

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 201

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 11 January 2018 at 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *Two Brothers* — Ben Elton (postponed from December)

## An accessible classic

**Our November Book:** *Agnes Grey* — Anne Brontë

The eponymous heroine of Anne Brontë's first novel becomes a governess to help support her family when her spendthrift father makes a ruinously bad investment. She is determined to show she is a capable adult and so, although her first situation is far from ideal, she sticks it out until her father's condition provides the excuse for her to leave. Her next post seems little better at first but she manages to come to an accommodation of sorts that allows her to cope with, if not completely control, her headstrong pupils. By the time her services are no longer required, she has just enough money to open a little school with her mother and then the coincidences necessary for a happy ending inevitably take place.

Most of the discussion centred on the nature of the society in the world of the novel: the limited options available for young women – those in the marriage market as well as those who needed to earn their living; the uneasy status of the governess – not quite servant, not quite family; the way that running a school provided independence; and the description of Victorian children who were far from the seen-but-not-heard stereotype. But there were stereotypes in

there too, leading one person to wonder if we will soon start to see novels featuring ineffectual and self-obsessed female curates.

The simplicity of the story and the predictability of the ending were things people criticised. Most readers thought that Agnes herself was probably the least well described character and, while we sympathised with her plight and admired the way she stayed true to herself, there were nods when someone described her as 'nearly pathetic'. Teachers in the group recognised several of the dilemmas she faced, not least the lack of support and back up from parents when it comes to discipline.

A couple of people who thought the book might be hard work were pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to read. While the language is of its time, the style is relatively straightforward and there is a single linear narrative: the only parts anyone struggled with were the occasional theological digressions. At least, they were the only parts that were difficult to read in terms of the writing – some readers were nearly as upset as Agnes by one horrible little boy's repeated abuse of animals. The introduction to the

**Our next book is**

*To Kill a Mockingbird* — Harper Lee  
and we will discuss it on 8 February 2018

Penguin edition implied Anne was well aware of her work's flaws, saying it was published only because of Charlotte's insistence/bullying.

Dave thought this introduction was the best part of the book, but it's fairly safe to say that his was a minority view. It's true that no one came out and said it was brilliant, but most of those

present had good (or, at least, interesting) things to say, and at least one person who had been put off the Brontës by studying *Wuthering Heights* for 'O' level might investigate more of their output. I think that's a result.

**Catherine Fitzsimons**

## What to Read Next?

As those of you who attend regularly are aware, we are, to some extent, victims of our own success and longevity: when picking a book for us to read from the library selection, Dave is constrained by having to pick one we have not read before (or, at least, not for several years) and one for which there are sufficient copies.

At the November meeting, we again discussed the idea of periodically choosing a book that could not be supplied by the library – perhaps one that has been published more recently, or a prizewinner. We decided that this would be feasible if we picked the book two or three months in advance. That would give people plenty of time to search out a copy or borrow it from standard library stock, friends, or another reader who was able to buy it early on.

**Karen** has put together a shortlist of recent prizewinning novels, and I have included it in this edition of ELM. At the January meeting, we will make a decision about which to read and it will become the book for either March or April (again, we'll firm that up then). If you can't make the meeting but have strong feelings about which you would – or wouldn't – like to read, then let me know!

**Catherine**

## What's On

A message from **Lesley Martin**

We are really fortunate to be hosting an event with author **Ruth Cherrington** on **Friday 26 January** at **2–4 PM**. Ruth will be talking about her new book: *Dirty stop out's guide to 1970s Coventry*. The talk will take place at **Central library**, once the legendary Locarno ballroom, where music mogul Pete Waterman started his DJ career and The Kinks, the Specials, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin once played. The book explains how Coventry's music scene provided something for everyone and traces the development of the area's music and nightlife.

Ruth has previously visited Central Library to give a very interesting talk about an earlier book, *Not Just Beer And Bingo! A Social History Of Working Men's Clubs*.

The event is free of charge and open to everyone, no booking is required.

If you have any thoughts about this news; 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**

## Avid Book Club - December 2017

Last month we voted to read a prize winning novel early in 2018. Some members suggested finding a partner to share the cost of the book.

2017 Booker winner	2016 Costa First Novel	2016 Costa overall winner	2016 Costa biography	2017 British Book Award Overall Winner	2017 Women's Prize for Fiction
<p><b>Lincoln in the Bardo</b> George Saunders 341pages</p>	<p><b>Golden Hill</b> by Francis Spufford 352pages</p>	<p><b>Days Without End</b> by Sebastian Barry 272pages</p>	<p><b>Dadland: A Journey into Uncharted Territory</b> by Keggie Carew 432pages</p>	<p><b>The Essex Serpent</b> by Sarah Perry 432pages</p>	<p><b>The Power</b> by Naomi Alderman 352pages</p>
<p>On 22 February 1862, two days after his death, Willie Lincoln is laid to rest in a marble crypt in a Georgetown cemetery. That very night, shattered by grief, his father Abraham arrives at the cemetery, alone, under cover of darkness.</p> <p>Over the course of that evening, Abraham Lincoln paces the graveyard unsettled by the death of his beloved boy, and by the grim shadow of a war that feels as though it is without end. Meanwhile Willie is trapped in a state of limbo between the dead and the living - drawn to his father with whom he can no longer communicate, existing in a ghostly world populated by the recently passed and the long dead.</p> <p>Unfolding in the graveyard over a single night, narrated by a dazzling chorus of voices, Lincoln in the Bardo is a thrilling exploration of death, grief and the deeper meaning and possibilities of life.</p>	<p>New York, a small town on the tip of Manhattan Island, 1746. One rainy evening, a charming and handsome young stranger fresh off the boat from England pitches up to a counting-house in Golden Hill Street with a suspicious yet compelling proposition - he has an order for a thousand pounds in his pocket that he wishes to cash. But can he be trusted?</p> <p>Set a generation before the American Revolution, it paints an irresistible picture of a New York provokingly different from its later self: but subtly shadowed by the great city to come, and already entirely a place where a young man with a fast tongue can invent himself afresh, fall in love - and find a world of trouble.</p>	<p>After signing up for the US army in the 1850s, aged barely seventeen, Thomas McNulty and his brother-in-arms, John Cole, go on to fight in the Indian wars, and ultimately, the Civil War.</p> <p>Having fled terrible hardships themselves, they find these days to be vivid and filled with wonder despite the horrors they both witness and are complicit in.</p> <p>Their lives are further enriched and endangered when a young Indian girl crosses their path, and the possibility of lasting happiness emerges, if only they can survive.</p> <p>Moving from the plains of the West to Tennessee, Sebastian Barry's latest work is a masterpiece of atmosphere and language. Both an intensely poignant story of two men and the lives they are dealt, and a fresh look at some of the most fateful years in America's past.</p>	<p>Keggie Carew grew up under the spell of an unorthodox, enigmatic father. An undercover guerrilla agent during the Second World War, in peacetime he lived on his wits and dazzling charm. But these were not always enough to sustain a family.</p> <p>As his memory began to fail, Keggie embarked on a quest to unravel his story once and for all. <i>Dadland</i> is that journey. It takes us into shadowy corners of history, a madcap English childhood, the poignant breakdown of a family, the corridors of dementia and beyond.</p>	<p>When Cora Seaborne's husband dies of throat cancer, she abandons her society life in London and moves to coastal Essex with her eleven year old son, Francis, and his nanny.</p> <p>After hearing rumours about a mythical sea serpent taking the lives of villagers up the estuary, she endeavours to find out more. Possessing a keen interest in natural history, she meets and clashes with, William Ransome, priest of Aldwinter, who dismisses the serpent as godless superstition.</p> <p>The Essex Serpent explores the boundaries between science and superstition, friendship and romantic love.</p>	<p>What if the power to hurt were in women's hands?</p> <p>Imagine a world where teenage girls awake one morning with extraordinary physical strength and power that outstrips their male counterparts. Thanks to a newly acquired section of muscle near their collarbone, young women can now conduct electricity like electric eels: inflicting pain or electrocuting to death as they wish. They can even waken this power in older women too. In Naomi Alderman's <i>The Power</i>, the balance of the world is irrevocably altered overnight.</p> <p>Exploring the concepts of gender, hierarchy and power, <i>The Power</i> is an ingenious and masterfully crafted piece of feminist science fiction as well as a searing indictment of our contemporary world.</p>