



One Writer's Beginnings (The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization)

By Eudora Welty

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Eudora Welty was born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi. In a "continuous thread of revelation" she sketches her autobiography and tells us how her family and her surroundings contributed to the shaping not only of her personality but of her writing. Homely and commonplace sights, sounds, and objects resonate with the emotions of recollection: the striking clocks, the Victrola, her orphaned father's coverless little book saved since boyhood, the tall mountains of the West Virginia back country that become a metaphor for her mother's sturdy independence, Eudora's earliest box camera that suspended a moment forever and taught her that every feeling awaits a gesture. She has recreated this vanished world with the same subtlety and insight that mark her fiction.

Even if Eudora Welty were not a major writer, her description of growing up in the South--of the interplay between black and white, between town and countryside, between dedicated schoolteachers and the public they taught--would be notable. That she is a splendid writer of fiction gives her own experience a family likeness to others in the generation of young Southerners that produced a literary renaissance. Until publication of this book, she had discouraged biographical investigations. It undoubtedly was not easy for this shy and reticent lady to undertake her own literary biography, to relive her own memories (painful as well as pleasant), to go through letters and photographs of her parents and grandparents. But we are in her debt, for the distillation of experience she offers us is a rare pleasure for her admirers, a treat to everyone who loves good writing and anyone who is interested in the seeds of creativity.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Among the most beloved of American writers, Eudora Welty's stories and novels have entertained us for over half a century. Here, in her memoirs, she writes with her usual candor and grace about how a writer's sensibilities are shaped. As compelling as her stories, as witty as her personality, as finely honed as her fiction, Welty's account of her life is a powerful and fulfilling read.

Review

In these lectures, thoughtful attention is given to a great many experiences...It is all wonderful...The parts of the book that are about her family...are by turns hilarious and affecting. They are a kind of present...from Miss Welty to her audience. (William Maxwell *New Yorker*)

Beguiling as autobiography and...profound and priceless as guidance for anyone who aspires to write serious fiction...It may, at that, not be possible to convey to someone else that mysterious transfiguring gift by which dream, memory and experience become art. Yet, in these few pages, Eudora Welty seems to have followed the trail...to the richness of her maturity with a gracious and warming clarity. (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*)

[Eudora Welty] is to be looked for, not in blatant self-advertising confidences, hints and nudges, but in the metaphorical clues she drops, which are the exposures of a disciplined sensibility. From them we can deduce a history of a life. One might say her writing, spun out like the web of a 'noiseless patient spider,' is not about but of herself. At bottom, the beauty and astonishment of her fiction, as Emerson might say, is 'all design.' For it is by design, by her calculated disclosures, that this storyteller makes herself and her writing powerful and free. (Daniel Aaron *London Review of Books*)

About the Author

Eudora Welty's many honors include the Pulitzer Prize; the American Book Award for fiction; and the Gold Medal for the Novel, given by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for her entire work in fiction.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Boris Hansen:

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Danielle Tilley:

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