

Bibliophilia

N. John Hall

David R. Godine (Jun 14, 2016)

Softcover \$18.95 (192pp)

978-1-56792-561-6

Bibliophilia will likely appeal to those who love to learn about books and their authors, and to those with a yen for collecting.

In N. John Hall's delightfully bookish *Bibliophilia*, Larry Dickerson, a retired New York bank clerk with time on his hands, decides that he's going to become a collector of rare books—namely, first editions, autographed copies, and the like. He's even bought some bookshelves for his apartment, with the notion of possibly having a formal library, “à la Masterpiece Theater.”

Larry's new interest, soon to become a minor obsession, is financed by the \$400,000 he received from auctioning off his great-great-grandfather's correspondence with Victorian authors. At first, Larry thinks he might stick to the Victorians and collect the works of Anthony Trollope, but then his focus shifts to American writers, primarily those associated with the *New Yorker* magazine.

Bibliophilia is a contemporary version of the classic epistolary novel, with e-mails chronicling Larry's collecting quest. Having reconnected with contacts who helped with the sale of his inherited correspondence, Larry receives expert guidance regarding the historical value of books and the intriguing lives of various writers.

By making Larry not particularly literary, with more of an acquisitive than cultivated mind, Hall allows his experts to write detailed e-mails that fuel Larry's collecting passion. Larry quickly finds common ground with quirky Harold Ross, the *New Yorker's* founder, and he develops a decided crush on the mordantly witty Dorothy Parker.

A bit rough around the edges and sometimes brashly naive, Larry's enthusiasm leads to successes and setbacks while broadening his intellectual and actual world. Hall plays against the stereotypical reclusive bookworm by having Larry hunt down his purchases through visits to antiquarian booksellers, and he also thrills at being given a private tour of the *New Yorker* offices. And though his girlfriend, Melanie, soon tires of too much time and energy being devoted to collecting, Larry remains dauntless and, in the long run, is far better off for having become a true bibliophile.

A brisk yet thorough read, *Bibliophilia* will likely appeal to those who love to learn about books and their authors, and to those with a yen for collecting. Larry's compulsion may prove to be contagious.

MEG NOLA (Fall 2016)

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