



The Weight of Heaven

Thrity Umrigar

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Filled with satisfyingly real characters and glowing with local color, *The Weight of Heaven* is a rare glimpse of a family and a country struggling under pressures beyond their control. Umrigar illuminates how slowly we recover from unforgettable loss, how easily good intentions can turn evil, and how far a person will go to build a new world for those he loves.

When Frank and Ellie Benton lose their only child, seven-year-old Benny, to a sudden illness, the perfect life they had built is shattered. Filled with wrenching memories, their Ann Arbor home becomes unbearable, and their marriage founders. But an unexpected job half a world away offers them an opportunity to start again. Life in Girbaug, India, holds promise—and peril—when Frank befriends Ramesh, a bright, curious boy who quickly becomes the focus of the grieving man's attentions. Haunted by memories of his dead son, Frank is consumed with making his family right—a quest that will lead him down an ever-darkening path with stark repercussions.

Filled with satisfyingly real characters and glowing with local color, *The Weight of Heaven* is a rare glimpse of a family and a country struggling under pressures beyond their control. In a devastating look at cultural clashes and divides, Umrigar illuminates how slowly we recover from unforgettable loss, how easily good intentions can turn evil, and how far a person will go to build a new world for those he loves.

The Weight of Heaven Details

Date : Published April 14th 2009 by Harper (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9780061472541

Author : Thrity Umrigar

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From Reader Review The Weight of Heaven for online ebook

Staci says

I remember being blown away when I read Thrity's book *The Space Between Us* in 2010. I thought she made India come alive in my mind and as I became further engrossed in the story I could swear that I heard the sounds and the smells of the country too. That's how vivid and wonderful this author's writing is...with her sharply honed pen she draws the reader into the pages of her imagination and you find yourself not wanting to leave.

The Weight of Heaven is another masterpiece by Umrigar and even though I was left with many conflicting emotions at the end of the book, I can honestly say that I loved it. I believed I experienced the entire gambit of emotions; extreme sadness, thrill of first love, anger, grief, hostility, bewilderment, indignation, happiness, joy, and too many more to list. I loved how the author told the story in segments because that gave the reader a chance to go back in time when life was really starting to get good for Frank and Ellie. The reader gets a glimpse into how very happy they truly were and then to see how they both plummeted into the tunnel of despair and grief after losing their only child. I started out feeling extreme sympathy and empathizing with both Frank and Ellie, but by the final page all of those connections and feelings were out the door. I was shocked to say the least and when I finally was able to close the book I just sat there in a stunned silence and really let everything soak in. Honestly, I'm still thinking about it a day later. Umrigar's story will haunt me for a while.

Recommend? Absolutely and with no hesitation.

Disclaimer: Thank you to TLC Book Tours for sending me a review copy. I was not compensated for my review. My thoughts on this book were in no way influenced by the author or publicist. They are my personal reflections based solely on MY experience while reading this novel.

Review Book #27

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Marina says

** Books 26 - 2018 **

This books to accomplish **Tsundoku Books Challenge 2018**

3,8 of 5 stars!

It is beautiful story about forgiving and let it go moment when your kids is passed away but you couldn't

accept truth is

Acceptance is one of the hardest things to do and in the end you just know you already missing what is important things in your life actually

It is another unexpected story from Thrity Umrigar.. It is really different from her previous works that i read before The World We Found. This pieces is too much sadness behind, grievence and loneliness with India as Settings :')

Abrar says

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Judy says

This novel, about a couple who loses a child and goes to India to try to reassemble their marriage, is well loved here on GR. I could barely stand to read it. Cliches ("for all the world" was used numerous times)and overwritten passages about how people were feeling cancelled out the interesting things she had to say about American multinational business and ripping off the natural resource of an Indian village. I could tell things were going to go very wrong by the end but was not expecting how melodramatic and over the top it would be. I've never seen a Bollywood movie but I feel I may have read a Bollywood novel.

Wendy says

I was first introduced to Thrity Umrigar through her novel, The Space Between Us. It was one of those novels that made the author an instant favorite of mine. I knew I had to read every book she wrote. I haven't quite managed that, but it's still something I'm working on. I followed The Space Between Us up with Bombay Time and now The Weight of Heaven.

What I love most about Thrity Umrigar is her gift for drawing out the emotions of her characters. The reader gets to know them through and through, feel what they are going through, know what they are thinking, and feel like we know them just as well as we do ourselves. At least that's how it is for me.

The Weight of Heaven is more than what it might first appear. An American man and woman grieving for their lost son move to India in hopes of reconnecting with each other and starting a new life. Their 7-year-old son had been their world. His death has torn them apart. Frank Benton blames his wife, Ellie, for their son's death, despite her doing everything she could to save him. His anger has put a wall between them that, at times, seems insurmountable.

Ellie is determined to save her marriage, while Frank, haunted by the memories of his son, turns his

affections toward an Indian boy, Ramesh, the son of the household cook and maid. In his own way, Frank wants to piece his family back together. However, the path he chooses to do that will have drastic consequences.

Ellie comes to love India, both the culture and the people. She is a psychologist and volunteers her time helping the people of Girbaug, the community in which they reside. She is well liked not only by the other characters in the book, but by me as well. She was not perfect by any means, but she has good sense and a thoughtful manner about her.

Frank's experience in India is much different. He runs the Indian division of an American company and faces constant conflict with his low paid workers and the locals whose land the company bought from the government. He has a more cynical view of the country. The death of an employee rattles him, especially the circumstances surrounding that death. And on top of that is his own overwhelming grief for his son.

I will be honest. I never grew to like Frank. I wanted to, at least on some level. I tried to understand him, knowing that people deal with their grief differently. His pain was palatable as was Ellie's. I wanted so much to reach into the book and comfort them both. I wanted to save Frank from himself. Because, even if I didn't care much for Frank or the decisions he made, I still felt for him, could see how the life he is trying to put together for himself is unraveling. He truly is a lost soul, who, in his desperation, made the wrong choices.

I was most drawn to the story of Prakash and Edna, Ramesh's parents. Prakash, in particular. He is a complicated character with many layers. He was not the most likeable, I suppose, but, like Frank, there is a desperation about him, a longing. His only son is being showered with affection by an American man, offered things Prakash could not offer Ramesh. His once happy marriage is not so good anymore. His life was not what he wanted it to be. Edna only wants what is best for her son. She is torn between her loyalty to her family and letting her son experience the finer things in life. Where her husband drinks himself into a stupor and hardly spends time with their son, here is a wealthy American family who encourages his education and welcomes Ramesh into their home.

Just as the personal aspects of the novel are emotionally charged, so are the social issues brought to the forefront: the impact of globalization on a small community and the cultural clashes between the Indians and the foreigners. The author offers a look into varying perspectives, providing a well rounded picture of the world and the characters she has created in the novel. And, although I am not going into depth about this aspect of the book, it was perhaps the piece I found most intriguing of all.

I barely have touched on the surface of the novel. It is multi-faceted to be sure. It is rich in culture and character. The Weight of Heaven was in some ways just as I expected, but it also held much surprise. It was not quite the novel I expected it to be. Thrity Umrigar proved yet again why she is one of my favorite authors.

Book Source: Bought for myself.

Sayantani Dasgupta says

Beautiful. Brutal. Powerful. I'm a fan of Umrigar for life. My goal is to hunt down everything she has ever written and devour it like a madman. Twice.

Ti says

The Short of It:

An emotional story about love and loss and so much more. The Weight of Heaven demands your attention, shakes you up, then leaves you heavy with the weight of it.

The Rest of It:

This is a wonderful, meaty book. As you can imagine, the death of a child is a delicate subject. There's something incredibly tragic about losing a child. Even when the child is gone, his memory lives on in everyday things... a stray toy found under the couch, the shoe that lost its mate some time ago, etc. As Ellie and Frank cope with their devastating loss, it's obvious to Ellie that Frank is having a particularly hard time of it. When an opportunity comes up for Frank to transfer to Girbaug, India, he doesn't think much of it. The thought of leaving seems almost more painful but Ellie encourages him to accept the offer. Perhaps change is what they need.

Frank's company puts them up in corporate housing which includes the use of a servant couple, named Edna and Prakash. Edna and Prakash live in a smaller house on the same property, with their son Ramesh, a very precocious nine-year-old. During their time in India, Frank befriends Ramesh and tutors him in math. Frank cherishes his moments with Ramesh, but Ellie worries that Frank is trying to replace the son he lost.

Unfortunately, Ramesh's father, Prakash also thinks the same thing. Prakash resents Frank's attention towards his son. The extravagant gifts, the promises of a better education, basically, his help in general. Prakash, although a hard worker, resents having to work for a white man. This is obvious. However, Edna, Prakash's wife thinks the exact opposite. She gushes over Frank's generous offers. She sees Prakash as a failure and treats him as such. Cursing him and openly wishing that she'd married someone else. As much as these two fight, there is love but frustration gets the best of them.

In addition to Frank's relationship with Ramesh, there is also Ellie's desperate attempt to hold onto Frank. As the days pass, she feels that she is losing him. The only time that he seems happy is in the presence of Ramesh and this saddens Ellie. Instead of turning to her, he turns to Ramesh to ease his pain. However, Ellie loves Frank with all her heart and wants to see him happy, so she gives into his requests to be with Ramesh and often joins them in an attempt to see what Frank sees in this child. They decide to take Ramesh to Bombay, or Mumbai as it is now called for a weekend trip:

"Bombay. Such a deceptive word, so soft-sounding, like sponge cake in the mouth. Even the new name for the city, Mumbai, carries that round softness, so that a visitor is unprepared for the reality of this giant, bewildering city, which is an assault, a punch in the face."

During this visit, even Ramesh is affected by the level of poverty. As they arrive at their 4-star hotel, Ramesh is overwhelmed by its opulence. Stunned. Speechless. Ellie regrets for a moment that they didn't consider his reaction to such an extravagant hotel. However, this is how it is throughout the story, Frank wants to give Ramesh what he cannot afford on his own, but in doing so, inadvertently asserts his money and power over the poorer people around him.

Even at work, Frank is constantly at battle with the laborers. Trying to do what's right, but not fully understanding the impact of his company's actions. The constant class struggle, his overwhelming love of Ramesh, and the fragile love that he has for Ellie and hers for him. This story triggers a whirlwind of feelings, smells and sounds. At first I was devastated by their loss. Umrigar's writing is so rich and beautiful

that I shed a tear once or twice while reading about Benny and how he died and the pain that Ellie and Frank felt afterward.

Other times I was very angry. I was angry that Frank could not see what he was doing to Prakash. Turning a man's son away from his father is a wretched thing to do, regardless of how abrasive Prakash was at times. I was also angry at how oblivious he was to the working conditions of his laborers. This also filtered down to Ellie a bit, although my reaction to her was not nearly as severe. Ellie loves India and its people, but she too, chooses to bully them at times when she sees the need to do so. One moment that comes to mind is when she is trying to convince Prakash to allow Ramesh to take a trip with them. She threatens him, and he is forced to agree although it tears him apart to do so.

As you can see, this novel evokes all sorts of emotion. I cried, I laughed I got angry. Through it all, I didn't want it to end. I lingered on each page to bask in its beauty. Although these characters are far from perfect, they are easy to relate to. Every time I picked the book up I was completely absorbed by the story.

The Weight of Heaven is the perfect book club book. There's just so much to discuss. This is my first experience with Umrigar's work. Now I must go read her other books as this one was just wonderful. If you like a book to sweep you up and take you to another place, a book that really forces you to think about the world around you, then you will love this book.

Source: A big 'thank you' to TLC Book Tours for asking me to be a part of this tour and for providing me with a review copy of the book.

Carol says

As a special treat for myself, I pulled this book off my shelf, I love Thrity Umrigar's books and The Weight of Heaven turned out to be an emotional experience. I did shed some tears and also got very angry.

Frank and Ellie Benton, living in Ann Arbor, Michigan lost their only child, Benny, to meningococcal infection. Frank is a business man for a company that sells medical products and Ellie is a therapist. When their boy dies, it brings havoc to their marriage. Frank blames Ellie for taking a short break from her sixteen hour stint of caring for their very sick son. His temperature was better before she collapsed from exhaustion and he was half way around the world on business. Ellie wants an escape from the constant grief and a new start that might help them to repair their marriage. She pushes hard for the move when Frank gets an offer from his company to manage a factory in Girbang, India. He didn't like the idea at first but later on, he relents.

They meet Ramesh who was a bit older than Benny and lives in a small shack that came with the property that they were staying. Ramesh's father, Prakash does the cooking and his mother, Edna does the cleaning for the Benton's. Ramesh is a delightful, intelligent but limited in education and social experience. Frank quickly becomes attached to him. Ellie finds comfort with her new friends.

This book took a big turn about half way through. I was shocked and surprised at what happened. India's class system is very present and Ellie is shocked at how poor the really poor are in India. There is spirituality, a rich appreciation of the cultural divide between the Western and India and a great deal of emotional torment in this story. The author, Thirty Umrigar is a master at creating emotionally powerful scenes and characters that are real and unforgettable.

I highly recommend this book to all who want understand the grieving process and want to learn more about

India.

Will Byrnes says

Frank and Ellie Benton have suffered what no parents should, the loss of their 7-year-old son, Benny. When Frank is offered a chance to manage a factory in Girbaud, India, the couple leap at the opportunity to get away from the constant reminders of their loss. But Frank transfers his love for his son onto Ramesh, the engaging, bright child of the people who take care of their house. His inability to truly get past the death of his own child and his desperate attachment to this Indian boy lead to a series of increasingly bad decisions.

Umrigar shows us the intersection where East and West meet, on a painfully personal level. There is no idealization of India here. Cultural warts are on full display. As are the more attractive elements of the Indian culture that make Ellie Benton feel that she is becoming truly local. Larger issues are brought to the fore as well, conflicts between tradition and modernity, between globalization and local values, between haves and have-nots at several levels. And while the insensitivity of the corporate West is portrayed neither is the West pilloried as having nothing to offer the Indian people.

It is a fast and intensely engaging read. I was moved to tears by this story. I had to stop myself from publicly dripping on the subways where I do most of my book reading, saving that for more private places. That this tale is so emotionally charged does not make it a melodramatic weepy. Do read it armed with some tissues, but the joy here is how well Umrigar portrays the details of grief, of a marriage under enormous stress. It is also more than merely a personal tale. The title refers to morality, and the choices characters make here are to be seen through the lens of right and wrong. Her ability to effectively portray personal trauma while painting a larger picture of disparate worlds intersecting, and do so in an accessible, personal way makes this is a wonderful novel.

Review posted – April 2009

Review re-posted – May 22, 2015

Publication date – April 14, 2009

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal, Twitter and FB pages

An audio interview in which Umrigar discusses, among other things, her sources of inspiration for writing this novel.

An interesting interview with Umrigar in AsiaSource.org

Umrigar is interviewed on The Writers Voice .The Weight of Heaven piece is part of the podcast at the bottom of the page, the interview running from 28:20 to 49:00. There is nice material in here on the loss of one's moral compass

Patty says

A white American couple, having lost their only son to a sudden illness, moves to India in the vague hope that a new start might help them overcome their grief. It does not go well. Or, it goes pretty well for the wife, who makes friends, gets a useful job, and finds herself a place. The husband quickly gets involved in corruption (paying bribes to the government for various benefits), scandal (when labor demands at the factory he manages lead to a strike), more extreme corruption and scandal (when a leader of the strike is killed in police custody, which the husband may or may not be responsible for), a weird obsession with a local little boy whom he wants to replace his dead son, and eventually murder.

I suppose he's meant to be a symbol of America (there's a *lot* of references to the contemporary Iraq war), which is fine, but I don't want to spend hundreds of pages focused on a dude who is so appallingly self-absorbed. He's not even *bad* particularly (at least not until the very end), just the very definition of privilege. It never occurs to him to see the differences between his own perspective and that of the others around him, or the consequences of his actions; all he does is whine about how hard things are for him. I'm not sure if Umrigar meant for him to be a Humbert Humbert sort of narrator, or if he was actually supposed to be sympathetic, but either way I hated him. The book was perfectly well-written and engaging, but it's hard to enjoy it when you can't stand the main character.

Ruqaiya Said says

I absolutely underestimated this book when I first purchased it on Amazon as part of some promotion they were running. It was always at the bottom of my to-read pile but it relentlessly stared at me every time I'd turn on my kindle.

So I finally picked it up last month because I was so darn bored at I needed to read something. Much to my surprise, I devoured major chunks of it every time I'd get a moment to myself. I found myself really connecting with the characters who by the way are so rich.

The main characters, Frank and Ellie Benton have recently lost their only son and are desperate to get away from the everyday grunt of their lives in Anne Arbour, where everyone and everything reminds them of him.

Most of the novel takes place in Girbaug, a tiny village outside Bombay where Frank Benton is posted by Herbal Solutions, a pharmaceutical company that has won the bid to procure the the Girbal trees with it's diabetes healing properties, that originally belonged to the villagers. They are met with vehement opposition from the villagers who believe that these trees belong to them and their ancestors, and a series of events taken place in which the company suffers a blow. Frank is still hurting from the death of his son and takes great interest in the servant's boy Ramesh much to his wife's disagreement. His wife on the other hand, a practicing therapist, spends her days running a clinic counselling the village women. Franks love for the boy intensifies through the course of the story and he decides to take the boy back to America, where he believes he will be able to give him a better life away from the dysfunctional life he has always known. His zeal grows to the extent that nothing can come in between him and his need to have the boy all to himself, and he decides to take matters into his own hand and that just throws everything out the window.

The above is just a very brief explanation of what takes place in the book, and I will leave it to that for fear of revealing too much.

Diane says

I discovered Thrity Umrigar in 2008, and she has since become a favorite author of mine. I felt honored to have received an advance copy of her new book: *The Weight of Heaven*, which is scheduled for release on April 14th, 2009, by Harper Collins.

In her new novel we meet Frank and Ellie Benton, a grief stricken couple from Ann Arbor, Michigan, who have just lost their seven year old son Benny, after a short illness. Unable to cope with this horrific loss, Frank accepts a new assignment running a factory, Herbal Solutions, in Girbaug, India, a coastal village near Bombay.

Unfortunately, the factory and its Third World workers are in the midst of a labor dispute over low wages. Frank calls the workers "lazy", and his wife sees the workers as justified. Ellie sides with the workers, suggesting that Frank give them a few "rupees" to make them feel like they "won". Even in India, Frank and Ellie are conflicted. Frank has difficulties understanding why his workers don't act like his workers did in America. This additional conflict only adds to the pain he is still experiencing in India over the loss of his son. Ellie on the other hand sees her new surroundings as an opportunity to help the less fortunate women in the village (she is a psychologist/therapist), and believes there is so much to teach these poor women that she sees at a local health clinic. She is determined to not let grief define her life, because she believes her son would not have wanted that.

Frank before long begins to find some comfort tutoring Ramesh, the young son of the couple's housekeeper. The boy is very bright and eager to learn. Before long, his interest in helping the boy becomes an obsession and new conflicts arise between Frank and Prakash, the boy's resentful, bitter, father. Frank will do anything to keep that bright and personable boy close by, no matter what it takes.

The Weight of Heaven is a hauntingly beautiful story about cultural divides and misunderstandings. It is a story about loss and working through grief, and one of those rare books that forces you as the reader to take stock of your life, and to think about the things that really matter most. The ending is shocking, but in some strange way--- wonderful. I am happy to say that this is one of those rare books, that left an imprint with me long after the final page was turned. There are so many beautiful passages that I found myself reading over and over again; a true gem. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Shawna says

This book was better than "If Today Be Sweet" but still not as good as "The Space Between Us." What made Umrigar's first book so good was that there was so much at stake, literally life and death, survival by inches. This book a mixture of the two previous titles, you have an American couple living in India. They are escaping the death of their son and find solace in the country and the husband, Frank begins to fixate on their housekeepers' son. I had a hard time suspending my disbelief in places--where Frank seems so clueless as to what would be motivating the boy's father (Hello! Clearly he's is jealous that the rich white man who is lavishing his son with gifts is going to usurp his place in his son's heart. Knowing the father was an orphan, might you imagine that loss of family might be sore spot for him?!) I won't give away the final reversal of this book, but it is pretty stunning. Frank's reaction to it though, sort of falls flat. I think he is revealed to be the ogre, thoughtless, American imperialist pig, that all the locals suspected him of being all along. All in all, not a bad read, but if you really want to get Umrigar at her best read "The Space Between Us."

Sherri says

How does one deal with the loss of a child? I hope never to answer that question, but the main characters in this book, Frank and Ellie, are forced to address their grief when their only son, Benny, dies unexpectedly. Frank has an opportunity to move to India, and he and Ellie see this as a chance to try to heal their wounds and keep their marriage from falling apart. Their decision seems logical - a move to a completely new country where people and places will not remind them of their lost son.

As they adjust to their new life in India, Frank befriends a young boy, Ramesh, the son of their housekeepers. Whether due to his grief or his true selfish personality, Frank is incapable of recognizing the conflicted feelings that his friendship causes for his wife and the parents of the young boy. These conflicting emotions, compounded with the differences in culture between the United States and India would make this a wonderful book club selection because of the number of discussion topics.

While this is not a "happy" book, due to the primary subject matter, it was still a very good book, with well developed characters and an unexpected ending.

Aishah Ail says

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Alice Meloy says

A novel of India that mixes in a bit of America in the form of a neurotic couple who can't get over their psychological problems. Having a difficult time coping with the unexpected death of their young son, Ellie and Frank Benton move from the American midwest to the west coast of India to work and to try to get over their grief. Frank forms an attachment to the nine-year old son of their servants, and his obsession with helping the boy achieve a good life (American style) leads to some life-changing decisions. Umrigar is a good story teller, and she does a good job describing issues of cultures in conflict, but I found a few too many clichés and stereotypes to believe her story wholeheartedly, especially the rather dramatic ending.

Karen says

This book is heart wenching on many levels- first there are Frank and Ellie, who are recovering from the loss of a child; then there is the case of the American company Frank works for in India, wreaking havoc on the lives of native Indians in its typically naive American way; and lastly the Indian house servants Frank and Ellie have inherited, along with their young son...you see where this is going? Umrigar takes the reader on this bumpy journey of love and loss, where the end in sight is inevitable. Good reading!

Mandi says

This book seriously blew me away. I finished last night at 3am and could not sleep afterward. I love Umrigar's writing style, which is so fluid and kind of poetic. Her insights into the insanity of parental grief were sharp and honest. I think Umrigar understands and translates the complexity, mystery, beauty and ugliness in dyads better than any other author I've read. This book was incredibly painful to read. And that's only considering the implications at the level of the individual characters. Add in the macro-level stuff about interactions between cultures and nations, and you've got an incredibly piercing commentary on people in contexts large and small.

Serena says

Thrity Umrigar's *The Weight of Heaven* is a heavy with grief, emptiness, and struggle. The Bentons (Ellie and Frank) lose their son, Benny, at age seven from meningococcus. Ellie has liberal leanings politically and is a therapist to clients in Ann Arbor, Mich., while Frank is a proud, American business executive with residual issues of abandonment. The loss of a child can be daunting for any family, and it is clear how grief of this magnitude can slowly rip a family apart.

"And now they were two. Benny was gone. What was left behind was mockery -- objects and memories that mocked their earlier, smug happiness. Benny was gone, an airplane lost behind the clouds, but he left behind a trail of smoke a mile long:" (Page 2)

As this American couple struggles with the loss of their son, Ellie and Frank embark on a new life in India when Frank is transferred to a new HerbalSolutions factory. The distance between them had gaped wide by this point, and both hope that the experience will help them repair their relationship and bring them closer to one another. However, in rural India with its impoverished population, Frank and Ellie find that their values change and their current circumstances and grief dictate their reactions to one another, their servants, the local community, and other expatriates.

"Now she was trying to control the sway of her hips, trying hard to resist the tug of the pounding drums that were making her lose her inhibitions, making her want to dance manically, the way she used to in nightclubs when she was in her teens. But that was the beauty of the dandiya dance -- it celebrated the paradoxical joy of movement and restraint, of delirium within a structure. This was not about individual expression but about community." (Page 220)

Readers will be absorbed by the local community and its traditions, the struggles of the Benton's servants, and the stark beauty of India. But what really makes this novel shine is the characters and their evolution from idealistic college students and young parents to a grief-stricken and dejected married couple in a foreign nation. The tension between Frank and Ellie is personified in the dichotomous views each character reveals to the reader about the Indian community from the lax work environment and labor disputes at Frank's factory to the deep-rooted sense of community and communion with nature shown through Ellie's interactions with individuals at a local clinic.

The Weight of Heaven is more than a novel about grief; it is about how grief can distort perception and push people to make life-changing decisions that can broaden their horizons and transform them forever. Umrigar's prose is poetic and full of imagery that paints a vivid picture of India and its rural community and its city life in Mumbai/Bombay. Class differences, the struggles of American expatriates, grief, death, and marital woes are explored deftly in this novel, and it is clearly one of the best novels of 2010.

Lara says

I am in awe of Thrity Umrigar. I enjoyed her previous book, *The Space Between Us*, but *The Weight of Heaven* positively blew me away. Even though this book drips with sadness and grief and made me want to throw it against the wall toward the end, I still give this one five stars because...well, WOW.

When I read, I like to flip up the bottom corner of pages where there are passages, phrases, ideas that I like or that impress me in some way or that make me want to talk about them. If you look at my copy of this book, practically every other page is dogged like this. From Ellie's realization of the inanity in saying "Have a nice day" (p. 21) to perfectly illustrative phrases like, "Her hands shook like birds in a rainstorm" (p. 234), *The Weight of Heaven* makes me wish my book club were talking about this book RIGHT NOW.

So, what's it about? It is the story of an American couple (Ellie and Frank) whose 7-year-old son has died, leaving them crippled with grief. (And the grief, oh my god, the GRIEF. If you read this book, do not attempt to read it on your commuter train, or you will find yourself fighting tears at 8:00 a.m., surrounded by strangers.) Actually, I'm not sure I could read this if I had kids. I don't know if my heart could take it. Anyway, Frank's company offers him a position managing the company's India office, and he and Ellie decide to go. Frank's business is more complicated than he thought when he took the job, with clashing cultural and economic ideas between himself (and his counterparts back in America) and the impoverished workforce and local residents - a situation that makes him hate India and everything about it; whereas Ellie finds friendship and fulfillment in volunteering in the community and feels precisely the opposite. As all of this is playing out, they (and, particularly, Frank) take an interest in their housekeepers' young son, which adds a new layer of cultural and economic tension to their lives and to their marriage.

The Weight of Heaven is well-written and fascinating and impossible to put down. Downright excellent, actually.

**PS - I forgot two things. (1) I think a lot of you will hate the ending; and (2) This book reminded me of this one class that I took in college that was supposed to be a contemporary literature class but instead was taught by a dude who should have named it "dystopian literature" - except instead of it being a true dystopia, it would be like a marital version of dystopia. I'm not sure I'm making any sense, but I thought it might be relevant enough to repeat here.
