



The Road to Damietta

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Rich in the atmosphere of thirteenth-century Italy, *The Road to Damietta* offers through Ricca di Montanaro's eyes a new perspective on the man who became the famous Saint Francis of Assisi, the guileless, joyous man who praised the oneness of nature and sought to bring the world into harmony. "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace," he said. "Where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy."

The Road to Damietta Details

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Author : Scott O'Dell

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From Reader Review The Road to Damietta for online ebook

Katherine Basto says

I love Scott O'Dell but this was not one of my favorite books by this prolific author. The positives are that his writing is lush, satisfying to the senses and filled with lots of appropriate details of the time that St. Francis of Assisi lived.

The story revolves around a young, aristocratic girl who becomes a copyist, writing out the scriptures on vellum. She becomes obsessed with the young Francis and follows him throughout the book. This is all well and good but it seems unlikely and at times forced. The plot and some of the characters fell flat for me. Francis, at times a jester, a buffoon, a mystic does not really come to life for me. One of the stronger characters is Sister Clare, who went on to found the women's order of the Franciscan Friars.

I did learn a great deal about the 5th Crusade and the world hasn't changed all that much. We are still fighting the infidels in Syria. I also did not like this edition's cover of the book and did not feel it really did justice to the overall story.

Ashley says

Well...this was kind of a strange book. Girl is in love with wild boy. Wild boy turns into a monk. Girl won't give it up. Girl never gets anywhere with boy. Girl ends up learning that the world doesn't revolve around her. So it has a good moral, but it's definitely not one that I'd give a shout out for.

Trixie Fontaine says

Outstanding; I'm so glad I ran across this book that I'd never HEARD of before and wouldn't have bought if it weren't for vaguely recalling how hard Island of the Blue Dolphins rocked. I'm not someone who's into reading about saints or the crusades or Italy or any of that; it's just a frank, well-researched story of a girl's infatuation that doesn't resemble any other cliched overtold version of same. Pulls in so many provocative issues (but in a simply-told, objective way) but most of all is just a perfectly told STORY, or story blanketing other stories.

I'm so glad I didn't know anything about this book or expect anything or see any of it coming. Just beautifully done in a well balanced, simply-stated way (but still very sensually told). I really appreciated this one; it read totally differently from anything else I've had my nose in lately.

Especially interesting to read as an alternative YA "romance"/adventure to Twilight, et al. ESPECIALLY considering the criticisms of the religious "agenda" of those books, this is a pretty healthy secular alternative.

Jose Phin says

This book is one of the great book I admired for long! I was about 11 in grade 5 when I read this book! I was in an age when I started getting interested in books and read them all day long (actually night long). And I

found this book in my school's library and was fascinated by the book cover (which is different from this cover shown in good reads) and I read the summary and my favorite saint, Saint Clare was mentioned! But it was labelled grade 10 on the first page of the book, so I tried asking the librarian and she surprisingly said yes!

So this book is the retold version of the story of the famous saint, Saint Francis of Assisi from the perspective of a girl named Ricca di Montanaro who fell high over heels with him. Francis of Assisi was a saint who abandoned his luxury life in order to become a preacher. From the start of the change to till his death, Ricca kept keeping hopes to be loved by him (which seems totally stupid and ridiculous, 'duh he's now a saint not the rich guy you knew before' was what I really wanted to get into the book and tell her). She even did an Indian naked dance to impress him which failed, of course! Other than that, I love this book! There were moments I cried, laugh and or do both of them at the same time! And my Saint Clare was also given praises from this book; like she is mentioned to be the most beautiful girl in the town! (Which is kinda opposite with me lol)

Paloma says

Review in English | Reseña en Español

I must have reread this book easily four or five times during my teenage years, and I remember I loved it... the setting, the description of Medieval Italy, the undying love of a young girl, and the change of a mundane man to a saint... Saint Francis of Assisi himself, no less. I recall that I loved going back to this book especially during winter while listening to Italian singers and just being transported to the European countryside while getting lost in a hopeless love story but which seemed so passionate to me.

However, this rereading experience has left me a bitter sweet feeling –I thought I would love the story again but was surprised because first, I had forgotten SO MANY DETAILS and things that I felt I was reading it for the first time. Sure, the premise was on my mind –the story of Ricca di Montaro, a 13 year old girl who is in love with Francis Bernardone, a rich young man who will eventually become Saint Francis and who is also best friend with Claire de Scifi, who will also become a saint. I remembered Raul de los Santos, Ricca's tutor, who tried to guide the stubborn girl and taught her beautiful calligraphy. And that was about it... none of the adventures the characters lived in Assisi, Venice, or Damietta were on my mind.

But above all this time I felt... different. I couldn't really sympathize with Ricca which, 15 years later after I first met her, seems to me a selfish, reckless, stupid girl. Honestly! I hated her arrogance upon seeing a holy man and just been able to think that her best friend had followed him because she wanted to be her lover! Also, thinking of 13th century Italy I really cannot believe a girl would be able to challenge her family the way she did. She'd probably had been locked up in a convent without any right to leave again had she been so careless at showing her passion for a man. And then... she was just 13! Ok as teenagers we are crazy and all but... once again, thinking of the historical context, I just couldn't be convinced.

I will always remember fondly Scott O'Dells fiction because of the time when I read his books –I forced my parents to buy me most of the books available by this author and then I binged on them like crazy during my teenage years. I think the memory of my reading experience is something I won't forget, but I definitely think that I grew past this particular book as obviously I am not the kind of reader who was the target audience.

Hace muchos, muchos años, durante mi adolescencia, en mi clase de inglés descubrí a este autor, Scott O'Dell y obligué a mis padres a comprarme todos los libros disponibles, que luego leí y releí desafortadamente durante mis solitarias tardes de aquella época. Ahora que lo pienso, la mayoría de los personajes de O'Dell son muy jóvenes –adolescentes prácticamente.

De este libro en particular, recuerdo haberlo leído unas cuatro o cinco veces y quizá fuera mi preferido de O'Dell: el contexto histórico, la descripción de la Italia Medieval, el amor de una joven por un hombre que eventualmente se convertiría en San Francisco de Asís... todo me fascinaba. Recuerdo que los fines de semana me encerraba en el cuarto con esta novela y ponía de música de fondo cantantes italianos para acompañar el enamoramiento desafortado de Ricca de Montaro, y sufrir cuando eventualmente no quedaba junto a Francisco.

Sin embargo, esta relectura me ha dejado una experiencia un tanto amarga, pues pensé que al releerla, volvería a disfrutarla mucho y la realidad es que –no era como lo recordaba. Para empezar, me sorprende que prácticamente HABÍA OLVIDADO TODO LO QUE PASÓ. Recordaba la trama, el enamoramiento de Ricca, la transformación del joven Bernardone en San Francisco, la amistad entre Ricca y Clara de Scifi (eventualmente Clara de Asís), al tutor español de la protagonista, Raul de los Santos, los rechazos y la desilusión... pero básicamente eso era todo, cada escena, y cada capítulo en cuanto a la trama me pareció totalmente nuevo –no recordaba nada en particular de los hechos ni en Asís, ni Venecia ni mucho menos cuando van a Damietta para intentar evitar la cruzada...

Pero más allá de no recordar los detalles, esta vez la experiencia fue diferente principalmente porque no pude tener empatía o identificarme con Ricca, la protagonista. Esta vez me pareció una chica necia, altanera, INSOPORTABLE. Una cosa es tener un enamoramiento cuando adolescente y otra comportarse con tanta necedad ante lo imposible. Honestamente odié su soberbia, pensando que podría convencer a un hombre santo de tomar placeres mundanos, y el rencor que le guardaba a Clare, pensando que sólo había tomado los hábitos para estar cerca de San Francisco. Además, y a reserva de no ser una experta en la Italia del siglo XIII, me parece que una chica con la personalidad de la protagonista, simplemente no hubiera podido existir –no podría desafiar a sus padres y seguir como si nada, sin consecuencias. Si bien tiene una breve estancia en un convento, lo cierto es que nunca dejó de desafiar a sus padres. Creo que una chica así, de haber existido, hubiera sido enviada a un convento de clausura y listo.

En definitiva, no soy la misma persona que hace 15 años leyó esta historia y probablemente “crecí” más que la protagonista, dejando de ser el lector objetivo de este tipo de libros. Sin embargo, creo que conservaré un buen recuerdo de los libros de Scott O'Dell por lo que en su momento la experiencia de la lectura representó para mí, hace muchos años en los fríos inviernos de Chihuahua.

Rick Edwards says

My daughter and I enjoyed reading this together. It offers an utterly contrarian portrait of Francis of Assisi, narrated by Ricca di Montanaro, a young woman of Assisi. Ricca carries the torch for Francis Bernardone from before his religious conversion. She nurses her unrequited love and continues to pursue him through many challenges, perhaps saving his life in Egypt during the fifth crusade where he walks through enemy lines to propose peace to the Muslim commander. The story is well told, and borderline-racy for young readers.

Angie says

I think I was eleven or twelve when I read *THE ROAD TO DAMIETTA* for the first time. I was in the middle of a serious Scott O'Dell binge and had just moved back to the States after living in Italy for a few years. So it had the added attraction of taking place in that country I loved at a time when I was having a fair bit of trouble transitioning back to the American culture and pace of living. I'd already burned through *Sarah Bishop*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *The Serpent Never Sleeps*, *The Spanish Smile*, and *Streams to the River* by the time I came across a copy of *THE ROAD TO DAMIETTA* in a narrow, dusty bookstore in West Yellowstone. My copy had the old blue cover. I have always liked it. Though the French cover is also quite nice. I have to be honest and say that the current cover kind of scares the crap out of me. Don't think I would ever have picked it up based on that cover alone, which would be a shame as it's really a beautiful book and one of the first young adult historical fiction novels I ever read. O'Dell was great for introducing me to so many time periods I was unfamiliar with as a young teen.

Ricca di Montanaro is thirteen years old and irrevocably in love. The object of her affections is Francis Bernardone--the son of a wealthy merchant and general bad boy about town in Assisi. Though most of the men look down on Francis, most of the women in town follow him with their eyes and stay up at night whispering word of his exploits to one another. Ricca and her best friend Clare di Scifi are no exception. But when Francis publicly renounces his father's fortune in favor of a life of poverty and spirituality, Ricca's hopes are shattered. Over the next several years, Ricca determinedly follows Francis, alarming her parents and family with her single minded pursuit of a man who has left behind all things worldly. When the fifth Crusade marches to Damietta, Ricca joins the march because Francis is there. It is at the fateful walls of Damietta that she sees firsthand the horrifying depths that violence and passion can reach when employed in the name of God. Disillusioned, his health ruined, Francis returns to Assisi and Ricca, as ever, follows him home one last time.

I have always found the history of St. Francis a fascinating topic. This is a fictionalized account told through the eyes of a young woman who decides she will love this young man for the rest of her life. It is an interesting specimen as Ricca herself is not very likable. She has many qualities I admire, including her doggedness and determination to remain true to herself. And she clearly recognizes something in Francis very early on that others do not. At the same time, she can be petty and unbelievably blind to realities, and these flaws persist to the end of the story. Normally, I might dismiss her out of hand. But for some reason her story (and particularly Francis') still resonate with me. I'm not sure if Ricca ever truly understands the man who became a saint. She and he are different kinds of creatures entirely. But in the end she does come to understand herself. And thus she achieves a kind of peace, I think. This is a novel about transformation and unrequited love, of human suffering and divine faith. It is haunting and real, never dipping into a cloying, romanticized take on the historical events it fleshes out. It is probably my favorite of O'Dell's many novels and, when I had the opportunity to travel to Assisi a few years ago, it came back to me with a vengeance as I walked the rose and white cobblestones of that hilltop town and remembered Francis and Ricca.

Maya Rock says

Good book. Shades of *Gone With the Wind*. Rich teenage girl who is a good illuminator in medieval or Renaissance Europe is in love with St. Francis of Assisi, before he is a saint, follows him around, realizes she

should really be in love with her hot Muslim tutor who knows the stars. But it's too late.

Martina Villarreal says

For those readers who were surprised at the cover not being so innocent, its good to remember that Scott O'Dell himself did not think of himself as a writer of children's books. When I was in college doing research on this author for my children's literature class, my research actually said that he thought of himself as a writer of novels which children just happen to read. I think this is a distinct difference worth remembering. After all, how many books for children mention orgies (Ricca says "I saw none of the orgy, it being described by my brother") and belly dancing in which the naked woman strips off her seven veils?

I've always thought this book was excellent. I first read it as a teenager, and even though at 33 I read other books for people my own age, I do come back to this one as a good, short reread every now and again. Yes, this is a coming of age story-- and the fact that Ricca's almost undying love of Francis threatens to make her an unreliable narrator, the narration actually is pretty reliable and refreshing. I won't give away any more than that but I do think this book is worth reading, especially if you are a Scott O'Dell fan.

Kara says

Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear. Oh Poor Ricca. Oh poor little rich girl Ricca. And I mean that sincerely. Poor girl, she's in love with a living saint – and those types of stories never end well. Someone who has heard The Call is not going to notice if someone is in love with them.

We follow the story of Saint Francis of Assisi from the outsider perspective of a young noblewoman (girl, really) whose had everything she's ever wanted handed to her on a silver plate and is more perplexed than anything else that she has finally found something she can't have.

She moons around after Francis, not really getting it that he has decided to reject all things material, convinced she can get him to fall in love with her if she writes him a sappy enough love letter.

She's also jealous of Francis's partner-in-spiritual-rebellion, Clare, convinced all their talk about God's love is a much more earthy love.

So Ricca lounges around the family villa, copying the more erotic parts of Song of Solomon to send to Francis, pouts that he doesn't love her yet, and ignores everyone's advice to grow up, 'cause all those silly adults have never *felt* the *feelings* she is *feeling*!

Ah the teenager years. Wouldn't repeat that experience if you paid me a million bucks.

And then the fifth crusade breaks out and it all kind of dissolves into 13th century fanfiction as Ricca makes her way to the Holy Land without being killed or raped, saves Saint Francis from execution, makes friends with all sides, and in general acts like an all around Mary Sue. Urgh.

Anna says

Okay where do I start... alright with our main character it's safe to say i did not like her. She was foolish and irresponsible chasing after Francis. I felt bad for him because she was chasing after him. There were times where i enjoyed it and times were I didn't it did show how the new Crusade affected Italy and how Francis of Assisi got his start and how his life transpired.

Bryce says

This was one of O'Dell's best. Simultaneously highly original and historically insightful -- a difficult feat.

Jenn says

I remember this book getting me interested in historic fiction as a young girl (5th/6th grade or so). The suggestive cover is strange to see, since the book is about a trip taken by St. Francis of Assisi. Perhaps there is an aspect of the book that was lost on me....

Hilda says

This was a pretty good tale about Saint Francis of Assisi, and of Ricca the young woman who became enamoured of him from their child-hood days up until his death.

The more Ricca professed her love for Francis the more he professed his love for Christ!

Brooke says

Completely new and refreshing subject-matter from the last book I read, but that tends to be the case. Having only been a distant observer of the folklore and life of St. Francis of Assisi, I look forward learning more and experiencing it from a woman's narrative.

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Neat book. Ricca's love for Francis can be inspiring at times, but at other times the plot became very unbelievable and I couldn't really follow her emotions. I was genuinely surprised at the amount of freedom of choice she had, being a teenage girl in thirteenth-century Italy, born into nobility, and of marrying/childbearing age. Maybe this wasn't very accurate to the time period?

Overall, a lovely collection of small and large adventures and interesting happenings, my favorite being Ricca's Egyptian dance for the sultan, although her attitude about seemed inconsistent with the general



disposition of her character throughout the book. I look forward now to reading more about the life and works of Saint Francis of Assisi, and even more so, the historical decimation of Damietta and other atrocities of the crusades.

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