

# Reviews

## Fiction

### Red Clocks

**Leni Zumas.** LB/Boudreaux, \$26 (368p) ISBN 978-0-316-43481-2

Zumas (*The Listeners*) imagines a palpable, powerful alternate reality in which the United States has passed the Personhood amendment, reversing *Roe v. Wade* and making abortion a crime. Four women whose futures changed overnight with the passage of the amendment struggle for equality in rural Oregon. Roberta Stephens has chosen to pursue a teaching career and faces an uphill battle to have a child in an oppressively gendered system while writing a biography of an obscure female polar explorer named Eivør Minervudottir. Roberta's star pupil is high school student Mattie Quarles, who, finding herself pregnant, makes a run for the Canadian border. Susan Korsmo, the wife of one of Roberta's colleagues, is quietly suffocating as an overburdened mother of two. Finally there is Gin Percival, a forest-dwelling "mender" providing illegal gynecological services until she is arrested for medical malpractice. As Gin's court proceedings devolve into a modern-day witch trial, the fates of these women converge—with parallels to the life of Eivør—as they are pushed into a series of bold challenges to the masculine power structures that stifle them. Zumas manages a loose yet consistently engaging tone as she illustrates the extent to which the self-image of modern women is shaped by marriage, career, or motherhood. Dark humor further enhances the novel, making this a thoroughly affecting and memorable political parable. (Jan.)

### The Winter Station

**Jody Shields.** Little, Brown, \$27 (352p) ISBN 978-0-316-38534-3

The outbreak of plague in Manchuria during the winter of 1910–1911 tests a Russian doctor's physical, emotional, and moral stamina in Shields's accomplished third novel (after *The Fig Eater* and *The Crimson Portrait*). When Chief Medical



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*Leni Zumas's Red Clocks is a powerful novel about a U.S. in which abortion is a crime (reviewed on this page).*

Examiner Baron Rozher Alexandrovich von Budberg learns that two bodies were whisked away from outside the Kharbin train station, he wonders why he wasn't notified. The czar's appointed administrator, Gen. Dmitry Khorvat, assures him the corpses were not Russian and so are of no importance, then asks him to investigate the death of a Russian businessman. The businessman's daughter describes her father coughing up blood before he died. Evidence mounts of a deadly epidemic made worse by a political cover-up. Matters worsen: a public-relations-minded Chinese epidemiologist breaks with tradition to conduct secret autopsies but refuses to shut down the railway during Chinese New Year; plague-wagons patrol the streets removing people who look sick; a doctor ignoring the baron's pleas to use masks, gloves, and disinfectant succumbs to contagion, as do countless others. Shields's Kharbin is plagued not only by disease but also by rumor, superstition, pride, and ignorance. This fictional portrait of a man caught in a real-life medical crisis proves affecting and timely in its exploration of conflicts between cultures and classes, ambition and mortality, science and politics. (Jan.)

### The Wolves of Winter

**Tyrell Johnson.** Scribner, \$26 (320p) ISBN 978-1-5011-5567-3

Johnson's debut novel is an exciting, fast-paced tale of a postapocalyptic world in which nuclear wars and a deadly flu pandemic have nearly wiped out humanity. Twenty-three-year-old Lynn

McBride and her family fled the disease, setting up a family compound in the Canadian Yukon, "the vast wilderness of nothing," a wintry landscape where they barely survive. When a bearded stranger named Jax arrives, the McBrides are wary, suspicious of a man who possesses unique and deadly skills, including an intimidating proficiency with weapons. More men appear, claiming to be traders, but a bloody fight erupts and Jax reveals he is running from Immunity, a shadowy group that claims to be developing a cure for the flu pandemic, but whose real purpose is sinister. Immunity wants to capture Jax alive, and now Lynn and her family are in danger, too. In a bitterly cold, snowy winter, they confront Immunity in a vicious climactic battle. Johnson is an excellent storyteller; the novel is full of action, suspense, and plot twists as the resilient characters fight for survival in a harsh winter wilderness. *Agent: Alexandra Machinist, ICM Partners.* (Jan.)

### Here We Lie

**Paula Treick DeBoard.** Park Row, \$15.99 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-0-7783-3026-4

With this story of two very different young women, DeBoard (*The Drowning Girls*) portrays the lies that people tell to find acceptance and the terrible acts that powerful people casually commit. The story opens in the present with a press conference about a woman's rape by a U.S. senator. The narrative alternates between this story line and one set in the late '90s and early aughts, in which poor Kansas girl Megan Mazeros forms a friendship with Connecticut senator's daughter Lauren Mabrey at all-girls Keale College. Each conceals a painful secret, and when the two are thrown together as roommates, they fall into the habit of using casual lies to paper over their differences, to hide their secrets, and even simply to amuse each other. Megan fabricates a history even more desperate than her real life to impress Lauren, the product of prep schools. Later, Lauren conceals her relationship with a young man that Megan briefly liked. The lies exacerbate the differences between the two until a horrific attack on the Mabrey family island off the coast of Maine shatters their friendship. While the rape looms in the future as a foregone conclusion, DeBoard only slowly