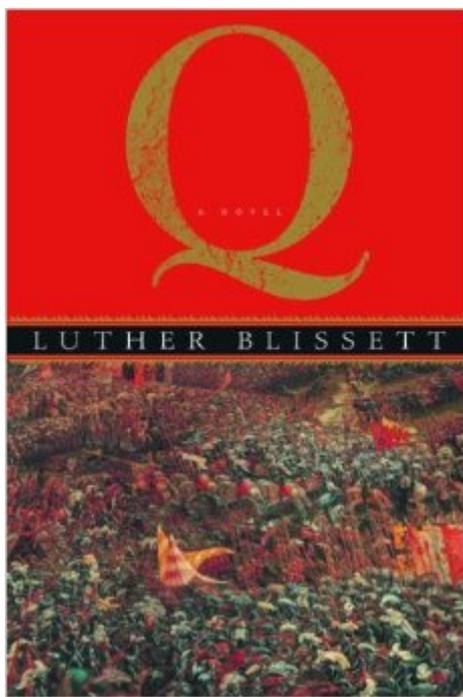


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Q



Synopsis

1517 Martin Luther nails his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, and a dance of death begins between a radical Anabaptist with many names and a loyal papal spy, known mysteriously as "Q." In this brilliantly conceived literary thriller set in the chaos of the Reformation-an age devastated by wars of religion-a young theology student adopts the cause of heretics and the disinherited and finds himself pursued by a relentless papal informer and heretic-hunter. What begins as a personal struggle to reveal each others' identities becomes a mission that can only end in death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The turbulent years of the early Reformation are the focus of this novel of ideas written by four young people who call themselves, jointly, "Luther Blissett." Thomas Muntzer, a leader of the Anabaptists, believes that Martin Luther has become too close to the prince bishops, from whom he accepts protection, to be an effective leader. Gustav Metzger, the speaker, is one of Muntzer's followers, accompanying him during the trauma of the Peasants' Revolt (1524 - 26), which Luther opposes, and serving as an on-the-scene observer. When the revolt fails, villages are leveled, the rebels are put to the sword, and many of the leaders of the revolt are arrested, tortured, and then beheaded. The revolt fails, in part, because of a spy named Qoelet (Q), whose diaries and letters to Cardinal Gianpietro Carafa, reveal his duplicitous actions. As the Anabaptist speaker escapes from one bloody crisis after another, changing his name whenever he changes locations, Q tries to track

him down and to counteract the increasingly dangerous effects of Protestantism. Each of the speaker's failures is related to Q's countermoves, as the speaker travels throughout Germany to Switzerland and the Low Countries, following the spread of ideas. Twenty-five years after surviving the Peasants' Revolt and vicious reprisals against the Reformation everywhere he travels, the speaker, now known as Tiziano Rinato (Titian), arrives in Venice with the financing he needs to distribute "heretical" pamphlets. He and Q finally meet for a showdown. The authors' casual, slangy style, filled with profanities, conveys the frustration and trauma of these four-hundred-year old events in a language with which the contemporary reader can easily identify.

Set in Reformation Europe between 1525 and 1555, *Q* is a historical novel of breathtaking proportions. Our narrator is a soul-searching wanderer who goes by many names (most notably Gert from the Well [in Muenster] and Titian [in Italy]) and who casts his lot with the rebels who have decided to fight authority in many of that era's pivotal, and bloody, conflicts. From the Peasants' War to the siege of Anabaptist Muenster to the Italian Inquisition, our hero thrives as an itinerant rabble-rouser -- a dreamer who sides with the underdogs not only as a matter of principle but as a matter of what it means to be alive in such heady times. Bearing witness to this era through our narrator's eyes is a revelation: it allows us to get a **feel** for what the Reformation and its attendant social movements might have meant for the many different people -- bohemians, "heretics," the poor -- who understood this as an opportunity to change the course of their everyday lives. Thus forsaking rote "historical accuracy" and "period-accurate dialogue," *Q* succeeds as a historical **novel** in the way it amplifies the deeply held convictions, motivations, and beliefs that flourished among the oppressed during the Reformation's bloodiest years. *Q* is also just a great tale of espionage and intrigue. While the reader may be confused at first as to how the papal informer's letters and observations bear on our narrator's journeys, these characters' intertwining fate eventually emerges as one of the book's most powerful themes. Indeed, one of the more interesting aspects of the novel is how *Q*, the informer, starts off as a relatively flat character (a professional spy through and through) but then comes into his own in the last third of the book with more personal reflections about his life and work.

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