

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 170

*The newsletter of the AVID Readers Group, based at Earlsdon Library*

**Next meeting:** Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *The Grass is Singing* — Doris Lessing

## An Interesting Journey

### Our October Book

*Norwegian by Night* — Derek B Miller

The main character of this novel is Sheldon Horowitz, an eighty-two-year-old, recently widowed American. He has been persuaded by his granddaughter, Rhea, whom he raised after the death of her father, to join her and her Norwegian husband in Oslo. After witnessing the murder of a young woman in their apartment, he runs off with her son in an attempt to save him from the murderer. He heads off to Rhea's summer home, by a circuitous route as he is without transport or money. Chasing them are both the police and the Kosovan murderer, helped by his friends from the war in the Balkans.

Sheldon may or may not be suffering from early stage Alzheimer's, but either way he spends a lot of time reliving past events and talking to dead people – his wife, his friend Bill and his son, Saul. Sheldon fought in Korea, although exactly what happened there is unclear, but he feels that by glorifying war, he encouraged his son to volunteer for Vietnam, where he was killed. One interpretation of his actions was to assuage the guilt he feels for Saul's death by saving another child.

Some readers found it a struggle to engage with the book, though those that persevered enjoyed it later on. The constantly changing scenes irritated one reader, who counted nine points of view in a few pages. The background of the Kosovan / Serbian conflict and the effect on participants interested some readers.

A lot of people end up dead, which provoked a discussion on Scandi crime. Does the violence in books and films reflect a violent society wondered?

Overall most people thought that this was well-written and a good read. One reader queried the significance / origin of the title. It is interesting that, although written in English, it was first published in Norway, where the author now lives.

Even more interesting was that the gender split of those present at the meeting was even!

**Chris Wilkin**

**Next month we will be reading:**

*Death du Jour* — Kathy Reichs

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> December.

## Ideas for further reading

Nothing else by this author, except policy papers from his day job and translations of this, shows on Amazon. So what to include in here? I'm sure we've looked at Norwegian noir before – perhaps as part of a survey of Scandinavian thrillers when we read *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* – and I wouldn't know where to start with that sub-genre anyway.

Fortunately (well, for the purposes of this column), someone felt that the end of *Norwegian by Night* was rather obvious and that led to a discussion of books where one knows the outcome right from the start – either because the author tells you, as in Donna Tartt's recent and acclaimed *The Goldfinch*, or because it's based on historical fact, such as Fredrick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal*. The latter of these manages to be enjoyable even so, said one person, because there is a twist – a twist that he then went on to reveal, assuming we had all at least seen the film! In case there's anyone else out there who, like me, has come across neither, I shan't spoil the surprise.

That led us on to thinking about other novels with twists: Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* got a mention (as it often does) and so did Deborah Moggach's *Tulip Fever*. Interestingly, both of these have historical settings too. There's also Gillian Flynn's recent bestseller *Gone Girl* where the confusion is, as with *Norwegian by Night*, because there is an unreliable narrator, or is it two? Have a read and see what you think.

One thing that some readers found interesting and others annoying in this month's book were the flashbacks to the hero's experiences in the war. This reminded someone of *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (Louis de Bernières). At first this appears to be a bit of a stretch; the two books are very far removed from each other – in tone as well as location – but *CCM* does have some pretty vivid scenes of fighting in the Greek mountains during the Second World War, events which here too have a profound effect on one of the characters.

So, although at first it seemed as if we there was nothing we had read that was quite like *Norwegian by Night*, a bit more digging unearthed a varied list of related suggestions after all.

## What's Been On

Several of us went along to hear Rachel Joyce talk about *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* and its recently published sequel, *The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennessey*. It was an enjoyable evening – even though many of us were rather damp when we arrived. Appropriately, therefore, we found out that one of the author's inspirations was the sailor Donald Crowhurst. The classic account of his deception is *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* (or *The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* if you buy a more recent edition). There's also, I've since found out, a 2006 film about him called *Deep Water*. However, one of the big questions of the evening was who would play Harold in a film. John Travolta anyone?

***I've had no updates from CLIS lately, so for future events, I would suggest you keep an eye on the [Facebook page](#).***

If you have any other reviews or recommendations, tales of literary events, or anything else you think other AVID readers would find interesting, please send them to

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