near to destroying this confidence, by flaunting her differences--often at the expense of the Banner women:

'Remember when she first came to Banner? She wasn't as determined then as she's got to be later. She was scared as a little naked bird. Wonder why!' said Aunt Nanny.

'Far from what she knew,' said Aunt Beck. 'That's in her face again now.'

'Got here and didn't even know how to pull mustard,' said Aunt Birdie. 'Yes she knew that. She was brought up an orphan after all,' Aunt Fay said (261).

The Banner women seem to ask how a woman so underprivileged, so deprived of essentials, can live in such a proud fashion, making them feel less than proud of their own respectable

lives? How can she be so defiantly self-satisfied when she hasn't shared in the sufferings and privileges reserved for mothers and daughters? In their eyes, her pride is inappropriate. Worst of all, it makes them feel underprivileged:

Gloria's so much of a one to like nice things and nice ways and sitting up out of the dust to ride where you're going," said Aunt Birdie. "Two on horseback's not much her style.

You'd never suppose that where she got to be Lady Clara Vere de Vere was in the Ludlow Orphan Asylum (199).

At Miss Julia's funeral, even the townspeople at large call her by a name that puts her directly in her place, because, in their minds, "orphan" carries with it a great deal of shame: "He's probably the best she could do. Little old orphan! If she didn't want to teach school the rest of her days'" (409). Implied in this statement is the assumption that since she didn't have a mother to show her the way, to help comport herself, she couldn't find a respectable man and settle into a suitable marriage, couldn't set up a house acceptable to the rest of the community.

Like Gloria, Laura seems, in time, to adapt to her fate, swallowing the bitter pill of her mother's death with more ease. As "mother of them [Fairchilds] all", Ellen is not surprisingly concerned by this strange acceptance: "Ellen felt a stab of pain to see her. It seemed to her that being left motherless had made little Laura feel privileged. Laura was almost dancing around Troy" (151).

Peeling back Ellen's fear reveals the root issue: without mothers these daughters must be viewed as defective and must be convinced they are so. For if they were not essentially defective, what would that say for mothers? The motherless daughters must be pitied, their plight discussed openly with fearful voices, as people speak of those selected by God to suffer a terminal disease or crippling disfigurement. Little hope is offered them. Others, more fortunate than they, search them for symptoms of the deprivation. When the two nine-year-old girls, India and Laura, awake the morning after Laura's arrival, it is apparent who has suffered from the lack of a mother and who has not:

Her [India's] hair was all spun out down her back, and she had a blue ribbon in it; Laura touched her own Buster Brown hair, tangled now beyond anyone's help. Their white dresses (Laura's in the suitcase folded by her father, and for a man to fold anything suddenly nearly killed her) were still identical. (9)

Later when Ellen looks at Laura, she is reassured in her beliefs of the absolute necessity of mothering by Laura's hopelessly shabby condition. Her father simply isn't sufficient, not even partly. At best, he could be compared to a broken-armed robot trying to care for tender little Laura. She is doomed to be skinny and poorly groomed for the rest of her life. Ellen's thoughts reveal that she believes the eight months alone with Laura's father may have permanently scarred her:

'Come help me make a cake before bedtime, Laura,' said

Ellen; now she saw Laura with forgetful eyes fastened on her. She's the poor little old thing, she thought. When a man alone has to look after a little girl, how in even eight months she will get long-legged and skinny. She will as like is not need to have glasses when school starts. He doesn't cut her hair, or he will cut it too short. How sharp her elbows are--Maureen looks like a cherub beside her--the difference just in their elbows! (24).

Ellen isn't alone in her diagnosis:

She [Aunt Tempe] sat down in a rocker, and Vi'let brought a pitcher of her lemonade--so strong it would bring tears to the eyes. 'And poor Laura,' she said, reaching out at her and kissing her again. To her, girls were as obvious as peony plants, and you could tell from birth if they were going to bloom or not--she said so (99).

If Laura didn't feel somehow handicapped before she arrived, she certainly does after a few days in the pitying gaze of her mother's family: "But I'm a poor little motherless girl, she thought, and sat down on the bottom step and cried a tear into the hem of her skirt, for herself" (103). So convinced is she by the Fairchild matriarchy's pity that she believes people can actually see her defect: "Did it show, that her mother had died only in January?" (211).

To locate symptoms of Gloria's deprivation, the Banner women looked no farther than her clothes, evidence of her severe lack of a mother's guidance. Thus begins the long account of the restructuring of Gloria's wedding dress, and indirect but nonetheless clear attempt to reverse the crippling and, to Banner women, matriarchy-threatening effects of her motherless upbringing: "'No wedding dress I ever saw had a pocket,' said Miss Moody. 'It was my wedding

handkerchief,' said Gloria." (262) They gnaw on this topic like dogs on a bone:

'Stand up there, Gloria! In your skirt there, where the sash is trying to hide it--you got a rip. Been in the briar patch with it?' . . . 'Lands! Will you look at the wealth of material she allowed herself in that skirt!' . . . Had to rope yourself in to be sure you was there, Gloria'. . . 'I believe that sash by itself must've weighed a ton,' . . . 'I don't see how she could have tracked around all day in a dress that's ten miles too big for her, and expected only compliments.' (254-255)

Before Gloria escapes their presence, the women in the family want to make it abundantly clear that she does not know what is appropriate for her to think and wear and do--and that she never has. To them, that is a flaw far greater than any she might try to assign to them with her uppity ways.

In spite of disapproval from her family, Gloria not only accepts but has come to appreciate her orphan status, for it has allowed her the freedom to become whatever person she liked. As a daughter, she would have been set on the rails of her mother's life, unable to alter her course unless she started a new life in a place where no one had known her mother. Living without family is less confining, less defining. Not only has Gloria managed to avoid a compulsory mother pattern, she also has been spared the associated sins, the inherited rut in which to trudge: " 'That I'm one to myself, and nobody's kin, and my own boss, and nobody knows the one I am or where I came from,' she said. 'And all that counts in life is up ahead'" (303). This

is hardly the speech of one deprived of life's essentials. What kind of woman has poor, motherless Gloria become? A model mother? A model teacher? Neither of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, yet she's done her best at both, followed her heart and found the flexibility necessary to become what she needs to. She's not a lover of matriarchal sacrifice, but she's one to love and care for her family.

Still unable to wear Gloria down with their reminders of her orphan status, the Vaughn and Beecham women leave it to the matriarch of the clan to deal her a much stronger blow. Granny Vaughn gives Gloria both a history and sins to inherit by giving her a mother and the worst one anyone can think of, Rachel Sojourner. What better way to assign legitimacy to their claims of her defects than to point toward "her" defective mother, and in a matriarchal community, the shaper of her life? The Banner women make it clear that because Gloria's own mother was incapable, she cannot expect to be anything other than an improper mother herself. The walk to Miss Julia's funeral brings Gloria past the grave of the woman chosen by the community to be her mother. She is reminded of the power of the community, of the gods even, to see that a mother unfit to care for a child is punished even by a disrespectful death:

They rounded a great clump of ribbon-grass as high as a haystack, out of which Rachel Sojourner's grave seemed to slide, ready to go over the edge of the bank, like a disobedient child. The small lamb on its headstone had

turned dark as a blackened lamp chimney (408).

In Delta Wedding, the Fairchild women look no farther than Maureen's mother to explain poor little orphan Maureen's addlebrained state:

He was fully told, that Maureen has been dropped on her head as an infant, that her mother, Virgie Lee Fairchild, who had dropped her, ran away into Fairchilds and lived by herself, never came out, and that she wore her black hair hanging and matted to the waist, had not combed it since the day she let the child fall 'You've seen her!' their two lives had stopped on that day, and so Maureen had been brought up at Shellmound (61).

It is the job of the matriarchy to ensure that no child remain in the care of an inadequate mother and to ensure that the incompetent mother is punished just as quickly and permanently as are other societal contaminants. Dropping a child on its head cannot be viewed as an accident but as an intentional failure, a rejection of the woman's role within her community. For the mother's sentence to remain unchanged, her child then must be forever known as one damaged.

Thus, the naming of Rachel as Gloria's mother is a cruel yet equally effective blow from Granny Vaughn's matriarchical ax. In fact, it nicks Gloria right at the root. Of course, Gloria set herself up for ridicule by making the others feel less privileged because they knew exactly who their mothers were and thus had little more to expect from themselves or their children. Rachel, also was, not coincidentally, a fine seamstress which gives one more

indication that even a flawed mother is better than none. Had Rachel lived, she could have at least taught Gloria to be a decent seamstress, given the community something to measure her daughter by. She would have had one future laid out for her, rather than defiantly choosing her own way. A past and a family, especially mothers, are Banner's great equalizers. The community will not let Gloria turn her lack of a family into an exclusive benefit or a way to belittle their way of life: "Gloria cried, 'I wish you all wouldn't keep on. I know I'm better than Rachel Sojourner and her lamb. Nobody here or anywhere else can make me believe I'm in the world on account of by fault of hers.' She threw back her mane" (251). She goes on, "'But I was a secret,' Gloria protested. 'Whatsoever I was, I was her secret,' She jumped up, her head like a house afire" (247). As soon as Gloria's pleasingly unfortunate lineage is created, everyone, including Miss Beulah, her mother-in-law, seizes the opportunity to watch her swing from a peg safely near the bottom of the social hierarchy:

'I ought to have known you on sight girl. The minute you walked in my house with your valise and satchel and the little setting of eggs for the teacher's present and unsnapped the elastic on your hat. You might have been poor, frail, headstrong little old Rachel Sojourner all over again. . . .

'Why that day when Granny came in from the garden with a bushel of greens in her apron, she stopped in front of you and said, 'Aren't you under the wrong roof, little girl?'" (248).

Aunt Birdie chimes in, "'Let her have it her way. But it's

still a mighty good country saying--like mother like daughter. She's Rachel's child. . .'" (255). This day yields sweet revenge for the family after all those months of enduring Gloria's disdain while she lived in their midst. Then they give Gloria a Beecham daddy, so that they can show her that she does have a family--that she's one of them. In a scene as much like a rape as any Welty has written, they force her to admit that she's born of their stock--that she has her future laid out for her just like them, that she must crush the silly idea that she could choose her own way: "'Come on sisters, help feed her! Let's cram it down her little red lane! Let's make her say Beecham. We did!' came the woman's voices" (260). As Madelyn Sprengnether says in her article "Delta Wedding and the Kore Complex":

"Determined though she is to remain an orphan of unknown origin, she [Gloria] is subjected to the ordeal of having the tribe initiate her as the daughter of Rachel and, conjecturally, Sam Beecham" (142). The Banner women collectively stuff Gloria's mouth full of watermelon as if to force what they've told her into her stomach, drowning out her uppity voice. Her silence is as good as an answer. Only after this humiliating ceremony, can she join the family. The Banner women literally force Gloria to eat the fruit of belonging, the taste of which will fill her with the understanding of her position within the community.

In a much milder dinner scene, Laura is nonetheless fed

significant food to remind her of whom she is:

'How Annie Laurie would have loved this very plate!' Uncle Battle said softly just now, holding up Laura's serving. 'Breast, gizzard, and wing! Pass it, boy.' . . . 'Now eat it all!' Uncle Battle called to her as the plate reached her. But it was a joke, his giving her the gizzard, she saw, for it was her mother that loved it and she could not stand that piece of turkey. She did not dare tell him what he knew. (12)

Joke though it may have been, this small event serves only to reemphasize the family's hopes that Laura could become at least a synecdoche of her mother, even by eating the same food. Even though she is not her mother and is fully well aware of it, Laura cannot communicate this to her newfound family. All they see when they look at her is the child Annie Laurie left behind. In fact, Laura's visit seems, in large part, an attempt on the Fairchilds' part to keep Annie Laurie with them, rather than to allow Laura to own her mother or grieve for her. She will never be a person distinct from her mother:

'Annie Laurie,' said Shelley softly, still in that practical voice that made Laura wonder. It always seemed to Laura that when she wanted to think of her mother, they would prevent her, and when she was not thinking of her, then they would say her name. She stood looking at the mound, green now, and Aunt Ellen or Uncle Battle or somebody had put a vase of Marechal Niel roses here no longer ago than yesterday, thinking of her for themselves (133).

To them, Annie Laurie was more than Laura's mother, but Laura will never know that side of her mother or be known as anything other than the little girl that Annie Laurie left motherless. Laura will always remain outside the family, ostracized, understood only in terms of her lack. Only, at

the last minute, through the untimely illness of another child is Laura considered as a substitute flower girl. Only by accident can she be temporarily included in the family circle:

'Aunt Ellen,' said Laura, kneeling at the love seat. 'I've already had chicken pox.'

'All right, dear,' said her aunt. But it did not seem to occur to her that now Laura might be slipped into the wedding in the place of Lady Clare. And Laura, staring at her, suddenly wondered where, truly where, the rosy pin was. She got to her feet and backed away from her aunt slowly--she wanted to know in what wave. Now it would be in the Yazoo River, then it would be carried down the Mississippi, then . . . (182).

Feeling her exclusion from the family circle, Laura sought to belong to Ellen's brood as well. But through her own carelessness she loses Aunt Ellen's pin that would have somehow made Ellen her mother. She didn't have the heirloom, the gift passed on from mother to daughter, long enough to prove she was a rightful inheritor. As Sprengnether says:

Laura's motherless condition makes her especially vulnerable to awareness of how it feels to be an outsider, at the same time that she longs for the comfort of the Fairchild family circle. Her experience of the care corresponds to her dual experience of the loss of a mother and the potential recovery of one in Ellen. (122)

Having Ellen's pin would have meant she belonged to someone. Sprengnether says, "In finding and losing the rose garnet brooch, Laura in one sense at least repeats the experience of having and not having a mother." (124) In some cases, the matriarchy extends its boundaries to include a symbolic member. Only daughters with mothers can ever be fully

integrated into the circle, a fact Laura need not be told but intuitively.

Like Laura, Gloria felt the need for a mother. She found it in Miss Julia, the woman that offered the only other alternative to her mother.

... makes it clear--despite her claim that she prefers to remain outside of a family circle--she too thinks daughters follow in mothers' footsteps and that she belonged to Miss Julia:

Why else would I have ever thought I could be a teacher? . . . That would have explained everything. If once she'd [Miss Julia] made a mistake--and had me. . . . But she saved me from the orphanage--even if it was just to enter me up at Normal . . . She encouraged me, she wanted me to rise. (303)

Miss Julia, then, proves herself to be a mother like Annie Dillard's, who is willing to encourage her child to realize dreams that might even take her away from her mother's home and influence.

Chapter 3

Having discussed the power of the patriarchy to absorb, label and confine, the next logical questions would be: What makes individual members of the patriarchy behave the way they do? Why are they driven to attain power? A surprisingly small amount of critical attention has of yet been paid to the matter. A closer examination is essential, however, because the temptation to indict these women for the misery surrounding them is overwhelming. Welty will not allow us simply to hate her characters or to write them off; we can only truly hate stick figures. Welty looks behind her 'tyrannical' mothers, examines their vulnerabilities, records their revealing asides. In short, she strives to love and understand all human lives that she brings to the page. One link between all the mothers' is their compulsion to control others. A second and related link is, in turn,

their desire that those daughters under this patriarchal control will will meet the mothers' unfathomable though real needs. Such control is expressed in a variety of ways from outright belittling to excessive giving that, when stripped of its pretense of maternal love, produces insurmountable indebtedness. To study Welty's patriarchy is to examine the mixture of cruelty and neediness working in symbiosis within all people.

In the characters of Granny Vaughn of Losing Battles and Ida M'Toy's mother, featured in the essay "Ida M'Toy," Welty creates both her strongest argument against patriarchal tyranny and, at the same time, her strongest explanation for such behavior. They are motivated by need. Both women are, on the occasion of their 90-some birthdays, the recipients of family reunion-style parties, complete with more dishes of food than they can taste, people dancing for their amusement and mountains of presents. Both women even wears hats they refuse to remove. Ida M'Toy, a powerful Mississippi midwife whose strength and abilities inspired Welty to write an essay about her, becomes the simultaneous victim and organizer of her mother's party. She recounts to Welty a moment of the tirade:

Mama says, 'Where my coffee? Bring on turnip and cornbread. Didn't you make a blackberry pie?' I said, 'Mama, you don't eat coffee first.' But she said, 'Where my coffee? Bring on turnip and cornbread. Didn't you make a blackberry pie? What's the matter with you?' Everything was so fine, you know. It took two big sons, one on each side, to quiet her, that's the way Mama acted! (Eye of the Story 347)

Nothing her family offers is enough; if she were ever satisfied or grateful, she would have to face the real possibility that they would leave with soothed consciences. Knowing Ida M'Toy as a strong, knowledgeable and artistic woman, Welty expresses astonishment at the transformation the memory of this incident creates in her:

And Ida ended the story laughing and crying. It was plain there was one person who had no recognition of Ida's grandeur and high place in the world, and who had never yielded at all to the glamour as others did. It was a cruelty for Ida, but perhaps all vision has lived in the house with cruelty. (347)

The cruelty, however, is two-fold. The ultimate cruelty for a woman like Ida M'Toy's mother trained primarily and often only to mother is aging and its accompanying loss of the ability to bear and to raise children. Her children are no longer bound to her by their need, and because of this, she has lost the ultimate authority with which to call them back. In Ida M'Toy's own statement about the children she has delivered as a midwife "They would steal from their own mother" (345) she herself reveals an understanding of the pain many mother's feel. The pain issues from the need of a child for her mother and the corresponding need that mother creates within her child. It does not matter that Ida M'Toy does not specify exactly what it is she thinks these children would steal, but it does matter that she makes such a statement at all. Implicit in her words is the knowledge that people feel compelled to take things that have not been

freely offered. Indeed, Ida's own mother has left her wanting of approval and acceptance and peace. By her lack of approval, her mother guarantees that her children will continue striving to meet needs that are so deep that she cannot articulate them.

Granny Vaughn's children similarly kowtow and kiss, hoping to collect a scrap of approval from her. Opening her birthday gifts, she fires a round of insults: "'Now what's that? It's that Christmas cactus coming around again,' said Granny. 'If there's one thing I'm ever tired of!'" (217). The next gift, "wrapped up like an owl, was an owl--in brown china, big as a churn, with a pot belly, sunflower-yellow feet, and eyes wired to flash on and off," inspires this venomous response: "'Like I didn't have enough of those outside without bringing one inside. Believe I'll like the next present better. I know what this is,' Granny told them" (217). In response to this one gift that she does like--the quilt that Aunt Beck has so carefully stitched--she checks her enthusiasm and says, "'I'm going to be buried under 'Seek No Further' . . . I've got more than one quilt that'll bear close inspection'" (217). Granny will not allow anyone the satisfaction of feeling sure of her approval. With the quilt, Aunt Beck had come dangerously close to hearing praise, to feeling absolved of the guilt Granny so wants her to feel for not loving and needing her enough. No amount of work or thought will satisfy. The dinner arrangements are

equally lacking. To one reunion member proudly holding up a string of fish, Granny shouts like a displeased god from her rocker throne, "'You could fry all of those in one skillet . . . I'm planning a little bigger dinner than most of you seem to think" (17).

Apparently, the older Granny grows, the more power she feels driven to scabble together. Along with her own increasing physical weakness comes the resentment of having to be cared for. Though she wants the attention, it is attention that resembles the nurture a mother gives a helpless child. Now relegated a secondary position in the matriarchy, she reacts strongly when her daughter, Miss Beulah predicts a plant's blooming: "'Can't tell a century plant what to do . . .'" (24) She is leaping to her own defense rather than the plant's. Like the queen of England, Granny has a crown but no real authority. Her only remaining weapon, her ability to badger, still proves a sharp one. All of her family members must momentarily bend the knee: "'Granny's being so brave behind you,' Aunt Beck gently reminded . . . and Aunt Nanny nearly fell over herself to hug the old lady, the cheeks in her big face splashed over red with blushes" (17). Ironically, the action of the passage pivots around someone who feels ignored, who feels herself to be wronged. As the recipient of patronizing physical attention, Granny says, "'Well, you needn't come patting after me . . . I'd just have to stop what I was

doing and run you off, like I do some others.'" (19)

Granny's limited power now depends on her family's penchant for abuse, in their huge capacity for guilt. Since she can no longer keep pace by her wit or her physical prowess, Granny resorts to being irritating. Indeed, her age reserves her the right to say whatever occurs to her, including rude greetings such as "'What are you doing here? . . . Thought they told me you was dead'" (18). Jack's arrival eloquently reveals just how much her power has declined: "Granny, up in the air, only looked him back cockily in the eye. Carefully he lowered her down to the floor, and when she got her footing he brushed some of his dust off her sleeves'" (77). He holds her and tusses her like a doll, yet a doll that demands coddling. She pretends to ignore all this affection while, on the other hand, to require that it be given: "'Ain't you got me a little sugar?'" (77) she demands of Jack.

Though her moment is in her grasp and every reunion eye is trained on her, Granny's self-proclaimed magnificence shrinks in the narrator's description:

Then Granny rose to her feet, her own crackling petticoats giving way to quiet the way kindling does when the fire catches. She stood only by her head taller than her cake with its candles and its now erect fierce flames. With one full blow from her blue lips, breath riding out on a seashell of pink and blue flame, Granny blew the candles out (183-184).

The reunion keeps respectful vigil over its fallen monarch, honors the power she once had and the fight she is putting

up to retain any shreds of it. Even Granny's great-great grandbaby is a potential threat to her power, taking her share of the attention and controlling the adults:

Even before her eyes opened, Granny had put both arms out. Lady May, the soles of her feet wrinkling like the old lady's forehead, went to the weakest and most precarious embrace she knew. They hugged long enough to remind each other that perhaps they were rivals (69).

Whatever power Granny holds over her vast family she retains only with their unspoken permission. Because it suits their own purposes, they praise her for harrassing the uppity outsider, Gloria. Though her own powers are declining, Granny wants to have some say in who will attain enough power to succeed her. During her "Rachel is Gloria's mother" tirade, Granny resembles a mean old bulldog untied from the porch post, turned loose to maim. The truth of Granny's historical accounts is questionable and yet, for this one moment, the Banner matriarchy gives her the authority that assures their validity.

This display of Granny's former power is short-lived, however, and for the rest of the reunion, she must endure sugar-coated attacks from those she has formerly succeeded in controlling. In a series of speeches made throughout the meal, her family lets her know, in no uncertain terms, that the baton has grown too heavy in her hand: "She is one of our oldest citizens today . . . It is said that Death loves a shining mark. So we had all best be careful of Granny, precious friends, and treat her nice for the year to come,

because she's shining mighty hard" (175). Another picks up a coffin nail: "'According to her years, she is about to live up her life here on earth, and may expect any day to be taken, but we hope she will be spared to bring her precious presence to one more reunion" (175). Each family member pivots events, especially Jack's arrival, around whether Granny lives or dies: "'And a good thing Jack knows it. Because the truth of the matter is,' Aunt Beck murmured, gazing at the old lady in the rocker, 'if we had to wait another year, who knows if Granny would've made it'" (74). Still another indicates that he has anticipated Granny's demise for some time:

'After Grandpa left this sorry old world, Granny appeared for a while to be trailing a wing. Yes sir, we in Banner told one another, he will soon have the old lady wooed upward. We know he's been hungry for her! I expect while we set around her today, Grandpa in Heaven is busy wondering why in the world she don't pick up her foot and track on up there with him. But I expect she's got her answer ready' (175).

This diatribe smacks so much of a request that Granny 'be done with it' that she must muster up some of her former ability to silence others: 'Suppose you try taking a seat.' . . . 'Go over there in the corner' (175).

Death and the knowledge that she must face it alone finally reveals a flaw in Granny's great maternal armor. As her family scatters to their trucks and then to the roads leading out of Banner, Granny is reminded that she is indeed going to die and that none of them will be able to prevent it, no matter how much she has given them or how much

control she formerly had over them. She holds out empty hands as if nothing has been enough to meet her needs.

Appropriately, she forgets she has opened her gifts:

'Just look around you,' said Miss Buelah. 'And you've thanked everybody too.'

Then Granny dropped her hands, and she and Miss Buelah looked at each other, each face as grief-stricken as the other (341).

They exchange only this look because neither is able to articulate the feeling. It is the look of a mother whose children have left her because they have others to love. Sooner or later, all members of broods marry to have their own children and no longer hover around their mothers. To soothe their consciences, her children explain their mothers' behavior away as senility, which probably is not the problem. Granny's age seems not to have weakened her mind but to have freed her from the fear of verbalizing some of its harsher thoughts that previously have remained politely unspoken. Like most mothers, Granny's feelings illustrate what Adrienne Rich calls

ambivalence of fear and relief [that] often marks the beginning of menopause. For women-defined-as-mother, the event may mean, at last, an end to unwanted pregnancies, but also her death as a woman (thus defined), as a sexual being, and as someone with a function (106).

Examined in this light, we see that, unlike Welty's surrogate mothers, Miss Julia and Miss Eckhart, Granny has nothing other than mothering with which to define herself. As Granny's birthday reunion disintegrates, so does her

pretense of composure: "'Now I once thought I had a big family,' said Granny. 'What's happening to 'em . . . 'Shame on ye. Shame on ye,' said Granny as their dust began to rise" (341). Offering, giving and, thus, indebting no longer provides her sufficient strength to keep her children at her side:

Uncle Curtis hugged Granny without words. She kissed him--then saw him leave her anyway . . .

'Parcel of thieves! They'd take your last row of pins. They'd steal your life if they knew how,' Granny said.

'Granny, don't you know who dearly loves you?' Miss Buelah asked, clasping her. 'Don't you remember the hundred that's been with you all day? Giving you pretties, striving to please you--'

'Thieves all,' said Granny' (342).

What have they stolen but their presence, their undivided loyalties. In a way, they have 'stolen her life' because they do not need a mother. Even Miss Buelah, who lives with and cares for Granny, has her own family that divides her allegiances. Granny is left in her rocker, deserted by her rebellious subjects, her crown tarnished and pathetic.

Though Laura McKelva of The Optimist's Daughter is responsible for her daughter's love for something other than her mother, for her desire to create something other than children, she feels this same inarticulable need for her daughter to narrow her pursuits, hover near her mother. In fact, Laurel owes her career in large part to her own mother--the career that took her away from her mother's home. Through her sewing, Laura McKelva has given order to

life, and in response, her daughter too has become a designer of patterns:

When her mother . . . sat here in her chair pedalling and spinning, Laurel sat on this floor and put together the fallen scraps of cloth into stars, flowers, birds . . . lining them up, spacing them out, making them into patterns, families, on the sweet-smelling matting, with the shine of firelight . . . moving over mother and child and what they were both making (159).

Because she wanted to spend time with her mother, the child Laurel had stayed where her mother was and had done what her mother did. In the process, her mother taught her that it is right to love something else in addition to your family:

'The most beautiful blouse I ever owned in my life—I made it. Cloth from Mother's own spinning, and dyed a deep, rich, American Beauty color with pokeberries,' her mother had said with the gravity in which she spoke of 'up home.' 'I'll never have anything to wear that to me is as satisfactory as that blouse.' (162)

This passion has given Laurel the same love of something other than her mother, in this case, cloth design. The same daughter who has watched her mother do all these things so confidently is the daughter who leaves to start a career of making things that would give herself fulfillment as well. Becky McKelva has transferred her own confidence to her daughter and has, by her example, given her the urge to wander and to start a life of her own. In her article, "Eudora Welty and The Dutiful Daughter," Elizabeth Evans says that it is Becky McKelva's confidence and strength that later leads her to expect too much from herself and her daughter: "She [Becky] was independent, more courageous than her brothers. And as the stories of her youth are told and

retold, it is clear that any daughter would be hard-pressed to measure up" (59). If she blames herself for failing to meet her mother's needs, we should not be surprised then that she would point a finger at her daughter for leaving, for being unable to do something to save her mother from death. In fact, Becky McKelva's last words indict her daughter for choosing not to live her life hovering around her mother. Laurel breaks the spell of the living by ceasing to keep vigil: "'To Laurel, while she still knew her, she had made a last remark: 'You could have saved your mother's life. But you stood by and wouldn't intervene. I despair for you'" (178). As Evans says, "Laurel is a dutiful daughter to a mother who was insensitive, who did not come easily to tenderness, who literally cursed her daughter as she died--despairing of Laurel because this dutiful daughter could not do the impossible" (59). More importantly, Laurel lacks the desire to do the impossible. She no longer believes, like her mother, that "anyone could be saved." (170) At least Laurel's mother, unlike her grandmother, is able to cry out her need to her daughter. This cry in some way allows Becky to confess her own failure and absolves her of her guilt for letting her own mother die:

Grandma had died unexpectedly; she was alone. From the top of the stairs Laurel had heard her mother crying uncontrollably; the first time she had ever heard anyone cry uncontrollably except herself.

'I wasn't there! I wasn't there!'

'You are not to blame yourself, Becky, do you hear me?'

'You can't make me lie to myself, Clinton!'

They raised their voices, cried out back and forth as if grief could be fabricated into an argument to comfort itself with. When some time later, Laurel asked about the bell, her mother replied calmly that how good a bell was depended on the distance away your children had gone' (168).

The wanderer in Becky McKelva always felt she was away from 'home' and felt guilty because she left her mother. She had moved too far away to hear her mother's bell or to give to or, metaphorically, to receive anything from her.

So the source of the patriarchy's tyranny appears to be a contorted form of love, a mixture of self-love and need-love. Even though Becky McKelva had left her mother's side to find a new life with her husband, the daily, mournful letters from her mother reminded Becky that she deserted her family. Only after reading these letters is Laurel able to begin to understand what mothers need and how far what lengths they will go to get it:

Widowed, her health failing, lonely and sometimes bedridden, Grandma wrote these letters to her young, venturesome, defiant, happily married daughter as to an exile, without ever allowing herself to put it into so many words. Laurel could hardly believe the bravery and serenity she had put into these short letters, in the quickened pencil to catch the pocket of one of 'the boys' before he rode off again, dependent--Grandma then, as much as Laurel now--upon his remembering to mail them from 'the courthouse.' She read on and met her own name on a page. 'I will try to send Laurel a cup of sugar for her birthday. Though if I can find a way to do it, I would like to send her one of my pigeons. It would eat from her hand, if she would let it' (180).

The pigeon would have become her emissary, a living reminder

to both Laurel and her mother that grandmother has needs that are not being met. Through the pigeon, she literally would have taken things out of their hands. Seen in this connection, Laurel's fear the birds and their drive to reach down the other's throat to feed is not unfounded. It is the fear of being choked by someone who does not hesitate to harm you in order to get what she needs. In his article, "An Early Reading of Optimist's Daughter," Reynolds Price puts it this way: "Her mother had at last endured the awful knowledge in its simple killing progression--that we feed on others till they fail us, through their understandable inability to spare us pain and death . . ." (85). Entangled with the gift, Laurel's grandmother sends her need. Laurel feels the same indebtedness that her grandmother had made her daughter feel, the same ponderous weight of the years of giving with expectation left unspoken:

Laurel could remember, too, her mother holding her own hands before her eyes, very close, so that she seemed to be seeing them, the empty working fingers.

'Poor hands in winter, when she came back from the well--bleeding from the ice, from the ice!' her mother cried.

'Who, Mother?' Laurel asked.

'My mother!' she cried accusingly (177).

Becky McKelva accuses herself as well as her child for both needing, taking and not returning. Ultimately, both Becky and Laurel feel the same terrible guilt over their inability to give their mothers anything of consequence. At her own

death, Becky laments that she can now hear the cries her mother would have uttered to her if she had knelt by her deathbed. The raw, unidentifiable need comes screaming into words that still fall short of expressing it: "It was her spirit speaking in the wrong words--'All you do is hurt me. I wish I might know what it is I've done' . . . Her cry was not complaint; it was anger at wanting to know and being denied knowledge; it was love's deep anger" (174). By crying out to her daughter, Becky resurrects her mother's accusing spirit once more. She accepts the blame for following her husband to Mount Salus, away from the true mountains of home. Though she acknowledges the impossibility of the task, Laurel finally admits to a yearning to have given her mother what she asked for, life. She watches her mother's handwriting burn on a stack of letters and articulates her urge to pull one back from the fire: "All Laurel would have wanted with her mother's 'this morning?' would have been to make it over, give her a new one in its place." (196)

"Love's deep anger" that Becky McKelva feels is fueled by Laurel's inevitable failure to love her enough to heal her and preserve her life, and most importantly, by losing hope that this is possible.

Still more revealing of the diversity of the expression of this need mothers' feel, is the juxtaposition within The Optimist's Daughter of Becky McKelva and Mrs. Chisom, Fay's overbearing mother. As Mrs. McKelva had passed on her

confidence and love of creating, Mrs. Chisom leaves her respective legacy to her children--dependency and selfishness. Because Mrs. Chisom lacks the strength Granny Vaughn passes on to her children, she reaches the goal that Granny failed to--keeping all her children tied to her apron strings. Mrs. Chisom and her family have chosen to meet their own needs at each others' expense:

'Yes, me and my brood believes in clustering just as close as we can get,' said Mrs. Chisom. 'Bubba pulled his trailer right up in my yard when he married and Irma can string her clothesline as far out as she pleases. Sis here got married and didn't even try to move away. Duffy just snuggled in' (87).

It is as if she has kept each attached by something like an umbilical cord; now the feeding goes two ways. Neither she nor her children has been strong enough to withstand the pain of severing it. This is the power of the matriarchy, the mother love that has mutated into a force that seeks not only to nurture but to retain the power given by nurturing. Mrs. Chisom is proud to see her daughter Fay clutch at her husband's corpse during his wake. Fay shares her need to consume others: "'Like mother, like daughter. Though when I had to give up her dad, they couldn't hold me half so easy. I tore up the whole house, I did'" (104). Mrs. Chisom has successfully secured her daughter Fay's allegiance. Fay indicates the extent of her dependency and need when after the wake, she runs suitcase in hand, screaming, "'I'm coming Mama! Don't you-all go off and leave me!'" (119).

The few Welty women who have tried to find individual

fulfillment while still living in the midst of their mothers' control and domination bear witness to the truth of Welty's statement that "perhaps all vision has lived in the house with cruelty." (Eye of the Story 347) Miss Eckhart, finds the source of her musical inspiration--her vision--within the pain of her life. Welty says of Miss Eckhart and her mother: "She . . . was trapped, you know, with her terrible old mother. . . I mean we don't know--they had tantrums in that house, and flaming quarrels." (Conversations 340) It is probably precisely because Miss Eckhart's mother belittles her music that music becomes a source of infinite value. Furthermore, Mrs. Eckhart is unable to keep her daughter from seeking the companionship of other people either.

In fact, the two people who threaten Mrs. Eckhart's power over her daughter, who give Miss Eckhart any happiness--Virgie Rainey and Mr. Sissum, the shoe salesman--are the ones her mother does her best to undermine. Or, truer still, she undermines the emotions her daughter feels toward the two, rather than the people themselves. The cheap little promotional doll Mr. Sissum gives Miss Eckhart inspires the purest joy she has ever known: "When her laughter was exhausted she would sigh faintly and ask for the doll, and then soberly set it down on a little minaret table, as if it were a vase of fresh roses" (299). Whether she is jealous of her daughter's happiness or outraged that

Mr. Sissum could affect her daughter more readily than she could, the real impetus behind Mrs. Eckhart's cruelty is jealousy, an emotion that weakens her. For one brief moment, Mrs. Eckhart has lost her daughter to another person, and she cannot bear it. She fears that her daughter might overcome their mutual strangeness, be absorbed into the community and abandon her. She uses one of the cruelest means of regaining control; she steals the doll and breaks it over her knee.

Although the story does not indicate Mrs. Eckhart's reaction to Mr. Sissum's death, it does tell us that her daughter attends his funeral alone and nearly throws herself in his open grave, overcome with grief. Miss Eckhart's mother could not acknowledge her daughter's sorrow because it would give validity to her need of someone other than her mother. Unlike Mr. Sissum, Virgie Rainey does not oblige Mrs. Eckhart by dying. She continues to invade the Eckhart home and engage Miss Eckhart's emotions and time. Again, Mrs. Eckhart tries to regain her daughter's allegiance by ridiculing her feelings for Virgie. Though surely Virgie does not escape the effects of the old woman's tirades, Mrs. Eckhart's daughter is the intended target, the one she desires to humiliate:

Once when Virgie was practicing on Miss Eckhart's piano, and before she was through, the old mother screamed, 'Danke schoen, danke schoen, danke schoen!' . . . She screamed with a shy look still on her face, as though through Virgie Rainey she would scream at the whole world, at least at all the music in the world and

wasn't that all right? Then she sat there looking out the front window, half smiling, having mocked her daughter But when the song was smoothly finished, Miss Eckhart made her way among the little tables and chairs across the studio. Cassie thought she was going for a drink of water or something for herself. When she reached her mother, Miss Eckhart slapped the side of her mouth. She stood there a moment more, leaning over the chair--while it seemed to Cassie that it must, after all have been the mother that slapped the daughter--with the key from her bosom, slipped out, beginning to swing on its chain, back and forth, catching the light. (305).

Not only did it seem to Cassie that Mrs. Eckhart must have slapped her daughter but it seemed so to Welty as well: "I think her mother hits her. But anyway, I wanted to indicate that they were passionate people" (Conversations 340).

Indeed, Miss Eckhart seems the mother here. Her mother has become a jealous child, angry because the music and Virgie are monopolizing her daughter. Neither Cassie nor Welty wants to believe that someone would so abuse her authority, but if Welty's characters are to be believed, then she must allow them to live out their lives and act in ways true to their motivations. If Mrs. Eckhart can make her daughter feel embarrassed or ashamed, if she can remind her daughter of the community's dislike of her strong connection to Virgie, then she can strengthen her position of control. Here, however, she has overplayed her hand, placed too much faith in her position as mother to guarantee that her daughter will kowtow. Her store of ammunition depleted, Mrs. Eckhart turns to the community to control her daughter by holding her slapped mouth crooked for the rest of her life.

Worse than a child who screams to draw attention while the mother disciplines, Mrs. Eckhart will use her crooked mouth to show everyone what her daughter has done, to suggest to their minds additional abuse: "stories began to be told of what Miss Eckhart had really done to her old mother. People said the old mother had been in pain for years and nobody was told" (107). With this eye gesture, she also reminds her daughter that though she has won one small battle, she certainly has not won the war. In the same passage, we see Miss Eckhart's one defense against such behavior. The key swinging from a necklace probably opens her safe in which she keeps her metronome, the thing most precious to her as a music teacher. Just as she has hidden the safe from her mother, she also has hidden away and reserves the keys to the deepest parts of her life.

Just how has Mrs. Eckhart been able to maintain the control that she does have? Certainly, she is physically weak and owns little of value to withhold from her daughter. Her method is her tenacity, her very presence. The following passage shows just how effectively Mrs. Eckhart has entangled herself in her daughter's dreams:

There were times in the studio when Miss Eckhart's mother would roll in; she had a wheelchair. The first years, she had kept to herself, rolling around no closer than the dining room, round and round with a whining wheel. She was old, and fair as a doll . . . She had wasting legs that showed knifelike down her long skirt, and clumsy-shaped, suffering feet that she placed just so out in front of her on the step of her chair as if she wanted you to think they were pretty.

The mother rolled into the studio whenever she liked, as time went on; with her shepherdess curls she bobbed herself through the beads that opened to her easier than a door . . . She was not so much listening to the lesson as watching it, and though she was not keeping time, it was all the more noticeable the way her hands would tip, tap against her chair; she had a brass thimble on one finger Should daughters forgive mothers (with mothers under their heel)? (304).

Just as she displays her crooked mouth to remind everyone of the slap, Mrs. Eckhart also wants them to see her 'suffering feet' because they symbolize the unhappiness of her life, all of which can somehow be blamed on her daughter. With every movement--her tapping thimble, the clacking beads, the whining wheel on her chair--she invades her daughter's privacy. Each sound solicits attention, requires apology. So, as the narrator asks, "Should daughters forgive?" (304) Should we try to understand why this mother does what she does? In the time of "June Recital," Mrs. Eckhart, like Granny Vaughn, is no longer called upon to mother, and so has been divested of the only authority she has ever known. Her energies are no longer needed to accomplish the one task her community had given her sanction to do. Now, she channels these energies into subversive schemes to help regain control over her once obedient subject. Ultimately unable to allow her daughter a life and ambitions of her own, Mrs. Eckhart invades the recitals, stealing the rewards from the very music her daughter holds precious and that she, at all other times, mocks:

At the close of the evening, saying goodnight, people congratulated Miss Eckhart and her mother. Old Mrs.

Eckhart had sat near the door during the whole evening--had sat by Miss Snowdie at the door, when she welcomed them in. She wore a dark dress too, but it was sprigged . . . She was letting herself be looked at and herself, at the end, be thanked (315).

This expression of the music is acceptable to all, the community as well as Mrs. Eckhart. As Marilyn Arnold says in her article, "When Gratitude Is No More: Eudora Welty's 'June Recital'":

The recital was a ritual, a thing that had to happen come spring. It was 'after all, a ceremony,' and it 'celebrated June' (p. 70) . . . There was 'sudden disintegration' as summer officially arrived with all its joyous freedom The recital was Miss Eckhart's only successful intrusion into the life of Morgana; for that time, she was theirs (67-68).

Not only is it Miss Eckhart's time to belong, but it is her mother's as well. At the recital too, she is accepted as the matriarch presiding over her daughter's 'occasion'. Like her daughter, Mrs. Eckhart is, for this brief time, freed from the stigma of her foreignness, of her daughter's spinsterhood. The recital allows her to reap from seeds she has not sown. Her position at the door shows the Morgana matriarchy that though she allows her daughter to throw these little parties, she is still in control of the guests and their hostess. By her presence, she assures the town that they need not worry about Miss Eckhart's behavior since she is monitoring it; she is the other adult in the strange house where they turn their daughters loose to practice the piano. Even in her official capacity as mother, she is still 'under her daughter's heel', invading, stealing. The

invasion is only possible, however, because her daughter allows it, feels a sense of duty to endure it. The same maternal force in Miss Eckhart that threatens to consume her prize student, Virgie, also drives Miss Eckhart's mother to remain in her daughter's house--a place where she both creates and receives misery. This maternal force seems driven by the even stronger fear of being alone. Though Arnold uses the following passage to elucidate the relationship between Virgie and her teacher, it applies to Miss Eckhart and her mother as well:

Carson McCullers too has understood the threat of togetherness, for she has repeatedly portrayed the lover, helplessly vulnerable, being exploited by the beloved who inflicts cruelty to preserve selfhood. Welty's sympathy for the separate ones, the 'wanderers,' does not blind her to the costs exacted by the individual quest for the luscious fruit. 'June Recital' explores with great sensitivity the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the urge to journey alone and the need to find a haven in others (62).

Both Miss Eckhart and her mother direct and receive blows to prevent being entirely consumed by one another, like Becky McKelva's mother's pigeons. Though living together means living in pain, neither mother nor daughter seems to have the strength to initiate the separation and continue alone.

Like her teacher, Miss Eckhart, Virgie seems compelled to stay by her mother's side long past the time other Morgana girls her age have married and severed maternal ties. Virgie --the promising pianist, the one who would succeed and leave the small town--returns to Morgana after a

brief, unimpressive sachet into the world. She willingly tethers herself to her mother's farm and all the work it entails. Though "The Wanderers" never explicitly spells out why she returns, Virgie's seems to succumb to the same societal constraints, the same feelings of duty that Miss Eckhart and Laurel know. As Elizabeth Evans says in "Eudora Welty and the Dutiful Daughter,"

Southern women (native or transplanted) are, far more than men, obliged to attend to family duties. In portraying dutiful daughters in Virgie and Laurel, Welty acknowledges that daughters are literally or figuratively bound by their mothers' presence and demands (63).

Even the genius Virgie is, like all other women in her community, tied to a string held tight between the pinching fingers of the matriarchy.

Virgie's sense of duty is not, however, fueled by an emotional dependency that her mother might have created within her but instead by a sense of duty to the relationship, and, I think, a subconscious hope that Mrs. Rainey would fill the 'mother-void' that she left in her daughter. Both "June Recital" and "The Wanderers" paint Katie Rainey as a woman much concerned with providing for husbands and sons. Rarely does she even acknowledge Virgie's presence. When Virgie turns 17, she comes home from Memphis of her own accord, and quickly her mother dashes any hopes she might have had that she has been loved or even missed. Her mother needs tending and does not hesitate to tell Virgie so the minute she steps off the train:

'You're right back at the right time to milk for me,' her mother said when she got there, and untied her bonnet and dashed it to the floor between them, looking up at her daughter. Nobody was allowed weeping over hurts at her house, unless it was Mrs. Rainey herself first, for son and husband, both her men were gone (452).

She is not moved by her daughter's return because daughters should not leave in the first place. Mrs. Rainey treats Virgie as if she has never gone, as if she has simply neglected to do the chores. Both quickly take up their expected roles and play them magnificently though they lack the accompanying emotions.

Even after years of neglecting her daughter, Mrs. Rainey still sees Virgie as a little child whom she now has the time to discipline:

Miss Katie knew then that Virgie would drive the cows home and milk and feed them and deliver the milk on the road, and come back and cook the little quails.

'It's a wonder, though,' she thought. 'A blessed wonder to see the child mind' (430).

She cannot understand that Virgie now acts, not out of obedience to her mother, but out of a mechanical sense of duty. Thus the encouraging change in Virgie's behavior that Mrs. Rainey believes is due to her mothering abilities results simply from an adult woman's urge to balance the books. And Virgie's is the worst kind of emotional accounting--she's paying debts. In one way, Mrs. Rainey likes having a daughter around for this very reason--someone is finally paying her back for all of her sacrifice:

'But it's my last summer, and she ought to get back

here and milk on time, the old lady thought, stubbornly and yet pityingly, the two ways she was.

'Look where the sun is,' she called, as Virgie did drive up in the yard . . .

'I see it Mama' (429-430).

When Virgie fans her mother, Mrs. Rainey reveals not gratitude, but more need: "'Fan me. If you stop fanning, it's worse than if you never started'" (431).

Growing up with little nurture or supervision from her mother, Virgie has become a woman who does not see any reason to follow in her mother's footsteps or to obey traditional rules of marriage:

Miss Katie thought she called to the road, but she didn't; shame drew down her head, for she could still feel little else coming to her from the outside world: lack of chivalry.

Waiting, she heard circling her ears like the swallows beginning, talk about lovers. Circle by circle it twittered, church talk, talk in the store and post office, vulgar men talk possibly in the barber shop. Talk she could never get near now she was coming to her (429).

Mrs. Rainey is concerned only how Virgie's behavior reflects on her. She has, of necessity, busied herself with providing for her family and not with nurturing her child daughter. Now, when Mrs. Rainey is weakened, she is forced to see the results of the neglect--her adult daughter. Only now, when Virgie is beyond her grasp, does she feel the need to take up the job of shaping. She is not entirely devoid of maternal urges. Indeed, she feels the same maternal need as other women to reproduce herself, to watch Virgie give her

own dreams shape. In the last delirious moments before her death, in fact, Katie Rainey confuses herself with her daughter:

And when Mama is gone, almost gone now, she meditated, I can tack on to my ad: the quilts' . . . Mama's rich in quilts, child . . . She was thinking, Mistake. Never Virgie at all. It was me, the bride--with more than they guessed. Why, Virgie, go away, it was me (431).

Finally, she would steal even Virgie's life, to start over with it for herself. Her own needs to be loved and accepted have grown so huge in her mind that she has met them at the expense of her own daughter. So much has Mrs. Rainey neglected her daughter that even Virgie's grieving is difficult to release, "a connection visible as the hair is in air, between the self and the moon, to make the self feel the child, a daughter far, far back" (453). Only when she packs her mother's things can she begin to feel the loss--not the loss of the woman who was her mother, but the loss of ever having been mothered. Her comment "'Mama keeps everything,'" (456) and the tears that follow seem cryptic until reexamining the daughter's relationship with her mother, until taking account of all the nurture Mrs. Rainey withheld from her daughter and kept for herself. The same loss that Virgie felt when she returned from Memphis to realize her mother would not even offer her a welcome overwhelms her again at her mother's funeral. It is a feeling that "she had lived the moment before" (452) because before this moment she had lived outside the constant

reminder of her mother's neglect. As the people who attended the funeral began "surrounding her and passing her and . . . sitting down to table without her," (452) Virgie understands just how invisible she has always been. Her mother has seen only her husband and sons. Because from such an early age Virgie has known only neglect, she has learned to steel herself against feeling need of any kind. Virgie has not stayed on her mother's farm for the traditional reasons: to meet a nice man in the hopes of settling down, to learn lessons from her mother or to work for her so that she will earn a material inheritance. She builds her dowry, not from what her mother will leave her but from her own resources. Virgie rejects the final traditional gift of mother to daughter because, even as a child, when she reached for anything her mother gave her, she felt, not love, but the pain that comes with conditions. Evans identifies just how far Virgie desires to flee from any attempt her mother might have made to square the deal: "Virgie takes one look at the household effects and tells Juba she and Minerva can share them all, can take it all away--what they have not already stolen. And she presses those ever-to-be-milked cows on Old Man Rainey since he has a truck to take them home in" (62).

It is Virgie who, of all Welty's daughters, seems finally able to live alone and peacefully in a matriarchal community. She faces her biological mother's inadequacies and acknowledges the nurture she found within her true

mother, Miss Eckhart. She recognizes and accepts within herself the part of Miss Eckhart who, though isolated from others, experienced great fulfillment.

Conclusion

The song sung at Katie Rainey's funeral "Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go," (446) could be the theme song of the struggle between all of Welty's mothers and daughters. It represents the continual pull between the two and explains, in part, why daughters remain in their mother's presence or feel tremendous guilt when they leave. As ugly as mothers' and daughters' behavior often is, it expresses real needs left unaddressed. Twisted and manipulative though the means may be, it is love that is the desired end.

When it occurs to women and even girls that their lives could expand beyond the boundaries set both by and for their mothers, could be lived in pursuit of alternative goals, their mothers' needs bubble to the surface. Inherent in the daughters' departure from tradition is a departure from their mothers. The root issue then is not that their

leaving is improper but that they are no longer trying to meet their mothers' needs.

Of all of the daughters Welty has created, Virgie, more than any other, seems to understand the whole of her experience of having been mothered and, because of this, seems not finally overwhelmed by it. Having been simultaneously appreciated and smothered by Miss Eckhart and neglected by her mother, Virgie has seen the rewards and abuses offered by a community of mothers. Unlike Miss Eckhart, she "grows up more rampant, and struggles into some sort of life independent from all the rest. . ." (One Writer's Beginnings 111) Though independent, she is not to live her life, we are led to believe, entirely alone. Virgie also is, unlike Laurel of The Optimist's Daughter, able to remember her true mother, Miss Eckhart, without guilt. She gleans goodness from their relationship, setting regrets and resentment aside which is finally what one who sees others as whole, complex people must do. In one of the final passages of "The Wanderers," Welty eloquently describes this seeming contradiction:

She (Virgie) had taken Miss Eckhart's hate, and then her love, extracted them, the thorn and then the overflow . . . With her (Miss Eckhart) 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 (460).

Virgie understands that however permuted, it had been love

Miss Eckhart had offered her. It is a form of the same love that drives Granny Vaughn and Mrs. Beecham to manipulate and that compels Becky McKelva to condemn her daughter for failing to save her from death. In view of this passage, one can even understand, at least in part, why the Welty matriarchy's express so much concern about "poor motherless children." Through the relationship between this surrogate mother (Miss Eckhart) and her daughter Virgie, Welty illustrates our human need both to give and to receive the deepest kind of love, the love between mothers and daughters, despite the risk of the injury we might inflict or receive in the process.

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