

2013 collection

Von Arnim, Elizabeth

Elizabeth and her German Garden

May 7th -- There were days last winter when I danced for sheer joy out in my frost-bound garden in spite of my years and children. But I did it behind a bush, having a due regard for the decencies ...' Elizabeth's uniquely witty pen records each season in her beloved garden, where she escapes from the stifling routine of indoors: servants, meals, domestic routine, and the presence of her overbearing husband , The Man of Wrath

Ormiston

"Nice little book". Gentle read. Picture of a bygone age.

Hadd Readers

Too many references to plants. Funny moments especially regarding her treatment of her "friends". A little disappointed as the book had been given rave reviews and it did not live up to it's reputation.

Under Bolton

We liked the way the author described the various outings eg. to the Baltic and indeed the picture she painted of life at that time. We were saddened that she wasn't able to dig in her garden because it was socially unacceptable.

Overall we enjoyed the book even though it wasn't a novel. We felt that she was an independent free-spirit who enjoyed her own company and that of her children.

Bowen, James

A street cat named Bob (NF)

When James Bowen found an injured, ginger street cat curled up in the hallway of his sheltered accommodation, he had no idea just how much his life was about to change. James was living hand to mouth on the streets of London and the last thing he needed was a pet. Soon the two were inseparable and their diverse, comic and occasionally dangerous adventures would transform both their lives, slowly healing the scars of each other's troubled pasts. A Street cat named Bob is a moving and uplifting story that will touch the heart of anyone who reads it.

Thursdays

Everyone really enjoyed this read. We learnt about his street life experiences. It was very interesting to learn how the "Big Issue" works. Easy read, but enjoyable.

KP Days

This was very repetitive and simplistic. Poorly written and I wondered why it had been left unedited. We didn't warm to James really and his love of Bob wasn't always believable. Why did he give up busking? We did he feel it was OK to sell Big Issue to people when he wasn't on his own pitch? That said, I was pleased when he healed the rift between his mother in Australia, we felt this section was really nicely written. We felt we only got the story he wanted us to hear, we wondered what it would have been like written as a biography.

First Steps

Enjoyable and easy to read. It was interesting finding out about the Big Issue. Quite repetitive at certain points but you did want to keep reading. We were kind of waiting for something dramatic to happen but it never really did.

Boyd, Hilary

Thursdays in the park

One Thursday in autumn, Jeanie meets Ray in the park, and a chance meeting blossoms into a friendship. They talk, laugh, share hopes and secrets and heartbreaks. They offer each other a second chance at life and love. But will they have the courage to take it?

Under Bolton

Not very inspiring and very predictable. A truly forgettable book.

Book Tuesday

Uninspired choice. Characters not interesting and were unbelievable. Hope this was printed on recycled paper to save the trees!

McIntosh

Most of us read this book. Although, we didn't feel it was badly written, it was very superficial. The ending was very cheesy – not memorable.

Bradbury, Ray

Fahrenheit 451

Fahrenheit 451. The temperature at which book-paper catches fire and burns. The hauntingly prophetic classic novel set in a not-too-distant future where books are burned by a special task force of firemen. Guy Montag is a fireman. His job is to burn books, which are forbidden, being the source of all discord and unhappiness. Even so, Montag is unhappy; there is discord in his marriage. Are books hidden in his house? The Mechanical Hound of the Fire Department, armed with a lethal hypodermic, escorted by helicopters, is ready to track down those dissidents who defy society to preserve and read books. The classic novel of a post-literate future, 'Fahrenheit 451' stands alongside Orwell's '1984' and Huxley's 'Brave New World' as a prophetic account of Western civilization's enslavement by the media, drugs and conformity. Bradbury's powerful and poetic prose combines with uncanny insight into the potential of technology to create a novel which over fifty years from first publication, still has the power to dazzle and shock.

Hadd Readers

Tedious, slow moving, concept was unbelievable, rubbish! One person thought it was not an enjoyable read as not an enjoyable story but a good representation of a futuristic society and this type of post apocalyptic world. Too many loose ends. A marmite book.

East Linton

Not all enjoyed this book and didn't feel empathy towards characters. Well written and lovely descriptive passages, but we felt it was a bit disconnected and a "bulked out" short story.

McIntosh

We all read and enjoyed this book. While short it "packs a punch". We could identify some prophetic ideas – eg people sitting dopyly in front of big screens or walking around with wires going into their ears! But, even he, didn't envisage the W.W.W. as a source of ideas and info.

Buchan, Elizabeth

Daughters

It is a truth universally acknowledged that all mothers want to see their daughters happily settled. But for Lara, mother to Maudie and stepmother to Jasmine and Eve, realizing this ambition has not been easy. With an ex-husband embarking on a new marriage, and the surprising and late blooming developments in her own love life to contend with, Lara has enough to worry about, especially with Eve's upcoming wedding. And when she begins to fear that Eve is marrying a man who will only make her unhappy, and Maudie reveals something that shocks the entire family, Lara faces the ultimate dilemma. Does she step in and risk the wrath of her daughters? Or does she stand by and watch them both make what she fears will be the biggest mistakes of their lives?

Thursdays

Light easy read. Only two of us read it, others were put off by the opening chapters.

Hadd Readers

Some of us felt the parents were in love, some felt that they were just friends, and some that the father just wanted a mother for his children. Lack of plot. Not likeable characters. Some felt that the father was concerned for his new wife's health. Basically an easy, light read.

KP Days

Nice cover – that was the best bit. Disappointing, absolutely no interesting characters. Lara was a walk over. Cover suggested Lara's secret was bigger. No one impressed with this one at all.

Chobsky, Stephen

The perks of being a wallflower

Charlie is a freshman. And while he's not the biggest geek in the school, he is by no means popular. Shy, introspective, intelligent beyond his years yet socially awkward, he is a wallflower, caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it. Charlie is attempting to navigate his way through uncharted territory: the world of first dates and mix tapes, family dramas and new friends; the world of sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, when all one requires is that perfect song on that perfect drive to feel infinite. But he can't stay on the side line forever. Standing on the fringes of life offers a unique perspective. But there comes a time to see what it looks like from the dance floor. *The Perks of being a wallflower* is a deeply affecting coming-of-age story that will spirit you back to those wild and poignant roller-coaster days known as growing up.

East Linton

This book split the group. Ranging from a book in which not a lot happens, to an interesting read from a different perspective, a unique viewpoint of a "troubled" teenager.

Ormiston

Marginally better than the other title in the pairing (John Green – *The fault in our stars*). Well written and it handled difficult things well. It gave insight into how different people deal with different situations.

Bellas

Probably a fairly accurate description of teenager life and the angst they go through. Not found to be really enjoyable not for our age group anyway; though teenagers would relate to it far easier. Raised lot of issues for teenagers?

Collins, Dan

In foreign fields (NF)

“...if we ran out of ammo I could see us getting dragged through the streets and beheaded on TV. We said we’d take our own lives, not fall into their hands ... He was shot in the heart and died leading his men – not a bad way for a soldier to go ... I heard the crack of the rounds. Mr Neal took shrapnel in the face – the blokes dived straight into the sewage ditches ... I said Mate; you’re on your own. Fix bayonets ... good luck...I was cradling Beharry in my lap ... I thought he was going to die ... The RPG passed between us – we were only 3ft apart ... I dwelled on having killed people and I felt really bad about it ... The ammo supply for the day was 47,000 rounds of 7.62. We had a total of 188 major contacts ... I felt this dull thud, like getting hit with a sledgehammer. I shouted, “I’ve been shot”! ... Every ambush got more intense. I thought I’ve got to get through this for my family ... a guy with an AK just stood up right near us. F***! Where did he come from? I dropped my rifle and emptied my 9mm into him ... Another Warrior came barrelling through. It was hit by a massive barrage of RPGs and just disappeared in the explosions. I thought, those boys are dead ... He was six feet away, frozen. I shot him several times before he had the” chance to kill me...”

KP Days

We started this but didn’t get very far. It just felt too much after “The Yellow Birds” with which it was paired.

Thursdays

No one read much of this book. One or two of our group tried a few of the stories but found them to be a litany of facts.

Dunbar

Soldier stories were illuminating, but too many to read. Showed the independence of the soldiers in the units (no-one was a single hero, but part of a team). No explanation of the motivation for their actions, other than duty. What about the emotion? Some of the group have anti-war views, and found futility, pointlessness and waste in war.

Connolly, John

The book of lost things

High in his attic bedroom, twelve year old David mourns the loss of his mother. He is angry and he is alone, with only the books on his shelf for company. But those books have begun to whisper to him in the darkness, and as he takes refuge in the myths and fairy tales so beloved of his dead mother he finds that the real world and the fantasy world have begun to meld. The Crooked Man has come, with his mocking smile and his enigmatic words: “Welcome, your majesty. All hail the new king.” And as war rages across Europe, David is violently propelled into a land that is both a construct of his imagination yet frighteningly real, a strange reflection of his own world composed of myths and stories, populated by wolves and worse than wolves, and ruled over by a faded king who keeps his secrets in a mysterious, legendary book.

Musselburgh

One out of three read and enjoyed. Two daughters read and interestingly the 17 year old thought it was written for an older age group. The 28 year old thoroughly enjoyed it.

Prestonpans

Tedious, full of anachronisms, clichéd, a meandering plot going nowhere half the time, stereotypical characters, gratuitous violence, utterly predictable except for the fact that the book finished about 100 pages before the end.

Lighthouse

Well, only one of us read this book and I have to say – we enjoyed it. I liked the fairytale descriptions, story for adults and did not find it tedious at all. We would like to read more of John Connolly's work as a result of this book. I was surprised it finished when it did as a lot of the pages are given over to the original fairy tales and it was interesting to remind ourselves of this.

Ferrante, Elena
My brilliant friend

From one of Italy's most acclaimed authors, comes this ravishing and generous hearted novel about a friendship that lasts a lifetime. The story of Elena and Lila begins in the 1950s in a poor but vibrant neighbourhood on the outskirts of Naples. Growing up on these tough streets, the two girls who learn to rely on each other ahead of anyone or anything else, as their friendship, beautifully and meticulously rendered, becomes a not always perfect shelter from hardship. Ferrante has created a memorable portrait of two women, but *My Brilliant Friend* is also the story of a nation. Through the lives of Elena and Lila, Ferrante gives her readers the story of a neighbourhood, a city, and a country undergoing momentous change.

Gullane

Long, detailed life of poor teenagers in a relatively closed society. Who is the friend? Can we face reading parts 2 and 3? Very interesting in lots of ways – details of differences between male/female attitudes. Violent males, but also protective of females. Interesting read.

Under Bolton

Most read the book and enjoyed it. Two members gave up half way. An interesting reflection on a poor post war community in Italy. Two older members enjoyed the old wives tales and can remember being told them a children.

Lighthouse

Fabulous, well written account of the trials and tribulations of two female friends from a poverty stricken post war Naples. Very evocative and although sometimes violent we felt that this was a believable story with superbly structured characters – not all of whom we liked. Looking forward to the next book. Elena Ferrante is on our favourites list!

Flynn, Gillian
Gone girl

'What are you thinking, Amy?' The question I've asked most often during our marriage, if not out loud, if not to the person who could answer. I suppose these questions prevail over every marriage: 'What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Who are you? What have we done to each other? What will we do?' Just how well can you ever know the person you love? This is the question that Nick Dunne must ask himself on the morning of his fifth wedding anniversary when his wife Amy suddenly disappears. The police immediately suspect Nick. Amy's friends reveal that she was afraid of him, that she kept secrets from him. He swears it isn't true. A police examination of his computer shows strange searches. He says they aren't his. And then there are the persistent calls on his mobile phone. So what really did happen to Nick's beautiful wife? And what was in that half-wrapped box left so casually on their marital bed? In this novel, marriage truly is the art of war.

KP Days

Most of us had read this previously and thoroughly enjoyed it again. A well rounded novel with lots of back story about Amy. Every character had a flaw. The amount of work that Amy had put into the treasure hunt was amazing – a truly evil woman. There were no redeeming characters but this helped make it more readable.

Dunbar

Considering this is a best seller and well reviewed book, it didn't go down that well with our group. Most people didn't like it, one person thought it was OK. Unsympathetic characters, contrived plot. Two manipulative people in a toxic relationship. Reasonably well-crafted, but very American in style.

Stick Ladies

Most of us found this book slow to get going and were very close to giving up, until the "real" Amy came to light. From then on it was gripping, but we felt the unresolved murder was an unfinished detail. The characters remained unlikeable the whole way through the story.

Goldacre, Ben

Bad science

Ben Goldacre's wise and witty bestseller, shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, lifts the lid on quack doctors, flaky statistics, scaremongering journalists and evil pharmaceutical corporations. Since 2003 Dr Ben Goldacre has been exposing dodgy medical data in his popular Guardian column. In this eye-opening book he takes on the MMR hoax and misleading cosmetics ads, acupuncture and homeopathy, vitamins and mankind's vexed relationship with all manner of 'toxins'. Along the way, the self-confessed 'Johnny Ball cum Witch finder General' performs a successful detox on a Barbie doll, sees his dead cat become a certified nutritionist and probes the supposed medical qualifications of 'Dr' Gillian McKeith. Full spleen and satire, Ben Goldacre takes us on a hilarious, invigorating and ultimately alarming journey through the bad science we are fed daily by hacks and quacks.

Dunbar

A thought provoking and, stimulating book. Makes you question journalistic head-lines – beware of scientific jargon! Look beyond sensationalist stories – do your own research!

Longniddry

General opinion was that it was very informative. Confirmed most of what we knew anyhow.

Stick Ladies

Quite an opinionated writer, however, some of his opinions do make you question your own presumptions and make some interesting points about the power of self delusion.

Green, John

The fault in our stars

Despite the tumour shrinking medical miracle that has bought her a few years, Hazel has never been anything by terminal, her final chapter inscribed upon diagnosis. But when a gorgeous plot twist named Augustus Waters suddenly appears at Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel's story is about to be completely rewritten. Insightful, bold, irreverent and raw, The Fault in Our stars is award-winning author John Green's most ambitious and heart breaking work yet, brilliantly exploring the funny, thrilling and tragic business of being alive and in love.

Longniddry

Gave a real insight into how teenagers cope with cancer. Well written. Surprisingly, it wasn't sad to read. Generally the book was appreciated by all readers.

Lighthouse

An absolutely fabulous story. We were all moved to tears with the plight of these cancer stricken teenagers and the quirkiness and likeability of all of them. Intelligent, funny, sad and emotional – a huge plethora of feelings made this book hard to put down.

East Linton

Only a few of the group attempted to read this. Most people had lost interest after a few chapters. Those who did read it, felt there was some important issues covered. It was appreciated that this is a “young adult” book and it's not always easy to put oneself back in that mindset.

Halpern, Justin

Sh*t my Dad says

After being dumped by his long-time girlfriend, 28 year old Justin Halpern found himself living at home with his 73 year old dad. Sam Halpern, who is “like Socrates, but angrier, and with worse hair,” has never minced his words. And when Justin moved back home, he began to record all the ridiculous things his dad said to him ... From the pitfalls of family weddings to confronting burglars naked with a shotgun, Sh*t my Dad Says is a chaotic, hilarious, true memoir of a father and son relationship from a major new comic voice.

Longniddry

Minus 10. Please refer to the title for our opinion of this book. Apart from one person who laughed out loud on a train journey.

Hallhill

We had a range of opinions from puerile to hilarious. Some very funny one liners.

Lynton Bookworms

About half were in agreement with the Longniddry group. The other half thought it was brilliant and hilariously funny.

Hannah, Sophie

Hurting distance

Three years ago, something terrible happened to Naomi Jenkins – so terrible she never told anyone. Now, Naomi has another secret – her lover, unhappily married Robert Haworth. When Robert vanishes, Naomi knows he must have come to harm. But the police are less convinced, particularly when Robert's wife insists he is not missing. Naomi is desperate. If she can't persuade the police that Robert is in danger, she'll convince them that he is a danger to others. Then they'll have to look for him – urgently. Naomi knows how to describe in detail the actions of a psychopath. All she needs to do is dig up her own traumatic past ...

East Linton

This is not a book we would have picked off a shelf. I like psychological thrillers, but felt somewhat uncomfortable with the subject and really uncomfortable with the graphic descriptions of the rapes. I didn't like Naomi as a character. To me she came across as having two distinct personalities. On one hand she was the wounded, secretive victim of a past rape, who was once again playing the victim in her current relationship. Then, she suddenly becomes this strong, devious, manipulative and totally focussed individual who can see through the tangled web of evil which has been spun by the two brothers. An

understanding of the relationships between the police officers would have been better as it felt that they, along with the other characters were not fully introduced to the reader. It certainly was a dark and mysterious journey and although reasonably well written, it wasn't for us.

Gullane

She CAN write, but her subject would give a psychiatrist a field day.

Stick Ladies

Book was enjoyed by the group. The cover was rather off putting but the story is not as grim as it is painted. The book would be rather predictable but we were all gripped by the story and were compelled to read it.

Heller, Joseph

Catch 22

Set in the closing months of World War II, this is the story of a bombardier named Yossarian who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. His real problem is not the enemy – it is his own army which keeps increasing the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service. If Yossarian makes any attempts to excuse himself from the perilous missions then he is caught in Catch-22; if he flies he is crazy, and doesn't have to; but if he doesn't want to he must be sane, and has to. That's some catch.

McIntosh

Not everyone finished the book. The person who did finish it, felt that in spite of initial reservations, they thoroughly enjoyed it. Others felt the characters unsympathetic and agreed with another group that it might appeal more to men. This book is complex with lots of repetitive strands, each building on earlier scenarios. The pace changes midway and becomes quite black and explicit in terms of depicting horror. Nevertheless, lots of humour and wit throughout.

East Linton

One a few read this book, a few had read it when it was originally published. Most found this a difficult book to read and felt little sympathy for the characters. It was appreciated that this was an iconic book.

Prestonpans

Not attracted by plot outline initially but found it gradually became fascinating. Dense and complex which means it has to be read slowly. One who had read it before thoroughly enjoyed a re-read. Another decided not to re-read because of the dystopian ending. Contrast between humour and horror. A classic.

Indridason, Arnaldur

Hypothermia

One cold autumn night, a woman is found hanging from a beam at her holiday cottage. At first sight, it appears like a straightforward case of suicide; María had never recovered from the death of her mother two years previously and she had a history of depression. But then the friend who found her body approaches Detective Erlendur with a tape of a séance that María attended before her death and his curiosity is aroused. Driven by a need to find answers, Erlendur begins an unofficial investigation into Maria's death. But he is also haunted by another unsolved mystery - the disappearance of two young people thirty years

ago - and by his own quest to find the body of his brother, who died in a blizzard when he was a boy. *Hypothermia* is Indridason's most compelling novel yet.

Haddington

A most enjoyable book, well written – a story of triumph over adversity.

Port Seton PM

Well written but slow paced. One member suggested that it was not memorable. The twist at the end saved the book from being completely unsatisfactory.

Ormiston

A good crime novel. The author read you down lots of paths. It was an easier read provided you didn't try to pronounce the Icelandic names. Didn't go for the easy option.

Irving, J

Prayer for Owen Meany

Ormiston

We struggled to get through this because it had so many pages – it could have been shorter. It seemed to us to be a bit repetitive. Life's too short for this level of detail. Feel compelled to get it back to finish it as a reward for the effort already invested!

Coastal

The main criticism was the length and the uppercase presentation of Owen's voice. A couple of us could not finish reading the book.

KP Days

A long book which required a bit of effort to plough through. Most of us thought it could have been less descriptive and shorter. Mixed views on story but on the whole we enjoyed it, particularly the beginning and end. Could have missed out some of the middle.

Ishiguro, K

Remains of the Day

A contemporary classic, *The Remains Of The Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro's beautiful and haunting evocation of life between the ears in a Great English House. In the summer of 1956, Stevens, the ageing butler of Darlington Hall, embarks on a leisurely holiday that will take him deep into the countryside and into his past.

The novel's narrator, Stevens, is a perfect English butler who tries to give his narrow existence form and meaning through the self-effacing, almost mystical practice of his profession. In a career that spans the Second World War, Stevens, is oblivious of the real life that goes on around him – oblivious, for instance, of the fact that his aristocrat employer is a Nazi sympathizer. Still, there are even larger matters at stake in the heartbreaking, beautifully crafted novel – namely, Stevens' own ability to allow some bit of life-affirming love into his tightly repressed existence.

Coastal

The setting and the historical background were interesting and well-portrayed, but the butler was incomprehensible to some of us.

Hallhill

Beautifully written. It would have been better if it was a bit shorter – some points were more laboured such as the section where he was mistaken for a peer, and the ending trailed away and was a little weak. That said it was very well crafted and enjoyable. Very good at recreating the 1940s and 50s and an insight into how people in service were expected to give up life and opinions for the good of the house and master.

Cooking the Books

Difference of opinion on this one. Some of us found it easy to read and appreciated the language. The title summed up the butler's state. Others struggled to get going with it. Captured the era and words weren't washed in it.

Ivey, Eowyn

The snow child

Alaska, the 1920's, Jack and Mabel have staked everything on a fresh start in a remote homestead, but the wilderness is a stark place, and Mabel is haunted by the baby she lost many years before. When a little girl appears mysteriously on their land, each is filled with wonder, but also foreboding – is she what she seems, and can they find room in their hearts for her?

Ekside

We loved this book and enjoyed the way that the story could be interpreted literally as an abandoned feral child – or as a fairytale.

We identified with the wife's despair at her childlessness and sympathised with the husband's concerns about how they would survive in Alaska. It led to a discussion about American pioneers and their attitudes to travelling to new territory. We all loved their feisty neighbour.

Musselburgh

The ending was rushed and left you uncertain of what happened. This was the lesser of the twinned books (Erin Morgenstern – The midnight circus). An uneasy mixture of fairy story and reality. It was a brilliant depiction of the pioneer struggle in a hostile environment and of nature too.

Under Bolton

We all loved this book. It's a gentle, beautiful fairy tale. Lovely descriptions of the Alaskan landscape through the seasons. We loved how the relationship between the characters developed through the story.

Well worth a read – would recommend it!

Jonasson, Jonas

The hundred-year-old man who climbed out of a window and disappeared

It all starts on the one-hundredth birthday of Allan Karlsson. Sitting quietly in his room in an old people's home, he is waiting for the party he-never-wanted-anyway to begin. The mayor is going to be there. The press is going to be there. But, as it turns out, Allan is not...Slowly but surely Allan climbs out of his bedroom window, into the flowerbed (in his slippers) and makes his getaway. And so begins his picaresque and unlikely journey involving criminals, several murders, a suitcase full of cash, and incompetent police. As his escapades unfold, we learn something of Allan's earlier life in which - remarkably - he helped to make the atom bomb, became friends with American presidents, Russian tyrants, and Chinese leaders, and was a participant behind the scenes in many key events of the twentieth century. Already a huge bestseller across Europe, The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared is a fun, feel-good book for all ages. Translated by Rod Bradbury.

Port Seton PM

All members enjoyed this book. The main character was attractive and the "flash-backs" were perfectly acceptable, because the readers knew that, no matter what the situation was he was in, he would survive. We enjoyed the humour too; and the references to world

personalities. Allan took every opportunity, from taking the suitcase onwards. We liked the Amanda character, and the way Allan “translated” her remarks; and we found the ending satisfying.

Gullane

A great yarn, quite hilarious by almost the ending. Cleverly written, with guest appearances by so many big names.

East Linton

A witty, well written fantasy, a bit reminiscent of Forrest Gump. Some felt it was too long and the plot flagged a bit towards the end. A good read though.

Joyce, Rachel

The unlikely pilgrimage of Harold Fry

When Harold Fry leaves home one morning to post a letter, with his wife hovering upstairs, he has no idea that he is about to walk from one end of the country to the other. He has no hiking boots or map, let alone a compass, waterproof or mobile phone. All he knows is that he must keep walking, to save someone’s life.

Coastal

We were not very impressed. Initially it seemed to be an easy read, but on closer inspection each of us found aspects to criticise. The general feeling was that his book, along with more and more “modern” novels, was written with a film in mind.

Gullane

A gentle story with hidden depths. Most of the group read and enjoyed this book. The relationship between Harold and Maureen was sweetly handled with the exploration and how things had gone wrong between them, very moving. Some poorish parts eg. the crowd that Harold attracted on his walk, but they didn’t spoil the overall enjoyment.

Longniddry

We all enjoyed this, and wanted to stay with Harold to the end of the journey. The relationship between Harold and his wife became central rather than the end point of the journey. The breakdown of their relationship triggered by the death of their son was an interesting addition not fully understood until later.

Kerr, Peter

Song of the eight winds: Reconquista (NF)

From the author of the bestselling Snowball Oranges series of Mallorcan travel books comes a substantial and compelling novel inspired by one of the most momentous and lastingly-celebrated events in the history of this enchanting Spanish island. It's 1229, the year of the Christian 'Reconquest' of Mallorca from the Moors, a Muslim people of Afro-Arabic origin who have ruled Spain in cultural splendour for five hundred years. Heading the Christian invasion is King James of Aragon, the dashing 21-year-old who sets out for Mallorca with a mighty armada of one hundred and fifty ships carrying some fifteen thousand foot soldiers and fifteen hundred cavalry. Set against a backdrop of breathtaking Mediterranean scenery, an enthralling saga of conflict, intrigue and forbidden romance unfolds. This is the story of Pedrito Blanes, the strapping young helmsman of the royal galley who, despite his humble background, becomes the monarch’s trusted friend - but with potentially tragic results.

Eskside

Simply written but good story. Interesting to hear how the places in Majorca were named. As usual religion does not come out of this very well.

Under Bolton

An easy read, but easy to put down. It could do with some serious editing and spell-checking. We enjoyed the descriptions of the landscapes and the conversations between King James and Pedrito.

North Berwick Lunch

Peter Kerr's book demonstrates a clear attachment even passion that he has for the land in which this story was set. It conveys a sense of lightness and darkness that any religion worth its spiritual salt embodies. There are moments of great tension and also poignancy. The author has done well in keeping an ear out for Mallorcan. Robert St Clair de Roslin, a Scot who describes to our hero Pedrito his homeland. It is a nice touch by Kerr that references some of his earlier works – an ex-pat in a confusing world.

Kingsolver, Barbara

Prodigal summer

From the author of the internationally bestselling *The Poisonwood Bible* comes this passionate story of two women from an Appalachian farming community whose lives are profoundly changed over the course of one summer. Deanna, a reclusive forest ranger, is caught off guard by a young hunter, and must decide whether to sacrifice her solitary life for love. And Lusa, left widowed by a terrible accident after only a year of marriage, discovers the possibilities in the acres which her husband left to her. As their stories become intertwined, these characters find not only their connections to each other but a sense of the beautiful yet fragile land which they share.

Thursdays Group

Only two of us finished this one. Others found it too slow to start. Interesting character development. Nature descriptions were rather long.

Hadd Readers

We all thoroughly enjoyed it. We liked the characters, especially the pairing of Garnett & Nannie. The details around Nature and how everything is connected and dependent was interesting and educational. You could immerse yourself in this book. We thought all the way through that the characters would come together more specifically than they did and were possibly a little disappointed, but loose ends are believable. Very enjoyable.

Hallhill

Very well written. Although initially disappointing that the stories were not tied together at the end – on reflection this was more realistic and left endings to the imagination.

Lackberg, Camilla

The stonecutter

The third psychological thriller from No 1 bestselling Swedish crime sensation, Camilla Läckberg. The remote resort of Fjällbacka has seen its share of tragedy, though perhaps none worse than that of the little girl found in a fisherman's net. But the post-mortem reveals that this is no case of accidental drowning... Local detective Patrik Hedström has just become a father. It is his grim task to discover who could be behind the methodical murder of a child both he and his partner, Erica, knew well. He knows the real question - and answer - lies with why. What he does not know is how this case will reach into the dark heart of Fjällbacka and the town's past, and tear aside its idyllic façade, perhaps forever.

Under Bolton

There were lots of characters in this book – so it was difficult to work out who was who. We enjoyed the history about the stone cutting. Some of the characters were not well developed and seemed superfluous. Overall, a lengthy and overly convoluted story.

Port Seton

An excellent translation. Rather a lot of characters to take on board. The women are portrayed as totally self – absorbed, but most readers found them believable if psychologically abnormal. Best part was the last part. Suggested this may be part of a series. Cleverly done, held the reader's attention. Our members of the group would recommend this book to "selected" friends who enjoy such dark writing.

East Linton

We all enjoyed this easy read and it kept our attention. We wondered why the parallel story of the stonecutter was included at all. Others thought it was the whole point of the story – why Lillian had turned out as she was and it was his ashes that turned up in the recent murders. A good read and a nice change.

McFarlane, Mhairi

You had me at hello.

What happens when the one that got away comes back? Find out in this sparkling debut from Mhairi McFarlane. 'Think of the great duos of history. We're just like them.' 'You mean like Kylie and Jason? Torvill and Dean? Sonny and Cher?' 'I think you've missed the point, Rachel. Rachel and Ben. Ben and Rachel. It was them against the world. Until it all fell apart. It's been a decade since they last spoke, but when Rachel bumps into Ben one rainy day, the years melt away. They'd been partners in crime and the best of friends. But life has moved on: Ben is married. Rachel is not. Yet in that split second, Rachel feels the old friendship return. And along with it, the broken heart she's never been able to mend.

Hadd Readers

Some of the book was mildly amusing. We all felt it was very predictable. Very light reading – one of the group thought it had been a work of time. Characters were not believable. Some liked "Christina" as a character. A few of the sub plots were not necessary to the main story.

Under Bolton

An easy summer read. Enjoyable but very forgettable. A diverting read for a long journey or plane trip. Wouldn't recommend as a good read.

Longniddry

"You had me at goodbye!!" Stunned this book was an award winner!

MacPherson, Marie

The first blast of the trumpet

Hailes Castle, 1511. Midnight on a doom-laden Hallowe'en and Elisabeth Hepburn, feisty daughter of the Earl of Bothwell, makes a wish - to wed her lover, the poet David Lindsay. But her uncle has other plans. To safeguard the interests of the Hepburn family she is to become a nun and succeed her aunt as Prioress of St. Mary's Abbey, Haddington. However, plunged into the political maelstrom and religious turmoil of the early Scottish Reformation, her life there is hardly one of quiet contemplation. Strong-willed and independent, she clashes with those who question her unorthodox regime at St. Mary's, including Cardinal David Beaton and her rival, Sister Maryoth Hay. But her greatest struggle is against her thrown godson, John Knox. Witnessing his rejection of the Roman Catholic Church - aided by

David Lindsay - she despairs that the sins of her past may have contributed to his present disenchantment. As he purges himself from the puddle of papistry, Knox finds his voice, denouncing everything he once held dear, but will that include his godmother, Prioress Elisabeth? And by confessing her dark secrets, will Elisabeth steer Knox from the pernicious pull of Protestantism or drive him further down the fateful path he seems hell-bent on, a path that leads to burning at the stake? In a daring attempt to shed light on a wheen of unanswered questions about John Knox's early, undocumented life, this novel throws up some startling claims and controversial conjectures. The First Blast of the Trumpet is book one of The Knox Trilogy.

Ekside

A number of us really enjoyed this book. We were interested to see how closely it related to actual history, and especially regarding the East Lothian history.

Mixed feelings regarding the use of Scots language. Most of us settled into it after a few chapters.

Marmion

Most of our group glanced at the first few pages of this book and decided not to read it as they felt the use of Scots was not authentic and the story trivial. Two read half and 1 read the whole book and enjoyed it. We thought it was well researched historically and painted a very convincing picture of life in 16th century Scotland. Interesting that it took place in places most of us knew well. It reinforced my knowledge of local Scottish history of that time.

Under Bolton

None of us managed to finish this book. We liked the fact that it was set in places that we know. It was hard going – too complex and some of the dialect made the book difficult to read. A glossary would have been helpful. We didn't understand a lot of the Scots dialect words, and gave-up. Typeface far too small and faint. All of us struggled to read it for this reason.

Martin, George R R

Song of ice and fire. Pt.1. of Game of thrones.

Summers span decades. Winter can last a lifetime. And the struggle for the Iron Throne has begun. It will stretch from the south, where heat breeds plot, lusts and intrigues; to the vast and savage eastern lands; all the way to the frozen north, where a 700-foot wall of ice protects the kingdom from the dark forces that lie beyond. Kings and queens, knights and renegades, liars, lords and honest men... all will play the Game of Thrones. Winter is coming.

Ekside

The format of this novel series is less fantasy than historical novel – so detailed that it seems an exposition of some real life universe. The characters ran the gauntlet - and gave something for everyone. Realistic exposition of politics – whether in the modern era or centuries ago.

Dunbar

Well written. Constructs a world very well. Only a few people managed to read it as it was felt it was too long.

Port Seton PM

Some of us read and enjoyed this book. One said that she would not have chosen this, but persevered! The description of Lord Start having his head chopped off was not so frightening as it would be on TV.

Mawer, Simon

The girl who fell from the sky

Marian Sutro is an outsider: the daughter of a diplomat, brought up on the shores of Lake Geneva and in England, half French, half British, naive yet too clever for her own good. But when she is recruited from her desk job by SOE to go undercover in wartime France, it seems her hybrid status - and fluent French - will be of service to a greater, more dangerous cause. Trained in sabotage, dead-drops, how to perform under interrogation, and how to kill, Marian parachutes into south-west France, her official mission to act as a Resistance courier. But her real destination is Paris, where she must seek out family friend Clément Pelletier, once the focus of her adolescent desires. A nuclear physicist engaged in the race for a new and terrifying weapon, he is of urgent significance to her superiors. As she struggles through the strange, lethal landscape of the Occupation towards this reunion, what completes her training is the understanding that war changes everything, and neither love nor fatherland may be trusted. "The Girl Who Fell from the Sky" is both a gripping adventure story and a moving meditation on patriotism, betrayal and the limits of love.

Ormiston

We all read it and enjoyed it. We debated the ending and most of us thought the author made the right choice. The contrast between life in Paris and the country was striking. You had to remind yourself how young the heroine was, which perhaps goes some way to explain why she reacted as she did at certain times.

Knowesley Park

A light read – slow to start but the story picked up once Paris became the location.

McIntosh

We were all disappointed in this book. We felt it didn't do justice to the women of SOE. The heroine seems a bit of a "ninny", often going against things she has covered in training. Not his best work.

Morgenstern, Erin

The night circus

The circus arrives without warning. No announcements precede it. It is simply there, when yesterday it was not. The black sign, painted in white letters that hangs upon the gates, reads: *Opens at Nightfall Closes at Dawn* as the sun disappears beyond the horizon, all over the tents small lights begin to flicker, as though the entirety of the circus is covered in particularly bright fireflies. When the tents are all aglow, sparkling against the night sky, the sign appears. *Le Cirque des Rêves* The Circus of Dreams. Now the circus is open. Now you may enter.

Musselburgh

4 different opinions in the one group.

Outstanding best book in the universe. Inventive, imaginative and truly spell-binding and enchanting not a character we didn't believe in.

Not sure about Bailey's character. We felt, we had read something similar, not really original, put me off the book.

Some of the naivety irritated.

Not my usual read and took a while to get into it. Once I got used to it, I really enjoyed it.

Bella

This was included in our first book box. Only some of our group read this book, they enjoyed it but felt the paired book (Eowyn Ivey – The Snowchild) was the better read. This book was also magical but in a darker more mysterious way. It was very imaginative and the readers were whirled around in the story as the mysteries unfolded.

North Berwick Lunch

This book is a gripping tale in the way that strongly shows the story written in what resembles a series of painting, many of which seem strongly illusion – like themselves. For example, when Bailey sat in his tree and sees the cluster of pyramid tents in black and white, set up one night the reader knows he can't quite believe his eyes. Prospero the enchanter, his daughter Celia – whom he feels her mother should have called Cordelia, after the favoured daughter in King Lear, presumably. It becomes apparent that they can control the activities on the stage, but they may not be so in control of their own lives.

Mulley, Clare

The spy who loved (NF)

In June 1952, a woman was murdered by an obsessive colleague in a hotel in South Kensington. Her name was Christine Granville. That she died young was perhaps unsurprising, but that she had survived the Second World War was remarkable. The daughter of a feckless Polish aristocratic and his wealthy Jewish wife, she would become one of Britain's most daring and highly decorated secret agents. Having fled Poland on the outbreak of war, she was recruited by the intelligence services long before the establishment of the SOE, and took on mission after mission. She skied over the hazardous High Tatras into Poland, served in Egypt and North Africa and was later parachuted into Occupied France, where an agent's life expectancy was only six weeks. Her courage, quick wit and determination won her release from arrest more than once, and saved the lives of several fellow officers, including one of her many lovers, just hours before their execution by the Gestapo. More importantly, perhaps, the intelligence she gathered was a significant contribution to the Allied war effort and her success was reflected in the fact that she was awarded the George Medal, the OBE and the Croix de Guerre.

Prestonpans

An entertaining read, not a lot of depth. Parts were well researched as shown by non-fiction book. Good descriptions of background scenery.

East Linton

About half the group read this and found it a difficult read. All the Polish names cause a bit of confusion and some people skipped bits. However, all those who read it were impressed by the descriptions of atrocities etc. Impressive amount of researched involved.

Hallhill

An interesting subject badly served by an incompetent author. Three quarters finished the book and all were disappointed by the poor quality of writing.

Ness, Patrick

A monster calls

The monster showed up just after midnight. As they do. But it isn't the monster Conor's been expecting. He's been expecting the one from his nightmare, the one he's had nearly every night since his mother started her treatments, the one with the darkness and the wind and the screaming...The monster in his back garden, though, this monster is something

different. Something ancient, something wild. And it wants the most dangerous thing of all from Conor. It wants the truth.

McIntosh

We acknowledged that the book could prove helpful to young people. There was a mixed reaction – some enjoyed it, others felt it added little to young people’s fiction. It was well written and illustrated. The group accepted that negativity may be partially due to an overload of adolescent books. It was preferred to the John Connolly book and some members would recommend to others.

Musselburgh

This has to be the most inventive and powerful book we have read this year or indeed for several years. We found ourselves struggling to put into words how much this book has touched us. Some of us were in tears. The book brought back many happy and sad memories of our parents. This book is stunning. Beautifully written and drawn. Please do not read the e-book as you would miss out on the amazing artwork. I believe Patrick has honoured Siobhan’s idea and she would have loved the outcome.

We loved the lines – “You do not write your life with words.. you write it with actions. What you think is not important. It is only important what you do”.

KP Days

Lovely book – very well written and illustrated. Very believable from a child’s point of view. We all enjoyed it, and thought it was totally convincing. Patrick Ness is a brilliant writer and we would like to read more of his young adult books.

Powers, Kevin

Yellow birds

An unforgettable depiction of the psychological impact of war, by a young Iraq veteran and poet, THE YELLOW BIRDS is already being hailed as a modern classic. Everywhere John looks, he sees Murph. He flinches when cars drive past. His fingers clasp around the rifle he hasn’t held for months. Wide eyed strangers praise him as a hero, but he can feel himself disappearing. Back home after a year in Iraq, memories swarm around him: bodies burning in the crisp morning air. Sunlight falling through branches; bullets kicking up dust; ripples on a pond wavering like plucked strings. The promise he made, to a young man’s mother that her son would be brought home safely. With THE YELLOW BIRDS, poet and veteran Kevin Powers has composed an unforgettable account of friendship and loss. It vividly captures the desperation and brutality of war, and it’s terrible after effects. But it is also a story of love, of great courage, and of extraordinary human survival. Written with profound emotional insight, especially into the effects of a hidden war on families at home, THE YELLOW BIRDS is one of the most haunting, true and powerful novels of our time.

Hallhill

The Yellow birds

This group asked to read this book.

Not all of our group finished it. Not at all well written – the structure didn’t hold together. Simple story made more complicated than it should have been. Not a satisfactory read for those that stuck with it. Very disappointed.

Book Tuesday

Some of the group had a problem with the poetic prose, among the hard reality of the facts so explicitly described. One began to realise it was written from a very personal experience and the subsequent consequences on returning to a “normal life”.

KP Days

Harrowing read. Insightful into what goes on but more as an element of not wanting to know detail, but maybe we should. Made us realise how young some of our military recruits have to be put through such a thing.

Simpson, Joe

The sound of gravity

As her hand slips from his grip, Patrick's life is shattered, forever changed... Trapped high on a high mountain face during the worst storm in living memory, a young man is forced to fight the brutal winter for his life - moments after his beloved wife is swept away forever across the ice. Haunted by grief and guilt, Patrick keeps vigil on the mountain for 25 years, in the hope that one day it will release his devastating secret.

Book Tuesday

Most of us chose not to read it for discussion, but those who did (especially those with experience of mountaineering) found it very real.

Hallhill

Everybody started this book, but only half of us finished it. The others went out for a wee after ten pages and didn't come back! Everybody found the plot unpalatable and the prose was unengaging and very badly written. A totally ridiculous story.

Eskside

The majority found this book quite unfulfilling, and decided to give up after several chapters. One member commented on the fact that the sex scene was very unrealistic, given that he hadn't had any relationship for a long time.... A big thumbs down.

Strayed, Cheryl

Wild (NF)

At twenty-six, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. In the wake of her mother's rapid death from cancer, her family grew apart and her marriage soon crumbled. With seemingly nothing to lose, she made the most impulsive decision of her life: to walk eleven hundred miles of the west coast of America – from the Mojave Desert, through California and Oregon, and into Washington State – and to do it alone. She had no experience of long distance hiking and the journey was nothing more than a line on a map. But it held promise – a promise of piecing together a life that lay shattered at her feet. Strayed's account captures the agonies – both physical and mental – of her incredible journey; how it maddened and terrified her and how, ultimately, it healed her. Wild is a brutal memoir of survival, grief and redemption – a searing portrayal of life at its lowest ebb and highest tide.

Eskside

A sure sign of an interesting read is when we start to discuss the book as soon as we arrive at our meeting, as we did with this one.

Some of us identified with Cheryl's "Wildness" and her need to get away. We had to remind ourselves that she was very young at the time – hence some of her self-centredness and obsession with sex! We felt that she was very lucky to meet so many people willing to help her, but perhaps that shows us that the majority of people are kind.

Haddington

Interesting, quite well written and easygoing. What a journey!! Metaphorically and physically.

Hadd Readers

She basically unravelled in grief! We all really enjoyed this book. We found the character quite unlike most of us in that she was quite impulsive and unprepared. She was very determined by this arose out of desperation. The trail itself was fascinating, all the people she met added more life to the experience. We loved her freedom to walk or step as she chose. We thought the killing of the horse was horrific.

Taylor, Laini

Daughter of smoke and bone

Errand requiring immediate attention. Come. The note was on vellum, pierced by the talons of the almost-crow that delivered it. Karou read the message. 'He never says please', she sighed, but she gathered up her things. When Brimstone called, she always came. In general, Karou has managed to keep her two lives in balance. On the one hand, she's a seventeen year- old art student in Prague; on the other, errand-girl to a monstrous creature who is the closest thing she has to family. Raised half in our world, half in 'Elsewhere', she has never understood Brimstone's dark work - buying teeth from hunters and murderers - or how she came into his keeping. She is a secret even to herself, plagued by the sensation that she isn't whole. Now the doors to Elsewhere are closing, and Karou must choose between the safety of her human life and the dangers of a war-ravaged world that may hold the answers she has always sought.

Gullane New

A fantasy of fantastical order! Took some reading. One member got to the end and wants to know what happens next – so is reading the next book. One member just couldn't finish it.

Ormiston

Two of managed to finish it. Fairly easy read, but can't say I was not persuaded to read the next one. A bit Twilightly saga. Enjoyed descriptions of Prague – brought back happy holiday memories.

Stick Ladies

Pleasantly surprised to find this book enjoyable and gripping throughout. Quick to read and full of memorable characters, who developed throughout the book. Personally, I'm already on the sequel which continues to engage. Members enjoyed the storyline in the book, they felt that the picture of ongoing and never ceasing war mimicked the experience of people in Israel who similarly have grown up and experienced only training, preparation, loss and war.

Thomas, Rosie

The Kashmir shawl

An epic story of wartime, family secrets, and forbidden love, set against the stunning exotic backdrop of 1940s Kashmir. Within one exotic land lie the secrets of a lifetime... Newlywed Nerys Watkins leaves rural Wales for the first time to accompany her husband on a missionary posting to India. Deep in the exquisite heart of Kashmir lies the lakeside city of Srinagar, where the British live on carved wooden houseboats and dance, flirt and gossip as if there is no war. But the battles draw closer, and life in Srinagar becomes less frivolous when the men are sent away to fight. Nerys is caught up in a dangerous friendship, and by the time she is reunited with her husband, the innocent Welsh bride has become a different woman. Years later, when Mair Ellis clears out her father's house, she finds an exquisite

antique shawl, a lock of child's hair wrapped within its folds. Tracing her grandparents' roots back to Kashmir, Mair embarks on a quest that will change her life forever.

Book Tuesday

A pleasant holiday read – well researched. We enjoyed Nerys's story but felt the modern story rather contrived.

Thursday's

One of our group had links with the Red Cross in Kashmir in 1946. They also had relations in Switzerland – she really enjoyed the story. It was a slow start but developed into a very descriptive narrative. We felt the ending was rather weak.

Eskside

First part of the book was well written and interesting. We enjoyed the descriptions of Kashmir and it's society just prior to partition. Second half of the book was felt to be contrived, and less believable, with a frustratingly neat ending.

Winterson, Jeanette

Why be happy when you could be normal?

In 1985 Jeanette Winterson's first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was published. It was Jeanette's version of the story of a terraced house in Accrington, an adopted child, and the thwarted giantess Mrs Winterson. It was a cover story, a painful past written over and repainted. It was a story of survival. This book is that story's silent twin. It is full of hurt and humour and a fierce love of life. It is about the pursuit of happiness, about lessons in love, the search for a mother and a journey into madness and out again. It is generous, honest and true.

Ormiston

We had dismissed this book on first impression. We take it all back – this was a beautifully written childhood memoir. It didn't seem totally miserable to us – her life was a mixture of experiences not only did we get a vivid picture of her childhood but her commentary on the way of life was also fascinating. A really, really good book.

Hadd Readers

Those that read it, disliked it. It generated a lot of discussion though. Generally, we felt the author was stuck in an adolescence and seemed petulant and only viewed the world from her own perspective without much care for anyone else's. We felt she was extremely disloyal to her adoptive parents and must have caused a degree of hurt with this book. Not particularly well written either. Wouldn't recommend.

Dunbar

This book – an immensely moving, heart rendering account of her life – what a feisty character she is! How she writes about her feelings, her crazy/madness periods, I was absorbed. Her experiences of hiding from her Mother so she could read all those books of prose in SECRET! It was her love of words that made her become a writer...

It's a very honest book. We found it cathartic.