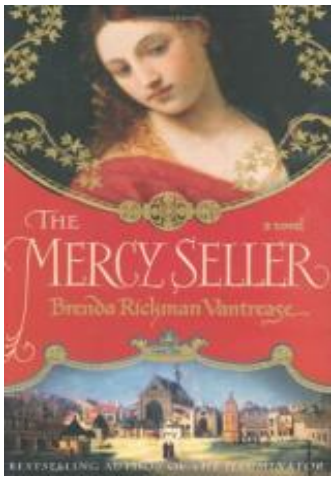
The Mercy Seller

by Brenda Rickman Vantrease



About the Book

In the fifteenth century, with religious intolerance spreading like wildfire across Europe, English-born Anna Bookman and her grandfather, Finn, earn a living in Prague by illuminating precious books, including forbidden translations of the Bible. Finn subscribes to the heresy that people ought to be able to read the Word of God for themselves, without having to pay a priest for the privilege, but holding that belief is becoming more and more hazardous. When the authorities start burning books and slaughtering heretics?including the man Anna was to marry?Finn urges her to seek sanctuary in England, but her passage abroad will be anything but easy.

In London, Friar Gabriel dutifully obeys church doctrine by granting pardons . . . for a small fee. But then he is sent undercover on a spying mission to France, where Anna has set up a temporary stall as a bookseller. Anna has no way of knowing that the wealthy young merchant frequenting her stall is actually a priest?just as Gabriel does not know he has met the woman who will cause him to doubt his vows.

As Anna continues her journey to England, where the movement to stamp out heresy is growing ever fiercer, Brenda Rickman Vantrease brings us a richly imagined and immensely rewarding novel of love, faith, and dangerous secrets.

Discussion Guide

1. The Mercy Seller is a book about loyalty and the ordering of priorities. Gabriel has taken an oath to the Church and to his Dominican Order. What do you think of the choices he makes when that allegiance comes into conflict with his loyalty to Anna and their child?

2. To whom does Anna owe a debt of loyalty? In what ways does she?or doesn?t she?keep her promises?

3. What loyalty do Sir John and the king owe to each other, and how do they discharge their debts? Can you draw

contemporary parallels where private and public loyalties come into conflict?

4. Anna and Gabriel travel great distances, both physically and spiritually, in the course of the book. What do they gain and lose on their journeys?

5. How do you regard the risks that such characters as Finn, Kathryn, and Sir John are prepared to take in service of their beliefs? What about when those risks endanger other people?

6. Would you say Father Francis is a good priest given the times in which he lived?

7. From the perspective of the previous questions: Who is traitor? Who is villain? Who is hero?

8. How is the idea that ?clothes make the man? exemplified in Gabriel?s apparel and behavior? Cite differences in the way he behaves and the way others react to him depending on which costume he is wearing.

9. What is the symbolism of water throughout the book?

10. What kind of future do you envision for Anna and Gabriel? How does that compare with the marriage of Sir John and Lady Joan? If you have read the author?s previous novel, **The Illuminator**, how do you feel about the resolution of the relationship between Kathryn and Finn?

Author Bio

Brenda Rickman Vantrease is a former English teacher and librarian who has traveled extensively in Europe and lives in Nashville, Tennessee. Her first novel, THE ILLUMINATOR, was translated into fifteen languages and chosen as a Book Sense 2006-2007 Reading Group Pick.

Critical Praise

?A remarkable first novel . . . Vantrease . . . depicts this complex period with imagination and care.?

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