



Homeland

Clare Francis

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It is 1946, and the eve of the harshest winter for a hundred years. Servicemen are pouring home from the war to a land beset by food and job shortages. As anti-Polish refugee propaganda reaches its height, Wladyslaw Malinowski, a young veteran of Monte Cassino, attempts to start a new life on a withy farm in the middle of the wetlands. His taskmaster is Billy Greer, newly demobbed, and itching to escape to a job in London. Stella, the local schoolteacher, has been waiting for the return of Lyndon Hanley, a hero of the Burma Campaign. But Lyndon is troubled, elusive, and ultimately unresponsive. When he goes away again, she finds herself falling for the beguiling and irrepressible Wladyslaw. As the country is brought to its knees by blizzards and coal shortages, people start to go hungry and attitudes harden. Then a death occurs on the wetlands, and it seems Wladyslaw, the outsider, will be held responsible.

Homeland Details

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From Reader Review Homeland for online ebook

Phil Vivian says

Excellent - not least in its evocation of location, character and relationships - and genuinely moving. I wasn't sure what to expect but enjoyed and appreciated it enormously.

Diane Wallis says

It's 1946 in the wetlands of Somerset and many of the inhabitants aren't very welcoming to the Polish soldiers and refugees living in camps in the area. Against a backdrop of a bitter winter with rationing of food and services unfolds a story of how Poles try to piece together their broken lives with very little encouragement from ignorant, resentful and backward-looking locals. There are a few sympathetic characters amongst the British, but not many.

Couldn't finish this. Not because I didn't want to, but there were technical problems.

I was going to listen to this on a four-hour car journey to the coast and back again (it's a 14-hour unabridged audio so I would have had a further six hours left once I was home). Outward journey ok apart from the cat screaming (see below) and a fair amount of Sat/Nav finding-the-way stress and mild-mannered disputes with the driver. But when motoring back, the Playaway kept defaulting to Chapter 4, the one where the doctor comes home and is contemplating an evening of quiet reading and domestic peace, only to be reminded by his wife that they must go out in their galoshes, walking in order to save petrol, to a nearby farm to welcome home Lyndon Hanley, a hero of the Burma Campaign. I removed the casing over the machine's battery, and by pressing on the battery firmly with my thumb I was able get back to the right part of the story using the "Chapter Forward" button. One of my travelling companions was a 15-year-old Burmese cat that hates car journeys. She screamed the whole way there and back although she did enjoy being in the holiday house. With the occasional stop to pacify the cat, I'd attempt to fire up the Playaway again and back it would go to the beginning of Chapter 4.

Eventually I decided to discover what happened later in the story and heard the beginnings of all the chapters, but after a while the little screen in the middle that shows how long is left in that chapter would go blank and I'd be off the air again. The pressing of the battery seemed no longer to be effective and I felt for the boy in the Dutch story about how he kept the sea from flooding the land by pressing his finger into a hole in the dyke.

Homeland, beautifully narrated by Steven Pacey by the way, would always grind to a blank-screen halt but when powered up again, the machine invariably reverted to the beginning of jolly old Chapter 4.

Wladyslaw Malinowski's story involving the loss of his parents and siblings was heart-breaking. Here was young man of culture and optimism beset by heartless British bureaucracy but reluctant to go home because of his well-founded fear of the Russians. By contrast, the local yokels in Somerset were brutish and backward. Billy Greer, returned serviceman and eventually the employer of Wladyslaw in the harvesting of withies, also had a tough story but his suffering started in childhood and tainted his character making him repellant.

Other reviewers mention a murder but I didn't get that far.

I won't try to read or listen to this again and I'll give the librarian a full report of the faulty MP3. Next time, I'll try something different.

Sandra Danby says

No, not the American TV series about Carrie Mathison and Nicholas Brody, the thriller by British author Clare Francis. Francis is a proficient thriller writer, but it is some years since I last read one of her books: until I picked one at random off my shelf one day.

Homeland is set after World War Two in the quiet rural corner of England that is the Somerset Levels. A land of rising and ebbing water levels, and unworldly place of withies and willows. Into this walks Billy Greer on his return from the war, going back to the house of his uncle and aunt where he spent the difficult teenage years before the war. There, he finds the house and farm in disarray, his uncle dramatically aged, and his aunt upstairs confined to bed after a stroke. And he meets again the woman who made his spine tingle when they were both teenagers.

Will he stay to rebuild the farm, or will he go to the promised job in London. And what of Annie, the local girl he could not forget while he fought his way around Europe?

Underlying the telling of Billy's story is that of the Polish soldiers, in a holding camp while they await either return to Poland or settlement in the UK. It is a difficult decision: their beloved country is unrecognizable and run by the Soviet Union, but they do not feel 100% welcome in England. Wladyslaw, a literature student who left university to join the Polish army, is an intellectual and a dreamer. But he takes a job working for Billy Greer, helping to set the rundown farm to rights. And there he meets local schoolteacher Stella who agrees to give him English lessons.

This feels like a quiet tale - and it is not a thriller in the 'spy story' definition - but it is a story which kept me turning the pages. There are many uncertainties: the future of the Poles, the various love triangles, locals and immigrants living alongside each other without a common language with inevitable arguments and misunderstandings. The denouement is not what I expected.

Having loved this, I now want to re-read Clare Francis' other books.

Read more of my book reviews at <http://www.sandradanby.com/book-revie...>

Strona po stronie says

Zupe?nie nie przewidzia?am, ?e ta ksi??ka wywrze na mnie a? tak g??bokie wra?enie. Teraz jednak, z ca?? pewno?ci? mog? powiedzie?, ?e je?li szukacie czego? patriotycznego, silnie zwi?zanego z nasz? to?samo?ci? narodow?, a jednocze?nie przera?liwie autentycznego, to jest to lektura tak?e i dla Was.

Nie dajcie si? zmyli? zimowej ok?adce - w tej lekturze a? wrze od emocji! Czytaj?c t? powie??, ma si? wra?enie, ?e Autorka wr?cz bezpo?rednio gra, operuje na naszym sercu. Nie wiem, czy jest to efekt, którego chcieliby?cie do?wiadczy?, ale u mnie akurat sprawdzi? si? doskonale. Gor?co polecam.

pe?na recenzja po polsku

Sharon D. Mapes says

A little hard to get I into but very captivating as a whole, good history information

Tracy Terry says

Interweaving the stories of the villagers of a rural community with that of the Polish servicemen living in a large resettlement camp based nearby, Homeland offers an interesting insight into the struggles of this particular community in post-war Britain and in particular that of the Polish servicemen but for me I'm afraid

that's about as good as it gets.

Lacking any deeply meaningful story. The author seems to concentrate on the narrative and describing the somewhat bleak landscape and living/working conditions - goodness only knows I got to know more about the thankless task of gathering 'withies' than I ever thought I would - and whilst I acknowledge that this is a work of historical fiction and not an action thriller I was disappointed that the occasional drama fuelled moments seemed both ill thought-out and as if they had been added as an afterthought to pad out the narrative.

Character wise, I'm afraid to say that things were little better. Lacking in any depth, I thought the men mostly stereotypical, the women particularly poorly penned and in need of some padding out.

A novel with huge potential that sadly never came to fruition.

Caroline says

The story was ok, basic, predictable and readable, however the historical interest was new to me and hooked me. I didn't know that the Poles had joined us so many years ago and am especially surprised at how difficult it was for them when now 65 years later they have arrived on our shores again. I also find books like this so fascinating to see how women were treated and what little value they had in society. Important yes as wife and homemaker but clearly no authority and expected to go back into the home after their exciting war time employment. Parts of this book are difficult to read especially as you know they will be based on fact but as all things to do with the First and Second wars we must learn from them.

Sheila Craig says

I gather Clare Francis is known as a writer crime novels and thrillers. Homeland is neither (which is fine with me as neither are particularly my cup of tea). This is really a story of battered young soldiers returning from the nearly endless horror that was WWII to the impoverished peace of post-war rural Britain.

In this desolate aftermath, Billy Greer and Lyndon Hanley return to their roots in the wetlands of Somerset, but both feel utterly out of place and unable to settle. Wladyslaw fought in the Polish corps under the British. With Poland now under The control of Russia, he and his fellow soldiers feel they have lost their homeland. The British, out of obligation, are offering them a new home in Britain. But the British give the refugee Poles a chilly welcome.

Francis deftly describes the Somerset Levels and the business of farming withies, the main livelihood in this sodden landscape. Her two viewpoint characters, Billy and Wladyslaw are well-drawn and strong foils: Billy with his resentment for his unhappy childhood, quick jealousy and angry outbursts; Wladyslaw a refugee and alone in the world, quietly intelligent and determined to make his way in the world. The storyline follows both young men as they struggle to find a livelihood and love. Lyndon is an enigmatic presence, charismatic and daring, but restless, unable to feel at home anywhere. His occasional arrivals brings disruption to both Billy and Wladyslaw, and features in the novel's tension and final crisis.

This is a story of real people dealing with very human issues, feeling the full range of human emotions in a very challenging time. The world, events and feelings of the characters rang true to me. Well worth reading.

Alok Kumar says

The book is a bundle of tragic romances. A sad easy read...

Kathy says

Not what I expected, but a interesting insight into post WWII England and the Somerset district, and the people who lived there. Not really aware before of the ill-feelings against Polish refugees there at that time. I thought the characters were interested, but could have been better developed, and found the ending a let-down.

Nigel says

Not as bad as I was expecting, not as good as it could have been. I surprised myself by picking this of my shelf and even more so when I noticed the majority of the reviews were from women. The biggest disappointment was, I felt, how the chance to explore the xenophobic treatment of the Poles' was a tad perfunctory, and even the historical notes were cursory at best. The story itself was fine, though a little uneventful until the final chapter.

janetandjohn says

The Somerset Levels are only about 15 miles north of where I live, and I know the roads well. I can imagine how dreary it must have been in really bad weather, and how cut off Wladislaw must have felt from his home country of Poland. Despite some reviewers comments about a "thin" story and "cardboard characters" I liked the read myself.

Gill Schell says

3.8 points : an enjoyable and interesting read covering the hard times experienced by the Polish in England after WW2. Set in the wetlands of Somerset, an area I'm not familiar with. My main criticism is that I would have liked the author to have developed the characters more. I was left feeling I'd never really got to know them.

Mary-Ellen Lynn says

Francis takes us back to the appalling British treatment of Polish servicemen who had fought with the Allies during the Second World War. At the end of the war, many Polacks resided in Britain, in fear of returning to their homeland, that had been taken over by Stalin. In Britain, they found themselves barred from victory

parades in London and contained in resettlement camps; segregated from society, they were reduced to subjects of public hostility.

Francis paints the Somerset wetlands beautifully - she captures a way of life impeccably. At the same time, she tells a story of betrayal, prejudice, and disillusionment in an unpredictable manner - her prose is free from cliché; instead, it is a sensitive characterisation of a particular time and place.

It might not win a lot of awards, but the story of Homeland is one I will not forget. Nor should any of us.

Mike says

Gentle comment by way of an unadventurous story on the shameful (as we look back now with the advantage of hindsight) treatment of the Polish servicemen in the UK after the last war. Things then were not so clear-cut in a time of shortage, tension and the post-war uncertainty as to Russia's intentions.

The tale is set in the relatively unfamiliar literary background of the Somerset wetlands.

This is an atmospheric book but some of the characters are thinly drawn. Lyndon Hanley loses importance because of it, and the story line is erratic. We are not sure whether this is Billy's or Wladyslaw's story because the focus shifts leaving neither tale fully developed. The structure is weak.

Nevertheless Clare Francis writes engagingly, particularly when setting the scenes
