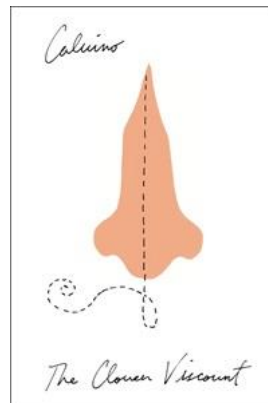


BOOK REVIEW

Punya Prakash Tripathi \*

***Il visconte dimezzato* (The Cloven Viscount) by Italo Calvino**



***Il visconte dimezzato* (The Cloven Viscount) by Italo Calvino (1952, 2017)  
Mariner Books, ISBN 978-0544960060, Pp. 115 pages, \$ 10.99.00 (Hardcover)**

At the moment when the whole world is celebrating the centenary of the greatest Italian literary figures Italo Calvino (1923-1985), reviewing one of his works becomes all the more pertinent. This book bears testimony to a ‘turn’ from the Neorealistic kind of writings Calvino had done in the early phase of his writing career. It underscores beautifully, for the first time, his literary acumen in penning down a ‘fantasy’ novel, published in the year 1952. It’s also important to note that it is the first of the series of three spectacular fantasy novels published in one single volume titled *I Nostri Antenati* (*Our Ancestors*)- a trilogy. *The Cloven Viscount* is the English translation, done by Archibald Colquhoun, of the Italian novel, but the current review doesn’t deal either with the quality of the translation or the skill of the translator.

The story of this novel is presented through the eyes of a young boy, an omniscient narrator. His uncle, Viscount Medardo of Terralba, who has never been to a single battle, goes to participate in a war against Turks and gets divided into two halves, after being hit by a cannonball. In fact, what unfolds after that makes this book an interesting read. One half, the right one, turns out to be bad and the other, the left one, is good. The right part called Gramo has a ‘destructive’ tendency as he cuts with his sword every non-living creature that he comes across into two halves. Moreover, he takes immense pleasure in inflicting pain on others and by doing so he creates an ambience of utmost fear. No one wants to face him, and he is hated by all the fellow citizens. On the contrary, the left part called Buono (a term that means ‘good’) is so

sympathetic and nice that people find it difficult to bear him too. At some point, both of them fall in love with the same girl, Pamela, and in order to win her they have to agree to a duel during which their old bruises open and a doctor reunites them together to eventually have one whole Medardo.

Calvino through the metaphor of the cloven Viscount brings to the fore the universal truth of the 'sense of incompleteness' which we all experience in our life. What we can also deduce from the story is that too much of either 'good' or 'bad' can be very difficult to handle in our society and that we should all strive to find a fine balance. Hence, completeness can be attained only through the co-existence of the two opposing sides.

The language is simple and fluid. Calvino has used many scientific terms in this book and the reason behind this to my mind is that he himself had studied Science and he was brought up by parents who were also Science scholars. Though the story is narrated by the nephew of the Viscount, interesting dialogues do find some space. The book is filled with episodes which make you laugh. The writer himself admits in the preface of the original Italian book that he wanted to entertain not only the readers but himself too. The reading of the book makes us believe that the great Calvino did materialize his desire.

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