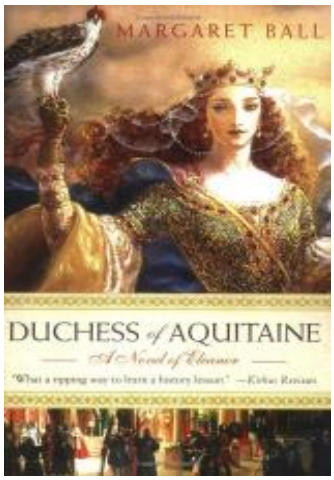
ReadingGroupGuides
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Duchess of Aquitaine

by Margaret Ball



About the Book

Beautiful and brilliant, Eleanor is the daughter of the duke of Aquitaine, whose glittering court is the twelfth-century birthplace of courtly love. For all of the duke?s boasts that Eleanor has the brains of a man and the soul of a warrior, everyone knows that a girl of fifteen cannot possibly hold the richest dukedom in France. Everyone, that is, except her dying father, who insists on leaving Eleanor his most valuable provinces --- and making her prey to the first baron who rides in to kidnap her.

Eleanor, though, is not content to sit idly by and let herself become a victim, and devises a plan to marry the heir to the throne of France. While her alliance to Louis VII may be a dazzling one, her husband is a cautious man whose wit and courage do not always match Eleanor?s own, and she ultimately finds herself seeking an even greater match with Henry II of England. Sweeping from the courts of Paris to the perils of the Crusades, **Duchess of Aquitaine** gloriously illuminates the life of one of the most powerful, resourceful, and fascinating women in all of history.

Discussion Guide

1. How much did you know about Eleanor of Aquitaine before reading this book?

2. Similarly, what did you know about the Crusades before reading Duchess of Aquitaine? How did reading this book teach you about --- or change your impression of --- this tumultuous period in European history?

3. How was Eleanor different from other women of her era? Do you think she was a ?woman ahead of her time?? What do you think are her most and least admirable qualities?

4. What do you think about Eleanor?s motives in marrying Louis and the way she conducted herself in the marriage? Can you imagine what her life might have been like if her father had lived to a ripe old age?

5. Discuss how the social and political climate of the period brought Eleanor and Louis VII together --- and tore them apart.

6. How do you rate Eleanor?s prospects of happiness with Henry? If you know how her second marriage actually turned out, how do you think her earlier experiences contributed to that outcome?

7. Take a moment to talk about Eleanor?s role --- as her father?s eldest daughter, a married woman, and a member of the ruling class --- in Europe during the Middle Ages.

8. To what extent do you think Margaret Ball took artistic liberties with this work? Discuss the nature of fact versus fiction in the historical novel. You may wish to take this opportunity to compare Duchess of Aquitaine with other historical novels you?ve read (as a group or on your own).

9. Why do modern readers enjoy novels about the past? Is reading a period piece a history lesson in itself?

Author Bio

Margaret Ball, whose previous works include bestselling novels written with Anne McCaffrey, as well as **Embeadery**, a guide to using classic embroidery stitches in beadwork, lives in Austin, Texas.

Critical Praise

?This book is as rich in detail as the finest tapestry, as sumptuous as a fur rug and dazzling in its portrait of a remarkable woman.?

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