

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Jodi Picoult

A Novel

BY ANY
OTHER
NAME

Book Club Kit

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear reader,

By Any Other Name is my 29th novel, but this one may very well be the “book of my heart”—the one I kind of feel I was destined to write, so that everyone knows the name EMILIA BASSANO.

I know what you’re saying: “Who?”

Emilia Bassano. The real-life subject of half of *By Any Other Name* . . . This book is about gender discrimination in theater and publishing—and it starts 400 years ago in Elizabethan England, with a woman who—I believe—may well have been the author of some of Shakespeare’s plays.

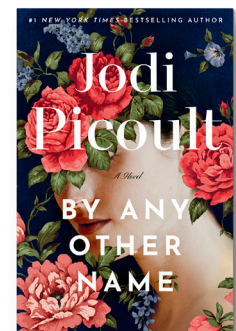
I’m not the first to believe that Shakespeare might not be the true author of the plays attributed to him. There have been other Anti-Stratfordians (as they are called)—including people like SCOTUS Justice John Paul Stevens, Helen Keller, Mark Twain, Malcolm X, Sigmund Freud, and Orson Welles. Most of the time, if you even breathe a whisper of the thought that, gee, maybe it’s weird Shakespeare was the ONLY playwright of his time to not collaborate; or that he was not formally educated nor apparently self-taught, as he did not own a single book at the time of his death; or that although there are many historical documents showing him as a producer and actor, there’s not a single one that confirms him as a writer of plays; or that upon his death no other writers of the time bemoaned his loss as one of their peers; or that it’s odd that someone who was so well-known in his field would have written multiple sonnets about dying poor and forgotten . . . well, the Stratfordians who believe Shakespeare is inviolable will call you a crackpot for thinking these thoughts. Why? Well, there are entire academic careers built on the premise that Shakespeare was the most remarkable writer of all time. Pull the rug out from beneath that premise, and lots of careers topple. To wit, my novel hasn’t even been published, and already on social media I’ve had some men tell me I’m an idiot for subscribing to the possibility that Shakespeare may not have written all 38 plays and long poems and sonnets by himself.

Thank you for helping make this the Year of Emilia.

I hope you enjoy the following book club kit, replete with discussion questions, a playlist, and an Elizabethan-themed cocktail recipe!


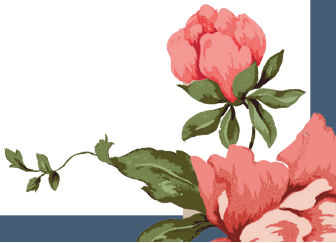
Happy reading!

Jodi 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?
 5. 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?
 6. “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?
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. Could you catch the various references to Shakespeare plays and sonnets in *By Any Other Name*? Which ones were your favorites? Did you check the back of the book—and discover any surprises?
8. “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.
9. 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.
10. 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?
11. 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?
12. 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?
13. 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?
14. If *By Any Other Name* was being adapted into a television show or movie, who would you cast in each role?



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW-DRIVER

Ingredients:

Superfine sugar

1½ ounces limoncello

1½ ounces lemon-flavored vodka

5 ounces fresh orange juice

4-6 dashes grapefruit or lemon bitters (depending on your mood)

Lemon wedge and slice

Instructions:

Rim a highball glass with the lemon wedge and dip the rim in sugar.

Fill the glass halfway with ice.

Pour in the limoncello, vodka, and orange juice.

Stir in the bitters.

Garnish with a lemon slice.





PLAYLIST

- "Fortnight" by Taylor Swift
- "The Tortured Poets Department" by Taylor Swift
- "Loml" by Taylor Swift
- Elizabeth—Original Motion Picture Soundtrack: Knight of the Long Knives
- "The King Must Die" by Elton John & Bernie Taupin
- "Desolation Row" by Bob Dylan
- "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift
- "Wildest Dreams" by Taylor Swift
- "Ophelia" by The Lumineers
- "August" by Taylor Swift
- "You've Got Everything Now" by The Smiths
- "Sigh No More" by Mumford & Sons
- "Timeless" by Taylor Swift
- "Nothing New" by Taylor Swift
- "Just a Girl" by No Doubt
- "Guilty As Sin" by Taylor Swift
- "Rhiannon" by Fleetwood Mac
- "Love Story" by Taylor Swift
- "God is a woman" by Ariana Grande
- "Run the World (Girls)" by Beyoncé
- "Summertime Sadness" by Lana Del Rey
- "The Man" by Taylor Swift
- "The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived" by Taylor Swift
- "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me" by Taylor Swift
- "Funeral" by Phoebe Bridgers
- "Down Bad" by Taylor Swift
- "Nightmare" by Halsey
- "You're Gonna Go Far" by Noah Kahan
- "Dandelion" by Kacey Musgraves
- "What Was I Made For" by Billie Eilish
- "When We Were Young" by Adele
- "The Albatross" by Taylor Swift
- "The Prophecy" by Taylor Swift
- "Traitor" by Olivia Rodrigo
- "Better by Myself" by Hey Violet
- "Helplessness Blues" by The Duke's Men
- "Lifetime" by Justin Bieber
- "All I Ask" by Adele
- "King of Anything" by Sara Bareilles
- "So Long, London" by Taylor Swift