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978-0-521-15377-5 - Eudora Welty: The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by Pearl Amelia McHaney

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EUDORA WELTY

The Contemporary Reviews

The American Critical Archives is a series of reference books that provides representative selections of contemporary reviews of the main works of major American authors. Specifically, each volume contains both full reviews and excerpts from reviews that appeared in newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals, generally within a few months of the publication of the work concerned. There is an introductory historical overview by a volume editor, as well as checklists of additional reviews located but not quoted.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Eudora Welty's writing and photography were the subject of more than one thousand reviews, of which more than two hundred are collected here from American and British sources. From the first, reviewers loved Welty's language but disparaged her lack of plot. Their eager anticipation of the next book is rarely diminished by the shock of reading entirely new styles of writing. Her work was admired even as it challenged its readers. The reviews selected for reprinting here represent the diversity of Welty's reception and assessment. Reviews from small towns, urban centers, noted fiction writers, professional reviewers, academics, and everyday readers are included. The comments of reviewing rivals such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Nation* and the *New Yorker*, when read side by side, reveal the nuances both of the reviewers and of the work of this important Southern writer.

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Series editor's preface

The American Critical Archives series documents a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public on the part of reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals. Although it would not be feasible to reprint every review, each volume in the series reprints a selection of reviews designed to provide the reader with a proportionate sense of the critical response, whether it was positive, negative, or mixed. Checklists of other known reviews are also included to complete the documentary record and allow access for those who wish to do further reading and research.

The editor of each volume has provided an introduction that surveys the career of the author in the context of the contemporary critical response. Ideally, the introduction will inform the reader in brief of what is to be learned by a reading of the full volume. The reader then can go as deeply as necessary in terms of the kind of information desired – be it about a single work, a period in the author's life, or the author's entire career. The intent is to provide quick and easy access to the material for students, scholars, librarians, and general readers.

When completed, the American Critical Archives should constitute a comprehensive history of critical practice in America, and in some cases England, as the writer's careers were in progress. The volumes open a window on the patterns and forces that have shaped the history of American writing and the reputations of the writers. These are primary documents in the literary and cultural life of the nation.

M. THOMAS INGE

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Introduction

From the start of her career, Eudora Welty was praised and plagued by the dichotomies of being from the South but having a universal point of view, of being a woman yet writing short fiction comparable with the best of her day, of keeping her own literary circles without being unduly swayed by publishers or fashion. Nearly always, her work was admired for the individual, dense, rich style, yet, nearly as often, it was criticized for lack of plot and for complex, abstruse description.

Remarkably, the reviews of Welty's *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (1941) identified the strengths and weaknesses of this first collection and of the writing that was to follow, stereotyped her writing for good and for bad, and found kinship with great writers and painters, American and foreign. Rose Feld, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, linked Welty's writing with that of Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, Kay Boyle, and Katherine Anne Porter, calling the short stories by these writers a "peculiarly feminine genre" with a "quality of mood which surrounds and gives meaning to the incident." For the next forty years, reviewers congratulated Welty on the mood she created in her fiction while counseling her to build more plot. Louise Bogan praised *A Curtain of Green* for Gothic elements as fine as Poe's and for the details that recalled the writings of Gogol before concluding that Welty's success was limited to the Southern region.

Katherine Anne Porter's introduction to *A Curtain of Green* was both a boon and a noose to Welty's career. Drawing from Porter's introduction, the *Kansas City Star* reviewer said that Welty had "done well to stay at home where she belongs" and went so far as to assume that she tended "to her own knitting in her Jackson, Miss., home, paying no heed to literary fads and fancies." Reading Kay Boyle's excerpts from Porter's introduction, we recognize the source of the myths that have fixed the beliefs of generations of readers: Welty as homebody, simple, hardworking (as opposed to talented), Southern, solitary, and, finally, Welty as a writer without a "'militant social consciousness.'"

Time and closer readings have shown some of the early reviewers to be amiss. In *A Curtain of Green*, for example, Rose Feld found only "The Petrified Man" coming near to "showing a sense of humor" and believed that Phoenix Jackson's ultimate purpose in "A Worn Path" was to get the pinwheel toy for her grandson

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rather than to get the medicine to relieve the damage caused by swallowing lye. The *Times Literary Supplement* reader erroneously assumed that Ruby Fisher of “A Piece of News” was a Negro. Despite such stereotyping, reviewers of the first collection of stories laid the groundwork of identifying significant themes that recurred in later fiction. Arthur J. Carr writing for *Accent* found in Welty’s stories a “moral paradox: that the meaning of the action depicted is greater than the persons of the story comprehend.” He pushed further, articulating perhaps the first feminist reading of Welty’s texts, saying that he felt an “absence of fertility or the revulsion from it.”

The reviews of Welty’s first book also indicated the range from which reviews of her work would continue to come: the big New York reviewing agencies of the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*; national magazines including the *New Yorker*, *Nation*, *New Republic*, and *Saturday Evening Post*; regional papers from Jackson, Memphis, and New Orleans; reviewers’ columns from cities as widespread as Chicago, Boston, Kansas City (and later San Francisco); literary journals, libraries’ and publishers’ reviewing media, and international papers such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Time and Tide*. The reviews of Welty’s initial fiction, prior to Welty befriending Elizabeth Bowen, prior to being published in the *New Yorker*, prior to writing America’s necessary novel, were remarkable in their wide perspective.

Welty’s stories garnered attention by winning prizes, but before her second collection was published, she wrote *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), an “American fairy tale” set on the old Natchez Trace. Marianne Hauser, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, said Welty “took a big jump, left psychology, common sense, and the short-story writer’s good-will far behind to tell a most wonderful fairy tale.” Lionel Trilling, writing for *Nation*’s readers, however, thought Welty’s writing too consciously simple, filled with “coy mystification.” Other reviewers, agreeing with either Hauser or Trilling, found *The Robber Bridegroom* either a small classic of high invention or a failure to entertain or to enlighten. Not until a reprint of the novella that brought about a review published in Australia in 1982 did the bridegroom’s rape and the heroine’s sexual pleasure attract attention.

Throughout Welty’s career reviewers compared her writing most often to William Faulkner’s work. Her characters, themes, Southern settings, masterful narration, and sometimes the level of difficulty earned her the company of Faulkner’s readers long before his 1950 Nobel Prize. This was fitting, for Welty was reading Faulkner in the 1930s and championing him as early as 1947. Reviewers compared her stories to those by master storytellers Anton Chekhov, W. Somerset Maugham, Katherine Mansfield, Kay Boyle, Katherine Anne Porter, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen. Katherine Woods called Welty the “American Isak Dinesen.”

For her humor reviewers variously compared Welty with Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Laurence Sterne, Ring Lardner, and Flannery O’Connor. For

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the breadth of her narration and complexity of relationships, especially in the novels, Welty suggested Faulkner, Henry James, Dickens, Jane Austen, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. Reviewers compared Welty's story cycle *The Golden Apples* to similar collections by Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner, and Porter. Testaments of the poetic nature of Welty's descriptions were references to William Wordsworth, Walter de la Mare, Arthur Rimbaud, Emily Dickinson, even Ovid.

As Welty's reputation grew, so did her influence, evidenced by mention of contemporaries and younger writers such as John Cheever, William Maxwell, Wallace Stegner, Reynolds Price, Alice Munro, and Anne Tyler. Erskine Caldwell and Carson McCullers were frequently mentioned for their depictions of similar Southern settings. We see in this company of fellow writers that Welty's work was comparable with the best – for many reviewers, *was* the best.

The visual artists whom reviewers referenced for comparison range from Rembrandt, Breughel, and Matisse to Pissaro, Seurat, and Dali. Welty is described as a painterly writer whose descriptions are sensual, colorful, synaesthetic, and harmonic. The musician they mentioned most often is Mozart.

Reviewers read Welty's second story collection *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943) with high expectations: two of its stories had won O. Henry Awards ("The Wide Net" first place in 1942 and "Livvie Is Back" first place in 1943) and a third was included in the 1943 *Best American Short Stories* volume. Each reviewer seemed to have a different favorite, yet overall many were clearly disappointed and consequently strained to figure out what had been lost or what was different from Welty's previous writing. *New Republic*, *Time*, *Partisan Review*, and *Nation* all condemned *The Wide Net* stories as too aesthetic, artificial, humorless, not of the real world. These reviewers were eloquently answered by Paul Engle – "that quality of prose, unsurpassed in America" – reviewing for the *Chicago Tribune Book Review* and by Robert Penn Warren in a seminal essay "Love and Separateness" for *Kenyon Review*. Warren wrote, "Perhaps we should look at a new work just in terms of its effects and not in terms of a definition of type." Engle and Warren had had significant roles in publishing Welty and fought to keep her in the public eye as well as to boost her writing critically. They were two of the "literati" whom later reviewers would charge with puffing up the public's reception of Welty. Yet the gang rape in "At the Landing" went unmentioned by nearly all. Jean Stafford writing for *Partisan Review* understatedly referred to this violence as "a seduction" that leads to the "subsequent collapse of [Jenny's] social position."

The political camps that had begun with *The Robber Bridegroom* and that continued with *The Wide Net* met at *Delta Wedding*. The novel, many suggested, was just a regional woman's book with no plot, written too poetically, without a social moral. Diana Trilling wrote, "I find it difficult to determine how much of my distaste for Eudora Welty's new book, *Delta Wedding*, is dislike

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of its literary manner and how much is resistance to the culture out of which it grows and which it describes so fondly.” In *Delta Wedding* Welty’s prose was on “tiptoe” according to Trilling, as she described what she saw as the sentimental past in a novel in which “nothing happens.” As with *The Wide Net*, reviewers complained of too much “atmosphere” and too little action. The *Christian Science Monitor* reviewer, Margaret Williamson, wrote, “There isn’t any suspense or crisis or noticeable sex appeal.” In this text, too, the reviewers missed the violence such as Uncle George’s rape of the wild girl whom Ellen encounters in the woods. William Holder (*Nashville Tennessean*) described Welty as a “distinguished regionalist” and was pleased with the lack of drama typical in the contemporary bestsellers by John Marquand, Daphne du Maurier, and Thomas B. Costain, for example: “In a day when the psychiatric novel, with its dingy explorations of the abnormal, and the full-blown ‘historical’ novel, slicked out in period finery and sex, have had such a run, ‘Delta Wedding’ is as refreshing as a sojourn beside a quiet, clean pool.” More than a half-century later, we have come to recognize the political, psychological, and historical inherent in *Delta Wedding*.

As Welty was derided and simultaneously praised for being a regional writer, the “literati” read her seriously. Her friend Nona Balakian, by whom she had been trained during her 1944 summer internship with the *New York Times Book Review*, argued that Welty recognized both the region’s and human beings’ complexities on her own terms. “The undertone of Miss Welty’s novel,” wrote Balakian, “is not gay” (*Tomorrow*, July 1946, p.74). John Crowe Ransom came to her rescue in *Kenyon Review*. And Elizabeth Bowen, before she and Welty had met, gave *Delta Wedding* a positive review in the *Tatler and Bystander*. Charles Poore of the *New York Times* recognized that Welty was continually ahead of her time in subject and in style, but Orville Prescott, also a daily reviewer for the *Times*, reviewed *Delta Wedding* for *Yale Review* and disagreed.

The structure of Welty’s next book, *The Golden Apples* (1949), befuddled reviewers. They settled most often on calling it a chronicle, though it was also described as an episodic novel, a sequence or string of stories or narrations, cantos, or a series of sketches. Harvey Breit (*New York Times*) thought that the “stimulating form” of *The Golden Apples* might “[c]onceivably . . . become a worthy invention within the short story genre.” Indeed, the form of this book that Welty refused to have called a novel or a collection of stories was the most controversial aspect that the reviewers debated. Francis Steegmuller (*New York Times Book Review*) thought that the book could succeed only when read as a whole so that the weaknesses of the individual parts could be excused and the “enchanted” pleasures could be understood. The reviewers disagreed about the successfulness of myth in the cycle, but all admired Welty’s imaginative powers. Hamilton Basso remarked that Welty was “not a lesser writer” when compared with Faulkner (*New Yorker*); Lee Canon (*Christian Century*) recognized the

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“suppressed desires and frustrations” of the characters; and Theodore O’Leary (*Kansas City Star*) applauded Welty’s excellent use of dialogue. (Several years later he complained of the “monotonous monologue” of *The Ponder Heart*.) But *The Golden Apples* also had its naysayers: Emmett Dedmon (*Chicago Sun*) found no reading pleasure in the book; Margaret Marshall (*Nation*) wanted every Southern book to be a polemical crusade. She wrote that the “device of ‘our town’” was a trap for sentimental Americans and that one was “scarcely ever made aware of the mixed racial background which must surely affect the quality of life.” Still, many reviewers hailed *The Golden Apples* as a “classic,” an opinion borne out by scholars who continue to regard this book as Welty’s finest achievement.

Welty never repeated herself, so reviewers reading each text independently of the last forgot, for the most part, the weaknesses they might have noted earlier. Each text was a new experiment with new characters, new organization, and/or new genre. *The Ponder Heart* first appeared in a single issue of the *New Yorker* (December 5, 1953) where three of Welty’s stories had appeared during 1951 and 1952. Published to acclaim in book form in 1954 (“a pleasant addition to a small number of comic novels with real literary merit,” wrote Paul Sampson, *Washington Post*), *The Ponder Heart* was the most positively received of Welty’s books. It was also selected as the alternative selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club for May 1954 and, adapted by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, opened on Broadway in January 1956. Reviewers generally forgave the brevity of *The Ponder Heart* because of the humor, the pacing, the language, and the imagination. The “sardonic comic brio” (V. S. Pritchett, *New York Times Book Review*) was easy to read and, unlike Welty’s previous books, offered few challenges. For some it was Welty’s finest work yet, a tour de force. Reviewers bandied about Uncle Daniel and Edna Earle, trying to decide who should be the center of attention. Although Harold Rubin writing for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* found it “too cute,” the *Nation* reviewer limited his response to three lines, and several British reviewers faulted the work. R. F. Grady’s opinion seemed to suggest the novella’s prevalent reception: *The Ponder Heart*, he wrote, was “one of the best introductions to a superior writer of our times” (*Best Sellers*).

On the heels of *The Ponder Heart* came *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories* (1955), a collection of seven stories written and published between 1949 and 1954. The excitement about *The Ponder Heart* put a comparative damper on this new set of stories about which the reviewers labored to find some kind, true words; “for discriminating readers,” Riva Bressler wrote in *Library Journal*. Orville Prescott spoke the frustration that many felt: Welty “persists in denying her own best gifts” by imitating the “faults” of Faulkner and Bowen (*New York Times*). It was difficult, however, to fault Welty, for “The Burning” had won the second-place 1951 O. Henry Award, and she had just won the Howells Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts

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and Letters. Her hometown newspaper quoted Welty saying that she regretted that there was no truly “funny story” in the collection (Frank Hains, *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*). The book as a whole failed to elicit overall praise, but the reviewers debated the merits of individual stories: “The Burning” and “Circe” were both the best and the worst story for some readers. Again, mood, atmosphere, poeticism displaced decisive action and memorable characters. Although the title of John K. Sherman’s review sounded positive (reviewers rarely create the headlines), “Seemingly Casual Touch Creates Rare Insights,” Sherman’s reading captured the critical point of view that dominated assessments of Welty’s work during the silent years that pass before her blockbuster novel *Losing Battles* appears in 1970. He smelled “only a whiff of a plot” and wrote that the “defect seems to be . . . a kind of spinsterish lack of participation and passion” (*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*).

The Bride of the Innisfallen represented the close of Welty’s short-story career. One hopes that she was sufficiently caught up in the dramatic production of *The Ponder Heart* to prevent her from reading the onslaught of negative reviews. They would have been cause enough to stifle her production of short stories. As it happened, it was the brutal murder of Medgar Evers that ignited a fictional response in 1963 (“Where Is the Voice Coming From?” *New Yorker*, July 6). This and one other story, “The Demonstrators” (1966), are collected with her four volumes of short fiction in *The Collected Stories*, 1980. Between *The Bride of the Innisfallen* and *Losing Battles* (1970), Welty published a children’s story, *The Shoe Bird* (1964), and nonfiction: occasional pieces, essays, and book reviews. “The Optimist’s Daughter” was published as a long short story in two parts in the *New Yorker* in 1969.

Finally, on her sixty-first birthday in 1970, the long and long-awaited novel *Losing Battles* was published. No reviewer remarked that Welty had changed publishers after eight books with Harcourt Brace. This work, the first with Random House, because it was a novel and because Welty had been relatively silent for so long, garnered more than 150 reviews, more than for any of her other work, more even than for the Pulitzer Prize novel, *The Optimist’s Daughter*. Nearly all the reviewers mentioned the extraordinary length, the multitude of characters (more than thirty), the Southern setting, and the style of “talk, talk, talk,” that some saw as “dramatic,” others as “a risk . . .” at which Welty “almost succeeded.” None perceived that Welty was modeling her dialogue novel after the style of Henry Green. Although a few complained and called the battle lost, the plot nonexistent, the setting all “atmosphere,” and the pace “lumbering,” (*Library Journal*) the majority were pleased with Welty’s ninth book, her first in fifteen years. *Losing Battles* was hailed a classic, the last of the big Southern family novels of manners. Reece Stuart (*Des Moines Register*) thought that it “may well be her masterpiece”; he praised it because it “deals not at all with the issues that dominate modern Southern writing.” Several reviewers warned readers to be patient, to savor the “human comedy” (Louis

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Dollarhide, *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*). Indeed, the comic elements and the family themes were the most discussed aspects of the novel.

The reviews of *Losing Battles* were typical of the overall critical opinion of Welty from the first: she was highly regarded for her wit, her stylistic experiments, her wide range of genres, and her portrayals of human relationships. She was equally limited, however, by the lack of action-filled plots, by the poetic aestheticism that was difficult to penetrate, and by her innovations. Reviewers outside the South either understood Welty or were bemused and befuddled in turn. Several of the most perceptive reviews of *Losing Battles*, for example, were from Minneapolis and London. Anne Cawley Boardman recognized “Miss Julia’s lifelong crusade to overcome the deep-seated apathy and ignorance of the locality” (*Minneapolis Star*), and Elaine Feinstein reviewing a 1982 Virago edition of the novel for the *Times* in London noted the subversive possibility that this same Miss Julia Mortimer, the schoolteacher, might be the mother of orphaned Gloria Renfro. Regardless of their particular opinions, reviewers were quick to admit that Welty was a master and that her writing was appreciated, even when not understood. The critics who loved Welty but disliked her writing were often the ones who misunderstood that which lay outside the norm of their expectations.

In the following year Welty published *One Time, One Place* (1971), a selection of photographs that she took as “snapshots” in Mississippi during the Depression years, many of which she had tried to publish in the late 1930s. One reviewer noted that while Welty was not a Walker Evans or a Cartier-Bresson, she was a “competent amateur” (*New Republic*). The reviews were positive, recognizing the photographs as social documents showing compassion and telling stories. Although the reviewers often quoted from Welty’s “Preface,” only a few recognized the significance of Welty’s description of the moment when she chose writing instead of photography. Tina Rathborne used *One Time, One Place* to identify what was missing, she believed, in Welty’s fiction and challenged Welty to “imitate the solidity, the involvement with things that matter in *One Time, One Place*” in her next novel (*Harvard Crimson*).

If everything about *Losing Battles* gave reviewers opportunity for negative criticism that they felt compelled to explain away, *The Optimist’s Daughter* was a reviewer’s delight. In this straightforwardly plotted short novel, the theme of death resonated universally. The characters were memorable, particularly a secondary character, Fay, who, for one reviewer, was “one of the bitchiest villainesses in American literature” (Robert Evett, *Washington Star*). A few reviewers even argued that Fay was more interesting than the ‘forgettable’ protagonist Laurel (Robert Lucid, *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin*). Although still set in the South, *The Optimist’s Daughter* was more contemporary than Welty’s other novels. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* stated, “This, whether we like it or not, is the way we are” (“After the Funeral,” May 21, 1972). Christopher Wordsworth called it a “woman’s book,” but also said that “Few books

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about the South – this is essentially about Southern phariseeism – have been so short and uncluttered with cobwebs and magnolias” (*Manchester Evening News*). The novel, likened to those by James and Austen, was a wise, philosophical book. Not all reviewers were pleased, of course: for some the writing was too subtle or the symbols were too obvious, but across the top of a copy of James Boatwright’s review in the *New Republic*, Welty wrote this note to her friends the Maxwells: “Dear Bill and Emmy, I was so happy over this review I wanted you to see it – Love, E – ” (Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History). The humor in *The Optimist’s Daughter* differed from that of the early comic stories and one reviewer noted that it was “sadder than *The Ponder Heart* as *The Tempest* is sadder than *Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (Thomas Stahel, *America*). The United Kingdom reviews were decidedly mixed, some not understanding the humor or the language, others finding believable portraits. *Le Figaro*’s brief review was accompanied by an interview with Welty, to which she wore “a canary-yellow dress that only an American dare wear” (Jean Chalon). Welty was daring in all that she wrote, but only Bruce Allen recognized what the scholars would identify and discuss in the ensuing years: “One senses, perhaps wrongly, that here we have the catharsis of an intensely personal drama” (*Library Journal*). *The Optimist’s Daughter*, though this was not foreseen at the time, was Welty’s last published fiction. She continued during the next fifteen to twenty years to refer to writing she wanted to get back to, but she kept busy with other projects and did not finish any fiction she had begun.

Now a Random House author (*Losing Battles*; *One Time, One Place*; *The Optimist’s Daughter*), Welty collected her nonfiction – essays, book reviews, and occasional pieces – in one volume titled *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews*, named for her essay about Katherine Anne Porter, the writer who had been her earliest champion. Having won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Optimist’s Daughter*, Welty, now sixty-nine years old – retirement age for most professionals, was beyond criticism. Welty’s essays revealed her to be an imaginative, emotional appreciator of fiction rather than an intellectual critic, but the reviewers accepted the collection because it demonstrated such love of and pleasure in reading. She was old-fashioned and conservative enough in her taste that one reviewer (Cathy Curtis in the *Daily Californian*) wondered what Welty would say of the experimental fiction of the day. By far the most commented-upon occasional piece was “Ida M’Toy” about Jackson’s ex-midwife. Overall, the reviewers agree that *The Eye of the Story* sent one back to reread Welty and to read those writers that she loved.

Published in 1980, the *Collected Stories* included Welty’s two previously uncollected stories from the 1960s. These two, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” and “The Demonstrators,” received the most attention in the reviews, but surprisingly, “First Love” and “A Still Moment” were often singled out for comment whereas the 1940s reviewers had generally found them oblique. Most

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reviewers ruminated on the experimental range and bounty of fiction in the one volume, acknowledged their favorites, and praised Welty for her long and successful career. Mary Lee Settle, an accomplished writer herself, argued once more that Welty was neither a regionalist nor a moralist (*Saturday Review*). Guy Owen said that Welty should win the Nobel Prize (she was nominated several times) and described her fiction as “intensely feminine”; he observed the sexual initiations and the violence that had been overlooked in prior decades (*Southern World*). With so much to select from, there are few negative comments, though Robert Towers saw little that was worth while between *A Curtain of Green* and *The Optimist's Daughter*.

What is left for a writer once her nonfiction and her short stories have been collected, once her career has been summed up, reviewed, and awarded every prize save the Nobel? Once again, Welty was ahead of fashion when, in 1984, she published her autobiography before memoir was *de rigueur*, at a time when telling one's story was still reserved for statesmen and notable figures. Welty wrote *One Writer's Beginnings* as a series of three lectures to inaugurate the William E. Massey Lectures in the History of American Civilization (1983). The revised lectures published by Harvard University Press became a bestseller for Welty and for Harvard University Press.

We can now see that *One Writer's Beginnings* was the final creative writing that Welty was to publish. Her remaining projects were retrospective; all were organized by their publishers and essentially edited by others. Welty helped to select the images for *Photographs* (1989), provided information about them, and gave a long, informative interview that began the book. The collection complemented Welty's fiction and demonstrated her vision and empathy for people. The reviewers raised excellent questions about why so many of Welty's subjects were black women, and why so few were white. How did these snapshots from the 1930s resonate with the FSA photographs by Walker Evans, Margaret Bourke-White, and Dorothea Lange? What might be understood about artists who cross genres, painters who photograph as well as writers who do so?

Photographs reprinted only a fraction of Welty's negatives; *A Writer's Eye: Collected Book Reviews* presented all the book reviews that Welty wrote during her lifetime. Reviewers noted both what can be learned about Welty's writing and what can be learned about book reviewing itself. Carol Shields read the collection as a “sort of subjective biography” (*Times Literary Supplement*), and Frederic Koeppel said that Welty held the same standards for other writers that she held for herself: passion and courage. He quoted a paragraph about Ross Macdonald's *The Underground Man* and said, “Every writer, from ink-stained journalist to Nobel Prize-winning novelist, should tape that paragraph to his word processor” (*Memphis Commercial Appeal*).

Although she did not win a Nobel prize, in 1996 she was awarded the French Légion d'Honneur, and in 1998, a few months before Welty's

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ninetieth birthday, the Library of America published two volumes of her writing: *Complete Novels* and *Short Stories, Essays, & Memoir* collecting all the fiction, nine essays, and *One Writer's Beginnings*. Reviewers gleefully recounted their favorite stories. Read anew or reread, the fiction gave pleasure, laughter, and awe. The work illustrated Welty's craft, her aesthetics, and her themes. Nearly every reviewer made the significant note that Welty was the first living author to be honored by having her work collected in the Library of America series. Tom Nolan quoted Library of America editor Max Rudin, who said that Welty's place in the canon was "'obviously secure . . . she's universally admired among her fellow writers; she's had an enormous influence'" (*Wall Street Journal*). These reviews bordered on hagiography and appreciation the likes of which Welty had been chastised for in her reviews of Elizabeth Bowen's work. The edge in the reviews was in the cautions: "You have to read carefully," said Fred Chappell (*Raleigh-Durham News and Observer*). Other reviewers agreed, and though they admired language, wit, human character, lyricism, and her brilliant success, they still found no plot in her novels. The Library of America volumes gave reviewers the opportunity to assess Welty's long, successful career, to compare her with other writers once again, and to find her work still equal to Chekhov's, Austen's, and Faulkner's.

Welty's final book before her death in 2001, *Country Churchyards* (2000), gathered significantly less notice than did her first story collection in 1941. Her involvement in assembling this book was minimal, but her photographs of churches and gravestones taken in the 1930s were supplemented with selected texts from the 1940s to the 1970s and were introduced by her friend and fellow writer Elizabeth Spencer. The reviewers of *Country Churchyards* responded with the nearly clichéd "delight," but also noted that Welty's photographs could be analyzed as documents of memory.

Welty and her reviewers lead us back to her writing. Rather than looking for her under your boot soles, find her in her books.

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I am appreciative also of the Interlibrary Loan staff at the Georgia State University Library, especially Marjorie Patterson and Maggie McMillan, who obtained copies of hundreds of reviews for me. Beginning in the 1960s, Eudora Welty began donating her papers to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Hank Holmes, director of the MDAH, and Forrest W. Galey, custodial curator of the Welty Collection, not only gave valuable assistance, but also offered friendly encouragement. I benefited also from the analyses of Welty's short fiction by W. U. McDonald, Jr., Diana Pingatore, and Carol Ann Johnston. I am much indebted to Welty scholars Hunter M. Cole, Suzanne Marrs, Noel Polk, Bethany Swearingen, and Victor H. Thompson for the extensive Welty bibliographies they have published. Their work in identifying and cataloguing the majority of the reviews made my reading and selection possible.

I thank also Eudora Welty for her generosity of friendship in the early stages of this project and Tom McHaney for his kindness, encouragement, and love.

The editor wishes to thank the following newspapers, journals, and individuals for permission to reprint reviews:

Kingsley Amis for a review of *The Ponder Heart* from *Spectator*, October 29, 1954.

Paul Bailey for "Awful Relations" by Paul Bailey from *London Magazine*, June–July 1973, and "Gloriously Ordinary" by Paul Bailey from *Times Literary Supplement*, June 4, 1982.

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Baltimore Sun for a review of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* by Reid A. Hoey, April 10, 1955.

Sven Birkerts for "From Her Rooted Place" by Sven Birkerts from *Oxford American*, November 24, 1998.

Books and Bookmen for a review of *The Optimist's Daughter* by Oswell Blakeston, August 1973.

Boston Daily Globe for "Survival – Strangest Fantasy of All" by Margaret Manning, May 22, 1972, and "Losing Battles – A View of Life in Mississippi" by Patricia Meyer Spacks, May 2, 1970.

Peter Buitenhuis for "When Gossamer Becomes a Brittle Network" by Peter Buitenhuis from *Globe and Mail*, June 10, 1972.

The Bulletin Company, *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin* for "What We Flee" by Robert F. Lucid, June 4, 1972.

Hortense Calisher for "Eudora Welty: A Life's Work" by Hortense Calisher from *Washington Post Book World*, October 26, 1980.

Catholic Accent (Greensburg, Pennsylvania) for "Books" by David Gibson, June 4, 1970.

Catholic World for a review of *The Golden Apples* by Clorinda Clarke, November 1949.

Chapel Hill Weekly (North Carolina) for "A Mississippi Scrapbook" by Walter Spearman, November 21, 1971.

Fred Chappell for "Living Legend" from *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 23, 1998.

Charlotte Observer for "Eudora Welty: Learning to Love at an Early Age" by Dannye Romine, March 11, 1984.

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Cleveland Press for "He's Pessimistic Over Optimist's Daughter" by Tom Alverson, May 26, 1972.

Columbus Dispatch (Ohio) for "Mississippi Kinfolk Posed for a Portrait" by Minnie Hite Moody, May 3, 1970.

The Commonweal for a review of *Delta Wedding* by Louis A. Collins, June 21, 1946, a review of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* by Jean Holzhauer, April 29, 1955, "People of Clay" by Edwin Kennebeck, January 22, 1954, and "Books" by Linda Kuehl, September 18, 1970.

Curtis Brown Ltd. on behalf of the estate of Elizabeth Bowen for "Book Shelf" by Elizabeth Bowen from *The Tatler and Bystander*, August 6, 1947, and "Elizabeth Bowen Reviews The Golden Apples" by Elizabeth Bowen from *Books of Today*, September 1950.

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Carolyn Gerrish for a review of *The Robber Bridegroom* by Carolyn Gerrish from *Womanspeak* (Sydney, Australia) November–December 1982.

Charles East for “The Welty Photographs” by Charles East from *Southern Review*, Spring, 1990.

Paul Engle for “3 Volumes Stress Vitality of American Short Story” from *Chicago Tribune Book Review*, October 10, 1943.

Evening Standard (London) for “Gone West Down South” by Arthur La Bern, March 20, 1973.

Financial Times for “Fiction” by Martin Seymour-Smith, March 22, 1973.

Fort Worth Star Telegram for “The Bride of the Innisfallen by Eudora Welty” by Harold Monroe, May 15, 1955.

Phyllis Franklin for a review of *Losing Battles* by Phyllis Franklin from *The Cabellian*, Autumn 1970.

Wade Hall for “Welty Novel a Dazzling Linguistic Tour de Force” by Wade Hall from *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 10, 1970.

Harvard Crimson for “One Time, One Place: A Mississippi Album” by Tina Rathborne, December 1, 1971.

Hudson Review for by Robert M. Adams, 7 (Spring 1954), copyright © 1982 the Hudson Review Inc., and for an excerpt from “Some Old Worlds, and Some New Ones Too” by Harvey Swados, 7 (Autumn 1955), copyright © 1983 the Hudson Review Inc.

Frances Ivy for a review of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* by Frances Ivy from *Commercial Dispatch* (Columbus, Mississippi), March 27, 1955.

Jackson Clarion-Ledger for a review of *A Curtain of Green*, January 11, 1942, “Eudora Welty Praised by Writers and Periodicals,” April 17, 1955, “The Lady of Letters Collects Her Work” by Sarah Bonassin from *Jackson Daily News*, November 7, 1980, “Miss Welty Magnificent in Newest Short Pieces” by Frank Hains from *Jackson Daily News*, April 10, 1955, “New Welty Work Taps Talented Mind’s Eye” by Leslie R. Myers, January 17, 1984, and “Welty’s ‘Shoe Bird’ Soars Wider with New Edition” by Leslie R. Myers, November 14, 1993.

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Nation for “The Gothic South” by Louise Bogan, December 6, 1941, a review of *Losing Battles* by Robert J. Griffin, June 1, 1970, “Notes by the Way” by Margaret Marshall, September 10, 1949, “A Storyteller’s Appreciations” by Robert Shaw, June 24, 1978, “Fiction in Review” by Diana Trilling, October 2, 1943, “Fiction in Review” by Diana Trilling, May 11, 1946, and “American Fairy Tale” by Lionel Trilling, December 19, 1942.
New Orleans Times-Picayune for “Literature and Less” by Elise Beauchamp, August 28, 1949.
New Republic for “In Brief,” February 12, 1972, “The Violent Country” by John Peale Bishop, November 16, 1942, “The Continuity of Love” by James Boatwright, June 10, 1972, “Full-Length Portrait” by Kay Boyle, November 24, 1941, a review of *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* by Reynolds Price, November 1, 1980, “Consolations of Poetry” by Isaac Rosenfeld, October 18, 1943, “Double Standard” by Isaac Rosenfeld, April 29, 1946, a review of *The Eye of the Story* by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., April 22, 1978, and “The Last Good One?” by Jonathan Yardley, May 9, 1970.
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- Tom Nolan for “Eudora Welty: Enduring Life, Enduring Work” by Tom Nolan from *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 1998.
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- Publishers Weekly* for a review of *Losing Battles*, February 23, 1970, a review of *One Writer’s Beginnings*, January 6, 1984, and a review of *Country Churchyards*, May 8, 2000.
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- Louis D. Rubin, Jr., for “Five Southerners” by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., from *Hopkins Review*, Spring 1950.
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for “Eudora Welty Says Much in Short Stories” by Ernest Kirschten, June 26, 1955.
- St. Paul Pioneer Press* for “Family Life Is Theme of Eudora Welty’s Novel” by James Gray, April 14, 1946.
- Peter Schmidt for “Welty: Reviews and Criticism” by Peter Schmidt from *Mississippi Quarterly*, Autumn 1996.
- Sewanee Review* for a review of *Photographs* by Stuart Wright, Summer 1990.
- Carol Shields for “Wafts of the South” by Carol Shields from *Times Literary Supplement*, August 12, 1994.
- Springfield Republican* (Massachusetts) for “Eudora Welty’s Fantasy Will Delight the Minority that Enjoys Airy Madness in Exquisite Prose” by L. S. Munn, November 22, 1942, and “Stories Too Green to Burn” by Sarah Schiff, January 11, 1942.
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- The State* (Columbia, South Carolina) for “Words of Wisdom” by Thomas McHaney, May 28, 1978, and “Miss Welty Wears Two Hats Well” by William W. Starr, December 17, 1989.
- Tampa Tribune* for “Belief is the Loser” by Francis J. Thompson, May 24, 1970.
- Time Inc. for “Cloud-Cuckoo Symphony” by George Dangerfield from *Time*, April 22, 1946, and “Sense and Sensibility” from *Time*, September 27, 1943.
- Times Educational Supplement* for “Story bored” by Victoria Neumark, June 15, 1984.
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- Tomorrow* for a review of *The Wide Net* by Katherine Woods, November 1943.
- Anne Tyler for “The Fine, Full World of Welty” by Anne Tyler from *Washington Star*, October 26, 1980.
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- Virginia Quarterly Review* for “Notes on Current Books,” Autumn 1972, and “Women Interpret Women” by George Herbert Clarke, Winter 1943.
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Elizabeth Ward for “Welty’s Parrot Gives Children Bird’s-View of Learning”
by Elizabeth Ward from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 20, 1994.

C. Vann Woodward for “Southern With Her Own Accent” by C. Vann
Woodward from *New York Times Book Review*, February 19, 1984.

The Wylie Agency for “The Details of Death” by Paul Theroux from
Washington Post Book World, May 14, 1972.

Jonathan Yardley for “Pattern and Passion” by Jonathan Yardley from
Washington Post Book World, May 7, 1978.

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A note on the selections

More than a thousand book reviews have analyzed, assessed, and/or promoted Eudora Welty's nineteen titles published between 1941 and 2000. Some two hundred are reprinted in this selected collection, followed by a checklist of additional reviews for each publication. The selected reviews represent the opinions of professional reviewers, writers, readers, and academics. I chose reviews that would illustrate a variety of opinions without showing my personal prejudice for the texts under scrutiny and without ranking the reviews as positive or negative. A conscious effort is made to demonstrate how one particular reviewer or publisher maintained or varied his or her judgment of the writing as Welty's career developed. I selected reviews that show both the trends and the idiosyncrasies of reviewers' assessments. I have aimed to present a diversity of opinions from various media, from rural and urban, and from various geographical areas. Typographical errors such as misspellings are silently corrected; however, reading errors, such as misidentifying a place or character, are retained because such errors can tell us about the reception and reading of a book. In all cases I intend that my selections will encourage the rereading of Welty's writing for the formation of further analysis, criticism, and enjoyment.

Reviews for the numerous limited editions of Welty's work produced by small presses are not included here. Reviews of three reprint editions of stories – *Selected Stories* (Modern Library, 1954, which contains *A Curtain of Green* and *The Wide Net* collections), *Thirteen Stories* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), and *Morgana: Two Stories from 'The Golden Apples'* (University Press of Mississippi, 1988) – are not included. Reviews of *In Black and White* (Lord John Press, 1985, photographs) and *The Norton Book of Friendship* (1985, co-edited with Ronald A. Sharp) are not included. *Eudora Welty: A Bibliography of her Work* by Noel Polk (University Press of Mississippi, 1992) is a complete listing and description of all of Welty's writings including these particular works not represented by reviews in this volume.

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Reviews of translations of Welty's works are listed in the "Additional Reviews" sections for each work, but my research of foreign reviews and of reviews of translations is by no means exhaustive. Translations of some of these reviews have been published in the *Eudora Welty Newsletter*.

The reviews in this volume are reprinted in full except where the review was a round-up or an essay-review of several titles. In those cases ellipses indicate where material irrelevant to the review of Welty's book is left out. The reprinted reviews are arranged according to the chronology of their publication. All known reviews not reprinted here are listed under "Checklist of Additional Reviews" for each publication, the anonymous reviews listed chronologically and the authored reviews alphabetically. Included in the checklists are brief notices, editor's choice lists, paperback printings, etc., as well as reviews with readings similar to the ones expressed in the reprinted reviews. I have distinguished between reviews and essays that are more or less analytical pieces written by academics and published in scholarly journals; the latter I have not included here. I have made every effort to read and verify the information for all the reviews included in one way or another in this collection. However, some details, of course, eluded my sleuthing. Reviews without complete publication information can be located in the Eudora Welty Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.