

Volunteer Book Review

Hamnet, by Maggie O'Farrell as reviewed by Susan Covington

Is there a connection between William Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, and one of his great plays, Hamlet?

Maggie O'Farrell thinks so and in her newest fiction, she makes that connection.

After discovering that Hamnet died in 1596 and Hamlet was written sometime between 1599 and 1601, she began speculating on the connection and began conducting research into Shakespeare's life, his relationships and the time in which he lived.

What she has crafted is a compelling story—not about Shakespeare, *per se*, but about the people in his life—Anne Hathaway, his wife, his family, especially his father, and his children.

She writes about how these relationships made Shakespeare into the person he was but, also, she makes them come alive in their own right, especially Anne Hathaway who is fleshed out as a multi-faceted woman with her own life apart from being Shakespeare's wife.

Hamnet was included in many best books of 2020 lists including the New York Times which described it as a "wondrous new novel (which) is at once an unsparingly eloquent record of love and grief and a vivid imagining of how a child's death was transfigured into art".

I cannot agree more and recommend it highly.

About the Reviewer

After growing up and living in the South for all of my life, I moved to Massachusetts five years ago to be close to my son and his family. I was trained as a musician, but my true calling was in working with books and doing research (a reference assistant at my local library, a children's book specialist at a new and used bookstore and availing myself of any opportunity to conduct research, including genealogy.) I've, always, had an interest in all things medical and was excited when I discovered the Public Health Museum. After going on the fascinating and informative tour, I offered my services. Even though I am not able to, physically, volunteer at the museum, I look forward to working with the staff at the museum as they continue their fine work.

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