

The Ramsay Scallop Short Guide

The Ramsay Scallop by Frances Temple

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Contents

The Ramsay Scallop Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	5
Setting.....	7
Social Sensitivity.....	11
Literary Qualities.....	13
Themes and Characters.....	16
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	19
For Further Reference.....	21
Related Titles.....	22
Copyright Information.....	24



Overview

In 1299, before the turn of the century, Europeans are experiencing religious and social turmoil. People fear the end of the world. Some escape the need to make spiritual and moral decisions by engaging in drunken brawls and orgies. Christians try to expiate their sins in preparation for Judgment Day. Religious leaders like Father Paul think sinners must withdraw from the world, pray and meditate, practice selfdenial, and reject temptation while awaiting Doomsday. Father Gregory thinks sinners must "walk away from" sin and guilt by confession, praying for salvation, and doing a penance, such as performing an arduous task or going on a pilgrimage to a religious shrine. Lady Elenor of Ramsay Castle and Sir Thomas Thornham, burdened by personal sins and guilt, take the written confessions of people in Thornham village and go on pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James at Santiago de Compostela in spiritual preparation for an uncertain future.

The Holy War between Christians and Muslims, called the Crusades, has come to a grinding halt after Christian soldiers failed to defeat the Islamic "infidels." Many have returned home wounded and sick at heart.

Other armed soldiers, after joining ranks and becoming mercenaries, are roaming Europe like bandits, killing heretics, seizing property, raping, and pillaging. Thomas Thornham returns home from the Crusades disillusioned by the waste of human life and guilt-ridden over his experiences as a mercenary. He confesses to his priest that he is unwilling to perform his expected "duties" as a feudal lord: to obey his father's wishes and marry fourteen-year-old Elenor and to administer the lives of the peasants who live in Ramsay Castle and in nearby Thornham village.

To consolidate property and power, marriages between those of noble rank are arranged by parents or guardians. Very young girls with a title or property are assets to be bargained off to the highest bidder. Many teenage girls marry strangers and later die in childbirth. Elenor's mother died giving birth to her sister, an experience that made Elenor apprehensive about marriage and bearing children. Because Elenor's father, Guerrard Ramsay, could not pay his tax (scutage) to the Earl of Leicester, Sir Robert Thornham paid it and became Lord of Ramsay Castle and Thornham. The two fathers arranged a marriage between sixyear-old Elenor and fourteen-year-old Thomas, a union that they thought would unite the interests of the castle fortress with those of the fast-growing village. After Ramsay dies, Sir Robert becomes Elenor's guardian.

Now Elenor is fourteen and Thomas is twenty-two. He thinks she is still a "brat," and she thinks he is still the bully who once locked her in the chicken house. Both are unwilling to honor the marriage contract.

Father Gregory advises them to go on a pilgrimage as chaste companions and postpone a decision about marriage. He believes that the act of walking, combined with prayer, helps people resolve emotional and spiritual dilemmas.



By the end of the thirteenth century, the feudal system is in decline. During knights' and vassals' long absences from home, peasants and merchants have become more independent. After all, the labor of their hands and backs provides the necessities of life in a harsh and impoverished world. Many peasant women have assumed tasks usually performed by their absent men. Some have remarried and started new families.

Returning Crusaders are neither triumphant nor especially welcome. Peasants no longer need knights for defense. The people of Thornham engage in drunken brawls and orgies to escape their problems, making the situation worse. To absolve their sins and restore order, Father Gregory suggests that Ramsay-Thornham peasants and merchants entrust signed confessions to Elenor and Thomas, who are leaving on pilgrimage.

They promise to return with a scallop shell from Santiago de Compostela as proof of the townspeople's absolution. With this symbolic act, they hope to face whatever comes in the new century.



About the Author

Frances Temple was born in 1945 to Frederick and Lindsay Crumpler Nolting in Washington, D.C., where her father served as a diplomat. She attended Wellesley College from 1963 to 1965. Then she became a member of the Peace Corps and served in Sierra Leone, West Africa, from 1965 to 1967. In 1969 she earned a B.A. in English and African studies at the University of North Carolina. From 1970 to 1974 she worked as a VISTA volunteer in Virginia, placing needy families in low-income housing and acquiring health services for them.

She received her M.Ed. at the University of Virginia in 1976. From 1983 to 1995 she taught second grade at Children's Hours School in Geneva, New York. Between 1990 and 1995 she wrote several books on how to teach writing to children, as well as several novels for young readers.

On July 19, 1969, Frances Nolting married Charles Temple, an education professor and writer. Their marriage produced three children: Anna Brooke, Jessica, and Tyler. During their marriage they have traveled to England, Spain, Portugal, Haiti, Jamaica, and Africa. They established a home in Geneva, New York, near the Canadian border.

An enthusiastic elementary teacher, Temple always wrote with her students during their free-writing periods. When they shared what they had written, her students complained that she never finished anything she wrote. They wanted to know: "What happens next?" Temple decided to practice what she preached and began her career as a serious writer.

During a trip to Spain, which she took with her husband and a group of his students, Temple walked the Pilgrim Way to Santiago de Compostela. Later she did extensive research about medieval customs and conflicts. In 1987 Temple wrote a historical romance, *The Ramsay Scallop*. Publishers rejected her book because they did not think a 1299 setting and a story that contained information about medieval social and religious groups and cathedral construction would interest readers. Temple put the manuscript away and started new projects.

In 1990 Temple and her husband spent six months in the Dominican Republic. While she was there she met young agricultural workers from Haiti who told her of atrocities committed by Dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. She decided to write a novel based on the Haitians' struggle to become a democracy under the leadership of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. *Taste of Salt: A Story of Modern Haiti* meshes two stories: that of Djo, a street urchin, and that of Jeremie, a young woman raised in a convent. The title refers to a voodoo belief that a pinch of salt helps zombies escape their prison of death, just as hope for freedom and democracy gives Haitians the courage to escape their deadly political and social prison.

Temple's inspiration for her next novel came from her family's involvement with refugees from El Salvador, who lived for a short time with her family in Geneva, New York. Grab



Hands and Run is about a family who flees from El Salvador to escape political persecution. Following their father Jacinto's orders, Felipe, his sister Romy, and their mother Paloma "grab hands and run" to safety in Canada. Critics praised both of these modern, realistic novels.

With Temple's reputation as a writer assured, publishers became interested in her historical novel, *The Ramsay Scallop*. In 1994 it became an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. In 1995 she wrote *Tiger Soup: An Anansi Story from Jamaica* about an African spider that tricks a tiger out of his soup, and *Tonight, by Sea* about boat people who escape from Haiti after Aristide is overthrown.

In 1995 Temple finished proofreading *The Bedouin's Gazelle*, the first of a projected series for young readers about North Africa and Islam, and then went for a walk with her husband. While they were walking she suffered a heart attack and died, cutting short her successful writing career.

Setting

With each chapter, settings change as the pilgrims journey from England, across the Channel to France, south through central France and west to Bordeaux on the coast, then south across the Pyrenees Mountains into northern Spain, and west to Santiago de Compostela. Hardships and experiences along the Pilgrim Way, contribute to the development of the characters.

The story begins in 1299 at the Peterborough fair, where shabbily dressed, fourteen-year-old Elenor Ramsay watches a medieval mystery play with her priest, Father Gregory. On the steps of a cathedral under construction actors perform the story of Adam and Eve. After the pair yields to the serpent's temptation in the Garden of Eden, devils groan, "Eternal remorse." An angel waves a golden sword, and Adam and Eve flee the garden. The play increases Elenor's fear of marriage and her role as a woman.

Nineteen weary Crusaders, led by Thomas Thornton, arrive at Dover. A formal welcome and feast at Ramsay Castle mask the conflicts that their return creates. England is in a severe economic depression.

Elenor and Thomas will be forced into marriage and leadership roles they are unwilling to assume. The peasants of Thornham village and Ramsay Castle must adjust to the return of the soldiers, absent for eight years, and face an uncertain future.

Wearing the dark, heavy clothing of pilgrims and carrying the signed parchment of people's confessions in a leather pouch, Elenor and Thomas mount their horses, Mab and Daisy, and ride to Yarmouth. On Saint Mark's Day, aboard the Saint Elwyse, they cross the English Channel. To Elenor the sea voyage is like being on a chariot pulled by wild horses.

In France, Thomas and Elenor travel a cobblestone highway through farm country. Peasants move to the side of a road lined with poplar trees to make room for the horses and litters of the nobility. The pilgrims stop at a hostelry at Abbeville run by monks. Men and women guests are segregated. Elenor meets three snobbish French women who make her feel like a bumpkin.

To escape their scorn, she goes to the stable to brush Mab and is nearly raped. Thomas meets Brother Ambrose, a teacher en route to visit his mother at Amiens, the site of a cathedral under construction. Adam, a troubadour, invites Thomas and Elenor to visit him in Paris.

In Amiens they meet Master Rogers, the aged architect of the cathedral, who says, "We are all working on a building, of spirit or of stone." Matthieu, a stonemason, takes Thomas on a scaffold to the top of the structure to show him how the stones are laid so carefully that they fit like teeth. On the ground floor Elenor observes carvings of scenes in the life of Christ. High on the scaffold, Master Rogers has a heart attack and



plummets to the stone floor, almost at Elenor's feet. She faints and has a vision of him ascending to heaven.

Elenor is intrigued by the lights of Paris, but Thomas restrains her like a lively puppy. They watch Adam and another musician perform a romantic ballad in a city park. The next morning they mount their horses and join other pilgrims bound for Santiago de Compostela. Included in the procession are priests from several orders and shackled prisoners. Adam introduces his friend Etienne, a student, and bids them farewell.

At a hostel run by Cluniac monks, Elenor meets Marthe, mother of three small children, who is traveling to meet her husband in Bordeaux. Etienne tells Thomas that he is bound for Toledo, Spain, to study Arabic so that he can translate Islamic texts. He has studied the sermons of Bernard of Cluny, the arguments of Peter Abelard, and the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. Down the road the new friends camp out in a grove to avoid fleas in the hostel. A hungry wolf tries to carry off Pipeau, one of the children, but Thomas rescues him.

At a crossroads the party decides to go to Chartres rather than Orleans. They sleep on the floor of Chartres Cathedral and participate in a Visitation Mass, so named because of the angel who visited Elizabeth and Zacharias before John the Baptist was born and also visited Mary, the Mother of Jesus, before his birth. Some say that the skill it took to build the intricately designed cathedral is from the devil. Others say that these skills could come only from God. Elenor buys a book for Thomas in which Bernard of Chartres says that men and nature cannot be separated. To deny intelligence and natural talent is to refuse God. She plans to illustrate the book later. Thomas confesses that he's forgotten how to read, although he speaks several languages.

They pass by a castle, where children are chanting to frogs in the moat and hitting them with sticks. The pilgrims are hungry, so later, Thomas returns, and they eat roasted frogs' legs and truffles, an edible fungus that grows underground. Around the campfire they tell ghost stories. During the night Elenor has a nightmare, and Thomas cuddles her like a child and assures her that hoot owls keep ghosts away.

At Vendome they stay with Jacques, a glassblower, and his mother, whom he pushes in a wheelbarrow. Thomas watches Jacques make stained glass for the leaded windows of the cathedral. Jacques's workshop is near a stream lined with beech trees, which fuel the glassblower's fires.

Near Ozon, Thomas, Elenor, and their friends enter a tavern surrounded by mulberry trees. The tavern owner accuses Thomas of being an English spy trying to discover how silkworms, secretly imported from China, spin silk out of mulberry leaves.

Thomas resists arrest. Because violence is forbidden to pilgrims, he has to appear before the Knights Templar at Ozon. Realizing that Thomas is no spy, the Master of Ozon decrees that as punishment Thomas must lead a group of pilgrims who have been waiting for an escort from Poitiers to Navarre and the hospice at Sancti Spiritus.



The Knight Templar explains that political unrest, drought, and famine make pilgrims unwelcome.

The residents of Poitou are hostile. Food and water are scarce. The human procession of pilgrims moves through town like a plague. Poitivins sic the dogs on stragglers and taunt the pilgrims as pious leeches.

Elenor shares her water with Marthe, who is nursing a baby.

The procession nears Bordeaux, and pilgrims swim in the salty Garonne River.

They go to the church where Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, is buried. The sixty pilgrims under Thomas's leadership board a ferryboat to Bordeaux and arrive at a Benedictine hospice, where monks bathe the pilgrims' feet and offer them bowls of soup. Marthe and her children are reunited with her husband. Elenor sells her horse to buy a house for them. Martin McFeery, a Scotsman, and sixty more pilgrims arrive by sea on the Lady Elwyse from England to join the cavalcade. They endure mosquitoes as they wade through a bog and continue the journey.

Elenor's new puppy, Greatheart, a gift from McFeery, gets lost, so Elenor leaves the procession to find him in the rocky mountains near Toulouse, where she falls and injures herself. Pierre Maury, a shepherd, finds her in a ravine and thinks God has sent her to him. He cares for her tenderly in his hut until she awakens from a head injury. Elenor awakens and hears Hassad, the Saracen, praying to Allah. Also a shepherd, Hassad shares Pierre's hut. He finds Greatheart among his flock grazing on the mountain. Thomas discovers that Elenor is missing from the cavalcade and begins a search. When Elenor and Thomas are finally reunited, they are overjoyed to find each other again and warmly embrace.

At Puente la Reina in Spain, pilgrims from southern France, Italy, Romania, and Greece join the procession. With a group of Italian girls, the Brigata, Elenor decides to climb 130 stone steps on her knees to the shrine of Santa Lucia at the top of a steep mountain. Even though Thomas disapproves, Elenor stubbornly climbs the mountain and suffers torn knees and fever. Nuns who tend the shrine nurse her back to health.

At Los Condos, Elenor, Thomas, and Martin ferry across the river to the church in Leon and the Convent of Santa Clara.

The Pilgrim Way is crowded at Ponferrada.

The three friends decide to take the high road through the mountains to get out of the dust and confusion. At the Pass of Cebrera they can see Santiago de Compostela in the distance. Suddenly, from the brush, a vicious wild boar with sharp tusks attacks Thomas. Martin chases him off with his staff, and Martin and Elenor carry Thomas's unconscious body to the Shrine of Misericordia, a hospice for the terminally ill. Elenor sits beside Thomas and prays for his recovery. She lives the life of a nun as she works alongside them. Martin leaves for Santiago de Compostela, but he intends to accompany Elenor back to England if Thomas does not live.



To cross into Santiago, pilgrims must bathe in the Lavacol River and symbolically cleanse their bodies and souls. Martin and the Brigata tour the city and see Mateo's sculptures of Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah at Portico de la Gloria. The Brigata leaves for Italy, and Martin goes to arrange passage on a ship bound for England.

Thomas, nearly recovered, and Elenor embrace outside the hospice and look at the stars. They have fallen in love and decide to marry in Santiago de Compostela before sailing home to England. Although Thomas is still weak, they leave the hospice and go to the Shrine of Saint James in Compostela de Santiago, where they deposit the signed confessions of the townspeople of Ramsay.

Elenor loses Thomas in the crush of the crowd, but when they meet again on the steps outside, he is holding a white scallop shell, the emblem of forgiveness of the people's sins and a blessing on their marriage.



Social Sensitivity

Social issues that arise in *The Ramsay Scallop* include the decline of the feudal system, the importance of religious beliefs, and the role of women in the society. In feudal times peasants lived in walled towns like Thornham under the protection of powerful barons who lived in nearby fortresses like Ramsay Castle. Barons, knights, and conscripted soldiers protected these peasants, especially when they were engaged in farm labor outside the walls. Viking invasions were common, and barons were often at war with each other over territory.

Christian knights and armies from European nations conducted Crusades against the Muslims of North Africa in an attempt to recapture the Holy Land from the "infidels." The Crusades ended in a stalemate, but the cost of engaging in a Holy War was staggering, not only in resources but in manpower.

While armies clashed in North Africa and mercenaries fought for power and territory in Europe, peasants at home learned new trades, like glassblowing and stonemasonry, and gained authority in the community. Broken families reorganized without husbands and fathers. When these men returned after eight years abroad, life at home had changed. By 1299 the need for fortifications and a standing army had diminished. Capitalism and democracy had begun to take root in England.

The church and clergy were important influences in every community. Trade towns like Peterborough in England and Amiens in France built cathedrals with spires reaching to heaven. Clergy were divided into many orders with different rules. Religious leaders disagreed in their visions about how to attain salvation. Some orders of priests and nuns lived in cloisters and prayed for the sins of the world. Others lived among the people. Members of the clergy could read and write, so priests established schools, conducted worship services, administered the sacraments of the church, heard confessions, and counseled the people. Nuns served as nurses and cared for orphans and the elderly. The Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchy dominated Christianity and considered other doctrines and beliefs, such as those of the Albigensians and Muslims, heretical and pagan. Pilgrims, like Elenor and Thomas, increased their knowledge of the world and tolerance for other ethnic groups and religious beliefs through their travels.

The major roles of medieval women were limited to those of wife and mother. Women who did not choose to marry became nuns. Peasant women, like Marthe, actually had more freedom of choice about whom they would marry than did a noblewoman like Elenor. Because Ramsay Castle has a huge tax debt, Elenor becomes a valuable commodity to her father, and later to her guardian, Sir Robert Thornham. She is traded to him like a piece of property. Complications of childbirth, including death, especially in teenage mothers, increase the value of a healthy, young girl. Elenor has no say about whom she will marry. Fortunately, Thomas Thornham is her equal in youth and intelligence.

Noblewomen and most orders of nuns could learn to read and write if they chose to do so. However, peasant women were too busy tending their homes or working as servants or laborers in the fields to become literate. The Italian girls in the Brigata tell of how a cobbler tricked the mayor of Puente la Reina into establishing a school for peasant children, and how their own priest taught them to read and write. Elenor is literate and a talented artist. When she buys Thomas a book at Chartres, she is surprised to discover that although he speaks several languages fluently, he is uneducated and cannot read.



Literary Qualities

Each episode in *The Ramsay Scallop* introduces new characters and settings that end with a discovery, or mini-climax. As Elenor and Thomas travel down the Pilgrim Way toward the next adventure, they gain selfknowledge and respect for each other as chaste friends. Near the end of their journey they discover that they are attracted to each other as man and woman and decide to marry when they reach their final destination, the Shrine of Saint James at Santiago de Compostela. They leave behind their feelings of dread and guilt for past sins and look forward to life in a new century.

Using sensory details, Temple describes the medieval market scene at Peterborough and Elenor's appearance as an unkempt tomboy. Thomas describes her as "wily as a rabbit, alert as a grasshopper with its antennae out." On the journey Thomas and Elenor wear heavy, dark clothing and large hats.

As hundreds of pilgrims move down the dusty trail "like a giant caterpillar," water is scarce. Hostelries are similar: stone buildings, straw bedding full of fleas on hard floors, and bowls of soup, ladled by monks.

Sometimes the pilgrims camp out under trees near a river. Temple describes the cathedral under construction at Amiens in great detail, its architectural design and the placement of the stones. She also describes Jacques's technique as a glassblower. The episode in the shepherd's hut with Pierre and Hassad gives insight into the lifestyle of shepherds.

However, most of the secondary characters are flat, not fully developed. For example, the five youths who accompany the pilgrims and find Elenor especially attractive have one or two dominant traits. Elenor eventually recognizes that Thomas possesses a combination of admirable qualities: tender emotion, studiousness, physical passion, godliness, and loyalty.

Temple includes medieval drama, songs, stories, and prayers in her novel. In the opening episode actors perform a popular mystery play about Adam and Eve on the steps of the Peterborough church. A mystery play, also called a miracle play or morality play, was a dramatic representation of a biblical event. The play increases Elenor's conflict about marriage and sex.

Devils chant, "Eternal remorse," as the Angel Gabriel expels Adam and Eve from the Garden.

In France, Adam, the troubadour, accompanies himself on a lute and sings a sad song of beautiful Doette, whose lover never returns from the Crusades. His song moves Elenor to tears. She entertains Marthe's children by singing nursery rhymes, like Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow, Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow.

Do you or I or anyone know How oats, peas, beans, and barley grow?



On market day in Zubiri, the pilgrims enjoy wine, music and dancing.

Fra Pietro leads worship services, and pilgrims pray the Lord's Prayer in English, Italian, French, and German. During Elenor's recovery in the shepherd's hut, Hassad translates for her the words of his Islamic morning prayer: "Allahu Akbar!" (God is most great!); "La ilaha il-Allah" (there is no God but Allah). On the mountain Elenor and the Brigata enact the Calvary on their knees by repeating an Ave Maria every step and a paternoster every ten steps as they climb to the Shrine of Santa Lucia.

In nearly every episode a character tells a story as an illustration. Father Gregory explains the legend of Saint James, a disciple of Jesus, and how he came to be buried at Santiago de Compostela. James was one of the first Christian missionaries who traveled by ship to Spain and established churches. When he returned to Judea, Herod had him beheaded. A ship of stone, manned by knights, arrived in the harbor and carried James's body through the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) to the west coast of Spain.

Wild bulls pushed the stone ship inland to Compostela, the field of stars. The knights covered the ship with earth and disappeared.

Later, Moors from North Africa conquered Spain, and many people converted to Islam.

A few of the remaining Christian soldiers had a vision of Saint James on a white horse. This vision inspired them to win Spain back for the Christians. The story illustrates why Christian pilgrims are entitled to wear a scallop shell from Saint James's shrine.

The lively old mother of the glassblower tells the story of a knight whose penance for breaking the chivalric code is to discover what women really want. If he cannot solve the riddle, he must marry an ugly hag who looks like a toad. He cannot solve the riddle, so he marries the ugly woman, but the horrified knight cannot bear to touch her.

She asks, "Would you have me old and ugly till I die, but still a loyal, wise, and humble wife, or would you rather I be young and pretty, not yet wise, and take your chances with those who come to see you on account of me?" The knight replies, "I leave the matter to your wise decision.

Do what you think best. Whatever pleases you suffices me." Having been given freedom to decide for herself, the ugly hag suddenly transforms herself into a beautiful, wise, modest, and loyal wife. This story makes Thomas realize that freedom to rule herself is all that a woman like Elenor really wants.

Etienne tells the story of how Charlemagne defeated the Moors in Spain, all except King Marsile at Saragossa. Charlemagne decided to return to France and sent his envoy Ganelon with the peace treaty to King Marsile. Ganelon was a traitor, and on his return he advised Charlemagne to sign the treaty. Thinking peace was secure, Charlemagne and his army began the journey home. Roland was left behind to guard the rear with a few soldiers. The Moors attacked Roland at Roncesvalles, and even though he fought bravely with his sword Durendal, they killed him. Before he died he split a rock and



broke his sword so that no "infidel" could use it. Charlemagne returned too late, but he executed the traitor Ganelon and buried Roland at a site where a church stands.

The pilgrims discuss qualities that make a man a hero. They decide that men become heroes because of what they do, and that women become heroines because they survive what happens to them. To illustrate how women become heroines, Etienne tells the story of beautiful Griselda, a poor peasant, who marries wealthy Lord Walter, a lifelong bachelor. The marriage guarantees her starving family a better life. Lord Walter agrees to the marriage, only if she promises to obey his every command. Patient Griselda obeys, even after he tells her their two babies are dead and treats her like a servant. Several years pass, and Lord Walter declares he will marry a new wife.

Griselda obeys and welcomes the bride, who looks exactly like her. Then Lord Walter reveals his scheme to test Griselda's loyalty. The "bride" and her brother are actually their daughter and son who have been living with Walter's sister. The family celebrates their reunion and live happily ever after. Marthe and Elenor agree that Griselda was a sap, not a heroine.



Themes and Characters

Two themes emerge during this thirtytwo-chapter episodic novel: self-discovery and tolerance for ethnic and religious differences. At the beginning of the story Lady Elenor is a child called "Brat," unwilling to accept her role as a woman, her marriage to Thomas Thornham, the possibility of childbearing, and the management of the servants and peasants who live and work at Ramsay Castle. She is confused about conflicting doctrines of the Christian church, especially the meaning of sin.

Wearing her dead mother's clothing, which is too large for her, she greets Thomas on his return from the failed Crusade.

To her, he is still the big bully who teased her when she was six and he was fourteen.

During the pilgrimage, prescribed by Father Gregory, Elenor observes medieval European women—from snobbish French aristocrats to Marthe, the young mother with two children and a nursing baby. (Elenor sells her horse Mab to buy them a house in Bordeaux.) In addition, she learns what women really want in life from a jolly old woman who tells stories and rides in a wheelbarrow. Elenor lives the life of a hardworking nun in the hospice at Misericordia.

The women who influence her most are the fun-loving Italian girls in the Brigata, who flirt with Thomas and show Elenor how to wash their louse- and flea-infested clothing in the river. They also give Elenor some lessons in sex education and explain away many of her fears about marriage and childbirth. To prove that she's a member of the Brigata, Elenor climbs the 130 stone steps to the Shrine of Saint Lucia on her knees. The girls do it in remembrance of Jesus' suffering on the way to the Crucifixion. Thomas disapproves of this penance, saying that self-torture is not holy because physical health and pleasure are not sins. He reminds Elenor that Christ did not want to suffer, that he prayed to be spared. Elenor defies him and does it anyway. Later she admits that he was right.

In addition to these new perspectives, Elenor meets several young men who admire her and increase her self-esteem: Adam, the romantic troubadour; Etienne, a student of philosophy; Martin from Scotland; Pierre Maury, the Albigensian shepherd; and Hassad, the Saracen.

Martin gives her a puppy that runs away.

Elenor leaves the Pilgrim Way to find him and falls on sharp rocks. Pierre discovers her unconscious body and carries her to his shepherd's hut. He thinks God has sent her for him to love. She explains that they cannot make love because of her pilgrim's vow of chastity. This surprises Pierre, who believes that lovemaking is a pleasure sent by God, not a duty. While they eat a delicious vegetarian stew, he explains that he's an Albigensian Christian, a sect persecuted by the Roman Catholic Christians. In his village of Toulouse, Albigensians must pay heavy taxes, and many are imprisoned or



burned at the stake for their beliefs, which include reincarnation of the soul and tolerance for other religions. He says he is "called" to be a shepherd and asks Elenor what she is called by God to do with her life. Stumped momentarily for an answer, Elenor decides that her calling is to fulfill her role as administrator of her parents' village and to make people's lives better.

She thinks of the religious conflict between the followers of Friar Paul and Father Gregory, the high taxes levied to support the Crusades, the families split up while the men were gone from home, and her betrothal to Thomas, who is no longer a stranger but has become her respected companion.

Hassad, a Saracen, shares the shepherd's hut with Pierre Maury. Elenor questions Hassad about his beliefs, which she compares to Christian beliefs. Muhammad was the founder of Islam; Jesus was the founder of Christianity. Allah is one deity; God is three persons (the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in one). Muslims study the words of Allah and his prophet in the Koran, pray, give alms to the poor, fast, and make pilgrimages. The Angel Gabriel spoke to Muhammad, just as Gabriel spoke to Zacharias and Mary. Christians study the word of God and Jesus in the Bible, pray, give alms to the poor, fast, and make pilgrimages. Although Pierre and Hassad both dream of marrying Elenor, they return her to Thomas on the Pilgrim Way.

Gradually, through shared experiences with Thomas, Elenor compares him favorably with all of the men she's met. He is kind, intelligent, strong, and brave. In addition, he never breaks his pilgrim's vow of chastity. By the end of the pilgrimage Elenor has fallen deeply in love with him and is ready for marriage. She has learned about the religious beliefs and customs of other ethnic groups. Rather than try to escape the sins of this world or punish herself with guilt and self-denial, Elenor discovers that overcoming hardships in daily life leads to contentment and courage to face whatever the future holds.

Thomas begins the pilgrimage with problems of his own. Guilt-ridden and depressed, he confesses to Father Gregory that during his boyhood he envisioned war as noble.

He shouted, "Kill the Saracens!" while he played at sword fighting. Now Thomas realizes the futility and horror of a Holy War. As a mercenary knight he killed Albigensians, a Christian sect. In addition, his father, Sir Robert Thornham, continues to dominate his life and shows no sign of relinquishing authority. Sir Robert has also arranged Thomas's marriage to Elenor Ramsay, "the Brat." Seeing no immediate solution to these problems, Father Gregory advises Thomas to go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Saint James of Compostela and to pray and meditate during the journey. He entrusts signed confessions of the people of Thornham and Ramsay to Thomas, as well as the safety of young Elenor. During the pilgrimage they are to get to know each other better but to remain celibate companions.

As they travel through France and Spain, Thomas forages for food and shelter. On numerous occasions he curbs Elenor's high spirits and stubbornness. His courage and leadership abilities become apparent when he rescues Pipeau from a wolf and



successfully herds the slow-moving train of pilgrims through drought and famine-stricken country, where people are hostile. Open to new ideas, Thomas discusses philosophy with Etienne, who hopes to learn the language and beliefs of Islam in Toledo.

Ironically, Pierre, an Albigensian, and Hassad, a Muslim, rescue Elenor and return her to Thomas. When Hassad asks Thomas to explain basic Christian beliefs, Thomas cites Christ's commandments: "To love God with all your heart and soul and to love other people as yourself." Hassad is amazed at the difficulty of keeping these two commandments. "No wonder Christians carry such anger!" he says. Thomas realizes how much he has grown to love Elenor when they are safely reunited.

Near death after the wild boar's attack, Thomas slowly recovers at Misericordia, a hospice for the terminally ill. He shares a bed with an old man who dies. Elenor works with the nuns who nurse the sick and dying. Realizing the strong attraction they feel for each other, Thomas and Elenor decide to marry in Santiago de Compostela before returning to England. Father Gregory sends word that Sir Robert has been injured in a hunting accident and needs Thomas to administer the estate. Elenor and Thomas collect the scallop shell at the Shrine of Saint James and look forward to a happy future.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Draw, or trace, a map of the British Isles, France, Spain, and Portugal. Beginning with Peterborough, Ramsey (Ramsay), and Yarmouth in East Central England, trace the pilgrim's route to the Shrine of Saint James at Santiago de Compostela.

2. Present an oral report on feudalism.

Explain why it developed and why it declined, and describe the social classes and the duties of each class.

3. In chapter 1, "Brat" kicks over a box on which the hurdy-gurdy man's animal act is performing and allows the dog, cat, and mouse to escape. In an essay, explain how freeing the animals not only from their master but also from their unnatural positions on the box symbolizes the decline of the feudal system.

4. Compare and contrast the fears and concerns of people at turn of the century in 1299 to the fears and concerns of people in 1999.

5. Mystery plays were performed on the steps of cathedrals during the Middle Ages. With several of your classmates, write and perform a mystery play, based on a familiar Bible story, such as the one Elenor watched on the steps of the cathedral at Peterborough. Create simple costumes and props to emphasize the moral of your play.

6. In chapter 3, Thomas unhappily confesses to Father Gregory five duties that he absolutely does not want to do. Briefly explain why he is opposed to each duty.

7. Research the Crusades. Make a timeline of the seven Crusades and record famous people or battles connected with each.

8. Muslims drove Christian Crusaders out of the Holy Land and prevented future European expansion to the east. Explain the impact on world history.

9. Research the Moors in Spain. What are some of their lasting contributions to Spanish culture?

10. Research the Albigensians in southern France. Why did Christian mercenaries like Thomas persecute them?

11. Explain why Thomas knows so little about women. What does he learn about them during the journey?

12. Write a report on the life and beliefs of one of the following men: Bernard of Cluny, Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Chartres.

13. Research the history of silk manufacturing.



14. Research the important events that were occurring in other parts of the world in 1299-1300, such as in Scotland and Italy, and write a report on one of them.

15. Write a report on the Great Pyrenees sheep dog, including a drawing or reproduction depicting one.

16. Some of the secondary characters in *The Ramsay Scallop* are flat, that is, they are not fully developed. Select one of these flat characters that you wish Frances Temple had characterized more fully. Write a character sketch, including description, a list of good and bad traits, and dialogue.

17. Pierre Maury tells Elenor he believes that when people die their souls migrate into a new body. What does he mean by this? Paraphrase the story he tells to explain the process.

18. In chronological order, make a list of insights that Elenor gains about being a woman as she grows from being "Brat" to becoming "Nora."

19. Intolerance toward people from different ethnic groups and religions still exists. Instead of using the terms "Crusades" or "Holy War," we call violence between religious or political groups "terrorism." Looking in magazines or newspapers, research information about a recent terrorist attack in which people were injured or killed. Make a list of reasons why terrorists hate their victims. Suggest ways to negotiate peace and end the terrorism.

20. *The Ramsay Scallop* projects a happy ending to the adventure-romance that readers probably assume will happen: marriage, a pleasant voyage back to England, welcome and praise at Ramsay Castle when Elenor and Thomas return with the scallop shell. But what if ...?

Write a 250-word surprise ending to the story.

For Further Reference

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Trager, James. The People's Chronology. New York: Henry Holt, 1994.



Related Titles

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1386), twenty-nine pilgrims journey to Canterbury to visit the Shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. They represent a cross-section of social classes in England during the fourteenth century: a knight, members of the clergy, merchants, landowners, and others.

Only the high nobility and serfs are missing. On the journey they entertain each other with stories that give a realistic picture of what life was like during this historical period.

John Child's *The Rise of Islam* (1995) includes pictures and information about the beliefs and customs of Muslims, including the history of the Crusades.

Paulo Coelho's memoir of his pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, *Pilgrimage: A Contemporary Quest for Ancient Wisdom* (1995), was a best-seller.

Neil Curry's *Walking to Santiago* (1992) is a book of poetry inspired by the author's observations during his pilgrimage. "Skull" is the most dramatic piece. Curry also wrote *Dangerous Journey* (1994), an illustrated book that depicts John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and includes Christian's allegorical pilgrimage to Paradise, as well as the later journey of his wife and children and their escape from the City of Destruction.

Catherine, Called Birdy (1994) is Karen Cushman's account of a girl, born into an aristocratic family in medieval England, who as a teenager discovers that she has less control over her future than a peasant working on her father's land. Catherine is her father's asset, to be married off in return for a political or economic alliance. Suitors arrive, but clever Catherine devises ways to make them leave without a signed marriage contract. While enduring her "training" to become a lady, Catherine enjoys fairs, feasts, friendships, her caged birds, and life in rural England. Although love and marriage seem to be an impossible combination for Catherine, unexpected circumstances produce the perfect husband for her.

Karen Cushman created another medieval heroine in *The Midwife's Apprentice* (1995).

In fourteenth-century England, Alyce, a cold and hungry teenage orphan, emerges from sleeping in a haystack and becomes an assistant to a stern and unaffectionate midwife. By observing the woman's excellent skills, Alyce learns about the mystery of life and death. Settings and characterizations accurately depict the historical period as Alyce grows to self-reliance and maturity.

In *Pilgrim Stories* (1998), Nancy Louise Frey retells the stories of modern pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

El Camino (1996) comprises the diary entries of Lee Hoinacki, an American who describes his religious experiences, discusses cathedral architecture, and tells new and ancient stories as he travels the Pilgrim Way for thirty-two days.



Set in fifteenth-century France, *Dove and Sword* (1995), a novel by Nancy Garden, is narrated by Gabrielle, a childhood friend of Joan of Arc who was burned at the stake for her religious and political beliefs.

In *How Do You Spell God?: Answers to the Big Questions from Around the World* (1995), two religious leaders, Rabbi Marc Gellman and Monsignor Thomas Hartman, discuss common beliefs among the major world religions. They discuss answers to such questions as "What happens after death?" and, "Why do good people suffer?"

As one volume in the Eyewitness Book series, *Castle* (1994) by Christopher Gravett contains pictures and details of how these buildings were constructed, their purpose, and their architecture, as well as information about the craftsmen who built them.

In Pilar Molina Llorente's *The Apprentice* (1993), set in fourteenth-century Italy, teenage Arduino is honored to become the apprentice of a famous painter in Florence.

His life grows complicated when he discovers a former apprentice shackled in the attic and a jealous coworker frames him. Eventually, Arduino studies under a new master and begins a serious artistic career.

James A. Mackay's *William Wallace: Braveheart* (1996) is a biography of the famous real-life hero who was fighting for the independence of Scotland at the same time that pilgrims from England were on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Strong as Death (1997) by Sharan Newman is an adult mystery novel about Catherine and Edgar, who go on a medieval pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. On their journey they encounter a motley group of pilgrims, one of whom murders for revenge.

Bernard Reilly's *The Secret of Santiago* (1996) is an adult novel about the legend of Saint James and the founding of the shrine at Santiago de Compostela.



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