

EUDORA WELTY PAPERS

(Mss. 4919)

Inventory

Compiled by
Rose Tarbell

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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SUMMARY

Size.	53 items
Inclusive Dates.	1951-1957, undated
Bulk Dates.	1951-1952
Languages.	English
Summary.	Forty-one letters, two postcards, and two greeting cards written primarily by Eudora Welty to John F. Robinson, relating primarily to their respective writing careers and mutual friends.
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Citation.	Eudora Welty Papers, Mss. 4919, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Stack Locations.	Range 7:28, Vault: 25, and Vault CD 17

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Eudora Alice Welty was born April 13, 1909, at the Welty estate on North Congress Street in Jackson, Mississippi, to Christian Webb and Chestina Andrew Welty. After completing high school, Welty went to Mississippi State College for Women (now MUW) in Columbus, Mississippi, from 1925 to 1927. She transferred to the University of Wisconsin in 1927, where she became an English major and began her study of English literature. After she received her bachelor of arts degree in 1929, Welty attended Columbia University Graduate School of Business in New York and studied advertising. Beginning in her young adulthood, Welty traveled widely and held various lecturing and teaching posts.

Her first novel, *Delta Wedding*, was published in 1946. Her novel, *The Optimist's Daughter*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969. Early in her career she served as a member of the *New York Times* book staff. She was also a lecturer and writer-in-residence at various colleges. Other works she is most known for are, *A Curtain of Green*, *The Wide Net*, *The Golden Apples*, *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, and her memoir, *One Writer's Beginnings*.

Welty was close friends with John Frasier Robinson (1909-1989) of Mississippi. He became a friend of hers in 1933 when he returned to Jackson (Miss.) from graduate school. Although he moved to New Orleans in 1936, their companionship flourished.

Robinson created many stories and sketches and published a small percentage of his work. Welty often critiqued his writing and made lengthy comments about it in her correspondence to him. They discussed not only literature, but also theater and cinema, possibly collaborating on a theatrical script or screenplay for the cinema.

Not only did the two share a lifelong friendship and a shorter, complicated romance, but they also shared a devotion to the craft of writing. She dedicated her novel *Delta Wedding* to him, having used his grandmother's diaries as inspiration for the story. Robinson spent over forty years of his life in Europe with his long-time companion, Enzo Rocchigiani, whom he met in 1949.

Eudora Welty died on July 22, 2001 at the age of 92.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection of Eudora Welty Letters and Postcards contains 41 letters, two postcards, two greeting cards, newspaper clippings, and one pamphlet. The majority of the correspondence is written from Welty to John F. Robinson, with the exception of a letter written to Welty from her editor with a handwritten note from her mother on the verso, and some letters to John Robinson from his colleagues.

Description of 1951 correspondence:

Numerous letters discuss Robinson's attempts to publish short stories and show Welty's continued push for him to keep making submissions. She critiques his pieces and very often urges him to submit more, even setting him up with her contacts in the publishing industry (including her agent, Diarmuid Russell), and inquires if he will consider submitting anything in England (Feb. 23). She suggests he make submissions to the *New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly*. This theme runs throughout the collection. Welty does not discuss Enzo Rocchigiani much, except to inquire after his health and to send her regards. She makes scanty reference to Enzo's wine business venture (Feb. 17), his application for a visa (Feb. 23), and "going his own way" (Oct. 9).

Several letters chronicle her stay in Ireland with writer Elizabeth Bowen, another longtime friend. She laments her inability to stay in Ireland longer than she is able and gives detailed descriptions of her impressions of the landscape and atmosphere there. She shares with Robinson many of the feelings and first-hand experiences that she draws upon for much of the fiction collected in *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories*. (1955). She also mentions her own struggles with writing and writing projects she was working on at the time.

Other subjects discussed are *New Yorker* magazine, author William Faulkner (Feb. 17, Feb 23, Aug. 29), a movie script Welty wanted to work on with Robinson (Feb. 23), opinions of literature, her writing of *The Bride of Innisfallen* (April 29), a murder in Anguilla, Mississippi (Aug. 29), and Welty's mother (Oct. 17). She mentions "Robber" in some letters (March 13 and Oct. 17), which probably refers to her novel, *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942).

Description of 1952-1957 correspondence:

Welty's letters are written during her time in New York, the United Kingdom, or her Mississippi home. Most letters addressed to John Robinson bear a New York or German address.

While in New York, Robinson resided briefly at Yaddo, an artist's retreat founded in 1900 and located in Saratoga Springs. Welty also spent time at Yaddo in 1941, sharing housing with Katherine Anne Porter and becoming close friends. Robinson received a formal letter (Jan. 15) from Elizabeth Ames (executive director of Yaddo from 1923 to 1969) with details regarding arrangements for his stay in 1952. Letters from Welty mention that he became ill while there and was staying at a local hospital (Jan. 27, Feb. 12.). In the summer of 1952 and early 1953, Robinson first went to Florence, Italy, but ultimately ended up in Germany. Welty speaks as if he was looking for employment there.

Additionally, Welty mentions the work and activities of contemporaneous writers and artists, some of whom she is acquainted with and others she is merely commenting upon. In a newsy January 3, 1952, letter, she reports that Nalbandian (this could be Soviet artist Dmitry Nalbandian, 1906-1993), will be doing an art show in N.Y; that Ruth Ford (actress) told her that William Faulkner wrote *Requiem for a Nun* for Ford; that she received pieces of a novel from Leonard Wolfe to comment upon and reviewed the book *The Short Novels of Colette* by Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette. She also gives her impressions of the latter and mentions the writer Denton Welch and Julia Strachey's *Pioneer City*. In other letters, she relates reading Jean Stafford's *The Mountain Lion*; attending a reading and discussion by Robert Penn Warren in Mississippi (Feb. 1952); and seeing Mississippi writer, Elizabeth Spencer (1921-), whose story *The Voice at the Back Door*, she also mentions (Jan. 29, 1957). Other books and performances mentioned include Weill and Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (Jan. 29, 1957), *Count Roller Skates* by Thomas Sancton (Jan. 29, 1957), and the play, *Ponder Heart*, which she may have had a stake in since she writes "all of us got our percent of the take" (Jan. 29, 1957).

In some letters Welty gives detailed criticism of literary pieces Robinson sent to her; letters written on Mar. 13, 1952 and Sept. 1, 1955 consist almost entirely of her opinions on his work. Like the 1951 letters, she is still persistent about pushing him to write and getting his writing published. She tells him to submit to the *New Yorker*, and upon their rejection she suggests the *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1, 1952). She again encourages him to get the opinion of Diarmuid Russel.

Welty mentions some of her own struggles with writing and some of what she's working on, but rarely by title or even what they are about. She specifically mentions a story she's working on called "Happiness" (Jan. 27, 1952) [she either never published it or did so under another title]. In a letter dated Jan. 25, 1955, she mentions a book of hers coming out in April, which must be *The Bride of the Innisfallen* as it is the only thing published that year. Of interest is a comment made by her niece, Mary Alice, who at the age of four asked Welty why she "types in blue jeans and a pretty pink bed jacket..." (Mar. 14, 1952).

Welty discusses activities of and visits with their mutual friends, including, among others, writers Katherine Anne Porter, Elizabeth Spencer, and Elizabeth Bowen. She also describes the mental illness of their friend Alice. She mentions a man named Hubert, who talks about recently arriving in California and experiencing rains and mudslides that damaged his home (Jan. 27, 1952).

Welty also comments on contemporaries like Elvis Presley and Billy Graham, who in 1952 she says was an "awful evangelist" who packs 11,000 in Tiger Stadium every night (June 19).

INDEX TERMS

Ames, Elizabeth.

Bowen, Elizabeth (1899-1973).

England – Description and travel.

Faulkner, William (1897 -1962).

Ireland – Description and travel.

Literary agents – United States.

Mental illness – United States – 20th century.

New York (N.Y.) – Description and travel.

New Yorker.

Robinson, John, 1909-1989.

Rocchigiani, Enzo.

Spencer, Elizabeth (1921-).

Southern States – In literature.

Warren, Robert Penn (1905-1989).

Welty, Eudora (1909-2001) - Correspondence.

Welty, Eudora (1909-2001) - Friends and associates.

Welty, Eudora (1909-2001) – *Bride of Innisfallen*

Welty, Eudora (1909-2001) – *Robber Bridegroom*.

Women and literature – Mississippi – 20th century.

Women authors - Mississippi

Yaddo (Artist's colony).

CALENDAR OF LETTERS IN COLLECTION:

Note: [pm] indicates that the year is taken from the postmark.

<u>Sender and recipient</u>	<u>Year, mo, day</u>	<u># of pages</u>	<u>Written or typed</u>
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Jan. 9	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Feb. 17 [pm]	4	Handwritten, signed
Letter			
To Eudora Welty from Philip Horton	1951 Feb. 20	1	Typed
To Eudora Welty from her mother	1951	1	Handwritten
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951	1	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Feb. 23 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Feb. 24 [pm]	1	Typed, signed "Reporter X"
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Mar. 13 [pm]	1	Typed and handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Mar. 22 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Apr. 2	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Apr. 11	3	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Apr. 24 [pm]	2	Typed and handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 May 18 [pm]	Postcard	Handwritten
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 July 9 [pm]	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Aug. 7 [pm]	8	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Aug. 29 [pm]	5	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Sept. 16 [pm]	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Oct. 9 [pm]	3	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Oct. 17 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Nov. 14 [pm]	6	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Nov. 18 [pm]	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Dec. 4 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951 Dec. 13 [pm]	2	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1951?	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Jan. 3 [pm]	4	Typed, signed

WELTY (EUDORA) PAPERS

1951-1957, undated (bulk dates 1951-1952)

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<u>Sender and recipient</u>	<u>Year, mo, day</u>	<u># of pages</u>	<u>Written or typed</u>
To John F. Robinson from Elizabeth Ames	1952 Jan. 15	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Jan. 27 [pm]	4	Handwritten, signed
To Eudora Welty from Hubert	1952 Jan. 27	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Jan. 31 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Feb. 12 [pm]	4	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Feb. 25 [pm]		Newspaper clippings
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	Feb. 1952 ?	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Mar. 5	4	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Mar. 13 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Mar. 14 [pm]	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Apr. 28 [pm]	2	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 May 1 [pm]	2	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 June 19 [pm]	6	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Aug. 15	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Peter McNerney	1952 Dec. 2 [pm]	2	Greeting card
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1952 Dec. 23 [pm]		Greeting card, handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1953 Jan. 27 [pm]	2	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1955 Jan. 25 [pm]	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1955 Sept. 1 [pm]	1	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	1957 Jan 29	3	Typed, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	June 14	6	Handwritten, signed
To Eudora Welty (?) from Mary Lou	Undated, but prior to 1952.	2	Handwritten, signed
To John F. Robinson from Eudora Welty	Undated	Postcard	Handwritten, signed
Newspaper clippings (6)	1952, 1956		
Pamphlet from Yaddo	undated		