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Main content

Article Preview :

Grace Paley's *The Collected Stories* is at once a cause to celebrate one of our country's premier fictionists and an occasion to reconsider just what it is that makes her work so extraordinary. One could begin by pointing out that Paley is a painstaking writer (40 years of patient work has produced some 45 stories) and then go on to suggest that *The Collected Stories* (which brings together in one volume three previous collections - *The Little Disturbances of Man* [1959], *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* [1974], and *Later the Same Day* [1985]) constitutes a rough chronicle of a certain slice of immigrant Jewish life in New York City during the decades between the early fifties and the mid-eighties. Or one could suggest that Paley's abiding alter ego, Faith Darwin Asbury (who appears in at least 13 of the stories), is roughly akin to Sherwood Anderson's *George Willard*, and that the same unities that bind the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* into an aesthetic whole also operate - albeit more loosely - in the threads that stitch one Paley...

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One of the triumphs of fiction is that it is created in the dark. It leaves my house in a plain wrapper, with no bloodstains. Unlike me, my stories are whole and indestructible. In a reversal of the natural order, I am the shadow, my fiction is the substance. If my books are buried by time they can be dug up. Part I *World's End* : *World's end* -- *Zombies* -- *The imperial icehouse* -- *Yard sale* -- *Algebra* -- *The English adventure* -- *After the war* -- *Words are deeds* -- *White lies* -- *Clapham junction* -- *The odd-job man* -- *Portrait of a lady* -- Part II *Sinning*. With *Annie* : *The prison diary of Jack Faust* -- *A real Russian ikon* -- *A political romance* -- *Sinning with Annie* -- *A love knot* -- *What have you done to our Leo?* -. The early stories, like *The 'Tree'* which he published in the *Adelphi*, or any of the pieces which were to appear in *The Map of Love*, are indeed very like the poems. They possess the same obsessive imagery, are written in heightened rhythms, deal with the same interior world. They are very clearly the work of the young man who wrote the poems. They were not, however, collected into a volume, as the poems were. *Eighteen Poems* had created a small sensation and Thomas was already a famous young poet.