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REVIEWS

THE BEST BOOKS OF 2020 SPECIAL ISSUE

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DEPARTURE FROM THE DARKNESS AND THE COLD



DEPARTURE FROM THE DARKNESS AND THE COLD
The Hope of Renewal for the Soul of Medicine in Patient Care

Hergott, Lawrence J.
Universal Publishers (182 pp.)
\$21.95 paper | \$9.99 e-book
Mar. 18, 2020
978-1-62734-302-2

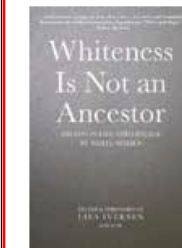
A doctor weighs the rigors, discontents, and joys of practicing medicine in this collection of essays and poetry.

In these pieces, Hergott, a cardiologist and emeritus professor of medicine at the University of Colorado, delves into the physically and emotionally grueling realities of a medical career as well as the humane idealism at its core. Several essays decry the subjection of doctors to the dictates of markets and corporate health care providers' demands; the result, he contends, is burned-out physicians with little time to care for their patients' emotional needs or to maintain family lives of their own. Hergott re-creates the ordeal and trauma of medical training—his nerves were so bad on one day of his residency, he writes, that he had to leave the hospital—and the hard-won confidence in his abilities that grew over time. He also tells stories of appropriate medical treatment choices that resulted in patients' deaths—every doctor has some—and discusses the painful process of learning and moving on from them. Other, contrasting stories tell of health care professionals forging connections with patients despite obstacles. Hergott recalls a ward full of nonresponsive hydrocephalic infants, many abandoned by their parents, who received tender care from the ward nurses; World War II veterans who opened up to him about things they'd never discussed with anyone; and a doctor in an elevator who lifted the spirits of a fragile patient just by making small talk with her. In several essays, he recounts the death of his adult son, Zachary, in a 2009 plane crash and the rudderless grief that he weathered in its wake—and the colleagues, patients, and strangers who helped him through it with simple gestures of caring.

Hergott writes in a limpid style that's vivid and often haunting: "They were young men, their bodies pale, translucent, and incomplete," he writes of convalescents at a military hospital. "Each had part of an arm or a leg missing or had some other wound inconsistent with the perfection of the rest of the body." His prose moves between clinical precision ("I felt the clamp placed in my hand and as I began to move it toward the cords a thought flashed in my mind...I could completely occlude his airway—which would be catastrophic," he frets while treating a choking toddler) and more lyrical observations that skillfully evoke mood and feeling (the toddler's mother had "her son enfolded in her arms, her head bent with her face close to his, she speaking softly to him in a way no one else could"). Even more than his prose, Hergott's poetry offers dense imagery that conveys psychological wounds beneath physical ones, as in a piece about a brain surgery patient: "When the staples come out, / and the bone beneath has healed, / and your flowing

hair— / artfully parted during— / covers the scar after, / there will be nothing seen / of what proceeded." The overall result is a rich and absorbing portrait of a doctor's life.

A luminous meditation on a healer's experience that's anguished and exuberant, by turns.



WHITENESS IS NOT AN ANCESTOR
Essays on Life and Lineage by White Women

Ed. by Iversen, Lisa
CAB Publishing (180 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book
Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-7353050-2-8

A collection of essays offers the reflections of 13 White women grappling with their own racial privilege and family histories.

In this book, Iversen complements her research on collective and family trauma in *Ancestral Blueprints* (2009). She provides readers with a dozen essays by White women, most of whom live in the Pacific Northwest and Canada, who contemplate their complicity in systemic racism. "Bringing visibility to both perpetrators and victims of injustice," writes the editor, "is necessary to heal inheritances of collective trauma." In particular, these essays focus on how "indoctrination in the innocence of white womanhood meant relying on white men to be solely responsible for the perpetrator roles of humanity" while ignoring the ways in which White women benefited from White supremacy. Many of the women's family histories include relatives both directly and indirectly involved in specific acts of racial violence. The grandparents of one essayist, for example, were present at a "legal lynching" of a Black man in Owensboro, Kentucky, who had been hastily convicted by an all-White jury for the rape and murder of a White woman. Another contributor is a descendant of Colorado Territorial Gov. John Evans, who was forced to resign due to his role in the Sand Creek massacre of over 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho. Other contributors include the children of European immigrants from working-class families who benefited from their Whiteness in their new homeland. Collectively, these essays are not just well written, but also poignant and often raw in their acknowledgment of the ways in which their authors have personally benefited from both White privilege and the myth of innocence surrounding White women. Most essays also conclude with a list of resources and sources that will be useful to others interested in exploring historical and contemporary Whiteness. Though this book takes the important first step in acknowledging how the past continues to benefit White women in the present, there is not much provided in terms of practical solutions geared toward not just reconciliation, but racial justice and reparations as well.

A timely and thoughtful discussion about the intersection of gender and White privilege.

FICTION | NONFICTION | CHILDREN'S | YOUNG ADULT | INDIE

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