

Passages

Anne Hamre

FriesenPress (Jul 29, 2016)

Softcover \$17.99 (378pp)

978-1-4602-8390-5

Passages is a down-to-earth and relatable work that reaffirms the goodness of ordinary people.

Anne Hamre's epic, multicontinent story of love and searching, *Passages*, is a sweeping historical romance that reads like a selection of moments from a multivolume history of European migration. Main characters Anne and Frank are an exceptionally tough couple who embody the hopes and dreams of ordinary people, and their heartbreak and triumph are related deftly.

Set in the early twentieth century, *Passages* takes its readers from the rough-and-tumble farm country of North Wales to the relatively virgin soil of Australia and Canada. Anne and Frank set off from the Old World in order to find cheap and available farm land for a planned dairy. However, this bucolic idyll is not the point of the novel. Rather, *Passages* is about how love and commitment can empower people to withstand hardships and defy society's limiting expectations.

Passages is well researched and succeeds in placing its readers snugly within its particular time frame. Hamre, who is a historian by training, brings the dynamism of the early twentieth century to life with a heady mix of technological abundance (telephones, automobiles, telegraphs) and residual rural splendor, with Frank and Anne musing about the "sun-burnt grass" or the green hills of Wales.

Frank and Anne represent the duality of this time period quite well. While Anne is intelligent and has an independent streak, the earthy Frank can be summed up in his own words: "I've been on my own since I was fourteen. All I know is hard work." On the other hand, *Passages* is also a timeless love story featuring two characters who maintain their loyalty to one another despite the swift injustice of time.

Passages does not contain the type of Sturm und Drang that most people would expect out of a historical novel. Rather, *Passages* makes mountains out of roast chicken and baby potatoes, with melodrama standing in the place of spectacle. This quiet, thoroughly domestic story builds its narrative upon the usual concerns over money, relationships, and careers. One can almost hear the intended cymbals clash when Anne declares to Frank "I am not myself without you" during a squabble over her teaching position. Hamre succeeds in making these everyday moments feel meaningful.

Passages is a down-to-earth and relatable work. Hamre's characters are believable, and they have struggles that almost everyone can identify with. Even through tragedy, *Passages* rewards its readers by reaffirming the innate goodness of its central characters and therefore the innate goodness of regular people everywhere.

BENJAMIN WELTON (April 11, 2017)

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