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Why had he come to her, with his dark secrets from a long-ago past? What was the purpose of their strange, haunting journeys back into her own childhood? Was it to help Dab, her retarded older brother, wracked with mysterious pain who sometimes took more care and love than Tree had to give? Was it for her mother, Vy, who loved them the best she knew how, but wasn't home enough to ease the terrible longing?

Whatever secrets his whispered message held, Tree knew she must follow. She must follow Brother Rush through the magic mirror, and find out the truth. About all of them.

## **Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush Details**

Date : Published January 9th 2001 by Amistad (first published 1982)

ISBN : 9780380651931

Author : Virginia Hamilton

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fantasy, Fiction, Cultural, African American



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# From Reader Review *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* for online ebook

## Agn? says

[why should we care that Brother Rush killed himself instead of being killed in a car accident? (hide spoiler)]

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## Rebecca McNutt says

A lyrical, haunting story about a girl searching for answers and a mysterious man who has a more complicated purpose than she ever imagined, *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* is a very sad, complex little novel that isn't for everyone, but many readers will truly appreciate its poetic tale of mystery and family.

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## Margaret says

When Teresa first notices the handsome stranger out on the street, she falls hard for him. Several weeks later, he appears in her apartment, and it's only then that she knows that he's a ghost, Brother Rush. He takes Tree and her mentally challenged brother Dab on journeys into the past, and slowly Tree realizes in these glimpses of the past, Brother Rush may be telling her something about her own present.

Hamilton's writing is wonderfully lucid and descriptive, showing Tree's thoughts in a language and idiom that perfectly express her character. Here's a passage I especially liked, from Tree's first meeting with Brother Rush in her apartment:

"The sweatshirt she had on couldn't keep her warm. Yet she was aware of the moment when the cold turned into something she could live with. Fear was sealed inside her, like a tatter of paper from her ream. And if you opened the tatter, it would read: This is all the scared I can get.

The categorizing part of my brain wants to say that this is fantasy, because it's a ghost story. I suppose technically it is, but it's so rooted in reality that the supernatural doesn't feel especially fantastic. It's simply a book about people, about Tree's relationships with her brother and her mother, who has to work so hard to keep the family going that she's rarely there, leaving Tree to take care of herself and Dab. It's a bittersweet book, full of loss and sadness, yet also full of love and hope.

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## Ms. Kelly says

The topic of this book is right up my alley, so I don't know why it took me a little bit to get into.

The characters were well drawn, once I got into it. I was really intrigued by the glimpses of the past, disturbed and conflicted (just like Tree) about M'vy and the way she treated Dab (now and in the past), and I also really liked the Sylvester character.

The ghost aspect was handled with a light hand - very gentle and non spooky or scary.

The dialect was a tiny issue for me. Although I understand the desire to make people read words the way they are said, and gain the flavor, to me there is something false about writing things like "Now is deh time" and "She can stay by her sel, shu, she almost..."

I think it is false because that isn't what those people are saying. They are saying "Now is the time" and "She can stay by herself, shoot,..." That is the meaning they are communicating, but the meaning is getting lost.

Now, I LOVE it when the flavor of the everyday language of black folks comes through, don't get me wrong. And that actually happens a lot in this book, too. In great sentences like "She knew about college, shoot. She knew nobody was gone give it to you."

Most of the book is done in this vein, liltin in and out seamlessly between casual black English dialogue and a more formal English narrative.

Very nice.

I must say, though, that the covers of Virginia Hamilton books have always been unappealing to me. I know, I know = the whole book/cover thing. But I just had to say it. I don't know if it is the era in which they were printed, or the artist, but I just don't like the way they LOOK.

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### **Amy Layton says**

There's certainly a reason as to why Virginia Hamilton is sometimes called the YA Toni Morrison. Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush is often even referred to as a YA Beloved, and it's clear why upon seeing the similarities between the two books involving ghosts, abusive but loving mothers, and a haunting past.

But as a work by itself, Sweet Whispers was phenomenal. This book discusses so many difficult topics with a nuanced tone--it discusses abuse, caretaking, homelessness, illness, classism, and so on and so forth. Not only does it discuss all of these ideas, but it discusses them well.

Not only that, but the characters in this are just so realistic and wonderful and three-dimensional. They're angry, they're sorry, they're sorrowful, they're loving. They're a family, as disjointed and dysfunctional as they may be. And that's another part of what makes this book so incredible. Not only does it discuss such ideas in a way that's nuanced and makes sense for the audience, but it weaves this discussion with characters who pop. They're an integral part of the story--there's no way to write this book without Tree and Dab and their mother and Brother Rush. It's all just absolutely wonderful.

Review cross-listed [here](#)!

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### **Tiffany says**

A girl meets a man and falls in love with him. What she doesn't know, but finds out later, is that *he's a ghost*. Duhn-duhn-duh!! Why is he there? What has he come to tell her? Ooohhh...

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## Leanna says

Sweet Whispers in its totality, was... well, just “okay”. There were some dislikes along the storyline, but, fortunately, enough surprises to carry me through to finally mildly enjoying the piece.

I’ll admit that when I started the book, the African American Vernacular was a little difficult for me to decipher. Perhaps decipher isn’t the best choice of words, more like the phrase hard-to-get-my-rhythm is more of an accurate description of my predicament. The same phenomenon happened when I read Pearl Cleage’s *What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day* and Elizabeth George’s *What Came Before He Shot Her*. Cleage & George used the same writing style true to the roots of African American culture. Once I was about half way through the book, things started to click and the story just progressed, flowed, and came together in an intriguing plot.

The same was true with *Sweet Whispers*. I believe that *Sweet Whispers* couldn’t have been written any other way by Hamilton. To quote Hamilton, herself, “if a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world”. If Hamilton wouldn’t have written the narrative of Tree, and the dialog among the characters in the tradition of their culture, I don’t think it would have been as striking of a story for me. As Lea states in her article, “by virtue of the ‘right’ categorization or label, if one is deemed to fit in, an individual is assured a place in the community” (p. 56). Tree’s “community” is her African American culture. When M’Vy tries to make her speak more “intelligently”, she is ultimately telling her to try her best to fit into the white community, not her own. This “duality” conflict is nicely supported by Lea’s article; a fabulous companion to reading *Sweet Whispers*.

I was surprised by Hamilton’s use of Brother Rush. I think that another set-back from instantaneous attraction to *Sweet Whispers* was that I really didn’t understand the fact that Brother Rush could be seen by Tree, Dabney, and Miss Prichard but didn’t seem visible to the boys on the street? Equally as odd, why couldn’t M’Vy see Brother Rush? For some reason, I wanted Brother Rush to be exclusively Tree’s; Tree’s secret, Tree’s prized possession that could take her away from the trials of her everyday chores of existence. This exclusivity would have made me feel more like *Sweet Whispers* was actually a “fantasy” novel. For some reason the availability of Brother Rush made me feel the story was of normal, everyday happenings.

So, I’m sure you’re probably wondering what I actually liked about the book. I think what drew me in and kept me coming back was how relatable Tree was in her yearning for family, heritage, and connection. The book truly echoed Sobat’s concept of “rememory”; particularly her notion of the “living-dead”. When Sobat states “a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory...is remembered...” and when the memory is gone, so is the person, she is putting words to what Tree is starving for: connection to herself through her family and her history, so that she is not forgotten. Two of my favorite quotes from the book that resonate with this sentiment are:

“Tree and Dab never had time to find out about the past, they had so little of the present” (p. 50)

&

“If you never told there’s some answers, how you gone know the questions?” (p. 135)

Coming of age, moment of reckoning, the turning point between never being the same and never turning back to who you were... these are themes of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. I believe that one of the defining moments in a young girl’s coming of age is the realization that her mother is fallible. Towards the end of the book, Tree realized what Baker stated in her article, “it [the reckoning:] allows her [Tree:] to lose her self-consciousness and to find comfort and confidence in her physical being, to exercise the power that has always been hers” (p. 249).

After further reflection, I do not necessarily feel that M’Vy’s faults were the sole catalysts of Tree’s coming of age. Sobat definitely struck a chord in my reflection of the piece when she wrote, “‘rememory’ [is:] so essential to both girls’ mythic quests for selfhood, identity, and ultimately survival” (p. 168). I believe that Tree realized, through Brother’s “travels”, her roots, her sending-culture, and all the reasons she is who she is and my M’Vy is who M’Vy is. This realization echoes Hamilton’s musings on two hearts, the battle of “two allegiances, the one, of being black and the other, of being American” (p. 17). For Tree, I believe she also fought an additional battle of two hearts: her heart for the past and her heart for her new future. I believe that both Tree’s past and M’Vy were the cause for Tree’s growing pains just as Hamilton states, “we carry our pasts with us in the present through states of mind, family history and historical fact” (p. 16).

Coming of age, moment of reckoning, the turning point between never being the same and never turning back... these are themes emerging in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. The characters grew to realize that they, their friends, their family, and even society were fallible. This realization turns to liberation but not without struggle and not without pain. I am beginning to realize that fantasy is truly about educating readers on the power, albeit it sometimes unpleasant, of transformation. I believe Lea would agree, for she opens her article with a similar tone, “the secondary worlds created in fantasy encourage the reader to compare and contrast the real world with the imaginary...fantasy as a genre can be transformative” (p. 51).

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## Cookie says

This book, at first, was difficult to read, simply because of the language. However, as the pages passed, I was drawn into a story that was both sweet and sad.

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## L says

[Review written by my younger self]

I turned the last page, expecting more and yet finding only the short bio on Virginia Hamilton. I felt like nothing had really been resolved. Hamilton's adolescent novel, *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, left me very disappointed by the ending. However, in looking back I realize now how powerful and effective a writer

Hamilton is, and that I was wrong in initially accusing her of the deus ex machina. A lot of my initial disappointment came from my lack of insight into the text. On second read, though, I find that the precise and all-inclusive details give much insight into the issues behind this story of a brother and sister, their deadbeat mother, and the mystery behind their dead uncle, Brother Rush. The issues of disease (specifically porphyria), family, and the "poor man's reality" is evident in all scenes presented between Hamilton's vivid characters.

The surreal existence of Brother Rush is comparable to the mystery surrounding the title character in Morrison's *Beloved*. Lovers of Morrison's story will highly benefit in their read should they continue the idea of the mystical versus the tangible in this tale. A seasoned professor at my university, in fact, refers to Hamilton as the adolescent's version of Morrison.

Readers of Hamilton's novel will benefit from reading it with more than just a shallow glimpse into the story itself. Even young readers can appreciate the many social ramifications the novel carries throughout its pages. While Hamilton does illicit a happy ending, it is tainted with a deliberate cynicism and a thought-provoking aura that characterizes Hamilton's writing.

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### **Elsie says**

The story is interesting and unique as it explores family relationships intertwined with the supernatural.

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### **Jamie says**

I'm glad our instructor briefed us on "the 30 minute read."

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### **Anna Kim says**

Though the story is lyrical and haunting, it progresses very slowly and takes some time to develop.

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### **Angela says**

Virginia Hamilton's book was interesting for me. It was not one that I melted into right away. It required more concentration and some dedication before I was hooked and pulled in. I think that perhaps language played a part with this. I once read a book that was translated from Portuguese, and it seemed to have the same effect. Hamilton's use of dialect required a mental adjustment for me that I had to slide into every time I read. This was why I finally gave in by staying put for a couple of hours to finish the book off in one go. Once in, it was easy to be taken with the story and the dialect. I loved it!

The use of dialect was an additional dimension into Tree's life and culture. I noticed a similar feel in the elements of M'Vy discussing the "mystery" after Tree tells her about Brother Rush to those elements in *The Secret Life of Bees*. It was that pull of religion, mythicism, and African tradition that comes from a deep sense of unity and history within African American culture. It is an fascinating theme in which Sobat

elaborates - that of the supernatural or spiritual experiences run through Hamilton's and Morrison's novels, as well as within the African American community. I thoroughly enjoy the discussions that rely upon something beyond scientific proof...which is probably why Carl Jung's ideas of a spiritual experience as a way to bridge a gap over insanity and into healing versus Freud's more scientific-based claim that such experiences manifest insanity.

Brother Rush was a captivating entity within the story. I loved him in the "rememories." Even though he was not terrifying in her encounters with him in the center of the table, I found myself a bit disturbed with Tree's descriptions of Brother Rush not ever talking or responding to her. On the street was not a problem, but in the table with "dead eyes" and no response to Tree bothered me. I understand Hamilton's purpose in doing this, but it did not stop my nightmares of ghosts from coming :). It was a strange reaction to have considering the non-threatening way that Hamilton wrote him into the book. I was happy he had "done his job" when Tree finally said goodbye, but I was still sad to see him go... and Dabney, as well.

I was puzzled in the way that Hamilton introduced Dabney. It took me a long time to realize the full extent of his issues and mental disabilities. Hamilton's ability to establish a link and deep connection between Tree and Dab was profound. I found such a depth of closeness in the midst of their lonely existence that touched me. I also appreciated the realness with which Hamilton addressed the loss and anger Tree felt. It was horrifying to be somewhat of a witness to all that M'Vy had done and yet satisfying to have the protagonist hold her mother accountable (and see a bit of M'Vy's perspective), and then for Tree to slowly find a way to exist with her mother again. As disturbing as many of the elements Hamilton's book addressed, she did a masterful job of bringing some healing and resolution to the ending. While it was not completely resolved, she was headed in that direction.

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## Heven says

I obtained a copy of Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush from Net Galley for review .

It took me a long time to get into this book as the language and dialect took a lot of getting used to as there was a lot of slang and street lingo that was used, which for me is what made it hard to get read. It's one thing to speak the words, but a whole other thing when you are reading it.

Tree, an adolescent girl is the first one to notice Brother Rush. Although she has been described as intelligent in her own right, she finds it necessary to do the minimum to get by at school, but everything she turns in receives good grades, she finds it necessary to not take the scholastic tests and not put a lot of effort towards thinking about her scholastic future.

Brother Rush, who first appears to Tree in a building not far from where she lives, but then mostly appears to her as the table in the "walk-in closet". He shares his memories with Tree and only Tree. The encounters she has with Brother Rush although not frightening in anyway, they seemed to me to be quite disturbing at times, especially when he does not respond to questions Tree asks, instead just looks at her with "dead eyes".

Even though I understand the reasoning behind the actions/reactions of Brother Rush, it was non-the-less disturbing to think of a ghost with no eyes, as I have always imagined ghosts to have eyes. In the end, it was sad, yet fulfilling to see all the things Brother Rush left incomplete at the time of his death, he was able to complete, appearing to Tree that one last time so she would be able to say farewell to Brother Rush.....and Dabney.

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## **Ann says**

Virginia Hamilton had an uncanny ability to authentically express the imagination and terrors of childhood. She also--seemingly effortlessly--introduced African American culture and vernacular into her books in a way that is a little less rare today. This book won the Newbery Honor in 1983.

Tree lives in an apartment with her brother Dab, who has exceptional needs. Their mother, Vy, works away from home and comes when she can to bring money and food to her children. There is another central character, Miss Pricherd, a nearly homeless older lady who Vy pays to clean the apartment and check on the kids. Tree resents Miss Pricherd's interference and what she sees as her laziness. Tree is busy working overtime to go to school, cook meals with what food supplies they've got, and keep her and her brother afloat, more or less.

Tree and Dab live in a world on their own. I can't think of another book that illustrates how two siblings who are the victims of neglect and abuse form a bond that is stronger and more dependable than anything else in their lives.

But this is not a book based solely on the sufferings of the present world. Tree falls in love with "the most beautiful dude in the world." Turns out, he's a ghost with a connection to her family called Brother Rush. Brother Rush appears to Tree and Dab in a spare closet/small room of their home. Standing in the middle of a table, he holds one hand to his ear and carries a fascinating looking glass in the other hand. (The image reminded me of Jean Cocteau.) Brother Rush shows the siblings scenes from their early childhoods with Vy and their deceased father that are sometimes freeing, but also horrifying.

I won't give anymore away. I will say that Dab is a very well-developed character with a disability. Tree cannot stand for anyone to call him the r-word. That's not how she sees him. She does not resent taking care of him, even though it is too much for a person of her age. Vy's often cruel rejection of her son, who she calls "the boy," is terribly realistic. There is an undercurrent of the feelings of love and hatred between children and their parents which makes the book explode in certain scenes.

One of my favorite aspects of the book is Tree's relationship with Miss Pricherd. Tree works overtime to explain away the image of the ghost in the table when the older lady catches a glimpse of him and faints. Their relationship, one of two misfits who see and understand more than others, develops very nicely.

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