

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Jodi Lynn Picoult is a contemporary American writer. Picoult has published 28 novels and short stories, and has also written several issues of *Wonder Woman*. Approximately 40 million copies of her books are in print worldwide and have been translated into 34 languages. In 2003, she was awarded the New England Bookseller Award for fiction.

Picoult writes popular fiction which can be characterized as family saga, frequently centering story lines on moral dilemmas or procedural dramas which pit family members against one another. Over her writing career, Picoult has covered a wide range of controversial or moral issues, including abortion, the Holocaust, assisted suicide, race relations, eugenics, LGBT rights, fertility issues, religion, the death penalty, and school shootings.

[wikipedia.com.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jodi_Lynn_Picoult)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from *By Any Other Name*? You may wish to talk about the thematic significance—literal and symbolic—of the title, for starters.
2. Take an opportunity to talk about Shakespeare and how his historic significance informed your reading experience. Were you surprised to learn that people question the true identity of The Bard? Do you believe Emilia is the true playwright now? Why or why not?
3. Gender swapping, mistaken identity, and missed communication are amongst the many tropes found in Shakespeare's plays. Did you notice these tropes also exist within Melina's timeline in *By Any Other Name*? Why might the author choose to incorporate these themes into the modern timeline, rather than the historical timeline with Emilia? What message is related to the reader with this choice?
4. Talk about the use of a framed narrative—the story behind the story—in *By Any Other Name*. Did you enjoy the alternating chapters between Emilia and Melina's individual points of view? Did you prefer one to the other, and why? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way? Emilia Bassano is a real-life historical figure who lived during Shakespeare's time. Did Emilia feel real to you in the world of this novel? And if so, in what ways? What narrative devices did the author use to bring her to life on the page? How is she similar to, or representative of, women in our day and age?

5. “There was a reason you could not create history,” Emilia says, “without writing the word story.” Talk about the power and permanence of putting lived experience into words. What does the act of storytelling mean to Emilia, Melina, and other characters in the novel? What does it mean to you?
6. “Being a woman,” says Melina, “means being told to speak up for yourself in one breath and to shut up in the next.” Do you agree? Cite examples from the book and popular culture that support this.
7. Melina struggles in being an ally for Andre as she advocates for herself as a woman. Do you think Melina is to blame for their fallout, or is Andre? How do we advocate for inclusion and diversity for others when we’re a member of one marginalized group, without losing our “place in the line” so to speak? Discuss.
8. What does *By Any Other Name* have to say about the nature of art and artifice, truth and deception? In what ways might you reconsider a woman’s place in the history of letters now that you’ve read this book?
9. Imagine Emilia’s time, when women were forbidden to write for a public audience . . . and now think of our very world today, one in which female voices across the globe continue to be suppressed, and books (especially about sex and gender) are banned. How does it make you feel to acknowledge the state of literature in the current moment?
10. We are taught that there is a moral to every story—something that we are supposed to learn about the world and ourselves from having read it. Do you believe that a work of fiction can “speak” to our own humanity? And, if so, what do you think *By Any Other Name* has to say?
11. If you had the chance to ask the author one question about *By Any Other Name*—about the inspiration for her story, the writing process, or her personal background—what might it be? If *By Any Other Name* was being adapted into a television show or movie, who would you cast in each role?

jodipicoult.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Starred Review */ Perennial best-seller Picoult, who has tackled such heady subjects as same-sex marriage, abortion, and racism, takes on another hot-button topic sure to ignite controversy and conversation: the question of Shakespearean authorship. In this dual time line tale, struggling playwright Melina Green has written a play about her ancestor Emilia Bassano, who she believes really penned many of Shakespeare’s greatest plays. Frustrated with sexism in the New York theater scene in 2023, Melina pushes her Black male friend Andre, also a playwright, to claim credit for her work when a lauded but arrogant critic expresses interest in getting the play produced. This leads to a Shakespearean—or should it be Bassanian?—comedy of errors. At the same time, Picoult tells Emilia’s story. Forced to become a courtesan at 13, she eventually falls in love with a handsome nobleman, but when she gets pregnant, she’s married off to a brutal man and forced to earn a living penning poems and plays for a dissolute actor, namely, William Shakespeare. Some readers will undoubtedly quibble with Picoult’s conclusions about the Bard, but they’ll just as assuredly find themselves thoroughly engaged with the struggles of Emilia, Melina, and Andre as writers with

the deck stacked against them in this timely and affecting tale. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Picoult's many, many fans will pounce on her latest incisive, pot-stirring tale, while the Shakespearean theme will attract even more readers. -- Kristine Huntley (Reviewed 6/1/2024) (Booklist, vol 120, number 19, p26)

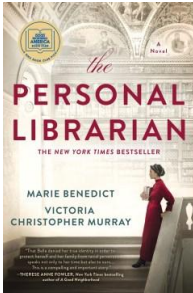
Publisher's Weekly

Picoult (*Wish You Were Here*) offers a stimulating if muddled parallel narrative of two women writers, each of whose work is credited to a man. In 1582, poet Emilia Bassano becomes consort to Lord Hunsdon, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain. At the time, women were forbidden to have anything to do with the theater, but when Emilia crosses paths with William Shakespeare, he's impressed with her work and agrees to pay for the sonnets and plays she's secretly written if he can take credit for them. Thus begins a working relationship that spans decades. In the present day, Emilia's descendant Melina Green writes a play about Emilia and Shakespeare, but fears she won't be able to get it produced after being told that people only relate to plays by men. Unbeknownst to Melina, her roommate, Andre, submits the play to a fringe festival under the pseudonym Mel Green, leading the artistic director to assume the writer is a man. After the play is accepted, Andre poses as Mel during the production, with Melina pretending to be his assistant. The Elizabethan sections, which follow Emilia through an unhappy marriage as the work she wrote for Shakespeare receives acclaim, are the strongest. In comparison, Picoult's depictions of racism and sexism in the contemporary theater world are a bit simplistic. It's a mixed bag. Agent: Laura Gross, Laura Gross Literary. (Aug.) --Staff (Reviewed 06/03/2024) (Publishers Weekly, vol 271, issue 22, p)

Kirkus Reviews

Who was Shakespeare? Move over, Earl of Oxford and Francis Bacon: There's another contender for the true author of plays attributed to the bard of Stratford—Emilia Bassano, a clever, outspoken, educated woman who takes center stage in Picoult's spirited novel. Of Italian heritage, from a family of court musicians, Emilia was a hidden Jew and the courtesan of a much older nobleman who vetted plays to be performed for Queen Elizabeth. She was well traveled—unlike Shakespeare, she visited Italy and Denmark, where, Picoult imagines, she may have met Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—and was familiar with court intrigue and English law. “Every gap in Shakespeare's life or knowledge that has had to be explained away by scholars, she somehow fills,” Picoult writes. Encouraged by her lover, Emilia wrote plays and poetry, but 16th-century England was not ready for a female writer. Picoult interweaves Emilia's story with that of her descendant Melina Green, an aspiring playwright, who encounters the same sexist barriers to making herself heard that Emilia faced. In alternating chapters, Picoult follows Melina's frustrated efforts to get a play produced—a play about Emilia, who Melina is certain sold her work to Shakespeare. Melina's play, *By Any Other Name*, “wasn't meant to be a fiction; it was meant to be the resurrection of an erasure.” Picoult creates a richly detailed portrait of daily life in Elizabethan England, from sumptuous castles to seedy hovels. Melina's story is less vivid: Where Emilia found support from the witty Christopher Marlowe, Melina has a fashion-loving gay roommate; where Emilia faces the ravages of repeated outbreaks of plague, for Melina, Covid-19 occurs largely offstage; where Emilia has a passionate affair with the adoring Earl of Southampton, Melina's lover is an awkward New York Times theater critic. It's Emilia's story, and Picoult lovingly brings her to life. A vibrant tale of a remarkable woman. (Kirkus Reviews, July 15, 2024)

READALIKES



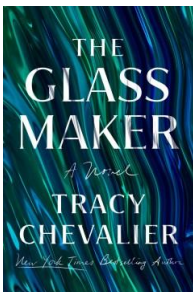
***Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict & Victoria Christopher Murray**

Based on the true story of Grace Marks, a young Irish immigrant and servant convicted of the brutal murders of her employer and his housekeeper in 1843 Canada. Grace's fragmented memories and mysterious past complicate the search for justice, as Dr. Simon Jordan, a psychiatrist, attempts to uncover the truth behind her role in the crime



***Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell**

A moving story about the death of William Shakespeare's 11-year-old son Hamnet, and the years leading up to the production of his great play, Hamlet.



***The Glass Maker* by Tracy Chevalier**

From the height of Renaissance-era Italy to the present day, this spellbinding novel follows Orsola Rosso and her family of glassblowers as they live through creative triumph and heartbreaking loss, and how through every era, the Rosso women ensure their work, and their bonds, endure.