

Hollins University

Hollins Digital Commons

The Hollins Critic

6-1970

Vol. VII, No. 3: Everything Brought Out In The Open: Eudora Welty's Losing Battles

Louis D. Rubin Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/critic>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

The Hollins Critic

Volume VII, No. 3

Hollins College, Virginia

June, 1970

Everything Brought Out In The Open: Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*



I.

Miss Welty when last seen, in 1955, published *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, her third collection of short stories (fourth if you count *The Golden Apples*). Thereafter, and for fifteen years, silence, the only exceptions being a little privately-printed essay, *Place in Fiction*, and a few magazine pieces. So it has been a long time between books.

Now comes, in the year 1970, the 61st of the author's age, her longest novel, *Losing Battles*, an affair of some 436 pages all told, being the story of a family reunion in the northeastern Mississippi community of Banner. This particular place in fictional Mississippi is too small even to be a town, and most of what happens

The Hollins Critic

EDITORS—John Rees Moore, George P. Garrett

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS—Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Daniel Hoffman, Howard Nemerov, Walter Sullivan, Benedict Kiely, Robert Scholes, R. H. W. Dillard, William Jay Smith

COVER ARTIST—Lewis O. Thompson

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS—Anne Grauer and Leila Davis

Published five times a year, in the months of February, April, June, October, and December, by Hollins College, Virginia. Second class postage paid at Roanoke, Virginia. Copyright 1970 by Hollins College, Virginia 24020.

All material appearing in *The Hollins Critic* is written by pre-arrangement with the contributors. No unsolicited manuscripts can be considered.

The Hollins Critic is two dollars a year (\$3.00 in Canada and overseas).

does so on a farm up a hillside several miles away from the post-office and the general store. The elapsed time is something more than 24 hours of a summer day and night in the 1930's. Most of what takes place is talk. The talk begins when Miss Beulah Renfro, grand-daughter of Elvira Jordan Vaughn, "Granny," puts in an appearance on the second page, after some 500 words of place-setting, shouting, "Granny! Up, dressed, and waiting for 'em! All by yourself! Why didn't you holler?" Thereafter everybody talks, all the time. It ends with a hymn, "Bringing in the Sheaves."

When Eudora Welty's people talk, it is a special kind of talk. They do not talk *to*, they talk *at*. Part of the reason that they talk is to communicate, but part of the reason is to dissemble, to mask, to hide. They converse obliquely, chattering away all the time but never entirely revealing themselves or saying what they think; and the barrier, the mystery that results, lies at the center of the high art of Eudora Welty.

I say high art, because the more I read and think about Miss Welty's fiction, the more I suspect that she is not merely a good writer, one of the very best of the half-a-dozen fine women writers that the South has produced in the past half-century, but a major author, one of the three or four most important writers to come out of twentieth-century America. Her best fiction—*The Golden Apples*, some of the stories, now *Losing Battles*—goes beyond story-telling, beyond people and places, to those truths of the human heart that only the greatest art can reveal. There is only one other Southern writer of her generation in her league: her fellow Mississippian William Faulkner, the greatest of them all.

Eudora Welty does it the hard way, and what is happening and what it means has to sink in, in retrospect, after reading the story. The writer she most resembles, I think, is Thomas Mann. That is to say, she is not technically experimental to any notable degree, and when you read her books you have to let the story pile up, until it is done. Then when you think over what you have read, you begin to perceive the ramifications, the events begin to link up, the people take on their meaning *sub specie aeternitatis* as it were, and the depth, the profundity of what you have seen happen in the story now begins to emerge. It isn't like the searing, tragic art of a Faulkner, for example, which holds you enthralled and breathless as a great elemental drama thunders toward climax and conclusion. The surface of her fiction is always deceptively mundane, matter-of-fact, usually funny. The difference between Miss

Welty's fiction and that of less gifted authors is that her fiction doesn't lie on the surface, and the surface is anything but superficial yet, paradoxically, everything is contained right there in the surface.

This is the chief difficulty with *Losing Battles*, one that may prevent it from attaining the massive popularity of so many lesser novels by lesser but more flamboyant novelists, and that gets in the way of immediate recognition for its author. What must be overcome, if the wisdom of *Losing Battles* is to be savored in its fullness, is its density of surface. Every line must be read carefully. It cannot be skimmed. *Losing Battles* is not difficult in the way that many novels are difficult. It hasn't an opaque surface that hides the story and the meaning behind a texture of dense language and obscure reference. Everything is out on the surface, but the art is the surface, and every inch of the surface must be inspected. This means that you have to follow the conversations and note the narrative directions and take in every word, every phrase, holding it all in suspension, letting it accumulate. Many of us don't like to read that way; we haven't the patience to follow every footpath and byway in a novel that takes approximately the same amount of time to read as it does for the events themselves to happen. So we tend to go racing through, and we miss the detail and so the story; and we can, if we want, say that this constitutes a criticism, an adverse judgment, a limitation of the art. Fiction that demands more attention than one is willing to give, we can say, is to that extent unsuccessful art. To which Miss Welty might reply (along with Lawrence Sterne, James Joyce, Thomas Mann and one or two other artists with the same shortcoming), "Oh, but you see, what I have to show you can't be shown in any other way than this, more's the pity, so that you'll have to choose whether *you* want to know what I have to tell you, in which case you'll have to let me show it to you the only way I know it, or whether *you don't* want to know it. For if I tried to show it any other way, *it* wouldn't be. You would instead be getting something else, something other. I'll do my best to divert and amuse and please you all along the way, but it must be along *this* way, for there isn't any other."

Of course Eudora Welty wouldn't say that. She would let her art, at whatever risk and at whatever cost, speak for itself, as she has always done. But she might point out, as she has in *Place in Fiction*, that

... the business of writing, and the responsibility of the writer, [is] to disentangle the significant—in character, incident, setting, mood, everything, from the random and meaningless and irrelevant that in real life surround and beset it. It is a matter of his selecting and, by all that implies, of changing, "real" life as he goes. With each word he writes, he acts—as literally and methodically as if he hacked his way through a forest and blazed it for the word that follows. He makes choices at the explicit demand of this one present story; each choice implies, explains, limits the next, and illuminates the one before. No two stories ever go the same way, though in different hands one story might possibly go any one of a thousand ways; and though the woods may look the same from outside, it is a new and different labyrinth each time.

II.

Losing Battles begins with the wait for the various grandchildren of Granny Vaughn and their families to arrive at the family residence, now the home of her granddaughter Beulah Beecham Renfro and her husband Ralph, and located way up at the end of a winding road north of the town of Banner. Among the most eager of those who are doing the waiting is a daughter-in-law Gloria Renfro, whose husband Jack has been away at the state penitentiary at Parchman since the day of their wedding. All are certain that Jack will get home for Granny's birthday reunion, however, not only to honor Granny and rejoin his wife but to see his little daughter, Lady May, for the first time. And soon Jack arrives, in good spirits, not at all resentful or embittered at his incarceration. He is overjoyed at seeing Gloria again, delighted with Lady May, and properly attentive to everyone present (though he does find time to get Gloria off by herself and renew relations properly). All the other relatives arrive, too, and everyone is in high spirits, remaining so for the entire occasion.

Unexpected guests at the reunion, and most reluctant to be there, are Judge Oscar Moody and his wife Maud Eva. It was Judge Moody who had sentenced Jack to his two years in prison, for fighting with Curly Stovall, the storekeeper at Banner, but nobody seems to mind that, Jack least of all. The Judge and his wife are present because their fancy Buick automobile has, hilariously and improbably, become lodged against a tree, far up on a hillside, after the Judge swerved off the road to avoid running over Lady May and Gloria. For the ensuing 24 hours the Buick remains there, teetering over the edge, its motor still running, with Aycock Comfort, a friend of Jack's, seated in it to keep it balanced. Not until the next morning, in just about as wild and as comic an episode as Miss Welty has ever created, is the Buick rescued, somewhat the worse for wear, and taken, tied between a school bus and a truck and with a pair of mules harnessed behind to do the braking, down the hill side and into the community of Banner.

At the reunion, people talk, sing, play, gossip. Among the numerous topics discussed are Granny's youth, the family's history, the obscure antecedents of Jack's wife Gloria, and the life, death, and influence upon the men and women of the Banner community of Miss Julia Mortimer, longtime teacher at the Banner school. Miss Julia has just died, at the nearby town of Alliance, but she is to be buried in the Banner cemetery. Gloria had been Miss Julia's protégé, and had married Jack against her wishes.

All the Vaughns and Renfros and Beechams and the related descendants and cousins and kin at the reunion, and all the other townfolk of Banner community as well, have been Miss Julia Mortimer's pupils, and she has vexed them all. In the mingled rage, guilt and nostalgia with which they speak of her, whether oblique or direct, the nature of their vexation becomes apparent. For in what she was, what she wanted them to do, what she sought to force them to learn about the world and themselves, she was a threat to the entire Banner community. It was her objective to make the people of Banner, her pupils, realize and confront the ultimate consequences of their humanity.

What all these generations of men and women want to do — do, indeed, succeed in doing for the most part — is to go about their lives and their family and community

Death of Archangels

for Annie and Richard

They guard the seasons:

Green courtyards, the field of sleep,

The feast at the table of snow.

At night you see them in the long bright watch,

Passing through tricks of stars.

Sometimes they move in a haze of antlered rain, untouched,

Or breathe over the soft bodies of animals.

They die, after ages, in a hazard of light,

A strand of longing;

Human hair, how it unpieces gold!

On a hill, looking out over late trees, are two.

They turn, grazed by the certain startle of a bird over water,

And fold, softer than quail, into the moving fall.

— MIMI DRAKE

doings innocently and unthinkingly, meeting birth, life, love and death as they arise, without the dread and the knowledge of anticipating or asking why. In so doing, they are not only helpless against time and change, but unable to deal with their circumstance. Miss Julia Mortimer had sought to force them to see who they were and what they were doing. As Gloria Renfro, who has come closest to being marked by Miss Julia's imprint, expresses the matter, in a rare moment of confrontation,

Miss Julia Mortimer didn't want anybody left in the dark, not about anything. She wanted everything brought out in the wide open, to see and be known. She wanted people to spread out their minds and hearts to other people, so they could be read like books.

That statement, uttered by Gloria after the funeral, and as she sees that she may not be able to win her husband Jack away from the family and into a life of their own, amounts to a confession that Gloria has been marked by Miss Julia's determination, even though by marrying Jack she had done her best to escape the mantle placed upon her.

Gloria's statement, I suggest, comes very close to being a statement of Eudora Welty's artistic credo. For in *Place in Fiction*, we find her saying much the same thing. She is writing about the importance of place in grounding fiction in reality. "The good novel," she says, "should be steadily alight, revealing. Before it can hope to be that, it must of course be steadily visible from its outside, presenting a continuous, shapely, pleasing, and finished surface to the eye." For place

has a good deal to do with making the characters real, that is, themselves, and keeping them so. The reason is simply that, as Tristram Shandy observed, "We are not made of glass, as characters on Mercury might be." Place *can* be transparent, or translucent: not people. In real life, we have to express the things plainest and closest to our minds by the clumsy word and the half-finished gesture; the chances are our most usual behavior makes sense only in a kind of daily way, because it has become familiar to our nearest and dearest, and still demands their constant indulgence and understanding. It is our describable outside that defines us, willy nilly, to others, that may save us, or destroy us, in the world; it may be our shield against chaos, our mask against exposure, but whatever it is, the move we make in the place we live has to signify our intent and meaning.

Thus the novelist, by selecting and defining people in a place—"the more narrowly we can examine a fictional character, the greater he is likely to loom up"—can through his focus provide awareness, discernment, order, clarity, insight—"they are like the attributes of love." The novelist seeks, hopes to write so that "the exactness and concreteness and solidity of the real world achieved in a story correspond to the intensity of feeling in the author's mind and to the very turn of his heart," since "making reality real is art's responsibility."

III.

It is from just that kind of searching recognition that people seek diligently and determinedly to hide, and in Eudora Welty's fictional world, families and communities exist to enable their members to hide from reality. For as Gloria Renfro understands and tells her husband Jack, "people don't want to be read like books," whether by others or by themselves. In Miss Welty's work, we sometimes come upon people who realize this. We find characters who shrink from such knowledge, and also a precious few who, like Miss Julia Mortimer, do not thus shrink.

In Miss Welty's first novel, *Delta Wedding*, Laura McRaven travels to Shellmound, the family seat of the Fairchilds in the Delta country. For the Fairchilds (except for one of them, Shelley) everything that happens is gentled, humanized, incorporated into their ordered world. Violence, death, terror—a cyclone, a shooting, a train that runs over and kills a girl—are denied; the Fairchilds pretend that such things never exist, and that the protected, comfortable family world that is Shellmound can go on forever. The community existence, the constant coming and going in company with each other, protects the private loneliness of each participant by being carried on as if such secret knowledge did not exist. In the family, certain things are known, and so those who are in the family can deal with each other in terms of the known, thus avoiding inquiry into private matters. As Shelley Fairchild records in her diary, "we never wanted to be smart, one by one, but all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside. Does the world suspect? that we are all very private people?"

Eudora Welty

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1909, Eudora Welty was educated "in the Southern manner with daughters . . . continuous but not too serious" at Mississippi State College for Women and the University of Wisconsin. Upon graduation, Miss Welty tried out a number of jobs in advertising, radio, and publicity. Having investigated many fields and been successful at none, she abandoned the notion of earning a conventional living and settled into a writing career. The novels which she had written in her youth were, without exception, set in Paris, and often opened with such memorable lines as, "Monsieur Boule deposited a delicate dagger in Mademoiselle's left side and departed with a poised immediacy." Miss Welty's style soon improved, however, and "Death of a Traveling Salesman," her first published work, appeared in 1936. Miss Welty has won many awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship (1942), the O. Henry Award (1942, 1943), the National Institute of Arts and Letters grant in literature (1944), the William Dean Howells medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1955), and the Hollins Medal (1967). She has also been an honorary consultant in American letters at the Library of Congress, and she has published in the *Southern Review*, *Harper's Bazaar* and the *New Yorker*.

Miss Welty lives at home, in Jackson, and occupies her time with painting, photography, and an active social life. Surprisingly, she feels that the latter is thoroughly compatible with her career. As she once confessed to Katherine Anne Porter, "I haven't a literary life at all . . . I do feel that the people and things I love are of a true and human world, and there is no clutter about them. I would not understand a literary life." Certainly Eudora Welty's appreciation of a world peopled with those who are true and human has contributed immeasurably to the sensitivity of her writing.

—LEILA M. DAVIS

I think one by one we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient."

Shelley, who knows this but for the time being at least will take part in the pretense, and little cousin Laura McRaven, who is from Jackson and knows things about the outside world that will not fit into Shellmound's version of life, realize what is going on. "My papa has taken me on trips — I know about geography. . . .," Laura insists. But she goes unheard: ". . . in the great confines of Shellmound, no one listened." Yet Shellmound is doomed, for change is inevitable, and the vague uneasiness that the peaceful, contained version of reality that Shellmound comprises will soon disintegrate is present throughout the book. Only Shelley, and Laura, will not be entirely helpless in its face; for only they, of all the Fairchilds, know that it is bound to happen.

The Golden Apples, published in 1949, is the masterpiece of all the books. In a set of seven closely-related narratives, together comprising forty years of human experience in the town of Morgana, Miss Welty sets forth a profound and hauntingly beautiful account of human beings in time, banded together to screen out the knowl-

Books By Eudora Welty

A CURTAIN OF GREEN AND OTHER STORIES

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1941. \$2.50.
 Toronto: Doubleday, Doran, 1941. \$3.00.
 New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947. \$3.00.
 Toronto: McLeod, 1947. \$3.50.

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1942. \$2.50.
 Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1942. \$2.50.
 London: John Lane, 1944. 10/6.
 New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948. \$2.75.
 Toronto: McLeod, 1948. \$3.25.
 New York: Atheneum, 1963. \$1.25. (pa.)

THE WIDE NET AND OTHER STORIES

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943. \$3.00.
 Toronto: McLeod, 1943. \$3.00.
 London: John Lane, 1945. 7/6.

DELTA WEDDING

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946. \$2.75.
 Toronto: McLeod, 1943. \$3.00.
 London: John Lane, 1947. 8/6.
 Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1947. \$2.25.
 New York: New American Library, 1964. 75¢. (pa.)

MUSIC FROM SPAIN

Greenville, Miss.: Levee Press, 1948. (lim. ed.)

THE GOLDEN APPLES

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949. \$3.00.
 London: John Lane, 1950. 9/6.
 New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956. \$1.35. (pa.)
 Toronto: McLeod, 1956. \$1.90. (pa.)

SHORT STORIES (essay)

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950. (lim. ed.)

SELECTED STORIES OF EUDORA WELTY

New York: Modern Library, 1954. \$1.45.

THE PONDER HEART

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954. \$3.00.
 London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954. 10/6.
 London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957. 6s.
 New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958. 60¢. (pa.)

THE BRIDE OF INNISFALLEN AND OTHER STORIES

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955. \$3.50.
 London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955. 12/6.
 London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957. 6s.

PLACE IN FICTION

New York: House of Books, 1957. (lim. ed.)

THREE PAPERS ON FICTION

Northampton, Mass.: Smith College, 1962. (lim. ed.)

THE SHOE BIRD

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964. \$3.50.

THIRTEEN STORIES

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964. \$1.65. (pa.)

LOSING BATTLES

New York: Random House, 1970. \$7.95.

edge of their mortality. The inhabitants of Morgana — King MacLain, far-wanderer, Morgana's favorite fertility symbol; his twin sons Ran and Eugene, marked for life (and for death) by their father's heritage; the Morrison children, Loch, who can leave Morgana, and Cassie, who can stay; Miss Eckhart, the German music teacher who brought "*the* Beethoven" to Morgana and thus left her impress on those able to receive it (or unable to escape it); and, most of all, Virgie Rainey, who duelled with time, place, and Miss Eckhart all the way — these are unforgettable people; and so, to only a lesser degree, are a host of minor characters.

"Time goes like a dream no matter how hard you run, and all the time we heard things from out in the world that we listened to but that still didn't mean we believed them," declares Virgie's mother, Miss Kate Rainey, to a stranger at the outset (and *only* to a stranger, for like Prufrock and Guido, Miss Katie Rainey would not dare say what she did to anyone who might report it in Morgana). It was not that Morgana did not believe the news from the world outside, so much as that its citizens strove not to believe it. King MacLain left town for years—and left his wife Miss Snowdie to raise the twins—but he always came back, usually at key moments, and at the end he attends Miss Kate Rainey's funeral, knowing he will be the next to die. Yet King never "left" Morgana; though separate from the town, he was never separate from its ways. He played by its rules, and operating within them, took what he wanted. Those rules were: never remind us that time, death and art exist, and are not accountable by Morgana's ways of measurement. Do not, in other words, tell us that we do not control our fate.

Poor Miss Eckhart—Lottie Elisabeth Eckhart, who taught Virgie Rainey to play "Für Elise" and to master the Liszt concerto, and who said that "Virgie would be

heard from in the world, playing that"—never learned those rules. She set a metronome in front of her piano pupils, let it tick away remorselessly, timelessly, in absolute disdain of Morgana clock-time; Virgie Rainey, outraged, demanded it be put away. When a terrible thing happened to her—attacked, raped—she would not leave town, and take from Morgana the knowledge that desperate things did happen, and that people survived as people even so. When the man she loved so timidly and inchoately was drowned, she nodded her head in helpless rhythm at the graveside, and then sought to throw herself into it—and Morgana could not countenance the evidence that there was grief that terrible or feeling that desperate.

At the end of her story—"June Recital," the heart of the book, Miss Welty's supreme creation—she comes back to Morgana from her place at the county poor farm, goes inside the old MacLain house where she had once lived and taught, and while her erstwhile pupil Virgie Rainey and a sailor boy cavort around and upon a mattress upstairs, sets her metronome to ticking and tries to set fire to the house. She fails at it, as with all she ever attempted; she is led away, back to the poor farm, and when Virgie Rainey, racing out of the still-smoking house, runs past her, they do not say a word or exchange a glance. For they were both, as Cassie Morrison divines, "human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them—human beings, roaming, like lost beasts."

But Loch Morrison, too young to understand what was going on, retrieves the metronome, fetches it up to his room, waits to hear it begin ticking of its own volition: "All by itself, of its own accord, it might let fly its little door and start up."

"You'll go away like Loch," Cassie calls out to Virgie many years later, after Virgie's mother's funeral. "A life of your own, away—I'm so glad for people like you and Loch, I am really." Loch has long since departed, but not before, in the story entitled "Moon Lake," he has successfully given artificial respiration to a drowned orphan, tirelessly, rhythmically, with no heed to clocks, the steady in-out, in-out rhythm of elemental life-giving itself—and of generation, of sex, as the scandalized Morganans sense instinctively while they watch him at work. They must bring him down to their size; Jinny Love Stark, already a determined citizen though still a child, will "tell on him, in Morgana tomorrow. He's the most conceited Boy Scout in the whole troop; and's bowlegged." But Loch Morrison is one of those who will leave, because he cannot pretend that Morgana is the world.

Yet it is Virgie Rainey—the gifted one, who battled Miss Eckhart all the way, sought to deny her own self, took a job playing "You've Got To See Mama Every Night" at the movie house rather than going on with "*the* Beethoven," went away briefly but came right back, sought fulfillment in a succession of lovers—who was most marked by Miss Eckhart. At the close, forty years old, unmarried, alone, ready at last to leave for good, she realizes that like the old music teacher, she too saw things in their time, in the rhythms of art and life and of ultimate human existence. Miss Eckhart had "offered, offered, offered—and when Virgie was young, in the strange wisdom of youth that is accepting of more than is given, she had accepted *the* Beethoven, as with the dragon's blood. That was the gift she had touched with her fingers that had drifted and left her."

A Spoon Found in the Cell of a Condemned Man

A piece of the bowl has been broken—
making a wooden lip, a
mouth looking down; or circle
snapped; a lemon cut for tea.

The half remaining to the handle—
a candy scoop in Kresge's,
tiny shovel; or a wishbone;
woman arched for love.

And the handle, taken twice—
snapped into fingers; or a boy;
long bullets; out of
the hearts of old trees.

Things breathing in the hand,
they blossom—already, I see
warm flowers, spilling
out of the breasts of young girls.

— JAMES TIPTON

So brief a summary, and of only the main plot-relationship at that, can do little justice to what is in *The Golden Apples*. It is, I think, an even more successful work than *Losing Battles*, but perhaps I say this for having known *The Golden Apples* for two decades, while *Losing Battles* is still to be lived with. But one recognizes at once, in the new novel, that Miss Julia Mortimer, with greater success, and Miss Lottie Eckhart, with lesser success, fought the same battle, representing for their fellow townsfolk the possibility, and the threat, of a greater and more ultimate discovery and self-revelation, and so were both feared and shunned. And similarly, Virgie Rainey and Gloria Renfro are of the same kind: both have been touched with the dragon's blood, and neither may put aside the legacy, struggle though they do. When the family accepts Gloria that day at the reunion, it is only with suspicion. They want her to become part of their common conspiracy, even down to the way she wears her clothes. As Aunt Beck says to Gloria, "you're just an old married woman, same as the rest of us now. So you won't have to answer to the outside any longer." But they ought not be so sure as that; "some day yet," Gloria tells her husband, "we'll move to ourselves." That is not what Miss Julia Mortimer had in

mind for her; but neither is it what the Renfros and Beechams and Vaughns want, either.

Miss Julia Mortimer is dead when the family reunion that constitutes *Losing Battles* takes place, and she never appears as a character, but increasingly her presence comes to dominate the story. At the last, as the inhabitants of Banner watch the long funeral procession from Alliance and the burial in the Banner cemetery—there are hundreds of persons present, former students from distant states, a governor, a Catholic priest, a judge (for that was what Judge Moody was doing in the neighborhood), dignitaries and plain folk both—we realize that the spinster schoolteacher has been a worthy adversary indeed to the family, and to all that makes human beings seek to flee from themselves and others. She has, in her time, made time run.

All of this is not told, or pointed out, as one goes along; it is realized as the reader begins putting together the experience of the bright, thick-textured surface of people, doings, and talk that constitutes this novel. *Losing Battles* is not, as it moves along its way, a somber book. It is alive in humor and merriment, and especially after we get into it well, filled with almost constant humor and diversion. But there are no shortcuts. It demands that the reader invest time and attention without stint, for as long as it takes to read it through. What it requires is sentence-by-sentence participation. What it provides, for those willing to take part, is delight ending in wisdom.

— LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR.

| |
|----------------------|
| PAID |
| SECOND CLASS |
| POSTAGE |
| at Roanoke, Virginia |