

choosing to focus on formal elements, she skirts the intellectual underpinnings crucial to an understanding of much contemporary art. The truth is that a great deal of it isn't self-explanatory, nor is it the kind of thing the average person would want hanging over the mantel. It often engages less with the world around it than with the art that preceded it or the museum that exhibits it. And in most cases, the viewer is helped immeasurably by learning the artist's biography and intellectual framework. Art has taken a journey away from the representational, and, however hard that makes life for tour guides, it isn't coming back.

Indeed, one wonders whether Heller's task is necessary. Why *should* art be equally accessible to all? What does it matter if most galleries attract only a cadre of well-informed insiders, while the rest of the world buys Thomas Kinkadee prints at the mall? It evidently matters to Heller, who wants people to stop worrying and enjoy the art. And it matters to museum curators, who hope to bring in the masses. Someday, a blockbuster Chris Ofili retrospective may attract the same adoring crowds that Monet's water lilies do today. Maybe we'll even see a line of dung-encrusted holiday greeting cards.

—ALIX OHLIN

REMEMBERING PATSY.

By Brian Mansfield. Rutledge Hill Press. 95 pp. \$14.99

Forty years after her death, Patsy Cline (1932–63) is a bigger star than ever. She sells more albums than when she was alive. Her haunting rendition of “Crazy,” a Willie Nelson composition, is the most played song on jukeboxes. And for fans who want to “see” Patsy as well as hear her, two biographical plays are currently touring. It's a remarkable afterlife for any singer, especially one whose Nashville stardom lasted less than two years—from her first hit, “I Fall to Pieces,” in July 1961, until her death in March 1963.

Her short career (along with three other Grand Ole Opry stars, she was killed in a plane crash near Camden, Tennessee) left us with too few photographs, and the same ones tend to get reproduced over and over again. I praise Mansfield, a journalist and music critic, for

unearthing new pictures in the Nashville music establishment: the Grand Ole Opry Museum, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and particularly the files of Les Leverett, official Opry photographer in the 1960s. Mansfield's short book intersperses these photographs with quotations. Singer k.d. lang, for instance, tells of receiving two Patsy Cline albums on her 21st birthday: “I started listening to them seriously and just being blown away by her interpretative quality and the timbre of her voice. . . . It was pretty powerful stuff, powerful to the point where it was transforming.” In tribute, lang named her first band the “re-clines.”

Remembering Patsy is no scholarly treatise (so we don't know where the author got the lang quote), but a sort of love poem by someone who wishes to pay his respects to a voice we all recognize. Many of the book's images display Patsy Cline's appeal beyond the provinces of country music. Photograph after photograph has her in cocktail dresses, looking like Dinah Shore or Connie Francis. We also see her arguing with producers at Decca Records, making nice to disc jockeys who may play her songs, conferring with her manager, and schmoozing with country music star and Louisiana governor Jimmie Davis (best known for composing “You Are My Sunshine”). This is Patsy Cline at work, not singing but engaged in the real labor of keeping her singing career alive. The publicity photographs most familiar to us—Cline in a cowgirl outfit—reveal only a



Patsy Cline shares a laugh in 1961 with Louisiana's governor Jimmie Davis.

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 Wilnot, 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