

BOOK REVIEWS

Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer. By Sara Lawrence Lightfoot. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley, 1988. xxiii + 321 pp. \$9.95. paper.

A daughter's loving account of her mother's life is entwined, in this gracefully written book, with a family history that could stand on its own as a sociological document. Each is enriched by the other. The mother, who was the first black woman to receive a medical degree at Columbia, became a pediatrician and then a psychiatrist, working primarily with children of the poor.

She and her husband, both deeply religious, devoted their lives to acting as missionaries within the United States to help those in need, and their family histories provide a welcome explanatory background to their productive and idealistic lives. The daughter who tells their story is Professor of Education at Harvard, and like her father, a sociologist. An award from the McArthur Foundation had given her the leisure to tape interviews with her mother (and with the father until his death) and then to write this thoughtful appreciation.

Perhaps a third of the book traces the histories of her parents' remarkable families. Although they differed in many ways they also had much in common. Both families lived in the south as part of the Negro community; felt proud of their light color; were middle class in community status and in their own values and education were poor; were religious.

We cannot read about them without outrage at the contrast between the respect they earned and received from blacks and the belittling and snubs that they received from even kindly whites. Portrayals of family members showed them as lively individuals, and also how differently they coped with white demands. Some kept almost completely within the black community; others adopted the social role that whites expected but walled off that way of behaving from the rest of their lives.

The mother's "journey as a healer" is given in detail. We see her as an only child, adoring her father but with a mix of emotions toward her mother. The father was a preacher; the mother was a dedicated teacher but subject to deep depressions that kept her confined to bed when school was out, and she stayed emotionally close to her own family, who thought she had married beneath her because the husband's skin was darker than her own. Their child was brown-skinned and lived in the shadow of a blond, fair-skinned, blue-eyed brother who had died before her birth. He had been expected to become a preacher like his father. She knew she could not preach, because she was a girl, but it may have been largely the wish to help make up for the

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tragedy of her bother's death that made her decide when she was fourteen that she would become a doctor and heal other children.

Her family accepted the decision and sent her from the south to live with her mother's brothers and sisters, who were then in New York, so that she would have a better education. After high school she was accepted at Cornell-- but was not allowed to live in a dormitory because she was a Negro. Although a scholarship paid tuition, she had to earn her room and board by acting as a maid-of-all-work in white households. On graduation she was refused admission to Cornell's medical school, in spite of her excellent record, because of her race. Again and again in her career, even as late as when she completed her psychiatric training, she met unreasonable rebuffs because of her race. It is no wonder that though she was fair-minded, empathic, thoughtful, she was never able to "let down all of her defenses" or be "fully free of suspicion" in her relations with whites.

She met her future husband through their mutual interest in music. They found they had the same ideals and similar aspirations and fell in love, though it was many years before they could marry. The details of those early years are a mix of their joy in each other, and their financial struggles, their sorrow when they had to be separated by professional demands, as when one of them was teaching at one location and the other studying or teachings at another. Through it all they held fast to their ideals and they eventually achieved a life very close to what they had hoped for when they first met: she helping children while she taught in medical school and did other related work; he teaching in colleges and working vigorously with movements to help blacks and the poor; and the pair having the three children they had hoped to have, and watching them grow to be productive adults.

Much in this book is relevant to the interests of this Academy. but one point may be of special interest. The mother's psychiatric training was in Freudian psychoanalysis and the anti-religious bias of some with whom she studied kept her silent, with them, about her own strong religious faith. In her personal life and in the psychiatric work, however, she felt no conflict between religion and psychoanalysis. Just as listening to "the Spirit" had helped her father save souls, so for her, listening to her patients' dreams (and thinking through the meaning of her own) was harmonious with listening to the Spirit. Both led her to ways of guiding her patients' lives with her own.

The book is a part of the Radcliffe Biography Series, aimed at setting forth the contributions that women have made to American life. It is appropriate there: it describes a unique and effective woman who achieved her success at a time when being a woman was almost as much of a handicap in the medical profession as being a black, and it also sets forth a special part of life in America that is unfamiliar to many. The simple, straightforward style in

which the material is presented is appropriate too, in this family story that is a tribute to her mother from a daughter.

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TWO BOOKS RECEIVED:

Ecstasy, Ritual and Alternate Reality: Religion in A Pluralistic World. By Felicitas D. Goodman. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1988. xii + 193 pp. \$35.00. paper.

How About Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World. By Felicitas D. Goodman. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1988. xvi + 142 pp. paper.

Felicitas D. Goodman, who is Founder and Director of the Cuyamungue Institute, taught anthropology at Denison University until her retirement. As an anthropologist Professor Goodman is committed to a careful "empirical" study in her chosen area of specialization. But as a person who recognizes that the very method one adopts needs to be assessed for its adequacy in the areas where one intends to use it, she explicitly introduces three essential elements relatively new in the use of empiricism.

First, she introduces into her investigation respect for the persons whose beliefs she studies and also respect for the beliefs of these persons. That is, she studies the beliefs in a non-reductive form: she does not interpret them all in terms of beliefs concerning the potentialities of the human spirit and concerning the extent and complexity of reality which are alien which are alien to the culture she is studying.

Second, she sees the relevance of traditional metaphysics to the communities she is studying and she knows how to handle these metaphysical views in such a way as to admit them without distortion into her investigations. Also, she studies these beliefs largely through personal stories of individuals who have accepted these beliefs.

Third, she is engaged in areas that are profoundly inter-disciplinary and with skill she cuts across disciplinary boundaries and synthesized her diverse findings.

These two books present something like a preview of the kind of work that we need to see more and more of in our academic studies of cultures and also in the study of religion and psychism.

Mary C. Rose

