

Reviews For
POISON IN THE BLOOD:
THE MEMOIRS OF LUCREZIA BORGIA

[Historical Novel Review](#)

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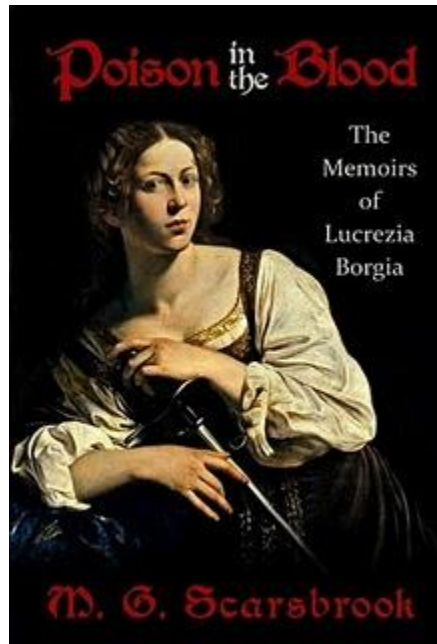
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HISTORICAL NOVEL REVIEW -- 03/13/2011

Poison In The Blood by M G Scarsbrook

Reviewed by Anita Davison



Although the name Borgia is well known for their power hungry and decadent lifestyle, little is known of Lucrezia, the daughter of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI. She was certainly a pawn in her father's quest for power, in that he married her off to three different members of European nobility in order to advance his political ambitions. She was also thought to have had an illegitimate child by a lover. However, the extent of her complicity in the political machinations of her father and brothers is unclear.

Contemporary accounts say Lucrezia had heavy blonde hair which fell past her knees, a beautiful complexion, hazel eyes which constantly changed colour, a full, high bosom, and a natural grace. Although I doubt anyone in 15th century Italy would have dared describe the Pope's only daughter as 'homely'.

History says Cesare Borgia suffered from syphilis and to cover his scars wore a mask and dressed in black. Insanely jealous of her second husband, Alfonso of Aragon (Duke of Bisceglie) when the Prince visited them in Rome, Cesare's men attacked him during the night. To retaliate, Alfonso's men shot arrows at Cesare while he strolled in the garden. This infuriated Cesare, and he had his servant strangle Alfonso while in the recovery room. Lucrezia and Alfonso had an infant, Rodrigo, who predeceased his mother in August 1512 at the age of 12.

It is this marriage and Cesare's hatred of Alfonso that Matthew Scarsbrook's *Poison In The Blood* deals with in a fast paced and very readable way. His Lucrezia is a young and relatively

innocent girl with a conscience, whose father rejected her mother when she was small, and whom she is forbidden to see. Lucrezia's betrothal to Alfonso of Aragon is arranged by her family, but she determines to be a good wife. To her horror, Lucrezia discovers her brother Cesare, keeps a locked room full of deadly poisons and that he also murdered their elder brother Juan, who received honours and privilege Cesare believed were due to him.

When Pope Alexander and Cesare go on campaign to defeat their enemies, they leave Lucrezia behind to keep the cardinals of the Vatican in order. Lucrezia seeks advice from Nicollo Machiavelli, the philosopher and poet, and performs well, but she is also aware that when her men return, Alfonso's days are numbered.

She plans to escape from Rome before the assassins strike, taking their infant son, Rodrigo with them and beg for shelter from Alfonso's estranged family. However, Cesare pre-empts them and returns early, inviting them to a feast which Lucrezia is convinced will be Alfonso's last.

Despite her careful arrangements, Alfonso is poisoned and lies near to death. His only hope of an antidote is the legendary Mithridate, but the formula has been lost. Undeterred, Lucretia goes looking for this miraculous antidote and is reunited with her mother.

Just when I was at the point of deciding this Lucrezia was a little too virtuous, her Borgia ancestry emerges and she persuades Cesare to spare her husband's life in exchange for the formula for Mithridate which she has memorised.

In Medieval Rome, beauty, decadence and luxury hide murder and betrayal. Lucrezia's fight to keep her husband alive is conflicted by the love she has for her brother, a twisted, dangerous man who may not be acting entirely alone.

I thoroughly enjoyed this portrayal of an ancient story and anyone who enjoys Medieval Italy, love, betrayal and a strong, resourceful heroine on a knife edge, will enjoy this well researched and well written book.

ENCHANTED BY JOSEPHINE – CELEBRATES WOMEN IN HISTORY

Poison In The Blood

May 14th 2011

I didn't know quite what to expect when I began reading Scarsbrook's new novel: Poison in The Blood. How was this historical novel going to be any different from the one (by a different author) I just recently read on Lucrezia? Honestly, I often find it difficult to read same subject-character books, one right after the other. So, needless to say, my excitement was not that great-but, I was on for the ride.

Well, I couldn't have been more surprised! Not only did I get a novel filled with more than the basic history as I know it (perfect timeframe, setting and figures) but this one is also a memoir. Written in the first person, Poison in the Blood brilliantly portrays Lucrezia's smarts, her compassion, love, strength of character and wit; something that is not always easily achieved when writing in this perspective.

But really, the thing that I found most interesting in this novel was the poison twist. Historically, the Borgias have always been suspected of dabbling in this area- so why not a novel exposing this? Scarsbrook is brilliant in weaving a plot that ties fiction and history together. Granted, the ending (which I will not give away!) is different from the real history; nevertheless, it could have been quite plausible, with the outcome of Lucrezia definitely being a less-maligned historical heroine.

I particularly enjoyed scenes involving Lucrezia's estranged mother, as well as the famous Machiavelli himself. These touches within the book brought Lucrezia to life for me. Her thoughts, emotions and actions made her so real that I began to empathize with her. Her father, the grand schemer of things was as brutal and conniving as we know. But, Cesare shows another side of his, as well (Though don't get fooled he's still bad!). Living such a twisted life, Lucrezia, who is usually portrayed as a pawn, was clever and strong in reversing her fate. And, that's what I loved most.

Brilliantly crafted, Poison in the Blood is a quick and engaging read that does not feign its way through the history. Rather, it brings an element of 'what if' that is splendidly interpreted into something more than just plain history. Scarsbrook has re-invented the past with suspense and a twist to create a book that is well worth reading.

Category: YA

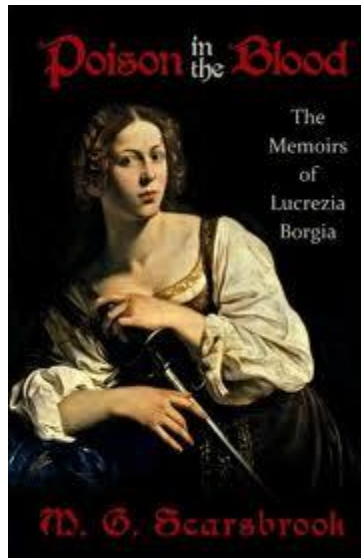
Loved it!

LINDYLOUMAC's BOOK REVIEWS

Saturday, May 28, 2011

Poison in the Blood, The Memoirs of Lucrezia Borgia by M.G. Scarsbrook.

Italy in Books - Reading Challenge 2011



- **Paperback:** 267 pages
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Publisher:** Amazon Digital Services 2011
- **Source:** eBook provided by the author in exchange for an honest and unbiased review.
- **Review Quote:** "Anyone who enjoys Medieval Italy, love, betrayal and a strong, resourceful heroine on a knife edge, will enjoy this well researched and well written book." Historical Novel Review



The May post with a list of books that the other people taking part are reading this month has already been posted. [May Reviews](#)

Until fairly recently the only historical novels I read on any sort of regular basis were those of [Philippa Gregory](#) but thanks to [LindyLouMac's Book Reviews](#) and the opportunity to review some other historical writers my horizons have been expanded. I have always considered my tastes very eclectic but am nowadays more likely to consider reading this genre, than I have been for years. With the themes of the stories based on real life characters it can be an interesting way to learn a little history. I admit to knowing very little about the historical background surrounding Lucrezia Borgia before reading this novel, so this easy and quick read was a pleasurable way to learn a little more about her.

Set in Renaissance Rome in 1497 it also was a good choice for my May entry for the [Italy in Books - Reading Challenge 2011](#) The daughter of Pope Alexander VI, Lucrezia Borgia leads a sheltered life amongst the glamour of the Vatican City. Yet after a brutal killing shocks the city, she learns that all is not as it seems and that her father's court holds dark secrets. She discovers that her own brother, Cesare and father are willing to commit murder to protect their own lifestyle and love of power.

Written as a memoir narrated by Lucrezia in the first person the blend of fiction and historical fact makes her come alive on the pages as she relates to us the intrigue and tragedy of her fathers court. There is no doubt in my mind that Pope Alexander VI was a nasty and brutal man, I disliked his character immensely. Even I knew of the historical connections of the Borgia family to poison, plus the title of the book so it was no surprise that the poison aspect brings the suspense to a story which I recommend to fans of historical novels looking for a quick read.

[Red Adept Reviews](#)

Poison in the Blood, by M.G. Scarsbrook

By SingleEyePhotos On October 13, 2011

I received Poison In The Blood: The Memoirs of Lucrezia Borgia, by M.G. Scarsbrook, as a review copy from Red Adept Reviews. It was in mobi format and appears identical to the version available on Amazon.com. The version I reviewed ended at approximately 75% with the rest being a preview of another book by this author (which I did not read).

Overall Rating: 4 stars

Plot: 4 stars

This story is told in the first person singular voice, as it purports to be the memoirs of Lucrezia Borgia. All events are told from her viewpoint, and all characters are shown as she would have perceived them. The story starts in 1597 when Lucrezia was 17 years old, and ends in 1500 with the deaths of her family members. I enjoyed the story; it teetered right at the edge between being YA and being more suited for adults. Lucrezia briefly gives the background of her early life and her relationship with her father, Pope Alexander VI, and her brother Cesare Borgia. She tells of her meeting with her future husband, the Aragonese Alfonso, Duke of Bisceglie; their marriage and child; and her growing unease about the probability that either her father, her brother, or both were poisoning political opponents to further the Borgia cause. Events come to a head when Alfonso is attacked and nearly killed.

Characters: 4 stars

Lucrezia is portrayed as a very strong, intelligent woman, which is historically correct. She takes the lead in trying to oppose her family and escape from Rome with her husband. She is very likeable and is shown as a good person who wants only to be left alone to enjoy her husband and child, unlike the more traditional portrayal of her as an adulteress and poisoner. Alexander VI comes across as just plain creepy and a consummate emotional manipulator. Cesare is proud and arrogant – the stereotypical Renaissance nobleman. His sole redeeming quality is his care for his younger sister, but even there, something comes across as ‘not quite right’ – perhaps a nod to the rumors of incest between him and Lucrezia. Alfonso is a nice guy, but weak and lacking in real personality, especially by the standards of the age in which he lived. Lucrezia and Alfonso are totally sympathetic characters while Alexander and Cesare are not.

Writing Style: 3 ½ stars

I enjoyed the author’s writing style. It was very simple and easy to read. Generally speaking, simple declarative sentences were used and characters spoke casual modern English – no attempt was made to ‘pretend’ that they were really speaking Italian or Latin. Chapters were quite short

and each one dealt with one incident or episode, which led to a very clear and concise overall style with ideas neatly packaged and presented. I did notice that the author slipped into the “had I but known” omniscient voice every so often. Once or twice would not be a problem, but it was somewhat over-used. I did notice a few scattered issues with homophones (ex. ‘reigns’ instead of ‘reins’ when used of a horse), but they were few and far between.

Historical Veracity:

I am adding the ‘historical veracity’ category because while the characters are very well drawn, a quick Internet search turns up the fact that the author has played fast and loose with the historical aspects. For most of the book, this was not an issue, or at least not noticeable, but toward the end, the errors became more obvious and more important to the story. Some were obviously due to literary license being taken; others could have very easily been corrected. As an example of the first type, no mention was made of the fact that Don Alfonso was Lucrezia’s second husband and their son was not her first child. More disturbing was the fact that the author had Cesare and Alexander die together, several years before either actually did die (the year was carefully specified as 1500) and, for Cesare, in a manner totally different from the historical facts. Alexander died in 1503, and Cesare in 1507. Another error that could have been easily corrected was that the Pope elected to succeed Alexander was Julius II, when it was actually Pius III (Cardinal Piccolomini). Although Pius III’s reign lasted for only 26 days, disregarding his papacy served no literary purpose in the context of this book. There were a few other historical inaccuracies that did not affect the story, but taken all together, this gives a poor impression of the value the author placed on historical accuracy in what purports to be a memoir, where the writer would have been ‘on the spot’ and known the facts.