



Lambs of God

Marele Day

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Carla, Margarita, and Iphigenia are three nuns living in a crumbling monastery on a remote island, forgotten by time, the world, and the church. Their liturgical calendar is governed by the changing of the seasons, and by the rising and setting of the sun. Their days are spent performing a ritual of prayer and storytelling, as they knit the wool of the sheep who inhabit the monastery grounds and into whose bodies they believe their deceased sisters' souls to have entered. Then, one day, seemingly out of nowhere, a priest appears. Hoping to rise in the church hierarchy, he has presented plans to his bishop to convert what he believes is an uninhabited and valuable piece of church property into a spa for the wealthy-and he has come to investigate the land. Father Ignatius is as surprised to see the nuns as they are to see a flesh-and-blood man, and what follows is the strange, moving, and often hilarious story of their struggle-a struggle of wills, but also of faith. Lambs of God is a beautifully written and haunting story of colliding traditions, conflicting beliefs, and magical trans-formations. It weaves together Christian belief, classical mythology, fairy tales, Celtic lore, and the mysteries of the natural world into one of the most memorable and gripping of contemporary novels. Like Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy*, Lambs of God is a wildly original investigation into the nature and complexities of faith.

Lambs of God Details

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Author : Marele Day

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From Reader Review Lambs of God for online ebook

Cathy says

Wonderful reading, and I wish I could get a copy of The Sea Bed which doesn't seem to be in print

L.G. Surgeson says

A highly unusual and thought provoking tale about the nature of faith, belief and religion. 3 feral nuns, the last of an island community, have their solitude broken by the arrival of a priest who has plans for their home. What the nuns then do is both outrageous and understandable. Day captures the world of these nuns, enclosed for decades, and their little nonsenses and eccentricities and juxtaposes their innocence and pure faith with the more worldly understanding of the invading priest. A beautiful, clever and thought-provoking tale.

Leah says

Lambs of God gifts its readers with lush imagery, memorable characters, and a pervading undercurrent of myth and magic.

It wasn't a story I was expecting to like, not only because of its religious setting, but because once I started, it took about 50 pages before I was fully settled into its world. It's slow-paced, full of vivid descriptions, slightly contrived...yet Iphigenia, Margarita, Carla, and even Father Ignatius (who I found hypocritical and didn't like much at all) were too strange to ignore, too *different* to dismiss outright. I'm glad I kept reading.

Recommended if you want a story about three nuns, a priest and a dilapidated monastery, tempered with magical realism.

3.5 stars

Nellie says

This is an interesting book with many twists and turns.

The story is about a group of cloistered nuns that have been forgotten by the church. A priest stumbles upon them. He is surprised to find them as it was thought the property was abandoned.

Good storytelling happen as the sisters knit in the evenings.
Highly recommend this book.

Stef Rozitis says

This strange and unsettling book is full of destabilising events. We begin in an abbey, where there are only three sisters left and their religious observances have taken on a peculiar flavour all of their own. They weave fairy tales and ancient myths as well as pagan beliefs through their understanding and observance of Christian monastic life and they have begun to connect with the environment in ways that are represented by dirt, by the wool they spin and wear and the sheep they have a symbiotic relationship with (and know they have begun to resemble). There are three nuns of differing ages, but they manage not to take on quite the stereotypes you would expect from them (although Carla comes close) nor do they quite fit the old cliche of maiden, mother, crone.

Their life is enclosed, they do not even see the seals, nor the causeway that is as shifting as the plot and relationships of the book and comes and goes to connect their "island" to the mainland, but at low-tide when there is a causeway a young and ambitious priest comes across to look at what he thinks is an abandoned monastery and to get it ready for selling or developing.

This is where it gets weird, with Ignatius as sort of a colonist coming into what he has already decided is "terra nullius" and all too ready to see the inhabitants as savages, especially given the lack of separation between themselves and their environment. Things like cutlery and dependence on technology are presented as evidence of being "civilised" while the sisters are portrayed as animalistic, instinct driven, rarely even speaking and kind of disgusting actually. At the same time throughout the book this view of them is undermined from time to time, both by Ignatius' occasional sexual attraction to one of them and by the many instances of culture by these "savages" their greater ability to weave myths and daily life together in complex ways as well as the technology of carding, spinning and knitting...human hair added to the mix. This is about gender- gendered power, culture and technology as the conflict of interests between Ignatius and the community becomes a potentially deadly game of wits.

Ignatius underestimates the three women by a long way and the reader is almost led to do the same (though there are hints all along). The "happy ending" almost seems too contrived and simple, it is achieved through the author unravelling the ideas of enclosure and in some ways self-defeating because the sisters can only win through by using power from the world they have abandoned (and a male is pivotal in this). In this story ONLY the master's tools can destroy the master's house but along the way we get some cynical views of church, culture, male power and ownership. Place and personhood are explored (often uncomfortably) and "knowing" is made complex as the irrational triumphs again and again. Surprising amounts of tolerance and forgiveness strew the emotional landscape but abuse and suffering can also lead to violence and death, while all sorts of unpleasant odors are constantly present along with dirt and degradation.

There's a disappointingly conventional and heteronormative view of sexuality, although the exploration of celibacies was sort of interesting, it wasn't quite as cynically treated as I expected (as you often find). At the end the author, reader and characters in effect have their cake (honey biscuits) and eat it too, the story weakens to allow resolution and to bring back a sense of taking the spirituality in the text more-or-less seriously (I had mixed feelings about this).

It's well worth a read and very thought provoking.

Ann-Marie says

I had never heard of Marele Day before hearing of this novel on the knitting community Ravelry. It was mentioned in one discussion of novels with knitting as a theme. Many participants recommended this novel, so I got curious.

It's a very weird novel and difficult to describe. Three nuns live peacefully on a remote and deserted island together with their sheep. They breed sheep for food, wool and company. They live in a closed community dependent only of themselves, the sheep and God.

Something happens which changes their way of living and one part of the novel is quite suspenseful.

The story is of course about much more than what is happening in the monastery. It's about life and faith and how we deal with both of those things. It's sometimes very funny and sometimes deeply sad.

I liked her language a lot. Poetic and vivid.

It's a wonderful and thought provoking novel which will stay in my mind for a long time.

Fransje says

Een heel erg vreemd en heel erg goed boek. En dat is knap, want het verhaal kan zo vreemd niet zijn of je gaat er toch helemaal in mee.

c2 cole says

I read this years ago in a book club and it might have been my favorite book from that club. Entirely unpredictable and hilarious.

Rita says

A bit slow getting into this story, but wow! What a rich tale... especially good for lapsed Catholics.

Aira says

good

Gaye Sweeney says

This was a book club read. I was sceptical at first but soon became enchanted with this very original idea. It's among the best of books I have read. I loved the descriptions of knitting history, the strange and unusual tale of 3 nuns and their surprise visitor. I half expected something sinister to happen, but besides their very odd 'handling' of their problem, it was sort of ok. The story tapered off in intensity towards the end, but it had me so interested from start to end. So a great book club pick and a 5 out of 5 from me.

Jalilah says

This is a rather strange book that I had a hard time getting into, but ended up really liking a lot. Three nuns between the ages of late forties to seventies have been living for a very long time on a remote island without any contact with the outside world. Their version of Catholicism blends in nature worship and mythology. Their daily lives consist of, in addition to praying, tending their flock of sheep, who they believe are the souls of other nuns who have since passed away, shearing the sheep and knitting the wool. Their lives change when they get a visit from outside, a young priest who is investigating the property where they live with the interest of turning it into a resort for the wealthy. I can't describe what happens without giving away spoilers, so it will suffice to say that the nuns in an attempt to keep their home are each in their own individual way forced to revisit and confront their pasts. It was fascinating. I highly recommend this novel!

La Stambergia dei Lettori says

Un'Australia selvaggia e isolata dovrebbe fare da cornice a una storia complessa e ricca, che racchiude in sé diverse vite tenute insieme dall'invisibile filo del destino.

Ma più che di Australia, in questo romanzo, troviamo il senso selvaggio e di "isolitudine" perché l'ambiente primario in cui si struttura la scena è proprio un isolotto abbandonato, dove sorgono le rovine di un vecchio villaggio di pescatori prima e un antico monastero di suore di clausura più in là.

Un ambiente feroce, che nel corso del tempo si è impossessato di quanto lasciato dall'uomo riprendendosi il suo spazio e trasformando il luogo in modo inaccessibile o quasi. Il verde dei rami e dei rovi, il fango, la presenza delle foche sugli scogli, il mare che come per miracolo, scopriremo a lettura avanzata, si solleva e si dirada per creare un lembo di passaggio di sabbia con il resto del continente, sono tutti elementi forti e presenti all'interno della storia, che hanno un peso enorme sulle vicende.

Una volta entrati dentro questa dimensione, è più facile per il lettore comprendere le dinamiche interattive tra i vari personaggi, e immaginarne la verosimiglianza: ci sono tre suore che si sono adattate a vivere nell'antico convento in rovina, che nel rispetto della clausura non hanno per decenni avuto più contatti con l'esterno e che dedicano le loro giornate alla fede, ai rituali che ricordano e che hanno nel tempo modificato perché nessuno in quel frangente, una volta decostruito il villaggio, si è posto il problema di renderle partecipi delle evoluzioni del tempo.

Suore che allevano pecore le quali, a loro volta, altro non sono che la reincarnazione delle sorelle perdute, che rispettano la legge divina occupandosi della raccolta del cibo, dei sacrifici animali e delle preghiere, cardano la lana con cui intessere i loro vestiti sgangherati. La loro esistenza procede immutabile, sino all'avvento di un agente esterno, rappresentato da Ignazio, braccio destro del vescovo che, convinto di trovare un rudere disabitato, irrompe nelle loro vite con l'intento di riqualificare l'isola a centro turistico di lusso.

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Caren says

The new edition of "Lambs of God" (1997) marks the announcement by Foxtel of the 2019 TV series, an Australian production of this classic novel. I am afraid, however, that televising this imaginative, fable-like text will diminish its charm by limiting the imagination of the viewer to what is presented on the screen. The three nuns, living their pastoral, religious lives in a ruined monastery, have shut themselves off from the modern world and exist in their own devised cycle of rituals and bonds with God and with the sheep they envision as reincarnations of the souls of their deceased sisters. Day introduces a touch of the Gothic, mythical, magical, and even somewhat macabre elements of storytelling, filled with religious symbolism, comedy and sensuality. The result is a mixture of the unbelievable-made-believable as the nuns confront the intrusion of a priest sent to evict them to make room for a luxury resort on their "sacred" site. Through her masterful storytelling, Day explores the power of stories themselves, the essence of faith, and the reassessment of what truly matters in our lives. While I was immersed in this tale, the outside world was as far away from me as it was from Day's quirky characters. The reader absolutely must "suspend [her] disbelief" (Coleridge) and allow herself to be swept away by this glorious tale of redemption. What a delight!

Barbara says

Exceedingly quirky and weird. Frequently hilarious, often squirm-inducing, but it had depth that surprised me. It features three forgotten nuns in a crumbling ruin of a monastery, lots of sheep, and a priest who stumbles across them in his quest to turn the property into a holiday resort. Oh, and knitting. Lots of knitting.

Also: I seem to be continuing my recent recurring theme of books about monks & nuns. It's unintentional, I swear.
