

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 2018

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

**Next meeting:** Thursday 13 September 2018 at 8pm

**Venue:** Earlsdon Library

**Book for discussion:** *The Way Back Home* — Freya North

## A perfect summer read?

**Our August Book:** *Brighton Rock* — Graham Greene

When you think of a quintessential summer read what are your immediate thoughts? Gang warfare? Murder? Abuse? A protagonist untouched by human feeling? Well, our choice for August was all this and more! Greene's 1938 thriller, *Brighton Rock*, is perhaps not an obvious holiday read and our AVID members will not be throwing it in their bag alongside their SPF 50 next year – of that I am pretty certain.

We follow the life of juvenile gangster Pinkie after he brutally murders a journalist one afternoon in the shadow of the busy promenade at Brighton beach. Greene takes us on a journey of underworld gang rivalry as Pinkie tries to cover his tracks and stops at nothing to avoid retribution for the killing.

A few AVID readers enjoyed the start of the novel and praised Greene's engaging style as they were drawn into the action and the terror of journalist Hale as he was stalked by gang members. Another reader described it as a tense and somewhat strange read as they felt Greene spent too much time telling and giving readers information, rather than showing them and allowing them to draw their own conclusions. This reader thought the movement of the novel was an ideal choice for screen adaptation and another reader supported this by drawing similarities to the television series *Peaky Blinders*.

Indeed, Greene collaborated on many films during his lifetime.

One group member thought the novel was well written but very bleak with descriptive phrases that were incongruent to the style of the rest. This reader was surprised by the Catholic references; a point which was the catalyst for a very interesting discussion about Catholicism and the underlying religious questions in the novel relating to damnation, guilt and the power of the church at the time. We discussed how Rose can only be saved by Ida but she chooses not to because she is so infatuated by Pinkie and believes he loves her enough to marry him outside of the church and be damned for all eternity. She then has nothing to lose and accepts his brutal treatment and even agrees to a joint suicide pact.

Have you ever read thoughts more romantic than Pinkie's on his wedding night?:

*She loved him, whatever that meant, but love was not an eternal thing like hatred and disgust ... The truth came home to him with horror that he had got to keep her love for a lifetime; he would never be able to discard her. If he climbed he had to take Nelson Place with him like a visible scar; the registry office marriage was as irrevocable as a*

*sacrament. Only death could ever set him free.*

One AVID reader has never before read a book with a protagonist so devoid of emotion. It seems Pinkie lacks any empathy and, as we only have very brief details about his life, there is a limited amount of empathy the reader can have for him. We know Pinkie and Rose both come from very poor backgrounds after the description of the depressing visit to Rose's parents' house – is poverty any explanation for Pinkie's sickening desire for power, violence, abuse and murder? Religion, sexual repression and a psychopathic tendency also form Greene's characterisation. One member felt the book

was pervasive, lacking in redemption and any humour. This reader described a level of disgust at how Pinkie's brain works and another member raised the question: can a person be born evil?

To summarise; we all appreciated the relatively short read and most were glad they finished the novel with a couple of members really enjoying it. Most felt it was extremely bleak in description, characterisation and subject matter and so would not invest any further time or emotion into reading it again.

Karen

## Our next book is

*The Color Purple* — Alice Walker

and we will discuss it on Thursday 11 October 2018

## What's on

The **Kenilworth Arts Festival** is at the end of the month and includes a literary weekend at the Priory Theatre on 22 and 23 September billed as “two full days of fascinating conversations, panel discussions and book launches.” Novelists featured include. Kamila Shamsie, Sarah Moss, Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Kit de Waal & Donal Ryan.

[kenilworthartsfestival.co.uk](http://kenilworthartsfestival.co.uk)

Most of the **Birmingham Literature Festival** takes place before our next meeting and, as usual, there are many big names: the festival has been curated by Sathnam Sanghera and features Caitlin Moran, Nigel Slater and Jonathan Coe alongside up-and-

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coming writers in panel discussions, author talks and new book launches. There are also writing workshops, nature walks, a narrowboat trip, shows that fuse theatre, music and storytelling, and others that combine poetry and even live cooking on stage.

[birminghamliteraturefestival.org](http://birminghamliteraturefestival.org)



## What to read next: short books

Following the list of long novels in a previous ELM, and people's relief that our last two books have been somewhat shorter, I thought I'd investigate what else comes in at under or around 50,000 words. Many online lists began with things I consider short stories: they're seldom published in volumes with nothing else – think Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (if you've not read that one, do!). So I decided to include on this list only things above 20,000 words. That encompasses some AVID books from the not-too-distant past by Hemmingway, Julian Barnes and Ian McEwan as well as other classics. For example, I'm sure most of us have read at least some of these:

- 📖 *Of Mice and Men* – John Steinbeck
- 📖 *The Invisible Man* – HG Wells
- 📖 *Death in Venice* – Thomas Mann
- 📖 *Heart of Darkness* – Joseph Conrad
- 📖 *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – Arthur Conan Doyle
- 📖 *The Little Prince* – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
- 📖 *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* – Alexander Solzheintsyn
- 📖 *Bonjour Tristesse* – Françoise Sagan
- 📖 *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – Douglas Adams
- 📖 *Slapstick* – Kurt Vonnegut

And then there's more recent stuff such as Max Porter's *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* and Kent Haruf's *Our Souls at Night*. I've read and enjoyed both of those so suspect that the others the same site suggested are probably worth pursuing. Here are the ones that sounded most intriguing:

- 📖 *Sula* – Toni Morrison
- 📖 *All This has Nothing to do With Me* – Monica Sabolo
- 📖 *The Guest Cat* – Takashi Hiraide
- 📖 *Wilful Disregard* – Lena Andersson
- 📖 *A Whole Life* – Robert Seethaler
- 📖 *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* – Lorrie Moore
- 📖 *The Vegetarian* – Han Kang
- 📖 *Crudo* – Olivia Laing
- 📖 *The End We Start From* – Megan Hunter
- 📖 *The Awakening* – Kate Chopin

I think that's a good start when my brother asks – ridiculously early, as ever – what's on my Christmas list. So, question for next time: what books are going on yours?

Catherine

Please send answers to that question, along with any news, reviews or recommendations, tales of literary events or anything you think AVID readers would find interesting, to:

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