



Leading the Cheers

Justin Cartwright

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After Dan Silas's advertising company is bought out, his invitation to his thirty-year high school reunion arrives with perfect timing, and he leaves London to return to the small Michigan town he has not seen since 1968. With wit, humor, and compassion, Whitbread Award-winner and Booker Prize-nominee Justin Cartwright takes Dan through the mounting stages of both culture shock and mid-life crisis. Back in Michigan, he discovers his best friend now believes he is a reincarnated Shawnee Indian and his high school sweetheart claims she had a daughter by him -- who has just been murdered by the Hollybush's new celebrity, a small-town serial killer. With brilliantly evoked characters and crackling dialogue, *Leading the Cheers* comically explores what people want out of life -- and what they get instead.

Leading the Cheers Details

Date : Published January 29th 2000 by Carroll & Graf Publishers (first published 1998)

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Author : Justin Cartwright

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From Reader Review Leading the Cheers for online ebook

Mew says

Not his best - a good 'killing time' read...

Morven says

Disappointed after The Promise of Happiness. I wouldn't recommend this book, it lost me by the end.

Maggie says

Interesting book but a litte far-fetched

Caroline says

I liked it a lot but it's hard to get away from the fact that it was published 20 years ago and has not aged well, mostly because of the how the internet has transformed our ways of communicating. (Yes this was a charity shop find I wouldn't have read it otherwise). These days Dan Silas and his old school friends would all be in touch on facebook so large elements of the plot would be rendered redundant. How the world has changed as 1998 doesn't seem that long ago really. That said there are a couple of extremely salient and current themes in the book, regarding middle America and an insightful precursor the the #metoo movement.

Redfox5 says

I found this book quiet a struggle to start and tho it wasn't awful, I found the book managed to make an intresting plot quiet dull. I only really warmed to two of the characters: Stephanie becuae I would bet money on that being me in a few years time which is very depressing and Gary becuae even tho he was crazy he seemed loveable

Lynley says

I'm a fan of Joanna Trollope, and I remember her saying in a self-deprecating sort of way, that although she's no great stylist like Justin Cartwright, her prose is at least functional. I'd never heard of Justin Cartwright but for some reason remembered his name, and now I've finally read one of his books.

I see what she means. I'm not sure what I'd been expecting by 'great stylist' -- I wondered if Cartwright had a specific, genius way with punctuation or something. Now I think the charge of 'great stylist' refers as much to

his insight as his prose. He certainly knows how to do dialogue. He knows how to offer up a thumbnail description of a character in a totally original way. He can describe an aroma like the master, Patrick Suskind.

As for the story, this is an eclectic range of bizarre happenings in the one book: a serial murder, a Christmas shop, advertising business, divorce, cheerleading... in this respect I'm reminded of John Irving. Most bizarre of all was the subplot about Gary and his delusions of having native American history. It wasn't until I'd finished the book that I realised the reason for this particular juxtaposition of plots: for Dan, returning to his childhood home meant coming face-to-face with the fact that the way he had imagined things was different from how others had imagined them, and he had no way of knowing which version was true. This was hammered home when he went to meet the killer in prison, and the way in which he had to make up an alternative story for Gloria.

By framing the story of Dan's middle age with an exaggerated version of imagined reality, the reimaged past life of the mentally ill Gary aided the character development of Dan.

I'm keen on reading more from this author.

Francis says

Some interesting insights on different UK / Euro - American perceptions.

Ilya says

Typically Cartwrightian in style (the main character is in conversation with himself really much more than with the people around him), but atypical in subject matter: America, high school reunions, American Indian history.

Molly says

This was an excellent book. I have recently discovered this writer and am trying to read all his books. I find him to have a strong hold on what makes us human. His writing stays in my head long after I have finished the page. quote from this book: The burden (of being human) is the belief that we are meant to be more than what we find.

Leoni Hofmeyr says

Brilliant.

This reviewer says it well, better than I can:

At times Justin Cartwright's narrative seems filigreed with ideas and ironies; at other times it seems concerned, quite simply, with one man who learns that his "version of what goes on is certainly faulty."

Love the way Cartwright's mind works, love the way he puts it into words.

Always questioning versions of reality, always poking fun at modern "certainties", always funny, always unpeeling characters to get to their core, always contextualising people and what they do and say and think in the context of where they come from and where they are going to (old world versus new). Always with every word in place, to my sensibilities anyway, never too much, never too little. Ans words that resonate with meaning.

He lost one star because of the beginning. Dont think that was constructed well.

Jenny Benn says

Cartwright is a fantastic writer. I love his prose and insightful commentary, however the story in this book didn't really grab me. I found it too unbelievable.

Jamie says

Still thinking about the book and the narrator's 'small migration,' -- the meaning of memory both individual and collective. The book jacket describes the book as witty and hilarious. Wonder if we read the same book?

Russell George says

I've read a couple of Justin Cartwright books and enjoyed them, particularly 'The Promise of Happiness', despite it being recommended by Richard and Judy's book club. The storyline to this book, about a British man returning to the US for a high school reunion, is both familiar and yet slightly implausible, given that his school sweetheart claims that her murdered daughter was also his, and his best mate has gone into some sort of periodic psychosis whereby he believes he is a native American.

And yet it sort of works. It's very readable, partly because the book moves along at a good pace. And yet our narrator is always a bit distant, which makes the story feel slightly distant too. There's a conscious lack of urgency, which Cartwright only just manages to rescue by his ability to write nice, fluid prose, but it never really stirs the soul.

Ian says

I somewhat generously gave this novel three stars because the author is undoubtedly talented and capable of passages of startling brilliance, however the plot becomes simultaneously more ponderous and preposterous as the novel draws on. The whole episode of the 'liberation' of the artifacts from the depository in London certainly stretched my credibility as did the narrator's motives for such a foolhardy venture. Perhaps he was attempting to assuage his own guilt at having made a relative success of his life while the former

schoolmates he had left behind were suffocating in the mundanity of life in a nondescript part of America. The aspect of the native Indians could have been fascinating, and is a subject I would like to learn a lot more about, but here was used more as an adjunct to the characterisation of the disturbed Gary and a subplot rather than the guts of the work. The narrator is typically flawed and frustrating in his naivety, lied to and exploited by his so-called friends, most heinously by the manipulative Gloria, whose perfidy knows no bounds. Nevertheless, I largely enjoyed the book and will give this particular author another opportunity to impress.

Suzanne says

I only vaguely remember this book - I found an old calendar with this written on one of the pages.
