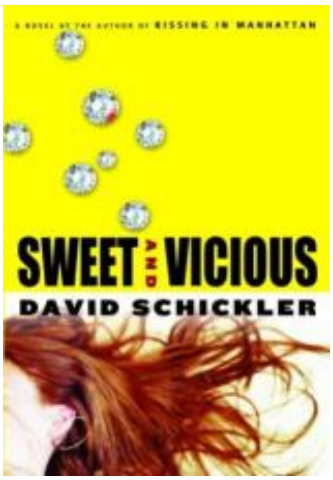
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Sweet and Vicious

by David Schickler



About the Book

"Fascinating and hilarious," "relentlessly clever," and "truly haunting" are all phrases that have been used to describe David Schickler's unique talent. And all apply to this brash, brilliant novel featuring two of the most memorable characters in contemporary fiction: Grace McGlone and Henry Dante.

Sexy and willful, Grace McGlone is saving herself for the right man. When Henry Dante pulls into the small Wisconsin town where she works at the car wash, she instantly knows he's the one. He knows it too. But when Grace discovers Henry has "The Planets" --- a stolen set of famous Spanish diamonds --- stashed in the back seat of his truck, she's having none of it. She's "trying for heaven," and the ill-gotten jewels must go. And so they do, in a race across the American landscape from Chicago to Yellowstone, purusued by a savage gangster obsessed by the diamonds he thought were his.

Passionate, criminal, comical, and possessing all the dark enchantment of a fairy tale, **Sweet and Vicious** is a modern love story shot straight from the heart of David Schickler's miraculous imagination.

Discussion Guide

1. How would you characterize **Sweet and Vicious**-tragicomedy, romance, suspense? Or does it defy categorization? What initial tone is set by the novel's opening scenes involving Charles Chalk and Helena Pressman?

2. Who are the novel's sweetest characters? Who are its most vicious ones? Which characters' actions meet your personal definition of heroism?

3. The cosmos appears as a backdrop throughout the novel, from the planetary diamonds to such details as the Nova. What is the effect of these numerous heavenly references?

4. Among the characters who are trying for heaven, what seems to be the admission requirement? Do any of them gain glimpses of heaven while they're still living?

5. Compare the Reverend Bertram Block to the Pobrinkises. How do these men perceive themselves? Do their sins have a common denominator?

6. David Schickler gave meaningful names to many of his characters, such as Grace, Henry Dante, and Hunter (who changes his name to Honey). Discuss the ironies provided by these monikers.

7. Do the characters in **Sweet and Vicious** fall into classic or revolutionary gender roles?

8. What criteria do Grace and Henry use when giving away the diamonds? Why are the uppity waitress and the misfit dancer chosen, for example? Are Robin Hood philosophies at work, or do Grace and Henry have a more highly evolved notion of needing and deserving?

9. The notion of onlookers and performance drives several of the novel's scenes, in settings as varied as diners and religious revivals. Is there such a thing as an innocent bystander in **Sweet and Vicious**? What was your experience as a voyeur into these imaginary lives?

10. Do the novel's twelve chapter titles form a cycle of any kind? In what way does the placement of Keening (a wailing lamentation) pave the way for a return to earth?

11. When Henry and Grace experience love at first sight, she is emerging from the car wash. What other artificial devices for cleansing appear in the novel? Does Henry and Grace's authentic love have the power to purify?

12. With a road trip, a jewel heist, and organized crime, **Sweet and Vicious** has all the ingredients of a conventional hard-boiled novel, yet it is anything but conventional. What devices does the author use to take his book beyond a standard genre? In what ways does he amplify the novel's literary traits and avoid creating caricatures?

13. Does the novel appear to offer any advice regarding such basic human cravings as sex, salvation, riches, and power? What role does violence play in satisfying these hungers?

14. As the characters journey cross-country, from urban locales to a kava-steeped spa and Yellowstone, how do the settings reflect the plot's evolution?

15. What was your reaction to the novel's shifting point of view and dual verb tenses? How would a uniform point of view have altered the narrative's impact?

16. How do you interpret the role of fate and coincidence versus divine intervention in the novel's many star-crossed victims?

17. Do the lovers in this novel mirror any of the characters in Kissing in Manhattan? Are there any parallels to be made

between the geography of **Sweet and Vicious** and the mythic New York apartment building featured in the author's short-story collection?

18. What is the nature of nature itself in **Sweet and Vicious**? What worldly wisdom can Grace share with the high school seniors she encounters at the end of the book?

Author Bio

David Schickler is a graduate of the Columbia University M.F.A. program. He is the author of **Kissing in Manhattan**, and his work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Tin House*, *Zoetrope: All Story*, and *Travel and Leisure*. He lives with his wife in New York.

Critical Praise

"Think Bonnie and Clyde as it might have been written by Tom Robbins"

Sweet and Vicious
by David Schickler

Publication Date: August 31, 2004
Hardcover: 256 pages
Publisher: The Dial Press
ISBN-10: 0385335687
ISBN-13: 9780385335683