



A Dual Inheritance

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For readers of Rules of Civility and The Marriage Plot, this engrossing, very smart novel about passion, betrayal, class and friendship delves deeply into the lives of two generations, against backgrounds as diverse as Dar es Salaam, Boston, Shenzhen and Fisher's Island. It is the most accomplished book-by far-of this prominent young author's career.

Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963: two students meet one autumn evening during their senior year at Harvard-Ed, a Jewish kid on scholarship, and Hugh, a Boston Brahmin with the world at his feet. Ed is unapologetically ambitious and girl-crazy, while Hugh is ambivalent about everything aside from his dedicated pining for the one girl he's ever loved. An immediate, intense friendship is sparked that night between these two opposites, which ends just as abruptly, several years later, although only one of them understands why. A Dual Inheritance follows the lives of Ed and Hugh for next several decades, as their paths-in spite of their rift, in spite of their wildly different social classes, personalities and choices-remain strangely and compellingly connected.

A Dual Inheritance Details

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From Reader Review A Dual Inheritance for online ebook

Lesley says

I received A Dual Inheritance free through a Goodreads Giveaway.

The novel traces the friendship of Ed Cantowitz, a poor Jewish boy, and Hugh Shipley, a wealthy WASP, from the time they meet at Harvard in their senior year until they are middle-aged. There is a woman in the mix, too. Her name is Helen, and she is the third point of their romantic triangle. We follow all three of them as they embark on careers, relationships, and travel.

I am in the minority here, but I didn't think this book was so hot. It was trying to be a sweeping saga of a friendship over the course of many years, but I found it cliched and a little tiresome. I couldn't feel that sympathetic toward any of the characters.

Neither Ed nor Hugh were particularly likeable, and I felt like both of them were caricatures of what they should have been. That is to say that I think the author was trying to be deep, but I don't think she was.

Also, there were some odd plot twists that did not feel natural at all. And events that I would expect Hershon to linger on (i.e., Ed meeting his wife and their marriage), were mentioned almost in passing, while she would spend more time on more minor events.

All in all, I would not recommend this book. It could have been good, but it was just okay.

Amanda Kay says

Disclaimer: I received this book as part of the Goodreads First Reads Giveaway. My copy is an ARC.

I'm not quite sure what to think of this book. On the one hand, Hershon has a nice writing style and pace and tells a good story. On the other, this is just another in a series of upper crust NY novels, all of which feature privileged people telling their stories and whining.

I think Hershon was attempting a love story for the ages, perhaps the way people can't let go of their first love. The result is a rather boring story that spans nearly half a century and never has a climaxing point.

I'm not even sure I can say anything else about this book. It's an okay read, a bit boring, but not terrible. In the end, I just felt like it was "there."

2.75/5 stars.

Owen says

This is a very long book and it encompasses so much. At times it felt like the author was going off to confusing places but she managed to stay on track for the most part. I like how she focused on these two characters, Ed Cantowitz and Hugh Shipley, and followed them through their lives post-Harvard. I was curious at first to see whether Joanna Hershon would play off of the Harvard stereotypes or try to avoid them. I would say she did both. We have Ed, who is Jewish and comes from a family that isn't great but probably average. Then we have Hugh, who was born into an incredibly rich family. They become friends at Harvard and for the rest of the story; they enter in and out of each others' lives.

A Dual Inheritance is very different from the types of books I usually read. I often read adult literary fiction but this book is so unlike all of the other subcategories of “literary” fiction. It felt as if the book wasn’t trying to be like other books or completely unique on its own either; it was just trying to tell a story. And I appreciated that.

I’ve never had any exposure to Hershon’s writing but I have to say that overall, I was impressed by it. The prose takes on a nonchalant attitude that does not mean uncaring, but simplistic. Despite the fact that the timeline was often interrupted and jumped around, I felt a connection to both Ed and Hugh. The two men are extraordinarily different, so the core of their friendship was at first difficult to find but they proved that over time, their relationship grew stronger.

One thing I liked about this book was the diversity of setting. Many people only stay in one location as they grow older but these characters traveled all over the world. From China to Africa, and Haiti to New York, each chapter of their lives was provided with a fascinating locale.

A Dual Inheritance rose above the expectations I had for it, but I did have a few complaints. Mostly, the length. At almost five hundred pages, this book is unnecessarily long. Usually what was occurring was important to the story but a lot could have been taken out. It took me a while to get into it but I eventually did, and I ended up reading the second half in one day.

This book is very American, and portrays the characters that attend one of the most prestigious colleges in the world. They go on to become very successful, and I think you will find that although they do well for themselves, they have their own human problems. Hershon did an excellent job portraying two men pursuing “the American Dream”.

*I received a free galley of this book from NetGalley for review, and I have to say that I was very impressed by the quality of the electronic version of the book. I did not catch any misspellings and it looked very clean and nice, no glitches that are common with Kindle versions of books.

Jenni Buchanan says

This book was one of my favorites of the past four weeks. Very grand in scope, but intimate in execution, *A Dual Inheritance* spans two families, three continents, and five decades, but it always manages to feel immediate and personal. It tells the story of Ed Cantowitz and Hugh Shipley, two very different young men who meet in college and become unlikely friends; the story then follows Ed and Hugh (and eventually each of their daughters) through the next 50 years as they chase very different dreams, meet with great success, terrible ruin, and discover—after each trying to abandon the legacy of their family and their past—that family is, after all is said and done, the only constant, and the only relief we have. *A Dual Inheritance* is a love story of epic proportions. Hershon’s prose is perfectly suited to the story, and her characters are a perfect and refreshing balance of good intentions and human frailty.

Taryn says

[This review can also be found on Bookwanderer!]

I've been trying to write my review of *A Dual Inheritance*, by Joanna Hershon, for a while. Not because I disliked the book (spoiler alert: I give it four out of five stars!), but because it spans so many characters, themes, and plots, it is hard to summarize and even harder not to spoil.

Here is the summary from Goodreads:

Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963: two students meet one autumn evening during their senior year at Harvard--Ed, a Jewish kid on scholarship, and Hugh, a Boston Brahmin with the world at his feet. Ed is unapologetically ambitious and girl-crazy, while Hugh is ambivalent about everything aside from his dedicated pining for the one girl he's ever loved. An immediate, intense friendship is sparked that night between these two opposites, which ends just as abruptly, several years later, although only one of them understands why. *A Dual Inheritance* follows the lives of Ed and Hugh for next several decades, as their paths--in spite of their rift, in spite of their wildly different social classes, personalities and choices--remain strangely and compellingly connected.

I'm a sucker for collegiate settings, and though we are only at Harvard briefly, I think Hershon does a commendable job using it as a backdrop to the relationship between Ed and Hugh. College is a period where people from disparate upbringings and backgrounds interact, often for the first time, and appropriately, Ed and Hugh could not be more different. However--as again often happens in college--the two become intensely close friends, each grappling with their own similar emotional 'inheritance' from their parents.

This section especially reminded me of *The Marriage Plot* by Jeffrey Eugenides--and I mean that as a compliment, as I enjoyed both of these books. Both have young people trying to define themselves, their relationships, and their aspirations; *A Dual Inheritance* focuses more on the impacts, intentional and otherwise, that parents have on their children. It also lacks the pretentiousness that some found so distasteful in *The Marriage Plot*; indeed, people are consistently and realistically dealing with their weaknesses.

As the boys grow up, they drift apart thanks to some poor decision-making late one night, and from that point on, the book follows their separate journeys. While Ed does eventually come to achieve the success he has always wanted, his relationships suffer. Hugh, on the other hand, is able to lead the morally-upright life he sought, but finds himself compromising his own integrity personally and professionally.

Then we meet each man's child, and watch as the cycle of inheritance starts all over again. What do we pass on to our children, consciously and unconsciously? How much of our personality is learned and how much is bred? These questions propel this second generation's act forward, and it is surprisingly uncertain, even at the end of the book, what the answers are. I really liked that.

And sure, while there are a few moments that might stretch your disbelief--that Hugh's and Ed's children not only attend the same boarding school, but manage to become friends, for example--they are easily overlooked due to the real and raw emotion that Hershon elicits from these characters. I empathized with each character in turn, and even saw a bit of myself reflected in each one. Hugh's desperation to do measurable good in the world; Ed's need to rise above his humble origins; Ed's daughter's all-consuming drive to achieve that ends up leaving her unhappy.

This is a lovely piece of literary fiction, particularly if you are interested in the idea of children trying to find identities separate from their parents, and I highly recommend it.

I received this book free for review from Ballantine Books through Netgalley. A Dual Inheritance will be available for purchase on May 7, 2013.

Bookwanderer Rating: Four out of five stars

Bookwanderer Tagline: TBA

Other Reviews: Publishers Weekly, 1776 Books, The Reader's Commute

Lynn says

Reading the first hundred pages, I couldn't figure out what was going on, had trouble figuring out who the main characters were except Ed and Hugh (Is this a gay love story?) and what was the importance of Helen? Actually I could have cared less. I entertained abandoning the book which I never do. I stopped reading and looked at some of the reviews and identified with the negative ones. I then googled some professional book critics who gave the book a good review but stated it was a difficult read. I had trouble believing it and felt nothing for the book but tried again. I was interested in the countries and peoples of Africa so that kept me going. And I began to know and fall in love with the novel. I became fully invested in the story and its end. Two men, graduates from Harvard take two very different turns. Ed, who came to Harvard on academic merit and scholarships, and Hugh, a legacy entrant whose family has lost money but has an old name. It is Ed who is ambitious and heads towards Wall Street, and Hugh who skips classes and chases girls, until being inspired by Anthropology and Film school. Hugh heads to Africa and later Haiti running clinics after seeing Nuer in Ethiopia suffering with smallpox and hearing the filmmaker he's working for, say he won't help because he wants to film Africans in their natural state. The central character is Helen, (a model for Helen of Troy?) who is engaged to and marries Hugh, but spent a two night stand with Hugh. The men have wives and children but Helen seems to be the key for these men to hold it together. In the end, I not only loved the book and the writing, I went back and read the first 200 pages so I could get clarification during a time when I was totally confused. This novel is well worth the time and I really admire it.

David Kinchen says

I've settled on my "beach read" book for 2013: Joanna Hershon's "A Dual Inheritance."

Hershon has written the kind of novel we've come to expect from Kurt Andersen, Tom Wolfe, Jonathan Franzen ("Freedom") and, of course Anne Tyler and Joyce Carol Oates: A sweeping, multi-generational book that explores class, job choices, love and marriage and what happens with the next generation. The kind of book Anthony Trollope was famous for in the 19th Century. My choice for a comparable Trollope novel: his 1875 masterpiece "The Way We Live Now" with its plot of financial skullduggery and the clash of classes -- both essential elements of Hershon's novel.

It's autumn 1962 and two unlikely Harvard students meet and find common ground. Ed Cantowitz and Hugh Shipley meet in their final year at Harvard. Ed, from the heavily Jewish Dorchester district of Boston, is far removed from Hugh's privileged upbringing as a Boston Brahmin, yet his drive and ambition outpace

Hugh's ambivalence about his own life.

Ed and Hugh develop an unlikely friendship, reinforced by a shared desire to transcend their circumstances, but complicated by their rivalry for the affections of Helen Ordway, whose parents have a home on Fishers Island, part of New York state but just offshore of Connecticut in the Long Island Sound. (The parents of "Mad Men" character Pete Campbell, played by Vincent Kartheiser, have a summer home on Fishers Island). A few years after their "cute meet" at Harvard their paths diverge -- Ed rising on Wall Street thanks to his friendship and mentorship with Helen's financier dad, and Hugh becoming a global humanitarian with medical clinics in Tanzania. The book's title could just as well be "A Duel Inheritance," because of their clash over the love of Helen, who ends up marrying Hugh after a brief affair with Ed.

"A Dual Inheritance" is sprawling in its scope, spanning from the Cuban Missile Crisis which begins as Ed Cantowitz and Hugh Shipley meet to the 2008 stock market collapse, with locations as diverse as Dar es Salaam, Boston, Shenzhen, and Fishers Island. "A Dual Inheritance" follows not only these two men, but the complicated women in their vastly different lives. And nobody is more complicated than Ed's and Jill's daughter Rebecca, unless it's Hugh and Helen's daughter Vivi, who are best friends. Their friendship is the link between Ed and Hugh, however tenuous and frayed it is at various times up to the novel's end on Fishers Island in 2010 when everybody meets to celebrate Vivi's wedding.

It didn't take me long to become absorbed by the characters in "A Dual Inheritance" and I think many readers looking for a big book to sink their literary teeth into will be similarly addicted. In addition to the authors mentioned above, think Nancy Thayer and Meg Wolitzer.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

I made it almost to the halfway point, and then Hershon completely lost me. The first few chapters were promising. It seemed like it was going to be a sort of anthropological study using class-conscious characters. The more I read, the more it felt like the author had no idea what her purpose was in writing the novel. When I got to the chapters about the Wall Street chaos, it was so confusing and so far off the track from the original story that I just couldn't care anymore.

Linda Dickson says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. You instantly identify with both main characters, probably because we all knew someone like them in college. It is an intriguing tale of two college classmates who form a lifelong bond. The two have nothing in common, save that they are both on the social fringes of campus life for entirely different reasons. Ed, stout, short, rough around the edges and only in school through hard work and scholarships. . . Hugh, suave, tall, from a well-heeled family and never had to worry about grades or the money to stay in school. The story follows their lives, loves and families over several decades, through interesting twists, turns, downfalls and hard learned lessons. You will find this one hard to put down.

Jessica says

I just can't with this book. The characters aren't interesting, the plot isn't interesting, the writing itself isn't interesting. Reading the first half has turned out to be kind of a chore and I think I'm throwing in the towel.

Lara Kleinschroth says

This book was sent to me for review by Netgalley.

We are all molded by two forces - our genetics and our environment/culture. To which extent either of these plays the greater role is the underlying theme of this intriguing and thought-provoking novel. Hershon performs an experiment with her characters - take two Harvard students from two different backgrounds in the 1960's, have them meet and become friends, then see where life takes them over the next 50 years. And how genetics and environment then also mold the lives of their daughters. No matter how far and for how long life may take us, some things inevitably circle back. With characters thoughtfully and lovingly led down their respective roads, and with subtle attention paid to detail in each time period and place, Hershon draws an intricate map of our time.

Danielle Villano says

This was a really wonderful and thought-provoking read. It presents a beautiful portrait of an unlikely friendship, and how that friendship grows, dulls, and rekindles. I began to think of the important relationships in my life; a book that allows you to reflect like that is certainly something special.

Lindley says

I am a sucker for generational novels--I like to see how the choices people make play out in the scheme of their lives--and the lives of their friends and family. To me, they seem more realistic. The story doesn't end with marriage, or with the guy getting the girl--it's more rewarding to see what happens afterward. A Dual Inheritance allowed me to see how two Harvard friends' lives came together, diverged, and came together again due to the choices they made. I especially enjoyed the moments in the novel when Ed paused to consider how his life could have played out differently if he had taken a single different action at that moment. It was also rewarding to see how Ed, Hugh, and Helen's choices ultimately shaped the lives and personalities of their children and sent them in unforeseen directions. I enjoyed following the lives of Hershon's characters and would agree with the comparison to the Marriage Plot, especially in the novel's final pages.

Jennifer says

This sweeping, gorgeously-textured novel is the finest yet from Hershon, showcasing her unique ability to find grace and insight in the simplest of moments, the sparest of gestures. A Dual Inheritance traces the

decades-long friendship between two vastly different men. Hugh Shipley is the diffident son of a patrician family who finds himself wandering through his four years at Harvard. Ed Cantowitz, the scrappy son of a former boxer and plumber, knows exactly what he wants: the world Hugh was born into. The two form an unlikely alliance, with Hugh serving as Ed's moral compass and Ed helping Hugh find motivation and purpose. Hershon recreates both their worlds--and that of 1960's Cambridge--with beauty and gentle humor, and then follows each man as their paths dramatically diverge after graduation. She explores their foibles and successes, their loves and indiscretions as they extend from Africa to Asia to Shelter Island--ultimately to be picked up by the daughters of both man, who form an unlikely alliance of their own. It's a sumptuous feast of a book, one that for me evoked Roth, Cheever and Styron at their best. Read it, and you will both lose and find yourself.

Adelle Waldman says

A *Dual Inheritance* is the kind of novel you get lost in--it is a big, sweeping, involving drama full of vividly rendered characters whose fates you care about deeply. As I read, the real world faded. I wanted only to be in the fictional world that Hershon created.

The book follows a handful of characters from their undergraduate years at Harvard in the 1960s to the present day, moving along the way from New York to Africa to the Caribbean and back again, and growing to include the unfolding lives of their children. At the book's center is a love triangle that is gripping and believable without being at all sentimental: the desire to know how it will ultimately unfold for characters we have come to know so well makes it very difficult to put down the book.

Not only are the characters extremely well-drawn--like Jonathan Franzen's, they feel exceptionally vivid and lifelike--Hershon also renders the shifting social and historical context with great precision and intelligence. She writes with a seemingly effortless authority about everything from the changing racial demographics of Boston neighborhoods in the 1970s to the machinations of Wall Street financiers--but she never loses focus on her wonderful cast of characters and the personal dramas that drive the book forward.

This is a book that will be read with great pleasure by anyone who loves an old-fashioned, character-driven novel in the tradition of many of the most beloved nineteenth century novels. I look back with fondness on the weekend I spent lost in its pages and envy those who still have the pleasure of reading the book for the first time to look forward to.
