



## What Was Lost

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A tender and sharply observant debut novel about a missing young girl - winner of the Costa First Novel Award and long-listed for the Booker Prize, the Orange Prize, and The Guardian First Book Award

In the 1980s, Kate Meaney—"Top Secret" notebook and toy monkey in tow—is hard at work as a junior detective. Busy trailing "suspects" and carefully observing everything around her at the newly opened Green Oaks shopping mall, she forms an unlikely friendship with Adrian, the son of a local shopkeeper. But when this curious, independent-spirited young girl disappears, Adrian falls under suspicion and is hounded out of his home by the press. Then, in 2003, Adrian's sister Lisa—stuck in a dead-end relationship—is working as a manager at Your Music, a discount record store. Every day she tears her hair out at the outrageous behavior of her customers and colleagues. But along with a security guard, Kurt, she becomes entranced by the little girl glimpsed on the mall's surveillance cameras. As their after-hours friendship intensifies, Lisa and Kurt investigate how these sightings might be connected to the unsettling history of Green Oaks itself. Written with warmth and wit, *What Was Lost* is a haunting debut from an incredible new talent.

## What Was Lost Details

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## From Reader Review What Was Lost for online ebook

### Mary-anne says

After reading this book, I can't wait for Cathering O'Flynn's next novel. I thoroughly enjoyed this one. The opening is so charming and Kate Meaney is such a sweet character. As the first part opens up a bit more, we see that she's actually quite lonely and her situation is sad, but she bravely carries on in her quest to get her detective agency off the ground, even though she's only 10 years old. The details of her agency (buying stationery, researching walkie talkies, staking out the mall, etc.) are so funny, but it's her notetaking and the observations she makes that are so clever and insightful and just make her so endearing. I loved this character.

When the second part of the book begins, we flash forward 20 years and Kate is missing, and has been missing for 20 years. The story follows three characters who are all related to her disappearance, the sister of the man who was suspected of being involved in her disappearance (Lisa), a man who may have been the last person to see her alive (Kurt) and another person I don't want to say too much about because I want you to get chills at the end of the book too. Lisa and Kurt both work at the mall where Kate carried out her surveillances as a young girl, Lisa as an assistant manager at the music store, and Kurt as a security guard. They both hate their jobs and have some pretty funny situations, observations, and dialogues pertaining to the life of the mall that make this book very current. The effect of the mall on society is a main theme in this book. "High street" shopping is often compared to mall shopping and how that's affected daily life and how people relate to each other.

This book covered things I haven't come across in fiction yet and so I found it fresh and modern. The "mystery shopper" concept, the glass cube classical department in the music store, the modern upper retail management style, with it's ever-threatening store visit, and the constant surveillance are just some of the current topics this novel covers. It has already changed my mall experience - just today I noticed a guy at the mall with an ear-piece thingy and it made me feel so watched.

O'Flynn is very good to her reader. She ties all the loose ends up beautifully and even leaves you with an unexpected tear in the eye (Oprah-style).

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### Jackie says

This first novel has gotten quite a bit of attention already--it's won the 2007 COSTA First Novel Award, was shortlisted for The Guardian First Book Award and long listed for both the Booker and the Orange prize.

O'Flynn is truly a new voice with a great talent. This book starts off with quirky 10 year old Kate, orphaned and living with her grandmother, a very smart, loner of a child. But she's not lonely--she's too busy running her own detective agency. Falling in love with her takes all of about 2 pages. Her escapades take up the first third of the book--and then she disappears. Literally. Her best friend for years, Adrian, a 22 year old candy shop/newstand clerk is blamed and, unable to prove his innocence, disappears. Flash forward 20 years to the life of Lisa, Adrian's younger sister, and Kurt, a mall security guard with a secret. The story weaves all of these people and their families together into a tapestry of then and now, reality and the

supernatural, beginnings and ends. Don't miss this first taste of what is bound to be a brilliant writer's career efforts. You won't be disappointed.

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### Heidi says

I wanted to love this book, and ultimately found it very funny, fresh, disturbing and original, but the fact that it was so different from what I expected and that I didn't have much in common with the main characters interfered with my positive feelings about it. It was a mystery about a ten year old girl whose disappearance leaves many unanswered questions and repercussions in its wake. The first half follows the activities of little Kate Meany, a self-styled 'detective' who shadows imaginary criminals at the local shopping mall. Fast forward twenty years to a number of people, several of whom still work at the mall, who have been impacted by her disappearance. The resolution of the mystery unfolds, ultimately to a satisfying and chilling conclusion. My problem was that sometimes this book seemed not so much a mystery as a social satire -- it examines relentlessly the dead end lives of the 'little people' who shop and work at the mall, as well as the mall's essential soullessness, and sometimes the sheer boredom and disillusionment of these lives, while humorously painted, was wearing. But it was well written and there was not a false note in it.

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### Kirstie says

Just not my cup of tea. Too many hidden storylines that I'd have to think too hard to figure out. But likable characters as nicely written

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### Stacey says

This is one of the most unique and imaginative books I've read in a long time. It's like Office Space meets Nancy Drew meets Silence of the Lambs meets Lost in Translation. It also reminded me of the Beatles song Eleanor Rigby: "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?"

Sorry for the comparison casserole, but it's a hard book to describe. It starts off following a little girl who imagines herself as a secret detective, then fast-forwards 20 years after her mysterious disappearance and follows her now-grown peers and their crappy mall jobs. But then her ghost appears on a security camera and the story becomes something else entirely.

It's agreeably short, very nearly flawless, and quite entertaining. My one petty quibble is that the author is British and the book contains a lot of working-class dialogue and slang; I felt like I needed a British-American translation dictionary handy at times. Lift? Oh, she means elevator. Trolley? Oh, shopping cart. Row? Oh, a fight. And why do they insist on pluralizing math to maths? Like one math's not bad enough. It wore me out a little. But overall I feel like this book will stick with me for a while and I will enthusiastically recommend it to other people.

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### Christie says

Catherine O'Flynn's debut novel, *What Was Lost*, is as labyrinthine as the tunnels under the Green Oaks

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Shopping Centre. Ten year old Kate Meany is an amateur detective, raised (until his sudden death) by an older, single father. In the novel's opening third, we travel with Kate and her stuffed monkey, Mickey, as they conduct stakeouts, deliberate over office stationary for Kate's fledgling detective agency, and pal around with Adrian, the 22 year old son of the man who runs the store next to Kate's house.

Flash forward almost 20 years and meet Kurt, a security guard at Green Oaks and Lisa, a manager at 'Your Music' a big-box music store in the same mall (and not incidentally, Adrian's younger sister). One night, while sleepily watching the security monitor, Kurt sees Kate. It's not possible: Kate disappeared the year she was ten and was never found. Adrian, suspected of wrong-doing, but never charged, disappeared and made no contact with his family except for a mixed tape he sent to Lisa every year on her birthday.

From these tangled threads, O'Flynn weaves an exceptionally good story about missed opportunities, luck, family and secrets. She even throws in a slightly gloomy (but fairly funny) picture of what it's like to work in retail.

O'Flynn's real strength is in her characters. Kate Meany is a wholly believable and totally enchanting little girl. Lisa and Kurt are flawed and likable. O'Flynn manages to tell us everything we need to know about a character with a line or two – whole back stories come to life with a few carefully chosen words. Even minor characters spring to glorious life and create a picture of small town-life which is ultimately eroded by progress aka big impersonal malls.

The story had an extra layer of meaning for me because it took place in the West Midlands of England and I once lived there. I am pretty sure that Green Oaks is actually Merry Hill, a huge shopping centre on the outskirts of Birmingham.

If I have one niggle about the book, it comes at the end. I didn't like part 42- it felt extraneous to me, like an unnecessary bow on a beautifully wrapped present. Had O'Flynn quit at the end of part 41, I think this little gem of a novel would have been damn near perfect.

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## **Paul Bryant says**

There were various important aspects of this book which I frankly did not believe - unhappily, the character (however endearing) of 10 year old Kate is one of them. She wanders around town and occasionally stays out all night with zero adult supervision and is hugely braver and more intent and concentrated than any actual 10 year old. She's pure fantasy, she's not a real kid at all, she's the kind of kid character adults make up and they're so nice it seems rude to point out how fake they are. Examples abound - William Brown in the William books (which I loved as a kid myself), Kevin MacCallister in Home Alone (didn't like him, the little shit), Addie Loggins in Paper Moon (loved her - gimme my two hundred dollars), etc etc. As for the adults, what a miserable shower they are - a thick pall of depression hangs over this book, and its glinting humour is like sunlight trying to break in but not managing to.

The unreality of Kate is at odds with the rest of the book which portrays the many ghastly details of grindingly dull provincial lives in modern Britain. What Was Lost is very good at this, positively shines, and you may need to keep a few Stone Roses, Happy Mondays and Chumbawamba cds around to remind yourself that English people can also smile and dance and be happy too. In the end this novel is dogged, not a paragraph sings or sparkles, no born writer is our Catherine; it's like someone having to do a paper on Urban Planning and hating the subject but absolutely determined to do the best job possible.

## Ken says

What Was Lost starts out quite strong. In the first section, I could not put it down. As the novel progressed, though, I became less excited, and I felt the ending did not fulfill the promise of the beginning.

What Was Lost follows an ensemble of characters and their relationships to each other and to the Green Oaks Mall in Birmingham, England. The story begins with Kate Meaney, and I could not read enough about her and the world she inhabits and half creates for herself. For reasons I don't want to give away, Kate is not the focus of the second section (which is the main part of the book), and the characters that are--Lisa and Kurt as well as a few others--are not as engaging and interesting to me.

This book won the Costa Award, an annual award given to the best first novel published in England, so it is a good book. I think that, for me, my expectations were raised so much by the first section, the later parts, while good, never quite measured up.

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## Nick Davies says

This was an unexpected pleasure - picked up from a library sale cheaply as it looked interesting, it turned out to be unusual but it worked very well. The book begins with a ten year old girl in the eighties, her school life and her hobby as an amateur sleuth, but then takes a sizeable shift to the present day, and the lives of two people who work in a Midlands shopping arcade. I was slightly less impressed with this second section of the book - it was sad and mundane and well-observed but contrasted with the sunny optimism of the opening section. In the end everything is brought together in a very clever and interesting way and I came to appreciate a lot of the wit and satire about consumer culture and ordinary British life in general. It did remind me of Clare Morrall's 'Astonishing Splashes of Colour', with which there were some similarities, and which I also enjoyed.

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## Jennifer says

1984, Birmingham, England. Kate Meaney is the sole proprietor and lead detective for Falcon Investigations (assisted by her top secret assistant Mickey the Monkey, a stuffed animal). If Falcon Investigations had an advertisement, it would read something like this:

### FALCON INVESTIGATIONS

Clues found. Suspects trailed. Crimes detected.

Visit our office equipped with the latest surveillance equipment.

Being only 10 years old and with limited transportation, Kate performs the majority of her detective work at the newly opened Green Oaks shopping center. Virtually ignored by her grandmother (her mother abandoned her when she was small and her beloved father died of a stroke not too long ago), Kate is free to spend hours trailing suspects at Green Oaks and observing the goings on in her neighborhood. One of her few friends is Adrian, the older son of a local shopkeeper and one of the few grown-ups who take Kate seriously. At school, Kate keeps mostly to herself until she befriends Teresa, a new girl who doesn't always do things by the rules either. Unfortunately, this fledgling friendship and Falcon Investigations comes to an abrupt end

when Kate disappears without a trace.

Fast forward 20 years and we meet Kurt, a security guard at Green Oaks shopping center. Lonely and adrift in life, Kurt is startled to see a young girl appear on the mall's surveillance cameras after-hours. Yet no trace of the girl is found; she seems to be a figment of Kurt's imagination. Kurt is haunted by the girl and ends up teaming up with Lisa, the assistant manager of the record store in the mall, to figure out who the girl is and what happened to her.

Like Kurt, Lisa is also lonely (despite being in a relationship) and stuck in her life. She is haunted by the disappearance of her brother Adrian, who was suspected of being involved in Kate's disappearance years before and fled home to avoid media scrutiny. Realizing that the girl on the video may be Kate, Lisa teams up with Kurt to conduct their own after-hours investigation in Green Oaks—hoping to solve the mystery of Kate's disappearance and remove the cloud of suspicion from Adrian. Along the way, Lisa and Kurt begin to forge a fragile connection, which is shaken when their investigation begins to bear fruit.

I loved this book! It has the most interesting blend of humor intertwined with sadness. Almost everyone in the book is lost and adrift in their lives except for Kate—who has purpose and drive to spare. O'Flynn does a brilliant job of creating fully realized characters. You get inside the heads of Kate, Kurt and Lisa, and I so enjoyed my time there—even though I often found myself simultaneously laughing and filled with aching sadness for them. Even Green Oaks becomes a character of sorts—becoming a menacing and almost evil presence in the story.

Although there wasn't nearly enough of Kate in the book (and the reason for my not giving it 5 stars ... I guess I want to punish the author for not giving me more of Kate!), I was entranced by this story from the very first page until the last. O'Flynn does a brilliant job of tying everything together in a way that was both satisfying and realistic. It was hard for me to believe this was O'Flynn's first book. She is a true talent (as evidenced by this book winning the Costa First Novel Award), and I await her next book anxiously. Do yourself a favor and read this book! It is filled to the brim with all the good and bad aspects of the human existence. Books like this don't come along very often so don't miss it.

#### An Excerpt

There were always fresh flowers on these graves, along with stone teddy bears and faded dolls. Among them was the grave of Wayne West, a boy Kate remembered vaguely from Infants One, who had somehow put his head inside a plastic bag and suffocated. Every year he was remembered in prayers at school and in mass, but Kate always wondered if he had really died that way. It seemed such a convenient cautionary tale. Kate was waiting for the day that the teachers would present some blind boy in assembly who had lost his vision when someone had thrown a snowball with a stone in it. The school had already had a talk from a boy with one foot who had lost the other playing on the railway tracks. Kate had a gruesome image of teachers from competing schools bidding for injured children at a local hospital and ascribing a range of childhood misdemeanors to them. "I've got a paraplegic little girl here, ideal for stamping out leaning back on chairs." "How about this almost-blind boy, ideal for carrot promotion."

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#### Dorian says

3 1/2 stars would be more accurate. Quick and mostly compelling first novel--written in 3rd person no less! Free indirect dicoruse! Hooray!

One of the three different narrative focalizations--that is, those sections that emphasises the actions and

thoughts of a ten-year old would-be detective in 1980s Britain--is more compelling than the other two. Not so much a crime novel as a meditation on crime. The book also has the virtue of being, esp in its first half, laugh out loud funny. The author apparently worked lots of menial service type jobs and her representation certainly rings true of my own experiences.

Where the book falls short is in its depiction of contemporary late-capitalist anomie. (Much of the book is set in a giant shopping center on the outskirts of Birmingham.) Love the details of the way the center arises from reclaimed brownfields--a service economy literally rising from the "ashes" of Britain's industrial past. And enjoyed the details about security guards and the after-hours work that goes into making that mirage-like space function.

But the depiction of this late-capitalist world is ultimately simplistic--it's shown to be soul-destroying and bad, yet avoidable by (quite fantastical) modes of escape (overseas travel, etc). Someone like J. G. Ballard has offered stranger, more compelling visions of similar spaces.

Still, the book is often enjoyable and worth a look.

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### **Monica Edinger says**

This is a fairly short book, but I spent a long time with it because I was listening to it.

This book begins in 1984 as little Kate Meaney wanders about her world of council flats and the Green Oaks mall, taking notes and investigating, a sad little Harriet the Spy. Then it jumps forward to twenty years dead smack in the midst of Green Oaks. Kate, we learn, disappeared in 1984 and no one ever knew what happened to her. Now we follow Kurt, a security guard and Lisa, a music store manager, both terribly sad adult workers in Green Oaks. By the end we learn about them, about some other characters, and about Kate.

The writing is spare and beautiful. I loved the way the author so vividly described the mall, giving it an atmosphere I wouldn't have thought possible. Her rendering of the many workers in Green Oaks is really wonderful. I recall in particular the two who control the garbage area and several of Lisa and Kurt's fellow workers.

Recently there was a thread on one of the children's lit lists (maybe child\_lit, can't remember) about the dearth of adult protagonists in books for children. As I listened to the first part of this book I thought about the opposite situation, child protagonists in adult books. This isn't a nostalgic book by any means, but it definitely is for adults. No sex really, but a building and layering of life experiences for various characters in the second part of the book that makes it sad, hopeful, and profoundly moving.

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### **Matt says**

In 1983 10 year old junior detective Kate Meaney--with her stuffed gangster monkey Mickey in tow--vanishes from a public school entrance exam. Her detective instincts previously leading her all throughout the newly opened Green Oaks shopping mall near her home, not to mention the curious neighborhoods near her English home, her disappearance suggests she stumbled upon activities of a nature no 10 year old ought to witness. "What Was Lost," which splits its time 33/67 between 1983 and 2004, spends its final two thirds in the 21st century unraveling the mystery of her disappearance. In 2004 a haunted and lonely mall security

guard Kurt befriends benumbed and lonely Lisa, a manager at one of the mall's music superstores, and their burgeoning relationship, and the connection they share with the lost girl Kate, pulls the disparate mysteries of this story to a resounding close.

Catherine O'Flynn's real accomplishment should be the way she bridges 20 years and two vastly unrelated narratives to tie up--if not entirely resolve--the unknowns in the lives of her three protagonists. But what will stand out is Kate's voice. Part Scout from "To Kill a Mockingbird," part Nancy Drew (without the technological gadgetry and know-how of Veronica Mars), Kate's imagination and ambition nearly drown out her despondant loneliness. Her friendship with Adrian, her relationships with her family--both parents are gone and she's being raised by a grandmother--all evince aspects of her solitude. And yet she's a charmer, a girl you'd want to an ice cream for.

The shift in tone from Kate's fairly light-hearted opening in 1983 to Lisa and Kurt's glum 2004 is as evident as the author's intention for us to connect these three characters. It's handled deftly and without incongruous linguistic pyrotechnics. O'Flynn's clear, lucid prose tells the story at it's own leisurely pace, and the patience with which she writes demands a certain patience from the reader. In the end much is revealed; no one is good or bad, or even mostly good and a little bad, or mostly bad and a little good. These are people stuck in a time and a place and they simply seem to exist as the world at large dictates their lives. Kate escapes that--and through the mystery of her disappearance, most others do as well.

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### **Sofia Mitkova says**

I really enjoyed this book. It was amusing and interesting to read, and it makes me want to read more of Catherine O'Flynn's books. The book starts off twenty years ahead with a girl named Kate. It talks about her life and her best friend Adrian. They go on missions and Kate in a way is stalking a man. In this part of the book we find out Kate is a lonely girl but she is kind and sweet. Then near the end Kate disappears one day and Adrian is blamed but never put in jail.

Then the book flashes forward to twenty years ahead. In this part, Adrian's sister Lisa and a security guard Kurt meet and go on the search for Kate. They see a girl in the "hallways" of the shopping center and they believe it's Kate. I agree with many other people's reviews on this part that it was very interesting and it brought lots of questions to mind. This part was truly one of the best parts. As the book progresses Kurt and Lisa keep investigating and finding more things about Kate. They find her monkey at one point that she always used to carry around with her. I noticed that this monkey was a key point as many other people who reviewed this book pointed out.

Then came the last part of the book. Here Lisa's brother commits suicide and many issues are resolved. The way Kate died is found out. And the person who had caused her disappearance was Gavin, a coworker of Kurt. The book ends with the sheriff talking to Gavin. Overall I'd say this book was really good and the main audience would be people who love mysteries. As many other reviews said this book keeps you wondering and it is a perfect storyline.

I would say this book is a must read for mystery lovers, and it gives a lot of emotion including some parts that may make you cry. I would say this should definitely be on your want to read list.

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### **Kristina says**

I just finished reading this book, and have nothing good to say about it. It was extremely dry and boring. The only reason I finished it was because it was for a book club, and it is relatively short. The book was uninteresting, depressing and felt contrived. It spent too much time on mundane details within the characters' occupations. Also, what the hell were the extra insights from various mall shoppers?

One of the worst books I've read in a long time...

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## Canadian Reader says

It was interesting to come to O'Flynn's debut after reading her third, and most recent novel *Mr. Lynch's Holiday*. In reading her books out of order, I wondered what I might notice about how she had developed as a novelist. Would signature preoccupations and themes be identifiable? I thought I might come away with a better perspective on her as a writer, a word artist, and I did.

*What Was Lost* is a fine novel. It is certainly deserving of the first-book award it received. It concerns an unusual, bright, and neglected child--Kate Meaney--a girl detective who lives with her grandmother in what was formerly a store (with a large plate-glass front window), sandwiched between a newsagent's and a butcher's shop, in a now derelict business section of town. Kate's quite elderly father has recently died; her mother ran off on them long ago. Using a children's guide to crime detection (a gift from her father), Kate spends much of her free time at a large shopping complex (Green Oaks), her trusty stuffed-toy monkey partner poking from her backpack, surveiling a suspicious looking man routinely seen in a particular section of this monument to consumerism. When not at the mall, Kate can usually be found conversing with kindly 22-year-old Adrian Palmer, her only real friend. Adrian has recently completed university, but he's "stuck". In spite of his father's prodding him to get on with a real job, Adrian works at his dad's newsagent's/sweet shop where he provides inappropriate --some might say "tone-deaf"--music recommendations to the mostly senior clientele. Kate will make another friend at school, the outrageously behaved "bad girl", Teresa Stanton. The neglect that Kate suffers at home seems almost benign when compared to Teresa's chaotic home life.

While Kate's story set in 1984 forms almost the first third of O'Flynn's novel, most of the book will concern itself with two adult characters who work at Green Oaks in the year 2003. Lisa is a manager at a music store, and Kurt is a Green Oaks security guard. Both of them are as stuck as Adrian had been in 1984. Repeatedly resolving and failing to leave their tedious jobs, they teeter on the brink of despair. Both spend their days watching shoppers try to fill their own lives of quiet desperation with consumer goods. Lisa is in a dead-end relationship with a lazy, dull music-store colleague whose dreams don't extend beyond moving into a larger flat that will provide a better view of Green Oaks. Kurt's partner, Nancy, died in a motor vehicle accident a few years back, but shortly before her death he was already aware that she no longer loved him. He has ongoing sleep troubles that contribute to an even bigger problem distinguishing what is real from what is not. He spooks his co-worker when he claims to see over the CCTV monitor a young girl (Kate) standing right next to this man who is doing his nightly walkabout. It turns out that Kurt is the only one who can see the girl, and now all but one of Kurt's colleagues--the weirdest-- refuse to work the night shift with him. In the end, perhaps the most important thing to know about Lisa and Kurt is that they are connected to Kate and Adrian, both of whom went missing 19 years before. By the end of O'Flynn's finely observed and captivating novel, the reader will know what happened to Kate and her 22-year-old friend.

While I don't feel this first novel of O'Flynn's is quite as strong as her third--she goes just a little overboard in her skewering of consumer culture and the characters' lives are just a tad too bleak--it is clear that she has been a fine writer from the start. First of all, she has a vision of life that informs and infuses her work. I can't think of a recent writer who so brilliantly captures the pall-like tedium of most people's working lives: the

repetitive, dull tasks; the variously idiosyncratic, dull, enraged, or bizarre work colleagues. Civilization certainly has its comforts and advantages, but I often think that some of the traditional, egalitarian indigenous cultures (like the Anishinabe/Ojibwa) had it right. Labour may have been somewhat divided along sexual lines, but there was variety and meaning in the work: one made things and performed tasks that were plainly critical to one's own and the group's survival. Many modern "jobs" offer little satisfaction to those who perform them.

Besides the fine, sometimes ironic and understated writing, O'Flynn has created characters here that you care for and wonder about, even after you've finished the novel. You feel something when you read her work. In this case, I'll admit that I felt a terrible sadness for what, in fact, was lost. However, O'Flynn does leave the reader with some hope in the wake of sadness. There is renewed human connection. (In this way, her first book resembles her third.) However, the humour that is so much a part of her later novel, *Mr. Lynch's Holiday*, is harder to find here.

Readers who are looking for lots of action may want to look elsewhere, but I believe thoughtful, more patient ones who enjoy character-driven literary novels will find much of value in *What Was Lost*.

Rating: 3.5, rounded up to 4.

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## Mon says

A few weeks ago, Borders across Sydney had a massive 75-90% off clearance sales. Not expecting anything good, I went into them looking for anything that looked like it would last more than 10 pages before I trash it in the bin and still, somehow, ended up with just 4 books. One of them was Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, I got it because it was insanely cheap and thick at the same time. The other two were 19th century classics that I planned to use as birthday presents (I know, but hey, I'm sure they would be more appreciated than Target chocolate).

*What Was Lost* was the last one I picked out of a pile of sad looking \$5 paperbacks lying on the ground. I was initially intrigued by its cover, which reminded me of Douglas Coupland's *Shampoo Planet*

So despite its tacky title font, I brought the book home.

And I was pleasantly surprised by WWL's sophistication. I wrote my architectural theory term paper on the danger of chained Shopping Center (or The Mall) homogenising consumptive experience and contributing to the lost of place-specific locality. Baudrillard once said that shopping centers have become the genius loci of the urban landscape, and that was only 20 years ago. I'm not sure how much O'Flynn knows about contemporary architecture, but she was spot on in the dissertation of that dreaded, air-conditioned experience of working in a mall. Marc Auge called it Non-place, Koolhaas called it Junkspace, both signifying a dissatisfaction of such retail architecture and how it is stripped of any possible symbolic meaning. There are some fairly profound ideas explored (or maybe I'm reading too much into it, I think I'm still stuck in the paper writing mode), and I enjoyed the way she toys with the concepts, provoking her audience without being too academic (I'm looking at you Koolhaas. I would like you more if you stop writing books that are longer than 800 pages).

That being said, What Was Lost is a light read. The opening is humourous and while the last two chapters more contemplative, the philosophy is very light hearted and introductory. Now, if only all the arch theory books on retail are this easy and short.

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### **Harold says**

An unexpectedly good find. Read this book and you will never feel the same about The Mall. Not because of monsters but because of how it eats at your soul. The plotting is intricate and admirable.

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### **Annie says**

2.5 Stars.

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### **Bettie? says**

Bettie's Books

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