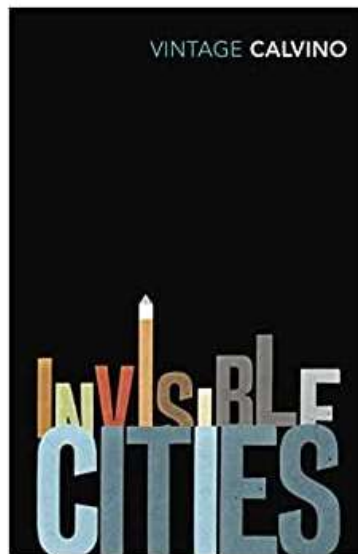


December 2020



Invisible Cities was written in 1972 by the Italian writer Italo Calvino. The fictional novel imagines a series of conversations between the Venetian traveller and merchant, Marco Polo with the great Mongolian emperor Kubla Khan. The majority of the book consists of brief prose poems describing 55 cities that are narrated by Marco. The cities have women's names and divided into 11 thematic groups of 5 each: Cities and memory, desire, signs, eyes, names, the dead; and thin, trading, continuous and hidden cities. The novel is devised within a mathematical structure, representing according to one critic, the playfulness of Calvino's work and his fascination with the mechanics of storytelling. Through the creation of myths about these invisible places the

reader is taken on an exploration of culture, language, time and space.

Short dialogues between Kublai and Polo are interspersed every 5 to 10 cities discussing these topics. It transpires that all of these cities are a variation on Marco's home town of Venice.

Calvino born in 1923, was initially influenced by neo-realism, growing up despising the Italian Fascist regime, he was part of the Communist resistance movement. But disillusionment of Communism moved his fiction towards Fantasy. In 1968 he joined the literary group Oulipo and its interest in structure and semiotics would inspire the writer's final works including *Invisible Cities*.

Our members had polarised opinions of this literary work. Comments included: 'language vivid and lyrical'; 'believable/unbelievable'; 'engrossing'; 'difficult to read, lacked context'; 'visually evoked images'; 'loved self-imposed mathematical structure'; 'no context and

'visually evoked images'; 'loved self-imposed mathematical structure'; 'no context and relevance'; 'bored'; 'loved descriptions of architecture, words more provocative than an architect's drawings'; 'raw and sensual'.

Despite our varying views, we all agreed that the translation of the novel was well done and the writing of a high standard.

Ratings: Janet, Margie, Kim, Viv, Sandy: 4, Dianne 3.5, Lynda 3, Nicola 2, Jenny 1.5.

Our next meeting will be at Preece House on 11/01/21 at 6:30PM to discuss *My Brother Jack* by *George Johnston*.

Hope to see you all there and happy reading!

Other Books We Read

December 2020

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett, 3.5

Parisian Lives by Deidre Bair, 3

Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart, 3, 3.5 4 & 4.5

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman, 4

Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey, 4

Atomic Habits by James Clear, 3.5

The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 3.5

Lady Clementine by Marie Benedict, 3.5

England and Other Stories by Graham Swift, 3.5

Shuttlecock by Graham Swift, 3

The Kashmir Shawl by Rosie Thomas, 2.5

Tomorrow by Graham Swift, 1

Knucklehead by Adam Snyer, 3.5

The World Beneath by Cate Kennedy, 3.5

Landscape of Farewell by Alex Miller, 3

Spiderweb by Penelope Lively, 3

The white girl by Tony Birch, 3

The Kennedy Curse by James Patterson 3

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig 2

The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie 3.5

Jack by Marilynne Robinson, 4.5

Eileen by Ottessa Moshfegh, 3

The Discomfort of Evening by Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, 4

Shotgun Lovesongs by Nickolas Butler, 3

Flaubert's Parrot by Julian Barnes, 3

Flaubert's Parrot by Julian Barnes, 3

Sputnik Sweetheart by Haruki Murakami, 3.5