



PHOTOGRAPH BY JERRY LEATH MILLS

# “WHAT I FEEL I WAS PUT ON THE PLANET TO DO:”

## An Interview with Wayne Caldwell

by Jerry Leath Mills

Wayne Caldwell graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1969 and proceeded rapidly through MA (Appalachian State) and PhD (Duke) degrees, specializing in English literature of the Renaissance and seventeenth century. After three years of college teaching in North Carolina and New York, he left academia, and he and his wife Mary returned to their native Asheville to join the furniture business of Mary's family. Although Caldwell had long felt the urge to write fiction, for years his literary efforts extended only to a few scholarly pieces and a history of his local church. But around 1998 he began in earnest, producing two prize-winning short stories that soon grew into a very large manuscript and won for him a two-book contract with the prestigious publishing firm of Random House.

The first volume to appear was *Cataloochee* (2007), a panoramic novel following four generations of North Carolina mountain people in the Cataloochee Valley from late in the Civil War to 1928, the beginning of their displacement by Federal authorities during absorption of their properties into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As the prospect of removal looms in the second half of the story, this displacement combines with numerous personal, domestic, and social conflicts in ways that critics have likened to the art of Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. *Requiem by Fire*, published in 2010, commences in 1928, one day after the *Cataloochee* narrative comes to a close. A sequel in the sense that it continues the earlier story, *Requiem by Fire* nonetheless stands as a self-contained entity with all necessary knowledge of previous events provided within its frame. The focus narrows somewhat from that of its predecessor, to the moving depiction of two principal characters – one old, one young – in their responses to the pressures of removal and loss.

The following interview with Wayne Caldwell was conducted at the office of Ambiance Interiors in Asheville on 9 July 2009.

Since his retirement as Professor of English at UNC-Chapel Hill, **JERRY LEATH MILLS** has settled in Washington, NC. Among his numerous publications is his creative nonfiction essay “Ruins of Time,” published in *NCLR* 17 (2008).

**JERRY LEATH MILLS:** *Wayne, is there a recognizable genre or sub-genre of Southern literature that you'd call "mountain writing"?*

**WAYNE CALDWELL:** Yeah, I think there is. If you'd asked me that four or five years ago, I'd have probably said no; but looking around here in the mountains now, you can hardly go behind a bush without finding an author of some kind, and I think there probably is a sub-genre of Appalachian literature that's legitimate to be considered as such these days.

*I assume we'd put Charles Frazier in that, and Robert Morgan and John Ehle and Charles Price, and surely Fred Chappell and a lot of Lee Smith's work. And Cormac McCarthy's first two novels, set in east Tennessee. What do all these have in common?*

Well, that they're working with a specific and distinctive setting would be the first thing you'd say. Mountain people tend to think of themselves as a little bit

**"See, the way I figure, the only land around here that's still wild's getting cut over by them Northern timber companies. And you know what a mess they leave behind."**

—*Cataloochee* (228)

more rugged and more independent than their counterparts in the flatlands. I don't know whether there's much truth to that anymore, but I think there was a deep truth to it in the eighteenth and

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We've lost some of that with the homogenization of culture, television and that sort of thing.

*And that would certainly make for conflicts such as you have in your writing, with people running right up against "progress" of one kind and another.*

Right. I'm interested, too, in the stereotype of the mountain character. It's difficult – at least I find it so – to avoid jumping off into the Beverly Hillbilly type of image. I remember reading something by Rick Bragg, I think it was, in which he said that in every story he read about mountain people they were toothless [*laughs*]. And I've been very careful since I read that for my characters to have

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teeth. And another stereotype that appears is the government coming to take your land away and bring in tourists to see what they want to call the "real mountain culture."

*The catch phrase politicians and social planners like to use is "green dollars," when they labor not to pollute with industry but to "sell culture" instead. They were pushing that idea back in the '20s and '30s in New Mexico, to the chagrin of people like Georgia O'Keeffe and Mabel Dodge Luhan, who knew full well that when you start selling your culture, you soon start tailoring it to the buyers' expectations.*

Yes. In the 1930s, when the park was being put together, they wanted to see women carding flax and running spinning wheels and wearing bonnets as their grandmothers might have done, stuff that the modern women probably didn't know how to do. I have a little dramatization of that in a section of *Requiem by Fire*.

*Do you think the mountain culture may have developed in a kind of isolation that was hard to turn loose of after isolation wasn't really possible anymore? You know, Thomas Wolfe uses a phrase about living "in the mountains pent," and of course he alters Penland to Pentland in his books, maybe implying that he felt trapped growing up in the area.*

Yes, and I felt something of that when I was a kid, too. I can remember when there were no interstate highways, and the way in and out of here was what they now call "old" US 70, and it took seven or eight hours to get from Asheville to Raleigh. So you might as well just stay up here in the mountains [*laughs*]. But the opening up of the mountains was begun by the train in the 1880s,

ABOVE The George H. Caldwell family, Cataloochee, NC, 1902; George Henry Caldwell (1857–1928) was the brother of Wayne Caldwell's grandfather, Jerry Ratcliff Caldwell (1880–1944).

**“At seventy-eight he could no more separate himself from his land than he could fly. His father lived to ninety, and his grandfather was in his eighties when he died. Silas expected to stay on his place ten years longer, maybe more, park or no park.”**

—*Cataloochee* (264)

and I read somewhere that the population of Asheville went from about five to eight thousand to something like twenty-five or thirty thousand in the decade of the 1880s. Phenomenal growth.

*I noticed your use of the train as a symbol of impending drastic change in both novels, as it is in Faulkner’s story “The Bear” [1942].*

*One might say the two-book sequence is in fact framed by*

*that image, kicking off in Chapter 2 of Cataloochee with a railroad episode that’s reprised in Silas Wright’s dream very near the end of Requiem by Fire. You’re looking back through time by way of your own family history, and as you write, are you consciously comparing then with now, seeing family history through a lens adjustment of how it looks now that change has taken place?*

I’m trying to see things as they might have looked to people then. I’m working on a new novel now, and I think a theme in it is going to be concerned with what’s history and what’s not. What’s the tension between history and fiction? How do we reinvent ourselves looking back in time? I know it’s been done before, but it’s still a rich vein in mountain culture.

*What would you point to in your two novels as some of the main things on your mind that you hoped to forge into the story?*

I think the main thing I was looking at was the people’s relationship to the land, what they thought and felt that it was. That’s maybe a trite thing to say about Southern literature, but I think

it’s important. A character’s relationship to the land is even more important than religion.

*That’s interesting. Near the end of Cataloochee and all through Requiem you find a situation with the park’s creation in which ninety percent of the nation will look at it as an enormous benefit, and maybe ten percent, including most of the locals, will see it as a big land grab. How does a person reconcile what he may even be persuaded to see as an ultimately good thing with a thing that has to be taken away from him personally? The sentiment “Why us?” is very much there in both novels.*

I don’t think the people in my novels have enough distance from what’s going on to recognize that in the future, it will be a good thing. The park was created twelve or thirteen years before I was born, and with my perspective now I can look around and see what we’ve done to the mountaintops outside the park, building condominiums, tearing down the forest, and so on, and then I can go to Cataloochee and I’m peaceful. I have to think that this was a very good thing for the government to do. But I know people in their seventies and eighties who are *still* bitter about it. They haven’t gotten another perspective on it, and they probably never will. But their children mostly have, and they’re glad to have the park to come back to.

And that goes to another part of mountain culture, the idea that the government is totally irrelevant. “If it don’t bother me, I won’t bother it.” And that’s been true in this country since the beginning, with the issues of tax on tea and tax on liquor back in the eighteenth century. As the country was settled, we brought that attitude with us into the fastness of the mountains. So that’s part of your mountain theme.

*How about suspiciousness of outsiders? In Cataloochee even Oliver Babcock has to prove himself before he comes up and saves the day. But in recent years there’s been a huge in-migration all over North Carolina. How is that working out in the mountains? Do most people look at it with acceptance or with resistance?*

We have both views around. Things have changed a lot, and Asheville has become known as some kind of hub or node of New Age culture. Downtown Asheville is coming to look a lot like downtown Chapel Hill looked when I was a student, in terms of the people you see with tattoos and stuff. That’s a little hard for some of the older folks to deal with. I kind of welcome it.



COURTESY OF WANNE CALDWELL

*I've described Cataloochee as "panoramic" a few times, in that it covers a lot of scenery and historical ground and holds the stories of a lot of people. In Requiem by Fire I see you focusing more narrowly on the lives of a couple of main characters, Silas Wright and Jim Hawkins, who exemplify the history of the area during these times, with your examination of what has to be given up sometimes to reconcile the old and the new. They're tragic figures, aren't they?*

Well, "tragic" may be too grand a word for it, but what happens to Silas is sad. I think he's a heroic character because he refuses to bend. He's got his 150 acres, and he's going to keep them from this damned government that's come in here and interfered with him, keep them until he dies, and after that he just doesn't care. He's based very loosely on the grandfather of a friend of mine, who actually stayed on in the park until the mid-'40s, through sheer stubbornness, mainly, and was probably around ninety when he died.

My character dies in the hard winter of 1935-36. I wanted to build a relationship between him and the young park ranger Jim Hawkins, who is having a very troubled relationship with his wife, Nell. Nell was a city girl from Asheville, and Jim brings her into Cataloochee on what she first thinks is a grand adventure, but then this adventure turns out to be full of flying squirrels and firewood and labor, and just not a very pretty life for her. And she ends up not being able to take it.

*Would you call Jim's experience tragic? He makes a life-altering choice, one that may condemn him to a form of solitude. We don't know what's going to happen to him ultimately, but you end his story on that beautiful note from Paradise Lost, where the challenge is to find a new life in the light of all that's gone before.*

Well, Jim's a lot like Silas in that he's a very stubborn man, and he makes a choice to stay with his duty and the place he holds so dear. I don't know if that makes it a tragedy, but he is certainly – I guess "conflicted" is the word they use these days.

*And you don't make the wife flighty or put her entirely in the wrong, though her mother is a hard pill to swallow. Nell has a right to some of the things she's not going to get within the life she has with Jim.*

Right. She's being asked to live in a world without electricity, and she's used to having some appliances

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and a telephone. Matter of fact, this lack of a telephone plays a pretty big role in the story. They would have gotten one soon – the Park Service ran electricity in when the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] began work on the infrastructure in 1934 – but that didn't happen quickly enough to benefit Nell.

*You started writing, by some standards, a bit late in life. Were there any specific happenings that made you say, "Now I've got to write"?*

I'd been wanting to write some serious fiction ever since high school. It's a powerful thing to live in Asheville and read *Look Homeward, Angel* at the age of fourteen. But due to one thing or another, mostly related to career, I never did write fiction until I turned fifty and realized that if I was ever going to do it, it was time to start. So I began working on some short stories. I had a few family nuggets that I thought would make good subjects. One was that my paternal great-grandfather was killed by a burning tree in Cataloochee. That made a short story and then wandered into a first novel. My wife's family gave me a story about her great-grandfather being killed by his own son, and I thought, hey, this is neat, I can retell this at some point. It had to wait a long time to get into a novel, but it came to be a very important plot element in *Cataloochee*. I changed things about it for the book, but behind it in real life was a dispute over land; the son and father had been in court two weeks earlier in a dispute over who was cutting trees on whose land.

*Spell out for me your family connection with Cataloochee.*

My grandfather was born there in 1880. He left the valley around 1904, when he married and his bride

wasn't inclined to live in such a backwoods place, so his experience sort of gets into Jim Hawkins's in the novel. His father, Marion, was the one who was killed by the tree, and Marion's father, Levi, was the patriarch of all the Caldwelles of Cataloochee. His father, Henry, had come there in the 1830s among the first settlers. My wife's family doesn't have any Cataloochee connections, but she has plenty of Haywood County links.



COURTESY OF WAYNE CALDWELL

So we're both pretty firmly rooted in these mountains, and it's natural to look back with curiosity about what could or should have been. I think we as Americans have really done a job on this land, and it really makes me sad the older I get. You look around the mountains and you see that what thirty years ago were woodlands are now "developed," and they're wondering why the houses are sliding off the mountainsides as the area erodes. We're still not as bad off as some of the coal mining areas in Kentucky and Virginia and West Virginia, with the

mountaintop removals. There's a campaign that pushes "clean coal." Well, there's just no such thing as clean coal. It hurts people working in the mines and the people who have to live breathing emissions from coal-fired electric plants. It's just a shame.

*A mountain novel that treats the coal mining business interestingly is Davis Grubb's The Barefoot Man, written back in 1971. And in Black Mountain Breakdown [1980], Lee Smith uses that issue of the rape of the mountains and desecration of the landscape as a kind of symbolic backdrop for other kinds of breakdowns in the book. Obviously she was thinking along the same lines as you.*

What can I say about my friend Lee Smith? She's just wonderful, a great encourager of other people who want to write, and a great writer herself. I think *On Agate Hill* [2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007] is probably her best book, and *Saving Grace* [1995] is one of my favorites, too. Now that we're back on mountain writers, let me say that I think Charles Frazier has written an extremely important book in *Thirteen Moons* [2006; reviewed in *NCLR* 2007], with its handling of the Cherokee Removal issue. Mountain people have a *lot* to feel guilty about in our treatment of the Cherokee. Charles is the kind of stylist who can bring that home. A writer I also like is Ron Rash, who teaches out here at Western Carolina University and has just come out with a fine new novel, *Serena* [2008]. I've admired his work ever since I read his *Saints at the River* [2004], which talks a little about what I talk about in terms of government-forced removal – in his case the removal of people that took place for the TVA lakes projects, a story even worse than the national park story. Ron is a good one, and he's under-appreciated.

*Other writers, mountain or otherwise, who've influenced you?*

Probably too many to name offhand. Faulkner of course, and of course Cormac McCarthy, whose picture hangs in my bathroom [*laughs*]. I've read Flannery O'Connor's stuff since I was in college and have learned quite a bit from it. There's a writer from out West, Colorado and Nebraska, named Kent Haruf, who won a National Book Award for *Plain-song* [1999], a wonderful book. He does what I call "poor and pitiful" very well, writes about the eastern area of Colorado where they grow sugar beets and all like that. I like his work very much. And Tim Gautreaux, the Louisiana writer – his new one, *The Missing* [2009], is very fine.

**"His devotion to Cataloochee soil shouted from every crease in his face. After the initial uproar about the park, neither North Carolina nor Tennessee had raised enough money to buy more than a shirttail's worth of land, and that had given Levi Marion heart."**

**—Cataloochee (236)**

*You were in academia for a while. Did you ever feel, while you were reading and reading and reading, what some critics have called the “Anxiety of Influence,” when you wonder whether a thought is really yours or John Donne’s or somebody else’s from all the study you’ve done?*

Yes, I did come under that anxiety, but having studied the Renaissance, I remember that writers of that period borrowed and stole from each other with great abandon and considered it complimentary. Lately I’ve gotten a little proprietary about the Cataloochee terrain, maybe [*laughs*].

*What about work in progress?*

In *Cataloochee* a kid named Rass Carter caught my eye. He’s twelve years old there and doesn’t play much of a part. I had thought that he’d be a major character in *Requiem by Fire*, but he turned out not to be. But this third book I’m working on, if things turn out well, is going to be his first-person story. My working title for it is “Scripture on the Ground,” a title I stole from a phrase in Charles Frazier’s *Thirteen Moons*, where he’s describing a rather violent scene that his narrator, Will Cooper, didn’t witness, but when Will comes up on the killing place with footprints and other marks, he calls those signs the “scripture on the ground.” Makes the point that we have to interpret what’s past as best we can, not having borne actual witness to it. I don’t know if I’ll finally use that title, but that’s what I’m using as I go along.

*Will this be a Cataloochee book too?*

It’ll be set mostly in Asheville. I’m thinking that Rass will leave Cataloochee with the others and then go to Chapel Hill for undergraduate and law



PHOTOGRAPH BY JERRY LEATH MILLS

degrees, and then World War II is going to break out. I’m hoping to have him go to Italy in the course of that, because I’d like to go back there myself to refresh memory. I wrote a fair amount of *Cataloochee* in Florence. I was there three times, each time working on a different chapter. That’s good fertile ground for writing.

*When you’re abroad, do you constantly think about where you came from, as Wolfe seems to have done?*

I don’t feel the sense of exile that Wolfe and other American writers who went abroad in the ’20s did. I think I understand it, though. Probably some of the characters in *Cataloochee* and *Requiem* would have felt that way when they were forced to leave. The preacher near the end of *Cataloochee* alludes to it in his sermon.

*You’ve had a lot of good input from your wife, Mary, in all this writing, haven’t you?*

I have, I have. Mary is my best reader. If I’m successful with female characters, it’s because she’s made me steer away from certain clichés and things like that. She’s the kind of reader who catches things: I remember once she was reading a Reynolds Price novel and pointed out that Reynolds’s character was eating cornbread at a meal and a couple of pages later it had turned into a biscuit. Some editor should have caught that, but none did.

*Spending all that time in the furniture store, especially one located right downtown, you must pick up a lot of local information from your clients, don’t you? Do folks ever come in and reminisce about how the town used to look and so on?*

Not so much these days, because we’ve evolved into an interior design store, but back in the mid-’70s



COURTESY OF WAYNE CALDWELL

and '80s we did have a lot of that. One of the most valuable contacts I had was with a Greek gentleman named Harry Chepriss. When I knew him he was in his nineties; he'd come to this country when William McKinley was President, and he lived to be 102. They lifted his driver's license when he was ninety-eight, so he would come into our store almost every Saturday morning as he walked his rounds. I heard an awful lot of good stories from him.

The gentleman whose picture's over there, the one in uniform, was my wife's great-uncle. He would come into the store on Saturdays and Wednesdays. He was legally blind, but that didn't stop him from telling stories. A lot of the speech rhythms I give my characters I learned just listening to him.

*Hemingway wrote somewhere that it was harder to write fiction in the first person than any other way. Are you finding this true in your work on the current book?*

Well, I've done about forty pages of longhand notes, and I feel that I don't have the voice yet, don't quite have it right. If I can't get it, I'll do it in third person. We'll see.

I know that people sometimes talk about "finding their calling." It's a religious term in my culture, and that's what I've found in writing. It took a while, but I can describe it as what I feel I was put on the planet to do, and it's a real good feeling. ■

## LOOKING BACK INTO THE UNDERGROWTH

*a review by Chris Green*

**Wayne Caldwell. *Cataloochee*. New York: Random House, 2007.**

**—. *Requiem by Fire*. New York: Random House, 2010.**

Wayne Caldwell's *Cataloochee* and *Requiem by Fire* narrate the character and dissolution of a small community of families in the Cataloochee region of Haywood County, NC, perhaps best known now as the area hosting the eastern most section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. *Cataloochee* (covering 1874 to 1928) delves into the community's character, and *Requiem by Fire* (covering 1928 to 1935) focuses on its disbanding as the park comes about. Like Wilma Dykeman's work, Caldwell's books rehearse the tale of rural Appalachian culture, modernization, loss, and adaptation. They do so with particular resonance for millions who have visited the Smoky Mountains; these readers will come to know the lives of the people who once inhabited the places whose trails they hike.

Caldwell's chapters work as episodic life-sketches that illustrate Cataloochee culture and response to change. Composed in clusters, chapters focus on a period and set of characters illustrating their perspective and then leap forward by a decade or so and dive into the lives (and histories) of another set of characters, all of whom are connected to each other and to the books' main tale. This method allows us to become familiar with and to appreciate the daily life of a community and

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its people. However, the third-person limited point of view often shifts between many characters in a single chapter, and all too often summaries of characters' backgrounds clog the flow of narrative. When introducing new characters, Caldwell's clear style is burdened again and again by having to provide essential orientation (the "who, what, when, where"). Such background does, however, reflect the interconnected community story.

Starting and ending in 1928, *Cataloochee* is framed by how its community deals with the "justified" killing (by his son and daughter-in-law) of Ezra Banks, one of its least liked members. After its prologue, the book begins in 1873 by charting the history, paths, and character of three young men born in 1850. Hiram Carter and Silas Wright exemplify the elements of Cataloochee that are threatened – connection to the land through work and need, commitment to family, and community interconnection. Wright's name's homophone, "right," is on target. The third man, Ezra Banks, escapes his abusive upbringing in the lowlands, marries into Hiram's

uncle's family, and raises apples. Just like his last name, Ezra works for wealth and prestige rather than to make a living and serve his community.

*Cataloochee's* first half highlights Ezra Banks's penny-pinching and overall negative interaction with his wife and family. This negative energy is contrasted against the character of the other families – how they work, love, celebrate, struggle, die, and relate. Wayne Caldwell's best writing occurs when describing people engaged in the daily acts of living. *Cataloochee* is not about individual character development, plot, and crisis, but about exploring the community's character as it deals with Banks and the eventual crisis it faces with the coming of the national park.

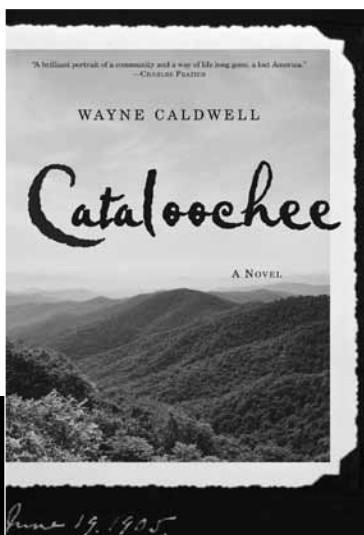
The most important turning point of the book comes in Chapters 24 and 25 when Hiram Carter dies from cancer at the age of seventy-six. By this time, local families are regularly buying from Sears catalogues, outsiders (who come to hunt, fish, and be with nature) have begun lodging with families, and talk about developing the federal park has begun. This leads Silas and

others to discuss openly area geography and how they have a very different view of nature and land than do the outsiders.

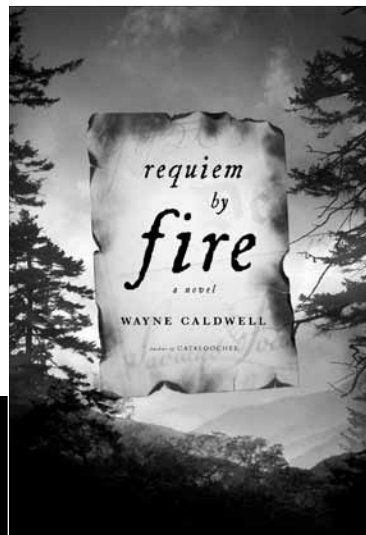
The book's final section shows how the community protects Ezra's son and daughter-in-law from being charged with Ezra's murder. At the same time, we see how agents are coming to acquire people's land. After Ezra's killing, his son's incarceration for the crime allows a kind and aspiring land agent (and lawyer) from the coast to ingratiate himself with the community by defending Ezra's son at the trial. The book ends with the circuit-riding Baptist preacher silently praying about what to say in his sermon about Ezra's death and the park's coming. The crisis is powerfully illustrated on the last page when Ezra's widow and her sister walk arm-in-arm to church with the exonerated daughter-in-law, showing the community's unity even as it faces its end.

*Requiem by Fire* begins and ends with eighty-five-year-old Silas Wright dreaming of fire, friends, and loss. In between comes the tale of the community's closing stages. After the first fire is extinguished, narration picks up the day after the trial that concludes *Cataloochee*.

*Requiem* is comprised of four sections and a concluding chapter. In the first, the lawyer (who defended Ezra's son in the first novel's murder case) and his boss (the head of the North Carolina Park Commission's local office) each meet with a part of the Cataloochee community. The section describes how the



BOOK DESIGN BY DANA LEIGH BLANCHETTE



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residents make various decisions about whether to take payment and move or to remain and accept the imposition of park rules, such as no tree cutting or pasturing animals on mountain balds. The section ends with two marriages. In the first, the outside lawyer marries a Cataloochee daughter, and they leave for Raleigh. The second is a wedding of necessity: pregnant Nell, a middle-class woman from Asheville, marries Jim Hawkins, a native of Cataloochee who attended a few years of college, took work as a forester in Buncombe County (where he met Nell), and gets a job as park warden for the Cataloochee area.

The second section shows how the couples adapt to their new circumstances and touches upon the lives of those who have left and those who remain. The third section delves into the minds of those whose community ties have loosened and how they cope, either by talking to dead spouses, by burning remaining buildings (while masturbating), or by salvaging and selling memory.

As with *Cataloochee*, what works well in the sequel is the narration of daily doings, particularly when people support each other. What fails is Caldwell's demeaning portrayal of outsiders and "bad guys," including Nell's parents, the park's superintendent, and the McPeters (another name to be taken literally), a local father-son team who gum together all sickening hillbilly stereotypes (dirty, violent, incestuous, etc.). Such caricatures distract the reader from the real conflict about how the area grows

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empty and its people struggle to make new lives. By the end of this section of the novel, everyone has left except for Silas Wright (whose wife had passed in 1927 and whose children had long since moved away) and the park warden and his family.

The fourth book's overt conflict involves Willie McPeters (yes, that's his name), but the real conflict happens between Jim and Nell Hawkins. Jim loves his job because it connects him with the land he knows, but Nell (who, in near total isolation, has learned the hard work of a Cataloochee housewife while mothering two young children) also wishes to return home, and both spend chapters mulling over their options. In part due to worry about McPeters, Nell decides to return to Asheville with the children, an outcome that never seems in question. The question is what Jim will do in response.

The final chapters narrate the incineration of empty homes. Jim, seeking to release anger,

burns one where he had found McPeters's body. Then, as CCC workers arrive and the park has its first visitors, the park's superintendent vindictively orders Jim to burn remaining buildings, starting with Jim's childhood home. Jim grimly does so, and Silas provides wisdom about loss and going on afterward. The book ends with a finely written scene that takes us into a winter morning and Silas's dying dream of fire where faces rise, float, and recede. Jim finds Silas's body and tenderly reads him his final mail.

In these two books, Wayne Caldwell conducts the important work of helping us to remember the cost and consequences of development and change. More than that, he helps us touch the people whose ways and lives seemed to grow from the mountains whose paths we now hike. Indeed, one can imagine Jim riding away and peering into the overgrowth that we now call the Smoky Mountains. With Caldwell's help, we are looking back. ■

**“Silas wondered why he didn't feel warm as he walked slowly through the conflagration. . . . The road simmered in front of him and the only place not aflame was the creek. . . . All Cataloochee – a burnt offering. . . .”—*Requiem by Fire* (332)**