



Complete Novels: The Robber Bridegroom, Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, Losing Battles, The Optimist's Daughter

Eudora Welty, Richard Ford (Editor), Michael Kreyling (Editor)

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This two-volume collection reveals the singular imaginative power of one of America's most admired Southern writers. "Complete Novels" gathers all of Welty's longer fiction, from "The Robber Bridegroom" (1942) to her Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Optimist's Daughter" (1972).

Complete Novels: The Robber Bridegroom, Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, Losing Battles, The Optimist's Daughter Details

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From Reader Review Complete Novels: The Robber Bridegroom, Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, Losing Battles, The Optimist's Daughter for online ebook

David says

"Delta Wedding" in particular is a masterpiece. For lack of a better description, her writing is as symbolically rich as Joyce, her work as lyrical as DH Lawrence or even Nabakov, and yet she's enormously undervalued in spite of her reputation. People usually cite Faulkner as the South's most important writer. I prefer Welty.

Iliana says

Delta Wedding, The Ponder Heart, and The Optimist's Daughter are three of my all-time favorite books. You feel the sweat, smell the food, and hear the crickets as you read about the South in Welty's books. She is one of the best story-tellers ever.

Nicole Northrup says

I had already read "The Optimist's Daughter," which is the last novel in the collection. It is absolutely her best! While Eudora Welty has the ability to make you feel, smell, and taste her world, I found the first novels to be very dated. The dialect and sensory language are just perfect. They do evoke the Mississippi of her youth!

Kaylee says

I was pleasantly surprised by The Robber Bridegroom -- I have varying degrees of hatred for all of Welty's short stories -- and thought perhaps I would like her other novels. Turns out that was my high point.

Welty was queen of capturing the south -- all of the ugly bits of it. The thing was, her writing makes it seem like she was perfectly fine with, say, the racism. I can't get past that. Each story or novel is populated with truly awful people; I think the only reason I liked The Robber Bridegroom was because it was more fantastical than her other work and I was surprised.

Meg M says

I have to read three of her stories for this half-assed "humanities" class I'm taking this semester. I've read two of the three, and I really hate these stories. I read reviews of her work and I was excited to be introduced to the works of such a highly acclaimed writer, but this is just disappointment and frustration.

The stories are "Powerhouse" (took a week to read it twice; had to read it twice to see if there was something I'd missed) and "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," which I had trouble finishing because the character named Steve is so frustrating.

Also, when he knocks Max into the dirt, Max doesn't do anything. What kind of shit is that? Max is so adamant that Steve is lying about Keela that he brings Steve all the way out to see Little Lee Roy, but doesn't seem to care that Steve knocked him down in the yard. I call bullshit. Nobody who has to be that right about everything would ever just take a punch like that lying down.

Jim Leckband says

The Robber's Bridegroom

Delta Wedding

The Ponder Heart

Losing Battles

The Optimist's Daughter

Brett McLay says

"The Ponder Heart" -- Welty is a national treasure.

Paul Jellinek says

This has all her novels in one volume. LOved them all--except "Losing Battles," which was a real disappointment. So tedious and unWelty-like, in fact, that I couldn't finish it. "The Ponder Heart," on the other hand, was terrific, and "The Optimist's Daughter" was even better: a flawless gem of a book that was even better on this second reading than it was when I first read it about five years ago. One of the great American novels of the 20th century.

Rick says

Eudora Welty's novels, like her stories, are fascinating for the light they shed on life in Mississippi in the early to mid-20th century. Most noticeable are the strong family ties and the penchant for storytelling that makes the past one with the present. These traits both define and limit the characters, giving them a place in the local society but in many cases preventing them from breaking out of stasis. People live by a code that doesn't make sense in every application, and Welty implies that, for all Mississippi's virtues, one's chance to develop may come from moving away. This is reminiscent of Quentin Compson's going to Harvard (which

seems to annoy virtually all the southerners I know), but then again, Quentin Compson's sojourn ends in suicide. I recommend Welty to anyone interested in American literature or the literature of the south.

Donald Yates says

I started with The Robber Bridegroom, which is the first novella. It reads like a medieval tale set in the swamps of Louisiana. Juvenilia? Delta Wedding moves in the direction of realism and stronger local color. Boy, do we get tired of that family, every time they sit down to dinner! I'm going to wait to read the others.

Anna says

Finally finished! It was a long slough. The writing is very fine. The portrait of Southern life it presents is exasperating and it's not hard to see how the hardness and blowhardness manifests itself in the political rhetoric we see today. These are a people who are tribal, proud, and poor. But they are also warm, accepting, and always ready with a laugh or story. Welty unveils it all, in a style that's vaguely folkloric. The love of story whether it be gossip or family history is omnipresent.

Meredyth says

A little bit of everything....humor, raelism...the necessity for humor in the face of realism. life is in tragedy..so see the life...don't miss a single detail because each is part of the story..and we are all in a story...that is how human Welty simply is.
try to get a book of her photgraphs..it is the same.

Karen says

I'm currently reading Losing Battles, which is a sprawling novel set in rural Mississippi in the 1930s. And wow, is it rural! Almost no one has a telephone and the local store is closed on Sundays. Each episode is quite drawn out, with a lot of talking, talking, talking, but it's quite humorous.

I've read the other novels in this collection years ago and Delta Wedding is my favorite. All her novels deal with eccentric Southern families, for whom she undoubtedly has great affection.

Robin Friedman says

Eudora Welty's Novels In The Library Of America

I became interested in reading further in Eudora Welty (1909 -- 2001) after reading a recently published volume of her correspondence with her friend and editor, William Maxwell. What There Is to Say We Have Said: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and William Maxwell Thus, I read this Library of America

volume which includes Welty's complete novels. A companion volume in the Library of America includes her stories, for which she is better known, together with her essays. *Eudora Welty : Stories, Essays & Memoir* (Library of America, 102) When the Library of America published its two volumes of Welty's writings in 1998, it was the first time that the series had published the work of a living American writer.

Welty was born and lived her entire life in Jackson, Mississippi. All her novels are set in Mississippi and have a strong, precise local character. Yet each is an individual work. It is difficult not to fall in love with the state and its people in reading Welty. In addition to writing, Welty had a strong professional interest in photography which shows, I think, in her novels. The books show a strong interest in description, both of places and people. Many passages have an almost photographic quality of a writer with a sharp eye, but the books capture nuances of meaning and thought that photographs can develop only rarely. Of the five novels, four are short. Welty takes small scenes and places and works them closely. The long novel, "Losing Battles" is itself a collection of small scenes and stories joined together. There is a great deal of humor in the novels, but in precision and detail of the writing, they make demanding reading. The novels span much of Welty's lengthy career as a writer. She published her first novel in 1942 and her final novel in 1972. This Library of America volume includes each of the novels together with a valuable chronology of Welty's life and short textual notes. My brief thoughts on each of the novels follow below.

Welty's first novel, "The Robber Bridegroom" (1942) is a short, historical work set in the late 18th Century. It is a mixture of legend, fairy tale, and realism told with humor, quickness, and style. The characters include the legendary, swaggering riverboat man, Mike Fink. The story is a contrast of innocence and naivety with greed and cupidity. The book is one of two Welty novels that became a Broadway play.

Set in a small town in the Mississippi Delta in 1923, "Delta Wedding" (1946) is quintessential Welty. The book describes the wedding of young Dabney Fairchild, 17, of a close-knit wealthy plantation family, to Troy Flavin, 34, the overseer of the family plantation. The short book moves slowly and deliberately as it offers a portrayal of a family, the Delta in all its aspects, and change. A major character in the book, George Fairchild, shows exuberance in his acceptance of life and people.

Welty received the William Howells Medal for Fiction for her short novel of 1954, "The Ponder Heart." This novel also became a Broadway play and musical. The book tells the story of a decaying Mississippi family when one of its more eccentric members marries into a family commonly described as "trash". The book is told in the brilliantly unreliable voice of one Edna Earle Ponder who describes small-town Mississippi, a murder, and a trial. It is an enigmatic comedy that may bear a variety of readings.

Fifteen years separated "The Ponder Heart" from Welty's next novel, the lengthy "Losing Battles" which was shortlisted for the National Book Award. This book is set in northeastern Mississippi in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression. It takes place during a family reunion for the birthday of a family matriarch. The book is a series of humorous short stories and vignettes that Welty wrote over the years and pieced together to form the novel. The major character is young Jack Renfro who has just escaped from Parchman Prison one day before his scheduled release to attend the reunion. In this long story, Welty describes her poor, hardscrabble people unsentimentally but with love. The reader comes to know almost every aspect of them.

Welty received the Pulitzer Prize for her final and I think best novel, "The Optimist's Daughter" (1972), which is set in Mississippi, New Orleans, and West Virginia. This is the only Welty novel which includes a significant autobiographical element. It tells the story of change and of clashing personalities in values in the conflict between the major character, Laura McKelva, 44, and her father's second wife, Fay, 40 following the death of Judge McKelva. "The Optimist's Daughter" is a story of place, loss, loneliness and, ultimately of accepting oneself and moving ahead with life.

Welty was a writer rooted to place. In her sense of locality and detail, her works describe a particularly local way of life and yet reach towards the universal. I enjoyed reading this subtle and demanding American writer.

Robin Friedman

Heila says

Enjoyed the first story.

Bogged down on the second, and am now moving on from this book/collection. She has some stunning turns of phrase though.

For Example, the below description of a girl on a train. I so enjoy train travel and this so wonderfully describes it:

"Thoughts went out of her head and the landscape filled it. In the Delta, most of the world seemed sky. The clouds were large--larger than horses or houses, larger than boats or churches or gins, larger than anything except the fields the Fairchilds planted. Her nose in the banana skin as in the cup of a lily, she watched the Delta. The land was perfectly flat and level but it shimmered like the wing of a lighted dragonfly. It seemed strummed, as though it were an instrument and something had touched it."

Has anyone else read her? If so, I'd really like to discuss her sometime. I wonder if she was trying in her writing some things that were going on in the rest of the art world of the time. Because I got a kind of Picasso-like distortion thing going on. It was weird.

You have to be really on it with short stories because they're so dense, so maybe right now in my life it's not a good time for the rest of hers...
