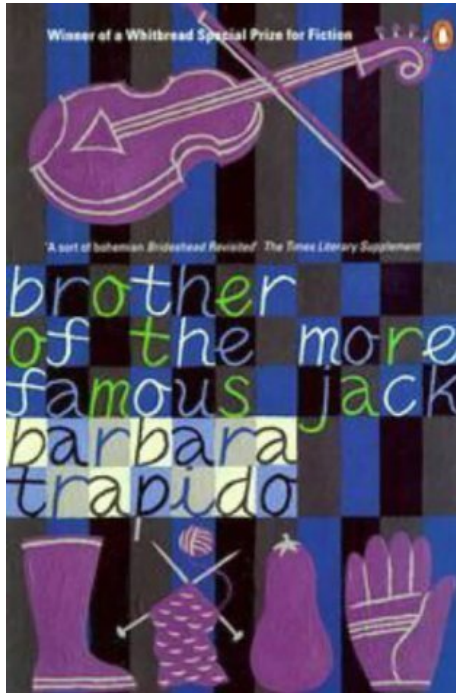


Book Reviews

Book reviews are welcomed from all members, not just those in the Reading Groups. Please email your reviews to Margaret Mason margaret@u3a-llandrindod.org.uk

The following review comes from Ian Paget.



Brother of the More Famous Jack by Barbara Trapido

At the beginning of this story, Katherine Browne has just left school. She is an only child, whose father died when she was very young. She gains a place at university after she is interviewed by Professor Jake Goldman who becomes a lifelong friend. He later tells her that she had the “best legs of the intake”. She is introduced to his family by John Millet, a bisexual artistic friend of the Goldmans. Kate is “morbidly fascinated by his preening beauty”. Millet once tried to seduce Jane Goldman, Jake’s wife and in turn introduces Kate to the sexual act which she finds “a comfortable and unremarkable filling of a gap”.

The two eldest children of the Goldman six are boys. Katherine falls in love almost immediately with the elder son Roger who is clever and attractive but shy and caustic. He leaves to work in Africa but their romance blooms by post. Jonathan is a couple of years younger, still a schoolboy, and he and Katherine do not get together until they are in their thirties, after each has separately had a failed marriage and a

child. Both boys are particularly rude to their tolerant parents though the obscenities and insults flow over a true deep affection. Jane, Jake Goldman’s wife is beautiful, pregnant with her sixth child and suffers from verbal abuse and badgering from her sons and her husband. However, Jane is in turn very demanding of her children and tolerant of her husband.

The reader is outraged by the way the Goldman family interact. The insults, Jake’s public groping of his wife, the filth of the kitchen and the children’s behaviour. Yet Kate is swept into the family and finds in Jane a person more accepting than her own mother. She also learns much more of life from the earthy Goldman family than she did from her prim middle-class upbringing.

Kate is attractive, adventurous and loves children and clothes and very quickly finds that sex is “rather jolly” as Jane once said to her. She is also clever, but only realises that in her early thirties when she has her IQ tested when she undergoes psychiatric treatment.

Having been betrayed by Roger and had all her perceived faults listed by him in his breakup speech, Kate flees to Rome where she becomes in turn promiscuous, pregnant, abandoned, a mother, and finally bereaved, when her child dies at a few weeks old. She returns to Britain on the verge of a breakdown. There is a happy ending when she is rescued from it all by Jonathan who has loved her since he was a boy and has matured into an understanding man.

This fascinating book takes its name from a rather obscure reference made on Kate’s first visit to the Goldmans, concerning a rickety chair. It was claimed to have been sat in by the poet William Butler Yeats “brother of the more famous Jack”. Jack Butler Yeats was an artist, who had won a silver medal for Ireland in the 1924 Olympics open painting section with a piece entitled “Swimming” but other than this reference has no other place in this book.

The book was first published in 1982 and won the Whitbread Special Prize for Fiction that year. It now shows signs of political incorrectness and its outlook is rather dated. However, it is a great read, and I loved the way that each short chapter often ends with a humorous punchline.

Ian Paget

12-10-20