

Scranton Lace

By Margot Douaihy
Illustrated by Bri Hermanson

Discussion Guide



Discussion Questions



1) Imagery is an important storytelling device in *Scranton Lace*. What is the visual significance of lace in the book and how does it interact with the text? Do the illustrations influence your perception of the poems? Conversely, does the verse alter your perception of the illustrations?

2) *Scranton Lace* roots personal experiences within broader universal investigations. What editorial choices can a poet make to help the specific transcend?

3) What are the roles of age and class in *Scranton Lace*? What poems explore them and how is tension seeded?

4) Identify moments of self-doubt in this book. What forms do they take? How do they play out and what is the overall effect?

5) Illustrations are woven throughout *Scranton Lace*. What narrative elements can visual artwork communicate that words cannot? What feelings or stories can words share that the visual artwork cannot express? How do two distinctly different mediums work together in *Scranton Lace*?

6) “The Book of Lace” is the longest poem in the collection, containing various perspectives and styles. Is there a danger of untidiness when an author includes experimental forms alongside traditional lyric poems? What creative possibilities emerge in chaos?

7) What are the moods of the poems “Stain” and “Gutted?” How are these moods sustained from beginning to end?

8) How are the social constructions of identity—namely the complexities of queerness, femininity, Americanness, and otherness—explored in *Scranton Lace*? Is there a cost to owning an identity? Have you ever had to negotiate an identity or balance two contradictory identities?

9) The Scranton Lace factory was a spirited topic of discussion during the 2016 United States Presidential Election. Hillary Clinton’s grandfather worked at the factory and Donald Trump held several rallies in Scranton. What, if anything, can you read into this book when examining it through a political lens? Should authors take responsibility for the political ramifications of their artwork? Why or why not?

10) Drawing from the definition from the Chicago School of Poetics, documentary poetry “examines pre-existing cultural documents—such as newspapers, family documents, advertising, archival material, and public testimony—to produce poetry that intervenes in the textual construction of reality by merging the social with the personal.” *Scranton Lace* pivots around (and uses authentic material from) a real place with an established legacy. What are the consequences of using a specific place in a work of art? How can artists navigate diverse perceptions of a real place, in documentary poetry or other forms?

Writing Exercises

1) “Dive” is a poem told as a dialogue. Challenge yourself to write poetic dialogue that exposes a fault line of some kind. Aim for succinctness without sacrificing emotional complexity. Integrate emotional beats that make your scene tremble.

2) “Blue Monday” and “Cutters” use song lyrics as storytelling devices. How are they used and what is their effect in each poem? What is the relationship between a poetic lyric and a song lyric? Select one “telling lyric” from a song that is meaningful to you and build a poem around it.

3) “Quick” and “Runaway” are prose poems. What makes the prose poem form unique? Identify other notable poets utilizing this form. Challenge yourself to use lineation to redraw one of the prose poems in *Scranton Lace*; how is your draft similar to the original? What new insights does the reconfiguration reveal?

4) The titular poem “Scranton Lace” integrates detail and contour to bring an abandoned building complex to life. Challenge yourself to write a poem about a place by first observing and interacting with it in your imagination. What are its personality traits? What is its attitude and philosophy? Identify the colors, temperature, smells, and visual signifiers that make this place unique. If this place were a person, would it be charming or dangerous? Is this place healing, spacious, toxic, or complex?

5) Inheritance is a helpful framework when thinking about Rust Belt cities like Scranton. Margot Douaihy suggests that many citizens in Scranton have inherited some element of the Scranton Lace story. Challenge yourself to revisit and revise the notion of a story that’s “in your blood” by writing a poem called “Inheritance.” Can you flip the script somehow? Can you bring new eyes and a new idea to a familiar, well-known place?

6) Artistic collaboration can take many forms (illustration and poetry, music and dance, fashion and painting, etc.). Devise a collaborative project that you can complete with a classmate, friend, or loved one. Track your process and share the challenges and revelations you both experience during the journey.

7) One of the imagined characters, Nour, is an immigrant from Lebanon. As the “Stage Directions” series of verse unfolds, it becomes clear that Nour is falling in love with her factory coworker, Elizabeth. Think about the “American Dream;” what does it mean to you and what it might mean for Nour’s character, a queer factory worker who is not from Scranton. Is the American Dream complicated for queer people and/or queer immigrants? Why or why not? Additionally, Nour is often made aware of her otherness as both an immigrant and a queer person. Contemplate a time when you felt your own otherness. Create a poem in which your alterity influences the form or the content.

