



A Curtain of Green and Other Stories

Eudora Welty , Katherine Anne Porter (Introduction)

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In her now-famous introduction to this first collection by a then-unknown young writer from Mississippi named Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter wrote that "there is even in the smallest story a sense of power in reserve which makes me believe firmly that, splendid beginning that it is, it is only the beginning." Porter was of course prophetic, and the beginning was splendid. *A Curtain of Green* both introduced and established Eudora Welty as an instinctive genius of short fiction, and in this groundbreaking collection, which includes "Powerhouse" and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," are the first great works of a great American writer.

A Curtain of Green and Other Stories Details

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From Reader Review *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* for online ebook

James Field says

I gave up after the first six stories. I call them stories, but they were so ambiguous that ‘story’ is the wrong word. In an avalanche of similes and over description, we’re introduced to a weird character, drift on to another weird character, then a third and a fourth, then the narrative stops. Tedious, pointless, and annoying.

Bill Kerwin says

One of the pleasures of reading is encountering an author who has influenced the authors we admire, and this pleasure may turn to delight when we discover this new author pleases us more than first. My admiration for Flannery O'Connor led me to Eudora Welty, but now I find that Welty--both as a writer and a person--is someone whom I both admire and love.

Both O'Connor and Welty write a lapidary prose, inlaid with irony and humor and inscribed with the characters—many of them eccentrics--who people their Deep South. O'Connor's viewpoint is both Catholic and Olympian, her pity distant and absolute. Her characters stagger under their sins, their flaws highlighted with ironies, until something—abrupt if not literally violent--opens them up to grace.

Welty, on the other hand, is something different. I would be hard-pressed to find a specific religious denomination in her viewpoint—although I hear she lived and died a Methodist—but I sense in all her writings a sort of Christian Humanism: a sense of the dignity of humankind, an affirmation of the incarnational mystery. In Welty, a character's flaws—although explored with devastating precision--reveal our common humanity. Though her prose is restrained, her pity is palpable. And everywhere, grace abounds.

Welty's worst stories—although still good—are the ones in which she tries too hard to be symbolic, like “The Key” or “The Whistle.” Better—indeed excellent—are the stories in which the characters and their flaws, and the attendant ironies, speak for themselves, like “Petrified Man,” “Why I Live at the P.O.,” and “Clytie.” But the best—almost half the book, and each one a masterpiece—are those stories in which the plot and characters inexplicably unite to produce a powerful symbolic narrative, stories like “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” “A Memory,” “A Curtain of Green,” “A Visit of Charity,” “Death of a Traveling Salesman,” “Powerhouse,” and “A Worn Path.” Katharine Anne Porter, in her introduction, describes such stories better than I can: they are stories “where external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end.”

Vel Veeter says

I first read Welty in college in an intro to American Lit class, specifically “A Petrified Man” from this collection, which remains one of my very favorite stories of all time. It’s funny, it’s weird, and it’s crass. It’s irreverent in just the right way.

Other stories from this collection hit the same kinds of spots. The stars of this one included “A Petrified Man,” “Why I live at the P.O.,” “Old Mr. Marblehall,” “Powerhouse,” and “A Worn Path.”

This collection isn’t a held together one at all, meaning these don’t have to be read together or in any kind of order. Welty put out about as many story collections as novels, and hit just right at the part of the American literary history to make a go of it in that way. These stories are from the early 1940s and feel much more polished and modern than that. Especially “A Petrified Man” and “Powerhouse” you see someone tapping into a kind of more liberal and libertine future that would definitely be awaiting American culture in decades to come. “Powerhouse” is about a Jazz star who rollicks and jives in the ways you might recognize rock stars in the subsequent decades and “Petrified Man” feels about like it predicts the entire career of Flannery O’Connor.

Here’s an excerpt from my new favorite from this short collection:

“The son is the worst of all. Mr. and Mrs. Marblehall had a child! When both of them were terribly old, they had this little, amazing, fascinating son. You can see how people are taken aback, how they jerk and throw up their hands every time they so much as think it. At least, Mr. Marblehall sees them. He thinks Natchez people do nothing themselves, and really, most of them have done or could do the same thing. This son is six years old now. Close up, he has a monkey look, a very penetrating look. He has very sparse Japanese hair, tiny little pearly teeth, long little wilted fingers. Every day he is slowly and expensively dressed and taken tot he Catholic school. he looks quietly and maliciously absurd, out walking with old Mr. Marblehall or old Mrs. Marblehall, placing his small booted foot on a little green worm, while they stop and wait on him. Everybody passing by thinks that he looks quite as if he thinks his parents had him just to show they could. You see, it becomes complicated, full of vindictiveness.”

Duffy Pratt says

In Annie Hall, Woody Allen explains how he thinks everyone can be divided up into the horrible and the miserable. In these stories, Welty puts a sharp focus on the horrible, but leaves some room for the merely miserable.

The writing is strong. Often, I found myself impressed with how good the writing was. At other times, I felt like she was trying too hard, and it was like slogging through a mire of similes. But usually, on a sentence by sentence level, and even paragraph by paragraph, I thought the writing was really fine.

And yet, I had a hard time engaging with these stories. They were very short on story, and were more like vignettes. In the best of them, it was like a written version of a Diane Arbus photo. But in others, I found myself wondering why Welty was creating such a nice sketch, and then doing nothing with it. It's possible that its something about Welty, but I also think that I've pretty much lost whatever taste I had for Southern gothic.

Catherine Mustread says

The title story in this first collection of short stories (1941) by Eudora Welty, is not darkly humorous like many of her stories, but would still qualify as dark with the story focusing on a bitter widow and the young

black boy helping her in her garden. Set in Mississippi, there is a current of sadness, acceptance and violence.

I listened to this story on Selected Shorts where it was featured on a segment called Strange Places.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4.25* of five

The Publisher Says: In her now-famous introduction to this first collection by a then-unknown young writer from Mississippi named Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter wrote that "there is even in the smallest story a sense of power in reserve which makes me believe firmly that, splendid beginning that it is, it is only the beginning." Porter was of course prophetic, and the beginning was splendid. *A Curtain of Green* both introduced and established Eudora Welty as an instinctive genius of short fiction, and in this groundbreaking collection, which includes "Powerhouse" and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," are the first great works of a great American writer.

My Review: Her first collection of stories, published *the same year* as her first story appeared in print! ("A Worn Path" in *Atlantic Monthly* {as it was then}, in 1941.) Diarmuid Russell, the superagent of his era, sold the collection on the strength of that...to a friend of Miss Eudora's who was working at Doubleday, Doran (as it was then). That, laddies and gentlewomen, is damn near inconceivable to today's publishing professionals. A collection by an unknown barely published writer getting published by a major house? Who's she sleepin' with?

The Muses. She was a gifted writer, and stories were her perfect métier.

It's a first book, though, and no matter how hard one tries, there is the inevitability of imperfection and probability of overexuberance. Here:

Night fell. The darkness was thin, like some sleazy dress that has been worn and worn for many winters and always lets the cold through to the bones. Then the moon rose. A farm lay quite visible, like a white stone in water, among the stretches of deep woods in their colorless dead leaf. By a closer and more searching eye than the moon's, everything belonging to the Mortons might have been seen--even to the tiny tomato in their neat rows closest to the house, gray and featherlike, appalling in their exposed fragility. The moonlight crossed everything, and lay upon the darkest shape of all, the farmhouse where the lamp had just been blown out.

first paragraph, "The Whistle" in *A Curtain of Green*

That's a lovely word-picture, and a kind of eerie mood-setting image. It's also too long and just a widge overwritten. But the story, a chilling little piece, is plenty interesting. It's always good to have an isolated farmhouse with a married couple basking in pale moonlight when something unexplained and menacing in its unexpectedness happens. The story left me physically chilled. And it's not her best work.

I am a major partisan of "Why I Live at the P.O." as among the great stories of the American South's culture. It's a flawlessly built, amusingly written moment in a family's life, a piece of time that any Southern boy with

sisters or maternal aunts can not only relate to but practically choreograph.

So I hope to tell you I marched in and got that radio, and they could of all bit a nail in two, especially Stella-Rondo, that it used to belong to, and she well knew she couldn't get it back, I'd sue for it like a shot. And I very politely took the sewing-machine motor I helped pay the most on to give Mama for Christmas back in 1929, and a good big calendar, with the first-aid remedies on it. The thermometer and the Hawaiian ukulele certainly were rightfully mine, and I stood on the step-ladder and got all my watermelon-rind preserves and every fruit and vegetable I'd put up, every jar.

"Why I Live at the P.O." from *A Curtain of Green*

Two sisters have a spat about a man, and the family weighs in. Hijinks ensue. It's a chestnut now, it was a chestnut then, and it's damn good and hilarious.

This is my idea of a good story collection, and the writer who created this first crack out of the box is my idea of gifted, and there is not one thing I'd say to her except "well done, Miss Eudora" if she stood right here in front of me, not one little hint of a frown or trace of a doubt in my voice. Make those mistakes and make 'em big, Miss Eudora, because if this is the FIRST then the BEST is gonna knock "good" right into "superb."

And it did.

Jeff says

When one hears someone speaking of great Southern writers it is usually Faulkner, O'Connor, and Welty who are spoken of in the same breath, especially of the gothic genre. In reading this first published collection of Welty's I must admit to being slightly underwhelmed. Now, that should be taken in context with the reputation that precedes it, the writing is fine, some of the stories are interesting, but it certainly is not at the level of Faulkner.

In this collection the two most traditionally revered stories are the title story as well as the final story called "A Worn Path." For me neither was a standout but of the two the latter was the better. To this reader the stories of note in the book include, in no particular order, The Key, Why I Live At the P.O., Old Mr. Marblehall, and Flowers For Marjorie. There are no suburban people in Welty's stories, no strivers, just those that are afflicted in one way or another. In these four stories two introduce us to people with much less than full mental acuity, one is a scoundrel bigamist, while the other features a family that could be called dysfunctional at best.

The two stories I rate the highest are back to back in the book. "The Whistle" tells of a poor farming family whose unending night is blighted by the tune of the town's frost whistle while "The Hitchhikers" shows us what happens when a good man picks up two men with bad intent but who are not in agreement about just how bad they wish to be.

Interesting stories and inevitably I will try some more of her writing but nothing in this book makes me want to hurry in doing so.

Charles van Buren says

Wonderful way with words but mostly pointless stories

By Charles van Buren on February 11, 2018

Format: Kindle Edition|Verified Purchase

Just as many of my fellow residents of the Jackson, Mississippi area, I became accustomed to occasionally seeing Miss Welty around town, particularly at the English Village Jitney Jungle grocery. Despite this and the general recognition that she is one of the great authors, I never read much of her work. Early on I developed a suspicion of anything which literature teachers and professors told me that I should read and particularly things they said that I had to read. In my later years I have gone back and read some of that material and have enjoyed some of it. I did not enjoy this collection of stories. Miss Welty definitely had a way with words but I require more from a story than the artistry of the language and the drawing of characters. The truth is, most of these stories bored me. I found them to be plotless and pointless. I simply do not understand those who say that I should ponder their meaning. I belong to the "if you have something to say, say it" school of communication.

Chad says

A Curtain of Green and Other Stories is Eudora Welty's first book, and this beautiful collection of short fiction, originally published in 1941, marks the beginning of a long, distinguished literary career. This is a book I've reread and taught several times, and each time I revisit these stories, I feel as if I'm catching up with an old friend. As is the case with outstanding fiction, I also see new elements in the stories each time I reread them. I recommend this collection for its diversity of subject matter: a former freak-show worker who was known as "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden;" a jazz musician whose wife may or may not have killed herself; an elderly grandmother who makes long, arduous walks into the nearest town to procure medicine for her grandchild. Indeed, after reading this collection, you will undoubtedly feel that Ms. Welty could write stories about almost any conceivable subject.

Humor plays important roles in several of the stories, and I want to mention a few words about two stories: "The Petrified Man" and "Why I Live at the P.O." These stories are similar in the fact that the humor emanates from the characters. First, in "The Petrified Man," Mrs. Fletcher is a woman extremely concerned with appearances. The entire story takes place in a beauty parlor while Mrs. Fletcher is having her hair fixed by Leota, and almost the entire story is told through dialog. Early in the story, Leota mentions Mrs. Pike, a new friend. For reasons that aren't entirely clear, Mrs. Fletcher views Mrs. Pike as a threat, and she continually reasserts her superiority to Mrs. Pike. Together, Leota and Mrs. Pike, who is seen only through Leota's stories, attend a freak show. Mrs. Pike loves the "freaks," and this implies, of course, that she welcomes differences. Mrs. Fletcher, however, emphatically states that she "detests freaks." The differences in opinion between Mrs. Fletcher and Mrs. Pike are the foundations for much of the story's humor, and Welty skillfully develops a rounded character with Mrs. Pike, even though Mrs. Pike is never seen in the story directly. While they attend the freak show, Leota and Mrs. Pike see a petrified man, a man whose food digests in his joints and turns to stone. Later, Mrs. Pike identifies the petrified man as an imposter, a man

named Mr. Petrie, someone who raped four women in California. Mrs. Pike receives \$500 from the police as a reward for leading to Petrie's capture, and this infuriates Leota because the freak show where Petrie was hiding was close to her beauty parlor. "The Petrified Man" explores themes of class, gender, and appearances, and it does so in a way that's extremely humorous. Ultimately, Leota serves as a connector between Mrs. Fletcher and Mrs. Pike's characters.

Mrs. Pike's ability to "see" others for who they truly are threatens Mrs. Fletcher, who is focused on outward appearances. Similarly, in the story "Why I Live at the P.O.," the return of Stella-Ronda threatens the security of Sister. In her introduction to *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*, Katherine Anne Porter describes Sister as "a terrifying case of dementia praecox." Indeed, Sister's actions are over-the-top and her first-person perspective is unreliable. However, I would like to make the argument that Sister verbally abuses Stella-Rondo and alienates her entire family because she feels invisible. Sister's aggression manifests itself in a series of neurotic acts, all aimed at attracting her family's attention. In addition, Welty uses humor to raise intriguing questions about Sister's character: Is Sister unaware of how contentious she actually is? Is Sister intentionally trying to be funny, or is she using humor as a defense mechanism? Is she mad (angry) or Mad (insane)? Other family members show preference to Stella-Ronda because she left China Grove, Mississippi, so at the story's conclusion, Sister also leaves home. She takes all of her "valuables:" the electric oscillating fan, the sewing-machine motor, the Hawaiian ukulele, etc. and moves into China Grove's post office, where she works. Like Mrs. Fletcher, Sister feels the need to continually assert her superiority, and both women are performers. They desperately need audiences.

A Curtain of Green and Other Stories both entertains and disturbs. The characters in these stories are memorable, and the stories themselves are some of the most influential short fiction from the early twentieth century.

Yve says

This book was disappointing and I felt like I was dragging through the last 150 pages just to finish it. Like Faulkner's, I don't get much out of Welty's stories other than someone yelling, "I'M FROM MISSISSIPPI!!! DEATH IS INEVITABLE!!!" There are other authors that focus upon their Southern homes to great effect (read: Flannery O'Connor), but reading Welty felt to me like listening to an 8tracks "southern gothic" "aesthetic" playlist that's full of gimmicky British "Americana" music like Hozier and Mumford & Sons that's included just because it's in a minor key and either has a banjo or mentions church and death. I have never much liked this "southern gothic" (I recall O'Connor's "school of Southern degeneracy" quip), and Welty seems to be a token of it. These stories are overloaded with similes, metaphors, and other over descriptive language that results in any meaning being obscured and every action becoming stilted, weighed down and drawn out by the mess of pretentious figurative language she must apply to it. I felt like I was reading about literary marionettes, not humans, and I got hardly any emotion out of it other than boredom and faint disgust. And that's just her portrayal of white people, because her few instances of black characters are even more one-dimensional, reliant on racist cliches, and uncomfortable to read (another similarity to Faulkner). I don't know anything about Eudora Welty's life and maybe she was actually a lovely woman, but from *A Curtain of Green* all I can think is that she hated humanity and her only fascination was evil. Ugh!

Annie says

sigh. i truly think this collection of short stories has ruined other books for me for the last three months.

where to begin? eudora is so terrific at the art of the short story. she says little of what she is really thinking, but creates tongue-in-cheek plots and characters that set your mind on fire with possibilities. i think of each of her short stories as a sort of mystery tale. in her mission to expose the american south for all its dirty beauty she is both mercilessly cruel, as well as ironic and hilarious.

between the tension of her natural humor and exuberance and fiercely enforced intellectual restraint, welty's central themes (the oppression of blacks and women, and the stupefying religiosity of the south) develop into perfectly ripened fruit. impressively, her power as a writer comes from saying more by saying less.

Melki says

'Why I Live at the P.O.' is still my favorite short story of all time. (Sorry, Shirley Jackson. You know I love you, too.) I first read it in college, and read it again in this collection. There's just *something* about this wacky tale of a young woman pushed SO far by her family, she leaves home to live at the post office, that tickles my fancy. Whatever that is.

Here's a wonderful collection by a consummate storyteller. Her characters are just bursting with life. They are traveling salesmen, beauticians, murderers, and outspoken postmistresses. Some of the ladies are so delicate, they cannot bring themselves to utter the word *pregnant*, but must spell it out instead. They are gossipy and judgmental. Many are lonely.

From 'Death of a Traveling Salesman':

But he wanted to leap up, to say to her, I have been sick and I found out then, only then, how lonely I am. Is it too late? My heart puts up a struggle inside me, and you have heard it, protesting against emptiness. . . .

But they are all very human. Welty certainly understood people. She saw their foibles, and she saw them at their best. And she knew, oh, so well, that even ladies in silk dresses let one rip every now and then.

Mike Goldstein says

A few of these felt dated/problematic, but mostly these are soooooooo good. Little insignificant people with their little insignificant problems. So bleak.

"Flowers for Marjorie," "The Whistle" and "A Memory" were my three favorites. "A Memory" makes the world seem so gross. So good.

Douglas Dalrymple says

It's been more than twenty years since my Southern Fiction class in college. Re-reading these stories now, I like them even more.

Karima says

Short stories at their finest.

She can set a scene! Here's an example:
from "A Memory"

She herself stared fixedly at his slow, undeliberate movements, and held her body perfectly still. She was unnaturally white and fatly aware, in a bathing suit that had no relation to her body. Fat hung upon her upper arms like an arrested earth slide on a hill. With the first motion that she might make, I was afraid that she would slide down upon herself into a terrifying heap. Her breasts hung heavy and widening like pears into her bathing suit. Her legs lay prone one on the other like shadowed bulwarks, uneven and deserted, upon which, from the man's hand, the sand piled higher like the teasing threat of oblivion. A slow, repetitious sound I had been hearing for a long time unconsciously, I identified as a continuous laugh which came through the openness pouched mouth of the woman.

Need I say more?

Lisa says

I expected to love Eudora Welty's writing but was disappointed. I slogged through this collection - only enjoying a couple of the more humorous stories. (*Why I Live at the P.O.*, *The Petrified Man*) Most of the stories felt heavy-handed and melodramatic and the language was too florid for my taste. I will return to Welty at some point and try some of her other collections. I'm rating this a generous 3 stars as it could be just my mood. (I'm currently reading *The Warmth of Other Suns* and am not finding stories of quirky white Southerners appealing right now.)

Sam Poole says

Flannery has been my favorite author for years and only Eudora Welty comes close to matching her aesthetic. These stories are not about people for whom one feels sympathy- they are losers, creeps, the tragic and the misunderstood. The famous works deserve their fame but the real power lies within stories like "The Whistle" and "A Memory". Dialogue makes up the majority of the action but it is the descriptions of a slowly changing southern atmosphere that gives real weight to the collection. One of the best works of southern short fiction you can read. It's still resonant!

Anne Monfort says

Curtain of Green is a collection of short stories by Eudora Welty. These stories are all beautifully written with rich details and descriptions. But, they're also really boring and confusing. Most of the stories were totally pointless and didn't seem to have a plot at all. For writers, these stories showed a lot about how to use symbolism and metaphors but beyond that, they just weren't any fun to read.

Michelle says

I picked this up because years ago I had enjoyed *Delta Wedding*. It found it sweetly poetic, a delicate glimpse into the drowsy-hot Mississippi summer of a motley family. The tone was perfect for a little girl observing the bustle of her elders around her. Plot was secondary to an evocation of southern life, but that worked for the novel.

Unfortunately, Eudora Welty's short stories held none of that charm for me. The tone that was so perfect for a little girl running around underfoot seemed confused when used as an omniscient narrator's voice. Each sentence taken on its own is still charming, but as a whole they fail to construct a compelling story. At the end of each story, I was left feeling like I had seen the shimmering outline of something potentially beautiful--but nothing more. The quirky characters never became anything more than dolls in each panorama Welty painstakingly arranged.

Maria says

I racconti di Eudora Welty assolvono tutti la stessa funzione, ossia mostrare una crepa: esiste una dissonanza tra la vita interiore dei protagonisti e il mondo esterno, e il mondo esterno a cui fare riferimento è la cultura del Sud degli Stati Uniti del Novecento, con tutto il bagaglio storico che ne consegue. Il conflitto è generato dalla contrapposizione di due forze che Eudora riconosceva anche in se stessa, come donna meridionale e come scrittrice: «desiderio d'indipendenza e senso di colpa». L'alienazione si manifesta in modo buffo, esagerato e grottesco perché non ha soluzione: la liberazione a cui tende lo spirito è contrastata dalle convenzioni sociali; la repressione degli istinti genera nuovi desideri e i desideri generano nuova colpa. A differenza dei romanzi di William Faulkner, però, in cui il conflitto si risolve con un atto di violenza, a differenza dei racconti di Flannery O'Connor, nei quali la violenza è la chiave per accedere alla grazia, le storie di Eudora Welty non si concludono in tragedia; l'obiettivo della sua scrittura non è trovare una soluzione al disagio ma dimostrare che esiste.

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