

# *The* PATRON SAINT of *Ugly*

1. *The Patron Saint of Ugly* has been described as an example of magical realism—literature that is grounded in the real world but also contains mythical or magical elements. What are some of the mythical or magical elements in *Patron Saint*?
2. The book has also been described as a Southern gothic novel, because it uses folklore and oral history to explore southern regions that have seen better days. Southern gothic characters are often slightly off-kilter, either physically or emotionally, or morally bankrupt. Frequently, an innocent character serves as a redeemer or sacrificial lamb. Do you see any of these elements in *Patron Saint*?
3. One recurring thread in *Patron Saint* is that various characters long to have their hearts' desires fulfilled. What are the hearts' desires of the primary characters, whether explicitly stated or not? Does everyone have his or her heart's desire fulfilled? If so, how is it fulfilled—or not?
4. Another overarching question is whether Garnet is “sainted” or merely “stained.” Manilla includes evidence suggesting that Garnet is indeed responsible for the healings, but there is also evidence that the water is responsible. What is your conclusion, and does it ultimately matter? If Garnet is *not* a miracle worker, what has she gained by the novel's end? What have the pilgrims gained? Or Nonna?
5. In evil-eye lore, beautiful children, particularly boys, are susceptible to the envy of *jettatura*. How is beauty both a blessing and a curse for the characters in *Patron Saint*? Through which characters is this theme particularly explored, and how?

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6. Because the novel is told through a series of tapes Garnet makes for an archbishop, we get most of the story from her point of view. Given her irreverent attitude, it's possible that not everything she tells the archbishop is true. In addition, Nonna often corrects Garnet's narration and even steals the tape recorder to make her own tape to set the record straight, as does Aunt Betty. Is it possible Garnet is an unreliable narrator and that not everything she tells us is true? If so, how might this change your reading of the book?
7. In addition to tapes, *Patron Saint* includes letters, newspaper clippings, a noir short story, a *Sixty Minutes* transcript, and two pages filled with the letter z. Why might Manilla include these artifacts? What do they add to the novel?
8. The novel is set in 1975, though often it dips back in time to when Nonna was a girl in Sicily or when Garnet's parents met in the 1940s. Why do you think Manilla sets the novel in the past rather than in the twenty-first century? Why does Manilla choose to end the book with a future 2025 *New York Times* article? How would the ending change if the article was not included?
9. *Patron Saint* grapples with issues of gender, class, religion, and race. How do you see these subjects explored?
10. *Patron Saint* is a faith journey not only for Garnet, but for the reader as well. It's left to each reader to decide whether Garnet is a saint, to decide how far he or she is willing to go on faith. As a reader, how far are you willing to go?

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