

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 204

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 10 May 2018 at 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *The Little Friend* — Donna Tartt

## An astonishing debut

**Our April Book:** *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* — Gail Honeyman

Almost unanimously, we agreed this was an astonishing debut novel. One AVID reader loved it so much, she read it twice inside a month.

A single dissenting voice came from someone who couldn't engage with Eleanor as a character and found Honeyman's writing style irritating. She compared this novel with another first person narrative: Amy Liptrot's brilliant memoir *The Outrun*.

The cover endorsement by Jojo Moyes – “funny, touching and unpredictable” – probably encapsulates our (majority) collective feedback.

Gail Honeyman got the idea for Eleanor after reading an article about loneliness, although the novel is so thoughtfully written that her starting point is not immediately obvious.

Most of us enjoyed the effortless style and surprising phrases that were hooks, giving us clues as to what to think about and look out for as the plot developed. Eleanor is obviously a vulnerable, socially awkward character but, in Honeyman's expert hands, she is likeable in spite of her behaviour: we care what happens to her.

To give a flavour of our AVID discussion, here are few of the comments made and opinions shared:

- Initially, beautifully described and slow moving; love how she reacts to and described seemingly ordinary things.
- Eleanor's take on things was very funny.
- “I wanted NOT to like it, but failed!”

- “Only found out it was set in Scotland, not London, on page 100!”
- Her reaction, interaction and attitude to others comes from her background and upbringing ... particularly her feelings of guilt and responsibility. Her view of herself was depressingly bad; “she thought she was evil and nasty.”
- We are told she's in her thirties and has a peculiar relationship with her mother.
- Eleanor learns about kindness from Raymond; “when he puts her to bed (on page 270), it made me cry.”
- There was some speculation about her mental health during our discussion. Did she have autism? Attachment disorder?
- Eleanor was used to suppressing her feelings – no sense of acceptance, or even expecting people to like her.
- “Raymond opened up a new world for her” – he welcomed Eleanor to his mother's home. She was deeply affected by the visit.
- The novel gives a different perspective on the world, perfectly illuminating the fact mental health conditions do not impact a person's brain power.
- “It's about broken hearts, not broken brains.” [This is in itself a quote – the subtitle of a textbook by Lorna Smith Benjamin.]
- “I'd replace vodka with gin & tonic!”
- One or two readers said Gail Honeyman's style was reminiscent of Sophie Kinsella and chick lit ...

## Our next book is

*Man and Boy* — Tony Parsons

and we will discuss it on 14 June 2018

- ... although others felt it was deeper than that – readability should be applauded, not condemned.
- “It was over-described in places and could have been tightened.”

This was such an amazing debut, I’m also listing some of the accolades *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* and Gail Honeyman have received:

- Winner of the Costa First Novel Award 2017
- Longlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction 2018

- No.1 *Sunday Times* bestseller
- Film rights acquired by Reese Witherspoon

Feedback from literary circles and professional book reviewers includes comments a debut novelist can only dream of [see below for those Christine quoted]. I believe AVID Readers were in agreement!

**Christine Miller**

### Some published praise for *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

1. ‘A truly original literary creation: funny, touching and unpredictable. Her journey out of the shadows is expertly woven and absolutely gripping.’ Jojo Moyes
2. ‘Original [and] unexpectedly funny.’ *Sunday Times*
3. ‘As perceptive and wise as it is funny and endearing ... Warm, funny and thought-provoking.’ *Observer*
4. ‘A narrative full of quiet warmth and deep and unspoken sadness ... Wonderful and joyful.’ Jenny Colgan, *Guardian*
5. ‘Unforgettable, brilliant, funny and life-affirming.’ Wendy Holden, *Daily Mail*
6. ‘I adored it. Skilled, perceptive, Eleanor’s world will feel familiar to you from the very first page. An outstanding debut!’ Joanna Cannon
7. ‘Hugely original, a funny and sad tale of a survivor who tackles the challenges of emotional reconnection with grave courage. Unmissable.’ *Sunday Express*
8. ‘A truly original voice and so good on loneliness: I sobbed and sobbed.’ Cathy Rentzenbrink
9. ‘An outstanding debut about loneliness and the power of a little kindness.’ *Mail On Sunday*
10. ‘So powerful – I completely loved Eleanor Oliphant.’ Fiona Barton
11. ‘An absolute joy, laugh-out-loud funny but deeply moving.’ *Daily Express*
12. ‘Heartbreaking.’ Bryony Gordon
13. ‘Deft, compassionate and moving.’ Paula McLain
14. ‘Heartwrenching and wonderful.’ Nina Stibbe
15. ‘Heartbreaking and heartwarming.’ *Stylist*
16. ‘Brave, smart and funny ... the most refreshing and heartwarming debut I’ve read in some time.’ *Yorkshire Post*
17. ‘Moving, funny and devastating.’ *The Herald*
18. ‘Quirky, witty and absorbing.’ *Heat*
19. ‘Warm and funny, moving and deeply original, Eleanor Oliphant is completely marvellous.’ Gavin Extence
20. ‘A beautiful and delicate balance between funny and heartbreaking ... restores your faith in humanity.’ *Red*
21. ‘You’ll laugh and cry reading this fine debut.’ *Prima*
22. ‘Delightful, dark and moving.’ Sarah Pinborough
23. ‘Warm, quirky and fun, with a real poignancy underneath.’ Julie Cohen
24. ‘A stunning debut! I laughed, wept and reflected.’ Lucy Clarke
25. ‘Satisfyingly quirky.’ *New York Times*

If you have any thoughts about this book; 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**