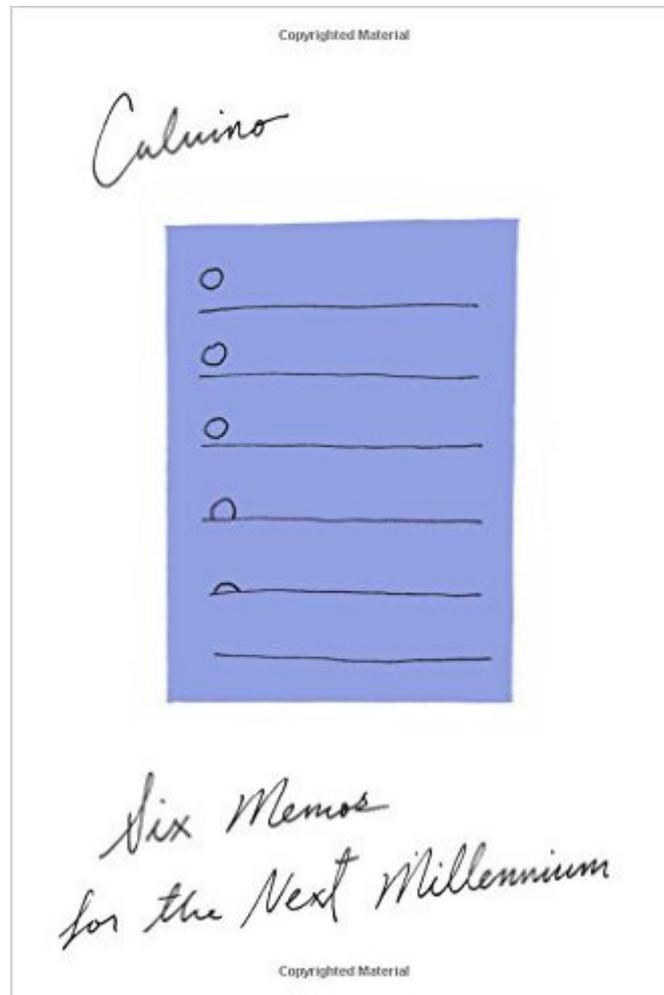


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Six Memos For The Next Millennium



Synopsis

One of the most rigorously presented and beautifully illustrated critical testaments in all of literature. "Boston Globe" A brilliant, original approach to literature, a key to Calvino's own work and a thoroughly delightful and illuminating commentary on some of the world's greatest writing. "San Francisco Chronicle" At the time of his death, Italo Calvino was at work on six lectures setting forth the qualities in writing he most valued, and which he believed would define literature in the century to come. Here, in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, are the five lectures he completed, forming not only a stirring defense of literature, but also an indispensable guide to the writings of Calvino himself. He devotes one memo each to the concepts of lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity, drawing examples from his vast knowledge of myth, folklore, and works both ancient and modern. Readers will be astonished by the prescience of these lectures, which have only gained in relevance as Calvino's next millennium has dawned.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Writing, as a true art (a "techne" in Aristotle's time), has not always been a universally accepted idea. Even Plato regarded writing as nothing more than a neat little trick that helps a person remember what they already know (In his work "Phaedrus," I do believe). Obviously, times have changed since then, and the difficulties of the written word--the imperfections that plague the inherently flawed medium--are what drive it and the writer to imitate life in a manner that only art

can. It is odd, then, that Calvino starts his book off with a single paragraph introduction, stating near the end of it that his "confidence in the future of literature consists in the knowledge that there are things that only literature can give us, by means specific to it." The segregation of different art forms is mainly decided by the particular, unique function that it serves. Calvino's introductory statement must be either the beginning of a defense of literature or a rallying of the literary troops to keep fighting the good fight. Of course, it's both. (Grace Paley said that all good stories have two stories in them. Regardless of whether or not that's true, she's much smarter than I am, and I'm going to believe her). I read this book after the constant gladhanding it was given by a friend of mine, and read it with such a close eye because I ended up doing one of those overly-academic rhetoric papers that are a right-of-passage for all English majors ("The Static and Evolutionary Qualities of Literary Theory from Aristotle to Calvino" just drips with snobbery).

This book is a collection of talks on writing Calvino was preparing as a series of documents specifying some important keys of literature that he felt needed to be recorded as crucial elements of literary tradition. Indeed, in his essay "Visibility," Calvino brings up his concern for the future of imagination and literature in a world so full of prefabricated imagery, where images are provided rather than solicited. While his initial impulse was to write six lectures, he evidently reported at one point of his process that he had ideas for eight, but in the end he only completed five. In her introduction, Esther Calvino clarifies that she decided to keep the title true to Italo's original intention and publish the series under the original title, despite the missing sixth. In the lectures themselves, Calvino provides the kind of insight and fascination with the making of literature that fuels so many of his best books. Rather than come across as a manifesto of his own brilliance, as the premise may sound, Calvino spends a lot of time in admiration of the work of other writers, from classics like Ovid and Dante to colleagues and contemporaries, like Francis Perce and Douglas R. Hofstadter. The lectures are of course sometimes punctuated with personal details about his own writing processes, but I found them very inviting and revealing about the ideas he was trying to point out.

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