

EUDORA WELTY'S LITERARY STATURE



Eudora Welty is a major writer of the twentieth century, a writer of incredible range and complexity, the peer of Faulkner, Woolf, and Joyce. Her achievements were widely recognized during her lifetime: She received a Pulitzer Prize, the French Legion of Honor, the Howells' Medal for Fiction, the Gold Medal for Fiction from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contributions to American Letters, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the National Medal of the Arts. She was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters and then elevated to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. And she received honorary degrees from at least thirty-nine colleges and universities, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton among them. She was one of the most "honoraried" writers in the history of American letters. She was also the first living writer to have her work published by the Library of America, an organization dedicated to ensuring that the nation's great writers will always be in print.

Perhaps this outpouring of praise, which continues to this day, is in part due to Welty's unique vision. Her stories are always tough-minded but are also affirmative. Among writers who tend either toward nihilism or sentimentalism, Welty stands tall as a "necessary optimist," to use Jay Tolson's term. Tolson writes that Welty confronted "her beloved, maddening South at its lethal, beastly worst. . . . But the triumph of the totality of her work--and what makes her hard

to place in American literature--is a credible optimism that prevails despite her refusal to ignore what is horrible and deadly.”

THE EUDORA WELTY HOUSE



The Eudora Welty House, a bequest from Welty to the state of Mississippi, is one of the most intact literary houses in America. The exterior, interior, and furnishings of this National Historic Landmark are as they were: Paintings and photographs, objets d’art, furniture,

draperies, rugs, and above all, five thousand books are in their original places — Welty’s heirs, who inherited the furnishings, have donated them to the Welty House. The house’s interior—with virtually every wall lined with books—immediately establishes that this was the home of a reader, a family of readers, who pored over works by the best minds of the twentieth-century, as well as reading the classics of world literature. Also in the House Collection are childhood memorabilia, family photographs, and medals and certificates of literary honors that Welty received. Welty lived in the house from the time she was sixteen until her death at age ninety-two. Surrounding the house is a garden created by Welty and her mother. An historic gardening consultant has directed the restoration of the garden to its 1925-1945 design, a design conceived and put in place during those years by Welty and her mother.

Few major American writers of any century have called one place home during their entire careers and have had their creative endeavors so enhanced by that one place. Not Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Whitman, Wharton, James, Eliot, Frost, Hemingway or Fitzgerald, to name a distinguished few. But Eudora Welty did, and the place that sparked her imagination and led to her magnificent body of work is a place that we need to treasure and to study. At 1119 Pinehurst Eudora wrote letters to and received letters from her friends and colleagues; 15,000 of those letters were in the house. And at 1119, Eudora wrote drafts of all her work, cut those drafts up, re-ordered the fragments, pinned them back together, and typed more drafts, eventually completing the stories and novels that would receive the nation's most prestigious literary awards. All of the correspondence and all of the manuscripts are now at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, where they will be open for research.

Interpretations of the house and garden themselves offer profound insight into the creative process of this major American writer. Both provide a sense of Welty's personality and values; images in her fiction are drawn from both, the books which offered her inspiration are readily at hand, photographs and paintings of friends and family are everywhere, her desk and typewriter along with examples of her "cut-and-pin" pattern of revision are in place in the upstairs bedroom where she wrote.

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI



The larger Jackson, Mississippi, locale also offers insight into Welty's fiction. Original manuscripts, correspondence, and photographs are available for research at the nearby Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Medgar Evers House is now open to visitors. The courage with which Medgar Evers lived and the tragedy of his 1963 assassination are evident in this house and inform Welty's "Where Is the Voice Coming From," a story that puts readers in touch with a time of tremendous upheaval and sacrifice. Jackson's Smith Robertson Museum offers exhibits about African American history in Mississippi and in the South. For readers of stories like "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," "Powerhouse," "A Worn Path," "Livvie," and "The Burning," the exhibits help to bring alive the times and places about which Welty wrote. Those stories in turn establish the insights that fiction can bring to historical studies. Finally, the Agriculture and Forestry Museum includes the reproduction of a small Mississippi town of the early twentieth-century, the sort of town about which Eudora Welty often wrote but which few of her twenty-first-century readers have actually encountered.

WORKSHOP CONTENT AND DESIGN

Scholars have often attempted to pigeonhole Eudora Welty's fiction—some have seen it as essentially apolitical, dealing with universal issues of love and separateness. Others have discussed it in regional terms, focusing upon its reflection of southern culture. More recently,

scholars have argued that the fiction is subtly but intensely political, commenting upon issues of race, class, and gender. The diversity of these approaches suggests something about the richness of Welty's fiction, a richness that defies efforts to categorize it. The workshops will attempt to use the Welty house, the Welty archives, and the city of Jackson to illuminate this richness and provide still other strategies for interpreting Welty's fiction.

During the workshops, we will look at the way actual places and events enhance Welty's fiction and at the possible reasons her fiction diverges from actuality in its development. We will examine manuscripts and discuss the nature and effect of the revisions Welty made in the course of writing her stories and novels. We will discuss the biographical, social, and cultural contexts from which her fiction emerged and will discuss ways in which the fiction reflects or transcends those contexts. We will be able to take the study of literature beyond the distant and abstract and to link it to the concrete world of a writer's daily experience. Encountering Eudora Welty's world should prove an exciting experience and should help us all to present Welty's fiction in new and engaging ways.

Reading assignments for the Landmark Workshop are designed to foster discussions of a great writer's creative process and of the ways a great writer can enhance a reader's understanding of the nation's history and culture. Readings will therefore be placed in their biographical, archival, and historical contexts. Participants in the Landmark Workshop should arrive in Jackson having read as much of the assigned material as possible, though reading and rereading during each of the workshop weeks will certainly be feasible. Assigned readings will include: Welty's autobiography, One Writer's Beginnings; her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, The Optimist's Daughter; and ten short stories—"The Winds," "A Curtain of Green," "The

Whistle,” “Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden,” “A Worn Path,” “Livvie,” “Flowers for Marjorie,” “Where is the Voice Coming From?” and “The Demonstrators.” In addition, we will examine a number of critical and biographical essays, many by workshop faculty members.

The two weeklong workshops will make use of classrooms at Millsaps College, a four-year, liberal arts college, which is highly ranked by U.S. News and World Report, the Fiske Guide to Colleges, America’s Best Colleges, The Insider’s Guide to Colleges, and the Princeton Review, but many workshops sessions will be held outside the classroom. Each of the workshops will follow the same syllabus and will begin with a focus on the Welty house—what it reveals about Eudora Welty’s life, the way it figures in One Writer’s Beginnings, and the impact it had on Welty’s fiction. On Sunday evening of each week, Suzanne Marrs, whose award-winning biography of Welty was published in 2005 and whose critical study of Welty’s fiction was published in 2002, will provide a biographical overview of Welty’s life. Then on Monday, the biographical context having been established, Peggy Prenshaw whose forthcoming book deals with women’s autobiographies, will focus sessions on landmark interpretation. A tour will then establish what an important story the Eudora Welty House as a National Historic Landmark has to tell, a story that will enhance the experience of anyone reading or teaching Welty’s fiction. The family furniture and photo albums Welty inherited from her parents help to demonstrate the importance of family to her life and work. The five thousand books on Welty’s shelves tell us about her wide-ranging interests—her interest in Sir Arthur Eddington’s discourse on the philosophical implications of relativity theory, her interest in the comic writings of S. J. Perelman, her devotion to the novels of Jane Austen, William Faulkner, and E. M. Forster, for example. These reading interests, of course, inform her fiction. The paintings on the walls of

the house provide a key to understanding Eudora Welty's aesthetic sense, including her love of the realistic landscapes of William Hollingsworth and of the mystical landscapes of A. E. (George William Russell). The mementoes Welty brought home from her visits to New York, San Francisco, and Europe illustrate the importance of travel to her life and suggest its importance to the fiction she wrote just as her desk and typewriter tell much about her writing process. The "cut-and-pin revisions" on display point to Welty's quest for a form that complemented meaning. The boxes in which 15,000 letters were stored and a framed letter from E. M. Forster suggests that correspondence with friends and fellow writers had a major impact on Welty's writing—that correspondence is housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. And the garden surrounding the house is the source of many images that appear in Welty's fiction.

On Tuesday, Prenshaw will discuss Eudora Welty and autobiography. And Marrs and Prenshaw will jointly lead discussions of Welty short stories that lend themselves to biographical interpretations, notably "The Winds," "A Curtain of Green," and "The Whistle."

On Wednesdays, we will visit the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to examine the Welty manuscripts, photographs, and correspondence held there and to discuss ways of using archival materials in interpreting texts and teaching classes. Visiting scholars Harriet Pollack and Noel Polk along with Michael Kreyling (week one) or Pearl McHaney (week two), each of whom has worked extensively with the Welty Collection and published works drawing upon that research, will investigate ways in which archival materials can enrich interpretations of Welty stories like "The Whistle," "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," "A Worn Path," "Livvie," "Flowers for Marjorie," and "Where Is the Voice Coming From?"

The following day we will visit both the Medgar Evers House, the 1960s home of the assassinated Civil Rights leader, and the Smith-Robertson Museum, where the African American experience in Mississippi is documented. Comparing the Eudora Welty House and the Medgar Evers House may be a key to understanding the roles two prominent Mississippians played during the Civil Rights Era. And the Welty House, when viewed in its Jackson, Mississippi, context tells much about the social and cultural history of the city and, by extension, the nation. During week one Leslie McLemore, a founding director of the Fannie Lou Hamer National Institute on Citizenship and Democracy, will lead these tours, and during week two they will be led by Alferdteen Harrison, Director of the Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center. Lillian Smith Award-winning historian Charles Sallis and distinguished literary historian Minrose Gwin will in separate weeks help to place Eudora Welty's two stories from the 1960s—"Where is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators"—in the context of the Civil Rights era.

Finally, Fridays will be devoted to bringing biographical, archival, and historical approaches to bear upon a single text, The Optimist's Daughter. The widely published Welty scholar Rebecca Mark will join Marrs, Prenshaw, and other visiting scholars in discussing this book and in synthesizing the import of each week's sessions.

At regular intervals during the workshop, participants will also have the opportunity to discuss pedagogical strategies for teaching Welty or to discuss opportunities for scholarly writing about Welty. Millsaps Professor of Education Marlys Vaughn and experienced master teachers will meet with those whose focus is pedagogical; Marrs and Prenshaw will meet with those whose focus is literary criticism.

CEU CREDIT OPPORTUNITY

Participants who complete all workshop sessions will receive a certificate confirming their participation and a detailed description of the workshop, which will specify the number of contact hours undertaken as well as outlining the reading assignments and session topics.

Participants may use these documents to apply for Continuing Education Unit credits in their home states.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Full and part-time classroom teachers in public, private, parochial, and charter schools, as well as home-schooling parents, are eligible to participate. Other K-12 school personnel, including administrators, substitute teachers, classroom paraprofessionals, and librarians, are also eligible to participate, subject to available space. The project director and several workshop faculty members will serve as a selection committee.

Interested teachers will find the application process and requirements described in the **NEH Guidelines**. Perhaps the most important part of the completed application is an **essay of up to one double-spaced page**. This essay should include information about your professional background and interest in the subject of the workshop; your special perspectives, skills, or experiences that would contribute to the workshop; and the role the workshop will play in enhancing your teaching or school service. Include an **NEH cover sheet** (to be completed online and copied for submission), a statement indicating which of the two workshops you would prefer to attend, **a resume**, and **a letter of recommendation** from the principal or department

head of your teaching institution or head of a home schooling association in support of your application.

The completed application should be submitted in triplicate (all copies collated), should be postmarked no later than **March 17, 2008**, and should be addressed as follows:

Wanda Manor
Office of Continuing Education
Millsaps College
1701 N. State Street
Jackson, MS 39210

STIPEND AND TRAVEL SUBSIDY

Participants will receive a \$500 stipend at the close of the workshops. All participants should anticipate arriving at Millsaps College on Sunday before the start of each workshop and attending all workshop sessions in order to receive the full stipend. In addition, travel subsidies will be provided. All participants living within 50 miles of the workshop will receive \$100; those traveling from great distances will receive at least \$300, but the exact figure depends upon the geographical make-up of the workshop participants.

HOUSING AND MEALS

Housing and meals will be available at Millsaps College. Participants will have access to the Millsaps College Library, the Hall Activities Center (including a swimming pool), and on-campus computer laboratories. Millsaps offers double- occupancy rooms in air-conditioned residence halls at the rate of \$105 per workshop week or single-occupancy rooms at the rate of \$160 per workshop week. Residents must provide their own sheets and towels. Bathroom

facilities will either be private or shared with one other room. If participants prefer off-campus accommodations, we will be glad to provide a list of nearby hotels and motels. Group meals will be taken in the Millsaps cafeteria at a cost of \$115 for the week. Parking is available at no charge to participants.

TRAVEL AND ATTRACTIONS

The Jackson-Evers Airport is served by American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, and Southwest Airlines as well as US Air. Car rental services are available at the airport as is cab service into the city. Amtrak and Greyhound also offer services to Jackson. Those who prefer to drive will find that Interstate Highways 20 and 55 intersect in Jackson.

The capital of Mississippi, Jackson has a population of approximately 300,000. A symphony, ballet company, theater, art museum, and history museum play key roles in the city's active cultural life. Natural history comes alive at both the zoo and the wildlife museum. The Mississippi Braves play double-A minor league baseball in nearby Pearl, and the Barnett Reservoir offers opportunities for boating and fishing. For more information on Jackson's many attractions, you may visit the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau web site (<http://www.visitjackson.com/>).