



## PSYCHO ANALYSIS AND SELF INTROSPECTION IN THE WORKS OF EUDORA WELTY

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**ABSTRACT** Eudora Alice Welty was an American short story writer and novelist who wrote about American South. Her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. Welty has availed for herself a unique position among the best contemporary fiction writers of America. Welty's women are portrayed exhibiting the inner and outer self exploring through introspection unravelling the mysterious of life. The characters in the novels of Welty are mainly concerned with the mysteries of inner life of man's being in relation to the universe, the confusion and problems in relationships and the meaning of human existence. The characters in her novels have an urge to know the 'other' through the 'self' contemplates over life's journey taking them through different experiences and revealing something new with a universal acceptance of knowing the 'self' in relation to the 'other' and her psycho analysis of their outer journey brings out the Universal meaning of knowing the unknown. Welty's novels provide an excellent artistic & creative glimpse into the minds of women.

**KEYWORDS :** Mystery, Self, Other, Universal, Women.

Eudora Alice Welty (April 13, 1909-July 23, 2001) 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 was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among numerous awards including the order of the South.

Miss Welty's fictional works are mainly concerned with the mysteries of the inner life. She explains that to her interior world is "endlessly new mysterious and alluring and relationship is a pervading and changing mystery; it is not words that make it so in life, but words have to make it so in a story. Brutal or Lovely." Vande 27

"In a career spanning five decades, Eudora Welty chronicled her Mississippi with a depth and intensity matched only by William Faulkner. Here, for the time in one volume, is all for her longer fictions. In *The Robber Bridegroom*, legendary figures from Mississippi's past mingle with Welty's own imaginings in an exuberant fantasy set along the Natchez Trace. The richly textured *Delta Wedding* vividly portrays the complexities of family relationships set against the backdrop of rural Mississippi of 1920's. In *The Ponder Heart* Edna Earle Ponders unrestrained and delightfully absurd monologue shows Welty's humor at its idiomatic best. The monumental *Losing Battles*, composed over fifteen years, brings Welty's imaginative gifts to the largest canvas of her career, rendering a Depression-era family reunion with mythic scope and ebullient comic vigor. *The Optimist's Daughter*, a taut and moving story of a woman coming to terms with her father's death, won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1972. A companion volume is devoted to Welty's short stories, essays, and autobiography. "One of the most original, subtle and magical of American writers. Her prose is incandescent and her vision supremely humane" --- Oates, back cover of the book.

The word "mystery" relates to the of Miss Eudora Welty. Sound is everywhere, words within and around in her novels a continuum of energy, a vital- force but only a part of it can be heard. The greater part is within, unmanifest, and beyond the grasp of conscious experience, but gently guiding and unraveling the mysteries universally. Cosmological language thus has the power to take away one from the petty self into that of universal space to understand the mysteries of inner life. Miss Welty's imagination takes the form of words and dare to penetrate the inner world of humans in her works.

The characters in the novels concerns with the mysteries or puzzles of man's being in relation to the universe, the confusion and problems in relationships, the meaning of human essence and the search for the identity. The character in the novels is concerned with self-introspection, with questions of knowing the 'self' in relation to the 'other'. Miss Eudora Welty's works are tinged with a touch of mystic element. She explains in her memoir in *One Writer's Beginnings* how she encountered realities through unexplained mysteries. She recalls her childhood experiences in the family and one such incident is the universal longing to know the unknown and that becomes the subject of her interest. Welty's novel contains a number of autobiographical

elements. She has stated that much of Becky Mckelva's background in *The Optimist's Daughter* is drawn from her own mother's life in West Virginia. Her urge to know the 'other' through the 'self' is seen in her women character in the novels. In her urge to know the unknown in the novels, she contemplates over her life's journey taking her through different experiences and revealing something new with a universal acceptance of knowing the 'Self' in relation to the 'other' and her psycho analysis of her inner-outer journey brings out the universal meaning of knowing the unknown.

As Mae Miller observes: It is our inward journeys that lead us through time forward back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiralling each of us moving, changing with respect to others. As we discover, we remember, remembering, we discover and must intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Miller Fall 96

All her works are tinged by a touch of mystic element and which Welty speaks so often in her essays, She knows that reality is not something merely to be analysed that there is more to people than what we see between their hats and shoes and that the solemnest----- and most joyous – challenge faced by the writer and by reader is to penetrate the shadow that divide us from them or it. Carson XXIV

Welty's novel contains a number of autobiographical elements. Some of the women characters are inspired by women of the town in the south. Welty has stated that much of Becky Mckelva's background is drawn from her mother's life in West Virginia. The character of Laurel Mckelva represents Welty's own desire to inquire into her past and understand how it affect it affects her present and future Welty's urge to know the 'other' through 'self' is seen in her story "*June Recital*" also. Miss Vircie had a strong liking for her piano teacher Miss Eckhart in the story. Although, both are different in vocation and a vocation, they have a similar inclination towards appreciation of art. In *Writer's Beginnings*, Ms Welty observes about Miss Eckhart, "She derived from what I already knew for myself, even felt. I had always known what animates and possesses me in what drive Miss Eckhart." *One Writer's Beginnings*, 101.

Mystery in the novels of Eudora Welty is explored & revealed by her vocation & avocation of photography, she excelled in creating tremendous life – like images and her avocation as photographer is certainly evident in her style and Welty's work is distinct from this stylistic approach of other authors and she has amazing potential to give much insight into her characters. Photography helped Welty to interact with the universe and reveal the unknown and envelop the meaning of human feelings, emotion, gestures & caged images. Photography trained her to invigorate to listen and to understand the unspoken words, the captured transient moments. Welty engaged and arrested the moments across the images creating multitude images of people in innumerable forms and situations. She reveals in her memoir, *One Writer's Beginnings*: "I learned that every feeling waits upon its gesture; and I had to be prepared to recognize this moment when I saw it. These were things a story writer to know." *One Writers Beginning* 85

In the novel *The Optimist's Daughter* the circumstances forced Laurel to make peace with the past & present in order to carry on forward. Having lost her father, mother she finds herself alone in the world and the circumstances are now beyond her control. Her inner journey brings a transformation in her life. She recalls one of the incidents at her mother's home in mountain where Becky rescued the set of Dickens which her father Judge Mckelva brought, at the risk of her own life when the house burnt down. Laurel further recalls the past frustrates Becky when the words spoken by Judge of taking her back but Laurel learns the mystery when Becky was dying she cried "liar". *The Optimist's Daughter* 150

The novel *The Optimist's Daughter* centres around the death of Judge Mckelva in New Orleans and his funeral and burial at home in Mount Salus, Mississippi, its meanings are felt through conflicting emotional upset of Laurel the Protagonist. Welty's several themes are human relationship, death and the effects of memory but Welty universally through the use of image, symbol, ritual and stories knits them into one universal thematic whole. Laurel Ponders over the nature of suffering of her father had gone through and less able to provide protection for her father while he lived, and she could not save him from Becky's scorn & to save him from marrying Fay. Her father, Laurel thinks was worn out by both wives. The sight gives her an insight to understand the complexities of relations. She already discovered Fay as a selfish hollow creature and thought that she had unnecessarily quarreled over the 'breadboard' given by her mother to Phil, her husband, she says, "It is memory that is the Somnambulist. It will come back in its wounds from across the world". *The Optimist's Daughter* 174

The strawberry symbol in the novel reveals a delicate subtle truth universally accepted. Becky, the protagonist's mother feels a stranger among the new relation. The symbol of strawberry is a device to take back the individual 'self' into the past & relate it to the 'other, Becky expresses her seclusion and purity of birth like those strawberries where she belonged and once they are plucked they wither and die. Becky says: "You had to know enough to go where they are and stand and eat them on the spot that's all". *The Optimist's Daughter* 149

Laurel's inner journey and fro explores the interdependence of relationships of women with men. She discovers the dependence of relationship, their contradictions, and inability to feel each other's needs and the yearning of mediator to bring them closer.

Imagery and Symbol are especially important in conveying the elusive character of Welty's idea of women. The Futility of trying to protect anything precious from outside incursion is one of the painful lessons Laurel learns from her father's death. She grows increasingly disturbed as friends and town's people invent a heroic past for Judge Mckelva where he laid down helplessly in his coffin. Laurel wanted to close the coffin lid against the eyes of the mourners and feels her father has "reached at this moment the danger point of his life ..... As though he were in the process of being put on trial here instead of being viewed in his casket." *The Optimist's Daughter* 82

Human urge to escape from the unpleasant situations & 'self' is revealed through Welty's women characters such as Becky. The 'eye' trouble as symbol which is a dual sense of seeing the 'other & self'. Judge's eye trouble and Becky's blindness can be interpreted as universal human urge of escapism, Becky tries to escape from the present into the seclusion of her past and Judge's remarrying Fay to escape the past. Becky though brave and strong in her roots and Judge a man of knowledge however are proved wrong. Vande observes: "Something happens to Judge Mckelva seeing the inside of it, the doctor explain in non medical terms to Fay: the Judge has experienced both an interference with (his) seeing and series of flashes" *The Optimist's Daughter* 6.

The books most pervasive system of symbolic imagery centres around birds with the first reference coming in the scene when Laurel Mckelva spends her childhood in her grandmother's home and encounters the birds 'Pigeons' and scared to see them her grandmother explains about the pigeon behavior that they were hungry like humans Laurel recalls the pigeons behavior at her parent's home and perceives the truth about the new meaning of the mystery of human relationship. Marilyn Arnold observes: The sometimes stark & indelicate realities of human interdependence and intimacy suggested figuratively through the behavior of the pigeon are predictably distasteful to Laurel facing them openly for the first time, the night she spends shut up with the past, she

realizes not only her parents urgent, baffling dependence and their simultaneous and paradoxical inability to meet each other's needs but also her own longing for her parents and their utter unreachability. Turner 243

The inescapable human mistake which is universal in human appeal is seen in Welty's characters. Laurel learns memory is 'Somnambulist', the night before leaving her parental home, she intensely wished to find a happy solution but Laurel accepts the imperfection with her past experiences and accepts it as the inescapable human mistake.

Ultimately it is suggested that the barriers imposed by time and change are illusory. On the last night in Mount Salus, Laurel dreams about riding in a train with her long – dead husband, Phil past the confluence of the Ohio & Mississippi rivers near Cairo, Illinois watering understands "that ..... Her life, any life ..... was nothing, but the continuity of its love. She believed it just as she believed that the confluence of waters was still happening at Cairo". Miss Welty calls, the mystery of relationship in all stages of awareness of women in the novel. Welty fictionalizes the experiences of women characters, their experience of trauma and triumph in an attempt to forge an identity, in their quest for the identity of the 'self' and the 'self' in relation to the world. *The Optimist's Daughter* 160

The women characters of Welty explores the unknown while facing the complex painful situations and discovers their true human 'self' like the protagonist Laurel recalls the past, her mother Becky's pain and illness and death of her father is the moment which brings her back to confront the lives of her parents and her own past life to unravel the mysteries of inner life. Women emerge with a new thinking universal in appeal. Laurel's father's funeral ceremony was ceremonised by a group of people who gathered and talked about him. Laurel tries to listen to people's conversation and ponders over the mystery of relationship of her father with the gathered group, she monologues: "They are trying to say for a man that his life is over. Here, helpless in his own house among the people he'd known and who'd known him since the beginning". *The Optimist's Daughter* 82

Eudora Welty's women with all endeavour tries to unravel the mystery of 'self' in relation to the 'other' ostensibly renouncing the world attachment with a new thought and expression of spiritual enlightenment to see and understand 'self' and relate it with 'Him'. Laurel leaves her home town Mount Salus with the a new wisdom of life of knowing the universal fact of manifestation of divine presence in all the ways of life, leaving all the worldly attachment behind Laurel says: "Life is nothing but continuity of its love" *The Optimist's Daughter* 160

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