



# The Dismal Science

*Peter Mounford*

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## **The Dismal Science** Peter Mountford

The Dismal Science tells of a middle-aged vice president at the World Bank, Vincenzo D'Orsi, who publicly quits his job over a seemingly minor argument with a colleague. A scandal inevitably ensues, and he systematically burns every bridge to his former life. After abandoning his career, Vincenzo, a recent widower, is at a complete loss as to what to do with himself. The story follows his efforts to rebuild his identity without a vocation or the company of his wife.

An exploration of the fragile nature of identity, The Dismal Science reveals the terrifying speed with which a person's sense of self can be annihilated. It is at once a study of a man attempting to apply his reason to the muddle of life and a book about how that same ostensible rationality, and the mathematics of finance in particular, operates—with similarly dubious results—in our world.

## **The Dismal Science Details**

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Author : Peter Mountford

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## From Reader Review The Dismal Science for online ebook

### Jennifer says

This novel focuses on a prominent member of the World Bank who somewhat rashly blows up his career. It is a story of an epic midlife crisis -- but it is also the story of why we do the things we do economically, politically, and morally. The writing is terrific.

It would be interesting to compare this to the growing herd of books about middle-aged men making a mess of things. This one has more weight than most I've read.

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### Bill says

Great book. Bought it earlier this week and it was so drawn in by it that I used every free moment to find out what was going to happen to Vincenzo next and finished it in a day.

From the title and description you might think that you need to have knowledge and/or interest in economics, international finance, etc., but that is not the case at all. Certainly it will be interesting to those who are, because it gives a good inside view, and a humorous one at that. But ultimately this is a story about a man trying to find meaning in his life, and human connection, in what is the absurd (and beautiful) world we all live in. If any of the following things are true about you, this book has something that will resonate with you:

- \* You've had a job that you are good at, but at times you fundamentally believe is absurd
- \* You've had a relationship that became distant, and about which you simultaneously felt guilt, anger, and longing (Bonus resonance points if they got killed by a car right when things were maybe improving)
- \* You have a child who frustrates you in some ways but you also crave their approval
- \* You've secretly wanted to quit your job in a grand gesture
- \* You are part of the global economy (i.e. you live on planet earth)
- \* You like to laugh

If none of the above are true, then this book might not be for you. (To which the narrator would add, "then again maybe it is.")

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### Renee says

Excellent novel, and a terrific read. If you liked Dave Eggers' *A Hologram for the King*, or Walter Kirn's *Up in the Air*, or Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*, this is a must-read. Adding to the mix are some interesting scenes in Bolivia and a walk-on by Paul Wolfowitz.

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### Kathleen Flynn says

A widowed Italian economist in his 50s throws over his cushy job at the World Bank in a fit of pique and embarks on a search for the meaning of life, sort of. Only he doesn't look that hard, and what he finds is somewhat inconclusive, not unlike life itself. This was a quick read and times quite funny, never overwrought or pretentious despite the presence of some heavy symbolism -- chess-playing, gruesome accidents offstage, a mysterious CIA agent, a doppelganger of the economist's dead wife, repeated references to Dante and Machiavelli -- and I admired its quiet rejection of excessive fictional contrivance, its willingness to simply be. I guess I hoped the protagonist would have learned more about himself by the end, but I appreciate that that is sort of the point.

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### **Christie says**

Vincenzo D'Orsi is a high-ranking economist at the World Bank. When he is pressured to cut off aid to Bolivia if a specific person is elected, he goes public. His statements to the press bring about the collapse of his carefully crafted life, leaving him to ponder what comes next.

A thoroughly enjoyable, well written read. I highly recommend this book.

(I'd actually rate this at a 4.5 stars but have yet to figure out how to get half a star.)

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### **Liz Kranz says**

The Dismal Science is the haunting story of an economist at the World Bank who has lost his wife and begins a process of deconstructing his life. The author skillfully draws you into the psyche of Vincenzo who like many of us is lost within his life. Through his own decisions, he loses his job and alienates his grown daughter, and the path he takes is eerily unintentional and intentional at the same time. The ending is both profound and unsettling. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Liane says**

I identified with Vincenzo's process of remaking himself through spontaneous decisions, some of which he clearly regretted. This isn't a story where everything works out. It's a story of the process of living and the complexities of relationships and emotions over decades. I also enjoyed the World Bank/political technical bits.

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### **Shawn says**

More 2.5, but the writing was stellar enough to let it sit with a half star more than it rightly deserved. I finished reading it and sat silently, hand to my throat, weighted -- stupefied, really, that a book could end up being so disappointing after showing so much promise. It was practically breathtaking how incredibly disappointing it ended up being.

This felt very much like the author feared having the story lapse into predictability, but didn't quite know what to do with it to keep it interesting without contrivance. It's the story of a middle-aged man who

seemingly sets sudden fire to his life, but during his decline you realize it wasn't so sudden after all. What a brilliant thing to explore -- a person who appears to have everything asking, "What's the point"? Sadly, however, by the end, and particularly with the final chapter, you're asking yourself the very same question in reference to having read the book.

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### **Eli Hastings says**

I'm lucky that I know Peter Mountford personally. Because if I didn't I'm not sure that I would have ever picked up his novels--A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism and, now, A Dismal Science. International economics and the nuanced moral issues implicit in them was a field I left behind in college (where I knew Peter first). I am very much a reader who tends toward darker, action-oriented fiction, stuff that pushes the border between literary and "commercial." Peter is an author who makes me rethink my aesthetic preferences. Both of his novels are page-turners because they take the world of international economics and force these monstrous concepts through the hearts and minds of wholly human--and humanly small--protagonists. Peter infuses his characters with the dramas and dilemmas of the world, taking an issue that, writ-large, causes many of us to glaze over. He makes it palatable and important and complicated and intriguing by way of his mastery of prose and, in particular, of character. Try to hate someone purely in Peter's book. Try to love someone unconditionally. As in life, you will probably fail. Lastly, I'll tread lightly here, but I will say that Peter has done something with the climaxes of his two novels that I would be surprised to learn that anyone else has ever done in the history of literature. You'll have to read them both to know what I mean. Bravo.

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### **Jenn says**

*The Dismal Science* is a subtle and painful journey out of the tunnel of heartbreak. Vincenzo D'Orsi is a man whose only identity is his job. His wife has passed, his daughter grown and gone. He has only one real friend and his connections to all other people are peripheral and fragmented.

On a day like any other day, he went to work, took a meeting and proceeded to deconstruct his life. Sabotaging himself at every turn, Vincenzo destroys his career and all future possibilities of working in his field, offends his daughter and even manages to alienate world leader Evo Morales. Left with nothing, he floats like water-logged wood through his days, unsure of what he wants to do with the days that follow. He's in that fringe place between middle- and old-age, a limbo where he still has the desires of a younger man but neither the energy or the will to make anything happen.

Peter Mountford has revealed the possibilities that await us all if we spend our life doing what is expected, what we are supposed to do while forgoing passion, mystery, excitement, adventure and love. He shows us that life is too short to avoid risk, too fragile to take for granted our future possibilities and that it is never too late to start over if we just have the guts to take that first new step.

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### **batya7 says**

I picked up this book at the library expecting it to be as scintillating as the comments on the cover: "...completely up-put-downable...", "...a terrific main character...", "...an extremely impressive imagining..." Instead, I found a well-written but dismally dull and muddled tale of a man's life unknitting

itself as he spirals downward.

It is on the tip of my mind what this novel reminds me of, another book looked forward to but delivering little. I kept reading because I thought something would happen. Anything. But the only thing that happened is the main character's self-sabotage. The rest is a dry tumble downhill. There are no peak moments, few mini-dramas to give it spice.

I daresay that the writing was good enough. The author uses some big words that caused my fingers to twitch in the direction of my Collegiate dictionary. I didn't pick up much about economics, however—or politics, for that matter. It all seemed to be grayed down in favor of Vincenzo's downward spiral.

Oh well.

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### **Tuck says**

a reader could see this novel as a continuation of the "young man's guide..." A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism (superior i thought to this one, or at least more visceral moral conundrums about usa brand capitalism) as the old man's guide. the protag vincenzo has lost his wife, and then quits his job at the world bank for a moral stance, then questions the whole purpose, of life and love, capitalism, and what really is important to humans and our silly, short, wonderful existences.

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### **Sophie Gale says**

I don't usually read "literary fiction." Most of it seems to be about horny, middle-aged white guys with First World problems. This one, however, is about an economist, a vice-president at the World Bank: he's still a somewhat horny, middle-aged white guy, but he does have some Third World concerns. I should have stuck to my principles and not let myself get seduced by the allure of the global economy in Bolivia... I read the last chapter and said "WTF???"

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### **Philip Athans says**

Almost gave up on this a couple chapters in but I'm so glad I didn't. This is a book every middle aged man will find truthful, at least a little depressing, and immensely personal. I'm shocked that so young an author could have so concisely captured that experience.

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### **Raphaela says**

My review of The Dismal Science in the L Magazine:

This novelist's first book, A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism, zoomed in on a player in the economic crises of the aughts, an ambitious young hedge fund employee with dollar signs in his eyes who negotiated his way through the ethics of getting his. In his new novel, Mountford shifts the focus to a protagonist from the same social strata who's playing the game in reverse: Vincenzo D'Orsi, an economist at the World Bank,

throws his job security and financial future in jeopardy with a spontaneous decision seemingly rooted in principle.

The greatest strength of Mountford's debut novel is its nuanced, often sympathetic approach to a six-figure-salary protagonist with a seemingly ruthless lust for wealth. He's similarly even-handed with Vincenzo's motives. While some of the crunchier people he runs across (a young anti-globalist protest leader, his Oberlin-alum daughter) wish to pin a medal of altruism on him, and a lesser writer might have made this a hero's journey of a corporate bad guy turned good, Mountford fashions something truer. Vincenzo is more realistic and relatable than the mythic political hero others wish he were—or the more stock character we might have expected.

Mountford's stories live—and thrive—in ethical gray areas. His characters constantly compromise some part of their lives to leave room for another: love for work, integrity for success, pragmatism for principled conviction. *The Dismal Science* forms new iterations of these conflicts; against the backdrop of the World Bank and its role in Latin America, the characters' struggles are a metaphor for the larger moral minefield unfolding around them.

*A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism* filled in a gap in fiction by humanizing one of the ubiquitous Wall Street figures dominating headlines anonymously. With *The Dismal Science*, he goes deeper by presenting an even more introspective character whose high-profile political maneuvers come with a psychological backstory. Here's hoping that Mountford will continue to offer up these imaginings of the inner lives of powerful men, which enrich the contemporary conversation.

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