

## In the Fullness of Time

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Nicolosi, Vincent. *In the Fullness of Time*. New York; Fonthill Press, 2009.

*You stayed home, so you don't know what it's like out there, do you? Amongst all those wolves. You don't know how they are or what we're up against. The only thing you know is Marion. Out there, they'll take any little thing and bend it into something it isn't. They'll use everything they can to destroy the President, to destroy his good name.* – Florence Kling Harding in *In the Fullness of Time* as she burns the late President's public and private papers (271).

In 1920, Warren G. Harding won one of the most lopsided elections in U. S. Presidential history over fellow Ohioan James A. Cox. Harding was Marion, Ohio. His career before politics was as the editor of the *Marion Star*. What is remembered from his electioneering is the “front porch” campaign, with speeches delivered from his home in All-American Marion, Ohio. By 1923, the President has suddenly died and the Teapot Dome scandal, amongst others, has brought shame up on the White House. Today, Harding's name frequently appears on historians lists of worst presidencies.

Vincent Nicolosi's *In the Fullness of Time* is about Marion at its peak and the town after everything falls apart. It becomes Marion against the world for those left behind (at least for our narrator). Told through the memories of Tristan Hamilton, a well-to-do busybody who sees the world through Marion colored glasses. Or, at least, that is how he portrays himself.

This would make a great book club read because the author is so ambiguous about the truth that two readers could walk away with very differing views on Harding and the narrator. Like any worthwhile historical fiction, *In the Fullness of Time* throws out plenty of historical tidbits, interpretations, and rumors, but does not try to prove anything. This is fiction.

Told at the time of the Kennedy assassination, the story is about Hamilton's life, his first love, and his sister Adeline. The first half of the novel deals more directly with historical topics: Harding's infidelities, the President's bi-racial ancestry rumors, and conspiracies that he was poisoned. Not surprisingly, Tristan has his hand in all of these dealings. Sometimes in the dealings with Harding's wife and mistresses, and frequently with the historians who try to tell the Harding story. But, as the story progresses, it becomes more and more about Tristan protecting Harding and Marion from the world. The idea is not to learn history (the narrator hates historians), but to protect Marion from receiving attention of any kind.

Hamilton, who organized the committee to create the Harding Memorial and now (in 1963) serves as the keeper of the remains of the President's papers, asks questions but he doesn't really want to know the answers. Hamilton (and his father and grandfather, who owned a construction and real estate empire) made his fortune building the city on neighborhood at a time. He spends his later life lamenting the evolution and destruction of Marion. By protecting Harding's legacy he is not sharing the modern world with the Marion of his memory.

Much of the second half of the story focuses on Hamilton's memories of an enthusiastic young academic, Matthias Mende, who was writing a biography of the President's time in office. Matthias disappears under mysterious circumstances and this is a point that the narrator keeps talking through as in an attempt to make things right. The book moves into a darker and more tense realm near the end. But, as I confessed earlier, I am sure another reader could easily walk away with a lighter interpretation of Tristan's story. To me, this makes *In the Fullness of Time* worth reading.

One element of the book that is factually based is the existence of the Harding Memorial in Marion, Ohio. As the narrator says, the memorial was "one of the last colossal monuments of the 20th Century" when built in 1926-27 and stands as comparable to the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials in many aspects. Many great descriptions and images of the structure's grandeur fill the *In the Fullness of Time*. And it and its namesake rest there today in Marion, Ohio.