Reviews

Remedy for Treason. Caroline Roe. Berkley Prime Crime. New York: Penguin, 1998. 259 pp.

Remedy for Treason[1] by Caroline Roe (pseudonym of Medora Sale) is the first book in a series of novels that take place in fourteenth-century Catalonia. Author of several mystery novels, Caroline Roe, in her *Remedy for Treason*, carries the reader off into a medieval world in which courtly intrigue and the daily tasks of a Jewish doctor called Isaac from the Catalan city of Girona are intertwined. Although Isaac is blind, his blindness does not prevent his resolving the tangled conspiracy to murder the Catalan King Pere III, discovering the culprits and tying together the loose ends of a plot of which inexplicable murders and kidnappings form part. And it will be Isaac, as well, who, with the logic and cunning of the best known detectives of fiction, will solve each one of the mysteries presented in the novels of the series.[2]

Remedy for Treason is not a mystery story that simply happens to be set in medieval times; it reaches beyond such simplification. In an article which appeared in 1999 in the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia*, a comparison is made between *Remedy for Treason* and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a comparison which indicates that we are dealing with a literary text of more import than we might have believed at first. Though the comparison in the article mostly takes into account the cinematic elements of both novels (and it should be mentioned that *Remedy for Treason*, however, cheerfully escapes the crudeness of *The Name of the Rose*), both texts are impeccably elaborated thrillers set in medieval times, and, it should be emphasized, both benefit from the excellent research carried out by their respective authors into the medieval world.

Caroline Roe is not only a mystery writer but also a scholar: she has a doctorate in medieval studies from the University of Toronto. In *Remedy for Treason*, Caroline Roe's knowledge of the times in which the novel takes place, in addition to her meticulously carried out research and the support given her by a number of esteemed medievalists, has brought about the creation of a novel of faultless historical verisimilitude. This prompts us to attempt to categorize *Remedy for Treason* according to genre: is it a historical novel or is it a mystery? It would seem to be both, with its perfect coupling of well-planned intrigue and historical accuracy. Similarly, its characters are an interesting mixture of fact (King Pere III —given the Spanish version of his name (Pedro) in the original English edition of the novel—Tomas de Bellmunt, the bishop Berenguer...) and fiction (Isaac, Raquel, Yusuf...). And it is precisely with its characters that *Remedy for Treason* trans-

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[1]Translated into Spanish as *Remedio para la traición* and into Catalan as *Remeis i traïcions,* both in 1999.

[2] *Cure for a Charlatan* (1999), *An Antidote for Avarice* (1999), and one ready for publication.

cends the normal boundaries of the mystery story to reach the heights of the novel.

In the way of Sir Walter Scott, Caroline Roe presents a story set in medieval times whose characters possess a strong credibility for today's reader. The characters in *Remedy for Treason* are, without exception, believable and human; their motivation is accessible. That the events take place in fourteenth century Girona, that several of the protagonists actually existed and that the medieval atmosphere is reproduced in all its detail, does not stop the reader from experiencing an attraction to the characters, from identifying with them and, thus, being carried along by the narration, a narration which, made up of diverse scenes gradually falling into place, captures the interest of the reader by forcing her in a sense to participate in the unfolding of the text.

In conclusion, it is only necessary to add that the choice of medieval Girona as the setting for *Remedy for Treason* was no mere chance. Fourteenth century Girona, as Caroline Roe herself explains, "was a very progressive city, as indicated by its laws and its judicial system."[3] With its events unfolding in a progressive medieval city, its easily accessible characters, its narrative construction of great swiftness, *Remedy for Treason* creates a complicity that takes hold of the reader from its very first page.

Shaudin Melgar-Foraster
University of Toronto

Les Mémoires de la Méditerranée. Préhistoire et antiquité. Fernand Braudel. Edited by Rosalyne de Ayala and Paule Braudel. Preface and Notes by Jean Guilaine and Pierre Rouillard. Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1998. Pp. 399.

Fernand Braudel (1902-85) had a brilliant career. *Agrégé* at the age of 21, he taught in Algeria and Brazil; his early research in the archives of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) introduced him to maritime and commercial records; he was closely associated with the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. After the war, he presided over the "jury de l'agrégation," held a chair in the Collège de France, and pioneered area studies in France. His passionate love-affair with the Mediterranean (inspired, perhaps, not only by his Algerian experience but also by an early meeting with Henri Pirenne) was a constant of his career. His doctoral thesis *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1947) became a best-seller when published in 1949 (revised second edition, 1966). In this fundamental work, Braudel introduced, with reference to the Mediterranean area between 1550 and 1600, his theory of "les temps différents du passé," the different rhythms, long and short term, that form the structure of *l'histoire globale*. Braudel affirmed the primacy of agricultural life in the Mediterranean region, the overwhelming importance of "le temps long qui finit par l'emporter," and his "structuralist" approach: "Je suis 'structuraliste' par tempérament, peu sollicité par l'événement, et à demi seulement

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[3]Mónica Fernández, "Caroline Roe: escritora de libros de misterio." *La Vanguardia* 19 June 1999: my translation.