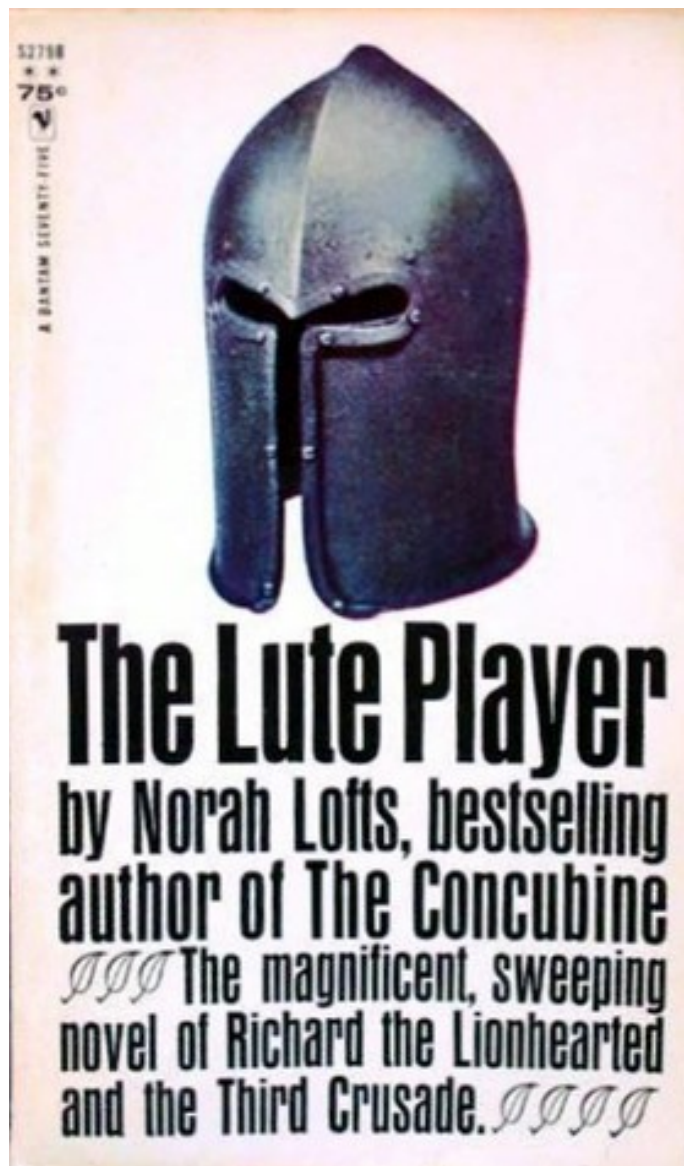


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**Norah Lofts**

**The Lute Player**



Title: The Lute Player

Author: Norah Lofts

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## Description

Out of the courts of twelfth-century England strode the legendary figure of Richard of England - leading his knights onto the Saracen battlefields - inspired by a vision of the Holy Land. Here is the story of the Soldier-King and the Third Crusade - of his strange, ill-fated union with Berengaria, Princess of Navarre - of his mother, the She-Wolf, Eleanor of Aquitaine who loved her son with a frantic, possessive pride. And, above all, here is the story of the minstrel whose life was linked with that of the King - the story of Blondel - the Lute Player.

## Insightful reviews

Joy H.: Added 2/6/15.

I read this book a long time ago.

Rowena Sudbury: This was a remarkable book. Split into five sections, it is told from three different points of view. The narrators are Blondel (the lute player), Anna of Apieta (the hunchbacked half-sister of Berengaria, Richard's ill-fated wife), and Eleanor of Acquitaine.

As an author of m/m romances, I was curious to read this book because it promised to highlight the long-held suspicion of Richard's homosexuality. This book was first published in 1951, and so I was curious to see how the topic would be dealt with.

The first mention comes near the end of Eleanor's portion, almost halfway through the book. She is shocked at a look of lust on Richard's face, directed at Blondel. She struggles with the knowledge, but does not reveal to him that she knows. She thinks he is flawed, but she loves him none-the-less. At this point, Blondel is unaware that he is the object of this lustful look.

We hear nothing more of it until much later in the book, in a section that is recounted by Blondel himself. After the first victory in the Holy Land, Richard takes in one of the released prisoners. Blondel is unaware that they are lovers. When this man sickens and dies, Blondel is the one who is at his bedside, as Richard has been called to surrender and give up his crusade. This man struggles to tell Blondel to give his love to Richard, but Blondel does not understand what he is asking. It is not until Richard and Blondel go off on their own, to find a different route home, that Blondel finds out the true nature of Richard. It sickens him, and he rebukes Richard. After that Richard leaves him with a purse of money, and when he goes off on his own he is captured and imprisoned. Blondel returns to Eleanor, and eventually Anna.

What fascinated me was Blondel's thoughts about Richard and homosexuality. He says it is considered "against nature" but he then goes on to list many other things that are against nature, fratricide and patricide for example. He says it goes against the teachings of being fruitful and multiplying, but then he says that holy vows also go against that. He says it is not listed as one of the seven deadly sins. His thought process on the whole thing is interesting to read. Although he felt shame at whatever happened between him and Richard (it is not spelled out) he has some sort of pity toward Richard's feelings. In the end he remembers Richard as a brave and courageous man, and thus he does not think the less of him for his desires.

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Soon after, in a section narrated by Anna, one of Berengaria's ladies in waiting has a conversation with Anna about Richard. She has been able to figure out his leanings, and is disgusted and wants Anna to tell Berengaria so that she can extract herself from their marriage. Anna wishes to keep the knowledge from Berengaria, but as it turns out she already knows.

The subject is not brought up again until the end of the book. At this point Berengaria is in a loveless marriage, and she all but admits to Anna that she is still a virgin. During the Christmas revelries there is much gossip about Richard and his leanings. Many of the women at court think that Berengaria herself is "queer" and that knowledge of this is what keeps Richard from her bed. The men of the court have a different perspective. They know what Richard favors, but they also know of his valor, his bravery, his virility, and they do not think the worse of him.

In the end, Richard makes a deathbed confession, he says to Berengaria, "But God makes us, you know, and he did not make me--a lover of women--it was not my choice." To me, that is the most powerful observation on the subject in the whole book. This is not a contemporary book, and I was quite pleased to read this observation in a book written in 1951.

Overall, I quite enjoyed the book. I can't vouch for its historical accuracy, but it was a quite enjoyable read.

Elizabeth: I'm slightly hesitant to give this book the coveted five-star rating (you may notice that the last time I rated a book five stars was almost a year ago... and also to a book about the Plantagenets), but giving it four wouldn't convey enough just how much I really loved this book and couldn't put it down, even with its flaws.

What are these flaws? Well, it's slightly racist, super ableist, a bit sexist, kinda homophobic (but I'll get to that)... which, if you know me, ELIZABETH WHY DO YOU LIKE THIS BOOK SO MUCH THEN?? but at the same time, I always hate historical fiction that reflects the contemporary time in which it was written, and not the viewpoint of whatever historical time period in which the novel's actually supposed to be set. This is a major problem with Eva Ibbotson's YA novels for example, it just wouldn't ring true that everyone is super tolerant and progressive--especially in the Middle Ages. I also point out that as the novel is divided into five parts in the viewpoint of different characters living in the Middle Ages, Norah Lofts does a great job of getting into that ~medieval headspace~. I mean, I don't really know what a true medieval person is going to think, but what I know of the time period and what was commonly believed at the time...I think she got it pretty well. But I do point out that these problems exist all the same, just in case you are someone who is heavily triggered by them.

The big thing is the ableism--Eleanor of Aquitaine says terrible things, imo--but on the same token, one of the central characters of the novel is Anna, Duchess of Apieta, a fictional illegitimate child of Sancho of Navarre, who is a hunchback. Anna is like, the best character of the book. She's intelligent and observant and witty and everyone who comes into contact with her recognizes that she's awesome. She's like the Marian Halcombe of this book, except Berengaria isn't as annoying/useless as Laura Fairlie (I really like that Lofts, who chooses to describe Berengaria as the most beautiful woman in Christendom, doesn't also go for the cliché

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that that means she's stupid/spoiled/horrible) and instead of equally bland/useless Walter Hartright you've got Richard I (who was a pretty terrible dude BUT interesting, at least in this book) and Blondel (the lute player of the title). On that note, I also appreciated that Lofts takes pains to point out that much of the book is fictional--I felt this was the sort of thing Anya Seton should've done with *Katherine*, instead of going on and on about how historically accurate everything was while at the same time not even getting John of Gaunt's hair/eye color right. Lofts does a great job of seamlessly putting together fact, legend and fiction and that's all I ask for in historical fiction.

Richard the Lionheart has widely been speculated to at least have been bisexual, if not completely homosexual. This is the route Lofts takes. I feel Lofts handled it that if seen from today I would go, "hmmmm that's not the best way to put it" but on the other hand, I think she got it spot on for a novel set in the Middle Ages in the first person viewpoint of medieval people. It's pretty sympathetic/progressive for the time period, not just of Richard I's but Lofts's as well (the novel was published in 1951).

I loved how bittersweet this novel was, about all these people pining after each other but no one in love with the right person--unrequited love is the novel's main theme and it's beautifully done. I also loved how evocative this book was, how I really felt sucked into the world Lofts created. I was grabbed right away from the first page. I can, though, see why people thought this book was boring and my big complaint of the book (besides all the aforementioned problems) is that Lofts kinda glosses over the really meaty, interesting stuff that happened. But it is really, really rare for me these days to read 50+ pages of a book in a day, and I found that happening a lot with this book (note that this book is about the same length as the last book I read, which ended up taking me over a month to finish), so it gets a five star from me. I may downgrade it someday, but for right now the rating stands.

Shawn: My first Norah Loft's book. I learn it too in the past to provide it a close evaluation yet I commit it to memory to boot written and enjoyable.

Kerry Hennigan: I don't comprehend why it took me goodbye to learn a booklet by way of Norah Lofts. She has lengthy been a celebrated old novelist, having produced a variety of Tudor titles and at the least at the Plantagenets (the interval I prefer). Anyway, due to my neighborhood library, i lately came upon a reprint of *The Lute Player*: a unique of Richard the Lionhearted. Now Richard I is known for a number of issues – combating within the 3rd Crusade, and being linked to Robin Hood. the doubtless legendary Robin doesn't make an visual appeal here, yet what we DO have is a really plausible portrait of Richard in keeping with the historic proof on hand to Ms Lofts on the time she wrote this novel. The Lute participant of the identify is Blondel, recognized often for his function in rescuing Richard from imprisonment by way of Leopold of Austria. Richard's early allies within the 3rd campaign had all turn into disgruntled or dissatisfied with the English king or the campaign (or both) and in certain cases became opposed to him. basically Blondel and the ladies in Richard's existence appeared to care what occurred to him and wish him back. The girls in query are his mom Eleanor of Aquitaine, his would-be spouse Berengaria, and Anna, Duchess of Apieta, who's destined to regularly stay within the shadow of these extra attractive and fascinating than herself. yet Anna involves recognize love, and, like Berengaria, to wish anyone who does not, or cannot, love her. Lofts

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makes use of a number of narrators to inform the story – Blondel, Eleanor and Anna all offer varied viewpoints at the precept humans and events. Blondel's account of Richard's campaign to recapture Jerusalem from Saladin is by way of a long way the main attention-grabbing a part of the novel, yet is very lengthy in coming. reason why I grew to become impatient with Ms Loft's slow, densely certain tale telling style. I stumbled on myself desirous to discover what occurred next, for the tale to maneuver on at a speedier pace, specially as soon as the important characters and the events were firmly established. First released in 1951, it really turns out that Ms Loft was once writing for an viewers for whom existence moved at a slower pace, who had extra time to spend on what to me was once procrastination and pointless detail. However, as an historic novel The Lute participant definitely does a superb task of shining new gentle on points of occasions frequently neglected or glossed over via the heritage books. For that it really is worth reading. Kerry Hennigan © August 2011

Ameliedanjou: learn this a long time ago, within the 80s. It used to be the 1st e-book I consciously selected to prevent interpreting -- i used to be lovely on the subject of the end, yet discovered i did not take care of the characters, and did not care what happened, and wasn't going to waste my time completing it. i used to be most likely being snobby, yet did not imagine it portrayed troubadours very appropriately - and that i love troubadours; learn their poetry, sing their songs etc.

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