small part of the career, and of the talent.

No one-hit wonder, Patsy Cline amounts to a cultural icon of the later part of the 20th century. Mansfield offers fresh glimpses into her life, but he doesn't try to unravel the secret of her endurance. Why do we remember Patsy long after we have forgotten Del Wood and other singers who were just as popular in the early 1960s? Whoever manages to answer that question will make a significant contribution to the history of mass culture.

—Douglas Gomery

JANE KENYON:
A Literary Life.
By John H. Timmerman. Eerdmans.
246 pp. $28

In 1977, about five years after he married fellow poet Jane Kenyon, Donald Hall spoke to a class at Dartmouth College about the envy and rivalry that so often spoil literary marriages. He may have been thinking of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, or any number of equally turbulent couples. "It doesn't have to be that way," said Hall. He and Kenyon, he explained, managed to work and travel together without going for each other's throats.

A professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Timmerman corroborates what Hall told the class: "Their relationship may best be understood as a *community* of two writers who held in common their mutual calling as poets." That's not to say that the couple's life together was an idyll. Kenyon recurrently suffered from severe depression; Hall underwent cancer surgery several times in the late 1980s and early 1990s; in 1994, Kenyon began debilitating treatments for the leukemia that would kill her the following year, shortly before her 49th birthday.

Kenyon is best known for pastoral lyrics that focus on emotional and religious struggles against a backdrop of rural New England. In her devotion to narrative and linguistic simplicity she resembles Robert Frost, another outsider who came to New England and made it his own. Frost channeled his adopted Yankee voice into traditional verse forms; Kenyon, as her collection *Otherwise* (1996) makes eminently clear, wrote free verse that has all the suppleness, clarity, and concision of good prose.

Some reviewers liken her to another New Englander. "She writes about [depression] more eloquently than anyone I can think of since Sylvia Plath," critic Paul Breslin observes. "Of course, the outcome, biographically and poetically, was vastly different. . . . Plath has the greater intensity, sublimity, power to conjure terror; Kenyon has greater subtlety, surer moral and poetic judgment, and a capacity for emotional generosity that eluded Plath almost completely. There is very little self-pity in Kenyon's writing, and she can portray the grief of others as memorably as her own."

Timmerman's biography is a kind of paean to Kenyon's abbreviated career. He ably recounts her music-filled childhood in a house on a dirt road outside Ann Arbor, Michigan (her father was a jazz musician, her mother a nightclub singer and seamstress), her first encounters with Hall in his University of Michigan class "Introduction to Poetry for Non-English Majors" (a class that once attracted the entire baseball team), her growing confidence and sophistication as a poet, her marriage to Hall in 1972, and their move in 1975 to his ancestral house on Eagle Pond Farm, near Wilmot, New Hampshire. The move, Kenyon once said, amounted to "a restoration of a kind of paradise."

Rural New Hampshire brought about another restoration as well. Although Kenyon had rejected Christianity as a teenager, partly in reaction against an overbearing grandmother, she began accompanying Hall to the South Danbury Christian Church. She soon experienced a religious reawakening. The minister, Jack Jensen, who also taught philosophy and religion at nearby Colby-Sawyer College, became her spiritual adviser and directed her to St. Teresa, Julian of Norwich, Simone Weil, and other devotional writers. "Jack gave me a spiritual life—it's that simple," Kenyon said. "Over the years my poetry changed to reflect my awakening. Life changed profoundly."

Though marred by repetition and, at times, excessive praise, Timmerman's biography provides a useful, well-researched, and often moving introduction to Kenyon's life and poetry. Readers will come away with an appreciation for her heroic battles against illness, for the spare and poignant lyrics that dramatized those battles, for Hall's harrowing grief after she died, and for the great loss her death meant to contemporary poetry.

—Henry Hart