



SIX
MEMOS
for the
NEXT
MILLENNIUM

ITALO
CALVINO

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

About the title: Although I carefully considered the fact that the title chosen by Italo Calvino, “Six Memos for the Next Millennium,” does not correspond to the manuscript as I found it, I have felt it necessary to keep it. Calvino was delighted by the word “memos,” after having thought of and dismissed titles such as “Some Literary Values,” “A Choice of Literary Values,” “Six Literary Legacies”—all of them ending with “for the Next Millennium.”

Calvino started thinking about the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures as soon as they were proposed in 1984. He stood before the vast range of possibilities open to him and he worried, believing as he did in the importance of constraints, until the day he settled on a scheme to organize the lectures; after that, he devoted most of his time to their preparation. From the first of January 1985 he did practically nothing else. They became an obsession, and one day he announced to me that he had ideas and material for *eight* lectures. I know the title for what might have been an eighth lecture: “Sul cominciare e sul finire” (On the beginning and the ending [of novels]). But I have not yet been able to find the text.

My husband had finished writing these five lectures by September 1985, at the moment of departure for the United States and Harvard University. Of course, these are the lectures Calvino would have read—Patrick Creagh was in the process of translating them—and he would certainly have revised them before their publication as a book by Harvard University Press. But I do not think there would have been major changes:

the difference between the first versions I read and the final ones lies in structure, not content. Calvino wanted to call the sixth lecture "Consistency," and he planned to write it in Cambridge. I found the others, all in perfect order, in the Italian original, on his writing desk ready to be put into his suitcase.

I should like to express my gratitude to Patrick Creagh for his hard work on the translation; to Kathryn Hume, from Pennsylvania State University, for the help she has given me—in more ways than one—in preparing the manuscript for publication; and to Luca Marighetti, from Konstanz University, for his deep knowledge of Calvino's work and thought.

Esther Calvino

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SIX MEMOS
FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

- 1 - Lightness
- 2 - Quickness
- 3 - Exactitude
- 4 - Visibility
- 5 - Multiplicity
- 6 - Consistency

We are in 1985, and barely fifteen years stand between us and a new millennium. For the time being I don't think the approach of this date arouses any special emotion. However, I'm not here to talk of futurology, but of literature. The millennium about to end has seen the birth and development of the modern languages of the West, and of the literatures that have explored the expressive, cognitive, and imaginative possibilities of these languages. It has also been the millennium of the book, in that it has seen the object we call a book take on the form now familiar to us. Perhaps it is a sign of our millennium's end that we frequently wonder what will happen to literature and books in the so-called postindustrial era of technology. I don't much feel like indulging in this sort of speculation. My confidence in the future of literature consists in the knowledge that there are things that only literature can give us, by means specific to it. I would therefore like to devote these lectures to certain values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature that are very close to my heart, trying to situate them within the perspective of the new millennium.