

Oscar and the Lady in Pink by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.  
Atlantic Books 2005.

This is a tiny little book, but it packs a mighty punch!

Oscar is a little boy dying of cancer in hospital separated physically from his parents by his condition and emotionally by their inability to rise above their grief at his fate. He is sad, alone, and drifting until; a hospital visitor comes into his life – Granny Rose, the Lady in Pink of the title.

As a way of helping him to deal with his condition Granny Rose encourages Oscar to write a series of letters to God, and it is these letters which comprise the book.

Oscar and the Lady in Pink wonderfully portrays the intense relationship between the major characters, and in spite of its underlying seriousness there is plenty of humour. But it also alludes to many other issues as well: the pain of child illness and mortality, the way such children are treated by hospitals, by family and especially by parents; the power of transcending love and the ability to contextualize and celebrate a life cut cruelly short.

Oscar and the Lady in Pink is sad but immensely uplifting, and if in its final pages it makes you cry – as it did me – you will nevertheless be very glad that you read it, and in ways that are hard to define, feel a much better person for having done so.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh