

Book Review: The Lost Bookshop
By Evie Woods

It's rare that I do not finish what I've started. But in the case of "The Lost Bookshop" by Evie Woods, I'm afraid the dreaded DNF (did not finish) applies. Just shy of the halfway point in the book, I gave up.

To be fair, I'm in the minority opinion here. I've seen the reviews:

"A magical story."

"An utterly enchanting tale."

"A joy to read."

It might seem I wasn't reading the same book as these folks. But I saw nothing magical, enchanting or joyous in the first 183 pages. And if a book hasn't reeled me in by then, it's not going to happen.

The story focuses on three individuals – Opaline, Martha and Henry. Their stories are told across multiple timelines – Opaline lives in the early 1920s, while Martha and Henry occur present day. And they're all told first person in rotating chapters. That's the first problem.

Each of the three voices sounds alike. It's clear the author is trying to provide varying perspectives, but that doesn't come through. In some places, if not for the name designation at the start of the chapter, you'd be hard pressed to know who's doing the narrating. Especially between Martha and Henry, who interact within the same timeline.

And the characters themselves, in my opinion, are lacking in substance. Each is running away from something – Opaline from an arranged family marriage; Martha from an abusive, alcoholic husband; and Henry from what seems like his fear of his newly

engaged status. But we're not told enough about these three people to make their stories compelling. In the case of Henry, for example, why is he desperately searching for this lost library? Why is he so enamored with old books?

In fact, even the people characterized as antagonists – such as Opaline's older brother and Martha's abusive husband – are sketched as thin as tracing paper. It's hard to connect with any character, good or bad, when you have no idea what their motivation is. Why is Opaline, a 21-year old from Dublin, so obsessed with what Emily Bronte may have secretly written?

The scene shifts don't help. The characters are shuttled between London, Paris and Dublin almost at the drop of a hat. And for individuals who are noted to have limited financial resources, they seem to get around Europe with little difficulty.

A reviewer referred to the book as "... a blend of historical and romance fiction with a sprinkle of magical realism on top." Maybe that's the problem. The author is trying to do too much, and the end result is not enough of a clear delineation on any particular style.

I also found it interesting to learn that the author, Evie Woods, is really writer Evie Gaughan. Why the name change? Did she not want to be immediately associated with such a dud of a book?

Again, I'm in the minority here, so you may want to check this out for yourself. There are many glowing reviews for "The Lost Bookshop." But I found it a difficult read from page one, and, still struggling 182 pages later, packed it in.

I give “The Lost Bookshop” 1 out of 5 stars ... only because I don’t feel I can be so cruel as to give it a giant goose egg. But if you endeavor to navigate through the pages and have a different viewpoint, I'd love to hear it.