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Heron Lake (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

Cook, Hugh. *Heron Lake*. Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2011. 278 pages. ISBN: 9780889629400. Reviewed by Bill Elgersma, Associate Professor of English, Dordt College.

Hugh Cook's novel *Heron Lake* depicts a community in small town Ontario, Canada, through the lives of individuals whose circles touch only at the edges, ultimately leading to the central character's reconsideration of her roots in the church. Written through a frequently changing third-person-limited point of view of five central characters, *Heron Lake* reads best without too much time between readings in order to stay acquainted with the characters' places in the narrative line.

Madeline Harbottle is a local school teacher, the independent-minded single mother of two adult sons, one who is mentally incapacitated because of a near drowning at an early age and the other, more stable, older brother now absent. Divorced early, bearing the guilt of neglect in the past and the burden of her family's continuing struggles in the present, Madeline has chosen to rely on no one but herself. Multiple sclerosis, which began several years back, leaves Madeline increasingly at the mercy of a body that will not bend to her will and the threat of what may happen in her future. As she watches her rest-home-relegated father, whose dementia leaves her unrecognizable to him, she does not wallow in self-pity but goes on, on her own, bolstered by the memory of her father's once strong will. But the circles of the other lives touch hers.

Cook's narrative skill is evident as he captures the character of each of the central figures. Voice ranges from

the narration and dialogue of Madeline's son Adam, whose observations are given in simple, choppy, sentences—"He stood watching the pigeons. They have very sharp eyes. I should probably go, he finally says"—to that of the crude and vulgar character of Orrin—"Stealing cars and banging girls were both easy for him 'cause cars were a piece of cake to hotwire once you knew how and with girls all you had to know was how to talk nice to them." Through the unique voices of these essential characters, Cook enables the reader to be privy to their thinking, knowing the plot before the town does because of the intersection of the individuals involved, leaving the reader with the question of how all this will come together rather than the question of what will happen next.

The story lets the circles of these authentically depicted characters touch, some in the past and some in the present, but all with some level of influence on Madeline. For those familiar with Cook's other work and his background, we pick up on a few details of how a faith community works quietly in the life of a woman who pushed her father's church far from her but can no longer handle life on her own: a visit here, a friendship club there, ready attention during catastrophe. We accept that those are enough for her to rethink her life's journey and God's grace throughout. For those unfamiliar with such a world, her sudden realization of God's grace may seem somewhat surprising.

MacDougall, Christopher. *Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen*. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. 304 pages. ISBN: 9780307279187. Reviewed by Sherri B. Lantinga, Professor of Psychology, Dordt College.

I hate running. I would have never, ever considered reading *Born to Run* if a friend hadn't so strongly recommended it and, to be honest, if I hadn't been out of other books to read. So, with a sigh, I picked up *Born to Run*. It has a nice-enough cover: a very fit man silhouetted on a mountaintop. Unfortunately, I opened the cover, which quickly led to hiding from my children so that I could keep reading.

In *Born to Run*, MacDougall searches to relieve his running-related pain. Given that shoe companies, sports science, and the medical profession warn that running is "an inherently dangerous sport" (155), the only solution they offered was to wear ever-more-expensive, cushioned running shoes or to quit running altogether. MacDougall's search for alternatives grows into a rich re-discovery of the

human spirit and body—and the wisdom of crazy people.

MacDougall, a perceptive writer who frequently contributes to *Men's Health* and *Runner's World*, seeks running-related information from all kinds of sources. Soon he focuses not on fast runners (where the bulk of the science is directed) but on those who run well over very, very long distances. There are those who run 100-mile trail races—nearly four marathons—such as the Leadville Trail 100: "Try running the Boston Marathon two times in a row with a sock stuffed in your mouth and then hike to the top of Pike's Peak. Done? Great. Now do it all again, this time with your eyes closed" (60). The Badwater Ultramarathon through Death Valley boasts a ground temperature of 200 degrees that melts runners' shoes unless they stick to the white line painted at the road's edge. MacDougall follows