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Book Review - Cardinal Hill

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Off the SHELF

Cardinal Hill by Mary Anna Bryan (Mercer University Press, 2016: ISBN 978-0-88146-573-0, \$18.00)

In *Cardinal Hill*, author Mary Anna Bryan, a retired English teacher from Lawrenceville, Georgia, creates the character of Margaret Norman in the same vein of Scout Finch from *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Margaret and Scout share several of the same traits, which make them interesting and convincing characters. Margaret, like Scout, is a smart, stubborn, and curious girl. The difference between the two characters is that while Scout is looking for answers to questions about society, Margaret wants answers to the questions that linger about her family, especially the mother that she never knew. However, they both approach their situations with unrelenting curiosity and an unwillingness to just “accept how things are.” Mary Anna Bryant crafts a curious and bright character in Margaret who winds up stumbling across situations that would trouble a young girl.

Set in rural Georgia back in the 1930s and 1940s, *Cardinal Hill* describes the Norman family and those who surround them, yet spends the majority of the book on Margaret and her interactions throughout her childhood and adolescence. Ms. Bryan describes Margaret’s days in such detail that you feel yourself becoming caught up in this fictional child’s life. It is no surprise that this novel won the 2014 Ferroll Sams Award for Fiction, which

is given to the best manuscript that speaks to the human condition in a Southern context.

Much of the book is spent describing the interactions and relationships between Margaret, her father, her aunt Maggie, her sister Louisa, her art teacher, Miss Tallulah, and the housekeeper, Ida. The dynamic between these characters takes the reader from highs to lows throughout the story. The reader experiences the tension between Margaret and her older sister Louisa and the tenderness between Margaret and her aunt Maggie. The history of Margaret’s own family remains a constant thread throughout the book, especially when it involves her mother. The theme of secrets carries through this novel, and many of the secrets are revealed as Margaret grows and becomes more aware of her family’s history.



Mary Anna Bryan constructs characters that are engaging and likeable. She gives them a depth that allows you to really see who they are and how they intersect in Margaret’s life. *Cardinal Hill* is an enjoyable book that would be great for young adults (especially young girls) and adults alike. This novel is one that you will want to read again and again. Recommended for both public and academic libraries in addition to middle and high school media centers.

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