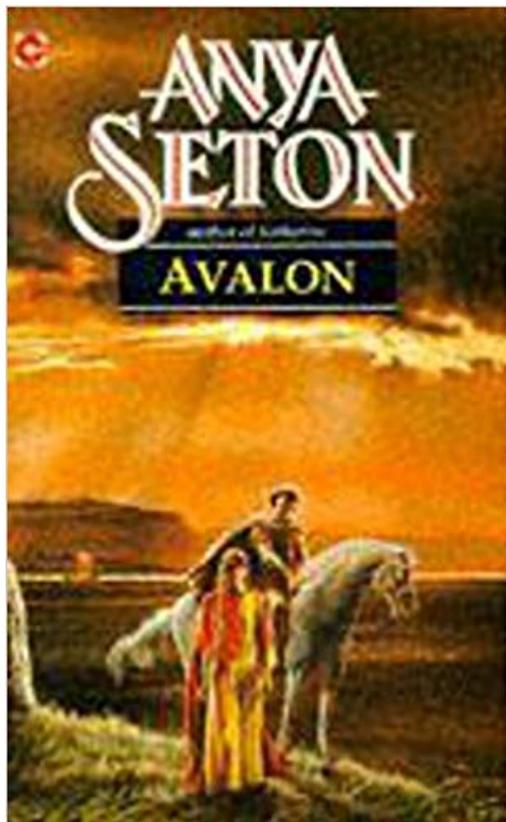


Avalon by Anya Seton



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It is the last quarter of the tenth century, a time of conflict between Church and State, a time of threat from Viking invasions. Amidst the violence comes a knight called Rumon, whose love for the beautiful Merewyn leads them both across the seas to an unknown western land.



Reviews of the *Avalon* by Anya Seton

Ffleg

Years ago I read two books by Anya Seton: *Katherine* and *My Theodosia*. I remember loving both of those and I'm currently working on my own novel set in tenth century Sweden and England. I decided to read *Avalon* partly as research and partly because I knew I would enjoy it. In my memory, the other two Seton novels were more powerful than this one, but that could be due to the span of years since I read them. In any case, this is a five star read.

The plot tells the story of Rumon, a French nobleman, and Merewyn, a young Cornish woman, whom we first meet as a teenager. Rumon, whose formal name is Romieux de Provence, is on his way to serve in the court of Edgar I, the current King of England. He encounters Merewyn, whose mother has just died. Rumon agrees to bring the young woman to her Aunt Merwinna, the current Abbess of Romsey Abbey.

As with Anya Seton's other novels, this is fiction based on historic fact. Many of the characters are historic figures. I believe Merewyn is fictional, but Rumon has some connection to a real character. The story also includes King Edgar I, King Edward (Edgar's son), Queen Alfrida, King Ethelred (Alfrida's son by Edgar - known as "the unready"), Dunstan (the Archbishop of Canterbury), Erik the Red, and Leif Erikson (Erik's son). The settings include England, Ireland, Greenland, and a brief stay in North America. The history of this era has conflicts and voids, but I felt that Anya Seton did an excellent job of resolving those. *Avalon* feels accurate in historic fact, portrayal of the hardships people faced at that time, and in the personalities of the characters, both fictional and real.

Steve Lindahl - author of *Hopatcong Vision Quest*, *White Horse Regressions*, and *Motherless Soul Onetarieva*

I hate books where everyone always makes mistakes that screw up their lives. And in this book, every character makes mistakes from the minute they are introduced. However, Seton has an excellent sense of the time period and her writing is beautiful.

Lonesome Orange Kid

Honestly, you start a book called *Avalon* and what do you think you'll be reading? I imagined something about Arthur or one of his descendants - in other words a fantasy. Instead, I got a brilliantly written history lesson that didn't feel like a lesson at all. It's part history, part romance and part geography. Pay attention and you may learn more than you'd think and not feel like you're sitting through a class.

It's a fascinating book and one I'll probably pick up and read again.

Kagrel

As in all her works, Seton's creation of the setting -- 10th century England and Iceland -- is second to none. I was drawn in right away, probably because I love older historical settings. The story of Rumon and Merewyn is bittersweet -- as an objective observer, the reader sees their emotions and attitudes towards each other, and how they never get their feelings in sync. Even at the very end, I thought they were finally going to get together -- as I'm sure Seton intended the reader to feel -- and was disappointed that once and for all they went their separate ways. Although, Seton's writing is so good that even this ending is more satisfying than would have been a happy ending with all the loose ends tied up and Rumon and Merewyn riding off into the sunset to live happily ever after.

Another reason I love Seton's works -- love older writers in general, actually -- is that she keeps her characters bound by the mores, values and customs of their own times, and not ours. A modern writer would have, I'm sure, had Rumon and Merewyn break the bounds of convention of their times and enter into an illicit affair, complete with graphic descriptions of sex scenes; perhaps if Seton were a writer in our day and time she would have done the same. Instead, she keeps her characters constrained by their culture, and the tension and anguish this causes in the reader, who wants so badly for Rumon and Merewyn to get together, makes the book, I think, more satisfying.

Another reviewer commented on Ms. Gregory's foreward and I agree with those comments. I was left feeling like Ms. Gregory was forcing herself to say something good about a book that she didn't really like, and that what she instead really said was, "if I had written this book I would have done it this way....."

Umsida

I loved Avalon. It is not the best Anya Seton book (that honor goes to Katherine). However, for a book set in the Dark Ages, it is absolutely fantastic. Anya Seton did a fantastic job transplanting readers into a time about which we know little. I knew nothing going into the novel about the Saxon kings and the Vikings. Seton did a great job in helping readers understand how scary and uncertain this time period was. Seton also gives a fascinating look into Viking society, something I knew little about.

However, I did not give this book 5 stars for two main reasons:

(1) The premise of the book is that Merewyn is living a lie and that she is not descended from King Arthur. Rather, she is the product of a rape. Merewyn's mother was raped by Kettil Redbeard (we learn later), a Viking. He is the same Viking who had murdered Merewyn's purported father. Somehow, at the exact time Merewyn is transporting her aunt Merwinna's heart to be buried in Padstow, her hometown, she is nearly raped by Kettil Redbeard, her father. The local priest recognizes him, as he had witnessed her mother's rape, and puts a stop to it. Merewyn is then kidnapped and taken to Ireland and Iceland (and ultimately Greenland). Now, it does not seem plausible to me that it would be the same viking and that the Viking would recognize her as a daughter and take her home with him. Nor does it seem plausible that Merewyn would just accept him as a father.

(2) Seton takes the controversial view that America was discovered by Irish monks. The idea that Rumon was swept to America, somehow encounters the descendants of these Irish monks and then manages to find Merewyn in Iceland after escaping seems implausible and far fetched.

Aside from these implausibilities, Avalon is a wonderful novel. Anya Seton's writing style is very rich (ignore Phillipa Gregory's horrid forward) and the time period is fascinating.

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