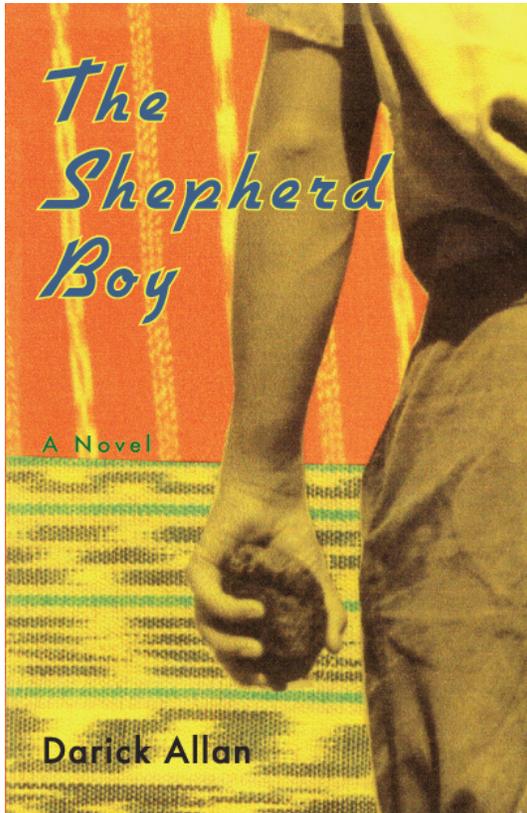# ALLAN'S "THE SHEPHERD BOY" REVIEW BY KIRKUS DISCOVERIES

Allan, Darick
THE SHEPHERD BOY
Portal Press (134pp.)
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A small act of violence shakes the rigid social hierarchy of 1960's Quito, Ecuador, in this haunting fable.

The gulf between Tommy Montovan, the young son of an affluent American diplomat, and Chaco Achuale, an impoverished Indian boy who herds his family's sheep near Tommy's house, couldn't be wider. One day, outraged by the normal callousness meted out to livestock, Tommy hurls a rock that gashes Chaco's cheek. The consequences for Chaco are harrowing: stitches from a drunken, cut-rate doctor that leave a disfiguring scar, and a bill that forces his family to go hungry for weeks. Tommy, a sensitive, religious child, is tormented by guilt, which adds to the pressure he feels from his stepmother Miriam, a beautiful, charismatic woman who beats Tommy and his siblings for the smallest infractions of her petty rules. When Chaco and his reluctant father show up to take what is for poor Indians the almost unthinkable step of demanding justice from rich gringos, Tommy lies his way out of it—then faces a devious campaign by Miriam to get him to confess. The seemingly straightforward confrontation illuminates the pressure cooker in which each boy lives. Chaco's is defined by the limitations of poverty, a social system forever closed to him by high walls and guard dogs and the cultivated stoicism he must call on to endure both. Tommy's is defined by Miriam, the wicked stepmother whose fairy-tale cruelty is but one element of her fascinating complexity. These characters inhabit a world of stark contrasts, governed by nuanced (and scutely observed) rituals of courtesy and deference through which the author maps out the realities of power and privilege and the subtle moral quandaries they impose. It's a harsh reality, brought richly to life by Allan's clear-eyed, often lyrical prose.

A well-wrought, deeply moving story.

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