ponderously set forth or forced. I think, for example, of the way in which Barilli shows the emergence in Leopardi's works of the nineteenth-century type *par excellence*: the "inetto" who lives within the subsequent pages of a Musil, a Svevo, a Pirandello, a Kafka. And then, with a reference that is immediately understandable to today's readers, Barilli mentions the "inept" intellectual played by Alain Cluny in Fellini's *La dolce vita*, who kills himself "per tedio della vita"; and with this reference, Barilli reveals not only how relevant Leopardi is to Fellini specifically and current cultural forms generally, but also how our contemporary art sheds retrospective light on the works of a "maggiore" who is far from the "embalmed" classic that generations of scholastic manuals and forced readings of his "A Silvia" have no doubt made of him for young readers.

Barilli includes a brief but very useful bibliography of the best editions of the works he analyzes, along with a judicious selection of critical works. Otherwise there is no standard critical apparatus in the form of footnotes or appendices, so that the volume can be read through as if it were itself a "narrative." And such it is: a narrative about narrative, written with energy and conviction, and with the passion of an esteemed critic who is also and always a devoted reader.

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Eugenio Bolongaro. *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature*. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 2003. Pp. 239. ISBN 0-8020-8763-9. \$50 (Cloth).

This study of Italo Calvino's early fiction sets out to correct a bias perceived by the author in the ever-increasing body of Calvino criticism. Bolongaro argues that previous studies tend to focus on works after the mid 1960s to emphasize the post-modern aspects of Calvino's fiction. The author argues that this emphasis gives short shrift to "Calvino's lifelong commitment, as an intellectual, to writing as a way of intervening into a particular social and historical situation" (4). The book is designed to pay close attention to this ethico-political commitment, as played out in five novels, *I giovani del Po*, the three novels of the fantastic trilogy, and *The Watcher*. Bolongaro maintains that these early works, read in conjunction with key essays of *Una pietra sopra*, constitute the foundation upon which Calvino's entire literary project is based.

The first chapter situates Calvino in the socio-political and cultural context of Italy from 1943 to 1963. Bolongaro provides a detailed account of the discussion surrounding the role of the intellectual in the reconstruction of post-war Italy, beginning with the debates between Vittorini and Togliatti published in *Il politecnico* (194–47). The author then traces the evolution of these debates through the pages of *Officina* (1955–59) and *Il menabò* (1959–67). He focuses in particular on key essays in *Il menabò* which elaborate on the role of literature and of the intellectual in the realization of a progressive social project which no longer involves an explicit political affiliation.

Chapter Two, "Italo Calvino: From Neo-realism to the Fantastic," examines

Calvino's neorealist novel *I giovani del Po* and the subsequent abandonment of the neorealist poetics in the first novel of the fantastic trilogy. The author provides a convincing reading of *I giovani del Po* as informed by a Marxist perspective on the alienation inherent in modern industrial capitalism and a desire to overcome that alienation by "siding with the working class." Bolongaro finds in *I giovani del Po* signs of the limits of the neorealist poetics. In *The Cloven Viscount*, undertaken as a diversion from *I giovani del Po*, the problematic of the role of the intellectual in capitalist society becomes the central issue. While both novels confront the issue of alienation in industrial society, the fantastic novel, Bolongaro argues, is paradoxically more effective than the realist novel in capturing the essence of "the modern divided self."

Chapter Three, "*The Baron in the Trees*: The Utopian Moment in Calvino's Fantastic Trilogy," focuses on the way in which the second novel in the trilogy reflects the evolution of Calvino's thinking on the issue of the role of the intellectual and his ethical commitments. "Intellectuals are no longer disguised in the clothes of the class whose concerns and moral claims they seek to interpret and make their own. Rather, intellectuals recognize their social situatedness, namely that their education and training, their 'bagaglio culturale' has matured and developed in the womb of the dominant class" (116). In Chapter Four, "*The Non-existent Knight*: Obstinacy without Illusions," the author expands on Calvino's own comment in the 1960 preface to the trilogy. Bolongaro points out that *The Non-existent Knight* is an attempt to imagine a new subjectivity. "In [*The Non-existent Knight*] the issue of the role of the intellectual in the struggle for progressive social change becomes the much more fundamental issue of how the self, the category of being that classical Western philosophy conceives as the site of moral autonomy and judgment, can exist at all" (136). Bolongaro contrasts the last two novels of the trilogy in terms of what he calls their "storytelling function." At the end of *The Baron in the Trees* the practice of writing appears as a motif, which then becomes one of the central issues of *The Non-existent Knight*. In the last work of the trilogy "the storytelling function is no longer simply thematized but rather expressly and distinctly problematized" (150).

In Chapter Five, "*The Watcher*: The Intellectual in the Labyrinth," the author reads *The Watcher* as a realist novel that calls into question "the ethico-political impulse to know the world and act in it" and demonstrates how *The Watcher* emerges as a sort of recapitulation of the main issues raised by the novels of the fantastic trilogy. In the conclusion Bolongaro argues convincingly that the ethico-political tension that characterizes the five novels studied in this volume remains fundamental to Calvino's *oeuvre*.

Overall, this study makes a valuable contribution to Calvino studies. The author achieves his goal of calling attention to the thematic continuity of Calvino's work and, in particular, to the centrality of the issue of role of the writer in society.

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