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"Camellia house, Jackson, Mississippi, post-1936," *Eudora Welty as Photographer*, p. 51, with the gracious permission of the Eudora Welty Foundation

- 1 "Camellia house" illustrates Welty's aesthetic awareness of the capabilities of the camera to transform light. The black and white lines of the shadows, ceiling boards, and sky pull our eyes to the white square at the photograph's center. Yet we are simultaneously aware of the upright poles wrapped in barbershop shadow stripes and

of the gently curving furrows of seedlings delineated by shadow and light, reminding us that shadows *are* light.

- 2 Several negatives of photographs taken in the camellia house exist in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, one with a young thirty-one or two-year-old Welty standing with one hand on an upright support, purse hanging at her side, diagonal lights and shadows across her blouse and skirt. This photograph she chose for the cover of *Eudora Welty: A Note on the Author and Her Work* by Katherine Anne Porter Together with *The Key, One of Seventeen Stories from Miss Welty's forthcoming A Curtain of Green*. Thomas M. Verich, former archivist for the Archives and Special Collections of the John Davis Williams Library at the University of Mississippi, describes this promotional pamphlet for Welty's first collection of stories (Doubleday 1941) in his catalogue *Eudora Welty: A Keepsake* of a 1987 exhibition and, in turn, prints the photograph on its cover. *Camellia house*, however, has no direct or indirect relation to Welty's story "The Key." Or does it?
- 3 The author's conscious and serious efforts to practice the art of photography are evident in her comments to D. Gorton and James Patterson when they were collaborating fifty years later on the 1992 *Eudora Welty Portfolio* of eighteen photographs printed by Diogenes Editions. Welty noted the textures in the sweater in *Woman of the Thirties* and in the "palmetto fan, straw hat, black skin, and quilt" in *Hat, Fan, and Quilt*. Even more revealing is her comment that the "folds on the shirt on the farmer's back [in *Farmers in Town*] [...] reminded her of 'looking down at the folds in the land from an airplane.'"²
- 4 The artfulness of Welty's photographs compels a comparison with the 1930s and 1940s work of Welty's contemporaries: Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Helen Levitt, Aaron Siskind, and Wright Morris, but what can be seen in *Camellia house* without reference to the work of trained commercial and portrait photographers is what we might see in almost any of her published photographs if we could train ourselves to see what she saw. The focal point of the image, the square of light at its near-center, draws us on a journey. What lies beyond is unknown, so we must read the striated patterns, dark and light, straight and angled. The viewer and the photographer stand in the beams of shadow and light that seem as substantial as the roofing slats and the support timbers. Could Welty be showing us the delightful play, the world unto its own, and the potential of the sun, the shade, the soil for the seedlings at her feet?
- 5 In "The Key," a deaf-mute couple, Albert and Ellie Morgan, are waiting in a train depot when a third character's key (to what?) slides to Albert's feet. The narrator addresses the reader to describe the startling appearance of the young man as he stands before Albert and Ellie:

You felt a shock in glancing up at him, and when you looked away from the whole yellow room and closed your eyes, his intensity, as well as that of the room, seemed to have impressed the imagination with a shadow of itself, a blackness together with the light, the negative beside the positive. You felt as though some exact, skillful contact had been made between the surfaces of your hearts to make you aware, in some pattern, of his joy and his despair. You could feel the fullness and the emptiness of this stranger's life.³

- 6 I look anew at *Camellia house*; I read again, with refreshed vision, "The Key."

NOTES

1. "Camellia house," *Eudora Welty as Photographer* (Jackson: U P Mississippi, 2009), 51.
 2. See *Photographs* 1, 14, 26 for the images and D. Gorton, "The Making of the Eudora Welty Portfolio," *The Eudora Welty Portfolio* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History/Diogenes Editions, 1992), n.p. for the quotations.
 3. Eudora Welty, "The Key," *Stories, Essays, & Memoir* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 42.
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