



BOOKFILTER'S JULY 2020 PICK OF THE MONTH

SHARE

MICHAEL GILTZ | JULY 28, 2020

BookFilter picks the best new theater book, exclusively for Broadway Direct readers.

Hamnet

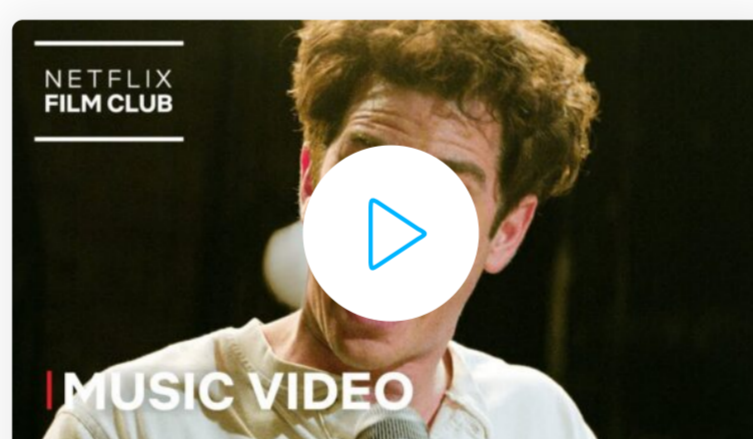
By Maggie O'Farrell
\$26.95, Knopf

To read or not to read the latest novel by Maggie O'Farrell? No need to equivocate like that great Dane, Hamlet. You definitely should choose "to read," for one of the most buzzed books of the year proves to be one of the best books of the year. It proves a modest comedy: a compelling romance as Will falls hard for Agnes, the eccentric, witchy sister of two boys he must tutor in Latin. Above all: a tragedy, for what could be more tragic than parents having to bury their own child? Genius is hard to depict, so O'Farrell wisely keeps Shakespeare, the playwright, off-stage for much of the novel. He's either a young man floundering about in a small town, fuming under the thumb of his abusive father or safely out of sight in London. Instead, we are plunged into the company of Agnes, her siblings and children and in-laws, and the neighbors who come to her for natural remedies for what ails them. Then the Black Death creeps in. O'Farrell meets the challenge of the Bard, having especial fun when following a letter from Stratford to London or a plague-infested flea from overseas to Stratford. (Pestilence has never seemed too playful.) And for theater buffs, the climax reveals in the way art can comfort and challenge even the deepest pain. This book is not to be missed.

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