

A worn path critical analysis



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The short story *A Worn Path* is one of Eudora Welty's most notable fictional stories. *A Worn Path* takes place in the rural South during the 1930s in the beginning of winter season. The setting of this story plays a major role of the imagery set by Welty. The brilliant use of tone and imagery by the main character helped to make the story feel real. In *A Worn Path*, Welty presents Christian imagery in the main character, Phoenix Jackson, from the obstacles she encounters on a journey to help a family member.

As the story opens up, right away, Welty describes the setting. The setting of the story takes place in December. The significance of the time of year is that it is close to Christmas which, according to the Bible, is the time of the birth of Christ. When thinking of the birth of Christ, things like new beginnings, new paths, and new journeys come to mind. As it ties to the main character, Phoenix Jackson, its not so much of a new path, but a new journey with new encounters that symbolizes that of the birth of Christ.

Along with the setting, the main character's name, Phoenix Jackson, is also an example of symbolism. The phoenix is a mythical bird that lives for several hundred years and dies in flames but is reborn again to start a new long life. (Leafloor 2014) The symbolism of the bird conveys a couple of different meanings. For example, the immortality of the bird relates to Christianity and the idea of being born again. Also, Welty compares the appearance of Ms. Jackson to a solitary little bird illustrating that she is alone on the journey she is taking. Lastly, Welty uses the bird, that flies over Ms. Jackson's head as she takes the hunters nickel, as a symbol of God watching over her as she does a bad deed.

Another example of biblical imagery in *A Worn Path* is when Phoenix Jackson says, "Now comes the trial." Welty writes that Ms. Jackson put her right foot out, mounted the log and shut her eyes. This part of the short story closely relates to the bible verse "walk by faith and not by sight" which according to Dena Johnson Martin means to not go by what one sees, but what one believes. While on her journey, Ms. Phoenix Jackson came across many obstacles and hardships that should have turned her around but she didn't let them stop her; she continued to complete her journey. Welty very well delivers this concept through the encounters of Phoenix Jackson by not only writing it but allowing the main character to narrate, grasping the readers' attention more. Even though Welty didn't consciously write this story to relate to Christian aspects, she perceived the idea through the main character over shadowing ideas of Christianity.

Lastly, the entire journey of Phoenix Jackson in the short story *A Worn Path* imitates that of Christ when he carried the cross to Calvary. Welty mentioned Ms. Jackson getting her dress caught on a thorn bush, running into a scarecrow, forgetting what she came to the doctor for and more but she continued. The biblical symbolism in the entire story was very visible yet hidden. Hidden from those who are unfamiliar with the Christian religion and visible to those who follow the Christian religion. The ties that Ms. Phoenix Jackson has between her and Christ is that both of them were determined to put themselves in danger in order to not help themselves but help others. Welty definitely delivered a message of faith through the difficult encounters faced by Ms. Jackson and it very closely symbolizes the acts of Christianity and the many people who live by the ideas of the religion today.

In conclusion, Welty uses biblical imagery in her short story A Worn Path that is narrated by a very strong-minded protagonist that puts herself into harms way just to help someone else. This story relates to so many real-world situations that people may go through everyday. Welty really anchored portraying the religion of Christianity in the journey and life of the main character Ms. Phoenix Jackson.