

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Laurie Lico Albanese, author of the novels and a memoir: *Hester*, *Stolen Beauty*, *Blue Suburbia*, and *Lynlle by the Sea*. Co-author of the novel *The Miracles of Prato*. Her books have been translated into Spanish, French, German and Portuguese.

She loves learning about people and exploring the world. worked in book publishing and journalism and has had stories which have appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and elsewhere. She's taught creative and formal writing to all ages, from elementary schoolchildren to adults, and currently runs a workshop for aspiring and journeying writers.

She adores libraries and bookstores, and each of her books has been chosen for the IndieBound list by independent booksellers. Other awards include a Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Research Grant, NJ State Council in the Arts Fellowship in Fiction Writing, and Catherine R. Dodge Foundation Fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

On a personal note, she loves to spend time with family and friends. She walks and plays outside almost every day and is happiest in nature. Pickleball is her new obsession! She practices yoga and body medicine, bikes, swims, kayaks, paddleboards, and can't wait to get back to traveling for adventure and research.

She grew up on Long Island, and graduated from New York University with a degree in journalism. She earned a MFA in Creative Writing from Stonecoast at the University of Southern Maine in 2016.

She lives with her husband in Montclair, NJ, where she raised her two grown children and enjoys spending lots of time with book people and writers.

Author's Website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the novel, we are told about the unique phenomenon of synesthesia, which plays a major role in -. In what ways does Isobel's synesthesia serve to propel the narrative forward?
2. Isobel's embroidery is an essential part of who she is, and allows her to express her internal creative process in a way the world values. Do you have a creative outlet or form of creative expression that is important to you?
3. Scottish myths and elements of the magical world run throughout the novel. How does Isobel's belief in magic and the spirit world change throughout the novel? What do you believe is real, or possible?
4. Early in the novel, Isobel's Auntie Aileen says, "To clothe a woman is to hide her failings and frailties." Throughout the novel, Isobel helps to clothe many women, including herself. Does Isobel take the same view towards clothing as her aunt, or is her approach more nuanced?
5. Examine the various positions and choices that women in the novel are given and have to overcome. What journey did each of these women take, and who do you think ultimately overcame the most?
6. On page 190, Isobel tells Nat, "Women want to read loves stories to know if a man is good, if love is true, who and what can be trusted." Discuss the different men in Isobel's life. In what ways is the truth of this statement revealed through Hester?
7. On page 252, Isobel asks herself whether Nat a cruel man or a weak man. By the end of the novel, what is your opinion on Nat's cruelty or weakness? Is it possible for someone to be both?
8. Hester is a novel that imagines the inspiration for Hester Prynne, the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*. If you have read *The Scarlet Letter*, does Isobel's story resemble how you might have imagined this woman's life?
9. Consider Isobel Gowdie and her legacy, as well as the legacy of the other women in Isobel's family, including her daughter. Which of the women in the family do you think were the most influential? What do you think Isobel and Margaret's legacy will be?
10. On page 313, Isobel says, "Like Nat himself, the book was a truth within a lie, and a lie within a truth." Consider Nat's personal journey and his relationship with Isobel. In what ways is this statement true?
11. How do you feel at the end of the novel? What do you think comes next for Isobel and Margaret in their relationship and their story?

Author's Website.

BOOK REVIEWS

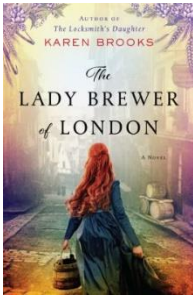
Publisher's Weekly

Albanese (*Stolen Beauty*) imagines in her standout historical the inspiration for *The Scarlet Letter*. Her proxy for Hester Prynne is Isobel Gamble, a skilled seamstress who has synesthesia and left her native Scotland for the U.S. in 1829 after her apothecary husband Edward's addiction to opium sent them to the poorhouse. Isobel's father paid their way out, and the couple took passage onboard a ship bound for America. Once stymied in her ability to express herself creatively, in Salem she uses her talents with needle and thread. She has a chance encounter with writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, recognizing in him a kindred spirit yearning for freedom, a spirit that moves Isobel to risk her life to protect people fleeing slavery. Later, her independent-mindedness leads to suspicions of adultery. Albanese describes Isobel's synesthesia brilliantly, such as in this memory of her cousins in a Scotland valley: "Their voices rise up in vibrant wisps of yellow and gold. The wind was sometimes fierce pink, and the sound of the waterfall on rocks glinted silver." Even those unfamiliar with the classic will be hooked by this account of a capable woman standing up to the sexist and racial prejudices of her time. (Oct.)

Kirkus Reviews

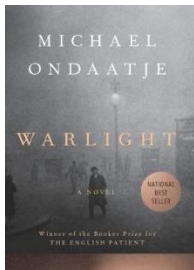
This novel reimagines *The Scarlet Letter* from the point of view of a woman who might have inspired Hester Prynne. Isobel Gamble is still a teenager when she emigrates from her native Scotland to Salem, Massachusetts, with her much older husband, Edward. Isobel comes from a long line of women with secret knowledge--her namesake is an ancestor known as Isobel Gowdie, Queen of Witches. But she's been taught since childhood to mask such knowledge, including her synesthesia, a condition that lets her see colors associated with sounds and letters. She's bent her energy to her skill at needlework, which has helped her support her family. With Edward, who's an apothecary, she believed she'd made a good marriage--until they ended up in the poorhouse because of his drug use. Salem is their second chance, but almost as soon as they arrive, he turns around and goes back to sea as a medic, leaving her almost penniless. Isobel gets to work and finds support from some people in the community. She also gets to know a tall and handsome young fellow named Nat Hathorne, a man she saw the day she arrived in town. Isobel is a red-haired beauty, and Nat's interest in her quickly turns into flirtation and more. The Salem witch trials are more than a century in the past, but Nat, an aspiring poet, is haunted by the role of his great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, one of the most implacable judges in the trials. The trials haunt this book, too, woven through its story of Isobel, a woman who bears the bigotry of the town because she's an immigrant and a woman whose husband may have deserted her. The author has incorporated plentiful research about the witch trials and, in Isobel's present, the Underground Railroad. The rich details of life in Salem in the early 19th century, and especially about Isobel's creative work as a seamstress and designer, enliven the tale. Nathaniel Hawthorne plays an unexpected role in this lively fictional look at the origins of his masterpiece. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

READALIKES



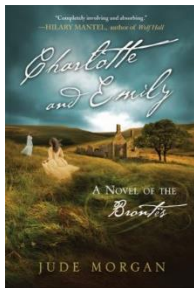
The Lady Brewer of London: a novel by Karen Brooks

1405: The daughter of a wealthy merchant, Anneke Sheldrake suddenly finds her family bankrupted when her father's ship is swept away at sea. Forced to find a way to provide for herself and her siblings, Anneke rejects an offer of marriage from a despised cousin and instead turns to her late mother's family business: brewing ale.



Warlight: a novel by Michael Ondaatje

he story of fourteen-year-old Nathaniel, and his older sister, Rachel. In 1945, just after World War II, they stay behind in London when their parents move to Singapore, leaving them in the care of a mysterious figure named The Moth. They suspect he might be a criminal, and they grow both more convinced and less concerned as they come to know his eccentric crew of friends: men and women joined by a shared history of unspecified service during the war, all of whom seem, in some way, determined now to protect, and educate (in rather unusual ways) Rachel and Nathaniel.



Charlotte and Emily: A novel of the Brontës by Jude Morgan

From an obscure country parsonage came three extraordinary sisters, who defied the outward bleakness of their lives to create the most brilliant literary work of their time. Emily, who turned from the world to the greater temptations of the imagination; gentle Anne, who suffered the harshest perception of the stifling life forced upon her; and the brilliant, uncompromising, and tormented Charlotte, who longed for both love and independence, and learned their ultimate price.