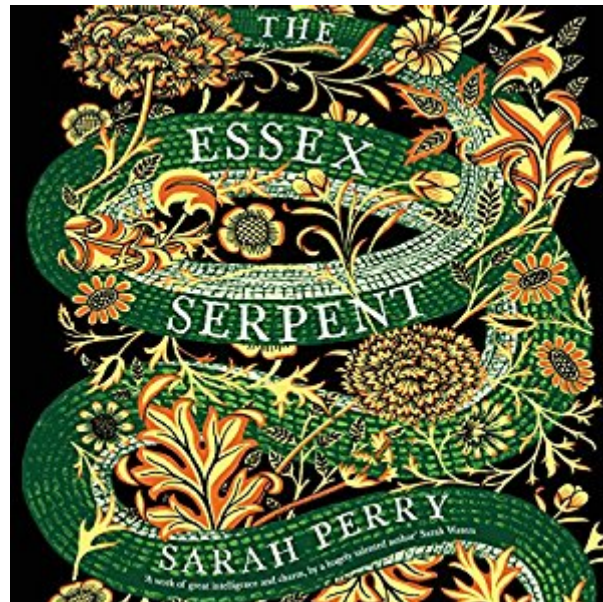




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The Essex Serpent: A Novel



Synopsis

Costa Book Award Finalist and the Waterstones (UK) Book of the Year 2016 An exquisitely talented young British author makes her American debut with this rapturously acclaimed historical novel, set in late 19th-century England, about an intellectually minded young widow, a pious vicar, and a rumored mythical serpent that explores questions about science and religion, skepticism, and faith, independence and love. When Cora Seaborne's brilliant, domineering husband dies, she steps into her new life as a widow with as much relief as sadness: her marriage was not a happy one. Wed at 19, this woman of exceptional intelligence and curiosity was ill-suited for the role of society wife. Seeking refuge in fresh air and open space in the wake of the funeral, Cora leaves London for a visit to coastal Essex, accompanied by her inquisitive and obsessive 11-year old son, Francis, and the boy's nanny, Martha, her fiercely protective friend. While admiring the sites, Cora learns of an intriguing rumor that has arisen further up the estuary, of a fearsome creature said to roam the marshes claiming human lives. After nearly 300 years, the mythical Essex Serpent is said to have returned, taking the life of a young man on New Year's Eve. A keen amateur naturalist with no patience for religion or superstition, Cora is immediately enthralled, and certain that what the local people think is a magical sea beast may be a previously undiscovered species. Eager to investigate, she is introduced to local vicar William Ransome. Will, too, is suspicious of the rumors. But unlike Cora, this man of faith is convinced the rumors are caused by moral panic, a flight from true belief. These seeming opposites who agree on nothing soon find themselves inexorably drawn together and torn apart - an intense relationship that will change both of their lives in ways entirely unexpected. Hailed by Sarah Waters as "a work of great intelligence and charm, by a hugely talented author," The Essex Serpent is "irresistible...you can feel the influences of Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, and Hilary Mantel channeled by Perry in some sort of Victorian sÃfÃ©ance. This is the best new novel I've read in years." (Daily Telegraph, London).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No spoilers in this review. OK, so I was sooooo excited to get this book and I am a bit disappointed. But it isn't because it is a poorly written book. It is a good book, good writing, good characters -- it is just that the book jacket description does not match the book hardly at all. You need to know this so that you are not disappointed as I was. The book jacket makes the book sound like it is about a little village in Ireland where people are dying or missing and it is blamed on a mythical/historical sea serpent. A natural scientist, a woman named Cora, goes to the village to investigate. This is all somewhat true of the story, but the sea serpent part is really a background story and does not dominate the narrative at all. It's almost a second thought. If I could completely ignore the book jacket description, I would say that this book is about Cora, a female scientist in late 1800s London, and her relationships with men, her unhappy marriage, her lovers, her difficulties in relating to her odd son, her hopes and dreams. The story is more about relationships, love and loss, friendships, and less so about women's dreams during this time period. A great deal of the dialogue is about religion vs science but it is only lightly worked. There were not many scary parts, only tiny bits and pieces scattered here and there throughout the book. The characters are well defined and interesting, though I needed to keep a notebook with names and notes at first to keep them straight. I rarely like to have more than 4 characters in a book and this had several to keep track of. The situations were believable. I only want to point out that if you are looking for something a bit more magical, a bit more along the lines of cryptozoology with the possibility of a sea serpent or a tracking down of a sociopathic killer in a small Irish village, you will not find that here. The book jacket is misleading, which is not the fault of the author. It is however a wonderfully written and interesting book and I do recommend it to those who enjoy stories with interesting characters, especially of women who are challenging societal roles.

This book has wonderful descriptions of the surroundings and many a great turn of phrase. However, the nonstandard or random use of commas and frequent abrupt changes in point of view makes for choppy narrative. Overall, reading this book felt like being restricted to two weeks of a

diet of dainty tea sandwiches. The narrative crawls along at a slow pace, repeats points already made, and never picks up the tempo. The characters are unique, but the writing keeps them at a distance from the reader. The question of the existence of a serpent amazingly fails to add suspense as it is treated more as a matter of town gossip and children's fun. Any curiosity about the supposed serpent is killed with mundane details of the behaviors of a large cast of characters' lives. A good read requires a good story rather than elegant writing. Embedded in the novel is a good story if the author had focused on it or studied plot development. As is I found it extremely tedious and would not have finished if not chosen by my book club.

I desperately wanted to love this novel, but I felt something got lost in translation. I didn't find all of the characters to be totally realistic, but I loved the setting and atmosphere.

While reading "The Essex Serpent," I struggled to identify why it so utterly captivated me. Now that I've finished, I think it's because Sarah Perry manages to deliver an original story in a voice that reads like what a 19th century woman novelist would have written *if she could have* back then. At turns brooding, sexy, and deeply atmospheric, the novel is a deeply original page-turner, chock-full of rich period details and sexual politics.

This novel has everything--romance vs loyalty, religion vs science, feminism vs chauvinism, nature vs the city.....it goes on and somehow it works.

4.5 stars is more like it. Perry's lovely prose, interesting, well developed characters, and superb depictions of setting made this novel a very enjoyable read. I felt exactly as though I were watching a PBS Masterpiece series.

A unique portrayal of real people in the Victorian era with interesting political, medical and spiritual threads. And a mystery!

I found the story line engaging, but the characters really pulled me into the book. They ring true, and I could imagine myself sitting with them and enjoying being part of the conversation. If you enjoy well written prose and great characters, you should enjoy The Essex Serpent.

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