



Book Club reviews June/July

You had a mixed response to our latest book club suggestions and it is always interesting to see such diverse opinions. We didn't receive as many submissions as we usually do but that is to be expected in the summer months.

Our first recommendation was **Mad Girl by Telegraph columnist Bryony Gordon** and her long running battle with OCD and mental health.

Brigitte recognised that the situation was worse when Bryony was diagnosed 20 years ago and felt "this book highlights the inadequacy of understanding and treatment of mental illness. Most mental health symptoms are brushed under the carpet as depression and given a prescription of anti depressants and goodbye!" She added: "I did not find the book funny but rather sad that we did not give enough care to patients with illnesses of a mental type. The book is honest and well written but rather too much swearing which is unnecessary."

Amanda felt she should have sympathy for Bryony and her battles but that she didn't. She explained: "Just over half way through the book she states '(When I'm high) I have a habit of blathering on and on about the same thing, and when it comes to my more generalised behaviour, I am no different. I am a broken record that nobody wants to listen to - monotonous, tedious, tuneless'. This summed up my view of the book and I skim read most of it so I could move onto something else."

Chris echoed the same sentiment about the jumpy nature of the book. She said: "I thought this was an illuminating book to read and the author was brave to have done it. Now I feel I understand a bit more about OCD and its ramifications. I did not like the writing style at all but will forgive the author for this because she had so much information to give, but I felt there was a lot of "I am going to tell you about this, oh no before I do that I will just describe that and what's more in the future such and such will happen."

Barbara said: "I am so glad I read this book, it was quite an eye opener, even though I think I know something about mental illness. I really like her breezy style and that she doesn't actually take herself too seriously in spite of writing about a serious subject. It made a nice change from a 'misery memoir' where it all seems to be someone's fault. I liked the way Bryony took responsibility for herself, didn't blame people and generally acknowledged that mental illness can just happen to anyone and we don't talk about it enough. The very last bit where she meets the tattooed man on the tube was a nice touch. I thought it was a very well written book by a brave woman who doesn't mind admitting her own stupidities and doesn't hold herself up as any sort of paragon. I found myself rooting for her all the way and sincerely hope that now she has found ways of dealing with her demons they keep out of the way more and more.

"I thought it was good to show that there doesn't have to be underlying trauma to cause mental ill health, it can strike anytime but ultimately you are responsible for your own choices although some help along the way is needed.

Alison was also unsure of this choice. She told us: "I have in the past enjoyed Bryony's pieces in the Telegraph - she writes amusingly. I read her first autobiography and it was in the same vein as this book - I sense she feels she is an expert in mental health issues despite her protestations and I got fed up with the catalogue of horrid things that befell her - OCD, alopecia, bulimia, drink, drugs, domestic abuse etc etc. This seemed to give her a slightly smug, superior attitude and I felt I was being talked down to. Interestingly, I rarely read her Telegraph articles any more as I think this attitude shows in the pieces she writes now. Some bits did make me laugh and I loved the episode where she is in the RIB for two weeks with seven men, but I sped read a lot of it as I was pretty bored through most of it. Definitely not a recommendation!"

However Amanda thoroughly enjoyed our next recommendation - **Tidelands by Philippa Gregory**. She said: "What a good read. I really enjoyed this book in spite of not being a historical fiction fan. What is refreshing is that it is about ordinary people living in extraordinary times, the English Civil War. This is a time that we don't really learn much about and this book gives a wealth of detail about life and beliefs during those days.

"The protagonist, Alinor, is a real flesh and blood woman who makes mistakes, lies and occasionally makes the wrong choices, but she is real, not a beautiful heroine (although of course she is beautiful). The story is complicated and involved and you just hope it will all work out but this is more like life than Hollywood romance and all the better for it.

Very good, well written and excellently researched I am now looking forward to the sequel "Dark Tide."

Chris wasn't a fan of this book though. She said: "I gave up on this one after about 100 pages. I found it slow, repetitive (all those journeys through the marshes) and the signals of doom and gloom were too signposted. I also felt that far too much effort was being made to inject poetic feeling into the narrative. One for the charity shop!"

Amanda also appreciated our recommendation of **Mum and Dad by Joanna Trollope**, saying: "Again a story of real people and families with all their tensions and difficulties. It is very good on describing ageing and living with a difficult partner as well as being sympathetic to the feelings and agonies of teen years. It is all described with a lightness of touch, which makes you feel for the characters even if sometimes exasperated by them. It does all finish rather neatly with every loose end sorted and tied up and this was the only slightly wrong note. The fact that everything gets sorted is a bit unrealistic. A very enjoyable holiday read."

Chris enjoyed the ending. She said: "An enjoyable read, and the way she sorted out all the conflicts was very satisfactory. I notice my 30+ daughter has taken it home with her after a visit!"

Alison said: "I usually enjoy her work, I think she writes well and it's always an easy read. However, although I engaged with this book and read it very quickly, I loathed the characters. Monica and Gus irritated me immensely - she being a doormat and he with his bullying behaviours. Subsequently, their children were all pretty awful, and most of the grandchildren and partners except Nic and the two boys. There wasn't really much of a story and at the end I found I really couldn't care less what happened to them all. I certainly wouldn't recommend this book - it was a summer read and instantly forgettable."