

Ann Patchett Biography

Source: www.Litlovers.com



Ann Patchett was born in Los Angeles but raised in Nashville, Tennessee. While at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, she studied with such notable authors as Russell Banks and Grace Paley before getting her first short works published. She labored long and hard in the trenches of *Seventeen* magazine (where her talents went largely unrecognized), before striking gold with her ambitious first novel, *The Patron Saint of Liars*, which was named a New York Times Notable Book of 1992 and subsequently made into a major motion picture.

Since her auspicious debut, Patchett has crafted a handful of elegant novels, garnering several accolades and awards along the way. But her real breakthrough occurred with 2001's *Bel Canto*, a taut, psychological thriller set in the claustrophobic confines of an embassy under siege in South America. Winning both the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Orange Prize, *Bel Canto* catapulted Patchett into the ranks of bestselling authors.

As if to prove her versatility, Patchett departed from fiction for 2004's *Truth & Beauty*, the heartbreaking account of her longstanding, difficult friendship with the late Lucy Grealy, a gifted writer whose disfigurement from cancer precipitated a tragic descent into addiction and death. This memoir won several literary awards and appeared on many end-of-year best books lists. Her novel, *Run*, followed in 2007.

Success breeds success; and with each book, Patchett's reputation grows. Perhaps the secret to her popularity has been captured best by Patchett's friend, Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Olen Butler. "She is a genius of the human condition," he says. "I can't think of many other writers, ever, who get anywhere near her ability to comprehend the vastness and diversity of humanity, and to articulate our deepest heart."

Book Summary

Source: www.Litlovers.com

Ann Patchett raises the bar with *State of Wonder*, a provocative and ambitious novel set deep in the Amazon jungle.

Research scientist Dr. Marina Singh is sent to Brazil to track down her former mentor, Dr. Annick Swenson, who seems to have disappeared in the Amazon while working on an extremely valuable new drug. The last person who was sent to find her died before he could complete his mission. Plagued by trepidation, Marina embarks on an odyssey into the insect-infested jungle in hopes of finding answers to the questions about her friend's death, her company's future, and her own past.

Once found, Dr. Swenson is as imperious and uncompromising as ever. But while she is as threatening as anything the jungle has to offer, the greatest sacrifices to be made are the ones Dr. Swenson asks of herself, and will ultimately ask of Marina.

State of Wonder is a world unto itself, where unlikely beauty stands beside unimaginable loss. It is a tale that leads the reader into the very heart of darkness, and then shows us what lies on the other side.

Discussion Questions

Source: www.LitLovers.com

1. How would you describe Marina Singh? How has the past shaped her character? Discuss the anxieties that are manifested in her dreams.
2. "Marina was from Minnesota. No one ever believed that. At the point when she could have taken a job anywhere she came back because she loved it here. This landscape was the one she understood, all prairie and sky." What does this description say about the character?
3. Talk about Marina's relationship with her boss, Mr. Fox. Would you call what they share love? Do they have a future? Why does he want Marina to go to the Amazon? What propels her to agree?

4. What drew Marina to her old mentor, Annik Swenson? Compare and contrast the two women. How does Annick see Marina? Barbara Bovender, one of Annik's caretakers/gatekeepers tells Marina, "She's such a force of nature. . . . a woman completely fearless, someone who sees the world without limitations." Is this a fair assessment of Annik? How would you describe her? How has the elderly doctor's past shaped the person she is and the choices she has made?

5. Describe the arc of Marina and Annik's relationship from the novel's beginning to its end. Do you like these women? Did your opinion of them change as the story unfolded? Why didn't Marina ever tell anyone the full story of her early experience with Annick?

6. Consider Annik's research in the Amazon. Should women of any age be able to have children? What are the benefits and the downsides? Why does this ability seem to work in the Lakashi culture? What impact does this research ultimately have on Marina? Whether you are a man or woman, would you want to have a child in your fifties or sixties? How far should modern science go to "improve" on nature?

7. In talking about her experiences with the indigenous people, Annik explains, "the question is whether or not you choose to disturb the world around you; or if you choose to go on as if you had never arrived." How does Marina respond to this? Did Annik practice what she preached? How do these women's early choices impact later events and decisions? How does Annik's statement extend beyond the Amazon to the wider world? Would you rather make a "disturbance" in life, or go along quietly?

8. Talk about the Lakashi people and the researchers. How do they get along? Though the scientists try not to interfere with the natives' way of life, how does their being there impact the Lakashi? What influence do the Lakashi have on the scientists?

9. Would you be able to live in the jungle as the researchers and natives do? Is there an appeal to going back to nature; from being removed from the western constraints of time and our modern technological society?

10. What role does nature and the natural world—the jungle, the Amazon River—play in Marina's story? How does the environment influence the characters—Marina, Annik, Milton, Anders, Easter, and the others? Annik warns Marina, "It's difficult to trust yourself in the jungle. Some people gain their bearings over time but for others that adjustment never comes." Did Marina ultimately "gain her bearings"?

The logo features the word "Book" in a large, bold, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, the word "Club" is written in a very large, stylized, blocky font where the letters are interconnected. Underneath "Club", the words "in a Bag" are written in a smaller, lowercase, sans-serif font. The entire graphic is set against a background of a stylized sun or moon with rays, and a jagged, mountain-like silhouette behind the "Club" text.

Book Club in a Bag

State of Wonder by Ann Patchett



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