

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### THE LAUNDRESS

Barbara Sapienza  
She Writes Press (304 pp.)  
\$16.95 paperback, \$9.95 e-book  
ISBN: 978-1-63152-679-4  
May 19, 2020

## BOOK REVIEW

A young woman reconnects with her Italian heritage and attunes to her inner self in this coming-of-age novel by Sapienza (*Anchor Out*, 2017).

Lavinia Lavinia (who was given the same first and last name, as part of an “old custom in Italy”) is sauntering through the streets of San Francisco from her home in the Mission District when this novel opens. Her Uncle Sal “scooped her away” from Naples before she was 5 years old and moved with her and her aunt Rose to the West Coast. Soon after Rose died, Sal hurriedly returned to Italy, leaving the 26-year-old Lavinia feeling abandoned. After dropping out of San Francisco State University, she set up as a laundress, “detailing” clothes for a range of offbeat clients from lawyers to sculptors. Lavinia has a habit of tipping with bubble gum, a gesture that catches the eye of an attractive barista. Her playful demeanor conceals that her lost past tugs heavily on her emotions. With the help of others, she starts to recover memories of her infancy, and in doing so sets out on a journey of self-understanding. Sapienza’s writing is delightfully descriptive as it evokes the streets of the Mission District: “Mothers with shiny black hair, dressed in flowing skirts and sandals, push their babies in strollers. Lavinia sidesteps past old cars parked on the sidewalks.” Connective forces stretch out across space and time as Lavinia recalls her Italian past: “The old ladies scream from their windows for *pane*, *prosciutto*, *mozzarella di bufala*, the groceries to be hauled up to their second- and third-story apartments.” As Lavinia breezes through the streets of San Francisco, she evinces the freedom of youth. This effervescence is beautifully balanced by the wisdom of experience, as proffered by Mercedes Montoya, the mother of a close friend. She counsels Lavinia: “La *querencia* is a safe place in the bull ring, the place where the bull goes to stay alive, to stay away from the lance of the matador. ...it’s a place regain his power.” Mercedes adds that “this is the place you will find within yourself.” Wistful yet uplifting, the book mourns the fading past, while celebrating the intricate beauty of each passing moment.

An acutely observed, tenderly philosophical novel that tells a wonderfully bittersweet story.

## EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media’s excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.