

Reynoldston Reading Group

Last month we read "The Little Stranger" by Sarah Waters. This is a Gothic ghost story set in rural Warwickshire just after the end of World War Two. The central character is Dr. Faraday, who is one day called to a crumbling mansion to treat a new maid who is so scared of things she has seen in the house that she wants to leave. Dr. Faraday is intrigued, by both the house and the Ayres family who live there, that he makes an effort to return to Hundreds Hall as often as he can. Dr. Faraday seeks, and believes he finds, a rational explanation for the strange and seemingly supernatural events but the Ayres family members are altogether less sure. Increasingly strange events occur in the house. Frightening and mystifying everyone who witnesses them. The author has been clever in applying layer after gentle, rustling layer of doubt, paranoia and unease and uncertainty into the readers mind. It is a spooky tale and not a comfortable read if you are alone in the house on a winter night.

The book provoked an interesting discussion. Many found the tale oppressive. The main character and narrator comes over as a bit of a plodder, dull and lacking humour. In fact it was difficult to warm to or engage with any of the characters. Overall we found the book not particularly exciting yet a page turner. The plot does not solve the mystery or reveal who is the "Little Stranger". The reader has to come to his or her own conclusion on that point and despite our detailed discussion and investigation we failed to agree who it was that appeared on the higher staircase in the final chapter to cause Caroline Ayres to cry out "You" and immediately fall over the banister to her death.

Our next book is "Good Wives? Mary, Fanny, Jenny and Me" by Margaret Forster. The book describes the lives of three wives of famous men; Mary Livingstone, the wife of David Livingstone, Fanny Stevenson, married to Robert Louis Stevenson and Jenny Lee wife of Aneurin Bevan. Margaret Forster reflects on the lives of these women and makes comparisons with her own marriage to Hunter Davies.