

Reviews

Homecoming provoked a number of likes and likes as well as comments, which made for a very interesting group meeting.

To quote Pat :

"Our differing perspectives and comments help to illustrate the way we all interpret the books based on our socialisation and experiences."

Review by Pat Spence

1. Apologies to the person who recommended The Homecoming, but I found it unnecessarily complicated and a chore to read. Twice Sabine had to encourage me to continue with it, which I did, but always referred to it as 'my homework'.
2. I am used to different locations/ time-lines /characters but could not see why it should take over 600 pages to find out how Isabel and her children had died. Did I care? No. Why wasn't I emotionally involved?
3. Well, half way through the book Kate Morton used the word 'chaos' and I wondered if that was what she was trying to convey. But why? She could have used Jess to unravel the mystery from the start. I could identify with her style of investigative journalism as a means of tying up all the strands of the history and the persons involved.
4. Indeed, it seemed like an Agatha Christie novel at the end where everything came together in a hurry, as the Editor had got exasperated and given Kate an ultimate deadline to submit her novel.

Why did I react like that to Homecoming?

- A) I LIKE TIGHT, LOGICAL WRITING.
- B) I ENJOY POLICE PROCEDURALS THAT HAVE THE ONE AIM OF SOLVING THE CRIME AND DISCARDING 'RED HERRINGS' ALONG THE WAY.
- C) I LIKE ORDER – NOT PREDICTABILITY – BUT A STORYLINE WHERE I CAN ENJOY THE THINKING PROCESS AND JOIN IN SOLVING THE CRIME – PREFERABLY BEFORE THE INVESTIGATOR!
- D) The information in the Homecoming was so disparate that it was not enjoyable for me. I was supported in my opinion by C.S. Lewis, when in 1959, he explained that authors should "Take great pains to be clear. Remember that though you start by knowing what you mean, the reader doesn't ... In a story it is terribly easy just to forget that you have not told the reader something that he/she wants to know – the picture is so clear in your own mind that you forget that it isn't the same in his or hers".
- E) This book therefore took me out of my comfort zone. Having said that, I enjoy Graham Norton's rambling style of storytelling, but even he found quoting on the cover of this book to be difficult, limiting his words to "A treat – it's fantastic" as if he had been paid to write something!

Excellent choice of career for Jess, the lead character. As an investigative journalist, she has the skills and contacts to root out the truth about the letter that upset her grandmother. She just didn't expect it would reshape everything she believed about herself and her family.

Loved the use of Daniel Miller's book 'As if they were asleep' as part of the narrative to inform and mislead both Jess and the reader.

Chris Browne

An Australian story told in a dual narrative of present day and 1950's murder mystery. There is an unusual device used of a third narrative through a book "*As If They Were Asleep*", Daniel Miller's supposedly fictional true crime story written about the murder.

Jess is the granddaughter doing the investigating of a family murder involving her grandmother Nora, which she has suddenly been made aware of, after she returns from England to Australia when Nora has a fall at home and is in hospital. A lot of the story is told through the book she has found. Her mother Polly's story is sidelined sadly as Nora has enjoyed family matriarch status and has taken over the family narrative, does not speak about her husband or her brother. She is particularly manipulative of Polly in order to selfishly enjoy managing the life of Jess her granddaughter and basically drives her own daughter away.

The first half of the book I found long and tedious and could easily skip bits until the actual story of the murder begins with the narrative in the published book Jess found, and Nora had hidden. We could see from a long way off that Percy and Meg who were neighbours to the murdered family were involved in some way but it still came as a surprise right at the end of the book that the husband Percy was the father of the baby of the family lost all those years ago.

There are a number of themes: homecoming, Jess comes home to Adelaide from England, Polly wants to get away from home, Nora's home has always been seen as Jess's real home, and poor Isabelle from England never felt at home in Australia, and wanted to leave.

Another theme is motherhood, the desperation for children and families and homemaking. I did not like the character of the grandmother Nora, who comes over as very selfish, sometimes cruel, and obviously duplicitous, but these traits are well hidden. Polly is desperate to make her own family and be a mother to Jess, but Nora discourages this to enable her own "mothering" of Jess. Isabelle, who died so long ago haunts the story as the mother who may or may not have killed her own family. In a very speedy finale all is revealed, there was no murder, but plenty of deceit. A good read.

Chris Timmins

A very atmospheric read with a complex intrigue and interesting study of family relationships

READING OF THE BOOK: It took me a few pages to get into the book. And then I became interested, curious and finally hooked.

THE DRAMA AND STORY LINE OF THE BOOK: I enjoyed the family drama. Like in our previous book → The Forgotten book shop in Paris - There are 2 stories running (parallel at 1st) The 1959 α the 2018 - Kate Morton's style and story line interwove both the past and the present into one story - it makes it captivating. The author kept us on our toes as it wasn't always easy to follow the story line with the added challenge of remembering who is who, with so many characters. Thankfully, many questions raised in my mind as I was reading the book were answered in the ending. I found the ending slightly unsatisfactory in its lack of details when the rest of the book is so full of what could be considered minutiae.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILIES AND WHO WE ARE: The author is keen to explore family relationships, the visceral need to know one's history; the relationships between mothers and daughters and the importance of "home". I enjoyed Kate Morton's very detailed description of the day by day, hour by hour events reflecting the emotional states of the characters and their relationship with each other and emotions.

AUSTRALIA AND VILLAGE COMMUNITY: I was suitably convinced by the village life of South Australia, but having a poor knowledge of Australia I couldn't empathise with distances and geographical details. To be honest the way the garden and surrounding vegetation was described didn't correspond to my image of Australia: so much rain! so much vegetation! It certainly didn't make me feel hot!

THE CHARACTERS: Jess behaviour was not convincing.

- her failure to visit her grandmother at the start of the visiting hour. On one hand seemingly very concerned by her grandmother's health. On the other rather surprisingly casual with regards to her visits to the hospital in terms of schedule. Her search for answers and research into the family history takes over. She spends very little time at the hospital.
- her failure to enquire with medical staff about Nora's condition
- her failure to pick up her phone when Nora dies.
- All far too contrived in an otherwise brilliant story line. Of course this is to serve the plot of the story, but in my mind, it is rather weak

THE CRIME INVESTIGATION = interesting to remember how this was carried out back then in the 50s. Daniel Miller's book "As if they were asleep" provides a story that runs parallel with for the overall story line of the book but I find it difficult to believe he would have been so "sensitive" to the family members and history.

OVERALL: gripping and atmospheric tell exploring the importance of "belonging", family secrets and relationships. From the beginning I suspected that Isabel hadn't kill herself and her children. As I read on, I at times doubted my intuition wondering if in fact a guilty verdict was perhaps appropriate. Am I gullible? Maybe, but Kate Morton is a skilled writer.

Sabine Deering

I found the book too long and too much repeating of what has already been written.
 Personally I found the story in parts totally unbelievable
 I didn't mind that the book covered two periods of time
 Having already read 2 other books by this author I found that this book had a similar type of ending so for me no surprise
 I didn't enjoy Homecoming

Jen Lazarri
