



Roots of Desire: The Myth, Meaning and Sexual Power of Red Hair

By Marion Roach

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Part history, part cultural commentary, part memoir, The Roots of Desire is a witty and entertaining investigation into what it means to be a redhead.

A redhead rarely goes unnoticed in a crowded room. From Judas Iscariot to Botticelli's Venus to Julianne Moore, redheads have been worshipped, idealized, fetishized, feared, and condemned, leaving their mark on us and our culture. Such is the power of what is actually a genetic mutation, and in *The Roots of Desire*, Marion Roach takes a fascinating look at the science behind hair color and the roles redheads have played over time. She discovers that in Greek mythology, redheads become vampires after they die; Hitler banned intermarriage with redheads for fear of producing "deviant offspring"; women with red hair were burned as witches during the Inquisition; in Hollywood, female redheads are considered sexy while male redheads are considered a hard sell; and in the nineteenth century, it was popular belief that redheads were the strongest scented of all women, smelling of amber and violets. Redheads have been stereotyped, marginalized, sought after, and made to function as everything from a political statement to a symbol of human carnality. A redhead herself, Roach brings candor and brilliant insight to the complicated and revealing history of redheads, making this a stand-out narrative and an essential tool in understanding the mechanics and phenomenon of red hair.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A redhead herself, NPR commentator Roach has an odd chip on her shoulder about it, relating all sorts of travails and opinions connected to red hair that the average non-redhead may never have guessed existed. To get to the bottom of our perceptions and experience of red hair, she explores the ancient legends of Lilith and Set, the traditions that depict both Judas and Mary Magdalene as redheads, and an Eve in London's St. Paul's Cathedral that has blond hair before the Fall and red hair after it. She visits "witch camp" in Vermont, a high-end hair salon in Manhattan, and Emily Dickinson's house, where a carefully preserved lock of the poet's red hair transforms Roach's image of her. Along the way, Roach (*Another Name for Madness*) makes some poignant points about what it means to belong to the redheaded minority in Western society, making gently suggestive comparisons to more overt patterns of prejudice. Yet the author seems to accept preconceptions about the sexuality and vivacity associated with red hair, and her jumping between examples often reads more like breathless conjecture than fact and leaches energy from extended vignettes, such as her visit with the witches. Whether readers enjoy this book will have a lot to do with whether they like the narrator's self-conscious red-headed persona. And, of course, whether they are as fascinated as she is by red hair. *Agent, Kris Dahl.* (*July*)

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Review

"One of the most extensive serious inquiries to date on what it means to be a redhead." *Chicago Tribune*

"Richly salted with fascinating cultural lore, and an engaging read whether you're a carrot-top or not."
Houston Chronicle

"A strong recommendation for redheads." *Library Journal*

About the Author

Marion Roach is the author of *Another Name for Madness*, a memoir of her family's struggle with her mother's Alzheimer's disease, and the coauthor of *Dead Reckoning: The New Science of Catching Killers*. A commentator on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, she has been published in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Prevention*, *Vogue*, *Newsday*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Discover*, and *American Health*. She lives with her family in upstate New York and teaches a memoir course at the Arts Center of the Capital Region.

Users Review

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