ReadingGroupGuides
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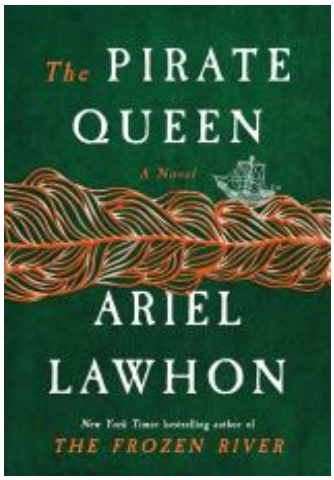
The Pirate Queen

by Ariel Lawhon



About the Book

A sweeping historical adventure inspired by the life of Grace O?Malley, the legendary Irish folk heroine who risked everything to defend her people. Venture onto the high seas with the thrilling latest from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE FROZEN RIVER and I WAS ANASTASIA.

Grace O?Malley was born to be a sea captain. But despite her natural skill on the water, Grace learns early that her dreams of a life at the helm are not compatible with the expectations of her noble family. As the only daughter of a powerful chieftain, her role is to secure a strong alliance and bear children. But when she?s sent to foster with a nearby clan, Grace falls for a clever and open-minded second son --- a man she cannot have.

Married off against her will to a brutal warrior, Grace performs her duty, all the while gathering followers loyal to her, and consolidating her husband?s power, only to be ousted from his lands. But this betrayal offers Grace the opportunity to return to sea, finally leading clan O?Malley?s mighty fleet. Just as Grace finds true independence, Queen Elizabeth?s incursions into Ireland grow bolder. She must fight to defend her land, her ships, and the people she loves most against the cruel and power-hungry English deputies, who will stop at nothing to check her influence.

Keenly observed and fiercely written, Ariel Lawhon's new action-packed novel channels the untamed beauty and harsh realities of 16th-century Ireland, as seen through the eyes of an unforgettable heroine who rightly became ?the Pirate Queen of Ireland.?

Discussion Guide

1. As you watched five-year-old Grace sacrifice her hair in the opening scene, what did you discover about her ability to overcome anything that stands in her way? What does the braid represent to her in the novel?s final scene?

2. On page 285, in the Maiden, 1543 chapter at The MacWilliam?s feast, we learn that Grace?s mother, Maeve, is secretly relieved to have no sons: ?Having a daughter is the real power. Men grasp for sons and often lose them as quickly as they can raise them. But daughters give a man his legacy.? How does this play out when Grace herself becomes a mother? What are the other sources of power for the women in the novel?

3. What does Richard Bourke teach Grace beyond knife skills? Does the long-simmering love between Richard and Grace make them vulnerable, or does it give them strength?

4. How did the oscillating timeline stoke the suspense? Which threads are continuously woven into all three arcs of Grace?s lifespan? If you were to think of your life as a Trinity Knot, what would the three strands of your identity be?

5. Despite their very different temperaments, Grace and her older brother, Donal O?Malley, are each other?s anchors and protectors throughout their lifetimes. How does their relationship evolve over time? What enables them to thrive, even though their innate talents don?t match the social expectations for a brother and sister?

6. How do Finola?s strategies compare with Grace?s? As the mother of three children by the abusive Donal O?Flaherty --- Young Eóin, Margaret and Merrick --- what determined if Grace could counteract their father?s destructive influence?

7. While you read about Eóin O?Malley?s calculated plans for his daughter?s marriage (Walter Bourke versus Donal O?Flaherty), did you see any wisdom in the chieftain system, or was it entirely oppressive? Would you have enjoyed living under Brehon Law and testing the waters with a trial marriage?

8. How did you react to the dramatic storm-born circumstances of Tibbot?s arrival? In what way is *Niamh*, along with the sea itself, his mother?s true home?

9. The chapter Mother, 1577 concludes with Grace requiring a promise from Sir Christopher St. Lawrence that includes ?that you always keep an empty chair and an extra plate at your table for those who might appear at your doorstep hungry or tired? (p. 412). How does Grace?s good heart enhance her leverage throughout her life, winning loyal followers such as Gutty and her son-in-law, Hook? Does it put her at a disadvantage against the likes of bloodthirsty opponents such as Sir Richard Bingham?

10. In her audience with Queen Elizabeth I, Grace observes that she and the monarch both know how to survive. What common traits do they share that enable them to overcome more than 60 years of danger? What might both women have achieved if they had been born in our time?

11. How much did you know previously about the Tudor reconquest of Ireland and the world of pirates and privateers during the 16th century? What makes fiction an effective way to understand historical facts? What are the ancestral legends in your family story?

12. How does THE PIRATE QUEEN expand your experience of other novels by Ariel Lawhon that you have read? What is unique about her ability to imagine the lives of extraordinary figures from the past?

Author Bio

Ariel Lawhon is a critically acclaimed, *New York Times* bestselling author of historical fiction. Her novels include THE PIRATE QUEEN; THE FROZEN RIVER, CODE NAME HÉLÈNE; I WAS ANASTASIA; FLIGHT OF DREAMS; THE WIFE THE MAID AND THE MISTRESS; WHEN WE HAD WINGS (co-written with Kristina McMorris and Susan Meissner); and BARRIERS TO ENTRY, an Amazon Original Short Story. Her books have been translated into numerous languages and have been "Good Morning America" Book Club, LibraryReads, One Book One County, Indie Next, Costco, Amazon Spotlight, and Book of the Month Club selections. She lives in the rolling hills outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband and four sons. She splits her time between the grocery store and the baseball field.

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