

Books for Fans of Character-Driven Novels

Kris Wiley for The News Review

I like a fast-paced thriller as much as the next person, but sometimes I'm in the mood for something quieter. Then I reach for a contemplative, character-driven novel, and this year I read several I recommend.

"Foster," a novella by Irish author Claire Keegan, introduces a girl who is dropped off at her relatives' farm so her pregnant mother has one less child to mind. She blossoms under the care of the couple, who grieve the loss of their child yet discover joy in tending their new charge.

"Foster" is tender and emotional – and an excellent introduction to Keegan's work. Fans also should try "Small Things Like These," a brilliant character study of a man faced with the choice to stay silent or upend his community's faith in their church.

"The Librarianist" was my introduction to author Patrick deWitt, who lives in Portland and perhaps is best known for "The Sisters Brothers," which was adapted to the screen.

I could not pass up this novel about Bob Comet, a retired Oregon public librarian. Bob is happy enough with his solitary life and daily walks around the neighborhood until, one day, he helps a lost woman back to her home at a senior facility.

From that single event, Bob develops relationships with a number of eclectic folks, and it leads to a memorable recounting of formative events in Bob's life.

I loved Bob, an everyman with an extraordinary life.

If nothing else, check out "The Librarianist" for the book cover of an old-school library borrowing card.

Finally, months after reading it, I continue to think about "I Went to See My Father" by bestselling South Korean author Kyung-sook Shin with translation by Anton Hur. It is the follow-up to her acclaimed novel "Please Look After Mom."

Hon returns to her hometown to care for her elderly father, who has become increasingly withdrawn from his family and neighbors.

Dealing with the grief of her daughter's death, Hon is slow to reconnect with her father. But after uncovering a chest of letters, she learns about her father's complex history, which includes war, economic instability and long absences from home.

Through those letters and correspondence with her siblings, Hon develops a more nuanced understanding of and appreciation for her remarkable father.

For more gift-giving suggestions, contact me at kwiley@cityofroseburg.org or 541-492-7051.

This Week's Library Events

Tuesday, November 14, 1 p.m. – Conceptos básicos de informática (registration required)

Tuesday, November 14, 6:30 p.m. – Online Book Group (email kwiley@cityofroseburg.org for the Zoom link)

Wednesday, November 15, 10:15 a.m. – Storytime with Aurora

Wednesday, November 15, 3 p.m. – STEAM program for elementary students

Wednesday, November 15, 6:30 p.m. – Vaux's Swifts: A West Coast Story presented by Larry Schwitters on Facebook Live (www.facebook.com/roseburglibrary)

Thursday, November 16, 11:15 a.m. – Storytime with Aurora

Thursday, November 16, 3-5 p.m. – Teen Volunteer Hours

Thursday, November 16, 6 p.m. – Android Basics for caregivers who require childcare (registration required)

Friday, November 17, 10:30 a.m. – Android Basics (registration required)