



The Plover

Brian Doyle

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A compelling, marvelous novel by the acclaimed author of *Mink River*

Declan O'Donnell has left Oregon aboard his boat, the *Plover*, to escape the life that's so troubled him on land. He sets course west into the Pacific in search of solitude. Instead, he finds a crew, each in search of something themselves, and what at first seems a lonely sea voyage becomes a rapturous, heartfelt celebration of life's surprising paths, planned and unplanned.

The Plover Details

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Author : Brian Doyle

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From Reader Review The Plover for online ebook

J.R. Stewart says

I loved "Mink River," which made it into my Top Ten. "The Plover" is equally wonderful. Brian Doyle is a writer's writer who respects and trusts the reader. He is not only a treasure to Portland, Oregon, he is a treasure to the broad world of literature. I'll stop now, before I gush all over myself.

Dianah says

The Plover is not exactly a sequel to Mink River -- more of a companion piece -- but fans of the latter will be thrilled to find out what happened to one of the most beloved characters. After sailing his little boat off the final pages of Mink River, the story of Declan O'Donnell continues in The Plover. Declan is a man of serious solitude and he is pleased to be starting a journey of peace and quiet. But, there is no quiet in Brian Doyle's head -- it is full of magic, mutterings and musings, and once these things are in motion, there is no stopping them.

Before Declan knows what has hit him, he has a boat full of bodies -- both human and otherwise -- along for the ride; "...ranging in size from [enormous] to an infinitesimal acorn barnacle, just born as this sentence began, and no bigger than the period which is about to arrive, here." No, there will be no solitude for Declan -- and how lucky for us. The Plover is a rambling, charming sea voyage, full of thrills, danger and narrow escapes.

It's also an excellent observation on the nature of things unseen: on what may be, on ideas, on imaginings, aspirations, and dreams. There is so much substance underneath Doyle's dazzling, rich language, I just wanted to read each sentence over and over until every whisper of nuance was absorbed, recognized, and experienced. Reading Doyle's writing is an enchanting discovery of how shattering and awe-inspiring language can be, and his literary contortions are both improbable and captivating at the same time.

Remember the first book you loved as a child? Remember how you wished so hard you lived in that book? That feeling is Doyle's "normal" and we should all be so lucky to live in his world.

Michelle says

I finished 'The Plover' several days ago and am only now writing this review. I was tired when I finished and I thought to myself, I will do this later. I have to let the words sit.

The words have sat.

In the meantime I have taken in many more words, but different kinds of words. I read an anthropology book, a fairy tale, a history book, a book in translation from Spanish with short, choppy words. The way those words stayed inside of me is very different from how Brian's words now stay inside me.

I'm reading a book by Faulkner and another by Joyce now and while reading I have been struck by the way Faulkner made his sentences long, focused on the stream of mind poetics. Joyce turned his sentences inside out and wore them like that, inside-out, the strings on the hem showing and hanging down, like he's making a joke out of all the seriousness of words but in a nice way, the way I make a joke about someone I love when they are being themselves and they are being so very them and I'm filled with love for them and have to point out that inside-out shirt, the strings that are left hanging and snagging, because that's part of who they are. That's the big joke that makes the big love inside of me or the love made the joke, I'm not sure.

Brian's words and books do the same thing as Faulkner and Joyce. They hit me that way.

One of the things about Brian's writing is how he tears words apart and bends them to make them fit together. It kind of reminds me of doing puzzles with my mother. My mom had a great deal of brain damage and she needs to be taken care of now. I do many puzzles with her to pass the time. She enjoys it but she doesn't do them like she used to. She'll take a puzzle piece and tear it if she thinks the piece ought to go somewhere and she doesn't like it. I try to stop her. I tell her it's not right. She won't listen. She puts the puzzle together the way she wants. What comes out sometimes is all her. Definitely not what the box advertised. A shaken up image, a word Picasso. A puzzle poem.

Brian puts the word-pieces together how he wants, when he wants, like every poet I love. Watching that in prose in the fiction world is really something. Like reading Rilke. Dense and imagistic. It takes me into it, almost, instead of me taking the words into myself.

So I should probably say that I know Brian. I don't know him super well but he's been around at some of the darkest points of my life. We've mostly written letters. I sent a couple of stories in to him and he rejected all of them but said he likes my work and knows he'll print something of mine someday. (Kind man.)

The first book I read from him was "the wet engine." It's about hearts and he goes on about them, the pain and necessity and beauty of 'that red pump.' His son has a congenital heart defect. I had one too, not nearly as serious as his son's, but being older than his son with not as much science available when my heart surgery happened, there was the fear of dying. I watched my brother's roommate at the hospital die at a young age from the same thing. My father and I were both operated on by the same doctor (Dr. Albert Starr) as his son. (He had another main doctor but Starr was involved.) My cousins were all operated on and all but one died on the operating table, also operated on by Starr. I was operated on in the same building as his son. There were so many similarities.

Reading his book 8 years ago, holding that little book in my hand and knowing the experience and the determination that, no matter what, to live densely, beautifully, gracefully, fully, in the small amount of time we have, is the best. To see that beauty. That's what I really see Brian is all about in the way he molds his words, sentences, paragraphs. He has so much to say, like his character Pipp, that he doesn't give himself or his readers much time to breathe, he's that passionate and that dense. He doesn't want to miss anything.

He's like fire turned into words and reading him is eating fire.

I love how he loves books, how he'll pass his magazine out for free so everyone has the stories and makes fun of himself for being nominated so many times for various awards and never winning. (He'll win one day, anyone who has followed him must realize that.) I love him for being out of print in a couple of his beautiful books and still living strong and writing strong.

Brian is an optimist and I am not. I'd like to be, I'd really like to be, but I don't think it's realistic. I guess my

life has been dark enough that sometimes I read Brian's stuff and think, "well, this is a novel. But I don't think that would happen." I don't think that Declan would really live happily ever after, not with a hell of a story more and a lot of pain. My main criticism about "The Plover" is that we don't know too much about Declan at the end of the book except that he's hard on the outside and soft on the inside. With Declan's abandonment and abuse issues I don't think it would be as simple as (SPOILER)

Him turning around a boat and going towards people and land instead of out to sea. People don't heal from that. They start to heal from that, it's a start, but then I'd say that the book really ended where the book should begin--where he decides he wants help and love. That decision is gonna help us readers know Declan. Brian himself wrote the words, "how we struggle is who we are." We don't see Declan struggle a whole lot, we see him running and be put-upon by other people and we don't see what is going on in his head, the real meat of why he's running and cold and out to sea. I also think there'd be rivers of hardness inside of Declan, rivers of stubborn pain. It just wouldn't be an inside/outside, hard/soft dichotomy, it would be mixed together, like salt water.

One main thing with Brian's writing that I have difficulties getting past is about religious community and how we have different experiences in that realm. Everything is hued with Catholicism and mysticism. Used in the way he uses it it's as if it's normal and an aspect of humanity instead of a cultural construct that not everyone accepts and sees well. He combines Catholicism with spiritual experiences and I don't experience that personally and feel the exact opposite when he evokes religious community. When he writes something about religious communities, instead of being drawn closer, I put his essay/book down and don't pick it up for awhile. He sometimes uses language and ideas he assumes to be universally felt in one way but is felt directly the opposite for people like me.

I'm so wary of being public and talking about religion and mysticism, especially in the format Brian does. Sometimes I read Brian's religious characters and think, "Okay. I don't live in that world. I would never be accepted so I don't know if I can finish." The character he's written that I get the most was Grace in 'Mink River' who is Declan's sister.

I wonder what would make me and people like me feel more a part of what he's writing? Am I the only one who feels this way? I don't know. I just know it's true for me. I haven't told him yet, and I'm sending this review to him, so he'll see it.

He asked me to tell him what was different about his two books in this Mink River universe, and what worked for me. I think the main part, for me, was the way he made that mystical experience more universal in 'The Plover.' I could identify with it more.

Is there a way to write religious community in a universal way? I don't know. I think one way to get to something like that is to rely more on individual personalities and how they relate to each other as individuals instead of how they relate to each other based on the shared experience of Catholicism and religious experience.

I liked 'Mink River' but I liked 'The Plover' more. I understood and got Declan more than I got the religious protagonists of 'Mink River.' As much as I might envy the close-knit community of Mink River, I'd never be accepted. I'd be on the outskirts. I'd be whispered about. I think they'd pray for me, that I'd 'get better' or 'find my way.' They'd always give me sympathy and not the respect that my fighting to be alive really deserves. There would be an ultimate ideal they'd want for me and because I wasn't living that and am still not living that, will probably not ever live that, I'd never be a part of 'Mink River.'

I'd take a book and a boat and sail away, hunt for people to love elsewhere. And it would always be a sort of pain that I'd never be a real part of 'Mink River.' I'm glad I get that voice, that I get a new home in Brian's writing world. I'd like to see that more from Brian. I love his work quite a bit and I get so frustrated when the religion stuff gets in the way of my being able to read him with my heart open and asking.

So that's where I'm coming from, those are my very emotional, experience-based responses to 'The Plover.'

I loved this book. I fully recommend it. Brian is in love with books and words and anybody who loves books and words should go out and read this book.

Thanks for this beautiful book.

Deb W says

I checked this out based on the glowing review of my favorite bookseller, waxing poetic about Doyle's prose. I HATE his prose.

Note to author:

1. If you have more than one semicolon in a sentence and it isn't providing a list of phrases, you need to seriously think about the use of periods. Reading your text is exhausting.
2. IF you were attempting to record the protagonist's stream of conscious thoughts by the multiple semicolons and commas that lead the reader along a crooked path, the technique failed.
3. The use of the f-word -- even when you replace the "u" with an "e" serves no purpose other than to illustrate your lack of command over the English language. It is trite and superfluous.

Richard Sutton says

Take a bow, Mr. Doyle, and publisher Thomas Dunne, too! A book like The Plover has becoming such a rarity lately, your work shines like a star breaking through the clouds. Now, I can see how the run-on sentences and dancing viewpoints might daunt some readers; but as a sailor with close to forty years on the water, I found the cadence of the main character's almost steady chants of self-deprecation and fix-it preoccupations very familiar. This is not a book for every reader; but rather, for those who love the sea, love boats, and have a glimmer that there is much hidden in plain sight in our world. Having known the feeling of shore-legs is also a definite plus for readers of this heaving, liquid prose.

The Plover is the last remaining love of a man who wants to free himself from expectations and involvement with others. He's chosen an ungainly cedar planked fishing trawler jury-fitted with a mast and sailing gear. He's named her for a small but plucky shore bird and launched himself into the immensity of the Pacific with only a single idea of course: West. His carefully constructed solitude is broken almost immediately by a friendly gull and an odd rag-tag passenger list that seems to grow with every landfall despite his best intentions to keep it simple.

Within these sometimes hilarious, sometime frightening and regularly mysterious pages, he discovers that he can love other people as much as he loves his little boat. Mr. Doyle has crafted some of the most beautiful

descriptive passages I've read and some of the most harrowing action, too. His characters are all much deeper than I initially expected. To think that someone this driven to deny his humanity could find redemption in the loving grace of an afflicted young child, the easy humor of a close friend, the deeply spiritual grasp of an almost silent Island woman and the evolving, miraculous worldview of a former politician, is incredible. Fighting storms and a maniacal ship's captain on the open seas, adds just the right amount of accessible conflict, but in the tradition of the fantasy writing of Yann Martel, the incredible can still be deeply moving. For me, the story of the seemingly aimless voyage of *The Plover*, found a landfall right in my heart.

Teresa says

Lyricism, humor, an expansive worldview, a sort of magical realism (as I said of his *Mink River*), a guardian gull and a twist on *Moby-Dick* or, *The Whale* (There's no whale and that's not the twist.): I enjoyed this immensely, though I think I enjoyed *Mink River* just a bit more, but perhaps that's only because I read it first.

I'd been meaning to read another book by Doyle for awhile now and decided to read this right away after hearing of his recent death. His final words at the end of his 'Thanks & Notes' are rendered even more poignant by a too-soon death: ...*I am the luckiest ship ever.*

Ken says

If you are drawn to words, Brian Doyle's *Song to the Pacific* will prove a delight. If you are drawn to the ocean, it will be even more so. His writing exuberance is evident from the first chapter as words leap over and over each other like porpoises plying the playful sea.

At first you think it will be the story of a lone sailor, Declan, moving philosophically around the lonely Pacific on his 30-foot home-with-a-hull, the *Plover*, but soon you realize that this is a story about humanity as much as a single man and the briny.

Thus, Doyle introduces us to a biologist friend, Piko, and his traumatized and speechless daughter, Pipa. Then there's the resident gull. And stowaway tern. And two rogue rats.

That's not all, either. Before the end, the boat will be packed to the gunwales with the flotsam and jetsam of human life that fall the boat's way during its many mild adventures (no over-the-top here, thank you). Together they become a microcosm for all that is good and hopeful and joyous in life.

I could easily criticize the book for a leaky plot, but who needs a plot with such writing as this? Doyle is not afraid to make up words; to indulge in bouts of Realism, Romanticism, or Magical Realism if it suits his writing mood; to have birds, animals, and fish talk; to wonder about life and death and the meaning of our short cosmic streak across the heavens; to do, in short, as he pleases without worrying about formulas and conventions and reviewers and, who knows, book royalties and such. Nope. Just Declan and his favorite, memorized Edmund Burke speeches, thinking and talking and piloting as they see fit.

A typical reverie: "One time when the wind was high and all sail set Piko tied himself to a longline and tied

his feet to cedar planks and surfed behind the boat until the rope snapped and he described a somersault very nearly landing back on his feet again in the water but not quite. Another time a pod of whales swam right at the boat their massive foreheads like seething walls in the water but at the last possible second they split into two lines and slid past the boat making booming sounds so deep and thorough and amused that Pipa mewled happily for an hour afterward. Another time a shark circled the boat for an hour until a leap of porpoises shot past and hammered the shark mercilessly until it fled. Another time flying fish flew over the boat east to west in such numbers that it seemed the Plover was covered with a silver sheen, silver snow, a living shroud, a moist blanket, a shivering roof. Another time the sky was so stuffed with stars and so many of them shooting stars that you would swear the stars were plummeting into the sea faster than the sea could drink them."

Like so. Run-on poetry with sparse punctuation. A long-noted song. And such characterization and description that you will briefly forget that the literary world hawked such things as plots and say you wish you could continue the voyage when this particular one comes to port as all must.

Recommended to poets, sailors, Melville fans, writer's writers, literary readers, freedom lovers, part-time philosophers, and those on the edge of despair with the land-lubbing world.

Maria Tizon says

The Plover piqued my curiosity instantly. Firstly, because I had no idea what a plover was. (Its a bird, in case you don't know either) Secondly, because the small paper plaque that was posted under the book on the shelf at Powell's told me that it was about a man setting off from the Oregon Coast and heading west because he was tired of people and all their people problems. I love that idea. Sometimes, you pick up a book and you know, right then and there, that you have to read it. I started reading while in line to board my plane. Somewhere between Portland and San Diego, I became absolutely enamored with Dec and the gull who flew 9 feet above the stern of the Plover. This joyous, beautiful novel engaged all of my senses, I could see the green trawler with its tattered red sail, the blue water, the sunfish and its giant eye. I could hear the water lapping, Pipa pipping and the laughter of the crew members who came to The Plover for their own reasons and had their own unique stories. I could taste those desiccated almonds, smell the salty air, feel the sand between my toes. More importantly, This was my first time reading Brian Doyle. It most certainly will not be the last. In fact, Mink River is on its way to me now as I write this. Doyle's writing style is a wonder and a stream of consciousness that flows right into your mind and heart.

Sue says

A magical, wonderful sea adventure-coming of middle age-fantasy-exploration-ode to the watery world-hard to describe but must read. I now know I must get to my copy of Mink River and the Brian Doyle back catalogue. This was not even on my agenda to read until I happened to see it on the new release table at the library and read a few paragraphs. I was caught.

There is science, environmental science.

*consider, for a moment, that the longest chain of
mountains and volcanoes and hills and guyots and cliffs*

and sheer walls on the face of the earth is invisible to the eye, unless you are plunged into the blue realm of Pacifica, which houses the Emperor Seamounts, which stretch nearly four thousand miles across the wild ocean like the longest grin there is; and consider further that only the very tail of this endless ridge, this vast vaulting, peers above the surface, and it is christened Hawaii....

(p 18)

One Declan O'Donnell has taken to sea, aboard his ship, The Plover, sailing west out of Oregon, with no port in mind and no companion save a gull who seems to be flying along. There are adventures to come, places to see, perhaps people to meet, but I'm not going to say because I don't want to spoil the magic of those moments. They are meant to be encountered as you read, not from reviews. But the past is probably OK.

And thinking of Christmas Declan suddenly got a wash of old old memory from when he was maybe ten years old and his sister Grace was maybe eight and the boys were little crawlers, this was before their mom left dragging her suitcase down the driveway and never came back, before the old man froze up inside totally and hated everyone and everything, and he was sitting by the fire....No tree, no presents, no special dinner, but no punching or screaming or cursing either; and everyone together. Best Christmas ever. (pp60-61)

And more ocean beauty:

Another time flying fish flew over the boat east to west in such numbers that it seemed the Plover was covered with a silver sheen, silver snow, a living shroud, a moist blanket, a shivering roof. Another time the sky was so stuffed with stars and so many of them shooting stars that you would swear the stars were plummeting into the sea faster than the sea could drink them. (p 149)

And one last quote that made me smile and made me happy for my dreams:

Certainly so, certainly so says the minister. But if we do not dream, then I think perhaps we are misusing our heads. They are not put on our shoulders only to be farms for hair. (p 259)

I'll leave it to you to find out who the minister is and what his dreams are :)

Very highly recommended

Diane Barnes says

In my 20's, I read several books by an author named Tom Robbins, who wrote wonderful novels populated by strange and wonderful characters, most of them with something that made them just a little different. This book reminds me of those novels in the same way: however fantastical the story, however unrealistic the situation, the writing is so good that I will follow those characters to the ends of the earth with no questions. And the ends of the earth is very nearly where we go aboard Declan O'Connell 's little boat, the Plover.

He starts out on the coast of Oregon, determined to sail alone due west to find solitude and peace, and escape from all the problems of civilization. He ends up in the Hawaiian Islands with an entourage of 4 men, 1 woman, 1 child, and a bevy of birds. There is magic along the way, and miracles, and love and friendship, not to mention the wisdom and the humor and knowledge and courage of the people on board.

I started this book because I needed a peaceful, quiet read for a few days, just like Declan needed to get away from the world of men when he set sail. Declan and I both realized that the world is a vast and magnificent place encompassing more than we will ever know, but you have to be open to the possibility of change and growth to let it in. A truly great read, and I'm a Brian Doyle fan for sure.

Skip says

Lots of people love this book. I read a few pages, gave up, and then toughed it out. For me, Brian Doyle's chaotic, stream of conscious writing style overshadowed some memorable characters. One reader summarized by saying "seemingly-mismatched puzzle pieces slowly aligning themselves to form a powerful tapestry ... [but it] never feels as complete. It's a modern art approach to writing where the goal isn't always a specific image but rather a mood." Declan decides to set off on an adventure across the Pacific Ocean in a small boat, and picks up stragglers along the way. There were two unforgettable characters: one who wanted to create a country called Pacifica to create a country integrating all of the hundreds of islands, cultures and resources of the Pacific Ocean, and the Pipster, a young girl who suffered a horrific accident, but seems to understand more of the world around her than her shipmates.

Wyndy says

Declan O'Donnell seeks solitude and anonymity and so sets sail alone from Defoe Bay, Oregon into the vast Pacific Ocean in a tiny boat called The Plover with no agenda, except not sinking, and no destination, except west and then west. A set of Edmund Burke's speeches is his only reading material, and oh how perfectly Burke's words are quoted here. Of course Declan's simple plan goes awry, and suddenly the most unconventional characters ever begin to inhabit his solitary world.

Declan is first introduced to readers in Doyle's debut novel 'Mink River' (a 5-star read for me), and it would

be helpful to understand the circumstances that drive him toward this journey, but 'The Plover' works fine as a stand-alone. I loved Declan and his ocean and his boat and his refugees. I chuckled and worried and cheered and reflected for 300+ beautiful pages. This is a book that should not be rushed - it ebbs and flows and dips and swells, just like the Pacific Ocean, and you have to slow down in order to appreciate fully the meditative prose, the rich descriptions of animals and environment, and the magical realism here. What a tremendous loss to the world of words that Brian Doyle passed away last year at age 60. He was an incredibly gifted writer and an author I highly recommend to all. 4.5 stars, and one small sample of the thought-provoking writing you can expect in this novel:

"Can a man who has often and pointedly claimed independence from all constraint and relationship continue on such a course for his entire lifetime . . . without finally arriving not at a welcome solitude but at a fearsome loneliness and desiccation of the soul?"

~ Declan O'Donnell, musing aboard The Plover

Dana says

I can't believe that I put this book off for so long! On the bright side however, discovering an fortuitously great book brings the same gleeful joy as finding cash in your couch. And boy did I ever hit the jackpot with this gem.

I will admit that it took me a while to get into this book but once I did it was hard to put down. I found myself thinking about it all day and dreaming about it all night. I loved all the characters in this story and the writing is smooth and magical and wise. So wise! There is a heaviness to this book but also a lightness. The adventure was wonderful and I found myself at the edge of my seat when reading about the villain. I greedily gobbled up this amazing book and now I sit, full and satisfied and happy, for having experienced this book.

4.5/5

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review.

Amantha says

Declan is a character I barely remembered from *Mink River* - his sister, Grace, was a bit more noteworthy. But as soon as he opened his mouth - as soon as that first "fecking feck" left his tongue - I suddenly had a jolt of recognition. Lost at sea - or so the citizens of Neawanaka assume when he sails one day and never returns. But that fate is far too simple for such a strong person as Declan O'Donnell. Turns out he had more in store than simply disappearing into the great unknown.

What gets me every time is Doyle's deft turn of phrase and lyrical prose. There were some parts that flowed so beautifully they begged to be read out loud. In his hands the extraordinary becomes even more sublime by the sheer ordinariness of it. Declan's best friend shows up on a remote island with his crippled daughter because he somehow knew that's where Declan was going to make port? Sure, absolutely. It's no more absurd than a little girl who can speak to birds, seagulls with sarcastic streaks, or a government official who dreams of uniting all of the Pacific Island countries into one nation.

I didn't give this book as many stars as *Mink River* simply because none of the characters had quite the same pull for me as Cedar did and the seagull never flat-out spoke the way Moses did, which I kept hoping would happen. Nothing is quite as thrilling as a talking bird. Still *The Plover* is a fantastic companion (or, if you haven't read *Mink River*, stand-alone) novel. I'll have to get my hands on my very own copy ASAP.

Preorder your copy from Powell's Books.

Stacia says

I loved it. Just loved it.

A few years ago I read a completely different book that had a quote that somehow applies to *The Plover* & to my reading of it. *"Sometimes when she told stories about the past her eyes would get teary from all the memories she had, but they weren't tears. She wasn't crying. They were just the memories, leaking out."* (The quote is from *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki.) *The Plover* is not my book. Not my story. It doesn't hold my memories. But when the tears leaked out of my eyes while reading, that quote is exactly what I thought of. It doesn't even make sense in a way, yet it does somehow. *The Plover* touched my heart & mind in so many ways. This story is well- & beautifully-told, a mix of reality & magic (not magical realism, more the magic of wonder & awe of the world we live in & with); true characters full of flaws, & wonder, & hope. A book that gave me some tears, smiles, & hope in our world. Gorgeous.

(Editing to add.... I said it's not magical realism. Yet, there are some touches there too. To me, though, they were so natural to the story that I see it more as an honoring of traditions or beliefs that all living things communicate, be they human, or animal, or plant. In my world, talking animals or plants are normal in some stories, but may be categorized differently by other readers. To each his own.)
