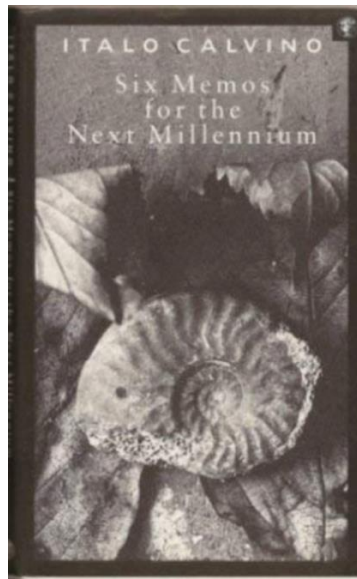


Introduction

“Molteplicità del possibile”: Italo Calvino’s *Memos* Between the Old and the New Millennium

Anna Botta and Lucia Re



This thematic issue of *California Italian Studies*, entitled “Calvino’s *Memos*: Between the Old and the New Millennium,” is comprised of comparative and interdisciplinary scholarly articles as well as more informal “Notes from the Field”—including excerpts from works in progress, artists’ statements, and commentaries—inspired by or related to the ideas and writings of Italo Calvino (1923–85), in particular (but not exclusively) the lectures known and published posthumously in Italian as *Lezioni americane*—in English as *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988).¹ Calvino’s *Memos* were originally lectures prepared, beginning in January 1985, after he was invited in 1984 to be the 1985–86 Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University. For all the Norton endowed lectures, Harvard stipulated that poetry was to be interpreted in the broadest sense, including all poetic expression in language, music, or fine arts. Calvino’s predecessors included, among others, Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Chávez, Aaron Copland, Northrop Frye, Helen Gardner, Pier Luigi Nervi, Octavio Paz, Frank Stella, and Igor Stravinsky; and among his successors over the years were Laurie Anderson, John Ashbery, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Umberto Eco, Nadine Gordimer, Herbie Hancock, William Kentridge, Toni Morrison, Linda

¹ Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988), then in Italo Calvino, *Saggi 1945–1985*, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 1:627–753; English translation: *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). A new translation by Geoffrey Brock also entitled *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* appeared in 2016 (London: Penguin Books). In her prefatory note to the Garzanti edition, Esther Calvino acknowledges the collaboration of Luca Marighetti and Angelica Koch in preparing the manuscript for publication. All quotes from *Six Memos* in this introduction are from the Brock translation, unless otherwise noted.

Nochlin, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Orhan Pamuk, and Agnès Varda. The *Memos* theorize principles or “values” that in Calvino’s view were especially relevant and important for literature (or, rather, poetry in the broader sense set forth by Harvard)—always seen in relation to other forms of discourse and expression—as it faced the new millennium, a millennium which Calvino, who died on September 19, 1985 at the age of 61 in the Santa Maria della Scala hospital in Siena (where he underwent emergency surgery after suffering a brain aneurysm), would not see. These future-oriented values for Calvino were also crucial to the reading and interpretation of poetic/literary works from the first and second millennia. The scholarly work included in this issue of *California Italian Studies* ranges in fact from studies pertaining to antiquity, the Middle Ages, and early modern literature and culture, to multidisciplinary reflections on literature, art, and science inspired by or based on the *Memos*, as well as critical problems and themes relevant to the contemporary era and the future of the humanities.

Calvino, as became evident from the carefully ordered notebooks, outlines, and papers that he left on his desk, and on which the volume *Lezioni americane* was based, prevalently used English terms for the lectures’ titles as he crafted, wrote, and revised them, reworking them (sometimes multiple times) before sending them off in batches to be translated by Patrick Creagh, who was not only a distinguished translator, but also a poet, living in Tuscany.² Geoffrey Brock, also a poet as well as an award-winning translator, is responsible for the new 2016 translation, which is the subject of his contribution to this issue of *California Italian Studies*.³ Calvino was to present his lectures in English, in which he became increasingly proficient over the years after cultivating his passion for the language by translating several chapters of *Lord Jim* and then writing his 1947 *tesi di laurea* on Joseph Conrad, himself a peerless second-language learner of English whose stylistic precision and *exactness* were a lifelong model for Calvino, all the way to and including the Norton Lectures.⁴ Traveling, lecturing and reading from his work in the United States over the years, Calvino, who eventually identified as a potential New Yorker,⁵ was able to speak clearly in English (unlike many of his Italian compatriots who thought they could but were incomprehensible to their audiences), as is evident from some of the extant recordings, including that of his fall 1984 lecture at Mount Holyoke College, discussed by Ombretta Frau in this issue. A native of Cuba, Calvino also spoke Spanish well, especially after his marriage in Havana to Esther Singer, an Argentinian and a professional translator who liked to speak Spanish at home with their daughter Giovanna. In Paris, where the Calvins lived from 1967 to 1980, Calvino became more fluent in French, conversing with Queneau and other members of the *Oulipo* and even attending Roland Barthes’ seminars on Balzac’s *Sarrasine*.⁶

The literary horizon of the *Memos* is decidedly comparative, and Calvino quotes most of the non-Italian works in the original. The titles for the completed Norton lectures were 1. “Lightness”

² Patrick Creagh had translated, among other poets, Giacomo Leopardi, who was one of Calvino’s favorite poets and is featured repeatedly in *Six Memos*. See Lucia Re, “Translator Patrick Creagh and the Sound of Italy,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no.1 (2013).

³ Geoffrey Brock translated the poems of another writer who was an early model and mentor for Calvino: Cesare Pavese. See Cesare Pavese, *Disaffections: Complete Poems 1930–1950*, trans. Geoffrey Brock (Copper Canyon Press, 2002).

⁴ See Martin McLaughlin and Arianna Scicutella, “Calvino e Conrad: dalla tesi di laurea alle *Lezioni americane*,” *Italian Studies* 57, no.1 (2002): 113–32.

⁵ See “La mia città è New York,” in *Saggi*, 2:2905–10. See also: Anna Botta and Domenico Scarpa, eds., *Italo Calvino newyorkese* (Cava de’ Tirreni: Avagliano Editore, 2002), 7–11.

⁶ See Anna Botta, “Calvino and the *OuLiPo*: An Italian Ghost in the Combinatory Machine?” *MLN* 112, no.1 (Jan 1997): 81–89. See also Warren Motte, ed. and trans., *OuLiPo. A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

("Leggerezza"), 2. "Quickness" ("Velocità"), 3. "Exactitude" ("Esattezza"), 4. "Visibility" ("Visibilità"), and 5. "Multiplicity" ("Molteplicità"). The title in English *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* was also Calvino's (though only "for the Next Millennium" never changed in the various phases of writing, while there were different variations and numbers for the first part of the title). The Italian title was chosen by Esther Calvino because Calvino and his friend Pietro Citati often used the expression "Lezioni americane" to refer to the Norton lectures Calvino was working on in the summer of 1985 in his study in the Roccamare house, near the sea-town of Castiglione della Pescaia, where Citati visited him and where Calvino was eventually buried in the small local cemetery. Calvino was unable to complete the sixth lecture, possibly to be titled "Consistency." The term *consistency*, which is not easy to translate into Italian ("coerenza" being a possible interpretation), appears, written in pencil, marked number six (while the previous five are traced over in pen over the original writing in pencil), in a handwritten table of contents for the *Six Memos* that was reproduced in the 1988 edition of the *Lezioni americane*.⁷ In her introductory note, Esther Calvino explains that her husband intended to complete "Consistency" while at Harvard and that it was likely to be about Herman Melville's 1853 novella, "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." To be sure, the character of Bartleby, a diligent copyist in a Wall Street law firm who suddenly refuses to write, i.e., to keep doing the tedious work of mere copying of contracts and briefs assigned to him, and remains obstinately steadfast in his passive resistance to meaningless work, is not only an example of almost heroic consistency verging on stubbornness, but certainly resonates with some of Calvino's own concerns—his own forms of refusal and of resistance (some examples among many: "La sfida al labirinto," "Non darò più fiato alle trombe," and "La decapitazione dei capi")⁸—and stubborn rejection of any form of cheapened, merely commercial and linguistically impoverished writing. Yet, as Gabriele Pedullà observes in his contribution to this issue of *CIS*, each of Calvino's values, including presumably consistency, is a value precisely because it stands in a constant relationship of opposition, and implicit tension, with its other; in the case of consistency, for example, multiplicity.

The fact that Melville's name does not appear in the other *Memos* suggests one of the reasons why Calvino may have had a difficult time with this lecture, ironically, in terms of trying to be consistent; as Laura Di Nicola points out in her analysis of Calvino's Norton Lectures in this issue of *CIS*, the lectures are constructed through an elaborate network of references and quotes from Calvino's most beloved writers, who act as "centers of gravity"—first of all Dante—and whose names recur consistently throughout the lectures, as if Calvino were constructing the image of a mobile, ideal library for his audience. At one level, the *Six Memos* are Calvino's highly personal reflections and a cavalcade across many texts and many traditions that belong in Calvino's own mental library (and, as shown by Laura di Nicola in this issue of *California Italian Studies*, also his actual library), ranging from Ovid to Boccaccio, Cavalcanti, Cervantes, Emily Dickinson, Kafka, Borges, Marianne Moore, Proust, Perec, the *Tao Te Ching*, and many others. At the same time, Calvino offers a reflection on how each of the six values is at work in his own writings that were dearest to him at the time (*Il castello dei destini incrociati*, *Le città invisibili*, *Le cosmicomiche*, *Fiabe italiane*, *Palomar*; *Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento*, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, *Ti con zero*) and provides almost a *summa* of these works, though others could

⁷ Calvino used to write in pencil the titles of works that he planned to write, tracing over the titles in pen once he actually wrote them. See Domenico Scarpa, *Calvino fa la conchiglia* (Milan: Hoepli, 2023), 622.

⁸ On Calvino's early resistance to conventional realism, see Lucia Re, *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

have been included, as shown by Joanna Woods in her analysis in this issue of the role and significance of *quickness* in *Marcovaldo*.

Yet the number six corresponds in reality only to the minimum number of lectures required by Harvard of its visiting professors; in Calvino's mind that number tended to grow as he faced a "molteplicità del possibile" ("multiplicity of the possible"), and he left lists of seven, then eight lectures in different orders and with different configurations, including a lecture tentatively titled "Cominciare e finire" ("To Begin and to End") which he may have planned to use as the opening lecture, and which, although he left with his papers a complete draft of it as well as notes, he was never able to finish. This draft of "Cominciare e finire"—regrettably yet to be translated into English—was published as an appendix to *Lezioni americane* in the 1995 Meridiani Mondadori edition of Calvino's essays edited by Mario Barenghi.⁹ According to the editor, Calvino had finally set it aside, though he still intended to use parts of it for the final lecture, number six, "Consistency." The line "In my beginning is my end" comes to mind, by T.S. Eliot, one of the poets mentioned in the *Memos* (he is evoked in "Multiplicity" for his and James Joyce's diverse forms of love for and homage to Dante),¹⁰ and also Calvino's predecessor as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard (1932–33). With neither a beginning nor an end, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, then, is very much an open work, partly along the lines of Umberto Eco's notion of *Opera aperta* (1962, *The Open Work*), and the text we have is only one textual configuration of a multiple, reconfigurable, combinatorial, multidirectional, and potentially expandable and endless work meant to stimulate and open up the audience's literary, auditory, and visual imagination, similar in many ways to Calvino's *Città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*). However, even in one of the last outlines of the lectures' sequence that included as the opening "Cominciare e finire," dated February 23, 1985, he added a key side comment that highlights the *Memos'* single unifying principle and its sense of urgency: "in tutte un richiamo alla insostituibilità della letteratura e della lettura in un mondo che non vorrà più leggere" ("In all [the lectures I must] recall the irreplaceability of literature and reading in a world that will no longer want to read").¹¹ In asserting the specific value of literature, Calvino is nothing but consistent.¹²

The publication of this issue of *California Italian Studies* coincides with the 100th anniversary of Calvino's birth, which is currently being celebrated with a variety of initiatives, conferences, journal issues, performances, new editions and translations of Calvino's works, exhibitions in Italy and abroad, as well as a dedicated website.¹³ New studies of Calvino's work and of his *Memos* have appeared in the new millennium and continue to appear, opening up new perspectives and

⁹ Italo Calvino, "Cominciare e finire," in *Saggi*, 1:734–53; the phrase "molteplicità del possibile" quoted above is on p. 752.

¹⁰ *Saggi*, 1:727; *Six Memos*, 143.

¹¹ *Saggi*, 2:2961. Our translation.

¹² See Lucia Re, "Calvino and the Value of Literature," *MLN* 113, no. 1 (1998): 121–37.

¹³ A new edition of Calvino's letters, *Lettere 1940–1985*, edited by Luca Baranelli, with 70 previously unpublished letters, came out in July 2023 (Milan: Mondadori), while a new edition of the invaluable *Album Calvino*, edited by Luca Baranelli and Ernesto Ferrero, with new documents and images, appeared in 2022 (Milan: Mondadori). An English language volume of Calvino's letters, based on a selection taken from the 2000 Mondadori edition is available as Italo Calvino, *Letters, 1941–1985*, edited with an introduction by Michael Wood, transl. Martin McLaughlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). The volume *The Written World and the Unwritten World: Collected Non-Fiction* by Italo Calvino, trans. Ann Goldstein (London: Penguin Classics, 2023) includes some previously untranslated essays. The dedicated Calvino website, created by Giovanna Calvino, may be found at <https://italocalvino.org/>.

using innovative approaches ranging from gender studies¹⁴ to transdisciplinary ecological studies that elaborate on Calvino's prophetic thinking about humans' relation with and impact on the natural world, and what is now called the Anthropocene.¹⁵ We received many excellent submissions in response to our call for papers and this issue, with the twenty contributions we selected, is exceptionally rich and varied, while the contributions are representative of a plurality of interdisciplinary approaches.

Calvino's *Memos* have at times been misread as implicitly upholding a conservative notion of literature as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, and for failing to consider the politics of aesthetics. Some critics have gone as far as painting him as a mere postmodern jester and a cynical apostle of neocapitalism; others as a great modernist, though belated and, implicitly, outdated.¹⁶ In reality Calvino was always consistently on the left—though after 1957 not aligned with any political party—and deeply political and committed not only through his consistent, precise interventions, open letters, and commentaries in the Italian press (including the pro-feminist and still highly relevant stand he took during the fight over the controversial abortion law in Italy),¹⁷ but also in all his literary and critical works. Indeed, he considered himself essentially a political being,¹⁸ and the values that literary discourse could, at its best, embody and uphold, a political strategy through which it was possible to engage the readers' minds (including especially young readers and students with whom Calvino dialogued often) in order to resist and counter the oppressive weight of the neocapitalist world system, and its destructiveness for humanity and for the planet. The continued relevance—at once literary and political—of his work is, as we hope this issue of *CIS* will show, undeniable.

As pointed out by Pier Paolo Antonello in his contribution to this issue, Calvino's *Memos* since their publication have intrigued many readers from a variety of fields and have been adopted, sometimes reductively, as a mere set of generative tropes that can be deployed analogically. Even software designers seem to have found inspiration in Calvino's work, a development that may (or

¹⁴ See for example, Bridget Tompkins, *Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm: Fashioning the Feminine in "I nostri antenati" and "Gli amori difficili"* (Leicestershire: Troubadour, 2015). A strand of feminist critique that dates back to essays by Teresa De Lauretis from the 1980s argues that women and the feminine are absent or insignificant in Calvino's fiction. But, as pointed out by Robert Rushing, in "What We Desire, We Shall Never Have: Calvino, Žižek, and Ovid," *Comparative Literature* 58, no. 1 (2006): 46, "gender studies that dispensed with Calvino early on as a writer with little to offer did so based on arguments that read his work too literally."

¹⁵ Serenella Iovino, *Italo Calvino's Animals: Anthropocene Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) and Serenella Iovino, "Italo Calvino and the Landscapes of the Anthropocene: A Narrative Stratigraphy," in *Italy and the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Iovino, Enrico Casetti, and Elena Past (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 67–77. Marco Lobascio, "Tra il mare dell'oggettività e lo sguardo dell'archeologo. Ambivalenze dell'anti-anthropocentrismo di Italo Calvino," *Italica* 97, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 237–63. See also the invaluable, ambitious book by Kerstin Pilz, *Mapping Complexity. Literature and Science in the Works of Italo Calvino* (Leicestershire: Troubadour, 2005).

¹⁶ See Lawrence Rainey, "Italo Calvino: the Last Modernist," *Modernism/Modernity*, 20, no. 3 (2013): 577–84.

¹⁷ Italo Calvino, open letter to Claudio Magris, *Corriere della sera*, February 3–8, 1975, republished in *Lettere*, 827–28. See Maria Popova, "Calvino on Abortion and the Meaning of Life," <https://www.themarginalian.org/2013/06/03/italo-calvino-on-abortion-and-the-meaning-of-life/>. See also Italo Calvino, "Che cosa vuol dire «rispettare la vita»," *Corriere della sera* 9 febbraio 1975; republished in *Saggi*, 2: 2262–67.

¹⁸ In a letter dated July 25, 1970, addressed to his perennial opponent, the poet Franco Fortini, Calvino wrote: "Ho scoperto che l'unica mia biografia possibile è politica, e dove la politica finisce non resta più niente da raccontare" ("I have discovered that my only possible biography is political, and where politics ends there is nothing else to tell"). Italo Calvino, *Lettere*, 706.

may not) bode well for the future of digital humanities.¹⁹ It is our hope that this issue of *California Italian Studies* will contribute to a better grasp of the significance of Calvino's work while highlighting the deeper and continuing relevance of his *Memos* for comparative literary and cultural studies as well as for the humanities in general, the arts, and the natural, mathematical, and social sciences.

This issue is divided into five sections: 1. **Autobiography of an absence**; 2. **Literature and the Dream of a Library**; 3. **Interdisciplinary Approaches and Dialogues: Music, Theater, Design, Architecture, Cinema, Mathematics and the Practice of Art**; 4. **The Animal-Human-Mineral-Vegetal Continuum** and 5. **Calvino in/and Translation**. These groupings are somewhat arbitrary and many of the contributions could be cross-listed in more than one. In a Calvinian spirit, readers should feel free to begin at any point and chart their own itineraries in this issue, which will hopefully foster multiple returns to *California Italian Studies* and to Calvino's works.

I. Autobiography of an Absence

“La vita [...] questa cosa scissa e disgregata, e priva di totalità.”
Carlo Levi on *Tristram Shandy*, as cited in Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, 669

“Life [...] this thing that is divided, disintegrated, deprived of wholeness.”
Six Memos for the Next Millennium, 56

Among the fifty-five cities described by Italo Calvino in his *Invisible Cities* is Baucis, an abandoned city whose inhabitants fled their homes years ago and now live in houses perched on stilts. Calvino writes, “con cannocchiali e telescopi puntati in giù non si stan[ano] mai di passarla in rassegna [la loro città], foglia a foglia, sasso a sasso, formica per formica, contemplando affascinati la propria assenza” (“with spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward they never tire of examining [their city], leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence”).²⁰ In a 1978 interview, the writer comments: “Forse per capire chi sono devo osservare un punto nel quale potrei essere e non sto. Come un vecchio fotografo che si metta in posa davanti all’obbiettivo e corra poi a schiacciare la peretta, fotografando il punto in cui poteva esserci e non c’è” (“Maybe to understand who I am I have to observe a point where I could be but I am not. Like an early photographer who poses in front of the camera and then runs to press the switch, photographing the spot where he could have been but isn’t”).²¹ Like the inhabitants of Baucis, Calvino had an ambivalent relationship with autobiography; rather than a teleological narrative that adds up to a distinctive identity, life remained for him what he called, citing Carlo Levi on *Tristram Shandy*, “una cosa scissa e disgregata, e priva di totalità” (“this thing that is divided, disintegrated, deprived of wholeness”).²² For Calvino, writing autobiography implied facing his own absence; nonetheless, he never tired of describing “the point where [he] could be

¹⁹ Paolo Ciancarini, Sergey Masyagin, and Giancarlo Succi, “Software Design as Story Telling: Reflecting on the Work of Italo Calvino,” *Onward! ’20*, Proceedings of the 2020 ACM SIGPLAN International Symposium on New Ideas, New Paradigms, and Reflections on Programming and Software (Onward! ’20), November 18–20, 2020, Virtual, USA: 195–208.

²⁰ Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), 2:423; Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974), 77.

²¹ Calvino, “Situazione 1978,” in *Saggi*, 2:2832–33; Calvino, “Situation 1978,” in *Hermit in Paris. Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 189.

²² Levi in Calvino, “Rapidità,” in *Saggi*, 1:669; “Quickness,” in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, 56.

but [is] not,” both through fiction and essays, and adopting an oblique, estranged, and often ironic gaze.

Calvino’s elusiveness, however, did not discourage the critic **Domenico SCARPA** who has recently published the most exhaustive literary, political, and intellectual biography of the Ligurian author to date, *Calvino fa la conchiglia* (2023), certainly one of the most important books to appear in this centennial of Calvino’s birth.²³ In the homonymous central chapter, which we publish here translated by Jim Hicks (“Calvino Makes the Shell”), Scarpa argues that the 1965 short story “La spirale” (“The Spiral”), included in the *Cosmicomics* and written midway in Calvino’s career, is of cardinal importance in understanding Calvino’s self-construction as a writer, his never-ending process of creating himself, inside and out. Through the voice of the primordial mollusk of the short story, Calvino tells us about his own, similar need to hide, from his earliest age and throughout his life, and about his urge to constantly correct what he had written, or, in other words, to remake his shell. He never ceased to create that protective shell of words, or fearing the constraints of a fixed identity. Scarpa writes that Calvino realized that “this self-correcting process was essential, not only for writing, but also for the construction of his self, for directing his own future existence—so that things written here-and-now would continue to resonate, in reverse, on things written there-and-then, across the entire extension of his past.”

The author’s difficult yet endlessly productive relation with his past, notably as member of the Communist Party, is also the subject of **Gabriele PEDULLÀ**’s “Notes from the Field”: “Italo Calvino, Communist.” Pedullà remarks that Calvino belonged to a generation of communist activists “raised on bread and dialectic,” yet he grew increasingly uncomfortable with the concept of dialectical synthesis as a way of overcoming contradictions. By the time he wrote the *Six Memos*, he had been exposed to French structuralism and its method of building critical discourse on irreconcilable binary oppositions. Yet, Pedullà argues, the Italian author never dissociated literary creation from political activism; in discussing the six values for the next millennium’s literature, Calvino repeatedly and passionately takes sides and is effectively deeply political. According to Pedullà, what is unique of Calvino is “his ability to unite his strong opinions with a will to reverse the perspective, and a desire to observe the problem from a different point of view, again and again. This attention to the verso of the card is tied both to his taste for literary estrangement (in the wake of Victor Shklovsky and Bertolt Brecht) and to his enduring, lifelong political commitment to the struggle of the oppressed.”

Ombretta FRAU’s article, “Italo Calvino’s Lecture at Mount Holyoke College: Description and the Future of Literature,” brings to our attention a little-known episode of Calvino’s life, his November 1984 visit to Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts (a historic women’s college) where he received a doctorate *honoris causa*. In his keynote speech—whose transcription is published here for the first time, along with the link to access the live recording—the writer talked about his passion for the ancient practice of description and read excerpts from three of his texts

²³ Another biography, originally written in Spanish (Antonio Serrano Cueto, *Italo Calvino, el escritor que quiso ser invisible* (Madrid: Fundación José Manuel Lara, 2020), has appeared this year in Italian translation: *Italo Calvino, Lo scrittore che voleva essere invisibile*, trans. Giuliana Carraro and Eleonora Mogavero (Milan: Mondadori, 2023). In 2020, the Spanish publication won the Antonio Domínguez Ortiz Premio de Biografías. While these biographies constitute an important step forward in Calvino studies, the unavailability to scholars of a substantial portion of his papers and letters makes a more comprehensive biography of Calvino, partly due to the writer’s own reticence, and in spite of the posthumous publication of a selection of letters and of some autobiographical texts—collected in *La strada di San Giovanni* (Milano: Mondadori, 1990) (*The Road to San Giovanni*, trans. Tim Parks [New York: Pantheon, 1993])—a project that still awaits to be undertaken, hopefully in this millennium.

that illustrate that passion—the ekphrastic essay “Il bottone” (“The Button”) (which describes paintings by Domenico Gnoli), two of his *Invisible Cities* and, finally, a chapter from *Palomar*, entitled “La pantofola spaiata” (“The Odd Slipper”). Frau’s article shows how “Calvino’s recommendation to revive the art of description goes hand in hand with his invitation to reflect on the shades and nuances of language, on precision (or what in his *Memos* he would call “exactitude”) and rigor as solutions to rescue language and literature from ambiguity and vagueness.” Calvino elaborated on how he was inspired by Georges Perec and Francis Ponge in literature, Domenico Gnoli in art, and by phenomenology in philosophy, explaining how description can illuminate its objects, forcing us to break free of perceptual habits and see them as if for the first time.

For Calvino, description, a key component of his own writing at the time, can truly become a way to redesign one’s relationship with the world and give a better grasp of the life of the things described, as well as of the observing self. As Calvino wrote in one of his essays: “mi sento vicino a capire che dall’altro lato delle parole c’è qualcosa che cerca d’uscire dal silenzio, di significare attraverso il linguaggio, come battendo le ali su un muro di prigione” (“I feel close to understanding that from the other side of the words, from the silent side, something is trying to emerge, to signify through language, like tapping on a prison wall”).²⁴

II. Literature and the Dream of a Library

“Il mio disagio è per la perdita di forma che constato nella vita, e a cui cerco d’opporre l’unica difesa che riesco a concepire: un’idea della letteratura.”

Calvino *Lezioni americane*, 679

“My uneasiness is for the loss of form that I perceive in life, against which I try to mount the only defense I am able to imagine: an idea of literature.”

Six Memos for the Next Millennium, 70

The five articles in this section address various vital aspects of Calvino’s passionate and comparative engagement with literary discourse in a global sense, ranging from classical antiquity to the present, and the dreamed future of the new millennium he did not get to see.

Laura Di NICOLA’s study of the deep structure of Calvino’s Norton Lectures that were eventually published as *Lezioni americane*, entitled “Le Norton Lectures di Calvino. Il racconto inedito di una biblioteca di apocrifi,” digs through various layers of sunken work, an underground archive of notebooks, handwritten notes, typescripts sent out to be translated only to be written over and reworked. She traces previous stages of Calvino’s study of the books he utilized, annotated and commented, and reused to write his lectures. The writing of these lectures, she argues, represents the first time that Calvino takes the measure of his entire mental library in order to recount his idea of literature. In the process, he offers mirror images of himself as writer and reader through the paths of his memory and of his poetic imagination. As never before, Calvino searches for his own place in the frame that holds together six ideal shelves. These ideal shelves

²⁴ Calvino, “Mondo scritto e non scritto,” in *Saggi*, 2:1875; Calvino, “The Written World and the Unwritten World,” in *The Written World and the Unwritten World*, 130.

are themselves reflections of himself and of an idea of literature whereby all forms of knowledge arise from anomalies hidden in the great library of the world.

Laura JANSEN's "Lightness and the Future of Antiquity in *Lezioni americane*" explores Calvino's vision of antiquity as part of the literatures of the future, taking as its point of departure Calvino's memo on lightness. It sets out to explore this question in particular from the perspective of the memo's reference, in its conclusion, to Kafka's "The Bucket Rider" (1917), a short story that also ends with a forward movement into an unknown future. According to Jansen, Calvino stages classical lightness as "a form of *avenir*, or 'things to come,' a process that mobilizes the Greco-Roman past at the time of writing, as he establishes its projection onto the future." Homer, and especially Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are models for Calvino not only in *Six Memos* but also in *Invisible Cities*, where lightness, or the "removal of weight," is the value behind Calvino's large-scale projection of Venice across the globe and deep temporalities. Calvino relates the *avenir* of a highly hybrid tradition, envisaging the endurance of ethical literatures beyond Anthropocene concerns, giving a voice to the non-human. Calvino's alternative take on antiquity's *avenir*, Jansen argues, speaks eloquently to the field of cultural, scientific, and technological production, in which vestiges of older literatures, like those of Homer, Lucretius and Ovid, are put to the test in an ever-changing world.

Akash KUMAR's article "'Il perché del gioco:' Chess and Medievalism in Calvino's *Le città invisibili* and *Lezioni americane*" considers chess as a particular mode of exchange in Calvino's *Le città invisibili*, one that draws upon the game's global nature and long history of representing cross cultural exchange. This focus lends itself both to an examination of Calvino's overarching medievalism in that work and his later reflections on his writerly identity in the essay "Esattezza" ("Exactitude") in *Lezioni americane*. Kumar argues that analyzing the representation of the game of chess in Calvino is essential in order to grasp not only Calvino's thought in his late period on language and systems of communication and control, but also his interrogation of the cultural other and ascertainment of global affinities.

Sarah CANTOR's "Epic Halves, Epic Doubles: Calvino, Tasso, and the Self-Reflecting Enemy" argues that Calvino's well-known preference, among early modern texts, for Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* does not preclude him from turning to Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* to bolster the epic features of his own novel *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952, *The Cloven Viscount*), a turning point in Calvino's literary production. The article discusses in particular what Calvino's novel, as an interpretive reading in itself, reveals to us about Tasso's poem. Calvino's own portrait of the universal warrior anticipates aspects of more recent critical approaches to Tasso, pointing out that the *Liberata*'s ethical divide between the army of the saved Christians and that of the condemned Muslims may not be as clearcut as it appears.

Such global affinities are also a theme in "La logica profonda del meraviglioso: Italo Calvino teorico della fiaba (e del fantastico)," by **Ezio PUGLIA**, who revisits Calvino's ideas on the fairy tale, crucial in order to understand the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, through the analysis not of Calvino's much-admired collection *Fiabe italiane* (*Italian Folktales*), but rather of Calvino's theoretical essays on the fairy tale and the fantastic. Puglia observes that despite Calvino's thorough knowledge of and interest in the main trends in fairy-tale studies, the leading scholars in the field have rarely discussed his views, which are nonetheless quite interesting and original. Puglia discusses the reasons why, for Calvino, the fairy tale is strikingly different from the fantastic genre. The fantastic is conceived by Calvino as a fully historical narrative typology, while the fairy tale is closer to the most remote sources of storytelling, providing decisive evidence

of the universal, transnational, and combinatory nature of fiction itself. Finally, Puglia discusses how Calvino hypothesized the existence of what Puglia calls a *deep fairy tale*.

III. Interdisciplinary Approaches and Dialogues: Music, Theater, Design, Architecture, Cinema, Mathematics and the Practice of Art

“Abbiamo a disposizione tutti i linguaggi: quelli elaborati dalla letteratura, gli stili in cui si sono espressi civiltà e individui nei vari secoli e paesi, e anche i linguaggi elaborati dalle discipline più varie, finalizzati a raggiungere le più varie forme di conoscenza: e noi vogliamo estrarne il linguaggio adatto a dire ciò che vogliamo dire, il linguaggio che è ciò che vogliamo dire.”

“Cominciare e finire,” *Lezioni americane*, 734–35

“All forms of discourse are available to us: those produced by literature, the styles in which civilizations and individuals of every country have expressed themselves over the centuries, as well as the languages developed by a host of disciplines in order to articulate a vast range of forms of knowledge: and we want to take from these the language best suited for saying what we want to say—the language that *is* what we want to say.”

“To Begin and to End”²⁵

For Calvino, literature is the territory where humans can experiment and explore not only with different kinds of poetic and narrative tools and strategies but also reflect on, adopt, and adapt different modes of vision and of structuring, understanding and even shaping reality, perception, and communication. The arts but also the social, mathematical, and natural sciences play key roles in the ceaseless experimentation practiced and envisioned by Calvino. Indeed, his influence outside of Italy may be larger outside than inside of literature per se (*Invisible Cities*, for example, has had an enormous influence on art, architecture, urban planning, and design). The eight readings included in this section therefore, in line with some of the most intriguing recent developments in inter- and transdisciplinary studies and creative endeavors at the international level, address creative and critical collaborations and networks of imaginative relationships with or inspired by Calvino between literature on the one hand, and, on the other hand, music (Rushing, Chiesa), design, theater, and architecture (Antonello, Snyder), cinema (Di Bianco), mathematics (Lolli) and, last but not least, the very practice of art (Viva, Ferrini).

In his article entitled “A Jazz *Cosmicomics*: Geometry, Perversion, Resonance,” **Robert RUSHING** considers composer and performer Lisa Mezzacappa’s 2020 jazz suite of Calvino’s *Cosmicomics*. Jazz might seem like an unusual way of interpreting Calvino, Rushing explains, but “Calvino himself suggested in *Un ottimista in America* that jazz has a particular and positive capacity to think through cultural dilemmas without ‘crystallizing’ into a static and unproductive image.” According to Rushing, jazz opens up a different way to hear and listen to Calvino: “playful, improvisational, and sensual.” The article analyzes in particular one track from Mezzacappa’s suite, “The Form of Space” (audible through the link provided in the text) arguing that her adaptation encourages us “to hear Calvino’s story as a critique of the purely cerebral, visual and geometric.” Indeed, the music points toward an almost neurotic subject who, surprisingly, may be both perverse and unpredictable.

²⁵ Our translation.

In her “Notes from the Field,” entitled “*Un re in ascolto*: Luciano Berio and Italo Calvino’s Collaboration as a Memory of the Future”—part of a work in progress—**Laura CHIESA** examines various phases of Calvino and Luciano Berio’s complex collaboration, as well as the divergences that arose between the two authors, for the “azione scenica” *Un re in ascolto* (*A King Listens*) by Berio, which premiered at the Salzburg music festival on August 7, 1984. Although Berio largely rewrote the libretto himself, using only fragments and sections of the text originally written by Calvino and adding a mashup of excerpts from other texts, Chiesa shows that the divergences between the two authors were in fact profoundly productive, especially for Berio’s subsequent work. Chiesa also examines Calvino’s short story “Un re in ascolto” (“A King Listens”) which was published only posthumously in the collection *Sotto il sole giaguaro* (1986, *Under the Jaguar Sun*), with a shorter version appearing in *la Repubblica* on August 12–23, 1984, with a brief introduction by Calvino himself, shortly after the premiere of Berio’s opera. Chiesa’s specific approach to the collaboration is through the notions of “expanded music” and “extended voice,” which she uses to analyze the significance of the different stages of the collaboration.

“‘A Calvinian character’: Bruno Munari’s Six Memos for this Millennium” by **Pierpaolo ANTONELLO** argues that the theories and creative work of one of the most important and versatile among twentieth-century Italian artists, Bruno Munari (1907–98), embody the six virtues extolled by Calvino in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* more than those of any other artist in the Italian Novecento, even though the two never actually collaborated. Munari’s work and method were *ante litteram* informed by *lightness* and *quickness*, Antonello shows, as well as *exactitude*, *visibility*, *multiplicity*, and *consistency*. He therefore uses Calvino’s “exalogue” as a map to chart some common denominators in Munari’s art, always difficult to systematize because of his constant experimenting in many different fields of practices, ranging from graphic and industrial design, to visual art, art pedagogy, children’s literature, and experimental film. Antonello shows how Munari’s series of seminal volumes including *Arte come mestiere* (1966, *Design as Art*), *Artista e designer* (1971), *Codice ovvio*, (1971, *Obvious Code*), and *Design e comunicazione visiva* (1968, *Design and Visual Communication*) may indeed be read as Munari’s own Memos for the next millennium.

Although both Calvino and the architect Aldo Rossi were among the most prominent intellectual stars to emerge from Italy onto the international scene in the post-1968 period, there is no concrete evidence that the two men knew each other’s work, or that they thought of themselves as part of the “postmodernist” movement of those years. Yet, **Jon R. SNYDER** argues in his article entitled “Un luogo della pura rappresentazione”: Theater and Architecture in Italo Calvino’s *Lezioni americane* (*Six Memos for the Next Millennium*) and Aldo Rossi’s *Quaderni azzurri* (*Blue Notebooks*),” their respective career trajectories parallel one another in striking ways. That Calvino and Rossi shared a wide-ranging set of literary and cultural references becomes apparent when Snyder maps out the dense textual network of the *Lezioni americane* onto that of Rossi’s notebooks (now known as the *Quaderni azzurri*), in which the architect recorded many of his readings and reflections on the latter. Snyder focuses on texts left unpublished by both Calvino and Rossi while alive (and still not translated into English today), namely the unfinished lecture by Calvino “Cominciare e finire” and the *Quaderni azzurri*. The juxtaposition of these works reveals the central importance of theatrical texts, spaces, performances, and ultimately of the concept of theater itself. For Calvino, theaters are a concrete “immagine dello spazio ideale in cui prendono corpo le storie”²⁶ (“image of the ideal space in which stories take shape”) and may serve as a synecdoche for all literary storytelling. For Rossi, who designed and built a number of theaters

²⁶ “Cominciare e finire,” in *Lezioni americane*, in *Saggi*, 1:744.

over the years, including the famous *Teatro del Mondo*, architecture is at its best when it is concerned less with function than with making itself available (“disponibile”) to the telling of the human story. The built environment of the theater should embody what Rossi calls “pure availability” (“la disponibilità pura”) becoming the place “where stories with transformative power may *take place*.” Calvino and Rossi not only acknowledge the enduring importance of the theater in the media-saturated and dispersive era of late capitalism, “but envision it as a place of unique imaginative freedom within the system of representation at the end of the millennium.”

Laura DI BIANCO in her “Notes from the Field” entitled “Calvino and Cinema: Revisiting a Difficult Love, in Dialogue with Duccio Chiarini about his Documentary, *Italo Calvino, lo scrittore sugli alberi*,” revisits in brief Calvino’s complex, lifelong relationship with the world of cinema. In the second part of her “Notes,” Di Bianco engages in a critical conversation with director Duccio Chiarini about the making of a documentary film on Calvino intended for a wide audience. Entitled *Italo Calvino, lo scrittore sugli alberi* (*Italo Calvino, the Writer in the Trees*), the documentary uses Calvino’s novel *Il barone rampante* (*The Baron in the Trees*) as its frame narrative and was presented at the 2023 Venice Film Festival. The interview, which took place before and after the documentary was completed, discusses the challenges of creating a portrait of a polyhedric writer while balancing creative impulses, material conditions, production demands, and the other contingencies that shaped the documentary film project, of which Di Bianco also provides a brief critical assessment. We may add to her assessment that one wishes that one of the most brilliant of Calvino’s successors as visiting professor of poetry for Harvard’s Norton Lectures, namely Agnès Varda, had also been able to make a documentary or feature film on Calvino or inspired by his works, for her cinema truly seems to embody—knowingly or not—the values of the *Six Memos*.

The essay “Molteplicità potenziale e creatività al tempo del computer: un matematico del 2000 legge Calvino” by philosopher of mathematics **Gabriele LOLLI**, gives a detailed history of the three factors that, according to him, contributed to revolutionizing today’s mathematics: the axiomatic method revived by nineteenth-century mathematicians, the success of the Bourbaki group in the mid-thirties, and the invention of the computer. Already in his 1967 essay “Cibernetica e fantasmi” (“Cybernetics and Ghosts”), Calvino showed that he was attracted to these new developments and saw parallels between the literary imagination and electronic machines, notably in their ability to keep track of and select from all possible combinations. Thanks also to his association with the Ou.Li.Po. group, the discreet charm of mathematics continued to have an effect on Calvino. Lolli then asks whether Calvino’s literary values expressed in *Lezioni americane* may be extended to include central characteristics of twenty-first mathematics and the mechanization of formal proofs, arguing that Calvino’s reflections are, however indirectly, invaluable for an overhaul of the pedagogy of mathematics in the new millennium that is both urgent and necessary.

In his copiously illustrated article entitled “Molteplicità e ritratto: sovrapposizioni autoriali fra Italo Calvino e Giulio Paolini,” **Denis VIVA** explores the limits and the legacy of the so-called “death of the author” theories, and the specificity of the theory of authorship elaborated by Calvino in part through a mostly “remote” collaboration with Giulio Paolini, the famous artist and author of photographic and mixed media postmodern portraits and self-portraits such as *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto* (1967, *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto*). This work was much admired by Calvino, who for Paolini wrote one of his most important essays, “La squadratura” for the book *Idem* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975). In 1996, Paolini was invited to design the cover of the book *L’occhio di Calvino*, a study (published by Einaudi) of images and visuality in Calvino’s work by one of the

most influential readers of Calvino, Marco Belpoliti. Paolini's cover commissioned by Belpoliti himself was a collage portrait of Calvino while he was proofreading one of his texts. Viva demonstrates through a scrupulous analysis that this image, through its many layers and allusions, raised and reformulated in a creative, critical and altogether new way major questions addressed twenty years earlier during Calvino and Paolini's first collaboration: the crisis of authorship and the multiplicity of the self, which Calvino also later stressed in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. By analyzing this and other portraits by Giulio Paolini in conjunction with Belpoliti's and Calvino's texts, Viva explores the specificity, the limits, and the rather surprising, forward-looking legacy for the new millennium of Calvino's and Paolini's collaborative theory of authorship.

In her "Notes from the Field" entitled "*Inhabiting Zenobia*," video artist and essayist **Costanza FERRINI** reflects back on her work by the same title, a video projection that took place on November 3, 2022 in New York city as part of *Light Year*, a series of monthly projections of video art and experimental film on the Brooklyn side of the Manhattan Bridge. The artists Jamila Campagna&Elektron, Raffaella Valsecchi, Francesca Manca di Villahermosa, Miltos Manetas, Alessio Liberati, and Dimitri Porcu & Lionel Martin took part in Costanza Ferrini's project. Through the video works or fragments assembled by Ferrini for the projection, *Inhabiting Zenobia* sought to evoke ideas running through Calvino's thought about the invisible—and sometimes unlivable—city, although the video did so without necessarily making them explicit. Zenobia is the name that Calvino chose in *Invisible Cities* for the most vertical of the "thin cities." It is perhaps, according to Ferrini, the fictional invisible city closest to the world-city envisioned by Calvino, which is likewise vertical and "thin." The work's essential hypothesis is that Zenobia—the invisible vertical city—is the projection of the society in which many of us now live. In her "Notes," Ferrini reflects on how in the 1970s Calvino anticipated the contemporary megalopolis and she offers her insights into how Calvino's work—especially *Invisible Cities*, "Dall'opaco" ("From the Opaque"), and *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*—inspired her own artistic activity. She contextualizes her work in relation to that of other writers and artists, such as the futurist painter Umberto Boccioni and the video artist Adrian Paci. Finally, she discusses the respective methods employed by the participating artists, as well as the links between their contributions and some of Calvino's key themes. A link providing access (via the Facebook platform) to the complete video version of *Inhabiting Zenobia* is included.

IV . The Animal-Human-Mineral-Vegetal Continuum

“Per Ovidio c'è una parità essenziale tra tutto ciò che esiste contro ogni gerarchia di poteri e di valori. Se il mondo di Lucrezio è fatto di atomi inalterabili, quello d'Ovidio è fatto di qualità, d'attributi, di forme che definiscono la diversità di ogni cosa pianta e animale e persona; ma questi non sono che tenui involucri d'una sostanza comune che—se agitata da profonda passione—può trasformarsi in quel che vi è di più diverso.”

Lezioni americane, 637

“For Ovid there is among everything that exists an essential equality that runs counter to all hierarchies of power and value. If Lucretius' world is composed of unalterable atoms, Ovid's is composed of the qualities, attributes, and forms that reveal the distinctiveness of every object and

plant and animal and person but that are merely thin sheaths over a common substance which—when stirred by profound emotion—can change itself into radically different forms.”

Six Memos for the Next Millennium, 11

In *Lezioni americane/Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino expresses his admiration for Ovid’s metamorphoses. Like the Latin poet, Calvino saw the world surrounding humans not as inert substance, but as an expression of “vibrant matter”—to use the term made famous recently by the new materialist philosopher, Jane Bennett.²⁷ While new materialists talk about giving agency to matter, Calvino points out the profound passion that may animate any substance, prompting its transformation into something completely different. His interests are directed towards what exceeds the human, namely, the common substratum that links organic and inorganic entities. In the wake of the ‘68 cultural revolution, Calvino reconsiders his approach to what he had called in a 1959 essay, “Il mare dell’oggettività” (“The Sea of Objectivity”). In that early essay, nature and the inorganic had appeared as a negative pole, a viscous magma from which the rational subject must strive to keep its distance. But by 1972 Calvino is ready to question his anthropocentrism; the treacherous “mare dell’oggettività” thus turns into a magical cave of Alí Babà, containing infinite treasures.²⁸ The idea that the human is not a fixed category but instead a porous hybrid, constantly subject to ontological mixing, is at the base of the post-humanism debate, a debate which has dominated the intellectual scene since the late eighties. It is no surprise that Calvino has been read as a prescient contributor to that debate and revisited by contemporary environmental criticism.

Paul HARRIS’ article, “The Petriverse of Italo Calvino,” considers Calvino’s work in the context of what the critic views as the geological turn in contemporary environmental humanities (the human viewed as a geological agent). Harris describes how Calvino’s mythic imagination creates a “petriverse” (a world of rocks, but also poetry, “verse,” composed of rocks) most explicitly in his interpretation of the Medusa myth and the so-called “Medusa complex,” as well as in his three “cosmicomic” renditions of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, where the mythic underworld is recast in images and theories from geology. The essay also presents artwork by the author, deploying a hybrid mode of writing and interpreting that is “reflective of the contemporary merging of critical and creative engagements with literature.”

In her article “‘The scope of an epigram’: Quickness, Magic, and Marcovaldo’s Environmental Eye,” **Gioia WOODS** examines how “quickness” is deployed in Calvino’s Marcovaldo stories and argues that, among the six values recommended in *Lezioni americane*, quickness, because of the mental agility it requires, is best suited to communicate in an instant the urgent threat of a pending sixth extinction and the scope of our era’s enormous environmental changes. Woods writes: “Calvino presciently advocated quickness to the next millennium as a means ‘to communicate among different things in terms of their differences’ with ‘nimbleness, mobility, and ease’ (*Six Memos*, 54–55).”

²⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁸ See Calvino, “Lo sguardo dell’archeologo,” in *Saggi*, 1:324–27. “The Archeologist’s Gaze,” has not yet been translated into English.

V. Calvino in/and Translation

“L’immaginazione europea del secolo XVIII [...] si apre con la traduzione francese delle *Mille e una notte* di Antoine Galland: nuovi orizzonti si aprono a una fantasia occidentale col suo incontro col meraviglioso orientale [...]: Si potrebbe tracciare una storia di questa spinta dell’immaginazione a uscire dai propri limiti.”

Lezioni americane, “Note e notizie sui testi” [Notes and Information on the Texts],
in *Saggi* 2:2976

“The European imagination of the 18th century [...] begins with the French translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* by Antoine Galland: new horizons are disclosed to western fantasy through this encounter with the Oriental marvelous [...]: One could trace beginning from this observation a whole history of the imagination’s urge to go beyond its limits.”²⁹

Calvino, whose work has been translated into fifty-six languages, is one of the most translated twentieth-century writers in the world.³⁰ As mentioned, he started translating Conrad’s *Lord Jim* around 1947, and found that he loved doing it and that translating is the most authentic and deepest way to read. Although he did not complete the translation at the time, he kept it among his unfinished works; in 1983 he was still planning to complete it for the Einaudi series “Scrittori tradotti da scrittori” (Writers translated by writers).³¹ He translated Raymond Queneau, known for his linguistic difficulty, and in fact, in the summer of 1985 he was working on a translation of Queneau’s poem, “Le Chant du Styrène,” in parallel with the Norton Lectures. *Fiabe italiane*, the Italian tales he collected and adapted and became one of his most felicitous and successful works, were indeed also a sort of translation, from a number of Italian dialects and regional idioms. Over the years Calvino engaged with and reflected on translation in several different ways, including in his capacity as one of Einaudi’s editors. He supported and valued literary translators, which is unusual in Italy, where often translators’ names are not even mentioned in book reviews, and their contributions rarely acknowledged. His interventions and comments on translation, although not systematic, amount to a theoretical and critical position on “translatability” that is very rich, though inherently paradoxical and still awaits the thorough critical assessment it deserves, though some initial work had been done. For Calvino, the translator is almost a heroic, indispensable figure in the universe of literature, though every literary discourse/text is, by definition, un-translatable.³² The myth that Calvino is easy to translate because his language is so clear and unambiguous³³ is easily dispelled for anyone who has tried to teach one of his texts along with its translation and has had the hands-on experience of seeing just how much of the original can be misunderstood or even lost entirely. The two contributions included here are meant as pieces of a puzzle that will

²⁹ Our translation.

³⁰ Through an initial gift of volumes by Esther Calvino, and the initiative of Laura Di Nicola, since 2015 a substantial and growing collection of translations is housed in Rome, *Fondo Calvino Tradotto*, Università La Sapienza. See Francesca Rubini, *Italo Calvino nel mondo. Opere, Linguaggi, Paesi (1955–2020)* (Rome: Carocci, 2023). According to Rubini’s study, the most translated book by Calvino is *Il barone rampante*.

³¹ Scarpa, *Calvino fa la conchiglia*, 64.

³² See Calvino, “Sul tradurre” (1963), in *Saggi*, 2:1776–86; “L’italiano, una lingua tra le altre lingue” (1971), in *Saggi* 1:146–53; “Tradurre è il vero modo di leggere un testo” (1982), in *Saggi* 2:1825–31.

³³ Jhumpa Lahiri, “Calvino Abroad,” in *Translating Myself and Others* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

hopefully reconstruct in the next few years a fuller image of Calvino's relationship with translation and translators.

More than fifty years separate the two English translations which are the object of the two essays included in this section. In 2016, twenty-eight years after the first translation of *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* by Patrick Creagh, **Geoffrey BROCK** was invited to retranslate the five extant lectures. In his "Notes from the Field," entitled "Tuning In: On Retranslating Quotations," Brock draws on his personal experiences in translating two quotation-heavy volumes, Italo Calvino's *Lezioni americane* and Roberto Calasso's *K.*, in order to raise and examine theoretical questions about context, intertextuality, and retranslation. Brock asks why a translator might choose to retranslate quoted passages that already exist and are available in other translations and demonstrates how new literary contexts can indeed justify retranslation.

In her "Notes from the Field," entitled "Italo Calvino's Earliest Translations into English by Rome-Based African American Translator and Editor Ben Johnson," **Melanie MASTERTON SHERAZI** calls attention to the short story "Last Comes the Raven" ("Ultimo viene il corvo"), published in *The Paris Review* in the summer of 1954, a publication which marked Calvino's first appearance in English.³⁴ Ben Johnson (Benjamin Tanner Johnson, Jr.), an African American translator and editor based in postwar Rome in the late 1940s and early 1950s and seemingly all but forgotten until now, translated and published that story as well as several of Calvino's early short stories. Though information about Johnson's career and time in Rome remains skeletal, Masterton Sherazi's excerpt from her research in progress on African American intellectuals in postwar Rome presents readers with a working knowledge of Johnson's move to Rome following his wartime service in Italy, where he studied and then taught as a lecturer at La Sapienza, collaborated with the influential journal *Botteghe Oscure*, and translated for publication, in addition to Calvino, a great number of Italian modernist literary texts.

In conclusion, for their invaluable help in shaping this issue of *California Italian Studies*, we would like to thank all our peer reviewers, as well as—for their availability to answer questions sometimes on very short notice, and provide useful feedback—Pierpaolo Antonello, Mario Barengi, Martin McLaughlin, and Domenico Scarpa. We are very thankful to the journal's Editor-in-Chief, Claudio Fogu, for his support, his input, and his faith in us, and, last but not least, our indefatigable, amazing managing editor, Leslie Elwell, and our valiant copyeditor, Joseph Tumolo. Grazie!

³⁴ Calvino, "Ultimo viene il corvo," in *Romanzi e racconti*, 1:266–71; Calvino, "Last Comes the Raven," trans. Ben Johnson, in *Last Comes the Raven and Other Stories* (New York: Mariner, 2021).