

The Meaning of Night – A Confession by Michael Cox.
John Murray 2006.

The pre-publication publicity for the Meaning of Night was brilliant, and I awaited the arrival of my review copy with keen anticipation, looking forward to a real treat. For a range of reasons I wanted to enjoy the book and be carried away by its long and complex narrative.

It is with enormous sadness, then, that I have to report my great disappointment in a book that I was sure I would love.

The story starts with a cold-blooded killing, and although I am sure it was not the author's intention to turn the reader against his principal character from the first page, that was the effect it had on me. I felt myself disliking Edward Glyver more and more as the story unfolded and caring less and less about what happened to him and why; I also felt increasingly irritated by the rather too obvious way in which the author manipulated me, using a range of literary tricks to make me keep turning the pages which, although they succeeded to start with, would have made me abandon the book long before had I not been reading it for a purpose.

In addition, although there were comparisons, at least with regard to the atmosphere of the book, to Dickens I do not feel that his reputation is in any danger of being rivalled; for even if Dickens wrote with contrivance, he did so with a subtlety and lightness of touch that Michael Cox does not possess.

The Meaning of Night is a big book, and for its author it must be a great achievement; but I am afraid that it left me both un-satisfied and un-moved.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh