Albert Howard Carter, III. *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy*. Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1987. Pp. 182.

I.T. Olken. *With Pleated Eye and Garnet Wing: Symmetries of Italo Calvino*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984. Pp. 157.

A space is created with the death of a writer which, like a dying star, may absorb surrounding matter and form a vortex. With the death of Calvino, it is hoped that new and enthusiastic studies will manage to escape the intellectual maelstrom and attempt to rightfully place him within that entangled typography which is contemporary literature. These two books bridge that difficult arc of time which surrounds the death of Calvino and unwittingly (not purposefully) represent useful examples of both cautious criticism (Olken), and optimistic speculation (Carter). Both authors set out to decipher the formulaic peregrinations of Calvino's imagination, each with surprisingly different results. Olken uses a staid, often repetitive, and highly abstractive method which is mindful of the immanent presence of authorial voice. Carter's approach is bright, upbeat, wide in breath and scope, and intrepidly explores possibilities of interpretation. I shall begin with Carter's text.

Although this monograph contains frequent insights, readers who anticipate a highly structured and systematic presentation of the "Fantastic" in Calvino will be sorely disappointed. This is not a mere cataloguing of examples under theoretical rubrics. For this unpretentious approach, we are grateful. I am reminded of Tristram Shandy's words:

Give me a credit for a little more wisdom than appears on my outside;—and as we jogg on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do anything—only keep your temper.

Indeed it is easy to keep one's temper while reading this study. The rhetoric is seductive, the auspicious decision not to control the circumstances of Calvino's fantasy is rewarding and refreshing. Rather than presenting a wide spectrum of specious ideological filiations, Carter anchors his approach to a specific goal: the exploration of "alternate visions" and how they are "made visible and plausible through literary elements so that we can explore intensified human desires and the limits of human thought." The basis of Carter's epistemological framework is the use of fantasy by Calvino as a structural tool of interpretation and artistic creation. The fantastic, Carter correctly points out, has been variously described by various theoreticians (Todorov, Eliade, Frye, Steiner) and indeed by Calvino himself. Yet it is not his purpose to establish dialectic poles of inquiry, nor classify normative entities. Instead his discussion of selected stories deals primarily with insights, personal query, and the possible heuristics use of comparative relations. In this Carter succeeds admirably.

After opening the text with a brief biographical note on the author en-

titled "Who was Italo Calvino?" he discusses Calvino's works in chronological order, beginning with *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and ending with *Palomar*. His discussion of selected stories (focussing primarily on the later, more popular Calvino), is limited to those relationships which appear most fundamental to himself as reader. The result is a personalized reading of Calvino which is often surprisingly brief (*Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* merits only 3 pages). Given this succinctness, it would be improper to weigh the merits of Carter's book by comparing it to highly formalized and theoretical studies of Calvino. Yet he fares well in the comparison. The suggestions he offers are pithy, rather than cursory, and leave the reader wishing for more. His lively style, when coupled with the verve and variety of Calvino's work ("a rich and ambiguous miracle" [152]), reveals a certain flair for the kaleidoscopic realities of literature and is both entertaining and enlightening. The often downright complexity of many critical approaches is tempered by Carter's scholarship. The ambiguity and increasing fragmentation of recent trends is swept away by a refreshing, humanistic inquiry.

For the most part the text is urbane, even wittily, written. I especially enjoyed his chapters on *Cosmicomiche* and *l con zero* where the fantastic past ("richly described and humanly interpreted" [81]), is perceived as a formulaic system whose values are purposefully personal yet surprisingly open to interpretation. His commentary on *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* is also well-stated and poignant. As a comparatist, Carter offers a stimulating string of associations which span both time and literatures (*Gilgamesh*, *Aristophanes*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Keats, Grass, Twain, Borges, Gide, Blake . . .).

There are few formulaic statements in this book. One of these is Carter's suggestion that he perceives a "general movement toward abstraction" (83) in Calvino. Such statements, however, are balanced by an underlying sensation in the text that the entire work is premised on what Carter calls "tentative speculations." This is an admirable quality when one considers that most criticism today is governed by manipulative documentation, not evaluative speculation.

This then is a general, exploratory, work, that makes use of a wide spectrum of competences in order to reveal the numerous and diverse activities which may occur in a reader when he sets out to read the work of Calvino. Carter has apparently foreseen possible "my-interpretation-is-better-than-yours" conflicts but remains unfazed in his enjoyable and highly readable extrapolations. The consistent rigor and intensity of research make this monograph a fine-meshed inquiry. Calvino encouraged complexity and, we are reminded by Carter, "enjoyed the notion of infinite freedom in the possibilities of writing, reading, and theorizing" (12). The book succeeds in fabricating a future encounter with Calvino and offers a suitable meeting-ground upon which these activities may converge to

reveal a fascinating network of interrelationships.

To grasp most of Professor Olken's interesting and insightful observations is instead a task which is often as exciting as it is frustrating. The basic point to be digested here is that works of criticism which attempt to illustrate narrative technique without drawing firm interpretive conclusions, often undermine the very complexities of discourse they posit and purport to decipher. Olken wishes to present a descriptive analysis of Calvino's symmetrical narrative gyrations. She attempts to do this while skirting literary theory. It is thus not always clear what the author holds to be the precise connection between Calvino's intellectual nomadism and her own constantly shifting meanderings. Professor Olken has apparently set herself the task of deciphering Calvino's complex problem of representation. It is disturbing, then, that she does not define her own key terms: radio symmetries, game, play, thematic symmetry, structural symmetry, patterns of nature, nature of patterns. Nor is it easy to fully comprehend when one unequivocal descriptive category ends and another begins.

The text opens with an introductory discussion of Calvino's literary "antenati" which is both insightful and well grounded. This introduction, however, is not crucial to the rest of the text. The nexus of the argument, that Calvino's poetics is constituted by a plethora of recurring patterns and symmetries, philosophical positions, aesthetic components, and stylistic devices, is indeed valid. The development of her argument, however, does not bolster her opening premises. Instead, she recreates "radio symmetries" of her own. In this way the work is reduced to a series of self-replenishing ideas which revolve around themselves. These ideas are never fully developed and follow an all too tired outline.

Though Olken moves adeptly from one Calvino story to another, her wandering discourse, at least to my mind, destabilizes the reader. She assumes, on the one hand, that the reader knows Calvino intimately. On the other hand, she distressingly insists that he plough through far too many lengthy quotations. The book would also appear to be misnamed, for while no mention is made of the heraldic trilogy in the title (letting one assume a larger range to the study) a good portion of the study seems to spawn from and "spiral symmetrically" around *I nostri antenati*. The rational, indeed enjoyable, prose of her argumentation is also hamstrung by an effort to strike parallels between stories and characters while foregoing critical analysis. Patterns and techniques are never really "laid bare," merely disclosed. The archeology of the text tends to be redundant. Though examples from Calvino's texts are plentiful I often found myself encountering "yet another" structure, theme, and pattern without having understood the preceeding one.

The book is also, unfortunately, replete with inconsistencies and errors. Page numbers to quotations from *I nostri antenati* are cited in footnotes in Chapters I, III, IV, but cited in the body of the text in Chapter II. *Le città*

invisibili, cited for the first time as the reference text in the footnotes to Chapter II is cited again in the notes to Chapter III. It is also often difficult, if not impossible, to crosscheck quotations in the original texts. It is not clear, for example, which edition she is using of *Il visconte dimezzato*: Gettoni, Coralli, or Nuovi Coralli? On page 58 she claims that a quotation is to be found on page 17 of *I nostri antenati*, Super Nuovi edition, when in reality it is on page 117 of the Nuovi Coralli edition of *Il visconte dimezzato*. The same is true of several other citations. There are also many typographical errors. Is Olken using a 1954 edition of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (76) or the 1964 edition? Page numbers are missing from quotations on pages 141 and 143 (or is the reader to assume that they are part of the quotations further on in the book), and again on page 58. In a text which is punctilious about the translation of Italian passages into English, one is surprised to find a missing translation (106), as well as errors in spelling (heppen, 123), and a period in the place of a comma (87). The Bibliography lists the Table of Contents of *Una pietra sopra*.

At times one is most distressed to find Olken misinterpreting an obvious metaphor. While referring to Pin's need for adult affection she states: "Pin finds this in the figure of Pane, with whom he goes off hand in hand at the end of the novel . . ." (57). But it is not *Pane* that Pin is walking with but *Cugino*: ("Ora camminano per la campagna e Pin tiene la sua mano in quella soffice e calma del Cugino, in quella gran mano di pane," *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, 195). It is also incorrect to state that *Le cosmicomiche* presents an "organic world . . . exclusive of man" (137). Qfwfq may not be a man but he does embody a human voice and preternatural vision. Indeed, the cosmic trilogy is a universe according to Qfwfq and represents a humanist, anthropomorphic stance by Calvino against "il mare dell'oggettività" (see "Scienza e letteratura" in *Una pietra sopra*, Torino: Einaudi, 1980, esp. 188).

Though the book reads as one long essay, the reader is left with the impression that its chapters are individual essays that have been poorly spliced together. Chapter IV is by far the most interesting of the essays, the fundamental difference from the rest of the book being the emphasis on *La speculazione edilizia* and *Marcovaldo*. Here too, however, the strategy is short lived and the author again retreats to a discussion of *I nostri antenati*. A more consonant approach could have been to highlight the heraldic trilogy while employing the body of Calvino's narrative as reference motifs for comparative analysis.

Both Professor Carter and Professor Olken are to be commended for attempting to render Calvino more accessible to a larger North American public. The books are eminently justified as gestures towards those who have been tantalized by the author but have not entered the vast library of Calvino criticism. It is unfortunate that both texts could not have presented similar, at least editorial, professionalism. Notwithstanding the unbalance,

however, these studies will generate new questions and open new avenues of research.

FRANCO RICCI
University of Ottawa

Fredi Chiappelli. *Il legame musaico*. Ed. Pier Massimo Forni con la collaborazione di Giorgio Cavallini. Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura. 1984. Pp. 436.

This fascinating collection of articles by Fredi Chiappelli (Director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at UCLA) was so well-received in Italy that it won the Lerici Prize for Non-Fiction ("Premio Lerici per la Saggistica"), the Country's outstanding annual award for criticism, in August, 1986.

The ensuing publicity in Italian newspapers, praising the selection of Chiappelli's work for the award, helped to increase the popularity and distribution of this book in Italy. The value of it had previously been documented by detailed reviews in important literary periodicals such as *Antologia Viessieux* (V. 78, 1985) and *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* (V. 31, 1985) by scholars of no less repute than Roberto Fedi (Florence University) and Emilio Pasquini (Bologna University).

Here in the United States, present and former students of Fredi Chiappelli, as well as scholars who wish they had been his students, are finding *Il legame musaico* extremely useful and delightful. Inside the sober sage-brown cover are gathered together twenty-five articles written between 1951 and 1981, whose scholarly interest can be defined according to different perspectives. Only one was unpublished before ("Postille al nodo Salomone").

Diachronically, the twenty-five essays accurately synthesize more than thirty years of Italian studies in the U.S.; they document Chiappelli's weekly confrontations with Italian and American graduate students during seminars on subjects raging from "the birth certificate of the Italian language," as Giorgio Varanini would call it ("L'episodio di Travale e il 'dire onestamente villania' nella narrativa toscana dei primi secoli"), to "Lorenzo Montano prima di 'Carte al vento.' "

"Most of them are classics but surprises are to be found among them," wittily anticipates Pier Massimo Forni, the editor, in the Introduction. And indeed Montano, Pasquali, Lorenzini, Doni, among other subjects, are treated with thoroughness and originality.

Synchronically, the approach of each paper testifies for what has become an almost proverbially sound background in Italian philology and linguistics (Fredi Chiappelli was among Bruno Migliorini's first batch),