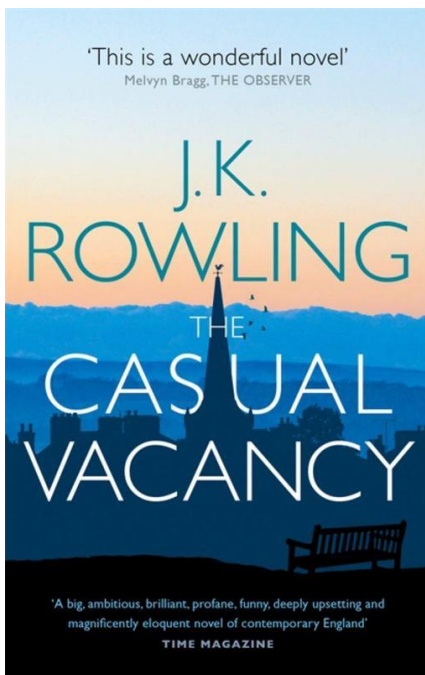


THE CASUAL VACANCY

J.K. Rowling

December 2023

This was a difficult review to write as opinions ranged from “hated this book” to “loved this book” and even “a love/hate relationship with this book”!



The story begins with the sudden death of Barry Fairbrother, a member of the Pagford Parish Council and a rowing coach to a young team. The rest of the book is about the impact this death has on the rest of the village community. Barry's death creates a “casual vacancy” on the Parish Council which provides an opportunity for to be filled by another “yes man/woman” by the snobbish and powerful members of Pagford and enable the Parish Council to rid themselves of the Council estate, or a supporter of Barry's approach to try and help the less fortunate members from the Council Estate, in particular, Krystal who is a teenager living in poverty with a drug addicted mother and a young brother whom she tries to protect.

The members of this community and their differences, are cleverly described by the author and the reader is drawn into the minutiae of the different factions from Krystal, disaffected teenage schoolchildren and their families and the “folk who live on the hill” – including the Chair of the Council and his acolytes. We become acquainted with small time politics, devious and dishonest “pillars of the community” and the sad impact of social deprivation , drug addiction and teenage emotions.

Rowling is very good at describing characters and the reader becomes familiar with each family and their relationship with each other and other members of the community. There are a lot of expletives! Some readers found this unacceptable, distracting or unnecessary but others thought it reflected how teenagers in particular talk to one another. Each family has their own “story” so the reader gets to know the strengths and weaknesses which make them who they are.

Although Barry dies at the beginning of the book, his humane approach is communicated to the reader via the conversations about him after his death. He was able to cross the divide and engage with the people in the community, in particular, Krystal, to whom he gives hope by getting her to join the rowing team (she is very successful) and paints a picture of the impact one person can have on his fellow men and women. His loss sadly opens the floodgates to others' corruption, power grabbing and ultimately to the terrible tragedy at the end of the book.

Some readers' comments:

Great wordsmith

Too many expletives

Lack of any decent characters that stood out

J.K.Rowling must be a meticulous observer of humanity as she is "spot on" with the characters she created and the town they lived in.

She seems very aware of people, their relationships, emotions, ambitions and stresses and weaves them into an epic tale

..passages of tragedy, love, hope, humour, anxiety and disappointment

I both enjoyed and was irritated by the book mostly because of its negativity and determination to show us the worst aspects in human character whether young or old, rich or poor.

I thought this book was appalling, I did not like the bad language or the sex fantasies. The only person who never had any badness was Barry and he was dead.

I thought the characters were cleverly constructed and it was an interesting story, though whether or not it warranted 500+ pages, was beyond me!

I know this story was meant to be an uncomfortable read without a fairy tale ending but this was not the book for me.

If this is a great book then I need someone to explain it to me.

Christine Wright