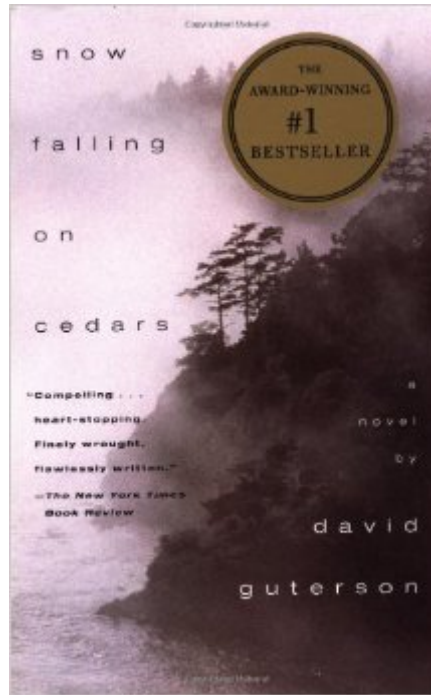


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Snow Falling On Cedars: A Novel



Synopsis

Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award American Booksellers Association Book of the Year Award San Pedro Island, north of Puget Sound, is a place so isolated that no one who lives there can afford to make enemies. But in 1954 a local fisherman is found suspiciously drowned, and a Japanese American named Kabuo Miyamoto is charged with his murder. In the course of the ensuing trial, it becomes clear that what is at stake is more than a man's guilt. For on San Pedro, memory grows as thickly as cedar trees and the fields of ripe strawberries--memories of a charmed love affair between a white boy and the Japanese girl who grew up to become Kabuo's wife; memories of land desired, paid for, and lost. Above all, San Pedro is haunted by the memory of what happened to its Japanese residents during World War II, when an entire community was sent into exile while its neighbors watched. Gripping, tragic, and densely atmospheric, *Snow Falling on Cedars* is a masterpiece of suspense-- one that leaves us shaken and changed. "Haunting.... A whodunit complete with courtroom maneuvering and surprising turns of evidence and at the same time a mystery, something altogether richer and deeper."--Los Angeles Times "Compelling...heartstopping. Finely wrought, flawlessly written."--The New York Times Book Review

Book Information

Series: snow falling on cedars

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Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (1,005 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Snow Falling on Cedars is an interesting, low-keyed book about a time and a place unfamiliar to most readers. I enjoyed it a lot, both for its language and its human insights. I would never have expected, however, that this book would generate such extremely divergent responses from

readers. Some think it is the best thing they ever read and others damn it as a waste of time. There is no question that much of what the critical reviews say is true: the book is slow, it is very long on detail, it jumps around in time, it doesn't focus on the 'mystery' and the trial, and the ending is somewhat predictable. But none of these things can be criticisms unless the author intended the book to be more fast paced, plot driven, and have a snappy surprise ending. The readers are really complaining that the book is not what they wanted or expected it to be - some more traditional mystery, love story, thriller type book - the kind of books that the shelves and best seller lists are full of and that demand nothing from the reader and deliver even less. This book, on the contrary, is an evocation of time and place. It is largely 'memory' even though it is not a first person narrative. It asks the reader to relax into a poetic reverie on who these people are and how they came to the situation upon which the plot turns. The author does not push the mystery element except as an excuse to uncover more information about his characters, their relationships and the origins of their current lives. Not everyone enjoys this kind of book. Certainly those who gravitate towards Jackie Collins or John Grisham should not be expected to find this to their liking. Even those who read only 'serious' literature have special tastes and only some will appreciate this.

Overall, I enjoyed this book very much. In particular I liked the evocation of the sea, snow and island way of life. The description of the geography was very powerful and one could almost taste the salt-laden air and feel the cold. Sometimes I would re-read a paragraph two or three times, both so as to fully immerse myself in the beauty of Gutterson's prose and in sheer awe and appreciation of his skill with words and his keen sense of observation of people. A strong feature of the novel is the way in which Gutterson shows readers how the environment has shaped his characters, for example, (1) Kabuo's obsessive yearning for his stolen land containing the strawberry fields, (2) Hatsue and Ishmael's childhood love affair, which grows from their fascination with the sea and cedar forests (I remember the imagery of the glass sea box), (3) later in the story, Ishmael draws comfort from the forest because it embodies Hatsue for him and reminds him of their intimate encounters in the cedar tree. In terms of evocation of place and atmosphere, this book reminds me very much of Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow (or as Americans would know it, Smilla's Sense of Snow) and The Shipping News by E Annie Proulx. All three books have in common the sense of snow, the sea, sailing etc and have been favourites of mine for some time. To me, this is a story about the tragedy of a man who cannot come to terms with the loss of a childhood sweetheart. Ishmael's war experiences impact upon his initial loss of Hatsue in many ways. Ishmael's yearning for Hatsue long after returning from the experience of war, is perhaps at times, a distraction which

prevents him from realising the full horror of his war experiences (including the loss of his arm and his innocence).

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