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INTRODUCTION

Since the Republic of Uzbekistan was declared independent in 1991, the role of teaching foreign languages has modified. Particularly, English has been increasing in importance and acquiring the status of the most preferred foreign language to be learned. The first President of Uzbekistan I.A. Karimov paid much attention to teaching and learning English. The proof to it is the Decree of the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued in November 2, 2017 “On additional measures of improving the system of public education” states that the system of teaching and learning foreign languages in the country is aimed at educating and training of the younger generation as progressively thinking people able to ensure the integration of the country into the world community because better communication leads to freer mobility and more direct relationship which in turn leads to better understanding and closer interaction.¹ In other words, the decree’s goal is to develop communicative competence which means the ability of a foreign language learner to survive, converse as well as be understood in the language. It presupposes not only learning foreign language itself, but also being aware of its history, geography, culture, literature as well.

Among the mentioned, I would like to emphasize the literature. The English and American literature is rich in masterpieces created by outstanding women authors such as Charlotte Bronte, Isabel Allende, Margaret Mitchell, Virginia Woolf, Eudora Welty and others. Without being aware and having knowledge of their literary works of such prominent writers and we cannot consider ourselves a culturally competent user of the English language. Therefore, we have chosen literary issue for our research work, to be more precise, finding and analyzing feministic ideas in Eudora Welty’s “The optimist’s daughter”.

¹Decree of the first president of the Republic of Uzbekistan .On additional measures of improving the system of public education” November 2, 2017.

The actuality of the FQW

The actuality of our qualification paper is explained by the rise of interest in feminism in the American literature, the interpretation of peculiar features of this movement in the works of prominent writer Eudora Welty.

The aim of the FQW

The purpose of the qualification paper is to investigate and to bring evidences from feministic point of view and to analyses the traits of the main and minor characters of the novel.

The tasks of the work include:

- To get acquainted with the biography and literary career of Eudora Welty.
- To illustrate contribution of the author to the American literature.
- To determine the role of the novel “ The Optimist’s daughter” in feministic movement.
- To describe the main and minor characters of the novel “ The Optimist’s Daughter”.
- To analyze the feministic ideas’ peculiarities of the novel.

The basis of the work :

The basis of the qualification paper is “ The Optimist’s daughter “ by Eudora Welty.

The degree of studiedness.

Noel Polk, Richard Ford , Michael Kreyling and others did research works and wrote literary articles about the role of Eudora Welty in American literature. They have analyzed the biography of the author and influence his life experiences to his novels.

The novelty of the FQW

Talented American writer Eudora Welty regarded as the prominent with her short stories and novels. His biography, literary activities and works have served as subjects to many research works. This research paper intend for analyzing the feministic ideas in her novel of “The Optimist’s daughter” and examine this novel

from two points of view: to observe it as literary work and to find relation between this novel and feminism.

Theoretical and practical significance of the work is that the material can be applied to conduct theoretical lectures on the English, introduction to literature, theory of literature. While the practical part can be used as a source in seminars on interpretation of literary text.

The structure of the work. It comprises introduction, two chapters, four paragraphs, conclusion and the list of used literature.

The first chapter includes two paragraphs and it is considered to be theoretical one. Here we deal with the role of women writers in literature and Eudora Welty's biography, literary career and contribution to the literature.

The second chapter comprises two paragraphs. This chapter is intended to be a practical part. There given character sketches of "The Optimist's Daughter" and the display of feministic ideas in character's life and analyses of women character's.

CHAPTER I. EUDORA WELTY IS THE PROMINENT WRITER

1.1 The role of women writers in literature

The concept of Feminism is a trend has been concerned to an analysis of the trend of male domination in the society; the general attitude of male towards female; the exploitation and discrimination faced by females; the need for and ways of improving the condition of women. In literature, this movement has concentrated on the role played by literature to foster gender discrimination as well as to contend it; the explanation for less importance of the endeavor by women writers in the literary tradition than that of the male writers; the divergence in the ways in which works of male writers and female writers, relatively, have expressed gender discrimination; and, the ways in which social status and literary traditions regarding gender discrimination have impacted one another.² In the 15th Century Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* which combats prejudices and enhances the importance of women in society. The book follow the model of *De Mulieribus Claris* written in the 14th Century by Giovanni Boccaccio. The concept got proper determination in the literary sphere during 1960s. Before that, feminism was constricted to the authorship of female writers and the expression given to women in literature with the help of female characters. The condition of women in society, in general, got representation through the situations faced by fictional female characters and their responses to these situations. The adoption of the idea by literature in a formal mode direct to the study of all the feature of human life; like social, cultural, educational, professional and financial; with an purpose to exposure the deliberate and unwilling efforts of the society to sustain or increase the effects of patriarchal superiority. First Wave Feminism concerned mainly to the treatment of women at the hands of male members of the society. The major works that raised the issues of feminism during this phase include- Mary Ellman's 'Thinking about Women' and Germaine

² Josephine Butler. "The Final Cause of Women." *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture. A Series of Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1869. 1-26.

Greer's 'The Female Eunuch'. A number of prominent works of the past were also analyzed during this stage so as to study the attitude of male members of society, in general, to the female ones. Second Wave Feminism is more commonly, also known as 'Gynocriticism'. This stage is believed to have begun with Elaine Showalter's 'A Literature of Their Own' published in 1970. This phase introduced, more or less the first time, a direct analysis of the relation between female and literature. During this period female writers and the importance they got in the society were studied. Female characters were examined with an approach to comprehend the divergence between the treatment of female characters at the hands of male and female writers, respectively. This phase is noticeable with the attempt to understand the evolution of the female literary tradition. Showalter suggested that female writers have passed through three basic phases, namely the 'feminine' phase, the 'feminist' phase, and the 'female' phase. In the first phase, the female writers did not manage to contend the male writers in any sense. They simply wrote trying to simulate the attitude of male writers towards female characters. Some even wrote with pseudonyms resembling male names. The second phase saw female writers writing, mainly, on the themes of the role of women and the persecution confronted with her in society. The third phase lacked the anger and discontentment in the works of female writers. The female writers, in this stage, created works which suggested that they had developed an independent identity as writers. 'The Madwoman Thesis' given prominence by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 'The Madwoman in the Attic' (1979) also forms an important idea concerned to feminism. It advocates that if women are not given an opportunity to show their creativity, their frustration leads them to behave in psychologically imbalance. The French concept of feminism even raised the issue of a separate language that belongs exclusively to women. The feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s were the beginning of the second wave of feminism.³ Their roots

³ Josephine Butler. "The Final Cause of Women." *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture. A Series of Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1869. 1-26.

were, respectively, 18th and 19th century liberal political philosophy that developed the idea of individual rights and 20th century anti-colonial politics and ideas of national development. Gender reform feminisms put women into these perspectives. In observing the motives of the discrepancy of the salaries of women and men workers, proponents of comparable worth found that wage scales are not set by the market for labor, worker's education or other credentials. Salaries are set by conventional "worth," which is rooted in gender and ethnic and other forms of discrimination. Development feminism addresses the political issue of women's rights versus national and cultural traditions. At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Forum held in Beijing in 1995, the popular slogan was "human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights." It can be seen in the document that cultural practices such as infanticide, dowry, child marriage, female genital mutilation and the 187 governments signed this document to end these practices. Women writers who lead feminist movement created and developed feminist fiction, feminist non-fiction and feminist poetry. It was rejudgement of women's historical and academic contributions that have been underestimated through the ages as an area of scholarly interest. Feminist literature played important role because it represents key elements of feminist activism and helps to spread feministic ideas. Much of the early period of feminist literary scholarship was given over to the rediscovery and reclamation of texts written by women. In Western feminist literary scholarship, Studies like Dale Spender's "Mothers of the Novel" and Jane Spencer's "The Rise of the Woman Novelist" were ground-breaking in their insistence that women have always been writing. Particular works of literature have come to be known as key feminist texts. "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" by Mary Wollstonecraft, is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf is noted in its argument for both a literal and figural space for women writers within a literary tradition dominated by patriarchy.⁴ The widespread

⁴ Ellis.G.H. *The Duties of Women*. 1882. Boston,1978.

interest in women's writing is related to a general reassessment and expansion of the literary canon. According to Elyce Rae Helford, "Science fiction and fantasy serve as important vehicles for feminist thought, particularly as bridges between theory and practice." Feminist science fiction is sometimes taught at the university level to explore the role of social constructs in understanding gender. Notable texts of this kind are Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Left Hand of Darkness", Joanna Russ "The Female Man", Octavia Butler's "Kindred" and Margaret Atwood's "Handmaid's Tale". As an example of feminist nonfiction which expresses women's lived experiences, Maya Angelou's "Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" was extremely influential, as it represented the specific racism experienced by black women growing up in the United States. Poetry served as a vehicle to communicate feminist ideas to public audiences, so a lot number of anthologies, poetry collections and public readings were powerful to disperse their views. Feminist literary criticism acknowledges that literature both represents and forms stereotypes and other cultural assumptions. Thus, feminist literary criticism observes how works of literature embody patriarchal attitudes or undercut them, sometimes both happening within the same work. Feminist theory and various forms of feminist critique began long before the formal naming of the school of literary criticism. "Woman's Bible," written in the late 19th century by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, which is written in the first wave of feminist movement, is an example of a work of criticism firmly in this school, and this work was beyond the male-centered outlook and interpretation.⁵ The definition of the feminist writer has changed over time, and in different generations, it can mean different things. For the purposes of this list, a feminist writer is one whose works of fiction, autobiography, poetry, or drama highlighted the plight of women or societal inequalities that women struggled against. Although this list highlights female writers, it's worth noting that gender isn't a prerequisite for being

⁵ Josephine Butler. "The Final Cause of Women." *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture. A Series of Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1869. 1-26.

considered "feminist."⁶ Here are some notable female writers whose works have a decidedly feminist viewpoint. Feminist and transcendentalist with strong family ties to Massachusetts, Louisa May Alcott is best known for her 1868 novel about four sisters, "Little Women," based on an idealized version of her own family. Excluded from the relationship scene is Beth who, from the beginning, is portrayed as being too good for this world. Her sickness from scarlet fever, and her early death is the turning point in Little Women. As Meg leaves in marriage, so does Amy in her trip to Europe, and Jo in her job to New York; Beth embarks on the ultimate journey from which there is no return. Beth's sickness and inevitable death is the main tragedy of the novel, but it is also one of the best things that could have happened to the remaining girls. When the sisters reflect back on their lives amid this sad situation, each one starts to grow and mature from this experience. Especially in Jo's case, when she travels to New York City to work as a governess. While there, she becomes acquainted with Professor Frederich Bhaer who teaches her to peel away the childish layers of the past, and blossom into the woman she has the potential to be. Little Women slowly winds down to a finish with the fruitful finishing of Jo's first novel. Always the author of the family, paralleling Alcott's real-life situation, Jo finally finds the inspiration and idea for the right kind of book. Instead of creating fantastical fiction pieces, she concentrates on what is more realistic and familiar. This gesture of maturity finally shows readers that Jo is now a grown up woman who knows what to make of her life. As the family gathers together one sunny afternoon, the cycle of growth and maturation is almost at completion. With children of their own, the remaining March sisters and their mother reflect on these past few years. Just as the tone in the beginning suggests vigor and curiosity of youth, the end promises the stability and tranquility of each woman's settled future. Louisa May Alcott ensconced this

⁶ Adams Tim. Interview with Richard Ford. *Granta*. August 15. 2018. P. 220.

novel in heavy didactic undertones.⁷ This can be attributed to her family background, for she was the daughter of transcendentalist philosopher/teacher, Bronson Alcott. Without actually preaching morality outright, Louisa May Alcott cleverly created situations and variations in her plots that provided readers with an idea of following the right course through believable examples. This was a major reason for her wide spread popularity with children and parents alike. The protagonists in *Little Women* are by no means perfect, therefore children of almost all ages could relate to the flawed characters. On the other hand, parents wanted to buy *Little Women* so that their children could learn from the moralistic themes streamed throughout the book. This intimate knowledge of her youthful audience comes from the Alcott looking back at her own early days, and producing from her own experiences, realistic adventures for the characters in *Little Women*. Alcott wrote *Little Women* with the intent on it being a mid-nineteenth century apprenticeship novel for young ladies. Isabel Allende, born 1942, Chilean-American writer known for writing about female protagonists in a literary style known as magical realism. She's best known for novels "The House of the Spirits" and "Eva Luna". Allende's writing almost always centers around women. Allende, a self-professed "raging feminist" from childhood, has a particular brand of feminism that rejects the idea that "women should be more like men to achieve equality and success." Rather, she believes "women working together - linked, informed and educated - can bring peace and prosperity to this forsaken planet;" that "feminine energy is needed in the management of the world." Her writing reflects these beliefs. Her books are deeply interested in women, not as complements to male protagonists, but as a central focus. Their world and the injustices and passions that are woven through it, form the landscape of her writing. As a young woman in Chile, she briefly held a job translating romance novels from English to Spanish. She was fired for altering the dialogue to make the women sound more intelligent. "It was one of those things one does to make ends

⁷ Lewis, Jane. *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991

meet," Allende said. "The female protagonists were all retarded. I improved them, and of course I was fired. Maya Angelou African-American author, playwright, poet, dancer, actress, and singer, who wrote 36 books, and acted in plays and musicals. Angelou's most famous work is the autobiographical "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings". In it, Angelou spares no detail of her chaotic childhood.

⁸Margaret Atwood, born 1939, Canadian writer whose early childhood was spent living in the wilderness of Ontario. Atwood's most well-known work is "The Handmaid's Tale". It tells the story of a near-future dystopia in which the main character and narrator, a woman called Offred, is kept as a concubine for reproductive purposes. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood explores the consequences of a reversal of women's rights. In the novel's nightmare world of Gilead, a group of conservative religious extremists has taken power and turned the sexual revolution on its head. Feminists argued for liberation from traditional gender roles, but Gilead is a society founded on a "return to traditional values" and gender roles, and on the subjugation of women by men. What feminists considered the great triumphs of the 1970s—namely, widespread access to contraception, the legalization of abortion, and the increasing political influence of female voters—have all been undone. Women in Gilead are not only forbidden to vote, they are forbidden to read or write. Some of the novel's concerns seem dated today, and its implicit condemnation of the political goals of America's religious conservatives has been criticized as unfair and overly paranoid. Nonetheless, *The Handmaid's Tale* remains one of the most powerful recent portrayals of a totalitarian society, and one of the few dystopian novels to examine in detail the intersection of politics and sexuality. The novel's exploration of the controversial politics of reproduction seems likely to guarantee Atwood's novel a readership well into the twenty-first century. Atwood lives in Toronto with novelist Graeme Gibson and their daughter, Jess. Her most recent novel, *The Blind Assassin*, won Great Britain's Booker Prize for

⁸ Makowsky. *Book of Members, 1780-2010*, Chapter W. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2014. P. 349.21

literature in 2000. Jane Austen was an English novelist whose name did not appear on her popular works until after her death, who led a relatively sheltered life, yet wrote some of the best-loved stories of relationships and marriage in Western literature. Her novels including "Sense and Sensibility" , "Pride and Prejudice" , "Mansfield Park" , "Emma" , "Persuasion" and "Northanger Abbey" represents the life and experiences of women characters. Charlotte Bronte 1847 novel "Jane Eyre" is one of the most-read and most-analyzed works of English feminist literature. The sister of Anne and Emily Bronte, Charlotte was the last survivor of six siblings, the children of a parson and his wife, who died in childbirth. It's believed that Charlotte heavily edited Anne's and Emily's work after their deaths. Emily Bronte Charlotte's sister wrote arguably one of the most prominent and critically-acclaimed novels in Western literature, "Wuthering Heights." Very little is known about when Emily Brontë wrote this Gothic work, believed to be her only novel, or how long it took her to write. Gwendolyn Brooks, first African American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize, in 1950, for her book of poetry "Annie Allen." Brooks' earlier work, a collection of poems called, "A Street in Bronzeville" , was praised as an unflinching portrait of life in Chicago's inner city. One of the most popular British poets of the Victorian era,⁹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning is best known for her "Sonnets from the Portuguese," a collection of love poems she wrote secretly during her courtship with fellow poet Robert Browning. Fanny Burn English novelist, diarist, and playwright who wrote satirical novels about English aristocracy. Her novels include "Evelina," published anonymously in 1778, and "The Wanderer". Kate Chopin Author of short stories and novels, which included "The Awakening" and other short stories such as "A Pair of Silk Stockings," and "The Story of an Hour," Chopin explored feminist themes in most of her work. Christine de Pizan¹⁰ author of "The Book of the City of Ladies," de Pizan was a medieval writer whose work shed light on the lives of

⁹ Levine, Philippa. *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1987.

¹⁰ Martha Vicinus. *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985

medieval women. Sandra Cisneros born 1954, Mexican-American writer is best known for her novel "The House on Mango Street" and her short story collection "Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories". Marilyn French, American writer whose work highlighted gender inequalities. Her best-known work was the novel "The Women's Room." Part of the New England Transcendentalist movement, Margaret Fuller was a confidant of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and a feminist when women's rights were not robust. She's known for her work as a journalist at the New York Tribune, and her essay "Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Charlotte Perkins Gilman , a feminist scholar whose best-known work is her semi-autobiographical short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," about a woman suffering from mental illness after being confined to a small room by her husband. Lorraine Hansberry is an author and playwright whose best-known work is the 1959 play "A Raisin in the Sun." It was the first Broadway play by an African-American woman to be produced on Broadway. Sarah Orne Jewett, New England novelist and poet, known for her style of writing, referred to as American literary regionalism, or "local color." Her best-known work is the 1896 short story collection "The Country of the Pointed Firs." Maxine Hong Kingston, born 1940, Asian-American writer whose work focuses on Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Her best-known work is her 1976 memoir "The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts." Doris Lessing, her 1962 novel "The Golden Notebook" is considered a leading feminist work. Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. Joyce Carol Oates, born 1938, Prolific novelist and short-story writer whose work deals with themes of oppression, racism, and violence against women. Her works include "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" , "Because it is Bitter, and Because it is My Heart" and "We Were the Mulvaney's". Adrienne Rich was an award-winning poet, longtime American feminist. She wrote more than a dozen volumes of poetry and several non-fiction books. Rich won the National Book Award in 1974 for "Diving Into the Wreck," but refused to accept the award individually, instead sharing it with fellow nominees Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Suffragist who fought for

women's voting rights, known for her 1892 speech *Solitude of Self*, her autobiography *"Eighty Years and More"* and *"The Woman's Bible."*¹¹

Margaret Mitchell became one of the most famous American writers with the publication of her novel, *"Gone With the Wind"* in 1936. She drew from her own background as a woman growing up in the South, but she also based her story on the controversial history of the South. Mitchell started out as a journalist, with her earliest articles appearing in the *"Journal"* in 1922. She began writing *"Gone with the Wind"* in 1926, though she may never have published the book had she not been angrily goaded into allowing the vice president of Macmillian, Harold Latham, to read the novel. The rest, as they say, is history... Despite the small number of her works, the legend of Margaret Mitchell has continued. *"Gone With the Wind"* has never been out of print. Its popularity continues, with each new generation reading, learning from, and enjoying the tale of Scarlett O'Hara. Margaret Mitchell's greatest contribution to literature was her *"Gone With the Wind,"* which she began writing in 1926 and published in 1936. At the time of its publication, the book sold more copies than any other American novel in literary history. The story centers around the life and times of Scarlett O'Hara, a Southern woman. Mitchell was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The novel has been published in 40 countries, with many critical studies and articles. During World War II, Margaret Mitchell was a volunteer for the American Red Cross and she raised money for the war effort by selling war bonds. She was active in Home Defense, sewed hospital gowns and put patches on trousers. Her personal attention, however, was devoted to writing letters to men in uniform--soldiers, sailors and marines, sending them humor, encouragement, and her sympathy. The USS Atlanta was an anti-aircraft ship of the United States Navy sponsored by Margaret Mitchell and used in the naval Battle of Midway and the Eastern Solomons. The ship was struck and sunk in night surface action on November 13, 1942 during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. Mitchell sponsored a

¹¹ . Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling. *Complete Novels*. New York: Library of America, 1998. P. 346.

second cruiser named after the city of Atlanta, USS Atlanta. On February 6, 1944, she christened Atlanta in Camden, New Jersey. Atlanta was operating off the coast of Honshu when the Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945. It was sunk during an explosive test off San Clemente Island on October 1, 1970.¹²

Women in Greek mythology were perceived to be more as objects than individuals. Many were taken advantage of by the Gods and by human beings. One would see that women's rights were very limited and they were not allowed to express much of their freedoms. Within this time period women were blamed for wars, destruction of towns, and the death of men. It was not unlikely to see goddesses using their powers for vengeance. Although the role of human women was limited the existence of goddesses attributed great amounts of power to female characters. The women of the Medieval times were surprisingly a lot more candid and sexual than one might expect of an era where the ideal of femininity was Mary, the mother of Jesus. In actuality, the women in the literature of the period, as well as the historical female figures seemed to be torn between the ideal and the physical desires and domineering character that her antagonist, Eve, embodies. In a careful reading of the literature of the time, one finds the first buds of a feminist literature emerging from the words on the pages. The theme of misogyny and superiority of men was the typical genre that authors took within their writing. Women were not looked to as a person but were considered a mere necessity for the procreation process. Women continued to be split between the ideal of the Virgin Mary, and her fallible counterpart, Eve. Unfortunately, the Virgin Mary was one of a kind, so there was often a general distrust of women. This distrust of women led to most works degrading the female race, and terming females as the "other", which was to be feared. Equality between the genders was not present within this era, and is evident from the numerous writings degrading the female race. The role of women in 19th century literature was one in which they redefine their place in society by accepting an image of themselves which involved both home-centeredness and inferiority. Elizabeth Gaskell did not concede to the idea of

¹² Marrs. Historical Background . Science and Arts Publishing. 2011. P. 387

women's inferiority, although she does concede to the notion that a woman's place is in the home, as is evident by her portrayal of Bessie in her poem "Cranford." In this time period, women were being portrayed as protagonists more often than in the past. In Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, Emma, the lead character, is portrayed as a "tragic heroine." At the time the book was written, the character of Emma was viewed as foolish and putting herself in narrow circumstances. Her suicide demonstrates the dangers of life for women who were looking to become independent at that time. Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Princess" states,

Man for the field and woman for the hearth,
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey

It is evident from these works that during this time women were still in a subjugated role despite their desire to break free of societies' restrictions. Women's roles in literature has evolved throughout history and had lead women to develop into strong independent roles. Modern literature has served as an outlet and sounding board for women's rights and feminist pioneers. Female writers have come to the fore front and provided today's readers with a vast array of ethnic and cultural perspectives. The unique voice of female minorities is a common theme in many coming of age novels that allows each writer to establish a separate identity for their characters and themselves. Women in modern literature often include strong independent females juxtaposed by oppressed women to provide examples for young female readers and to critique short comings of our society. The emergence of the independent female novelist in America has allowed for a new evolution of the role of women in fictional literature. It is difficult to summarize the role of women in Hispanic literature, as it has been ever changing. At times she may be submissive, at others, the fiercest of beasts, and most surprisingly sometimes seemingly weak but in actuality the most contriving of creatures. It is

surprising to see a feminist view point since the Medieval times in Spanish and Latin American literature, but it's most productive era has come to exist in the last twenty years. To their contemporaries, nineteenth-century women writers were women first, artists second. A woman novelist, unless she disguised herself with a male pseudonym, had to expect critics to focus on her femininity and rank her with the other women writers of her day, no matter how diverse their subjects or styles. The knowledge that their individual achievement would be subsumed under a relatively unfavorable group stereotype acted as a constant irritant to feminine novelists. George Eliot protested against being compared to Dinah Mulock; Charlotte Bronte tried to delay the publication of *Villette* so that it would not be reviewed along with Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth*. Bronte particularly wanted to prevent the male literary establishment from making women writers into competitors and rivals for the same small space: "It is the nature of writers to be invidious," she wrote to Mrs. Gaskell, but "we shall set them at defiance; they *shall* not make us foes." We tend to forget how insistently Victorian reviewers made women the targets of *ad feminam* criticism. An error in Gordon Haight's *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* illustrates this common modern oversight; Haight quotes E. S. Dallas as saying of Eliot that no "Englishman" could approach her as a writer of prose.¹³ The word Dallas actually used was "Englishwoman." To Haight, such a distinction may seem trivial; to George Eliot, it was not. Gentleman reviewers had patronized lady novelists since the beginning of the nineteenth century; in 1834, for example, the reviewer for *Fraser's* had gloated prematurely over what he believed to be the true authorship of *Castle Rackrent* and *The Absentee*: "Ay: it is just as we expected! Miss Edgeworth *never* wrote *the* Edgeworth novels ... all that, as we have long had a suspicion, was the work of her father." But the intense concentration on the proper sphere of the woman writer did not appear in criticism until the 1840s. Victorian critics strained their ingenuity for terms that would put delicate emphasis on the specialness of women and avoid the professional neutrality of "woman writer": authoress, female pen, lady novelist, and as late as

¹³ Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870.*: Yale UP, 1957.

Hurst & Blackett's 1897 commemorative volume, *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign*, the elegant "lady fictionists," described by "living mistresses of the craft." Through the 1850s and 1860s there was a great increase in theoretical and specific criticism of women novelists. Hardly a journal failed to publish an essay on women's literature; hardly a critic failed to express himself upon its innate and potential qualities. This situation, similar to the expanded market for literature by and about women in the late 1960s, suggests that the Victorians¹⁴ were responding to what seemed like a revolutionary, and in many ways a very threatening, phenomenon. As the number of important novels by women increased through the 1850s and 1860s, male journalists were forced to acknowledge that women were excelling in the creation of fiction, not just in England, but also in Europe and America. As it became apparent that Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth were not aberrations, but the forerunners of female participation in the development of the novel, jokes about dancing dogs no longer seemed an adequate response. One form of male resistance was to see women novelists as being engaged in a kind of aggressive conspiracy to rob men of their markets, steal their subject matter, and snatch away their young lady readers, to see them as "dominating" because of superior numbers rather than superior abilities. As late as 1851, there were a few hardy souls who continued to deny that women *could* write novels. Coventry Patmore conceded that "there certainly have been cases of women possessed of the properly masculine power of writing books, but these cases are all so truly and obviously exceptional, and must and ought always to remain so, that we may overlook them without the least prejudice to the soundness of our doctrine." Some reviewers found the situation so embarrassing that they had to treat it as an unfortunate accident. In 1853 J. M. Ludlow glumly advised his readers, "We have to notice the fact that at this particular moment of the world's history the very *best* novels in several great countries happen to have been written by women." But by 1855, even before the appearance of George Eliot, the

¹⁴ Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Women of England. Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*. 1839. Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1841.

emergence of the woman's novel was so striking that most readers and reviewers would have agreed with Margaret Oliphant in linking it to other symptoms of social progress: "This, which is the age of so many things—of enlightenment, of science, of progress—is quite as distinctly the age of female novelists." Even those critics who disapproved of changes in the doctrine of the two gender spheres were far from advocating women's retirement from the literary field. The new questions of women's *place* in literature proved endlessly fascinating, and the Victorians approached them with all the weight of their religious commitments and their interest in the sciences of human nature. Although most periodical criticism, especially between 1847 and 1875, employed a double standard for men's and women's writing and seemed shocked or chagrined by individual women's failures to conform to the stereotypes, a few critics, notably G. H. Lewes, George Eliot, and R. H. Hutton, were beginning to consider what women as a group might contribute to the art of the novel. Most of the negative criticism tried to justify the assumption that novels by women would be recognizably inferior to those by men. When the Victorians thought of the woman writer, they immediately thought of the female body and its presumed afflictions and liabilities. They did so, first, because the biological creativity of childbirth seemed to them directly to rival the aesthetic creativity of writing. The metaphors of childbirth familiarly invoked to describe the act of writing directed attention toward the possibility of real conflict between these analogous experiences. In an 1862 review of Mrs. Browning, Gerald Massey wrote: "It is very doubtful if the highest and richest nature of woman can ever be unfolded in its home life and wedded relationships, and yet at the same time blossom and bear fruit in art or literature with a similar fulness. What we mean is, that there is so great a draft made upon women by other creative works, so as to make the chance very small that the general energy shall culminate in the greatest musician, for example. The nature of woman demands that to perfect it in life which must half-lame it for art. A mother's heart, at its richest, is not likely to get adequate expression in notes and bars, if it were only for the fact that she must be absorbed in other music." Second, there was a strong belief that the female body

was in itself an inferior instrument, small, weak, and, in Geraldine Jewsbury's words, "liable to collapses, eclipses, failures of power ... unfitting her for the steady stream of ever-recurring work."¹⁵ Victorian physicians and anthropologists supported these ancient prejudices by arguing that women's inferiority could be demonstrated in almost every analysis of the brain and its functions. They maintained that, like the "lower races," women had smaller and less efficient brains, less complex nerve development, and more susceptibility to certain diseases, than did men. Any expenditure of mental energy by women would divert the supply of blood and phosphates from the reproductive system to the brain, leading to dysmenorrhea, "ovarian neuralgia," physical degeneracy, and sterility. Physicians estimated that "maternal functions diverted nearly 20 percent of women's vital energies from potential brain activity." Female intellectual distinction thus suggested not only a self-destructive imitation of a male skill but also a masculine physical development. Elizabeth Barrett referred in a general way to this widespread association when she apostrophized her heroine, George Sand, as "thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man," but it was often used more snidely in allusions to George Eliot's "large hand" and "large eye"—metaphors of artistic mastery that invariably suggested to the Victorians large noses and large feet. This physical imagery was further popularized by Victorian phrenologists like George Combe, who believed creative traits to be revealed by the shape of the skull. The bizarre theories of the phrenologists and the quacks were reinforced by the expertise of scientists like James Macgrigor Allan, who stated dogmatically to his fellow anthropologists in 1869 that "in intellectual labour, man has surpassed, does now and always will surpass woman, for the obvious reason that nature does not periodically interrupt his thought and application." ¹⁶ Advanced thinkers were influenced by these ideas even if they rejected them. George Eliot wondered whether women's lack of originality might be attributable to her brain structure:

¹⁵ Levine, Philippa. *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1987. pp-56

¹⁶ Lewis, Jane. *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991. pp-72

"The voltaic-pile is not strong enough to produce crystallization." Mill, refuting the brain-weight argument in *The Subjection of Women*, thought it necessary to mention that the heaviest brain on record belonged to a woman. Although women writers often believed that they did labor under innate handicaps of mind and body, they nonetheless felt pressured to prove both their reliability and their physical endurance. What women must demonstrate, Eliot wrote, is the capability for "accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command." As they met deadlines, edited magazines, and coped with the strenuous burdens of part-publication and serialization, women writers expressed more openly their irritation with those sisters who exploited the old stereotypes of weakness and sickliness. In reviewing Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* in 1877, for example, Mrs. Oliphant could not conceal her annoyance at Martineau's woeful claim that overwork had destroyed her health and would send her to an early grave. Oliphant commented that "many a hard literary worker will smile at these tremendous prognostications." Similarly, women physicians like Alice Putnam Jacobi made a point of debating male doctors on the question of female health and of correcting some of their more peculiar assumptions. Even so, arguments from physiology retained sufficient force in 1929 to lead Virginia Woolf to ignore a century of three-deckers and suggest that women's physical weakness meant that they should write shorter books than men. Another explanation given in criticism for the inferiority of female literature was women's limited experience. Vast preserves of masculine life—schools, universities, clubs, sports, businesses, government, and the army—were closed to women. Research and industry could not make up for these exclusions, and, as indicated in *Fraser's*, women writers were at a disadvantage: "A man's novel is generally a more finished production than a woman's; his education and experience give him a wider range of thought and a larger choice of character, and he usually groups his personages and incidents more artistically, and writes better English than his rivals." ¹⁷As a form of social realism

¹⁷ Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995. pp-43-44

and a medium for moral and ethical thought, the novel obviously required maturity and mobility in its creators. Further, it required a complete set of emotions. Since the Victorians had defined women as angelic beings who could not feel passion, anger, ambition, or honor, they did not believe that women could express more than half of life. E. S. Dallas proclaimed it "evident that from that inexperience of life, which no amount of imagination, no force of sympathy, can ever compensate, women labour under serious disadvantages in attempting the novel." Denied participation in public life, women were forced to cultivate their feelings and to overvalue romance. In the novels, emotion rushed in to fill the vacuum of experience, and critics found this intensity, this obsession with personal relationships, unrealistic and even oppressive.¹⁸

¹⁸ .Raftery, Deirdre. "Frances Power Cobbe." *Women, Power and Consciousness in 19th-Century Ireland, Eight Biographical Studies*. Ed. Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy. Dublin: Attic Press, 1995. 89-123.

1.2 Eudora Welty's contribution to the American literature

Eudora Alice Welty was an American short story writer and novelist who wrote about the American South. Her novel "The Optimist's Daughter" won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. Welty received numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Order of the South. She was the first living author to have her works published by the Library of America. Her house in Jackson, Mississippi has been designated as a National Historic Landmark and is open to the public as a house museum. Eudora Welty was born in Jackson, Mississippi on April 13, 1909, the daughter of Christian Webb Welty and Mary Chestina Welty. She grew up with younger brothers Edward Jefferson and Walter Andrews. Her mother was a schoolteacher. Eudora soon developed a love of reading reinforced by her mother, who believed that "any room in our house, at any time in the day, was there to read in, or to be read to. Her father, who worked as an insurance executive, was intrigued by gadgets and machines and inspired in Eudora a love of all things mechanical. She later used technology for symbolism in her stories and also became an avid photographer, like her father. Near the time of her high school graduation, Welty moved with her family to a house built for them at 1119 Pinehurst Street, which remained her permanent address until her death. Wyatt C. Hedrick designed the Weltys' Tudor Revival-style home, which is now known as the Eudora Welty House and Garden. Welty studied at the Mississippi State College for Women from 1925 to 1927, then transferred to the University of Wisconsin to complete her studies in English literature. At the suggestion of her father, she studied advertising at Columbia University. Because she graduated in the depths of the Great Depression, she struggled to find work in New York. Soon after Welty returned to Jackson in 1931, her father died of leukemia. She took a job at a local radio station and wrote about Jackson society for the Memphis newspaper *Commercial Appeal*.¹⁹ In 1933, she

¹⁹ . Peggy Whitman Prenshaw. *More Conversations with Eudora Welty Jackson*: University Press of Mississippi, 1996. P.89

began work for the Works Progress Administration. As a publicity agent, she collected stories, conducted interviews, and took photographs of daily life in Mississippi. She gained a wider view of Southern life and the human relationships that she drew from for her short stories. During this time she also held meetings in her house with fellow writers and friends, a group she called the Night-Blooming Cereus Club. Three years later, she left her job to become a full-time writer. In 1936, she published "The Death of a Traveling Salesman" in the literary magazine *Manuscript*, and soon published stories in several other notable publications including *The Sewanee Review* and *The New Yorker*.²⁰ She strengthened her place as an influential Southern writer when she published her first book of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*. Her new-found success won her a seat on the staff of *The New York Times Book Review*, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship which enabled her to travel to France, England, Ireland, and Germany. While abroad, she spent some time as a resident lecturer at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 1960, she returned home to Jackson to care for her elderly mother and two brothers. After Medgar Evers, field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi, was assassinated, she published a story in *The New Yorker*, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?". She wrote it in the first person as the assassin. In 1971, she published a collection of her photographs depicting the Great Depression, titled *One Time, One Place*. Two years later, she received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel *The Optimist's Daughter*.²¹ She lectured at Harvard University, and eventually adapted her talks as a three-part memoir titled *One Writer's Beginnings*. She continued to live in her family house in Jackson until her death from natural causes on July 23, 2001. She is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Jackson. Her headstone has a quote from *The Optimist's Daughter*: "For her life, any life, she had to believe, was nothing but the continuity of its love." Throughout

²⁰ Peter Schmidt. *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991. P.67

²¹ . Polk Noel. *Eudora Welty: A Bibliography of Her Work*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. P. 45

the 1970s, Welty carried on a lengthy correspondence with novelist Ross Macdonald, creator of the Lew Archer series of detective novels. While Welty worked as a publicity agent for the Works Progress Administration, she took photographs of people from all economic and social classes in her spare time. From the early 1930s, her photographs show Mississippi's rural poor and the effects of the Great Depression. Collections of her photographs were published as *One Time, One Place* and *Photographs*. Her photography was the basis for several of her short stories, including "Why I Live at the P.O.", which was inspired by a woman she photographed ironing in the back of a small post office.²² Although focused on her writing, Welty continued to take photographs until the 1950s. Welty's first short story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman", was published in 1936. Her work attracted the attention of author Katherine Anne Porter, who became a mentor to her and wrote the foreword to Welty's first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*, in 1941. The book established Welty as one of American literature's leading lights, and featured the stories "Why I Live at the P.O.", "Petrified Man", and the frequently anthologized "A Worn Path". Excited by the printing of Welty's works in publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, the Junior League of Jackson, of which Welty was a member, requested permission from the publishers to reprint some of her works. She eventually published over forty short stories, five novels, three works of nonfiction, and one children's book. The short story "Why I Live at the P.O." was published in 1941, with two others, by *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was republished later that year in Welty's first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*.²³ The story is about Sister and how she becomes estranged from her family and ends up living at the post office where she works. Seen by critics as quality Southern literature, the story comically captures family relationships. Like most of her short stories, Welty masterfully

²² Michael Kreyling. *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1991. pp. 55

²³ Peter Schmidt. *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991. P.67

captures Southern idiom and places importance on location and customs. Eudora Welty's 1941 short story collection *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* focuses on the female characters' conflicts with internal and external identities of womanhood as derived from the realities of living in the Depression-era South and living up to preconceived images of ideal southern femininity, images of the southern belle or southern lady. Such romantic images of ideal southern femininity were based partially on cultural expectations and partially on plantation genre literature and included characteristics of purity, innocence, and passivity that were absurd traits for Welty's women who were living as widows, as workers, and as heads of households, and not as southern belles. Welty writes of women who feel obligated to embody those images of ideal southern femininity despite the modest and often harsh circumstances in which they find themselves, and those feelings of obligation lead to inevitable internal and external conflicts for the female characters "A Worn Path" was also published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *A Curtain of Green*. It is seen as one of Welty's finest short stories, winning the second-place O. Henry Award in 1941. Welty's debut novel, *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), deviated from her previous psychologically inclined works, presenting static, fairy-tale characters. Some critics suggest that she worried about "encroaching on the turf of the male literary giant to the north of her in Oxford, Mississippi—William Faulkner", and therefore wrote in a fairy-tale style instead of a historical one. Most critics and readers saw it as a modern Southern fairy-tale and noted that it employs themes and characters reminiscent of the Grimm Brothers' works.²⁴ Immediately after the murder of Medgar Evers in 1963, Welty wrote *Where Is the Voice Coming From*. As she later said, she wondered: "Whoever the murderer is, I know him: not his identity, but his coming about, in this time and place. That is, I ought to have learned by now, from here, what such a man, intent on such a deed, had going on in his mind. I wrote his story—my fiction—in the first person: about that character's point of view, Welty's story was published in *The New Yorker* soon after Byron De La Beckwith's arrest. Winner of

²⁴ Marrs. National Women's Hall of Fame, Eudora Welty.2011.P. 438.

the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972) is believed by some to be Welty's best novel. It was written at a much later date than the bulk of her work. As poet Howard Moss wrote in *The New York Times*, the book is "a miracle of compression, the kind of book, small in scope but profound in its implications, that rewards a lifetime of work". The plot focuses on family struggles when the daughter and the second wife of a judge confront each other in the limited confines of a hospital room while the judge undergoes eye surgery.²⁵ Welty gave a series of addresses at Harvard University, revised and published as *One Writer's Beginnings*. It was the first book published by Harvard University Press to be a *New York Times* Best Seller (at least 32 weeks on the list), and runner-up for the 1984 National Book Award for Nonfiction. In 1992, she was awarded the Rea Award for the Short Story for her lifetime contributions to the American short story. Welty was a charter member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, founded in 1987. She also taught creative writing at colleges and in workshops. She lived near Jackson's Belhaven College and was a common sight among the people of her hometown. Welty personally influenced several young Mississippi writers in their careers including Richard Ford, Ellen Gilchrist, and Elizabeth Spencer. Eudora Welty was a prolific writer who created stories in multiple genres. Throughout her writing are the recurring themes of the paradox of human relationships, the importance of place (a recurring theme in most Southern writing), and the importance of mythological influences that help shape the theme. Welty said that her interest in the relationships between individuals and their communities stems from her natural abilities as an observer.²⁶ Perhaps the best examples can be found within the short stories in *A Curtain of Green*. "Why I Live at the P.O." comically illustrates the conflict between Sister and her immediate community, her family. This particular story uses lack of proper communication to highlight the underlying theme of the paradox of human connection. Another example is Miss Eckhart of *The Golden Apples*, who is considered an outsider in her town. Welty shows that

²⁵ Rebecca Mark. *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. pp-58.

²⁶ . Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling. *Complete Novels*. New York: Library of America, 1998. pp 34-56

this piano teacher's independent lifestyle allows her to follow her passions, but also highlights Miss Eckhart's longing to start a family and to be seen by the community as someone who belongs in Morgana. Her stories are often characterized by the struggle to retain identity while keeping community relationships. Place is vitally important to Welty. She believed that place is what makes fiction seem real, because with place come customs, feelings, and associations. "A Worn Path" is one short story that proves how place shapes how a story is perceived.²⁷ Within the tale, the main character, Phoenix, must fight to overcome the barriers within the vividly described Southern landscape as she makes her trek to the nearest town. "The Wide Net" is another of Welty's short stories that uses place to define mood and plot. The river in the story is viewed differently by each character. Some see it as a food source, others see it as deadly, and some see it as a sign that "the outside world is full of endurance". Welty is noted for using mythology to connect her specific characters and locations to universal truths and themes. Examples can be found within the short story "A Worn Path", the novel *Delta Wedding*, and the collection of short stories *The Golden Apples*. In "A Worn Path", the character Phoenix has much in common with the mythical bird. Phoenixes are said to be red and gold and are known for their endurance and dignity. Phoenix, the old Black woman, is described as being clad in a red handkerchief with undertones of gold and is noble and enduring in her difficult quest for the medicine to save her grandson. In "Death of a Traveling Salesman", the husband is given characteristics common to Prometheus. He comes home after bringing fire to his boss and is full of male libido and physical strength. Welty also refers to the figure of Medusa, who in "Petrified Man" and other stories is used to represent powerful or vulgar women. Locations can also allude to mythology, as Welty proves in her novel *Delta Wedding*.²⁸ As Professor Veronica Makowsky from the University of Connecticut writes, the setting of the Mississippi Delta has "suggestions of the goddess of love, Aphrodite or Venus-

²⁷ Rosenberg Karen. 6. Peggy Whitman Preshaw. *More Conversations with Eudora Welty Jackson*: University Press of Mississippi, 1996. pp.89

²⁸ Thomas Jo. For inventor of Eudora, Great Fame .The New York Times, 2009. pp. 156.

shells like that upon which Venus rose from the sea and female genitalia, as in the mound of Venus and Delta of Venus". The title *The Golden Apples* refers to the difference between people who seek silver apples and those who seek golden apples. It is drawn from W. B. Yeats' poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus". It also refers to myths of a golden apple being awarded after a contest. Welty used the symbol to illuminate the two types of attitudes her characters could take about life. Female characters have in common is their struggle between the imagery of the ideal woman and the economic and social reality of the South in the 1930s. Welty does not offer resolutions through these characters, but she places their struggles on stage, and in doing so, she opens the doors for gazing upon, questioning, and understanding real women in short stories that are absurd, tragic, and/or comical. Descriptions of the ideal southern woman, southern belle, and southern lady in this thesis are based in part on concepts articulated by both Danielle Fuller in "'Making a Scene': Some Thoughts on Marriage in Eudora Welty's 'Delta Wedding' and 'The Optimist's Daughter'" and Anne Goodwyn Jones in *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*. Fuller and Jones, as well as many other critics and historians, describe the ideal southern woman as a "marble statue, beautiful and silent...rather than a person is a personification, effective only as she works in others' imaginations," and embodying the characteristics of passivity, sexual purity, and innocence. Anne Goodwyn Jones, in her book *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859 - 1936*, devotes over 300 pages to the ideal southern woman and how southern female writers dealt with her. She opens her book with an explanation of the connection between the South and femininity and suggests that "the lady.. seemed the flower of a uniquely southern civilization". Though ideas of proper womanhood have been important to many societies, for instance, Jones explains that in the South the southern lady "is at the core of a region's self-definition; the identity of the South is contingent in part upon the persistence of its tradition of the lady".²⁹ She continues with this argument throughout her book. To evidence the

²⁹ Waldron Ann . Eudora Welty:A Writer's Life. Knopf Doubleday Publishing.P. 277.

cultural upholding of the ideal, Jones cites a 1920s nostalgic address by a southern man, Lucian Lamar Knight, writing on the subject of the ideal southern woman: The Confederate woman. Imagination cannot dwell too tenderly upon a theme so inspiring. It took the civilization of an Old South to produce her - a civilization whose exquisite but fallen fabric now belongs to the Dust of dreams. But we have not lost the blood royal of the ancient line; and in the veins of an infant Southland still ripples the heroic strain. The Confederate woman, in her silent influence, in her eternal vigil, still abides. Welty's mentally incompetent, suicidal Clytie Farr and Welty's equally mentally impaired adulterous Ruby Fisher are certainly in circumstances far from this ideal - far from being the pure altar and "blood royal of the ancient line" that Knight praises. As Jones states, the limitations of the southern ideal made it impossible for real women to function in real lives separate from men. This poses a particularly poignant problem for Welty's female characters, many of whom have no choice as unmarried, widowed, or isolated women but to function apart from males. Jones explains the limitations of the ideal feminine image. But real southern girls who aspired to become ladies found behind the rhetoric a complex and sometimes contradictory set of values. For the image wearing Dixie's Diadem is not a human being; it is a marble statue, beautiful and silent, eternally inspiring and eternally still. Rather than a person, the Confederate woman is a personification, effective only as she works in others' imaginations. Efforts to join person and personification, to make self into symbol, must foil because the idea of southern womanhood specifically denies the self. Welty's characters are in the midst of that failing struggle between person and personification.³⁰ They struggle trying to be the symbol, the ideal, of southern femininity but fail because of the impossibilities inherent in the symbol. As Jones states, the image was so perfect that it was not human, and human females must fail in trying to attain its perfection. One must question whether the southern ideal differed, then, from other cultural ideals of femininity.³¹ How, for instance, did the

³⁰ Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling. Complete Novels. New York: Library of America, 1998. P. 346.

³¹ Rebecca Mark. The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*.

ideal of southern womanhood differ from the ideals of the British Victorian lady and American true womanhood? Jones answers that all of these cultural ideals enjoined that women be passive, sexually pure, pious, submissive to authority, and content. The difference is the southern lady, though, is more ingrained and central to the South's definition of itself. Southern femininity is also a more persistent ideal, still an expectation over half a century after the Civil War's close. According to Jones, it is also a more potent, more extreme version of the other cultural ideals of femininity. For instance, it emphasizes fragility and helplessness to the point that protecting the southern lady seems to the southern gentlemen both essential and appealing even to the "lady's" detriment and the class - aristocratic — that the image of the lady represents receives a stronger emphasis in the South than elsewhere." Peter A Smith's article "Flannery O'Connor's Empowered Women" is also applicable to this study of Welty's female characters. In the article, Smith argues that O'Connor's female characters have to take on traditionally masculine roles, not in place of but in addition to traditionally feminine roles, in order to survive and function in the world. He states, "they lay claim to all of the privileges due a 'southern lady' while also having assumed all of the economic power of an absent male". These female characters, according to Smith, forge an extended womanhood in which the domestic sphere is no longer merely the household, but enlarges out of necessity to encircle the farm, the work environment, and more. In the same way, Welty's female characters struggle to create an altogether new female identity with expanded duties, concerns, strengths, expectations, and weaknesses. The female characters of Welty's "Petrified Man," for instance, work outside of the home and struggle to encompass that reality into their womanhood.³²

³² Rebecca Mark. *Understanding Eudora Welty*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999. P.34.

II. The illustration of feministic ideas in the “ The Optimist’s Daughter”

2.1 Character sketches of “ The optimists daughter”

The Optimist's Daughter is a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction winning 1972 short novel by Eudora Welty. It concerns a woman named Laurel, who travels to New Orleans to take care of her father, Judge McKelva, after he has surgery for a detached retina. He fails to recover from the surgery, though, surrenders to his age, and dies slowly as Laurel reads to him from Dickens. Her father's second wife Fay, who is younger than Laurel, is a shrewish outsider from Texas. Her shrill response to the Judge's illness appears to accelerate his demise. Laurel and Fay are thrown together when they return the Judge to his home town of Mount Salus, Mississippi, where he will be buried. There, Laurel is immersed in the enveloping good neighborliness of the friends and family she knew before marrying and moving away to Chicago. Fay, though, has always been unwelcome and takes off for a long weekend, leaving Laurel in the big house full of memories. Laurel encounters her mother's memory, her father's life after he lost his first wife, and the complex emotions surrounding her loss and the wave of memories in which she swims. She comes to a place of understanding that Fay can never share, and leaves small town Mississippi with the memories she can carry with her. The book begins with the main character Laurel Hand who travels to New Orleans from her home in Chicago to assist her aging father as a family friend operates on his eye. Laurel's father, Judge Clint McKelva, remains in the hospital for recovery for several weeks. During this time, Laurel begins to get to know her outsider stepmother (Fay McKelva) better, as she rarely visited her father since the two were married. Fay begins to show her true colors as the Judge's condition worsens. To the distress of all who knew him, the Judge dies after his wife throws a violently emotional fit in the hospital. The two women travel back to the Judge's home in Mount Salus Mississippi for the funeral and are received by close friends of the family. Here, Laurel finds love and friendship in a community which she left after childhood. Ironically, the warmth of the town clashes with Fay's dissenting and antagonistic

personality.³³ The woman from Texas, who claimed to have no family other than the Judge, is soon confronted by her past as her mother, siblings, and other members of her family show up to her house to attend the funeral. Though Laurel confronts Fay as to the reason for which she lied, she cannot help but feel anything except pity for the lonely, sullen woman. Directly after her husband's funeral, Fay leaves to go back home to Madrid, Texas with her family. After her distraught and immature stepmother leaves, Laurel finally has time to herself in the house she grew up in with the friends and neighbors she knew since childhood. During the few days she remains, Laurel digs through the past as she goes through her house remembering her deceased parents and the life she had before she left Mount Salus. She rediscovers the life of friendship and love that she left behind so many years ago, along with heartache. Her visit to her hometown and the memories of her parents open up a new insight on life for Laurel. She leaves Mount Salus with a new understanding of life and the factors which influence it the most—friends and family. But most of all, she gains a new understanding and respect for herself.

Laurel is the main character of the work, Judge McKelva's daughter, who is an only child. She is a widow having once been married to a man named Phil Hand. After his death, Laurel returned to her parents' home because of her mother's sickness, before returning to Chicago, only to be brought back by her father's condition which is where the events in the novel begin. In the story Laurel and Fay have many arguments because of Fay's rude personality. After her father's death, the funeral, and Fay's unexpected vacation, Laurel returns to her father's home. There she reminisces about past memories, including those of her parents, and her fear of birds, before she comes to her epiphany about life. Fay is Judge McKelva's second wife, therefore Laurel's stepmother, Judge McKelva met her at the Southern Bar Association at the old Gulf Coast hotel where Fay had a part time job

³³ Makowsky. Book of Members, 1780-2010, Chapter W. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2014. P. 349.21

at the time.³⁴ However, Fay is also younger than Laurel. Fay's personality is not pleasant and causes everyone in the story to see her as obnoxious, self-centered, and rude. This causes the other characters in the novel to pity her. In the course of the story we see that Fay is also dishonest, lying about having a family—she had said that they were dead—but when they come for Clint's funeral, they clearly are not. After the funeral Fay makes a snap decision to return to Texas with her family for a short time before returning at the end of the novel.

Clint McKelva is Laurel's father, who is an optimist. Judge McKelva is being treated for an eye illness he has, he dies after eye surgery and other complications much to the distress of everyone who had known him. In the book we learn more about him after he dies, including of his already deceased first wife, Becky, as well as the occupation he held as a judge. Is Laurel's mother and Clint's first wife. She died before the events in the story occurred, but through the memories of Laurel, she plays a large role at the end of the story. "The Optimist's Daughter" is a compact and inward-looking little novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner that's slight of page yet big of heart. The optimist in question is 71-year-old Judge McKelva, who has come to a New Orleans hospital from Mount Salus, Mississippi, complaining of a "disturbance" in his vision. To his daughter, Laurel, it's as rare for him to admit "self-concern" as it is for him to be sick, and she immediately flies down from Chicago to be by his side. The subsequent operation on the judge's eye goes well, but the recovery does not. He lies still with both eyes heavily bandaged, growing ever more passive until finally--with some help from the shockingly vulgar Fay, his wife of two years--he simply dies. Together Fay and Laurel travel to Mount Salus to bury him, and the novel begins the inward spiral that leads Laurel to the moment when "all she had found had found her," when the "deepest spring in her heart had uncovered itself" and begins to flow again. Not much actually happens in the rest of the book--Fay's low-rent relatives arrive for the funeral, a bird flies down the chimney and is trapped in the hall and yet Welty manages to compress the richness of an entire life within its pages. This is a world,

³⁴ Makowsky. Three Writers Win Book Awards. The New York Times, November 16, 1984. P.32.

after all, in which a set of complex relationships can be conveyed by the phrase "I know his whole family" or by the criticism "When he brought her here to your house, she had very little idea of how to separate an egg." Does such a place exist anymore? It is vanishing even from this novel, and the personification of its vanishing is none other than Fay--petulant, graceless, childish, with neither the passion nor the imagination to love.³⁵ Welty expends a lot of vindictive energy on Fay and her kin, who must be the most small-minded, mean-mouthed clan since the Snopeses hit Frenchman's Bend. There's more than just class snobbery at work here though that surely comes into it too. As Welty sees it, they are a special historical tribe who exult in grieving because they have come to be good at it, and who seethe with resentment from the day they are born. They have come "out of all times of trouble, past or future--the great, interrelated family of those who never know the meaning of what has happened to them." Fay belongs to the future, as she makes clear; it's Laurel who belongs to the past--Welty's own chosen territory. In her fine memoir, *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty described the way art could shine a light back "as when your train makes a curve, showing that there has been a mountain of meaning rising behind you on the way you've come." Here, in one of her most autobiographical works, the past joins seamlessly with the present in a masterful evocation of grief, memory, loss, and love. Beautifully written, moving but never mawkish, *The Optimist's Daughter* is Eudora Welty's greatest achievement which is high praise indeed Mary Park.

"It is easy to praise Eudora Welty," as Robert Penn Warren has written, "but it is not so easy to analyze the elements in her work that make it so easy and such a deep pleasure—to praise."³⁶ To say that may, indeed, be the highest praise, for it implies that the work, at its best, is so fully created, so deeply realized, and formed with such apparent innocence that it offers only itself, in shining unity." "The Optimist's Daughter" "is Miss Welty's work at its best, and reconfirms Mr.

³⁵ Marrs. Saint Louis University Associates. Recipients of the Saint Louis Literary Award. 2016. P. 547.

³⁶ Marrs. National Women's Hall of Fame, Eudora Welty. 2011. P. 438.

Warren's general tribute, including the difficulty of analysis: Laurel Hand, long absent from the South, comes from Chicago to New Orleans, where her father dies after surgery. With Fay, the stupid new young wife of her father, Laurel returns to her former Mississippi home and stays a few days after the funeral for reunions with old friends. In a night alone in the house she grew up in, she confronts elements of the past and comes to a better understanding of it and of herself and her parents. The simplicity of the story belies its universal implications. This is a story of "the great interrelated family of those who never know the meaning of what happened to them." With unsurpassed artistry Miss Welty shows us Laurel's struggle to come to terms with her father's death and with the life of the small Mississippi town he was so intimately involved with. In trying to deal with people who, like Fay, never even care to understand what has happened to them, Laurel realizes that she too has kept her distance from a shared past. Like so many today, Laurel has lived in a city where she survives by avoiding any real involvement with those around her. It is only the shock of her father's death that leads her to new insights into the relationship between love and death and memory. Certainly this book will be a rewarding experience to readers of Miss Welty's earlier work. Newcomers will discover its many dimensions and great substance: the large cast of characters and the complexity of their relationships, the rich humor and subtlety of dialogue that reveals without describing, the wideness of scope compressed within the boundaries of a short novel, the wisdom and discernment that underlie the author's vision of human life. *The Optimist's Daughter* is the story of Laurel McKelva Hand, a young woman who has left the South and returns, years later, to New Orleans, where her father is dying. After his death, she and her silly young stepmother go back still farther, to the small Mississippi town where she grew up. Alone in the old house, Laurel finally comes to an understanding of the past, herself, and her parents. The people of Mount Salus, Mississippi always felt good about Judge McKelva. He was a quiet, solid reassuring figure, just as a judge should be. Then, ten years after his first wife's death, he marries the frivolous young Wanda Fay. No-one can understand his

action, not least his beloved daughter, Laurel, who finds it hard to accept the new bride. It is only some years later, when circumstance brings her back to her childhood home, that Laurel stirs old memories and comes to understand the peculiarities of her upbringing, and the true relationship between her parents and herself. *The Optimist's Daughter* is a reflective, poignant novel of independence and love, for which Eudora Welty, one of America's greatest contemporary Southern writers, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.³⁷ A war widow who has returned to the South finally understanding her past, her parents, her marriage and herself. The major characters in *The Optimist's Daughter* are Judge McKelva, Becky Mckelva, Laurel Mckelva, Wanda Fay, Dr. Courtland, Miss Adele Courtland, Tish Bullock, Major Bullock, Miss Tennyson, and Miss Missouri. Becky Mckelva was Judge Mckelva's wife before she died and had Laurel Mckelva with him. Wanda Fay remarried Judge Mckelva after his wife's death. Dr. Courtland did surgery on Becky Mckelva and the final operation on Judge Mckelva. Miss Adele Courtland is the sister of Dr. Courtland and is a bride's maid to Laurel McKelva. Tish Bullock is also a bride's maid to Laurel and is the daughter of Miss Tennyson and Major Bullock. Miss Tennyson is another bride's maid to Laurel McKelva and is married to Major Bullock. Miss Missouri is the maid to the McKelva's and a long time friend of the family. Two main characters in *The Optimist's Daughter* are Wanda Fay and Laurel McKelva. Wanda Fay is a woman in her 40's and has the maturity of a child. Whenever she becomes mad, Fay starts to scream, point fingers, and search out people who will help her. She can not stand up and fight for herself, instead Fay uses tactics to make her opponent feel sorry or inferior.³⁸ This makes her extremely hard to get along with since she is always demanding and never giving. Laurel McKelva is the complete opposite of Wanda Fay. She is kind hearted, nice, caring, and intelligent. Laurel has an air of maturity and understanding around her due to her experiences in life. In "The Optimist's

³⁷ Martha Vicinus. *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985

³⁸ Polk Noel. *Eudora Welty: A Bibliography of Her Work*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. P. 45

Daughter” Judge McKelva will soon enter eye surgery to fix a slipped retina. Judge McKelva, his daughter, Laurel, and his new wife, Fay, are all anxious about the surgery and what might happen. Laurels mother died from cancer that started with her eyes and the family fears that the judge might be suffering from the same illness. The surgery symbolizes a fear that is contained by the three main characters and is a form of foreshadowing. As mentioned by Laurel several times, she fears that her father might not make it out of the operation and die, like her mother, blind and confused. I predict that Judge McKelva will not make it through the surgery or he will die shortly afterwards. With such a sudden death, Laurel and Fay will not have time to say good-bye to him and this will lead to complications later in the book. As predicted, Judge Mckelva dies after his surgery, but he holds on for a few weeks before his ultimate death. Although the Judge did eventually die, he did not die shortly after his surgery as predicted. Laurel and Fay show an almost immediate dislike to each other during the Judge’s decline and after his death. This hate could, later in the book, manifest itself into a conflict between the two. Judge McKelva’s daughter, Laurel, and his wife, Fay, disliked each other from the beginning of the book and are in one constant conflict. Fay is like a child trapped in an elder’s body. She is used to things being her way, likes to be spoiled, stubborn, and impatient. Laurel is young and kind hearted. She is more than willing to wait for her father to get better, but Fay is not. When they are in New Orleans, Fay keeps speaking about Marti Gras and how the Judge promised he would take her one day. Not once does she show any concern with her husband’s condition, but instead continues to think of only her self. Laurel is gravely concerned with her father’s condition and even spends almost all daylight hours at the hospital with him. Laurel confronts Fay about her lack of care and concern for her husband. Fay goes into a temper tantrum and screams about how her husband has ruined her life because he is no giving her whatever she wants. Laurel gives up on trying to understand Fay and continues to look after her father. The conflict between Fay and Laurel is never resolved and will never be. Fay and Laurel are two opposites and they do not attract. Judge McKelva’s wife, Fay, is in a conflict

with her past. She tries to destroy everything of the past so that it will not come back and haunt her. Through out the book Fay displays ways in which she hates the past. Some examples are, When she tells Laurel that she has no family but then her family comes to Jude McKelva's funeral, how Fay destroyed all remains of Becky McKelva, and how she refers to herself as being in the future, not the past. Fay's hate for the past comes from a desire to disassociate herself with her family, which lies in the past. Although at the end of the novel Fay does return with her family to her hometown for a few days, she had no interest with them in the beginning of the book. The Optimist's Daughter is set in New Orleans and the small Mississippi town of Mount Salus in March of the 1970's. In New Orleans, Marti Gras has started and adds an atmosphere of excitement. Although a hospital is where the novel revolves around in New Orleans, Marti Gras is brought up several times. The hospital adds a sense of anticipation for what might happen. In Mount Salus, the small town and people give a sense of closeness and understanding. In such a small town all of the residents know about the loss of Judge McKelva and it gives the feeling of love and warmth even if the main characters do not see it this way. Mount Salus adds the characteristics of a caring family to the plot of the story. The setting helps add missing characters to the plot of The Optimist's Daughter.³⁹ Wanda Fay and Hillary Clinton I believe to be very similar people. Fay is very selfish and cold hearted. She does not care what other people think as long as she gets her way. Her motives can never be figured out and might even come from some sort of mental disorder. Fay is also very demanding and all of her demands are supposed to be met immediately or else she becomes very hostile. Hillary Clinton matches Fay in many aspects. She is selfish and cold hearted, very demanding and wants all the power that she can get. Hillary is also swift and concise when she attacks, but Fay tends to scream and rant. Fay is also like a child, she cries, screams, and throws fits. A large part of The Optimist's

³⁹ Michael Kreyling. Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1991. P. 67.

Daughter takes place in the small Mississippi town of Mount Salus. Mount Salus is a rather small, rural town where everyone knows everyone and does not have any major industries or manufactures. Fifty years earlier would have seen the town in a much different state and it is very possible that Mount Salus might not have existed. If the township had existed there would have been a much smaller population than its 2000 or so now. Those who lived here would have been living off small shops and retirement. The other possibility for Mount Salus is it was a rather large city that survived due to the railroad. If the town was a hub for trains to come through, it would have been full of warehouses and office buildings that dealt with the transportation of goods. After interstates and highways were built and their popularity picked up, Mount Salus could have been left high and dry. With more and more goods be carried by trucks now instead of trains, many people would have left Mount Salus. This would account for the small population of the township at the time of the novel. The McKelva house represented all of Laurel's fears. She had to face all of her deepest horrors when she finally said good-bye to her father. In the house she discovered several items that contained emotional memories for her and she was forced to face them all. The house is a symbol of all of Laurel's conflicts that she faced before and after her father's death.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Louis Bayard. Review: Eudora Welty and Ross Macdonald, Conjoined by a Torrent of Words. The New York Times, July 13, 2015. P.14.

2.2. The display of feministic ideas in character's life

The Optimist's daughter" regarded as one of the masterpieces that vividly express the elements of feminism. Eudora Welty's 1941 short story collection *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* focuses on the female characters' conflicts with internal and external identities of womanhood as derived from the realities of living in the Depression-era South and living up to preconceived images of ideal southern femininity, images of the southern belle or southern lady. Such romantic images of ideal southern femininity were based partially on cultural expectations and partially on plantation genre literature and included characteristics of purity, innocence, and passivity that were absurd traits for Welty's women who were living as widows, as workers, and as heads of households, and not as southern belles. Welty writes of women who feel obligated to embody those images of ideal southern femininity despite the modern and often harsh circumstances in which they find themselves, and those feelings of obligation lead to inevitable internal and external conflicts for the female characters. These characters are conflicted about how to be feminine in a society in which the qualities deemed ideally feminine are impractical to adhere to in a less-than-ideal world.⁴¹ Their beliefs in femininity are ingrained in them, creating an internal conflict as they feel their own failure to meet those standards of womanhood. At the same time, they feel a pull to their own identity and recognize the difficulty in bridging the two. The realities of their lives without viable men in a poverty-stricken South complicate and, in fact, fully impede, any attempts to adhere to a set standard of femininity based on the ideals of the past that are so reliant on authoritative males. If the ideal southern woman was an outgrowth of the men in her life — mother, wife, daughter - then the absence of viable males creates an obvious problem. Welty's women cannot hang their identities on the peg of masculinity because it is absent.⁴²

⁴¹ Adams Tim. Interview with Richard Ford. *Granta*. August 15. 2018. pp. 22-23.

⁴² Carol Ann. *Mississippi Writer's Page: Eudora Welty*. Johnston: University of Mississippi, 2011. pp.45-47.

The book begins with the main character Laurel Hand who travels to New Orleans from her home in Chicago to assist her aging father as a family friend operates on his eye. Laurel's father remains in the hospital for recovery for several weeks. During this time, Laurel begins to get to know her outsider stepmother better, as she rarely visited her father since the two were married. Fay begins to show her true colors as the Judge's condition worsens. To the distress of all who knew him, the Judge dies after his wife throws a violently emotional fit in the hospital. The two women travel back to the Judge's home in Mount Salus Mississippi for the funeral and are received by close friends of the family. Here, Laurel finds love and friendship in a community which she left after childhood. Ironically, the warmth of the town clashes with Fay's dissenting and antagonistic personality. The woman from Texas, who claimed to have no family other than the Judge, is soon confronted by her past as her mother, siblings, and other members of her family show up to her house to attend the funeral. Though Laurel confronts Fay as to the reason for which she lied, she cannot help but feel anything except pity for the lonely, sullen woman. Directly after her husband's funeral, Fay leaves to go back home to Madrid, Texas with her family. After her distraught and immature stepmother leaves, Laurel finally has time to herself in the house she grew up in with the friends and neighbors she knew since childhood. During the few days she remains, Laurel digs through the past as she goes through her house remembering her deceased parents and the life she had before she left Mount Salus. She rediscovers the life of friendship and love that she left behind so many years ago, along with heartache. Her visit to her hometown and the memories of her parents open up a new insight on life for Laurel. She leaves Mount Salus with a new understanding of life and the factors which influence it the most—friends and family. But most of all, she gains a new understanding and respect for herself. Laurel is the main character of the work, Judge McKelva's daughter, who is an only child. She is a widow having once been married to a man named Phil Hand. After his death, Laurel returned to her parents' home because of her mother's sickness, before returning to Chicago, only to be brought back by her

father's condition which is where the events in the novel begin. In the story Laurel and Fay have many arguments because of Fay's rude personality. After her father's death, the funeral, and Fay's unexpected vacation, Laurel returns to her father's home. There she reminisces about past memories, including those of her parents, and her fear of birds, before she comes to her epiphany about life. Fay is Judge McKelva's second wife, therefore Laurel's stepmother. Judge McKelva met her at the Southern Bar Association at the old Gulf Coast hotel where Fay had a part time job at the time. However, Fay is also younger than Laurel. Fay's personality is not pleasant and causes everyone in the story to see her as obnoxious, self-centered, and rude. This causes the other characters in the novel to pity her. In the course of the story we see that Fay is also dishonest, lying about having a family—she had said that they were dead—but when they come for Clint's funeral, they clearly are not. After the funeral Fay makes a snap decision to return to Texas with her family for a short time before returning at the end of the novel.⁴³

In the main character's life, we can see several examples of feministic ideas. For instance, Laurel is a widow, whose husband had gone to the war after their marriage and never return.⁴⁴ Anyway, Laurel is so optimistic women and enthusiastic worker because she never complaints about her life. After the death of her father Laurel feels loneliness and harsh peace, but she has loyal and dear friends that care about her as her own relatives. We can notice it clearly in the following sentences:

"-You have bad luck with your husband, too?- Mrs. Chisom asked her.

-You was cheated, - Mrs, Chisom pronounced-So you have not got father,mother, brother, sister, husband, chick nor child. Not a soul to call on, that's you."

-What do you mean ! This girl here surrounded by her oldest friends!"The mayor of Mount Salus stood there, clapping Laurel on the shoulder- And listen furher:

⁴³ . Dawidoff Nicholas. At home with Eudora Welty: Only the Typewriter is Silent.The New York Times. November 28. 2011. P. 35.

⁴⁴ . Edwin McDowell. Welty book is first Harvard U. bestseller. The New York Times, March 13,1984. P. 16.

bank's closed, most of the Square's agreed to close for the hour of service, county offices closed. Courthouse has lowered its flag out front, school's letting out early. That ought to satisfy anybody that comes asking who she's got!..."⁴⁵

Through this Welty tries to show feministic ideas that women can live without her couple, without her family in society. Laurel has no family, no husband and children, but she is surrounded by her friends, even the whole city tries to care about her.

Despite the separation, Laurel still loves her husband and loyal to him as before, so in the extract of scandal with the step-mother Fay this feelings are shown:

"... Do you want to know why this breadboard right here is such a beautiful piece of work? I can tell you. It's because my husband made it.

-Made it? What for?

-Do you know what a labor of love is? My husband made it for my mother, Phil had the gift- the gift of his hands. And he planed-fitted-glued-clamped—it's made on the true, look and see, it's still as straight as his T-square. Tongued and grooved tight-fitted, every edge..."⁴⁶

Saying these words Laurel showed love and faithfulness and estimation to the labor of her husband. But at this moment, Fay laughed at her tears:

*"Your husband? What has he got to do with it? He is dead, isn't he? I will tell you what: you just about made a fool of yourself."*⁴⁷

As an answer to Fay's words Laurel:

*"...I believe you underestimate everybody on earth..."*⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Eudora Welty. *The optimist's Daughter*. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 86

⁴⁶ Eudora Welty. *The optimist's Daughter*. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 203-204

⁴⁷ Eudora Welty. *The optimist's Daughter*. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 205-206

⁴⁸ Eudora Welty. *The optimist's Daughter*. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 206

Laurel had been ready to hurt Fay. She had wanted to hurt her, and had known herself capable of doing it. But she something prevented her from doing it.

“- I don't know what you're making such a big fuss over. What do you see in that thing? - asked Fay.

-The whole story, Fay. The whole solid past...

-Whose story? Whose past? Not mine? The past isn't a thing to me. I belong to the future, didn't you know that? ”⁴⁹

From these answer of the Fay we can feel that, Fay is extremely optimistic , regardless the loss and deprivation she loves herself and expects better things from her life . Instead of being sorrowful and sad after the separation from her family and losing her husband, Fay shows ignorance to the happenings around her and loves herself more than anyone . And it occurred to Laurel that Fay might already have been faithless to her father's memory and said that Fay was not anything to the past and she could not do anything to it then , but it was everything for Laurel herself. Laurel lives with her memories of the past at this period. The past is no more open to help or hurt than was Father in his coffin. The past is like him, impervious, and can never be awakened. Memory will come back in its wounds from across the world, like Phil, calling us by our names and demanding its rightful tears. It will never be impervious. The memory can be hurt, time and again – but in that may lie its final mercy. As long as it's vulnerable to the living moment, it lives for us , and while it lives , and while we are able , we can give it up its due. Laying the breadboard down on the table where it belonged, Laurel says:

“ Memory lived not in initial possession but in the freed hands, pardoned and freed, and in the heart that can empty but fill again , in the patterns restored by dreams ” .⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Eudora Welty. *The optimist's Daughter*. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 208-209

From the words of Missouri, the servant of the house Fay reveals as a selfish and egoist character who loves herself very much and her old husband loved her too.

“... After a moment’s hesitation , Missouri went on ,

-He always want Miss Fay to have her breakfast in her bad.”⁵¹

Even on day of the funeral of her husband, Fay ordered breakfast in her bad and was late to the ceremony:

“ I am the widow! They can all wait till I get there.”⁵²

Fay always thought she should be happy as a women, she is somehow like a little child and quarreler , but the main thing is that she never plunge in sorrows, wants to be pleasant and enjoy her life. When Mc.Kelwa , her husband was ill and in hospital, she made him stand up, go with her to the festival and and feel pleasure.

In the extract of the funeral ceremony, when everyone comes to see off Mc. Kelva to the last way, the good sayings were told about the Judge as well as his former wife Mrs.Becky . Giving example, the Presbyterian minister’s wife remember Becky , the mother of Laurel with positive opinions:

“...May I see him?- the Presbyterian minister’s wife asked right and left as she elbowed her way in, as if Judge McKelva’s body were the new baby. She gazed on him lying there, for a minute. And here I’d been waiting to see who it was I was saving my Virginia ham for, - she said turning to Laurel and squeezing her around the waist.-It was your mother first told me how I could harness one of those and get it cooked so it was fit for anybody to eat. Well , it’s headed right for your kitchen,- she nodded back to the coffin.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Eudora Welty. The optimist’s Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 136

⁵¹ Eudora Welty. The optimist’s Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 74

⁵² Eudora Welty. The optimist’s Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 76

⁵³ Eudora Welty. The optimist’s Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 79-80

From these sentences of The Minister's wife we can see that, the significant role of the woman in society, the idea was given by the Becky McKelva and this was a big impulse to the business of another woman. It was Laurels mother showed and advised how to utilize "Virginia Ham" and she is now thankful and the owner of this business.

One more woman character of the "The Optimist's daughter" is Miss Adele Courtland. Miss Adele Doctor Courtland's sister, looks greatly aged, but not married. She is very kind to Laurel as she was Laurel's first-grade teacher, in a Psyche knot. She is elegant woman and her voice is capable of authority. She comes and lives with Laurel a little period to calm her after her father's death :

*"...People live their own way , and to a certain extent I almost believe they may die their own way, Laurel, - Miss Adele turned around, and the chandelier threw its light down on her. Her fine-drawn, elegant face might almost withered a little more while she was out here with the kitchen to herself. She wore her faded hair as she had always worn it from the day when she was Laurel's first-grade teacher, in a Psyche knot. Her voice was as capable of authority as ever. -Sleep, now Laurel. We'll all be back here in the morning, and you know we won't be the only ones. Goodnight!"*⁵⁴

Laurel also loved Miss Adele as a teacher and friend as she always care about Laurel at home and in the kitchen like her mother:

*"... You can not help being good. That is what father said about you in New Orleans and then , He was the best thing in the world too- Dr. Courtland."*⁵⁵

Another woman character of the work is Judge McKelva's private secretary, an old woman called simply as "Dot". Once when she worked with Judge MCKelva , he helped her, clearly, judge gave her money when she could not afford to buy the thing which she really wanted and she never forget him for this reason. She must have been seventy. When he retired her feelings had been hurt.

⁵⁴ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 69

⁵⁵ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 69-70

Of course, he'd seen to it that she was eased into another job, but she had never forgiven him. She came to the funeral ceremony with her nonchalant, twenties stalk on her high heels:

*"...I could not resist- she said in her throaty baritone as she approached the coffin. -When I first came to work for him, - said Dot, looking at him now, - I paid thirty-five dollars of my salary to a store in Jackson. It was on sale from a hundred dollars. I really can't to this very day understand myself. But, "Why, Dot," this sweet man says, "I don't see anything so specially the matter with giving yourself a present. I hope you go ahead and enjoy it. Don't reproach yourself like that. You're distressing my ears, I'll never forget his kind words of advice..."*⁵⁶

By the rundown heels on her shoes as she lumbered toward her, Laurel knew her for the sewing woman. She would come to people's houses and spend the whole day upstairs at the sewing machine, listening and talking and repeating and getting everything crooked. Miss Verna Longmeier is one more women character of the work which could spend her life without any man.

*"... A big apple-chicked woman in a hairy tam smiled into Laurel's face from the other side. I remember, oh, I remember how many Christmases I was among those present in this dear old home in all its hospitality"*⁵⁷

Mrs. Chisom, the mother of Fay, also loses her husband and son, nevertheless she does not show her emotions and pretends her as a happy woman. Seeing the coffin she remembers the death of her son painfully:

"...What happened to Roscoe, Grandma?- Wendell asked.-Son, you've heard me tell it. Stuffed up the windows, stuffed up the door, turned on all four eyes of the stove and the oven,"-said Mrs. Chisom indulgently- Fire Department drug him out, rushed him to the Baptist hospital in the fire-wagon, tried all their

⁵⁶ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 80-81

⁵⁷ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter. New York Times Book Review. 1995. pp. 89-90

tricks, but they couldn't get ahead of Roscoe. He was in Heaven already.-I am his mother. Well, his mother could seat and be thankful he didn't do nothing any more than anything having remarks made against him.In his coffin he was pretty as a girl. Honey, he just stretched him out easy and put his head on a pillow and waited till he quited breathing... ”⁵⁸

We can notice that Mrs. Chisom had bad memories related her son , regardless the loss of her son and husband she delighted and fun. She felt sorry and regretted for her daughter's fortune:

“... 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... ”⁵⁹

Welty compare the memory to spring, beautiful and short as a spring .She remembers the her happy days of childhood :

“...Memory returned like spring, Laurel thought, Memory had the character of spring . In some cases, it was the old wood that did the blooming... ”

It is obvious from the examples that, “Optimist's daughter” include peculiar features of feminism and they have been analyzed through characters. We can see traits of feminism in the life of major and minor characters, especially in Laurel 's life, as well as in the speeches, dialogues between characters and in their actions.

⁵⁸ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 92-93

⁵⁹ Eudora Welty. The optimist's Daughter.New York Times Book Review.1995.pp. 115

CONCLUSION

The research work is dedicated to the investigation of feminist ideas from character's life in the work of Eudora Welty's "The Optimist's Daughter". First, some information is given to clarify the trend of feminism and the role of women writers. The concept of Feminism is a trend that has been concerned to an analysis of the trend of male domination in the society; the general attitude of male towards female; the exploitation and discrimination faced by females; the need for and ways of improving the condition of women. In literature, this movement has concentrated on the role played by literature to foster gender discrimination as well as to contend it; the explanation for less importance of the endeavor by women writers in the literary tradition than that of the male writers; the divergence in the ways in which works of male writers and female writers, relatively, have expressed gender discrimination; and, the ways in which social status and literary traditions regarding gender discrimination have impacted one another. The role of women in literature as well as to foster feminist ideas, introduced new insight into literature and here some notable female writers such as Louisa Alcott, Isabel Allende, Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Eudora Welty are feminist writers whose works have a decidedly feminist viewpoint. The definition of the feminist writer has changed over time, and in different generations, it can mean different things. Feminist writers highlighted the plight of women or societal inequalities that women struggled against in poetry, drama, autobiography, and in fiction. They reflect their own experiences and realistic adventures in characters' life. Such images of ideal southern femininity were based on cultural expectations, and Welty's characters included characteristics of purity, innocence, passivity that were absurd traits for Welty's women who were living as widows, as workers, as heads of households. "The Optimist's daughter" is considered one of the masterpieces that express the elements of feminism.

“ The Optimist’s Daughter” includes several examples of feministic elements, because the work itself consists of a lot of female characters. In the course of study we have analyzed and come to the following conclusion:

- Eudora Welty portrayed her own image in the work of “ The Optimist’s Daughter”;
- Eudora Welty is believed to be one of the women writers who reacted negatively to woman’s position and discrimination through her works, especially, “The Optimist’s Daughter”;
- The novel depicts women’s role in society through several life of female characters;
- The work presents feminist ideals that they are more self-assured, reliable, independent, at the same time vulnerable and victims of their fortune;
- Laurel, the main character of the work, is described as a strong and independent woman, despite the death of her husband and without children, she could live and work for herself;
- Fay, Laurel’s stepmother, is not pleasant and causes everyone in the story to see her as obnoxious, self-centered and rude, so they have many arguments;
- The notable aspect of Fay’s character is that, she can love and respect herself in any condition, even her husband dies and nobody shows her loving and caring attitude;
- Laurel rediscovers the life of friendship and love that she left behind so many years ago, along with heartache. Her visit to her hometown and memories of her parents open up new insight on life for Laurel.
- At the end of the novel, she leaves her hometown with a new understanding of life and the factors which influence it the most – friends and family, but most of all, Laurel gains a new understanding and respect for herself.

By way of conclusion, as it can be seen from our final qualification paper, Eudora Welty is valued in literature as she illustrated feminine characters owning an independent and strong personality and tried to show the

indispensible role of women in society through her works, particularly in “The Optimist’s Daughter” .

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