



Suckle

Benjamin Salmon

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Suckle is an ambitious look at the decisions made by a man struck with an extraordinary talent.

An outlandish exploration of the ways loneliness, love, and loss manifest themselves in a seemingly ordinary man, *Suckle*, by Benjamin Salmon, is both funny and heartbreaking.

The bulk of the text is written as a manuscript in the first person by protagonist Benjamin (known as Benny). His story is gritty, centered around his discovery that he has the ability to lactate on command. Aided by a new love interest, a prostitute named Rosie, Benny finds himself in a host of weird situations, from Rosie publicly suckling him at a governor's ball to the two following an evangelical preacher's revival around healing the sick with his "man milk." Interspersed throughout Benny's manuscript are entries from one of his editors, a man who is breathlessly checking Benny's sources while dealing with romantic troubles of his own.

Suckle's biggest credit is that it is delightfully bizarre—a book about a lactating simpleton performing miracles with his prostitute girlfriend has to be. Salmon's choice of letting Benny narrate his own story is a smart one, allowing for profound observations about his bleak life to occur in his own voice—from the struggles of having a diminished IQ to that of growing up poor and tormented.

Refreshingly executed, the text also vacillates nicely between voices, both Benny and the manuscript editor having very different writing styles. Though the editor's interludes are brief, Salmon shows great skill in developing a whole backstory for him fleshed out amid his research for Benny's book, another crucial element to the novel. His dramatic tale of spurned romance with a long-distance partner mirrors Benny's story in several ways, showing that love can make even the most successful of men look and feel foolish.

The text could do with less exposition, but some editorial decisions can be chalked up to Benny's inability to understand the necessity of censoring some of the more mundane parts of his life.

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AMANDA ADAMS (March/April 2017)

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