

# The Good Mother of Marseille

By Christopher X. Shade

176 pages / ISBN: 978-1-7323025-2-5



---

“Intense visions abound in Christopher X. Shade’s **THE GOOD MOTHER OF MARSEILLE**. Well-developed characters, finding themselves in a landscape that is both beautiful and troubling, come to Marseille in search of many things – a chance to prove themselves, an adventure, a last hurrah. But what they find within is deeply more meaningful and surprising.” Chantel Acevedo, author of *The Distant Marvels* and *The Living Infinite*

---

Dear Reader,

I’m thrilled to introduce you to my debut novel, *The Good Mother of Marseille*.

Here you’ll find questions and topics for discussion. In order to provide you with the most thought-provoking questions possible, I found it necessary to reveal some of the plot’s secrets. If you haven’t finished reading *The Good Mother of Marseille*, I hope you’ll resist peeking at this guide!

Do you have a book group? I’d love to speak with them about these and other ideas central to *The Good Mother of Marseille*, in person or via Skype – reach out at [cxshade@gmail.com](mailto:cxshade@gmail.com).

Thank you for reading! Yours truly, *Christopher X. Shade*

- The book’s website: [ChristopherXShade.com](http://ChristopherXShade.com)
- The publisher’s website: [PalomaPress.net](http://PalomaPress.net)

## About The Book

In Christopher X. Shade's *The Good Mother of Marseille*, it's the summer of 2013, in the year of Marseille's designation as the European Capital of Culture. Readers get a taste of this dangerous, impoverished yet seductive port city of France as they follow the interwoven stories of Americans who have come to wander and sightsee. Noémie, a central character and an anthropology student, wants to make the gritty graffiti-covered neighborhood of *Cours Julien* her home, but she's running out of time, money, and her university sponsor's patience.

---

“A veritable bouillabaisse of a novel, simmering with intrigue and steaming with surprises.” **Lorea Canales**, author of *Becoming Marta* and *Los Perros*

---

Noémie watches over Corey, from New Jersey, who is an earlier version of her: also an anthropology student, he's just getting started. But what he wants is very different. He searches the Marseille streets for someone to love. In the old port, the wife of a small-town Alabama couple presses to see all the sights while her husband is losing his vision to an eye disease. Noémie intersects with everyone – has she stolen the couple's passports? A Colorado man with late-stage cancer and fear of the unexpected falls in love with a French woman he meets at a café. In Marseille and then in Paris, a woman helps her journalist husband figure out what is happening in his head as he experiences a peculiar stress disorder. Hovering on the fringe are the Marseillais, the shopkeepers, artists, café waiters. Who among them will save Noémie?

To the rhythm of European street life, each American puts a Marseille experience in the context of their own histories. It's a love letter to the turbulence of Marseille, and to the turbulence to be found under the surface of each of us, the pounding hearts and jarring fears.

## Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. In your reading, did this French port city come alive for you? How does the language and imagery help to create this effect? What are instances of particularly stunning scenes in which the setting most comes alive?

2. What were your impressions, if any, of Marseille before you read the book? Often Marseille is associated with organized crime and corruption (the movie *The French Connection*), and certainly this novel at times depicts Marseille as a dangerous, turbulent place. And in the story what stands out as unexpected discoveries, thwarting this expectation?
3. How do the spheres of other settings intersect with what is happening for these characters in Marseille?
4. Does Noémie's search for belonging find resolve? And why would she want this to be her home, such a place as this, where there are fights in the streets, depravity, thieves, and poverty, where life is not easy? In what ways are each of these characters searching for something? Which characters have a search that is resolved?
5. Does the book have a happy ending?
6. Why do Russ and Sophie fall in love? Are they a good match?
7. How would you compare Russ and Harv's friendship to Noémie and Corey's, or to Julio and José María's?
8. Works of art figure into the novel a great deal. Identify those moments when art is operating in the narrative. What significance does each have in the story? What do these works of art tell us about the nature of the world described in the novel? About our own nature? Corey describes Monsieur Rousseau as the Bill Traylor of Marseille — does this comparison work? In the later scene with the Confederate flag, what is Corey suggesting about art?
9. The novel takes place during the year of Marseille's designation as the European Capital of Culture. Why do you think the author chose this time?
10. The "good mother" is the church on the hill, the holy presence of Mary who has watched over the residents of Marseille for centuries. How is religion handled in the book, and how are ways the story might have unfolded differently had religion been the central theme?
11. An early draft of the novel, long before it was completed, had the title *The Third Cathedral*. How does this title suggest a different theme, and potentially alter our interpretation of the novel's story?

12. Occasionally there are words in French, such as on pages 55 and 56 in “The Stationer” chapter the word describing the “sluggish draw” of a certain pen. In your reading what were memorable moments of French language for you?

## More Praise

“A remarkable work of imagination, a debut novel that not only introduces us to a gifted writer of fiction, but offers a beguiling glimpse into the zeitgeist of a generation’s appetite for the exotic and the mysterious. In the Hemingway tradition, its many linked stories gel into one compelling story of Americans abroad. Shade’s sensitivity toward his characters is infectious, and, quite frankly, unforgettable.”

**Philip Schultz**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author most recently of *Luxury* and *The Wherewithal: A Novel in Verse*

“Marseille with its hot dangerous streets, its bars, and beautiful churches becomes a character in this fresh and original novel by Christopher X. Shade. Here we glimpse anew intriguing and moving facets of human nature so skillfully and believably portrayed.”

**Sheila Kohler**, author of 13 books, most recently a memoir, *Once We Were Sisters*

“The Good Mother of Marseille is a beautiful and memorable debut, a melancholy tale of both lost and found, a love letter to the night-lights of France, a movable feast for this 21st century.” **Scott Cheshire**, author of *High as the Horses’ Bridles*

- More at [ChristopherXShade.com](http://ChristopherXShade.com)

## About the Author

**Christopher X. Shade** is co-founder and co-editor of Cagibi, at [cagibilit.com](http://cagibilit.com), a journal of poetry and prose. His stories and book reviews have appeared widely, and he has won story awards including the 2016 Writers at Work fellowship competition. He teaches fiction and poetry writing at The Writers Studio. Raised in the South, he now lives with his wife in New York City.

