raggio-utopia della fattoria coi conigli in cui l'idiozia che deforma la percezione della realtà del personaggio si bea" (184).

Remigi's frequent use of the word "monotonia," which also appears in her subtitle, is a deliberate echo of an observation made by Pavese in *Letteratura americana*. Every genuine writer, he said, is "splendidamente monotono," in that every page will bear the writer's stamp, lending a certain sameness to the most diverse material. This stamp—a recurring image or situation, a recurring turn of phrase—is an expression of the underlying meaning of the surfaces of the writer's world, in which all concrete objects have a natural symbolic value, capable of revealing the force and shape of human destiny. Towards the end of his life, Pavese would find this notion illuminated and confirmed in F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*. Guided by Matthiessen's sharp gaze, says Remigi, Pavese descended into the "tenebrosi abissi dell'anima puritana," a literary journey that awakened the darkest corners of his being: "la sensibilità vulnerabile e spigolosa, la costrizione volontaristica, il senso dello scacco dinanzi a un destino implacabile, l'anelito religioso – di una religiosità laica, s'intende, gravida d'assoluto e di trascendenza" (165-66).

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Italo Calvino. *Italo Calvino: Letters, 1941-1985*. Ed. Michael Wood, trans. Martin McLaughlin. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. 640. ISBN 9780691139456. \$39.50.

Michael Wood's *Italo Calvino Letters, 1941-1985* is a selection of six hundred and fifty letters from Calvino's life that document and demonstrate how Calvino was perhaps the most important Italian voice of the twentieth-century. The letters trace Calvino's life from his college days in Turin to his final years in Rome and Paris. The selected letters were derived from Luca Baranelli's influential text *Italo Calvino, Lettere 1940-1985* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000). Martin McLaughlin translated the letters to an English that retains the clarity and tone of the original Calvino letters to give the reader an accurate representation of literary culture of the second half of the twentieth-century. My review will contend that Wood intended to preserve a Calvino who was less Italian and more international in scope.

A youthful Italo Calvino wrote to his close friend Eugenio Scalfari on 7 March 1942. In his letter, Calvino expressed how he enjoyed writing letters: "A fine thing it is to have a distant friend who writes long letters full of drivel and to be able to reply to him with equally lengthy letters full of drivel; fine not because I like to plunge into captious polemics nor because I enjoy getting certain ideas into the head of some idiot from the Urbe, but because writing long letters to friends means having a moral excuse for not studying" (3).

Although Calvino's tone of voice seemed sarcastic by using words like "drivel" and explaining his drive to write letters as "a moral excuse for not studying", I argue that he truly enjoyed composing letters to close friends. Calvino used tone to am-

plify his deepest thoughts through words he considered closest to his most natural desires.

Calvino was a productive letter writer throughout his life. The main purpose he had in composing letters was to articulate the idea of literature as dialog. This thought was best exemplified in Calvino's May 6th 1972 correspondence to the essayist Giuseppe Bonura: "Literature – even though people usually study it author by author – is always a dialog amongst many voices which intersect and reply to each other within literature and outside it" (412). I emphasize that Wood's selection shows the international aspect of Calvino's writing given its avocations that literature has a natural synergy that transcends cultural boundaries. The synergy creates a unified world culture that can appreciate the writing of even the most native authors like Calvino.

One of the book's extraordinary features is McLaughlin's persistence on polite formality and frankness at once. McLaughlin explains himself in a concise note, drawing the Anglophone intended audience's interest meticulously to the greetings of each letter. The audience might consider the greetings incoherent in their assorted structure. McLaughlin explains Calvino's greetings by stating that there are certain conventions in Calvino's letters "that need no explanation to an Italian reader but do require one for the Anglophone reader" (xvii). One standard McLaughlin clarified was this supposed opaqueness stating that "the Italian custom of addressing even quite close colleagues and acquaintances by their family name" (xvii). McLaughlin stated that "[n]aturally when the author does use first names to his correspondents, I have respected this in the translation" (xvii). Another aspect of McLaughlin's translation that I enjoyed was how he retained original informal usages like inputting "deareugenio" as one word instead of separating the two demonstrating that Calvino and some colleagues were very close friends. I should also like to mention that Calvino combined phrases like the "youknowwhat" to refer to the army and "whatsitcalled" to refer to the Fascist Party card in order "to avoid his letters arousing suspicion" from the censors. I advocate that even though the reader initially finds Calvino's usage comical, Wood explains its seriousness in a useful explanatory endnote.

I would like to expound more on McLaughlin's translation. I truly appreciated McLaughlin's sympathy to Calvino's numerous variations of style and tone. The letters are rich in irony. Wood's compilation gives a precious interpretation into the growth of Calvino's canon. I argue that the collection seizes Calvino's honesty as well as his enduring fervour for literary customs. Wood maintains the honesty I mentioned by remaining faithful to the form and tone of the original Calvino letters.

My only criticisms of Michael Wood's collection is that the explanatory endnotes should have been placed at the end of each letter rather than at the end of the book, and that each letter should have been listed individually in an appendix. In doing so, the text would have been much easier to navigate. Instead, the reader is left flipping through the whole book to locate the parts it requires.

Michael Wood's *Italo Calvino: Letters, 1941-1985* is an important contribution to literary studies that provides readers with a much needed English translation of Calvino's correspondences. Anglophone readers will be impressed with how gracefully Wood's book reads. In filling the gap I just mentioned, Wood has added more

structure to the Western Canon. Researchers, students, and casual readers will find Wood's collection an invaluable investigative tool that explores Calvino's life in a way that gives a globalized structure to the author's works.

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Letizia Modena. *Italo Calvino's Architecture of Lightness – The Utopian Imagination in an Age of Urban Crisis*. New York, London: Routledge, 2011. Pp. 284. ISBN 978-0415880381. CAD \$ 163.23.

Le città invisibili di Calvino è stato oggetto della critica sin dalla sua pubblicazione nel 1972. L'immaginifica creatività che permea le impossibili città che Marco Polo descrive a Kan, la commistione fra topos letterari classici e visioni contemporanee, tutto ciò ha reso questo libro una palestra per la critica postmoderna. Tuttavia il senso dell'operazione calviniana non si esaurisce qui: far emergere la profondità etica oltre la patina estetica è l'obiettivo del saggio di Letizia Modena *Italo Calvino's Architecture of Lightness – The Utopian Imagination in an Age of Urban Crisis*.

Cruciale è restituire all'opera il suo contesto nell'ambito di un'epoca entro la quale lo spazio urbano è diventato la dimensione costitutiva dell'esistenza. Uno spazio il cui sviluppo tumultuoso – a seguito della ricostruzione postbellica – si è realizzato al di fuori di un pensiero capace di progettarlo. Come reazione alla prima cementificazione selvaggia, negli anni Sessanta e Settanta, architetti e urbanisti si pongono il problema di trovare nuovi strumenti epistemologici adatti a organizzare la città *per* l'uomo, e non solo *intorno* all'uomo. È allora nel dialogo vivo con queste voci critiche che nasce il lavoro calviniano. Come spiega in modo preclaro Modena, "*Invisible Cities* explores much more than the ontological and epistemological propositions that are identified with postmodern fiction. The novel was engaged in an explicit and implicit dialogue with the theories, projects, expositions, and critical histories devoted to revitalizing urbanism and renewing city life and civic engagement" (57).

La prima dimensione del testo esplorata dal saggio di Modena è quella dell'utopia. Analizzando i contributi critici in ambito filosofico, politico e sociale, l'autrice fa emergere la rivitalizzazione dell'utopia come pietra di paragone dell'azione: "In this sense, the convergence of utopia, ethics, and the imagination developed in Calvino and other authors [...] of the period the belief in the utopian mentality as a tool to be employed for pedagogical goals" (55). L'utopia non assume dunque la forma dell'irraggiungibile, quanto quella del necessario metro sul quale confrontare le aspirazioni concrete. Non tanto e non solo come traguardo reale, quanto soprattutto come "palestra" per l'immaginazione: "Calvino – scrive Modena – chose to theorize and demonstrate in novelistic form his concept of utopia as a perceptual and cognitive therapy for the imagination that could enable his readers (or travelers) to envision alternatives to existing urban forms and social conventions" (62). Le città narrate da Polo diventano allora esercizio della mente, uno stimolo ad andare oltre l'esistente in un'elevazione che ha la sua eco più precisa nella "leggerezza" in