

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 205

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 14 June 2018 at 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *Man and Boy* — Tony Parsons

## Donna Tartt has a lot to say

**Our May Book:** *The Little Friend* — Donna Tartt

Our novel for May was *The Little Friend* by Donna Tartt. A huge, doorstop of a book – the sight of it was a little overwhelming and for some (including me!) and most didn't quite manage all 212,000 words. Tartt's second novel arrived ten years after her debut and is centred around a child called Harriet and the unexplained death of her brother, Robin.

One member described reading it as a 'slog' and certainly didn't look forward to opening the pages each evening! She thought Tartt over-described everything with unnecessary detail. Another member thought the plot was a little unrealistic given the young age of the children and felt that it would have been more suited to the screen rather than a novel. The plot was rather difficult to follow at times with so many twists.

Another AVID reader quite liked the character of Harriet but gave up on the book due to the sheer amount of pages and nothing really happening for several chapters!

There was one member who did finish reading until the end and, whilst she took a while to fully engage with the text, she was glad she finished it all. This reader was not concerned that there wasn't a complete resolution but did feel that it was rather silly that Danny didn't die given the circumstances: jumping up and down in a

water tower for two days was not very believable. But she could see why Tartt wouldn't have wanted Harriet to have his death on her conscience.

Most members didn't read many chapters before giving up and those that read more didn't feel that the novel was worth the time commitment or the investment in finishing as Tartt wasn't clear on what really happened to Robin in the end. One review on Goodreads seemed to echo our thoughts:

*The entire book; waffle. Anyone that can write book about nothing is some kind of wonderbeast. Get someone to rip out every other ten pages and you will never know what you've missed. The characters are the most dimensional real people I've ever encountered but nothing happened and there isn't any resolution for any issue raised.*

Tartt's follow-up, *The Goldfinch* (2013), published over ten years later, saw her awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. It would be interesting to read this as a comparison, but given the word count is even more than *The Little Friend* I'm not sure many of us would be willing to find out!

**Karen**

### Our next book is

*The Great Gatsby* — F Scott Fitzgerald  
and we will discuss it on 12 July 2018

## Doorstops

'Is *anything* this long worth reading?' wondered an AVID reader last month.

'No,' said several people firmly.

I'd beg to differ: it's not that I think long is always better: I'm in the 'depends' camp. Challenged to name a good book over 200,000 words long I went on t'Internet to find a suitable list and chose the first of many offered by Google. Here's a random selection of long books from a – possibly different – list, itself chosen at random. The numbers are the lengths of the books to the nearest thousand words and there are plenty of others weighing in above a quarter of a million.

You'll notice the absence of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, *A Dance to the Music of time* and *Lord of the Rings*. That's because, unlike Wikipedia, I think of each volume as a separate book since that is how they are most commonly published.

If you have any news; reviews or recommendations; tales of literary events; or anything you think AVID readers would find interesting, please send them to:  
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Catherine

<i>A Suitable Boy</i>	Vikram Seth	594	Who should Lata marry? And who should decide? Follow the travails of Mrs Rupa Mehra and her extended family as they sort this out. Long or not, I've read this two or even three times because it really is hugely enjoyable. Definitely one for paperback or even e-book though!
<i>Atlas Shrugged</i>	Ayn Rand	562	The only thing I can say about this book is it did give me a little insight into the thinking of ultra-libertarians. I wasted two weeks of my life reading it. Seriously, don't.
<i>War and Peace</i>	Leo Tolstoy	561	Although, of course, the precise number will depend on the translation, this still comes in at over half a million. I did get lost with all the names – I always do, even in shorter Russian novels (except <i>Death and the Penguin</i> ) – so can't say I thought it was a brilliant novel. But I maintain it's the best history of Napoleon's ill-fated campaign I've read (although for Waterloo see <i>Vanity Fair</i> – a mere 275k long and much funnier – although not about the battle, obv.).
<i>Les Miserables</i>	Victor Hugo	531	Needless to say, the musical only includes one thread of the story, but everything in the musical is in the book – well, maybe not the songs. One day I'll read it in French.
<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	Margaret Mitchell	419	In 1939 they didn't balk at making long films that stuck closely to the book. Of course the book is better but, in this instance, there's not much in it. Melanie's much less pathetic in print, though.
<i>Bleak House</i>	Charles Dickens	361	I only got round to reading this last year, and enjoyed it more than I thought I would from the title and the reputation. However, of recently-read-for-the-first-time Dickens, I preferred <i>Hard Times</i> .
<i>Ulysses</i>	James Joyce	265	I'll get round to this one day ...
<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	JK Rowling	257	I like Harry Potter as much as the next person, but this is my least favourite of the books – a shame, since the series pivots on it. You see it shows, in a bad way, that Rowling had made it: there's stuff that would have been edited away had it been presented by a lesser author or formed part of a book that the publishers weren't under such pressure to get out. Still fun though.
<i>A Prayer for Owen Meany</i>	John Irving	236	I thought we'd read this one, but no it was <i>The Cider House Rules</i> (222k). This is more odd, less traumatic.
<i>The Little Friend</i>	Donna Tartt	212	See above
<i>Moby Dick</i>	Herman Melville	206	This has a reputation of being a book that lots of people start and no one ever finishes. I managed. Like <i>W &amp; P</i> , I enjoyed it more for what it taught me than as a novel. If you want to know anything about whales or whaling in the nineteenth century this is far more readable than text books – but no pictures, at least not in the copy I read.