



Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath

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This engrossing debut novel depicts Sylvia Plath's feverish artistic process in the bitter aftermath of her failed marriage to Ted Hughes--the few excruciating yet astoundingly productive weeks in which she wrote Ariel," " her defining last collection of poems.

In December 1962, shortly before her suicide, Plath moved with her two children to London from the Hughes's home in Devon. Focusing on the weeks after their arrival, but weaving back through the years of Plath's marriage, Kate Moses imagines the poet juggling the demands of motherhood and muse, shielding her life from her own mother, and by turns cherishing and demonizing her relationship with Ted. Richly imagined yet meticulously faithful to the actual events of Plath's life, Wintering is a remarkable portrait of the moments of bravery and exhilaration that Plath found among the isolation and terror of her depression

Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath Details

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Author : Kate Moses

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From Reader Review *Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath* for online ebook

Daneil Newcomb says

There are some books you devour, indulging in page after page, drinking in the words like ice cold lemonade on a sweltering summer day or homemade cookies from mother's college care pack. These books are ingested with urgency and saturating yourself in their goodness. These are the books you skip meals for, or stay up far too late to finish, or push aside your to do list for another day to read just one more chapter. There are books you devour, but this is not one of those books.

This book is much too rich for swift consumption. Like a deep chocolate torte, it sits upon your tongue and leaves you heavy-lidded and humming as it's bittersweet flavor soaks into each of your taste buds. This is a book that must be savored, one chapter at a time, leaving space for the words on the page to be fully digested.

I highly recommend reading the poems that couple to the chapters as you go. Moses has done a beautiful thing.

Becky says

As someone who has studied Plath's life and work for a long time, I was intrigued by the notion of someone having taken on Plath, Hughes, and their friends and families as characters for a novel.

The chapters of *Wintering* are each titled after one of Plath's *Ariel* poems, in the original sequence Plath had planned for the book -- the manuscript was to begin with the word "love" and end with the word "spring." *Wintering* author Kate Moses has clearly done a lot of excellent research -- this is apparent even before you get to her notes at the back of the book. Readers who are familiar with Plath's life and work will find the characters' thoughts and the book's settings dressed with details from Plath's poems, journals, and letters -- the six jars of honey, the "lurid skins" of balloons that appear in an *Ariel* poem.

It is on this level that *Wintering* succeeds as "A Novel of Sylvia Plath." Kate Moses has immersed herself in the wealth of material that's out there, by and about Plath, and has produced a crystalline snowglobe world out of what had been chunks and fragments.

It's also interesting that the novel appears not to take sides. Plath and Hughes are human, each with strengths and flaws. Even Dido Merwin and Assia Wevill are fleshed out, rather than left as flat villains of the piece.

But herein lies what dissatisfied me about *Wintering* -- there doesn't seem to be any villain. Or, if a villain, per se, isn't necessary, there's no fire, no thrill, none of the crash and bang and intensity one gets from reading Plath's actual writing, whether it's her poems or journals. Apart from one scene in which a delirious Plath hears strange voices on the telephone and seems to see carrion birds in her house, there is no hint of her irrationality and demanding nature (aspects of her personality that have been under debate for decades, as to whether they really existed) or her intensity (which was an undeniable Plath trait).

Even though I was largely dissatisfied with the book (far too many of us Plath fans feel like we own her),

there's no denying Kate Moses' achievement. Her creation is believable and incredibly detailed, especially the descriptions of life at Court Green (as idyllic and bucolic as I ever imagined it myself), the interactions of the Plath and Hughes characters (both as newlywed writers goading each other to produce, and as an estranged couple), and Plath's isolation during the winter in London, as she cares for her two young children.

I'm giving the book only three stars because, though I feel Plath fans will enjoy it, I can't imagine a casual reader picking it up and pushing all the way through to the end. As far as I'm concerned, a good biography of Plath is still much more interesting, especially with the mystery of "What was going through her head that day?" Though Moses has imagined that in a believable way, the mystery of not knowing is still more interesting.

The glory of *Wintering* is in the details -- details that have been picked up from primary source material: the poems, letters, and journals of Sylvia Plath.

Kate Stericker says

Although I feel that Moses accomplished her artistic vision, I would not recommend this book to anyone not intimately familiar with the life and writings of Sylvia Plath. Because I approached this book as I would any other novel, I was frustrated by many of the features which were likely intended to appeal to Plath fans. For example, Moses' writing style (presumably modeled after Plath) is so lyrical that the book often seems like an extended prose poem, making it difficult to tell whether long sections are relevant to the plot or simply intended to sound poetic. Similarly, the fact that the narrative skips through a time period of only two years results in frequent jumps of two or three months backwards, contributing to a frustrating lack of narrative progress. If I had been able to recognize the allusions to Plath's work and appreciate the vivid imaginings of figures from her life, I'm sure I would have enjoyed this book more; as it is, *Wintering* is not for me.

Danielle says

This novel is a beautiful and poetic portrait of the last months of Sylvia Plath's life. It is heart breaking and joyful with hope and desperation at a constant ebb and flow. Kate Moses does a masterful job weaving the facts of Plath's life with the fictional intimate conversations, and interactions imagined between the known lines of Plath's fiery rise from the ashes of her broken marriage and the rapid fall of her star as her passion finally burned her out.

Fans of Plath should definitely pick up this novel, but anyone who has felt the lows of depression, the fevered passion of love or the struggle of the artist with their muse will also enjoy reading this book. Although it is a sad story to be told, the prose is vivid, visceral and truly beautiful, with Plath's trials and triumphs touching your heart at every turn. Moses does a good job being objective as to Plath and her husband's Ted Hughes turbulent relationship. She leaves the reader with a full picture of this time in their lives with no "villain" despite Hughes' sexual affair which was ultimately responsible for their split and Plath's subsequent rush of inspiration which resulted in her collection of poetry titled Ariel. Plath's tragic curse is that her muse is her misery, the pain that makes life so crisp, so real leaves her soul lost with out its other half. Unfortunately Sylvia never see's the possibilities, the alternate ways of life she could pursue. Her inspiration a rising flame fed by the destruction of her former life, that creative spark burning bright before fading to black.

A beautiful tribute to Sylvia Plath told in an original style that I can't wait to see more of in the future. If this novel catches your eye, you won't be dissatisfied!!!

Kathy says

Mixed reaction here. Kate Moses obviously immersed herself in all the Plath writings (by and about) and does try to channel the very words Plath might have used. So, you really have to admire her earnestness and her love of language.

But Sylvia Plath is tricky territory. So many of us are sort of fangirls, you know? And we all have our triggers and sore points and exalted opinions and sorrows and yearnings. (and we wonder about--how we wonder--what the poems of the next decades would have held).

The structure of the novel is clever: chapters with the names of the poems of Ariel in the order in which Sylvia placed those poems, without the changed sequence and the omissions and additions of the first edition, which was arranged by Hughes. This structure made me go take a look at the poems that aren't in my first edition...and appreciate the ones that Hughes tagged on at the end.

And yeah, the whole question of balancing mothering very small children and keeping sane and writing..Moses, who has kids of her own, obviously gets it and probably identified at a core level with that struggle.

But..if you just picked up this book randomly, if you weren't a lover and student of all the Plath poems and the many Plath histories and letters and criticism...would you get it? I mean, we know how Plath's life ended, and as the narrative zigs and zags (in the order of the poems, which are not chronological in Plath's version) you get bits and pieces. If you know, you nod sagely and think "yeah, Dido did find Sylvia annoying...but really, Merwin doesn't like to be called Bill, why on earth is Moses so cozily doing that?". If you don't...I don't know, would you just go "why the f*ck are these precious people maundering so"? Ultimately I thought the book was a good attempt, but...no, you really have to read the actual writings. Though..well, nicely audacious of Kate Moses to try this.

Janet says

I loved this novel, beautifully imagining Sylvia Plath in her struggles with her time, her marriage, herself--depression, motherhood, perfectionism... I really felt this marriage to be true, and the novelist's understanding of her character unlocked some of the mysteries of Plath's choices and dilemmas. Gorgeously written, utterly persuasive. I actually teach point of view using scenes from this book as exemplars.

Kathy says

I don't know what to think of the book "Wintering" yet. I am enjoying the poetic prose but at times it gets confusing, especially during the Ariel chapter.

I understand that the poem, Ariel, was one of Sylvia Plath's best poems, and Ariel, the horse, was very significant in her life (an inspiration), but for me, this chapter went on a bit too much. It was mostly just descriptions of the scenery and her relationship to the handling of the horse. Ariel was not an easy horse to maneuver and Sylvia was celebrating her birthday by sneaking out at dawn with Ariel for a horseback ride.

The chapters that I enjoyed much more were the ones about Sylvia who was on her own in London, coming to terms with the break up of her marriage, and her obsessive creation of poetry and how the words were just demanding to get out...and get put on paper. Given a voice.

The book follows Sylvia in the last winter of her life, living in Yeats' old house in London, working, caring for her children and coming to terms with the death of her marriage.

I am a big Sylvia Plath fan, by the way and I thought this book was well written, very descriptive (which I love). As I wrote before, there were some points (like the Ariel chapter) that dragged, but for the most part, the book was excellent.

Worth reading, even though it is a bit depressing. Very descriptive writing style.

Shaz S says

Since I had no previous knowledge of Kate Moses's work, I picked up this book purely on the basis of my obsession with Sylvia Plath. The book is a fictional look at the last few months of SP's life. The narrative switches quite comfortably between first and third person narrative very often. Considering this is Kate Moses' first book, its quite impressive but its not an easy read. The titles of the chapters are from the poems of Ariel, her last collection of poems. The book starts with Sylvia moving to London with her two children from Ted Hughes's house in Devon. There are frequent flashbacks embedded throughout to inform the reader of her life before the separation. In London Sylvia is coping in her own obtuse ways with the hardships of being a single mother creating a new life, struggles of motherhood and the her own suffocating relationship with her mother. The emptiness, the ache, the sacrifices, everything that Sylvia felt is delivered so beautifully in this fictionalised tale that it almost becomes real. And the language just overwhelms you, in a brilliant way of course, The light in her words, the poetic flow, the stream of emotions writing, its beautiful almost to the point of tears. But this kind of excruciating verse-prose is not for everyone. This book demands resilience. and I am not ashamed to say that I finished the book even though it took me almost a month to complete.

The book is engrossing most of the time but there are a few chapter which drag on forever, are repetitive and annoying to the point that you almost have to force yourself to keep going. Another thing I didnt like in the book is the melodramatic portrayal of the way Sylvia handles her relationship with her husband, almost turning her into someone petty and mean. Or Maybe I have idolised SP to such an extent in my mind that I cannot see her as a normal human being handling things in very erring human ways. All in all this a beautiful tribute to a beautiful tortured-soul.

Lorri Steinbacher says

Moses so completely captures the oppressive sadness as well as the manic creativity that I imagine marked the last few months of Plath's life. I like that she ends on a hopeful note, rather than on the more salacious point of her suicide, which takes place a few weeks later. Since Moses used Plath's journals as part of her background research this makes sense--she cannot extrapolate on those last weeks as those journals were destroyed by Hughes. Like all good, complex characters you simultaneously want to give Plath a hug and a day off while also wanting to shake her out of some of her more self-indulgent thought patterns. This is not an easy book, but it is worth the time.

Ophelinha says

I really, really disliked this book.

I cannot even put my finger on why I hated it so much that it took me one month to finish reading it. I found the writing pedantic, a sad, lukewarm copy of Plath's lively, strong, powerful writing.

I also found the chronological disorder very poorly structured and very confusing. The long descriptions fail to capture the reader's eye, and are simply too much.

What is more, I couldn't find Plath – one of my favourite writers - among the pages of this novel, aiming at recreating the jigsaw of Sylvia's last months, before her tragic suicide.

Amy Westgarth says

Fantastic. A perfect addition to Plath's own journals.

There's some criticism on here about the dense prose, but, having waded through 750 pages of the aforementioned journals, I can confirm the writing style is absolutely spot on.

I do take the point that if you want to properly experience Sylvia Plath you should *read Sylvia Plath* and not someone pretending to be her. However, this being written in the third person helps reassure the reader that Moses is only trying to be *like* Plath, not actually *be* Plath. It's good to keep that in mind.

The way the narrative weaved back through previous events and seemed to fixate on certain events/objects/places/people with no warning was very authentic. The overall sense of abandonment and loss of hope was palpable. The whole melancholic tone of the book was suffocating at times yet impossible to resist. Reading this was like eating expensive chocolate – you can't have too much at once or consume it too quickly. Every mouthful/page must be savoured and processed before moving on. At several times I had to put the book down and think over what I'd just read. There was a constant, uneasy sense of teetering over the edge of a cliff. We know what happens to Plath in the end and as such are just edging forward... pulling back... waiting... waiting... for the tale to reach its inevitable conclusion.

I was absolutely enthralled by this book. I loved it. ALTHOUGH had I been new to Plath I would have really

struggled with the heavy, overly descriptive prose style. None of the events the book was talking about would have made any sense either and I would have just got frustrated and given up. So some background on Plath is essential to be able to enjoy *Wintering*.

I know die-hard Plath fans disagree, but I personally thought this book was excellent.

Amy (literatiloves) says

I love biographical fiction. I really liked *The Paris Wife* and *Loving Frank* so, I knew this would be right up my alley!

Wintering is a novel based on the last few months of Sylvia Plath's life with flashbacks to earlier times in her marriage to Ted Hughes. It is an emotional and depressing read (but, emotional and depressing is my middle name) and it is beautifully written. I love how the book is set up. The chapters are named for the poems in *Ariel* in their original sequence. And each chapter coincides with the events that are referred to in the poem. The format did make it a slower read for me. Part of the book is written in the "present" time frame then flashes back to previous times so, I would find myself having to look back to see where the chapter I was reading took place in relation to what I just read. But, I liked the way that it was written.

The writing is so rich and descriptive, you really feel the emotions that she must have felt at such a dark time in her life. She was separated from her husband who was in a relationship with someone else, she was dealing with depression, living in London during one of the coldest winter in history with her two small children and her poetry was pouring out of her. You really feel the desperation that she must have felt. My only con would be that it was so descriptive that that bogged me down in parts. But, I loved it and give it five stars. If you have any interest in Sylvia Plath, her poetry, or just love biographical fiction, I would recommend it.

Noëlibrarian says

I gave this book the rare compliment of reading it twice -- once when it first came out, back in 2003. I have a frustrating relationship with Plath, to whom I'd like to give, alternately, a long hug and a hard slap. Apparently that's the way Ted felt about her, too.

As a child of a mother who made many attempts at suicide, and who finally died by accident when she was about Plath's age (when I was 2 1/2 and my sister was 5 1/2), I have always been struck by the extraordinary self-centeredness of young parents who choose suicide. I imagine Plath's children, who are older than me by about a decade, have searched all their lives for the answers to why they were not --worthy enough? --compelling enough? --loved enough? --to have a mother who chose to stay, to live, if only for them. Kate Moses has helped to shed some light on these terrible questions, and for that, I thank her.

Beverly says

I don't write reviews nearly as often as I should but this book compels me to write one. The novel is based on facts known about Plath, but what makes this book extraordinary is the beauty of the prose. Each chapter is named after a poem in Plath's final book *Ariel*. The chapter entitled "*Ariel*" was so beautiful I read it twice.

If you are at all interested in Plath and her work, I highly recommend this book. I loved it.

Aniko Carmean says

Wintering, a novel of Sylvia Plath by Kate Moses, received glowing accolades from enough newspapers and reviewers to fill several pages at the front of the novel. Praise is heaped on the lucid intensity of the prose and the ability for Moses to give insight into the last several months of Plath's life. I'm going to be in the minority in not loving this book, mostly because I am of the opinion that if you want Plath, there is plenty about Plath by Plath. Between her journals, her letters home, and her collected poems, there is no shortage of access to the writer herself. Yes, Moses writes in a Plath-like voice, but that is the flaw: it is only like Plath, it is not actually Plath. If you want the real deal, go straight to the canon. There is no need for an intermediary, not even one as talented as Moses - especially when Moses takes what was written in legitimate first-person and puts it at a third person remove.

Wintering's format is taken directly from Plath's intended layout for Ariel. Each chapter is named for one of the Ariel poems, and the content follows suit, tying together events from the poem, journals, and other sources. The format lends an interesting ebb and flow to the recounting of Plath's story. The details are shown in a fevered, stop-caption motion that disregards any sense of chronology and shatters the sense that this might be a conventional biography written from an unconventional perspective. The movement of the story through time keeps the reader unbalanced in a way that emphasizes the sense of imbalance Plath herself seems to have felt during the tumultuous and emotional time period.

I would have been smitten with this book if it had been written as straight fiction. There are many beautiful scenes that felt straight fiction written by Moses, and not Moses-imagining-herself-as-Plath. If you need one reason to pick up Wintering, Chapter Six: Barren Woman is it. The intensity of Assia's interest in acquiring Sylvia's life is breathtaking and unforgettable. The breakfast where Assia dresses like Sylvia and repeats a dream she knows will attract Ted is taut, storytelling perfection. Moses has an unparalleled talent for describing the emotional landscape of a shattered woman trying to rebuild herself. More than anything, I would love to read a story by Moses that isn't fictionalized biography. I bet that would be a book I could love without any reservation.
