



Wicked Company

Ciji Ware

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In 18th century London the glamorous Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres were all the rage, beckoning every young actor, actress, playwright, and performer with the lure of the stage lights.

But competition and back-biting between theatre owners, patrons, actors, and writers left aspiring playwrights with their work stolen, profits withheld, and reputations on the line. For a female, things were harder still, as the chances of a "petticoat playwright" getting past the government censor was slim. In this exciting and cutthroat world, a young woman with a skill for writing and an ambition to see her work performed could rise to glory, or could lose all in the blink of an eye...

In Ciji Ware's signature style, real-life characters of the day create a backdrop for a portrait of a glittering era, a love story, and a compelling glimpse into what life was like for a strong and independent-minded woman in an emphatically man's world.

Wicked Company Details

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Author : Ciji Ware

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From Reader Review Wicked Company for online ebook

Jane says

Wicked Company

This book overall had a good storyline but it was not as well written as the 4 Seasons books. It seemed to almost plod along at times but as it did have a long awaited happy ending, I am giving it a 4 star instead of 5. Overall, I love Ciji Ware's books and will read more. I think this was an aberration.

Misfit says

3.5 stars. OK, so since I didn't take the book from Sourcebooks but got it from the library I don't have to wait until late September to post my review, right?

Edinburgh, 1761. Sophie McGann's bookseller father runs afoul of the law as well as a vengeful nobleman and she finds herself in need of a quick getaway out of Scotland before she lands in the clapper as well. Coming to her rescue is the ever-so-handsome Hunter Robertson who hides her in his friend James Boswell's trunk and she's off to London to start a new life with her Aunt and Uncle (who also run a bookshop), but she finds her uncle dead and her aunt well on the road to insanity. Never one to let her spirits down for long, Sophie bucks up and puts the bookshop and printing business to rights. Located near the Covent Garden theater district, Sophie soon finds herself thoroughly entrenched in the theatrical community, including the famous actor/manager David Garrick who encourages her to pen her own plays. Eventually Sophie needs to get out of Dodge in a hurry and retreats to the theaters at Bath where she meets up with old friend Hunter (who is surprised at how nicely Sophie has grown up), as well as two lords with a great interest in the theater business, Roderick Darnly and Sir Peter Lindsay-Hoyt.

Since this is a romance, you know that just as our pair discover true love there's going to be complications and separations, and Sophie finds herself at the mercy of our two debauched noblemen. Is Sir Peter really the dear knight in shining armor he seems, or does he desire Sophie for other reasons? What deep dark secrets does Darnley hold and what is his compelling interest in Sophie? The story from here on out takes plentiful twists and turns and ups and downs as Sophie and Hunter fight the baddies, have numerous Big Misunderstandings and separations whilst trying to keep their true love alive.

I actually enjoyed this book a great deal, especially the different setting of Covent Garden, and Ware did a nice job of weaving her fictional characters in with the historical ones. It was interesting to see how the plays came together along with the struggle women had whilst writing plays and succeeding in a man's world, as well as getting anything past the King's censor. The first two-thirds of the book were pretty near unputdownable (I love a good romance), but in the end things got a wee bit too much with the melodrama, the separations waaaaay too long, and IMHO could do with editing out about 200 or so pages and wrap things up quicker. Still, a good quick read despite its length and I'd recommend it for romance fans, as well as those interested in all things theatrical. 3.5/5 stars.

Christy B says

I jumped at the chance to read and review this. I am a geek for old-time theatre and love stories of women busting through the gender restrictions of their time.

Jumping from Edinburgh to London to Bath and everywhere in between, this is the story of Sophie McGann, a young woman who has more of her share of hard times, trying to fight for a voice in the theatre. She suffered through an annoying censor who was one of many who had their opinion that the theatre was no place for 'petticoat playwrights,' and other road blocks such as her work being stolen and having to choose between her work and love.

It amazed me how this little Scottish woman persevered through every hardship that came her way, and believe me, there was a lot of hardship. It seems every time she turned around, there was something there to take her down. I wondered if Sophie was going to ever get any type of happy ending.

Wicked Company blended both fiction and real historical figures. I loved the focus on the women playwrights, who have been largely forgotten. Sophie came across a few of them at Drury Lane, such as Kitty Clive and Elizabeth Griffith. This book opened my eyes to their work, which I plan to further explore in the future.

Wicked Company was right up my alley. I loved it. It was a thick historical novel set in the 18th century with a wickedly strong heroine and with a great view of the gritty world of the theatre. The descriptions and characters were spot on. I know this sounds cliché, but I felt like I was right there with Sophie, experiencing her frustrations.

This is one of my top books read this year!

Elmira says

Not a bad book, but I would have enjoyed it much more had I been 18, instead of (ahem) a lady of a certain age. It was a romance dressed up as historical fiction, but at its heart it was really a romance. The minor historical inconsistencies (how an 18th century character would act in a situation vs. how a person of modern day sensibilities would act) drove me nuts! I love the cover, but I don't care enough about the two main characters to waste my time finding out if they ever discover true love and happiness in a cruel world. I've got my own cruel world to deal with!

Amy Bruno says

Author Ciji Ware earned a lifelong fan in me ever since reading *Island of the Swans* (READ MY REVIEW) last year and was reinforced when *A Cottage by the Sea* (READ MY REVIEW) was re-issued by Sourcebooks earlier this year. So, when I got an email about reviewing the latest Ware re-issue, *Wicked Company*, I jumped on it quick!

In her author notes Ciji Ware states that the inspiration for writing *Wicked Company* came up unexpectedly while conducting research for *Island of the Swans*. The main character of *Island of the Swans*, Jane Maxwell,

had a sister who had written and produced several plays. Ciji then researched further and found that there were about 98 women who wrote plays and had them run in London's most famous play houses between the years 1660-1800. And even though they were among the most popular writers of the day most of us know little about these extraordinary women.

In *Wicked Company*, Ware brings 18th century London and the struggles of a woman playwright to life. Sophie McCann is the daughter of a Scottish printer from Edinburgh who eventually comes to London and finds herself immersed in the theatrical world of Drury Lane and Covent Gardens. Ciji has a great talent for creating awesome and unforgettable characters and while Sophie's naiveté got on my nerves a smidge I still really enjoyed her. Her tenacity and ambitiousness was inspiring and you really rally for her. My only issue with this book was that after a while it seemed that everything and anything bad happened to Sophie, but I think the author was just trying to show the various obstacles that playwrights had to deal with at the time and for that I think she did a bang up job.

Wicked Company is a great read and I very much recommend it!

Terra says

Wicked Company by Ciji Ware is one of those books you're either going to like or not like. The writing is wonderfully done with consistent action throughout the book but I just found the storyline to be a little too depressing for me.

Sophie McGann is a young beauty working under her father as his apprentice in their bookshop. Lovely auburn locks and small stature make her look much younger than what she is and it's difficult for some to take her seriously because of this. On top of this Sophie is much to trusting and has a fiery Scots temper that would most certainly put mine to shame. Her temper gets her into predicaments that could very well cost her her life but lucky for her she has a Guardian Angel that seems to show up at just the right time to save her cute little behind. Unfortunately, most of us know that reality and religious and political censure can creep up on you and bite you in the ass when least expected.

Hunter Robertson is a startlingly vision of a man let alone a Highlander. Raised through poverty has taught Hunter to use his wits and all his God given talents to try and help his family survive. With Sophie's help Hunter is able to progress to the theater and shows much promise to take him into a realm that will make him comfortable for the rest of his days. Even though he is a rake of the highest stature, it doesn't make him any less susceptible to a certain little auburn haired Scot that will take his heart, break his heart and give him a run for the money in between.

The author does a wonderful job at keeping a nice pace to the story and gives us a realistic look at what Great Britain might have been during the 1800's. Instead of giving us a look at the aristocrat riches and wonderful life, she has taken us to the back streets and alleys of harshness, desperation, betrayal, injustice, love, talent and a sadness for the deaths that consume our characters throughout.

Dorkette says

It's a long-winded, crappy Harlequin romance with annoying and one-dimensional stereotypes for characters. As soon as "boy meets girl", we know that they will end up together. Sophie is a prude and a drip (and an amazingly fertile one), inconcievably devoted to Hunter (no kidding; that's his name) of the wide shoulders and tight buns, despite his unpleasant, rude, and verbally abusive behaviour. On the rare occasion that he's both nice and around, they kiss/have sex, then he abandons her for months to years. Lather, rinse, repeat. The romance plot bears a faint resemblance to Mansfield Park, but at least Fanny didn't marry the guy who knocked her up, then ran off to the colonies for years to save his skin.

Why did I actually finish reading this book? Well, the plot as it relates strictly to the theatre was fairly well done, and the historical details are quite interesting. And I finish 99% of books that I start. Otherwise, unless you're a theatre history buff, and perhaps not even then, don't even try.

Alex says

After reading and really enjoying Ciji Ware's "A Race to Splendor," I ordered this book because the subject and time period seemed like it would be something I'd really enjoy. Yet I found that 100 pages in, I felt like I was forcing myself to keep reading. I wasn't bored, but I wasn't invested in the story. Giving a couple stars because Ware is a genuinely decent writer, but this particular work just didn't do it for me.

Victoria Hess says

Wicked Company, by Ciji Ware is about as much fun as I have ever had in the 18th century. The novel introduces us to a young Scot girl, Sophie, whose mother is dead, and who works with her father in a bookstore and print shop. The church is not very happy with the bookstore, because it sells books that the church doesn't consider appropriate. There is also the matter of the etchings. Between the two, the father is arrested and sentenced to prison, where he dies.

Meanwhile, Sophie has met a young man, Hunter, who is a street performer. She introduces Hunter to the local theatre manager, and Hunter rapidly becomes an important actor, as well as dancer, singer, and ultimately manager of theatres.

After the death of her father, Sophie is spirited out of Edinburgh to London, where her aunt has another bookstore, and also dementia from syphilis. Sophie gets the bookstore in order, while also trying to take care of her aunt. Sophie gets printing contracts with a nearby theatre, and that becomes the center of her life. Even when Hunter reappears and becomes a romantic interest.

Over twenty years or so, there are episodes involving Bedlam (an asylum), ocean voyages, journeys throughout southern England, many theatre performances, theft, blackmail, a marriage and some murders, births, and deaths, and more. Much more. Sophie discovers that she has a talent for writing drama, and though it is a struggle to do so, she successfully earns a living doing it.

This is probably a book that is better enjoyed by women, because there is a romantic interest that simmers throughout. But this is not a simpering romance. I highly recommend this book to those who enjoy historical

novels, particularly those with an interest in the theatre and the struggles of early female dramatists.

Erin says

I wish I could add a half star to this review. While the book had an interesting premise and was relatively well-written, it wasn't Ciji Ware's best.

To start with the pros - I enjoyed the idea of a female playwright trying to make her way in a male-dominated world. I also really enjoyed that I'd been to many of the places where Sophie's story unfolded. From the Royal Mile in Edinburgh to Bath and even the Actor's Church in Covent Garden. It made the background more real to me and brought back great memories of past trips.

For the cons - the story took on a very familiar cadence...Sophie finds herself in trouble with a powerful and slimy guy. She gets mad and does something stupid. Hunter saves her and then runs off. They both pine for each other until they repeat the cycle a few months or years later. This book took place over the course of many years. Many long years. It took a very long time to get to the conclusion of the story, and when I did, there was an unnecessary rush to tie off loose ends.

While I didn't hate the book, it wasn't the best. Some better editing would have been a huge help.

April says

WICKED COMPANY by Ciji Ware is an amazing historical romance set in 1761-1774 Scotland and Boston. It spans thirteen years, is well written, very detailed, has depth, the plot is very interesting. It has romance, deceit, betrayal, intrigue, passion, secrets, danger, misuse, playwrights, theatre, actresses, government censor, actors, a true love story. This story is very detailed with vivid characters and plot. The characters are enchanting, determined, real life, strong, independent and will sweep you off your feet. The heroine, Sophie, is independent, beautiful, a petticoat playwright, strong willed, is misused, betrayed, determined to use her own name for her playwrights, and falling in love with her long time friend/protector Hunter. The hero, Hunter, is handsome, a juggler, wants to be an actor, becomes Sophie's protector and falling in love with her. This story spans over a period of thirteen years, takes them into danger, adventure, Sophie's marriage to an evil, worthless, liar and drunk who uses her to know end. She learns everyone is not what they often seem. Befriends a actress, playwright, becomes with child by her husband, the child dies, she craves for love from her long time friend, Hunter. Hunter, thinks of her only as a friend/sister for years, but learns he is attracted to the woman she has become. Together they face the odds. Sophie, after a long estrangement with her drunken husband, becomes involved with Hunter. Has his child, becomes entangled with someone she believes to be her friend but soon learns he is only after her mind and will do anything to get her to write plays for him. Sophie and Hunter suffer through years of trials but finally find true happiness, family, and true love. This is an intriguing story of love, betrayal, truth, and show the struggles female playwrights went through to get their work published in the 18th century. I would recommend this book, it is long with great details and a wonderful story. A keeper. This book was received for review from the publisher and details can be found at Sourcebooks Landmark an imprint of Sourcebooks and My Book Addiction and More.

Viki Allen says

loved this book from beginning to end, main character was fantastic! great to read a strong, witty female lead

Patty says

This is a tale of a young woman who finds herself without her father. A young woman who was brought up educated at a time when women were not thought to have brains. After her father is arrested for selling books the church finds offensive Sophie writes a tract against those that convicted him and finds herself in serious trouble. Helped out of town by her actor friend she runs to London to seek out her aunt and uncle only to find more problems. Being strong and smart Sophie uses her writing and print making skills to survive.

Ms. Ware's writing style is such that you find yourself drawn into the time period. It was rather like watching a movie in my head. Her descriptions of place, attire and even persons are detailed but not so that you feel like you are reading a list. It's all drawn together so well in the whole of the story. The characters are well conceived and interesting. I did get a bit annoyed with Sophie though; as smart as she was portrayed to be it seemed she just never learned when it came to men. I also found it a touch hard to believe a young girl would survive so unscathed in this time period. But those minor niggling thoughts aside I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

I was not aware that there were so many female playwrights in this time period. It did not surprise me that they were looked down upon and generally dismissed. The descriptions of the theatres and the backstage goings on were fascinating and added so much to the story. I am a theatre lover so it doesn't matter the time - a play is a play!

The central love story was full of challenges. I truly wonder if two people would really survive what these two went through over the course of so many years. There was an appalling lack of communication although I suppose back in this time period women **WERE** supposed to be seen and not heard. heh.

Mary Anne Shew says

I've come to enjoy historical fiction in recent years, especially books focused on women, and Ware's "Islands of the Swans," the first of hers that I've read, immediately made me a fan.

So I'm not happy to report that this one disappointed me.

It's clear Ware did her research when she unearthed the fact that there were almost one hundred female playwrights in 18th-century England, something certainly not well known today. Most of the time, the women had to write under a male name to get their works produced on the stage. But a number authored plays--under their own names--that went on to be popular for many years, even after the death of the author.

Ware crafted a fictional Sophie McGann as her heroine, daughter of a bookseller / printer in trouble with censors for stocking books they deemed unsuitable reading, including plays. She encounters handsome and talented but penniless Hunter Robinson and helps him get work on the stage.

Eventually her talents attract the attention of wealthy and smarmy Lord Darnly, who wants both her writing skills and her ability to procreate.

Thus ensues a long cat-and-mouse game where Darnly continually manages to get Robertson out of the picture, Sophie refuses him, and she gets Robertson back. Along the while, she has to dodge her counterfeit baronet husband and gambler, Peter Lindsay-Hoyt, while also writing her plays.

My disappointment comes from the characterizations of Sophie and Hunter. For someone as clever as she is, she doesn't ken the real threat of Darnly enough to stay out of his clutches. Hunter's pride and ego get into the way each time she yet again has to get him out of deep trouble, even when he's half-dead in prison on false charges. This goes on through almost all of the novel's 600 pages. And the ending is far from satisfying.

I really wanted Sophie to dump the whole lot of them and start anew elsewhere.

That said, if you enjoy theater, you'll love Ware's accounting of all that goes into producing a play, including the backstage and off-stage intrigues, the writing and rewriting, the crashes of the duds and the successes of the hits. I suspect not much has changed in today's theater world.

podle says

Hoo boy - you know, I love me some historical romance but this was actually unreadable. A story about a female playwright during the reign of King George would normally be the kind of thing I would eat up in one afternoon on the couch. I slogged through as much as I could, but yow - the phrase, "We made beautiful perfect love." just shouldn't be written seriously. Ever. Sorry.
