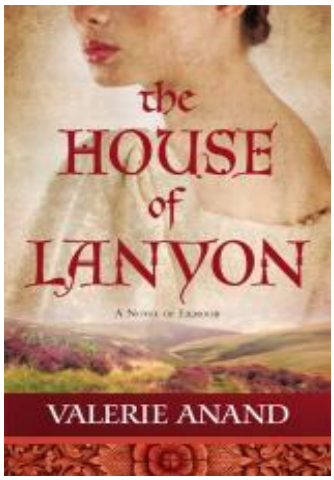
The House of Lanyon

by Valerie Anand



About the Book

Richard Lanyon answers to no one save the aristocratic Sweetwater family who owns the land he farms. His bitter resentment is legend within the bounds of their tiny Exmoor community but as their tenant, Richard Lanyon must do their bidding. Driven to succeed, Richard is prepared to take what is not his, and to forfeit the happiness of his family to claim the entitlements he lusts for.

When two ambitious families occupy the same patch of English soil, rivalry is sure to take root and flourish. A glimmer of initiative swells into blind desire, and minor hurts, nursed with jealousy, fester into a malignant hatred. When a bitter feud is born the price for this wild and beautiful piece of ground will take more than three generations to settle.

Discussion Guide

1. This book is set in fifteenth-century England and attitudes to marriage at that time were very different from present-day perspectives. The arranged match was normal, especially when inheritance or business arrangements were involved. Even today, arranged marriages (or at least arranged introductions) are the norm in some cultures. What do you feel are the pros and cons of arranged marriages?

2. A stringent class system was very much in evidence in this book. Were there any advantages in maintaining that structure? Do you think the class system motivated Richard Lanyon?s actions? Has society, as you know it, completely shed the class system?

3. Many of the characters in **The House of Lanyon**go through life keeping uncomfortable secrets. Peter, Liza, Richard and Christopher all do so. For which of these characters do you feel the most sympathy? The least?

4. The principal setting of this story is Exmoor, in southwest England. Do you feel that Exmoor in any way affects the

plot ? that its physical characteristics form part of the cause and effect in the story?

5. The love affair between Liza and Christopher is presented as a real love, not a passing infatuation. Given that Liza is pressured into marrying Peter, and that Christopher is almost compelled to remain in the priesthood, do you sympathize with the way they finally become lovers, or do you feel they should have refrained?

6. Peter has a terrible shock when he realizes that Nicky is not his son. What difference might it have made to the rest of the story if he had never found out? Were his actions justifiable?

7. When Peter learns of Liza?s infidelity, he is outraged but eventually he defends her from his even more outraged father. Quentin, too, springs to her mother?s defense. Do you think these are reasonable reactions? How would you have responded if you had been either Peter or Quentin?

8. Several households are described in the book. The principal three are the homes of the Weavers of Dunster, the Lanyons of Allerbrook and the Sweetwaters of Clicket. Discuss and compare them. Do you have a clear preference for one household over the others?

9. The women of the time had to work hard to run their homes, and they often helped in family businesses, too. The women of Allerbrook milk cows, do dairy work and help with the harvest; the Weaver women make yarn and weave. In Marion Locke?s home, the women gut fish. Were they, do you think, happier and more fulfilled than the Sweetwater ladies who were mostly confined to giving orders to the servants?

10. The old adage ?the more things change, the more they stay the same? could be applied to family life in the fifteenth century and the twenty-first century. What concerns/issues/pleasures do we experience today that our fifteenth century friends also dealt with?

11. As you saw in the story, the prevailing political winds can and do blow with enough force to cause serious problems in a small community such as Clicket. How would the average family have been affected by a call to arms?

12. Why do you suppose that Liza?s mother, Margaret, chooses to marry Herbert Dyer?

13. Herbert Dyer proves to be a dubious character. Would it have been better had Liza and Peter not discovered his underhanded business practice? Or would things have been worse for Margaret, in the end, if the law had caught up with him? She believes she is right to leave him. Do you agree? Compare the standards of the fifteenth century and the modern world.

14. Horses were important in those days ? the equivalent of the car today. On Exmoor, deer and sheep were also important. Can you pinpoint any moments in the story when horses, deer or sheep created turning points in the plot?

15. Family traits and characteristics have a way of showing themselves in succeeding generations. Discuss.

16. If you had to change places with any of the characters in **The House of Lanyon**, whom would you choose?

17. A theme throughout the book is Richard Lanyon?s determination to raise his family higher in the world and to outdo

the Sweetwaters. Do you empathize with these motivations? Given his modest origins, why was he so obsessed with ?climbing the ladder,? so to speak? Can you make any comparisons between Richard Lanyon and someone you know today?

Author Bio

Born in London, Valerie Anand knew at the age of six that she wanted to be an author. At the age of fifteen, she saw MGM?s film *Ivanhoe*. She walked into the cinema knowing that she wanted to be a novelist and walked out of it knowing that historical novels were the kind she most wanted to write.

Over the course of her long and distinguished writing career, Valerie has written many works of historical fiction and is well known for the Ursula Blanchard series of Elizabethan mysteries written under the pen name of Fiona Buckley.

Still living in London, Valerie Anand is a frequent visitor to Exmoor, the setting featured in *The House of Lanyon.*

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