

# Calvino's Literature Values in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

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**Abstract**—In his work *Six Memos for the Next millennium*, Calvino explains the essence of literature from five aspects closely related to his aesthetic qualities, that is, “Lightness”, “Quickness”, “Exactitude”, “Visibility” and “Multiplicity”, which can be understood as follows: “Lightness” is the premise and “Exactitude” and “Visibility” are realized by “Quickness”, with “Multiplicity” as the final pursuit of literary connotation and aesthetic value. Based on his consideration on literature, the world and their relationship, his aesthetic view is reflected in the basic value and aesthetic connotation that literary creation should be adhering to, which shows distinct personal characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Calvino, aesthetic features, Six Memos for the Next millennium*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Italo Calvino, as an influential contemporary Italian writer, advocates intellectual writing and tries to integrate science, philosophy and politics into literary creation, thus forming different writing styles and topics and actively exploring alternative directions for future literary creation and forming a unique aesthetic view of novels. In his work *Six Memos for the Next millennium*, he systematically elaborates his literary ideas in aesthetics by proposing “Lightness”, “Quickness”, “Exactitude”, “Visibility” and “Multiplicity”, which is regarded as the best guide for followers to fully understand Calvino and his creation aesthetics.

## II. THE AESTHETIC QUALITIES OF CALVINO

“Lightness” aims to elaborate the relatively serious topics in a light way to let the reader to understand the heaviness of topics in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. “Lightness” is Calvino's way of perceiving the world, as well as his criterion of literary creation. It is a writing ideal that the author intends to realize after careful consideration — to create lightness and beauty by means of poetic texts with imagination and metaphor. In the process of creation, the author tries his best to remove the weight of the structure and language of the novel, so that readers can get enlightenment from the relaxing language. However, the expression of “Lightness” should not reduce the rich connotation of the works. Through the author's easy and clever expression, readers should clearly feel the bearing and helplessness of

reality. Lightness is the way for Calvino to reduce weight. In writing his novels, Calvino puts more emphasis on lightness. Whenever he needs to depict a heavy scene, he refuses to put more weight on it and seeks for a light image to pull away the weight. In his novel *Invisible Cities*, he describes many light and beautiful cities. However, at the end of the novel, he exposes the heaviness of human beings and the absurd social reality in a light and elegant way, which he is able to express his true views more elegantly.

The beauty of Calvino's quickness lies in the pursuit of mental speed. Calvino believes that in literary creation, writers always pay attention to speed, so the plot of the story will develop faster, giving readers a kind of reading pleasure. Paying attention to speed in writing can make the article refined, with a distinct sense of strength and rhythm. At the same time, Calvino prefers short stories because he believes that it can better embody the density advocated by the author and ultimately leave the essence in the works. He emphasizes that the author can approach the infinity with the most transparent, clear and light style, leaving infinite imagination space for readers, and arouses readers' spiritual resonance with short, smooth, constantly moving and rapidly changing stories. However, the emphasis on “Quickness” is not negation of slowness, because they are dialectical. When the chapter comes to an end, he concludes with the story of Chuang tzu's drawing:

Among Chuang-tzu's many skills, he was an expert draftsman. The king asked him to draw a crab, Chuang-tzu replied that he needed five years, a country house, and twelve servants. Five years later the drawing was still not begun. “I need another five years,” said Chuang-tzu. The king granted them. At the end of these ten years, Chuang-tzu took up his brush and, in an instant, with a single stroke, he drew a crab the most perfect crab ever seen. (Italo Calvino, 1995:54).

To be quick, this aesthetic concept must be achieved by concise language, compact structure, fast visual effects, and keeping pace with the clever brain as a whole. For literary exactitude, Calvino believes it includes design, images and language. In Calvino's view, it should be regarded as a standard of writing, known as the “crystal structure”. It is to express the complex world in precise and stable language, which is his unique way of thinking in writing, and is in line with his aesthetic concept of “Exactitude”.

“my research for exactitude was branching out in two directions: on

the one side, the reduction of secondary events to abstract patterns

according to which one can carry out operations and demonstrate theorems;

and on the other, the effort made by words to present the tangible aspect

of things as precisely as possible. (Italo Calvino, 1995:74).

Language endows literature with possibilities but also with limitations. In Calvino's view, exactitude is not easy to achieve. Because natural language always contains much more than formal language does, which affects the essence of information. And in the expression of some characteristics of the world around us, we often have situations that cannot be described by the language, which shows clearly the powerlessness of language. Compared with the richness of the world, language is far from enough, and literary creation can only approach the exactitude with infinite efforts.

Calvino attaches great importance to the visual reproduction of literary works. He hopes that readers can enjoy the plot that the writer wants to present through words, which requires the writer to give full play to his imagination, so that every character becomes clearer, and every vivid image brings out its potential. In order to achieve vividness, writers need to use literary fantasy to arouse readers' interests in participation, which requires writers not only to have a direct grasp of the real world, but also to combine illusion with perceptual experience, so as to finally reproduce the story in front of readers. “Visibility” is the requirement of imagination and pictorial presentation in literary creation. Calvino declared that imagination is a “high imagination”, which has the power to “impose yourself on our faculties and our wills, stealing us from the outer world and carrying us off into an inner one” (Italo Calvino, 1995:82). A writer without imagination can only produce mediocre works and even endanger the development of literature. Calvino believes that there are two approaches to imagination: one is to recycle an image that has been used and change its meaning in a new context. The second is to start from scratch.

Calvino believes that writing can combine imagination with reality. “All ‘realities’ and ‘fantasies’ can take on form only by means of writing,” “in which outwardness and innerwardness”, appear “composed of the same verbal material” (Italo Calvino, 1995:99). The combination of uncertainty and fluidity brings infinite possibilities for literary interpretation. What Calvino wanted to write was a work of encyclopedia, a result of his complicated epistemology and his reverence for reason and science. He uses a wide range of languages and words to describe a great deal of details, so that the material in his hands can be spread and expanded, and his works can cover the various topics and become a real encyclopedia. He believed that modern novels should be like encyclopedias, providing readers with knowledge and containing various characters and their

relationships. In essence, the world is a vast network of relationships, and because of their complexity, it is necessary to accurately describe these relationships, cover all of them and ensure the richness of the content of the work.

Calvino clearly pointed out that the foremost quality that literature should embrace is “the taste for mental orderliness and exactitude, the intelligence of poetry, but at the same time that of science and of philosophy”. (Italo Calvino, 1995:118) The content of literature is a huge collection of science, philosophy, physics, geology, biology, agriculture, medicine, chemistry and other multiple categories of knowledge. As he said: “the grand challenge for literature is to be capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the various codes”, into “a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world.” (Italo Calvino, 1995:112) The complex, changing and diversified works can reflect the unity of the author's personality, knowledge and connotation and meet the expectations of more readers.

### III. CALVINO'S AESTHETIC ORIGINS

Italo Calvino was born in 1923 in a small town in Cuba. His father was an excellent gardener while his mother is a botanist. Calvino has been attached to nature since childhood. His dwelling place was an experimental station for the cultivation of flowers as well as a research center for tropical plants, so he was familiar with a lot of natural science, and knew many kinds of strange flowers and plants. Nature inspired him, and his early works remained fairytale.

At the same time, his reading experience as a child laid the foundation for his later writing. Although Calvino could not read at that time, it did not hinder him in understanding of books and periodicals, and he was immersed in the illustrations and cartoons of books and periodicals. He can indulge his imagination in colorful pictures, which had a profound impact on him and promoted the development of his imagination and creativity.

Calvino's reading range includes but is not limited to philosophy, physics, chemistry, mathematics. In addition, he is also familiar with Europe's tradition of ideology and culture, especially the one contained in those classic philosophical works, so the materials being presented in his works are very full and complete, which also laid a foundation for his “multiplicity” quality. He includes philosophical ideas in his literary creation, which made his works more profound and charming, and aroused us to think about his works. Calvino's last novel *Palomar* reflects his speculation on philosophy and cosmology, as well as his aesthetic views such as “Lightness” and “Exactitude”.

Calvino, who has always declared himself a “Parisian Recluse,” wanted to introduce the world in its purest sense. In 1944, he joined the Italian Communist Party and the anti-fascist guerrillas, which had a great impact on his literary creation. His novels *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947) and *La nuvola di smog* (1965) are his representative works of realistic themes. Although Calvino lived in an era when Italian fascist organizations were taking over, he was not under the control of fascist ideology. Influenced by his

parents, who believed in freedom and reflection, he was not heavily influenced by religious worship, and his departure from the Italian communist party in 1957 can be explained this way. His aesthetic concept of "Lightness" is his yearning for freedom under the pressure of life.

He insists on independent thinking in forming unique aesthetic experience and creating the value of literature with rich imagination. Calvino believes that in the infinite world of literature, there are always many new or old methods, and genres and forms worth exploring, which can change our existing image of the world. As a result, Calvino's novels always leave readers with a sense of adventure. In his creation, Calvino fully displays his profound thinking on the world. His works are exquisitely conceived, deeply thought, diverse and distinctive. Most of his early works belongs to realism, incorporating his personal experience, social reality and his own unique imagination into them to show the reality of life in rich imagination.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Calvino insisted on his world view and values, and his unique aesthetic experience. In the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, he proposed five aesthetic views, namely "Lightness", "Quickness", "Exactitude", "Visibility" and "Multiplicity", which provided a new direction for the development of literature. Calvino maintains the freedom of literature creation all through his life, which embodies the unique value of literature. He set up his maverick image with his value on freedom and openness.

His aesthetic outlook has exerted an important influence on world literature. "Lightness" is the premise while "Exactitude" and "Visibility" are realized by "Quickness", with "Multiplicity" as the final literary connotation and aesthetic quality. Based on his consideration on literature, the world and their relationship, his aesthetic view is clearly reflected in the basic value and aesthetic connotation that literary creation should be adhering to, which has distinct personal characteristics. His profound thinking on history helped him a lot in pointing out the direction for the development of literature in the new millennium with.

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