



The Road to San Giovanni

Italo Calvino , Tim Parks (Translator)

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A major testament by an essential 20th century writer composed of five strikingly elegant "memory exercises" about his life and work--now available in paperback. With visionary passion, the author traces pieces of his childhood and adolescence, his experiences during WWII, and more. "Storytelling at its best."--Chicago Tribune.

The Road to San Giovanni Details

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Aline Borges says

Na dúvida entre 2 e 3, fico com a maior nota.

Confesso que terminei o livro com um certo dissabor. Não fosse a escrita excelente do Calvino e o poder de imergir o leitor até nas mais estranhas divagações (quantas vezes vemos uma problematização sobre o ato de levar o lixo pra fora?) meu descontentamento com o livro seria maior.

A proposta me parece interessante, uma coletânea de memórias e reflexões do autor perdidas ao longo do tempo e reagrupadas na obra. Tenho certo apreço por textos com o objetivo de apenas trazer um olhar reflexivo do nosso cotidiano, mas custo acreditar que um leitor não tão simpatizante acharia a leitura agradável. Ainda mais levando em conta o estilo do Calvino, com longas sentenças e passagens que não visam concluir um pensamento, mas apenas trazer o leitor para sua livre divagação.

Aliás, aqui preciso esclarecer que não o faço como uma crítica negativa ao autor em si, pelo contrário, as duas outras obras que tive a oportunidade de ler foram viagens maravilhosas, e incluo uma delas (Se Um Viajante Numa Noite de Inverno) como uma das melhores que já li.

Talvez parte da culpa no descontentamento seja minha pela expectativa que trouxe ao começar o livro, uma vez que meu contato anterior com as outras obras foi excelente, mas não consigo deixar de lado a sensação inócua que fiquei ao terminar de ler. Tirando algumas belas passagens, resta pouco de marcante ou para uma verdadeira reflexão.

A leitura (na minha mais humilde opinião) vale para o leitor que quer apenas apreciar a escrita do Calvino, mas não recomendo como primeiro contato, visto que a experiência pode ser um tanto maçante e afastar os leitores de um autor tão incrível.

Jay says

“The Road to San Giovanni” consists of five “memory exercises”. I found each of these chapters were written in a very different manner and strangely arranged in a sequence from the most sentimental to the most analytic. In that, I mean that the first three exercises were descriptions of things that had happened in the author’s life, and the last two are more commentary based on reflection and analysis. The end-posts here are mostly written fragments. The first exercise, the title story, is long descriptions, often long sentences with thoughts running together, describing the author’s childhood taking trips up a mountainside to the family garden. There’s a lot of description here, but it is run together so as to make reading a chore. It’s as if the author wanted to save his thoughts as rapidly as possible but using the most poetic wording he could. The second exercise describes the author’s cinema experiences as a child and young man. Here the writing is more like a typical short story, and there’s more than just description – some analysis is done concerning things like the impact of poorly dubbing English pictures had on later Italian movies. The third exercise concerns remembering a battle in WWII, where the author seems to remember more about what happened after some reflection. The fourth piece is about garbage cans and the act of disposing household garbage. Calvino dives into this one with gusto, and compares the French and Italian methods of garbage disposal, and how society seems to like similar, “agreeable” garbage containers. A fun analysis, but in the end it seems to be just an exercise when it could have been more. The last bit, called From the Opaque, is more indescribable. It purports to be about seeing at different levels, but other analogies, like a theater and a landscape, are drawn into the writing. This is written as snippets of what I’d call pseudo-logic, unpunctuated paragraphs of writing that sounds like it was lifted from a philosophical essay. This was really overwhelming to deal with since there didn’t seem to be a purpose beyond making the snippets of text to look philosophical and academic. If that’s what he was going for, he got it.

Overall, I found this a mixed bag. In general I liked Calvino's writing. I did not enjoy the first or last exercises, although at least I found the first to be quite poetic and revealing. The middle three bits were most interesting, and closest to publishable essays. I found myself agreeing with the reasoning of the essay on garbage, and finding it quite interesting. Although I have not read other Calvino books, I suspect this is not a good introduction.

Lazarus P Badpenny Esq says

With customary sensuality, his assured prose attentive to the attendant aromas, the tastes and textures of events, Calvino excavates the darkened corners of his personal history: the pre-dawn journeys into the landscapes of his childhood accompanying his father to their family smallholding, afternoons spent in gloomy cinemas, night-shrouded raids with his fellow partisans during wartime.

Kathleen Fowler says

According to the foreword written by Calvino's widow, in the spring of 1985 which was to be the year of his death, Calvino was optimistically planning to write another 12-15 books. One of these was to be called *Passaggi Obbligati* and was to be comprised of a series of memory exercises. Those that had already been completed at the time of his death are here presented under the title of the first, "The Road to San Giovanni," which also happens to be one of the most personal and accessible of the pieces. The subject matter of these essays ranges from memories of childhood, reminiscences of youthful exploits with the partisans during WWII, a tribute to the American films of the 1930s, and even a humorous contemplation of the social contract symbolized by the lowly trashcan, and how unburdening oneself of garbage may even be an apt metaphor for the act of writing. Only one of these essays left me cold, "From the Opaque," which was so opaque that I really have no idea what the author was attempting to communicate.

Gaurav says

The Road to San Giovanni

'The Road to San Giovanni' is a collection of five autobiographical essays- though it would be appropriate to call them 'memory deliberations' instead- which presents an affecting self-portrait and offers indirect insights into how Calvino conjured up his imaginary worlds- worlds which are surreal, mystical but so enthralling that they look real- whose language combines exactitude, freedom and lightness to form different voice altogether.

Calvino starts with his relationship- which was not usual as his father was curious about the minute examination of flora, he had passion for studying and acclimatizing exotic plants, while Calvino used to weave his own world of fantasy-with father.

"The way my father saw things, it was from here up that the world began, while the other part of the world below the house was a mere appendix, necessary sometimes when there were things to be, but alien and insignificant, to be crossed in great strides, as though in flight, without looking to right or left."

Every other day Calvino walked to the farm with his father. Neither spoke, for the minds of both were elsewhere; the one already on the land, the other lost in the city. It was a struggle Calvino never really resolved:

"Every morning of my life is still the morning when it's my turn to go with Father to San Giovanni."

Second essay- A cinema goer's autobiography- is probably the best of all, Calvino meditates about his teens, surreptitiously attending movies. He often arrives late and leaves early.

Calvino talks about influence of cinema on his life- Calvino created a unique world of his own in cinema which provided him a realm of imagination, he conjured up a space of new dimensions where he could relate the world in consciousness to something tangible.

"A different world from the one around me, but my feeling was that only what I saw on the screen possessed the properties required of a world, the fullness, the necessity, the coherence, while away from the screen were only heterogeneous elements lumped together at random, the materials of a life, mine, which seemed to me utterly formless."

The narrative gaps and transpositions which result inspire the distinctive style of his own works.

Calvino- the soldier, fighting with the Italian partisans, has a comparable experience when he attempts to reconstruct a battle he had thought was a victory but which had in actuality been a defeat. To do so he uses signs to precisely invert the narrative. This third essay has a tragicomic tone, like the films of Calvino's admired contemporary, Federico Fellini whose influence can be seen in the works of Calvino as most of the works of Calvino are surreal, mystical, like a lucid dream.

"The imagined memory is actually a real memory from that time because I am recovering things I first imagined back then. It wasn't the moment of Cardu's death I saw, but afterwards, when our men had already left the village and one of the bersaglieri turns over a body on the ground and sees the reddish-brown moustache and the big chest torn open and says, 'Hey look who's dead.' and then everybody gathers round this dead man who instead of being the best of theirs had become the best of ours, Cardu who ever since he had left them had been in their thoughts, their conversation, their fears, their myths."

The fourth essay is characterized by humor about 'La Poubelle'- the dustbin, Calvino talks about existential purpose of agreement- 'La Poubelle Agree' which, according to him, asserts existence of a man.

"Thus daily representation of descent below ground, this domestic and municipal rubbish funeral, is meant first and foremost to put off my personal funeral, to postpone it if only for a little while, to confirm that for

one more day I have been a producer of detritus and not detritus myself."

The final essay describes possibility of a reconciliation specifically through the writer's relation to creative landscape. 'From the Opaque' in which the two extremes- opaque and the sunny- are deliberated. Calvino accepts that he is actually situated 'in the depths of the opaque' **however he is attracted to 'sunny' and that, in writing, he is 'reconstructing the map of a sunniness that is only an unverifiable postulate for computation of the memory, the geometrical location of the ego.**

Italo Calvino

David Macpherson says

The first two "memory exercises" were amazing. The first is a piece of his father walking to and from the fields. The second essay was about watching American films as a kid in Fascist Italy. Wonderful. The third piece, about not really remembering a battle during WW2 was good. The last two were so dull I don't even remember them. Weigh it all out, and it is worth a good deal for the good parts

Graziano says

Io non riconoscevo ne' una pianta ne' un uccello. Per me le cose erano mute. Le parole fluivano fluivano nella mia testa non ancorate a oggetti, ma ad emozioni fantasie presagi. E bastava un brandello di giornale calpestato che mi finiva tra i piedi ed ero assorto a bere la scrittura che ne sortiva mozza e inconfessabile - nomi di teatri, attrici, vanita' - e gia' la mia mente aveva preso il galoppo, la catena delle immagini non si sarebbe fermata per ore e ore mentre continuavo a seguire in silenzio mio padre, che additava certe foglie di la' da un muro e diceva: "Ypotoglaxia ... (18-9)

Ma cio' che muoveva mio padre ogni mattina su per la strada di San Giovanni - e me giu' per la mia via - piu' che dovere di proprietario operoso, disinteresse d'innovatore di metodi agricoli, - e per me, piu' che le definizioni di doveri che via via mi sarei imposto -, era passione feroce, dolore a esistere - cosa se non questo poteva spingere lui a arrampicarsi per i gerbidi e i boschi e me a addentrarmi in un labirinto di muri e carta scritta? - confronto disperato con cio' che resta fuori di noi, spreco di se' opposto allo spreco generale del mondo. (22)

Cos'era stato dunque allora il cinema, in questo contesto, per me? Direi: la distanza. Rispondeva a un bisogno di distanza, di dilazione dei confini del reale, di veder aprirsi intorno delle dimensioni incommensurabili, astratte come entita' geometriche, ma anche concrete, assolutamente piene di facce e situazioni e ambienti, che col mondo dell'esperienza diretta stabilivano una loro rete (astratta) di rapporti. (52)

Continuo a scrutare nel fondovalle della memoria. E la mia paura di adesso e' che appena si profila un ricordo, subito prenda una luce sbagliata, di maniera, sentimentale come sempre la guerra e la giovinezza, diventi un pezzo di racconto con lo stile di allora, che non puo' dirci come erano davvero le cose ma solo come credevamo di vederle e di dirle. (70-1)

... dal fondo dell'opaco io scrivo, ricostruendo la mappa d'un aprico (a solatio) che e' solo un inverificabile assioma per i calcoli della memoria, il luogo geometrico dell'io, di un me stesso di cui il me stesso ha bisogno per sapersi me stesso, l'io che serve solo perche' il mondo riceva continuamente notizie dell'esistenza del mondo, un congegno di cui il mondo dispone per sapere se c'e'. (116)

Tuna Turan says

Kitapta yazar?n be? farkl? konuda yazm?? oldu?u metinler derlenmi?. Kendisiyle yüzle?me notlar? olarak da adland?rabiliriz. Konu itibariyle beni çok etkilemedi?i için kitab?n içine bir türlü giremedim. Baz? kitaplar? okuman?n gerçekten zaman? oldu?unu dü?ünüyorum.

‘Yaln?zca seyircisi oldu?unu dü?ündü?ünüz film, kendi ya?am?m?z?n öyküsüdür.’

Andrea Peretta says

Si tratta di un romanzo autobiografico in cui l'autore utilizza la metafora della "strada" per descrivere il complicato rapporto con suo padre. La figura del padre e' rappresentata dalla strada che conduce verso le campagne di Baragallo nei pressi di San Giovanni (IM); mentre la figura del figlio é la "strada" che porta alla città e ai luoghi della cultura. Il giovane Calvino si allontana dalle aspettative del padre poiché non riesce a cogliere la sua dedizione all'agricoltura e alla botanica. Al termine di una faticosa giornata trascorsa nei campi, lungo la via del ritorno a casa, padre e figlio restano a lungo in silenzio non avendo aspirazioni ed interessi comuni da condividere. Il punto cardine del romanzo l'ho ritrovato in questa riflessione dell'autore: "presto s'era capito da una parte e dall'altra che non avremmo imparato niente e l'idea di educarci all'agricoltura era stata tacitamente dimessa o rimandata ad un'età di maggiore saggezza, come se ci fosse concesso un supplemento di infanzia". In età adulta Calvino riconosce che la letteratura gli ha "restituito il significato di tutto", torna sui luoghi della fanciullezza e apprezza gli insegnamenti del padre. Questo romanzo ci insegna a far memoria delle nostre radici; personalmente, ho trovato un po' faticoso comprendere le lunghe pause di introspezione personale dell'autore. Mi sento di consigliare questa lettura a chi come me prova nostalgia per le "strade" dell'infanzia.

Emre says

Görüyorsunuz, nas?l ayr?l?yordu yollar?m?z, babam?nki ve benimki. Ama ben de çok farkl? de?ildim: Arad???m yol, t?pk? onunki gibi, bir ba?ka yabanc?l???n, insan üstdünyas?n?n (ya da cehenneminin) derinlerinden kaz?p aç??a ç?kard???m yol de?ilse neydi? Yar? karanl?k avlu giri?lerinde (bir kad?n gölgesi, kimi zaman yok oluverirdi orada) gözlerimle arad???m ?ey, bütün söz ve ?ekillerin gerçe?e, somuta, bir yank?n?n yank?s?n?n yank?s? olmaktan ç?k?p kendi deneyimime dönü?tü?ü bir dünyaya aç?lan aral?k kap?, bak???mla ku?ataca??m sinema perdesi, çevirece?im sayfa de?ilse neydi? Sf:18

San Giovanni'ye yakla?t?kça babam gene gerginle?irdi; bu, kendisinin hissetti?i yegane yere bir an önce ula?ma arzusunun son bir d??avurumu de?ildi yaln?zca, ayn? zamanda sanki oradan onca saat uzakta olman?n pi?manl???, o saatlerde bir ?eylerin mutlaka yitirilm?i ya da bozulmu? oldu?u kan?s?, ya?am?nda San Giovanni olmayan her ?eyi bir an önce silme iste?iydi; bir de, San Giovanni dünyan?n tamam? de?il, dünyan?n yaln?zca bir kö?esi, kalan her ?eyin ku?att??? bir kö?esi oldu?undan, bu yerin onun için her zaman bir umutsuzluk anlam?na gelece?i duygusu. Sf:27

Öyleyse o zamanlar sinema, bu ba?lamda, ne anlama gelmi?ti benim için? Söyleyeyim: uzaklık. Bir uzaklık gereksinmesine, gerçekli?in s?n?rlar?n? yayma, çevremde ölçüye gelmez, geometrik kendilikler gibi soyut boyutlar?n -ama ayn? zamanda somut, kesinlikle yüzler, durumlar ve ortamlarda dolu, do?rudan deneyimin dünyas?yla kendi (soyut) ili?kiler a??n? kuran boyutlar?n- aç?ld???n? görme gereksinmesine kar??lık geliyordu. Sf:46

?u k?sa ömrümüzde, her ?ey orada, beyazperdede öylece durur, kayg? verici derecede var???n? duyurur; ilk sevgi imgeleri ve ölüm uyar?lar? her dü?te bize ula??r; dünyanın?n sonu bizimle ba?lam??t?r ve sona erecek gibi de?ildir; yaln?zca seyircisi oldu?unu dü?ündü?ümüz film, kendi ya?am?m?z?n öyküsüdür. Sf:53

selcuk says

Kitap, Calvino'nun farklı zamanlarda çe?itli vesilelerle yazd??? be? yaz?dan olu?uyor. Kendi hayat?na dair gözlemlerinden olu?an bu yaz?larda Calvino; babas?yla ili?kisinden, sinema tutkusundan, sava?tan, güne?ten ve hatta çöp atma ritüelinden bahsediyor. Öyle ki çöp atmakla ilgili ba?lay?p ya?am üzerine felsefik dü?ünceler olu?turdu?u bölüm çok güzeldi. Bir de babas?yla yürüdü?ü San Giovanni yolu bana çok tan?d?k geldi. Calvino'yu seviyorsan?z elbette okuyun ama çok da acele etmenize gerek yok.

Laura says

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TR Invisible Cities

Bina says

I spent the better half of last weekend on the beach reading this book, which was left behind in the house where I was staying. It consists of a series of provocative vignettes that approach memoir, or "memory exercises" as Calvino called them. I re-read many of the masterful sentences in this collection, impressed (obsessed, even) with the powerful ideas underlying it.

Calvino plays with the very idea of memoir, and of memory itself.

When he recalls a battle, he begins with an extended metaphor of memories as sediment buried under a riverbed. He acknowledges the problems inherent in unearthing them: To explain his memories of war would be to "bury them again under the sedimentary crust of hindsight, the kind of reflections that put things in order and explain everything according to the logic of past history."

(This seems the defining problem of collective memory, or history, as professors like to call it.)

Calvino also struggles to represent figures from his past. In the title exercise, he describes his father, who espoused vast botanical knowledge. Instead of the taxonomical names his father taught him, Calvino recalls fantastical names for the plants... and then reveals his dilemma about recounting details that he never paid attention to in the first place.

(The problem of personal memory: What do we tell ourselves that we remember? What do we tell ourselves to remember?)

Another piece recalls his boyhood days at the cinema and how they transformed under fascist rule. It is a beautiful, nostalgic essay. For me, it's foremost a reflection on how regimes that limit the individual's experience with art can also oppress the imaginative space. It reminds us that cinema plays a political role, in helping us to transcend reality, to believe in what lies beyond the physical boundaries of a tangible world.

The artistry of his prose is apparent almost everywhere. [I am tempted to dwell on his awesome use of free modifiers, what Virginia Tufte would call branching sentences, but I don't want to be a grammar Nazi; Calvino was distinctly anti-Fascist.] How much of this is owed to the art of the translator, I can't be sure. Even Calvino's father used a different one of his many tongues depending on the topic of conversation. He required a certain language to express humor (français, mais oui) or banality (English, of course.) Is it the translator Tim Parks, for example, who uses the word callow multiple times in one book -- and what's the word for this in Italian?

On Fellini, Calvino writes this -- which I think should be on the great filmmaker's gravestone if it isn't already: "That is why Fellini manages to disturb us to the core: because he forces us to admit that what we would most like to distance ourselves from is what is intrinsically close to us."

My favorite piece, though, is his 30something page-long rumination on garbage bins. It overflows with absurd free association. For Calvino, the act of emptying dustbins shows that the personal is political; it embodies our participation in a system and our acceptance of authority for reasons of convenience. (A sort of social contract theory centered on garbage, if you will...)

Trash is also existentially relevant ("we are what we don't throw away"). And for Calvino, no surprise, it's Marxist: What we do along the chain of trash distribution defines our social and economic roles, with the vividness of an orange peel or a scribbled-out page.

After reading that one, I fell asleep by the water, dreaming of a time when Calvino lived, so that we might spend an afternoon together not remembering. Like an abstract painting, the final vignette places you in a realm of possibility for time and space. It is, like most of his work, worth waking up for.

Fatima says

