



Adam, One Afternoon

Italo Calvino

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This collection of playful, deadly fables is populated with waifs and strays, a gluttonous thief and a mischievous gardener. The grimly comic story *The Argentine Ant* moved Gore Vidal to declare 'if this is not a masterpiece of twentieth-century prose writing, I cannot think of anything better'.

Adam, One Afternoon Details

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Author : Italo Calvino

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Paul says

The Vintage edition that I read was in reality an early Calvino short story collection with the addition of the novella, 'The Argentine Ant'. Aspects of the oblique and playful nature of the mature Calvino's writing were already in place at the turn of the 1950s. So, the title story, for instance, is a charming modern folk tale. Less flexibly, some of the stories find the young author in the grip of Marxist dogma.

At times, I found the empathy with his poor and marginal characters engaging, such as the itinerants sleeping at the railway station in 'Sleeping like Dogs'. At other times, the ideology of the former communist partisan leads the writer to produce simplistic stereotypes of good and evil. 'A Judgement' springs to mind here. It's entirely understandable that a man who'd witnessed atrocities carried out under fascism/Nazism, often supported by 'old money', would feel this resentment but it sometimes lends the reading experience all the joy of a propagandist pamphlet. I was reminded of the clumsier writing of British fellow travellers of the 1930s - Auden, Upward and Warner. Fragments of partisan life presented in 'Fear on the Footpath' and 'Hunger at Bevera' worked much better, I felt.

'The Argentine Ant' is tremendous fun and left this reader groping after allegorical interpretations, and enjoying their eluding him too. So while this book isn't in the same league as 'Invisible Cities', say, or 'Mr Palomar', it's an enjoyable insight into the development of one of the twentieth century's finest writers.

Kyriakos Sorokkou says

πως με ηλες τις συλλογες διηγημων αυτ? δεν αποτ?λεσε εξα?ρεση, κ?ποιες ιστοριες μου ηρεσαν, κ?ποιες με ηφησαν αδι?φορο, και κ?ποιες ηταν απλ? καλ?ς. Ρ?χνω τ?ρα μια ματι? στα περιεχ?μενα μετ? απ? ηνα χρ?νο και ε?ναι τ?σες πολλ?ς, ν?μιζα ηταν λιγ?τερες. Και δε θυμ?μαι και πολλ? προ?γματα ηρα αυτ? το ρηβιο? δε θα ε?ναι και τ?σο αντικειμενικ? η ενημερωτικ?, αλλ? θα προ?τεινα να διαβ?σετε σ?γουρα τα παρακ?τω διηγηματα:

ηνα απ?γευμα, ο Αδ?μ

ηνα καρ?βι γεμ?το καβο?ρια

Τελευτα?ο ηρχεται το κορ?κι

Τα υπ?λοιπα δεν ηχω ιδ?α για τι θ?μα μιλ?νε. Ξεχν?ω. Γερν?ω. Μαμ?.

Βασικ? τα περισσ?τερα διηγηματα ηχουν ημεση η ημμεση σχ?ση με τον Δε?τερο Παγκ?σμιο

Π?λεμο, και για να του β?λω τ?σσερις αστ?ρες σημα?νει ητι μ' ηρεσε και το προτε?νω.

Paakhi Srivastava says

Adam, One Afternoon is a world of fable created with Calvino's unerring precision on human reality. I always have discomfort with novels which sound inconclusive or end abruptly. For the same reason, I kept the book aside after reading the first two stories. On introspection, I realized my folly that human emotion, condition and thoughts do not have latitude. The breadth and depth of a cryptic memory may be infinite but in reality, the power of tragedy is that it pulls out an alternative reality card even before you have attended to first one. So, I picked the book again and here and hence flitted by.

This collection reflects the author's inventiveness; the characters of each vignette are well developed and detailed. A magical quality- of rawness, surprise and subtleties-in the flight of a crow, leap of a stray cat,

taste of the cake walks through these tales. Calvino's allegorical touch renders fiction timeless.

The stories are varied and very readable. My favorite ones are (in the order they titles appear): The Cat and The Policeman (thoughtful to the brim), Leaving again shortly (crude), Theft in the cake shop (hilarious), Seen in Canteen (provocative) and Adam one afternoon (enchanting). This is my first book by Calvino. His strength is his economy of words and subtlety; rollicking stories on the surface with grimness underneath.

I recommend this book to those who would like to be introduced to Italo Calvino's writing. I will reserve a 4-5 star rating for his other books, where there will be no scope of disliking a 'part of the whole'.

Hüseyin says

A varied set of short stories covering a time range from pre-war to post-war era. Most stories are grim and have death at the main role (e.g. One of the three is still alive), Some others read like middle-age literature (e.g. Crow Comes Last), some are comical (e.g. Desire in November). A cleverly hidden symbolism (e.g. in Argentine Ants) lurks beneath the surface of what looks like a straight and to-the-point prose. Although it is not my favourite Calvino, I enjoyed reading this collection.

Margherita Dolcevita says

Calvino ha scritto la maggior parte di questi racconti a poco più di 20 anni. Non mi viene in mente nessun altro che così giovane abbia scritto così bene. Certo, non tutti i racconti sono efficaci ed emozionanti, ma ci sono alcuni gioiellini davvero imperdibili. La resistenza vista dall'interno, piccoli partigiani, piccole pedine in una partita così grande da fagocitarli e trascinarli nel dimenticatoio, viene narrata in modo delicato, semplice, intimo.

Stavrula says

3.5

Rhys says

Italo Calvino is probably my favourite writer. This collection is one of his earliest volumes. Only his novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and a few stories from the beginning of *Numbers in the Dark* predate the tales in this book.

Adam, One Afternoon contains 21 stories, the first 20 of which were published as a collection in 1949, just three years after his first book appeared. The 21st story, 'The Argentine Ant' (one of Calvino's finest realistic short stories) was written in the early 1950s.

'The Argentine Ant' is rather downbeat in tone but many of the other tales are curiously lighthearted despite the themes of war and deprivation they often deal with. Calvino's wartime stories resemble fables but they

aren't particularly moral and even their development is always slightly ambiguous. 'The Crow Comes Last' is the best of the wartime bunch, a menacing tale about an inscrutable and possibly emotionless expert marksman.

Calvino's comic touch is also evident in these pages. 'Theft in a Cakeshop' and 'Dollars and the Demi-mondaine' are charming and frothy, but with a darker heart than might be immediately apparent. Usually Calvino presents the viewpoint of the ordinary man: the gardener, peasant, soldier, prostitute, migrant worker. But in 'Leaving Again Shortly', one of my favourites tales in the book, a saga of minor revolution against rich landlords is related somewhat morosely from the viewpoint of the estate owners themselves.

Calvino was a superb writer, the best or one of the best!
