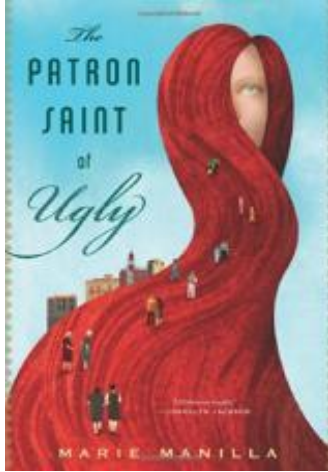


# The Patron Saint of Ugly

by Marie Manilla

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## About the Book

Born in Sweetwater, West Virginia, with a mop of flaming red hair and a map of the world rendered in port-wine stains on every surface of her body, Garnet Ferrari is used to being an outcast. With her sharp tongue, she has always known how to defend herself against bullies and aggressors, but she finds she is less adept at fending off the pilgrims who have set up a veritable tent city outside her hilltop home, convinced that she is Saint Garnet, healer of skin ailments and maker of miracles.

Her grandmother, the indelible Nonna Diamante, believes that Garnet's mystical gift can be traced back to the family's origins in the Nebrodi Mountains of Sicily, and now the Vatican has sent an emissary to Sweetwater to investigate. Garnet, wanting nothing more than to debunk this "gift" and send these desperate souls packing, reaches back into her family's tangled past and unspools for the Church a tale of love triangles on the shores of the Messina Strait; a sad, beautiful maiden's gilded-cage childhood in blueblood Virginia; and the angelic, doomed boy Garnet could not protect.

Saint or not, Garnet learns that the line between reality and myth is always blurred, and that the aspects of ourselves we are most ashamed of can prove to be the source of our greatest strength, and even our salvation.

## Discussion Guide

[Click here to see the publisher's version of THE PATRON SAINT OF UGLY Book Club Guide.](#)

1. THE PATRON SAINT OF UGLY has been described as magical realism --- literature grounded in the real world, but which also contains mythical or magical elements. What are some of the mythical or magical elements in PATRON SAINT?
2. The novel has also been described as Southern Gothic, which makes use of folklore and oral history to explore

southern regions that have seen better days. Southern Gothic characters are often slightly off-kilter --- physically or emotionally, or morally bankrupt. There is frequently an innocent character who 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 they are explicitly stated or not? Does everyone have his or her heart's desired 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 environmental factors are at work. 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 in PATRON SAINT, to children and adults, male and female? In which characters is this particularly explored, and how?

6. The novel is delivered as a series of tapes Garnet makes for an archbishop, thus 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 in fact steals the tape recorder to make her own tape to set the record straight, as does Aunt Betty. Is it possible that Garnet is an unreliable narrator, and that not everything she tells readers 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 60 Minutes transcript, two pages filled with the letter z. Why might Manilla have included these artifacts? What do they add to the novel?

8. The present day of the novel is 1975, with dips back in time to when Nonna was a girl in Sicily, and when Garnet's parents met in the 1940s. Why do you think Manilla set it in the past rather than the 21st century? Why did Manilla choose to end the book with a future 2025 *New York Times* article? How would the ending change if the article were 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. Each reader will determine whether or not Garnet is a saint based on how far he or she is willing to go. As a reader, how far were you willing to go?

## Author Bio

Marie Manilla is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her fiction has appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Mississippi Review*, *Calyx Journal*, *SouthWrit Large* and other journals. Her novel SHRAPNEL won the Fred Bonnie Award for Best First Novel. STILL LIFE WITH PLUMS: Short Stories was a finalist for both The Weatherford Award and ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year.

## Critical Praise

"Manilla has created a complex, endearing character, whose story will absorb readers from beginning to end. Beautifully written, filled with detailed prose meant to be savored."

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### **The Patron Saint of Ugly**

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