

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 179

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 10 September 8pm  
**Venue:** Earlsdon Library  
**Book for discussion:** *Water for Elephants*—Sara Gruen

## Food for a community

### Our August Book

*Peaches for Monsieur le Curé*—Joanne Harris

*Peaches for Monsieur le Curé* focuses on Vianne, her two daughters and their trip back to Lansquenet, a small French town they left many years ago and not under the best of circumstances. Now settled in Paris, Vianne receives a letter from a long-dead friend requesting she go back to visit the town which may well be in need of her special sort of assistance.

Once there she finds some things much changed. Her old enemy Monsieur Reynaud appears diminished, is suspected of arson (yet again) by most of the community, and has been relieved of his duties as parish priest. The town itself has also undergone drastic change with a large Muslim community now living in Les Marauds. The two communities initially lived together harmoniously, with coffee mornings for the ladies and the children playing football together in the town square. However, things changed when Ines Bencharki arrived. Tension is now in the air as the two communities struggle to live together. Vianne finds herself acting as a bridge between them and trying to get to the bottom of the central mystery: who is Ines Bencharki?

*Peaches for Monsieur le Curé* received largely positive reviews. Some people had read the previous two stories in this series and others had not: although some felt reading the previous books would have been helpful, others were happy to take this story on as a standalone.

Whilst some enjoyed reading about the two communities and liked the idea of insiders versus outsiders, some concern was raised about what authority the author had to write about the Muslim community, which at times made one particular reader feel uncomfortable.

The idea that the book was essentially a detective story was proffered, though its effectiveness was questioned as there were no real clues into who the villain of the piece actually was. In fact, the phrase 'info dump' was used as, from page four hundred onwards, most of the information the reader had been seeking throughout the book seemed to be given.

Reynaud was much improved in this book; everybody enjoyed his awkwardness in asking Vianne for help and quite appreciated his novel way of receiving confession – through his letterbox. He also seemed to spend quite a lot of time mediating a dispute about a cat, with little success.

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](mailto:cathfitz5317@yahoo.com).

Vianne did not get off so lightly however. Whilst some thought she was helping and enjoyed the way she acted as a bridge between the two communities, allowing them to air their grievances, others thought she was a bit of a busybody and didn't really do much. Her magic, so evident in previous books, was largely missing here, which was a shame. Her feelings of where she belonged were also questioned and some just couldn't understand why she had agreed to make the trip in the first place.

Of course one cannot discuss this book without talking about food. As with the previous books in the series food plays a central role (someone suggested all mentions of food are about sex, quite racy for book

club). The descriptions of food were greatly enjoyed and the addition of the traditional Arabic food being cooked was a pleasing extra in this instalment.

All in all *Peaches for Monsieur le Curé* was a conflicting read. Pacing was an issue, with one person taking the Judy approach and skipping the middle to get to the end. That being said, one reader was eagerly awaiting the next book in the series.

Should anyone be looking for their next dose of Joanne Harris, then *Blackberry Wine* comes highly recommended.

**Melissa Mortenson**

**Next month we will be reading:**

*Under Your Skin*— Sabine Durrant

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 8 October.

## What's on

Riley's Creative Writers present this year's second **Open Mic Night**. Bring a poem or a story to share, or just sit back and enjoy. Everybody welcome – bring the family for a fun evening celebrating the spoken word with your local poets! **Thursday 17 September, 5.30 – 6.45pm at Bell Green Library**. For more information call Russ at the Library on 024 7678 5819.

**Meet the author: Arthur Penlington**, former Coventry journalist and man behind BBC TV News. Hear the inside story of life on the front line alongside Kate Adie and Martin Bell. Arthur will also talk about his humorous travel book *Around The World In Wonder Socks*. **Saturday 19 September** from **2pm** at **Central Library**. No booking required. For further information please ring 7683 2314 or email [central.library@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:central.library@coventry.gov.uk).

**Meet the author: Margaret Holbrook** has had poems and short stories printed in several anthologies. In June 2014, her story *Our Brian* was longlisted for BBC Radio 4's *Opening Lines*. Her play *Sandy's Ashes* is being performed at Congleton Festival in September this year. She will be visiting two libraries on Monday 21 September: Stoke from 11am and Foleshill Library from 2pm. Both events are free. Please contact the libraries for further details (7678 6990, [stoke.library@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:stoke.library@coventry.gov.uk) and 7678 6977, [foleshill.library@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:foleshill.library@coventry.gov.uk) respectively).

**The Journals of Alison Evans** An illustrated talk by John Burton, chairman of the George Eliot Fellowship, about this Bedworth diarist who was the daughter of Canon F.R. Evans, a nephew of George Eliot. **Saturday 17 October, 2.30pm** at **Warwick Road United Reformed Church**. Tickets are £5.00 each are available from the church office (7622 0299) or at the door on the day. Refreshments are included, and profits will go to the church roof fund.

**Seven Minute Stories** is the culmination of the WMRN short story collaboration between regional reading groups and West Midlands writers. At the event, each writer will read a seven-minute extract from their story and will talk about the process of writing to commission. An anthology of the stories in full will be given away on the night. The event will take place on **Thursday 10 December 6.00–8.00pm** at the **Library of Birmingham**. More details and how to book here: <http://www.birmingham-box.co.uk/event/seven-minute-stories-december-2015/>. It is always popular so early booking is advised.

## **Opportunities** *(Things we could do, but would need to talk about first!)*

### **READING GROUPS FOR EVERYONE**

Every month, I get an email from this website (<http://readinggroups.org/>) listing sets of books that they are giving away for reading groups to discuss. They're now expanding the site so that we can each log in as a member of the group (once Dave, or whoever in the library service 'owns' the group signs up for a code to pass on to us) and then apply for these giveaways and competitions ourselves.

**T S Eliot Prize** The Poetry Book Society has an exciting opportunity for Reading Groups to get involved with the 2015 T S Eliot Prize once the shortlist is announced on 22 October. On this date, you can download our Reading Group Notes, which include three poems from each collection, a biography, reviews and discussion ideas to use in your session.

We'd like your reading group to shadow the judges (chair Pascale Petit, Kei Miller and Ahren Warner) by discussing the poetry on the list. We want to know who your group decided should win with a short write-up of your session (no more than 400 words), detailing your rationale, who came close and any key conversations or disagreements you had along the way. Email your entry to [competition@poetrybooks.co.uk](mailto:competition@poetrybooks.co.uk) by 17 December for your chance to win:

- Up to 10 tickets for your reading group to attend the 2015 T S Eliot Prize Readings at London's Royal Festival Hall on 10 January 2016 (accommodation and travel costs are not covered)\* or
- Two complete signed sets of the 10 shortlisted titles

## **What to read next ...**

... will return next month, but with such a detailed review and so many events, there's not much room, is there? ☺

