

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 175

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

Next meeting: Thursday 14th May 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *Dissolution* — CJ Sansom

American Cider

Our March (& April) Book

The Cider House Rules — John Irving

The Cider House Rules is the story of Homer Wells, an inhabitant of St Clouds, an 'orphanage' (I'll explain the scare quotes later) run by the ether-addicted Wilbur Larch. All attempts to get Homer adopted as a child fail so he ends up becoming an assistant to Dr Larch. But one day a young couple turn up in need of help ... and end up taking Homer away with them. War arrives, and Wally goes off to fight, but Homer remains to work in the orchards, thanks to a fake medical history created long before by a protective Wilbur. When Wally is reported missing, Homer seems set to end up with Candy but it is not to be: he eventually returns to St Clouds to continue the work of his unlikely guardian angel.

Of course, given that the book is nearly 1000 pages long, that's only a fraction of the story so perhaps it is a good job that we had an extra month – and then an extra week – in which to read it. Even so, there was at least one person who didn't finish it and a few others who struggled.

For some readers, the problem wasn't so much the length as the rather gory details of how and why Wilbur becomes an abortionist. There's also a rather

graphic photograph (thankfully not illustrated) that plays a significant role in his life and that of Homer and the other 'orphans' who are, in reality, the unwanted children of women who come to St Clouds to give birth rather than have their pregnancies terminated. Even Homer, opposed to abortion, acknowledges that Dr Larch's clean and medically competent service is better than the alternatives.

However, once one gets past that, the relationships between the characters, controlled as they are by affections and hatreds that are nearly always unspoken, are tightly woven. While it might not have you itching to read on to find out what happens next, there is a certain satisfaction seeing how the story unfolds; things work out as they do and, while it may not be in the way one expects, there is a rightness and cohesion to it. There is humour too, although, admittedly, much of it is dark so again may not be to everyone's taste. In fact, in spite of the author's reputation and the continuing popularity of this book, it was, for AVID readers, rather like American cider – minus the punch we expected.

Catherine Fitzsimons

Next month we will be reading:

The Hundred-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared—Jonas Jonasson

Coventry Inspiration Book Awards WINNERS 2015

What's The Story?: *Very Little Red Riding Hood* by *Teresa Heapy*

Telling Tales: *Supercat vs. The Chip Thief* by *Jean Willis*

Hooked on Books: *Stay Where You are and then Leave* by *John Boyne*

Rapid Reads: *Annie's Choice* by *Catherine MacPhail*

Simply The Book: *Boys Don't Knit* by *T S Easton*

The winner of the Adult category is yet to be announced.



What to read next

This month's author ...

Many of John Irving's books have been bestsellers. His first, *The World According to Garp*, dates from 1978 and *Avenue of Mysteries* is due out this year. All the ones I've read are as sprawling as *The Cider House Rules* and, while they are not all as gory, the black humour and willingness to deal with some of the crueller facts of life are there. I've canvassed various other people who have read more than one of his books and most are in agreement: don't let this one put you off; try *A Prayer for Owen Meany* which has, according to Wikipedia, made it to several high school reading lists whereas there were requests to ban *The Cider House Rules* from many American libraries.

... and others

I got that last snippet of information from an American friend of mine and then found myself looking at the [Banned and Challenged Books](#)

site of the American Library Association. The lists make interesting reading. Even if your tastes are catholic with a small c it is easy to see why some people have asked libraries to withdraw things such as the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, but classics such as *Of Mice and Men* – backbones of examination courses in other places – continue to be challenged. Many of them are books aimed at children, teenagers or young adults that are criticised for being age inappropriate so if you want to find a YA book that doesn't feel childish this could be the place to go to for a recommendation!

If you have any other 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.

Once Upon A Time... there was a woman who loved books but who had got in a rut with her reading. The mother of young children, she found an hour-and-a-half once a month at AVID just what she could manage, and the company and the chocolate biscuits were very much to her liking, if not always the books – but at least those were varied and new to her. For a while she co-edited the group's august publication, the *Earlsdon Literary Magazine*.

The children grew a bit and their activities clashed, but the woman's reading had been rejuvenated by the group.

The woman moved away but she never wanted to be taken off the mailing list. She's still friends with people she first met there and still likes to hear what is being read and enjoyed or enjoyably disliked.

Now she goes to another library book group which has themes rather than set books but also has good company and chocolate biscuits and isn't on past her unfeasibly early bedtime.

Not The End

Jennifer Vaudin

What's On

FIRE & DUST

Poetry and storytelling open-mic poetry evening at

The Big Comfy Bookshop

Come with an open mind and an open ear.

Thursday, 21 May

Admission Free. Doors open 7.00pm

Venue details:

The Big Comfy Bookshop

Fargo Village

Far Gosford Street

Coventry

CV1 5EA

Learn more about The Big Comfy Bookshop on owner Michael McEntee's blog:

<http://thebigcomfybookshop.blogspot.co.uk/>

