

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Kiss Mommy Goodbye

Joy Fielding, Doubleday, 1981, pp. 308, hardcover, \$14.95.

Merle Wallis Bolick

This is a pretentious but well-crafted thriller about a child-custody kidnapping. In *Kiss Mommy Goodbye* Joy Fielding follows the fortunes of the heroine Donna from her first meeting with gorgeous Victor, through the whirlwind courtship to the increasing misery of their marriage, the divorce and custody suit, Victor's kidnapping of their children and Donna's reactions.

As a thriller, it works extremely well. As a novel of domestic life, it is almost unrelievedly dreary. There is nothing quite like being dragged through other people's marital squabbles — thank the Goddess! The first battle between Donna and Victor is a *tour de force*. I found myself stopping to gasp, "How does Joy Fielding *know*?" just as I do in parts of Doris Lessing's works. Victor is a very recognizable type of marital gamesplayer, and he always wins. Fielding renders the intricate, terrifyingly mad logic of his arguing style with utter conviction.

But this is not a subtle work. The arguments go on and on and are then subjected to detailed post-mortems. Fielding is bound and determined that we *get the point*. Victor is clearly paranoid, and lest we miss this, the word is used on page seventy-two. And again and again.

So what we have is a thriller in the high sociological style. A justification for this style and for the entire first section of the book is to

prove that a nice girl *could* marry such a monster, but the point is never really proven. We sympathize with Donna but never totally identify with her because Victor is so obviously a creep, from day one. He may be handsome in a steely way, but I remain unconvinced that he is such a good lay as to warrant marrying him.

But if we leave all that aside, the main problems with this work are structural, perhaps a natural outcome of Fielding's attempt to use two popular/patriarchal *genres* simultaneously: the thriller and the romance. The thriller she manages quite nicely, after a slow start. But the romance kills it. Reading this book is like being caught on the treadmill of the middle pages of a Marilyn French novel. French, too, is a writer not known for subtlety: like Fielding, she calls her conqueror Victor. But in French there is a saving note of irony, a glimpse of women's power to be alone and like it, once they get over being dolorous.

In the conventional romance, however, there is no room for women's separateness. The ladies of the romance world, like Donna, simply move from man to man. If one man is a handsome rapist, then the next one is sure to be a cuddly rescuer. French spares us at least this much in her antiromances. After all, can the suffering romance heroine ever become the doer and seeker required as the thriller subject? I don't think so. Not with a rescuer waiting in the wings.

Certainly *Kiss Mommy Goodbye* doesn't bridge the gap between romance and adventure. So despite the really gripping climax, I fin-

ished the book feeling curiously frustrated. There was only one solution — to get on my bicycle, pedal down to the Women's Bookstore, and buy a button that asks, "What if Prince Charming never comes?"



## Basic Black with Pearls

Helen Weinzwieg, Anansi Press, 1980, pp. 135, paperback, \$7.95.

Merle Wallis Bolick

What appears to be happening here is that Shirley, a woman in uniform — basic black with pearls and a Holt Renfrew tweed coat — waits for her lover, a C.I.A. agent, who always appears in disguise. Her method of recognizing him consists of analysing "the way he stands, the way I feel." Any man of a certain height and shape may at any instant reveal himself to be the mysterious Coenraad. Their globe-trotting affair has lasted several years, meetings being arranged by means of a mystifying numerical code to page and line numbers in *National Geographic*.

On the occasion detailed in *Basic Black with Pearls* this code, which calls for "some imagination" and works "most of the time," takes Shirley to the King Edward Hotel in Toronto, feeling somewhat panicky since this is the city where she grew up and where her respectable husband and children still live. But now the familiar streets become a message in code. Where is the meeting to take place? The curtain at the back of a little Kensington bakeshop may conceal passion, intrigue, the lover! Scenes

from Shirley's squalid childhood are revisited in the hope that Coenraad may be disclosed.

A fantasy world? Perhaps. Or romance gone berserk. A metaphor for the way all women are taught to wait and wait, finding meaning only in the possibility that somewhere out there, a Man is waiting just for us. If we only make ourselves available enough, read the codes right, and learn to see every man as a possible incarnation of Love, we are bound to find our fulfilment. A feminist *Waiting for Godot*, *Basic Black* exposes this process of reading reality as one great love letter in code.

Shirley, the globe-trotting adulteress, doesn't fit the ideal role for women. Or does she? As a romantic, waiting for Coenraad, perhaps she does. In a surreal meeting she confronts the woman who *does* manage to fill the wife-role Shirley has fled:

She is completely adaptable. She is not beautiful, or even handsome; her attractiveness possibly lies in a kind of simple willingness, a compliance uncluttered by second thought.

The lobotomized woman? Shirley is surprised that what is required of a wife is not positive qualities but simply a lack of resistance. But her own resistance has consisted merely of an affair which is itself an ideal schooling in passivity.

Or perhaps the affair with Coenraad is merely a fantasy. Perhaps Shirley's been spending the time away from her family in a psychiatric institution. Perhaps Coenraad is her shrink. Weinzwieg is a writer with such a perfect sense of what to *leave out* of her novels that we can never be absolutely certain. It doesn't matter. What is clear is that Shirley's choices are amongst equally impossible alternatives: the male-defined institution of marriage; the institution of psychiatry which reduces women to passivity through manipulation, chemicals, psychosurgery; or continual gaslighting by an omnipotent lover who tells her, "officially, you don't exist."

It is for this stark, ironic clarity that I value *Basic Black with Pearls*. Because we can never be sure whether Shirley is telling the "truth," we can insulate ourselves from the implications of her predicament if we wish. But how we judge Shirley and her final choices will largely reflect how we judge ourselves, how much we trust ourselves and other women.



### What Matters

Daphne Marlatt, Coach House Press, 1980, pp. 160, paperback, \$5.25.

#### Priscilla Galloway

Isolated bits of this book leap at me, demanding my involvement, my feeling, thinking response. Marlatt by turns makes contact with the student of metaphysics in me, that philosophy of being and becoming; with the woman in me who, like her, has struggled with a marriage; with the mother in me, who also has been pregnant and has given birth, has suckled her child and marvelled at his/her growth. All these points of contact — and yet they remain that; the work never comes together for me as a whole.

Is this my failure or the failure of the work? Or does it matter? Perhaps not — and yet the book is concerned with Marlatt's struggle to sift her life for essence, for what matters. I would like to feel a sense of wholeness in that struggle.

Marlatt's world is a kaleidoscope, her poetry a constantly tilting collage of images. However, the poetry which follows her son's birth seems more grounded, considerably less abstract than that which precedes it.

The events which shine through her reflections upon them are major turning points in many women's lives: pregnancy, birth, and motherhood; a marriage that seems focussed upon the needs and career of her (psychologist) husband as she moves with him from California

to Vancouver (a coming home which is no home to him), back again to the U.S. — struggling herself with various alienations before she finally returns with her son to Vancouver, where she feels "located," where there is "something about this place so restful to me my body relaxes into it." All along she struggles to write and to do some part-time teaching.

The author uses three forms: the short-line, jump-cut poems, counterpointed by journal entries and by paragraphs of prose poetry as she seeks through her writing to find a totality of meaning, a fundamental sense of being.

Marlatt makes heavy demands of her reader: a sophisticated background in metaphysics and existentialism, wide reading in modern poetry, empathy with visceral feelings, and the will to stay with her as she works her mix. The reward of the reading only minimally balances the effort required. Nonetheless, there are those moments of deeply felt contact; and a bright, honest, courageous woman's documentation of this fundamental part of our shared existential struggle is a work of value.



### Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System

Sherrill E. Grace and Lorraine Weir, eds., University of British Columbia Press.

#### Elizabeth Sparkes

This book of critical essays is not for everyone. The reader who turns the pages of Atwood for perspective and pleasure may find that critical dissection distances more than it illuminates. The two editors, Sherrill Grace and Lorraine Weir, bookend the seven essays they have chosen for this study of Atwood's cultural codes and system of values. Grace begins by examining Atwood as critic and the critics of Atwood, and by outlining thematic patterns: duality,

nature, selfhood, and word power. Weir concludes the text with her perspective on the "mirror" and the "map" that Atwood's writings offer. Both editors quote the lines from *Two-Headed Poems* (p. 67) which convey Atwood's idea that language shapes society as much as society shapes language:

Language, like the mouths  
that hold and release  
it, is wet & living, each

word is wrinkled  
with age, swollen  
with other words, with blood,  
smoothed  
by the numberless  
flesh tongues that have passed  
across  
it.

The essays between these two vary in interest and focus; Atwood's recent novel *Bodily Harm* is almost ignored and *Surfacing* is scrutinized repeatedly. An exception, Linda Hutcheon's essay, studies two other of Atwood's novels, *The Edible Woman* and *Life Before Man*. She examines the author's comparison of women's romantic expectations and their prosaic realities (life before and after men).

A feminist perspective on Atwood's poetry by Barbara Blakely continues this major duality which the poet rejects and thrives on — the female/male relationship. Blakely's core idea in "The Pronunciation of Flesh" revolves around images of "the circle game" which women and men play endlessly in male-dominated territory. As Blakely interprets the poems, freedom from the entrapment of male consciousness comes through women's being able to envision beyond "conventional categories"; through their actions that destroy the illusion of "safety and solidity"; and through their assuming an identity in a "new field of existence."

Eli Mandel's study follows with a series of questions that guide the reader toward his view of the politics in Atwood's poetry. Her use of "mystification" and "shamanism" function to carry the reader away

from mythically based mind sets that inhibit creative vision.

In contrast to Mandel, Robert Cluett turns the reader away from magic and toward computers. After analysing the prose in *Surfacing*, Cluett's computer suggests that Atwood's writings, like her readings, are purposely devoid of colourful stress and variation. Atwood deviates from the norm of other writers through her lack of "ornate" syntax, her subtle use of monotone.

Yet another examination of *Surfacing* follows. This intriguing paper by Marie-Françoise Guedon identifies the Indian perceptions in Atwood's fictional world. Guedon's work develops the heroine's "quest for sanity" in relationship to the traditional Indian belief in spiritual power. Her anthropological explanations of Atwood's theme of rebirth carefully balance delicious morsels from *Surfacing* and fascinating discussions of North American Indian culture.

A third scrutiny of *Surfacing* comes with Philip Stratford's comparison of Atwood's novel and Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode*. Stratford examines these novels of alienation, search, and confession and contrasts their cultural settings (the Old World heritage of Aquin's narrative and the New World hostility of Atwood's fiction).

George Woodcock's essay returns the reader to Atwood's poetry, particularly her poems of the past decade. His work, "Metamorphosis and Survival," discusses the transformations that Atwood's verse envelops to allow her movement through past and future. Woodcock refers to Ovid and Keats in his discussion of Atwood's vision of change and her sense of timelessness. He maintains that *True Stories* offers the best of Atwood's talent. In these, a recent collection of poems, she reiterates her feelings about abandonment of reason, the injustice of the senses, and the unhappy connection of love and violence.

For the Atwood devotee, I would

suggest a rereading of her works in combination with the essays by Woodcock, Guedon, Stratford, and Blakely. These four form the energy of *Language, Text, and System*. For the Atwood fan with limited reading time, I would suggest (with preference to *True Stories* and *Bodily Harm*) a rereading of Atwood.



### A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981

Adrienne Rich, W.W. Norton & Co., 1981, pp. 61, paperback, \$4.95 (U.S.).

Suniti Namjoshi

That the book is written within a feminist context is obvious. What is perhaps less immediately obvious is the contribution it makes to the continuing dialogue between women (and men concerned with these issues). Virginia Woolf said about Charlotte Brontë's works, "... if one reads them over and marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire." (*A Room of One's Own*, p.70) Rich herself replied many years later, "... much poetry by women — and prose for that matter — is charged with anger. I think we need to go through that anger. . ." (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, p.48)

Does one have to be either calm like Jane Austen or indignant like Jane Eyre? *A Wild Patience* offers an unexpected answer: patience can be wild and wildness patient. The terms themselves can acquire a new meaning as they are made to fit experience; and experience need not be chopped up to fit the terms. In the poem "Integrity," Rich is able to say

Anger and tenderness: my selves.  
And now I can believe they breathe  
in me  
as angels, not polarities. (p.9)

She brings the same honesty to bear on the relationship of "heroines" to the Women's Movement. How is a non-hierarchical movement, a movement without a "star-system," to praise its heroines, those women who were

strong in health  
through a collection  
of circumstances  
soon to be known  
as class privilege? (p.34)

The end of the poem makes it clear that the genuine attempt to see a person as herself is praise.

how can I give you  
all your due  
take courage from your courage  
honor your exact  
legacy as it is  
recognizing  
as well  
that it is not enough? (pp.35-36)

And in a movement where the emphasis has been on speaking out, speaking from one's own experience, not defining someone else's reality for her or him — Rich describes the experience of a black woman who has been framed. The concluding lines of Rich's poem make the question of impertinence just that, not pertinent.

What I am telling you  
is told by a white woman who they  
will say  
was never there. I say I am there.  
(p. 48)

Now the real issue must be faced: will we, or will we not, bear witness?

And finally there is one particular line from the book that haunts me:

I can never romanticize language  
again (p.4)

What does it mean, not to romanticize? To stick to "reality," not dreams? How can one know? And don't dreams matter? Perhaps it means *not* retreating into the private world of love, of art, of the imagination. The first poem in the book is a love poem, and in some sense a "private" poem in that we "overhear" the persona speak to

her lover. But it is the infringement of the public on the private that gives the poem its extraordinary power. The lovers do not live in Arcadia, they live in this world, where

Two women sleeping  
together have more than their sleep  
to defend. (p.3)

And again in the same poem

but when did we ever choose  
to see our bodies strung  
in bondage and crucifixion across  
the exhausted air  
when did we choose  
to be lynched on the queasy  
electric signs  
of midtown when did we choose  
to become the masturbator's fix  
(p.3)

*A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* offers an awareness of what it might mean to cut through prefabricated polarities to actual experience. And this requires an unswerving accuracy in the use of language, which is a far more difficult feat than the "romanticization" of language and the verbal flourishes and embroideries that that affords.



## Spare Parts

Gail Scott, Coach House Press,  
1981, 62 pp.

### Christine St. Peter

Gail Scott's *Spare Parts*, a collection of five post-modernist stories, recounts the perilous journey of a maturing woman as she crosses a good part of Canada and, more aptly, experiences five stages of life. Scott follows a trail already blazed by Alice Munro and, I think, relies to some extent on our knowledge of that finely wrought realistic background for her own fragmentary and often surrealistic embellishment of the older tradition. The whole work is as densely textured as a poem, with extraordinarily rich symbolic imagery, and it is this aspect that gives the book its emotional power.

The spare parts of the title are the bits of life the narrator pastes

together; they are also the interchangeable — and generally unmanageable — parts of bodies she experiences, her own and other people's. In the first story, for example, the eleven-year-old narrator eagerly displays the newly-sprouted tits on her T-shirt and waits hopefully for the results; throughout all five of the stories she will be betrayed by this hope and by her sexual desire, which has in it a curiously mechanical functioning. Here's a representative sample from the first story:

It was night. I walked through the milkwood fields as starry with the white pods as the starry sky. There were clocks in all the village crotches. They sat on their verandahs rocking and ticking. I slipped into the narrow path of the ravine that led to Rita's door. She had the biggest clock. It was ticking loudly. But her milkwood eyes were crying.  
(p.18)

Rita's tears reveal the estrangement of the natural life from the social mores and, because this is a small Ontario town, mores are religious and political as well as social. The book opens with a glorious sense of physical promise: "Spring came through the gully bursting wide the creek edges where I lost my grandfather's watch"; it closes with the ruined springtime world flying off into the "heavenly blue dust" like so many pieces of junk parts from a disintegrating automobile: "There's a torn patch in the sky. If only I could smell some F's. Maybe the spring would come back."

Each of the stories has its distinctive style. The first, appropriate to the young child, is clear and simple, reflecting the pristine quality of her experience and the half-comprehension of the adult inconsistencies which confront her. The next story, "Ottawa," presents us a female Prufrock whose sensibility is a composite of pop records, advertising chic, and trendy art models. The third, "Withdrawal Symphonies," perhaps the only unsuccessful stylistic experiment in the group, offers a much more

sophisticated narrator whose experience takes the form of a highly ornamented musical form. But it is in this story that the narrator becomes a mother, and the pain and struggle this creates provide the emotional power of the rest of the collection. In "Tall Cowboys and True," the woman abandons her children for a red-sneakered man — she's always been susceptible to that colour — and the nightmare vision takes the shape of a macho western movie set under an outcrop in the Rockies: "She took his hand. They walked along the Main Street. Horses and oil tankers, hitched to the same posts, fitfully pawed the sand, eyeing each other nervously." (Reminiscent of Atwood, this, but she's hard to escape in Canadian literature.) The final story, "Petty Thievery," enters the hyped-up world of the thriller, and the protean male, disappointing throughout the book, now imprisons her and sends her kid to a "foreign country," the ultimate estrangement.

Woman and her experiences as a collection of spare parts. It's a powerful image and a stylistic mode which Gail Scott crafts with great care in this surprisingly poignant and often funny book.



## The Journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950-1962

Dial Press, 1982, \$21.95.

Sherrill Cheda

Reading the private words of a person is similar to eavesdropping and voyeurism: we always feel slightly uncomfortable at being there and, while wondering if we'll be discovered, we are constantly aware that the writer wasn't writing this for our eyes. We are invading her privacy and violating her space. Yet it is even more annoying and less private

where censors have been there before us: her husband, her editor.

The (omissions) — as opposed to ordinary cuts — in these journals are terribly annoying, even more so when we are told that her husband, Ted Hughes, has left out references to what editor Frances McCullough calls "intimacies" and that these omissions "have the effect of diminishing Plath's criticism, which was quite strong." So even when we as women have not used our silences, there have been others, men, who make sure the truth about our lives and our sexuality remains silent. But this is nothing compared to Mr. Hughes's own words in his foreword: "Two more notebooks survived for awhile, maroon-backed ledgers like the '57-'59 volume, and continued the record from late '59 to within three days of her death. The last of these contained entries for several months, and I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The other disappeared." Consequently we have almost none of Sylvia Plath's own words during her most prolific and creative periods.

As these journal entries show, Sylvia Plath was a brilliant, ambitious, and insightful writer who painfully understood sexual politics but didn't have the support of feminists or a feminist analysis. She strongly felt the pull between her professional ambitions and the limitations of women's roles in the 1950s. Her other early perceived conflicts were between the solitude she needed for creativity and her need for companionship, as well as her own sexuality and what men and society expected of her sexually.

At the age of eighteen she was writing in her journal: "... I can only lean enviously against the boundary and hate, hate, hate the boys who can dispel sexual hunger freely, without misgiving, and be whole, while I drag out from date to date in soggy desire, always un-

fulfilled. The whole thing sickens me. . . If only I can find him. . . the man who will be intelligent, yet physically magnetic and personable. If I can offer that combination, why shouldn't I expect it in a man?" A little later that same first year at Smith College she starts "... to realize that most American males worship woman as a sex machine with rounded breasts and a convenient opening in the vagina, as a painted doll who shouldn't have a thought in her pretty head other than cooking a steak dinner and comforting him in bed. After a hard 9-5 day at a routine business job." Still in 1950, at the height of the feminine mystique, she records: "and yet does it not all come again to the fact that it is a man's world? For if a man chooses to be promiscuous, he may still esthetically turn up his nose at promiscuity. He may still demand a woman be faithful to him, to save him from his own lust. But women have lust, too. Why should we be relegated to the position of custodian of emotions, watcher of the infants, feeder of soul, body and pride of man. . . I want to be able to sleep in an open field, to travel West, to walk freely at night."

And so it is from the moving words of this journal that we learn that the Sylvia Plath of *The Bell Jar* and *Ariel* was indeed a fully conscious, struggling artist in touch with herself and the world around her. Some of her finest prose is evident in these journals, as is her joy when her writing goes well. "Some pale, hueless flicker of sensitivity is in me. God, must I lose it in cooking scrambled eggs for a man. . . hearing about life at second hand, feeding my baby and letting my powers of perception and subsequent articulation grow fat and lethargic with disease."

During the summer before her first suicide attempt, she observed: "To annihilate the world by annihilation of one's self is the deluded height of desperate egoism. The simple way out of all the little dead ends we scratch our nails

against. . . why did Virginia Woolf commit suicide? Or Sara Teasdale or the other brilliant women? Neurotic? Was their writing sublimation (oh, horrible word) of deep, basic desires? If only I knew. If only I knew how high I could set my goals, my requirements for my life!"

Her diary is full of her desire to strive for perfection and her impatience with herself for not meeting those high standards she had set. She badly wanted success and fame and, as she said, "Not being perfect hurts." What she feared most was the death of her imagination.

And then she met Ted Hughes. They had what must have been a whirlwind courtship between Easter and June 16, 1956, when they were married. All that happiness, all that passion was quickly modified, for, as she writes, within a month, while still on their honeymoon, the heaviness began. Their fights often had to do with domestic duties such as his expecting her to sew on his buttons or fix his breakfast. There is also evidence that Plath went back to her foremothers, not only in her reading, but also in her mind and travels. In 1957 she made a pilgrimage to the Brontë house in Yorkshire and recorded her observations and feelings. She also looked to other writers as role models: Mavis Gallant, Adrienne Reeli, Anne Sexton, May Sarton.

While in her college years, she struggled with how to reconcile being an artist with being a mate. After her marriage she struggled with how to be an artist and also be a mother. As she matured, she tried to understand her anger and depression as well as her love and joy.

In spite of the omissions, gaps, and destroyed and lost diaries, these published journals are examples of some of Sylvia Plath's most brilliant and tortured writing, full of hope and despair, insight and observations — a joy to read and a real contribution to literature.

## The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982, pp. 622, paperback, \$11.95.

*Fran Beer*

This great collection, which includes all forty-one of Eudora Welty's published short stories, really deserves nothing less than a thesis. To set out to review the collected stories of a writer who has been so justly honoured for her literary achievements over the years feels a little presumptuous. Early granted both Guggenheim and O'Henry awards (1942), Welty has been regularly honoured on up through 1973 when she won the Pulitzer Prize for her novella *The Optimist's Daughter*. She has received honorary degrees from universities ranging from Smith College (Massachusetts) to the University of the South (Tennessee).

Born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi, Welty lives there still, and the deep South provides the setting, the atmosphere for her stories. This edition actually consists of four separate volumes, published in 1941, 1943, 1949, and 1955, plus two uncollected stories from 1963 and 1966. The first volume, "A Curtain of Green," dazzles immediately, and displays as well as any her special array of short-story skills — though, by the way, she has also authored five novels.

Welty's sense of detail is extraordinary: the waiting room of a remote train station is quiet "except for the night sounds of insects. You could hear their embroidering movements in the weeds outside, . . . or listen to the fat thudding of the light bugs and the rushing of their big wings against the wooden ceiling"; "a little girl lay flung back in her mother's lap as though sleep had dealt her with a blow"; a suitcase was "strapped crookedly shut, because of a missing buckle, so that it hung apart finally like a stupid pair of lips."

Welty brings her characters alive

and gives them voices so that you can clearly see, and as often hear, them: "'Reach in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder on it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher honey,' said Leota to her ten o'clock shampoo-and-set customer. 'I don't like no perfumed cigarettes.'" She has a sense of humour that can make you laugh out loud or bring a lump to your throat. Her flair for the grotesque combines with a skill for filling the most common situations with wit and feeling: "Petrified Man" takes place in a beauty parlor; the story's action is the stinging and dripping of setting lotion, the combing out of the perm, the banging of the screen door — but the punch line has to do with the unmasking of a phony man of stone in the freak show who turns out to be wanted in California on four counts of rape.

Welty doesn't need "plot" in any contrived sense of the word: she knows how to isolate a meaningful configuration of character, situation, emotion, incident. The ability to present the special point of view of a limited character and still let her audience know what is "really" going on can be a rich source of irony — as in "Why I live at the P.O." — or of pathos — as in "Death of a Travelling Salesman."

This awesome combination of skills means that you are captured quickly by these stories, by their voices and images; and given the combination, you are not surprised to learn that during the Depression Welty worked as a photographer and reporter. She also worked for the W.P.A., and these Depression jobs must go a way toward explaining her great compassion and her political independence, her tenderness toward the outcasts, the lonely, the poor and ignorant, the old, the black. These are the characters she loves; the "enemy" is the complacent, comfortable, conventional middle class.

"A Visit of Charity" tells of a young girl sent by her Campfire

troop to do her good deed at the old-folks' home: she is terrified; the old ladies are grotesque and cruel to each other; the nurse is cold and mechanical. There is no contact, no sharing, no alleviation of misery. In the fine title story, a woman, spiritually and emotionally dead since the loss of her husband, seeks release by working obsessively in her garden, and her final crisis comes, not in rational terms, but in a surrender to the growth and the rain. In "A Worn Path," an ancient Negro woman, Phoenix Jackson, makes an astonishing, arduous journey into Natchez to get medicine for her little grandson. Her heroism becomes more affecting as she must connect with the white world, contacts even more difficult than her journey. But her mission, and her vision, are sustaining, and she heads home with the medicine and a little paper windmill she's bought him, a fragile symbol of their hope: "We is the only two left in the world. He suffer and it

don't seem to put him back at all. He got a sweet look. He going to last."

The trail that old Phoenix follows, called the Natchez Trace, lies between the Pearl River, which runs through Jackson, and the Mississippi. It winds through the second volume, "The Wide Net," like some kind of fateful lifeline. Welty has chosen a wide range, socially and historically, as if to show how strong its force is: a deaf orphan boy, an embittered old Southern belle, a wild-eyed visionary, a young lovelorn recluse — these lives, and others, are all bound by the common link of the Trace. Geography also plays a role in the third volume, "The Golden Apples," but here Welty has created a fictional town, Morgana, Mississippi, and a cast of characters — the main families — all of whom figure in the stories.

"The Bride of the Innisfallen" again shows a bold range of time and place: a Northern man and

woman meet in New Orleans, ferry over the Mississippi, and drive deep into bayou country; their family home burned by Northern soldiers, their menfolk gone, two sisters hang themselves; a compartment full of travellers jostle each other on the boat train headed from London to Cork; the story of Odysseus's visit is retold from Circe's point of view. But a nagging sense of dislocation and alienation has crept into these stories; the humour is gone. And of the last two, written in the 60s, Welty says, "they reflect the unease, the ambiguities, the sickness and the desperation of those days in Mississippi."

These last disturbing stories do not offset the tenderness, the compassion, of the whole: "What I do in writing of any character is to try to enter into the mind, heart, and skin of a human being who is not myself." And she does. There's nothing for it but to read these stories yourself.

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