

First Thursday Book Club Discussion Questions

Title: The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox

July 2018, 2 pm. Nancy Stepsis hosts.
Iona Clark leads the discussion.

1. Some of the earliest scenes Esme shares with the reader are those from her childhood in India. What do they reveal about Esme, her family, and their place in time and society?
2. Alex and Luke are both married men in love with Iris. Do you think Iris really loves either one of them? Why or why not?
3. O'Farrell's novel is steeped in secrets. As the story of Esme and Kitty unfolds simultaneously with the story of Iris and Alex, O'Farrell offers clues about the true nature of these relationships. How do these two stories relate to each other? How does it affect your feelings about the characters?
4. Why do you think Esme was sent to Cauldstone, and never released to go home? Do you think she is mentally unbalanced? Give examples from the book to support your opinion.
5. Esme is both taken aback and fascinated by many things that Iris shows and tells her. What does Esme find so remarkable about Iris? How are Iris and Esme similar? How are they different?
6. As Iris discovers more about Cauldstone, she discovers some of the more outrageous reasons that women were sent to "mad houses" like it. According to the novel's descriptions of that time period, what do you think drove this trend? Do you think changes have occurred in our view and treatment of women who don't "behave"? Why or why not?
7. O'Farrell creates distinct voices for the three main characters and shifts between their points of view to tell the story. Why do you think the author made this choice? What do the characteristics of these different voices reveal about Iris, Esme, and Kitty? How does this technique affect your reading experience?
8. How will the revelation of Esme and Kitty's secret change Iris's life? Do you think it will alter her relationships with Luke and Alex?
9. What do you make of the ending? What do you imagine will happen to these characters after the last page is turned? Has the author satisfied your interest in these characters?