

The Heartbreaker Susan Howatch Time Warner 2003

‘You just want to – quote – “save” me to make yourself look good, but what makes you think I want to be “saved”.’

Nick Darrow, the Vicar of St Benets, responds to the accusation from Gavin:

‘I’m not sure how you’re using that word “saved”, but I’ll say this: I don’t like seeing people’s talents blighted. I don’t like seeing people fail to realize their potential. And yes, I do want these people to be saved – saved from frustration and despair – but I wouldn’t use the word “save” here. I’d say I want them to be liberated to become the people God designed them to be. I’d say I want them to be empowered to achieve fulfillment and a lasting happiness.’

Once again one of Susan Howatch’s characters has put into words, the very thoughts and ideas that I have struggled with in my Christian journey of faith.

It was my minister who first suggested that I read one of Susan Howatch’s novels. As a member of a liberal church where the Holy Spirit only seemed to be mentioned on Whit Sunday, I had started having spiritual experiences and he recommended that I read ‘Glamorous Powers’, the second of a series of six novels set in Starbridge a fictional Cathedral town based upon the author’s home town of Salisbury. I found it was a book that was difficult to put down and couldn’t wait to read another and so followed it by reading her first Starbridge novel, Glittering Images. Since then I have had to wait a couple of years for each new novel to be published.

The Heartbreaker is the third in a trilogy located around St Benets a church with a healing centre in the City of London. The author explains that although each book is designed to be read independently of the others, the more books read, the wider will be the perspective on the multi-sided reality which is being presented. Jon Darrow, Nick’s father, is the main character in Glamorous Powers and appears in other Starbridge novels. Nick Darrow has inherited some of his father’s abilities and is in the later Starbridge novels and in all three St Benet novels.

The story of the Heartbreaker is told by two of the characters, Carta and Gavin, very different people whose lives are brought together through the death of a mutual friend. Set in 1992, against the background of the struggle of the Church of England to recognize Women’s Ordination, Susan Howatch weaves an intriguing narrative around city life and healing, prostitution and fund-raising. Carta, who thinks the only thing she shares with Gavin is a temporary sexual attraction is proved wrong, as Gavin’s world spirals out of control and they change each other’s lives forever.

Susan Howatch’s novels contain a core of spiritual wisdom, which as one of her characters explains is the ability not just to see the world as it really is but to make sense of it so that one can live in the best possible way.

If you have never read her novels, do try one. And if you do like her work, you will not be disappointed with The Heartbreaker.

Sue Barker

