

style, ranging from short introductory notes to more academic discussions. As this may be related to different origins, some more information on the essays' first contexts could have been useful to readers curious about their original aims, or interested in Calvino's career as a whole. Such information, however, is not necessary to enjoy the book.

In fact, after reading it some readers may feel like turning to one of the books discussed, or going back to the classics they have read with a new interest. Even though the interest of individual essays may vary depending on the reader's background and tastes, the general aims and the ideas expressed in the title essay are completely valid. Calvino reminds us that in the end the only reason for reading the classics is that it is better than not reading them (p. 20) and that books important to us are not read for obligation, but for pleasure. And this is something both students and teachers of literature should always remember.

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ITALO CALVINO, *Seis Propuestas Para el Próximo Milenio*. Madrid: Siruela, 1989. 138 pages.

Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* is a posthumous collection of lectures that should have been delivered at Harvard University, but could not because of the author's death. These six memos stand for the literary values that Calvino proposes to save and encourage in the future. If these requirements were fulfilled, the function of literature could be said to be entirely existential; in other words, it would establish a real and meaningful communication, discarding purely rhetorical works. Literature would bring

poetry, science, and philosophy together, encouraging an escape from the world of the individual self. We would interpret literature as a way to save language from the present day «disease», the world of visual technology that is making it lose its cognitive strength and quickness. Literature would be understood as a means to shape life.

The memos are on: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, multiplicity and consistency. They correspond to the different chapters in the book. Calvino puts forward Lightness as the way of looking at life that writers should aim at if they are to fight against the heaviness that we see in the present world. Here, Calvino insists on the fact that he is not proposing an escape from reality, but an approach to the world from a different point of reference, with other methods of knowledge based both on philosophy and science. Next, Quickness basically refers to both economy and precision in language. Quickness can also be read as the result of the balance between concentration and craftsmanship on the one hand, and mobility and ease on the other. In a similar way, the need for exactitude in the organization of literary works, the choice of language and images and their intelligent use so that their inherent referential power is preserved and exploited to the maximum. In the next memo, on Visibility, he enhances the creation of valid, new images. Multiplicity is concerned with the fact of looking at the novel as an encyclopedia that interweaves various kinds of knowledge and codes into a plural vision of the world.

Calvino puts forward an optimistic outlook on the future of literature, and his ambitious proposal could, in this sense, be easily mistaken for a romantic attempt, had the book not been written in such a rational and intelligent way. The names given to the memos already point at the bright side of life. Besides, the book itself is a good example of the values the

author is portraying. The simple language Calvino uses to convey such delicate and deep matters turn the book into an attractive theoretical and practical text. Also, the way his assumptions are exemplified with texts from the past and the present is very clarifying. By doing so, he backs his arguments and helps the reader to visualize the message, providing this work on literary theory -usually a grayish subject- with an unconventional, lively flavour. Brevity and quality are the two key adjectives to describe this book.

On the whole, it is a balanced work thanks to the contrast and complementation between ideas and language, past and present, theory and practice. I think all these characteristics contribute to making the access to literature easier for everybody.

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WAYNE C. BOOTH. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1988. 557 pages.

A reader who is permanently open to an exchange of ideas and a revision of values through fiction: such is the ideal after which, according to Wayne C. Booth, we should try to fashion ourselves if we are to take full advantage of our positions as consumers of literature. For what is being proposed in professor Booth's latest book, *The Company We Keep*, is nothing less than the recovery of the old idea of literature as valuable instruction, which has been neglected in literary studies for more than thirty years.

Doubtless there are specific reasons for that neglect, and Booth takes most of them into account at the very outset of his book. The «rejection of inquiry into

values», as he puts it, that has been brought along by various developments of literary criticism (with the notorious exception of Marxism, where nevertheless the ethical has sometimes been bracketed in favour of the political, or has been considered synonymous with it) is succinctly but didactically examined in the first pages, in a lively description of the most abstract theorizations of art. But it is in the consideration of an alternative form of discussion on books, to which the reader would be able to bring along his/her own personal values and opinions, that this book makes its most important contribution.

Thus Booth makes substantial use of a metaphor that has been long left unused in critical practice, but which was one of the key figures in the humanist discourse on books for more than four centuries: the image of the book as a friend to the reader. The many gifts that such friends may bring to us are analyzed and described in detail: otherness (the approach to a different culture or to a set of world-views that are different from ours), intensity, variety, enjoyment. «Implied author» is the term employed by Booth here: for he takes into account the way in which the very notion of authorship has been relativized in the last decades, and thus distinguishes between the «author» that the rhetoric of the book implies and the actual writer (neither of them is to be confused, moreover, with the narrative voice, which may point to values which do not coincide with those that the implied author wants to promote).

However, the final decision to integrate these values or to reject them, to accept the friendship that the book offers or to dismiss it will rest solely in the reader's hands. Booth does not see the interpretive act as the collective choice of some nebulous «interpretive community», but as the result of a serious and responsible personal investigation carried out by the reader. And it is there, in the field of per-