

# A worn path by eudora welty

Literature



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## A Worn Path by Eudora Welty

Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" is a complex work full of symbolism that invites multiple and varying interpretations. My research question is whether the character of Phoenix Jackson presents a redemptive story or a pessimistic story. My hypothesis is that Phoenix Jackson and her journey are a pessimistic story about the destructive nature of racism and Southern Bible Belt Christianity.

In his article "Eudora Welty's The Worn Path," Dennis Sykes argues that all the symbolism in the story illustrates the plight of Southern blacks in post-Civil War America. In his view, the story symbolizes the illusory nature of the quest for equality. Dennis Sykes is reputable as he was a professor of literature at Quincy College. His article also appears in the peer-reviewed journal, *Explicator*. His argument in the essay is very strong. Particularly, he makes mention of the marble cake as a symbol of integration (Sykes 152). The source is useful for my paper because it provides strong arguments in support of a pessimistic interpretation of the story. The story represents the failure of equality for Southern black citizens.

Dean Bethea's "Phoenix Has No Coat: Historicity, Eschatology, and Sins of Omission in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path'" explores Welty's story as a criticism of Bible Belt Christianity's acceptance and promulgation of racism. At the time of the writing of the article, Bethea was a professor of literature at Western Oregon University. Currently, he is an assistant professor of literature at Centenary College and well-qualified to write on the subject. Dr. Bethea's argument is a bit weak due to the bias present in the article. While he presents a well-reasoned interpretation, at times, his tone and political stance become apparent in his reading of Welty's work. Overall, the article <https://assignbuster.com/a-worn-path-by-eudora-welty-essay-samples/>

will prove useful because it presents a pessimistic reading of the story, a reading in which Phoenix is not on a redemptive journey but on one that will still lead to inequality for blacks.

David Piwinski's short essay, "Mistletoe in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path,'" delves into the Christological symbolism of mistletoe. Piwinski presents the legend that mistletoe was originally the wood used to make Christ's cross but was cursed to become a parasitic shrub after serving as a means of killing Jesus Christ and presents the reading that Phoenix Jackson is a Christ-figure (Piwinski 40-1). Dr. Piwinski was a professor of literature at Herkimer County Community College at the time of the essay's composition and thus a credible source. While the argument is strong, the source is of little use to my paper. It only examines a single symbol, and it presents a redemptive view of the story. If it is of any value, it will serve as a counterargument with which I must contend.

After reading these three sources, I am not revising my research question. I still view Welty's "A Worn Path" as a tragic story about the illusory quest for equality for Southern blacks. While many critics present Phoenix Jackson as a Christ-figure who suffers for the good of others, I see her sacrifice and journey as ultimately being futile and negative.

#### Work Cited

Bethea, Dean. "Phoenix Has No Coat: Historicity, Eschatology, and Sins of Omission in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path.'" *International Fiction Review* 28. 1-2 (2001): 32.

Piwinski, David J. "Mistletoe In Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path.." *Anq* 16. 1 (2003): 40-42. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 June 2012.

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