

Book Review of *Ordinary Genius*

by Tom Roth, Interlibrary Loan, State Library of Kansas

Ordinary Genius, by Thomas Fox Averill. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. \$22.00.

Thomas Fox Averill, author of the popular *Secrets of the Tsil Café* and Kansas Center for the Book Fellow, has written a very nice collection of short stories not unlike his earlier short story collections such as *Seeing Mona Naked* (1989) and *Kansas Stories* (1989). In this collection, as in those earlier ones, most of the stories take place in Kansas. We again are reminded that the ordinary can sometimes have a spiritual quality and what seems mundane can be magical.

These stories cover an array of subject matter. "Bocce Brothers" is a story of twin 13-year-olds who try to outwit a priest into telling the secret of who their father is. In "Topeka Underground" we are given a glimpse of a magical relationship between a young boy and his elderly neighbors; a relationship that grows, but seldom are words spoken. In "Bus" we see the relationship between a mentally challenged young man and his bus drivers. We see that relationships come in many forms, and how one person who has few friends or family in his life, considers the city bus drivers to be his friends and companions. "Shopping" deals with a middle-aged gay man and how his grouchy old father confronts his son's sexuality and his significant other, Bill. We get a glimpse of his father trying to deal with his own wife's death and Bill's illness. The whole story "Shopping" takes place in one grocery store trip.

The stories in this collection cover a wide range of emotions; they are little slices of life that give us peeks into the psyche of a parade of interesting characters. Averill's stories are magical, and all have a very personal touch. This is a great collection for adult readers and would also be fitting for junior and senior high school readers. Thomas Fox Averill shows how a short story should be written and provides readers with many hours of both fun reading and reading that will make them think about relationships with those around us, and the world at large. Many of these stories have a spiritual quality that will make readers want to read more of this writer's books.