

Room to Read Book Group Report by Beverley Redfearn

Dark Places by Gillian Flynn

This, the second novel by the American author of *Sharp Objects* and *Gone Girl*, certainly illustrates her talent for the macabre. Described in the Big Issue Scotland, as 'dripping with ominous atmosphere, complex psychology and moral ambiguity', the book explores the mystery surrounding the gruesome murder of three members of an impoverished farming family, the Days, in 1985. Ben Day was committed for the murders, largely on the evidence of his younger sister, Libby, who was just seven years old at the time. As events unfold, twenty four years later, Libby questions her own recollections of that horrific night and the reader learns what actually happened in the preceding hours, days and months leading up to that night of awful, bloody annihilation.

Whilst there was general agreement on characterisation, describing individuals as being loathsome, odious and insidious, (as the author no doubt intended), there were wide differences in our appreciation of Flynn's writing technique and plot. Comments ranged from 'an improbable plot' to 'a fiendishly clever plot'.

Serious discussions centred upon the influences of environmental factors in the lives of the main characters, particularly poverty, as well as peer pressures and expectations, drug abuse, and inherited traits and psychotic behaviours. We also made reference to the injustices of the American penal system.

Several members of the group could not finish the book, describing it as too dark, whilst one reader hated, loathed and detested it.

Considering suitability for a reading group, we attributed scores of 2 - 3, because of the amount and range of discussions it evoked, but we could not recommend it to a friend. We recognised that this probably reflected our particular demographic, and that a younger audience might more readily accept the level of cruelty and depravity within the pages of *Dark Places*.