

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 168

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

Next meeting: Thursday 11th September 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *The Secret River* — Kate Grenville

Missing Children, Missing Depth

Our August Book

Light Shining in the Forest — Paul Torday

Unfortunately only four members of the group were able to make it to August's meeting (although someone sent in their views by e-mail) – no cakes but the debate was still lively.

The novel centres around the disappearance of three children and another unlikely trio of characters who, for their own reasons, decide to find out what really happened. While the book itself was reasonably well written and sort of worked as a light mystery, it was not a great read — mainly because there were a number of strands which didn't seem to fit together very well and that left people at best slightly confused.

At the start of the book you think it is going to be simply the story of three very different people getting together to solve a mystery, but the novel soon brings in a religious element — one of the missing children showed signs of the stigmata before they disappeared and people hear strange voices in their heads throughout the book. The problem is that there is no subtlety shown by the author in combining the two strands.

The lack of subtlety and depth is also shown in the characters who come across as very stereotyped with any details merely serving

the purpose of moving the story along. A local newspaper writer is more interested in writing a news story that will give him his big break than finding the missing a children; a civil servant newly appointed as a Children's Czar even though he has never got his hands dirty decides he must now actually get involved with helping real children; an intelligent, under-rated secretary who is the only character to wholly care about finding the missing children; and their abductor, made fun of as a child because of a facial deformity who finds a beauty in taxidermy.

Lastly the plot doesn't really come together. A criminal who would have been all over the newspapers is not convicted and is given a new identity – or at least name and place to live. However, nothing is done about his striking facial deformity and yet no one recognises him.

I suppose it would quite hard to recommend even a good book about missing children because the subject matter might distress some readers. In this case there is no need to worry because the story and writing aren't good enough.

David Lloyd

Next month we will be reading:

Norwegian by Night — Derek B. Miller

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 9th October.

(No, there isn't a page missing. *What to read Next* will return next month, along with any stories anyone would like to share about their holiday reading. Ed.)