

Our book for December was Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman. This was an interesting and enjoyable read. It was well written, taking the reader through a wide range of emotions. The book had depth and was not frightened of discussing difficult issues but was interspersed with humour often based on rye observations of the human condition. A compelling read with an unexpected twist at the end.

Our book for November was The Great Gatsby by F Scott Fitzgerald. We were all impressed by the quality of the writing; his beautiful imagery creating atmospheric detail of this glamorous, decadent, frivolous and superficial time in American history. We had lively discussions about many themes: 'The American Dream' and how tarnished it had become, the 'carelessness' that wealth and privilege afforded to the characters. However, we felt that at times the plot lacked substance and we wanted more information about many of the characters especially Gatsby and his associates.

Our book for October was Burial Rites by Hannah Kent. In this book, the author retells the story of a double murder which happened in 1828 in Illugastadir, Iceland. It is a very well researched and a beautifully written book. Her descriptive prose clearly evokes the hardships of isolated communities living in difficult and impoverished circumstances. The attention to detail when describing the structures in which the family units lived and their daily routines is very evocative. The characters are interesting and gave rise to lively discussion about their actions and motivations. We found this book so absorbing that we have decided to read another title by the same author.

Our book for September was Inside the Whale by Jennie Rooney. This is a beautifully written book giving delightful detail of family life and society in the 1930's and 40's and extending into the modern day. The book is narrated alternately by Stevie and Michael, which gives great insight into their feelings, emotions and motivations. Their lives, like so many others are changed fundamentally and both are traumatised by the impact of the war. Although they find care and love from others, they continue to feel a bond and a deep sense of loss. We were a little puzzled by the title, but research indicated that the author felt Stevie gained safety and security and Michael gained forgiveness.

Our book for August was The Silk Factory, by local author Judith Allnatt. It is a well written book with excellent descriptions of the characters and settings. The story centred on Weedon Bec, had two interwoven plots, one in the modern day and one taking the reader back to Napoleonic times when the Military Ordnance Depot was built. We felt the modern day plot, depicting the problems of divorce, were a little cliched but the nineteenth century characters seemed very real and we all wanted to know more about their lives, the hardships they experienced and the consequences of events. There was great personal tragedy and memories of this echoed forward in time. Many of us will be looking out for more titles by the same author.

Our book for July was The Child by Fiona Barton. This was a well written story that brought all the characters together. It held our interest to the very end, helped by many red herrings. All were surprised by the unexpected ending. It was a good read and one we would recommend.

Our book for June was *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes. This was a bittersweet story containing humour, pathos and romance. Although light in style; the story about a quadriplegic contained the challenging issue of assisted suicide. We enjoyed the depth of her characters and insight into family life. We were both gripped and moved by events in the book.

Our book for April was *Barkskins* by Annie Proulx. We thoroughly enjoyed this book; which was ambitious in the both the centuries and continents it crossed. We found her characters interesting, but at times were disappointed not to hear more about their lives. Many of whom were living through hard, dangerous times with no recourse to justice or modern medical facilities. They were ruthlessly exploited by people whose only motive was profit and protecting their own livelihood. At times, the book felt disjointed; this was possibly due to the scope of the book, but also reflects the nature of society before modern communications. Journeys lasting months, if not years to keep in contact with distant family or to undertake a business meeting were common. A strength of the book was her descriptions both of the environment and the conditions the characters were living in; a strong sense of peril was very evident – human life was cheap. We felt great injustice and loss. Parts of the book were shocking and saddening and the issues are ones that regrettably we are still struggling with today.

Our May title was *Autumn* by Ali Smith. The response to this contemporary book was mixed, with many finding her prose a challenge, definitely not an 'easy read'. However, it was a thought provoking book, with some beautiful and vivid descriptions that created images that required understanding at different levels, but sometimes left the reader feeling a little bewildered. There was humour in several sections that lifted the book. There was also a lot of play on words that some felt gave meaning to her themes but others felt added little. So, a deep book suitable for those who enjoy exploring themes, images and ideas rather than plot and characterisation.

Our book for March was *Now We are 40* by Tiffanie Darke. This book created a strong reaction and prompted vigorous discussion. The author, who has worked as an editor for a glossy Sunday magazine presented an image of Generation X (usually accepted as the cohort born between mid 1960s – early 1980s) that we found difficult to recognise and very opinionated. We felt the book was self-absorbed and London orientated. There was a lot of celebrity name dropping and it was written from the perspective of someone who was privileged and had a large disposable income and therefore bore little resemblance to the experiences of the majority. Sweeping generalisations were made that painted a very positive image of this generation with little evidence to support and equally made quite negative judgments of previous generations, many of which we strongly disagreed with. Very stimulating, but not a book we would recommend.

Our book for January was *When the Floods Came* by Clare Morrall. The book is set in a future where society has suffered from a catastrophic virus and subsequent problems with fertility, and also severe weather change with significant flooding. It is a gentle thriller, where an isolated family whose main contact with the outside world is through the internet are confronted by the arrival of a charismatic stranger. Should they celebrate the end of their isolation or be wary of this enigmatic young man. We enjoyed discussing how probable some of the changes to society were, both with

regard to the virus and the severe weather patterns. Many found the book compelling but all were surprised at the rather abrupt ending.