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Autobiography & Memoir

Of Time and Change
Frank Waters
Unknown $20.00 (272pp)
978-1-878448-86-6
(October 1998)

Despite the simplistic writing style, Water's memoir will fascinate two diverse readers: members of the art and literary world hungry for stories about such people as Mabel Dodge Luhan, Leon Gaspard and Dorothy Brett; and avid fans of the Southwestern culture which developed around Taos, New Mexico. In this memoir, his last book before his death in 1995, Waters, the grandfather of southwestern literature, reveals his perceptions of the important members of the artistic community who settled Taos before and after World War II. He offers honest portraits of the marriage between Tony Lujan and Mabel Dodge Luhan, and of the lives of Nicolai Fechin and Andrew Dasburg. He also speaks with authority about the Native American people of this region and their role in the development of both the artistic community and his own spirituality. Because he offers the reader a powerful description of his time and community, the book will be valuable reading for an audience interested in that society or that region.

However, despite the characters that establish his sense of the Otherworld, and his deeply spiritual kinship with the Pueblo people, this memoir does not offer deep insight into the man himself. Though his novels (The Man Who Killed the Deer is most well known) are exceptional in the exploration of the complex relationships between humankind's cultural and political ethos and that of other spiritual worlds, this text lacks that complexity. Through his spiritual filter we are allowed to see the inner workings of his many and varied friendships. We are also given insights in exchange in the physical and political landscape of the region he loves, but we are rarely privy to the inner workings or landscapes of the man himself.

This memoir covers the public aspect of his life in Taos with grace and insight, but what we love about many memoirs—the interaction of outer and inner lives, and the complexity of the conceitedness—is not fully developed here. In that sense, Frank Waters remains the private, mystical persona we sense behind his novels.

Anne-Marie Oomen