

The Sheep Queen

by Thomas Savage

A READING GROUP GUIDE

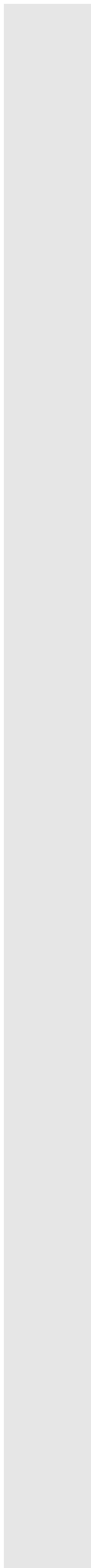
“Thomas Savage was born in 1915 in Salt Lake City, Utah, to a remarkably handsome couple, Elizabeth (Yearian) and Benjamin Savage. Elizabeth Yearian was the oldest daughter of a famous Idaho sheep-ranching family, and her mother, imperious and powerful and well connected, was known as ‘the Sheep Queen.’ The ranch itself had been founded a generation earlier when the clan patriarch discovered gold.

“When Savage was two years old, his parents divorced. Three years later his mother married a wealthy Montana rancher named Brenner, and from that time he was ranch-raised as Tom Brenner in Beaverhead County in southwest Montana. He was fortunate to be part of two eccentric and sprawling clans — the Yearians and the Brenners.”

— Annie Proulx, from her Afterword to
The Power of the Dog, by Thomas Savage

READING GROUP GUIDE QUESTIONS
AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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?

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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 own family heritage and background?

Notes About the Author

Thomas Savage was born in 1915 in Salt Lake City. He studied writing at the University of Montana and received his B.A. from Colby College in 1940 and an honorary M.F.A. in 1952. His literary career spans five decades and thirteen novels. He has also held numerous jobs besides that of writer: wrangler, ranch hand, plumber's assistant, welder, railroad brakeman, insurance adjuster, and English teacher — at Brandeis University and Vassar College, among others. Savage was the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship in 1980. His most recent novel, *The Corner of Rife and Pacific*, was selected by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the fifteen best novels of 1988, was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award, and received the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award. His novel *The Power of the Dog* was recently reissued by Back Bay Books, with an afterword by Annie Proulx. He currently lives in Virginia.

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Also by Thomas Savage
The Power of the Dog

“Gripping and tense . . . a work of literary art.”

— Annie Proulx, from her afterword

“Thomas Savage is a writer of real consequence . . . a masterful novelist.”

— Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Post Book World*

“*The Power of the Dog* offers so many pleasures, readers will be forgiven if they do not immediately notice that it also engages the grandest themes — among them, the dynamics of family, the varieties of love, and the ethos of the American West. Put simply, *The Power of the Dog* is a masterpiece.”

— Larry Watson, author of *Montana 1948* and *Justice*

“A fine novel . . . studded with fleeting insights, and reverberating for some time after it is laid down.”

— Jack McClintock, *Chicago Tribune*



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