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Donna Freitas, she hears voices

Jeannette Cooperman | Oct. 24, 2008

Donna Freitas

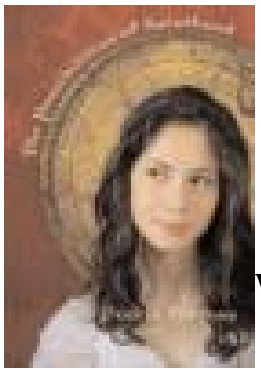
Donna Freitas is an assistant professor of religion at Boston University, earned a solemn doctorate in religious studies from the Catholic University of America and wrote a dark tome, *Killing the Imposter God*. Then she started researching *Sex and the SoulPossibilities of Sainthood* even has its own trailer on **youtube.com**.

Sounds like the book practically wrote itself.
I teach about the medieval women mystics, and now I joke that I hear voices

too.

Any idea why this story seized you?
My mother had died suddenly, and I was spending a lot of time thinking about what she had left me. Like cooking -- I was conscripted into the kitchen as a kid. And she and my grandmother prayed to the saints all the time; we had statues all over the place.

Antonia thinks she's the only girl in high school who's never been kissed. What was *your* first kiss like?
Er ... I was a late bloomer like my protagonist. But I ended up having a pretty wonderful kiss.


Well ...?

I'm not kissing and telling. When I wrote the kissing parts in the book, I was beet red and had one hand over my eyes. I couldn't believe I was writing a kissing scene. But I finally realized she was *going* to have her first kiss, and I was going to have to write it.

So how autobiographical is the novel?
I, too, used to see the Communion line as a parade of potential boyfriends. But being a saint, that never crossed my mind.

Who was your favorite saint?
The Italian favorite, St. Anthony, finder of lost things. We talked to him all the time in my house. Put on a pot of tea, call on St. Anthony, because Grandma's lost her purse and we've got to go.

Antonia comes up with a few suggestions, like a patron saint of secrets. Are you sure there isn't one already?
I checked. There is, however, a patron saint of spelunking, and I learned all about St. Expeditus, patron saint of hurrying things up.

You relished this subject, didn't you?
In some ways, the saints are wonderfully kitschy, comedy-in-waiting. I don't mean that disrespectfully. People focus, and for good reason, on the darker side of Catholicism, but there's this wonderful lighthearted side that's filled with life.

What difference do you think the saints make?
Oh, it gives you a place to go with your little needs -- actually not always *little* needs, but those daily things you worry about. One of the things that's so hilarious is how specific they are; you literally have this *army* of men and women you can turn to. If you're having trouble in gym class, St. Sebastian's your man -- who else is going to care?

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