



★ Children of God

Lars Petter Sveen

Graywolf Press (Oct 16, 2018)

Softcover \$16.00 (256pp)

978-1-55597-820-4

Lars Petter Sveen's *Children of God*, translated by Guy Puzey, collects stories featuring the New Testament's marginal people. On the edge of the Roman empire, a place where everything is "so mixed up, so confusing ... that it [is] impossible to keep track of all the groupings and all the factions," characters' lives intersect. The miraculous and the inexplicable fold into the mundane as a matter of course. As characters navigate the chaos within and without, each story bears witness to human nature and the fine-grained texture of revelation, suffering, and doubt.

There are Roman soldiers and prostitutes, thieves and apostles, and whether they are following orders, rules, family expectations, or social mores, the familiar becomes a potent trap for them. Whatever devil someone knows proves more beguiling than the light-bearer they don't. Although these characters are often awash in their own darkness, none is without light, even when they don't have the strength to embrace it.

Jesus—whether he is present or absent, alive or dead—is most important as a important catalyst. In counterpoint, there's a persistent antagonist in the form of a blind stranger who is "what stays in the shadows while the light falls elsewhere." He offers a nightmarish familiarity variously disguised as comfort and ambition.

In the central contest between light and dark, each character's journey is intensely personal, directed by memories, human connections, and experiences. The implications echo, from "A Light Gone," where the leader of a child gang lays down his life for his followers, to "I Smell of Earth," where notions of heaven and hell are turned on their ear.

Children of God exposes the turmoil of illumination, a striving that exists alongside what's confusing, inscrutable, and seemingly contrary. Puzey's impressive translation delivers an astounding voice to English-language literature.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November/December 2018)

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