



Under the Jaguar Sun

Italo Calvino , John Radziewick (Editor) , William Weaver (Translator)

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“The thought . . . called up the flavors of an elaborate and bold cuisine, bent on making the flavors’ highest notes vibrate, juxtaposing them in modulations, in chords, and especially in dissonances that would assert themselves as an incomparable experience.” — From *Under the Jaguar Sun*

These intoxicating stories delve down to the core of our senses of taste, hearing, and smell. Amid the flavors of Mexico’s fiery chiles and spices, a couple on holiday discovers dark truths about the maturing of desire in the title story, “Under the Jaguar Sun.” In “A King Listens,” a gripping portrait of a frenzied mind, the menacing echoes in a huge palace spur a tyrant’s thoughts to the heights of paranoid intensity. “The Name, the Nose” drives to a startling conclusion as men across time and space pursue the women whose aromas have enchanted them. Mordant and deliciously offbeat, this trio of tales is a treat from a master of short fiction.

“[Calvino is] a learned, daring, ingeniously gifted magus . . . *Under the Jaguar Sun* . . . fuses fable with neuron . . . The reader is likely to salivate.” — Cynthia Ozick, *New York Times Book Review*

Under the Jaguar Sun Details

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Sandra says

Tre racconti che coinvolgono i sensi; nell'intento dello scrittore avrebbero dovuto essere cinque, ma la morte glielo ha impedito. Comunque i cinque sensi sono coinvolti ugualmente nella lettura, i due mancanti nei racconti, la vista e il tatto, li mettiamo in opera noi lettori mentre leggiamo il libro.

Il mio preferito è stato il secondo, che dà il titolo all'opera, "Sotto il sole giaguaro", il cui protagonista è il gusto. Siamo in Messico, con la sua cucina ricca di sapori forti e contrastanti, durante un viaggio in cui lui e lei, Olivia, sono due turisti curiosi e interessati. Il viaggio si svolge dentro di loro, con una guida turistica d'eccezione, il gusto, attraverso il quale si manifestano passioni, con le forme potenti che la terra scelta per viaggiare conosce bene: la storia del Messico è piena di guerre mortali tra uomo e natura, che si placavano solo con sacrifici agli dei, anche umani. Offrirsi come cibo all'altro, darsi in pasto ai denti dignignati dell'altro e infine congiungersi, divenire cibo l'uno per l'altro è un atto di cannibalismo emotivo, di forte sensualità, in cui sensi ed eros si mescolano indissolubilmente, in un racconto che è anche profumato di cibi e colorato degli ingredienti della straordinaria cucina messicana.

Il primo racconto, "Il nome, il naso", dedicato all'olfatto, mi è piaciuto meno perché mescola storie diverse, accomunate dal finale, l'ho trovato un po' confusionario. L'Ultimo racconto, "Un re in ascolto", è dedicato all'udito, è bello anch'esso perché tratta della forza e contemporaneamente della estrema debolezza del potere, che rende prigioniero colui che ce l'ha, prigioniero della paura di perderlo; l'unico difetto che vi ho trovato è che la storia è troppo portata alle lunghe, a momenti noiosa. In ogni caso la fantasia di Calvino mi lascia sempre stupefatta.

Hamideh says

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Kamrani Adnan says

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Anastasia says

Για ?λλη μια φορ? ο Italo Calvino με το μοναδικ?, αξεπ?ραστο ?φος του και τον μαγευτικ? του λ?γο μας ταξιδε?ει στον χ?ρο των αισθ?σεων. Απομον?νοντ?ς τες τον?ζει τη σημασ?α κ?θε μ?ας στην καθημεριν?τητ?ς μας, το ρ?λο που διαδραματ?ζουν στον τρ?πο που βι?νουμε τον χωροχρ?νο και που επηρε?ζουν τον ψυχισμ? μας. Τρεις αυτοτελε?ς ιστορ?ες, με διαφορετικ?ς αφηγηματικ?ς τεχνικ?ς και υφολογικ? στοιχε?α, ικαν?ς να διασκεδ?σουν, να προβληματ?σουν να προκαλ?σουν συνειρμο?ς.

"και η επιμον? δεν ε?ναι ποτ? τ?σο ε?θραυστη ?σο τη στιγμ? του μεγαλ?τερου θρι?μβου της "

"Κ?θε προσπ?θει? σου να ξεφ?γεις απ? το κλουβ? σου ε?ναι προορισμ?νη να αποτ?χει: ε?ναι μ?ταιο να ψ?χνεις να βρεις τον εαυτ? σου σε ?ναν κ?σμο που δεν σου αν?κει, που ?σως δεν υπ?ρχει."

Asl? Can says

E?er okumak istedi?iniz ya da okudu?unuz ilk Italo Calvino kitab?ysa; Jaguar-Güne? Alt?nda Italo Calvino'nun edebiyat?na hafif ve temkinli bir giri? olabilir. Okumas? ve takip etmesi di?er kitaplar?na nazaran kolay ama Italo ile henüz tan??m?? say?lmazs?n?z, onda daha ne numaralar var.

SeyedMahdi Hosseini says

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Andrew says

Rather shamefully, this the first time I've read Calvino (I have some of his other books on the shelf), but being a short story aficionado it seemed a good place to start. Three seperate stories (in both subject matter and style), the link here are the senses: taste, hearing, and smell. Apparently there were to form a larger work

containing the remaining senses, plus a possible overstory, however these can be enjoyed in their own right. Calvino died before it was completed.

"Under The Jaguar Sun" is an interesting piece touching on food/cannibalism, but also on how we cannibalise each other in relationships in the less than literal sense. "A King Listens" started with a magnificent concept - the King can never leave the throne for fear of being usurped - and then runs with that theme to an ever logical (yet illogical) conclusion. This story, I think, could have ended several pages before it did, however, and the direction it took didn't grab me. Finally, "The Name, The Nose", ends the book with the best story. Three disparate strands concerning the smell of female conclude with a revelation over the exact nature of that smell - I found this profounding intriguing and disturbing.

Calvino does not seem to be a writer content with telling a story, and meaning upon meaning are layered here which I enjoyed. In some respects, these stories reminded me of Borges. Whether that simularity continues in his other works I am eager to discover.

Alice Lippart says

This book contains fascinating and disturbing, captivating and vivid portrait of three of the senses.

Serge Pierro says

Seeing as this is my first exposure to the artistry of Italo Calvino, I must say, I'm impressed. Originally this work was to be of all five senses, but he had died before completing it, thus only taste, hearing, and smell are featured.

Each of the stories were very interesting in their own way.

The first one, "Under the Jaguar Sun" was dripping with sensual undertones and vivid forays into spicy Mexican food and chile peppers... that is, before it ventured into the realm of ... well, you'll have to read it! ;)

The second, "A King Listens", was an interesting exploration of paranoia and holding onto power. Sadly, this one seemed to drag on longer than was necessary, but before it did, there were many fascinating elements contained within.

The third, "The Name, The Nose", essayed the concept of finding women by their scent. There were three stories contained within, and were told from three different perspectives.

As good as the stories were, one can't help but notice that Calvino has an incredible imagination and the literary prowess to present it in a fascinating manner. At times his sentence structure reminded me of Pynchon, as his sentences would contain 70+ words. However, what made this beautifully written work most interesting, was how he would approach a subject and delve into it from every imaginable angle... and then pull back and re-approach it another way, until at the end, you were left marveling at his exposition. I'm looking forward to reading his other works!

Inderjit Sanghera says

Under the Jaguar Sun is Calvino's exploration of our senses; sensuous and salacious, Calvino is able to render even the most mundane of smells into something magical, our tongue and mouth become receptacles to the most titillating of flavours and the silver cadence of a woman's voice is transformed into a symbol of love.

The set of stories starts with Under the Jaguar Sun, a story about a somewhat disaffected couple and their holiday to Mexico. The couple gradually become fascinated with a cannibalistic ritual associated with the food they eat, indeed the food they eat is described in great detail, every morsel of food is consumed beneath the cacophony of emotions which beset the couple as they journey further and further in Mexico's macabre history. Eating becomes a form of communication in a world in which words mean so little, our tongues and teeth cease to communicate via voices, but instead transmit their desires and obsessions via taste, that most amorous of senses;

“And I couldn't help remarking how certain manifestations of Olivia's vital energy, certain prompt reactions or delays on her part, yearnings or throbs, continued to take place before my eyes, losing none their intensity, with only one significant difference; their stages was no longer the bed of our embraces but a dinner table.”

The bitterness of walnut sauce, the heat of jalapenos, all of these tastes increase their sensory receptivity, the world transformed into a world of taste, as they begin to fantasise about that most unknown of tastes; human flesh. Their minds febrile with their cannibalistic fantasies, they use taste to travel back in the past to a cannibalistic ritual, as the narrator feels the knife of the priest-cut cut his throat as he feels himself become one with world and their bodies become one with the food they are eating.

A King Listens is the story of a paranoid king who hears the endless echo of insurgency in his palace walls, which are transformed into a giant ear, receptors of the rebellion which is taking place in his mind.

“The palace is a clock: its ciphered sounds follow the course of the sun; invisible arrows point to the change of the guard on the ramparts with a scuffle of hob-bailed boots, a slamming of rifle-butts, answered by the crunch of gravel under the tanks kept ready in the forecourt.”

Repetition is the reassurance which the king needs to prevent paranoid ideas about rebellion entering his head, so long as sounds remain the same, his reign will remain the same too. However he hears the sound has never heard before; the sound of a woman singing, the silvery cadence of her voice envelops his heart and disturbs his soul, he tries to reach it, to capture it, to kiss and caress the sound of her song, but fails to do so, but not before becoming surrounded in a world of pure sound;

“If you raise your eyes, you will see a glow. Above your head the imminent morning is brightening in the sky : that breath against your face is the wind stirring the leaves. You are outside again, the dogs are barking, the birds awake the colours return to the world's surface, things reoccupy space, living beings again give signs of life...now a noise, a rumble, a roar occupies all space, absorbs all sighs, calls sobs...”

The final story, The Name, The Rose, is an elegiacal celebration of smell, as three different men; a disaffected musician, a dandy and a caveman search for the sultry scent of an unknown woman. It is the most poetic novella in the collection, perfume becomes an art form which can only be truly discerned by the truest artist of all; a man in love. Their noses are indifferent to the beauty of the smell; the execrable scent of excrement is given as much importance as the indescribable loveliness of a woman's perfume, what matters is the ability of our noses to see the world via a carousel of smells;

“I knew nothing of her, but I felt I knew all in that perfume; and I would have desired a world without

names, where that perfume alone would have sufficed as name and as all the words she could speak to me: that perfume I knew was now lost in Madame Odile's liquid labyrinth, evaporated on my memory, so that I could not summon it back even by remembering her when she followed me into the conservatory with the hydrangeas."

The men fail to realise that they are in fact being led by the nose and the perfume which has perforated their souls and they are following is in fact the smell of death. *Under the Jaguar Sun* is a wonderful, original and beautiful exploration of our senses, a masterpiece whose lack of length is made up for by its sensuous brilliance.

leynes says

I found this book at the *American Bookshop* in Milan, which is quite ironic as Calvino is one of Italy's most famous writers. I desperately wanted to pick up a book by a 'local' and when I saw this for a good price, immediately Matthew's (MCS-books) recommendation came to mind, and so I decided to pick this up.

Under the Jaguar Sun is a collection of three short stories, each focusing on a different sense: taste, hearing and smell. A couple on an culinary journey across Mexico are excited by the idea of a particular ingredient, suggested by ancient rituals of human sacrifice. Precariously balanced on his throne, a king is able only to listen to the sounds around him – sure that any deviation from their normal progression would mean the uprising of the conspirators that surround him. And three different men search desperately for the beguiling scents of lost women, from a Count visiting Madame Odile's perfumery, to a London drummer stepping over spent, naked bodies.

Calvino envisioned this book to grow into a broader collection spanning all of the senses, unfortunately, he died before he could complete this project, and thus it's wiser to consider these stories apart from one another; there's no frame story, no threat that weaves them together.

Please don't be fooled by my rating, it couldn't be more misleading as I absolutely loathed the first story (what a whopping one star that was), really adored the second one (five stars!) and highly appreciated the third (a good 4). This collection was an emotional rollercoaster, there was no middle ground, it was either intensified hatred or skyscraping love.

The reason for my hatred of the titular story, *Under the Jaguar Sun*, is a simpel one: I hate sensual stories, even just sensual themes in literature. As soon as it became clear that Calvino was linking the couple's taste for food with their sexual appetite, I was fucking out. I found it laughable and creepy, and whenever our protagonist talked about wanting to feast on his partner and devour her and actually chewing her flesh, I couldn't help but twist my mouth in disgust. **(Tr)eat your girl right all you want but leave me out of it.** The story's execution was way too clumsy for my taste and its final message had me rolling my eyes. Again, I'm all here for unsatisfied couples regaining their passion for one another, I just don't want to read about it.

And so with much lowered expectations, I started reading *A King Listens* and let me tell you, **drop whatever you're doing and read this fucking story.** It is now one of my all-time favorite short stories and I cannot believe that Calvino popped that out so effortlessly, like what? Ya gurl was shook! *A King Listens* is the embodiment of *hearing*. Written in second person, Calvino really gives you the feeling that you are sitting on a throne in a giant palace that functions as your ear, he transferred the King's paranoia and fears in regards to a possible rebellion and the usurpation of his throne to the reader; you feel haunted, you feel alone. It's so

rare for a short story to elicit so much emotion from me.

The city crumples like a burning page. Run, without crown, without scepter; no one will realize that you are the king. There is no night darker than a night of fires. There is no man more alone than one running in the midst of a howling mob.

The last story, *The Name, the Nose*, was brilliant as well, albeit more confusing and ambitious than the other two. Again, Calvino managed to encapsulate the sense of smelling with his words, which is a feat that I respect, not many writers can do that. My only criticism is the fact that the story should've been longer: its ending was way too rushed and over-the-top and the character of Monsieur de Sainte-Caliste, in particular, would've warranted further examination. I think the entire murder-subplot should've been omitted for more of his musings.

All in all, I am incredibly happy that I've read this short story collection as it made me "hungry" for more of Calvino's work. (Olivia and her boo from the first story would be proud of me; shove ya hunger elsewhereee!) Thanks again, Matthew, for this great recommendation!

Ned Rifle says

Before reading any Calvino I had noted with dismay that none of his novels ever really get much beyond the 200 page mark, how foolish I was to worry. From what I have read stories of any size can satiate and I am now happy for their warm abundance. These are three stories about three senses - do not listen to the quibbles about how the two other senses were to have stories and that it would all be housed in an elaborate frame story, these are illusion, they never existed. These stories do, and they're lovely.

Janet says

Master storyteller Italo Calvino set out to write a book about the five senses but died before completing that project. He did, however, complete the three stories that comprise this collection. Set in Mexico, and following the culinary adventures of a couple on holiday, "Under the Jaguar Sun" is about the sense of taste and how taste comes to define the couple's relationship. "A King Listens," perhaps the most fully developed of the stories (and certainly the most memorable), explores the consequences of a monarch's uncanny ability to hear all that occurs in his palace. In "The Name, the Nose" two men obsessively search for the women who bewitch them with indefinable, unknowable, elusive scents. As always with Calvino, these three extraordinary and haunting stories give us much to ponder. Even though his project was never completed, the stories stand on their own merits and are authentically "Calvinoesque."

Mahrya says

Normally, I hate the word "sensual" because it reminds me of essential oils and the phrase "taking a lover," and lying about on the divan whilst eating succulent grapes dripping with the juices of summer, but this collection contains essays about the senses, so I think the word actually applies in this case. If I'm remembering correctly, this is Calvino's last book. He was going to write five essays for five senses, but he died before he got there. The essay on taste is my favorite. It's about spices and the desire/repulsion for

cannibalism, and it's well--very sensual.

Bbrown says

In three stories dealing with the senses of taste, hearing, and smell, Calvino once again demonstrates his ability to use a seemingly simple jumping off point to explore more interesting topics, like the nature of relationships, the pointlessness of power, and the way desire connects to loss.

The first story, the one that gives this collection its name, is the best of the three. Concerning itself with taste, Under the Jaguar Sun does a great job evoking the lush atmosphere of Oaxaca and the surrounding parts of Mexico, and more specifically the Mexican cuisine of the region. Although in the beginning it appears as though Calvino's story about taste is going to be about the sensual nature of food (hardly a new interpretation of the topic), the tale takes a turn as it dances around the idea of cannibalism, and relationships as a form of emotional cannibalism. Flesh to the Aztecs was what raised the sun and fueled the universe, and in this story Calvino presents us with a tale of the flesh in more ways than one. Beyond the interesting take on the topic Under the Jaguar Sun also features a realistic depiction of a relationship and creates a sense of simmering tension that is masterfully done, making this story stand with the very best that Calvino has written.

The second story, A King Listens, has an interesting premise, but the execution prevented the story from striking me with real force. Here a king keeps himself on his throne perpetually, out of fear that leaving his throne for even a moment will provide all the opportunity a usurper would need to replace him with a convincing double. While on the throne the king can only keep in touch with the occurrences of the palace and in the city at large through his sense of hearing, though who knows if what he thinks he hears is truly what is occurring. Sound, when it reaches us through echoes or from a distance, can be warped and misleading. Intriguing, but Calvino wrote the story in such a way that the reader feels detached from the thoughts of the king and the events of the story as a whole. It also doesn't help that the king has no characterization beyond his position and a generous dose of paranoia. The fact that this story was penned only a year before Calvino's death raises the possibility that he was not done tinkering with it yet, but as it stands it is decidedly the weakest of the lot.

The final story is called The Name, the Nose and is actually a set of three intertwining tales following men dealing with women that they can only identify by their scent. Skipping between a nobleman, a caveman, and a rock band's drum player, the story does a fine job at drawing parallels between the three stories and generally establishes smelling the scent of a woman as a primal, timeless experience. The story also establishes that, despite its primal nature, scents are things we imbue with meaning on our own through our life experiences, not pieces of objective information. Not quite as strong as Under the Jaguar Sun, but a solid story with impressive complexity given that it is less than twenty pages long.

The novel ends with a note from Calvino's wife Esther, which states her belief that Calvino would not only have written stories dealing with the remaining senses of sight and touch, but would have created a frame narrative as well, perhaps to illustrate the world that exists outside of the physical senses. If he had pulled it off then this work would have stood with Invisible Cities and If on a Winter's Night a Traveller as one of Calvino's best. Instead we are left with a more modest work, but one where two of the three stories are quite good. I round that up to 4 stars on the strength of Under the Jaguar Sun, and recommend it to anyone looking for a shorter work by Calvino.

Ophelia.Desdemona says

4.5

The story A King Listens was mind-blowing.

Elis says

Calvino costruisce tre storie sulla scoperta dei sensi e sull'importanza che hanno nella vita di ognuno. In "Sotto il sole giaguaro" sono analizzati solo tre dei sensi: la ricerca di una fanciulla tramite l'olfatto, il piacere o disgusto del cibo attraverso il gusto e la solitudine di un re che ha affilato l'udito.

Si prende consapevolezza attraverso queste brevi storie di un qualcosa che spesso non ci rendiamo conto di possedere ma che sono inevitabilmente gli attrezzi fondamentali della nostra vita. Calvino fa anche questo!

sevdah says

Calvino planned on writing a book about the five senses, but passed after finishing just three of the stories (taste, smell, hearing). The Sunday Telegraph wrote that "the pleasure of these stories is intense" and it truly is. The language is rich, almost physically gratifying, an absolute joy to read.

NAMIK SOMEL says

?çerisinde son derece ilginç öyküler bar?nd?r?yor.

Özellikle Ad Burun öyküsünün finali ve kokunun yo?un hissedili?i çok güzel aktar?lm??.

Ama favorim bir kral ve bir tutsa??n duydu?u ayn? seslerin yaratt??? alg?n?n anlat?ld??? Kulak Kesilmi? Bir kral adl? öykü..

Michael Finocchiaro says

Unfortunately unfinished because Calvino passed after completing only three of the five planned stories, this is a late work where he wanted to do one story for each sense. Under the Jaguar Sun is about the sense of taste, A King Listens about the sense of hearing, and lastly The Name, The Nose about the sense of smell (obviously). Highly entertaining and typically imaginative of Calvino, these stories are unique and yet a bit frustrating because one wonders what he would have done with sight and touch...R.I.P. amico Italo!
