to surprise the lady, and indeed everything seemed somehow to have been foreseen by her, Private Tomagra could only make sure that no further doubts were possible; and finally the urgency of his madness managed also to grasp its mute object: her.

When Tomagra stood up and, beneath him, the widow remained with her clear, stern gaze (she had blue eyes), with her hat and veil still squarely on her head, and the train never stopped its shrill whistling through the fields, and outside those endless rows of grapevines went on, and the rain that throughout the journey had tirelessly streaked the panes now resumed with new violence, he had again a brief spurt of fear, thinking how he, Private Tomagra, had been so daring.

THE ADVENTURE OF A BATHER

WHILE ENJOYING a swim at the beach at ———, Signora Isotta Barbarino had an unfortunate mishap. She was swimming far out in the water, and when it seemed time to go back in and she turned toward the shore, she realized that an irreparable event had occurred. She had lost her bathing suit.

She couldn't tell whether it had slipped off just then, or whether she had already been swimming without it for some time, but of the new two-piece suit she had been wearing, only the halter was left. At some twist of her hip, some buttons must have popped, and the bottom part, reduced to a shapeless rag, had slipped down her leg. Perhaps it was still sinking a few feet below her; she tried dropping down underwater to look for it, but she immediately lost her breath, and only vague green shadows flashed before her eyes.

Stifling the anxiety rising inside her, she tried to think in a calm, orderly fashion. It was noon; there were people around in the sea, in kayaks and in rowboats, or swimming. She didn't know anyone; she had arrived the day before with her husband, who had had to go back to the city at once. Now there was no other course, the signora thought (and she was the first to be surprised at her clear, serene reasoning), but to

find among these people a beach attendant's boat, which there had to be, or the boat of some other person who inspired trust, hail it, or, rather, approach it, and manage to ask for both help and tact.

This is what Signora Isotta was thinking as she kept afloat, huddled almost into a ball, pawing the water, not daring to look around. Only her head emerged and, unconsciously, she lowered her face toward the surface, not to delve into its secrecy, now held inviolable, but like someone rubbing eyelids and temples against the sheet or the pillow to stem tears provoked by some night-thought. And it was a genuine pressure of tears that she felt at the corners of her eyes, and perhaps that instinctive movement of her head was really meant to dry those tears in the sea: this is how distraught she was, this is what a gap there was in her between reason and feeling. She wasn't calm, then: she was desperate. Inside that motionless sea, wrinkled only at long intervals by the barely indicated hump of a wave, she also kept herself motionless, no longer with slow strokes, but only by a pleading movement of the hands, half in the water; and the most alarming sign of her condition, though perhaps not even she realized it, was this usury of strength she was observing, as if she had a very long and exhausting time ahead of her.

She had put on her two-piece suit that morning for the first time; and at the beach, in the midst of all those strangers, she realized it made her feel a bit ill at ease. But the moment she was in the water, she had felt content, freer in her movements, with a greater desire to swim. She liked to take long swims, well away from the shore, but her pleasure was not an athlete's, for she was actually rather plump and lazy; what meant most to her was the intimacy with the water, feeling herself a part of that peaceful sea. Her new suit gave her that

very impression; indeed, the first thing she had thought as she swam was: It's like being naked. The only irksome thing was the recollection of that crowded beach. It was not unreasonable that her future beach acquaintances would perhaps form an idea of her that they would have to some extent to modify later: not so much an opinion about her behavior, since at the seaside all the women dressed like this, but a belief, for example, that she was athletic, or fashionable, whereas she was really a very simple, domestic person. It was perhaps because she was already feeling this sensation of herself as different from usual that she had noticed nothing when the mishap took place. Now that uneasiness she had felt on the beach, and that novelty of the water on her bare skin, and her vague concern at having to return among the other bathers: all had been enlarged and engulfed by her new and far more serious dismay.

What she would have preferred never to look at was the beach. And she looked at it. Bells were ringing noon; and on the beach the great umbrellas with black and yellow concentric circles were casting black shadows in which the bodies became flat, and the teeming of the bathers spilled into the sea; and none of the boats was on the shore now, and as soon as one returned it was seized even before it could touch bottom; and the black rim of the blue expanse was disturbed by constant explosions of white splashing, especially behind the ropes, where the horde of children was roiling; and at every bland wave a shouting arose, its notes immediately swallowed up by the blast. Just off that beach, she was naked.

Nobody would have suspected it, seeing only her head rising from the water, and occasionally her arms and her bosom, as she swam cautiously, never lifting her body to the surface. She could, then, carry out her search for help without

exposing herself too much. And to check how much of her could be glimpsed by alien eyes, Signora Isotta now and then stopped and tried to look at herself, floating almost vertically. With anxiety she saw the sun's beams sway in the water in limpid, underwater glints, and illuminate drifting seaweed and rapid schools of little striped fish, on the bottom the corrugated sand, and on top, her body. In vain, twisting it with clenched legs, she tried to hide it from her own gaze: the skin of the pale belly gleamed revealingly, between the tan of the bosom and the thighs, and neither the motion of a wave nor the half-sunken drift of seaweed could merge the darkness and the pallor of her abdomen. The signora resumed swimming in that mongrel way of hers, keeping her body as low as she could, but, never stopping, she would turn to look over her shoulder, out of the corner of her eye: at every stroke, all the white breadth of her person appeared in the light of day, in its most identifiable and secret forms. She did everything possible to change the style and direction of her swimming—she turned in the water, she observed herself at every angle and in every light, she writhed upon herself—and always this offensive, naked body pursued her. It was a flight from her own body that she was attempting, as if from another person whom she, Signora Isotta, was unable to save at a difficult juncture, and could only abandon to her fate. Yet this body, so rich and so impossible to conceal, had indeed been a glory of hers, a source of self-satisfaction; only a contradictory chain of circumstances, apparently sensible, could make it now a cause for shame. Or perhaps not; perhaps her life always consisted only of the clothed lady she had been all of her days, and her nakedness hardly belonged to her, was a rash state of nature revealed only every now and then, arousing wonder in human beings, foremost in her. Now

Signora Isotta recalled that even when she was alone or in private with her husband she had always surrounded her being naked with an air of complicity, of irony, part embarrassed and part feline, as if she were temporarily putting on joyous but outrageous disguises, for a kind of secret carnival between husband and wife. She had become accustomed with some reluctance to owning a body, after the first disappointed, romantic years, and she had taken it on like someone who learns he can command a long-yearned-for property. Now the awareness of this right of hers disappeared again among the old fears, as that yelling beach loomed ahead.

When noon had passed, among the bathers scattered through the sea a reflux toward the shore began; it was the hour of lunch at the *pensioni*, of picnics outside the cabins, and also the hour in which the sand was to be enjoyed at its most searing, under the vertical sun. As the keels of boats and the pontoons of catamarans passed close to the signora, she studied the faces of the men on board, and sometimes she almost decided to move toward them; but each time a flash, a glance beneath their lashes, or the hint of an abrupt jerk of shoulder or elbow put her to flight, with false-casual strokes, whose calm masked an already burdensome weariness. The men in the boats, alone or in groups, boys all excited by the physical exercise, or gentlemen with shrewd demands or insistent gaze, on encountering her—lost in the sea, her prim face unable to conceal a shy, pleading anxiety, with a cap that gave her a slightly peevish, doll-like expression, and with her soft shoulders heaving around, uncertain—immediately emerged from their self-centered or bustling nirvana. Those who were not alone pointed her out to their companions with a snap of the chin or a wink; and those who were alone, braking with one oar, swerved their prow deliberately to cross her path. Her need

for trust was met by these rising barriers of slyness and *double-entendre*, a hedge of piercing pupils, of incisors bared in ambiguous laughter, of oars pausing, suddenly interrogatory, on the surface of the water; and the only thing she could do was flee. An occasional swimmer passed by, ducking his head blindly and puffing out spurts of water without raising his eyes; but the signora distrusted these men and evaded them. In fact, even though they passed at some distance from her, the swimmers, overcome by sudden fatigue, let themselves float and stretched their legs in a senseless splashing until she displayed her disdain by moving away. Thus this net of insistent hints was already spread around her, as if lying in ambush for her, as if each of those men had been daydreaming for years of a woman to whom what had happened to her would happen, and these men spent their summers at the sea hoping to be present at the right moment. There was no way out: the front of preordained male insinuations extended to all men, with no possible breach, and that savior she had stubbornly dreamed of as the most anonymous possible creature, almost angelic, a beach boy, a sailor, could not exist: she was now sure of that. The beach guard she did see pass by, certainly the only one who would be out in a boat to prevent possible accidents, given this calm sea, had such fleshy lips and such tense muscles that she would never have had the courage to entrust herself to his hands, even if—she actually thought in the emotion of the omment—it were to have him unlock a cabin or set up an umbrella.

In her disappointed fantasies, the people to whom she had hoped to turn had always been men. She hadn't thought of women, and yet with them everything should have been more simple; a kind of female solidarity would certainly have gone into action in this serious crisis, in this anxiety that only a

fellow woman could completely understand. But possibilities of communication with members of her own sex were rarer and more uncertain, unlike the perilous ease of encounters with men; and a distrust—reciprocal this time—blocked such communication. Most of the women went by in catamarans accompanied by men, and they were jealous, inaccessible, seeking the open sea, where the body, whose shame she suffered passively, would for them be the weapon of an aggressive and calculable strategy. Now and then a boat came out packed with chirping, overheated young girls, and the signora thought of the distance between the profound vulgarity of her suffering and their volatile heedlessness; she thought of how she would have to repeat her appeal to them, because they surely wouldn't understand her the first time; she thought of how their expression would change at the news, and she couldn't bring herself to call out to them. A blonde also went by in a catamaran, alone, tanned, full of smugness and egoism; surely she was going far out to take the sun completely naked, and it would never remotely occur to her that nakedness could be a misfortune or a torment. Signora Isotta realized then how alone a woman is, and how rare, among her own kind, is solidarity, spontaneous and good (destroyed perhaps by the pact made with man), which would have foreseen her appeals and come to her side at the merest hint in the moment of a secret misfortune no man would understand. Women would never save her; and her own man was away. She felt her strength abandoning her.

A little rust-colored buoy, till then fought over by a cluster of diving kids, was suddenly, at a general plunge, deserted. A seagull lighted on it, flapped its wings, then flew off as Signora Isotta grasped the buoy's rim. She would have drowned if she hadn't grabbed it in time. But not even death

was possible, not even that indefensible, excessive remedy was left her: when she was about to faint and couldn't manage to keep her chin up, drawn down toward the water, she saw a rapid, tensed alertness among the men on the surrounding boats, all ready to dive in and come to her rescue. They were there only to save her, to carry her naked and unconscious among the questions and stares of a curious public; and her risk of death would have achieved only the ridiculous and vulgar result that she was trying in vain to evade.

From the buoy, looking at the swimmers and rowers, who seemed to be gradually reabsorbed by the shore, she remembered the marvelous weariness of those returns, and the cries from one boat to another—"See you on shore!" or "I'll race you there!"—filled her with a boundless envy. But then, when she noticed a thin man in long pants, the only person still out in the water, standing erect in a motionless motorboat, looking at something or other in the water, immediately her longing to go ashore burrowed down, hid within her fear of being seen, her anxious effort to conceal herself behind the buoy.

She no longer remembered how long she had been there: already the beach crowd was thinning out, boats were again lined up on the sand, the umbrellas, furled one after the other, were now only a cemetery of short poles, the gulls skimmed the water, and on the motionless motorboat the thin man had disappeared and in his place a dumbfounded boy's curly head peered from the side; and over the sun a cloud passed, driven by a just-wakened wind against a cumulus collected above the hills. The signora thought of that hour as seen from the land, the polite afternoons, the destiny of unassuming correctness and respectful joys she had thought was guaranteed her and of the contemptible incongruity that

had occurred to contradict it, like the chastisement for a sin not committed. Not committed? But that abandonment of hers in bathing, that desire to swim all alone, that joy in her own body in the two-piece suit recklessly chosen: weren't these perhaps signs of a flight begun some time past, the defiance of an inclination to sin, the progressive stages of a mad race toward this state of nakedness that now appeared to her in all its wretched pallor? And the society of men, among whom she had thought to pass intact like a big butterfly, pretending a compliant, doll-like nonchalance, now revealed its basic cruelties, its doubly diabolical essence, the presence of an evil against which she had not sufficiently armed herself and, at once, the agent, the instrument of her sentence.

Clinging to the studs of the buoy with bloodless fingertips now with accentuated wrinkles from the prolonged stay in the water, the signora felt herself cast out by the whole world, and she couldn't understand why this nakedness that all people carry with themselves forever should banish her alone, as if she were the only one who was naked, the only being who could remain naked under heaven. And as she raised her eyes, she saw now the man and boy together on the motorboat, both standing, making signs to her as if to say she should remain there, that she shouldn't distress herself pointlessly. They were serious, the two of them, composed, unlike any of the other, earlier, ones, as if they were announcing a verdict to her: she was to resign herself, she alone had been chosen to pay for all. If, as they gesticulated, they tried to muster a kind of smile, it was without any hint of maliciousness: perhaps an invitation to accept her sentence good-naturedly, willingly.

Immediately the boat sped off, faster than one would have

thought possible, and the two paid attention to the motor and the course and didn't turn again toward the signora, who tried to smile back at them, as if to show that if she were accused only of being made in this way so dear and prized by all, if she had only to expiate our somewhat clumsy tenderness of forms, well, she would take the whole burden on herself, content.

The boat, with its mysterious movements, and her own tangled reasoning had kept her in a state of such timorous bewilderment that it was a while before she became aware of the cold. A sweet plumpness allowed Signora Isotta to take long and icy swims that amazed her husband and family, all thin people. But now she had been in the water too long, and the sun was covered, and her smooth skin rose in grainy bumps, and ice was slowly taking possession of her blood. There, in this shivering that ran through her, Isotta realized she was alive, and in danger of death, and innocent. Because the nakedness that had suddenly seemed to grow on her body was something she had always accepted not as a guilt but as her anxious innocence, as her secret fraternity with others as flesh and root of her being in the world. And they, or the contrary, the smart men in the boats and the fearless women under the umbrellas, who did not accept it, who in sinuated it was a crime, an accusation—only they were guilty She didn't want to pay for them; and she wriggled, clinging to the buoy, her teeth chattering, tears on her cheeks. . . Over there, from the harbor, the motorboat was returning even faster than before, and at the prow the boy was holding up a narrow green sail: a skirt!

When the boat stopped near her, and the thin man stretched out one hand to help her on board and covered his eyes with the other, smiling, the signora was already so far

from any hope of being saved, and the train of her thoughts had traveled so far afield, that for a moment she couldn't connect her senses with her reasoning and action, and she raised her hand toward the man's outstretched hand even before realizing that it wasn't her imagination, that the boat was really there, and had really come to her rescue. She understood, and all of a sudden everything became perfect and unfailing, and her thoughts, the cold, her fear were forgotten. From pale, she turned red as fire; and standing on the deck, she slipped on that garment while the man and the boy, facing the horizon, looked at the gulls.

They started the motor, and, seated at the prow in a green skirt with orange flowers, she saw on the bottom of the boat a mask for underwater fishing; and she knew how the pair had learned her secret. The boy, swimming below the surface with mask and harpoon, had seen her and had alerted the man, who had also dived in to see. Then, without being understood, they had motioned her to wait for them, and had sped to the port to procure a dress from some fisherman's wife.

The two were sitting at the poop, hands on their knees, and smiling: the boy, an urchin of about eight, was all eyes, with a dazed, coltish smile; the man had a gray, shaggy head, a brick-red body with long muscles, and a slightly sad smile, with a dead cigarette stuck to his lip. It occurred to Signora Isotta that perhaps the two of them, looking at her dressed, were trying to remember her as they had seen her underwater; but this didn't make her feel ill at ease. After all, since someone had perforce to see her, she was glad it had been these two, and also that they had felt curiosity and pleasure. To get to the beach, the man took the boat past the docks and the harbor and the vegetable gardens along the sea; anyone who saw them from the shore no doubt believed that the three

were a little family coming home in their boat as they did every evening during the fishing season. The gray fishermen's houses overlooked the dock; red nets were stretched across short stakes; and from the boats, already tied up, some youths lifted lead-colored fish and passed them to girls standing with square baskets, the low rims propped against their hips. Men with tiny gold earrings, seated on the ground with spread legs, were sewing endless nets; and in some tubs they were boiling tannin to dye the nets again. Little stone walls marked off tiny vegetable gardens on the sea, where the boats lay beside the canes of the seedbeds. Women with their mouths full of nails helped their husbands, lying under the keel, to patch holes. Every pink house had a low roof covered with tomatoes split in two and set out to dry with salt on a grill; and under the asparagus plants the kids were hunting for worms; and some old men with bellows were spraying insecticide on their loquats; and the yellow melons were growing under creeping leaves; and in flat pans the old women were frying squid and polyps or else pumpkin flowers dredged in flour; and the prows of fishing boats rose in the yards redolent of wood fresh from the plane; and a brawl among the boys caulking the hulls had broken out, with threats of brushes black with tar; and then the beach began, with the little sand castles and volcanoes abandoned by the children.

Signora Isotta, seated in the boat with that pair, in that excessive green-and-orange dress, would even have liked the trip to continue. But the boat was aiming its prow at the shore, and the beach attendants were carrying away the deck chairs, and the man had bent over the motor, turning his back: that brick-red back divided by the knobs of the spine, on which the hard, salty skin rippled as if moved by a sigh.

THE ADVENTURE OF A CLERK

It so happened that Enrico Gnei, a clerk, spent a night with a beautiful lady. Coming out of her house, early, he felt the air and the colors of the spring morning open before him, cool and bracing and new, and it was as if he were walking to the sound of music.

It must be said that only a lucky conjunction of circumstances had rewarded Enrico Gnei with this adventure: a party at some friends' house, a special, fleeting mood of the lady's—a woman otherwise controlled and hardly prone to obeying whims—a slight alcoholic stimulation, whether real or feigned, and in addition a rather favorable logistic combination at the moment of good-byes. All this, and not any personal charm of Gnei's—or, rather, none but his discreet and somewhat anonymous looks, which would mark him as an undemanding, unobtrusive companion—had produced the unexpected result of that night. He was well aware of all this and, modest by nature, he considered his good luck all the more precious. He also knew that the event would have no sequel; nor did he complain of that, because a steady relationship would have created problems too awkward for his usual

ITALO CALVINO

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Italo Calvino (15 October 1923 – 19 September 1985) (Italian pronunciation: [ˈiːtalo kalˈviːno]) was an Italian journalist and writer of short stories and novels. His best known works include the *Our Ancestors* trilogy (1952–1959), the *Cosmicomics* collection of short stories (1965), and the novels *Invisible Cities* (1972) and *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979).

Lionised in Britain and the United States, he was the most-translated contemporary Italian writer at the time of his death, and a noted contender for the Nobel Prize for Literature.[1]

Biography

Cuba

Italo Calvino was born in Santiago de Las Vegas, a suburb of Havana, Cuba in 1923. His father, Mario, was a tropical agronomist and botanist who also taught agriculture and floriculture.[2] Born 47 years earlier in San Remo, Italy, Mario Calvino had emigrated to Mexico in 1909 where he took up an important position with the Ministry of Agriculture. In an autobiographical essay, Italo Calvino explained that his father "had been in his youth an anarchist, a follower of Kropotkin and then a Socialist Reformist".[3] In 1917, Mario left for Cuba to conduct scientific experiments, after living through the Mexican Revolution.

Calvino's mother, Eva Mameli, was a botanist and university professor. A native of Sassari in Sardinia and 11 years younger than her husband, she married while still a junior lecturer at Pavia University. Born into a secular family, Eva was a pacifist educated in the "religion of civic duty and science".[4] Calvino described his parents as being "very different in personality from one another",[3] suggesting perhaps deeper tensions behind a comfortable, albeit strict, middle-class upbringing devoid of conflict. As an adolescent, he found it hard relating to poverty and the working-class, and was "ill at ease" with his parents' openness to the laborers who filed into his father's study on Saturdays to receive their weekly paycheck.[5]

Early life and education

In 1925, less than two years after Calvino's birth, the family returned to Italy and settled definitively in San Remo on the Ligurian coast. Calvino's brother Floriano, who became a distinguished geologist, was born in 1927.

The family divided their time between the Villa Meridiana, an experimental floriculture station which also served as their home, and Mario's ancestral land at San Giovanni Battista. On this small working farm set in the hills behind San Remo, Mario pioneered in the cultivation of then exotic fruits such as avocado and grapefruit, eventually obtaining

an entry in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* for his achievements. The vast forests and luxuriant fauna omnipresent in Calvino's early fiction such as *The Baron in the Trees* derives from this "legacy". In an interview, Calvino stated that "San Remo continues to pop out in my books, in the most diverse pieces of writing."[6] He and Floriano would climb the tree-rich estate and perch for hours on the branches reading their favorite adventure stories.[7] Less salubrious aspects of this "paternal legacy" are described in *The Road to San Giovanni*, Calvino's memoir of his father in which he exposes their inability to communicate: "Talking to each other was difficult. Both verbose by nature, possessed of an ocean of words, in each other's presence we became mute, would walk in silence side by side along the road to San Giovanni."[8] A fan of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* as a child, Calvino felt that his early interest in stories made him the "black sheep" of a family that held literature in less esteem than the sciences. Fascinated by American movies and cartoons, he was equally attracted to drawing, poetry, and theatre. On a darker note, Calvino recalled that his earliest memory was of a socialist professor brutalized by Fascist lynch-squads. "I remember clearly that we were at dinner when the old professor came in with his face beaten up and bleeding, his bowtie all torn, asking for help."[9]

Other legacies include the parents' masonic republicanism which occasionally developed into anarchic socialism.[10] Austere, anti-Fascist freethinkers, Eva and Mario refused to give their sons any religious education.[11] Italo attended the English nursery school St George's College, followed by a Protestant elementary private school run by Waldensians. His secondary schooling was completed at the state-run Liceo Gian Domenico Cassini where, at his parents' request, he was exempted from religious instruction but forced to justify his anticonformist stance. In his mature years, Calvino described the experience as a salutary one as it made him "tolerant of others' opinions, particularly in the field of religion, remembering how irksome it was to hear myself mocked because I did not follow the majority's beliefs".[12] During this time, he met a brilliant student from Rome, Eugenio Scalfari, who went on to found the weekly magazine *L'Espresso* and *La Repubblica*, a major Italian newspaper. The two teenagers formed a lasting friendship, Calvino attributing his political awakening to their university discussions. Seated together "on a huge flat stone in the middle of a stream near our land",[9] he and Scalfari founded the MUL (University Liberal Movement).

Eva managed to delay her son's enrolment in the Fascist armed scouts, the *Balilla Moschettieri*, and then arranged that he be excused, as a non-Catholic, from performing devotional acts in church.[13] But later on, as a compulsory member, he could not avoid the assemblies and parades of the *Avanguardisti*,[14] and was forced to participate in the Italian occupation of the French Riviera in June 1940.[15]

World War II

In 1941, Calvino dutifully enrolled at the University of Turin, choosing the Agriculture Faculty where his father had previously taught courses in agronomy. Concealing his literary ambitions to please his family, he passed four exams in his first year while reading anti-Fascist works by Elio Vittorini, Eugenio Montale, Cesare Pavese, Johan Huizinga, and Pisacane, and works by Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein on physics.[16] Disdainful of Turin students, Calvino saw himself as enclosed in a "provincial shell"[17] that offered the illusion of immunity from the Fascist nightmare:

"We were 'hard guys' from the provinces, hunters, snooker-players, show-offs, proud of our lack of intellectual sophistication, contemptuous of any patriotic or military rhetoric, coarse in our speech, regulars in the brothels, dismissive of any romantic sentiment and desperately devoid of women."[17]

Calvino transferred to the University of Florence in 1943 and reluctantly passed three more exams in agriculture. By the end of the year, the Germans had succeeded in occupying Liguria and setting up Benito Mussolini's puppet Republic of Salò in northern Italy. Now twenty years old, Calvino refused military service and went into hiding. Reading intensely in a wide array of subjects, he also reasoned politically that, of all the partisan groupings, the communists were the best organized with "the most convincing political line".[18]

In spring 1944, Eva encouraged her sons to enter the Italian Resistance in the name of "natural justice and family virtues".[19] Using the battlename of "Santiago", Calvino joined the *Garibaldi Brigades*, a clandestine Communist group and, for twenty months, endured the fighting in the Maritime Alps until 1945 and the Liberation. As a result of his refusal to be a conscript, his parents were held hostage by the Nazis for an extended period at the Villa Meridiana. Calvino wrote of his mother's ordeal that "she was an example of tenacity and courage… behaving with dignity and firmness before the SS and the Fascist militia, and in her long detention as a hostage, not least when the blackshirts three times pretended to shoot my father in front of her eyes. The historical events which mothers take part in acquire the greatness and invincibility of natural phenomena".[20]

Turin and communism

Calvino settled in Turin in 1945, after a long hesitation over living there or in Milan.[21] He often humorously belittled this choice, describing Turin as a "city that is serious but sad". Returning to university, he abandoned Agriculture for the Arts Faculty. A year later, he was initiated into the literary world by Elio Vittorini, who published his short story "Andato al comando" (1945; "Gone to Headquarters") in *Il Politecnico*, a Turin-based weekly magazine associated with the university.[22] The horror of the war had not only provided the raw material for his literary ambitions but deepened his commitment to the Communist cause. Viewing civilian life as a continuation of the partisan struggle, he confirmed his membership of the Italian Communist Party. On reading Vladimir Lenin's *State and Revolution*, he plunged into post-war political life, associating himself chiefly with the worker's movement in Turin.[23]

In 1947, he graduated with a Master's thesis on Joseph Conrad, wrote short stories in his spare time, and landed a job in the publicity department at the Einaudi publishing house run by Giulio Einaudi. Although brief, his stint put him in regular contact with Cesare Pavese, Natalia Ginzburg, Norberto Bobbio, and many other left-wing intellectuals and writers. He then left Einaudi to work as a journalist for the official Communist daily, *L'Unità*, and the newborn Communist political magazine, *Rinascita*. During this period, Pavese and poet Alfonso Gatto were Calvino's closest friends and mentors.[24]

His first novel, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Nest of Spiders*) written with valuable editorial advice from Pavese, won the Premio Riccione on publication in 1947.[25] With sales topping 5000 copies, a surprise success in postwar Italy, the novel inaugurated Calvino's neorealist period. In a clairvoyant essay, Pavese praised the young writer as a "squirrel of the pen" who "climbed into the trees, more for fun than fear, to

observe partisan life as a fable of the forest".[26] In 1948, he interviewed one of his literary idols, Ernest Hemingway, travelling with Natalia Ginzburg to his home in Stresa. *Ultimo viene il corvo* (*The Crow Comes Last*), a collection of stories based on his wartime experiences, was published to acclaim in 1949. Despite the triumph, Calvino grew increasingly worried by his inability to compose a worthy second novel. He returned to Einaudi in 1950, responsible this time for the literary volumes. He eventually became a consulting editor, a position that allowed him to hone his writing talent, discover new writers, and develop into "a reader of texts".[27] In late 1951, presumably to advance in the Communist Party, he spent two months in the Soviet Union as correspondent for *l'Unità*. While in Moscow, he learned of his father's death on 25 October. The articles and correspondence he produced from this visit were published in 1952, winning the Saint-Vincent Prize for journalism.

Over a seven-year period, Calvino wrote three realist novels, *The White Schooner* (1947–1949), *Youth in Turin* (1950–1951), and *The Queen's Necklace* (1952–54), but all were deemed defective.[28] During the eighteen months it took to complete *I giovani del Po* (*Youth in Turin*), he made an important self-discovery: "I began doing what came most naturally to me – that is, following the memory of the things I had loved best since boyhood. Instead of making myself write the book I *ought* to write, the novel that was expected of me, I conjured up the book I myself would have liked to read, the sort by an unknown writer, from another age and another country, discovered in an attic."[29] The result was *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952; *The Cloven Viscount*) composed in 30 days between July and September 1951. The protagonist, a seventeenth century viscount sundered in two by a cannonball, incarnated Calvino's growing political doubts and the divisive turbulence of the Cold War.[30] Skillfully interweaving elements of the fable and the fantasy genres, the allegorical novel launched him as a modern "fabulist".[31] In 1954, Giulio Einaudi commissioned his *Fiabe Italiane* (1956; *Italian Folktales*) on the basis of the question, "Is there an Italian equivalent of the Brothers Grimm?"[32] For two years, Calvino collated tales found in 19th century collections across Italy then translated 200 of the finest from various dialects into Italian. Key works he read at this time were Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* and *Historical Roots of Russian Fairy Tales*, stimulating his own ideas on the origin, shape and function of the story.[33]

In 1952 Calvino wrote with Giorgio Bassani for *Botteghe Oscure*, a magazine named after the popular name of the party's head-offices. He also worked for *Il Contemporaneo*, a Marxist weekly.

From 1955 to 1958 Calvino had an affair with Italian actress Elsa De Giorgi, a married, older woman. Excerpts of the hundreds of love letters Calvino wrote to her were published in the *Corriere della Sera* in 2004, causing some controversy.[34]

After communism

In 1957, disillusioned by the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, Calvino left the Italian Communist Party. In his letter of resignation published in *L'Unità* on 7 August, he explained the reason of his dissent (the violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising and the revelation of Joseph Stalin's crimes) while confirming his "confidence in the democratic perspectives" of world Communism.[35] He withdrew from taking an active role in politics and never joined another party.[36] Ostracized by the ICP party leader Palmiro Togliatti and his supporters on publication of *Becalmed in the Antilles* (*La gran*

bonaccia delle Antille), a satirical allegory of the party's immobilism, Calvino began writing *The Baron in the Trees*. Completed in three months and published in 1957, the fantasy is based on the "problem of the intellectual's political commitment at a time of shattered illusions".[37] He found new outlets for his periodic writings in the journals *Città aperta* and *Tempo presente*, the magazine *Passato e presente*, and the weekly *Italia Domani*. With Vittorini in 1959, he became co-editor of *Il Menabò*, a cultural journal devoted to literature in the modern industrial age, a position he held until 1966.[38]
Despite severe restrictions in the US against foreigners holding communist views, Calvino was allowed to visit the United States, where he stayed six months from 1959 to 1960 (four of which he spent in New York), after an invitation by the Ford Foundation. Calvino was particularly impressed by the "New World": "Naturally I visited the South and also California, but I always felt a New Yorker. My city is New York." The letters he wrote to Einaudi describing this visit to the United States were first published as "American Diary 1959–1960" in *Hermit in Paris* in 2003.
In 1962 Calvino met Argentinian translator Esther Judith Singer ("Chichita") and married her in 1964 in Havana, during a trip in which he visited his birthplace and was introduced to Ernesto "Che" Guevara. On 15 October 1967, a few days after Guevara's death, Calvino wrote a tribute to him that was published in Cuba in 1968, and in Italy thirty years later.[39] He and his wife settled in Rome in the via Monte Brianzo where their daughter, Giovanna, was born in 1965. Once again working for Einaudi, Calvino began publishing some of his "Cosmicomics" in *Il Caffè*, a literary magazine.

Later life and work
Vittorini's death in 1966 greatly affected Calvino. He went through what he called an "intellectual depression", which the writer himself described as an important passage in his life: "...I ceased to be young. Perhaps it's a metabolic process, something that comes with age, I'd been young for a long time, perhaps too long, suddenly I felt that I had to begin my old age, yes, old age, perhaps with the hope of prolonging it by beginning it early."
In the fermenting atmosphere that evolved into 1968's cultural revolution (the French May), he moved with his family to Paris in 1967, setting up home in a villa in the Square de Châtillon. Nicknamed *L'ironique amusé*, he was invited by Raymond Queneau in 1968 to join the Oulipo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) group of experimental writers where he met Roland Barthes, Georges Perec, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, all of whom influenced his later production.[40] That same year, he turned down the Viareggio Prize for *Ti con zero* (*Time and the Hunter*) on the grounds that it was an award given by "institutions emptied of meaning".[41] He accepted, however, both the Asti Prize and the Feltrinelli Prize for his writing in 1970 and 1972, respectively. In two autobiographical essays published in 1962 and 1970, Calvino described himself as "atheist" and his outlook as "non-religious".[42]

Calvino had more intense contacts with the academic world, with notable experiences at the Sorbonne (with Barthes) and the University of Urbino. His interests included classical studies: Honoré de Balzac, Ludovico Ariosto, Dante, Ignacio de Loyola, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Giacomo Leopardi. Between 1972–1973 Calvino published two short stories, "The Name, the Nose" and the Oulipo-inspired "The Burning

of the Abominable House" in the Italian edition of Playboy. He became a regular contributor to the important Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, spending his summer vacations in a house constructed in Roccamare near Castiglione della Pescaia, Tuscany.
In 1975 Calvino was made Honorary Member of the American Academy. Awarded the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1976, he visited Mexico, Japan, and the United States where he gave a series of lectures in several American towns. After his mother died in 1978 at the age of 92, Calvino sold Villa Meridiana, the family home in San Remo. Two years later, he moved to Rome in Piazza Campo Marzio near the Pantheon and began editing the work of Tommaso Landolfi for Rizzoli. Awarded the French Légion d'honneur in 1981, he also accepted to be jury president of the 29th Venice Film Festival.
During the summer of 1985, Calvino prepared a series of lectures to be delivered at Harvard University in the fall. On 6 September, he was admitted to the ancient hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, where he died during the night between 18 and 19 September of a cerebral hemorrhage. His lecture notes were published posthumously in Italian in 1988 and in English as *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* in 1993.