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Smouldering Fires (Rediscovered Classics)



Synopsis

Anya Seton, whose many novels won her world-wide acclaim, wrote, for her last book, a fast-paced novel that explores the subconscious mind of a young girl whose troubled dream life parallels that of another girl who lived over 200 years earlier. A shy high school senior, Amy Delatour is a misfit in the well-to-do community in which she lives with her widowed mother and French-Canadian grandfather. Amy's passion is for the 19th-century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whom she sees as a romantic and tragic figure. Her immersion in the poet's life and writings is partly fueled by her grandfather's tales of his ancestors and of the injustice of le grand d rangement, when the French Acadians were expelled from their home in Nova Scotia in 1775. Amy has steeped herself in the lore of the period, and the efforts of a young English teacher to draw her out through hypnosis brings unexpected results. What begins as an unauthorized attempt to free Amy from her frightening visions of the past ends with intimations of reincarnation or, at least, genetic memory. Anya Seton's many fans will not be disappointed in this closely researched and deeply engrossing novel--nor will readers new to her finely crafted historical fiction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book covers some of the territory the author covered in her best selling novel, "Green Darkness", that of past lives. The trouble is that the author is unable to capture the magic inherent in her best seller. While this well researched book is of some interest, due to its subject matter, there the similarities stop. Those who have read the other will be somewhat disappointed with this

readable, though somewhat tepid, fare. Here the book revolves around a young New Englander, Amy Delatour, a teenage girl of French Acadian-English lineage, who often goes into a fugue stage where she believes she is a tormented soul named Ange-Marie, a French Acadian in exile in eighteenth century Connecticut who had been separated from her beloved husband, Paul. The shy and bookish Amy lives in a state of anguish and uncertainty, until one of her high school teachers, Martin Stone, takes an interest in this unusual, highly intelligent young woman. Together they will try to get at the bottom of her mysterious dream states and her fire phobia. The novel starts out promisingly enough, but it never quite reaches its promise. It has a feel of needing to be further fleshed out. While parts of the book are quite interesting, the reader feels as if one were given a delicious appetizer to tempt the palate, only to find that the main course is not forthcoming. Still, there is enough in this novel to make for a pleasant read. Those who have an interest in past lives regression will surely find this book to be of interest.

The central idea of this book -- of a girl who has some sort of psychic connection to an ancestress of 200 years past with whom she shares a name -- is captivating, and the little bits of historical detail that Seton weaves in makes it interesting. However, this book has some big weaknesses in terms of the writing. While there are passages and scenes that are very well-written, draw the reader in, and transition smoothly to other scenes, they are interrupted by passages that are poorly written and transitions that are sudden and unexplained. For instance, the beginning of the book is very weak. It's almost as though Seton was so anxious to get into the meat of the plot that she didn't want to take the time to "set up" the story. As an example, chapter one ends with Amy running away from Martin Stone, unwilling to commit to talking with him again and afraid that he would report her to a school counselor. Chapter two starts up two weeks later, with Amy and Martin meeting in his apartment. There is no explanation given for what changed Amy's mind. Such a lack of transition seems amateurish and isn't what one would expect from a seasoned writer like Seton. Also, as other reviews have stated, the ending of the book is flat. There was so much Seton could have done with the ending of a story like this, but it's almost as though one day she decided she was through writing the story and just ended it where she was. This should have been a longer book, with the weak parts better developed. I think the story line was creative and interesting and deserves a 4; however, the writing itself deserves a 2. So I am compromising at a 3. If you've read other Seton books then you'll understand she was not at her best here. This was her last book, and it feels like she had just lost the inspiration, the desire to write, or something. If this is your first Seton book, don't let this one turn you off. Her others are better!

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