



Domino

Ross King

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Ross King's delightful, Rabelaisian novel recounts the adventures of young George Cautley, an aspiring artist who, as he makes his way through London's high society, finds that nothing is as it seems and everyone wears a disguise. Moving from masquerade balls in London to the magnificent and mysterious opera houses of Venice, Cautley is drawn into a web of intrigue and murder spun by the seductive and tempestuous Lady Beauclair. Suspenseful, menacing, and laced with black humor, King's picaresque tale is full of surprises and suspense, told at the pace of a thriller and with the richness of a restored painting.

Domino Details

Date : Published December 30th 2003 by Penguin Books (first published January 1st 1995)

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Author : Ross King

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From Reader Review Domino for online ebook

Jane says

The guy has an ear for patterns of 18th-century speech, but the story draaaags along as he indulges in extended descriptions of dress and make up. Candide gets lost in a costume shop . . .

Rose says

I'm throwing in the towel on this one. The pageantry of 18th century life is on display in remarkably rich detail, but the characters are mostly types -- familiar ones who seem to be culled straight from Fielding and Richardson and who were therefore remarkably predictable. Ross's characters take too many walks and struggle too much with the weather and take too many paragraphs simply to respond to remarks that are put to them. Ross King gets the tone just right, and he notices and writes about an awful that period authors seem to have considered beneath their notice. But its not enough to make this book compelling. In fact, this novel is off-putting. He keeps setting up all this interesting scenarios and then never developing them. Despite all the intriguing settings and set-pieces, nothing much happens. This was King's first book; he eventually went on to write award-winning art historical tomes. A wise decision on his part.

Vika Ryabova says

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Scarlett Sims says

I love historical fiction. The 18th century is one of my fave centuries, and I loved all of the details about the clothing and food and such. My biggest problem with this book was that the plot was kind of convoluted. There are so many mistaken identities and hidden identities that I got confused.

Niklaus says

Indubbiamente il libro è ben scritto ed è accurato nella descrizione della Londra (ma anche di Venezia e Napoli) di fine '700. Manca tuttavia di quel qualcosa in grado di trasformare un libro leggibile in un libro "da leggere". Tra i difetti menziono l'eccessiva lunghezza, caratteristica che solo pochi autori come Stephen

King, possono affrontare senza sedare il lettore. Alcune parti poteva agevolmente essere tagliate e il lettore ne avrebbe giovato. C'è di meglio in giro.

Jan Cocquyt says

This books enters my personal top ten of best fiction books ever!

Nathan says

A tale with an embedded tale set in Italy and England in 1720 and then England again in the 1770s. The voyages of an Italian castrato and a young aspiring English painter. Are the two tales connected? Are the narrators reliable? Just who are these people?

King leaves these questions to the reader to work out, if they can.

This gets three stars for the good writing. The plot(s) are confusing, the motivations of the characters unclear. But it is certainly atmospheric and conjures up time and space very well.

Rated M for moderate violence and adult themes.

Monica says

Ross Kisg is lecturing in NYC. wish I was there -- *a historical novel, Domino, about the world of masquerades and opera in 18th-century London. King is best known to American readers as the author of the nonfiction Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture.* --The Frick Collection

Martin says

Normally I would start a book review with a brief synopsis of the story. Normally. When I have a good idea what the story is about or what the logical progression of events is. In this case I have no idea what's happening. Granted, the narrative is compelling, the descriptions of the period mesmerizing and spellbinding and the sense of reality is utterly sublime. In a nutshell, with many onion layers, digressions and diversions the story probably comes down to:

An old painter has an engaging conversation at a masked ball with a young gentleman who interrogates him about the perambulations and ideally scandals of society and in particular the most famous castrati of the period. Now the painter becomes the narrator and tells the story of his travels from the country side into the heart of London society. I'm not giving anything away when I say that this outer story is of no consequence at all and doesn't add anything story-wise whatsoever. We are now firmly embedded in the life

of the narrator who, as the son of a clergyman, has little or no knowledge of the real world and therefore lands in various unfortunate situations of his own inexperienced devising. Much of these events feel very much like the adventures of The Idiot in the story The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Like the Idiot our unhappy painter-to-be doesn't learn much from his experiences and keeps stumbling on and on. He meets a stunning beauty who hires him without credentials, without experience to paint her portrait. All this leads to the introduction of another layer of narrative when the dear lady tells the tragic story of Tristano the famous (and fictitious) Venetian Castrato. All this appears to wrap up at some point because every character finds out that every other character isn't who he or she appears to be and is either the other person or is married, engaged or related to the other person. You be the judge.

Quite frankly I shouldn't be this negative, there is some amazing writing going on and the author clearly spent a tremendous amount of time researching the period and the characters. Pretty soon you will be checking the top of your head to see if your freshly powdered wig is still in its predetermined place. Not many other books give such a vivid depiction of a historical period and only a novel like The Nature of Monsters by Clare Clark or any of the novels by Michael Gregorio come close.

Fortunately not many writers create such and astonishing amount of confusion as Ross King. When I started reading the novel I felt the strange sensation that the chaotic jumble of events felt similar somehow. Once I managed to wade deeper into the marshes I realized that I had the same sense of confusion during the reading of Ex-Libris, also by Ross King. This time I wanted to know why exactly I had such a hard time figuring out what happened and to whom. Of course the fact that the story revolves around masks and mistaken identities didn't help.

I started searching for specific passages where the progression of events doesn't make sense or doesn't add up. Here is a very good example of how the reader gets off track, sometimes even without realizing it:

That is to say, in this moment I noticed many things about Eleanora that I had hitherto failed to notice or recognize; as if, before, I had seen her only like this, through the false image of some warping piece of glass. Unable to face this reflection I turned and, to the sounds of her laughter--as unpleasant and mirthless as her smile--plunged down the stair and into the rain. ...

(2 pages of narrative in which the protagonists stumbles through the streets of London, walks into a pub where he has two beers, enlightening conversations and other such miscellaneous interactions) ...

'Jealous', Eleanora was saying two minutes later. She was still seated before the glass, ...

If you read the text at a normal speed, which I can't, I have to read it very slowly, you might skim over this detail and think nothing of it. But unfortunately such episodes occur all over the novel and it slowly grates at the frontal lobe. Minor additional aggravations are things like many grammatical errors and misspellings, which are completely out of tune with the otherwise carefully crafted text.

The ultimate irony is that King's non-fiction books are crystal clear in their narrative and storytelling and read much more like fiction than either Ex-Libris or Domino. I recommend reading this if you're into a good period piece and if you want to be thrown head first into London and Venice of the 18th century.

Siobhan says

Well-written, tightly organized, dual story of two young men a generation apart picking their way through a wanton, masked society. Beautiful settings and full of lush description, but the protagonist is frustratingly naive. Explores duality, reality and illusion, truth and distortion, and gender identity, and the form mirrors the themes. Nonetheless, it is a frustrating story.

Samantha says

I almost didn't make it through this, and freely admit I ended up skimming most of the last third of the book. The academic in me was definitely impressed by the breadth and depth of information jammed into this volume, but mostly it felt excessive and self-indulgent, rendering almost unreadable what had all the makings of an excellent story. I was surprised, as I've liked everything else I've read by Ross King and certainly knew to expect a certain tone and scholarly pursuit of plot, but for some reason it just didn't shake out nearly as well in this as it did in Ex Libris or any of King's exceptional nonfiction offerings.

Brad says

A well written book by a well respected historian. The author mimicked the writing style of the period (early 19th century) and his descriptions, settings and research was fine. However, I found the story hard to follow and it didn't come together for me, though perhaps I should have read it in a shorter period of time.

AV AV says

Prachtig verhaald. Twee verhaallijnen in twee werelden in twee perioden door elkaar. Niet een boek om er even bij te lezen. Ik moest het terugbrengen naar de bieb. Ik heb het niet geheel kunnen lezen. Ik pak de draad wel weer eens op.

Marisa says

As always, this author's research and writing style is brilliant. Unfortunately, this book is like a roller coaster, with segments that are intriguing and entertaining, but long chapters where the reader believes the best part of the book may be the end (brilliant and boring may be an appropriate summary). Domino has a philosophical theme that is intriguing, but the character development and plot (or lack thereof) left me disappointed. I place this in the category of a good idea - a writing with potential - that misses the mark.

Christie says

I don't know why I didn't like this book. The main character reminded me of someone from Goldsmith, the history was good, the sense of place was pretty good, and yet somehow I could not get very interested. Kudos to the author for the research, but something went really wrong somewhere for me to get bored with a book and give up reading it.
