

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 216

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

Next meeting: Thursday 8 August 2019 at 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *Until Death* — Ali Knight

History repeating

Our June Book: *Cousins* — Salley Vickers

Overall the book wasn't loved by the group, despite some members having high hopes as they had enjoyed previous works from this author.

Generally the book was found difficult to follow the complex family tree at times and this wasn't helped by readers not feeling invested in the characters.

The choice of character for the main narrative seemed odd as it was a side character who was not central/integral to the story. The most liked/interesting characters were Arabella and Betsy whose story was deemed interesting.

The consensus from the group was that the end of the story was rushed as if the author was trying to get it over with. It was also noted that, though patterns of behaviour events can repeat within families, it is not usually repeated identically to previous generations.

Helen U

Other books by Salley Vickers

Miss Garnet's Angel

Instances of the Number 3

Mr Golightly's Holiday

The Other Side of You

Where Three Roads Meet

Dancing Backwards

Aphrodite's Hat (short stories)

The Cleaner of Chartres

The Librarian

Please send news, reviews, recommendations, tales of literary events

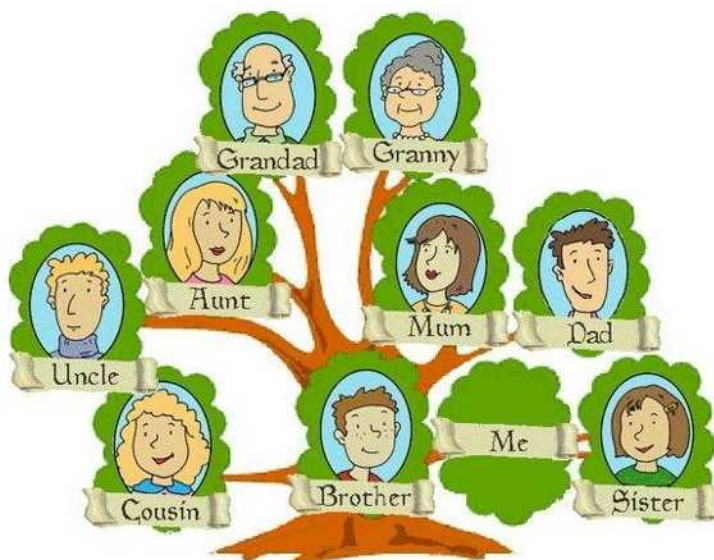
or anything you think AVID readers would find interesting, to:

Catherine Fitzsimons

What to read next: More cousins

The obvious place to start with any of these pieces is with the author's other works – but everyone at the last meeting who had read something else by Salley Vickers said that the other book or books was/were better and, while I concur, I can't remember a huge amount about the others (I know I've read all but the short stories) to add much detail: the first three

are more quirky than *Cousins*, the next two are interesting because they draw heavily on psychoanalysis (though I'd still rate Sebastian Faulks' *Human Traces* above either), and what I remember about the others is feeling that the characters were well drawn and the settings interesting ... but the plots escape me. Not sure why I was convinced we'd 'done' *The Cleaner of*



Chartres – I can't find an account of the discussion in the ELM archive.

So other books about cousins. Went hunting to get a memory jog and one of the first that came up was Daphne du Maurier's *My Cousin Rachel*. That one has definitely been an AVID book (February 2011). Although it shares some of the Gothic atmosphere of *The House on the Strand* it was much more well-received, perhaps because we in this group can cope with an unreliable narrator better than time travel!

Lots of the others were children's picture books or family sagas (neither genres in which I have read widely) and there are whole lists of stories about relations falling in love. Not sure why the latter surprised me given the success of the *Flowers in the Attic* series I remember us passing round at school (covered in brown paper to prevent the nuns seeing what we were reading!).

But neither romance nor marriage between cousins is taboo – although, as we discussed in the last meeting, it was certainly more common in the past when people lived in a smaller world. And,

therefore, another class of books that explore relationships between cousins are historical novels. While Regency romances from *Mansfield Park* to Georgette Heyer (e.g. *Frederica*) may spring to mind, another common setting is during the War of the Roses – a period which was called the Cousins' War until Sir Walter Scott told tales about it. And that takes us to Philippa Gregory's series starting with *The White Queen*, through *The White Princess* (which we read in September 2016), to *The Last Tudor*. The most interesting of these is, I think, *The Red Queen* focusing on Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII.

Moving from the past to the future, *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff is Young Adult dystopian fiction published before it became a thing. The book was banned in many American schools because it is uncompromising – although not quite as bleak as some of its later imitators.

Scary for a different reason is Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay*. Not because of the content but because it is rather long and also features in many of those lists with names like '1000 books you *must* read next week'. These cousins meet as boys in New York near the start of the second world war and become enmeshed in the world of superhero comics. No, that didn't make me want to read it any more, either. But it was surprisingly good fun in the end.

And, also set in New York, is *The Emperor's Children* by Claire Messud. Reviews show this is a Marmite book so I shall say nothing about it for now ... but, if you (have) read it, I would love to know what you think.

Catherine

Image from cliparting.com

Our next book is

Never Let Me Go — Kazuo Ishiguro

and we will discuss it on Thursday 12 September.