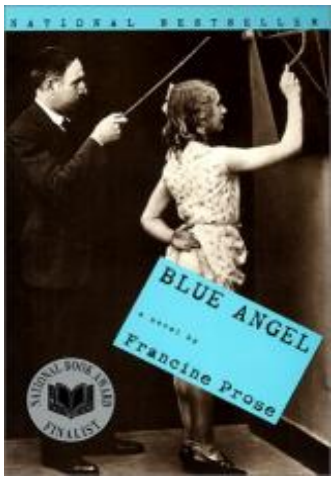
Blue Angel

by Francine Prose



About the Book

It's been years since Swenson, a professor in a New England creative writing program, has published a novel. It's been even longer since any of his students have shown promise. Enter Angela Argo, a pierced, tattooed student with a rare talent for writing. Angela is just the thing Swenson needs. And, better yet, she wants his help. But, as we all know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions...

Deliciously risque, Blue Angel is a withering take on today's academic mores and a scathing tale that vividly shows what can happen when academic politics collides with political correctness.

Discussion Guide

1. ". . . the writer need not paint a picture of an ideal world, but only describe the actual world, without sermons, without judgement" (pg. 3). How does this quote from the first chapter resonate throughout the novel? Do you think it reflects what Francine Prose is aiming to accomplish in *Blue Angel*? Is she successful? Why or why not?

2. Angela's favorite novel is Jane Eyre, which is about a governess who falls in love with the scarred, angry father of her charge. One of Swenson's favorite novels is The Red and Black, which is about a young man who also happens to be social climber. How is this ironic?

3. Much is made of the fact that Angela is a compulsive liar. That said, what do we really know about Angela? Working backwards from the end of the novel, reconstruct her history. Who is her father? Was she molested?

4. "What if someone rose to say what so many of them are thinking, that there's something erotic about the act of teaching, all that information streaming back and forth like some . . . bodily fluid" (pg. 22). Discuss this quote from Chapter 2. Is it true?

5. One theme central to the novel is that of truth, which is crystallized during the dinner party given by Dean Francis Bentham. Swenson witnesses Magda commit what he calls professional suicide by elaborating on an attempt to teach her students a Philip Larkin poem in which the word "fuck" is used. Was Swenson projecting his own fear of the truth, or did you get the sense that Magda was walking a fine line? In a situation such as that, is there such a thing as too much truth?

6. How would you characterize Swenson's relationships with the women in *Blue Angel*: Sherrie, Magda, Ruby and Angela. Is there something that he wants from them that they can't give him? If so, what is it and does it affect Swenson's final fall from grace?

7. How do you feel about Swenson? Did you empathize with him? Were you angry with him? Regardless of Angela's predatory nature, did you hold him more responsible for the eventual outcome of the situation than she? Why or why not?

8. Discuss the current climate of political correctness. What are pros and cons of political correctness? Is too much political correctness better than no political correctness?

Author Bio

Francine Prose is the author of 23 works of fiction, including the highly acclaimed THE VIXEN; MISTER MONKEY; the *New York Times* bestseller LOVERS AT THE CHAMELEON CLUB, PARIS 1932; A CHANGED MAN, which won the Dayton Literary Peace Prize; and BLUE ANGEL, which was a finalist for the National Book Award.

Her works of nonfiction include the highly praised 1974: A Personal History; ANNE FRANK: The Book, The Life, The Afterlife; and the *New York Times* bestseller READING LIKE A WRITER, which has become a classic.

The recipient of numerous grants and honors, including a Guggenheim and a Fulbright, a Director?s Fellow at the Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, Prose is a former president of PEN American Center, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is a Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College.

Critical Praise

" Francine Prose, a literary arsonist with blistering wit, sends up both smug academics and politically correct undergrads in the satrical bonfire Blue Angel. "

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