

Standard staff *summary*:

From albums to books to films, the editors keep track of their favorite artistic creations to recommend as a watch, listen or read.



REVIEW | 'A Town Called Solace' explores themes of love, loss through many perspectives

Eden Leavey /
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Print

After promising to take care of Mrs. Orchard's cat, Moses, for the duration of her stay at the hospital, eight-year-old Clara is shocked to discover that a strange man has moved into her elderly neighbor's house. His name is Liam Kane, and he is no happier to be relocating to Northern Ontario than Clara is to watch him occupy her friend's home.

Longlisted for the Booker Prize in 2021, "A Town Called Solace" by Mary Lawson seamlessly weaves together the perspectives of protagonists Clara, Mrs. Orchard and Liam Kane.

Clara is trapped in the middle of a family crisis when her rebellious older sister runs away from home. She spends her days waiting at the window for Rose's return, finding comfort in Moses and developing an interest in her new next-door neighbor.

Mrs. Orchard is a widow on her deathbed, still riddled with guilt from a crime she commit-



Graphic by Tara Behbehani

ted decades ago. In an attempt to make amends before it is too late, she reaches out to Liam, who she has not spoken to since he was a child.

Liam Kane is newly divorced and unemployed. Seeking isolation, he moves into Mrs. Orchard's house after learning that she left it to him in her will. In the process of rebuilding his life, Liam fosters a connection with a fragile child in need of support.

Despite the three charac-

ters' indisputable differences, namely in age, their journeys are innately related. Each plays a crucial part in healing another's trauma.

Its slower pacing may deter some readers, but the novel's lyrical writing and endearing dialogue kept me turning the pages.

While I recommend "A Town Called Solace" to everyone, it is particularly a must-read if you are a fan of authors who focus on character writ-

ing, such as Sally Rooney and Fredrik Backman. Their books "Normal People" and "A Man Called Ove" bear similarities to the structure and development of Lawson's novel.

In peeling back the layers of loneliness, family and grief, "A Town Called Solace" masterfully narrates a story about human connection and the universal longing for love, all the while uncovering the mystery of how three wildly distinct characters are intrinsically linked.

REVIEW | 'Stoner' novel returns subtlety to biographical realistic fiction

Clara Martinez /
Editor-in-Chief

My copy of "Stoner" by John Williams still has a small white sticker that reads "£5" stamped on the cover, nearly a 50% markdown from the price printed on the back. I grabbed the novel from the lowest shelf, very nearly on the floor, at the back of an indie bookshop in Brick Lane. I wouldn't go as far as to say it was dusty; it appeared unbothered.

I paid in cash with a £5 bill and dove into the life of William Stoner with no presumptions or expectations, quickly realizing the irony of the brazen price tag as the more I read, the more priceless it seemed in its humble insights.

The novel chronicles the life of William Stoner from childhood to death as he navigates family expectations with his curiosity for literature. He is born to a farming family in Missouri, and they send him to the state university to study agronomy

to take over the family business.

Instead, Stoner falls in love with literature, and he derails from the clearcut path of an agricultural homelife to pursue a career as a scholar at the university. As the years go by, Stoner separates from his family over an unhappy marriage, is manipulated by his colleagues and leaves a lasting reputation of scandal at the university where he has spent his whole life as a professor. It is not until Stoner meets his end that he realizes his lofty goals had never taken him beyond the university gates.

Williams portrays the shifts in Stoner's character as he matures with such subtlety that it is only possible to see the effect of a life's accumulation of disappointment when you return to the first few pages.

The prose is plainly told; I would compare it to the feeling of a conversation after midnight, spoken in low voices with a biting honesty that is only tangible after dark.

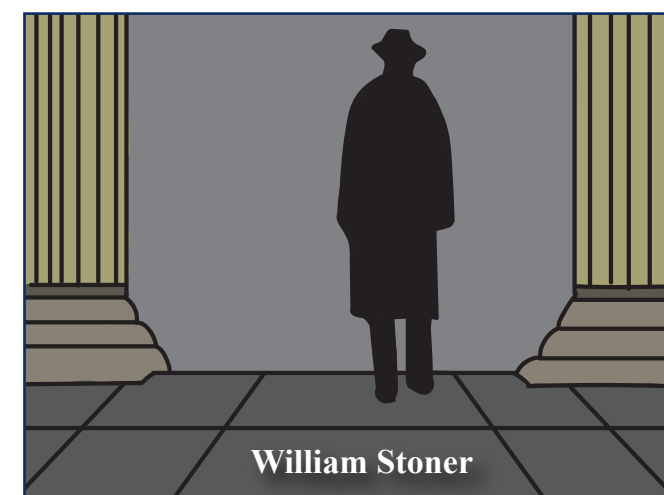
The novel is a pattern of hope and determination followed by inevitable, sequential

solitude. Readers spiral between pride and pity as Stoner becomes more and more relatable in his search for something greater than mediocre. It was academia, then love, then acclaim, then love once more, and yet a dense melancholy air hangs over the novel from beginning to end.

In a way, Stoner becomes an extension of everyone who picks up the novel, detailing a calm descent into loneliness. It's a parable that seems to end

before the conclusion, leaving you to flip the pages thinking there is more just to stare at than the blurb on the back cover. The lesson? Perhaps that life does have limitations beyond the bounds of sheer human strength, though it is up to the reader's view on Stoner's triumphs and defeats that shape the vague ending of the book.

The novel is a quiet masterpiece. It is like breathing in pure oxygen; true in its form and suffocating in its effect.



Graphic by Clara Martinez