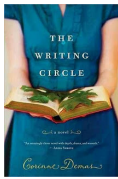


The Writing Circle



This novel examines the writing process itself especially that nerve-wracking period when an author first shares her work with other people. Nancy writes for a medical newsletter for a living; how ironic, she often thinks, that a doctor's daughter researches articles about prostate health, skin cancer, even *empty nest syndrome*, and then makes pronouncements about them in the voice of a medical practitioner rather than her own. Her novel is a deeply personal story, one that imagines her father's life beginning with the night he watched a couple say good-bye to their newborn daughter. Nancy has waited until after her father's death to imagine his story. And as in all fiction, the bare biographical facts are merely a springboard to the tale, not its actual foundation.

A colleague invites Nancy to join the group which includes a biographer, a poet, a historian, a thriller writer, and a young man who is trying to find his true topic. The group is the very elitist sounding, Leopardi Circle, named after Giacomo Leopardi, the late author who was "tortured, pessimistic, and, above all, passionate." Passionate is the operative word here; quite a few of the members have had dalliances with each other. In fact, there is at least one unexpected affair between two group members during the course of the story. Another two members were once married.

One intriguing facet about the book is that the story is told through the point of view of all writing group members, but also of several of their children and significant others. The poet, Gillian turns out to be the most caustic member of the group, highly critical and unsympathetic despite the fact she is one of the most established and famous. Indeed this year--rumor has it--she is likely to win the Pulitzer.

Corinne Demas pokes sardonic fun at writers' egos, but also weaves an interesting story showing the interconnections between people in a New England town. And the book is replete with manuscripts in process, everything from poetry to a thriller to biographical vignettes, all done with much talent. When I read Demas's own publishing credits, this made sense, because she has written short stories, a memoir, children's books and poetry.

Other novels about writing groups include The Circle, a mystery set in Britain about an eccentric writers' circle, and The Savage Detectives that depicts two members of a Mexican literary movement travelling the globe and sharing all sorts of misadventures. If you prefer to look at other literary circles, how about The Jane Austen Book Club by Karen Joy Fowler and Mary Alice Monroe's The Book Club, both interesting takes on groups of people finding themselves and each other through books.

Posted by Dory L. on January 10, 2011

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