

**Faces in the Moon.** By Betty Louise Bell. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. 193 pages. \$19.95 cloth.

"I was raised on the voices of women. Indian women." So begins Betty Louise Bell's memorable first novel. It is a classic beginning for the coming-of-age narrative customary in first novels, whether of European or Native American provenance. But despite its programmatic promise, *Faces in the Moon* quickly becomes rather complicated. For one thing, the voices raising the young Cherokee girl, Lucie, are not quite "Indian"; in fact, those of Momma and Auney, though Indian by (mixed) blood, tell the stories of two women willingly cut off from their tribal past. Embodied in their insistent efforts to bleach and curl their hair is the choice the two women have made to inhabit a world much more recognizable as that of stereotypical "poor white trash" than of Indians. Both are often drunk, always abusive, slatternly, and very poor. Despite the occasional story—of stealing old man Cornsilk's watermelons, of Auney's childhood escape from an outhouse—the telling of which offered Lucie brief respite from pinched cheeks, swinging broom handles, "screams" and "tears," Momma's gifts to the child are too few to evoke any love. Only when Momma is lost in telling a story is Lucie able to confess, "I did not hate her, then . . ." (p. 8).

Not surprisingly, Lucie eventually follows in the footsteps of a long line of fictional southern heroines (familiar from the work and lives of a dozen southern women writers, including Carson McCullers, Maya Angelou, Bobbie Ann Mason) who determine early to make their escape. For this Indian child, however, there is respite. When one of her mother's abusive white male lovers—who has raped the child in a chillingly understated scene—insists that Momma choose between Lucie and him, Momma immediately stuffs the child into her car. On the way to deliver Lucie to a great aunt, Lizzie, and her husband Jerry, who live in an unfamiliar rural Oklahoma, Momma assures the child that her new home is peopled by witches.

But this abandonment proves to be the beginning of Lucie's salvation. With Lizzie and Jerry, Lucie learns the full truth behind the mantra repeated again and again by Momma and Auney—"Your Grandma was a full-blooded Cherokee"—and a photograph—"a dark-eyed beauty with olive skin and black hair to her waist, shapely in a cotton housedress and holding a new-born baby" (p. 8). That "dark-eyed beauty," Lucie begins to realize, was

Momma before she began to pass. It was Momma before the drink, before the fat, and indeed before the white men. (Lucie soon learns that her father was Indian as well.) With Lizzie and Jerry, Lucie learns both the quotidian and the heroic stories of Indian life. Told by Lizzie's voice, these include the essential historic tales of the Trail of Tears, stories about the Oklahoma earth, and one emblematic lesson: the story of Quanah Parker, mixed-blood Comanche rebel, merciless killer of whites, symbol of a people's unquenchable anger. She learns a second mantra: "'Don't mess with Indian women,' Lizzie said. 'Ain't no body meaner'n a Indian woman been crossed'" (pp. 156-57).

When Lucie leaves Lizzie and Jerry, she carries three important stories: first, the narrative that links her, irrevocably, to the people dislocated by government fiat; second, a connection to the rebel hero ("This here child been spoken for by Quanah Parker hisself" [p. 153]); and third, the germs of understanding that will eventually transform her hatred for Momma into something more complex.

Lucie's escape from Oklahoma, like most events in her life, is at once dramatic, sad, and funny. At Lucie's Long Island wedding to a Jewish Gatsby, Momma puts in a memorable appearance: "She stepped out of the cab dressed for the event, a tea-length multilayered turquoise chiffon, her hair freshly peroxidized and tightly permed. . . . And the hat, Lord have mercy, was a wide-brim straw with a sequined turquoise horse in the front. I watched from the picture window as three hundred pounds of turquoise, with gloves, tried to find the front door of my in-laws' North Shore home. Melvin's grandmother, coming in from the back, caught a look at Gracie, shrieked, and had to be rushed into the back room by Melvin's parents" (pp. 49-50). "It wasn't my fault I hated her then," Lucie insists.

Lucie soon discovers that this wealthy Long Island world is no more hers than was the "white trash" world of Gracie and Auney. She makes another dramatic escape—this time to California, where she becomes a professor of English literature.

But she cannot rest: "Every year I become more Indian, my hair darkens, my eyes grow fierce and still. Slowly, the blood rises, dragging me into its silence. . . ." (p. 33). At the same time, she bears the mixed-blood's persistent fear that if she declares her Indianness, she will be mistaken for a dreaded "wannabe." Moreover, she has heard the slurs about the Cherokees' willingness to offer tribal membership to just about anyone. In a wonderfully comic

passage, Bell satirizes this dilemma: "This here's the Reverend Tom Cottonmouth, Speakin' to ya from the national I Wannabe a Cherokee network in Tulsa, Oklahoma . . . . If youse got Cherokee blood a-running through your veins, no matter how distant, no matter how pre-e-e-posterous, no matter how recent, the Cherokees loves y'all . . . . Send us your money now, Indian brothers and sisters . . . . Don't be left outta the new Cherokee Nation. Cherokee. We mean Indian" (pp. 57–58).

Finally, of course, Lucie goes home to bury Momma. Among her mother's cheap and trashy things ("she kept every material object that ever crossed her path . . . . She traveled by Knickknack. Without ever having left the state, she had a cake dish with Niagara Falls, a bronze cable car from San Francisco, an Elvis pillbox, and a lighter in the shape of the Washington Monument" [p. 40]), Lucie finds her mother's nearly illiterate "My Life." As she reads and laughs, reads and weeps, and then burns this last of her mother's stories, she realizes, "I did not hate her then" (p. 185).

From that moment, she begins to belong to her own line of Indian women. Just as her mother and aunt had searched for their mother's face, she finds that "I cannot look at the moon without searching it for mothers, known and unknown" (p. 188).

The *Faces in the Moon*, then, are not only Indian faces. Like Bell's cast of storytellers, the faces include those who are not Indian, whether by birth or by choice. Thus the novel chooses not to conclude with a cliché—a comfortable "home-coming," with Lucie finally acknowledging her place among her people. Instead, the final scene depicts another event familiar to America's dislocated mixed-bloods: the search, in the archives, for the documentation that should, finally, certify authentic Indian identity. Here, too, Bell achieves comedy: "The librarian was a pink middle-aged man . . . . He looked up and grinned. 'Who do you think you are?' he said. 'Lucie Evers.' 'No,' he sighed, 'what tribe?' 'Cherokee?' I said, but heard the question in my voice. He smirked and reached behind him for the book. He stretched the heavy black book toward me, grinning broadly at the joke. *Cherokee Rolls, Dawes Commission.*" Lucie explodes into anger: "I am Quannah Parker swooping down from the hills into your bedroom in the middle of the night . . . ." And then, after returning the book and scratching her name from the waiting list: "'Don't mess with Indian women,' I say. He's still waiting, confused. 'That's all. You don't need to know no more than that'" (pp. 191–93).

*Faces in the Moon*, then, follows a narrative path familiar in many women's autobiographies. It is focused on the domestic—the kitchen table provides the venue for most stories—and on the oral tales through which women, at least in current essentialist stereotype, pass culture down through generations. At the same time, Bell's comic voice and her rare insight into the confusions wrought by mixed blood and perhaps even more by parents' decisions to "pass" for white, make this novel an authentic original.

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**A Friend to God's Poor: Edward Parmalee Smith.** By William H. Armstrong. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1993. 518 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

William Armstrong's biography of Edward Parmalee Smith takes on a monumental task. A natal humanitarian, Smith's varied career included service with the budding Children's Aid Society, seeking to ease the privation of New York's indigent children in the 1850s; advocating and securing supplies for wounded Civil War combatants; as well as founding and furthering Black education throughout the post-Civil War South. The importance of these early achievement should not be understated.

The biography, however, is foremost the story of Smith's dedicated role in the American Missionary Association's attempt to administer an Anglo-Saxon sense of order to Indian Country during Ulysses S. Grant's administration. Known as the Peace Policy, Grant's idealistic Indian program eloquently illustrated the pervading beliefs of the United States as it sought to conclude its expansion and jurisdiction over remaining groups of autonomous tribes. During this uneasy and chaotic time, Smith served as Grant's commissioner of Indian affairs for two-and-one-half years, enduring five departmental and one Congressional investigation into his or his agents' management of Indian assets. Exonerated officially, if not in the minds of some, Smith was the symbolic scapegoat for incensed critics of the Peace Policy.

President Grant, in agreement with the significant Christian humanitarian movement considered so successful in the Reconstruction South, and impressed by Quaker work among eastern