Earlsdon Literary Magazine 191

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

Next meeting: Thursday 10 November 2016 at 8pm
Venue: Earlsdon Library
Book for discussion: *Bring up the Bodies* — Hilary Mantel

Unfilled potential

Our October Book

Maybe I'll Write More Later ... Maybe — Patricia Illich

Maybe I'll Write More Later ... Maybe is the debut novel by Patricia Ilich – written when the author was 73 years old.

Many of the group 'quite liked' the starting storyline which centres on the tragedy of Peter who, instead of welcoming back his parents from a dream holiday of a lifetime, had to plan a funeral following a plane crash. Four years later, Peter is informed of a miracle: his mother has survived as evidenced by a journal written about her time on a deserted island.

The continuing story of travel, survival and human connection fails to live up to the promising start with major storylines of a paedophile ring and subsequent revenge lacking purpose and connection to the rest of the novel.

While the story has some merit, none of the group enjoyed the lack of character definition or the writing style which barely got above tolerable. The juvenile depiction of conversations was particularly commented upon.

Overall, the group felt the novel had potential but it was not fulfilled. A good edit would also not have gone amiss.

Dave Lloyd

Our next book is
Kind of Cruel — Sophie Hannah
and we will discuss it on 8 December 2016

Last month's mystery solved

On Facebook, the picture was accompanied by the comment: This is our faces when we saw the size of the chocolate cake we were given on the cruise ship it had 7 levels of cream, now weigh 5lb heavier.

On publishing models

As Dave has noted above, we were rather surprised by the standard of writing in this month's book. After all, it seems to have come from a publisher, so wouldn't it have been edited? Read on.

The world of publishing is not as binary as it once was. Not so very long ago, there were two real options. If you were good, and determined, and lucky, your book would be 'properly' published, and the house would deal with everything for you; editing, design, artwork, typesetting, proofreading, printing, distribution, marketing were all part of the package. The other option was the vanity press: publishers who would typeset and print a certain number of copies (usually several hundred, if not a couple of thousand) of your book for a fee – although they would maybe provide a cover design or/and an ISBN – but then they'd send the whole lot to you to get rid of.

But now things are completely different. Anyone can publish a book. All you need are the words, an ordinary computer and an internet connection. There are no printing costs for an e-book, obviously, and no up-front cost for print-on-demand (POD) services like Create Space and Lulu – individual copies are made only when they're ordered, meaning no boxes of unsold stock in the garage but, conversely, no link with the distributors who supply 'real' books to libraries and bookshops. This ability to evade the gatekeepers has led to a surge in titles, particularly of e-books, but many – some would say most – are of dubious quality because few writers are capable of doing all the jobs needed to make a book ready for printing. Even the best don't usually have the necessary distance from their manuscript to do the work of a literary agent or initial editor who would help them improve the structure or tighten the story.

However, there ARE good self-published books out there. Savvy authors make sure their written work has been critiqued and edited, give thought to the cover design, and take pains to make sure the formatting and layout are spot on. The lucky have talented and able friends – probably in a writing group – who are able to do at least some of these tasks for them and, for the rest, there are people out there (like me) who you can pay to do one or more of these jobs. For those who want to see their work in libraries and bookshops across the country, there are companies who will deal with distribution. Many also offer marketing – something that, nowadays, even most traditionally published authors are expected to do a lot of themselves. Indeed, several writers I know have moved into self-publishing because they felt their work was not being adequately promoted.

There is a middle way, sometimes referred to as supported publishing. There are companies that offer the whole gamut of services at a one-stop shop, allowing authors to select from various packages or pay only for the help they require without having to carry out multiple searches. In theory, this might explain the poor editing and amateurish cover design of this

month's book: the author chose not to pay for these, but only printing, distribution and marketing – or she may have chosen people who weren't very good, or even ignored advice from them or undone their work (yes, this happens).

Yet Austin Maculey's front page suggests they are a traditional publisher, with at least one author I've heard of among the hundreds they have dealt with over the last ten years. Odd, since traditional publishers are usually far more protective of their reputation (for example, allowing authors little or no say in cover design – another thing that disenchants those with contracts). Digging a little deeper, however, reveals that Austin Maculey refer to themselves as 'hybrid' publishers who will offer a traditional deal for some books and a 'partnership' deal for others. In the latter case, the writer pays 'a small contribution' towards costs and the implication is they then get treated the same way as those who are offered a traditional deal. Therefore, we can only assume that they employ poor designers and worse editors, no? I would be wary of reading anything else from them for that reason – which is a shame for their other authors.

What to read next …

Since Patricia Illich has not published any other books, and, as the rant above makes clear, I'm avoiding others from the same stable, I thought I'd look instead for self-publishing successes.

Such books are often bought and reissued by a 'proper' publisher. The most notorious example is, of course, EL James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy but, at the other end of the spectrum, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was also initially self-published – and may well prove to be the better seller in the long term. There are plenty of examples in the sci-fi category – which suggests many fans are writers – but more mainstream authors who have broken through by going their own way first include Marcel Proust and, more recently, John Grisham and Lisa Genova (*Still Alice*).

Have you read any great self-published books?
If you have thoughts on this, 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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Among my favourites though are the *Chronicles of St Mary's* – a series of books by Jodi Taylor that relate the adventures of the motley staff of an institute whose function is to 'investigate major historical events in contemporary time' (don't call it time travel!). She published the first story as an e-book and, within three months, had over 65,000 downloads and a contract with Accent Press. The books are great fun and evidence that something a bit different can find a market.

Catherine Fitzsimons