

#92 June 2024 Cameraderie
Eudora Welty (1909-2001)



Eudora Welty, known principally for her novels and short stories, was also a photographer. I will occasionally report on writers and artists who were also photographers. From the Wikipedia article: “[Welty] was an American short story writer, novelist and photographer who wrote about the American South. Her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973.”

Here is the Wikipedia link, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudora_Welty, and her photographic paragraph from the Wikipedia entry:

While Welty worked as a publicity agent for the Works Progress Administration [WPA], 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* (1971) and *Photographs* (1989). 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. Although focused on her writing, Welty continued to take photographs until the 1950s.

If you wish to read “Why I Live at the P.O.”, here is a link to the full story, evidently now in the public domain: [Eudora Welty: Why I Live at the P.O. \(art-bin.com\)](http://art-bin.com).

A personal note about reading literature. When my grandkids started kindergarten, they listened to the teacher read books to them even before they could read for themselves. Part of the reading curriculum was to understand “author’s purpose”: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. So literary analysis began for my grandkids at age five. If you choose to read Welty’s short story about living at the P.O., may I suggest that you consider what was Welty’s purpose, and delving a bit deeper, what was her view of the characters in the story?

The Eudora Welty website is here: <https://eudorawelty.org/>, and has a number of her photographs. Below are a few photographs from the website.

I can't find a citation for this, but it clearly was during or influenced by Welty's WPA work.



This image conveys significant dignity for this hard-working woman.

Again, this was probably taken during or soon after Welty's time with the WPA.



Despite its physical flaws from impinging sunlight, this is an extraordinary portrait of another woman of great dignity. Note the resonance between the matriarch in white with one arm outstretched and the image on the wall of Christ in white with arms outstretched. I believe the other image on the wall is Christ blessing little children. The more one looks at this photograph, the more one sees. Since Welty took the photograph, there must have been a backstory of preparation for posing for a family portrait taken by an honored visitor, with everyone dressed to the nines for the occasion.

Another shot, also probably from the WPA period or after.



What I see running through the three images I have shown (all from the Eudora Welty website) is a focus on the dignity of women. This young window-shopping woman is erect and poised, and carefully dressed—note the heels.