

The Last Call by Ann Cleeve presented.

by Jan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emilia Hart is a British- Australian novelist. She was born in Sydney and educated at Barker college. She studied law and English at the University of New South Wales and became a lawyer. In her mid 20's she moved to London. At 26, after suffering a stroke, she decided to write short stories and poetry.

Hart began writing her debut novel, *Weyward*, whilst living in Cumbria, where the novel was set. She drew comparisons between the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612 and the rise of violence against women during the COVID 19 lockdown, remarking that the two seemed horribly linked.

Weyward was published in the UK in February 2023 and the USA in March 2023, where it became a New York Times bestseller. Hart's second novel, *The Sirens* was published in February 2025. The novel, loosely based on various myths of sirens, mermaids and selkies.

ABOUT THE BOOK

2019

Under the cover of darkness, Kate flees London for the ramshackle *Weyward Cottage*, inherited from a great- aunt she barely remembers. With it's tumbling ivy and overgrown garden, the cottage is world's away from the abusive partner who tormented Kate. But she begins to suspect that her great-aunt had a secret. One that lurks in the bones of the cottage, hidden ever since the witch hunts of the 17th century.

1619

Altha is awaiting trial for the murder of a local farmer who was stampeded to death by his herd. As a girl, Altha's mother taught her their magic, a kind not rooted in spell casting but in a deep knowledge of the natural world. But similar women have always been deemed dangerous and as the evidence for witchcraft is set out against Altha, she knows it will take all of her powers to maintain her freedom.

1942

As World War II rages, Violet is trapped in her family's grand, crumbling estate. Straightjacketed by societal convention, she longs for the robust education her brother receives - and for her mother, long deceased, who was rumoured to have gone mad before her death. The only traces Violet has of her are a locket bearing the initial W and the word 'Weyward' scratched into the baseboard of her bedroom.

Weaving together the stories of the extraordinary women across five centuries, Emilia Hart's 'Weyward' is an enthralling novel of female resilience and the transformative power of the natural world

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the knowledge of other Weyward women help Altha, Violet and Kate heal when they need to?

Weyward beautifully interlaces the lives of Kate, Violet and Altha showing how their experiences and abilities connect from across the centuries. Each woman faces their own challenges, yet their stories echo each other in profound ways. The cottage a central symbol in their lives represents a sanctuary and a source of strength. The women's connection to nature and their unique abilities highlight the novel's themes of resilience and improvement. Kate's escape from her abusive relationship mirrors Violet's fight for survival. The novel emphasises the cyclical nature of their experiences. This connection empowers them to face their future with confidence and courage.

2. What role does nature play in healing these three Weyward women?

The Weyward women's deep connection to nature and their magical abilities are central themes, showcasing the healing and transformative power of the natural world. The group commented on the wonderful descriptions of nature - the heightened senses of the women, hearing the sounds of insects, their silent understanding of all plants and animals (which they use to protect others).

3. Were the Weyward women witches? What does it mean that these women can communicate with insects and crows?

We discussed that fact that these women were herbalists but being women were in danger of being classed as witches in comparison to men with the same skills such as Monks. Religion also protected this is why Altha's mother made sure they were seen to attend church regularly.

All three women had a deep, inner ability to connect with nature which didn't make them witches.

One book club member had researched witch trials informing us that during King James's reign, when he sharpened the English Witchcraft Act in 1603, 500 were hanged in England, 400 in Scotland, only 3 in Wales. The typical victim was a poor old woman with a bad reputation, who was accused by her neighbours of having injured or caused harm to other people's livestock by use of sorcery. Similar to Altha's story.

4. Consider the evolution of the name 'Weyward' and the way women in the novel receive it. Why and how do the Weyward women grow to accept and proudly own this name? Why do you think more recent versions of Macbeth have replaced 'Weyward' with weird?

The witches of Macbeth (three sisters) 1623 were not called witches in the text but Weyward later replaced by weird 'wyrd'. This word being grounded in the root of power. We identified that the 'witches' or 'sisters' master manipulators of men's lives, able to deceive and even perhaps control them, which is indeed the results of the Weyward sisters lives and they were proud. Once they discovered the stories of their female ancestors they grew in the knowledge of their own inner strengths.

5. Violet spends a lot of time and energy in search of information about her mother. Similarly, Kate seems to understand who Violet was. Once they both find answers, how does this new knowledge affect Violet and Kate moving forward? Does it change the way they view themselves at all?

Each of the Weyward women is shaped by the trauma experienced by their predecessors and part of their journey involves breaking the cycle. Altha's witch trial and her mother's ostracization for practising folk healing leave a legacy of fear and caution in her descendants. Violet's mother suffers under her father's control, ultimately dying because of his indirect actions and Violet's life is similarly marred. This trauma culminates in Kate's story, where the psychological and physical abuse mirrors the experiences of her ancestors. The three gain strength from the others suffering.

6. We learn that Kate 'reread' books she'd loved as a child. How did the themes from various works of Shakespeare, The Secret Garden and Grimms Fairy Tales make an impression on both Kate and Violet? Do you have a book that you've returned to over the years and what makes you keep going back?

It was expressed that many of us revisited books we read in childhood. It seemed reading these books again gave a level of calm and peace. Maybe a feeling of fulfilment like no other book can give. Rereading can give a sense of comfort in the stability and unchanging nature of a story or nostalgia as it brings back beloved memories. Some books our members reread:

Little Women

The House at Green Knowe

The Secret Garden

Anne of Green Gables

Agatha Christie

Billy Bunter

Robert Louis Stephenson poetry.

MEMBERS COMMENTS

Interesting, factual, left reader to wonder. Read quickly wanting to jump ahead to discover more

Enjoyed, well written. Knew there would be a positive ending. Was surprised at the twist realising that Altha really did cause the cattle to stampede.

Description of nature was wonderful.

Violet was the most interesting character, better written. Could relate closely with Kate, more our timeline.

Enjoyed every page.

Thought provoking

Cracking story.

Enjoyed as much the second time around.

Grounded in reality with an edge.

Not a book I would normally buy. Good but not that good

Fine, knew what was coming.

Read it quickly, page turner. Well written. Really enjoyable.

Totally absorbed, took me out of myself.

FINAL SCORES

Sandra. 8

Sue A.	10
Sue.	10
Jan.	10
Rosemary.	8 1/2
Pippa.	9
Helen.	7 1/2
Maureen.	9
Marina.	7
Diane.	9
Jackie	8

See you next time.