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Toward Salvation: Italo Calvino's Wakeful Phenomenology

> The luxuriance of the terrace corresponds to the desire of each member of the family. For Mrs. Palomar it was natural to extend to the plants the attention she reserved for individual things, chosen and made her own through an inner identification and thus becoming part of a composition with multiple variations, as an emblematic collection; but this spiritual dimension is lacking in the other members of the family. In the daughter because youth cannot an should not become fixed on the here but only on the further-on, the over there; in the husband because he was too late in freeing himself from his youthful impatiences and in understanding (only in theory) that *salvation* lies solely in applying oneself to the things that are there.
> --Narrator, *Mr. Palomar* (italics added)

A Resistant Model of Knowing

In the process of creating work distinguished by a uniquely open-ended literary form, Italo Calvino repeatedly appeals to concepts of multiplicity through plot and narration. Calvino's fictional characters perform analysis in both the textual and physical realms—analysis that often ends in the failure to discover the absolute truths they seek. Such figures appear repeatedly as a testament to Calvino's invocation of multiplicity at the level of theme. However, his attention to multiplicity also extends into the realm of interpretation. Just as Calvino's fictional readers endow both text and world with meaning, readers of Calvino bring their own meanings to his text. While Calvino's characters operate thematically, those accessing his narration function in the realm of the interpretation.

As noted in the above epigraph, characters like Calvino's Mr. Palomar fail to achieve "salvation" as a result of their blindness to the multiplicity of things that are "there." These figures fail to appreciate the people and objects that are most accessible to

them due to an overwhelming desire to find a supreme truth about life. They follow a traditional model of transcendence that both dictates the existence of such knowability and urges individuals to go beyond those things that are immediately present. This model suggests the necessity of exhaustive inquiry in order to account for what it supposes exists beyond the realm of the visible. While Calvino's characters often presume that such a transcendent truth exists, they never succeed in finding it. Instead, they encounter more information than they can explain. There are too many potential ways to order the images they see and too many angles from which to approach what they consider the truth of the world's people and objects.

One method practiced by Calvino's characters in an effort to apprehend the world's wealth of disorder is what he refers to as phenomenology. Another analytical procedure based on the suppositions of the transcendent model, phenomenology attempts to account for every object as it appears outside of systems of power and knowledge. It supposes that each person and object possesses one stable identity. This process of trying to understand things solely as they appear often results not in the realization of a perfect form or order in the world, but of the pervasiveness of visual and symbolic chaos. Calvino's characters phenomenologically contemplate objects only to understand the impossibility of applying that phenomenology to everything. The infinite ways of seeing and understanding absorb the phenomenologist into abstraction. Calvino's characters often succeed only in separating themselves from the things they wish to comprehend. Instead of dealing only with what is immediate as Calvino's fundamental definition of phenomenology suggests, his characters continually attempt to surpass their observations of what is "there."

Calvino's "salvation" involves the idea of accepting multiplicity itself as knowledge and dealing with phenomenology's inability to fully exhaust it. This essay demonstrates how Calvino's novels speak to the idea that knowledge as multiplicity emerges upon enduring intangibility. I illustrate the ways in which Calvino's literature shows its readers how to apply themselves both to text as his characters do, and to interpretations of the world. I also contend that Calvino suggests a method of salvation characterized by a phenomenological approach not inclined to abstraction like the one used by Mr. Palomar and others. There is a way of being aware of what is at hand without analyzing it to the point of removal from the events, people and things of the world." [2]

For Calvino, there is also a way to participate in the world's multiplicity without giving up one's singularity. Objects and people can retain their own uniqueness despite their incorporation into larger categories. This concept represents another aspect of Calvino's salvation. In order to effectively seek salvation, one must realize the capacity of "events, people and things" to remain unique even in the face of generality. I discuss Calvino's theories on how things can be simultaneously singular and multiple, how this preservation of singularity speaks to the existence of many truths, and how recognition of each object's unrepeatable qualities can facilitate "salvation."

To these ends, I explore texts that address both thematic and interpretive concepts of multiplicity. I also investigate those texts that deal with characters that struggle to choose between the practice of phenomenology and the devotion to the aesthetic life of things that always escapes that phenomenology. I establish the theoretical success of the principles of phenomenology, but also critique those principles by showing how they fail to function practically. In doing so, I show the ways in which Calvino emphasizes the

necessity for salvation from the type of analytical abstraction typical of phenomenology. I speak to Calvino's creation of a "new salvation"—one achieved by dedicating one's attention to the most immediate things in life instead of striving for knowledge of one supreme truth beyond the realm of existence.

Italian Literature in Translation

Many literary critics often refer to Calvino's narrative style as rich and difficult to characterize. When read in English, his works possess an unmistakable identity distinguished by a particular charm and wit. However, judging from Calvino's comments on the effects of translation on the Italian language, the English versions of his novels fail to fully produce the mood created by the original Italian lines. He repeatedly focuses on issues of translation in his essay "L'antilingua," claiming that Italian loses its unique "essence" when translated. [3]

Calvino speaks to that quality of language that transcends simple meaning—to the need to maintain that essence without corrupting its ability to be understood. He alludes to those aspects of language, which when arranged in certain ways, can produce a particular set of sounds or a meaning not wholly contingent on the definitions of the words used. This "other" effect of language can be described as an aesthetic production of text. The aesthetic characteristics of language are not reducible solely to meaning, and it is these characteristics that become lost in the process of translation.

As noted by translators, the sensory effects of language speak to the awareness that exists at the extremes of the consciousness. The peripheral area of the consciousness can grasp the peculiar harmony of words capable of generating an aesthetic experience with the passage and can provide a sense of the life of those words. The ability of

language's "life" to transcend simple meaning is often addressed by thinkers such as Alfred Norse Whitehead. In *Adventures of Ideas,* Whitehead writes, "language is particularly inadequate" when it comes to "elements . . . on the fringe of consciousness . . . which massively qualify our experience" [4] Even before undergoing the translation process, language cannot always sufficiently express sensations. Where translation from Italian to English is concerned, this inadequacy becomes increasingly problematic.

Though Calvino's translator William Weaver admits that meaning is seldom lost in translations of Calvino's work, he notes that its essence becomes far less perceptible. Analyses of Calvino's texts in English are almost certainly symptomatic of this lack of linguistic character. Ideally, Calvino seeks a language that appears clear to an international audience but also clearly alive and with its individual spirit. While he remains concerned with writing in a way that can be understood in Italian just as it is in English, textual moments in English do exist as a testament to the aesthetic limits of translation. The Italian text itself fights to adequately convey its particular "life." In translation, this "life" is doubly corrupted. The English text does not possess even the "life" of the original Italian text.

One must remain aware of such divergence when performing close readings of Calvino. One must understand that, "Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader" (*If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* 260), translates as "Ora siete marito e moglie, Lettore e Lettrice," (*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* 263) which more precisely means, "Now you are *husband* and wife, *male* reader and *female* reader" (my translation). By imposing the English world "man" instead of "husband," the English translation deprives the readerly couple of the equality they posses when rendered in Italian. Because English

words have no gender, the unique sexual categories of the two readers cannot be conveyed. While the English translation of the second part of the clause indicates that the two readers are completely alike, "Reader and Reader," the Italian suggests otherwise, specifically that they are alike but also different. Their differences unite as a result of their identities as readers, showing that they retain their singularities while also participating in the larger institution of reading.

While gendered nouns are not specific to Calvino or to Italian, English has a particular inability to express them. English cannot fully impart the idea that Calvino's "Reader" and "Reader" are male and female without using two words to describe each. By failing to delineate here, the English text also fails to communicate the larger significance of the readers' genders. Calvino's Italian text makes evident their identities as sexually disparate, but similar as a result of their reading practices. English does not allow this "flash of insight" (Meyer 189). The potential sensory effects of the Italian text change when translated specifically into English. In many ways, the English denies insight into the thematic relevance of how Calvino's readers remain singular as a result of gender while also participating in the general category of "reader."

Even the investigation of this seemingly minor phrase exposes the problematics of language translation. Just as his characters embark on quests for meaning, so readers of Calvino must grapple with issues of meaning when reading his texts in English.

Potentiality in the Hands of the "Reader"

Calvino's insistence on knowledge as multiplicity appears repeatedly in each of the novels investigated in this essay, particularly when it comes to his suggestion that textual meaning depends upon the interpretations of the reader. He proposes the idea that

one text possesses an infinite number of potential readings as a result of its exposure to an infinite number of readers. All readers bring to the text their unique perspectives formed by their specific socio-political influences. According to Calvino:

> The decisive moment of literary life will be that of reading . . . literature will continue to be the "place" of privilege within the human consciousness, a way of exercising the potentialities within a system of signs belonging to all societies at all times. The work will continue to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or constantly renewed on contact with the eye of the reader. What will vanish is the figure of the author, the personage to whom we persist in attributing functions that do not belong to him. (*Uses of Literature* 15-16)

By suggesting that literature has no "life" until read, Calvino suggests that all possible meanings exist only insofar as his readers do. When readers read, they do so in keeping with their particular implications in the cultural mandates of their historical moments. As years pass, cultures change along with exegetical methodologies. Novels can "be born . . . judged . . . destroyed or constantly renewed" according to the specific sociopolitical characteristics of its readers. Any narrative truth is always manifold because it is always changing. The identity of the author is no longer relevant. He cannot control the analytical processes of his readers, and any meaning he intends to impose upon them cannot survive in the face of the world's inevitable development.

This idea of readerly authority appears repeatedly in what has been referred to as Calvino's guide to reading, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler.* As the tortured novelist Silas Flannery watches his muse—a young woman sunning herself in a deck chair—he

contemplates the implications of authorship. While she reads an unidentified book Flannery thinks, "At times I convince myself that the woman is reading my *true* book . . . It's no use my sitting down again at the desk . . . to copy that true book of mine she is reading: whatever I write will be false, a fake, compared to my true book, which no one except her will ever read" (*Traveler* 170). Flannery recognizes that the "truth" only exists as the reader dictates. It is her unique approach to the text that endows it with meaning. He imagines what it would be like to be able to know the woman's particular understanding before writing, so that he might feel he has captured a text rich with hidden meaning and life-affirming significance. Flannery ponders further:

> All the elements that make what I write recognizable as mine seem to me a gage that restricts my possibilities. If I were only a hand, a severed hand that grasps a pen and writes . . . Who would move this hand? The anonymous throng? The spirit of the times? The collective unconscious? I do not know . . . I would like . . . to transmit the writable that waits to be written, the tellable that nobody tells. (*Traveler* 171)

Flannery understands the power of "the spirit of the times"—the ways of knowing and being as wholly dependent on societal mandates. He wishes to be able to predict the potential interpretations exercised by "the collective unconscious." It is this very "spirit" of society comprised of the social, the political, and the cultural that cannot be predicted accurately due to its unstoppable mobility. Though he can never adequately predict the spirit of his readers in the present or the future, he knows it is there and will be there. He longs to approach that "writable" that cannot yet be written and that "tellable" that cannot yet be told. It is the readers who write and tell the "truth". It is these readers who render

the truth infinite due to their very multiplicity. The author has no access to truth as it is often imagined—as one surpassing ideal. Neither can he know truth as multiplicity. Only his text has access to truth. The text becomes a form of truth when exposed to the countless eyes of its readers.

At the point of disgust with his incapacity for writing truth, Flannery realizes the need to resort to other means of reaching his readers. He must write something that "does not exist and cannot exist except when written, but whose absence is obscurely felt by that which exists, in its own completeness" (*Traveler* 172). Looking again at the lady reading in her deckchair, Flannery notices that she stops reading to observe a butterfly. It manages to take her attention away from her book. The written world of the unnamed novel succumbs to the unwritten world occupied by the butterfly. "The unwritten world has its climax in that butterfly. The result at which I must aim is something specific, intimate, light . . . I felt the need to write 'from life,' that is, to write not her but her reading . . . thinking that it must pass through her reading" (*Traveler* 172). In other words, to be able to retain any sort of personal effect on his text, Flannery must include something that can transcend the limits of power and knowledge to which his words are always subject. He must attend to that which is beyond words—to something ineffable yet presenting all that readers can sense. He must identify aspects of life that remain outside historical assemblages, like the graceful lightness of the butterfly. It is its aesthetic quality that places it, in all its lightness, into the realm of both the written and unwritten world. It is a completely new concept. Although each potential reader may experience this lightness differently, its ineffable aesthetic quality remains as a testament to the artistic intentions of Silas Flannery. Instead of dealing with something out of reach

by striving to create one "true" book, he attends to something that is available to him. By directing his attention to the emotionally moving and vital qualities of the butterfly, he discovers a form of insight not dependent on ideals, but on reality.

Calvino's *Marcovaldo* also speaks to the authority of the reader as indicated by the novel's concluding line. "Only the expanse of snow could be seen, white as this page" (*Marcovaldo* 121). [5] Although the "readers" in *Marcovaldo* read and interpret the world in addition to deciphering texts like the readers in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, their readings prove equally informed by presupposed notions of existence. A moment in which a character's view of the world attests to his inextricable link to consumer society appears in the chapter entitled "The Forest on the Superhighway." The episode unfolds as Marcovaldo's family members suffer from a lack of heat in their apartment. In search of a solution, Marcovaldo's son Michelino reads a fairy tale that describes the son of a woodsman who chops wood in a forest. Michelino decides to follow the young woodsman's example, collects his brothers, and goes out to find a forest. "At the sides of a highway, the children saw the forest . . . boughs in the form of a toothpaste tube, a face, cheese, hand, razor, bottle, cow, tire, all dotted with a foliage of letters of the alphabet" (Marcolvaldo 37). What Michelino and his brothers see as a forest is in fact a group of billboards. When he reads about a forest, he develops an idea of what a forest is—of how it appears. With the fairy tale text's assistance, he "learns what the *sign* is" (Tamburri 86), but remains unable to identify what a "real" forest is. He has never seen a forest as society knows it. The green leaves and dark branches by which society at large identifies a forest have no meaning to Michelino. Instead, he interprets his world according to what

he does know. He knows that a forest yields firewood. The billboards can indeed be used as such, and so they constitute a forest.

Like the readers in *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Michelino approaches the fairy tale with form an individual "reservoir of knowledge"—in this case not the dominant species of knowledge. Even the naïve reading of a child endows the text with meaning. The fairy tale allows the billboards to "constitute their own 'semiotic reality' as trees that constitute the forest about which they read in their book fables" (Tamburri 87). The written text allows Michelino to "rewrite his own reality" (Tamburri 88), thereby affirming its potential to generate multiple "truths" not necessarily endemic to the truths of the "spirit of the times" invoked by Silas Flannery.

While Michelino's approach to the fairy tale indicates the existence of readerly influence on textual significance, it also suggests literature's ability to transcend its written content. He uses the knowledge he acquires from reading to discover a solution to his family's problems. Just as he visualizes inaccurately the characteristics of a forest while he reads, Michelino applies his misreading to his life. He carries his misreading into the realm of reality, proving the power of the fairy tale to generate not only a textual idea, but also a visual truth for Michelino. This particular truth (which is not the truth recognized by his father and others familiar with the typical definition of a forest) is one of many, because it is a truth born of reading a text.

Just as Michelino incorporates his understanding of the "unreal" text into his reading of the "real" field of existence to produce a misreading (or at least an unconventional reading) of a forest, Officer Astolfo misreads what he sees as a result of

his a priori knowledge and his assumption that representation of reality is in fact reality itself. Upon receiving a report that Michelino and his brothers are destroying billboards:

> Officer Astolfo set out to inspect . . . There, in the beam of the motorcycles headlight, he caught a little urchin who had climbed up on a billboard. Astolfo put on the brakes. "Hey, what are you doing there? Jump down this minute!" The kid didn't move and stuck out its tongue. Astolfo approached and saw it was an ad for processed cheese, with a big child licking its lips. (*Marcovaldo* 38)

Astolfo clearly mistakes the unreal advertisement for the real child he seeks to apprehend. He takes the picture of the boy as the real thing. When he thinks he sees a child on the billboard, he immediately imposes an assortment of presuppositions based on what he knows about "naughty" children upon the image. Because he expects to see a child characterized by multiple facets of mischievous behavior, it is no surprise to him that the child he sees is sticking out his tongue. The sign he perceives appears to fit the image produce within his particular methods of ordering his world. Because he is so implicated in these modes of comprehension, he does not consider that the boy he sees is a simulation. For him, there is only one precise reading of the situation. Astolfo becomes further entangled in his world of signs upon investigating a second billboard:

> A little later, in the shadow of a huge billboard, he illuminated a sad, frightened face. "Don't make a move! Don't try running away! But nobody ran away. It was a suffering human face painted in the midst of a foot covered with corns: an ad for a corn-remover. "Oh, sorry," Astolfo said, and dashed away. (*Marcovaldo* 38)

Again, he misconstrues the meaning of what he sees by confounding the real and the unreal. He would expect that a delinquent boy would have a "sad, frightened face," and so he assumes that photographic rendering of the sad, frightened, corn-afflicted person is the boy he pursues.

As the natural result of his interpretive process, Astolfo continues on to a third billboard, this time certain that he cannot be fooled by ads again. However, during this third encounter with simulation, his visual misreadings transform reality into unreality. Instead of mistaking a visual symbol for a real human object, Astolfo mistakes that real human object for a symbol:

> The billboard for a headache tablet was a gigantic head of a man, his hands over his eyes, in pain. Astolfo sped past, and the headlight illuminated Marcovaldo, who had scrambled to the top with his saw, trying to cut off a slice . . . Astolfo examined it carefully and said: "Oh yes. Stappa tablets! Very effective ad! Smart idea! That little man up there with the saw represents the migraine that is cutting the head in two. I got it right away!" (*Marcovaldo* 38-39)

And so the text of the world defeats Astolfo yet again. Because he knowingly falls victim to signs twice, he develops a new relationship to the billboards—one defined by foreknowledge that they are always approximations and nothing more. Of course, this analytical theory proves faulty when he again confuses the distinction between the "semiotic reality" of the advertisements and the "actual reality" of Michelino, his brothers, and Marcovaldo. He fails to identify what is "really" happening because he can only accept one reading. He reads according to what seems most "right" in keeping with

traditionally held methods of reading. "He is a policeman of signs and interpretants; he represents, that is, the metaphorical police of the traditional rules and regulations of reading similar to those 'prescribed' rules of writing" (Tamburri 88). In other words, if what he thinks he sees fits with what "should" be there, then it is definitively right and true. His notions about existence are "implicit in the overall code of mental plays, according to the rules by which" he "formulates his thoughts" (*Uses* 9). Because Astolfo's method of interpretation fails, this teleological ideology suggesting the existence of one correct reading becomes corrupted. As illustrated by Michelino and his brothers, multiple readings of the same text can and do exist as brought about by readerly authority. To approach this array of textually-engendered meaning, "to sample the potential multiplicity of what may be narrated" (*Six Memos* 120), is the target at which Calvino aims.

The Myth of Silence

When scrutinizing the texts of most of Calvino's later novels the justification for the extensive scholarly attention to what is referred to as his open literary form becomes evident. Chapters end with ellipses. Stories evaporate at their most tantalizing points never to be resumed. Episodes with little or no emblematic similarity appear together like pieces of a puzzle that demand assembly. Calvino refers to the presence of myth in his literature by remarking, "Myth is the hidden part of every story, the buried part, the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get there . . . we need a whole series of signs with many meanings . . . Myth is nourished by *silence* as well as by words" (*Uses* 18-19, italics added). For Calvino, the myth of a novel is its very ineffability—an ineffability thick with meaning. He writes, "the struggle of

literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said; what stirs literature is the call and attraction of what is not in the dictionary" (*Uses* 18). It is this silence that speaks most intensely in Calvino's novels, seldom more forcefully than at the conclusion of *Marcovaldo.* As Marcovaldo takes his children on a hunting trip, he observes a wolf in pursuit of a hare. The wolf follows the hare's paw prints on the snow in hope of a meal, but cannot find it. Logically, the hare should be where its prints end; yet it is not. The last few lines of the novel read, "Is he here? There? Is he a bit farther on? Only the expanse of the snow could be seen, white as this page" (*Marcovaldo* 121). The hare's location, as well as the significance of the passage and the novel as a whole rests with the reader. The possibilities are as infinite as the open space of the page—a space populated by the multiple meanings granted by myriad readers. Limitless analyses of Marcovaldo's final lines attempt to discern the allegorical significances of the wolf and the hare. Does the wolf represent the reader who tries to find meaning but cannot? Does the hare symbolize the author who is always one step ahead of those readers? In keeping with Calvino's thoughts on the goals of literature, the answer to both questions is "yes." The invisible hare is a myth. There are no sufficient words to describe where it goes or what it symbolizes. It exists on a limitless expanse of snow within the realm of that which is not yet read, always already waiting to be pursued and endowed with meaning. The text's "silence" is charged with meaning, and it does indeed "stir" the literature by reaching outside the "confines of language."

In *If On A Winter's Night a Traveler,* Calvino speaks to the power of silence through Ludmilla, the "ideal reader." As the novel's main character, the reader (and also

the reader reading Calvino) begins to read a book entitled *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*. As the plot progresses, both readers seem to be heading toward a conclusion. However, just as the book is "getting interesting" (*Traveler* 27), a binding error becomes apparent. The pages containing this sought-after plot resolution are absent, substituted by the inclusion of the pages already read. The reader resolves to return his copy to the bookseller the next day and goes to bed. He spends "a restless night . . . with . . . dreams as with formless and meaningless life, seeking a pattern, a rout that must surely be there" (*Traveler* 27). The reader encounters a feeling of hopelessness when faced with the unknown. Because he cannot foresee an end, he feels robbed of meaning and purpose. When he returns the book, he meets Ludmilla. She too intends to find the continuation of *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, but admits "I rather enjoy the sense of bewilderment a novel gives you when you start reading it, but if the first effect is fog, I'm afraid the moment the fog lifts my pleasure in reading will be lost, too" (*Traveler* 30). Later in the novel, Ludmilla also remarks, "I wish the things I read weren't all present, so solid you can touch them; I would like to feel a presence around them, something else, you don't quite know what, the sign of some unknown thing . . . (*Traveler* 46)". Ludmilla seeks immersion a text capable of producing sensations--sensations that exist not only due to literature's particular linguistic composition, but also as a result of its powers to transcend the limits of language. Ludmilla wants to experience the "essence" of what she reads. She is interested in the aesthetic powers of the novel as a whole, apart from its simple linguistic structure and meaning. She pursues that aesthetic that is not reducible to meaning alone. Ludmilla prefers an engagement with the unknown because she feels that

it possesses a feeling of that which is still to come, and resplendent with aesthetic possibility. While discussing the act of reading, Ludmilla observes:

> Reading is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be . . . The book I would like to read now is a novel in which you sense the story arriving like still-vague thunder, the historical story along with the individual's story, a novel that gives the sense of living through an upheaval that still *has no name*, has not yet taken shape . . . (*Traveler* 72, italics added)

Ludmilla seeks a literature that speaks to her senses in ways that written language alone cannot. She seeks the sort of myth present in the conclusion of Marcovaldo—a text whose meaning is "nourished" by its very "silence" (*Uses* 19). Though she recognizes that literature contains unavoidable aspects of history and the imposition of her particular readerly interpretation, she also seeks the presence of that which exists outside of language—outside of her unique consciousness. According to Calvino, "The unconscious (the part of the mind containing ideas not yet integrated into traditional models of knowing) "is the ocean of the unsayable, of what has been expelled from the land of language . . . the power of modern literature lies in its willingness to give a voice to what has remained unexpressed in the social or individual unconscious" (*Uses* 19). Those qualities of literature that exist beyond linguistic systems are the unthought of thought, or more precisely, ways of thinking that have not yet been thought. Ludmilla hopes that literature can allow her access into that realm of silence—into the realm that seems so imminent as she reads the novels that "bewilder" her. The novels most capable of producing awe do so because they possess a potential to express those things that have

not yet acquired names or taken shapes—those things that "the conscious mind would not have arrived at deliberately" (*Uses* 21).

Ludmilla goes on to say:

> The novel I would most like to read at this moment . . . should have as its driving force only the desire to narrate, to pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves . . . (*Traveler* 92)

Her desire to observe without implementing analysis exemplifies the attitude of Calvino's "ideal" reader. She espouses a disinterested approach to reading by allowing the text to develop independently from her own symbolic impositions. Like Calvino's Mr. Palomar, she "would like us . . . to confront" text while stripped of all preconceptions and associations" (Di Pace-Jordan 5). She wants to "think only insofar as she sees" (Cannon 96), or rather as she reads. She passively watches the text without experiencing an immediate desire to discover any overarching opinions it may have on how to live life. However, that she does not deny the existence of such a supreme existential philosophy philosophy. She prefers to absorb that depth which linguistic analysis can never sound—to get beyond it by coming into contact with the bloc of sensations granted by the text, by heading toward that space that her senses push her toward—a space where something is about to become evident. She wants to follow the "entangling" stories, and to feel that each has life like an ever-growing tree. Ludmilla prefers literature very much like that of Calvino, in which "each scene is everywhere a vision of action, movement, and

performance. What animates it is the irreducible, mysterious, universal energy" (Di Pace-Jordan 9).

Calvino's Phenomenology

Calvino's fascination with questions of perception only begins to make an appearance in Ludmilla's unique attitude. In a lecture published in the *New York Review of Books*, he suggests the capacity of phenomenology to resist other dominant lines of thought. In a response to these philosophies stating that either the world is beyond words or it is dependent solely upon language, Calvino proposes:

> An important international trend in the culture of our century, what we might call the phenomenological approach in philosophy, the estrangement effect in literature, urges us to break through the screen of words and concepts and see the world as if it appeared for the first time to our sight. ("The Written and Unwritten World" 38-39)

Calvino's Mr. Palomar consistently attempts to view the world of phenomena without involving the complications of his own psyche as it is swayed by familiar methods of interpretation. In the chapter entitled, "The Naked Bosom," Mr. Palomar sees a topless woman as he walks along the beach. Immediately, he begins to think about how to behave as he passes by her. As he gets closer, he "turns his head in such a way that the trajectory of his gaze remains suspended in the void and guarantees his civil respect for the invisible frontier that surrounds people" (*Palomar* 9). He remains only temporarily satisfied with his behavior however, as he reconsiders that the aversion of his eyes from the naked women professes "a refusal to see" and a reinforcement of "the convention that declares illicit any sight of the breast . . . My not looking presupposes that I am thinking

of that nakedness, worrying about it; and this is basically an indiscreet and reactionary attitude" (*Palomar* 10). Consequently, Palomar intentionally passes the sunbather again, this time making an effort to look in her direction, note her state of undress, and also look at the landscape behind her to prevent her from thinking that he stares at her breasts. Again only momentarily pleased with himself, Palomar realizes that his attempt to equate the sunbather with the landscape behind her might mean, "flattening the human person to the level of things" (*Palomar* 10), thereby keeping alive a traditional practice of male superiority. He goes back toward the woman, again readjusting his glance only to wonder if his most recent action relegates "the bosom again to the semidarkness where centuries of sexo-maniacal Puritanism and of desire considered sin have kept it" (*Palomar* 11). Returning a final time toward the woman, he walks straight toward her intending to look directly at her bare chest. As he does so, she covers herself with a gasp of impatience and moves away from Palomar. Feeling defeated, he thinks, "The intolerant weight of an intolerant tradition prevents anyone's properly understanding the most enlightened intentions" (*Palomar* 12).

Palomar tries desperately to treat his encounter with the sunbather as though he knows nothing about society's position on nudity. He does not wish to perpetuate the attitude that the naked bosom is taboo in keeping with these "sexo-maniacal" and "Puritanical" views. Neither does he want to communicate an air of chauvinism by either exercising his right to stare openly at the woman's breasts, or by reducing her to the level of an object similar to the landscape that surround her. Palomar wishes to reach beyond all that has come before by observing things only as they appear visually. "He only questions whether, in our image-glutted culture, our vision, locked in habit and

convention, is still capable of recognizing object reality in its pristine form and quality so as to provoke new levels of consciousness" (Di Pace-Jordan 5). Unfortunately for Palomar, his efforts to act only according to his perception of images are only theoretically successful. His phenomenological approach, though declaratively complex, proves so reductive as to withdraw him from the reality he attempts to know. The sunbather is not an abstract concept, but a human being. As Palomar bitterly declares, she is implicated in tradition—one that understands Palomar's extreme attention to her bosom as unwelcome and peculiar. However, understanding this fact does not bring him any closer to knowing her. His readings of the world extract him from reality, rendering him a rejected observer instead of an appreciated participant, as he desires. His efforts to apprehend lead to more questions than answers, calling into question the efficacy of his phenomenology.

Because his phenomenology fails to yield any practical results, Mr. Palomar's actions succeed in troubling the concept of phenomenology. This fact reflects Calvino's belief that the most productive relation between philosophy and literature is one in which each calls the other into question.[6] He seeks to discover whether the "writer philosopher" can "cast a fresh philosophic look upon the world, a look that at the same time is also fresh for literature" (*Uses* 41). The question of how to adequately understand that which is understood to have certain inherent qualities as a result of cultural codes cannot be answered with the help of phenomenology alone. Though Calvino ultimately discusses the answers potentially provided by the union of philosophy and literature, he repeatedly demonstrates the phenomenological failures of Palomar, particularly when it comes to his use of defamiliarization,[7] and questions the ability of phenomenological practices to

produce knowledge.[8] On several occasions, Palomar attempts to make the things he sees seem odd in order to be able to look at them as though he has never seen them before. He attempts to disassociate himself from all he knows about sexual intercourse by observing mating tortoises in "The loves of tortoises." He observes:

> Their shells strike each other. It is their mating season . . . The courtship consists of making so many turns around the little patch of grass, with pursuits and flights and skirmishes not of the claws but of the shells, which strike with a dull clicking . . . The sensations of the pair of mating tortoises are something Mr. Palomar cannot imagine . . . What does eros become if there are plates of bone or horny scales in the place of skin? But what we call eros—is it perhaps only a program of our corporeal bodies, more complicated because the memory receives messages from every cell of the skin, from every molecule of our tissues . . . And what about the tortoises . . . Perhaps the eros of tortoises obeys absolute spiritual laws, whereas we are prisoners of a machinery whose functioning remains unknown to us . . . Do tortoises understand themselves any better? (*Palomar* 20-21)

By studying the sexual act of tortoises, Palomar becomes able to think about it apart from what he already knows about human sexual practices. His defamiliarization allows him not only to contemplate the physicality of sex both tortoise and human, but also to imagine what eros might be when set apart from preconceived notions of it. He imagines that the tortoises, whose "poverty of sensory stimuli" (*Palomar* 21) may allow a more intense spiritual experience of sex, might have a more authentic sexual experience than

humans. By setting himself apart from the specifically human knowledge, he sees the possibilities inherent in sex. Though he has never felt the presence of such possibilities in keeping with his preconceived knowledge and firsthand experience, he makes sex temporarily odd and creates the potential to understand sex in an original light.

As noted by Brian Fitzgerald, though Palomar's observation of the tortoises proves imaginatively fruitful, his defamiliarization fails to answer "human questions" (52). Though he seeks to find "a bridge thrown over the abyss" (*Palomar* 27), he manages to create even more questions.[9] Upon realizing this, Palomar's thoughts on the state of human eros conclude with an evident ellipsis. He is left only with a phenomenological observation of the tortoises' next visible action, and no resolution to his efforts access the spirit of human sexuality.

Often frustrated by the failure of his phenomenology and haunted by all that he does not know, Palomar regularly suffers from anxiety. He tries to find patterns in everything and attempts to catalogue those things that seem to resist order and form. As he visits the reptile house at the zoo, he notices the disorganized arrangement of the animals as a "squandering of forms without style and without plan, where all is possible, and animals and plants and rocks exchange scales, quills, concretions" (*Palomar* 86). However, he also realizes that "among the infinite possible combinations, only some . . . become fixed . . . and in this finite number of ways of being . . . lies order" (*Palomar* 86). Palomar tries to catalogue the seemingly infinite number of possible combinations—to isolate each creature along with its singular "necessity" and "beauty" (*Palomar* 86). When faced with the chaos of the reptile house, Palomar attempts to render its contents (animals, plants and rocks) finite. However, instead of making the situation more

comprehensible, his efforts to gauge its components reveal the evidence of infinity all the more strongly. The number of possible permutations has a dizzying effect on Palomar, generating more and more questions about the animals in the cages. Are they patient or desperate? Do they wait for something? Does time move slowly or quickly? *La vertigine dell'infinito* (the vertigo of what is infinite) takes its toll on Palomar in the forms of these questions, and the orderliness of any method he might impose to dissolve it remains unsuccessful.

A character demonstrating similar efforts to account for the multitude of existence appears in Calvino's *Difficult Loves* in a group of tales called "Stories of Love and Loneliness." In "The Adventure of a Photographer," Antonino "thinks that everything that is not photographed is lost, as if it had never existed, and that therefore, in order really to live, you must photograph as much as you can" (*Difficult Loves* 224). He becomes obsessed with photographing his female muse, Bice, in an attempt to capture her essence—her true self as presupposed by traditional principles of phenomenology. He remains concerned with visually seizing Bice's most absolute qualities, recognizing that there are "many possible photographs of Bice an many Bices impossible to photograph, but what he was seeking was the unique photography that would contain both the former and the latter" (*Difficult Loves* 228). Assuming the existence of a fundamental self by pursuing Bice's "true character" (*Difficult Loves* 227), Antonino suffers frustration at his continual failure to "get her." Thinking like Palomar and resorting to the consideration of surface, Antonino employs a phenomenological photography. Instead of trying to capture Bice as a figure divorced from "ever link with space and time" (*Difficult Loves* 228), he tries to "aim at a portrait completely on the surface, evident, unequivocal, that did not

elude conventional appearance, the stereotype, the mask" (*Difficult Loves* 228). He wishes to include all signs of Bice's identity as a "social, historical product" because such images retain more "truth" that those that claim to be true as a result of their removal from that social history. He decides not to pose Bice, but rather to observe her as she is apart from his influence. He waits for moments in which she is unaware of his presence to photograph her, wanting to catch her while she is outside the purview of "his gaze, of any gaze"—outside of the power of the constructed world to assign subjectivity. Just like the sunbather plagued by the focus of Palomar, Bice leaves Antonino.

While he clearly suffers a failure to approach reality, the meaning of which his photographic methods attempt to draw near, he continues to search for its truth and his purpose in life. He sinks into depression in the absence of Bice, resolving to make a catalogue of "everything in the world that resists photography" (*Difficult Loves* 234). He directs his attention to corners of his room, radiators, and finally newspapers. In the process of shooting, Antonino realizes that he is taking pictures of other pictures in those newspapers. He turns his spotlight on the blurry images of the media. "Having exhausted every possibility, at the moment when he was coming full circle Antonino realized that photographing photographs was the only course that he had left—or rather, the true course he had been obscurely seeking all this time" (*Difficult Loves* 235). He realizes that, by copying copies of images, he engages in the most superficial and immediate method of visual observation possible. His discovery is especially ironic because those things removed from society that he so seeks are replete with "the conventions of fashion" and "the falsity of official ceremonies" (*Difficult Loves* 234). His removal from reality is twofold. He pushes himself into abstraction with his fanatical cataloguing, and

pays homage to the very traditions with which he struggles in his earlier efforts to discover essence as it precedes existence. Though he thinks he finds meaning by capturing the unreality of images (an unreality he considers absolutely locatable and thus capable of apprehension), he comes no nearer to discovering his purpose or to making evident his "relationship with the world" (*Difficult Loves* 227) that he wishes to discern prior to his obsessive visual project.

Vertigo Over the Void

In his essay "Cybernetics and Ghosts," Calvino refers to this need to discover stability when confronted by a "shapeless avalanche of events" (*Uses* 17).

> Faced with the vertigo of what is countless, unclassifiable, in a state of flux, I feel reassured by what is finite, 'discrete,' and reduced to a system . . . My stance . . . is dictated by some kind of intellectual agoraphobia . . . to defend me from the whirlwinds that literature so constantly has to face. (*Uses* 17)

The desire to account for the world's multiplicity brings about a vertiginous feeling for Calvino as well as his fictional characters. Attention to such chaos appears frequently in conjunction with the mention of vertigo—of hovering precariously above a void. Reference to vertigo surfaces most patently in the chapter "Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo" in *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler.*

As a crowd of people makes its way over a bridge to exit a city to avoid an impending military conflict, Lieutenant Alex Zinnober encounters the dizzy Irina. As the two make their way across the bridge, Alex encourages Irina to lean on him. In response she screams in fright saying, "The void, the void down below . . . Help . . . vertigo . . ."

(*Traveler* 82). Alex cannot understand her utterance and can detect no reason for her experience of vertigo. When he later asks her how if she has recovered from her fainting spell, she assures him, "It's nothing . . . I have dizzy spells when I least expect them, even if there is no danger in sight . . . If I gaze at the sky at night, and I think of the distance of the stars . . . If I were to lie down here . . . with my eyes facing up, my head would swim" (*Traveler* 83). Keeping in mind that Irina first suffers from vertigo in the midst of the "general confusion" (*Traveler* 81) of the deluge of people crossing the bridge, the explanation for her affliction becomes plain. Like Calvino, she feels the "vertigo of what is countless, unclassifiable, in a state of flux." Akin to Palomar, Irina cannot look at the stars without becoming overwhelmed at the vastness of the universe.

The void to which she refers can be seen as a space occupied by that which is unclassifiable and irrrepresentable. In keeping with the doctrine of voidness put forth by philosopher Nagarjuna in the second century AD, the void is not literally a space, a thing, or the representation of the irrrepresentable, but the end of all representation. It is not an image of nothingness, but rather no image at all.[10] Considering this, it becomes possible to see that Irina not only grows dizzy upon contemplating infinity, but also upon facing the nothingness of the void she mentions as she faints—upon realizing the impossibility of representing all of the chaos that crowds her mind and begs to be classified and represented. She thinks of the representation of the irrepresentable multiplicity of things, and feels threatened by the possibility that such a realization of the seemingly boundless is out of reach.

While the reader never receives additional information on Irina's awareness of the void or her efforts to resist the feeling of vertigo, the obsessive behaviors of Mr. Palomar

and the photographer from *Difficult Loves* appear more accessible when considering her musings. By employing phenomenology to bridge the gap between themselves and the reality for which they wish to account, they attempt to discover the representation of the irrrepresentable. They wish to make sense of the infinite chaos that confronts them in a confusion of images (as in the reptile house and the multitude of scenes to photograph). Calvino also endeavors to render the vastness of the universe less overwhelming by imposing forms in situations where vertigo is present. He allows the narrator of *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* to read the world with tarot cards. His Marco Polo often relies on a chess-board in *Invisible Cities*. Even the arrangement of stories into specific categories in *Difficult Loves* and *Palomar* speaks to Calvino's awareness of vertigo and to his desire to combat the "intellectual agoraphobia" that leaves him feeling helpless. He imposes closed systems to make understanding seem available—to assure himself that some meaning to life exists, especially when it comes to his ability to produce "literature" despite "whirlwinds" that question both his ability to represent and point of representation itself.

Like Mr. Palomar, Calvino has limited success in finding patterns capable of mapping the world. Instead, he experiences vertigo at every turn and realizes the pervasiveness of disorder (or at least the inability of humankind to read the extant varieties of order). In a final attempt to escape the world from which he derives perpetual fear of the unknown, Palomar tries to learn how to be dead. He realizes, however, that even this is an unsuccessful method of avoiding the omnipresent mysteries that seem to negate the possibility of existential harmony he seeks. Death is not an experience transcending life, but a further separation from all he wishes to find. It "means resigning

himself to remaining the same in a definitive state" (*Palomar* 124)—a state without access to any sort of transcendent truth. When Palomar becomes conscious of yet another defeat, he decides in a philosophical manner earlier described as either "pseudo-work" or "hyper-work" (*Palomar* 26) that he will remain alive in order to "set himself in describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all, he will no longer think of being dead" (*Palomar* 126). Although his plan is again phenomenological and seemingly headed toward yet another failure, it aims at an important idea. Mr. Palomar wishes to observe enough of the world so that he no longer wishes to be dead—so that he no longer wishes to attain a position of supreme knowledge. It is upon understanding his goal that Mr. Palomar dies. Once again, he is deprived of the answer he seeks—the answer dictating that answers should not be sought and that the ongoing search only succeeds in fracturing his relationship to the reality that matters most. He does not live long enough to reach a point of accepting the unknown. Earlier in the novel Palomar sits at home on his terrace, the design of which reflects his desires and those of his family. The narrator describes Palomar as being "too late in freeing himself from his youthful impatiences and in understanding (only in theory) that *salvation* lies solely in applying oneself to the things that are there" (*Paloma*r 52). While Mr. Palomar does not learn to connect to reality in time, he dies with the understanding that he must aspire *not* to know. He must "suffer intangibility" (*Six Memos* 111) in order to draw nearer to the tangible. For Calvino, this refusal to go beyond "the things that are there," and to search for absolute truth emerges as the supreme act of knowing.

Returning to Ludmilla, the term "ideal" now seems increasingly apposite to describe her attitudes toward reading and being. She enjoys feeling "uneasy from the very

first page" (*Traveler* 126) of a novel. She pursues the sort of obfuscation created by thorny texts. She understands this elusive quality as an "accumulation of life" (*Traveler* 150) and devotes her efforts to absorbing the sensations inherent in that accumulation without attempting to discover anything beyond them. Gradually, the male reader of *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* grows to understand Ludmilla's unique awareness of the rewards of "applying oneself to the things that are there." When his journey to find one authentic novel ends in the discovery that every fragment of novels he imagines are inauthentic belongs to the novel he seeks in the first place, he realizes that truth can be multiple—that one definite answer eludes him just as one definite novel does. In this moment a reader asks him:

> Do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end? In ancient times a story could end only in two ways: having passed all tests, the hero and heroine married, or else they died. The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death. (Traveler 259)

The Reader reflects on this and immediately recognizes an urgent desire to marry Ludmilla. Evaluating his actions through Calvino's advice to citizens of the next millennium, the reader grasps the need to endure all that seems unsubstantial, to except its existence as outside the intellectual scope of humankind, and to turn his attention to the immediate events of his life. He marries Ludmilla because she is "there" and because she does not occupy a space of transcendence. Unlike Palomar, the Reader succeeds in exercising Calvino's method of knowing based on those things that are present instead of those that exist beyond perception.

Because the novel the Reader seeks consists of and constructs multiple truths, he begins to understand his being as an integral component to the array of meanings. Since each markedly different chapter of the book maintains its own uniqueness in his mind (thanks to the vital qualities identified by Ludmilla), he sees the possibility of retaining his own singularity even when incorporated into that multitude.

The idea that people and objects can preserve their singularities even when integrated into such multiplicity appears often in Calvino's critical work. In a reading of Roland Barthes' *La Chambre Claire,* Calvino addresses Barthes' theories on the existence of a "science of uniqueness for every object" (*Uses* 306). He observes that although Barthes concerns himself with "instruments of scientific generalization" (Uses 306), he also looks with a "poetic sensitivity aimed at defining what is singular and unrepeatable" (Uses 306). Barthes performs studies of how things can be classified in terms of their larger scientific categories while also maintaining their "aesthetic gnosiology" and "eudaemonism of understanding." According to Calvino, Barthes shows that this "aesthetic gnosiology or eudaemonism of understanding" is possible, or at least that "it is possible to seek it" (*Uses* 306). As in my earlier study of language and its ability to produce particular aesthetic experiences when linguistically arranged in a specific way, Calvino suggests that things can possess an aesthetic spirit (aesthetic gnosiology) despite any categorization or generalization. As realized by Calvino and the Reader in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, things can possess generalities while preserving their singularities. The novel's individual stories can be completely distinctive by virtue of their particular sensory effects, but also part of one larger novel. It is possible to apprehend the world both in terms of its universal classification and its particular light

and mobile aesthetic qualities. For Calvino, it is the "poetic essence" of things that can lead toward *eudaemonia* (happiness produced by understanding the world in multiple terms), and to what I call Calvino's new salvation.

A New Salvation

In each of the novels explored in this essay, Calvino deals with modes of knowing not founded on traditional models of inquiry. Instead of espousing a search for knowledge characterized by the need to transcend life's most available features to find a supreme truth, he suggests an application of attention to those very available features. He suggests that an awareness of immediate things can lead to "salvation." Calvino's salvation is not one acquired by receiving knowledge of God. Neither is it acquired by entering the realm of the afterlife. Both of these methods of achieving salvation originate in long-held religious teachings and rely on the authority of the transcendent model refused by Calvino. They do not acknowledge the idea that salvation can be born of "applying oneself to the things that are there" (*Palomar* 52) as Mr. Palomar fails to do, and as the Reader in *If On A Winter's Night at Traveler* learns to do.

The concept of "applying oneself to the things that are there" is twofold for Calvino. He concerns himself with how one attends to text as well as to life. Where text is concerned, Calvino advocates the ways in which Ludmilla wants to read texts that have only "the desire to narrate, to pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves" (*Traveler* 92). Calvino feels that one must remain open to the power of a text instead of looking for its definite philosophy. Readers must allow a text to grow as they read. Their particular readings must endow the text with

meaning and must grant it "life" like a tree that is always being created and always growing. Ludmilla allows for this growth and life by looking only at the words in front of her.

Calvino's "new salvation" is one brought about by considering life as Ludmilla approaches reading. Instead of implementing a phenomenological approach to life that forces the phenomenologist into alienation from the things he/she wishes to know, one must remain aware of Calvino's particular attitude toward phenomenology. He suggests that the practice can give rise to knowledge of things just as they appear. While the concept of phenomenology does suppose the existence of a stable self or essence, Calvino does not advocate using phenomenology to discover such absolute truth. His work promotes what I call a "wakeful phenomenology." For him, one must remain awake to the potential of this more successful phenomenology—one that calls for ongoing observation without the intent to explain all that can be seen. Calvino's literature speaks to the need to look at the world just as it is and to refuse the search for certain truths. One must be wakeful of the multiplicity of the world without attempting to impose meaning on it. Calvino's work indicates that one can understand the world in terms of its most mobile qualities—the qualities of life that suggest the possibility of freedom from the ideological limitations of the transcendental model. In this way, one can move toward a salvation embodied by the "edaemonia" (*Uses* 306) of accepting the great, mysterious multiplicity of existence.

Notes

1. Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 110-111. Calvino refers to the necessity to suffer intangibility, especially in terms of Proust's work.

2. *Six Memos*, 105. Calvino refers to the great multiplicity of existence as an interconnection between "the events, the people, and the things of the world." He recognizes the need to discover this interconnection as the "calling" of novelists in the 20th century. He refers specifically to the work of Carlo Emilio Gadda, noting that Gadda's novels best exemplify the effort to compose an "encyclopediac" piece capable of conveying the multiplicity of existence.

3. "La nostra epoca è caratterizzata da questa contraddizione: da una parte abbiamo bisogno che tutte qual che viene deto sia immediatamente traducibile in altre lingue; dall'altra abbiamo la coscienza di che ogni lingua è un sistema di pensiero a se stante, intraducibile per definizione. Le mie previsioni sono queste: ogni lingua si concentrerà attorno a due poli: uno di immediata traducibilità nelle altre lingue con cui sarà indispensabile communicate, tendente ad avvinciarsi a una sorta di interlingua mondiale ad alto livello; e se un polo in cui si distillerà l'essenza più peculiare e segreta della lingua, intraducibile per eccellenza, e di cui saranno investiti istituti diversi come l'argot popolare e la creativita poetica della letteratura." ("Una Pietra Sopra")

"Our era is characterized by this contradiction: that on one hand we need everything that is said to be immediately translatable into other languages; on the other hand we need to know that every language is a system of thought and thus untranslatable by definition. My provisions are these: that every language will be concentrated around two poles: one of immediate translatability into other languages that will be indispensable for communication, with a tendency to develop a sort of world language at the highest level; and a pole that will reveal the most peculiar and secret essence of language, untranslatable par excellence, comprehensive of various areas like popular jargon and the creative poetics of literature." (my translation)

4. Meyer, Steven. *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 188-190. In the chapter of his book entitled "At the Whiteheads'," Meyer addresses language's ability to limit the range of aesthetic experience with literature. He refers to Alfred North Whitehead's work with Wordsworth's poetry, which describes readers of Wordsworth as experiencing "flashes of insight beyond the meanings already stabilized in etymology and grammar." For Whitehead, Wordsworth's linguistic combinations succeed in conveying what is often lost when words are applied to it, namely its aesthetic power. As Calvino's translators note, it is this very power or "essence" that is lost in the process of translating his novels from Italian to English. English does not allow for the same "emotional" experience that makes itself manifest in Italian. The unique "linguistic combinations" unique to Italian are different from the linguistic combinations that appear once the Italian text has been translated into English. The two languages are linguistically quite different, and their

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linguistic constructions affect those aesthetic qualities dependent upon specific combinations of words and sounds.

5. Cannon, JoAnn. *Postmodern Italian Fiction: The Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Eco, Sciascia, Malerba*, (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), 101. As noted by JoAnn Cannon in her essay "Calvino's 'Snow Job' or A Shovel Full of Snow," "The work of literature will exist only insofar as it has certain potentialities vis-à-vis its rapport with the reader, who, in turn, deals with the work according to his/her intertextual reservoir of knowledge."

6. Calvino, *The Uses of Literature*. Trans. Patrick Creagh. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1986), 41-47. In the chapter entitled "Philosophy and Literature," Calvino calls for a union of philosophy, literature, and science, saying, "Science is faced with problems not too dissimilar from those of literature. It makes patterns of the world that are immediately called in question, it swings between the inductive and the deductive methods, and it must always be on its guard lest it mistake its own linguistic conventions for objective laws. We will not have a culture equal to the challenge until we compare against one another the basic problematics of science, philosophy, and literature, in order to call them all into question" (45-46).

7. Cannon, 98-102. Cannon discusses the process of defamiliarization as it relates to Mr. Palomar's encounters with tortoises in "The Loves of Tortoises" and with a gecko in "The Gecko's Belly."

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8. Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 149-150. Many thinkers, including Gilles Deleuze, problematize phenomenology as a method of inquiry. Deleuze discusses the ways in which phenomenology supposes the existence of transcendent truths, specifically the existence of a stable self. He understands phenomenology as an empirical process that does not succeed as a "rigorous science." Deleuze writes, "Phenomenology wanted to renew our concepts by giving us perceptions and affections that would awaken us to the world . . . But we do not fight against perceptual and affective clichés if we do not also fight against the machine that makes them. By . . . making immanence an immanence to a subject, phenomenology could not prevent the subject from forming no more than opinions"(149-150). In other words, phenomenology assumes that there is an essential identity to each subject, thereby eliminating the possibilities for discovery brought on by affect.

9. Di Pace-Jordan, Rosetta. "Italo Calvino's Legacy: The Constant and Consistent Vision." *World Literature Today* 66.2 (1992): 468. Di Pace Jordan might define the void as "the juncture between that which has already perceived and that which has not yet entered our consciousness."

10. Franchi, Stefano. "Palomar, the Triviality of Modernity and the Doctrine of the Void." *New Literary History*, 28 (1997): 757-778. Franchi details the origins of the doctrine of the void. He refers to the void as the absence of representation.

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