



Edisto

Padgett Powell

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Simons Everson Manigault ('You say it 'Simmons.' I'm a rare one-m Simons") lives with his mother, an eccentric professor (known as the Duchess), on an isolated and undeveloped strip of South Carolina coast. Convinced that her son can be a writer of genius, the Duchess has immersed Simons in the literary classics since birth ("Like some kids swat mobiles, I was to thumb pages") and has given him free rein to gather material in such spots as the Baby Grand, a local black nightclub. ("It was an assignment. I'm supposed to write. I'm supposed get good at it.")

Edisto Details

Date : Published April 15th 1985 by Holt McDougal (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780805013702

Author : Padgett Powell

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels, American, Southern, Young Adult, Coming Of Age

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From Reader Review *Edisto* for online ebook

Jim says

It always concerns me when someone compares a book to *Catcher in the Rye*. It's done too often and I've yet to find a book that truly measures up to Salinger's classic. But I try and not let it put me off and to judge every book on its own merits. Of course now I've read *Edisto* I can see why people might want to compare it to *Catcher in the Rye*—they're clearly wanting to compliment Powell on a job well done (and he has done a good job, no arguments there)—but it really doesn't need to be compared to anything for that to be true.

Edisto is a coming of age story but there are hundreds of those and its protagonist, Simons Manigault (pronounced 'Simmons'), really has little in common with Holden other than a distinctive voice and a daft name. Both narrators styles are distinguished by certain stylistic ticks but Simons's tone is the more affected of the two and his unnecessarily-convoluted narration makes this a far harder read than I expected; you have to concentrate to follow him and his sentences are not short. Your typical twelve-year-old—if there even is such a thing—he most certainly is not.

Edisto is a place. It's in South Carolina. And it's tiny. New York it is not. More people live in a New York city block than in the whole of *Edisto*. And yet Simons and Holden do have one thing in common: their problems stem from their families. Of course most pubescent boys think that and a lot of the time it will be true too. Simons refers to his father as the Progenitor and his mother as the Doctor although the local blacks call her the Duchess. His parents are separated and he lives with his mother who believes her son to possess a capacity for literary genius:

Well, it's true [that aged three] I couldn't tie a shoe or stop wetting the bed, but those Golden Books never gave me a problem. And then it was on to all these award children's books about contemplative rabbits, and llamas that talk and go both ways, which I didn't know at the time was preparing me for faculty parties.

[...]

Some get to goo-goo, I had to read.

Now he's twelve and as literate and literary as any English professor although probably nowhere near as articulate; left to his own devices he's developed his own idiosyncratic—and often both entertaining and amusing—approach to communication, part slang, part dialect but mostly the kind of words kids his age have never heard of and wouldn't be interested in using if they had.

There's not much story to *Edisto*. The boy bums around on his own—not unreasonably he doesn't have a huge circle of friends but the nothing's huge in *Edisto*. He spends most of the book hanging around with a guy he calls Taurus and doesn't seem to mind being called Taurus even though that's not his name. Here's how we're introduced to Taurus:

We are well into that kind of dance this evening when Taurus shows up. Elbows on the drain counter, I am keeping my weight off my ribs and watching the food cook when I see him. You do not know what in hell may be out here on a hoodoo coast and I do not make a move. What follows is not nearly so ominous as I would sound. He don't ax-murder us or anything like that. Yet there is something arresting about this dude the moment you see him. He is shimmery as an islander's god and solid as a butcher. I consider him to be the thing that the Negroes are afraid of when they paint the doors and windows of their shacks purple or yellow. His head is cocked,

his hand on the washtub of the Doctor's old wringer, its old manila rolling pins swung out to the side. When he comes up to the screen, I know I have seen his face before.

That's the assignment. To tell what has been going on since this fellow came trying to serve a subpoena to we think Athenia's daughter and scared Theenie so bad it about blued her hair. Before he came I spent most of my time at the Baby Grand—Marvin's R.O. Sweet Shop and Baby Grand, where I am a celebrity because I'm white, not even teenage yet, and possess the partial aura of the Duchess ("The Duchess boy heah!"). And I look like I hold I my liquor ("Ain't he somp'm."). The trick there is to accept a new can when anybody offers and let your old one get drunk by somebody else.

Why exactly his mother takes to and, more importantly, trusts this man who has appeared as a process server—and does indeed carry out that kind of work during his short stay—and maintains he's the grandson of their maid, Theenie I have no idea. Nor am I sure why Theenie hightails out of there when he arrives leaving her accommodation empty for him to move straight into. But "the assignment" Simons's mother gives him—basically the book she asks him to write—is a what-I-did-this-Summer kind of report. And that's what he does, he says what he and Taurus get up.

What Taurus and his mother get up to he's oblivious of until it's too late. Although he's not stupid he's only a certain kind of clever and Life really has to beat him about the head and neck to get him to pay attention to stuff that most normal folks would've cottoned onto within minutes. But that's part of his charm. There's a bit of a Huck Finn about him too which never hurts but really not much happens and the book's real pleasure is in the boy's descriptions of his life. *Catcher in the Rye* it is not. Nor is it *Huckleberry Finn*. Some have hated it and I can see why. I can see to why some might've given it five stars but to my mind that's being blinded by style over content and you need both to my mind. For me Powell doesn't pull it off. I far preferred *You & Me*.

Benjamin Rathbone says

As far as books about seeing life through a child's eyes go, this is the best one I've read. The main character, Simons Everson Manigault, is a lot more learned than your average child as his mother, called by him the Doctor and by the locals the Duchess, is preparing him to be a famous author one day. He's a young white boy that regularly hangs out at the local juke bar, populated by 1970s black folk.

But he still carries all the same inexperience and innocence as a young boy struggling with his parents's separation. Then a mysterious man without a name - Simons quickly dubs him Taurus - shows up, and he finds a potential father figure or best friend.

This is a slice of life kind of book, one that champions that phrase about the specific being universal, that can leave you looking at a lot of little things in a different way. Powell's distinctive language, meandering but always poignant, sets it apart and makes it shine.

Pete says

I started this book years ago, but finally finished it this past week, very very glad I did. The comparisons to *Catcher in the Rye* are imprecise, but there's not really a better way to peg a story seen through the eyes/mind

of a seethingly intelligent young man. Simons feels at once older and younger than HC, and is far less of a dipshit, because he knows how much he has to learn about the world and can admit that tenderness. The last 50 or so pages really take off--it turns out you need to read in the world of Edisto for 150 pgs before Powell can demolish it completely. I should confess I worked on getting this book published as an e-book, so I am not completely unstained by commerce here, but cot damn, this book.

Here's a triumphant sentence fragment from the third to last page, about life changes:

"... some new profession, name maybe, no regrets, no losses, no cumbersome ideas of what he is or is to be, no freight train of future ideas bearing down on him, no comet of good old days burning him to a cinder of constantly failing memory."

The gnarled voice can slow you down a bit, and not-a-ton happens in this book, but that's the point, in fact.

update: here is every line i noted in my reading of this book. rare book that really picks up as it goes. the last third is so great.

... everybody in that book (a book Simons read) sounded like these Dobermans I heard about at the Grand. They feed them ashes in their food, which somehow lowers the oxygen in the blood, and when they grow up they don't believe in anything, except maybe killing, and even the handler has to wear a football suit, more or less, and throw meat to wherever he wants them to go.

[Simons misidentifies condoms]

I found these gold-coin-like deals almost like candy mints, except, thank God, light enough to tip me off before I tried to eat one. Then I thought they were amusement-park tokens or pirate doubloons you buy drinks with in a resort-town bar or something. Then I figured they were gambling chips from the Bahamas, where they'd been on a trip. Gambling chips--I was close.

You can wait to know something like waiting for a dream to surface in the morning, which if you jump up and wonder hard you will never remember, but if you just lie there and listen to the suck-pump chop of the surf and the peppering and the palm thrashing and feel the rising glare of Atlantic heat, you can remember all the things of the night. But if you go around beating the world with questions like a reporter or federal oral history junior sociologist number-two pencil electronic keyout asshole, all the answers will go back into mystery like fiddlers into pluff mud. You just sit down in the marsh and watch mystery peek out and begin to nibble the air and saw and sing and run from hole to hole with itself. Lie down and the fiddlers will come as close to you as trained squirrels in a park. and how did [Taurus] teach me that? I don't know, but you don't need a package of peanuts or anything.

Well, a master sets a precedent and it is available for all the trials of posterity. And I am posterity.

tune in one of these weather-farm-fishing shows where the guy sounds like a very young grandfather, and in two hours you know whether to cut tobacco or go fishing or stay in bed, and you have this cozy feeling because a grandfather like that is free, and useful to all of us. He talks about Russians and crime and rain, and his voice never changes
smelling the coast in that gently howling pagoda at 3 A.M.

things like this piled up on me, little nothings that seemed like somethings

seeing Daddy's car parked a little crooked in the driveway

somehow they would all be insulted if I went about trying to sift action out of what I considered actionless events

Once, thought, [his fighting parents] worked up to the ignition point, and she said, "It's over. Get out."

"Hell, it's my house. You get out." And beat her to the bedroom. That one tickled me.

But it's still kind of hard to lie there hearing all this, even though some of it's funny. Too much of it's about you, in the third person, when they could just get you in there for your opinion instead of relegating you to misfit. Hell, I would have told them all they needed to know. They'd have both been jaked up if they had asked me. I don't know how they ever managed to dream that they had an object, like a commodity on a market they had to invest this way or that. And finally, there was a feeling I had that they had quit being themselves in favor of my becoming themselves, as if they were sacrificed to me. They assumed this sacrifice willingly together and only later on discovered that there were two lives being gambled on one.

willing gentlewomen from the low country

Taurus's girl was shabby where mine was shiny, loose where mine was tight, and I had already taken a heavy fall for her because of those jaw-breaker eyes

nothing to call the bureau of standards and measures about

big wobbly blessing

walking incitement to riot

big, wonderful, warm girls who are just a hint upset about things

I can worry about round, wonderful girls with their edges ruined by life's little disasters, who remain solid and tough in their drive to feel good--to themselves and to you [slightly icky but it's in character and feels true to the development of male desire]

I was a reader turning pages written some time ago, discovering what happened next

We go to Savannah, the closest place you can find an Episcopal layout. Right down in the slums, people already holding tallboys and blinking in the rising glare, we hit this pocket of new cars and a cathedral. All the dirt and smoke butts and dead banana trees changes to the soft, stained panes of biblical wonderment; and fresh acolytes with red-and-white robes and white faces and red lips carry gold candles; and the priest puts on twenty sashes and linen underthings and gold-braid overthings until he sweeps when he walks; and gold emerald-studded pikes get carried around, with three prongs for the Trinity; and the people kneel and stand and sing and kneel and pray on red velvet cushions that swing down for your knees like footrests under Greyhound bus sets, but of the finest, heaviest, wood-pegged oak, not bent pot metal; and the sermon intones with catchphrases like "more and more"; and the creeds, Apostle's and somebody's, get done; and then we pray, and then we line up for Communion. The Father wipes the silver chalice with a beautiful linen rag large as a small tablecloth, turns the cup two inches each time to keep you from having to drink where the last worshipper lipped it, as if that takes care of the germs. But I don't care, I always reach out very piously--that's to say, in slow motion, the way you move for some reason to take and eat the body of Our Savior--reach out and lay my hand over the Father's in somber reverence to the moment and then press down as the silver rim clears my upper lip and suck a slug of wine that should have fed six communers. I have to, because the bread of His body is stuck to the roof of my mouth like a rubber tire patch, and if I can't wash it loose by swishing His blood around, I'm going to have to dig it off with a finger, in slow motion, and possibly gag.

She was what they call a good soldier

heavy news

if the good old days were on a respirator, I'd do them the service of going around and pulling the plug

it don't need no news conference

I took them to fend off the future

Daddy took me outside and said he'd be back, was going into town on "new business." I caught that odd modifier and noticed he was new. His suit was without wrinkles. Even his skin looked smoother. My idea of him all along was one of these modern store mannequins with stark wood-cut faces always too darkly stained and expressing some dire problem despite the perfect poise with which they model a new suit

a heavy woman carrying on like some folk were cruising for a caning if they didn't shape up.

And miles become kilometers, shacks condominiums, marsh marina, and I feel like one of those bullet-shaped birds in Audubon's drawer

So don't get down on your mother if she's drunk a lot, demanding, promiscuous, imperious, or anything. Because you might be wrong, you might not see the good soldier marching all along down in the trenches, for you. And you might be an igno, after all.

Margaret said some people had regular hopes still

Because once upon a time she was a regular polite heroine in the small-town world of young virgins

engaged to a handsome dude with papers

Here the playwright always turns the screws with something like the girl catching her dude in another man's arms

It's like an outcross in dogs or horses. If she'd got that first dude, it would have been severe ideological inbreeding, and I might be shy or vicious or something. This way, the way Vergil tells it anyway (he breeds bird dogs), I can be a "good athlete," which means not baseball but just a solid individual partaking of two separate strengths and not two compounded weaknesses, I hope

It was that he did not know what his life held and so studied it very closely

then-next

now-next

now-now

without a congenital blessing or a disease

apropos of all this horseshit

roads deliberately curve everywhere when they could go straight

i'll just watch the photographs yellow

He'd never be so eager to frame and crop the past, because that poses the present--you have to pose it to photograph it. And that means you can't take the future in its full array of possibility, because you're fixing to have to compose it for the present snapshot. It's all square, very square.

It's like when you watch TV sports with instant replays. You don't even get caught up in the live play, because if you miss something you just run back in and see the great action you missed--the scenes already past which make the game you never saw so memorable.

no regrets, no losses, no cumbersome ideas of what he is or is to be, no freight train of future bearing down on him, no comet of good old days burning to a cinder of constantly failing memory

So that's me. This is my motto. Never to forget that, as dully as things get, old as it is, something is happening, happening all the time, and to watch it.

is like living in an architect's model

now we have furniture that *will not* make noise

Lisa says

Unusual prose, some of it blistering. And by "some of it" I mean two sentences. The rest is annoyingly self-important blather. Sure, the author flouts convention. But convention is there for a reason, in this case READABILITY.

What seems inventive and fresh in snippets quickly becomes grating. Grating like that person behind you in the movie theatre eating malted milk balls one after another, chewing furiously. Grating like the woman in the cubicle next to you at work scratching her head with the tip of a steel nail file. Scritch scritch scritch. You know what that noise is only because you kept hearing it and snuck a look. Aren't you sorry now?

Martin says

This character is a near perfect creation even though Simons is twelve and has a bigger vocabulary than Ernest Hemingway. Powell's writing inspires trust and the reader doesn't question that this boy talks this way. His mother, the Doctor, wants Simons to be a great literary star. He's supposed to be writing a novel at her request. His mother drinks at home while his father, the Progenitor, has left after a disagreement with the Doctor over how to raise Simons. Soon, a surrogate takes his place, whom Simons calls Taurus. Taurus initiates Simons into black culture (Taurus is mixed race) by taking him drinking at the Grand where Simons meets Jake, et al. Finally, Simons realizes Taurus and his mother have been lovers, just before the Progenitor moves back in. The prose is electric and full of irony. Powell's syntax is distinct, the language rich and fresh. A pleasure to read, Edisto took me only a day to finish. I recommend highly and plan to read it again and again.

Brynn says

This is a book that I will read again in ten, five, or maybe two years. It was beautifully written from the perspective of a young boy growing up in a small town around the Prohibition Era. I can't say I understood all of it, but it was beautiful. The plot can be disjointed in a way vaguely reminiscent of Steinbeck's writing. I will come back to *Edisto* to visit its beaches, the Baby Grand, and the strange world of this boy.

(After rereading, 1/31)

The writing is still as lovely as the first time I read it. The speech patterns of the main character are challenging at first, but they add to the atmosphere of the story. Simons Everson Manigault is smart, thoughtful, and someone I hope I would have been friends with if we grew up together. A Huckleberry Finn type with more booksmarts.

Vit Babenco says

Practically every time I am tempted to read critically lauded book it turns out to be far below my expectations. But actually it's a small wonder – critics serve the publication industry and establishment and not a reader.

The twelve year old hero has a grownup's advanced vocabulary and child's rudimentary thoughts clearly induced by the author himself.

"Between living and dying, she had made two mistakes. One was letting her daughter go to New York to be a singer, and the other was letting them take her daughter's baby from its grandmother, herself, who got there in time to get it and take it home and raise it right, whether he was half white or not and sick. It was the sick that got him away from her, the sick that her daughter gave it, junk in it. Her daughter in New York messed up on drugs and taking things called fixes got the baby away from her and got her half convinced he was going to die so she let them take him and then she was never able to get him back and her fool daughter crazy enough to go to a place like that was too crazy to want him if she could have had him and she was just an old colored lady a long way from home and she left. It grinded her up to think about it and she never forgot it and she knew it was not true about having only to die and live till you die. You had to be careful somewhere in between or you could be chased by something like losing your daughter's baby because you weren't careful somewhere else, and you lost your daughter herself or she lost her sense, which is the same. You could be chased by it and even caught up with."

Edisto is too artificial to be convincing enough.

They compare *Edisto* to the work of J.D. Salinger and Truman Capote but in fact it sits between them like a spooky tooth between two fangs.

Stephanie says

I was really torn between giving this book three or four stars. I ultimately gave it four because of its strong, thought-provoking ending, which will likely stay with me for some time to come.

I didn't mind that Simons was precocious and actually found his voice and character somewhat convincing. As smart and insightful as he is in some ways, he's definitely childish in others, and not just in his lack of experience in love. His thought process is naïve; he puts ideas together in a way that someone with more knowledge of the world could not.

In other words, Simons is smart, but merely child-smart: his logic is sound, but his often-wrong conclusions reflect a child's lack of depth. *Edisto* nails the nostalgic feeling a good coming-of-age novel imparts regardless of how different you are from the main character: the way the narrating character thinks brings you back to your own child-mind and the freshness of perception—as well as the breathtaking ignorance—you had way-back-when.

The characters and world of this book are quite vivid. The other thing that edged it into being a four-star book for me was how richly imagined and described it is. I chose this book for a "mini book club" during a family vacation to coastal South Carolina and while it proved not to be the best choice for the purpose—its opaque stream-of-consciousness style put off the other book club members—it was a great way to feel more "in" South Carolina while I was there. *Edisto* helped me get below the surface of the vacation-resort world I was in for a week and leave with a deeper sense of place for Charleston and coastal South Carolina.

My main problem with this book was my unease with the book's treatment of race and gender. Before I delve further into this objection, I note that I am not one of those readers who dislikes or turns away from a book simply because I find the characters and themes disagreeable. I don't think that every classic book with racist ideas or themes should be discarded because we're more enlightened now; I simply think we need to read such books with a critical mind and reflect both on what they got right and what they got wrong.

Throughout reading *Edisto*, I struggled with how to deal with its antiquated views of race. Are these purely naturalistic, a reflection of how people truly spoke and thought at a specific time and place? Did the author "fast-forward" childhood memories from the 1950s or early 1960s into an era where they don't quite fit? Or is this simply a matter of the protagonist's age and the particular limitations of his personality?

While Simons essentializes the black people he observes, this could be understood as a product of his unsophisticated child-mind. Most of us are guilty of forming false stereotypes of one sort or another as children that we ideally unlearn as we grow up. The problem, though, is that the way Simons thinks and talks about race seems so antiquated that I couldn't believe a 1970s kid would think that way: this was ultimately the greatest challenge to my suspension of disbelief.

This novel is set in the Nixon era (1969-1974). It's right at the cusp of when I would find it believable for somewhat educated characters to be referring to black folks as "Negroes." I did some research on the topic and found this article, which reports that the word "started its decline in 1966 and was totally uncouth by the mid-1980s." I suppose then it's not out of the question that a Nixon-era twelve-year-old Southern white boy like Simons would use it casually and neutrally, quasi-scientifically, the way he does. But it really made me feel like I was reading a 1950s-era book rather than a 1970s-era book.

The other, bigger issue is that the most compelling theme of the novel—the struggle to maintain the ability to live in a raw, immediate present, and to resist the development of the calculating adult consciousness that ping-pongs between past and future—is so mixed up in antiquated ideas about race that makes it hard to embrace some of the book's conclusions about life as fully as I would like to embrace them.

To Simons, black adults live in a realer, more sensual world than white adults. This is a classic racist misconception that centers on condescending false ideas about the inherent "simplicity" of an entire race and one that, again, feels like it should have been on its way out by the time period in which the novel is set. Near the end of the book, Simons does show some insight that the social differences he observes have more to do with class than race, but the book rides this premise throughout: the "magical Negro" is the only person capable of evading white upper-class neuroticism.

An easy dodge would be that the twelve-year-old narrator's mind is not only *not* the author's mind, but that the gaps in Simons' thinking are fodder for the savvy reader to question. It could be argued that the book stands as a subtle condemnation of old-school white Southerners' views of race as something that could only exist in a childish mind. Yet the book resists a totally cynical interpretation, as it makes its readers feel the same longing as Simons to escape the buttoned-up, buttoned-down world of his parents, and convinces us that this must not be the only way adults can be.

Edisto makes us want to believe that what Simons projects on the world is real, that there are at least "some people" who don't become what his literary cousin dubs "phonies." It's just that the savvier among us can't accept Simons' thesis that there is an essential racial difference at work. The sad truth is that the reason we keep writing and reading coming-of-age books, however flawed those books often are, is that most adults are condemned to spend most of their lives longing for a state of being that seems forever shut up in the museum of childhood.

Tony says

Simons (just one M) Manigault is coming of age on Edisto Island. His mother is a professor, known as the Doctor or the Duchess. She's eccentric. Simons favorite picture of her is when he is pouring water on her as she lay face down drunk in the sand. His father, the Progenitor, took the picture back before the separation. He's a successful lawyer and would like to move them to Hilton Head where Simons can play baseball and go to a fancy school. Simons doesn't like baseball.

But the Duchess has a different regimen in mind for Simons, already precocious at 3. So his bassinet becomes a library. Added to this incubator is the history of Edisto (not spelled out). Once a slave port, the island swelled with free blacks after the Civil War. So Simons, at 13, reads; he writes stories; he wonders at the mystery of his mother; and he does all this as a white boy in a black culture.

I loved the language of this book. I loved the cadence. The paragraphs sound and look as if they should be put to music. Lessons, given and received.

"Another thing, you can't profane this mash pit, because of Jake's boy."

"Who's Jake's boy?"

"He's Jake's boy, but it's on the q.t. because he's in Bull Street in the retard section. I've never seen him. The story is, they fed him the wood chips for coloring the shine and he ate them like potato chips and that did it. All they meant to do was kind of slow him down so they didn't have to mind him so close, but it slowed him down further than they figured."

This book also talks about Race, without ever saying WE'RE TALKING ABOUT RACE.

I think everyone should read this.

Faith says

This was a rereading of a classic.

Jessica says

I tried...I really did, but this story just wasn't compelling enough for me. It didn't help that Powell's writing style is rather indirect. Definitely on the other end of the spectrum from Hemingway's flat, matter of fact prose. I don't have the energy to continually re-read passages to make sure that I understand what is happening.

Samadrita says

After nearly 2 months of trying to plod through this book and develop some sort of connection with it, I give up. Perhaps it's the erratic narration, the rapidly changing scenarios or a bunch of new characters appearing on every alternate page and scattering in the next one like headless chickens. Whatever it is I will have to remember that Padget Powell's brand of Southern Literature just doesn't work for me, finalist for the National Book Award or not.

I would rather spend my reading time experiencing the dizzying disorientation induced by Faulkner's narration rather than Powell's.

Graceann says

It is as if this author took a creative writing course, and then decided that they were ready to do a novel. Every novelistic cliché is present here, and it's boring beyond belief. Don't waste your time.

Petergiauinta says

I confess I'd never heard of this book or author until my own eccentric mother (shades of the Doctor?) dropped two mint copies of *Edisto* and *Edisto Revisited* on my coffee table last summer, along with a book on Mesopotamian mythology and a few other things I made her take with her when she left. I'm sure she picked them all up for a few cents at some estate sale or somewhere and I didn't really plan to read them until I was shuffling things around recently and noticed on the cover that Saul Bellow, Walker Percy and Donald Barthelme all thought this was a helluva book. And I figured those three guys couldn't all be wrong. And they weren't.

Simons Everson Manigault is a fascinating character with a great voice, but Percy is wrong in his back-cover blurb: it's not better than *Catcher in the Rye*, but that's not even the book to compare it to...*Edisto* is more like a little something Faulkner might have tossed off in between novels, if he had written a few decades later.

So I finished it today at lunch while I was eating a steak, a pretty rare treat for a Sunday meal, and I liked it so much that I picked up *Edisto Revisited* and finished my salad to that...apparently young Simons is no longer so very young in *Revisited*. I look forward to finishing it.

Trish says

For years I'd heard about folks interested to get a first edition copy of this novel, so I'd assumed it was a classic. Written in the time before Goodreads, it does not have a long history of reviews there, but I trust many members have read this classic since it first came out in 1985. Republished now as an ebook under the aegis of Open Road Media, this little gem gets a new airing.

A young boy grows up in his single mother's beachside home in South Carolina. She works all day as a professor so often leaves him to his own devices. He makes friends among the locals, his maid's friends, and chums at the local public school. Thinking that a little encouragement from birth might make a difference in his development as a writer of repute, his mother surrounds his crib with classic literature. He is given a notebook in which to record his adventures.

Our boy, Simons (pronounced *Simmons*) Everson Manigault, is twelve. He has a vocabulary that belies his chronological age, but there is much about the world he still needs to learn. The mysteries of adulthood top his list.

Written in dialect and in the sketchy way of a journal, this may be a little hard to follow at first, but rewards the reader in the end. I recommend plowing through, for by the end you have entered into the language, the time, the place, and the ethos. Circling back to the start once again, you will realize how much you understood, and how much you would still like to glean from this marvelous harvest. We understand, deep in our bones, what has happened here, and how the world, truly a mystery to an adolescent who has no grasp of larger issues, appears to unfurl in all its tattered glory.
