



## **Foxlowe**

*Eleanor Wasserberg*

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A chilling, compulsive debut about group mentality, superstition and betrayal – and a utopian commune gone badly wrong

We were the Family, and Foxlowe was our home.

There was me – my name is Green – and my little sister, Blue. There was October, who we called Toby, and Ellensia, Dylan, Liberty, Pet and Egg. There was Richard, of course, who was one of the Founders. And there was Freya.

We were the Family, but we weren't just an ordinary family. We were a new, better kind of family.

We didn't need to go to school, because we had a new, better kind of education. We shared everything. We were close to the ancient way of living and the ancient landscape. We knew the moors, and the standing stones. We celebrated the solstice in the correct way, with honey and fruit and garlands of fresh flowers. We knew the Bad and we knew how to keep it away.

And we had Foxlowe, our home. Where we were free.

There really was no reason for anyone to want to leave.

## Foxlowe Details

Date : Published June 2nd 2016 by Fourth Estate

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Author : Eleanor Wasserberg

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## From Reader Review Foxlowe for online ebook

### Ashley Daviau says

I'm left a little bit conflicted by this book. While I did enjoy the overall story and subject matter, I was just left with a feeling of wanting more. We're dropped right into the story of a girl living in a cult but given no background on how the cult began or any real idea of what they believe in. I also found the way the story jumped back and forth in time without any indication confusing and got quite lost as to what was happening when. But in general I did really enjoy the story. I thought it was gripping and really showed how cults can totally brainwash someone and the chilling events it can lead to.

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### Maria (Big City Bookworm) says

#### 3.5 Stars

*The children are the easiest for the Bad to slip in to. They must be watched.*

Firstly, I would love to give a huge thank you to the Harper Collins Canada First Look Program for providing me with an Advance Reader Copy of Foxlowe by Eleanor Wasserberg in exchange for a fair review. It is a huge honour to be a part of the first block of Canadian feedback for this debut novel!

Foxlowe is one of those books that makes you feel uneasy from the second you start reading it. The dark undertones are present immediately and they never dissipate. I'm one of those strange kids that likes books, and even television show and films for that matter, that are darker in tone. When I came across Foxlowe through the Harper Collins Canada Facebook page, I was immediately drawn to the front cover. A creepy house with a vague, yet intriguing name like Foxlowe, I just knew I needed to find out more. I read the synopsis and I knew right away that this was the perfect story for me. I entered for a chance to be one of 10 Canadian book bloggers to read and review Foxlowe as part of the HCC First Look program, and I am so completely honoured to have been chosen! I had the opportunity to read another novel through the HCC First Look program a while ago called Where They Found Her by Kimberly McCreight and I absolutely loved it, so I had really high hopes for Foxlowe.

Foxlowe tells the story of a small group of people who live in a commune of the same name. The story is told from the perspective of a young girl named Green, her Foxlowe name, who has lived on the commune her whole life. She is part of the small group of children known as the Ungrown. New to the group of children is Blue, Green's younger sister. There is also a group known as The Grown that consist of the adults of the house, three of which are considered the Founders. I don't know about you, but cults have always been something that both intrigue and scare me. I find it interesting to see why people flock towards cults in the first place, but I never really thought about the people that are born straight into the lifestyle.

Each member of Foxlowe has two names, their Outside name being the name that they were born with before they joined Foxlowe, and the name that they are given when they join it. Because Green was born into the cult, it is the only name she has ever known. It is the only lifestyle she has ever known. This idea makes for a really interesting story, as some of the characters, especially the older ones, have their memories of their old lives that pull at them to return home where Green only knows Foxlowe as home, and can't understand what is so great about the Outside.

While I found the idea behind this story to be truly unique and attention grabbing, it was definitely hard to follow. The writing style was unlike anything I have ever read before and I found it quite difficult to understand at times. It makes sense, due to the nature of this story, and the fact that it takes place in a cult, that the way these characters speak is slightly off. They still speak English, but slang terms that refer to things that only the members of Foxlowe can understand are thrown in throughout the story and this definitely confused me slightly. One of my favourite books of all time is A Clockwork Orange which is filled with Nadsat slang, yet I was still able to wrap my head around it eventually. I can't say this was the case for Foxlowe. Terms like The Bad, The Crisis and the Cloud were used and I just couldn't figure out what everything meant. I had my personal guesses, but none of them were addressed in detail.

Ultimately, I was left with a lot of unanswered questions by the end of the novel. How did Blue arrive at the cult? Is she a biological sibling of Green or was I missing something here? What was the point of including the character of Kai? Was there a deeper storyline going on with the children of Foxlowe? There were definite undertones there, and I think I have a theory, but once again, I just couldn't seem to grasp a definitive answer. The last few moments of the novel make me believe that my theory is true, but it was too hard to tell for sure.

I also had a hard time figuring out how old each of the children were. They measured their ages by solstices rather than years and that made it really hard for me to figure out how many years apart they were from one another and also how old they were at any given time during the novel as time jumped a lot throughout the duration of the novel.

I loved the chapters towards the ends of the novel, that provide us with a flash forward into the life of Green as an adult. I feel like these chapters were even more dark and twisted than the moments told from her childhood perspective. These chapters gave us as the reader insights into how badly life at Foxlowe corrupted Green's mind and how hard it is for her to accept any other lifestyle.

Overall, I think that Foxlowe had one hell of an intriguing premise. The dark and twisted undertones that I got from reading the synopsis definitely found their way into the entire novel. Apart from the writing style being difficult to follow and understand, I believe that the story is quite interesting and had the potential to be fantastic if it weren't as vague and answered a few more questions. Foxlowe is dark and gripping and it definitely gave me the chills on multiple occasions!

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### **Initial Post Reading Thoughts:**

Foxlowe was dark and creepy and had the right formula to be a story that is right up my alley. I love stories with darker undertones and Foxlowe definitely had that. However, I found it slightly hard to follow and a little vague. I didn't get all the answers that I was hoping for. The ending however put the little black cherry on top in terms of the darker nature of the story!

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### **Erin says**

I don't know what the fuck I just read but I'm glad its over.

Foxlowe is strange, confusing, and boring. The plot if there was one, was vague and incomprehensible.

Did I mention it was boring?

Foxlowe is also pointless and I don't recommend it.

CCPL October Book Club

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### **Emma says**

I'm left feeling rather ambivalent about the book, it just didn't quite succeed in what I thought it was trying to do.

The initial part, Green's childhood within the cult, was finely balanced between youthful *joie de vivre* and cruelty, against a backdrop of adult manipulation, abuse, and deceit. It was dark and challenging, with the events on the periphery as important as, or even more important than, those related by the child narrator.

Then it all falls apart. People leave, things happen, there is Afterwards. But none of it captures the intensity of that first section. If anything, it serves to undermine it because by the end I was bored by the pitiful, sad lives of the ex members. Maybe that's the point? The dark power and pull of people working together apart from society, who then become nothing when trying to be part of the wider world? It didn't feel that way though, the plot seemed lost. Thematically, the book looks at the ways in which people can surrender to baser instincts when the group identifies somebody as an 'outsider' or 'threat', yet it lacks the emotional punch necessary for the reader to really feel the danger of it.

Thanks to Netgalley for the opportunity to choose this review copy. All opinions are my own.

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### **Susan says**

The centrepiece of his novel is, in many ways, Foxlowe itself, a large house which belonged to Richard's family. Richard, along with Freya and Libby, are the founders of a commune which, although begun as an experiment into a new way of life, is beset for human failings – including deceit, jealousy and control.

The main character is a young girl called Green. Green has spent all her life at Foxlowe, but anyone who arrives has their name changed to reflect their new life. Green is not the only child – there is also a boy named Toby and a baby, who arrives mysteriously with Freya one day. Although initially resentful of having to share Freya, Green names her Blue. The children have no education, but spend their time relating why their way of life is best, avoiding the outside – where The Bad lurks – and being punished by Freya for even minor transgressions.

I recall reading another book about communal life – Arcadia by Lauren Groff – although that was set in 1960's America. This novel shares the same sense of an idealistic dream turned into reality; although this is a much darker read. Freya believes strongly in the groups way of life and Green happily goes along with her. It becomes obvious though that, as the children grow, both Toby and Blue have questions that their isolated way of life does not answer. Although Freya is not happy for the outside world to intrude, when it does, it has disastrous consequences...

This is a disturbing read, which would be a good choice for book groups with much to discuss. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

## **Brittany (UnderTheRadarBooks) says**

4.5 stars. This was powerful, disturbing and thought-provoking. I will be thinking of this one for a long time.

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## **Sheila says**

3 stars--I liked the book. Content warning: child abuse.

This book sounded like everything I love, and I've been wanting to read it since I first read the English edition's summary a year ago. The descriptive copy uses phrases like "crumbling old house" and "modern gothic" and "haunting, enchanting world of an English commune." I love books about cults and communes, so this sounded like my sort of thing.

And it was, and I liked it, but I didn't love it like I expected. The book's strength was in its descriptions of life on the commune--the filth, the lack of medicine and adult supervision, sharing all belongings, etc. Though the narrator thought her childhood was happy, it's pretty obvious from an outsider's perspective that it was a horror. Another strength was in the description of character relationships; the narrator's, sadly, were largely one-sided, despite how desperately she wanted to be loved.

Despite these strengths, I thought the post-cult chapters were less engaging. No spoilers, but I also thought part of the plot was a bit muddled too.

Still, this is Wasserberg's debut, so I'll definitely check out her next book.

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## **Simon says**

Creepy old house ✓? Cult/Commune ✓? maniacal leader ✓? coming of age brain washing ✓? utterly gripping ✓ unsettlingly chilling ending ✓? Yes that's pretty much Foxlowe. What a corking read. Just my kind of gothic, dark, troubling read.

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## **Joanne Harris says**

An interestingly literate take on the Kid in A Cult genre, this one's part-fable, part-modern Gothic, depicting the damaged interactions between members of an isolationist commune. I caught echoes of THE VILLAGE; THE GRACES; Nick Cave's AND THE ASS SAW THE ANGEL; even parts of WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE. The voice of Green is strong and clear (if sometimes a little fey for my liking); the imagery is powerful; the undercurrent of menace and suspense strong until the very end. My one reservation, which is personal and does not reflect on the novel's undoubted quality, is that to me, the "cult" remains too nebulous and unidentified. This is no doubt a deliberate move on behalf of the author, and yet, with its language of ritual, ley lines, standing stones, the Bad and so forth, it seems clear that we're dealing with some underlying form of indigenous faith or religious belief. Not to mention it at all, therefore, seems weak, and to me undermines the principle of the beliefs of the commune being exploited by an unstable and

abusive leader. That's just my take, though - others may feel that to avoid mentioning specific beliefs is fairer to those individuals who might share them. However, to me, the language of paganism is already so deeply embedded into the narrative that it hardly makes any difference, except to deflect possible criticism from pagans who might be offended...

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

The first part of this book takes place in a home called Foxlowe, where people take new names and live in one big group, and people who leave are called Leavers and never again mentioned by name. The community lives in extreme poverty and cold, and in fear of a woman called Freya who seems to be the leader. The child Green grows up during this period. It is atmospheric, feels like it should hold some kind of magic, but then all of the sudden the characters and the reader are jolted into reality and into the future without knowing what has happened. (Well, the characters know more than the reader.) Some questions are answered through this storytelling tactic but I still felt at the end that I had a lot of questions. And I'm not sure the combination of settings and moods worked for me, it was like I wanted it to go farther in one direction or another.

Interesting debut novel though, and I would try the next book this author writes.

*Thanks to the publisher for providing a copy through NetGalley.*

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### **Ashley says**

\* I was provided with a copy of Foxlowe from Harper Collins Canada's First Look program as part of the first Canadian feedback of the book.

**In a nutshell:** A dysfunctional coming of age story in which youths grow up in a commune, believing it is a utopia.

It takes a strong plot, well-defined characters and originality for a book to grip my interest from the first to last page, and Foxlowe did just that. This debut novel about a commune makes you stop and wonder if you were never taught any differently, would you really know what the difference between what is "right" and "wrong"?

May i start off by saying in this case, you SHOULD judge a book by its cover. It is endearing, with a large house surrounded by clouds yet the sun shines through the back of it, trees shedding leaves suggesting changing of seasons, and lights on throughout most of the house, revealing that although the path towards it seems questionable, it is inhabited, and actively at that.

Green grows up in a commune, called Foxlowe, with a "family" that she believes is perfectly normal, more pure than the outside world, as it has been shielded from what is known as "The Bad." The family, however, harbours secrets that run deep and threaten the nature of the small society. Shared lovers, painful punishments for those who disobey, and "leavers" plague Foxlowe in a cycle of power and control. Green watches in horror as all she has ever known crumbles around her. This riveting yet disturbing tale will keep readers on their toes.

“I knew that when I was born, it brought the Time of the Crisis, and that everything Freya did, even the things that hurt, were to keep the Family together and safe ever afterwards.”

The family dynamics in Foxlowe are interesting, particularly between two of Foxlowe's founders: Freya and Libby, as the two seem to fight for power and are overcome by jealousy for one another. The dynamics make one wonder what life must be like for people in communes, especially for people growing up in them. Do those living within communes truly think of them as utopias, even if their behaviors are questioned by the much larger outside world? Without giving too much away, the book will also make readers wonder how much potential psychological and physical abuse are inflicted upon children in these types of environments.

As I myself was never raised in a commune nor have I met someone who has been, I cannot personally relate to a single character in the book and can only speculate that similar incidents that happen at Foxlowe may have occurred in real communes around the world. Nevertheless, the characters and their storylines are enthralling.

Although the writing style may seem choppy and disoriented at times due to abrupt paragraph breaks and lack of quotation marks for dialogue, it works for this book and the nature of the plot. It is simplistic and descriptive where it needs to be. At times, however, it can be hard to follow the story as certain sections take place in the future with no forewarning and readers are left to fend for themselves in sense.

Overall, Foxlowe is a dark and compelling read that I devoured quickly. I am excited to see what the rest of the world thinks of the book as it makes its debut!

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## Blair says

I completely breezed through this debut novel, swallowing it practically whole (I like food/eating metaphors for reading; they always feel incredibly apt to me somehow). It's about a girl who's raised in a small commune at Foxlowe, the ancestral home of one of the group's founders. As is often the case in books like this (see: *The First Book of Calamity Leek*, to which this bears more than a passing resemblance), the protagonist, Green - that's her suitably hippyish 'Foxlowe name' - is the one who is fiercely protective of 'the Family' and refuses to rebel when the other children start to reject its practices.

The story is addictive (it helps that I'm a huge fan of stories depicting cults/communes) and it's easy to get swept up in the atmosphere. The relationships are well-formed, and Foxlowe itself is balanced so effectively: on the one hand there's the horror of the gruesome punishments Freya inflicts on the children; on the other, the community has an idyllic, enchanted air; there's something haunting and oddly beguiling about the way it's portrayed. Once Green leaves Foxlowe, the plot develops in ways I didn't anticipate. You can see exactly why she would have trouble letting go of her past; her new life is scarcely better than the old one, it's just that she's restricted in completely different ways. (view spoiler) The contrasts - and, in the first half, the question of what happened to Foxlowe - make the whole thing incredibly tense and gripping.

If you don't like child narrators, you might not get on with Green's rather naive language, particularly the substitution of very randomly chosen words with Foxlowe-specific equivalents (for example grown/ungrown instead of adults/children), a device which seems rather contrived when the members of the commune use proper English for almost everything else. And indeed, it's easy to question Green's eloquence when she has supposedly never learned to read or write properly. But I'm nitpicking; once I got swept up in the story, I forgot about all this.

This is one to watch out for; I couldn't put it down, and stayed up way longer than I should have so I could finish it. The ending is delicious - (view spoiler).

*I received an advance review copy of Foxlowe from the publisher through NetGalley.*

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### **Karen M says**

That last line pushed this book into 5-star territory for me. (That's all I'll say for now.)

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### **Petra says**

I have no idea how to rate this book. It's weird, creepy, sad, but also thought provoking. however I can't help feeling that it could have somehow been more. It's worth a read though in my opinion.

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### **Jean Menzies says**

Another impressive debut novel. In this title Wassenberg tackles the story of a young girls experience growing up in an abusive commune or 'cult'. The story itself is told from the perspective of our female protagonist, Green, who begins the book as a very young child, of around 4 years old. We follow her narrative as she recounts her upbringing in this run down but magical communal home known as Foxlowe, if it be a little dark magic.

I use the word abusive but unsurprisingly Green is unable to process her childhood as such. She adamantly believes in the mythology and organisation of Foxlowe and has no interest in the outside world. She is the only member of the commune to have been born there although she is one of three children to have been raised there: the ungrown. Other than her young companions there are 9 other residents of Foxlowe whom we meet in the book. It is Freya, however, whose presence dominates the story, commune and the life and mind of Green.

Read the rest of my review on my blog: <https://morejeansthoughts.wordpress.c...>

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