



A Quiet Belief in Angels

R.J. Ellory

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Joseph Vaughan's life has been dogged by tragedy. Growing up in the 1950s, he was at the centre of series of killings of young girls in his small rural community. The girls were taken, assaulted and left horribly mutilated. Barely a teenager himself, Joseph becomes determined to try to protect his community and classmates from the predations of the killer. Despite banding together with his friends as 'The Guardians', he was powerless to prevent more murders - and no one was ever caught. Only after a full ten years did the nightmare end when the one of his neighbours is found hanging from a rope, with articles from the dead girls around him. Thankfully, the killings finally ceased. But the past won't stay buried - for it seems that the real murderer still lives and is killing again. And the secret of his identity lies in Joseph's own history...

A Quiet Belief in Angels Details

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Author : R.J. Ellory

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From Reader Review A Quiet Belief in Angels for online ebook

Morticia Adams says

This wouldn't have been a bad crime thriller, had it not been ruined by the author's apparent belief that he's a much better writer than he actually is. He aims for the lyrical and poetic and falls flat because he doesn't apparently understand the value of restraint or economy, and that constant repetition of an idea will diminish its impact.

I suspect that many editors today aren't ruthless enough, and are too ready to swallow their authors' self-hyping. A good editor might have suggested that Mr Ellory put less effort into the elaboration of his style, and more into ironing out the flaws and implausibilities of his story. Of the latter there are unfortunately quite a few: no insight into the motives of the killer, no satisfactory explanation of the narrator's obsession with and irrational feelings of responsibility for the murders; inadequate acknowledgement of the traumatic legacy a series of such horrific crimes would surely have had on a small town where nearly everyone knew each other. And too many anachronisms in the dialogue - "enough already", "enjoy", etc – that's just lazy writing!

Despite this, I really think that as a story-teller, he does have some talent: I read the book to the end because I was keen to see the resolution of the mystery, and the identity of the culprit. But as a writer, sadly, he doesn't have a great deal to say.

Emir Ibañez says

Esta novela me dejó con muchos sentimientos encontrados, pero de manera buena.

Más allá de que la premisa nos dice que se trata de un asesino en serie, la historia no está encarada desde el punto de vista policial con investigaciones, interrogatorios, ni todo eso a lo que ya estamos acostumbrados. Está narrado en primera persona por Joseph Vaughan, un niño común y corriente que vive en Augusta Falls, un pueblito en el que empiezan a aparecer cuerpos desmembrados de sus compañeras de escuela. Conocemos detalles de su vida como la muerte de su padre, la relación con su madre y su maestra de primaria quienes serán un pilar muy importante en su vida, así como también todo su recorrido por su niñez, adolescencia y adulterz, con sus éxitos y pérdidas, pero siempre, siempre, manchado por esos asesinatos que no se detienen y se siente en la responsabilidad de atrapar al responsable.

También está intercalado por algunos capítulos narrados en flash-forward, cuando encuentra al asesino y lo mata. Ese es uno de los tantos puntos que te mantienen pegado a la historia, pero creo que si esa pista puesta allí para enganchar al lector no hubiera estado, de todos modos me vería enganchado con la historia desde la página uno. No es la trama lo que sobresale en esta historia, sino la manera que está narrada. Es tan poética y a la vez sencilla que te lleva a sentir muchísima empatía con Joseph casi de modo instantáneo, con un manejo de prosa y metáforas tan bellas que si tuviera que señalar los pasajes que más me gustaron el libro terminaría rayadísimo.

Agarré este libro esperando encontrarme con una historia policial y terminé llevándome una historia mucho más emocional y profunda, con personajes enternecedores, esperanza y fe en la humanidad, pese a tanta injusticia y tantos altibajos en la vida. Definitivamente el personaje de Joseph se quedará conmigo por mucho tiempo.

También quiero destacar la atmósfera y la ubicación temporal que está introducida de manera sutil pero de

modo que tenga la relevancia que se merece, porque en la historia transcurren 30 años paulatinamente, comenzando con la explosión de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Es larga, lenta y algo densa, pero que vale totalmente la pena leerla así, absorbiendo cada capítulo, cada conversación, cada párrafo. Es una de esas novelas para releer algún día.

John Herbert says

Read it and WEEP!!!!!!!

Maybe or maybe not physically, but sure enough you'll weep inside at Joseph Vaughan's life in Augusta Falls and beyond.

Such a damaging life, as fear and outrageous violence takes away a normal upbringing, surrounding him with the ghosts of lost children, forever haunting his nightmares, as this beautifully crafted novel progresses.

You find yourself not so much identifying with the various characters in Augusta Falls, as becoming one of the townsfolk yourself, sharing their fears, understanding their bigotry, living their dramas, the despair, and the ignorance.

After reading a hundred pages or so I felt like I'd read a complete book already, such was the skills of Ellory's decription and character building.

Not so much a book, more a total experience.

Not so much a murder story, more a journey through one man's tormented soul.

Not so much a great book, more a memory that can never be eradicated.

It left me utterly gobsmacked.

I put the book down and just sat there stunned.

Carrie says

When I first started reading R.J.Ellory's, A Quiet Belief in Angels, I thought,

"This is a con....this can't be right....this is a joke!"

I was convinced I was reading the works of the Master, Steinbeck.

Right from the opening lines, Ellory had me drawn in, taken under the influence of, and then totally intoxicated by his verbal skills and mastery over phrase, paragraph and perfect prose.

'Sat at my window, chin almost touching the sill, and looked out into the night. Sky as hard as flint, the scudding clouds thin and fragile, like they'd disperse with nothing more than a fingersnap, but all of it beautiful in a broken-up, haphazard kind of way; the ghosts of day-clouds, backlit afterthoughts to remind you of morning. The morning gone, the morning on its way...which one it didn't seem to matter. In the air the crisp snap of lodgepole pine and bitter juniper made the taste of breathing sour and electric.'

Pure poetry!

‘Tried not to think of my father, the sound of his voice, the smell of him – bitter apples, coal tar, sometimes cigars. I closed my mind down to nothing. Waited and watched, and then waited some more. Tried to breathe deep and even and slow. Tried to close out the sound of bugs and trees, of wind and the stream. Tried to hear other things. Things that came from darkness.’

More impeccable prose!

Added to his power over words, was R.J.’s inimitable expertise as a story teller. I read with eagerness and yet uneasiness, the unfolding of the heinous, extraordinary crimes that disturbed and haunted the ordinary, hard-working, everyday folk of Augusta Falls, Georgia; commencing in 1939.

As I travelled with him, sometimes coaxed, sometimes running ahead, I couldn’t help but feel perturbed that the road in front might not be going the way in which I wanted to walk.....at times, as a reluctant traveller, he forced me to tread the path that he had beaten out and I became timorous, totally disquieted that the destination we were heading for was not one I would choose to aim for; not a place I would seek to visit.

R.J. Ellory forcibly delivers, he will not disappoint!

He is a Writer to be reckoned with and bears a name that one day, I am confident, will be reckoned up amidst the All Time Greats!

Are we sure he did not sit and learn at the foot of John Steinbeck?

Carrie King

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Joe Maguire says

This is a somewhat difficult review to begin as I have quite mixed feelings having just finished the book. My conclusion is probably best summarised by saying that I really enjoyed the novel and am glad to have read it, despite some flaws that became more evident as the story developed.

The prose was excellent, with some descriptive passages that are pure poetry. This rich prose became a little formulaic as the book went on, and there was a noticeable increase in repetition of similes later in the book that made me wonder if the author was simply rushing. The pace is quite slow but for me the writing style was able to carry this and I never found myself bored. In short, the prose is the best feature of this book, giving life to a plot and characters which otherwise might have seemed flat, and making this read worthwhile.

The plot and characterisation were engaging and there were enough twists to keep me guessing to the end. Having reached the end however, there are some aspects that I find unsatisfying -- not enough explanation of the motives of the eventual child killer, some lack of clarity about why our protagonist first takes such an active role (responsibility?) for stopping the killings, some odd decisions and actions which are not explained within the plot. Similar to my feelings about the quality of prose, I also had the feeling that the plot quality suffered as the book went on, and that despite the length of the novel there were plot elements and characterisations later on which were rushed compared to those earlier in the book.

As with 'A Simple Act Of Violence' which I also recently finished, Ellory has clearly put significant time and effort into researching the historical, geographical and political setting for this novel and that shines through as a positive for me in both works.

Philip says

I've been too busy to review the last few books I've read, but I want to make the effort and start again.

OK, so I picked this off the shelf mostly because of the title. It's a nice, lyrical title and the backcopy said it was about a young group of boys who band together to discover who is killing little girls in their home town.

Sounds exciting, right?

I'm really torn about this book. On the one hand I think it's really well written, even if the prose does get a little purple and overly descriptive at times – that's just my personal taste, but the real failing is the plotting and storyline.

Contrary to what the backcopy says, this book is NOT about a bunch of young boys trying to track a killer Famous Five style. The Guardians, as these boys call themselves, only meet twice and are caught and bawled out the second time by the local Sheriff, so they never meet again. That's it. That's the end of that storyline. What the backcopy would lead you to believe is the whole theme of the book is actually begun and ended in a few pages.

So what happens the rest of the time? Well, that I think is the book's biggest problem, our hero, Joseph Vaughan, for ninety-five percent of this book doesn't do anything. He gets on with his life and has the same trials and tribulations (though a few more tragedies) as anyone while these murders continue in the background. He feels bad, but he doesn't go out and seek the killer. He doesn't do anything about it.

****SPOILERS****

There are also some huge plot holes in this book. Joseph is obsessed with these killings, but when his mother – who has had a breakdown – offers to tell him who did it, he walks out. I think he does that twice. Surely you would want to hear every theory, not matter who it came from. This seemed really stupid and out of character.

Another thing that annoyed me is after a certain death in the book, there are only two people who could be the killer! And no one figures this out. It's obvious!

Joseph goes to jail at one point and I have many problems with this. Firstly, there are so many holes in the case it could strain vegetables. People must have been very unaware of their rights in the 50s because even I, with no legal training, could have got this case dismissed. As it is, Joseph is sent to jail for ten years, which I think only takes a chapter to get through and this does somewhat undermine just how long he is falsely imprisoned, until his case is reheard by the Supreme Court and his conviction overturned. I must also mention his idiot lawyer, who I would have fired ten minutes after meeting him. Again, were people really so unaware of their rights that they just took the first schmuck lawyer they were given?

And finally the ending, which also seems rushed and gives no real explanation of why the killer did these unspeakable things to young girls. Who the killer is seems to be just put in for twist value and doesn't really make any sense.

A promising beginning, but an unsatisfactory middle and ending.

Linda Parks says

How exactly does a person move beyond a childhood filled with death? Death that seems to take form and follow... yet stay in front all the while, taunting with its ability to control the very life one tries to escape? This story begins in early 1900's with the death of a young boy's father - and what follows is a not so sweet serial killer mystery in surrounding Georgia country where everyone is suspect and one boy is destined to be haunted - if not hunted - forever.

I'll admit, I do like for stories to move a bit faster than 'Angels' did, but the way this one was told totally captivated me. I was more than impressed with the brilliant prose contained on its pages and there was just enough mystery to keep me guessing most of the way. It was a good story - and the reminder of fashions and placement of historical facts thrown in here and there definitely made you feel as if you were in that era - looking through that young boy's eyes and feeling the harsh life that surrounded him and his townspeople. The most striking thing about this book, to me, was the way in which it was written - even more than the story itself. The rough, painful - even the morbid scenes - were described in a beautiful fashion. One can only admire someone with such a way with words and want to receive that presentation. I most certainly will be looking for more stories from Ellory.

Gail says

I do not have the right words to describe my absolute love of this amazing and wonderful book. It is simply stunning. I have not been able to put it down and just loved Joseph Calvin Vaughan: I just wanted to hug him and take away all his pain and the terrible tragedies that dogged his life from an early age.

I have read some amazing books this year and had just finished a terrific book before moving onto one of my favourite authors, R J Ellory and this heartbreakng novel.

All I can describe it as is a little like Shawshank Redemption with all the heartache that book delivered.

My only questions would include why the murderer killed his victims in the brutal fashion that he did? Had something happened in his past? - but that didn't spoil the plot for me and didn't detract from my joy of reading it.

I would dearly love this to be made into a movie and I would be right at the front of the queue wanting to watch it.

Simply amazing, beautifully written (as always) and addictive read. I will never forget this story - ever.

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Lili says

Here is a man with “a quiet belief in angels” a man who is both persistent and intrepid; I found this book hard to put down, a beautifully written book, the prose illuminating and the story startling. Never once was I tempted to skip the long passages so confidently written. The author writes an Incredible and disturbing account of the long, long hunt for a child killer, and in so doing relates the poignant, heart wrenching story of the boy who became that man. Brilliant.

Joni says

Finally! I have finished this book. I thought I never would. It's SOOO slow-moving, but the prose is just brilliant. It reads like an enchanting, on-going poem. Don't read it for the story, read it for the words, because the latter far surpasses the former.

However it is a good story as well, slightly marred by the fact that there was no mystery in it for me as two of my relatives let slip the murderer's name in front of me before I started reading. People like that should be hanged.

But even that didn't ruin it for me, because this isn't a plot-led book. The words take on a life of their own. Magic.

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Kahlan says

Il est des destins auxquels il est impossible d'échapper. Seul le silence nous conte celui de Joseph Vaughan, jeune garçon vivant dans une petite ville du sud des Etats-Unis, où une série de fillettes entre huit et douze ans sont assassinées dans d'horribles circonstances. Écrivain en herbe, le jeune garçon vient de perdre son père et il se sent très concerné par ce qui se passe. A l'heure où toute la ville se lance dans une véritable chasse aux sorcières pour trouver l'assassin, lui voudrait juste pouvoir protéger ces petites filles. Une histoire qui le hantera toute sa vie...

Connu pour ses polars et ses thrillers, ce premier roman traduit en France de R. J. Ellory est atypique et déroutant, mais plein de finesse et de pudeur. Les premiers temps de ma lecture ont été un peu laborieux, je le reconnais. Je ne voyais pas du tout où l'auteur voulait en venir, à nous raconter par le menu la vie de Joseph, la moindre de ses pensées à propos de ses parents, son institutrice, ses voisins, et les petites filles enfin. Et puis peu à peu, je me suis surprise à aimer ça. Joseph est un personnage très attachant, un bon garçon auquel sa mère a inculqué nombre de belles valeurs, un chevalier au sens noble du terme. Comme une flagrante injustice, le destin, à moins que ce ne soit le tueur, va s'acharner contre lui.

La plume de R. J. Ellory dans ce roman est juste extraordinaire. L'auteur se place dans la peau de ce jeune homme et il nous livre son histoire comme un témoignage, comme si Joseph était là, assis en face de nous, et nous contait sa terrible histoire. Alors certes, le texte n'est pas dénué de certaines longueurs et j'avoue être passée à côté de quelques références historiques américaines (sur certaines personnalités essentiellement), mais c'est aussi cette lenteur qui fait qu'on se sent si concerné par ce qui arrive à Joseph. Cela rend le

dénouement d'autant plus brutal et certains l'ont reproché à l'auteur. J'ai personnellement trouvé qu'il collait tout à fait à l'état d'esprit de Joseph à la fin de sa vie.

Ne vous attendez pas à de grands frissons. C'est plus un roman noir qu'un thriller, mais R. J. Ellory excelle dans la création d'une ambiance noire et oppressante, sur laquelle plane l'ombre d'un tueur sans merci, par opposition à la foi et à la ténacité d'un jeune homme extrêmement attachant. C'était le second livre que je lisais de cet auteur, et je suis d'ores et déjà convaincue d'en lire bientôt d'autres. Un roman à découvrir, vraiment.

Anne says

A great big 5 STARS! Was blown away by this book, more by the style of writing than the story. Loved it!

Geraldine O'Hagan says

I have no idea why everyone likes this book so much, as it's clearly crap. Not only that, but it takes an unnecessarily long time about being crap.

The protagonist, Joseph Vaughan, appears to be suffering from some type of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Or at least that's the only explanation I can come up with for his turgid prose, literary pretensions and ability to focus the story resolutely on himself for a full 400 pages. The reader is told of roughly 30 murders (it's hard to be precise, as the uniformity of victim and circumstance leaves little material with which to differentiate them), a series of tragic deaths, a false imprisonment, the destruction of at least two families and the tale of Joseph's mother's descent into madness. All of this is related exclusively and entirely as it directly personally affects Joseph. All the most memorable facts from a child's history of Early-Mid 20th Century USA are trotted out as a backdrop to the fascinating life and terrible suffering of our hero. Civil Rights protests and a Holocaust of which the characters are oddly well-informed at a very early stage serve as stage-dressing to Joseph's single-minded obsession with catching the man apparently responsible for the death of every female he has ever met. A constant stream of girls and women enter his life as combination muse/breeding instrument, and are summarily dispatched for increasingly spurious reasons. At no time do we get any inkling of what any of these characters think or feel. They are essentially just extra building-blocks in the ever-growing and incredibly boring wall of pain and suffering that makes up Joseph's life.

To compound the all-round awfulness Joseph is that most horrifying of creatures, the protagonist-author. We are forced at regular intervals to read extracts of his turgid prose, as well as to hear the encouragements of all his friends, family and acquaintances as they eagerly await his production of the next Great American Novel. This confluence of the author's and his protagonist's narcissism results in several instances of such epic self-regard that I began to feel quite embarrassed to be privy to Ellory's private ego-stroking.

Meanwhile the story drags on, its twee faux-American language and bloated self-love dragging it down at every turn. Finally the author, having obviously decided that the length and pomposity of his work has now reached a sufficient level for it to be declared classic, hurriedly bashes out a nonsensical dénouement, before concluding with a pathetically self-regarding ending in which Joseph is lauded as a Great American writer, presumably meaning that all those women and girls didn't suffer in vain, as they are immortalised as weeping ciphers whose cries of pain provided the chorus in the operatic melodrama that was the life of Joseph Vaughan. The end.

Karine says

Mooi geschreven.

Deed me qua inhoud een beetje denken aan 'De kraaien zullen het zeggen' van Ann-Marie MacDonald en ook aan 'De kleine vriend' van Donna Tart. Denk dat ik deze kortelings nog eens ga lezen.

quote over lezen:

Mijn vader zei altijd tegen me dat het een van de belangrijkste dingen was die je kon doen. Hij zei dat je je hele leven in een hutje kon wonen in een dorpje van anderhalve man en een paardenkop, maar als je kon lezen, kon je in gedachten de hele wereld over reizen. (p26)

over rouwen:

Je moet niet langer rouwen dan bloemen vers blijven en dan moet het over zijn. Het leven gaat verder. (79)

David says

A book with a lot of promise that fails miserably. What captured my attention in the beginning was the prose style...it was very evocative but then it came to drown in its over reliance on similes...that repeat themselves over and over and over.

The story itself started good but became unendingly episodic and cliche. The serial killer narrative and coming of age narratives never gelled. Characterizations were a little interesting but this was lost in a story that went nowhere, I stopped reading when he met Brigid (I just could not take anymore), and a style that was too heavy and too loaded with similes...more interesting metaphors would have helped break it up some. The slow pace would have been more interesting if the introspection went beyond the obvious...almost cliche in its nature.

It was a disappointing book because I had such high expectations after reading the first chapter...but it faded quickly after this.

Not recommended...but I did not hate it either....luke warm is my appraisal.

Leslie says

4* for this audiobook edition; 3½* for the book itself

Mark Bramhall's voice was excellent for this book. It intensified the brooding Southern atmosphere significantly for me! As for the story, this isn't the type of mystery I prefer but I found it well written and the perspective of a person living in a rural area in which a serial killer of young girls is operating was interesting. However, there were a few times when the first person narration by Joseph Vaughn described things he couldn't have known or seen or heard about later. Also, Vaughn's sense of responsibility or connection to the girls is not normal nor adequately explained. It is necessary for the way the author

concluded the case & the book but it didn't feel natural.

Tony says

Ellory, R. J. A QUIET BELIEF IN ANGELS. (2009). *****. I believe that this is one of the best-written books I have read in years. Although it is a crime novel, it reads as much like a family saga as anything else. It is set in a small town in Georgia, where a young boy, Joseph Vaughan, grows up as most other boys in such a setting, until a tragedy strikes and a young girl is found murdered and violated on the outskirts of town. The townspeople are aghast at such an event, and begin to look at each other in a different way. The war is beginning in Europe and people are rethinking their attitudes about foreigners in their midst. A German family comes under suspicion and suffers the effects of their neighbors bias. Then, another young girl is found; this time, not only murdered, but mutilated. Joseph Vaughan and his young male friends decide that they have to do something to help. They form a club whose purpose is to watch over the young girls of the area to see that they are kept safe. In spite of their avowed efforts, additional girls turn up dead over the years. The police from several counties don't have a clue as to the killer's identity. One day, Joseph finds another body and is traumatized by his discovery. He vows that he will dedicate his life to determining who the killer was and bringing him to justice. In the midst of all this, Joseph goes on with his life. He wants to be a writer and is encouraged in this by his young teacher. Later, when Joseph is 18-years old, he and the teacher have an affair which turns into a full-blown love relationship. Joseph is dogged, however, by some evil force that thwarts him at every turn, and not only turns this relationship into a tragedy, but lays the groundwork for similar negative events for the rest of his life. There is a surprise ending, but you had the same clues as Joseph did throughout the book. They were subtle clues, but they were there. This is one of those books that you will pick up and read again in the years to come. It is that good. Highly recommended.
