



The Facades

Eric Lundgren

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Along the streets of the once-great Midwestern city of Trude, the ornate old buildings lie in ruin. Shrouded in disappointment and nostalgia, Trude has become a place to “lose yourself,” as one tourist brochure puts it: a treacherous maze of convoluted shopping malls, barricaded libraries, and elitist assisted-living homes.

One night at Trude’s opera house, the theater’s most celebrated mezzo-soprano vanishes during rehearsal. When police come up empty-handed, the star’s husband, a disconsolate legal clerk named Sven Norberg, must take up the quest on his own. But to discover the secret of his wife’s disappearance, Norberg must descend into Trude’s underworld and confront the menacing and bizarre citizens of his hometown: rebellious librarians, shifty music critics, a cop called the Oracle, and the minister of an apocalyptic church who has recruited Norberg’s teenage son. Faced with the loss of everything he loves, Norberg follows his investigation to the heart of the city and through the buildings of a possibly insane modernist architect called Bernhard, whose elaborate vision will offer him an astonishing revelation.

The Facades Details

Date : Published September 12th 2013 by Harry N. Abrams

ISBN : 9781468306873

Author : Eric Lundgren

Format : Hardcover 218 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Contemporary, Novels

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From Reader Review The Facades for online ebook

Aaron (Typographical Era) says

The world is everything that is the case.

Unless, that is, you're stuck spending time in Trude, the fictional city at the heart of debut author Eric Lundgren's novel *The Facades*. Once considered the "Munich of the Midwest" in the late 1890s, the place "still looks beautiful on a map," but the next century would prove to be most barbarous to its one beautiful feats of architectural wonder.

Grand hotels, windowed with cardboard, still advertised ten-dollar rooms on their outer walls. Decrepit mansions hung on the boulevards, spattered with graffiti. Money, with its gaseous tendencies to rise and escape, drifted to the suburbs of Sherwood Forest and New Arcadia.

It's here, within the elusive borders of this crumbling city where A doesn't always equal A, that Sven Norberg walks the streets night after night, his "pockets jammed with evidence bags," hoping to stumble upon some clue that will unlock the mystery behind his famous wife's recent disappearance.

The local police, who rely more on the prescient fragments of dream knowledge provided to them by an officer known only as "The Oracle" than they do on actual detective work, have hit a brick wall in their investigation. The shotgun toting, librarians turned terrorists, who are protesting a complete shutdown of their beloved institutions due to a lack of funding, are of little to no help. The local arts and entertainment editor, one of the last people to see Sven's opera singing wife Molly Norberg alive, only communicates potentially useful information by way of cryptic acrostics.

In other words, solving this particular mystery won't be an easy undertaking.

READ MORE:

<http://www.typographicalera.com/facad...>

Shaun Wright says

Lundgren's debut *The Facades* follows Sven Norberg through the Midwestern town of Trude, hunting for his missing wife. One night, Molly, Trude's celebrated mezzo-soprano, disappears after rehearsal one night with no hints as to what happened. Convinced that something sinister was at work, Sven becomes obsessed tracking down his wife. His hunt takes him through many of Trude's unique buildings and interacting with some very odd characters. There is his son who is drifting away after the disappearance of Molly, a group of rebellious librarians whose leader lusted after Molly, a sunglasses wearing cop known as The Oracle, a music critic that speaks of Molly in acrostics in his articles, and of course the odd architecture of the city. In fact, as the novel progresses, Sven seems to only find peace communing with the mall, the central library, the opera house, and the assisted living home, all constructed by the eccentric architect, Bernhard.

While it may seem like an oddly constructed who-done-it, *The Facades* is more an existential stroll through a surreal land. Stylistically, Lundgren's writing is simply compelling. With sentences laden with bizarre and delightful metaphors he works up the reader's inquisitiveness in both the mystery of Molly and the oddities that makes up the city of Trude.

To some, the ending may seem unsatisfactory in how Lundgren resolves the major questions brought up in the book. However, I feel that the ending is a perfect match for the tone set by Norberg's persistent, yet absent-minded approach to his wife's disappearance. Coming at it at a relatively small 272 pages, this book would make an good and interesting weekend's reading.

Elizabeth says

I received an advanced copy of this book at ALA and really enjoyed it. I've read many "near future dystopias" but this is a present-day, dystopic novel, set in the fictional midwestern city of Trude. Instead of inserting a bits of sci-fi and tech-based tropes, it lingers in the absurdist and existential. In my mind's eye, it is always overcast in Trude.

I immediately lent my copy to my sister, an architect. This is like *Invisible Cities*, she said. Never read it, now I've got another book to seek out.

Anyway, I found this story unique and familiar at once. As a midwesterner, Trude sometimes felt a little too familiar...

Jamie says

I like to think I'm an intelligent person, but I think I'm not smart enough to understand this book. Yes, I understand that our narrator, Sven, is unreliable in the sense that he remembers all of the good things about his missing wife Molly and none of the bad. He doesn't seem to realize that she was unhappy and that he was apparently pushing her away, even when other characters almost come right out and say it. And I suppose the whole point of the book is reminding people the dangers of becoming too wrapped in one thing to the exclusion of everything else, so that you don't miss important things like the fact that your only child is slowly pulling away from you to join what I'm pretty sure was a cult.

But really, a lot of the aspects of this book felt as though they were only there to highlight its own cleverness. At first, I enjoyed the quirkiness of the town. (Although I-99 is a real interstate that exists in Pennsylvania and this clearly was not set there, so every time he mentioned I-99 I thought of my hometown, which is located off that road.) I liked the idea of such an oddly constructed mall, and the idea of librarians holing up in the last remaining branch of the public library system. Eventually, though, these little tidbits just kept piling up, completely separate from what seemed to be the main story and adding nothing except amusing anecdotes.

There were also a lot of things introduced that never get resolved. Maybe they were never meant to be, but

what was the point of bored policemen inventing fake evidence for cases? What purpose was there for people trying to convince Sven that the charming British man at the opera at the end was the town's theater reviewer, when everyone knew that wasn't the case? Was the entire town involved in Molly's disappearance, as at times seemed to be the case, or was everyone else just as clueless as Sven?

I started the book not knowing what was about, and I finished it the same way. For the first half, I was completely engrossed in the mystery, in the town's oddities, but by the end of it, I just wanted it to be over.

Ashley says

I read this book in a day (a long day, but a day no less). I'm a sucker for unreliable narrators, the mildly surreal, and vigilante librarians. Frankly, the book had me at vigilante librarians. It's a strange book and not one to come to if you're looking for a tidy narrative that easily resolves itself. Ostensibly about a man living through the months after his wife vanishes, it quickly emerges that this is hardly a mystery novel. Instead, this is a book to read for the pleasure of language, a strange mid-western city full of the highly (perhaps overly) literate citizens, a missing woman, and militarized libraries.

Like I said, strange but fun. If you approach it with an open mind, I think you'll enjoy it.

Vicki says

I think 2.5 is more accurate for me. It's definitely got some really clever elements, but they feel wasted on a weak, throwaway story.

There's a moment in the book when the protagonist, Sven, is reading the memoir of the city of Trude's most influential architect, the crazy but brilliant Klaus Bernhard. Bernhard calls his lost love, Ulli, "the missing heart" of his architecture." As irony would have it, *The Facades* seems to suffer a similar loss.

In a book as stylish and hipsterific as this one, I can't say I'm surprised that it's "missing heart." Whenever a book has an obvious preoccupation, like aesthetics, other elements of storytelling seem to fall to the wayside. Ultimately, I wish the main characters and the plot did the setting justice. Sven (yes, we're getting the inner thoughts of a person actually named Sven, living in 'Murrica) is a stereotypical suburban wet blanket, and his son Kyle is aloof and friendless. Sven is a self-described paranoid who goes out each night to search for his missing wife, Molly. Kyle, with little fanfare, becomes devoutly religious and subsequently is a mere ghostly presence in most of the book. Neither character is markedly intriguing. Molly seems like she has more of a story to tell, but it's Sven's voice we get, a dry, mechanical kind of narration that lacks intimacy and emotional grit.

Trude is the real character in *The Facades*. Eric Lundgren seems to hit his stride when describing the city's history and the perpetually disgruntled architect who contributed to its infamous design. Take for instance Trude's mall: Built as a spiral with a seemingly unsolvable, mysterious labyrinth of tall hedges at its center...

"The mall had become Trude's most popular tourist attraction, despite its impracticality for actual shopping: people flew in from all over the world simply to walk through it, departing the city without even setting foot downtown. Maybe the ultimate emptiness at the heart of capitalism was the architect's didactic

joke. They sold a souvenir T-shirt at a stand outside the labyrinth, screen-printed with Bernhard's spiral blueprint and the slogan TRUDE WE TRIED."

The mall really captured my imagination. As did the *highly* selective retirement home, Traumhaus, whose inhabitants earn their keep by writing their memoir—the more disturbing the better—and submitting chapters for review. So the passages exploring Trude and its oddities were glimmering moments of creativity that sort of convinced me of Lundgren's potential as a literary fiction writer. I would read another book set in Trude, if he chooses to build upon this small universe he's created, in the hopes that a second installment revolving around all new characters might improve upon the narrative stumblings of the first.

Now maybe this was glaringly obvious from the book description, but I hadn't expected the postmodern undercurrent, i.e. how can we know what we know to be true?, nothing is certain, there are no absolute truths, etc. But it's there—I kept getting flashbacks to the numerous reincarnations of the post horn symbol and the maddeningly quest of *The Crying of Lot 49* and that department in 1984 where history is literally rewritten. I suppose it's out of fashion to drop the word "postmodern" in jacket copy, but Lundgren seems to want to play with this, the instability of things we assume to be immutable. I just don't think he pushes it far enough. There's a lack of commitment to the ideas that renders them soggy and too last-minute. I realize I'm not giving much context to how this dapples with the postmodern. Without spoiling anything, it's difficult to frame, other than this: Sven the paranoid is driven to find answers, only will he?

Sometimes inventive, other times a bore, *The Facades* is a strange little book. I'd recommend to some, certainly not to all.

Diane S ? says

A very hard book to pinpoint or place into any known genre. There is a city called Trude, once known as the Munich of the Midwest, now known as a good place to commit suicide. A city that has decaying mansions, broken down buildings and an authoritarian mayor bent on destroying the towns library. Its beleaguered starring man is Sven, whose wife Molly has disappeared. He wants only to find her and finds clues everywhere but inside himself.

In a little over two hundred pages this book includes a assisted living center called Traumhaus, where one must apply to be admitted. Where scrabble games are a spectator sport and where a group of residents called "The Pinkies", yes they wear pink bathrobes and slippers, are the envy of the other residents.

There are gun toting librarians in ski masks manning a reference desk that most are afraid to approach. They are called the Trude 13, they sleep in the library, and refuse to leave because the mayor wants to blow up the building. It is important to note that the author works at a public library in St. Louis. Of course everyone thinks the mayor is upset with the library because he returned a waterlogged romance book (of course it was that way when he checked it out) and had to pay for the book.

Sven and his son are left to themselves, a job Sven is not up to. Of course there is a church ready to step in. What would a decrepit town be without a church preparing themselves for the second coming. Anyway there is so much more and I have to admit I really enjoyed reading this. For a first novel it is very good. The meaning, well that I think will change for each person that reads this. There are many different ways to go. Of course there is always the possibility that one many not find any meaning, but they will have a great time getting there.

Tobias says

And here's my review: <http://www.startribune.com/entertainm...>

Drew says

4.5 out of 5. I can't exactly say why I'm not giving this a full 5. Perhaps it's the way it was a bit slow to start or the few moments here or there that felt unnecessary or superfluous. Although, I almost wonder if this book will grow in my estimation some years down the line - re-reading it to discover new facets, uncover new tricks of language, and so on. New light shed upon things I previously thought to be just... there. Who is to say? Readers should understand (and be warned) that the slightly wacky sound of the official synopsis is more muted in the book - but that the true depth is in the distinct imagination of the author and of his creation here. This is a puzzle to be solved - but you can't be upset if there turns out to be no solution.

Full review at RB: <http://wp.me/pGVzJ-OB>

(***This review originally appeared here, at The Next Best Book Blog - give them some love!***)

Chandler Smith says

This is the kind of novel that really makes me question the value of the Goodreads star system. After receiving a free, signed (!) ARC at Book Expo America, I began reading the novel on the subway ride home and could not put it down. Lundgren's writing reminds me of a combination of two of my favorite authors, Steven Millhauser and Charles Baxter -- Millhauser because of the incredible metaphor-laden prose that enlivens and personifies the town's architecture, Baxter because of the lovelorn nightwalking narrator's wry melancholy. But more even than the language, I was carried along by the central question, "What happened to Molly?" (the narrator's wife who inexplicably disappeared). I've often observed in the past that a mystery can illuminate even mundane details with the essential glow of clues, and since Lundgren's details are never mundane, I found myself gripped by the potential significance of every new object that came into view. What was the connection, I wondered, between the bizarre, anachronistic wonderland of Trude and the tragedy at the heart of this family? What truths would out?

Had this book answered those questions in a meaningful way, I wouldn't hesitate to give it five stars. But, although Lundgren does a magnificent job of inciting the reader's curiosity, he seems minimally interested in alleviating it. I am not suggesting that this book needs to end like a cat-detective cozy or even a classic noir novel, where we learn in the end a set of plausible, factual circumstances that explain everything that has come before. But the big reveal at the end of THE FACADES was so vague and underdeveloped, it made me feel misled by everything that had preceded it. Novels like *Hardboiled Wonderland* and *The End of the World* by Murakami or *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson or even *White Noise* by Don DeLillo (another novel THE FACADES resembles, with its concern for marital secrecy and the sinister properties of shopping malls) satisfy not because they explain away the weirdness they present, but because they aren't afraid to explore it. By the end of THE FACADES, though, I felt that Lundgren didn't necessarily understand the emotional lives of his characters, or even the logic of the world he had created.

BIG SPOILER ALERT, but if Molly wanted to leave her husband -- if she wants to "live in the world," as an acrostic late in the book implies -- why didn't she just ask for a divorce? Why did she also abandon her teenage son? Because then we wouldn't have this novel? That really strikes me as the only reason, and for me, that's not enough.

Nevertheless, even though I was incredibly frustrated by the last chapters, Lundgren held my interest throughout, and his sentences never quit, so I'm giving this four stars for that.

Karli says

Quirky, magnetic, and multifaceted, *The Facades* is an unsolvable mystery of a book, but it's worth the effort! Vaguely reminiscent of Amelia Gray's *Threats*, the book has a slightly sinister undertone and an unreliable narrator in a familiar search for his missing wife. Structured like a literary labyrinth that serpentine around topics like marriage, family, loss, grief, sex, communication, and architecture, you may never find your way out!

Leah Lucci says

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Brian says

Ugh. I guess I am too stupid for this book. Halfway through, I went to my local library and picked up Calvino's *"Invisible Cities"* to see if it would help. Nope. While the sentences were riveting at times, with many interesting words and turns of phrases, after a while I just got the feeling that the author was laughing at silly, stupid me. I don't like opera. I don't like architecture. And I don't like stories that go absolutely nowhere. I hoped it would get better. Then I hoped it would end, even as I dreaded picking it up again. Characters go nowhere. The plot is ... not necessarily pointless, but in the end I didn't care at all. I get that people should work on building themselves, making the place they inhabit an extension of who they are, and who they aspire to be. This debut took me there kicking and screaming ...

Molly says

All along I felt that I had missed something. Some piece of history or crucial description of a character. In the last chapter I realized that I knew all I needed to know, and it was ok to wonder about the rest. Absolutely perfect ending. Will definitely revisit this book in the future.

Rene Saller says

The Facades is an unapologetically literary novel, teeming with sly allusions to other books, mostly of the

experimental and postmodern variety. If this description makes it sound irritating, too clever by half, I have failed to describe it adequately. Let me try again: *The Facades* is cerebral but not heartless; surreal, not unreal. It has the familiar strangeness of a recurring dream. You know you're home, but the streets are all askew. The first-person narrator, a depressed and defiantly dull man, is a cipher: His city, Trude, in all its elegant decrepitude, is the real protagonist. Trude (its name is an homage to Calvino's *Invisible Cities*) is a mash-up of various moribund Midwestern cities, but because I live in St. Louis, which also happens to be the author's current home, I couldn't help but be struck by its many similarities to my heartbreaker of a hometown. The satire is never mean-spirited, in the way of, say, Franzen, and it's clear that Lundgren loves this locus of losers. The inhabitants of Trude have a certain pluck, if not heroism: They flock to the opera hall and idolize the local mezzo-soprano (the main character's wife, whose disappearance kickstarts the plot). The militant public librarians, who take up arms to defend their institution against the assaults of the boorish, bottom line-worshipping mayor, have a doomed nobility. The town's official suicide bridge is covered with small commemorative plaques, one for each life taken, as stipulated in the town charter. My favorite character, who is already dead by the time the story begins, is a crazy architect who designed, among other beloved landmarks, a labyrinthine shopping mall and an asylum for memoirists. His name, by the way, is Bernhard (as in Thomas, as in *The Loser*). This is a slender but very dense novel that I'm sure will yield new pleasures on future readings. It is also very funny and surprisingly moving. I loved it.
