

**READERS GUIDES & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS
FOR TEACHERS, STUDENTS, LIBRARIANS**

**FOR
Linda Lappin's Novels:**

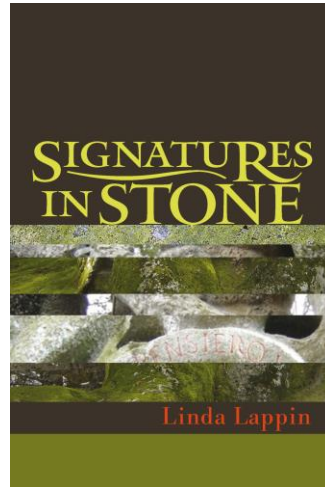
Signatures in Stone (2013)

The Etruscan (2004,2013)

Katherine's Wish (2008)

For discount copies of the paperback editions of *Signatures in Stone* and *Katherine's Wish* available for book discussion groups, please contact the publishers.

SIGNATURES IN STONE



Book Details

Title: Signatures in Stone

Author: Linda Lappin

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250 Pages

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Narrator

1. Do you think Daphne is a reliable narrator? Can we trust what she tells us? Why or why not? Does her degree of reliability increase or decrease throughout the story? Does it stay the same? Comment on her name.

Characters

2. Each of the four guests at the villa have come there in search of something in particular, although what they claim to be searching for and what they are really looking for may not necessarily be the same thing at all. How would you summarize each character's personal search or purpose in coming to Bomarzo: Daphne, Nigel, Clive, and Prof. Finestone?

3. With regards to Finestone, what is his theory about the original creator of the garden? What importance does this have on the story?

Structure and Plot

4. The book is divided into three sections: *The Angel and the Snake*, *The Hell Mouth*, and *Sophia*. What happens to Daphne in each of the sections? How does the title of each section relate to what happens in it?

5. *Signatures in Stone* , like the villa with its many floors and rooms, has many “levels” of mysteries. One level regards the house itself, another the true identities and histories of Manu and Amalia; yet another the secret motivations of the guests for being there, still another, the identity of the murderer, the disappearance of the map, and over all this, the essential mystery of the garden itself: who created it, why, and most especially, *what it means*. Can you follow the development and resolution of these mysteries? Are any of them interlocked? Are any left unsolved?
6. What is the hidden treasure of Bomarzo, in your opinion? Who finds it and how?
7. Do you find the ending satisfying?
8. How does Daphne change in the course of the novel?

Setting

9. How important is the setting in this novel? Could you imagine it set anywhere else?
10. In what ways do the statues in the Monster Park evoke or symbolize the sins, souls, follies, or inner nature of the characters? Which of the statues described do you find most frightening? Which do you find intriguing?

Themes:

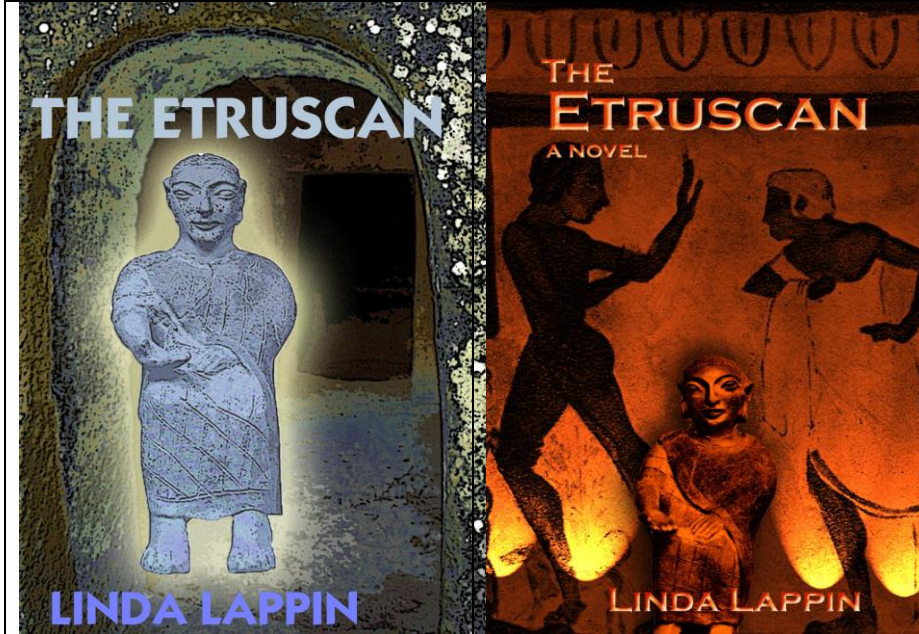
11. Daphne’s overwrought imagination and addiction make her vulnerable to the visits of an incubus. The novel has been described as a phantasmagoria, which means “a shifting series of phantasms or imaginary figures as seen in a dream or fevered condition or as called up by the imagination” (OUD). What kind of phantoms does Daphne encounter and how are they produced? What is their impact on her health and sanity?
12. Have you ever visited a Renaissance or baroque garden? Would you agree that they are places that may change your destiny?
13. In your opinion, which of the two forces wins out in the end, the imagination or the reality principle?
14. This book has been called a gothic parody, a mash-up, and a hermetic capriccio. Would you agree with any of these definitions?
15. Can you interpret the title in terms of Daphne’s theory of correspondences of signatures?
16. What do you think of the author’s prose style? Can you pick out a favorite passage in the book?
17. After reading this novel, did it make you want to read about any of the places or ideas mentioned in the book?

For further reading

Mary Butts, *The Journals of Mary Butts*, ed. N. Blondel, Yale University Press, 2002
 Mary Butts partially inspired Daphne’s view of Signatures in Lappin’s novel

Margaretta J Darnall and Mark S Weil, “ Il Sacro Bosco di Bomarzo : its Sixteenth Century Literary and Antiquarian Context” *The Journal of Garden History*, 1984.

THE ETRUSCAN



Kindle Edition 2013

Hardback, Wynkin de Worde 2004

Now available from Kindle on amazon ASIN: B008KM69YQ

The author would like to thank Professor Susan Stabile of Texas A&M University, Professor Gaetano Prampolini of the University of Florence, Professor Sandro Melani of the University of Tuscia and their students for contributing ideas to this study guide.

Point of View and Structure

1. The core of the novel is Harriet's narrative, written in the first person point of view. This document is inserted in a traditional 3rd person p.o.v. shifting back and forth among the minor characters -- Stephen, Sarah, Wimby, and Mrs. Parsons. Our first impressions of Harriet are filtered through their thoughts, and we later discover the journal through their eyes. How does this narrative structure affect the reader's perception of the central story: Harriet's encounter with Federigo del Re?

2. In what ways are the two parts of the novel: the "psychological drama of introspection" pertaining to the London group and the "romantic mystery" of Harriet's narrative interlocked? In what ways are they remote from each other? Is there any "middle ground" between the two realms?

Characters

1. **Triangles** The novel is structured on strong personality conflicts, triangular relationships, and parallel characters, found in the 3rd person sections and in Harriet's narrative. The complexity of these triangular relationships becomes clearer as we learn more about the characters' past and as secrets are revealed. Key triangles are : Harriet-Stephen-Sarah Harriet-Stephen- Wimby
What other triangles do you note? What about parallel characters? Are any names symbolic?

2. Harriet and the Count

In what ways are Harriet and the Count diametrically opposite? In what ways are they alike? How does their mutual attraction manifest itself? Does their attraction remind you of any other literary love stories or seductions you have read about? The Count may be a Byronic hero, but is Harriet a typical ingénue?

3. Mrs. Parsons

Mrs. Parsons' entry into Harriet's house marks the beginning of a journey "downwards" into Harriet's psychic world which will be developed through her narrative. How does Parsons bridge the gap between the world of Harriet's narrative and the world represented by the London group?

Setting

1. Harriet's Etruscan Italy and Stephen's London are in strong contrast -- with Fiesole in Chapter 2 being an area of transition. Here the novel begins to move from a realistic narrative mode to a more symbolic one. What elements foreshadow this transition?

2. In what ways does Harriet's description of places in Italy (farmhouse, woods, tombs, etc) reflect her inner world?

3. As the first three chapters of the novel progress, landscape and setting become more symbolic, typical of the gothic novel. Comment on these elements

Farmhouse Tower Tomb Villa Forest
Mirrors the door of the soul

Imagery

1. Why is autumnal imagery important in the novel?

2. Comment on the plant imagery in this book: dahlias, sunflowers, pomegranates, mushrooms, trees.

3. How are these animals woven into the plot: wild boar, snakes, dog, porcupines, scorpions?

Themes

Harriet's narrative begins with a "fall" in the tombs. The prelude to this fall is recounted in flashback, when Harriet describes her visit to the British Museum and the impact that an Etruscan statue she saw there had on her. This episode might be considered a "call to initiation" (See *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell)

1. Harriet's narrative incorporates many structural elements shared by fairy tale and myth ("the animal groom" fairy tales) concerning women's initiation. In what ways is Harriet's story a successful or failed initiation?

2. What other references to myths or fairy tales do you find?

3. The illusory nature of experience is one of the themes of *The Etruscan*: how is this expressed in the novel stylistically and plot-wise?

The Ending

The novel has an open ending, and may be interpreted in many ways, corresponding to the minor characters' evaluation of it: a document in code, a fiction, the product of illusion, an indecent tale...etc. After balancing the evidence, what conclusions do you draw about the identity of Federigo del Re and his attitude toward Harriet?

A Wider View

The novel draws on two recurrent themes in American and English fiction set in Italy:

1. Italy as a place of seduction and moral intrigue.

2. the attraction between opposites and the clash between the emancipated view of women and sexuality typical of northern countries and the more archaic Mediterranean view.

How are these themes treated in *The Etruscan*?

What other novels based on these themes have you read?

For Further investigation

Is Harriet a reliable narrator?

Identify the gothic elements in plot, character, structure, setting, and imagery.

See Mirella Billa's study of the gothic, especially the chapters on landscapes and interiors: *Il Gotico Inglese* Il Mulino Editore, Bologna 1986.

Etruscan Places

Can you find any influence of DH Lawrence's Etruscan Places in this novel?

"The door of the soul"

See also Lawrence's poem *The Ship of Death*

In what ways is the count a parody of Lawrence's masculine ideal?

Compare Harriet to the heroines of *Women in Love* and *The Plumed Serpent*

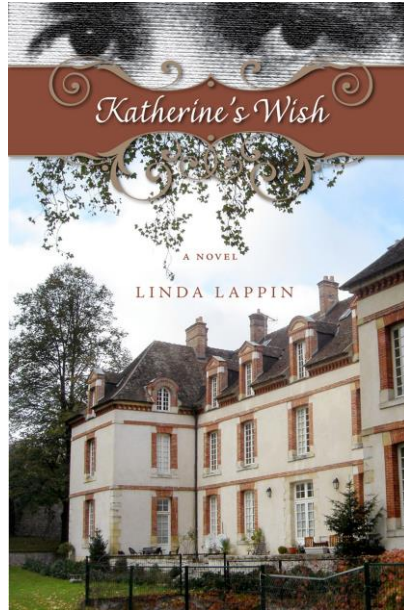
The New Woman

Harriet as a New Woman AND an American ingénue.

The character of Harriet is a composite inspired by many female characters and real persons of the era. She is an example of the New Woman. Some of the literary influences that contributed to her are Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield (and some the characters from her stories), as well as the American heroines of Henry James. What characteristics in Harriet make her an example of "the New Woman."

How do the male characters reflect patriarchal attitudes?

Katherine's Wish



Available on Amazon also on Kindle
And from www.wordcraftoforegon.com
Wordcraft of Oregon, 2008 ISBN: 978-1-877655-58-6

1. For the person who selected this book for the group, what made you choose *Katherine's Wish*? Were you familiar with the life or writings of Katherine Mansfield? Did the book meet your expectations? Why or why not?

2. Setting:

Katherine's Wish attempts to create a detailed portrait of Mansfield's life as a writer and woman in her historical context. How true to life does the period setting seem? A good historical novel should make us feel like time travelers caught in another era. Does the author succeed in giving us that illusion? What aspects of daily life and society were most vividly drawn? What did you learn about the period that you did not know before?

3. Character and Point of View

Katherine's Wish deals with the last five years of Mansfield's life, presenting three perspectives: the viewpoint of Katherine Mansfield, that of Ida Baker, her companion; and that of John Middleton Murry, her husband. Discuss the three main characters. Do they convince us as real

people? Why do you suppose the author chose to use three perspectives instead of sticking only to Mansfield's or Ida's point of view? How would the novel have been different if only one had been used?

Katherine's Wish is the story of a triangular relationship. Discuss and define that relationship. Can you identify any significant moments of tension, love, jealousy, reconciliation or understanding highlighted in the novel? How do you judge the three characters and their interaction? Does the relationship evolve or remain static?

Aside from the three main characters, there are some minor characters in the novel who are historical personages: DH Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and S.S. Koteliensky. How life-like are these secondary characters? Did you learn anything about them that you did not know?

4. Structure:

Flashbacks are used in this novel to acquaint the reader with important events which happened in Mansfield's life before the book opens. Do you feel that the information provided in these flashbacks was sufficient in order for readers to understand the story?

The novel follows Mansfield as she travels from country to country, residing in various hotels and rented homes, including her own home in London, The Elephant. Discuss the different places of residence and the dominant mood of each one.

5. Themes: writing, spirituality, and illness

Katherine's Wish explores Mansfield's development as a writer. Find passages dedicated to the theme of writing and the writer's life. From the novel, did you gain a sense of what being a writer signified for Katherine Mansfield?

Katherine's Wish also deals with Mansfield's spiritual quest. Find sections in the book dedicated to spirituality and religion. How were spirituality and writing linked for Mansfield?

Katherine's Wish is the story of an illness. Does the novel give a sense of Mansfield's physical distress? Do readers feel her approaching death?

The author claims that despite the tragic story this novel recounts, it is a life-affirming story of Mansfield's search for wholeness. Do you agree?

6. Epiphany –

In literary criticism, the term "epiphany" refers to a moment of revelation, self-knowledge, or insight that comes to a character in the midst of daily life. Mansfield's short stories are sometimes structured around such moments. Are there any epiphanies in ***Katherine's Wish***? Identify and discuss them.

7. Language and Style

Ask group members to read their favorite passages aloud and say why they have chosen them. Do you notice any recurring symbols or metaphors in the book?

8. The Title

Why do you think the author chose this title? Do you find it appropriate?

9. In your opinion, is this a book for women or for a mixed readership?

10. Follow up

Compare this book to other works of historical fiction you have read. Why do you think historical fiction is such a popular genre? Would you recommend this book to another book group? Why or Why not?

11. Further reading:

The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield, Penguin edition

Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield, edited by CK Stead, Penguin edition

The Memories of LM, Ida Baker

Similar novels:

The Hours by Michael Cunningham, *The Master*, by Colm Toibin,

Other novels by Linda Lappin

The Etruscan, Wynkin deWorde 2004