



Chalcot Crescent

Fay Weldon

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Its 2013 and 80-year-old Frances is sitting on the stairs of Number 3, Chalcot Crescent, Primrose Hill, listening to the debt collectors pounding on her front door. From this house she's witnessed 5 decades of world history - the fall of communism, the death of capitalism - and, with the bailiffs, world history has finally reached her doorstep.

Chalcot Crescent Details

Date : Published October 1st 2009 by Corvus (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9781848872684

Author : Fay Weldon

Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Dystopia, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review Chalcot Crescent for online ebook

Bookmarks Magazine says

"I am not cynical. I am just old. I know what is going to happen next," says Frances in Weldon's latest mix of memoir, fiction, and diary. But, in fact, it is difficult to predict what will happen next in *Chalcot Crescent*, as it is "essentially plotless" (*Seattle Times*). Readers may find themselves confused by the myriad unnecessary characters and offshoots from the main story. And while Weldon's dystopia of Red Peace (stemming from Greenpeace) and communal vegetable plots is witty and creative, Frances's recollections may seem familiar: as in many of Weldon's previous novels, the heroine's life mimics the author's. Still, Weldon's prose, clever, humorous, and satirical, remains brilliant as well as eminently quotable, and most readers should find plenty to enjoy in the adventures of the latest incarnation of Fay. This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Maureen Reil says

This was an intriguing read and it is narrated from the viewpoint of an 80 year old woman writer named Frances. She spent and borrowed money like it was going out of fashion in the good times and carried on spending but it was too difficult to borrow in the bad times and guess what, she ended up broke and in debt so the money did go out of fashion after all. Lessons for us all there. This book is set in the very near future and it might come true any day now, when the world economy collapses and we have to go back to trading with other countries what little goods we actually produce. This country (UK) falls into a dictatorship which is responsible for feeding it's own people. So they come up with the nutritional and tasty, national meatloaf but there are rumors that it is made out of old people. We are told through various back stories about the life of Frances and her sister Fay and her extended family. And these passages, I particularly enjoyed as we got to know the lot of them and how they were all connected to one another. To live in this way, was clearly bleaker than a Dickensian novel and if this is what's in store for me, then I don't know if I want to be around to endure it. Fay weldon is truly a gifted author, who's imagination shines and stirs and makes you think. Even though she says halfway through that you can give-up reading it if you want to and you have her permission, I'm glad I didn't as it was well worth finishing.

Maria says

Decided to dnf this one at page 80. I'm trying to get better at dnf-ing when a book feels like a chore to read. This one reminded me of Atwood, just not as good. It's not a bad book, but I am kind of a mood reader, and this just wasn't something I wanted to read just now. In addition to that, reading reviews of it gives me the impression that it's almost plotless, with a lot of side character stories that goes nowhere. More drawing up the picture of a life than anything else, and it's not a life I was interested in reading about.

The story so far: an elderly lady is sitting on the stairs with her grandson, while the authorities are banging on her door. It's a dystopian light with feminism as a prominent theme. While giving us small glimpses into what has gone wrong with society (this world is different, but recognizable in that it shows us how things could have turned out), she reminisces about her life, her family, and all her complicated relationships. If I had finished this book, I predict that I would have given it 3 stars.

Gerry says

I started reading my first Fay Weldon and very quickly became very involved and intrigued by the plot and it's setting. It was unusual in the way it was set in a future 'now', but not so very far future 'now'.

At one point the main character, Frances - who is written as narrator - invites you to put the book down, give up and do something else and this I found I could not do.

However later the pace slows and phrases are repeated from earlier in the book. Whether this is supposed to reflect the age of the 80 year old Frances, or whether it is just a padding technique I don't know, but I believed Frances to be very lucid for an 80 year old and these things irritated me.

All in all an enjoyable book.

Laura says

"Time somehow bypasses these profound personal affronts, as water will flow around and not over a stone. The current may smooth the worst of the jagged bits of hurt but not so you'd particularly notice. There's the rock, still there, harder and more obdurate than anything else. These are affronts to one's identity--and it is a matter of identity: one's very being--if you are prevented from making the connection between you now and you then, it sends you off into an alternative universe not of your choice and not of your liking."

Wow! I really enjoyed Weldon's exploration of an aged author's blurred perception of the reality around her, and the stories she has concocted in her head. Unreliable narrators can be great fun. All the more so when they have a dry sense of humor. Given a rating of 4.5 stars or Outstanding. I'll hopefully add to my review in the next few days.

Pjr says

Excellent book - never liked Fay so much when I was younger and she seemed more radical I guess I am not as black and white in my opinions any more and have mellowed, as has she :) - glad she has turned to Faith, makes a very good read - very funny and chillingly true to what happens in our societies - highly recommend

Mason says

Fay Weldon set her latest novel "in a speeded-up future," the Telegraph explains. It's "a parallel future London of 2013, where the recession has caused Britain to become a dictatorship," says the Independent's

review of the book. By then “it has become apparent,” reads the Guardian’s review, “that recession is not a temporary departure from the norm but an awakening from a happy but foolish dream of prosperity into a grim and enduring reality: this is how it is and it will go on like this, only worse.”

“The country has gone seriously to the dogs,” the Telegraph says. “It is being wrenched back—or not—by a National Unity Government. Resources are scarce except for those in charge of doling them out. The rest make do with National Meat Loaf, rumoured to owe its high protein content to the most obvious, and disgusting, of sources.”

Read the rest of the review on my website, *Failing Gracefully*.

Jan Millsapps says

This book is the best Weldon novel in years - styled as an octogenarian might write her mishmash of memoir and fiction - and confusing the distinction between them. Sometimes repetitive in recalling her complicated past (as if possible dementia is setting in). When she thinks she's uncovered a plot to overthrow the dystopic government (at the hands of her own grandchildren), she can't be sure whether she's just made this up or if it's really happening. Clever, sassy, classic Weldon.

Kathleen says

I admit I have not always appreciated Fay Weldon’s writings over the many years of her notable career. However, this latest novel is intriguing on so many levels. Set in 2013, in England, the central character is 80 year old Frances, who is based on the baby Fay’s mother miscarried when the author was a toddler. Why certain personality and behavioral traits were ascribed to Frances and what, if any, connections to Weldon’s family are never explained.

The novel is both a biting satire and a love story, a story of bright, talented, artists and writers, scientists and activists, of living well and facing eviction over a 50 year span of time. The stories of friends, family, lovers, children, and grandchildren reveal important truths and moments of epiphany that shape Frances’ life and also continue to connect the dots among many of the important people in her life. The details of life in 2013 and the years that led to that (i.e., described as Shock, Crunch, Squeeze, Recovery, Fall, Crisis, Bite and National Unity Government) are too close to our own reality to dismiss as fiction.

Book Wormy says

Chalcot Crescent Fay Weldon
?????????

I really wanted to like this book more than I actually did, its my favourite genre dystopian fiction and its set in the present day but with a twist, however I just didnt really connect with it.

Fay Weldon imagines a world in which instead of having a miscarriage her mother instead gives birth to another daughter, Frances.

Frances the imaginary daughter is the narrator of the story 80 odd years old and living in an England that while vastly different from today is still recognisable including references to current well known personalities (Sarkozi, Brown, Leman Brothers etc) world events follow what has in fact happened and then diverge.

England is now run by an invisible coalition known as NUG, the population are fed on National Meat Loaf suitable for vegetarians, and young revolutionaries gather to plot a bloodless coup.

Against this back drop Frances reminisces about her promiscuous past, her failed relationships and her extended family often incorporating fantasy scenes into her story.

The premise of this story is very good but I found all the interconnecting relations difficult to keep track of although this does seem to reflect to a certain extent Fay Weldon's real life.

An interesting story but for me it lacked the punch of a Margaret Atwood dystopian novel.

Ciara says

set in a dystopian near-future/alternate universe in which the current financial crisis has calcified into a new world order. set in England, which is being run by the national unity government, a quasi-dictatorship comprised of social scientists. Frances, our 80-year-old narrator, lives alone in the home she bought her ex-husband out of after their divorce. She had been a well-known author & playwright in her younger days, but blew through her money while everyone else was blowing through their money, thinking the good times would never end. Now she struggles to get by & has complicated relationships with her two daughters & various grandchildren.

Her ex-husband's son by another woman is now an adult & forms Frances's grandchildren into a revolutionary cell bent on kidnapping a high-ranking NUG official (who happens to be Frances's son-in-law) & staging a bloodless coup. They make Frances's house their home base, & Frances makes the decision to, first, try to prevent the kidnapping by warning her daughter. But in the process, she learns a long-kept family secret & decides not to prevent the kidnapping. Instead, she waits until it's done & she's alone with the captive, & then she alerts NUG.

&...yeah, that's pretty much the whole plot of the book. Most of what surrounds this is Frances's recollections of her youthful dalliances, her writing career, & the financial & political changes that took place, bringing the world to its current configuration. Apparently Frances is & was a radical feminist, & is sympathetic in some respects to the aims of her grandchildren's revolutionary goals, but she is also jaded by age & experience & has a lot of pointed things to say about youthful idealism & naivete in politics. I really enjoyed that aspect of the book a lot.

The writing dragged at times. It took me a while to get into Weldon's tendency to repeat the same phrases again & again. At first, I wasn't sure if it was a narrative device, or if she'd just forgotten that she'd already used that exact same wording a time or two already. But the plot & the characters kept me going, & I'm glad, because I found the story really engaging. I finished the book in just a few hours.

Petra Chase says

The saying 'don't judge a book by its cover' has never been so relevant. I really don't know why I picked up this book from a used book store in Chaing Mai, because it has plants on the cover and the title sounds like it comes from a kitchen sink novel. But my copy of the book is full of folded pages and pen marks, because there is so much wisdom and so many quotes that I didn't want to forget. It's like listening to a cynical grandmother talk about her younger years, with the volume turned up. It really made me learn to appreciate the acquired wisdom of the elderly and listen to my grandmother more!

Favorite Quote: "The stropky three year old looms so large in the mother's consciousness, she is astounded to find it is so tiny and helpless when she picks it up from preschool."

Leeny says

Actually, I really enjoyed this book - wasn't very interested in the beginning, but by the end I thought it was very clever, above all in its discourse on human nature.

El says

Dystopia! Feminism! What more do I need!

No, really. What more do I need? Because this was missing something.

Parts of this book were incredibly awesome. The fact that it's an alternative universe version of the life of a sister Weldon never had is appealing to me, so appealing. Let's take that life that never was and make a story out of it. Let's set it in a time that's pretty much now, today, and recognizable in different ways, yet so different that we can't recognize it yet... but we can recognize that it's close to happening.

I think there's a glimmer of genius here.

This is the first book by Weldon that I've read which is sort of surprising in its own right because she is considered (like Margaret Atwood or Joyce Carol Oates) to be a "feminist writer". You think I'd have read all 29 of her books and had serious thoughts about all of them. But this is the first. I picked it because of the dystopian premise and also (yes) because of the beautiful blue, Europa Editions cover. I don't often go by the cover, but those Europa Editions (like the NYRB covers) turn me on in ways most books do not.

I'm fascinated by the storyline but in the end felt cold. Not in a dystopian-world-lends-itself-to-a-cold-feeling way, like one would hope. But in a I'm-not-sure-the-author-was-convinced-in-what-she-was-saying way. Which is a huge bummer. (Note: Here comes to really unfair part of my review...) When I read Atwood, there is an aloof feeling I get, like I can't quite reach the characters but yet I can relate to some of them in really surprising ways. I feel like Weldon was going for the same approach here - an antiseptic, cold bathroom floor tile, hard look at these characters. It just didn't quite reach the same level as Atwood's writings. See? Unfair. I know.

I'm not so disappointed that I refuse to read more by Weldon. I think she has something that I want or need when I read, but this particular book might just not have been the one, despite all signs pointing otherwise.

Lisa says

What if events of the past few years turned out a little different? What if someone who wasn't ended up being so? How would the world be different? Fay Weldon takes on these questions and blurs the lines of perception and reality, fiction and history in the clever, engaging "Chalcot Crescent."

Frances, the narrator, is an 80-something woman in the London of the near future, where the sociologist/psychologist-run National Unity Government (or "NUG") has taken over. Not as touchy-feely as it sounds, this government has its own rules for society. But the book's not really about that; it just forms the backdrop. Frances -- a fiction writer, presented in the intro as the sister Fay lost when her mother had a miscarriage -- moves back and forth between the past and the present, detailing her lovers and friends and family history as her grandchildren plot against the NUG and she's stuck in her house on Chalcot Crescent.

What is Frances imagining and what is real? Are her children everything they seem? And what's really in National Meat Loaf since it's "suitable for vegetarians" -- or is it? Less a cautionary tale than a glimpse at what we might have to get used to, "Chalcot Crescent" is at turns wryly funny and wistful, gently and honestly exposing the various weaknesses most of us would demonstrate in the face of changes we don't fully understand.
