

Description of Perseverance in Eudora Welty's Short Story "A Worn Path"

*Ganieva Orzigul Khayriddinova*¹, *Turayeva Dilorom Rustamjonovna*²

Abstract: Eudora Welty is a prominent figure whose contribution to American Regional and Modern writing is crucial which even nowadays continues to explore in a myriad of research. Eudora Welty made significant contributions to American literature with her distinctive storytelling style, profound investigation of human experiences, and portrayal of the American South. The following paper discusses Eudora Welty's mastery in the description of the woman character's perseverance and sacrifice to her family members, overall mother's love based on the short story "A Worn Path" and thus analyzes the writer's peculiar literary style.

Keywords: Eudora Welty, short story, perseverance, character, theme, portray, human, psyche, description, American Literature.

I. Introduction

Any literary work can inevitably explore human nature and delve into its depths by showcasing true feelings and emotions. In XX-century American Literature among the writers the interest in the psychoanalytic approach in prose has risen; and vividly expressing Freudian and Jungian influence on prose writers has been remarkable. Eudora Welty is a prominent figure whose contribution to American Regional and Modern writing is crucial which even nowadays continues to explore in a myriad of research.

Eudora Welty made significant contributions to American literature with her distinctive storytelling style, profound investigation of human experiences, and portrayal of the American South. Eudora Welty's works are frequently identified with the Southern literary tradition. She caught the essence of the American South, its cultural nuances, and the complexity of Southern life in her short stories and novels. Her depiction of the region's landscapes, accents, and social dynamics aided in a greater understanding and appreciation of Southern literature.

Eudora Welty's contributions to American literature garnered her several honors and a literary legacy that will live on. She received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1973 for her work "The Optimist's Daughter", as well as numerous other important prizes and medals during her career. Eudora Welty's books are still studied, admired, and acclaimed for their literary accomplishments and profound insights into the human condition.

II. Literature Review

Eudora Welty's oeuvre has been researched for its themes, symbolism, narrative techniques, and the historical and cultural context in which the story was written by literary scholars as Elaine Orr, Roland Bartel, Dennis J. Sykes, Kevin Moberly, Kathleen Feeley and others. Especially "A Worn Path" is explored by many for its narrative structure, author's thematic approach in the story and cultural aspect the story focuses on. It narrates an old woman's story where all her both explicit and implicit feelings are depicted.

The short story "A Worn Path" was first published in February, 1941 in 'Atlantic Monthly'. Elaine Orr identifies Phoenix as a fabulist who has "a penchant for re-creation (making up stories) rather than

¹ PhD, Associate Professor

² Master student Bukhara State University



resolution” [16]. She has also been identified as “a completely and beautifully harmonious person” and Nancy K. Butterworth has noted that the character is neither a stereotype or stock character [16].

It is widely stated that the author’s short stories are investigated by many literary critics. It can also be witnessed that the author’s short stories and novels have been studied from different aspects. But in this article, we have tried to analyze Eudora Welty’s mastery in the description of the woman character’s perseverance and sacrifice to her family members, overall mother’s love based on the short story “A Worn Path” and thus to analyze the writer’s peculiar literary style.

III. Results and Discussion

The poetics of Eudora Welty’s short fiction is distinguished by the mix of subtle psychological analysis with lyricism, as well as the presence of elements of the bizarre and symbolism, which adds the works a philosophical overtone. The system of techniques that the writer develops is based on a lyrical feeling. It can be considered as a result of contemplating pictures of the lush nature of the American South that is depicted with remarkable skill and love; it is rooted in the very rhythm of narrative speech, growing out of a watercolor-blurry style.

The story “A Worn Path” by Eudora Welty is a short story first published in 1941 which narrates the story of an elderly African American woman named Phoenix Jackson. The author describes how she overcomes challenges to obtain medicine for her grandson on a journey through the rural Mississippi landscape. The story “A Worn Path” explores a plethora of themes concerning to perseverance, determination, and the resilience of the human spirit.

The central theme of the short story “A Worn Path” is the Phoenix Jackson, the main character's incredible tenacity and determination. Phoenix begins on a long and laborious journey to acquire medicine for her grandson, despite her advanced age, physical obstacles, and racial persecution. She represents the tenacious human spirit, as well as the power of love and sacrifice, through her unflinching determination. The short story starts with the character description and the author from the beginning of the story leaves poignant feeling on the reader with the description of her character. *“It was December—a bright frozen day in the early morning. Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small cane made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the still air that seemed meditative, like the chirping of a solitary little bird. She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoe tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket: all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoelaces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor like copper”* [15]. The story begins with December which symbolizes peace, goodness and at the same time the end of life, dullness as well. The main character Phoenix Jackson is an old woman, and she is in need of help in the story. But the phrases ‘*early morning*’, ‘*bright day*’ hints that the story ends with good ending, furthermore it symbolizes hope for the future, too. Metaphors and similes as ‘*with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock*’, highlights the main character’s inner world where everything is balanced. This is the woman who is carrying very heavy emotions with light smile on her face. For the deep love for her family member, for her grandson Phoenix braves the challenges of the worn path to get medicine. The author focuses on how brave the woman is if she loves the people around her. There can be no obstacles for her to overcome in order to achieve the goal she aims.

Eudora Welty explores the themes of mother’s love, selflessness, and woman’s identity through description of perseverance in the main character’s inner portrait. The author achieves this through the



memory and recollections of the main character. In some episodes of the story they are fragmented, and this shows the challenges of her age when people start moments of confusion and forgetfulness. But the significance of these fragments of memory is that they showcase Phoenix's personal identity and what she has passed through to become the person in the story. Moreover, it helps the reader grasp how memory can both provide the person to be strong and overcome the challenges.

One of the important aspects of the story is that nature plays a significant role in the story, with the landscape serving as both a physical obstacle and a source of solace for Phoenix. The natural elements, such as the thorny bushes and the looming scarecrow, represent the challenges and dangers she encounters. However, nature also offers moments of respite and beauty, symbolizing the resilience and interconnectedness of life. In the passage above in order to portray the main character the author uses a plethora of nature elements. Description of the month (December), the day (a bright frozen day), part of the day (early morning), trees (pinewood) are used deliberately to show Phoenix's state of mood. It expresses that she is in a desperate situation and in effort to get medicine she is enduring all the challenges she faces. Even the wrinkles (*'numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead'*) in her complexion is depicted with a tree which hints that the woman lives in harmony with nature, and the woman herself is a part of nature. Furthermore, it can make us understand that the woman is a nurturer as nature is. The woman's skin is depicted similar to gold (*"a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark"*) which is a precious metal in nature. Thus it expresses the value of mother in the family, the woman's role in society. These themes intertwine to create a poignant and layered narrative in "A Worn Path" reflecting the struggles, triumphs, and resilience of its protagonist while addressing broader societal issues of the time.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, it should be reiterated that "A Worn Path" illustrates Eudora Welty's mastery in expressing her main characters' psychological depth through elaborated prose, and complex narrative structure systems. Investigation of perseverance in Phoenix Jackson's identity and self-discovery explains the readers the state of mind and psyche of the woman who is a backbone of the family. Through portraying characters' inner thoughts, memory and recollections the short story suggests a nuanced and introspective exploration of the human psyche.

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