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From Marion, Ohio, Schoolroom to
White House Cloakroom

David D. Anderson

The Presidential election of 1920 was compounded of myth, legend, and history; it was the last in which both parties attempted to tap the myth of Ohio as Mother of Presidents; it was the election that gave the legend of the smoke-filled room to presidential folklore; it was the first in which women were permitted to vote and hence presumably to rid presidential politics of bossism, cronyism, and corruption; it was that in which "normalcy" triumphed over responsibility in rejecting membership in the League of Nations; it was the first after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and in which politicians of both parties were presumably clear-headed, clean-living, and sober. When the dust settled, early in the evening of November 2, Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio, publisher of the Marion Star, had overwhelmingly defeated Governor James M. Cox, publisher of the Dayton Daily News, Harding carrying thirty-seven states and 16,152,200 popular and 404 electoral votes to eleven states and 127 electoral and 9,147,353 popular votes for Cox. The people had spoken loudly and clearly, and "normalcy" became the postwar American reality on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1921, while Woodrow Wilson, an aging relic of a more idealistic age, retired to watch and brood on "S" Street. Yet in two and a half years Harding was dead; in three he had become symbolic of the weakness inherent in the democratic system, and he continues to rank, alternately with Ulysses S. Grant, as the worst of American Presidents.

But whatever the nature or source of the scandals - Teapot Dome, the Veterans Bureau, the Alien Property office, the Department of Justice - that mar the memory of the Harding Administration and the extent to which Harding

may or may not have been involved in or had knowledge of them, the decade following Harding's death saw, not only hundreds of headlines, each more sensational than the others, but the growth of a literary cottage industry devoted to revealing the truth, the inside story, of Harding, his administration, his foibles and the scandals. Among the books published in the decade were Samuel Hopkins Adams's novel Revelry (1926), William Allen White's Masks in a Pageant (1928), Gaston B. Means's The Strange Death of President Harding, Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday (1931), Harry M. Daugherty's The Inside Story of the Harding Tragedy (1932), Alice Roosevelt Longworth's Crowded Hours (1933), and a number of others, all of them combining to produce the image, mythical or real, of an ordinary man with a handsome facade in a job too large for him, a man haunted by his weaknesses, by the betrayal of his friends, by his domination by an unsympathetic wife. Harding dead became the symbol of all that was declared to be wrong in a system that permitted a young man of modest ability to rise from his birthplace in a rural Ohio farmhouse to occupy the highest office and the most prominent residence in the land.

Among the other exposés, in mid-1927, as the Teapot Dome hearings continued to make headline after headline, another work appeared that, more than any of the others, had about it, as Harry Hansen commented in his column "The First Reader" in the New York World, "the ring of truth." This remarkable work, authentic in its artlessness, was called The President's Daughter. Published by something called the Elizabeth Ann Guild, Inc., and written by a young woman of thirty-one named Nan Britton, it had been previously rejected by Boni and Liveright, by Cosmopolitan,

by Alfred Knopf, by Simon and Schuster, by William Morrow, by Albert and Charles Boni; it had survived a raid by John S. Sumner of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and the confiscation of both plates and sheets; it survived a conspiracy of silence on the part of reviewers and newspapers until H.L. Mencken reviewed it and the Harding Administration at length in the Baltimore Sun in an article entitled "Saturnalia"; it was denounced on the floor of the United States Senate, and it became a regular for months on the best-seller lists. By the end of the year it sold more than 90,000 copies at \$5.00 each, about twice the current price of books of similar length at the time.

Nan, thirty-one years younger than Harding, had been born in Claridon, Ohio, a village ten miles east of Marion, on November 9, 1896, to Dr. Samuel Britton, a physician, and his wife Mary, a country school teacher. When Nan was three, the family moved to Marion, where Harding, Republican and editor of the Marion Star and Dr. Britton, a Democrat, became friends, Harding occasionally published sketches written by Dr. Britton of his experiences in country practice. When, in 1913, Dr. Britton died, leaving an almost penniless wife and four children, Harding helped Mrs. Britton secure a job as a substitute teacher. Nan, then a high school junior, was Harding's sister Daisy's student in her high school English classes, and since 1910, when she was almost fourteen and Harding was the Republican candidate for governor, she maintained that she had become a Republican supporter and more: "Warren Harding and Harding's future formed my life's background," she wrote, "and whether or not anyone else credited me with the capacity for such a cumulative emotion as love, I knew that I was in love with Warren

Harding." From then on, she recounts, Harding was the center of her school-girl existence: the wall of her room was papered with photos cut from campaign posters and newspapers; she went on expeditions with or without her sister or girlfriend past the Harding house on Mount Vernon Avenue; she sought glimpses of the Harding and Phillips families on Sunday rides - and experienced a growing dislike for Mrs. Harding, and, as rumors circulated about Harding and Mrs. Phillips she felt an increasing dislike for her; she resisted attempts by her mother - and by Mrs. Harding - to discourage her "schoolgirl" crush; she remembered family calls on the Hardings and the occasional lone encounter with her love object:

... I had just stopped to pick a particularly pretty wild poppy when I looked up - to see Warren Harding approaching! It was too late to retreat, so I walked bravely toward him... [hoping] that the ground would open and swallow me....

... I knew that he recognized me for he began to smile and take off his hat. Then, with a bow that could not have been more gallant had I been a titled lady, and the same smile which has won even the hearts of his enemies, he bade me "Good evening!" To this day I have not the slightest idea whether I found my voice to answer, but I remember I momentarily recovered sufficiently to look up at him, while all the way home I exulted, "Isn't he wonderful! Isn't he wonderful!"

Although defeated for the governorship, Harding's political star continued to rise: in 1912 he placed William Howard Taft's name in nomination for re-election at the Republican National Convention; in 1914 he was elected to the U.S. Senate; in 1916 he gave the keynote address at the Republican National Convention. And, although Nan does not recall it, sometime in the summer of 1914 he apparently began to write to her at a cottage at Brady Lake, where she and her mother stayed while both took teaching courses at nearby Kent. But apparently at that time, there was no attempt at a rendezvous by either.

In the summer of 1915 the Britton family broke up, the mother, with a younger child, moving to Martel, east of Marion, to teach, the baby, John, to live with an aunt, the older sister, Elizabeth, to Chicago to work her way through music school, and Nan, followed by her 16-year-old brother Howard, or "Doc," to Cleveland to work in a China store, and, after a year, sponsored by "benefactors" - identified as Kenyon College classmate of her father's, to whom she had appealed - to Chicago briefly to work at Carson Pirie Scott, and then in the fall of 1916, "outfitted properly from head to toe" from Marshall Field's by those benefactors, she went on the New York to attend the Ballard Secretarial School, while living with the family of another benefactor. Meanwhile, she wrote, "Morning after morning I bought the papers, watching...[for] any mention of my beloved Warren Harding."

Graduation day approached; Nan had not only completed the course successfully, but had worked temporarily for Ignace Paderewski and his wife in Polish War Relief. Finally, on May 7, 1917, a month after the nation had gone to war, "after many revisions, and after destroying dozens of sheets of perfectly good Y.W.C.A. paper" she wrote a fateful letter. "My Dear Mr. Harding," it began; "I wonder if you remember me; my father was Dr. Britton, of Marion, Ohio." After reciting her meager, innocent qualifications for "an all-day position...which will afford me prospects of advancement," she concluded: "Any suggestions or help you might give so would be greatly appreciated, I assure you, and it would please me as to hear from you."

While the frenzied debate of the draft bill went on around him in the

Senate, Harding scrawled an immediate reply on Senate stationery: he did remember her, "you may be sure of that, and most agreeably, too;" he would indeed help her, if necessary going "personally to the war or navy department to urge your appointment." Most thrilling to Miss Britton were the closing lines: there was "every probability" that he would be in New York the following week; he would call her or "becomingly" look her up, and he would take pleasure in doing so." Her reply was immediate:

It was good to know that you remember me... I am hoping that you will be in New York next week and that I can talk with you; I am inclined to think that an hour's talk would be much more satisfactory [than a mere list of her qualifications that he had requested]. There is so much I want to tell you; and I am sure that I could give you a better idea of my ability - or rather the extent of my ability, for it is limited - and you could judge for yourself as to the sort of position I could fill... .

Again he replied immediately, and Nan records that

It pleased me immensely to read "I like your spirit and determination. It is like I have always imagined you to be." Like he had always imagined me to be. Then he had thought about me!

A skylark amid the clouds could not have been happier than I during the intervening days between my receipt of this letter and the arrival of its author.

Before Nan could reply, Harding was in New York, telephoning - "What a sweet shock to hear his voice!" - asking her to meet him at the Manhattan Hotel at 10:30 that morning. There they reminisced in the lobby about, she writes, "my childhood and my adoration of him, and he seemed immensely pleased that I still retained such feelings. I could not help being perfectly frank." Finally they adjourned to his room - the only one available, he said. It was the bridal chamber.

In Miss Britton's brief digression that she had been but sixteen when she had last seen Harding, that she had then called at his house to

congratulate him upon his election to the Senate, either her memory or her arithmetic is faulty. Harding was elected on November 3, 1914; Miss Britton was eighteen on November 9. In May of 1917, consequently, she was half through her twenty-first year; Harding was nearing fifty-two.

"...we had scarcely closed the door behind us when we shared our first kiss," Miss Britton remembered. "I shall never, never forget how Mr. Harding kept saying, after each kiss, 'Oh, dearie, tell me it isn't hateful to you to have me kiss you!' And as I kissed him back I thought that he surpassed even my gladdest dreams of him."

But the bridal bed remained undisturbed; between kisses they discussed her need for a job and her plans to visit Elizabeth in Chicago. Harding tucked \$30.00 in her "brand new silk stocking" - echoes, perhaps, of countless smokers at the Elks or assignations in houses along the railroad tracks in Marion or other Ohio towns, although Nan was too innocent to understand the gesture - and he apologized that he had no more to give her.

Later, in a taxicab, Harding tested her ability to take dictation:

"My darling Nan: I love you more than the world, and I want you to belong to me. Could you belong to me, dearie? I want you...and I need you so..."

I remember the letter did not run into length because I silenced him with the kisses he pleaded for...

Before that remarkably full day was over, Harding had accompanied Nan to the secretarial school to check her qualifications and he took her to meet Judge Elbert H. Gary, Chairman of the Board of United States Steel. Gary, in turn, instructed his Comptroller, "Mr. Filbert, I want to help Senator Harding to help this young lady." With employment promised, they

returned again to the bridal chamber at the Manhattan, where Harding told her once more that "I'd like to make you my bride, Nan darling." But the bed remained undisturbed, as it was also to for Harding's second trip to New York before her visit to Chicago.

There she received the first of the hundreds of letters, thirty to forty pages each, scrawled with the homely endearments of which Harding was fond and which Nan found romantic. In response to her request, he sent her a money order for \$42.00, explaining that the odd sum would appear to be payment for "some possible work" she had done for him. And he suggested the first rendezvous, in Indianapolis, where he was to speak. He registered her at the Hotel Claypool as his niece; later, they went on to Connersville, where she became Miss E.N. Christian, using the name of George Christian, Hardings' secretary, a joke, Harding said, on Christian." But, Miss Britton writes, "There were no climactic intimacies," either in the hotel rooms or as they lay in each others' arms on the midnight sleeper to Chicago. Artlessly, at Englewood the next morning, Nan remarked to Harding that he looked a bit tired. "God, sweetheart! What do you expect? I'm a man, you know," he exclaimed somewhat perversely. But the following night, in a Loop hotel, their lovemaking remained, in Miss Britton's word, "restricted," and Harding went back to Washington, leaving Miss Britton to recreate her innocence at the time:

...in my own eyes I was safe so long as my virginity was sustained. It seems to me unbelievable now when I think back on my ignorance about certain things...when during our ride together from Connersville to Chicago, I experienced sweet thrills from just having Mr. Harding's hands upon the outside of my nightdress, I

became panic-stricken. I inquired tearfully whether he really thought I would have a child right away. Of course this absurdity amused him greatly, but the fact that I was so ignorant seemed to add to his cherishment of me for some reason. And I loved him so dearly.

Harding's lengthy letters, the letters that Nan was unable to produce when, years later, the Harding family demanded proof of their relationship, continued to arrive, thirty or forty pages of scrawled endearments and doggeral verse, often of Hardings' own composition. Discouraging a young admire, Nan returned to New York late in June, to begin work at United States Steel on July 1st. In mid-July Harding visited her, and again she recounts that, in their hotel room on Seventh Avenue, "...I was deliriously happy to lie in close embrace with my darling," but she still could not permit "the intimacies which would mean severance forever from a moral code...."

But on July 30, 1917, Harding returned, and, in "a hotel where friends of his in Washington had intimated to him that they had stopped under similar unconventional circumstances," Miss Britton recalled, "I became Mr. Harding's bride - as he called me - on that day."

After a comely of errors, in which two men - apparently detectives - burst into the room and questioned them and then, after discovering Harding's name in his hat, became suddenly respectful, Harding tipped them with a \$20.00 bill. Later, in the taxi he remarked, "Gee, Nan I thought I wouldn't get out of that under \$1000!" They went to dinner at Churchill's and Harding returned to Washington on the midnight train.

Harding visited New York regularly, and they also met elsewhere - in

Plattsburg, New York, and in New Jersey - wherever they could be together, and the letters continued to come, including a special delivery letter almost every Sunday morning. But most of all, Nan enjoyed their dinners together; "They were so sweetly intimate," she wrote, "and it was a joy just to sit and look at him:"

The way he used his hands, the adorable way he used to put choice bits of meat from his own plate onto mine, the way he would say, with a sort of tense seriousness, "That's a very becoming hat, Nan," or, "God, Nan, you're pretty!" used to go to my head like wine and make food seem for the moment the least needful thing in the world.

By late 1918, with Harding tied more tightly to Washington as the war wound down and Mrs. Harding - the Dutchess - fell ill, Nan began to visit him there. He met her at her hotels, took her to his office, to the theatre, and even on excursions throughout the city. It was in his office in the Senate Office Building, early in January, 1919, that, Nan records, "we both decided afterward that our baby girl was conceived."

"Mr. Harding told me he liked to have me be with him in his office," she wrote, "for then the place held precious memories....," but neither of them anticipated her pregnancy. Harding continued to visit her in New York, and by the end of February they were certain of her condition. Harding's nervousness and, in spite of his protestations to the contrary, his reluctance to have her bear the child seem to suggest a cooling of his ardor that apparently escape Miss Britton. He talked about an "operation" and on one occasion suggested she take "Dr. Humphrey's No. 11 tablets," but Nan refused. He did, however, provide her with the ring she so badly

wanted, and, "we performed a sweet little ceremony with that ring, and he declared that I could not belong to him more utterly had we been joined together by fifty ministers." By the end of July, however, she gave up her work and went to Asbury Park, New Jersey, to await the birth of her child; only once during that time, a month before the child's birth, did she see Harding, briefly, during a quiet trip to Washington. On October 22, 1919, the baby was born; she was named Elizabeth Ann. Although Harding visited Asbury Park at least once, with friends, during Nan's confinement, he did not see Nan, nor, in spite of Nan's suggestions and her often-made plans, did Harding ever see his child. Nor, apparently, did Nan see Harding again until he came to Chicago in June, 1920, for the Republican National Convention, at which, Nan was confident, he would be nominated for the Presidency. But he wrote faithfully and "was very generous, sending me as a rule \$100 or \$150 at a time... . He used to send very old bills so that they would not be noticeable to one handling the letter, and has sent me as much as \$300 and \$400 in one letter with nothing but a two-cent stamp to carry it." For most of 1920, Elizabeth Ann was boarded with a nurse in Chicago, where Nan remained, not returning to New York until late summer of 1921, well after Harding's election and inauguration.

There were surreptitious meetings during the convention, however, at Nan's sister's apartment, although Harding resisted meeting her and Elizabeth Ann "some morning in the park... . I suppose it would have been unwise," however, she concedes. He provided her with a ticket to the

convention, and she witnessed both the nominating speech and his ultimate nomination from high in the gallery. Sentimentally, she remembers,

How could that surging multitude - cheering and whistling and stampeding the aisles with their Harding banners held aloft - be interested anyway in the tumult of utterable emotion that rose within me? My eyes swam, and I recalled my Freshman school year at Marion, when, in the margins of all my books, I, then but thirteen years old, had written the prophecy of my heart, longing, "Warren Gamaliel Harding - he's a darling - Warren Gamaliel Harding - President of the United States!"

I was very happy to be a Harding booster; in fact, of all the work I have ever done, that was the most enjoyable. Everything was Harding! I wrote to Mr. Harding's sister Daisey, telling her where I was, and in her letter she said she knew how happy I must be to be working for my "hero." She well knew he was that to me.

After his nomination Harding sent Nan on a recuperative trip - she had apparently not yet recovered from her childbirth nearly a year before - to the Adirondacks, promising meanwhile that he would establish a "substantial amount" in a fund for Elizabeth Ann. The fund apparently never materialized, but in the mountains she met for the first time a man she identifies as "Tim Slade," a secret service man assigned to Harding. In reality he was James Sloan, Jr., a Secret Service veteran of more than twenty years, who remained almost alone among insiders in choosing not to write his memoirs of the Harding Administration - even Colonel Edmund Starling, his boss, published the semi-indiscreet Starling of the White House in 1946. Sloan - or Slade - remained a trusted escort and messenger for them to the end and beyond, when he sometimes came to Nan's assistance in emergencies after Harding's death.

On her return to Chicago Nan went to work for the Republican National Committees in the Auditorum Hotel, distributing lithographic photos of Harding.

On election night Nan took the midnight train to Marion, planning to go on to New York, while her sister Elizabeth kept the baby. But she spent two weeks in Marion, seeing Harding on several occasions, both publicly as an admirer and supporter and privately, in a house used for campaign offices, through the agency of "Tim Slade". She delighted in "the two (or maybe three - I cannot remember)" \$500 bills Harding had given her, and she and Harding discussed possible adoptive parents for Elizabeth Ann; then she went on briefly to New York and then back to Chicago to rest, while the Hardings went on to Florida for a post-election vacation.

In February, when Harding went to Cleveland for dental work they met again briefly at the Hotel Statler, largely to discuss Elizabeth Ann's future; it remained undecided, with Harding suggesting "a Catholic home," and Nan concluding that she would best be adopted by her sister Elizabeth and her husband, a course Harding reluctantly accepted and which ultimately was done. Apparently there were no intimacies, but Nan returned to Chicago exhausted. After letters from Nan containing photos of the baby were lost in the mail, they exchanged letters through the agency of "Tim Slade" and later through Harding's valet, Arthur Brooks, another White House insider through at least three presidents who has chosen to remain silent.

Finally, in June, 1921, five months after she had last seen Harding, Nan made her first post-election visit to Washington. There, escorted by "Tim Slade," she met Harding in the Cabinet Room, and then occurred the

first of the most ignoble episodes of the entire relationship. Nan writes,

... Mr. Harding said to me that people seemed to have eyes in the sides of their heads down there and so we must be very circumspect. Whereupon he introduced me to the one place where, he said, he thought we might share kisses in safety. This was a small closet in the ante-room, evidently a place for hats and coats, but entirely empty most of the times we used it, for we repaired there many times in the course of my visits to the White House, and in the darkness of a space not more than five feet square the President of the United States and his adoring sweetheart made love.

For nearly two years Nan moved restlessly through the New York - Washington - Chicago circuit, and on one occasion she went to Marion when Harding was there, but only in Washington could they meet, however seldom, alone. Nan worked sporadically, at U.S. Steel and as secretary to the president of Northwestern University; she took courses at Columbia and Northwestern; each meeting with Harding became more emotionally painful than the last. Nan remembered that,

In the ante-room there was a leather couch, so dilapidated that I remember I remarked to Mr. Harding that one might think it had been there ever since the White House was built. We used to sit there a great deal, especially the times when Tim Slade would wait for me either outside or on the other side of the President's office, in a large room beyond Mr. Christian's office and far away from the sound of our noices. And sometimes, especially later on in Mr. Harding's brief two and one-half years of service, it was wise that we should be away from everybody, for I took many tears down to the White House.

And then, in the spring of 1923, as Harding planned his trip to the West and Alaska, either as the beginning of his re-election campaign or to get away from the corruption of which he had become aware, Nan suggested she take a university study tour to France. In Dijon, in late July, where she

was studying French, she learned of his illness; on August 3rd, in a chance encounter with some American girls in a shop she learned that he was dead in San Francisco.

The rest of The President's Daughter and its sequel, Honesty or Politics, published in 1932, is anticlimax, the pathetic, sometimes ignoble, sometimes sordid, always pathetic story of Nan's attempt to gain recognition and support for her daughter from the Harding family, of Nan's two unsuccessful marriages, of the arbitrary dismissal of a suit against the Harding estate by a partisan Ohio jury, by her search for some measure of justification, perhaps even her search for the obscurity into which she and her daughter ultimately passed.

Michigan State University

THE LANTERNE

By Louis J. Cantoni

Devotees of the lanterne have cause to celebrate. Nineteen-eighty-six marks the golden anniversary year of this trim poetic form. It sprang to life when, in 1936, Lloyd Frank Merrell halved Adelaide Crapsey's cinquaine into unrimed lines of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 1 syllables. Centering the lines gave the form a unique appearance and suggested its name, lanterne, the French spelling of lantern.

Born in Princeville, Illinois in 1887, Lloyd Frank Merrell spent most of his adult years in Michigan, where he was a protestant minister. He wrote effective poetry in many forms and he authored several books. In 1962 Philosophical Library published his book, Flowering Dust, a long poem in free verse about man's endeavor to explore the meaning and reap the joy of life. His last book, Daughter of the Stardawn, was published privately in 1972, the year after his death. The book consists of 86 superbly crafted sonnets.

It was my good fortune to meet Merrell at a gathering sponsored by the Poetry Society of Michigan in 1963. He was 76 at the time but appeared much younger. We discussed poetry and our own writing and publishing efforts. He impressed me as a quiet, unassuming, introspective person who charmed those with whom he spoke by the full attention he bestowed upon them.

The lanterne has special meaning for me because writing this form helped me through several difficult years. Things were not going well, I had little control over an accumulation of distressing events. Concentrating on the lanterne--this brief, demanding, elegant form--gave me the sense that I could initiate something, that I could gain a controlling perspective on my life.

During those years I was particularly open to lanternes. My usual experience has been that poems find me, I do not seek them out. But in those years I looked for lanternes, I welcomed them. I discovered that listening to the recorded lute music of Toyohiko Satoh enhanced my writing. Hearing the wonderful, healing tones, my thoughts and feelings leapt toward the challenge of compressing experiences, whether playful, joyful, melancholy, or simply insightful, into eleven syllables.

Following are four lanternes. The first two, untitled, are by Merrell. They appeared in Glowing Lanternes, No. 35, 1976. The second two are by me. They appeared in my book of poems, Gradually the Dreams Change, published in 1979 by South and West.

Love
whistles
at each fear
and fears wag their
tails.

QUINTESSENCE

Deep
forest
trails take me
to my very
self.

God,
my proud
wisdom falls...
I am crumbling
dust.

PATCHWORK

Day-
dreams show
harlequin
how to be a
prince.

Here are some guidelines and observations which should promote the writing of successful lanternes. This svelte form expresses a perception or mood in one sentence. Whimsey is neither possible nor desirable in all lanternes, but it can add a delightful turn. Centering the five lines distinguishes the form, but a lanterne is a poem because of its content, not its typography. All lines, except perhaps the fourth, should end on strong words, not on articles or prepositions. If poetry is characterized by compression of language, then lanternes test the limits of poetic expression. Lanternes can be regarded as attempts to capture the essence of one's life experiences. Successful lanternes have great impact, are rich with meaning.

Now you know about my love affair with the lanterne. I pursued this form when my personal needs dictated such action. Things are calmer now and, sometimes, I even experience a certain serenity. These days I am open to long poems. O, I write an occasional lanterne, but, like my other poems, this neat little form has to press itself upon me.

Wayne State University

PASSES AT THE MOON: STORIES FROM KANSAS. Thomas Fox Averill. (Topeka, Kansas: The Bob Woodley Memorial Press, 1985. 86 pages. \$5.00.)

These stories provide a varied view of Kansas, not only in the time they span but also in the landscape they depict. We move from a story set in western Kansas during the depression to southeast Kansas and the mores of the early 1950s to a story set in present day Lawrence. And yet there is a flow to these separate tales, for within this variety there is contained not only a strong sense of region but an even stronger sense of family and community.

Each story, in some way, shows us the importance of these familial and communal bonds. At the center of this book, both figuratively and literally, there is a trilogy of stories which reveals the history of one family spanning four generations. Each of the three stories is narrated by a different character, thus their stories overlap, complement and almost contradict each other until the reader finally assimilates the tales and gains from them a perspective of the interlocking needs, guilt, strains and love that can create and can break family ties. There is a sense of the finite quality of life, as each story deals specifically with death. Yet the reader is left with the pervading cyclic sense which recounting the life of a family furnishes, for in each tale of the trilogy there is also birth and new life.

The title of Averill's collection of short stories, Passes at the Moon, gives us another theme worth considering. The full moon represents the many possibilities of life, its fullness of promise. This promise, for the characters who people this book, is often the promise of a fulfilled life, gained through self-reliance, through family or by becoming a vital member of a larger community. The moon is a changing entity, yet constant, just as life itself.

For Martin, in the first story, "Martin's Full Moon," the night of the full moon is a time of self-realization, a time of decision and choosing a new direction for his life. In "Pegasus' Wing" the constellations in the night sky become a fantasy of imagined relationships between friends and lovers. In this tale, the main character dislikes the full moon, he doesn't want to face the realities of fleeting passion and broken promises that have molded his life.

Averill's moods range from the wild humor of "Helen Singleton and the Dead Cat" to the quiet tragedy of "A Leukemic." Each story is well-crafted and the set of stories as a whole provides enjoyable reading. Beyond that, this collection is noteworthy for its portrayal of Kansas. The setting is an integral as-

Review Passes at the Moon

pect of the book. These families and communities could exist elsewhere but they would not be quite the same. Kansas is not merely a subtle setting, it shapes the characters as well as the action in these tales.

Cynthia S. Pederson

Topeka, Kansas

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