



The Sweet Girl

Annabel Lyon

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From the award-winning author of *The Golden Mean*, a captivating, wholly transporting new novel that follows Aristotle's strong-willed daughter as she shapes her own destiny: an unexpected love story, a tender portrait of a girl and her father, and an astonishing journey through the underbelly of a supposedly enlightened society.

Aristotle has never been able to resist a keen mind, and Pythias is certainly her father's daughter: besting his brightest students, refusing to content herself with a life circumscribed by the kitchen, the loom, and, eventually, a husband. Into her teenage years, she is protected by the reputation of her adored father, but with the death of Alexander the Great, her fortunes suddenly change. Aristotle's family is forced to flee Athens for a small town, where the great philosopher soon dies, and orphaned Pythias quickly discovers that the world is not a place of logic after all, but one of superstition. As threats close in on her—a rebellious household, capricious gods and goddesses—she will need every ounce of wit she possesses, and the courage to seek refuge where she least expects it.

The Sweet Girl Details

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Author : Annabel Lyon

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Hez says

Generally, I liked the premise of this book. The time period (shortly before Alexander's death and in the immediate aftermath) is a very interesting one in Greece. Hellenistic Greece has just begun to take a shape which will be further defined by Alexander's successors. Aristotle himself is also an interesting character, as a Macedonian philosopher living in Athens. The role of women is a great topic to choose, as it was evolving slowly at this point between Classical Greece and the Roman Empire, and the daughter of a "progressive" philosopher is a great lens to show this through.

All in all, it was off to a great start. But this start sort of spluttered and died.

I think of it as a bit contrived. To me, it seems as if Lyon sat down and researched Hellenistic Greece and Aristotle. Then, she made a list of key points that she needed to show the role of women, the Macedonian Empire, daily life in Greece, and Aristotle's philosophies. She then appears to have written one scene to showcase each of these points and mashed them together into a "vignette" style story with no clear purpose. It's a snapshot of a story - it isn't a whole story. There's a rich world that she left out. It's almost as if this is the first draft for a larger work - who has ever read a historical fiction less than 200 pages?

There were decent moments in this book, which makes me feel even more that it didn't live up to it's potential.

I liked how she did managed to showcase each possible path of Pythias. At this time in Greece, there were really three choices for a woman's role: wife, priestess or hetairai. Pythias sort of muddles through each of these roles. She appears to be making the decisions herself, but really it feels like the author is making the decision for her - forcing her into a role to cover another base in her research about the time period. She didn't stay true to the character of Pythias - I think Aristotle's daughter would have fought harder, tried harder to be what she seemed to want to be - educated. Maybe this is a projection from my own biases. But I feel that the character of Pythias was just as wishy-washy as the plot itself.

That being said, the one thing I liked was the character of Nicanor, and Lyon's portrayal of PTSD - something that's almost never addressed in this era's historical fiction. "In his mind, my husband is still in Egypt, Persia, Bactria, Kandahar, India, Babylon - torching villages, raping peasant girls, starving, night-marching, eternally suffering under the obsession of an eternally suffering king."

I gave it three stars, but I think that's generous. I saw potential and even the occasional glimmer of something worthwhile. But generally, I think it fell flat.

Aaron (Typographical Era) says

Last but not least, Annabel Lyon's The Sweet Girl was the thirteenth and final novel in my Giller longlist reading. I didn't know much about either the author or the novel going in, which in some respects is a shame since after finishing the book I discovered that Lyon's previous novel, The Golden Mean, is somewhat of a prequel to this latest offering as it chronicles Aristotle's time spent mentoring a young Alexander the Great. The Sweet Girl, which can be read stand alone, picks up much later and revolves around the life of

Aristotle's teenage daughter Pythias. Had I known these details upfront the completest in me would have demanded that I read the two works back-to-back, but since I didn't, I couldn't, and I'm mostly glad that to have only read the one.

Pythias is most certainly not a sweet girl in anyone other than her father's eyes. She's dirty, homely, unkempt, educated (a big no-no) and outspoken. Her idea of a good time is dissecting dead animals to see what makes them tick and then boiling their bodies until the skin slips away so that she can create intricate puzzles from the bones that remain. Yeah, she's a strange one alright, but the real question is whether or not she's an exception to the rule of the day that brands women as the inferior sex or an example of what all girls can aspire to be if only they are granted the equal opportunity to partake in the more formal education that is currently reserved only for the males of the species.

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<http://www.typographicalera.com/the-s...>

Zara Garcia-Alvarez of The Bibliotaphe Closet Blog says

The Sweet Girl by Annabel Lyon is a historical fiction novel in the time of ancient Greece, a story focused on the beloved and only daughter, Pythias, called Pytho, of the philosopher, Aristotle.

When I first opened the novel to the formal list of the Cast of Characters, as I might in reading a Shakespearean play, I was a tad intimidated with the ancient Greek names: Pythias, Herpyllis, Nicomachus, Tycho, Pyrrhaios, Glycera, Euphanor, and Nicanor. As beautiful as they sounded as they rolled off my tongue, I was hesitant in turning the page to read further in anticipation and assumption of a verbose reading—but I'm glad I did and ever so relieved that my assumption, too, was wrong.

The voice of the main character, Pythias, known as Pytho is directly intimate and perfectly written in the tone of an inquisitive, intelligent, yet young, and innocent girl born into privilege and prestige on account of her famous father.

A certain highlight in this novel is the humanized portrayal of Aristotle, the deep and forward thinker, the natural egotism and elitism sometimes awarded to men and women of genius, but especially, the endearing and tender love he has as a family man and father towards his household including those of his servants, and the special bond he has with his highly praised and beloved daughter.

What one would normally know of Aristotle is his philosophical discourse, but it is in this novel, *The Sweet Girl*, that readers are enlightened to his special pedigree, temperament, and soft inclination and social exception to his daughter, Pythias, who he unconventionally raises to read, think, explore, dissect, and study in so much that she is inclined to a deep reservoir of intelligence, logic, and wit that cannot contain her from the surprise of men of her father's tutelage and peers and the scoffing irritation and jealousy of their wives as well as the women of the small garrison town, Chalcis.

What's interesting to note is the ritualistic and relationship dynamic between Macedonian and Athenian cultures at the time of ancient Greece between the privileged wealthy and the destitute poor; the educated and the uneducated; the men and the women; the master and the slave.

The propriety of women as talented weavers, market hagglers, family chefs, and elegant forms of visual

beauty come at a high price of illiteracy and social hypocrisy.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog, The Bibliotaphe's Closet:

<http://zaraalexis.wordpress.com/2012/...>

Maree Cox-Baker says

Just didn't like it. Couldn't get into it and was bored so I dropped it. Giller Prize? Really?

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I wish was a) brave enough to do a video review or b) lived near all of you so I could just gush in person about this book, which would be easier than trying to write down with words how reading it made me feel. I loved this book -- it broke my heart about ten times -- and I found Lyon's writing style beautifully sharp, modern, slightly magical, a teensy bit mysterious, and very, very human.

Set in 4th century BCE, the novel follows Pythias, beloved daughter of Aristotle. Brilliant, but not pretty, Pythias' life is unfair: doted on by her father, educated by him and once praised as having one of the most brilliant minds he's come across, but still a woman, and good only for keeping house. She must remain modest, chaste, veiled, silent.

When Alexander dies, Athens grows hostile to Macedonians, and Aristotle's family flees to a seaside town, heavily fortified by the army, where he has a family estate. After Aristotle's unexpected death, the impact of his passing is more than just an emotional loss. His mistress, the woman who raised and loved Pythias since she was four, is sent away, neither blood nor family nor a slave bequeathed to Pythias. When the family's stores raided, Pythias finds that the household slaves she loves do not feel the same way. Penniless and adrift, an unwanted woman among her father's acolytes, Pythias first fights to survive and then to find some measure of happiness.

Little is known about Pythias, so Lyon created a life for Pythias that is wild, complicated, incomplete (the story ends around, I think, Pythias' mid-twenties.) The strength of this story comes from Pythias, who is smart and striking, emotive and honest. Lyon's writing style is precise and sharp, yet heavy with inference and intimation. Pythias speaks in polite obfuscation at times -- ever the lady -- until her experiences shift her from someone reserved and polite to someone who owns her agency, decisions, voice. The plot follows this subtle transition; at some point the story drifts into the fantastical, but whether it is really magic or just hysteria (we learn earlier from Pythias' young friend about the wandering uterus), there's a disquieting sense that the concrete reality Pythias grew up with may not be *the* reality of the world she lives in.

Technically, this book might be a 'sequel' to Lyon's *The Golden Mean*, but I haven't read *The Golden Mean* and I don't think I missed anything. This takes place, I believe, some decades after the events in *The Golden Mean* and is a vibrant, beautiful novel about growing up in the shadow of someone brilliant, famous, and contradictory; coming-of-age in a brutal way; and the powerful agency claimed by this historically forgotten woman.

Erin says

"Pythias is her father's daughter, with eyes his exact shade of unlovely, intelligent grey. A slave to his own curiosity and intellect, Aristotle has never been able to resist wit in another--even in a girl child who should be content with the kitchen, the loom and a life dictated by the womb. And oh his little Pytho is smart, able to best his own students in debate and match wits with a roomful of Athenian philosophers. Is she a freak or a harbinger of what women can really be? Pythias must suffer that argument, but she is also (mostly) secure in her father's regard.

But then Alexander dies a thousand miles from Athens, and sentiment turns against anyone associated with him, most especially his famous Macedonian-born teacher. Aristotle and his family are forced to flee to Chalcis, a garrison town. Ailing, mourning and broken in spirit, Aristotle soon dies. And his orphaned daughter, only 16, finds out that the world is a place of superstition, not logic, and that a girl can be played upon by gods and goddesses, as much as by grown men and women. To safely journey to a place in which she can be everything she truly is, Aristotle's daughter will need every ounce of wit she possesses, but also grace and the capacity to love."

My thoughts on the book- Well, I just couldn't put this book down and I loved the first section. I can see that Annabel Lyon did her research on Aristotle. It is not very often that we get to know a little about his personal life rather than just his work. It was very easy to see that he cared very deeply for Alexander the Great and I would have liked to see this fleshed out a little bit more. The love and conversations between Aristotle and his daughter reminded me of Sir Thomas More and his beloved daughter, Margaret.

However, the book goes downhill after Aristotle's death and the departure of Pythias's brother and stepmother. I felt that the events of the book began to take on a more rapid speed- one minute Pythias is battling to maintain her home, then she escapes to the temple, then she is living with a madam/midwife and then she becomes a beggar on the streets? Not to mention that book ends rather abruptly and left me with a very unsatisfied feeling and way too many questions about what would happen next.

There was no author's note at the end of the book and I was disappointed. I really wanted to know where Lyon drew her research from and I wanted to know what happened to Pythias after the end of this book. I couldn't find much on Aristotle's daughter in my own GOOGLE search and wonder if the whole storyline about the daughter and all she went through was mere creative licence. In fact, the only thing that came up was this book.

Not a book that I will consider revisiting in the future.

Iset says

DNF at 27%. Don't get me wrong, this is not the worst book I've ever read by a long shot, but I just can't put up with the silliness. The writing style is very simplistic, and it feels like this book is aimed at a juvenile reading level. The text is peppered with As You Know Bob moments (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php...>) – where an information dump is attempted to be disguised by a

character telling us or another character information that they already know full well – and here it's done in such a clumsy, obvious way that it got on my nerves.

Worse, the characters speak like 21st century people and this totally destroyed my immersion and suspension of disbelief. Aristotle is referred to as “*Daddy*” throughout, which seems far too modern and overly familiar besides – “Father” or perhaps “Papa” would have been a better choice. Characters use modern slang such as “*freeloaders*”, “*all right, pet*”, and “*I’ll write him*”. Perhaps the worst example was when, after Aristotle and his daughter kill a lamb for dissection, he tells her she’ll regret it afterwards “*Because it’s cute*”. Setting aside the fact that “cute” is an American slang term dating from circa 1834, I can’t imagine Aristotle ever explaining it in that manner – I could perhaps imagine him saying something about the empathy of young children or the preciousness of life, something philosophical to genuinely explain why, but “*Because it’s cute*”?! That just sounds so out of character and such an incredibly modern turn of phrase that it jarred me right out of the story.

Finally, I have to wonder how much research went in to this. Apart from the anachronistic dialogue, the author makes key mistakes, such as describing a man as distinguishable as Macedonian and specifically not Athenian because he wears his hair short and goes cleanshaven like Alexander the Great, his king. The problem with this is that such a styling was not traditionally Macedonian at all; when Alexander styled himself in this way, he was emulating the Athenian mode of appearance (and it later caught on amongst his contemporaries). Ultimately, I just can’t continue with this. The characters feel like they’ve been transported straight out of the 21st century. Welcome to Athens 90210. I cannot buy into it. This just does not provide any sort of plausible, let alone realistic, imagining of ancient Greece. Skimming the rest of the book I don’t feel hopeful that it gets any better, so, I’m out.

4 out of 10

Jana says

Volela bih da me neko prosvetli jer zaista ne kapiram šta se izdešavalo u poslednjih sto stranica, i poentu svega toga. Knjiga izgleda kao da je sklepana na brzinu, jer ima toliko vidljivih propusta i nerazjašnjenih stvari da ne znam od čega da počinem.

Sažetak knjige zvuči obećavajuće - žena se bori sa svojim ocem za kontrolu nad svojim životom, pored toga je ljubavna priča u centru fabule.

Zanimljivo, jer odnos oca i kćerke iako neuobičajen za to vreme, ipak nije kakav je opisan. Štaviše, rekla bih da je Pitija bila poprilično pasivna kada su donošene odluke u njeno ime.

Ljubavna priča - ne znam da li se pod ljubavnom pričom podrazumeva mnogo zainteresovanih osoba muškog pola za devojkicu koja ne zna šta da radi sa svojim životom? Zaista, ovde se ljubavna priča može pronaći tek u tragovima, ali toliko je minorna da stvarno nije bilo neophodno isticati njenu važnost na koricama knjige.

Knjiga u suštini nije toliko loša. Neki delovi bili su poprilično zanimljivi, ali eto, meni je te delove pomalo zasenilo ovo što sam gore navela. Vidi se da je spisateljica zaista obavila detaljno istraživanje kulture i naroda u to vreme, i taj aspekt mi se zaista svideo. Svidelo mi se i to kako je Pitija toliko toga naučila od svog oca i što je toliko bila žedna znanja, i što je uspevala to znanje i da stekne uprkos lošem položaju žena

tog vremena.

Ne znam da li da komentarišem to što sam na svakoj drugoj stranici pronašla neku gramatičku grešku koja mi je bola oči, i zaista, zaista ne razumem zašto velika izdavačka kuća s toliko mnogo izdanja i italaca ne posvećuje dovoljno pažnje gramatičkoj ispravnosti prevedenih tekstova.

Becomingme says

This book had the potential to be so much more, instead it sank beneath the waters falling below almost to failure. The story of the daughter in Athens, that seemed to have no relevance later on in the book, but also was one of the stronger parts of the book. The biggest failure in the book is during the muddled climaxes: I just DID NOT CARE!

I won't say this book is wholly bad, and it's a good little read for a type of romance/love novel that isn't really deep (alas puddle deep par for the course on this book). Yet, I still cannot hate it fully, because there are good things too. I don't regret reading this book, but I'm left feeling like there should have been a GREATER book.

Nadja says

Ne preporučujem nikome

Kao prvo sažetak knjige nema veze sa istom. "Neoekivana ljubavna priča"? Nema je. Čak i ova nazoviljubav izmeću muškaraca (da, množina) prema Pitiji je minimalna. "Ova knjiga se bavi duhovnom borbom izmeću oca i kćeri za kontrolu nad njenom budućnošću"? Neema. Odnos njih dvoje jeste neobičan za to vreme, ali je to i očekivano za Aristotela i njegovu verku- borbu nema. "Upoznaćemo se sa sazrevanjem devojke.." SAZREVANJEM? Nema.

Stil pisanja ožajan (ili je do prevoda?) Preovlađuju rečenice od 4 reči.

Sve je nekako zbrzano i nejasno, kao da je pisao 12ogodišnjak sa trojkom iz srpskog. Uopšte ne vidim trud i rad pisca u ovoj knjizi, čak je i istraživanje tadašnje Grčke i naroda svedeno na minimum. I plus na svakih 20ak strana se naglo menja slika i gubi dodir sa prethodnim likovima bez objašnjenja (što me izuzetno živcira)

Zatim, kada su otac i Pitija ubili neku životinju, mislim da je bilo lane (radi proužavanja skeleta), Aristotel joj je rekao da će da joj bude žao kasnije. Na njeno pitanje "zašto" odgovorio je: "Zato što je slatko". Zar stvarno treba da mislimo da bi on, veliki mislilac i filozof, rekao tako nešto?;

Dalje, pojma nemam šta se izdešavalo sa ostalim likovima, šta se desilo sa Klio, Eufranorom (koji je ,kako sam razumela, bog Dionis?), Glicerom..? Plus su likovi skroz nerazvijeni.

Jedina pozitivna stvar kod ove knjige je što ima jako lepe korice. K, šalim se, ima nekih delova koji su bili zanimljivi i uspela sam da završim knjigu tako da baš ne mogu 1 da dam. Stoga (jedva) dve zvezdice

Tara says

This book took me by surprise. I did not quite know what to make of it. First, it started off with a child's voice. Simple. I was not all that interested, though I kept reading. The idea of giving the daughter of Aristotle some history was fascinating to me. As she aged, the writing got more lively and intelligent and Lyon has her own unique style that captivated me. And I could relate to Pythias, the introspective, gawky, untamed daughter of the master philosopher who fights for a place in society. Then Aristotle dies, and Pythias' life goes on a downward spiral. The book takes some magical realism turns (or is Pythias suffering a nervous breakdown?), and some odd plot twists that made no sense to me. For an intelligent woman who rivaled the Lyceum students, she makes some deranged choices. All to have the book end with a loveless marriage. But then...the very last page gives a final twist that I think most readers miss. I don't see anyone address it in their reviews that I saw. Did I imagine this final twist? Is it intentionally vague??? Don't want to give it away, because despite these plot flaws, the character, setting, dialog, writing is so unique, I still came away with a feeling I read something special.

Guylou says

I won this book through the first-read contest. I would have given three stars if the book ended on page 117, but since it did not and I have to rate the entire book... I will give it two stars only. I hate writing a negative review for a book that is not even on the market yet, but a review must be truthful. So here it goes...

To start, the title is wrong for this book. There was nothing sweet about this story; even the main character would rather have salt over sweets. The first half was interesting. I enjoyed reading about Pythias' relationship with her father and how he taught her so many wonderful things. The second half felt like I was being rushed through a series of events. It felt like the author had done a lot of research and was trying to cram all that information in part II and III. It was too superficial. I would have like to get more details in order to really understand Pythias' decisions. She was being swayed by the tides of her "not so sweet" life and appeared to have no say in the matter. The end was without consequence and left me wondering if there was really anything worth remembering about this book.

Jane says

Title is quite ironic: Pythias, the heroine, daughter of Aristotle, is anything but sweet: prickly and feisty might be more like it. We see her childhood in a happy home; Aristotle respects her mind and teaches her. When Alexander dies, as Macedonians, the family leaves Athens for Calchis where Aristotle has property, neglected though it is. He dies and Pythias is left to fend for herself, becoming priestess, helper to a midwife, then a courtesan. In the last part, she marries her cousin, a soldier back from the war, with what we'd call PTSD, and they try to make a life together with him taking up farming. The story ends on perhaps a note of cautious optimism.

Hboyd says

The Sweet Girl follows Pythias, the daughter of Aristotle, through her father's death and subsequent events.

This is a rich and powerful account of female life in the ancient world. The subtlety of the narrative is beautifully crafted and is probably what led to my feeling so wound up about what happens to Pytho. We see the little signs as she does, and we feel their consequences just as strongly. For example, when, in adolescence, she is no longer welcome to shadow her father at his symposiums or on his visits to the school, becoming more of an annoyance than an amusement; when she is pursued mercilessly by a lustful calvaryman; when she is forced to become a "worthy companion" just to eat; and when she is forced to marry her unwilling cousin.

This tragic account is all about the breaking of a spirit that had hoped for more, and could have gotten it, had her civilisation not been so damned narrow-minded. It really got under my skin, and set me to thinking about how lucky I am, to have freedom, an education and independence. What about all those women, in my society and in others, who still don't have these things? What progress have we really made, in 2000 years?

Shawna says

A good, quick read.

On the minuses it was a bit vague for me, though I know this is probably due to lack of historical information about Pythias. But I felt that the story (only 230 pages) was a bit skimming. I was also a bit thrown by the first few chapters where the girl talks extensively about her period, which unfortunately might turn off many readers (i.e. men especially)

On the plus, it is an interesting story about a girl in a bad situation who is relatable, and who you can root for. The writing is solid, and the story easy to follow, though I am not really sure if they actually used the word Fuck in the 4th c. as it is used today.
