



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Eleanor Catton
The Rehearsal (2009)

The Luminaries Eleanor Catton

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About the author

Eleanor Catton was born in 1985 in Canada and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand.

She holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she also held an adjunct professorship, and an MA in fiction writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters. She currently lives in Auckland, New Zealand.

Her debut novel *The Rehearsal* (2009) was shortlisted for the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Dylan Thomas Prize, and longlisted for the Orange Prize. It has since been published in seventeen territories and twelve languages.

The Luminaries

It is 1866 and gold rush has gripped the town of Hokitika, New Zealand. When Walter Moody arrives, hoping to make his fortune, he finds himself drawn into a series of strange events. Why are twelve local men gathered together in a conspiratorial assembly? Is it just a coincidence that a wealthy man has vanished, a whore has tried to end her life, and an enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk all on the same night? In this town of whispered secrets and precarious fortunes, who can Walter trust?

From the untouched natural beauty of the New Zealand coastline to the nebulous opium dens where avarice and vice rule, Catton has created an enthralling world full of mystery and intrigue; a network of fates and fortunes that is as complex and exquisitely patterned as the night sky.

Discussion points

At the start of the book Walter Moody stumbles across a tense meeting between twelve local men and is entrusted with their secrets. What do you make of these men? Do they tell Walter the whole truth, or are their stories distorted by external loyalties, self-interest and their individual character traits?

The Luminaries is set in New Zealand during the nineteenth century. How does Catton give you a sense of the story taking place in a different era? And how does the novel compare to other historical fiction you have read?

Astrology is a prominent theme in the book. At the start of each chapter, a chart depicting the twelve men's star signs and an epitaph forewarns the reader of ensuing events. To what extent are the characters determined by their star signs and the complementary planetary movements?

Following the court scene, do you feel that each character has received their just desserts? Were any characters let off lightly or unjustly punished, and if so why?

Was the novel's ending a shock or inevitable? And how does the outcome change your opinion of free will and determinism?

Themed reading

Hilary Mantel *Wolf Hall*
Patrick DeWitt *The Sisters Brothers*
David Mitchell *Cloud Atlas*

Useful links

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