

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – Birdsong

Reviewer name: Scott Main

Book title: Birdsong

Author name: Sebastian Faulks

Genre: Modern Fiction – First World War

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: This First World War novel of 1993 is a staple of readers group circuits up and down the country, and for good reason. Set in France before and during the conflict, it is the story of a young Englishman Stephen Wraysford who is impelled through a series of extreme experiences, including a traumatic love affair with Isabelle Azaire which tears apart the bourgeois French family with whom he lives. It blends an intense romanticism with an equally intense realism about life in the trenches. Faulks has really done his research on the horrific details of that man made hell on Earth. His account of the mining and counter-mining operations is particularly stunning and harrowing. In the foreground is the blood, the mud, the love, the savagery, the whole surreal insanity of war. In the background, the occasional tones of birdsong float from a Paul Nash type shattered landscape. The birds are singing still. The graves of 16 million men lie beneath that song. This was brought to television in 2012 by Abi Morgan starring Eddie Redmayne and Clémence Poésy (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1127876/?ref=sr_1), but please do read the novel first. Some novels are so well written they remain with you indefinitely. This one has haunted me for 27 years.

What you liked: Beautiful prose backed by immense research on the realities of First World War conflict.

Who should read this book?: Anyone who appreciates fine historical fiction