

## RELUCTANT CRUSADERS

**There will be wolves.** Karleen Bradford. HarperCollins, 1992. 210 pp., \$16.95, \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-0023892-6, 0-00-647391-1.

My initial impression was that this was what I, in the haughtiness of my own adolescence, would have referred to as a most *improving* sort of book. It is true that the first two chapters of *There will be wolves* are a bit too conscientiously devoted to coaching the reader in the minutiae of daily life in eleventh-century Cologne. But once this groundwork has been done and the principal characters introduced, the novel quickly gathers momentum, and the balance between delight and instruction is tilted heavily in favour of the former.

Primarily an adventure story, *There will be wolves* is well-plotted and suspenseful. The People's Crusade, led by Peter the Hermit, sets out for Jerusalem in 1096; improbably, a remnant of this company gets as far as Constantinople before succumbing to exhaustion, virtual starvation, and the bloodshed that results from their practice of sacking the towns along the way for provisions and profit. To her credit, Karleen Bradford makes no attempt to sanitize the unpleasant truth that a secular army will pillage and murder, that faith alone cannot sustain the needs of the body, or that greed and self-interest frequently masquerade as piety. Rather, by depicting these evils through the eyes of Ursula and Bruno, two reluctant young crusaders, she makes a case for a kind of informed innocence as the best defence against the dangers of the adult world.

The characterization is complex, though by no means beyond the scope of the intended audience. Ursula, accused of witchcraft for her proficiency with herbal healing, is somewhat given to pride and stubbornness. She learns difficult lessons in tolerance and humility. Bruno, a less flawed but also less convincing character, discovers his own limitations and unexpected resilience. Though the novel ends with the marriage of the protagonists, it resists a decline into sentimentality. That even in marriage both characters retain their individuality and continue to practise their trades is strong evidence that *There will be wolves* succeeds in being didactic without being simplistic.

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