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Avey's "The Sheep Walker's Daughter" (Book Review)

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Book Reviews



Avey, S. (2016). *The Sheep Walker's Daughter*. Reno, NV: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada. 227 pp. \$16.00. ISBN 9781935709848

The Sheep Walker's Daughter is Sydney Avey's first novel, now in its second printing. Avey makes excellent use of dual first-person narratives to explore her primary theme of family, specifically the relationship between mother and daughter. The book opens in September 1953 with the death of the family matriarch: Leora. This event throws the two narrators, Dolores and her daughter Valerie, into crisis for radically different reasons. Readers are not only treated to unique voices and perspectives, but also the secrets each narrator is keeping from the other. While strong believable characters and their relationships are the core of this book's charm, it definitely falls into the genre of historical fiction.

Additional characters transmit the other themes of the novel. Leora and her husband Alonso, though physical absent, provide the historical mystery that drives the plot. Much of the book explores the history and culture of the Basque people group of Spain and their diaspora in the United States. Likewise, Father Mike carries the themes of faith and self-discovery. His voice is one of gentle wisdom to the characters and the reader. He is the sounding board for Dolores especially during moment of tension. "Often the people we are most angry with are mirrors of our own souls."

Avey uses fresh images to keep the reader engaged and reminded of the two decades the novel spans. "San Francisco is an elegant lady during the holidays, wrapped in furs and dripping in diamonds; if her slip is a bit tawdry dockside, all the more fun." Overall, Avey weaves art, history, mystery, romance, and faith together at a brisk pace. Her strong characters and attention to detail make the themes contemporarily relevant and the novel enjoyably hard to put down.

Reviewer

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