

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 176

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

Next meeting: Thursday 11th June 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *The Hundred-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared*—Jonas Jonasson

Enjoying a Different Genre

Our May Book

Dissolution — CJ Sansom

Dissolution is set during the reign of Henry VIII. The country is beset by savage new laws and a powerful network of informers who work for Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell and his commissioners are travelling throughout the country investigating the working of the monasteries with a single planned outcome – their dissolution.

However, in one monastery – Scarnsea, on the Sussex Coast – events are spiralling out of control. Cromwell's commissioner has been found beheaded; a cockerel has been sacrificed on the altar and the monastery's great relic has been stolen.

So enters Matthew Shardlake, a lawyer and a supporter for reform in the pay of Cromwell, who is sent to investigate.

Most readers found the novel well-written and easy to read – not always easy when you are allowing the characters to behave and speak as they would at the time.

The settings were believable, especially the contrast between the wealthy lifestyle found in the monastery and the

poverty faced by those who lived in the surrounding area. Particular reference was made to how cold it must have been for those living at the time and the powerful descriptions of how bad the latrines and sewage must have been.

The author created strong characters – regardless of whether they were to be liked or disliked. Particularly strong is Shardlake himself who, through his investigation, is forced to question everything that he believes to be true.

Many of the group approached the book – an historical mystery – with a degree of trepidation. The fact that many of the group not only liked the book, but would recommend it to fellow readers was therefore a positive outcome.

Dave Lloyd

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 Catherine Fitzsimons cathfitz5317@yahoo.com.

Next month we will be reading:

Sweet Tooth—Ian McEwan

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 9th July.

What to read next

This month's author

Given the closing paragraph of Dave's summary above, and that I remember recommending these books in a previous edition of ELM, am I allowed to say 'I told you so'?

The Shardlake series now stands at six books. The ones which follow *Dissolution* are (in order): *Dark Fire* (which deals with long-lost military secrets), *Sovereign* (where he gets to meet the King – although not under the best of circumstances), *Revelation* (statutory serial killer to deal with), *Heartstone* (featuring the *Mary Rose* and Princess Elizabeth) and *Lamentation* (with Shardlake at court as Henry's health wanes). Matthew continues to develop as a character, as do Guy and his other friends – and enemies.

Sansom's other novels have more recent settings. *Winter in Madrid* takes place during the Spanish Civil War and *Dominion* deals with one of those questions that it seems every historical novelist (the male ones at least) is bound to have a go at answering: what would happen had Germany won World War II. If anyone has read either, I would love a review for a future edition of ELM.

From One Reader to Another

The Reading Agency, English PEN and Free Word are inviting 12 reading groups to read two books in translation between August and November 2015, in tandem with another reading group elsewhere in the UK. (Books will be provided.)

Members of the selected reading groups are also invited to a day of sharing at the Free Word Centre in London in November, which will bring all participating groups together for enthusiastic discussion on translation and stories across cultures and will also include talks by well-known writers and translators about their experiences of engaging with international literature.

And others

The most obvious comparisons are the SJ Parris books featuring Giordano Bruno (*Heresy* et al – we read one of them a few months ago), the *Cadfael* books of Ellis Peters, The Umberto Eco classic *The Name of the Rose* and, of course, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel. Between them they cover Cromwell, murder and mayhem in monasteries, and medieval and Tudor sleuths. I've dealt with other historical detectives in this column before, so rather than going back to Lindsey Davis' Falco or Susanna Gregory's Chaloner I'm going to suggest Karen Maitland for those of you who liked reading about the detail of daily life, the contrasts and the smells. Her books are set a couple of centuries earlier but *The Gallows Curse* covers an less well-known period of religious upheaval, *The Owl Killers* also deals with those inside and outside a religious community and *Company of Liars* is a picaresque tale of a group of players travelling through England in a plague year. Although I've enjoyed all of these, I didn't pick *Falcons of Fire and Ice* from the shelf last time I was in the library: I was distracted by an easier to carry home paperback, but maybe next week ...

Does this sound interesting?

Should we sign up?

We can talk about it at the next meeting – there'll still be time to sign up.

If you can't make it on 11th, email cathfitz5317@yahoo.com and I'll bring your views along.