ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Ugly Dachshund
G.B. Stern
K.F. Barker, illustrator
J.N. Townsend Publishing
978-1-880158-15-9
(January 1998)

Animal lovers predisposed to humanize their pets may enjoy the revival of this 1938 bit of froth. G.B. Stern's *The Ugly Dachshund*, a canine version of Anderson's *The Ugly Duckling*, is set in pre-war Provence. Tono, a young, lumbering, and yes, melancholy great Dane is a misfit in a villa filled with dachshunds and people who are described as "Legs." The dog-meet-dog world includes some bewhiskered guests, who arrive with other Legs and amble through the anecdotal narrative.

Poor Tono is jealous of the special attention the other dachshunds receive as they are picked up and caressed by Legs or allowed to accompany them on sailboats. The tale wags to a very predictable and cheerful ending as Tono discovers his ilk and true love.

The Disney studios saw the story's potential for children and made what the current publisher describes as a "forgettable" movie in the 1960s. While this book may be enjoyed by either children or adults for the adventures of its doggy characters, knowledge of French and German is necessary to fully understand it. It is vexing not to be able to make a reasonable guess of the meaning of the frequent non-English passages—even within context. That said, Stern's tasty descriptions of the texture and quality of dogs are nonpareil. For example, Erda's heart is as "soft and dark and fragrant as mushrooms on toast." Or, "the little dachshunds' coats and forepaws all blended into a warm golden hue of gingerbread."

The Ugly Dachshund's revival will appeal to those who fondly remember the original edition and to those readers—especially dog lovers—who enjoy gentle stories told from the perspective of animals.

Linda Salisbury