



Così Fan Tutti

Michael Dibdin

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An Aurelio Zen Novel

Michael Dibdin's overburdened Italian police inspector has been transferred to Naples, where the rule of law is so lax that a police station may double as a brothel. But this time, having alienated superiors with his impolitic zealotry in every previous posting, Zen is determined not to make waves.

Too bad an American sailor (who may be neither American nor a sailor) knifes one of his opposite numbers in Naples's harbor, and some local garbage collectors have taken to moonlighting in homicide. And when Zen becomes embroiled in a romantic intrigue involving love-sick gangsters and prostitutes who pass themselves off as Albanian refugees, all Naples comes to resemble the set of the Mozart opera of the same title. Bawdy, suspenseful, and splendidly farcical, the result is an irresistible offering from a maestro of mystery.

Così Fan Tutti Details

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Author : Michael Dibdin

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Sunita says

Zen is exiled to Naples and hopes to lounge through his posting until he can retire. But he is caught up in personal and professional mysteries and crimes. One of the subplots is based on the Mozart opera (hence the name), and this is a more lighthearted and comic installment than some of the others. Very enjoyable.

Nikki says

This is the first Aurelio Zen mystery I've read although it probably won't be the last. (Michael Dibdin, sadly, died in 2007). Set in Naples, this book is a bit of a tour-de-force as it is loosely based on the Mozart opera of the same name, but updated to modern-day Italy. Quite enjoyable.

Lyn Elliott says

This is the least satisfactory Aurelio Zen I have read. Here we see Zen with little integrity, turning his back on responsibility, accepting and entering into the corrupt and inefficient world of crime and policing in Naples. There's not much appealing about Zen's character in this book.

The Così Fan Tutti theme is far too complicated to sustain and the whole plot goes up in the air in the end, like coloured paper shapes.

I think it is time for me to move to books about Italy written by Italians, not English or American bestselling authors.

Bruno Bouchet says

Dead Lagoon was the first Zen mystery I read and I can see why Dibdin went in this direction for Così Fan Tutti. Looking back, Dead Lagoon was pretty grim and miserable both in weather and mood. Clearly Dibdin wanted some fun for the next book and he certainly has it with this. The plot of opera is quite cleverly updated and interwoven into the book and the opening is beautifully cinematic in its following of the garbage truck. You don't really need to know the opera to spot the operatic like qualities of the plot - sisters, lovers, disguises, tricks to test fidelity. It's interesting that the central character from a very serious book can suddenly be transported into what is effectively a comedy, and a farce at that. I whipped through it (good reading when you're stuck at home with a terrible cold as I was) but I can't help feeling comedy and farce are not Dibdin's strongest suits. It was all just a little too forced and the final scenes too reminiscent of a comic opera pastiche. But clearly the author is having a rollicking time, and it is infectious. You just have to go along for the ride and enjoy it for what it is. What remains to be seen is whether Zen can return to be a serious character in the next book.

Darwin8u says

So funky. I'll write more in a couple days. Jet lag is a harsh and unforgiving mistress.

- Robert Farwell / Edward Jones library / Mesa, AZ 2014

Alan Taylor says

Not the most successful of Michael Dibdin's Aurelio Zen novels but an interesting experiment. Loosely based around the plot of Mozart's similarly named opera, the plot is similarly farcical. Zen, never the most dedicated of policemen, is here a lazy, work-shy bumbler who rarely seems to know what is going on and at times the plot became so convoluted that I shared his bemusement. But there is enough here to make the book worthwhile and some laugh out loud moments such as the taxi driver who interprets American-English to Italian despite her only English being Cockney dialect.

Silvio111 says

I have not finished this one yet; I am half way through, but I think this may be my least favorite ZEN mystery. (I am a hopeless fan; I am working my way through them all...)

This plot runs parallel to the famous opera, "COSE FAN TUTTE." I think the opera title refers to a female "tutte" ("all"); as in "Women are all like that;" whereas the book title has been altered ("TUTTI") to refer to the masculine, or inclusive, as in truly everybody, not just all women. Forgive my mangled Italian translation; I am not fluent.

The chapter headings are taken from the libretto in Italian; Dibdin translates them (in his own way) into English for the Table of Contents.

All very interesting and amusing, but a bit too contrived for me to focus on the mystery. Dibdin has a curious sense of humor, and there are moments in the book where I did burst out laughing, in spite of being alone in my house. This bodes well for an amusing book. I will reserve final judgement until I finish the book.

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Later: Just finished the book. I take back everything I said. The plot is a sublimely amusing farce; equal to anything from Shakespeare, as regards mistaken identity, obsessive infatuation, secret plots coming to fruition, and even Zen's poor mother. A very entertaining book; much lighter reading than most of the other Zen novels. IN this one at least he does not get his heart broken; he mostly stays above the fray, although I don't think I am spoiling anything by mentioning that he does end up in a garbage dump! Highly recommended; just a slow starter.

Linda says

I rarely read mysteries, but this was a fun summer escape in preparation for a real fall escape. I'd never heard of the author before, but in his genre he appears to be quite well known and respected.

The book drips with sarcasm about human vanities and political machinations. Inside jokes based on sibling rivalry of the northern versus southern regions of Italy piqued my interest. There's much more than pasta to learn about this fascinating country.

The plotline touches various and sundry forms of love (of course, given the title), loyalty, and survival in a country whose politics is governed by conniving minds and greased palms. Perhaps this is an insight into what America will become in the next decades. I hope not.

The final chapter, written in present tense, reads like a modern Opera Buffa

Lukasz Pruski says

"Everybody in Naples is more or less a gangster, my dear. It's a question of degree."

Zen again. *Così fan tutti* (1996) is my fifth novel by Michael Dibdin featuring the unconventional, unpredictable, and often unlucky police inspector Aurelio Zen. This time the plot takes us to Naples (the Italian name Napoli - coming from Greek Neapolis - sounds much better, of course), and is closely based on motifs from Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto to Mozart's famous opera buffa *Così fan tutte*. Note the one-letter difference in spelling of the titles - *tutte* is feminine while *tutti* masculine - the substitution is not insignificant for the novel!

Zen is posted to a lowly job of a harbor detail commander in Naples. He tries very hard not to do much in his new job and avoids any involvement in police work, which suits his subordinates fine since they are busy running various lucrative businesses, including a brothel, from the police station. Meanwhile, crime keeps happening in the city: local businessmen disappear, literally treated as garbage by sanitation crews. Zen is supposed to work on the case of Greek sailors knifed in the port by an American counterpart, but he does not exhibit much diligence, instead helping a middle-aged widow arrange an intrigue that aims at breaking her two daughters' infatuation with local hoodlums (this thread of the plot borrows heavily from the opera's libretto).

The romantic intrigue is purely farcical, and the crime-related components of the plot are not the main focus of the story. The author is at his best providing a biting, satirical look at Naples' local character, proving again his superb observation skills and smooth writing. This layer of the novel is also truly hilarious - just imagine the situation when the police force, mourning their comrade fallen in action, are so extreme in their grief that even the whorehouse operating on the police station premises needs to be temporarily closed.

The operatic ending of the novel offers a truly clever denouement. Readers who - unlike myself - like plot twists will love the avalanche of surprises. Revelations are stacked upon revelations, and most of them

actually do make sense.

While a lightweight and broad farce, *Così fan tutti* is a well written, funny, and readable book.

Three stars.

John says

I gave up on this book with less than 50 pages left to read. I enjoyed the TV movies based on Dibdin's Zen mysteries, so i thought i would enjoy the books. Man, what a disappointment. The novel starts out witty and interesting and slowly degenerates into a boring, unfocused mess. There is no momentum to the story, and Dibdin tries hard to be clever and unusual, but just turns out confusing and irritating. I think this may be a rare case where the film adaptations are superior to the books.

Nathanielk says

Starts strong, but degenerates into farce as Dibdin tries to cram his crime plot into a re-telling of the opera of the same name.

Nikki says

I loved this one. It was exactly the pick-me-up I needed after Dead Lagoon, which was depressing. I'm not at all familiar with the opera, but this book made me think of a Shakespearean comedy, especially the dénouement.

Lauri says

Oh, Michael. I love how clever you are, how you put in small plot elements that I forget about until they come up to surprise me much later in the book and add to the complexity of the case; how Aurelio is a good man despite himself... but. Sigh. This one was just too silly in the end. Like a parody of an Aurelio Zen book. And it started with such promise. I'll keep reading, but hope this is an anomaly.

Antigone says

In this, the fifth installment of the Aurelio Zen mysteries, Michael Dibdin tries his hand at farce.

Criminapol's Detective Zen has put in for a transfer to Naples, taking a demotion a hair's breath before his superiors can inflict one upon him. In a city known for its rampant corruption (there's a working brothel on the top floor of the police station), Zen plans to keep his head down, his nose clean, and his days free of

intrigue. He makes only the most infrequent and desultory visits to his office, preferring to relax at home, lunch in the local cafes and attend the occasional evening soiree - which is where he meets a fascinating woman with two daughters in need of rescuing from their mafia boyfriends. What this has to do with a knifing at the port and a gang of homicidal garbage men who have decided on a more literal interpretation of the government's desire to clean up the streets will come clear in time.

I'm not a fan of farce, and while Naples makes an excellent venue for a Marx Brothers' romp, I found I missed the gravity given over to honest detection. As a character, Zen already rides a bold line of satiric resignation. Pushing him into a landscape of operatic dimension simply didn't work for me.

Benjamin says

If you just relax at the beginning and accept that this is going to be silly, then it's really a lot of fun. I read it on trains between Linz and Vienna and it made me smile. And also made me think about similarities between Dibdin's Italy and my Austria. I laughed a few times, too. The themes addressed in the more serious Zen books are still here, but I guess the biggest one is "Who are the real criminals?" I mean, are all the corrupt things like bootlegs of designer gear and video games, really so terrible? Or in this kind of abstract, fantasy version of prostitution where all the pimps and drugs are mysteriously absent from the equation, and so it really is a victim less crime... And I think Dibdin is asking that in the previous books too, with corruption and Zen's own willingness to bend and break rules as well as the realistic motivation to "close the case" as opposed to actually catching the bad guy. Discovering the truth is just a by product of trying to make a believable story for the officials. So that kind of cops are not the good guys, crooks are not the bad guys thing is in all of them. The bigger criminal operators, like politicians and mafia bosses, aren't bad because of the operations they're involved in (except when they regrettably have to murder someone) but because of the scale of the operation. If they were just committing crimes to pay the bills and occasionally taste the dolce vita it would all be fine. But they had to get greedy.

The opera is referenced throughout, but Dibdin has cranked the silliness up with way more characters and a lot more disguises and mistaken identities so that even in the case of Zen himself we don't really know who is a cop and who is a gangster or if maybe cops are just a different kind of gangster. Actually, there are some terrorists too, so you don't know if the terrorists are cops or gangsters, etc. But they are all likeable. Essentially, every character in the opera is doubled.

Although it takes place in a city, and no one is doing any crafts or cooking, this is more or less a cozy mystery. Violence is mostly off-screen, so to speak, except in a cartoonish opening that is meant to make it clear that this is not intended to be realistic. There is plenty of romance, or rather, sexual tension, like the opera. So just something for laughs, a good way to pass the time as I sped past the home of the real life dungeon dad at 200 kilometers an hour.
