



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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The dog days of August and early September are the perfect time for diving into books. This column will review our recommended late summer reads.

Page turning suspense is always a big hit. Michael Koryta is the author of 'Envy the Night'. Fans of early Michael Connelly and Robert Parker books will be thrilled to latch onto an author who knows how to write crisp dialogue. This is a superb suspense novel that pivots on a revenge plot line, complete with villains from the past career of the hero's father, who was a former contract killer. The characters are well developed and believable, and the writing a cut above many in this genre. Koryta is only 23 years old so hopefully we can look forward to many more of his books.

'Child 44' just made the Mann Booker Prize long list. The hunt for a serial killer in Stalin's Russia is anything but routine as politics interferes with the pursuit of a child murderer. It is a chilling book; you come away with a real feel for the terror of the Stalinist years when you could trust no one, not even your spouse. The hero is a complicated personality and member of the state security apparatus. He has a past that he is unwilling to confront until he has no choice. The book explores the dilemma of professional obligations when loyalty leads to evil deeds.

Inspector Wexford returns in Ruth Rendell's new mystery 'Not in the Flesh'. It's a welcome addition to the series as the seemingly bucolic town of Kingsmarkam continues to produce murder victims at a rapid clip. Wexford is a thoughtful copper and a real humanitarian despite his constant exposure to the village underbelly. Other members of his team are more cynical, which produces good banter as they probe myriad suspects for clues. This mystery also incorporates a timely plot dealing with integrating Somali immigrants into English life.

One of the staple plot lines of an engrossing beach read is the trials of dysfunctional families. 'The Condition' by Jennifer Haigh flows beautifully and has enough humorous observations to keep the building angst from being relentless. The pre teen girl in the family develops a medical condition that parents and siblings cope with in various ways – illuminating their own shortcomings and strengths. There are finely drawn characterizations; you may not like everybody at certain junctures but you will understand what motivates them.



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'The Art of Racing in the Rain' by Garth Stein is narrated by a mutt named Enzo, but don't be discouraged by that information if you're not a dog lover. It's a wise book about the Swift family and Enzo's unique perspective on family life and car racing. Having spent his life observing and listening (and watching the Weather Channel) Enzo is in a good position to provide astute commentary on the actions of the humans in his life. This is highly recommended for its originality.

There are also some terrific non fiction books to recommend. Armchair cookbook reading is a great pastime but we think these next books will inspire you to produce some summer treats. Mario Batali has written 'Italian Grill' and the pictures are so evocative you will be gnawing the pages if you're not careful. The recipes are fantastically flavorful and straightforward. The grilled asparagus wrapped in pancetta was out of this world. Our other favorite is 'The Splendid Table's How to Eat Supper' by NPR correspondents Lyn Kasper and Sally Swift. The recipes are accessible, emphasize flavor and are beautifully photographed. We especially like the "Building the Library" sidebar with cookbook suggestions.

'Bringing Nature Home' (How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens) by Douglas Tallamy should be required reading. It's the most important book about gardening and the environment published this year. The premise is simple – indigenous trees and shrubs support local insects, which in turn support local birds and wildlife. A garden full of non native plants is effectively the same as plastic in terms of its ability to provide food and shelter for our native species. The book is user friendly and has lots of detailed plant lists to reference. This is a hopeful book since it offers each of us a way to make a positive contribution to biodiversity. Following the advice in this book will result in yards full of birds and butterflies!

Enjoy the rest of the summer and come in and tell us about your favorites books!

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