



As always, thanks for sharing your thoughts on our latest round of recommendations for the Book Club and to so many of you for your kind and supportive comments – it really does mean a lot. So what did you think of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (George Orwell), *Buried* (Lynda la Plante) and *The Street Party* (Claire Seeber)?

Chris told us it wasn't the first time she had read *Wigan Pier* as it was required reading for the health visitor course many years ago. She said: "I found myself in agreement with Orwell's overall assessment of how hard life was for the underpaid and underprivileged at that time with not much in the way of the facilities we can now aspire to. Although he might feel happier that the general standards of living have improved I think he would still be taking up arms about the lack of political information and education prevalent today. Maybe he would support the Extinction Rebellion movement. Having said that it was quite a rant and somewhat repetitive in content and it was good when it was over."

Graham said: "This is a book I had always intended to read, and as a book club choice, it pushed me into reading it. It was good to read an author expressing himself freely, way before political correctness became the fashion. I've been inspired by his style to read his earlier books. The two parts of the book were very different which made for interesting reading."

However Brigitte said: "I read this book many years ago and I certainly do not want to read it again. It was a book that everyone wanted to read at that time. Just like *Animal Farm* I was very bored with both books."

Chris admitted to never reading a Lynda la Plante book before and decided she wouldn't again. She explained: "I know she is a very much read writer but I think her editor is too much in awe of her to point out a few things. There were too too many themes..... adoption, murders, elderly parents dying, quirky older policemen, hearts of gold criminal women, a train robbery, an explosion, a lesbian dead horse-woman policewoman, hidden money in ramshackle cottages, forgery of passports, children in care, a flight overseas. I was tired of it all long before the end and I didn't care about any of them enough."

Alison agreed with Chris. She said: "It was a huge disappointment - what a terrible book!!! Badly written, poor plot and I found myself constantly confused as to what was happening. The main character was unlikeable and I would have given up

reading except I wanted to write this review. Interestingly, my husband started reading it and has just told me he's giving up as he can't work out what is going on. I'm struggling to think of any positives, the characters were unbelievable and unlikeable and I really could not have cared what happened to any of them One of the worst books I've read in a long time-sorry!!" (Editor's note – no problem Alison, we like to chose diverse ones which we know not everyone will like!)

Alison also said she found *The Street Party* an easy read which she enjoyed – but that she wouldn't necessarily recommend it. She explained: "I felt so sorry for the young lad Zac, accused of rape, and it made me wonder if this happens more times than we are aware of. His mum Ruby was a character I liked whereas everyone was pretty horrid. Ruby stuck by Zac but even she had some initial doubts which I'm sure would be the case. It was her grown up daughter who made her pull herself together. Ruby's best friend Melissa was beset with her own demons; desperate for her own child but married to an abuser. The ending for her was rather too neat and unbelievable. The conclusion for Willow's family made me cross; effectively they had escaped any retribution. I'm sure this was deliberate on the author's part. Although Willow and her brother were clearly behaving as they were because of their unhappy upbringing it was hard to feel sorry for them."

Sheila enjoyed the book and said: "I found myself very quickly engaged in this book, and really liked the style with entries by the three main characters, Ruby, Melissa and Nella. I found it difficult to put down. I warmed to each of the three women even Nella, until her last entry when I realised how manipulative she was. The other characters were less likeable in the main, and I really felt for the children as they experienced the trauma of events at the party and beyond. I will look out for other books by Claire Seeber."

However, Barbara disagreed about the book. She told us: "This was billed as an unputdownable, gripping domestic thriller, well I'm not so sure. I wondered if it was meant to be social commentary on today's society and the divisions within it, a bitchy chick lit about the 'filthy rich' or an exposition of domestic abuse, bullying and the whole thing of being accused of something. For me it didn't do any of those things. Every scenario that could have been used was, we had everything, drug dealers, dodgy politicians, slave traders, Grenfell tragedy (clumsily disguised as an explosion in the street), teenagers, mixed race families, tragic deaths, children in care, what have I left out? It was all in there, oh and there was a street party with dire consequences.

"The characters were very one dimensional and completely unconvincing, the only character who I felt was remotely sympathetic and real (ish) was the boy Zach. Of course Ruby had to be from a dysfunctional family and tragically widowed after marrying a mixed race man. And really she didn't know what a Tesla was! This woman is a shopkeeper she can't be that ignorant. Nella was unbelievably bad so was the ghastly Marcus her husband as for the children!

“I know that there are some pretty damaged girls around who can cause mayhem and I think we are supposed to feel for her as she is neglected emotionally but I just wanted to give her a good slap. There are many more characters, several of them unnecessary and just confusing. The story went on and on, with just about every cup of tea mentioned as well as every glass of champagne. Consequently there was not much dramatic tension.

“It was disappointing that the main point of the story was the mother’s anguish over the accusation of her son but it really didn’t come across and you didn’t really feel for her, the same as you didn’t feel for Melissa who was abused by her husband. You were supposed to but she was just too much of a cliché. As for the convenient romance, less said.

“This could have been a really good and interesting novel about families and their effect on children and the wider circle as well as about bullying and where it can lead but by including every possible scenario, too many clichés and torpid writing it really wasn’t.

Thanks as always to our contributors for their honest, open and interesting reviews! If you would like to get involved with the Book Club please contact Sherry and Debbie in the Central Office – and watch this space for our next round of recommendations.