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WILLOW TREES PRESS

REVIEWS

1984-1985

COOPER, J. CALIFORNIA  
WALKER, ALICE

2017/193



# MOTHER JONES

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November 19, 1984

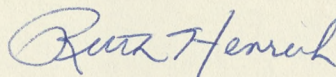
Alice Walker  
Wild Trees Press  
P.O. Box 378  
Navarro, CA 95463

Dear Alice Walker,

Thanks very much for sending us the proofs from A PIECE OF MINE. (And Belvie has since given me a copy of the finished product--it's a beautiful book.)

I just want to let you know that we will be considering the book for review in an early '85 issue. In the meantime, I wish you luck with the press and appreciate your thinking of us.

Sincerely,



Ruth Henrich



Cooper, J. California  
A PIECE OF MINE  
Wild Trees (P.O. Box 378,  
Navarro, CA 95463)  
paperback original \$7.95  
12/15 SBN: 931125-00-6

Twelve stories of man/woman troubles in a black, small-town setting—nearly all of them narrated, in a folksy/anecdotal style, by older-and-wiser black women. Most of the men are abusive, most of the women are victims. . . at least at first. In “\$100 and Nothing!” an under-appreciated wife takes posthumous revenge on her no-good husband. Other rotten men get their comeuppance in assorted ways: a jealous (but philandering) husband tries to kill his unfaithful wife, accidentally killing his tacky mistress instead; another leech of a man dies by hanging (“Me, I believe it was an accident. . . he was either trying to fix it so Della would catch him in time to stop him and realize she loved him, or he was fixin it for her”); middle-aged men are abandoned by their newly liberated spouses. In a few cases the women never get revenge or better men or freedom: “Loved to Death” is a mawkish lament for a woman driven to fatal alcoholism by cruel men; “Sins Leave Scars” chronicles the life of an abused girl who grows up unable to love. And the didactic, platitudinous strain that runs through almost all of Cooper’s stories is especially emphatic in “Color Me Real”—about a part-black woman who suffers from the prejudices of both white and black men. . . until she finds true love with a childhood playmate. (“She was neither white nor black now. She was a woman, his woman. It lasted til death did them part, leaving beautiful brown children on the beautiful brown earth.”) Still, if there’s little variety in this collection, and little shape or depth to Cooper’s monologues, there’s plenty of energy, personality, and humor—all of which (along with the sponsorship of Alice Walker) should help to attract a black/feminist audience.



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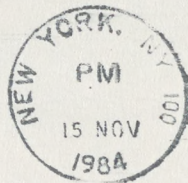
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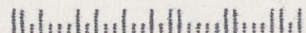
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**KIRKUS  
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Mr. Robert Allen  
WILD TREES PRESS  
P.O. Box 378  
Navarro, CA 95463





# Fate of these women hangs on gumption

**A PIECE OF MINE.** By J. California Cooper. (Wild Trees Press, \$7.95.)

Reviewed by  
Carol Fowler  
Times book editor

Alice Walker, whose "The Color Purple" won both the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize last year has started a new venture. Along with Robert Allen she has founded Wild Trees Press.

Their premiere publication is "A Piece of Mine," a collection of short stories by J. California Cooper.

Like Walker's "The Color Purple," Cooper's book is written in the folk English spoken by black people. Each story is told from the viewpoint of a narrator, an observer, sometimes detached, but more often a participant in the emotional line of the story, while the main character remains silent. These "kissing friends" remain anonymous, voices but not names in the stories.

"Cooper creates vividly the voice of the sister-witness that all of us, if

we are lucky, and if we are loved, have in our lives," writes Walker in a foreword to the book.

Cooper's stories, arranged in somewhat chronological fashion in terms of the main character's age, tell of women sometimes triumphant, but more often used and abused. Although the men in their lives play pivotal roles in determining the lot of these women, it is more often the women's gumption or lack of it that determines their fate.

Take Mary, in "\$100 and Nothing!," the opening story. A woman with instinctive entrepreneurial skills, she parlayed a single acre purchased for \$5 into a thriving store.

She marries a husband along the way, who becomes tired of her and envious of her success. Eventually he takes up with someone younger and prettier, while Mary wastes away with an illness.

But Mary has the last word. Even from beyond the grave, she gives him one year, knowing the business will fall to pieces, and she leaves him \$100 and a note to be opened one year from the day of her death.

Cooper has the gift of honing a life to its essence and fitting it to the confines of a short story. They reveal the minds and hearts of black women, both young and old — mostly rural born.

Early on in the book, the stories seemed to have the same narrator, a single voice and tone. But as the book progresses, the narrators seemed to take on as much color and variety as the main character. The fusion of speaker and actor seemed to be more secure.

This initial effort of Wild Trees Press, along with Walker's novels and poetry, should chart new areas in contemporary literature.



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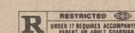
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Feb, 1985

Plexus

## Reviews

## Books

## Extraordinary Women

A PIECE OF MINE, by J. California Cooper. Wild Trees Press, 1984, \$7.95

What a pleasure it is to read short stories about strong women living ordinary lives, and overcoming in extraordinary ways the difficulties that all women—and especially black women—face!

J. California Cooper's first collection of stories, *A Piece of Mine*, deals honestly and directly with the things that shape women's lives: love, violence, sex, abuse, children, work, death, nature, and friendship with other women.

Cooper's narrators are "sister-witnesses," to borrow Alice Walker's term from her foreword to the book, women who tell the story of a woman close to her, with whom she has shared cares and confidences, joys as well as sorrows.

A particularly moving relationship of this sort is described in "Loved to Death," a disabled woman's outpouring to "Mr. Notebook" about her dead sister, the only person in her life who encouraged her to live, love, and run:

When we was growing up, everybody always tell me "Sit down and rest!" But Zalina always say, "Come on! Run! Run!" I was scared to... just wanted to stand and cry. But one day, she pulled me and I HAD to! And I did! I felt the whole world turning under my feet! I just laughed and cried and Zalina just threw her head back and laughed so happy with me!

"A Jewel for a Friend" is about Pearl, a woman who is mistreated

by her husband and ignored by her children, so that the focus of her life becomes saving up, cent by cent, the money to purchase a nice headstone for herself. Her story is told by her best friend Ruby ("I am Ruby and she is Pearl and we was jewels"), a 90-year-old woman who

...life just kept rollin and I began to rub her whole little beautiful sore body...all over...and when I got to them bruised places I kissed them and licked them too...

Most of Cooper's stories describe abuse—physical and emotional—that women experience at the hands of men. This rarely gets her women down for long, though. Many of the women transcend their pain by creating liberating alternatives for themselves.

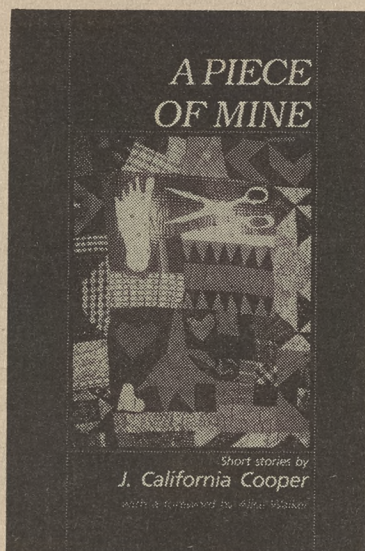
Others are vindicated by a force more powerful than themselves, a karmic force in many of Cooper's stories that operates to hand each character the fate s/he deserves.

"We hoe our own rows and what we plants there, we picks," says one character, stating a truth that is borne out in all of Cooper's stories.

Though many of Cooper's characters have extremely difficult lives, these stories are not at all depressing. Cooper writes with an uplifting humor that comes from keeping a compassionate perspective on the human condition. Even the hardest of situations is tempered by the narrator's overview of it and acceptance of the wild variety of human expression.

Cooper's book is the first to be published by Wild Trees Press, a press formed last year by writer Alice Walker and her partner Robert Allen, former editor of *Black Scholar*. *A Piece of Mine* augurs well for the integrity and quality of the work we can expect from Wild Trees.

—Jane Sooby



has managed to hammer away half of Pearl's husband's headstone over the 11 years she's worked at it. This brilliant story testifies to the bonds between women friends that endure beyond the grave.

"A Jewel for a Friend" is also the only story in the book that explores the possibility of physical intimacy between women. The single lesbian encounter between Ruby and Pearl occurs after Pearl has been beaten by her husband. Ruby sees this experience as a natural extension of their shared love:



## BOOKS IN REVIEW

### A Piece of Mine

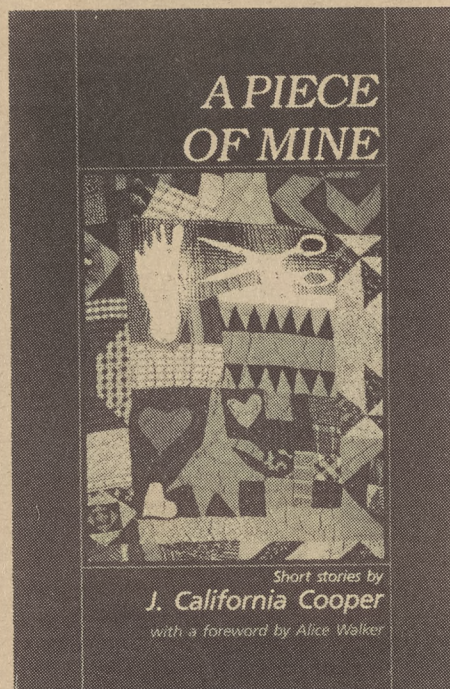
By J. California Cooper  
Wild Trees Press, Navarro, CA  
1984; 124 pp. \$7.95

#### Reviewed by Paula Ross

**T**he appearance of the first book from Alice Walker and Robert Allen's new publishing venture, Wild Trees Press, has been a quiet one as far as I can tell. For the last six months, I'd been hearing subdued rumblings that Walker had established her own press. What, I wondered, would the author of *The Color Purple* and *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*; poet of *Revolutionary Petunias* and *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning*; and editor of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing, A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* choose as the vehicle to launch her personal publishing ship into the uncertain and precarious waters that buffet the efforts of independent publishers to remain afloat? Over a late summer lunch, with a new acquaintance, another Black woman writer who moved in literary circles I knew only by reputation, I found out.

Wild Trees Press set sail with a collection of work by Black Oakland playwright J. California Cooper. *A Piece of Mine* contains twelve short stories. According to Walker's brief but cogent foreword, it is a perfect illustration of the infant press' motto: "We publish only what we love."

Anyone familiar with Walker's Gracie Mae Still ("Nineteen Fifty-Five"); Hannah Kemhuff ("The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff"); or Celie (*The Color Purple*), will instantly recognize why Cooper's women found a home with Wild Trees. These are women who work hard, try to hold themselves and their families together in spite of beatings and rapes and the heavy feet of economic oppression, sexism and white racism on their own necks and the necks of the people they love. Sometimes they



triumph, thumbing their noses at the odds. Sometimes they are trampled under the weight. Sometimes they simply persevere, cooking the meals, washing the clothes, planting the gardens, loving their men (and their women), gossiping and laughing with their best girl friends. They all live, in the best way they know how.

Cooper possesses a fine ear for the diction of southern Black, primarily working class and rural speech. She draws heavily on that skill to quickly set the scene for many of her stories here.

I'm telling you, say what you willomay, these mornings, early like this, is just too beautiful! People think that here in the country there ain't nothing but boredom, day after day. But they wrong! These is big days following great big days! Lookit them trees

down that road and that big fat cow over there! And that sun coming up! Now ain't that pretty?!

"Say What You Willomay!"

It is as if, anxious to push forward her different storytellers, eager to let them spin their tales, she quickly sketches in a few lines, rapid strokes that silhouette a town or a piece of countryside. She is impatient to get to the real center of the stage — the people. Mindful of the limits imposed by the short story form, she economically allows her narrators, her tellers of tales, to outline the stories' settings, using the words of their conversations as the pieces of charcoal, the pencils and the paintbrush.

Most of the pieces here use the device of the minor character as narrator. Cooper conjures up, as Walker points out, the spirit of Zora Neale Hurston's character Phoeby, the best friend of Janie Crawford in Hurston's sublime novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Phoeby, and women like her, exist on the sidelines, in the margins of the lives of their more flamboyant sisters and friends. And it is the Phoebys who collect the stories, who are trusted not to forget, who are ultimately the best loved and cherished.

It would not be difficult to fly right by the evidence of love between women in *A Piece of Mine*, however. As I read here story after story of women physically and emotionally battered by men who sought to prove their manhood by having "...to stand on our shoulders, tear us down, make us look like nothing to make yourself big enough to do what you want to do!" ("Color Me Real"), I felt pounded into the ground, despairing of yet more portrayals of Black women's suffering at the hands of Black men. But perhaps because I needed to know that the world Cooper evokes was not unremitting in its bleak messages, I combed the stories for some relief. And it is there. At fifteen, Letta becomes the sole support of her parents, crushed beneath a white man's tractor, "all in fun." She still finds the time to help her Phoeby friend build a house ("Funeral Plans"). Middy, whose husband James "got an extra woman, Sally,..." not because he really wanted one, but because "...there was a long-lived rumor still going around that a man had to have an extra woman

on the side or he wasn't a man!'", buys Sally the house Sally rents from James and deeds it to her. Sharing with Sally what it means to break out of her life as a mule of all work, Midy tells her, "You better do something for yourself before it's too late" ("Liberated"). And at ninety, Ruby visits two or three times a week the graveyard where her friend Pearl is buried. She sits in a rocking chair under a sycamore tree, visits with her dead friends, eats her lunch and rests. Then she gets to work — chipping, grinding and breaking away at the fancy gravestone that adorn's Pearl's husband's grave. "...he don't deserve no stone since he stole Pearl's" ("A Jewel for a Friend").

The love and caring which save *A Piece of Mine* from unrelieved grimness, are not confined to relationships between female characters. It is interesting to speculate whether or not critics like Ishmael Reed and David Bradley, Black male writers who castigate Black women writers like Walker, Audre Lorde, and now, I would guess, Cooper, will be capable of seeing all of what *A Piece of Mine* contains. Many of Cooper's men are abusive, short-sighted, stingy, deeply suspicious of and hostile towards women. It is easy, then, to overlook the men who are genuinely loving, supportive and generous, who want women in their lives to be equal partners, not subjugated servants. These men may not be readily apparent, due in part to the aspect of Cooper's style which depends heavily on dialogue or dialogue-like descriptions. She often rushes the reader through incidents of horror — rape, incest, battering — at such a pace, and with such vividness, there is little time to notice anything else. However, in at least half of the stories, women and men develop strong, deep and loving bonds with each other. Marriages endure and dreams are shared. But in the stories where this is so, the successful relationships often play a Phoeby-like role similar to that of the stories' narrators — they are on the sidelines, in the margins. Still, without them, the core of the stories would be severely weakened.

Cooper is not always successful in maintaining a high level of interest (for the reader) in these pieces. After the first three of four, I grew tired of the unchanging Phoeby voice of her storytellers. Although they are presented as dif-

(continued on page 38)

Coming up! 1/85



# Cooper...

(continued from page 34)

ferent women, of different ages, different circumstances, after a while they sounded all alike to me. So I was reassured when I found "Mrs. Eustace B. (for Bernard) Walker and I am Ida R. Walker, myself" of "Too Hep To Be Happy!" After almost eighty pages, she was a new voice, a gust of fresh air. It is another welcome, and needed breather, when Vilma in "The Free and the Caged" takes some time out.

She decorated the cottage with flowers and leaves, planting wild flowers in bottles and jars and hanging them around the eaves of the little house. Rocks were made into designs around the yard with novel pieces of wood. Feathers were made into bouquets in odd little containers. She had improvised a bird bath and to her great delight, the birds used it. She visited the fat brown cows and petted their warm skins and shooed flies away from their eyes. ...A cat from somewhere attached itself to her; it came every morning and she fed it, then they sat together each with their own thoughts till each evening the cat would go away to some-

thing somewhere of its own.

This oasis, this pause in the rapid-fire volley of talk which impels Cooper's stories down the track, was too rare. More time out would not only allow the reader a chance to digest the onslaught of impressions, to distinguish one woman's story from another, but technically, it would be legitimate from the point of the view of the various narrators, one of whose chief functions is to *observe* and to communicate those observations. The keenest eyes and ears could not possibly produce such accurate records as *A Piece of Mine* holds if the train on which they are passengers moves eternally at breakneck speed, never halting in any station along the way.

Having written seven plays, and with drawers full of other manuscripts, according to my lunch companion of last summer, Cooper will undoubtedly continue to write. *A Piece of Mine* gives us a whirlwind introduction to her considerable skill at telling stories and creating totally believable characters. On the next trip, I hope she'll allow herself, and us, the luxury of spending more time in one corner of the world she knows so well.



Tuesday, December 25, 1984

## BOOKS/PATRICIA HOLT

# A Wise Vision From a Storyteller

**A Piece of Mine** by J. California Cooper

Wild Trees Press; 124 pages; \$7.95

**Y**ou are sitting in your kitchen having coffee with a neighbor when suddenly out comes a story she's been holding back for months, maybe years.

You find yourself entranced by the tale, not only because it's about people you recognize (though you haven't met them) but because it's told with compassion and ebullience, even during the painful parts.

But what you like most about this story is the sound of it. "Now the mens took to hanging around her and things like that!" exclaims your friend. "She was a regular size woman, she had real short hair and little skinny bow legs, things like that, but she was real, real nice and a kind person . . . to everybody."

"Anyway, pretty soon, one of them men with a mouth full of sugar and warm hands got to Mary. I always thought he had a mouth full of 'gimme' and a hand full of 'reach' . . ."

**W**hat happens to the character of Mary in this tale, called "\$100 and Nothing!" is part of the wry, wise vision offered to us by Oakland author Joan California Cooper in this book of short stories. Cooper, a playwright, knows very well how to "talk" these stories to us, to "overdo" exclamatory phrases, to remain so deeply in colloquial language that we don't catch the power of her message until it comes back to haunt us.

For example, Mrs. Eustace B. Walker in her kitchen tells us, "and I am Ida R. Walker, myself. I have lived in this house, this same house!, for 81 years! I was born here, raised here, married here and I lived right here!" This is Ida Walker's way of building up to a story about her niece, a buxom young woman who fell in love with Mrs. Walker's 70-year-old neighbor and became his lover. ("Whatever he did, he musta done it right! I ask her if she knew what she was doing thinkin' like that bout a old man . . .")

Throughout this story, Cooper



J. California Cooper

inserts italicized asides from Mrs. Walker ("*I'm gonna roll out these rolls and pop them in the oven for us to make our acquaintance by.*") so that by the time she finishes explaining why the 70-year-old man never married and says, "*NOW! Let's you and me butter up some of these nice hot rolls and get a piece of that crispy hot chicken . . .*," we feel as though we are members of the family and have been sitting in that kitchen all our lives. It's only later that we reflect back on that 70-year-old man and what he could not give that made him so afraid of life, and of "the womens."

Most of the stories are not pretty. They are about domestic life in (presumably) the rural South and the unspeakable crimes committed mostly by men in the name of love, sex, possession, freedom — just about all the bases are covered here. Lida Mae is seduced, knifed, raped, beaten and mutilated by lye for the "sin" of throwing away her future. Mr. Rembo beats his wife and has his way with the drunken lady next door. Letta's parents get crushed by a tractor at a factory where white men like to "play" with the happiness of black couples. Minna, impregnated at 13 by a white man, is impregnated again by the same man after he ties up his child in a nearby chair.

**T**here is some vindication to be found in these stories, but it is clear that revenge is not what Cooper is after, at all. It is, rather, a kind of redemptive grace reminiscent of Alice Walker's final sequences in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "*The Color Purple.*"



# BOOKS

## Alice Walker back on scene as poet and publisher

By Diana Ketcham  
The Tribune

Alice Walker is back in public view, after spending a quiet year in the country following "The Color Purple's" sweep of the literary prizes in 1983.

Walker has a new book of poems out this month, "Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful." She will be signing copies at Berkeley's Cody's Books on Nov. 20 at 8 p.m.

Using some of her earnings from "The Color Purple," Walker has launched another career as a publisher. With her friend Robert Allen, former editor of The Black Scholar, Walker has set up Wild Trees Press in Navarro. They expect their first book in the stores by the end of November.

If "A Piece of Mine," by Oakland writer J. California Cooper, indicates what Wild Trees has to offer, Walker and Allen are off to a promising start.

Cooper's stories of small town life satisfy as moral fables as well as with their earthy humor. A former orphan girl is so successful selling vegetables that she can find a home for black orphans. The patient wife of a violent drunkard is rewarded by a second marriage to a gentle man.

"In its strong folk flavor," Walker said, "Cooper's work reminds us of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. Like theirs, her style is deceptively simple and direct, and the vale of tears in which some of her characters reside is never so deep that a rich chuckle at a foolish person's foolishness can not be heard."

As their second book, Walker and Allen are bringing out a first novel by Virginia writer Jo Anne Brasil. Entitled "Escape from Ellie's Barbecue," it chronicles the coming of age of a white teenager in Boston in the '60s.



J. California Cooper, left, is one of the writers published by Wild Trees Press, set up by Alice Walker, right.



Calling Wild Trees a small press that will publish only a few books a year, Walker said they had their eye out for "manuscripts we love and can't bear to not have available."

"California (Cooper) has written stories a large number of people will just

plain enjoy," she said. "These are the stories that the world might lose. They are stories that could be spoken. What is unique is that she has written them down."

Wild Trees does not intend to limit

itself by ethnicity, sex, expertise or genre, Walker said. Cooper, an Oakland playwright who has had many plays produced locally, had never written stories until Walker encouraged her to try.

■ ■ ■

THE TRIBUNE CALENDAR Sunday, November 11, 1984

OAKLAND, CALIF.

wild trees press — post office BOX 378 — NAVARRO, CALIFORNIA 95463



## A Wise Vision From a Storyteller

**A Piece of Mine** by J. California  
Cooper  
Wild Trees Press; 124 pages; \$7.95

**Y**ou are sitting in your kitchen having coffee with a neighbor when suddenly out comes a story she's been holding back for months, maybe years.

You find yourself entranced by the tale, not only because it's about people you recognize (though you haven't met them) but because it's told with compassion and ebullience, even during the painful parts.

But what you like most about this story is the sound of it. "Now the mens took to hanging around her and things like that!" exclaims your friend. "She was a regular size woman, she had real short hair and little skinny bow legs, things like that, but she was real, real nice and a kind person ... to everybody."

"Anyway, pretty soon, one of them men with a mouth full of sugar and warm hands got to Mary. I always thought he had a mouth full of 'gimme' and a hand full of 'reach' ..."

**W**hat happens to the character of Mary in this tale, called "\$100 and Nothing!" is part of the wry, wise vision offered to us by Oakland author Joan California Cooper in this book of short stories. Cooper, a playwright, knows very well how to "talk" these stories to us, to "overdo" exclamatory phrases, to remain so deeply in colloquial language that we don't catch the power of her message until it comes back to haunt us.

For example, Mrs. Eustace B. Walker in her kitchen tells us, "and I am Ida R. Walker, myself. I have lived in this house, this same house!, for 81 years! I was born here, raised here, married here and I lived right here!" This is Ida Walker's way of building up to a story about her niece, a buxom young woman who fell in love with Mrs. Walker's 70-year-old neighbor and became his lover. ("Whatever he did, he musta done it right! I ask her if she knew what she was doing thinkin' like that bout a old man ...")

Throughout this story, Cooper



J. California Cooper

inserts italicized asides from Mrs. Walker ("I'm gonna roll out these rolls and pop them in the oven for us to make our acquaintance by.") so that by the time she finishes explaining why the 70-year-old man never married and says, "NOW! Let's you and me butter up some of these nice hot rolls and get a piece of that crispy hot chicken ...," we feel as though we are members of the family and have been sitting in that kitchen all our lives. It's only later that we reflect back on that 70-year-old man and what he could not give that made him so afraid of life, and of "the womens."

Most of the stories are not pretty. They are about domestic life in (presumably) the rural South and the unspeakable crimes committed mostly by men in the name of love, sex, possession, freedom — just about all the bases are covered here. Lida Mae is seduced, knifed, raped, beaten and mutilated by lye for the "sin" of throwing away her future. Mr. Rembo beats his wife and has his way with the drunken lady next door. Letta's parents get crushed by a tractor at a factory where white men like to "play" with the happiness of black couples. Minna, impregnated at 13 by a white man, is impregnated again by the same man after he ties up his child in a nearby chair.

**T**here is some vindication to be found in these stories, but it is clear that revenge is not what Cooper is after, at all. It is, rather, a kind of redemptive grace reminiscent of Alice Walker's final sequences in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "The Color Purple."

San Francisco  
Chronicle  
12/25/84



NOVEMBER 2, 1984 (ISSN 0000-0019) VOL. 226 NO. 18

\$2.00

# Publishers Weekly

The Journal of the Book Industry

FRANKFURT 1984—GROWING PAINS

PORTRAIT OF A PUBLISHER: JOHN PIZEY

BOOK DESIGN & MANUFACTURING

Contents, Page 5

## A PIECE OF MINE

*J. California Cooper.* Wild Trees Press (P.O. Box 378, Navarro, Calif. 95463), \$7.95 ISBN 0-931125-00-6

"There ain't no sense beatin' round the bush with the fellow who planted it," says a character in this promising fiction debut by playwright J. California Cooper. Reminiscent of the fiction of Alice Walker (who, with Robert Allen, founded Wild Trees Press), these 12 folkwise and earthy short stories are written as monologues, in which one "sister" bears witness to the life story of another. Both humorous and tragic—often at the same time—these tales are in some ways morality lessons. In one story, a mistreated wife gets a clever revenge on her husband from her grave; in another, an older woman hits on a plan to meet eligible single men at funerals; and in a third, a young woman with ambitious plans for her life gets forever sidetracked by a seduction. Throughout, men are seen as both victims and oppressors, whether witting or unwitting, while women are presented as friends and soulmates. But both men and women are treated with such bemused love that these tales of passions gone astray are transformed into celebrations of life. This is the publisher's first book.

[December]

# HELPWARE™

COMPUTER BOOKS FROM OSBORNE/McGRAW-HILL



★Cooper, J. California. *A Piece of Mine.*

Wild Trees Pr., P.O. Box 378, Navarro, CA 95463. Dec. 1984. 124p. fwd. by Alice Walker. ISBN 0-931125-00-6. pap. \$7.95.

This collection of short stories is something of a literary event: it is the first collection of stories to be published by dramatist Cooper, who was named Black Playwright of the Year in 1978, and it is the first book to be published by a new small press founded by Pulitzer Prize-winner Alice Walker and former *Black Scholar* editor Robert Allen. Further, the stories are wonderful, very human tales of the life struggles of women and their men. Most are told in a folksy, conversational manner by a "trusted other," a female friend of the woman in the story, and while these women suffer many woes in their lives, the stories sparkle with warmth, humor, and, often, revenge. Libraries should purchase liberally: Cooper's stories deserve a wide audience.—Ann H. Fisher, Radford P.L., Va.



# Alice Walker back on scene as poet and publisher

By Diana Ketcham  
The Tribune

Alice Walker is back in public view, after spending a quiet year in the country following "The Color Purple's" sweep of the literary prizes in 1983.

Walker has a new book of poems out this month, "Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful." She will be signing copies at Berkeley's Cody's Books on Nov. 20 at 8 p.m.

Using some of her earnings from "The Color Purple," Walker has launched another career as a publisher. With her friend Robert Allen, former editor of The Black Scholar, Walker has set up Wild Trees Press in Navarro. They expect their first book in the stores by the end of November.

If "A Piece of Mine," by Oakland writer J. California Cooper, indicates what Wild Trees has to offer, Walker and Allen are off to a promising start.

Cooper's stories of small town life satisfy as moral fables as well as with their earthy humor. A former orphan girl is so successful selling vegetables that she can found a home for black orphans. The patient wife of a violent drunkard is rewarded by a second marriage to a gentle man.

"In its strong folk flavor," Walker said, "Cooper's work reminds us of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. Like theirs, her style is deceptively simple and direct, and the vale of tears in which some of her characters reside is never so deep that a rich chuckle at a foolish person's foolishness can not be heard."

As their second book, Walker and Allen are bringing out a first novel by Virginia writer Jo Anne Brasil. Entitled "Escape from Ellie's Barbecue," it chronicles the coming of age of a white teenager in Boston in the '60s.



J. California Cooper, left, is one of the writers published by Wild Trees Press, set up by Alice Walker, right.

Calling Wild Trees a small press that will publish only a few books a year, Walker said they had their eye out for "manuscripts we love and can't bear to not have available."

"California (Cooper) has written stories a large number of people will just

plain enjoy," she said. "These are the stories that the world might lose. They are stories that could be spoken. What is unique is that she has written them down."

Wild Trees does not intend to limit



itself by ethnicity, sex, expertise or genre, Walker said. Cooper, an Oakland playwright who has had many plays produced locally, had never written stories until Walker encouraged her to try.

■ ■ ■

THE TRIBUNE CALENDAR Sunday, November 11, 1984

OAKLAND, CALIF.

wild trees press — post office BOX 378 — NAVARRO, CALIFORNIA 95463



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Oakland Tribune 11/11/84

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Harriet Doerr  
Nominated for award

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It happens almost every year the time of the Nobel Prize for Literature. An Eastern European name is uttered by the Swedish academy, and American readers scurry to find out who this unknown great might be. A rush to find the books is the first step. A flurry of translation follows, then the bidding for rights, as publishers gear up to bring the new Nobel laureate to the American public.

This year the focus of the post-Nobel scramble is a small Bay Area publisher, Gilman Parsons. When the prize to Czechoslovakian poet Jaroslav Seifert was announced in October, Parsons was sitting on a warehouseful of the only English version of Seifert's major poem, "The Plague Column."

Since then the young San Francisco book dealer has done a brisk business in Seifert, selling the hardbacks at \$50 a crack and the paperbacks at \$25. With its foreword by English scholar Cecil Parrot, the edition offers hard-to-find background information about the Czech poet, Parsons said.

"Irony" is the way Parsons described his luck in being the sole source of the Nobel laureate's book. With some friends, Parsons founded his London-based publishing venture, Terra Nova Editions, in 1978, when they were still students at Oxford. It folded in 1982. When he and his wife Barbara moved to San Francisco, they hauled their unsold stock with them.

University of California Press, whose monumental edition of Charles Olson's "The Maximus Poems" won the Los Angeles Times Book Award for poetry this week. The UC Press's "The Maximus Poems" brings Olson's unfinished epic to the public after 20 years of editing.

A first novel by Palo Alto writer Harriet Doerr made the list of nominees for the 1984 American Book Awards. The winners will be announced on Nov. 15. Doerr, who is 74, received a flood of critical praise last winter for her "Stones of Ibarra," about a middle-aged San Francisco couple who decide to live out their lives in a Mexican village.

Doerr shares the first novel category with Padgett Powell's "Edisto," and "Tapping the Source" by Ken Nunn. The other novels nominees are: "Foreign Affairs," by Alison Lurie, Philip Roth's "The Anatomy Lesson," and Ellen Gilchrist's "Victory Over Japan." Eudora Welty's "One Writer's Beginnings" was nominated in non-fiction, along with Ernest Pawel's "The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka," Richard Marius' "Thomas More, a Biography," and Robert B. Remini "Andrew Jackson and the course of Modern Democracy."

Three Bay Area environmental gurus will gather this coming Friday, when the Berkeley Ecology Center celebrates its 15th anniversary. Fritjof Capra, who wrote "The Tao of Physics" will be on hand to talk about his latest book, "Green Politics." In this new volume, Capra and co-author Charles S. Frickel

## Cyril Magnin disputes Ball statement

Fund-raisers Cyril Magnin and Robert Lindquist have disputed director William Ball's statement that the American Con-

fund-raising group, and Lindquist was the executive director.

"There was no half-million — or any



# WESTERN BOOK ROUND-UP

## NEW RELEASES FROM WESTERN PUBLISHERS

### ART / PHOTOGRAPHY

New collections from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: **Portraits of Artists**, photographic portraits of famous painters, sculptors, and photographers; and **Faces Photographed**, also photographic portraits, but of everyday people. Both books are in color and in black and white. (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, Ca 94102).

**What Shall We Do Without Us?**, by Kenneth Patchen (Sierra Club books, San Francisco, CA; \$25 cloth, \$12.95 paper). Kenneth Patchen died in 1972. His work often combined several media, the most striking of which are his poem paintings. They are vivid with life and color, and the short poetry becomes more striking when seen with Patchen's primitive drawings and primal colors. The reproductions from the UC Santa Cruz Archives collections (37 of them) are excellent.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY/BIOGRAPHY

**Friends of All Creatures**, by Rose Evans (Sea Fog Press, PO Box 210056, San Francisco, CA 94121; \$7.95 paper). A brief biography of the people throughout history who have been especially kind to animals, with illustrations by Valeria Evans. The book is good for children, but is researched well enough to interest general readers.

**Son of the Morning Star**, by Evan S. Connell (North Point Press; \$20 cloth). The story of Custer and his death at Little Bighorn, meticulously detailed and researched. Connell is known for his lucidity and story-telling flair.

**Spike Jones and His City Slickers**, by Jordan R. Young (Disharmony Books, PO Box 142, Beverly Hills, CA 90213; \$14.95 paper). Spike Jones was a bandleader in the 1940s and '50s who specialized in zany reworkings of popular songs. Anything known about him is in this book.

**Merton, By Those Who Knew Him Best**, ed. Paul Wilkes (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA; \$12.95 cloth). Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk, and a man of energy and magnetism. People's opinions of him vary. Included are a schoolmate of Merton's from grade school, fellow Trappist monks, singer Joan Baez, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Merton's former students.

**Playhouse**, by Diane Alexander (Dorleac-MacLeish, 5100 Longfellow St., Los Angeles, CA 90042). The Playhouse was a theatre in Hollywood where spirited, eager, and out of work actors made a living before being discovered. These included Charles Bronson, Martha Graham, William Holden, Frances Farmer, and Dustin Hoffman, among many others.

**The Charles McCabe Reader**, essays selected by Gordon Pates (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA; \$14.95 cloth). The irascible and opinionated McCabe, who died in 1983, was an unusual and popular writer. None of the columns included in this book have been anthologized before.

### COMPUTERS

New releases from Sybex Press: **The Commodore 64 Connection**, by James Coffron, \$14.95 paper; **The Easy Guide to Your Macintosh**, by Joseph Caggiano, \$12.95 paper; **The Complete Guide to Your IBM PCjr**, by Douglas Hergert, \$19.95 paper; **The Easy Guide to Your Coleco ADAM**, by Thomas Blackadar, \$9.95 paper; **Fifty Pascal Programs**, by Bruce H. Hunter, \$19.95 paper; **The CP/M Plus Handbook**, by Alan Miller, \$15.95 paper; and **The College Student's Personal Computer Handbook**, by Bryan Pfaffenberger, \$14.95 paper (Sybex Press, 2344 6th St., Berkeley, CA 94710).

### FICTION

**My Christine and Other Stories**, by Merce Rodoreda (Graywolf Press, Port Townsend, WA 98369; \$7 paper). Short stories by the Spanish writer of *Time of the Doves*, usually known for her gutty realism, also shows her flair for magic and dreams. Rodoreda died in 1983.

**A Chimney Sweep Comes Clean**, by Chandler Brossard (Realities Library, San Jose, CA 95111; \$3.50 paper). The story is of a British sleazeball. This small book is interesting for its bizarre sense of humor. The cover is of a naked man (except for shoes and socks) crossing the street, and holding an umbrella.

**A Guy Like You: A Tale Perpendicular to Itself**, by Lawrence Andrews (Persepolis Press, 2000 Center St. #1012, Berkeley, CA 94704; \$5 paper). The story of a self-made down-and-out as far as its story goes, which is not far. It is more like an angry prose poem than a short story.

**Nahanni Trailhead: A Year in the Northern Wilderness**, by Joanne Ronan Moore (Mountain Books, Seattle, WA. 98119; \$8.95 paper). A couple spends their honeymoon building a log cabin in the Canadian wilderness while trying to survive. Both are novices at living off the land, but they had prepared by reading books about it. Their account is light and engaging.

**A Piece of Mine**, by J. California Cooper (Wild Trees Press, PO Box 378, Navarro, CA 95463; \$7.95 paper). A quiltwork of short stories depicting black men and women in a small town. It combines humor and tragedy in focusing on human foibles and eccentricities.

### FOOD

**The Ego Diet**, by Gerald Laurence (Oak Tree Publications, 9601 Aero Dr. #202, San Diego, CA 92123; \$8.95 paper). A diet book with a sense of humor. Equates bad shape with bad habits.

### HISTORY/POLITICS

**A Prisoner of Martial Law**, by Jan Mur (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, San Diego, CA 92101; \$19.95 cloth). Jan Mur is the pseudonym of a man who lives and writes in Poland, and who was interned for being a member of the Solidarity movement when General Jaruzelski declared martial law. It is an account of

Mur's life in the detention camp, and an attempt to make people remember the very recent history of Poland.

### PSYCHOLOGY/SOCIOLOGY

**Jesus' Answer to God**, by Elizabeth Boyden Howes (Guild for Psychological Studies; no price given, paper). A Jungian interpretation of Christ and God, questioning how much Christ really deviated from Judaism and analyzing the reasons why he did.

### MISCELLANEOUS

**Bargain Hunting in the Bay Area**, by Sally Socolich (Wingbow Press, 2929 5th St., Berkeley, CA 94710; \$5.95 paper). An updated listing of auctions, dates of factory outlet sales, even parking tips.

**Influencing with Integrity**, by Genie Z. Laborde (Syntony Publishing, 1450 Byron St., Palo Alto, CA 94301; no price given). A guide to effective communication among corporate managers and sales-oriented professionals.

### Univ. of California

**California and the American Tax Revolt, Proposition 13 Five Years Later**, by Terry Schwadron, Paul Richter, and Jack Citrin (\$19.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper).

**Pepys at the Table: 17th-Century Recipes for the Modern Cook**, by Christopher Driver and Michelle Berriedale-Johnson (\$10.95 paper).

**Paradiso: The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri**, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum; drawings by Barry Moser (\$29.95 cloth).

New editions also of Shelley's **Frankenstein** and Twain's **Huckleberry Finn** include wood engravings by Barry Moser.

**The Italian-Americans: Troubled Roots**, by Andrew Rolle (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK 73019; no price given, paper).

**Los Angeles in Fiction**, ed. David Fine (Univ. of New Mexico Press; \$24.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper).

### Univ. of Washington Seattle

**Early Maritime Artists of the Pacific Northwest Coast**, by John Frazier Henry (\$40 cloth).

**Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family**, by Yoshiko Uchida (\$8.95 paper).

**Social Solidarity among the Japanese in Seattle**, by S. Frank Miyamoto (\$7.95 paper).

**The Reservation Blackfeet: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival**, by William E. Farr (\$19.95 cloth).

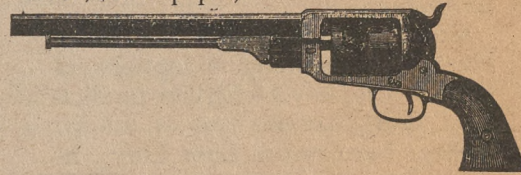
**The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors of the North Pacific Coast**, ed. Jay Miller and Carol M. Eastman (\$35 cloth).

**Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians**, by Hilary Stewart (\$24.95 cloth).

**25 T'ang Poets**, ed. Sydney S. K. Fung and S. T. Lai (\$75 cloth).

**Run, River, Run**, by Ann Zwinger (Univ. of Arizona Press, 1615 E. Speedway, Tucson, AZ 85719; \$10.95 paper).

**An Editor on the Comstock Lode**, by Wells Drury (Univ. of Nevada Press, Reno, NV 89957; \$10.95 paper).



## A 10th Anniversary Offer

The *San Francisco Review of Books* is now in its 10th year of publication. That makes it one of the longest-running, independently owned book reviews in the US. To celebrate this occasion, we're offering, between now and March 31, 1985\*, **One Free Subscription** with every one purchased. That means that you and a family member or friend can get **two** Subscriptions for just \$9! (Or: two two-year Subscriptions for only \$18).

In the next several months you'll be seeing interviews with such well-known writers as Stewart Brand and William Kotzwinkle; a Letter from China; a profile of the Soviet émigré writer, Vassily Aksyonov; original short stories; and book reviews of the type which you won't see in any other periodical. *Plus* reviews of films and plays, and other cultural events of note in the Bay Area.

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