

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 183

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

Next meeting: Thursday 14 January 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*—Alexander McCall Smith

Chinese cooking?

Our December Book

Lone Wolf—Jodi Piccoult

Lone Wolf tells the story of a family in crisis and examines a situation where love and other emotions – large helpings of guilt about various things in this case – can set siblings against each other or/and their parents. In this story, Luke has been injured in a car crash and is in a coma. Daughter Cara, who has been living with him and escaped the accident relatively unharmed, is holding out for a miracle but estranged son Edward, who has been called back from his job teaching English in foreign climes, believes the best thing to do would be to let their father go. But their desires have as much to do with secrets they are keeping as the medical possibilities and impossibilities and that leads them to court with their mother's new husband Joe drawn into the conflict on a side that forces him to make difficult choices too.

The story is told from almost everyone's point of view with most of the history revealed in the thoughts of Luke while he

lies unconscious. But it is his account and his life that makes this different to other Jodi Piccoult novels (at least ones I've read). Luke works with wolves. He has devoted his life to them and, at one point, deserts his wife Georgia and young children to live with a wolf pack in the wilds of Canada for many months. Unsurprisingly, he soon becomes a celebrity and, even less surprisingly, the culture shock of returning to live as a human precipitates the end of his marriage.

So much, then, for the book, but what did people think of it? Let's look at the characters first because understanding what we thought about them explains some of the other ideas. In short, most of **us** didn't like most of **them** (the honourable exception is Joe). Maybe that's because we get far enough inside their heads to see the worst of them rather than faces they present to the outside world where such raw feelings are tempered or

Next month we will be reading:

A Most Wanted Man—John le Carré

The date for discussion of this book is 11 February 2016.

hidden. Or maybe not. All of them have spent most of the backstory hiding feelings and not telling each other important things, and the lack of communication can't be entirely explained by keeping secrets (everyone, it seems) or having forgotten how to speak (Luke, at least for a while). The consequence of that, of course, is that we didn't really care what happened.

The multiple point of view structure was considered a strength by some but confused others. One reader suggested that had the publisher used the chapter titles (character names) in the running headers it might have helped. At least Luke's sections were easy to recognise: being out of it, he spoke in italics. That, I think, tells you all you need to know about how different the voices of the characters were! An odd couple of the chapters were narrated by a minor character and most of us thought they were totally unnecessary.

While we're on style, we agreed that the book was easy reading but more than one reader said that they'd found themselves at the end of a page with nothing on it having made any impression – rather like calorie-light food laden with MSG: easy to eat tons without any conscious effort.

But what about the story? There's lots of information about wolves which was, most of us agreed, somewhere on the spectrum from interesting to fascinating. The author seems to have done her research quite well, although how accurately she used it for the purposes of the story is another matter – none of us were expert enough to judge. However, it is there to explain why Luke is as he is ... but not all of it is needed

to explain the aspects of his character that have led to his relationships with his family being as they are. So, we reckoned, nearly all of that belonged in another (possibly non-fiction) book.

That leaves the family bit. As secrets were revealed (and at least one of the twists was reasonably interesting) some things began to make sense – but none of us really understood how Georgia and Luke got together, what took them beyond an initial attraction to marriage, because neither recounts anything about their good times together. But then, I suppose, doing that would have detracted from the main conflict. Between them, Cara and Edward have uncovered more or less all the relevant history by the time they have agreed on an action at the end, so, we reckoned, the story could have been told using just the sections from their points of view.

So there you go: AVID readers recommend filleting the book and serving it up in at least three different volumes by separating out the meat of the main story, adding some more filling to Luke and Georgia's history and spicing up the observations on wolf packs with pictures.

Catherine Fitzsimons

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:

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