



The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath

Kimberly Knutsen

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Set in the frozen wasteland of Midwestern academia, *The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath* introduces Wilson A. Lavender, father of three, instructor of women's studies, and self-proclaimed genius who is beginning to think he knows nothing about women. He spends much of his time in his office *not* working on his dissertation, a creative piece titled "The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath." A sober alcoholic, he also spends much of his time *not* drinking, until he hooks up with his office mate, Alice Cherry, an undercover stripper who introduces him to "the buffer"—the chemical solution to his woes.

Wilson's wife, Katie, is an anxious hippie, genuine earth mother, and recent PhD with no plans other than to read *People* magazine, eat chocolate, and seduce her young neighbor—a community college student who has built a bar in his garage. Intelligent and funny, Katie is haunted by a violent childhood. Her husband's "tortured genius" both exhausts and amuses her.

The Lavenders' stagnant world is roiled when Katie's pregnant sister, January, moves in. Obsessed with her lost love, '80s rocker Stevie Flame, January is on a quest to reconnect with her glittery, big-haired past. A free spirit to the point of using other people's toothbrushes without asking, she drives Wilson crazy.

Exploring the landscape of family life, troubled relationships, dreams of the future, and nightmares of the past, Knutsen has conjured a literary gem filled with humor and sorrow, *Aqua Net* and *Scooby-Doo*, diapers and benzodiazepines—all the detritus and horror and beauty of modern life.

The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath for online ebook

Nancyliz says

I think I understand a character and then I don't. Katie, Wilson, January, Steven, Lucy. No spoilers here, but I just finished reading, and...January! What is the matter with you? Your childhood does not add up to your adulthood. I'm glad my own daughters are raised, because based on this character I would never have kids at all. If I knew a January was in my future I would tie every loose tube in my body.

The author creates a real world alive with people that I've never met, as far as I know. Every place and time is distinct, described in crisp language. No wasted words, and yet the reader knows the streets, the rooms, the sheets, the sweatpants, and the upholstery. She captures inner dialogue incisively. Whether you like these people or not, there is nothing fuzzy. While the reader may think WHAT???, the reader will never think, Um...wha...???

So, dive in. I'm fairly certain that January is a fictional character, so we maybe can feel secure that she will not show up on our doorstep someday and use our toothbrush.

Jason Schneider says

Just like other readers/reviewers, I found this book hard to read at times and by the end of it I was just reading it to finish it rather than stopping and leaving these characters in limbo. This didn't seem to matter since that's where the author left them in the end. Characters that I wanted to like because of their brokenness and instead ended up hating them because of it. To me this sounds like bad character development which seems impossible considering how detailed they were. Each character was very specific about their unhappiness with what life had dealt them, despite the fact that their situations were directly related to their constant bad choices. It feels a little self indulgent and self absorbed, covered with a thick layer of self psycho analytical b.s. that really left me wondering if the author has any concept of what it's like to face the life challenges she depicts in these pages. Needless to say, it's not a book I would recommend or read again even though I received it for free via Goodreads Giveaways, it's currently in my bag of donations to the local charity shop.

Michael says

Ein neuer Roman, der den großen Namen Sylvia Plath im Titel führt, und die alte Frage: geschickte Marketingstrategie oder gibt es tatsächlich einen Bezug zu SP?

Wie kommt es überhaupt zum Titel? Wilson A. Lavender unterrichtet an der Uni "Gender Studies" und will seine Dissertation unter dem Titel THE LOST JOURNALS OF SYLVIA PLATH schreiben. Ausgerechnet er, dem im Laufe des Romans immer deutlicher wird, dass er die Frauen in seinem Umfeld nicht versteht, wagt sich daran, fiktive Tagebücher von Sylvia Plath zu schreiben. Allerdings, und das ist auch gut so, kommt er über den ersten Satz nicht hinaus mit seinem gewagten Projekt.

Im Zentrum von Knutsens Roman stehen aber die Schwestern Katie und January und mit ihnen auf engstem Raum komprimiert ungefähr alle Themen, die in einem "Frauenbuch" auftauchen können: jahrelanger sexueller Missbrauch im Kindesalter, Vergewaltigungen, Sex in der Ehe und außerhalb, Fremdgehen, Schwangerschaft, Mutterrolle und einiges mehr. Erheiternd ist das alles nicht, zumal beide

Schwestern nicht gerade liebenswert sind und mich durchaus gegen sich aufbringen konnten, insbesondere die lern- und reiferesistente jüngere January, die sich für den Mittelpunkt der Welt hält und auch ihrer Schwester Katie und deren Ehemann, dem ständig überforderten Wilson, mächtig auf die Nerven geht. Sie hat nun einmal beschlossen, ihr Kind bei ihrer Schwester zur Welt zu bringen, und diesem Entschluß müssen sich alle beugen. Nach der Geburt des Kindes wird sie es einfach bei ihrer Schwester zurücklassen, um in den Tourbus eines mittelmäßigen Rockstars zu steigen, den sie als Jugendliche geliebt hat.

Wem dieser Reigen von sexuellem Streunertum, Lebensuntüchtigkeit und Verantwortungslosigkeit noch nicht den Rest gibt, der bekommt es zusätzlich mit dem Thema Sucht zu tun. Drogen und Alkohol werden reichlich konsumiert und insbesondere einige männliche Figuren sind Alkoholiker.

Wilson ist trockener Alkoholiker, aber ihm fehlt der Puffer, der das Trinken für ihn war. Ohne diese Schutzfunktion, diese "Glasglocke", ist er dem Leben nicht gewachsen. Im Laufe des Romans findet er einen Ausweg: über Medikamente gerät er ans Heroin, das fortan sein Begleiter in der "männlichen" Welt des Auverkäufers sein wird, nachdem er seine universitäre Laufbahn und seine Ehe zerdeppert hat.

Das Personal des Romans ist kein plathsches Repertoire und ich habe den Eindruck, dass Plath dieses Buch nicht gefallen hätte, aber wer weiß. Mangelnde Perspektive der Figuren und mangelnde Fokussierung sind sowohl Probleme der Protagonisten wie auch des Romans selbst.

Trotzdem gibt es drei Sterne, die sich Kimberly Knutsen durch ihr erzählerisches Können verdient. Denn auch wenn mir die Problemdichte bis zur Überdosierung zu hoch ist und vieles konstruiert und gewollt wirkt, ist die Autorin zugleich eine sehr genaue Beobachterin, die gerade in den alltäglichen Szenen erzählerisch Funken schlägt. Im Gegensatz zu den bedrohten und scheiternden Existzenen steht eine Prosa, die sehr lebendig und anschaulich ist und nicht unterzugehen droht.

Ich bin auf Kimberly Knutsens nächstes Buch gespannt, vielleicht nimmt sie sich etwas weniger vor und überzeugt dadurch umso mehr. Ich traue es ihr zu.

Deano says

The authenticity of the characters is displayed most profoundly in the interplay of pathos and humor contained in the development of each. Knutsen writes crisp, spare prose that rings true in every sense. Reflecting the trauma of life that alters each character's trajectory, the author nonetheless provides hints of hope and salvation. The darkness is overcome by light. The pathos by humor. The pulse of narrative draws in the reader and made it difficult to put down.

Suzanne says

I was first interested in this book because of its title, and I was a little disappointed that the Sylvia Plath motif was not more prevalent, but I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the book was set in Kalamazoo, where I spent a lot of time in my youth. Also, Knutsen's skewering of academia was funny, and I grew to care about the deeply flawed characters and their messy lives.

Ionia says

This can be a difficult book to read at times, since you know from the beginning that everything is not going

to come up roses, but it is also unique, moving, funny and heartfelt.

I love books that can mirror real life so accurately that you feel like the author really poured their heart and soul into them. You definitely feel that when you read "The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath."

Kimberly Knutsen writes with a passion and it is felt through each of her carefully worded passages. I enjoyed reading this and found myself nodding my head in agreement with many of the characters thoughts and much of the dialogue. This author is able to put into words what many people must think but not be able to voice.

The characters are strong and believable and the emotional link between them is apparent from the beginning. These are not one-dimensional characters and it is obvious that the author put a lot of work into each of them.

If you enjoy realistic dramas, and books that can make you forget about your own worries and become involved with the characters, this one is likely something you will enjoy.

This review is based on a complimentary copy. All opinions are my own.

Renee says

I had a tough time getting through this book. I was not a fan of the author's all too descriptive ways. At times it was like reading a mail order catalog, not for me. I wasn't invested at all

Rachel (Life of a Female Bibliophile) says

The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath is a book that explores and dissects family, life, love, and relationships. Each character is dealing with personal issues that they struggle with on a everyday basis.

Katie wants a fairy tale life she can't have and is constantly feels depressed because she feels disappointed with the life she's living. Her husband, Wilson is equally unhappy and also feels no love from his marriage. On top of that, he also wants to be respected as an academic as the only male in his Women and Gender Studies department and vows to prove them wrong with his dissertation titled "The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath".

Katie and Wilson constantly nitpick and nag at each other making their relationship unstable. Both are so miserable, are not honest with each other, nor do they seem to trust each other very much. I observed that while reading this novel that they seem to blame each other for their own problems as they try to avoid personal demons that are deeply rooted in their past and upbringing. In addition to all of this, they both have a pessimistic view on life.

Katie's sister, January, who imposes herself on her sister's family is very selfish and very self-centered. She was my least favorite character in the entire novel. She's depressed, is energy draining, melodramatic at times, and brings a lot of her problems on herself. Instead of fixing her own problems, she wants others to do it for them.

The novel is a bit of a heavy book, just by looking at its title. It deals with chronic depression, alcoholism, among other issues. I personally thought it would be more of a dark comedy because of the title and synopsis, but it ended up being too heavy of a book for me personally. It's moderately slow-paced and it is set up into multiple sections. I did like that the story character-driven and how the multiple point of views allow readers to really get inside of the characters heads and see their past and current lives.

Overall, I wished that there was more character development in the book. While some characters changed for the better or got a better grip on how to solve their issues and move on, many were stagnant and dove deeper into their depression. The story moved a bit too slowly at times for me and I had trouble staying with the story at times.

FTC Disclaimer: I received this book from the author in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Trevor Church says

“The sky in Portland was the color of rose petals. It was 1973, and I was eight, and it was the first summer I had to wear a shirt. I could no longer go topless like the boys in the neighborhood, and I hated it. It was confusing. What was so shameful about a girl that she had to be covered when the boys on the block could do as they pleased, whipping off their tank tops in the heat of day, running free at night, the summer breeze cooling their sweaty skin? It was my first hint that there was something wrong with being a girl, that we were dangerous, somehow...”

The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath begins with the internal dialogue, like that above, from one of the central characters – Katie – as a flower child, growing up in Portland, Oregon in the 1970’s. The way in which author Kimberly Knutsen introduces us to key figures in the book is refreshing. She does so without overbearing outwardly descriptions and instead chooses to focus on the more personal and complex details of the psychological developments of Katie and protagonist Wilson – a style that feels reminiscent of works by early feminist authors Sylvia Plath, Djuna Barnes, Anne Sexton and Kate Chopin. This becomes evident as the book progresses and we continue to read consistently strong and vivid prose depicting an honest and well-layered account of both girlhood and womanhood in modern America – an obvious talent of the authors.

What makes The Lost Journals a strong feminist novel in my eyes is not just Knutsen’s homage stylistically to the great female authors that came before her, but it’s her well-rounded, equally balanced representation of both men and women. I am impressed by the author’s ability, as a woman, to be able to give such an accurate portrayal of the modern American man. I felt as though she had taken much of my inner fears, thoughts and experiences and put them on paper. Between the lines of eloquent prose that the author has delicately put to paper as carefully as paint on a canvas, is an honest, unapologetic critique of both the male and female experiences as well as truth’s seldom explored in print pertaining to marriage, monogamy, aging, sex, motherhood and fatherhood, as well as the true inner workings of an American, suburban household.

The structure of the book was both inspirational to myself as a writer and reader – Knutsen has broken the boundaries of traditional format and moves us in a nonlinear format through time. The book is divided between seven parts consisting of thirty-three chapters. Each “part” feels like a life chapter rather than an “act” (a format now traditionally reserved for plays). This allows the reader to become more attached to the characters. We are not left feeling that this is a piece of fiction, because through a careful command in introducing the characters to us, as well as a rhythmic thickening of the plot, it feels as though these are real people – you and I. In one way or another we are able to relate to these characters. There is no ten-page description reserved for enough detail to write a biography on each character, but instead we are fed information that fills the characters out in honest flesh and blood, organically. Nothing is forced within this

novel.

The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath does not force an imaginary world upon us, it simply forces us to open our eyes to the world that we are already participating in. I feel I was given a gift in reading this book, in that I now know my real-life mother better – similar to Katie, a sometimes single-mother in Portland, Oregon. I also feel as though through Wilson, I have a better understanding of the men around me who are more inclined to a heteronormative lifestyle. Through his struggles with addiction, fatherhood, marriage, fantasy, affairs, academia and financial stability we see the modern man on an honest platform – just as screwed up by society as everyone else.

By the end of the novel I felt as though Katie and Wilson were friends of mine, if not family. I laughed, cried and got angry with them. They allowed me to enter the bedrooms of their suburban life, and whispered their darkest secrets to me – for that alone I am grateful to have read this book.

Candice says

Good lord this was heavy. It felt like stuffing dirty underwear in your ears to block out the sound of your parents fighting. My heart is broken.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

To be clear, there's nothing particularly bad about Kimberly Knutsen's *The Lost Journals of Sylvia Plath*, and the reason I didn't care for it isn't because it's badly written -- titled off a clever premise that the rest of the book is hung off of (one of the main characters, a rare male professor of women's studies, has decided for his dissertation to "creatively recreate" the last two volumes of the real Sylvia Plath's personal diary, which were originally burned by her husband right after her death), this is a very typical MFA-type character-heavy domestic drama, with nothing really that unique about it but nothing really that terrible either. No, the main problem is simply one of length; at 400 densely packed pages (or over 500 under a traditional layout), and with almost nothing of importance actually happening to these characters in all that time, I just quite simply lost my patience for the book about halfway through, as will most people who don't have a very specific love for glacially paced academic tales. Not a bad book to check out, but buyer definitely beware.

Out of 10: **7.7**

Molly Nesting says

A remarkable feat of story telling. Great character development, beautiful prose, detailed vivid settings, descriptive and realistic drama. Kimberly is a writer who is not afraid to discuss real life, love, marriage, siblings, grief and happiness. Read this book and look forward to another Knutsen novel.

