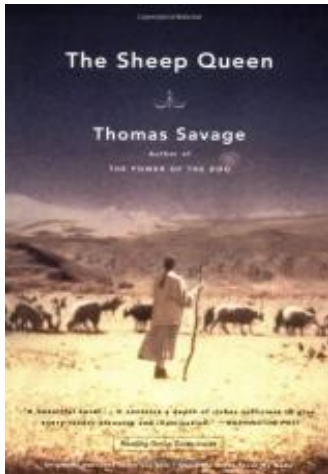


The Sheep Queen: A Novel

by Thomas Savage



About the Book

A western family saga at once intimate and epic, this rich, compelling, emotionally charged novel tells the story of the Sweringen family of Idaho: Emma, the matriarch, known as the Sheep Queen ("surely one of the most fascinating characters in current fiction" Publishers Weekly); the daughter who disappoints her; the grandson who adores her; and the granddaughter, given up for adoption, who spends nearly half her life finding her way back to her family.

Discussion Guide

1. At the turn of the last century, men were usually the dominant figures in their households. How and why did the Sheep Queen get to be so powerful? What privileges did this power allow her? Give examples of when this power was not enough to get what she needed.
2. Discuss how gender roles are played against stereotype in *The Sheep Queen* - for example, in the way that the Sheep Queen was more her father's son than daughter.
3. Discuss the theme of loss throughout the story - the Sheep Queen lost her son, Amy and her biological mother lost each other, Tom lost a childhood with Amy. . .
4. The related families in *The Sheep Queen* are so close-knit. Discuss how this affected the relationships between the family members and the choices they made for their individual futures. Think about the relationships within your own family in the same way.
5. Why did Beth give up her daughter for adoption? Do you think those who have been given up for adoption should seek out their biological families? How do you think that search affects these families?

6. Discuss the characters' Western sensibilities, the ties to the land, and the isolation of the West.

7. Why did Tom Burton, the narrator, escape from his family in the West to establish a life for himself on the East coast? How was life different for him in the East.

8. Discuss identity and roots and the impact Amy's discovery had on her and how that acknowledgment changed her. How does reading *The Sheep Queen* make you feel about your family heritage and background?

Author Bio

Thomas Savage was born in 1915 in Salt Lake City. His literary career spans five decades and thirteen novels, most notably *The Power of the Dog* (1967), named "the year's best novel" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Sheep Queen* (originally published in 1977 under the title *I Heard My Sister Speak My Name*). His most recent novel, *The Corner of Rife and Pacific*, was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award, won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award, and was selected by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the fifteen best novels of 1988. He was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1980.

Critical Praise

"A fine novel.... A sense of family as anchor and root and self-definition [gives] the book its considerable strength.... Mr. Savage is a writer of the first order, and he possesses in abundance the novelist's highest art-the ability to illuminate and move. "

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