

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Book Club

by Gill Hilton

‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...’ Caroline looked up from her book, checking that she had everyone’s attention.

Most people had already arrived. Claire was eating a takeaway, her iPad looking straight into her mouth, resting on some part of her anatomy so that it moved up and down in time with her chewing. Jane had entered the meeting apparently sitting in front of a Hawaiian sunset. She had already apologised, saying Barney had been using the laptop and that she didn’t know how to turn off the background. Fleur may have been paying attention but her face was so fragmented into tiny jiggling squares that it was impossible to tell. And Chrissy was sipping Sauvignon Blanc.

“I just wanted to share with you,” continued Caroline, “something that we’ve been focusing on in my creative writing workshop.”

All eyes fixed on the screen, careful not to roll upwards. All heads nodded with varying degrees of politeness, although Fleur could have been morphing into a giant locust as far as anyone could tell.

“This week,” Caroline ploughed on, “Patrick talked about anaphora. This is *such* a coincidence, because this is exactly what Dickens uses here.”

“Oh look,” Chrissy said, “Debs is in the waiting room.”

Caroline opened the waiting room door and in popped Debs, mouthing enthusiastically.

“You’re on mute!” said three people all at once, using post-Covid vernacular as if it were their mother-tongue.

Caroline did not wait for Debs to unmute.

“Anaphora is the repeated use of the same word or phrase at the beginning of adjoining phrases or sentences,” she pressed on.

Debs, now unmuted, said,

“Sorry everyone, lovely to see you all. Sorry, where have you got to?”

Caroline hastily resumed.

“We’ve just been talking about the opening of the book. Dickens uses a device called anaphora. It’s used by writers for emphasis, to build up intensity,” here she glanced down at her notes, “or to create a driving rhythm.”

Jane would have liked to say that the book had transported her into another world. Instead, she inwardly sighed, leant back in her chair and disappeared into a tropical sea. Fleur started to point out Jane’s submergence but her voice disintegrated into tinny, staccato blips and then her face stilled into that of a gargoyle.

“You’ve frozen, Fleur,” Claire raised her voice, as if it might carry better to Fleur, but the main effect was for her camera to become speckled with droplets of sweet and sour sauce.

It was at this point that Chrissy turned off her camera. It was only polite that she should send a chat message. It was a poor connection, she wrote, but she could still hear them. It was not true; she had turned down the volume. It was with the glee of a schoolgirl that she refilled her glass and picked up the book. It was starting to become a more tolerable time.