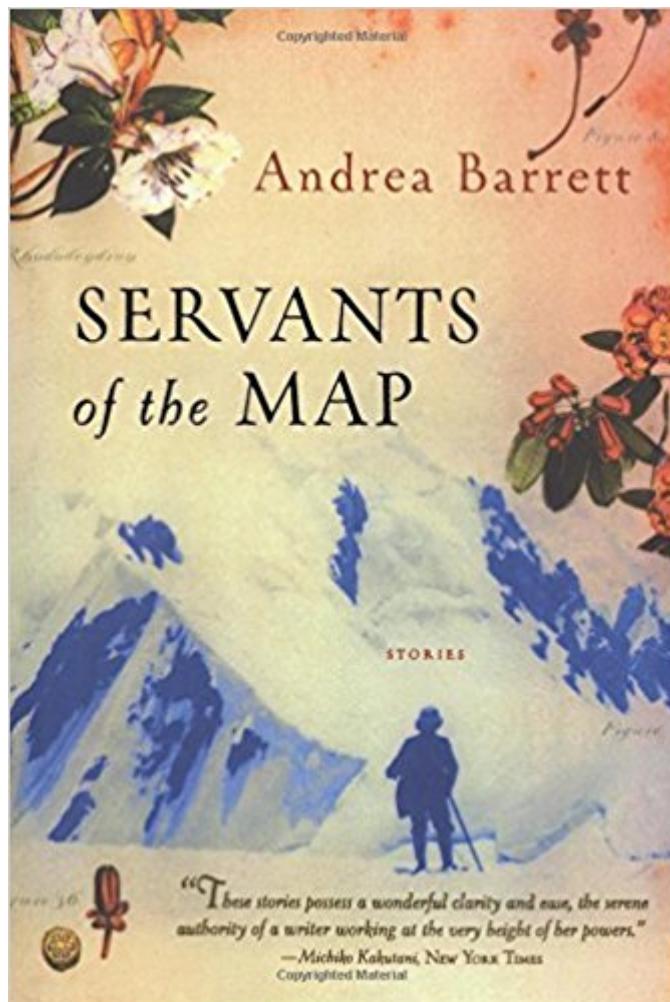


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# Servants Of The Map: Stories



## **Synopsis**

"Luminous....Each [story] is rich and independent and beautiful and should draw Barrett many new admirers." •Publishers Weekly, starred review Ranging across two centuries, and from the western Himalaya to an Adirondack village, these wonderfully imagined stories and novellas travel the territories of yearning and awakening, of loss and unexpected discovery. A mapper of the highest mountain peaks realizes his true obsession. A young woman afire with scientific curiosity must come to terms with a romantic fantasy. Brothers and sisters, torn apart at an early age, are beset by dreams of reunion. Throughout, Barrett's most characteristic theme •the happenings in that borderland between science and desire•unfolds in the diverse lives of unforgettable human beings. Although each richly layered tale stands independently, readers of Ship Fever (National Book Award winner) and Barrett's extraordinary novel The Voyage of the Narwhal, will discover subtle links both among these new stories and to characters in the earlier works.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

No one limns the opposing pull of inner and outer worlds more eloquently than Andrea Barrett. Her naturalists, explorers, scientists, and healers are driven to work and above all to know; they categorize, theorize, and collect the phenomena of the natural world with an urgency that feels like physical need. But they are motivated equally by desire and loneliness, and the theme of domestic life runs like a countermelody through each of the six lovely, deeply memorable stories in Servants of the Map. The narrator of the title story, a cartographer in the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of

India, is a timid, home- and family-loving man, but the Himalayas strike him with the force of a revelation. The heroine of the lyrical "Theories of Rain" is a creature of strong feelings and appetites, driven to ask questions about the world around her in the same spirit as she longs for a neighbor and mourns the brother separated from her in childhood. Her scientific curiosity is scarcely different from her desire: "Through that channel of longing, the world enters me." Fans of Barrett's earlier books (the sublime *Ship Fever* and *Voyage of the Narwhal*) will delight in tracing the stories and characters that wind in and out of these three books, producing the sense of something lovely, ongoing, and whole. In the final story, Elizabeth finds consolation in her work caring for tubercular patients--"as if, in the order and precarious harmony of this house and those it shelters she might, for all that gets lost in this life, at last have found a cure." The same might be said of science, and of Barrett's art. --Mary Park --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Travelers, naturalists, nurses, botanists, surveyors a multitude of seekers and healers populate this luminous new collection of two novellas and four stories by National Book Award-winner Barrett (*Ship Fever*; *The Voyage of the Narwhal*). Tracking her wandering protagonists from the banks of the Schuylkill in Pennsylvania in 1810 to the Himalayas in the 1860s and on to New York's Finger Lakes in the late 20th century, Barrett elegantly portrays the transitory nature of life and love. Selected for Best American Short Stories (2001) and The O. Henry Awards (2001), the title novella follows young British surveyor Max Vigne on a long, arduous mapping expedition as he writes letters home to a cherished wife that become a chronicle of the distance that is growing between them. Partings and reunions of loved ones recur in these stories. In "Theories of Rain," a young orphan studying the mysteries of precipitation and passion yearns for the brother she was separated from as a child; in the novella "The Cure," a nurse at a village in the Adirondacks finds the brother she lost years ago and yet struggles to communicate with him. In the contemporary "The Forest," Barrett creates a lovely comedy of the inevitable gap of perspectives between an illustrious Polish scientist who has grown nostalgic with age and a young woman who yearns to break free of the past. The mark of Barrett's artistry is her ability to illuminate loneliness and isolation, but also to capture the improbably forged bonds between her disparate characters. Familiar figures appear and reappear in more than one story, and many readers will be able to make connections between these tales and Barrett's earlier works. Yet each is rich and independent and beautiful and should draw Barrett many new admirers. Author tour. (Feb. 1) Forecast: An elegant sepia-toned jacket and Barrett's rapidly growing reputation as one of the finest writers at work today will assure a substantial audience for this radiant collection. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

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I loved the writing style and subjects. If you are interested in the history of natural sciences you will love it.

Title story draws you into a man's mind, closely observed, fully appreciated, but from a distinctly female perspective. Infinite compassion, a surprise.

As described, arrived quickly, love the paperback format. I like historical fiction and this fits the bill. It is perfect.

Arrived in timely manner, as described.

This collection of six stories kept my attention throughout, although I generally don't like short stories at all. It helped that her characters had a scientific bent: a surveyor and amateur botanist, a retired physical chemist, a biochemistry post-doc, a fossil collector. I appreciated that the science was accurate, so far as I could tell, and simply a matter-of-fact element of who these people were. Ms. Barrett's settings range from Eastern Pennsylvania in 1810 to the Himalayas during Victoria's reign to the modern East Coast. Connection is a theme of the story collection as a whole. Two young women dream of reuniting with long-lost brothers. Two sets of sisters struggle with their differences. Two girlhood crushes founder on the rocks of reality. Names and objects from one story pop up in another. I still don't know why I happened to buy this book at a library used book sale, but I'm very glad I did.

This is a special book of six short stories (with one of them approaching novella-hood). The stories all feature people engaged in the pursuit of science in one form or another, including a surveyor and botanist in the Himalayas, a physical-chemist turned theoretical structural-biologist, amateur paleontologists, an entomologist, and a molecular biologist. But science does not dominate the narratives; rather, the stories are tales of the human heart and of finding a place in the world. In the end, the reader does not think of the characters as scientists but rather as humans, people with everyday human needs and concerns. For a non-scientist reader such as myself, to so convincingly convey the humanity of her characters is quite an accomplishment by Andrea Barrett (whose college training was as a biologist). The first story, which also is the title story, is relatively focused in

time: 1863 and 1864, when its central character Max Vigne is a lowly surveyor with lofty dreams participating in the Kashmir Series of the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India, an integral component of "The Great Game". The other stories all encompass broader swaths of time, going back decades or even generations from the year the principal action is set (1979, 1910, 1853, 1986, and 1905). Further extending their arc, and thereby imparting a sense of the sweep of an epic, the stories are linked by the family trees of one or more of their characters. For example, Max Vigne's daughter is one of two central characters in "The Cure", set in 1905 in a village in the Northern Adirondacks that caters to tubercular patients, and two of his great-great-granddaughters is each a central figure in two other stories. Moreover, the interrelationships among characters extend back to two of Barrett's previous works -- "The Shipping News" (which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1996 and which I also thought to be a special book) and "The Voyage of the Narwahl" (which I look forward to soon reading). Nonetheless, despite the subtle links among them, the six stories can each stand alone as a self-contained story. And marvelously rich and compact tales they are, ones that in the hands of less accomplished authors would end up as three-hundred page novels. *SERVANTS OF THE MAP* is a treasure.

If you plan to read only one book by Andrea Barrett, let it be this one. Most of the main characters in these stories are related by blood or marriage to those in some of her other works: *The Air We Breathe* "TAWB" (read it first if you think you might have time for more), *Ship Fever*, and *Voyage of the Narwhal*. The first story, *Servants of the Map*, is about a Civil Junior Sub Assistant in the Himalayan Service during the early 1860s, and is told primarily in the form of letters from Max Vigne, born in 1835, to his wife, with whom he shares his experiences in the Himalayas: surveying, mapping, collecting and writing about the local fauna, and dealing with some pretty colorful fellow HS workers. Some of his descendants show up in *TAWB* as well as in the last story of this collection, *The Cure*, about the life of homeopath Nora Kynd, born in 1825 (who appears in *Ship Fever* and *TAWB*), another Kynd family member, and Max Vigne's wife and children. Both *The Forest* and *The Mysteries of Ubiquitin* are about the Marburg sisters, born in the mid-1950s, whose father, Leo, is a major character in *TAWB*. The setting of *The Forest* is a party, during which the younger, less successful sister prodigy finds herself stuck with an elderly, visiting professor. He suffers a mishap when, on a whim, she takes him on a little adventure. In *The Mysteries of Ubiquitin*, she appears again, this time as a successful, thirty-year-old biochemist en route to an enzymology meeting who encounters the man who, years earlier during her childhood and his young adulthood, was her first crush. A relationship ensues during which she learns more than she

wanted to about certain relatives. Theories of Rain and Two Rivers are also related. The first concerns a girl, Lavinia, born in 1790, who spends a lot of time thinking about her long lost brother, who she has not seen since she was a child. The siblings become separated when she is spirited away by two "aunts" after disease decimates her family, orphaning the two. She is infatuated by a neighbor, but is courted by another. Two Rivers follows her brother, Caleb, born in 1788, who is taken in by a theology teacher with an interest in paleontology. He becomes a schoolteacher, and meets an intriguing young woman on a solitary paleontology expedition. Summary: Barretts' phenomenally written short stories will leave you wanting more, which, fortunately, there is. The family tree at the back of TAWB entitled "The Families" is indispensable in keeping track of the characters in this and the other books. These stories deserve at least four stars as a stand-alone book, five stars in combination with The Air We Breathe and Ship Fever.

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