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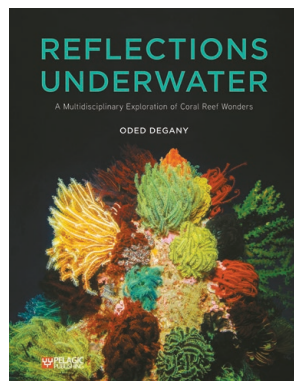
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Multidisciplinary Indeed

Book Review by Caitlin Richards

Reflections Underwater: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Coral Reef Wonders
by Oded Degany. Pelagic Publishing, London, England, 2023. 288 pages

What, exactly, is a “multidisciplinary exploration of coral reef wonders?” At first glance one notices the beautiful photographs in *Reflections Underwater*, and Oded Degany could have stopped there and created a wonderful coffee table book that was 80 percent photos and 20 percent written content, but the author didn’t. Instead, Degany has given us an exploration of coral reefs and other under-sea wonders that encompasses science, biology, mathematics, poetry, philosophy, anthropology, literature, astronomy, religion, and mythology. Multidisciplinary indeed.



COURTESY OF THE PUBLISHER

In the prologue Degany says that there is no correct order in which the book needs to be read; each chapter is independent and the book can be read in any order the reader likes. That being said, there’s no reason not to read *Reflections Underwater* in the order it is written.

Degany, a mergers and acquisitions executive, got into diving as a means to “replenish (his) energy” as he was suffering from burn-out. His decision to pursue diving stemmed from an experience he had as a child visiting the coral reefs in the Red Sea; he “remembered ... the calmness induced by seeing the reddish mountains meeting the deep blue sea.” He now dives to “engage in the sensual and intellectual experience of diving in tropical coral reefs.”

“Sensual” is a word that comes up a lot in the prologue, so it can take the reader by surprise that the book quickly becomes scientific to the point that one feels the need to have Google at hand to look up some of the terminology (there is also a glossary in back). Though just at the point the reader might be overwhelmed with the science, Degany will move artlessly to philosophy, art, anthropology.

He offers the results of his extensive research without drawing conclusions; the reader is offered different theories and points of view. “A visit to a coral reef raises an infinite number of questions about animal behavior, morphology, coloration and more.” And Degany offers infinite ways to answer these questions. He is as likely to reference Voltaire as he is Darwin. When talking about why fish school he draws an inference to human behavior—attraction, repulsion, alignment—and even points out that Hollywood has made use of this dynamic in films such as *The Lion King* and *Batman*.

There is never a sense that Degany is exploring a different world—rather he portrays a great interconnectedness between sea life and terrestrial life. As interesting as all the research is, the book comes even more to life when Degany relates his own experiences, as this one with an



PHOTO BY ODED DEGANY

Squat shrimp octopus: “I could feel that he looked at me intelligently, that he was curious about me and about my interest in him.”

Degany’s is a fascinating approach, and the world missed out on an excellent teacher when Degany made the decision to go into the business world. Someone who can take a subject and come at it from so many different angles and offer so much insight without ever telling the reader, or student, what to think, is rare.

In the epilogue Degany does offer some of his own thoughts and conclusions. “The intellectual journey into the world of coral reefs presented in this book is only a glimpse of this magnificent wonder. The problem is, this story does not have a happy ending. The coral reef ecosystem is in great danger.”

Though the marine world was not affected by man as early as the terrestrial world was and is therefore in better shape than the terrestrial world, man’s use of the planet is having a negative effect on the coral reefs and their inhabitants. Degany does leave us with this bit of hope: “it is essential to understand that we still have a good chance of preserving these magnificent marine habitats.”



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