

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 202

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 8 March 2018 at 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* — Jean-Dominique Bauby

## “I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks.”

**Our February Book:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* — Harper Lee

AVID started the year with a real treat; Harper Lee's classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Published in 1960 it was an instant best seller with critical success, won the Pulitzer Prize and was made into an Academy Award winning film. For those who hadn't read it before it came with great expectation – and it didn't disappoint.

As we discussed the novel, every single member enjoyed reading it with comments such as ...

“Love it.”

“Brilliant! Loved all the characters and the writing style. I wish it could have carried on and on ...”

“I could picture myself there – just amazing.”

“Stunning. I could imagine every scene in my mind.”

Good Reads summarises *To Kill A Mockingbird* as, “taking readers to the roots of human behaviour – to innocence and experience, kindness and cruelty, love and hatred, humour and pathos”. Through the main protagonist, Scout, we experience life as young child set against the racial intolerance of Alabama in the 1960s as her lawyer father defends a black man in a controversial court case.

We discussed the political relevance of the novel set in the 1930s but published just as JFK came into office – a shift in politics to finally address inequality and social justice. For many this novel didn't just reflect changing attitudes towards race in the United States it helped change them. The film adaptation has been cited as a

critical part of this catalyst for change and one member really enjoyed comparing the book with the film version and the similarities and differences noted.

One member describes Lee's style as 'genius' and her characters all 'simply brilliant'. This member loves the conflict offered by Scout – a child dealing with adult concepts. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is read annually by this member and is their favourite novel of all time.

We all agreed that morality is a key theme of the novel. Atticus Finch is the moral compass and his refreshing and compassionate attitude towards his work and for every person he met was, at times, overwhelming. For some he is a flawless character. One member felt the novel was an extremely important social commentary and this was supported by another who felt that every child should have to read this novel to understand what it means to be a good citizen.

One AVID member found Atticus' relationship with his children cold/distant and felt he was sometimes irresponsible for exposing such young children to difficult adult themes. This member felt that the character could have explained concepts to his children in greater depth.

We all concurred that the novel is worthy of its reputation, acclaim, success and indeed the Pulitzer Prize. Thoroughly enjoyed by all yet we are now slightly concerned that we have peaked in February!

Karen

### Our next book is

*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* — Gail Honeyman

and we will discuss it on 12 April 2018

Note that the library does not hold Readers' Groups copies of this. If you're having difficulty getting hold of a copy, please contact others through the Facebook group (see below).

# Fictionalising Family History

## Our January Book: *Two Brothers* — Ben Elton

The brothers of the title share no blood. For the first part of their lives, this matters little. But they were born in Weimar Berlin and the rise of the Nazis changes everything: the 'twin' adopted at birth can be safe. The story of the boys' childhood is told in parallel with that of one of them, resident in cold-war England, being approached by the foreign office to contract a woman in East Germany, someone it seems he once knew. But is she who she claims? And which brother is he? The answers are not straightforward as, throughout the novel, people change their behaviour and identity in order to survive and protect those they love. The resulting complexities left some readers confused at least some of the time

Although Elton is a writer known for his comedy, he does not deal flippantly with such a dark time and subject – in fact some readers felt there was sometimes a gratuitous focus on gruesome details. Even so, many of us felt there was a mismatch between the voice and the subject, pointing particularly to the informality and modern feel of the dialogue, and the amount of it used for exposition when a line or two narrative would have supplied the necessary context. This alone spoils it for readers who could cope with the shifting perspectives and identities and the sheer length of the book. Elton had obviously done his research – and there were

some details that people appreciated – but seemed determined to include everything. This led to it being yet another book where lots seemed to be crammed into the last few chapters.

It also meant that even potentially sympathetic characters had their faults held up to inspection. While this is usually a good thing, in *Two Brothers* it left many of us struggling to find a character we could warm to: you'd think someone was horrid, then find something out that made you think they weren't so bad after all ... only for them to then do something nasty or no to an extreme and change your opinion back again. The boys' mother and the woman the older Paul lives in London were probably the only exceptions to this.

No one at the meeting absolutely hated it, but no one absolutely loved it either – those that didn't finish it were struggling because of the length – or the sheer weight of their hardback copy! As Dave said, 'It's a good story but I'm not sure Ben Elton's a good enough writer to pull it off.' So, to take a few more words from our beloved turnkey, AVID Readers probably wouldn't recommend this book but we don't feel we wasted our time reading it. Especially as the discussion strayed on to questions of choice and identity that were, of course, very interesting!

**Catherine Fitzsimons**

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](mailto:cathfitz5317@yahoo.com)

## Facebook group

You may have noticed that ELM not quite as regular as it might be. This is because of my wildly fluctuating workload (the joys of freelance life!). So, in order to make sure that news can get round more quickly Karen has set up a Facebook group – 'AVID Readers Group, Coventry'. Following discussion at recent meetings, we have decided to make this a closed group for those who attend or/and are on the circulation list for ELM. If you're a regular and have not yet joined do send a request to be added.

**Catherine**