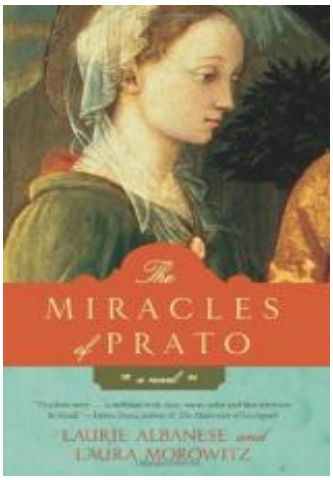
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The Miracles of Prato

by Laurie Albanese and Laura Morowitz



About the Book

At the height of the Italian Renaissance, Filippo Lippi is a Carmelite monk at the Convent Santa Margherita, a man equally revered as a great painter and reviled as a rogue. Constantly divided between spiritual and earthly pursuits, it is there behind the cloister walls that he encounters the greatest temptation of his life. Lucrezia Buti is a penniless and beautiful young novitiate, in whose face Lippi finds the inspiration for countless Madonnas. A passionate love develops between the irascible artist and his young muse, resulting in a scandalous romance that threatens to destroy them even as it fuels some of Lippi's greatest work. It will take a miracle of undying faith, unsurpassed beauty, and unfathomable love to save all that Lippi and Lucrezia cherish.

Discussion Guide

1. What are the many "miracles of Prato" and why do you think the authors chose this title?

2. How is your experience of the novel enhanced (or diminished) by looking at the website documenting the restoration of Fra Lippi's Prato frescoes?

3. A woman's life in medieval and Renaissance Italy was largely limited to one of three roles: wife, nun, or prostitute. How is this reflected in the novel's female characters? Do you think Lucrezia successfully transcends these social limitations? Why or why not?

4. Why do you think Lucrezia ultimately decides to go with Fra Filippo and to allow their relationship to become sexual? Do you think the decision was wise? Moral? Inevitable?

5. The church was arguably the most powerful institution in Renaissance Italy. Discuss the importance of the church, both positive and negative, in relation to Fra Filippo's life and development as a man and as an artist.

6. Fra Filippo tells Lucrezia, "to paint is to pray." How do Fra Filippo, Lucrezia and Sister Pureza perceive and understand God differently? How does each express their faith?

7. Many important scenes unfold in the herb garden in the Convent Margherita. Discuss the meaning and symbolism of this setting. Consider Sister Pureza's wisdom in relation to her role as midwife and herb garden caretaker.

8. Is the convent a sanctuary, or a prison? For whom? Why?

9. What were the most vivid and convincing aspects of Fifteenth Century Italian life in the novel? What details in particular made this world come alive for you?

10. The novel may be seen as a meditation on beauty. What is the relationship in the book between external beauty and spiritual beauty? Between physical beauty and the creation of art? Between beauty, purity, and godliness? Do you agree with these associations as they are made in the novel? Can you explain how this relationship between beauty and faith might be appropriate to social and cultural realities in 15th Century Italy, and yet inappropriate by 21st Century cultural standards?

11. What did you learn about the daily life of an artist that surprised you? How might your approach to the study and appreciation of Renaissance art be changed after reading **The Miracles of Prato**?

12. The Holy Belt of the Virgin Mary is an important symbol in the novel, both as one of faith, and one of female power. What role does the belt play in the successful return of Lucrezia's baby? Do you believe this is a miracle, a human manipulation, or both?

13. The color red appears in many guises and in relation to many objects in the novel. Which objects can you think of and what is the symbolism behind them?

14. The Miracles of Prato is a collaboration between a novelist and an art historian. Can you see how this partnership benefited the story?

15. The novel is based on true events, but the authors take many liberties with the fragmented facts that history passed on to us. This is often an area of contention between historians and novelists. Do you have a bias toward or against fiction that liberally imagines the internal thoughts and private motives of public figures?

Author Bio

Laurie Lico Albanese has written a novel, **Lynelle By the Sea**, and her poetry has appeared in *Mothering* magazine, the literary magazine *Emergency IV*, and in the anthology *Our Bundle of Joy*. She has written for other publications, such as the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*. She teaches creative writing to children in the Montclair, New Jersey, school

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