

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 195

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

Next meeting: Thursday 11 May 2017 at 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *The Girl who saved the King of Sweden* — Jonas Jonasson

Formula fic?

Our April Book

***The Girl on the Stairs* — Louise Welsh**

The novel *The Girl on the Stairs* by Louise Welsh is a type of thriller and the blurb suggests it will be dark and disturbing. It is set in modern Berlin. It ends – like Hamlet – with several corpses, none of them exactly a homicide.

Readers were, with one exception, unenthusiastic about it. The exception thought it compact and ‘quite liked’ it. For the rest, opinions ranged from ‘didn’t care’ to ‘really disliked’. Specific criticisms were that the central character was one-dimensional and unrealistic/obsessive, that there was ‘nobody to like’, that both character and plot events were stereotyped (empty building, graveyard, heart attack). The ending was

both criticised (for its suddenness – as if the author got bored) and admired (for leaving out uninteresting mopping-up). A few themes were introduced – such as whether knowing a sperm donor was a relative of the pregnant woman's lesbian partner was a threat – and then just dropped by being declared to be only speculation. General agreement that the book was unimpressive didn't trigger much discussion, as was to be expected.

No one was itching to read another book by Louise Welsh and some wondered whether her job as a literature professor led to formulaic writing.

Terry Thomas

Our next book is

The Five People You Meet in Heaven — Mitch Albom

and we will discuss it on 8 June 2017

A thought from Terry

At the end of the last meeting, the group briefly discussed, with banter, the choice of future books within the dual constraints of (i) set copies being available and (ii) not having recently already been used.

I wonder whether we could ginger up the meetings by (after the collective book criticism) one member describing a NEW book they had (bought?) read and liked.

What do you think?

What to read next

Well, after that review, I don't think it's worthwhile doing my standard search to see what else that author has written! We've had surveys of crime and psychological thrillers in recent editions of ELM so hmmm ... what to suggest?

No idea, so I'll take the easy way out: here are the books I've read over the last month that I thought deserved 8+/10 – give one of them a go and let us know if you agree.

A Hologram for the King – Dave Eggers

It was only when I googled to check something about this that I found it had been made into a film last year. Sort of *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* with less romance and more personal discovery.

His Bloody Project – Graeme Macrae

Rather gory and some pretty nasty characters, but convincing range of historical voices.

The Professor of Truth – John Robertson

Obviously inspired by the Lockerbie bombing, this novel charts one man's twenty-year search for the truth about who killed his wife and daughter.

Homo Deus – Yuval Noah Harari (non-fiction)

A fascinating and well-argued exploration of how AI, genetic engineering and other such advances could – and may already be – changing society and what it means to be human.



Alif the Unseen – G Willow Wilson

Strange blend of cyberpunk, fantasy and the sort of literary search that drives *Possession* (although this is a far easier read) set in an un-named emirate. Maggie Stiefvater (a name that some may recognise) loved it too.

The Museum of You – Carys Bray

A wonderful child protagonist, another grieving father (sorry) and a very real setting that relies less on an odd sub-culture than *A Song for Issy Bradley*.

Everything I Never Told You – Celeste Ng

Oh dear, another grieving family – sorry, these books just seem to have been jumping up at me! This is like a gentler *The Lovely Bones* without the ghost.

Different Class – Joanne Harris

OK, this one *is* a psychological thriller, but funny too. It's set in the school of *Gentlemen and Players* and features characters from that and *Blueeyedboy*. It does stand alone but, of course, I had to seek out the one of the three I hadn't read and may yet have to go back to the one I have!

Catherine Fitzsimons

If you have any thoughts on the suggestion above, 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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