



So I Am Glad

A.L. Kennedy

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The ferociously talented author of **Original Bliss** and **On Bullfighting** offers this haunting tale of two forlorn people who find in each other a hope and love as genuine and original as this marvelous book in which they come to life.

M. Jennifer M. Wilson has decided to become a voice. A professional enunciator, an announcer, a voice-over artist, she has retreated into a world of words. Behind the sound-proof double doors of the recording studio she must surely be safe from the painful inconveniences of hate and love. Until reality breaks in and Jennifer uncovers the harsh vocabulary of addiction and the addictive extremes of sex. -An alchemical romance, a Swiftian satire for our times, an impossible spiritual journey and a devastating plummet into insanity and perversion, So I Am Glad is oblique, incisive, hilarious and horrific.

So I Am Glad Details

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Kate says

"What could happen between the professionally calm and the long-term dead?" Behind this incantation from the recent prize-winning Scottish novel *So I Am Glad*, one can almost hear the chuckle of its mad-scientist author, A.L. Kennedy. Her story--a romance set in contemporary Glasgow--is at once inopportune and darkly funny. Its overall success depends upon the reader's willingness to humor a bizarre plot device: Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac--the seventeenth-century philosopher, not the familiar large-nosed character from the play--wakes up one day in a house shared by three Scottish gen Xers. There he falls in love with Jennifer: a radio announcer, S&M aficionada, and "calm person" for whom language is as empty of emotion as she is. (Unlike most people, who have "whole hordes of feelings, all barrelling round inside them like tireless moles," Jennifer confesses she has "a certain moley something missing.") Like the non sequiturs that punctuate their dialogue in the early chapters, Kennedy's two lovers initially seem like unrelated concepts; she connects them through the language of courtship, until, as Savinien tells Jennifer, their "lives [are] speaking directly, having set us aside."

Kennedy encodes her characters' neuroses directly into her prose, which is one of the most entertaining aspects of *So I Am Glad*. For example, Jennifer's description of sex--"like a mad traffic policeman tangoing through ink, like a killer whale fighting to open an envelope. [I]t really makes no sense to me"--makes her bewilderment, and the reader's, literal in overdetermined, nonsensical similes. Unfortunately, as Jennifer and Savinien become more intimate, Kennedy's verbal fireworks dissipate, fading out almost entirely by the end of the book. In spite of their intriguing quirks, the two main characters, when combined, produce a fizzle: safe, but somehow disappointing when one had been prepared for a small explosion.

Jon says

Lovely bit of strangeness. A woman finds her new housemate is ... No, I can't even give you that much without spoiling it a bit. Sufficed to say its a sweet sort of magical, mixed with sordid and gritty sort of realism. Is in large part about writing and writers without being too navel gazing.

Also sad stuff and sex which is how you know its Alison's work. Would deffo recommend.

Kris says

Wonderful writer -- and a very weird book. I liked the writing and the way that the novel connected

imagination with reality, but the plot and characters are weird enough (a man who glows in the dark and is a reincarnated Cyrano de Bergerac, a woman seemingly without emotions who has an extremely checkered sexual past) that the book might not be everyone's cup of tea.

Atie Reynaert says

I don't now whether I absolutely love this or hate it

Emma says

Cyrano de Bergerac turns up in Partick, fights a duel in a park just off Crow Road. I was charmed by this book.

How about a sequel : 'Choderlos de Laclos in Kelvinside'?

Armand says

I chose this book on a total whim; I didn't even know what it was about, and I kept at it for about 130 pages, but it just didn't hook me in the way I'd hoped.

Kennedy is a solid literary stylist and has a gift for describing the minutiae of human existence (without being dull), and it's always a treat to read something in a Scottish dialect (although not over-the-top like Irvine Welsh's stuff), but at the end of the day, the tendency to eschew strong plot for deep character focus just didn't pull together for me the way I'd hoped. I'm sure that I would have finished it if it had been a short story or novella.

I can see why people would really like this book, but it just wasn't for me.

Stas says

kennedy is one of my favorites, along with Angela Carter and Penelope Fitzgerald. I used to be obsessed with a girl who believed that she was the Cyrano in one of her previous lives. Reading this book at the same time was pretty cool.

Alexis says

I remember liking this book enough to track down more of A.L. Kennedy's work but I also remember knowing that I did not completely understand what was going on throughout the story. Images from it stick in my head and that is always the true test for me of a book I ultimately look back on with great affection and reverence if not complete adoration. I probably read this in 2002, it is a book I associate with my friend as I think we both read it although I cannot remember if it was her love for it or mine that got us to share it. I

can't quite see her really having loved it but until I ask her I won't be sure. Regardless, there was something to the darkness of it that made me recall it today and put it on my list.

I have an association between *So I Am Glad*, *Anagrams* by Lorrie Moore and Don DeLillo's brief *The Body Artist* which accounts for some of part of why Kennedy's novel remains in my thoughts but I think revealing the reason for the association would probably count as a spoiler so I will stop here.

Paul says

This is a difficult one to review and to categorise. It could be described as a fairy tale/fable, it is certainly satire; there is a love story thrown in (of sorts) and a touch of magical realism. The issues explored are serious ones, including child sexual abuse and its later life consequences for the protagonist Jennifer Wilson. It is set in Glasgow, with a brief foray to Paris.

Kennedy writes well and her prose is lyrical and sharp with some very amusing asides relating to the political backdrop (written in the mid-1990s). Jennifer is something of a lost soul whose body and emotions are missing any real link between them. Jennifer avoids emotions. Her much quoted description of the casual sex she finds herself having is illuminating;

“Like an inadvertent Irish dancer tied up in a hot canvas sack, like a mad traffic policeman tangoing through ink, like a killer whale fighting to open an envelope.”

Life begins to change when she and her housemates take in a man who has forgotten his name. Over time her remembers, he is Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (yes that Cyrano). You are left to decide for yourself who Savinien is; ghost (he seems real enough and relates to all the other housemates and even manages to fight a duel in a Glasgow Park!), imposter or the real thing. Jennifer and Cyrano begin to have feelings for each other and there appears to be a healing process and working through going on. But, of course Kennedy is not so straightforward as to make this a redemptive novel and the ending emphasizes this.

There were some odd notes, especially the violent BDSM session with the ex-boyfriend; although for once the male partner was on the receiving end and it did fit with the response pattern that Jennifer had developed. There is a deep vein of humour, some of which ought not to be funny. The style is distinctive and I can understand why some people just don't get along with it. I did find it insightful, although it took a while to engage my attention.

Sandra says

Initially disappointing because very different from 'Paradise' which I thoroughly enjoyed, and also I am not a fan of the vaguely fantastic. Nevertheless, the writing, as ever, was such that I was drawn in, kept re-reading sentences for joy in their construction, and able to enjoy the story of it, even though I finished feeling slightly guilty that I knew nothing about Cyrano de Bergerac.

Karen says

Eh? Jennifer was an intelligent, witty, self-aware narrator, knowing when to expand on a scene, when to draw a curtain over it; the dialogue between the flatmates was sharp, funny and believable. But I just had no idea what was going on with the plot. Every time Martin/Savinien opened his mouth I switched off.

Helen Varley says

a couple of pages into this book i realised that i've already read it. i knew i'd read something by this author but i didn't realise it was this one. i think this is more of a reflection on the poor state of my memory for non-essential things, rather than on the quality of the book - i now have a vague memory of liking it the first time round, so let's see what i think this time ...

ok now that i have read it again i can say that i am disgusted by my bad bad memory. this is a great book, kennedy's language is rich & wonderful, she portrays very real characters & is a great storyteller. i hope i don't forget it again!!

Caroline Taggart says

This book has had wonderful reviews, but I found it a real struggle and nearly gave up several times. The narrator, Jennifer, is a misfit, someone who doesn't do feelings and relationships. She reads – new bulletins and the like – for a living. Fair enough – potentially a very interesting character. She's living in a shared flat in Glasgow and when the new flatmate appears, he turns out to be a reincarnation of the long-dead French author Cyrano de Bergerac. OK, no problem with that, or with their developing relationship, although I found the broken English he spoke difficult (and therefore annoying) to read. But what's with the unpleasant S & M sex scene with the ex boyfriend? What's with the weird upbringing in which Jennifer had to watch her parents having sex? What's with the perfectly reasonable but irrelevant political comments on the bulletins she has to read?

I very much like Jennifer's tone, the way she addresses the reader directly and talks frankly about herself and the way she is writing the book. I'm sure A L Kennedy is a very talented writer. But for me there was too much here that just didn't hang together.

Cherry says

A difficult one to rate. I suspect I'd enjoy it more on a second reading, when I'm not expecting a rational explanation for the weirdness! Great writing. Interesting to be in the head of such a cold and isolated character.

Emma says

She can write, she really can evoke emotion, touch on the unsayable. Unfortunately, she only started writing like that in the final chapter. I wished the whole book had been like that. Instead, there was a lot of un-Savinion related gibberish, internal monologue, distracting side lines. Tedious, almost impossible to progress through.

And. There could have been so much more Cyrano in this book.
