

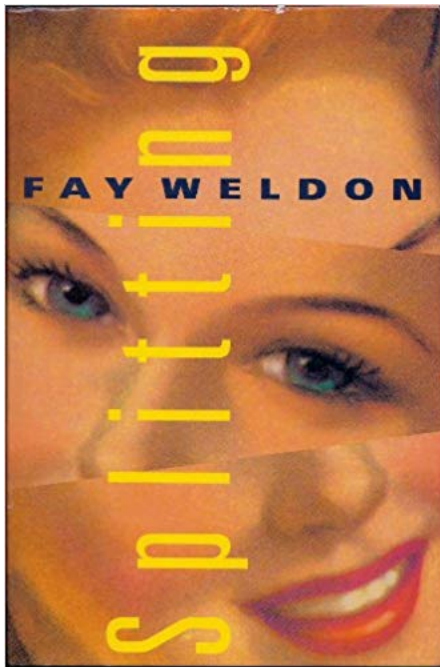
# The Columbus Dispatch

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## BOOK FARE

'SPLITTING' IS PAINFUL BUT ENTERTAINING, TOO

*Nancy McAllister, For The Dispatch*

Splitting is Fay Weldon's satirical take on divorce and its emotional aftermath. A husband splits up with his wife, and she subsequently develops multiple personalities. The novel is set in the idyllic English village of Barley. Angelica White, a 17-year-old from a modest background, is the star of a rock band named Kinky Virgin. She marries Sir Edwin Rice, an indolent, pot-smoking member of the local gentry. With her decision to marry Edwin, the youthful and wild Angelica gives up her music, her thigh-high boots and her nose rings. She and Edwin take up residence in Rice Court, the old and crumbling estate of Edwin's family.

And so begins the transformation of Angelica White into the proper wife, Lady Rice.

Edwin, not being one of his father's favorites (his father is a strange man who likes to knock out his own teeth with a cleaver), is not heir to his wealth, though he is allowed to live on the estate and draw a small allowance.

Lady Rice donates her earnings from Kinky Virgin, a small fortune, to the repair and renovation of Rice Court. She turns the manor house into a popular tourist stop that generates an income for the two of them.

As the years pass she and Edwin develop a circle of interesting friends. They throw lively dinner parties to entertain themselves. This is all well and good until a hilarious outbreak of sexual escapades among the group.

Edwin takes up with the village seductress, but Lady Rice refuses to acknowledge the obvious. Later, Edwin catches Lady Rice in a compromising, though innocent, position with another man.

Ranting and raving he throws Lady Rice out of the estate, rendering her penniless. Then he takes up with his drunken cousin, Anthea Box, who carries a riding crop and prefers making love in the linen closet.

The nagging doubts that have been bickering in Lady Rice's head during her 11-year marriage suddenly emerge and take the shape of distinct personalities. Having lived in a happy state of unawareness, the "perforated personalities" vie for control and seek an explanation for what has happened to Lady Rice.

The young Angelica recovers her childhood memories. The proper Lady Rice worries. The efficient Jelly lands a job with Edwin's lawyer, and then wreaks havoc in her own divorce proceedings by intercepting letters, setting up false credit accounts and tempting her new boss.

The promiscuous Angel, in charge of the repressed sexuality of the others, seduces a chauffeur. The masculine Ajax analyzes the whole sordid mess.

Splitting is peopled with amusing and wildly exaggerated characters. Weldon, a seasoned writer, is able to pull off what few other writers could.

Through wonderful and outrageous lies she reveals the more painful aspects of modern relationships between the sexes - all the while entertaining her readers.

Columbus free-lance reviewer **Nancy McAllister** is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.

At A Glance

Splitting is a novel by Fay Weldon (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$21).