



# *INAMORATA*

## Readers' Guide

Lake Union Publishing  
420 pages  
\$14.95  
ISBN 978-1477823033

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) Odile's gift is to inspire a great work of art, but the cost is that the artist never creates again. Do you think, as she does, that such a price is worth it? Is there any work of art or literature that you feel would be worth such a sacrifice? Do you think, as Odile does, that art requires sacrifice?
- 2) What do you think of the role of art in our lives? Do you agree, as the characters in the book do, that it can give life meaning and, as Odile says, give mankind a reason to strive, something that counters death and suffering? How important do you think art is?
- 3) Nicholas thinks of himself as a savior, even though his wish to save men from Odile has backfired more than once—leading men to commit suicide in some cases. Do you think he's right? Do you believe, as Nicholas does, that their deaths are a mercy compared to what will happen to them in Odile's hands?
- 4) Odile asks Joseph where his "vision" comes from, and he answers that it doesn't matter. Do you agree? Do you think where talent or inspiration comes from is important? Does knowing the source of an artist's inspiration change the way you view his work?
- 5) Sophie's love for her brother and his for her was tempered and changed by abuse. What do you think of their relationship? Do you think it wrong or immoral, particularly given what forged it?
- 6) Do you think the inspiration Joseph takes from his sister is tainted by their relationship? Or does the depth of his talent redeem it and make it all right—or even necessary?
- 7) In the book we discover that Joseph's writing of an anonymous letter to Edward Roberts' father led to Edward's suicide. Do you think Joseph's writing of this letter was justified, given what Edward did to them?
- 8) Do you believe Sophie and Joseph cripple each other? Do you think they live "half a life," as Odile believes? Or do you think, as Sophie does, that theirs are lives "doubly lived?"

9) What do you think of the reasons that motivate Nicholas and Odile—his need to “matter” and hers to be recognized? Do you think those worthy or admirable motivations?

10) If you had been offered the gift that Madeleine offered Odile, would you take it?

## **Author Interview:**

*What inspired Inamorata?*

The inspiration for *Inamorata* came from three things that all weirdly conspired to point me in its direction. First, my best friend took a vacation to Venice. She called me from there in excitement to tell me that it was so “my city.” She said that if New Orleans (a city I love) was a streetwalker, then Venice was an aging courtesan, and I had to write about it. I’d never written anything set outside of the U.S., so I was hesitant.

But I also have a “thing” for Byron, and I’ve read almost every bio, etc. on him that I can. I happened to be in the middle of reading a collection of his letters and journal entries, and it coincidentally happened to be the collection from the year or so he spent in Venice, writing *Don Juan*. When I looked into what research was available and realized there were all these travelogues and travel books about Venice in the 19th C—which is when Americans and Europeans began adding the city to their Grand Tours in force—I became more and more fascinated by the place.

And then, finally, my youngest daughter told me I should write a book about a succubus. She wanted me to write one in a young adult novel, but given that a succubus steals sexual energy, it seemed inappropriate. But that spurned the idea of a courtesan, which took me back to Venice, and I loved the idea of doing something paranormal and otherworldly, as I’d been skirting around such topics for years, and so ... *Inamorata* was born.

*What inspired the characters?*

The character that everything revolves around is Odile Leon, the celebrated courtesan and muse. Because Odile was the inception of the story (see above), everything had to spin off from her.

Of course, there needed to be a force against Odile, and Nicholas Dane was inspired by the real-life boy-toy of the famous courtesan Catherine Walters. While vacationing, Catherine met a young man whom she seduced for the sheer pleasure of it. He became her “folly” for a short time, and then she abandoned him. He never got over it. He essentially stalked her, determined to win her back and then, when it became clear she would not have him, he tried to destroy her, and nearly destroyed himself.

The characters of Joseph and Sophie Hannigan were a bit more complicated. I knew I needed an artist for Odile to set her sights on. Only an extraordinary man could gain Odile’s attention, and

I did still have Byron in mind. I also knew I wanted the man to be an artist rather than a writer or a poet, because I'd studied artists years ago for another book, and I have a bit of a fascination with them. Plus, there were a lot of them in Venice at that time. Thus Joseph was born.

But I also wanted a woman—an ordinary woman, or at least one who thought of herself as ordinary—to set against the sheer impossibility of everything else. I wanted her to have something at stake, so I made her Joseph's sister. I had also just read Marguerite Duras' *The Sea Wall*, which was a book I loved, and I found the relationship between the brother and sister in the book, and its subtext of possession and desire and love and anger, intriguing. After that ... well, what can I say? Sometimes weirdness just happens when you start putting words on the page. You've got to love the subconscious.

*What drew you to this time period in Venice?*

Well, the 19th C in Venice is pretty fascinating. For most of that time, Venice was occupied by the Austrians, which was a pretty humiliating and depressing state of affairs for a city that had been a city-state with nearly absolute autonomy for practically its entire existence. In 1848 the Venetians rebelled against Austria, but that independence lasted about 18 months, and they were under its thumb again. It went from the richest city in the world to one of abject poverty in less than a hundred years—and that contrast, the poverty and dereliction among these rich treasure troves of art and architecture, was stunning. I loved playing with that juxtaposition in the characters' different points-of-view.

And just in terms of personal comfort in stepping outside of an American setting, the fact that there were many expatriates in Venice at this time—not just Americans, but British and French and Germans—enabled me to have an un-American setting while at the same time keeping an American essence and point of view. And of course, I've always loved the idea of artists' salons. A pretty irresistible combination.

*You've never set a book outside of America before—how did you like the experience?*

It was nerve-racking, for one thing, to tell the truth. America, for most of its existence, has been a very self-contained place. What happens in other parts of the world influences it, but generally you can live in America without really being aware of the rest of the world, and there are some parts where you can live your whole life without meeting someone from a different culture (which is a problem in more ways than one).

That isn't true at all in Europe, of course, and Venice especially was a world hub for much of its existence. In the later 19th C., it was a must stop for artists and writers from all over the world, and for young men on their educational Grand Tour. In writing about Venice, I found that I also needed to know what was going on in the countries around it. Communication, transportation, money, wars, political disputes ... all of those things had an impact on the city, and so my research was much more far reaching, even if it didn't actually have anything to do with the story.

What I did find amazing however—and so completely unlike America—is that Venice today is very much like Venice in the 19th C. You can look at a photograph or a view and be fairly certain it is the same view and the same building that existed in the 1800s. America is not at all like that. Buildings, views, streets, maps ... almost nothing is as it was then. It was actually comforting and reassuring to look at a picture of a view and know that it is essentially unchanged from 200 years ago. It made some things much easier.

*What kind of research did you do?*

As always, I like to rely on primary sources first and foremost, and I continually celebrate the impulse of travelers to keep journals of their experiences and impressions. I started with one of the most famous Venetian tourists—Henry James—and from there went to lesser known personages who spent some time in Venice, many of them socializing in Katharine Bronson's well known Venetian salon. Most of the artists who patronized the salon then sketched or painted scenes and people—and of course, views of Venice—and those were extremely helpful. Gautier's *Journeys in Italy*, William D. Howell's *Venetian Life*, Mary Lutyens' edited letters of Effie Ruskin, *Effie in Venice*, were especially invaluable.

Best of all, however, were the travel guides from the period, which talked not just about sightseeing and art, but about hotels, restaurants, currency and negotiating the labyrinth of Venice and all its little problems and annoyances. They could not have been more perfect! And they were ALL available on line.

*What do you hope readers will take away from Inamorata?*

I think inspiration is an interesting beast. I think it has a powerfully redemptive quality, but I also think it can be keenly destructive, and I'm interested in that conflict, as well as the paradox that beauty can be born of ugliness and that tragedy can beget sublimity.

In the book, Odile asks Joseph what makes him see the world as he does, and he dismisses the question, saying, "Does it matter what makes me see that way, or only that I do?" She answers him, "I have spent a lifetime with artists of all kinds. And that is the question that eludes them all. Where such talent comes from is a mystery. Is it a convolution in the brain that causes it? Or is it in the eyes? The heart? What makes the prism through which you see the world? What would you be without it?"

That, for me, is the question that lies at the center of *Inamorata*