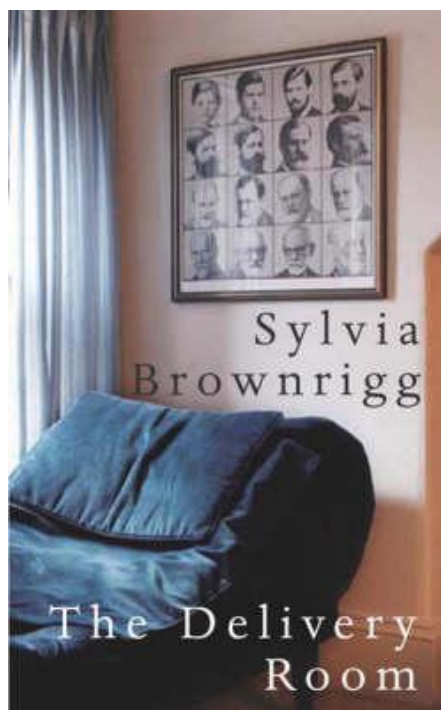




The Delivery Room

Sylvia Brownrigg

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'The Delivery Room' is a story about people, about life and death, about relationships, regrets and reconciliations - and about the therapist's couch.

The Delivery Room Details

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From Reader Review The Delivery Room for online ebook

Erica says

I don't remember how I came across this book... I picked it up because of the focus on the interactions between a therapist and her clients. The "delivery room" is what the therapist's husband calls his wife's office. What I didn't realize at the time until I got into the book... issues of having children are central. No interest in going there. I am coming to terms with the likelihood that I will not give birth to a child. My patience with the magic of all things maternal is worn quite thin. But oddly, I somehow found a comfortable place within this text -- an unexpected surprise. The therapeutic relationship, for my money, is depicted quite well.

Brownrigg played quite a bit with point of view... most of the time it worked, though sometimes it was more challenging than perhaps it needed to be. POV shifted often, sometimes in the course of a paragraph. Like I said, I don't know how it worked, but it did!

Truly a good read.

Emma Kaufmann says

A Serbian therapist (Mira Braverman) gives therapy to many disturbed patients in London 1998 and 1999 against the background of the Kosovo war. I just found it unbelievably boring and rambling. I don't want to know every thought in a person's head unless that person is interesting. The author did not engage me emotionally in any of the characters dilemmas or problems.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in January 2007.

Sylvia Brownrigg's third novel is her darkest so far. Its main themes are given by three different symbolic or real life associations prompted by the title: birth, psychiatric therapy, and death. The main character is a Serbian psychotherapist named Mira, who faces additional worries apart from those connected to her patients (many of whom are women with problems connected, either literally or figuratively, to childbirth). Though living and working in London for decades with her English husband, she worries about her family in the midst of fighting in former Yugoslavia (The Delivery Room being set about a decade ago), about her relationship with her stepson and his wife, and about the way that "Serbian" is turning into a dirty word, as a name associated with the atrocities of ethnic cleansing. The word "delivery" is also used by NATO to describe the airstrikes on Kosovo which occur midway through the novel.

The first part sets the scene and introduces the characters. (The patients seemed to me slightly too connected to each other and to Mira's family for verisimilitude, but this flaw was not too off-putting.) but with the second part, bad news turns the novel onto its bleaker path. Mira's husband is diagnosed with cancer, which becomes the centre of the rest of the novel as it dominates her emotional life. This is not a novel to read if you find such topics distressing to read about. I'm not sure that the introduction of something so serious works; it possibly overbalances a novel that has already tried to bring in so many themes under the general heading of delivery. It would be just as overpowering and central in real life, it is true, but in a novel it comes

over as heavy handed and less realistic, paradoxically. It lacks the lighter touch which helped The Metaphysical Touch, which deals with the equally downbeat issue of suicide, to be more successful. Reading The Delivery Room, I was surprised when a comparison occurred to me that I hadn't thought of before: that Sylvia Brownrigg's style is similar to that of Carol Shields, another writer whose work I generally enjoy. Shields is generally less dark and more domestic, but the issues Mira has with her stepson and vice versa could well appear in one of Shields' novels. This thought may well be due to re-reading The Republic of Love just before starting on The Delivery Room, but I think it is valid. Both of them have gentle styles, and their novels are not only character based, but they also share a knack of bringing characters to life quickly. Brownrigg is perhaps not yet as good - and this novel seems to me to be something of a retrograde step - but she could easily rival the Canadian author with a little more experience.

Erin says

I must say, I just didn't get the hype surrounding this book. It is, in spots, beautifully-written. But the story was slow and the individual stories/characters much less interesting than they could have -- and should have -- been. Also annoying is that the author insists on shifting point of view from paragraph to paragraph, without any indication or warning, so that the reader has to (or, at least I did) constantly go back and re-read a passage to figure out who's POV you're in at any given time. Delineating who's-who gets easier as the novel progresses, but I don't usually want to work that hard just to follow a story.

Also annoying to me was the intense focus on the main character's (Mira's) nationality (she's Serbian). Perhaps it's because, as an American, I don't live in close proximity to that part of the world, but the gasps and horrified reactions that every other character seemed to have when they discovered her nationality and how top-of-mind that was for her at all times -- what others must think of her being Serbian -- just didn't ring true for me. At all. It was distracting and, I thought, overdone.

Amy says

I had greatly looked forward to this book, and figured the themes would be right up my alley. But sadly, it did not live up to my hopes. I enjoyed it just fine, but was not compelled enough to recommend it. I always find it interesting to read a novel where the protagonist is a therapist or analyst. I wonder how a writer manages to know so well the kinds of inner tensions, thoughts, actions and behaviors and reasonings that are so well known and understood by those practicing in this field. In fact it was incredibly perceptive, from thought to action, to subtle yet complicated ways of being, thinking and practicing in this realm. She was spot on, like only a true analyst could be. And yet the main character was neither warm, nor particularly likable, nor particularly interesting. I didn't find her compelling. I also felt that by "naming" her patients, (with encapsulating captions) she dishonored them and their stories in some way. Made me think about the importance of names and who were are essentially beyond them and comprised as a whole. I just don't think of the work in that way. And I felt that for better or worse, I am more human in the work than she. And to be honest, I think that makes a difference.

The story itself? Entirely missable, and passable.

Jenny Yates says

This is a strong and deeply emotional novel, and sometimes it's very sad. It deals with basic life changes – birth and death – and it charts the journey through these transitions with great attention to the shades of feeling.

The novel is set in London, in 1998 and 1998, at a time when Milosevic was president of Yugoslavia, and NATO was threatening to bomb. The main character, Mira Braverman, is a psychoanalyst, a Serbian who married a British man and who has lived in London for many years. She is still experienced as foreign, and she often has to justify the Serbian viewpoint. Her phone conversations with her sister, Svetlana, who is going through war and deprivation in Belgrade, provide a counterpoint to the more ordinary – but still all-important – births and deaths happening in London.

Mira's patients are brought into the mix, each adding particular fears and anxieties. Most of them are women who have lost children, or who are yearning for children. Mira is a good analyst, able to stand back and allow her patients to find what they are looking for. But at the same time, she is dealing with her husband's sudden physical weakness, and then with an aggressive cancer that threatens to snatch him from her. The only other family she has in London are her step-son and his wife, and the relationships with them are a little problematic.

Mira's character is drawn very strongly, although some of her patients are sketched more loosely. Her husband Peter also comes to life, and we participate fully in the love and the loss of him. This is where the novel is especially sad and especially finely written. I imagine that, for anyone who's lost a spouse to cancer, this would bring back the experience very vividly, so someone in that situation might want to think twice before taking up this book.

Anne Goodwin says

The delivery room is the moniker Mira Braverman's husband, Peter, ascribes to the office in their North London flat from which she operates her psychotherapy practice. Over a period of just over a year, the reader bears vicarious witness to the trials and tribulations of her patients while Mira struggles to prevent her own pain intruding upon the therapeutic hour.

This is a beautiful novel about what it is to be human: about birth and death; grief and yearning; and the boundaries between public and private. It's about conflict, from minor misunderstandings to the fragmentation of nations and all-out war. It's about national identity, about insiders and outsiders and the risks entailed in genuinely getting to know another human being. Like therapy itself, it's a gentle novel woven with textured detail, absorbing and gripping while proceeding patiently, eschewing formulaic tropes and attention-grabbing gimmicks, towards some deeper truth.

Review continues at <http://annegoodwin.weebly.com/annecdo...>

Kirsty says

Sylvia Brownrigg's fourth book, *The Delivery Room*, was my choice for the Serbia portion of my Around the World in 80 Books challenge. I was intrigued by the storyline, which revolves around the Serbian conflict,

and was eager to read it due to the reviews which promised lyrical prose, something which I adore within fiction. Michael Chabon, for example, writes, 'In Sylvia Brownrigg's hands, grief and longing are as sensuous a part of life as a fine meal or the touch of a lover.'

The Delivery Room, heralded a 'compelling, complex, and always deeply human' novel, begins in 1998, in the 'safe haven' of Mira's north London flat. She works as a therapist with a host of very different clients from one of the rooms, which her husband has dubbed 'the Delivery Room'. Mira herself is Serbian; the book's blurb states that she must exist 'in a time when Serbs have become the pariahs of the West, when Milosevic's Yugoslav army is continuing its bloody struggle in Kosovo, testing NATO's resolve.'

In terms of the characters who people Brownrigg's novel, the reader gets a feel for them immediately. Mira's husband Peter, for instance, 'opened his eyes, and there she was before him: confessor, magician, wife. His beloved Mira. Gatherer of stories.' Vastly different viewpoints about many issues are explored here, all using the lens of Mira's quite diverse psychology patients. In this manner, Brownrigg opens up her novel to encompass more than one viewpoint on the war in Serbia and its aftermath. Mira's story, as one might expect, is by far the most compelling, perhaps because she seems to relate everything with more authority than some of the secondary characters have.

Brownrigg's sense of observance, and the attention to detail throughout *The Delivery Room*, are sharp and focused. There are some startling pieces of comparative prose here which illustrate Brownrigg's world and character descriptions wonderfully; for instance, 'a voice so thick he wanted to stroke it', 'a pale planet of a face that floated for a moment there by the night-dark door', and 'there was something he concealed from her, a tumour of information'. Serbia herself is used as a character within the novel; she looms over and pervades all. Mira, for instance, spends time 'Watching from a distance as her former country worried itself into separate bloodied pieces, and parts and limbs...'.

The Delivery Room is well informed about this particular period of Yugoslav history, and the ripples which it leaves in the West. Brownrigg's writing is measured and intelligent, and sometimes quite powerful. The author's use of language in this multilayered novel is often packed with meaning. Whilst there is rather a lot going on here at times, Brownrigg does not let this detract from the poignancy of the war's effects, both upon those caught up in it, and its observers. Many themes run through *The Delivery Room*, but by far the most pervading is grief. In Mira's particular case, Brownrigg demonstrates the importance of family, no matter how many miles and conflicts may separate them.

Due to the sheer amount of characters we are introduced to here, and whom the author has clearly made quite an effort to make distinct from one another, *The Delivery Room* sadly does not always feel like an entirely focused novel; rather, it tends to become a little meandering and repetitive at times. Regardless, the story does come together well in the end, and if you are interested in this period of history, it is certainly worth a read.

Mel says

3.4***

A novel that provides a non-western perspective on the most recent Balkans War. Mira a Serbian and a practicing psychologist in London must hold-back her personal trauma- the War and her husband's ongoing battle with lymphoma – while listening to the despair of several relatively privileged Brits. Her empathy and wisdom and deep cultural roots help to sustain both herself and her clients.

Janice says

This is the second book I have read by this author, the first being "The Metaphysical Touch" many years ago, which I loved. This newer one is also beautifully written--almost a stream of consciousness--much of the book reveals the thoughts and feelings in intricate detail of Mira Braverman, who is a Serbian woman, a therapist, living in London in the late 90's, while her country is being attacked, both literally and by the press and public outcry around the world. At the same time Mira is attempting to cope with the grave illness of her husband, the dangers to her homeland and family there, she also is committed to her relationships with her patients, who sit with her in the "Delivery Room". I found her a brave woman, who wants very much to stay true to her helping role with her clients, at the same time she is grieving so herself.

Jenni Ogden says

This was a difficult book to rate. It is very much a literary novel and well written, but I found it heavy going at times. I usually love long books but this was too long. The characters were hard to connect with, although Mira, the main character, a Serbian psychoanalyst living in the UK, was well drawn, and her interactions in a country where Serbia is seen as the bad guy certainly gave me food for thought about prejudice. The stories of Mira's clients and her interactions with them were not convincing, and I found it difficult to empathize with any of the clients. I found Mira's way of giving each of her clients a label; the "Bigot", the "Aristocrat", the "American", ironically prejudicial; perhaps this was the point the author was attempting to make, but I don't think so. Mira's English and Serbian families were better drawn, but still not engaging. In spite of involved descriptions of many very sad events, I not once felt a hint of a tear. Perhaps this bleak story was a realistic tale, and I simply wasn't in the right frame of mind for it. I felt almost a duty to read it to the end, because the author had taken such care in the writing of it. I kept hoping it would engage me, but even the end was a disappointment.

Jennifer says

I can't remember what was the original impetus to read this book. Set at the time that the Balkans conflicts filled the media, a Serbian psychotherapist married to an academic and living in London sees clients, many with issues around children. Her husband discovered he had a son when the boy was seven years old and although they do have a relationship which has carried on into the son's adulthood and marriage, it is slightly uneasy. Uneasier still with the Serbian wife with whom the son clashes over issues in her homeland. Then Mira's husband Peter develops a lymphoma...

The book left me unmoved. I did not take to Mira and could never square that she gives nothing whatsoever of herself away to clients but mysteriously (given that she has her English husband's surname) several know enough about her origins to refer to them and even use them to provoke her. I did not like the way she gives her clients names such as The Mournful Madonna or The Bigot when discussing them with her husband. I can see that she wanted a way to preserve their anonymity but felt uncomfortable with her choices. I am also aware that I hold people who profess competence in assisting others with their inter - and intra - personal difficulties to a higher standard than mere mortals and that I am so often startled and disappointed that I should not have been surprised that Mira does not distinguish herself in her personal relationships. Mind you, I think I might adopt her standard response to "How are you?" which is merely "Thank you"

The Delivery Room is her husband Peter's name for the room in their flat in which she sees her clients and

the book has a lot to do with birth... in the end I believe we do see Mira develop into a kind of mother and that part was quite nicely done, but delivery is a word I have always found ugly and disempowering in relation to birth. Perhaps I should have known in advance that the book would not quite get the oxytocin flowing for me.

Wendy Greenberg says

Using the omniscient narrator enables Brownrigg to straddle both sides of the therapy room. This twists the different strands together very cleverly.

Throw in the Balkan war, cancer, lost babies, found babies and family dynamics and it is a bit too "over-issued" for me.

Lovely writing confounded by so many adjectives that I wondered if it was a comic device. Overlong and rambling

Mimi says

The Delivery Room in this novel is not a place of birth, but the room in which psychologist Mira Braverman meets with her clients. She is an ex-pat Serb living in London and married to a British man. Her country is disintegrating, and her adopted country is readying to begin bombing.

Meanwhile, her professor husband is diagnosed with cancer and as she deals with his care, his son - who he did not meet until age 7 - and his wife begin to become more involved in his life.

The set up of this novel is very interesting, and the main character is Orthodox, which is why the novel was recommended to me. I really appreciated her faith, and there were some beautiful meditations on the way that her faith was an anchor as she dealt with life's blows.

Sadly, though, all of these pieces never quite came together in an interesting plot. I kept reading but was never engrossed.

I did write down a good quote from the novel, though, so all was not lost.

Monique says

Very well written book, but didn't grab me. It was about a psychotherapist named Mira who lives with her englishman, Peter. Peter gets cancer and the illness brings together him and his stepson, Graham, and his expecting wife, Clare in a way no one expected. We get a glimpse of some of Mira's patients, and the kooky way she nicknames all of them (The Bigot, the American...etc), which is all very nice and cute and warm and different but at the same time I felt they weren't interesting enough. Plus the point of view changed so often and so suddenly I was sometimes thrown off by what was happening and who was talking. As a sort of subplot there were a lot of politics going on. Mira was Serbian living in London, and the setting is in the late nineties, when NATO was threatening to bomb Kosovo to stop Milosevic, often called another Hitler in the book by the brits, and everyone in London hates the Serbs. Thus making it difficult for Mira to get along with some of her English patients, and live there knowing her family was back in Serbia trying to survive. Next thing you know, Peter is dead and all of the characters are trying to cope. It was sad, definitely, but I

didn't feel sad reading it. There were parts though, about the mention of Peter's dog Molly, who died before he met Mira, and that actually brought more of a tear to my eye than anything about Peter's cancer. However, when Peter found out he had cancer, and started ruminating on what it was like to be in the land of the living and healthy like the rest of the world, it did make me stop and think, and pity the character. He was coming to the end, and that's a scary place. So in that sense Brownrigg did a really swell job.
