

Discussion Questions for “The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty”
August 26, 2017

“Why I Live at the PO”

1. How does the point of view affect your reading of the story? Is our narrator reliable?
2. One theme that runs through each story in the collection “A Curtain of Green and Other Stories” is isolation combined with difficulties in communication. How are each of the characters isolated despite being in the close confines of the family home? Who is to blame for the difficulty in communication?

“Death of a Traveling Salesman”

3. Which character(s) represent “traditional” Southern ways and which character(s) represent the move towards modern isolation?
4. How can we compare Welty’s depiction of men in this story to the barrenness or “sexual horror and flight” often found in Hemingway or Faulkner?

“A Worn Path”

5. The journey has been a literary device since ancient times. How is Phoenix Jackson’s walk through the woods along the Natchez Trace, also known as the “Devil’s Backbone” due to its rough and lawless conditions, similar to Odysseus’s seven-year journey home after the Trojan War?
6. The story is set in 1940’s Mississippi. How does this story depict race relations at that time? Do you think Welty paints black people sympathetically or not?

“First Love”

7. “Whatever happened, it happened in extraordinary times, in a season of dreams...” So begins “First Love.” Do you agree with Robert Penn Warren that Welty’s aim is to show how ambiguous reality is?
8. Why do you think Welty selected a deaf-mute child as a narrator when dialogue is one of her main tools? How is Welty using communication barriers to progress the story?

“The Wide Net”

9. Doc says that “The excursion is the same when you go looking for your sorrow as when you go looking for your joy.” Does the story prove out his observation?
10. “As the group drags the river, what types of things does the “wide net” capture? How does each person’s or group’s response to these things suggest something about their character or identity?”

“Shower of Gold”

11. Some critics characterize Snowdie MacLain as a true “female character of the South.” Do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Is this opinion true of the “old” South vs. today’s South?
12. The story’s title is an allusion to Greek myth; Zeus’s and Danae “conceived [Perseus] in joy beneath a shower of gold.” Snowdie, like Danae, had a father who wanted his daughter to remain fruitless. Do you see any parallels between King and Zeus? How do these Greek allegories create more depth to the story?

“June Recital”

13. Miss Eckhart’s metronome ticks off time, yet the story shifts fluidly between moments in time. How do these shifts in time and perspective in “June Recital” create a “complicated spatial and temporal montage?” Does Welty seem to favor one view of time over another?
14. The characters in “The Golden Apples” story cycle are considered wanderers and dreamers trapped in the small town of Morgana. How do you see these prototypes in the story’s characters?

“Moon Lake”

15. In what ways does “Moon Lake” illustrate the complexity of group relationships and how slight the difference between insiders and outsiders is?
16. What characters reappear in the three stories we read from the “Shower of Gold” collection? What do these stories have in common and how do they differ? Did each story shed light on the other stories and how?

“Circe”

17. “Circe” is a retelling of the portion of the “Odyssey” in which Circe turns Odysseus’ men into swine. How does the shift in point of view provide a feminine perspective, often lacking in Greek lore?
18. Throughout the story, Circe tries to understand mortals. Does she succeed? Like many of Welty’s other stories, how does the theme of alienation support the story?

“The Burning”

19. How does “The Burning” capture the feeling of living in a totally different world today than the one you lived in yesterday?
20. Are the characters in “The Burning” very human, even at their most inhumane moments?

“Where Is the Voice Coming From”

21. “Where Is the Voice Coming From” is set during the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s. Welty was inspired to write this story after learning of the 1963 assassination of Medgar Evers, a local black civil rights pioneer. How does using the point of view of the white assassin affect your view of the story?
22. What is the source of the voice in this story? How did the inflammatory language affect your perception of the narrator and the story?

Overall, did you like this selection of stories? What themes did you notice throughout the decades of stories we read? What was your least favorite and most favorite story?