



BOOK CLUB REVIEWS JUNE/JULY/AUGUST 2022

Thank you all for submitting such wonderfully varied reviews.

The Salt Path by Raynor Winn attracted a variety of opinions. Alison gave it 5/10 and said: "I read this quite a long time ago. It was of special interest to me as I live near the south west coast path so knew the places she wrote about. However, although it was an easy read there were lots of questions left unanswered. A lot of it didn't ring true - there was no real explanation as to why they lost all their money and I wasn't convinced by their abject poverty. All of a sudden, she had a job and her husband who was apparently very ill was off to university. Interestingly, a friend went to see her at a book festival; she described her as mysterious, she only read passages from the book and wouldn't answer questions. I found the book irritating as I couldn't believe it was all true and haven't been tempted to read her next book. I feel bad as the book is described as life affirming, hopeful etc - I was left feeling cynical and annoyed for feeling thus." Barbara wasn't expecting to enjoy the book but ended up really bonding with the story. She said: "I'm not really sure why I liked it, maybe because it was different from my usual reading. I started off thinking they were totally off their heads but came round to their point of view, especially when the walking and hardships endured seemed to help Moth with his illness. It was a remarkable journey but sometimes reading it felt a bit like an endurance test too. It did get a bit repetitive and the writing could be a little flat. The part in the beginning where they left the animals I found heartbreaking, more than the sections about Moth and his illness, maybe that is just sentimentality on my part. I felt it began to fizzle out a bit towards the end and I did wonder how it would all end. Well I guess the second book will have the answers! So an interesting worthwhile read, but there is no way I would do the same, too addicted to 'stuff'."

Rosemary said: "The beginning of the book feels almost traumatic with the loss of home, livelihood and terminal diagnosis coming all together. Throughout the early chapters emotions are very raw as Raynor and her husband, Moth, face one challenge and hardship after another. At times it was uncomfortable reading as they faced abuse or conversations closed when they revealed their circumstances. They begged drinking water from cafes and sometimes they climbed fences to use facilities without paying. It was a hard hitting account of how previously honest, hard working people can fall on hard times. However, as the book proceeds the beauty and proximity to nature of the South West Coastal Path, together with Moth's improving health and their ability to meet all challenges, brings a new perspective and a measure of peace and acceptance. The descriptions of the sea and stunning countryside are one of the strengths of this book. When Raynor and Moth temporarily returned inland for the winter and to earn money they felt less at home than they had felt in their flimsy tent on the Coastal path and they went back to resume their walk as soon as possible. The ending, where a chance encounter, just as their walk nears completion, provides them with a home by the Coastal Path, seems rather too neat, but the message of the book is the triumph of love over all sorts of adversity."

The Librarian by Salley Vickers was enjoyed by all our reviewers.

Ruth said: "I had half listened to this on Radio 4 so it was good to read it properly. I felt the author captured the essence of the 50's and the morals and constraints still in post war Britain. The frustration of those intelligent women who were deprived of a decent education and still stifled by the morals of the time expected to be good wives and mothers. The author accurately portrayed the anxiety and worry over the 11 plus felt by teachers, parents and children and the expectation that all children in the lower streams would not go to the grammar school. I remember it well. I was pleased there was a part two to complete the story of Lizzie and Sam and felt it was a fitting end to the novel."

Alison thought it was an excellent read and described Vickers as a reliable author who manages to interweave lots of strands into her stories. She said: "She clearly has a passion for books and their importance in children's lives. She conveyed the rigid morals of the late '50s -the shame of an illicit affair...Vickers is skilled at fleshing out characters and how life can change in an instance with a small event. I quite liked the ending as it tied up lots of loose ends and the idea that Elizabeth had been so inspired by Sylvia that she became a famous children's author was a nice touch. 8/10"

Barbara said: "I very much enjoyed this book, it was an interesting story set in interesting times with complex and three dimensional characters. The love affair was sensitively written as were all the intertwining relationships. I do like these just post-war novels (maybe because they remind me of a time which is just out of reach but I still have a sort of ancestral memory of them. I actually read this book twice and enjoyed it both times. A satisfying read."

Time for the Dead by Lin Anderson was only reviewed by Alison who was disappointed. She said: "It was an ok read. I struggled to work out why I wasn't that impressed and I think I found it a bit one dimensional. Rhona was irritating- I know she had suffered a traumatic event (because I hadn't read any other of the books I wasn't entirely sure what this was), but she was pretty mean to those who cared about her-colleagues and boyfriend. The only time the book came alive was when Blaze the dog appeared-what a star!! I won't be reading any more of her books I'm afraid. I read it quite quickly but was pleased to finish it. 4/10"

Our John Steinbeck recommendation – *The Wayward Bus* – attracted a lot of attention but it was very mixed.

Alison said: "Wow, what a great read. I haven't read Steinbeck in a while and forgotten what a fabulous author he is. I'd never heard of this novel and what a treat it was. He manages to convey the heat, dust, poverty, need, greed, and lust in such a way that you can envisage it. All the characters are flawed in some way and most of them are people you probably wouldn't want to meet! Reading this was like peeling an onion-to start with the passengers all seem quite ordinary but as time goes on layers are removed to expose their true nature. I was cheering for the downtrodden waitress Norma with her desire to meet Clark Gable and I really hoped she managed to make something of her life. I also wanted Mildred to break free from her appalling parents - Juan was the catalyst for this hopefully. Although he was a rough and ready character there was something darkly charming - which was what attracted Mildred. I was left desperately wanting to know how everybody's lives turned out - a sign of a great book when you care so much for the characters. I'm off to read more Steinbeck. 9/10"

Graham said: "Not much happening and taking a very long time to happen. Would have made a good short story. Description a plenty. Too much so." Sheila agreed, adding: "I really couldn't get into this book and although the characters were well drawn, I didn't connect with them. I have enjoyed Steinbeck's writing in the past, but this wasn't a book for me. I wanted him to speed things along and get on with it. However, my favourite character was Pimples and whenever he appeared I was cheered."

Ruth balanced things by saying: "I have never read any of John Steinbeck so this was a good opportunity to take the plunge and try one. I am not sure what I made of it. It is very much of its' time post war America with people trying to make the most of the opportunities or lack of them to survive and make a living. I didn't feel drawn to any of the characters but could recognise the frustration felt by the older women as time was passing them by and they were unable, especially Mrs Pritchard, to escape from the situation they were in. The book I suppose was a metaphor for travelling through life as the characters pass and possible future was gradually revealed."