



Sweetness

Torgny Lindgren , Tom Geddes (Translator)

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The two brothers, who no longer meet or speak to each other, are neighbors in a northern Swedish village. They used to share a wife, each thinking he had sole tenure. Each thought that he was the father of the woman's only son. The boy died in an accident while the two men bickered as to which of them should rescue him. All the petty rancors come to light when a woman arrives in the village to give a lecture and lodges with one of the brothers. She becomes the mutual messenger, the joint repository for their recriminations. A tour de force by one of the true European masters of black humor.

Sweetness Details

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Ruth Bonetti says

Lindgren writes well, with evocative descriptions but about rather gruesome characters. Two brothers are holding out on death to outstay each other. A female lecturer is trapped by a snowstorm and during her stay hears both sides of a story which shows the bond of mutual loathing between brothers.

Isabelle says

Synnerligen vackert formulerad med speciella grammatiska böjningar som en hade kunnat ifrågasätta i andra kontexter men som här används med sådan finesse.

Vissa delar var rent ut vämjeliga när han dök in i otäcka kroppsliga beskrivningar från huvudpersonens något objektiva och utomstående vinkel, så totalt befriad från de känslor av äckel en kunde förväntat sig.

Tror aldrig jag läst en bok förut som så lite beskrev huvudpersonen ifråga om henoms egen syn på livet utan mest använda henne som ett verktyg att berättade den egentliga historien; i det här korta formatet dock och då så mycket utforskades i brödernas uråldriga fejd så fungerade det.

Dragenus says

En smått fantastisk liten berättelse. En märkligt närvarande och tvetydig berättarröst. En märkligt frånvarande och tvetydig hjältinna. Och så Hadar och Olof. En skräckberättelse som aldrig blir skrämmande, en gåta som aldrig ställs. Jag är smått tagen. Rekommenderas starkt.

Bettie? says

Missing from the library description box above is the name of the translator, who is Tom Geddes.

Opening paragraph: **After the lecture she was going to stay at a little guest-house, and would be moving on the next day. She had her clothes in the big bag with the shoulder strap, and all her personal effects in her briefcase; books, writing pad and pens.**

Marco Kaye says

Desolate and precisely told. Works like a fairy tale in that nothing feels out of place. Michael Haneke movie vibes. Story is about a lady writer who comes to deliver a lecture in a tiny tiny town in northern Sweden, and ends up living with a man who gives her lodging for the night, Hadar, in the last stages of cancer. Nearby lives Hadar's brother, also dying but of heart disease. Therein lies the Lindgren, everyone is suffering.

The recipe, it seems, for a Lindgren novel is 1) Two ill men. 2) One nurturing woman. 3) Food as salvation. That was the way in *Hash*, one of my Top Ten of All Time, only here, it's less darkly comic. Still some funny moments, though, involving food and the body as food. The "sweetness" of the title. I won't give anything away here, only that it's a little creepy.

Lindgren is simply a genius for dialogue, effortlessly shifting between a summary of what the characters said, and actual quoted conversation. For a novella-length work, it still pays off big time in the end. I had but one gripe: the woman's new work is about St. Christopher, and I wanted it to tie in more or at least reveal something interesting about the Saint. This could be a fourth Lindgren element, to show a character in the act of writing. Can't wait to read more Torgny, for reals. What a writer.

Marco Freccero says

Era un paesaggio in cui la luce del mattino disponeva di tutto lo spazio necessario.

Torgny Lindgren non è molto popolare nel nostro Paese, che ha scoperto la letteratura del nord Europa solo di recente.

Ma "Miele", è un altro piccolo gioiello di questo autore.

Una scrittrice, di cui non si saprà mai né nome, né sembianze, gira la Svezia per tenere conferenze sulle vite dei santi. Nel suo girovagare, finisce in uno sperduto villaggio nel nord di quel Paese, e un vecchio si offre di ospitarla in casa sua.

È malato, in procinto di morire. E odia suo fratello, anche lui prossimo alla morte, che abita una casa poco lontano dalla sua; e da costui ricambiato della stessa moneta.

In questo paesaggio statico, dove ciascuno dei due attende che sia l'altro a tirare le cuoia per primo, la donna è l'unico elemento che crea azione, e turba. Invece di andarsene, resta; perché durante la notte nevica, certo. Ma anche quando lo spazzaneve libererà la strada, lei sceglierà di rimanere.

Nei libri di Lindgren l'azione è affidata alla parola, alla riflessione; nessuno viaggia o compie imprese spericolate, o memorabili. Di fatto, l'unico movimento che si registra in questo libro, è l'andirivieni della donna da un'abitazione, all'altra. E poi ve ne è un altro.

Si alza il coperchio, e si scopre che cosa c'è stato nel passato di questi due uomini, che cosa li ha condotti a odiarsi con tanta, cortese determinazione.

"Miele" è ottimo per chi è a caccia di una storia in apparenza banale, dove tutto si consuma nei dialoghi, e in stanze dove a parte il suono della voce dei protagonisti, non accade altro. La forza della parola, la sua capacità di svelare, senza artifici o trucchi di sorta. Sembra facile, ma questo è un lavoro che riesce solo a pochi, grandi autori.

Leena Grönholm says

Syvästi vaikuttava ja järkyttävä teos. Kirja, jota joutuu pohtimaan pitkään. Oli pakko lukea samantien loppuun asti.

Harald huijaa luennoitsijanaisen kotiinsa hoitamaan itseään. Haraldin veli Olof asuu viereisessä talossa. Kumpikin veljes on kuolemaisillaan ja nainen päätyy hoitamaan heitä kumpaakin. Vähitellen paljastuu, miten lapsena hyvin läheiset veljekset ovat päätyneet vihaamaan toisiaan ja tavallaan toistensa vastakohdiksi - suolaiseksi ja makeaksi.

Kim says

Imaginative and interesting as a concept, yet I ended up feeling like it went on for far too long (and it was only 160-something pages!). Maybe this is due to the fact that the characters never become more human, only more and more like grotesque legends. The salt brother and the sweet brother, after a life spent to try and spite the other, are now both dying but struggling to outlive the other. Their albino woman who gets taken by the sun, the grandfather collecting honey, the ditch/wall they were digging between their houses, the dark northern winter. There might be wisdom and metaphor under all of this. Maybe I'll see it if I reread it again some day.

karen says

Trav'ling lady, stay awhile
until the night is over.
I'm just a station on your way,
I know I'm not your lover.
Well I lived with a child of snow
when I was a soldier,
and I fought every man for her
until the nights grew colder.

She used to wear her hair like you
except when she was sleeping,
and then she'd weave it on a loom
of smoke and gold and breathing.

And why are you so quiet now
standing there in the doorway?
You chose your journey long before
you came upon this highway.

Trav'ling lady stay awhile
until the night is over.
I'm just a station on your way,
I know I'm not your lover.

the above has very little to do with this book, but it sets a mood that i felt when i was reading this, and there is a trav'ling lady and some snow, so it can't hurt to listen to it while you read the review. it also features prominently in the movie *mccabe and mrs. miller* , which i also like.so.

this book is like the vivisection of a fairy tale. it starts out beautiful and quiet and cold, and goes into some

unexpectedly dark places, places i think are more interesting than a lot of other, more popular swedish books (koff, what??)

on tuesday, *the girl who kicked the hornet's nest* came out in this country. and the crowd went wild.the book companion to the *sex and the city 2* movie also came out and we sold about a million of those, too. i do not understand the appeal of either.

i read *girl with the dragon tattoo* , and it was fine, but i don't understand the fucking raving infatuation. it is a semi-solid piece of crime fiction, but why it is elevated above the genre almost universally is beyond my ken.

so i decided to make a new endcap of scandinavian lit that i felt was a better representation of the scope of the region's offerings (and i am in no way an expert, i just noticed that in the last month, i have read a book from denmark, one from finland, and one from sweden, and i have plenty more in my have-read-backstock.) and it is a lovely endcap, indeed. indirect r/a at its finest.

this book is out of print, or i would have included it on the display, because i think it tells a beautiful story, and it tells it very simply and well. maybe i will finally get to the point in this review, maybe not.

the story is small and simple in its scope and props - a trav'ling female writer giving a reading to an uninterested crowd in a remote town lodges in the evening with a man dying of a cancer that is eating him away into nothingness. a snowstorm strands her in his house, and while she stays (and stays and stays), she befriends the only other inhabitant of the area, the man's estranged brother, who is being killed by his own corpulence, his body oozing sweet liquid from pustules as he lolls around on a sofa all day eating sugar cubes, both of them staying alive simply to have the satisfaction of outliving the other. eventually, she learns the root of their estrangement, from both sides, and becomes a sort of confessor/ spiritual figure to them in their feud.

and that's it. but it is beautifully told - i will add some quotes tomorrow - the book is not at hand this very minute. wait here, i will return.

here is a nice one:

"She had never found conversation appealing or enticing. In conversation thoughts are always being forced into unpredictable feints or digressions, they are twisted and distorted to please or annoy, they can be villainously treacherous. Solitary thought, on the other hand, is sovereign, it stays confined within and doesn't have to make compromises. Even when you're in two minds, you remain whole.She wanted to be left in peace with her thoughts."

i figure, when i get really old, and am slapped in a nursing home, there will be many copies of the remaining two books in larsson's trilogy, along with *harry potter* and *twilight* and all the books that were overbought and then donated to the nursing home by grandchildren for whom "books" will be relics, and if i kick off in the middle of one of 'em - no biggie.

Lena says

Stranger than strange. Someone told me he was thinking of the Berlin Wall writing it. Love his way to make Sweden a strange and exotic place. I listen to his books, he reads them himself in swedish, and he is so

good.

Fiamma says

un angolo sperduto di svezia, il rapporto di amore/odio tra due fratelli uno grasso e uno magro - entrambi malati, una scrittrice che capita all'improvviso riportando equilibrio. il dolore, la malattia, il dolce e il salato, le vite dei santi, la morte e la storia che pian piano si ricompone. il grottesco esagerato che sazia subito, come un eccesso di miele.

Joey says

I picked this book up randomly from a mall kiosk selling used books. Definitely one of my better impulse buys. I found that this book almost had a fable-type aspect to it and I enjoyed that part of it very much. It is about two estranged brothers, both sick, but with polar opposite symptoms. The main character is a female lecturer trapped because of a snowstorm. She visits both brothers and they each tell their own version of their feud and the story of the woman that they both loved. I don't normally re-read books, but this is one that I would like to read again. It seemed to me so rich with meaning that I am sure I missed things in my first reading.

Lorenzo Berardi says

One of the most original things I've ever read, though *Hummelhonung* (Honey) is disturbing and difficult in its own way. There's a dangerous lack of human beings in the counterposition of two twin brothers in a remote corner of Sweden.

Like salt and sugar the two old brothers are impossibile to mix together and the only thing that keeps them alive is their reciprocal hate. Each of them has a lethargic, selfish and out of time life just aiming to survive to the long wished death of his twin.

Torgny Lindgren gradually unveils the reasons of this incomprehensible competition thanks to the presence of a third character, a woman preacher accidentally blocked by a snowstorm in the house of one of the twins.

Divided between salt and sugar the woman doesn't pick a part. She tries to understand two opposite solitudes being forced to live a third and sour one.

Adam says

This deserves 3.5 stars. *Sweetness* is a good novel but ranks half a notch below other Lindgren books I've read. Here, Lindgren touches more on the grotesque than he usually does, and his fans will find it a must-read. However, I wouldn't recommend it as someone's first Lindgren book. Much better to start with *Hash* or the *Merab's Beauty* story collection.

Tove Selenius says

Torgny Lindgren borrar djupt ned i mänskligheten, som han plär. Den här gången tar han vägen rakt genom äcklet.

Det är kroppsvätskor och -funktioner som får berätta den säregna historien om två motstridiga bröder, eller kanske om ett självmotsägande helgon. Den heliga dåren, det inbjudande och motbjudande i en gestalt. Mitt i allt sitter författaren, en medelålders kvinna söderifrån, som i stormens öga. Hon är ingen. Hon vårdar och iakttar och lockar ur de båda bröderna historien om hur de kom att bli låsta i en evig och meningslös kamp.

Lindgrens saktmodiga stil resonerar hos mig, fast jag inte finner den där perfekta frekvensen just här i Humlehonung. Det är vackert och meningslöst och långsamt. Det är viktigt och det är vidrigt, om vart annat.
