

Raglands: The Anamnesis of the Life of "Anwen"

Nikki Goodwin

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Romantic fantasy novels enjoy great popular appeal. Whether in print or e-book form, they offer readers escape into imaginary worlds inhabited by heroines and heroes who, despite many obstacles, experience supernatural events that change their lives.

Nikki Goodwin's first novel, *Raglands: The Anamnesis of the Life of "Anwen,"* tells the story of a girl born into rural sixteenth-century Europe. As Anwen matures, she learns about the magical powers she's inherited from her maternal ancestors and develops her own special abilities. Anwen and Teleri, her grandmother, choose to live in a remote part of the woods because some villagers believe them to be witches. They use their knowledge of herbs to heal themselves and anyone who asks for help. In her late teens, Anwen attracts the attention of Winn, the only son of Lord Blatheon, owner of Ragland Castle and ruler of Raglands. The peasant girl and the nobleman fall in love and support each other through numerous threatening scenarios.

Early in the recalled story, or anamnesis, of Anwen, Lord Blatheon hosts the Day of Festivals. On this rare occasion, common folk are allowed to interact with lords and ladies. Anwen hopes to see Winn and prepares carefully for the occasion. "She made sure she'd washed her hair in the ointment her grandmother made. It was a secret ointment, the smell of which was so subtle but so intoxicating," Goodwin writes.

Anwen has the ability to see beyond the present and into the past. When Winn returns to Raglands, wounded but victorious over the Mythrian army, Anwen knows the enemy will return and uses her powers to protect him. She implants images of fear in the Mythrians' minds, causing them to flee forever. The narrator explains that Anwen, "knew that anything born from a thought could be manifested physically."

Anwen transitions into the past and future spontaneously, such as when she loses a family talisman from around her neck. As she despairs the loss of this precious item, Sekhet, an entity who has guided her through other difficult situations, appears once more and takes Anwen back to her time on earth in ancient Egypt.

The book's imagery successfully conveys the sense of a fairytale life in earlier times. But there are problems, too. Told from a limited third-person perspective, the narrator relates the story instead of showing character interchanges in true-to-life dialogue and action. The characters act predictably, according to type. Scenes change without benefit of transition, and repetition of information, grammatical errors, clichés, and awkward syntax appear throughout the book. Episodes of rape and violent retribution make the book inappropriate for younger readers.

Despite these drawbacks, devoted readers of the romantic fantasy genre will find Anwen's story entertaining.
MARGARET CULLISON (September 7, 2012)

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