



The Bookseller

Cynthia Swanson

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The Bookseller follows a woman in the 1960s who must reconcile her reality with the tantalizing alternate world of her dreams

Nothing is as permanent as it appears . . .

Denver, 1962: Kitty Miller has come to terms with her unconventional single life. She loves the bookshop she runs with her best friend, Frieda, and enjoys complete control over her day-to-day existence. She can come and go as she pleases, answering to no one. There was a man once, a doctor named Kevin, but it didn't quite work out the way Kitty had hoped.

Then the dreams begin.

Denver, 1963: Katharyn Andersson is married to Lars, the love of her life. They have beautiful children, an elegant home, and good friends. It's everything Kitty Miller once believed she wanted—but it only exists when she sleeps.

Convinced that these dreams are simply due to her overactive imagination, Kitty enjoys her nighttime forays into this alternate world. But with each visit, the more irresistibly real Katharyn's life becomes. Can she choose which life she wants? If so, what is the cost of staying Kitty, or becoming Katharyn?

As the lines between her worlds begin to blur, Kitty must figure out what is real and what is imagined. And how do we know where that boundary lies in our own lives?

The Bookseller Details

Date : Published by Harper (first published March 3rd 2015)

ISBN :

Author : Cynthia Swanson

Format : Kindle Edition 371 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Writing, Books About Books

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Erica says

What's going on in publishing these days? Is the same designer responsible for all these covers?

If so, good job, designer. You won again.

These covers always pull me in because of course they do. Why wouldn't they?

None of these books have lived up to their covers, sadly.

Don't get me wrong. I liked this one. It's a solid story with good writing and an interesting premise.

Unfortunately, I got a little tired of it. Also, it made me feel sad but not in the way I like to feel sad. It made me feel heavy-sad, sort of sloggy, sort of burdened, though I think that was because the tale pinged on things in my own life that I'd rather not think about. That's on me, not the book.

Synopsis: Kitty lives in Denver, Colorado, in the early '60's. She starts the book as an artsy, single woman who owns a bookstore with her best friend. Something Wicked This Way Comes is newly released upon the world. At night, she dreams she has a totally different life in which she is a wife and mother and wears Jackie Kennedy-style clothing. Her two lives, the bookish life and the dream life, as well as her separate personas, could not be more different but the one thing that remains true in each is the love for and from her parents.

So it's funny how many of the things referenced aren't there anymore, such as Rocky Mountain News. Vogue theater. MayD&F! "Monkey" Wards! Stapleton Airport. Those are all long gone but I remember many of them. But! Pearl Street is alive and well and even sports a little mystery bookstore. But, see, to me, all the name-throwing-outting made me feel as if this were written specifically for Denverites and those who have a more-than-passing knowledge of the city. A sort of love letter, which is nice because those are usually written about Paris and NYC and not our little state capital, but it was also a bit offputting because why does anyone need such specifics in a story if they don't live here? I live here (well, 30 minutes from the area in question) and even I was all, "Ok, ok. Get on with it. I don't care where you are."

In addition, I was a little thrown out of the story by the over-exuberant commentary on racism. For instance, the kid next door talks about Willie Mays and how the color of his skin shouldn't matter, it's his skills as a baseball player that are important. Yes, that's true and it's great that this kid thinks that but the conversation didn't feel like it came about naturally. It felt shoehorned in to make a point and, thus, I was thrown right out of the flow. Later, at a dream party, Katherine mulls over how uncomfortable she is with the "colored help" and then thinks to herself that she was raised to go out of her way to treat people of color the same as she treats white people and that her dad worked with black people and her mom took care of babies of all colors, etc. so this whole only non-whites work for whites thing made her question society. While, yes, that's pretty much exactly what it sounds like when white women rationalize why they're not racist, does everyone have long, expository, internal thought-stories about how they feel on racism when they're at a party? Because I don't. I have to talk about my racism out loud as soon as I realize I've said or done something horrible which, of course, makes it all worse and then I go and feel like a stupid asshole for days afterward. This happens way too often and it certainly is always loud and embarrassing but it is never stuck to the confines of my internal musings. But maybe other people have social enlightenment at parties? I don't know. Regardless, that, too, threw me back out of the story.

So I had some quibbles. Overall, though, the topics of this story ((view spoiler)) are interesting and handled in a fashion that, as everything unfolds and the reader realizes what has happened, creates a sense sympathy for the main character in both her forms.

It's a sad story but definitely worth the read.

Alaina Meserole says

I don't know about you... but I would love to own a bookshop and have these dreams..

The Bookseller was a pretty interesting book. I feel like I flew through the kindle version because it just kept reminding me of other little books. Sort of like *Outlander*, but not really. In this book, you will meet Katharyn and Lars. Whenever she goes to sleep, well she wakes up in this different world (sort of).

Maybe I should dive more into that? Same world but a different time zone is probably a bit easier to think about. When she is actually awake, she is a single hardworking woman who owns a bookshop and is painting her bedroom yellow. Hey don't hate on that sunshine-y color, because my bedroom at my dad's house is yellow too. I wanted blue, but my dad compromised with yellow - close enough, right? Anyhoo, well when she goes to sleep.. she sort of wakes up to a husband and kids. Yup, you read that correctly.

Now Lars is a handsome fella and their kids are beyond adorable. However, she doesn't know anything about them or this new version of herself. She doesn't like her actual name and goes by Kitty in her real life.. but in this one her husband calls her Katharyn.

While reading this book, I'm so intrigued that she time travels while asleep - because sometimes dreams can seem so vivid. Yet, this is actually vivid for her. She remembers everything about it when she wakes up. I couldn't decide if this dream-like world would eventually become her real-life world.. or if she was going to get stuck in this dream forever. I just wanted to find out how it ended!!

If I could change one thing about this book.. it would definitely be how she treated Michael. He's one of her kids and autistic.. but I feel like she definitely treated him differently than her other two - which made me frown. Now I know that most people don't know how to deal with autistic people or kids but it doesn't help when everyone notices that you treat one differently than the other. Before ya get all mad at me and shit, my older brother is autistic and my parents never treated him differently. If you talk to my aunts and uncles, well yes - they did treat him differently when we would visit and it honestly annoyed all of us. He's my brother and that's all I'm going to treat him as - he's not made of glass. We annoy and nag each other just like every day siblings - of course I don't tolerate him being bullied and either would my sister.

Sorry about my little rant! Overall, it was a good and interesting book.

Denise says

The Bookseller is a first-time novel for Cynthia Swanson. Katharyn/Kitty, the main character kept me engrossed in this novel from page one.

In the Bookseller, Swanson takes us on a startling journey where a woman is thrust into an alternate world that might have been, if she had made different decisions. The Bookseller is a wonderful exploration of identity, love and loss. The 1960's tone is elegant, slightly mysterious, and thoroughly engrossing.

The Bookseller's plot fascinated me, was well written and the many twists and turns kept me engaged until the final page. Katharyn/Kitty's journey kept me guessing. The Bookseller is an unique, intriguing read.

Sara says

Kitty Miller is single. She owns a business with her best friend, Frieda, and she is pretty contented with her independent life and her cat. Then she falls asleep one night and finds herself in an alternate reality in which she is Katharyn, a married woman with children, a loving husband, and a much more complicated but fuller life. Dreaming of this life once is like taking a trip, but Kitty dreams of this life over and over again and the line between reality and dreaming begins to blur.

I adore authors who can take unbelievable, incomprehensible concepts and make them seem possible and real. Kitty as a character is interesting, believable and sympathetic. I began to care what happened to her and worry that she would be stuck in one of these lives when she wanted to live in the other. The plot and the tension build and when Swanson gives us the key to the puzzle, she does not cheat her reader with the manner in which she resolves this dichotomy.

I thought this novel was well-written and great fun. I could not figure out what would prove to be true until the last reveal and I liked that it wasn't a choice between one good life and one bad life, but a choice between two worlds in which something would be lost on either side. Kudos to Cynthia Swanson for a story well-told.

Fred says

This Cynthia Swanson's first novel. The plot is set in Denver in the 1960s, Miss **Kitty** Miller(30) is single & dreams of a new life to be Mrs. **Kathryn** Anderson(30) married to a rich Man.

- Kitty is a unhappy school teacher, from parents for failing their children. Her best friend, Frieda Green's advertisement job has too much pressure. They open a simple Sisters' Bookstore & must consider moving from the city to the suburbs where businesses are growing. Kitty is lonely & calls a "personnel dating ad" for Lars Anderson & decide to meet but Lars does not show?

- She dreams she is Mrs. **Kathryn** Anderson with Lars & triplets. But after waking, **Kitty** reads in the newspaper why he did not show a Lars Anderson death notice....

The plot continues flipping between the Kathryn dream & Kitty real worlds. She must consider what is gained and/or lost in either world. Later, she must step back to see if the best both worlds were ever possible?

Tara Chevrestit says

I expected to love this story. It takes place in the sixties and follows an independent woman who owns a book shop. She begins living in a parallel world in her dreams at night. When awake, she's the bookshop owner with her best friend. She has a cat and loves her parents and is helping the neighbor boy learn to read.

When she's asleep she's the mother of triplets with this blue-eyed husband who takes her to cocktail parties.

There's a situation with one of the kids that I didn't know what to make of. Am I supposed to feel sorry for the mother? Am I supposed to learn more about aggressive autistic kids? Or am I supposed to believe that sixties' crappola about how if you're not there to raise your kids, they come out wrong in the head?

Nevertheless, I gained nothing from this story line and did not enjoy it. If I was Katharyn, the mother and wife, I'd darn well make an alternate reality for myself just to get away.

Actually, I gained nothing from this book. I feel mean saying that, but it's the truth. Parallel lives...would be interesting as heck if both lives weren't so dull. If I'm going to read about someone life--or lives--in this case, please make them more interesting and exciting than my own.

Kitty--she goes to work, talks to her friend, talks to her parents, goes home and sleeps, and of course frets about this dream life.

Katharyn--she does the motherhood/wifey thing, attends a cocktail party or two, shops, fights with her kid.

What is supposed to appeal to me about either life? Kitty's life was dull and predictable, but Katharyn's life was not only dull--but intolerable. Would send me to the looney bin.

And in between these boring lives, the book is filled with boring descriptions and histories. I don't care about Kitty's Freida's high school days. I don't care how the living room looks, from the windows to the carpet to the architecture. I don't care about the neighborhood or all the different people who live here or there.

Long review short: this is the most boring book I've picked up in a while. It's a boring, over descriptive narrative following two extremely boring lives. And the ending really disappointed me. (A point in the book's favor: I did find the ending unpredictable. It seems most readers were predicting it all along. For me, however, I was surprised.) It's not the life I would have chosen...but then again, we don't get to choose our lives. We merely make tiny choices that lead to a big result and we have little control over things.

<http://www.bookbabe.blogspot.com/2015/...>

Jody McGrath says

Bittersweet. The book is about a woman named Kitty who lives another life in her dreams where she is Katharyn. It is one of those books where one decision could have lead to a different path. Or is it? This book had many layers, and presented some twists (which were blatantly obvious). It was well written and engaging, but at the same time predictable. It was a good read though.

RoseMary Achey says

Psychosis is the backbone of this novel set in the early 1960's

Psychosis is a symptom of mental illness rather than the name of a medical condition itself. Broadly speaking, it means a loss of contact with reality. The affected see or hear things, people who are not there. In The Bookseller after the loss of her parent's in a plane crash, the main character has a prolonged psychotic reaction.

After reading this book, you may have a severe psychotic reaction yourself...well perhaps not that drastic, but clearly you will want to scream you bloody head off! Save your time, money and sanity and skip this novel.

Melinda says

Not really sure what to make of this book. It left me scratching my head and digging for answers as to what I read.

I'm confident I understand the direction Swanson was going, for me, it failed in execution. Needless to say my reading journey was severely stunted.

Swanson undoubtedly stepped out of the box. She demonstrated her originality while clearly setting herself apart. I have mixed feelings regarding Kitty/Kathryn, she has good intentions yet she contradicts these intentions in many ways.

This has to be the most boring book I have ever read. I kept with it hoping the excitement would unleash but it was a futile exercise. I stifled my yawns and made it through to the end feeling as if I could have used my valuable time otherwise. I wasn't a fan of the way autism was approached, yes the narrative is set in the 1960's contributing to the ignorance (fingers crossed) but it still made me very uncomfortable. I'm also not a huge fan of 'what if?' which of course is the premise of this book. The narrative was leaning towards 'tell' as opposed to 'show' and it made for one grueling ride. The ending was predictable adding to my frustration.

After reading this book, spending time with Kitty/Kathryn it's official I love my life even more than I did prior to cracking this book open. This book is proof one should participate in life than be a spectator.

Erin says

Denver 1962. Single gal, Kitty, runs a bookshop with her best friend, Frieda. Marriage and a family never became part of the plan, but Kitty has a good family and friend network and the faithful love of her cat, Aslan. Cynthia Swanson plays with the "What if?" question that often haunts us, as we get older. For Kitty it happens through her dreams. Into this alternate reality, Kitty is Kathryn, married to the blue eyed Swedish - American architect that answered her dating advertisement in 1954. Kathryn is the mother of 3 children (triplets) and her life is an endless round of parties and entertaining her husbands clients. Upon awakening, Kitty becomes transfixed making her life better, but also wanting to spend time with her dream

family. Think "It's a Wonderful Life" meets "Inception."

While I did read this book in one sitting, I am feeling a little ho-hum about it all. I find myself agreeing with many of the other reviews, I did like Kitty much better than Kathryn. Maybe the characters (Lars and the kids) were just too perfect in the beginning for me to accept how everything played out in the end. I also felt a real disconnect between the Kitty and Frieda story. I failed to connect with their friendship, always feeling I was a mere observer and never immersed in the story.

Laurel-Rain says

Kitty Miller and Frieda Green own and run a bookstore in Denver, Colorado. It is the 1960s, and their idyllic world includes books and all things bookish.

But at night, Kitty lives in an alternate world created in her dreams: she is Katharyn Andersson, married to Lars, with triplets: Mitch, Missy, and Michael. And Michael is autistic.

When Kitty first begins visiting her dream world, her life is almost perfect. But as she spends more time there, she realizes the challenges of this world.

And then, at some point, she must question which world is real? And which world is a dream?

A captivating tale that took me back to what life was like for me in the 1960s where I could totally relate to both Kitty and Katharyn and what choices were involved for each version of the young woman she was.

"The Bookseller: A Novel" was impossible to put down, and I didn't want it to end. Which version of reality would we finally have to accept? And what did these dream worlds tell us about the young woman and the choices she had to make? 5.0 stars.

Marla says

What an interesting concept. When Kitty Miller goes to sleep she is in a different life only a few months ahead of where she is now in her life. She is married with three kids. In her real life she is single running a bookstore with her best friend Frieda. Her dreams feel very real with her and she is finding out there are parts of her dreams she likes and parts of her awake life she likes. There are also parts that are disappointing in both lives. But are they really dreams. I really enjoyed this book and highly recommend it.

Jess says

This was a read I quickly became immersed in. The gentle cadence and details of the story absorbed my attention and I couldn't put the book down this morning as my coffee grew cold. One of the aspects of the unfolding of the story was in the beginning there is a clear delineation between reality and the fantasy world that the main character dreams herself into. As the story reveals more, the lines between reality and fantasy blur, both for Kitty Miller/Katharyn Andersson and the reader. Towards the end of the book, I was

questioning which life was real and which was fake. When the reason for the entire dual realities is revealed, I was shaken. This is a book where the characters are easy to love. I cried at the end scene where she meets her parents on the street. I rallied with support when Katharyn embraces her reality and reclaims the aspects of her life that she needs to. Fantastic read and I recommend!

Kathy Cunningham says

Cynthia Swanson's *THE BOOKSELLER* is ostensibly a story of two realities, one in which protagonist Kitty is a 38-year-old single woman who runs a failing bookstore with her life-long best friend and lives alone with her cat, and another in which Kitty (now called Katharyn) is married with three children, living the typical 1960's suburban family life. Kitty-the-bookseller is convinced that her experiences as married Katharyn are dreams, a fantasy place she visits as she drifts off to sleep. As the dreams continue, Kitty begins to explore her world in the fall of 1962 in order to unravel the things she sees in Katharyn's world in the spring of 1963. And she comes to the conclusion that if just one phone conversation she had eight years earlier had lasted a few minutes longer, she would be Katharyn, married to Lars, with three kids and a station wagon. If she had the choice, which would she choose, bookstore and best friend, or husband and children?

This aspect of the novel is indeed intriguing, although I was quickly reminded of such films as "Sliding Doors" (1998) and "The Family Man" (2000), both of which involve characters who have visions of a different reality, a reality that might have happened had they made different choices. But ultimately *THE BOOKSELLER* isn't really about alternate realities, or dream-states, or quantum leaps into different worlds. These fantasy elements are just plot devices for a story that really centers on the psychological struggles of a woman whose life hasn't turned out as she hoped it would. Swanson tangles up her plot with questions about both women – is Kitty disappointed and depressed because she hasn't met "Mr. Right," or is Katharyn stagnating in her supposed suburban bliss? But it becomes clear fairly quickly that Kitty/Katharyn really has no choice.

I totally enjoyed reading this book (I gobbled it up amazingly quickly), but I found myself loving Kitty-the-bookseller, with her cat and her adoring parents and her best friend Frieda and their little bookshop on a corner left behind when the streetcars stopped running in Denver. And while I'm sure I was supposed to want Kitty to be Katharyn, with her gorgeous husband and cute little triplets, I never did. Somehow, Katharyn's husband never seemed like a real person – maybe he was too patient, too understanding, or his eyes were too blue. And their life – which is full of cocktail parties, fancy clothes, a loyal maid, and two cars – just seemed so much the 1960's cliché that it annoyed me. Even as details begin to emerge revealing that the cliché isn't as perfect as it at first seems, it just never felt real to me. What would a real person do if his wife suddenly told him that she had made him up, created him and their children from her imagination? Lars is very understanding, very patient, and his eyes sparkle in all their blueness . . . but I never quite believed in him.

In the end, *THE BOOKSELLER* frustrated me, because what worked best in the novel was Kitty's life with her cat, her best friend, her wonderful parents, and the struggling bookstore. What didn't work as well was Katharyn's fantasy romance, the kids, and the station wagon. If the choice was mine – and of course, it isn't – I would have chosen Kitty's life. As it is, there really isn't any choice, and once Kitty/Katharyn realizes this she begins to understand what her dreams really mean. "There is no such thing as a perfect life," Swanson writes, and that's certainly true. And there is a suggestion at the end of this novel that Kitty/Katharyn will eventually find a way to merge both of her lives into one that might be satisfying, if not perfect. Even so, I felt a bit empty as I reached the final page, as if something wonderful had been truly lost.

Maybe that was Swanson's ultimate point. This is a well-written and engaging novel. I just didn't respond to it as I expected to.

[Please note: I was provided a copy of this novel for review; the opinions expressed here are my own.]

Gloria says

An interesting twist on the classic "what if" tale. One huge pet peeve: the crappy Spanish of Alma the housekeeper. Seriously, couldn't Harper get someone who actually knows Spanish to check that the author's Spanish was accurate? Btw, not only was it not accurate, it was actually ATROCIOUS.
