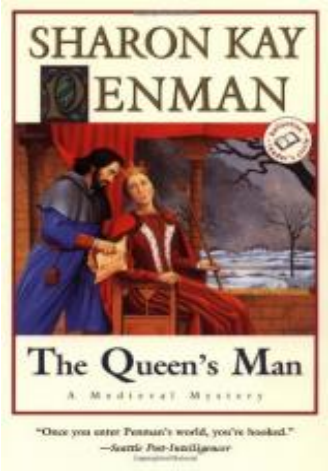
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The Queen's Man

by Sharon Kay Penman



About the Book

Epiphany, 1193. Eleanor of Aquitaine sits upon England's throne. Her beloved son Richard Lionheart is missing, presumed dead--and the court whispers that her younger son John is plotting to seize the crown.

Meanwhile, on the snowy highroad from Winchester, a destitute young man falls heir to a blood-stained letter, pressed into his hand by a dying man. The missive becomes Justin de Quincy's passport into the queen's confidence--and into the heart of danger, as he pursues a cunning murderer and jousts with secret traitors in Eleanor's court of intrigue and mystery....

Discussion Guide

1. Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the most powerful and accomplished women in history. What other strong female characters (either real or fictional) have you read about recently? What are the similarities and differences between those characters and Eleanor?

2. What sort of confinements did women live within in medieval society? Although the position of women in society has changed dramatically since the Middle Ages, do you feel there are similarities between the way women live in society today and the way they lived then?

3. Did you notice Penman's use of medieval words and phrases in **The Queen's Man: A Medieval Mystery**? Did it add to your enjoyment of the story or detract from it?

4. Every once in a while, Penman allows her characters to use modern phrases, such as when Luke--suffering from a hangover--says his mouth "feels like five miles of bad road." Did you notice these flashes of modern phrasing? Did they interfere with or contribute to your understanding of the characters or your enjoyment of the story?

5. In describing the process of working on a mystery, Penman has said it's necessary to leave clues for readers to pick up--should they choose to do so--so they can solve the puzzle. Were you trying to solve the mystery as you read through this story? What clues did you find?

6. Do you see any parallels between the medieval fear of leprosy and the modern fear of AIDS? If so, what are they?

7. What effect did the revelation about the murder of the goldsmith, Gervase Fitz Randolph, have on your feelings about his death?

8. If you had been Justin, would you have stopped to help Gervase? Would you have carried out your promise to deliver his letter?

9. As you read about Gervase's family and their possible motives for murdering him, did you think one of them might have been involved in the killing?

10. After spending some time in the twelfth century with Justin de Quincy and Queen Eleanor, did their world seem surprisingly familiar? Or utterly alien? What were the most striking similarities between their society and ours? The greatest differences?

11. Do you think the changes in society have caused changes in human nature over the centuries?

12. How does this medieval mystery compare to contemporary murder mysteries? Do you prefer one over the other? If so, why?

13. The historical characters central to this story--Eleanor of Aquitaine and her sons Richard and John--have appeared in movies, books, and on television. How does Penman's portrayal of these characters compare to other portrayals you may have encountered?

14. Justin is very angry at his father for failing to acknowledge him as his son, and yet the Bishop of Chester made sure Justin was clothed and fed, that there was a roof over his head, that he received a first-class education, and that he became a squire for a local lord. Considering the bishop's position and the social values of twelfth-century England, do you think Justin was wronged by the bishop? What alternatives did the bishop have?

Author Bio

Sharon Kay Penman is the author of seven critically acclaimed historical novels: THE SUNNE IN SPLENDOUR, HERE BE DRAGONS, FALLS THE SHADOW, THE RECKONING, WHEN CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS SLEPT, TIME AND CHANCE and DEVIL'S BROOD. She has also written four medieval mysteries. Her first was THE QUEEN'S MAN, the queen in question being Eleanor of Aquitaine, a finalist for an Edgar Award for Best First Mystery from the Mystery Writers of America. Her other mysteries are CRUEL AS THE GRAVE, DRAGON'S LAIR and

PRINCE OF DARKNESS. She lives in New Jersey.

Critical Praise

"There is much tension in the court....There are conspiracies and spies all over....[Her] other novels are gloriously multi-linear, having several plot lines and an abundance of characters; **The Queen's Man** is skillfully linear, having one plot line and only characters associated with that line. She is equally successful with either form....Her prose is rich, her dialogue is masterful, never trite....Penman is simply one of the classiest acts in today's literary world. "

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