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### Analysis and Comparison of “A Worn Path” by Eudora Welty

The many vivid and in-depth analysis of the short Story “A Worn Path” by a woman from Mississippi named Eudora Welty has spawned much conjecture as well as much contemplated critical thinking. The men and women who have spent many hours reading and interpreting the overwhelming imagery and symbolism within this American piece of fiction have done justice to the art of writing in their vibrantly different views and opinions. As stated in several of the sources from which ideas, commentary, and viewpoints were reviewed, without asking the author whether the planning and construction of this or any other piece of literature has been a deliberate and conscious act of bringing a many-fold mental picture of the world, either imagined or as true as any of the laws of physical science, through medium of written language into the unconscious observational capacity of the human beings who have the curiosity, ability and passion to review their world which is then compared, contrasted, and brought to bear in the decision making of the daily lives of these same persons. The goal being: to bring forth the reason and equality which literature, education, and personal strength allow man to go forward on this line of time at this age in the vast history of our beginnings.

It is unfortunate that it is a fact that there were slaves and persons who were bought and sold, oppresses, and kept purposely supplanted to a level and reason of thinking which not only affected the many who directly had suffered under the unforetold anguish, for which no person, who has not been a slave, will ever have the capacity to describe with any inkling of the actual suffering. (Moberly 120), but nearly 200 hundred years later in the future, the seeds of the

intentional persecution, fear of, and misunderstanding has produced, or rather not produced, descendants who have been able to heal fully, who will not reach their full potential, nor ever be able to read and understand for themselves that which is the culmination of these persons prehistoric identity. For is it both the descendants of oppressor and of oppressed who bear the brunt and weight of past custom, mistake, or ideal. For the man who must sit and enjoy his freedom of speech, while having to endure that of others which has been reduced to the vulgare immanis vulgae of the language which was denied to them, is not actually freedom, but slavery to the ideal which created ignorance in one swift synaptic chemical charge in the form of a decision to place other beings below himself, which can and will never be forgotten, and from which full convalescence may last until nature makes her decision as to the human race and the future which will follow.

A literary analysis titled: *Toward the North Star: Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" and the Slave Narrative Tradition* written by Kevin Moberly from Saint Cloud State University emphasizes the slavery imagery and symbolism within the story by Ms. Welty. Trials and tribulation of the old Phoenix are here compared to those of slaves attempting to flee the oppression and lack of human decency in the most modern of the backward societies yet recorded (Welty 10). The use of the hunter in the story as the cumulative evil of the Jim Crow era, to represent the laws of the time may not be entirely correctly inferred. How could one put forth, that a man who has affectionately helped an old lady out of a ditch where she has fallen, can be used to embody all that is evil and wrong in the segregated southern United States? In this cited essay by Moberly it is stated in the first paragraph, that the man leveled his shotgun at the old woman (Moberly 107). Another of the literary writers, supposed that the hunter intended the old woman hard. Would a man have bothered with an old lady who had fallen in a

ditch in obvious distress is there had been hatred or malicious intent in the heart of this man (Sykes 152)? This however, is not the language used by Ms. Welty, who simply authors, that the shotgun was pointed in the direction of the old woman. If one has hunted with a shotgun, or has observed the poise of hunters who hunt waterfowl, and or upland game birds, one might ascertain that with the types of action which are used for such hunting, that it is customary to carry a shotgun in the broken position, with the action being pivoted open, often not containing a shell until such time as prey is sighted and or heard or smelled. Thus, the direction of the barrel may actually point towards the ground, in the direction of a person to whom is being spoken. A woman with the vast experiences such as Phoenix might be aware of this, and take no offense, as

The literary analysis performed by Mary Ann Dazy of the meaning and symbolism of the action of having a 'nice lady' (Welty 65) tie her shoes has much to say about the action of the women and about the purpose for the shoe tying in the surroundings which old Phoenix found herself upon entering town and tracking towards the doctor's which was her goal. (Dazy 92) It is generally known, that women can be as much of more condescending, perverse and evil than any male adversary, especially toward another woman, however, the busy woman, who has her arms full of a day's shopping at Christmas-time has taken the time to stop and speak with one who is supposedly beneath her. The young woman, who is referred to as "missy," helps with the request, during which she verbalizes the sentence "Stand still then, Grandma." Moberly has interpreted this as a derogatory and condescending comment (Moberly 122). However, this woman, whom has been named "missy" was more than likely brought into the world by such a woman as Phoenix; was given to this "Grandma" to be cared for by parents who were not inclined to do as such, and was perhaps told many times, to "stand still," while her own shoes were being tied. This young miss, was reverberating what had been taught to her by such a

woman as Phoenix. With this declaration Phoenix had completed her journey, one of many, where the young woman had been dressed in the proper form to tie the shoe of a young lady such as Phoenix. The segregated societies were separate, however, had obvious beneficial and positive influence upon one another.

Marilyn Keys, a literature professor, compares the journey of the old woman to the path which Jesus is to have taken as he leaves his confines to be crucified. The Via Dolorosa, or Path of Pain, as it is translated, is a series of steps of stages which are listed in the bible describing this final journey of Jesus to his death. Phoenix faces a number of obstacles which parallel those of Jesus (Keys 355). Moberly with his essay title, perceives “A Worn Path” as a slave narrative, however, he fails to properly define the characteristics of the slave narrative, except for alighting to the fact that these narrative are episodic in nature (Moberly 110). Besides this one single description, these was no further direct background his claims to the narrative thesis are muddled because of lack of explanation. On the other hand, Ms. Keys provides explicit examples to religious stories and references such as the hill which Phoenix has to climb on her journey parallels the mountain were Jesus is to have been tempted by the devil (Keys 355). The thorned bush which catches the old lady and will not let her pass is akin to the Christian ideals of thorns being attributed to the crown of thorn which Jesus is to have worn as he made his Via Dolorosa. Jesus meets a woman on his journey also. This woman who has no ties or relation to him, favors him a passionate thoughtless gesture of wiping his face of blood and sweat. The “missy” of “A Worn Path” performs a seemingly meaningless task for Phoenix, but which has profound meaning to her (Keys 355). This positive and sacral view to the story would perhaps be one which will propel persons away from the continual references to the hatred and pain of the slavery issue.

Those who are descendants of both sides of the slavery issue which finds a “path” into the lives of modern man, even in this day and age should be inclined to search for the “paths” which lead not to the further ways of encumbrance but to those conduits which allow the educational hindrance to be spanned and then surmounted. “Racial Conflict” (Lister 1), as Ms. Lister in her analysis states under the heading of social context must not be an issue or theme in this work, as themes such as the path representing the journey of life are much more interesting and prevalent. It is in a letter from the author herself, from Eudora Welty, in which is stated that the viewing of the diploma in the office of the doctor is the end of her journey. It should be the end of the journey upon the path to mental and social convalesce from the century old cancer of slavery, as well as the first step to the correct school of thought, with education and experience combined into the key to the future.

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## Annotated Bibliography

Davis, Robert G., ed. Ten Modern Masters. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1953. 441.

The publisher and editor bring together a collection of short stories from American authors, which are discussed and reviewed literally. The introduction and the three stories by Eudora Welty are the focus of the research. The comparison stories may also play a role in the research.

Dazy, Mary Ann. "PHOENIX JACKSON AND THE NICE LADY: a NOTE ON EUDORA WELTY's "a WORN PATH"." American Notes & Queries 17 (1979): 92-2. Literary Reference Center. EBSCO. SCC Library, Sanford, FL, USA. 20 Apr. 2008. Keyword: A Worn Path.

Analyzes the shoe tying incident in the short story, and places significance and symbolism upon it.

Keys, Marilyn. "'a WORN PATH': THE WAY OF DISPOSSESSION."

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This literary analysis essay puts forth the ideas and meanings of the short story from the point of view of a teacher of American Fiction in Great Britain. Many aspects of the short story are delved into.

Mizener, Arthur, ed. Modern Short Stories the Use of Imagination. 1st ed. New York: W.W.

Norton & Company, Inc., 1966. 163--165.

The publisher has brought together a collection of analysis of short stories which, as the title states, uses the vast human imagination within the literary framework. The analysis are two to three pages in length, and will be researched and compared to the other sources.

Moberly, Kevin. "Toward the North Star: Eudora Welty's 'a Worn Path' and the Slave Narrative

Tradition." Mississippi Quarterly 59 (2006): 107-127. Literary Reference Center.

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This is a journal article and literary criticism regarding the meeting of Phoenix with the hunter, and the racial implications, et cetera

Pierpont, Claudia R. Passionate Minds. 1st ed. New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 2000.

The Author takes twelve of the most influential and outstanding women writers of the world, and describes what they have done to change it, and how. Eudora Welty is one of the chosen authors, and the research on this author on and about her life and work will be used as research.

Pinwinski, David J. "Mistletoe in Eudora Welty's "a Worn Path."" ANQ 16 (2003): 40-42.

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Analyzes the symbolism of mistletoe in the short story

Isaacs, Neil D., Life for Phoenix, in *Sewanee Review*, Vol. LXXI, No. 1, Winter, 1963, pp. 75-81. Reprinted in *Short Story Criticism*, Vol. 27.

The author of the essay used examples from the plot of "A Worn Path" to show the Christian background of the author, as well as Christian values within the story.

Pierpont, Claudia R. Passionate Minds. 1st ed. New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 2000.

The Author takes twelve of the most influential and outstanding women writers of the world, and describes what they have done to change it, and how. Eudora Welty is one of the chosen authors, and the research on this author on and about her life and work will be used as research.

Sykes, Dennis J. "Welty's the Worn Path. Find More Like This." Explicator 56 (98): 151.

Literary Reference Center. EBSCO. SCC Library, Sanford, FL, USA. 20 Apr. 2008.

Keyword: A Worn Path.

Compares the journey of Phoenix to the exodus of ex-slaves from the lost south.