



Ararat

D.M. Thomas

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First of a series of novels about Soviet Russia. The theme of improvisation, which I introduce here, reflected my own sense, still, that in writing a novel I was on a high wire and ready to fall off, since I didn't consider myself a traditional novelist, and still don't.

The TLS asked me to review an Anthology of Armenian Poetry, edited by Diana der Hovanessian. I fell in love with the poetry, and was moved by the tragic history of Armenia. This was one starting point for this novel; the other was Pushkin's 'It sails. Where shall we sail?...' The last line of his poem 'Autumn'.

Ararat Details

Date : Published May 1st 1984 by Pocket Books (first published 1983)

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Author : D.M. Thomas

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From Reader Review Ararat for online ebook

Helen says

I always forget how good DM Thomas is until I reread him !

Richard says

I found the narrative slightly confusing...

MJ Nicholls says

The fourth novel from sex-obsessed Russophile DM Thomas is a curious frame tale (and frame tale within frame tale) concerning a repugnant Russian writer and his antics on a sea liner who is working on his own version of Pushkin's *Egyptian Nights* (included as the centrepiece of the book). The story commences with Rozanov, another repugnant Russian writer who, at the request of his blind lay, improvises a tale about a sickly writer who meets various curious characters such as an ex-Nazi butcher (whose dealings are outlined in unpleasant detail), a nurse who concedes to be bedded, an interviewer, and a woman named Donna who might be to old for the writer to bed. Inside this improvised tale is the tale of the Italian *improvvisor* in Pushkin's story, lending the novel the illusion of symmetry. An oddly breezy, at times oddly repugnant, intellectual riff of a fairly diverting nature.

Josh says

I love Love, and the child of Love, the love-child. I am in love with Love. Love is the centre of my life. Love acts, and Love sings. Love is the Most Beautiful Lady, and has a dark ambiguous cunt. I am the child of Love, and her master. Love fills my days with boredom, and gives my nights moments of rapture. Love is laying me waste, but I want her devastation. I love Love when she combs her red-gold hair, and when she whispers shameful phrases in the dark. I love her when I am sick, and she ministers to me. I love her when she presses the golden swan to her slim body; and when she broods tenderly over the Christ child. I love her when she sits naked on a rock, her hair in strands from the sea water, her left hand resting palm-upward on her sturdy thighs – whether to give or to take, we don't know.

What happens if you throw Alexander Pushkin, Milan Kundera, and a traditional Armenian story teller into a blender?

David Logan says

Gorsh, I read this a long time ago. Published 1983. All I remember is that I liked it.

Talie says

twisted b/w dream and reality. Odd story - it didn't rest well with me about the old man and young woman

Seth Augenstein says

Fascinating and strange. Would have rather had it last 500 pages instead of 200.

Shovelmonkey1 says

This book is not just a book. It is physical proof that I have a compulsive book buying problem. I bought this a few years ago based solely on the title and I did not even pause, stop or blink before I shelled out the small £2 asking price nor did I bother to read the back cover to see what the book was actually about. And there lies the rub.

What was I expecting?

A travel narrative or travel history of an area (Armenia and NE Turkey) with which I am familiar and would like to have spent more time but never got the chance.

What did I get?

A vastly inexplicable yet oddly engaging novel which traversed time periods and geographical locations and generally managed to befuddle and befuse the bejesus out of me.

(And now, because Dan requested it...) This book, for me, was as random as being run over by a joy riding polar bear. It could have only been made to seem comparatively less random if the polar bear had then reversed over me to check I was dead and then ridden off wearing my head as a hat. So there you go.

This book had the word-scent and taste of something written a long time ago but really it was only written in the early 80s. The author may in fact have been Paul Auster before Paul Auster was Paul Auster or even realised what being Paul Auster was all about. Post modernism with a dash of nostalgia. There is a lot of improvised poetry in this book (quatrains dontchaknow) and the book itself is largely a demonstration of the worth of improvisation as a skill to dazzle and entertain, as a literary pursuit and as a way of life. After all, do we not improvise every day? Set in Russia, America and Armenia, it is the mysterious Mount Ararat which provides a linking theme between all three stories, although to be honest I'm still not really sure why. After all this I still don't know enough about Armenia but I do know I still want to go there.

Angela says

A matroshka of a story that floats through time and space, "Ararat" is the first book in a series by DM Thomas (of which I read the fourth book, the political satire "Summit," many years ago). It has all the hallmarks of a D M Thomas novel - his fascination with the psychology of cruelty and the hysteresis of relationships - but at its heart is an homage to a century and a half of Russian literature.

Rick says

Terrific, unusual book, in three minds with at least three stories. The writing is delightful-fabulous.

Homo says

post modern hyper cool

Samuel Mardirosian says

like a mature Wes Anderson, but occasionally in a good way
