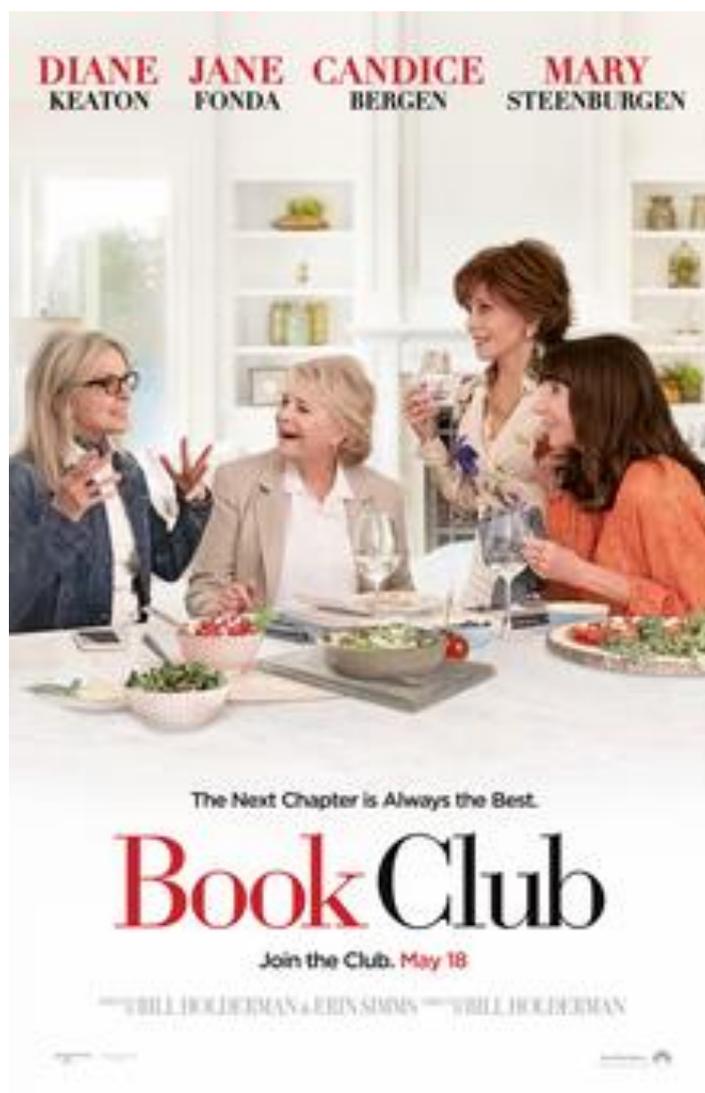


Book Club



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by **Bill Holderman**. Produced by **Alex Saks, Andrew Duncan, Bill Holderman & Erin Simms**. Screenplay by **Bill Holderman & Erin Simms**. Production Design by **Rachel O'Toole**. Cinematography by **Andrew Dunn**. Original Music by **Peter Nashel**. Edited by **Priscilla Nedd-Friendly**. Costumes by **Shay Sutcliffe**.

Cinematic length: 104 minutes. Distributed by Paramount Pictures in the USA and by several others elsewhere.. Production Companies Apartment Story & June Pictures. Cinematic release 17th May in Lebanon. One day later in Great Britain and the USA. Check for ratings. Rating 80%.

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Cast

*Diane Keaton as Diane *Jane Fonda as Vivian*

*Candice Bergen as Sharon * Mary Steenburgen as Carol*

AND

*Craig T. Nelson as Bruce * Ed Begley Jr. as Tom*

Andy García as Mitchell Don Johnson as Arthur * Richard Dreyfuss as George*

*Wallace Shawn as Doctor Derek * Lili Bordán as Irene the dance instructor **

Tommy Dewey as Chris Alicia Silverstone as Jill * Katie Aselton as*

Adrienne Mircea Monroe as Cheryl*



Jane Fonda a recent photo. This woman has passed her eightieth birthday

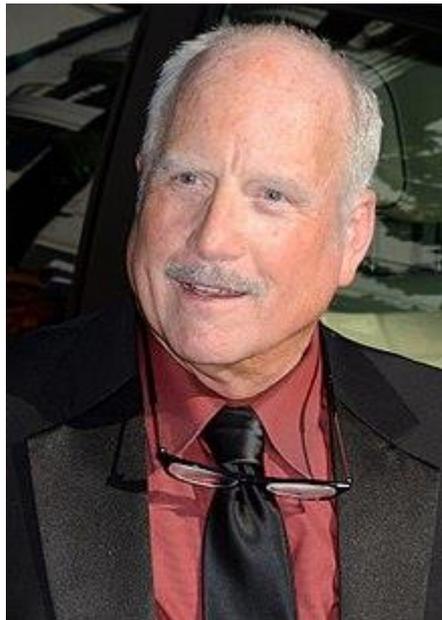
The review

Hollywood style romantic comedy did not die when Doris Day, Cary Grant, Audrey Hepburn and Rock Hudson all retired from the genre in the late 1960s. *Book Club* shows that the genre is very much alive – and in good health. One thing does puzzle though.

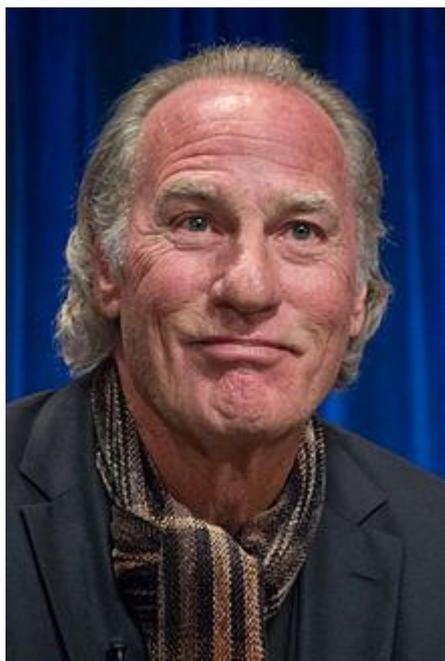
Why should a light, sweet comedy get such extreme reviews, for and against? Not since 1973s *Last Tango in Paris* has a major Hollywood film given rise to such mixed reviews. Usually the extremes of ardent admiration and ferocious contempt go with politically motivated films or pornographic efforts, but this film is not political, has no nudity, violence sordidness or explicitly obscene talk. So why the extremes?

The plot must hold an answer. In a virtual prologue with old seventies stills and more recent photographs the situation is set. Four women graduate in 1974 and form a book club, inspired by Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying*. Decades pass, (four of them) and the narrator Diane (Diane Keaton) has recently been widowed after a long and happy marriage. She has three adult children and will soon be a grandmother. Sharon (Candice Bergen) a judge, ended her sex life with her divorce, eighteen years before. Her former husband Tom (Ed Begley Jr.) and son are both engaged to blondes who look like teenage twins. Carol's sex life ended six months before the story starts. Carol (Mary Steenburgen) was happily married until her husband's retirement (also six months before) since then his thoughts rarely go beyond restoring his bike. Vivian (Jane Fonda) now a very wealthy and stylish hotelier, separates love and sex and says so. She has no time for love, so she says.

Vivian sets the cat amongst the pigeons when she makes *Fifty Shades of Grey* for the group's monthly read and discuss book. For all four this inspires and opens up a world of possibilities with love, sex, romance and relationships. The story then splits four ways as the four friends opt for different possibilities. Deft editing and their meetings to discuss developments, seek advice and give reassurance means the four entwined narratives do not confuse. There follows amusing moments, serious points, exuberant experiences and calming conversations.



The love interests



The film making here becomes so cleverly seamless that many in the audiences do not pick up on that. Too many Hollywood comedies rely on welling orchestral music, declarations of eternal love, stagey self-indulgent acting and misty eyes. Here we get boppy just right tunes as part of the scene, Sharon replies to a soppy speech about love with realities, Everything moves with restrained if fast paced acting and

usually with cheer. Everything clicks together despite four separate narratives fitting into the overarching fifth. That is not an achievement to belittle or take for granted as many of the negative writers have done.

The greatest strength and most likeable in *Book Club* is the combination of realistic optimism, strength and exuberance the film puts into depicted life. When Carol happily dances solo at the charity benefit her zest and the music are communicating something that permeates the film. It happens again when Diane tells her daughters that she does not need their solicitous care, her life is not over because she is old and one of them tells her to have fun, which is just what she will do. The film clearly shows that nothing is wrong with fun, love or sexuality – even amongst those ageing if they go about it the right way, right!

Critics will say it easy to have fun if you are a rich Californian and if like Jane Fonda, at the age of eighty you look like forty is approaching. Okay. Even if nobody in this film suffers from poverty, violence or illness, between them they have many other problems and they have to learn to cope – and they do.

So why do some people hate funny, optimistic films?