



## The Canticle of Ibiza

**Justin Kurian**

Stillwater Press

(390pp)

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*The beauty of a nigh-untouched island is used to reflect ambitious higher thinking in The Canticle of Ibiza, a novel of grandeur and appeal.*

A trip into a Bohemian wonderland serves as a magical backdrop to Justin Kurian's compelling existentialist novel *The Canticle of Ibiza*.

John is a former Wall Street hedge-fund investment professional who arrives in Ibiza in 1988 to track down an old colleague and fellow navel-gazing academic, Gunther. As John travels around the island, he also attempts to relocate the lost dreamer inside himself.

John is a quite confident hero whose logic and abilities to make quick sense of social flare-ups garner him due awe among the friends he makes in Ibiza. Indeed, because of his rare combination of poise, humor, and rationality, John becomes a sought-after personality for the island's denizens, including an aged American Vietnam War expat, a shy sculptor with a menacing ex-wife, a strange and domineering femme fatale, and a slew of misunderstood outcasts.

John's evolution progresses in a thoughtful manner, as his magnetism precipitates invitations to various remote locales and parties on Ibiza, away from the island's tourist traps. These settings imbue his inner search with a ruminative quality that melds well with the book's eccentric tornado of secondary personalities. In time, John manages to crack the personal codes of scam artists, would-be artists, and snooty island transplants in equal measure. And the volley of John's vanities is tempered by his courage and freedom from the social assumptions that those around him seem to be entombed by. His tenacity is smoothed even more by the prospect of a burgeoning romance.

The island's stunning, beach-strewn environs are employed to delicious effect, celebrated for being beautiful and nearly untouched. They are used to reflect people's ulterior ambitions in higher thinking. Throughout, the prose churns with images as of the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean, which metaphorically cleanse John's inner crises—as well as the tumult in those around him. Here, everyone seems to be fleeing from something. Still, John's path toward finding his former colleague is a bit buried in the process of his adventuring, even as Gunther's absence undergirds the book's forward progression, propelling each of John's incremental maneuvers. The perils of the best-laid plans of the elite and the wanderers of the world are handled with balance and insight regardless of the outcome of John's initial search.

*The Canticle of Ibiza* is a robust and enlightening novel in which a man finds more than what he was searching for in the course of an island adventure.

RYAN PRADO (June 4, 2024)

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