

**EDITOR'S
NOTE**

It feels to me as if I've always known Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. As if my brain were born and instantly had *Invisible Cities* in its matter to refer to. But that wasn't the order of things. Pippi Longstocking came first and then someone—probably my friend Yates who came from a family of architects, artists, and readers—pressed it on me for the first time. And someone else in college—my professor of post-War Italian Literature, or my professor of Italian feminist theory—made me read it. Whereupon I chose to devote an entire semester to studying it. I remember feeling like the calligrapher to the perverts trying to execute a coherent thesis in my remedial Italian about one of the most complex crystal literary structures ever written. Yet, there is a point of origin in my consciousness, *Invisible Cities* came to me precisely when I was ready to read it, when my mind was blasted open to complexity and patterns—after which the world and my memory of it dissolves into a series of visual, theoretical and mathematical illustrations of Calvino's masterpiece.

So that: There isn't a city on a river that isn't split in two, twice; two parts on either side of the water and two parts on either side of the water's reflection. There isn't a massive tangled city center that doesn't seduce its residents into its heart, feed upon their life force. There isn't a city not made of dreams—and over time, broken dreams. No city that isn't a ghost sooner or later, and throughout its web of streets haunted by a single fleeing spirit. There is no unconquered city; they are all colonies. There are no cities that don't envy others; no populations who aren't desperate to have at least one something completely different. There are no storytellers who aren't Marco Polo recounting farflung adventures to an imperial Kublai Khan. Nor are there listeners who don't stop listening in order to weave their own synchronistic narrative—a second independent strand of thought, running alongside the first, reflecting and interacting, vying for dominance.

Calvino's fiction isn't a story; it's an ordering and reordering of the emotional and philosophical reverberations of our civilized world, our human condition. The book itself is extremely formal—each chapter is a prose poem describing a city. Each city has variations. Cities are grouped into categories according to random patterns. Each city is imagined; each city is conceptual. Every interlude between Khan and

Marco Polo is a thought experiment about powerful structures—empires, governments, languages, lands, tales. And the intelligence behind the entire construction is singular.

We have not tried here to mimic the original. With the polyphony of writing gathered, I'm barely sure we're referencing it. Our Invisible Cities satisfies itself by occupying the reverberation. Our stories and poems are our cities and they issue in many respects from Calvino's meticulous categories: desire, memory, signs, the eyes, the names, the dead. Some of the work is extremely formal—with precision edges and self-contained references—and some of it is so organic it dampens the page with its dew, heat, and flora. If there's a tribute to Calvino here, it's noisy and free form—more wake than memorial.

Minna Proctor

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