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Spring 2011

Review of *Pieces of the Plains: Memories and  
Predictions from the Heart of America*. By John Janovy,  
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Hammer, Mark, "Review of *Pieces of the Plains: Memories and Predictions from the Heart of America*. By John Janovy, Jr." (2011). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1161.

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**Pieces of the Plains: Memories and Predictions from the Heart of America.** By John Janovy, Jr. Lincoln, NE: J&L Lee Co., 2009. iii + 187 pp. Drawings, notes, sources. \$21.95 paper.

John Janovy, Jr., author, parasitologist, and Varner Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, describes his book as “sort of a memoir, but one in which experience is the main character, instead of the writer.” Janovy divides this experience into three sections describing his past, his present, and humanity’s future.

He writes about aspects of his (and his wife Karen’s) childhood in Oklahoma in the section on the past, providing snapshots of people’s lives as a way of representing the Plains. Along with these come insights, such as why watchmakers are found in mountainous Switzerland and not on the level Plains.

In the section describing the present, Janovy discusses a range of topics from lenses (his life spent looking through microscopes and binoculars), to campus politics, to a selection from his recent novel *The Ginkgo: An Intellectual and Visionary Coming-of-Age* (2009) that provides a unique perspective on the life of a college-educated young woman who’s part of a Nebraska Sandhills ranch family.

In the future section, Janovy talks less about the Plains and more about his perspective on modern science and the relationship between science and politics. He goes on to examine “What is a Human Being” from a biological and sociological perspective and concludes by speculating about the future of human civilization, predicting that in 2,000 years humans may return to an agrarian-dominated culture, lacking in fossil fuels, perhaps more similar to life in the first century CE than in the 21st.

As “Pieces” in the title suggests, the book is something of a Janovy sampler, containing various specimens of the author’s popular writing. His use of the term “Plains” is broad, encompassing martinis and unlimited horizons, marine kelp and barrel racing, intensive care units and cattle branding, as well as the war in Iraq and culture wars. The Plains may look rather simple and idyllic from the author’s photograph on the book’s cover, yet Janovy’s writing portrays many of the region’s complexities and tensions.

Janovy the teacher is never far from each chapter’s storyline. Describing his central theme as “education in the broadest sense, a constant learning derived from exploration of things and places,” he sets out in the book’s pages to engage in a discussion of big ideas just

as he does in his classroom. Janovy's love of teaching is evident throughout and ought to inspire other college and university teachers. **Mark Hammer**, *Department of Life Sciences, Wayne State College, Nebraska.*