

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 209

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

Next meeting: Thursday 11 October 2018 at 8pm
Venue: Earlsdon Library
Book for discussion: *The Color Purple* — Alice Walker

The summer I was fifteen, something terrible happened ...

Our September Book: *The Way Back Home* — Freya North

Everyone has a summer they remember forever. Oriana has returned to the village she grew up in for the first time in years. Staying with her mother and stepfather, she's guarded about what has caused the break up of her relationship and her return home from America. But as she finds herself increasingly drawn to Windward, the huge house that was the chaotic artists' community where she was born, it becomes clear that there is more to be untangled from the past than the present.

That was the blurb that excited at least one reader of our August book. Did it fulfil the promise? Read on.

Someone who said it was 'chick-lit' (see August's *ELM*) and not the sort of thing they enjoyed admitted that the writing flowed which made it easy to pick up.

"Of course," was the response from elsewhere. "There's so much repetition, especially of the fact that something terrible happened the summer Oriana was fifteen, you could open it anywhere and not be lost. And short chapters made it easy to put down as well!"

"Not entirely fair," said another. "There are some evocative descriptions of the countryside and house."

The setting *was* something else we enjoyed, on the whole, although I'm not sure if thinking of Windward as looking a bit like the main building of Coundon Court

school is a compliment or not. We spent some time unpicking the timeline, as the ages of the main characters didn't seem to match up with the careers (and deaths) of the real musicians who were said to have visited, but we were able to come up with dates that made everything work – at the price of making the commune copycat rather than a radical experiment.

While some people thought that the characters lacked depth, others were able to believe in them and enjoyed watching how the relationships between them played out. Unfortunately, there wasn't much sympathy for any of the major characters and we discussed whether or not the childhood freedom (which might now be considered neglect) explained the immaturity of Oriana and the brothers – not that that provided an excuse for their parents. Even those who 'kind-of liked' the heroine wondered what she had going for

Our next book is

Fingersmith — Sarah Waters

and we will discuss it on Thursday 8 November 2018

her that made her so desirable, and worried about her moral centre. However, with fourteen of them introduced in the first twenty-odd pages, there were some nice people in the book, and Bernard (Rachel's second husband) seemed the best of them, although there were votes for minor characters including Cat and Django.

There were some things about the story that we thought were rather hard to believe: the disparity between Rachel's two husbands, the extent of her antipathy towards Oriana and, particularly, the punishment the adults meted out to the still-a-child when the something terrible happened. However, many of the emotional responses of the main characters were credible, given their history (see above) and even, perhaps, predictable. In

fact, one reader reached the end and was so unsurprised that they wondered if they had read the book before.

The 'something terrible' was left unexplained for a lot of the book and the frequent, not particularly subtle, hints became annoying, especially for those who didn't care about the protagonists. Perhaps this was one of the consequences of the author being what is known in the world of writers as a 'pantster' rather than a 'planner': a slightly different arrangement of key revelations might have helped keep things tense and avoid the following assessment from someone who didn't finish it: "It was an easy enough read, nothing wrong with it ... except that it was as dull as ditchwater."

That's probably a rather harsh assessment to finish with, especially as at least one person wanted a sequel. So the last word goes to the person who came to the meeting having not read the book because they couldn't get hold of a copy. Did they want to take one away, having heard what we all thought of it?

"I don't think I'll bother," was the response.

Catherine

Please send news, reviews or recommendations, tales of literary events or anything you think AVID readers would find interesting, to:

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What to read next

It's been a busy few weeks, so this month I'm simply giving you a straightforward list of other books by Freya North in order of their rating on Goodreads (highest-rated first).

Catherine

- *The Turning Point* (2015)
- *Pip* (2003)
- *Chloe* (1997)
- *Home Truths* (2006)
- *Fen* (2001)
- *Rumours* (2012)
- *Secrets* (2009)
- *Chances* (2011)
- *Cat* (1999)
- *The Way Back Home* (2014)
- *Polly* (1998)
- *Sally* (1996)
- *Pillow Talk* (2008)
- *Love Rules* (2005)