

July 6 2011

Koja, Kathe. Under the Poppy

In an unnamed 19th century European town teetering on the brink of war, madame Decca and brothel owner Rupert are astonished and not entirely pleased by the sudden reappearance of Istvan?Decca?s brother, Rupert?s estranged lover, and a master puppeteer. His appearance ignites jealousies old and new, placing Rupert in danger from the attentions of a volatile politician whose advances he?s rejected. At the same time, soldiers are filling the town and the whores and performers?the line between the two is blurred at *Under the Poppy*?are forced to entertain the rowdy soldiers and their corrupt general in more ways than one, just to survive intact.

Despite the melodrama inherent in the set-up, the storytelling is clear beneath the baroque trappings. Koje?s technique of alternating narration among the characters is effective, revealing secrets bit by bit and uncovering hidden depths. Deliberately paced, the story is nevertheless engrossing. Suggested for fans of *Fingersmith*? by Sarah Waters.

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