



Antonia Lively Breaks The Silence

David Samuel Levinson

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One writer's mysterious death, another's relentless quest for fame, and a bitter literary critic's passion for manipulation drive the story of this haunting novel set in a small upstate New York college town in the 1990s.

Catherine Strayed wonders if she'll ever know the truth about the death of her husband, a promising writer who died under circumstances that could have been accidental, or a suicide, or perhaps even murder. But after his death, instead of leaving the secluded college town to which he had brought her, she simply tries to go on with her life there. When her former mentor, who had also briefly been her lover—a powerful critic who singlehandedly destroyed her husband's chance for success—takes a teaching job at the college, Catherine's world threatens to collapse. For with him has come his latest protégé, an exotic young woman named Antonia Lively who has written a novel that has become a literary sensation. She insinuates herself into Catherine's life, and mysterious and frightening things start to happen as, unbeknownst to Catherine, the younger woman sets out to steal the truth of her life and the death of her husband so that she can plunder them for her next literary triumph.

Levinson's richly crafted characters and his tautly drawn plot mark the debut of an exciting young talent.

Antonia Lively Breaks The Silence Details

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From Reader Review Antonia Lively Breaks The Silence for online ebook

Chaitra says

I have mixed feelings about *Antonia Lively*. As a few days have passed between ranking this book and writing this review, I feel I was generous in handing out my rating of 3 stars. Don't get me wrong. *David Samuel Levinson* can certainly write. It's what he chose to write about is what bothers me.

Antonia Lively is set in a small college town in Upstate New York, and deals with a number of characters in the literary world. Wyatt, a now-dead one-time novelist; Catherine, his wife; Henry, her former lover and the man who destroyed Wyatt's first novel and career; Antonia Lively, a brilliant young writer who is Henry's current flame, and their relationships with each other form the crux of the novel. There's also a side plot of Antonia's father and uncle being displeased and deranged about the short story that shot her off to fame, and all of it adds to the uneasiness and mystery that permeates this book.

The premise is good. I like mysteries and I like books about authors and the blurb compared it to *The Secret History* which is a novel I love. But that's not true. I couldn't connect with the characters, I couldn't care what happened to any of them and I sure didn't see any of their appeal. Especially, I couldn't see the appeal of the lady-killer Henry. I can't even see why the man would be a respected critic considering his major cant is that fiction should not take any inspiration out of the author's or any real life. I find that ridiculous since it invalidates a major chunk of literature out there. I'm not disputing his existence, just his reputation and respectability within the novel's frame.

Catherine mopes and Antonia is dislikable even when we don't know that she is repugnant and I didn't quite care for Wyatt's story. I also didn't like the fact that the novel plays coy with us. There are a few scenarios where everything is described or so we think at the time, and several pages down the line we come to know we were not told one small thing that's now going to be important. It also keeps doing the sudden reveal of some nasty detail during a rambling mental monologue. By the end of the book, nothing was really surprising. I even guessed quite a few of the details *because* they were convoluted and hence fit right in.

The prose was good and the atmosphere excellent, however. I wish the story had been less busy, and that at least one of the characters more interesting than they were. As it is, it's not a book that appealed to me. 3 stars and declining in my mind.

*** *I received this book via NetGalley for review.* ***

Allison Campbell says

<http://noranydroptoread.com/2013/10/2...>

The blurbs compare this title to THE SECRET HISTORY and REBECCA, so perhaps my expectations were too high with this novel. The premise: Catherine Strayed gave up her own career to support her husband's writing, even moving to an insufferable small town to do so. When her former professor/lover, Henry Swallow (who is also the reviewer who destroyed her husband's career), moves to town, things get awkward. Now widowed, she leads a quiet life until Antonia Lively, Henry's latest protege, turns up at her door.

First, the Big Ideas: What is fiction? What responsibilities does an author have? Who owns a story – the writer, or those who lived it? At what point is fiction separate from the reality that inspired it? These are certainly interesting questions, and Levinson explores them thoroughly. He doesn't reach any Big Conclusion, but it would have been shocking if he had. As an intellectual exercise, this novel provokes discussion admirably.

The plot: The “shocking” twists and turns are somewhat random, and Levinson relies overmuch on coincidence. One “revelation” surprised me only because the characters hadn’t realized it earlier. The pacing is very slow, and I’m a patient reader. Sixty pages in, I had only managed to reach the emotion “bored.” It took me two weeks to slog through the first 100 pages because I kept putting it down in favor of books that actually held my interest.

The characters: ANTONIA LIVELY BREAKS THE SILENCE reminded me a bit of THE GREAT GATSBY, in the sense that it was very well-written, but I cared not a whit for any of the characters. I had developed some minor sympathy for Catherine by end of the first third, but then Levinson changed points of view, and I could barely be bothered to continue. There’s an “I” in the third-person-wandering point-of-view, and I believe I was supposed to be surprised when the identity is revealed. I wasn’t; rather, I couldn’t see the point. Something something clever metafiction, I suppose. Or something.

I don’t have to like characters, but I need something besides an intellectual exercise to keep me going. If I hadn’t committed to write a review for this novel, I would have chucked it after the first sixty pages without concern that I would miss anything.

Source disclosure: I received a copy of this book courtesy of the publisher.

Courtney Townill says

Quick Thoughts:

-A lot of the dialogue in 'Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence' was awkward and unnatural sounding. From the way 23 year old Antonia Lively speaks, to the way her uncle consistently calls her, "my dear niece."

-So many things in this novel were bubbling with potential! A thriller based in the literary community? Deep family traumas and lies? Infidelity? Mysterious, closed off men? Sign me up! Unfortunately, I think Levinson was afraid to put his characters in the thick of these conflicts. Much of the conflict was internalized and told to us, rather than having the characters confront each other. Also, Antonia's Uncle Royal is a BIG source of fear and conflict in the story, yet every time he popped up, he was there for thirty seconds before disappearing again. Very passive.

-Levinson created a character with Winslow, and I felt like I at least knew the place very well. The town became a living, breathing thing that I became a part of.

-One of my favorite parts about reading thrillers is having an ending that makes you second guess every action of each character once you finish the novel. There were not enough seeds planted throughout the novel to give the ending a solid punch. The pacing of this novel also did not have the quick, un-put-downability that most thrillers come with.

Heather Fineisen says

There is some good writing here and there, but the narrator is at best unreliable, maybe incompetent...the plot too thick with metaphorical smoke and characters sharing one another like cigarettes, ashes everywhere but the damn ashtray.

Mallory says

Really more like 3.5 stars. The writing was solid, detailed. Well-written, complex characters. The story took several surprising turns. However, by the end I felt the complexity of the story and the notion of a story in a story in a story? Too many damn writers and stories in this story.) on the affected side. Trying too hard. Overall a good read, perhaps just too dramatic for my taste.

Rebecca McNutt says

With its current overall rating of 3/5 stars, I wasn't expecting a lot from this novel. I bought a copy anyway and I'm glad I did, because it turned out to be a lot better than I initially thought it'd be.

Gail says

Oh dear ... I'm not a critic but somehow this book was sold to me last week at a local bookstore ahead of its official release. It was not a good purchase.

The story is vapid, empty of meaning or redemption and with an incredibly poor cast of characters (who were not well developed).

I also found it irritating that none of the cast seem able to speak in more than one or two word sentences i.e. this "conversation" between Antonia and Ezra:

"Where's Henry?"

"Am I my father's keeper?"

"That was a nasty thing you did. I have been nothing but kind to you."

He blinked at her, dumbfounded. "What ... I don't ... what are you talking about?"

"Don't play stupid with me," she said sharply.

"Where's my father?" he asked, rising.

"I just asked you that. Besides Henry has nothing to do with this."

Ezra was laughing, "He has everything to do with everything."

Okay ... so seriously, that was taken from pg 141.

There is no development of character and no development of thought either ... well, except when the only way the "plot" is presented is through the "thoughts" and "thinking" of the players in the story. They think of their pasts, their regrets, their wishes, their loved ones (living & dead) and drop information that is supposed to lead us to the point of the story.

Then mysterious characters clumsily appear without introduction or meaning - from behind bushes or on darkened porches. What? Who are these people? Where do they belong? Well, to find out we must wait for a

daughter, lover or widow to get alone so he/she can "think" this person in to the story by reminiscing in thought.

So ... do you get it? Me either. I didn't even finish the book ... I spent too much time calling my daughter to read out loud some of the insipid lines from almost every page. It was just taking too much time.

... so from that you get the point. Or maybe you don't. I know I didn't.

Robert says

I didn't really feel much of anything after I finished this novel. Not happy, or sad, or anger, or despair, or excitement, or resentment. Even as I was reading **ANTONIA LIVELY BREAKS THE SILENCE**, my only desire was to set this book aside and move on to the next one.

Instead of aiming to be either literary fiction or a mystery, this novel tried to combine elements of both, and the glue never quite seemed to gel. The novel might have been better served if it stepped back a bit and got out of its own way. Because there's no question David Samuel Levinson has talent, and there's no question he's got a great career ahead of him, but I don't think this is the book that is going to lead him to the Promised Land.

To be fair, it's not a bad book, but none of the characters really resonated with me. Pretty much all of the characters end up being unlikeable, their faults leaving more permanent marks than their assets. The story had me a bit lost at times, like I'd been jarred from the merry-go-round, and I was left staring up at the clouds from the flat of my back. And when it was all said and done, I was left feeling a bit helpless, more than a little lost, and more than a little hopeful that I'll connect with my next read a bit more than I did this one.

I received this book for free through NetGalley.

Janics says

I really did not enjoy this book. From my perspective it was overwritten.

Owen says

I had so much fun reading this book. Not because the subject matter is particularly fun, but because it felt like a mystery or a melodrama throughout the entire book. I understand it is about death and other serious things, but it fits the whole small-town-many-mysteries idea well.

After the death of her husband Wyatt, Catherine Strayed is trying to cope with her life in her upstate New York town. She works in a bookstore and is surrounded by writers, things that constantly remind her of her late husband- who was also a successful novelist. Things get more complicated when a man by the name of Henry shows up. He had an affair with Catherine when she was a college student and because of the breakup, he used his position as a well known book critic to trash Wyatt's novel. When he comes to stay in

Catherine's cottage, she has to figure out how to get over her anger toward him while at the same time respecting her late husband.

The writing in this book held my attention the entire time. At times it felt like a mystery or a comedy or whodunit, but at other times it got pretty sad. The author did a good job of creating an interesting plot with enough back-story, and all of the characters were great. One thing I was confused about was the time in which it took place because all of the writers had typewriters but when I looked at the description of the book after reading it, I saw that it took place in the 1990s. I don't think that was mentioned in the book, unless I missed it.

The ending was sort of surprising and I'm still not sure how I feel about it. It went along with what was happening for most of the other parts of the book but it felt disconnected from the idea of who Wyatt was as a person, because we were never introduced to him.

Literature enthusiasts and people that love books about writers will love this book.

Jennifer says

This book was weird - not good, not bad. An easy read and an interesting story, but not one I'm very satisfied with.

Danielle Villano says

I loved the premise of this book. I've always been a huge fan of books about writers. It's sort of thrilling, knowing that the writing life can be dramatic and interesting, right?

However, while I found a lot of this writing to be lovely, I didn't really think that I got to connect with any of the characters. The shift between POV confused me; I didn't know how to feel about any of the characters, really. Even Catherine, who I thought I was supposed to empathize with - feel for - I felt disconnected from her.

I did not see the allure of Henry, or understand the fascination with Antonia, or yearn to know Wyatt's secrets. I felt like a bystander, reading an account of some lives that I felt very little for.

I know this sounds harsh. I really did find the writing to be beautiful, though; the descriptions of heat in a small, slow town were stunning. I could feel that heat. I wish I felt the same pull towards the characters.

Merredith says

I felt like this book was trying too hard to be intelligent. For some reason, it was also reminiscent of *Dear Mr. M* by Herman Koch. The book is about a woman, Catherine, living in a small town near NYC in the mid-1980s. She never much wanted to live there, but did for her husband, a once-promising writer whose career was destroyed by a single review. After he died two or so years ago, she continued to live in the small

town and work at a bookstore for a boss who was disrespectful and gave her almost no hours. Catherine ends up getting entangled with her ex advisor/ex-boyfriend/man who destroyed her husband's career, and his new girlfriend, a very young up and coming writer, and things go from there. It sounds much more interesting than it was. Once in a while the narrator flips around, and while no one is particularly likable, the other people are better than Catherine. It was just ok, pretty pretentious. I don't really recommend it.

Jessica Piazza says

Truly lovely descriptive writing, and enough twists and turns to keep any reader interested. The novel starts off a little slow, but picks up pace and gets better and better and better. Recommend!

Mark says

In one of my favorite movies, *Henry Fool*, sanitation worker Simon Grim is inspired by the movie's namesake to begin writing poetry. It turns out he's so good at it that he ends up winning the Nobel Prize. The movie's writer and director, Hal Hartley, achieves this suspension of disbelief by never showing any of Simon's poetry to the audience. Instead, we are left to imagine these earth-shattering poems that amaze the other characters in the movie. Simon's poetic genius is all the more believable because we aren't given the opportunity to read his work for ourselves and dispute its genius.

On the flip side, David Samuel Levinson, the author of *Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence*, has committed one of the unspoken sins of art creation, which is to write something, and then to have that writing referred to, within that very work, by a (fictional) critic as "nothing short of ingenious and nothing less than a page-turner" (311). This fictional critic also proclaims the author of *Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence* to be "the greatest fiction writer of her [sic] generation" (311). Not even Norman Mailer had the guts to do this. Sure, he'd talk about how great he was *outside* of his works of art (e.g., in an interview or whatever), but never, to my knowledge, *within* one of those works. (You'll note the disparity of gender in the above quotation from the book, and this is explained by the fact that, within the world of the book, *Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence* was written by one of the book's own characters. Perhaps Levinson believed that this one degree of remove absolves him, because he's not, technically, writing about himself. But this would work only if we were meant to believe that the version of *Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence* being so intensely praised by the critic weren't the very book we'd just read. And I don't see how this could possibly be the case here.)

This arrogance would be slightly forgivable if *Antonia Lively Breaks the Silence* were, in fact, "ingenious" and evidence of a writer who is "the greatest...of [his] generation." But it is not. On the contrary, this novel serves as an OK waste of a couple of afternoons if you're looking to read something that doesn't tax your brain and as long as you don't care too much about believable characterization.

This book reminded me of *Girl on the Train* in that it's populated by characters with strange motivations who continually, almost compulsively, interact with each other even though they should really know better. I had been expecting a rather low-key book about literate individuals inhabiting a sleepy college town. What I got was a quasi-thriller that became a quasi-thriller only in the very last part of the book. Whereas the beginning was all about grief and anger with some petty jealousy thrown in, the end was all about Chekov's gun going off (twice), with "tragic" results.

I put "tragic" in scare quotes because the tragedy is a big part of what didn't work for me in this book. The events that led to someone getting shot in the end read like paint-by-numbers melodrama. Actually, it all read as pretty melodramatic in a way that I just couldn't appreciate. Why did Catherine keep talking to Harold (the man who ruined her dead husband's career) and why did she ask him to move into her guest cottage? Why did she believe she and Antonia were friends? They interact just a few times in the book and never really connect in a meaningful way. Why does everyone freak out because Antonia used an ugly story from her family's past as the basis for her novel? Haven't writers done that since the dawn of fiction? It may not make her a very nice person, but then writers aren't competing in a likeability contest; they're trying to make art.

Speaking of which, this book was weirdly "down" on writers and writing. Beyond many of the characters distrusting and/or disliking writers as a whole, the overall theme of the book itself seems to be that writers are awful. Considering that it's written by a writer, this is an odd bit of self-loathing. Especially in a book by one of the greatest writers of his generation.
