



Revolutionary Road / The Easter Parade / Eleven Kinds of Loneliness

Richard Yates

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Three classic works--including the virtuosic "Revolutionary Road, "soon to be a major motion picture--that exemplify the remarkable gifts of this great American master.

Richard Yates's first novel, "Revolutionary Road "is the unforgettable portrait of a marriage built on dreams that tragically never come to fruition. In "The Easter Parade, "he tells the story of two sisters whose parents' divorce overshadows their entire lives. And in the stories in "Eleven Kinds of Loneliness, "we witness men and women striving for better lives amid discouragement and disillusion.

(Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)

Revolutionary Road / The Easter Parade / Eleven Kinds of Loneliness Details

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AC says

I've now read Eleven Kinds of Loneliness. I'm not going to bother w/ Easter Parade. And it's led me to lower my rating from a four (after reading Revol.Rd.) to a three. This is a paradox, since I actually liked the stories more than the novel (R.R.).

I did like some of these stories. But none of them are memorable (...yes, I know, 'none' is supposed to be singular...) -- and after a while, they grew tiresome.

Both his tone (that is, his style) and his worldview are so thoroughly dated (and conventional -- nowhere is this clearer than in his treatment of the 'Negro' character, Sid, in "A Really Good Jazz Piano"), that it is hard to imagine that this work will survive as anything more than as period piece.

Yates is a competent writer. But the seams show in his work. Everywhere. One can see the author putting them together plank by plank (yes, mixed metaphor -- But I've been reading Bruno Schulz today...).

At his best ("No Pain Whatsoever" or "A Glutton for Punishment"), one doesn't much mind this. But one never gets away from it.

I'm sorry to say that I think that Yates is overrated.

Previously:

This review is only for Revolutionary Road -- the only one of the three texts that I read.

Set in the early 1950's (c. 1955), and written in 1961, this is Yates' best known novel (thanks to the recent movie), dedicated to a troubling story of (view spoiler) American-style, lived in the shadow of kitsch.

It is a fine book, though the writing shows its age somewhat - the characters are rich, the story believable and moving, while Yates himself has a hard and bitter edge to his soul.

There are passages that are very affecting. In part, perhaps, because he is describing my parents' generation (if not quite their circumstances).

Well worth reading.

Angela says

Since I reviewed each title separately this is going to be insanely long. You've been warned.

Revolutionary Road (4 stars)

Part of my "re-reading in 2011" challenge. I believe I first read this in 2007, and was completely blown

away. This time was no different.

It loses a bit of intensity on a second read-through, since you know what's going to happen. You wait for it. But the build-up to that is what really makes this genuine. Frank & April Wheeler are your typical suburban couple—a nice little home in Connecticut; she a housewife and he commuting to Manhattan; two little kids. But they have so many *issues*, and they think they're the only ones.

They're both stuck-up and delusional, which makes the story sad. They think they're better than everyone else on Revolutionary Road, and have these grand plans to break free of it and move to Paris. But you know they'll never follow through with it, because that's the kind of people they are. They talk a lot, and drink a lot, and only care about themselves despite what they say.

The only character that makes a bit of sense is John Givings, who's committed to the asylum. Everyone else is typically suburban and two-faced, presenting a pleasant exterior but hating everything on the inside.

Yates makes even the typical housewife seem grand and important, amidst her washing dishes and scrubbing the bathroom. April is obviously meant to do more than just iron Frank's shirts, but she's presented in such a way that she's trapped.

It also says a whole lot about life's purpose. Isn't this what everyone wants, after all? A nice spouse, some kids, a house in the 'burbs. But they realize too late that there's nothing for them after achieving the "American dream," and they're stuck in a lifestyle they don't necessarily want. But that's a discussion for a later time.

The Easter Parade (2 stars)

In *Easter Parade*, we follow the lives of two sisters—Sarah and Emily—as they grow throughout their lives. It details the paths they chose for themselves, and the various situations they found themselves in.

Sarah, the elder sister, was a virgin until her wedding night and ultimately bore her husband, Tony, three sons. They lived in an estate on Long Island, which they inherited from Tony's parents. Emily, the younger, chose the path of a career woman, living in Manhattan and having dozens of men find their way into her bed. Some were boyfriends, some were not. But they were both miserable and drank too much.

The first half of the book sped through their early lives, which I suppose was necessary but not very well-written. In a matter of an hour, they had grown from five years old to at least twenty. It wasn't even that interesting. Their parents get divorced, they have high school boyfriends, Sarah gets braces. All right, let's get to something interesting.

The rest of the story had the potential to be good, but I couldn't get over how terribly stereotypical the sisters were. The virginal housewife; the city-dweller who slept around. Their characters were too easy to figure out, and the situations they found themselves in came as no surprise. I had zero sympathy for either of them, and it made it difficult to enjoy anything at all about it.

After *Revolutionary Road*, I was highly disappointed in this one.

Eleven Kinds of Loneliness (3 stars)

Eleven Kinds of Loneliness is exactly that—eleven different stories focused around different people, each

with their own special breed of being alone. Rather than discuss every story in the collection, I'm touch upon a few of my favorites.

Doctor Jack-o'-Lantern is the first to appear, about one Vincent Sabella, a kid who transferred to a new school. Because he's not the popular type and pushes everyone away, he spends the majority of his time alone. His teacher, Miss Price, tries too hard to get him to belong, and I was just embarrassed for her. You could feel Vincent's anguish; he wants to fit in but at the same time doesn't want people talking to him. It's the same sad story—being the new kid sucks.

Fun with a Stranger is also about the loneliness of the classroom. The third grade is divided between Mrs. Cleary's class—the young, fun teacher—and Miss Snell, who is strict and proper. The differences between the teachers is so stereotypical and comical at times (Snell's class is doing schoolwork as Cleary's is having a loud Christmas party across the hallway), but you know the pain of Miss Snell's students. They stare longingly at the other classroom, but they're stuck with the non-fun teacher (who suffers a sort of loneliness herself).

A Really Good Jazz Piano follows two friends, Carson and Ken, in their travels around France. They meet women and hang out in clubs, but they both feel something missing from the experience. Ken at some point has to go home to a job, but Carson has an endless supply of money and wishes to do nothing but wander Europe. They're both a sad picture, but they wallow in their misery together.

There *are* more I enjoyed but you get the gist of it. These stories say a lot about people in general, and the different sorts of internal suffering we experience—most of the time alone, even if we're amongst others.

James says

How do you describe what you have just experienced when you've just finished reading a perfectly-written book? Richard Yates' masterpiece, *Revolutionary Road*, is a modern classic in the true sense of the word. He captures life in the fifties and the ennui and longing that lay hidden behind the grey flannel suits and the white aprons. This book works on every level, just one being the way he successfully creates a central couple as protagonists and is able to provide, in a theme and variation style, two other couples whose lives in different ways mirror those of the central couple, the Wheelers - Jack and April. Yates uses motifs with superb subtlety to provide a continuity that lasts throughout, even surviving the climactic finale.

What amazes me even more is that this was a first novel - it is unusual for the first novel of an author to be his best. I also find interesting that this novel was bested by Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, a book that I personally like, for the National Book award in 1962 (Heller's *Catch 22* was also a finalist). That suggests the quality of the competition in that year was very high (I wish I could say the same about every year). I found this to be a book that works well on many levels and one that I strongly recommend be read by all.

Gary says

As I got into this fine novel 'Revolutionary Road', I could hear playing in my head Pete Seeger's song 'Little Boxes'. This searing account of mid fifties suburban America, brings out the reality that life isn't all perfectly square corners. The lives that are lived out in these "little boxes" aren't as neat and orderly. Much as we try to

encase it, life is impossible to confine.

The story itself is timeless, and will resonate with all who read it. The prose flows like a river and is a pleasure to read.

Highly recommended.

Lebogota says

Fashioning Himself a Hero: Death of Another Salesman

The Laurel Players is an amateur theater group with high hopes of establishing a loftier cultural standard in their Connecticut suburb, but their short-lived attempt to put on a play is an utter failure. This sets the tone for the rest of the book, and the author's exploration of the themes of social aspirations, the desire to project oneself, and role-playing to meet or consciously balk social expectations.

Like the Laurel Players, everyone in the story knows that they are merely putting on a performance. They resent the trappings of middleclass life. Frank and April Wheeler get together with friends Shep and Milly Campbell to drink and put on a veneer of sophisticated and jaded ennui as they rail at the failure of the American dream and its lack of "authenticity." So long as they can scoff at society and speak of it with derision, they can remain above it and be untouched by it. But no one really remains untouched or unaffected.

The story is told from Frank's perspective and he is the master of play-acting and self-image. Yates adeptly uses imagery to convey this. One of the prevalent images is that of mirrors. Frank is constantly checking his reflection in the mirror and adjusting his expression so that it reflects what he wants to project. The book also contains extensive descriptions of Frank's clothes and how he feels in them. Apparently, in this case, the clothes DO make the man. Frank literally fashions himself into the image he wants to project, always conscious that his projection is insincere. He feels that his scorn is heroic, that he can see things to which others are blind, he can understand things that are beyond their comprehension. His understanding, however, is limited to the extent to which he can control his world.

The façade of toughness hides the fact that he has a basic need. What Frank seeks most of all, from his father, from his wife, from society, is affirmation of his manhood. April is aware of this and when she suggests her plan make it possible to move to Paris so that he can realize his dream of the artistic, intellectual life he has always claimed to want, she appeals to the logic that means the most to Frank: "It's your very essence that's being stifled here. It's what you are that's being denied and denied and denied in this kind of life... You're the most valuable and wonderful thing in the world. You're a man." He accepts this argument and is buoyed by it, feeling that "Never before had elation welled more powerfully inside him; never had beauty grown more purely out of truth; never in taking his wife had he triumphed more completely over time and space... He had taken command of the universe because he was a man."

Frank's elation, however, is short-lived. Although he had always purported to want to move to France to pursue the dream of the intellectual and cultured life, in fact he is horrified because actually trying to succeed would leave him vulnerable to failure. April unwittingly comes to his rescue again, when it turns out that she is pregnant. Frank now has the excuse he needs not to go ahead with the plan. April is devastated, and the events that unfold as she tries to keep their dream alive spiral into tragedy.

Richard Yates's writing style is rich in images and character contrasts. Revolutionary Road explores a lot of the same themes as Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: the sham of the middleclass dream, the ordinary man as hero (at least in his own mind), infidelity, entitlement, social convention and morality, rejection of and by family, a lack of affect. The difference is that whereas Willy Loman embraces the American Dream, Frank Wheeler attempts to disavow it, even as he is being sucked into it. Both eventually end up being destroyed by it. This is the sort of future that one could foresee for Willy Loman's sons. In fact the timing would be about perfect, with Death of a Salesman being written in 1947 and Revolutionary Road coming out in 1959.

Even a lot of the imagery that Yates uses is a tactic nod to Miller's original. Both works contain symbolic references to: seeds (DOAS), plants (RR); diamonds (DOAS), golden (RR), the rubber hose (DOAS), the rubber syringe (RR).

For all that is borrows from Miller's masterpiece, Revolutionary Road stands up on its own as an independent piece that is still relevant today. The book's Revolutionary Road leads to the suburbs, and there is no escape.

Vivienne Strauss says

Richard Yates is quickly becoming a favorite author of mine, he captures the tragedy of being a human being like no one else I've ever read, equal to Cheever and Updike, possibly better.

James says

Revolutionary Road: This is one of the most moving, revealing books I've read. I started it, prepared to hate it based on the soulless movie version that came out a few years ago.

Much has been written about the book and the story. All I can add is that this is one only three books I can recall that has moved me to tears, despite my knowing exactly what was going to happen (thanks to the aforementioned movie version).

The Easter Parade: Heartbreaking. Yates' characters move through life realistically. One can see the heartbreak coming and wish it could be avoided, but of course it isn't.

Eleven Kinds of Loneliness: Perfectly collected short stories reminiscent of Raymond Carver's works in their depth and profundity.

Dina says

I read *Revolutionary Road* a few years ago and was absolutely floored by it, for all of the obvious reasons. It left me so introspective, so unable to make forthright assertions about things, that it wasn't until earlier this month that I was able to delve into the other books contained in this volume, *The Easter Parade* and *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*. And so now, still reeling with the feeling of one who's been caught in a terrible lie, I'll

try to coax anyone who cares to read on to undergo this weirdly therapeutic experience of submerging yourself in Richard Yates for 3 novels, back-to-back-to-back.

I could simply state that, as un-well read as I may be, I've never come across someone who so perfectly captures the human condition as well as Richard Yates. But that would sound conflated and untrue. So perhaps I'll refine that statement and say that I've never read someone captures *women* in the way that Richard Yates does. I don't mean this in a mere "gendered reading" way of looking at how he portrays women, but simply in awe of the way that he makes them so human, so humbly flawed and proud and arrogant and unsure. April's cool, aloof distance after fights with Frank, Emily Grimes being not nearly as composed as she appears, even to herself, brides-to-be questioning their very nature on the eve of their wedding - all of these women are incredibly real and Yates must have been one astute motherfucker to paint all of these brush strokes so precisely. But then again, his rendering of Frank Wheeler, a magnum opus of a character study, is so complete, rational, and raw that in reading, you become Frank. You begin to take on (or acknowledge in yourself) all of the clumsy, fumbling ways of dealing with life that torture Frank day after day. And so we're back at the beginning again. Richard Yates: Champion of Depicting the Human Condition.

I'll retract and stutter and continue to be more unsure of myself if I write any further. Just trust me in this much: you'll be a better person after reading these books.

Jen A. says

After watching and enjoying the movie, Revolutionary Road, including the special features in which Kate Winslett reveals that it was the book that made her want to do this film, I decided I had to read the book too.

The novel is excellent! My first time reading Richard Yates, and come to find out that he's a brilliant writer of the human situation. These characters feel real and honest, not simple archetypes plugged into a story. I watched the movie & read the book within about a month or two of one another, and was pleasantly surprised to note that the movie stayed true to the novel.

This is a relatively quiet story -- no big gun fights or action sequences -- that is full of emotional turmoil and tightly strung nerves. I'm glad I read the book in addition to watching the movie; I feel that I understand and empathize with the characters even better for having read this story myself.

Sarah says

Though I've read Revolutionary Road a handful of times before, it's been a while and I was jazzed to find an Everyman's copy at Book Buyers, which comes with a timeline of the author's life and concurrent events. So I didn't know Yates was a big old alcoholic before (not shocking, I guess) or that he was broke and lived terribly at the times when he writing his most prolifically. Also not shocking. But thumbing through the timeline really did give a new perspective on how awful his life was in some ways, and how that might have colored his books. RR continues to be one of my favorite all-time novels and I won't re-review it again here, just suffice to say please read it if you haven't. The Easter Parade: Though RR frequently gets labeled "depressing", this book knocks it out of the park. I vacillated between thinking it was misogynistic or simply a downcast representation of the times and personal circumstance, but either way it's fantastic. There's

simply no redemption for these women, at all, and it would be a lesser novel if there was. This was kind of a funny choice of books to read right after getting married and still having wedding drizzle on my brain, but it was sort of perfect for that reason too. Yates is an excellent reminder of the shlump that is modern life, how we're all just fooling ourselves. After I finished the stories in *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* I listened to a podcast I'd been saving that talked about Yates and Shirley Jackson and how they're both widely underappreciated, and how Yates especially only allows any kind of hope for those in his stories who understand wholly that they're nothing, simpletons, with or without aspirations. That's probably why it's easy to dismiss his books as depressing, but it's why he's brilliant and why I'll keep re-reading RR, and now the others too, over and over again as the years pass.

Kaya says

I only read *Rev Road*. Not the other two- the library wanted it back. Pfft.

HOLY CRAP! Read this NOW. If you like getting punched in the guts. Then puking and crying. Then having a baby and trying to shoving it back in. Then reliving every moment of your childhood of your parents fighting. Then hating your significant other. Ugh. Tears. Drama. PUKE! My top 5 books ever!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Ushnisha says

In your face reality!

Justin Evans says

I haven't read the stories at the end yet, but the two novels kick ass. Specifically white, middle class, suburban ass. And they kick it until it bleeds and hurts and comes back for more. As I will.

Diane Robinson says

I loved this book. The writer has a profound knowledge of human nature in the hidden desires , dark thoughts, and delusions of the book's characters. Poignant stories that you will want to re-read.

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

I've already reviewed *Revolutionary Road* previously. This brief review is focused on Yates' novel, *The Easter Parade*. This is the story of two sisters and their lives in an odd, somewhat dysfunctional family. A novel, in three parts, that revolves around the feelings of loneliness, despair, denial, and even the love between Sarah and Emily Grimes. Sometimes painful, sometimes grim, reading this novel always felt real. There's something about this novel that just sticks with the reader long after you've set the book down. This

is a solid 4 of 5 stars for me.
