



The Wonder

Emma Donoghue

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The Irish Midlands, 1859. An English nurse, Lib Wright, is summoned to a tiny village to observe what some are claiming as a medical anomaly or a miracle - a girl said to have survived without food for months. Tourists have flocked to the cabin of eleven-year-old Anna O'Donnell, and a journalist has come down to cover the sensation. *The Wonder* is a tale of two strangers who transform each other's lives, a psychological thriller, and a story of love pitted against evil.

The Wonder Details

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From Reader Review *The Wonder* for online ebook

Taryn says

4.5 Stars. Eleven-year-old Anna O' Donnell insists that she's been living off the manna of heaven for the last four months and no longer needs food to survive. Her parents and community seem to blindly accept the claim. People travel from great distances for a chance to interact with this living miracle. To appease any skeptics, a committee hires two watchers to observe Anna over a two-week period. One of the watchers is Lib Wright, a nurse who worked under Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War. She considers resigning as soon as she finds out the details of the job, but decides to keep her commitment with the assumption that she'll be able to expose the hoax in a couple of days.

A fast didn't go fast; it was the slowest thing there was. Fast meant a door shut fast, firmly. A fastness, a fortress. To fast was to hold fast to emptiness, to say no and no and no again.

Lib arrives on the scene ready to expose the girl's deception. She searches every nook and cranny for the tiniest of crumbs and keeps meticulous records of all the girl's vital signs. She is concerned about the integrity of the investigation, because she doesn't fully trust the second watcher, a nun, to be as scrupulous with her observations. As Lib spends time with the girl, her attitude softens and her concerns become more complicated. **Emma Donoghue writes her characters so empathetically that they make my heart ache.** I felt every bit of Lib's psychological journey as if it were my own. I desperately clung to the hope that one of the adults in Anna's life would take control of the situation. It was frustrating to watch the obviously capable nurse being disregarded and being forced to make *"her voice as soft and womanly as she could"* in hopes that the *"important men"* would listen to her concerns. Even though I could relate to Lib's incredulity, I liked when her preconceived notions were called into question. The skeptical journalist William Byrne makes her confront her homeland's part in intensifying the culture she has been so prejudiced against. She admonishes one character for telling Anna a "lurid" religious tale, but she discovers that she had greatly misinterpreted the situation: *"I don't think you understand our stories, ma'am."*

"Do you know what indelible means?" [Lib]

"A stain that won't come off." [Anna]

The mystery of the girl is intriguing, but there's also an interesting historical context. In the Authors Note, Donoghue tells how she was inspired by the phenomenon of Fasting Girls between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. The characters that Lib encounters were affected by the Irish famine, which ended seven years before Anna's fasting began. Lib's background leads to interesting reflections on the many lessons she learned from Florence Nightingale. **The setting of Athlone, Ireland made me feel confined.** Most of the scenes are set in Anna's bedroom or in the spirit grocery that Lib is staying in, with occasional jaunts into the bog lands. It feels even more isolating because of Lib's culture shock. **Lib is an unwelcome outsider trying to navigate this unfamiliar world where everyone seems to be talking in code, a strange mix of Catholicism and superstition.** Language is a very important element of the story. There are many miscommunications and misinterpretations. Each chapter begins with a single word and its multiple definitions, calling attention to the numerous ways that words and phrases can be interpreted. This also

comes across in the riddles that Lib uses to entertain Anna.

Like small gods, children formed their miniature worlds out of clay, or even just words. To them, the truth was never simple.

Lib spends her two weeks in Athlone grappling with the incredible situation she has been thrust into and attempting to logically find a solution to this real-life riddle. **This slow-building mystery had me riveted!** All the questions I needed answered kept me captivated to the very end. Why did Anna suddenly decide to stop eating? What are the potential motives for the adults in her life to play along with a charade that would endanger a child? How has she survived four months if she has only consumed spoonfuls of water? How have they been sneaking her food and who is responsible? Is it possible that she really is a miracle? Will Anna survive the fast? Will Lib convince anyone to listen to her concerns? How will she overcome her ethical dilemmas? **Great characters, well-drawn setting, and interesting moral and ethical issues.**

I received this book for free from Little, Brown and Company & NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. The publication date is September 20, 2016.

Julie says

The Wonder, by Emma Donoghue is a 2016 Little, Brown and Company publication.

‘Room’ is the only book I had read by this author before this one. I was so impressed with that novel, I put this on hold at the library, the instant it was released, but by the time it became available, after a whopping two month wait period, I’d already forgotten what the synopsis was, and my interest had waned somewhat.

That, and the very different subject matter, the depressing tone, and the very slow pacing made this a difficult book to stick with, as least for me.

Lib, a nurse who worked during the war as one the ‘nightingales’ is commissioned to travel to Ireland to care for eleven year old Anna, who has not eaten for four months. Some believe she is a miracle child, while others are convinced it’s all a hoax.

Lib is to stay with the child and make sure no one is passing her food on the sly and of course to observe her health and care for her as much as is allowed.

As time passes, Lib learns the dynamics of this small community, its legends and superstitions, as well as the family’s belief system which is deeply religious. Anna, in fact, is obsessed with religious passages and cards.

Lib is honestly perplexed as she investigates what is surely a hoax, determined to discover the truth and hopefully save Anna from certain death.

Well, the premise is certainly one I’ve never encountered before, with a based, in part, on the ‘fasting girls’

phenomenon back in the Victorian days.

I admit, I'd never heard of such a thing, so I came to appreciate the author's choosing such an obscure topic to build a fictional story around.

However, I did struggle for a long while with this one, and became frustrated often, but the last quarter of the book was riveting and shocking, and held by undivided attention.

I can't say this book would go down as one of my favorite reads of 2016, due to the heaviness and the bleakness of the situation. This is a dark story, which addresses several dark and controversial topics, but it is a book I still recommend. I was pleased with the outcome and how the mystery was resolved, and I learned a few interesting historical facts, as a result.

Overall, this one gets 3.5 stars

Larry H says

Emotional, at times disturbing, and tremendously thought-provoking, *The Wonder* once again demonstrates the sheer power of Emma Donoghue's storytelling ability, which first dazzled me with the extraordinary *Room*.

Lib Wright was a nurse alongside Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, escaping her own personal issues. But after the war, even for a Nightingale Nurse, life is monotonous; she is treated with disdain by her supervisors and fellow nurses, and is left to little more than menial work. But when an unusual opportunity for work comes her way, she jumps at the chance.

Eleven-year-old Anna O'Donnell is growing up in a small Irish village. She claims not to have eaten anything for several months, and says she is subsisting on manna from heaven. Anna and her family have become a sensation throughout Ireland and England, journalists have covered the story with a combination of skepticism and hope, and people have begun to flock from all over the world to spend time with the "wee wonder."

Lib, along with a nun who is also a nurse, is hired to watch Anna around the clock, to prove whether Anna's claims are true. They are to watch Anna for two weeks, trading shifts, and then report on their findings, which would determine if the girl is the miracle which some claim she is, or if she is perpetrating some kind of fraud.

Is the girl getting some sort of secret nourishment, or is she really surviving on manna from heaven? Lib, who doesn't share the same religion as the O'Donnells or most of Ireland's citizens, is instantly skeptical, and believes she will uncover the truth fairly quickly. She searches for any way that Anna could be sneaking food, or if her family is in on the lie. But as she gets to know Anna, and understand where her religious devotion comes from, she finds herself doubting her own training and religious beliefs, and wondering if Anna really is part of a miracle.

But as Anna's condition starts to decline, Lib must decide what her true role is: is she merely investigating Anna's claims, or is she responsible for protecting the child, even if those around her might be endangering

her? How can she go against her mentor's training, to remove any emotional involvement with her patients?

The Wonder posed some interesting questions, and Donoghue unfurled her plot and ratcheted up the tension, little by little. While I had my suspicions about how the story would tie itself up, it is tremendously compelling from start to finish, although it certainly was a little disturbing as well, because I don't understand the type of religious devotion which imbued the characters.

This book reminded me a bit of Ian McEwan's *The Children Act*, in that its protagonist faced an interesting emotional and ethical dilemma which they thought they would be able to solve fairly quickly given their professional expertise, but then found themselves drawn in beyond their expectations. Donoghue did a great job with this story, which made me think as it made me feel.

NetGalley and Little, Brown and Company provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blog...>

Cheri says

Edit: Available to order or purchase!

Edit#2: I've thought of this everyday since I finished reading it, and am changing my rating to 5 Stars, as well.

Lib is a nurse, a Nightingale, trained by Florence N. herself. She is living in London, when she's called to Athlone, Ireland, smack dab in the middle of Ireland, for a two-week nursing task in a private capacity. She arrives at her housing, a room above a small grocery, after a lengthy and bumpy ride in a jaunting car. She can't believe anything about this is right, the village is nothing more than a few haphazardly buildings huddled together, with a whitewashed building up from there, standing out with its pointed roof with a cross above

The town seems mired in myth and fairytale; indeed fairies are much to blame for things gone wrong in this strange village, which Lib can't quite comprehend. Rituals abound to prevent the fairies from their naughtiness.

Lib's just settled down to eat when Dr. McBrearty shows up to fill her in on some of the details of her charge, Anna O'Donnell. The girl is eleven, and for four months, since her birthday, Anna has not taken any food, not eaten at all, since then, yet is still seemingly healthy. Anna has been brought there to watch over her, essentially to supervise and report if she does, in fact, not eat at all.

It goes against what she believes in, but as a nurse she's to follow the doctor's orders and to not interfere, merely document. Another nurse, a nun, stays with her the other shift during the day. The family has been, not surprisingly, accused of creating this hoax, what Lib believes is a hoax. As time goes by, Lib is taken with the girl, and yet still she believes firmly that this child must be being secretly fed. Receiving only spoonfuls of water a day, observed by herself and the Nun, how can she have survived for this long?

Anna exudes an aura of benevolence to all those around her, she is quietly accepting of both those who

believe in her “miracle” and those who do not believe. Lib has learned to build emotional walls. The details are where Donoghue shines in this historical, fictional tale that immerses you in the setting, the people and the time. The dirt roads, the countryside, every detail about life on the O’Donnell farm, and yes, even the fairies.

This does have a sense of mystery to it in that so many are trying to prove their side of Anna’s story. Is she surviving on air and water alone or is she somehow obtaining nourishment some other way? There are over 50 cases documented between the 16th and 20th century, of what were termed “Fasting Girls” in Europe and North America, even though that’s a lengthy period of time for only a relatively small number of cases, why would anyone choose to fast permanently?

Religion is ever present in this story, but it is neither in a positive or negative way. It’s simply the background of the story. There are some recitations of prayers by the girl, Anna, which I was aware of... and I am aware there are others who try to avoid overly-Christian novels, and others who avoid novels with too many “naughty words” - my opinion is that you are “safe” on both of those accounts.

Pub Date: 20 September 2016

Many thanks to Little, Brown and Company, NetGalley and to author Emma Donoghue for providing me with an advanced copy for reading and review.

Cathrine ?? says

3.5★

This story about the investigation into claims of a young Irish Catholic girl living on nothing but water for four months was initially slow to engage me. I think this was because I disliked the main protagonist so strongly.

Town and church officials have hired an outsider to continually monitor the girl-wonder to try and discern the truth. Lib is educated and harshly skeptical, believing she will unlock the mystery quickly to expose a ruse. But there is more going on than she knows and Anna is not what she expected. In fact, none of the characters are what I expected. There was a subtle creepiness about it all that kept me turning pages with the building tension.

There were also morsels hard for me to swallow, e.g. I accept, miracle or not, that someone can go without food for a long time, yet though Anna appears healthy, under observation she only drinks 2 or 3 teaspoons of water per day. The brain alone would shut down pretty quickly. Also, Lib is a highly trained nurse and yet unable to act accordingly as she daily observes what she considers a starving child. Did I mention she was hard to like?

Then again, perhaps I am being harsh. It all unfolds in just under 2 weeks.

Like Lib, I am often skeptical. I’ll just throw in that the author has this thing about characters trapped in a *room* together.

Though a bit flawed in my opinion, it ended up being a unique, worth-my-time read.

Linda says

"Everybody was a repository of secrets."

Emma Donoghue presents the multifaceted story of a young English nurse, Lib Wright, who has been assigned to a remote Irish village. As a well-trained apprentice of the famous Florence Nightingale, Lib has attended to the needs of many a patient, especially those wracked with wounds and eventual death during the Crimean War.

But this patient.....This patient is a frail smidge of an eleven year old lass who has not taken food in four months according to her family and the village doctor. Lib must stay within the O'Donnell household and verify this as truth. She and a staid nun take shifts to monitor young Anna and document her daily routine as well as observing the family setting.

Anna surrounds herself with the comfort of holy cards and Scripture. The waft of Irish folklore and the wee people traipse in and out as Lib tries to make sense of it all. Not only is Ireland itself so foreign to Lib, but its culture, religious beliefs, and customs perplex her even more.

How can anyone exist on a spoon or two of water each day?

A well-played hoax or a miracle in the making?

The tension escalates as Lib befriends a young male journalist from Dublin who wishes to engage in conversations about this "Fasting Girl". Lib is caught up in a web of trying to sustain her professionalism, and at the same time, give in to the maddening desire to lay out all the irregular pebbles of stone before her.

"None are so blind as those who will not see."

Donoghue does a fine job of shifting the storyline into a well-tuned crescendo at the end. That was worth the price of admission. Although a fictional account of the young Anna, the author was inspired by almost 50 accounts of Fasting Girls going for long periods of time with no food between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries.

A fascinating read with a highly unusual topic that I've never encountered before. And so well-done by the very talented Emma Donoghue.

Diane S ? says

4.5 When Libby a nurse trained by Florence Nightingale, fought alongside of her in the Crimea, contracts to work with a family in Ireland, she has no idea what she is letting herself in for. Eleven year old, Anne, is said to have not eaten any solid food for over four months and Lib's job will be to observe her for two weeks, to see if the claims are true. She will alternate this duty with a nursing sister of the same Catholic faith as the

family.

Extremely atmospheric, I felt the same frustration and desperation as Libby, this is such a vividly told story. Running up against Irish superstitions, so much she does not understand, and the hard and fast faith of this family and the people who pilgrimage to come see the child. She makes a friend of a newspaper reporter and he will help Libby see the truth before her unseeing eyes. Anne, herself has secrets, reasons for doing what she is doing and the local doctor should be hanged for being inept. Everyone has their reasons for doing what they do and I felt like shaking so many of them. Hard not to engage fully into this story. Where is the line drawn between evil and faith, duty and neglect, responsibility?

I was not a lover of Room, though I know many are. Loved Frog Music but I think this may be my favorite by this author. In the tone and atmosphere this reminded me a bit of the darkness of Burial Rites. This is also based on a composite of fasting girls as they were known and the authors afterward needs to be read.

ARC from Netgalley.

Norma * Traveling Sister says

4.5 Stars rounded up!

First off I have never been so riled up while reading a book before as I was with this one! I wanted to give a few characters a piece of my mind! I wanted to throw my book at them but gently as I would never want to hurt my precious books but some of those characters sure needed to be smacked around a little!

THE WONDER by EMMA DONOGHUE was an intriguing, gripping, mesmerizing, and a beautifully written Historical Fiction novel which was set in a small Irish village from the nineteenth century that grabbed my attention from the very first chapter.

I really like THE COVER of this book as that is what initially drew me in when I first seen it and then when I noticed who the author was yup I knew that I would have to purchase it when it would go on Chapter's 40% off of their bestsellers books.

THE WONDER is a fitting TITLE for this book but I am not going to go into why as I believe this book is best to go into reading blind as I did. The blurb from the book says it best: AN IRISH VILLAGE IS MYSTIFIED BY WHAT APPEARS TO BE A MIRACLE BUT MAY ACTUALLY BE MURDER IN THE NEXT MASTERPIECE FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR EMMA DONOGHUE.

EMMA DONOGHUE delivers a well-written atmospheric, unique, interesting, and an extremely captivating story here with well-developed CHARACTERS that had me totally engaged and guessing throughout the slow-building mysterious storyline as the complex pieces of the puzzle are revealed to us which definitely ruffled some of my feathers.

To sum it all up it was a thought-provoking, intense, steady-paced, quick and easy read with a wrapped up quite nicely and satisfying ENDING for another enjoyable read. Would recommend!!

All of Brenda & my reviews can be found on our Sister Blog:
<http://www.twogirlslostinacouleereadi...>

Carol says

Sometimes I just want to smack characters in a book and this is one of those times!

Assigned by her mentor (*Florence Nightingale*) to watch over an eleven year old "miracle" child in Ireland who hasn't eaten in four months, a skeptical British nurse believes an easy task is at hand to quickly prove foul play and return home, but soon finds herself in the midst of a strangely complicated and religiously close-knit Catholic family.

Somewhat slow going while the story builds and characters are developed, but very atmospheric throughout as a nineteenth century small Irish village and their many superstitions are brought to life while complex pieces of a mystery are uncovered.

THE WONDER has a uniquely imaginative plot that kept me guessing where it was headed, and an ending I truly enjoyed.

(Thank you NetGalley and Little, Brown and Company for the free ebook in exchange for an impartial review!)

Jan says

I seem to be on a 'Meh' roll these days...

The beginning started out promising, the last 30 pages were fantastic, but the in between was really slow and boring.

Trained by Florence Nightingale, Nurse Libby is requested to stand 'watch' over a child who has apparently not eaten a thing in 4 months, yet remains alive and vibrant. Between Libby and a nun, they are to take shifts so the child (Abby) is never alone, helping to ensure that this is not a hoax.

Set in a small Irish village where Religion reigns high, Abby is labeled as special, the chosen one. But Libby doesn't share the same faith-she is determined to expose the fraud. Through her time spent with the family, priest and other 'gawkers' who come to see this special child, she soon finds that there is no one who has Abby's best interests at heart.

As stated earlier-the last 30 pages are really strong and I'm glad I finished instead of throwing this in the DNF pile, but those 185 other pages were sooooo slow paced. Ever been to a seminar where the key speaker talks in a monotone voice the entire time? That is how this read...no twists, turns or surprises until the very end. There are less than 220 pages to the whole story, but it read like it was 400+.

I was a huge fan of Room, so while this was a disappointment, I will be happy to give her another try.

My thanks to NetGalley for the ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Matthew says

Hmmmm . . . well, not too sure about this one. I enjoyed it okay, but it made me uncomfortable and I wasn't satisfied with the plot progression. I am not sure that I have a great way to explain it other than it is a "feeling" I have.

I actually probably felt more comfortable with the writing in this one than I did with Room and Frog Music and I found myself into the plot much sooner than I did with both of those. But, I just couldn't get comfortable with what was happening in this story. It really just felt like the plot was trying to rub me the wrong way. Now, I know it is sometimes the point of the story to make you feel this way, but it is almost like it surpassed that and made me feel just wrong.

As someone pointed out, though, what might feel uncomfortable now might turn out to be thought provoking and might cause me to reflect a lot on it in the future. I can see that – I can definitely see the topics in this book coming up in conversation.

So, at this point – 4 stars for the writing, 2 to 2.5 stars for the plot development. I will give it a 3 to 3.5.

Deanna says

My reviews can also be seen at: [https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress...](https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress.com)

I've only read one other book by Emma Donoghue but I loved it. "Room" is one of my favorite books. Because I enjoyed it so much I was worried that anything else I read from the author would pale in comparison. However, after reading the description for "The Wonder" I was very intrigued.

Eleven-year-old Anna O'Donnell has become somewhat of a tourist attraction. A miracle girl who has apparently survived for four months without eating any food and who according to the local doctor is otherwise healthy.

Libby Wright is an English nurse hired to keep watch over Anna for two weeks, alongside another nurse who happens to be a Nun.

Libby as well as many others believe what's happening to be a hoax. Someone must be feeding this child. How could she possibly survive on just spoonfuls of water? Others believe Anna truly is a miracle girl.

It's not long before Lib becomes very attached to Anna. Will she figure out what's going on? Can she save Anna?

I really enjoyed this book. I was pulled into the story very quickly and hated when I had to put it down. I love the way Emma Donoghue writes. An amazing and unique plot with such great characters. I was desperate to find out what was going on and was extremely satisfied with how it all came together in the end.

I can't wait to read more from this wonderful and talented author.

Thank you NetGalley, Brown and Company, and Emma Donoghue for providing an advanced readers copy of this book for me to read in exchange for my honest review.

Frances says

4.5* Who would not wonder about a young child at the age of 11 years who will not eat and hasn't for some four months, but seems to be flourishing without eating so much as a crumb. Born into the religious O'Donnell family, they all rally around the girl and believe her to be thriving by the special providence of the Almighty. The local Doctor McBrearty residing in the tiny town of Athlone, Ireland knows the family well and is unhappy with the newspapers reports not believing the story by implying it is nothing more than a hoax. He decides a committee should be formed and have the truth brought to light no matter what is uncovered. Subsequently two nurses are hired for this responsibility, to monitor Anna O'Donnell closely over a two week period by confirming not a morsel of food goes past her lips and she is indeed a miracle. A nun, Sister Michael from a nearby village with nursing skills, and a Nightingale trained Nurse from England Lib Wright, are hired for this rather extraordinary and unusual assignment. When Lib meets with Anna she is immediately suspicious of her claim to only sip water, and that most likely her family have been feeding her on the sly. It doesn't take long for Lib to decide she doesn't require two weeks to observe Anna but only a night to expose the pitiful swindle and be on her way back to England away from the smells of animal dung and burning peat that greeted her upon her arrival. She adamantly believes it to be nothing more than a well planned deception. Lib Wright is a fascinating character as her inner thoughts are provided throughout the chapters with a good deal of reflection and pondering about her task at hand and those involved. Author, Emma Donoghue has written a captivating, mesmerizing novel which was engaging and is a particularly unique story. Highly recommended.

** Thank you to Publisher Little Brown and Company, and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for my honest review. **

Liz says

A very different sort of mystery. Anna O'Donnell has supposedly not eaten for four months when Lib Wright is brought on as a nurse to monitor whether she is actually taking nourishment somehow. Is someone feeding her? Is she truly a religious miracle or is she "hysterical" as one doctor supposes? You quickly get caught up in trying to determine this young girl's situation. And as Lib's concerns go from trying to catch her out to worrying about her health, so did my concerns shift.

I found this to be an engrossing novel, as in dinner almost didn't get on the table engrossing. The characters aren't as fully fleshed out as I would like, but the book just raises so many issues. Why don't people, including the doctor and the parents, realize what is happening? Why don't they force Anna to eat? Where do religious beliefs fit in all of this? Or following orders or instructions instead of one's own thoughts?

This would make a great book club selection. You'll want to talk to others about this book!

Sue says

THE WONDER by bestselling author Emma Donoghue is an example of an excellent piece of storytelling. Donoghue writes convincing and vivid historical fiction. I was drawn into the book right from the beginning. Having loved "THE ROOM", I was eager to read this novel.

The setting for Emma Donoghue's novel is a small Irish village in the Irish Midlands after the end of the potato famine in Ireland in 1850s rural Ireland. The author really captures a wonderful sense of time and place. Emma Donoghue is so talented in immersing her readers.

Anna O'Donnell is an 11-year-old girl living in Ireland in the 1830's. She claims not to have eaten food for the past four months and is living on manna from heaven. Religion plays an important presence in this story.

A local committee has hired Lib Wright, an English nurse trained by Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, along with a Catholic nun, to watch Anna around the clock for two weeks to see if they can catch the girl sneaking food. Is this a hoax or a miracle? Or is it murder? Lib is determined to find out the truth, battling against superstition.

The supposedly "miracle" has reached the masses, and tourists flock in masses to the O'Donnell family's cabin hoping to witness this miracle. An international journalist is sent to cover the sensational story.

Lib believes firmly that this child must be being secretly fed. Receiving only spoonfuls of water a day, how can she have survived for this long?

"As Anna deteriorates, Lib finds herself responsible not just for the care of a child, but for getting to the root of why the child may actually be the victim of murder in slow motion."

This is a beautifully written book and explores the power of religion over a young person's mind. The bond that grows between Anna and her nurse is spectacular. This is one special book that took me to a different time and place for short while. During that time I was totally engrossed in this story and the characters.

Many thanks to Little, Brown and Company, NetGalley and to author Emma Donoghue for providing me with an advanced copy for reading and review.

Emily May says

Lib had a dizzying sense that time could fall into itself like the embers. That in these dim huts nothing had changed since the age of the Druids and nothing ever would. What was that line in the hymn they'd sung at Lib's school? The night is dark, and I am far from home.

I loved this book so much. So much. I can easily see why it won't be for everyone - truth be told, the plot

moves fairly slow - but I was just so engrossed in the story and atmosphere. I suppose it just depends how much this kind of tale appeals to you; whether or not you want to know more.

It starts in a dreary, rainy Ireland in the latter half of the 19th Century, shortly after the Crimean War. Lib Wright is an English nurse who served under the legendary Ms Nightingale and she has been brought to Ireland to watch over a new patient - 11 year old Anna O'Donnell whose parents claim she has not eaten anything since her last birthday, four months ago. Lib and a nun work shifts to observe the girl - to try to discover if and how she is taking any food, or if she has somehow managed to survive without it.

I was completely absorbed into the mystery of what was going on in this quiet, rural Irish village. How could she have survived without food? Was it all a crazy scheme invented by the family? Could something else underhanded be going on? Or could it really be an act of God like so many of the locals seem to believe?

In Lib's experience, those who wouldn't cheat a shopkeeper by a farthing would lie about how much brandy they drank or whose room they'd entered and what they'd done there. Girls bursting out of their stays denied their condition till the pangs gripped them. Husbands swore blind that their wives' smashed faces were none of their doing. Everybody was a repository of secrets.

Lib's increased frustration was one I shared - a need to discover the truth. A need to solve this simple but baffling mystery. Between the **religious fanaticism of 19th Century Ireland** and its **infuriating sexism**, I got so caught up in everything. And I think so much of it comes down to one thing: **atmosphere**.

The Wonder is a very **atmospheric, Gothic, Irish tale**. But it's quiet and pastoral too; more of a Wuthering Heights Gothic than a Bram Stoker. Lib is alone in this little bubble, in the very centre of Ireland, far from what many would deem to be "civilization". The family's superstitions about the little folk and the small discoveries that Lib can't explain add an eeriness that permeates the entire book.

As I was reading the book, nothing supernatural had actually happened, and yet I felt an overwhelming sense of otherness. Like something was not quite right; like being in this tiny, unknown place in Ireland was somewhat like stepping into another world where the paranormal was possible. **I didn't just read this book; I felt it.**

I absolutely needed to know what was happening. I needed to know whether something otherworldly was at play, whether this child was being betrayed by those she should have been able to trust most, or whether she herself was behind it. I was pulled in by the atmosphere, by the mystery, and by the sexism that saw the local doctors dismissing Lib's opinions and cutting her off mid-sentence. Modern nursing was a very new thing at the time of this novel's setting and nurses were generally looked down upon by doctors, considered capable of watching and cleaning patients, but not offering a prognosis.

The Wonder was fascinating to me. I think there were many interesting themes floating around in this small-ish book, but I risk giving away spoilers by discussing them. Anyway, if this sounds interesting to you, go read it. I can't stop thinking about it.

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Amalia Gavea says

"...and besides, we should speak nothing but good of the dead."

For me, *The Wonder* was one of the most anticipated novels of the year. It ticked all the right boxes: Ireland, Florence Nightingale's nurses, ambiguous religious issues, provincial superstitions. So, once it knocked on my door, I started reading it immediately.

We find ourselves following Lib, a young, educated nurse, trained by the legend called Florence Nightingale, to beautiful, mystical Ireland and on a strange mission, a few years after the Crimean War. Lib has to certify as to the truth about Anne, a girl of eleven, who claims to have stopped eating for four months. What is bizarre is the absence of any visible consequences of her abstinence. Upon her arrival, Lib finds that the child has become a local legend, almost elevated to the status of a saint.

Initially, Lib may come across as not particularly likeable, since she shows clearly that she regards Anne and all those who surround her as frauds. However, I don't believe we should accuse her of being narrow-minded. Let us not forget that she is a woman whose true religion and vocation is Science, and sometimes, scientists can become as obnoxious as religious fanatics. Still, Lib is not the only watcher of Anne. A nun, sister Michael, has also been appointed the task. This is a very interesting interaction that helps us see how Donoghue demonstrates the gap between Religion and Science. The nun is silent and under close scrutiny by Lib. A third character that is interested in the case is Mr. Byrne, a young journalist of *The Irish Times*, who seems to share Lib's disbelief and cautiousness towards the "wonder", despite the fact that he is a Catholic.

What draws the readers' attention, initially, is the eternal battle between Science and Religion, Faith against Logic, Hope against Evidence. And then, we stay for the characters who are realistic, each anchored to their own set of beliefs and ways of life. Lib comes to a point where she starts considering that perhaps science can't explain everything. She is not obnoxious, but confident in her knowledge and her abilities, and brave enough to stand for what she believes in an environment that slowly becomes paranoid. Anne is an extraordinary character. It is a rare case in adult fiction that we see such a strong child heroine, and Anne is the heart of the novel. A gentle human being, firm and devoted to her belief, kind and caring for kin and strangers alike. She wants to understand and Lib is her guide.

Emma Donoghue's writing is a work of Art. She weaves a delicate veil to hide themes and clues, all in a language that is simple, but rich and beautiful. Her descriptions of the Irish vilage are vivid, the characters and the dialogue are parading right in front of our eyes, we feel we are a part of the small community as we see it through Lib's confused eyes.

It is extremely hard to write a review without spoilers. This is true for every book, but especially for *The Wonder*, as the mystery that permeates the case never loses its tension. My heart was pounding towards the final pages, it took all my strength to resist reading the end right there and then. Visit after visit, day after day, I was trying to guess Anne's secret, the community's Lib's. Folktales and superstitions add to the haunting atmosphere of the story. The fairies, the bogs with their mystical capacity to preserve the dead bodies, the religious hymns that are ever-present in Anne's household...

This is a novel that stays with you for many reasons. The story, the characters, the writing. *The Wonder* allows us to judge it by its beautiful cover, and the result is to be remembered as one of the finest examples in recent Literature.

Elyse says

NO SPOILERS AT ALL in this review:

"More Water?" She offered the spoon.

"Anna's eyelids flickered but didn't open; she shook her head. "Be it done to me".

I kept thinking about "Be it done to me". What's the source of an 11 year old girl feeling resigned - powerless? Or, do those words mean something else, altogether to the child?

A little girl won't eat. Religious reasons? Something else?

Her parents are convinced she can live without food.

Incredible? skeptical? Outrageous fraud?

There have been many letters proclaiming Anna's case is a miracle.

What's going on?

In my own life:

.....our daughter was anorexic for 14 years. - very serious - horrific years for our entire family. So, I know a thing or two or more about eating disorders.

Yet...from the start - Emma Donoghue had me in the palm of her hands - I never once compared this story to my own or any other modern day eating disorder. Its an incomparable story.

It wasn't until the final notes of Emma's book - [in the author's notes] - where I learn more about her inspiration came from for this novel. Absolutely fascinating! The story Emma invented -with inspired facts- make this book

completely different than any book I've ever read about a child refusing to eat.

Interesting characters - and gorgeous prose!!!

A side note: I was sold on this novel - as soon as I learned the location was in a small Irish village!!!! I've been falling in love with 'everything Ireland' since meeting a panel of Irish authors this past summer.

If this is not a #1 BEST SELLER - I'll be shocked! Emma takes us on a slow easy ride at the start...a little faster in the middle --then speeds the dial towards the end. My heart was beating faster.

Thank You Little Brown and Company, Netgalley, and Emma Donoghue

Dem says

4.5 Stars

Spell Binding and so atmospheric, The Wonder is one of the best Irish historical novels I have read in a very long time where facts and fiction come together to create a story that gets under your skin.

Clearly the Irish Midlands were a depression where wet pooled, the little circle in a saucer"(Quote from The Wonder)

The setting for Emma Donoghue's novel is the Irish Midlands about seven years after the end of the potatoe famine in Ireland. This location is approx 20 miles from where I reside and I was eager to see how this historical novel would read for me.

An eleven-year-old girl stops eating, but remains miraculously alive and well. A nurse, sent to investigate whether she is a fraud, meets a journalist hungry for a story. Set in the Irish Midlands in the mist of a close knit Catholic community in the 1850s. The Wonder - inspired by numerous European and North American cases of 'fasting girls' between the sixteenth century and the twentieth.

This is such an atmospheric novel, and the author really captures a wonderful sense of time and place. The harshness of the landscape and the lifestyle of the people really draws the reader in. The country people are ruled and in fear of their religion. The customs and language and superstitions of the time is so accurately portrayed in this beautiful written tale and while not new to me being Irish and very aware of my heritage I appreciate historical fiction well written and based on facts.

She wonders - Did the Irish hate food. (Quite from The Wonder)

This novel is a brooding and moving story that is haunting and wonderfully atmospheric. Another good reads's friend said it reminded her of Burial Rites and I couldn't agree more.

I had intended to listen to this book on audio and did try the audio sample but this one worked better for me on kindle and my thanks to **NetGalley** for the opportunity to read this one.

Joey Woolfardis says

This review can be found on Amaranthine Reads.

A young girl in Ireland has supposedly lived on no food at all for months on end, claiming that she is living off "manna from heaven" and English nurse Lib has been sent over from England to watch her to make sure the claim is valid. Surrounded by religious superstition, Lib must get to the bottom of the miracle-or stop the destruction of a young girl's life.

This book was basically a short story fleshed out with too much inner monologue and chatter about not a lot. The plot was intriguing enough for me to wait until the very end to find out how this seemingly innocent young girl is defying all the laws of nature and existing on no food and very little water (cheeky two-way bet that it's god or subterfuge), but altogether that was basically the whole plot. There were no side plots, nothing coming in at the sides except a crude attempt at a romance and basically quite a lot of anti-religious sentiment. I don't feel I can say anything about Ireland and Religion, but I should hope that anyone trying to do so would do it much better than Donoghue did.

It takes 50% of the book to get to anything relatively interesting. We are following basically every second of Lib, the protagonist, as she walks to and from her watch of Anna: we have around four pages of actually

following her every footsteps. Once we begin to hear about this mysterious Manna from Heaven it gets pacier, but then drops off again and falls down dead in the bog. It is a slow book, with little characterisation and completely dull happenings. The only good thing about it, and why I've gone for two stars instead of one, is that it is written really well, but only in factual terms.

I enjoyed the structure of the book. Grammatically there was nothing amiss and the few typos there were can be forgiven. The dialogue I always thought was really rather good and gave enough information to keep it all alive but didn't kill the story by giving away too much. Punctuation and everything else that is taken in to account when talking of factually good writing was good. Well done, Emma.

But that is the only praise one can give such a ridiculously tiny, short-sighted book. I also wasn't keen on how the protagonist was ready to drop her knickers as soon as a man who wasn't in to the working-class superstitions of rural Ireland comes along and, whilst his role as the reporter come to blow the whole thing wide open was a welcome jolt to the absolutely monotony of the book, the way he intermingles with the protagonist is ridiculous and unnecessary.

A technically well written book, but a ludicrous and ultimately boring story.

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