

Chapter-2

Forks and Loops of Time: Italo Calvino's

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller

Practically all theories of narrative distinguish between what is narrated (the 'story') and how it is narrated (the 'discourse'). For a narrative text -- a complex sign -- the signifier is a 'discourse' (a mode of presentation) and the signified is a 'story' (an action sequence). Postmodernist fiction problematizes, transgresses and disconfirms customary assurances and experiences and establishes a break with mimetic illusion. Christopher Nash points out that postmodernist fiction are anti-realist not only at the level of content but more importantly at the level of form (36). Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is no exception.

In an interview conducted in January 1978, one year before the publication of his novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, Italo Calvino responded to a question about his future writing plans with these words: "What I keep open is fiction, a storytelling that is lively and inventive, as well as the more reflective kind of writing in which narrative and essay become one" (Calvino, *Hermit in Paris*, 190). Calvino created this very type of fiction in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, a novel that consists

of a metafictional narrative that frames the beginnings of ten unique novels.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller is a postmodern novel which is self-conscious of the literary and reading process. It is considered postmodern because it seeks to overturn the dominant discourses in reading which are the authority of the traditional, silent, dictatorial author. Calvino demystifies the authority of the author in the novel through the use of metafiction structure and the multiplicity of authors which make the reader aware and critical of the fiction and the author. The meta-narrative level of self-consciousness with which the novel is written is captured in the opening line, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*." Calvino presents reading as a subjective process through the multiplicity of reading and deliberate ambiguities which develop the idea of multiple interpretations.

In a device common to postmodern novels, the author Calvino is introduced into the narrative of the novel, as the author of the book the reader is about to read. The narrative consists of ten novels within one frame story, structured by multiple digressions and commentary on the novelistic form, role of the narrator, and expectations of the reader. The

question posed by the novel is how to evaluate the reading strategies that reflect on the reader's own reading strategies.

The book begins with a chapter on the art and nature of reading, and is subsequently divided into twenty-two chapters. The odd-numbered chapters and the final chapter are narrated in the second person. That is, they concern events purportedly happening to the novel's reader. These chapters concern the reader's adventures in reading Italo Calvino's novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Eventually the reader meets a woman, who is also addressed in her own chapter, separately, and also in the second person.

The alternating chapters present the first chapters of ten different novels, of widely varying style, genre, and subject-matter. All are broken off, for various reasons explained in the interspersed chapters, most of them at some moment of plot climax. Calvino's text commences on a hypothesis of novelistic elements 'If... on a when, a someone...would do what?' The entire novel, even its plot, is an open trajectory where even the author himself questions his motives of the writing process.

A main concept in postmodern writing is the foregrounding of the ontological, which is the urge to make the reader aware of what he or she is reading and to point out the relationship between the reader and the text

and the author. In “*If on a winter’s Night a Traveller*”, such a concept is visible in the first chapter instantly. The author uses the notion of self reflexivity as he speaks to the reader indicating what they should do before they begin reading and the process that the reader might have gone through to get the book. It also starts to create a relationship between the reader and text and author.

...Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your back, on your side, on your stomach. In an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed. You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position. With the book upside down, naturally. (*IWNT* 1)

Calvino deals specifically with the act of reading as a process of discriminating the real story from super added accretions. The process of reading is for grounded, even to the point where they become a motif to describe all the activities of the readers. At the beginning, the Reader is a passive figure, setting out on his course of enjoyment, full of anticipation. The Reader’s activities are recorded in stark, realistic detail.

We can share the confusion and doubt of the Reader amid the inviting calls of various categories of novels in the bookshop, his sudden move, evading them all, reaching for the new Calvino novel and so on. From this point onwards, alternate chapters are devoted to the reading process plus the activities the passive reader is forced to take up because of the discontinuity of the novels, and the novels actually read by him, which bear no thematic connection to each other, though it is possible to uncover certain rubble links among them.

The Reader and Ludmilla, the Other reader are somewhat conventional specimens, approaching the book for the pleasure of it, their chief concern being the urge to follow the story line, in its windings, twisting and meanderings to the conclusion.

I prefer novels... that bring me immediately into a world where everything is precise, concrete, specific. I feel a special satisfaction in knowing that things are made in that certain fashion and not otherwise, even the most commonplace things that in real life seem indifferent to me.
(IWNT 30)

These two conventional readers are forced into an awareness of the fact that their personal universes are horribly out of tune with their surroundings. Their innocent anticipation of the conventional straight

forward plot delineation is met with the worst possible disaster- the realization that the world in which they live, and the fictional worlds into which they hoped to escape have been simultaneously and equally pervaded by the chaos and confusion of postmodernism.

The Reader and Ludmilla are brought face to face with a world where nothing is certain and anything is possible. This strange reality demands that they fight against the chaos to restore the semblance of order that they are familiar with. Calvino presents the Reader's attempt in finding closure of the fiction novels he has partly read. The novel explores the literary process in writing a novel, as the Reader encounters the writing philosophies of Silas Flannery and Ermes Marana, and the reading process as the Reader encounters different types of readers as he travels the world seeking closure. In exploring the literary and reading processes, the novel self-consciously draws attention to its status as being fiction and provides a self critique of the fundamental structure of narrative, exploring the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Calvino dissociates narrative and causation by a succession of different episodes which collapses into a temporal amalgam from which the reader finds it difficult to infer the narrative development. The various episodes that are alluded to merge different times and spaces i.e. different chronotopes. The text switches narrative situation from one

chapter to the next and we as readers, hover between different modes of narrative. The embedding of writings into the text that remain distinguishable from the novel itself obeys a largely modernist aesthetic of narrative.

When Calvino creates the Reader as protagonist and the text as fragment, he fixes attention on the point of intersection between texts and readers in the search for story. As the metatextual commentary indicates, Calvino's reader-narrator self consciously explores the state of exhaustion in twentieth century literature.

.... It's not that you expect anything in particular from this particular book. You're the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything. There are plenty, younger than you or less young, who live in the expectation of extraordinary experiences: from books, from people, from journeys, from events, from what tomorrow has in store. But not you. You know that the best you can expect is to avoid the worst. This is the conclusion you have reached, in your personal life and also in general matters, even international affairs. (*IWNT* 4)

Postmodernist Strategies for Temporal Disintegration

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller is a postmodernist metafiction or, “theoretical fiction” in Mark Currie’s terminology (Currie 52-53). By conveying an uncanny feeling of familiarity in the real readers of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, who begin reading the story of a fictional Reader who begins reading *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Calvino’s novel successfully stages a confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller makes use of almost all the postmodernist strategies in disrupting temporality. There is the frame story in which the protagonists are the Reader, and the female Reader, Ludmilla. Embedded in the matrix of the frame story we find ten novel fragments which the Reader reads – they are only beginnings of the novel, the action narrated by different subjective selves is always broken off at the point when something is about to happen. This multiplication of diegetic levels and their transgressions distorts the temporal sequence. Recursion and metalepses are employed by Calvino to achieve this.

In its technical sense, “recursion refers to the repeated application of a rule or routine to the variable values of a function” (Heise 59). In literature the embedding of stories within stories is the most obvious

corresponding form. In recursion time seems to be suspended at one level while it proceeds at another. Certain strategies of recursion can block or blur temporal progression. The experience of temporal continuity depends on our ability to construct events in succession at a similar scale or a similar level of abstraction.

Hence the splitting of the narrative thread in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* into a multiplicity of levels affects the time experience of the reader. Narrative leaps between diegetic levels prevent the experience of temporal continuity since framed & framing story cannot normally be construed as pertaining to the same time sequence: while events proceed at one level, they are suspended at the other levels until the narrative focus returns to them. But to say this is to simplify the temporal processes that occur during the reading of framed stories.

Recursion, ... is a means of articulating a temporal interval through a narrative that is not its own, but that of another moment in time: that is, of giving it a structure of meaning while "at the same time" leaving it semantically empty as an interval of pure chronology, since nothing can happen in the frame narrative while the framed story is being told. Recursion figures the moment as what it is not, replacing it

by the story of another moment; somewhat paradoxically, it becomes narrative by not being narrated. (Heise 61)

Calvino's chapter delineation is a classic example of recursion. The frame narrative, dealing with the Reader's search for a closure in a chaotic world, is presented through twelve chapters which don't have any chapter headings. The framed stories are the ten novel fragments which the Reader reads, they are only beginnings of the novel, the action narrated by different subjective selves is always broken off at the point when something is about to happen. By means of accumulating a number of interrupted and thus fragmentary novels (or beginnings of novels) which one by one are read by the Reader-protagonist (and by the actual reader), the author repeatedly breaks with the temporal expectations of the reader. Time and again the latter has to correct his notions of the fictional world and to replace them by others.

From the first paratextual elements, Calvino's novel appears unusual and baffling. The "Contents" are positioned before "Chapter One" and inform the real readers of the existence of twelve numbered chapters and ten intercalated titled "chapters," which turn out to be ten embedded fragment-stories written in ten different styles and belonging to ten different literary forms and genres, including a mystery, a Bildungsroman in the realist tradition and rich in sensory details

reminiscent of Proust, a mock literary biography, a war story doubled by a tangled love story, a gaucho story, a political satire, and a Japanese narrative imbued with delicate eroticism and seasonal references made in haiku style.

The task to be accomplished by the reader (the reader protagonist as well as the actual reader) can be considered as a continuous process of reconstruction and deconstruction: reconstruction of a fictional world where certain things might possibly occur and deconstruction of that same world and substitution of it by another possible world. It is through the effective deployment of recursion that Calvino achieves this process of reconstruction and deconstruction.

Transgressions of levels, which Genette calls 'metalepses' abounds in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. When Gerard Genette coined the term "metalepsis," he defined it as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse " (234-35). Metalepsis is the breaking of the boundaries that separate distinct 'levels' of a narrative, usually between an embedded tale and its frame story. The Reader in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, who is the narrator cum protagonist attempts to establish communicative contact with the actual readers from the beginning of the novel itself.

...You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice-they won't hear you otherwise-"I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" Maybe they haven't heard you, with all that racket; speak louder, yell: "I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!" Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone. (*IWNT* 1)

It could be called a 'diegetic-to-extradiegetic metalepsis', a serious transgression violating the "sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (Genette 236), in other words, the domain of the discourse and the domain of the story. Metalepsis is indeed a very powerful tool in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* that consciously plays with the logic of representation which underlies all aesthetic illusion.

Calvino uses self-reflective metafiction to make the reader aware that the novel is purely artificial. The main meta fiction narrative of the novel is written in the second person, using the pronoun "You". Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which

self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). She goes on to argue that:

Metafiction is not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency within the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion. . . . The expression of this tension is present in much contemporary writing but it is the dominant function in the texts defined as metafictional. (Waugh13-14)

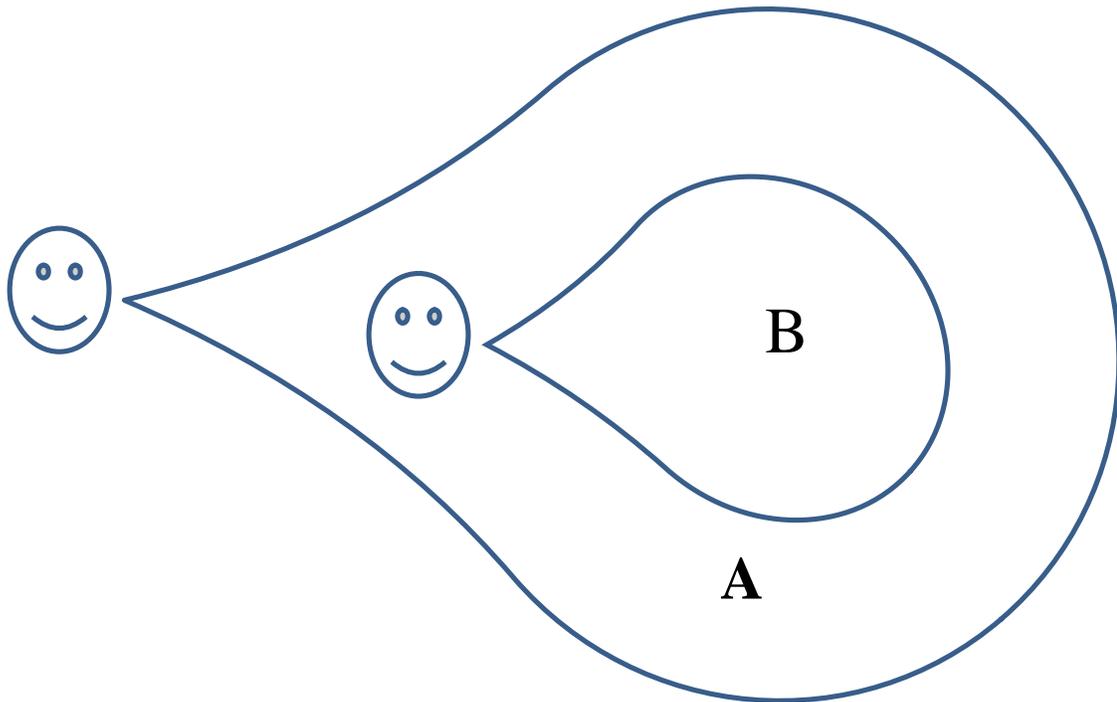
In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* the action of multiplication is more prominent than duplication – the frame story itself is made up of various actions: the Reader's, Silas Flannery's and Ermes Marana's. In addition to this there are the ten fragmentary novels bearing no apparent link between one another. The various first person narrators have no place or function in the frame story, and their stories are first- person novels: fiction within fiction.

Multiplication device operates on the embedded novel fragments whose discontinuity is emphasized – the selection being from divergent languages, nationalities, modes and genres. In addition, by keeping them

fragmented, this effect is enhanced. Still 'subtle lines of continuity' may be drawn between them. Starting from the movement from the simplicity of the first novel in which the narrator is "an anonymous presence against an even more anonymous background," things are added on till the sixth novel, which starts on a strip of erasure culminating in the tenth novel whose narrator erases everything, leaving the reader with a blank page as at the beginning. The techniques of multiplication and duplication weave a web of subtle links among the supposedly disconnected novel fragments and create different temporal stances.

The matrix narrative is another postmodern device employed by Calvino to distort narrative temporality. A matrix narrative is a narrative containing an 'embedded' or 'hypo narrative.' The term 'matrix' derives from the Latin word *mater* (mother, womb) and refers to "something within which something else originates"(Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). In linguistics, a 'matrix sentence' is one that embeds a subordinate sentence. Ordinarily, both the transition to a hypo narrative, its termination and the return to the matrix narrative are explicitly signaled in a text. Calvino in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* presents such a matrix narrative.

Gerard Genette has illustrated the basic structure of embedded narratives with the help of a naive drawing using stick-figure narrators and speech-bubble narratives.



Genette calls the narrator of A an 'extradiegetic narrator' whose narrative constitutes a 'diegetic' level, while B is a 'metadiegetic narrative' told by an 'intradiegetic' narrator. On the next level of embedding, one would get a meta-metadiegetic narrative told by an intra-intradiegetic narrator. B is a 'hyponarrative' told by a 'diegetic narrator', and if there were an additional level the hyponarrative momentarily suspends the continuation of the matrix narrative, often creating an effect of heightened suspense.

Hypo narratives are also often used to create an effect of '*mise en abyme*', a favourite feature of postmodernist narratives. *Mise en abyme* is the infinite loop created when a hypo narrative embeds its matrix narrative. It is a mechanism for considering the relationship between the part and the whole of a text: it is a part of a text that models, in one way or another, the whole text in which it is embedded.

Mise-en-abyme is a play of signifiers within a text, of sub-texts mirroring each other. This mirroring can get to the point where meaning can be rendered unstable and in this respect can be seen as part of the process of deconstruction. "It can be described as the equivalent of something like Matisse's famous painting of a room in which a miniature version of the same paintings hangs on one of the walls"(Genette 15).

The 'Chinese box' effect of *mise-en-abyme* has been extensively employed by Calvino to distort temporality. *Mise-en-abyme* occurs within a text when there is a reduplication of images or concepts referring to the textual whole. The 'Chinese box' effect of *mise-en-abyme* often suggests an infinite regress, i.e. an endless succession of internal duplications. A blurring of the time sense sets in when different levels of the embedded stories resemble each other through multiplication and duplication.

Three types of duplication occur through mise-en-abyme. Simple duplication is defined as a sequence connected by similarity to the work that encloses it. An obvious example would be a story told within a story, or perhaps a figure, say a painting or statue, that has some similarity to the general work. The point of a simple mise en abyme is to offer a directly appropriate model for reading the whole work. Infinite (repeated) duplication is also defined as a sequence which is connected by similarity to the work that encloses it, but which regresses infinitely. The example often provided is the old “cover of the Quaker Oats packet, which has a picture of a boy holding a packet of Quaker Oats which has on it a picture of a boy holding a packet of Quaker Oats and so on to infinity” (McHale, *PF* 124). The third duplication is the aporetic duplication. A classic example of aporetic duplication occurs in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.

....I [Silas Flannery the novelist] have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels. The Reader buys a new novel A by the author Z. But it is a defective copy, he can't go beyond the beginning.... He returns to the bookshop to have the volume exchangedI could write it all in the second person: you, Reader ... I could also introduce a young lady, the Other Reader, and a

counterfeiter-translator, and an old writer who keeps a diary like this diary ...But I wouldn't want the young lady Reader, in escaping the Counterfeiter, to end up in the arms of the Reader. I will see to it that the Reader sets out on the trail of the Counterfeiter, hiding in some very distant country, so the Writer can remain alone with the young lady, the Other reader. To be sure, without a female character, the reader's journey would lose liveliness: he must encounter some other woman on his way. Perhaps the Other Reader could have a sister.... (*IWNT* 197-198)

This hypo narrative is like an internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by specious duplication. It is at the same time a mirror of a mirror and a mirror itself. McHale argues that "mise en abyme is another form of short circuit, another disruption of the logic of narrative hierarchy, every bit as disquieting as a character stepping across the ontological threshold to a different narrative level. The effect of mise en abyme ... is to rob events of their solidity, and the effect of this is to foreground ontological structure" (*PF* 125).Calvino through the effective deployment of mise-en-abyme foregrounds the very fictionality of the text.

The titles of the fragment-stories embedded in the Reader's story converge — in chronological order — in Chapter Eleven, making up yet another fragment-story that metafictionally turns upon itself by means of *mise en abyme*:

...If on a winter's night a traveller, outside the town of Malbork, leaning from the steep slope without fear of wind or vertigo, looks down in the gathering shadow in a network of lines that enlase, in a network of lines that intersect, on the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon around an empty grave — What story down there awaits its end? — he asks, anxious to hear the story. (*IWNT* 252)

The Matrix –story in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is a realistic depiction of the postmodern temporal chaos. Calvino is aware that he has no privileged standpoint from which to view and order things. So instead of suggesting a neat, well-patterned alternative world, he tries to convey the chaos and confusions that he perceives in a reality where worlds are rapidly being displaced by other worlds. This necessitates a renunciation of the simplified strategies of fixities and closures and hence the novel is an open ended one.

The chaos in the world of books can be explained in several ways, and we are not given any grounds on which to choose one over the other—another instance of postmodern plurisignificance where many versions of truth co-exist simultaneously, if not in harmony, in mutual tolerance. There are many possibilities for the chaos. The chaos could be the willful creation of the translator Ermes Marana, even though the motives that prompt him to such a course are many and uncertain. According to the publisher's representative Mr. Cavedagna, Marana, in actuality lacking knowledge of the languages he claimed to know, was merely masquerading unknown, substandard novels under the famous titles he was supposedly translating.

Marana could be following the orders of the Sultan, who suspects that coded messages of his enemies are enclosed in the novels supplied to his Western wife. Ermes Marana, who lost a bet with a female reader (supposedly Ludmilla) might be creating discontinuous novels to vex her, and disturb her all-consuming concentration in the pleasures of reading.

In the diary of the writer Silas Flannery, he expressed a desire to write, "...a book that is only an incipit, that maintains for its whole duration the potentiality of the beginning, the expectation still not focused on an object" (*IWNT* 177). Again in the diary he gives one plan for the novel, which closely resembles the plot delineation of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*:

“.... I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels ...” (*IWNT* 197).

So here we find two possibilities: the novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* by Calvino is actually the story written by Silas Flannery according to his plan. Or, Silas Flannery may have been inspired by the actual incidents in the life of the Reader and created the plot-structure out of it.

Thus we find many probable causes for the sudden mess-up in the realm of books, but the uncertainty and mystery surrounding the entire business reminds us of the fact that, the situation the reader finds himself in is an authentic and realistic rendering of the postmodern confusion the current generation is facing. At the end it is suggested to the Reader by another reader that it may not be necessary to have an end:

...Do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end? In ancient times a story could end only in two ways: having passed all the tests, the hero and the heroine married, or else they died. The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death. (*IWNT* 259)

What the Seventh reader here tries to convey to the Reader is the artificiality of such limiting closures. The reader's response to this is one of desperation. Faced with the realization that he can no longer restore

order in fiction, he makes a final attempt to neatly round off, at least the story of his life - his chosen solution is one of the conventional accepted patterns: marrying Ludmilla. Frank Kermode, in his classic study, *The Sense of an Ending*, claims that narrative endings reflect the human need for a temporality shaped by the ending and Calvino's ending of the novel projects this tryst with time.

According to Ulla Musarra, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is "a novel in which the device of self-reflection plays a predominant part, but where self-reflection is at the same time transcended" (136). *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, just as certain fictions by Nabokov and Borges, is essentially about books, a book which deals principally with the production and consumption of books, with problems of poetics and aesthetics, and with questions of narratology in particular. At the same time the novel 'rewrites' mostly in a parodical way, certain moments of the classical and modern literary tradition .

In "*Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts*" James Kincaid proposes that texts aren't coherent; we just read them that way. It is actually a beguiling premise. What if most literary texts are in fact "demonstrably incoherent, presenting us not only with multiple organising patterns but with organising patterns that are competing, logically inconsistent?"(Kincaid 783). Kincaid's notion of "demonstrable

incoherence" seeks to negotiate a ground for criticism between two diametrically opposed modes of reading, and consequently between two opposed attitudes toward the nature of language and its relation to the world. His discussion becomes a gesture towards placing more responsibility for meaning-making with the reader and towards a conception of the text as a "triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation" (Barthes 5).

Theorists and philosophers like Barthes, Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, and C.S. Peirce and Nietzsche before them have variously argued that the sovereign, unitary subject of knowledge is no more to be discovered outside and prior to texts. What is true to a reader in any one reading need not be true to another reader or the same reader another day. "Different readers are free to actualize the work in different ways, and there is no single correct interpretation which will exhaust its semantic potential. But this generosity is qualified by one rigorous instruction: the reader must construct the text so as to render it internally consistent" (Eagleton 81).

....This is why my reading has no end: I read and reread, each time seeking the confirmation of a new discovery among the folds of the sentences." "I, too, feel the need to reread the books I have already read," a third reader says,

"but at every rereading I seem to be reading a new book, for the first time. Is it I who keep changing and seeing new things of which I was not previously aware? Or is reading a construction that assumes form, assembling a great number of variables, and therefore something that cannot be repeated twice according to the same pattern? ... I seem to retain the memory of the readings of a single book one next to another, enthusiastic or cold or hostile, scattered in time without a perspective, without a thread that ties them together. The conclusion I have reached is that reading is an operation without object; or that its true object is itself. (*IWNT* 255)

Calvino anticipates all possible readings and (mis)interpretations and discards them one by one, transmuting what one of his fictional personae says into fact:

...It is my image that I want to multiply, but not out of narcissism or megalomania, as could all too easily be believed: on the contrary, I want to conceal, in the midst of so many illusory ghosts of myself, the true me, who makes them move. (*IWNT* 162-63)

Ultimately, however self-referential and self-subverting the novel may be, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is successful at least in deconstructing all modern and postmodern theories of fiction

Untangling the Temporal Loop

To identify the temporal patterns in *If on a winter's Night a Traveller* we have to identify the individual patterns of temporality employed at various levels of text creation. This identification can be effected by a structural analysis of the novel. While attempting to identify the temporal patterns we have to also consider how the fictional temporality is rearranged and reconstructed by readers by a superimposition of the temporality of perception. This becomes the final temporal pattern of the text that evolves through reading.

Elizabeth Ermath in her *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* argues:

Paratactic, parodic, paralogical writing operates simultaneously in more than one mode, and once such multiplication has taken place, we depart from the Euclidean universe of unity, identity, center, and enter the non-Euclidean universe of pattern, superimposition, and differential function. Instead of continuity we have leaps in

space, instead of linear time we have time warps that
'superimpose one part of the pattern upon another.' (166)

Ermarth maps out the baffling new terrain of a postmodern space-time manifest in what she calls the "paratactic" narrative strategies of recent experimental fiction. In place of customary uses of syntax in a Euclidean fiction that conveys the reader in straight lines from one fixed point to another, parataxis shifts the reader around among simultaneously unfolding spheres of experience. Spaces open up, become available for brief habitation, and then recede according to no absolute sense of chronology. Since the reader is invited to subvert the traditional sequence of the act of reading, the situation of the reader in the text is that of an object in the gravitational field of Einstein's space-time, where the space is curved as a result of that intervention.

If on a winter's Night a Traveller does not exhibit linear or retrospective or cyclical time, which makes up conventional story telling. Calvino restructures the chronological pattern of temporality using different structural techniques. By distorting the horizontal pattern with other diachronic or synchronic patterns he creates a labyrinthine plot, which breaks all conventions of narration. Calvino has designed a narrative form that deliberately makes temporal configurations difficult or impossible to conceive. Calvino addresses the problem of rendering the

reality of time experience in coherent form, in the medium of a verbal narrative. In one sense, the novel may be described as an allegory of time-both the historical and the subjective.

Calvino tries to defamiliarise time through the clever manipulation of time shapes. In the opening chapter itself Calvino analyses the post modern concept of time.

...The dimension of time has been shattered, we cannot love or think except in fragments of time each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears. We can rediscover the continuity of time only in the novels of that period when time no longer seemed stopped and did not yet seem to have exploded, a period that lasted no more than a hundred years.(*IWNT* 3)

In this quote the author basically reveals an aspect of the postmodern where the continuity of time is collapsed and limited and is rediscovered in the novels of that particular period of time. He elaborates his point when he mentions that we cannot love or think except in fragments of time which is directly associated with his style of writing in the novel. Moreover time is not indicated in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. A narrator in one of the framed stories inhabits a universe that

is stripped of all temporal coherence. “I am caught in a trap, in that non temporal trap which all stations unfailingly set” (*IWNT* 12).

Just as the Reader is made to reorient his thinking on time, the Reader is also challenged to look at time in a new way. The Reader’s experience becomes a metaphor for a philosophy of time. The Reader is always searching for the end of the book and instead finding another new beginning. He wants to read from point A to point B and get off the ride.

...What you would like is the opening of an abstract and absolute space and time in which you could move, following an exact, taut trajectory; but when you seem to be succeeding, you realize you are motionless, blocked, forced to repeat everything from the beginning. (*IWNT* 27)

The Reader is stuck in his own black hole, either immobile or heading for a possibly circular infinity. The novel narrates, or attempts to narrate time but the author constantly reminds us of the limitations under which he has to perform. The chief limitation in narrating time in fiction is the natural limitation of the conventions of language. Written language, especially when configured in narrative structures, is forced to present time in a medium that operates on the basis of discrete digital units: words. “Opening a path for yourself, with a sword's blade, in the barrier

of pages becomes linked with the thought of how much the word contains and conceals” (*IWNT* 42).

Calvino shows his keen awareness of the limitations involved in verbal narration and tries to construct an allegory of time experience through the structural innovations as well as direct commentaries on the experience of the reader. There is also the blurring of conventionally absolute boundaries between levels of narrative. The novel continually invokes the notion of nested narrative in its presentation of stories within a frame story, but begins to undermine the concept by blurring story- and world-boundaries, providing no explicit rationale for this collapse. Even the notion of *mise-en-abyme*, which explicitly invites the reader to contemplate the way in which one story reflects upon the other, fails to explain or clarify the rise and fall of verisimilitude and fabulation in each strand, nor does it provide logic for the ways in which the strands converge.

In fact time turns into a parameter that no longer applies to either the act of narration or the narrated events, but only to the narrative discourse itself as a textual artifact. In terms proposed by Gerard Genette, three parameters define the way in which the time of the story or narrated events relates to the time of the narrative discourse, the representation of those events: order, frequency and duration.

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for “consuming” it is the time needed for crossing or traversing it, like a road or a field. “The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading” (Genette 86).

Calvino’s experiment with time is very radical because it addresses the dimension of narrative temporality, especially duration. Duration relates to the pace of narration. The duration of the narrative discourse of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, then must be understood as a kind of virtual temporality, realized in the reading process. Through the fracturing of narration and narrative material, the only time that remains in the novel is that of textual articulation itself.

When the novel is sieved for the purpose of finding out its temporal character, we find that there are many supporting factors like storyline, focalization, point of view and linguistic signifiers which are cleverly hidden behind the all pervading temporal distortion.

Unlike such textual elements as character, plot, or imagery, point of view is essentially a relationship rather than a concrete entity. Point of view in narrative is not simply a question of a single, unchanging

relationship between two static elements. "If we understand point of view to concern the relations between narrating subjects and the literary system which is the text-in-context, then we confront a complex network of interactions between author, narrator(s), characters, and audiences both real and implied" (Lanser 13). The traditional approach towards point of view equates it "with the perspective of the angle of vision from which the story is told," and consequently firmly locates the point of view "in the narrator or narrating voice" (Hantzis 6).

Italo Calvino alters points of view several times so as to grasp the attention and hold on to the involvement of the readers in the sequence of events, preparing them for the point of plot climax. The multiple points of view in the narrative provide the interplay of differing "temporal stances". The second-person point of view which dominates the narrative of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is a point of view that rejects traditional concepts of narrative subjectivity and authority. The second person narrator is "the consciousness that generates the 'you'-utterance" (Hantzis 47) and the second person point of view is "that which constructs the whole of the textual world through the voice that speaks it" (Hantzis 12). "Second-person" point of view is constituted "when the narrator, character, narratee, and, consequently, the reader and author are simultaneously constituted in the pronoun 'you'" (Hantzis 79).

...This book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read: this is why he was not given a name, which would automatically have made him the equivalent of a Third Person, of a character (whereas to you, as Third Person, a name had to be given, Ludmilla), and so he has been kept a pronoun, in the abstract condition of pronouns, suitable for any attribute and any action. (*IWNT* 141)

The experience of reading conventional "first-" and "third-person" point of view texts involves the experience of identifying with stable, authoritative identities. In saying "I," it is argued, the "first-person" narrator "confers subject status upon her/himself" (Hantzis 74). Hantzis's claim is that 'second-person' point of view proper directly challenges the concept of subjectivity and narrative authority that underwrites 'first' and 'third-person' points of view. "The experience of reading 'second-person' point of view proper is different because the 'second person's' oscillation hinders the production of a single, privileged subjectivity able to guarantee its own authority or the value of its knowledge" (Hantzis 133). The identity of the 'multiple subject' oscillates between positions like the "you"-as-narrator, the "you"-as-character, the "you"-as-reader and so on.

The point of view of a "second-person" narrator, "is ephemeral and un-author-ised outside the voicing of the text; it [only] persists so long as the narration persists" (Hantzis 75). Its process is one in which the reader, against all conventional tendencies towards stability and exclusivity, "continually places her/himself in and continually displaces her/himself from the 'you' while simultaneously placing and displacing others in and from the 'you'" (69). Hantzis argues that it is this characteristic oscillation and ambiguity that differentiates the "second-person" point of view from types of displaced or disguised "first-" and "third-person" utterance that employ "you" in ways "easily comprehended by traditional dyadic theories of point of view" (81).

...It is time for this book in the second person to address itself no longer to a general male you, perhaps brother and double of a hypocrite I, but directly to you who appeared already in the second chapter as the Third Person necessary for the novel to be a novel, for something to happen between that male Second Person and the female Third, for something to take form, develop, or deteriorate according to the phases of human events. (*IWNT* 141)

Different episodes of the novel are seen through the eyes of several focalizers. The frame story itself is made up of various focalizers: the

Reader's, Silas Flannery's and Ermes Marana's. Multiperspectival narration is employed by Calvino to present his novel. The embedded novels with its various first person focalizers address the problem of rendering the reality of time experience in coherent form.

...I would like to swim against the stream of time: I would like to erase the consequences of certain events and restore an initial condition. But every moment of my life brings with it an accumulation of new facts, and each of these new facts brings with it its consequences; so the more I seek to return to the zero moment from which I set out, the further I move away from it.(*IWNT* 15)

The variable focalizers provide different temporal stances and patterns which stripes away the temporal coherence of the narrative. The various perceptions contradict or corroborate with each other. What emerges across the several focalizers is a sense of the complex, multilayered temporal patterning which structures and over determines the narrative.

The interlacing of You-narrative and I- narrative

Calvino's novel is composed of two narrative strands, the first one constituting the "you" narrative, and the second presenting itself more

conventionally as "first -person" narration. The first is a frame narrative which deals with the phenomenological present of the "you"-protagonist narrated principally in what Genette calls simultaneous narration, "narration in the present tense contemporaneous with the action" (Genette 217). The second strand, narrated in both the past tense and present tense, is the framed stories, the ten fragmentary novels bearing no apparent link between one another.

The text abruptly and unsystematically alternates modes of second-person narrative and very conventional first -person narrative. The 'you'-protagonist's story proceeds in a typical postmodern aesthetic sense and expresses a deconstructive attitude towards language. The second person narrative or the 'you' narrative needs a more exhaustive study as it plays a major part in distorting the narrative temporality.

Second-person narrative is a mode that may be defined, provisionally, as narrative in which the second-person, personal pronoun 'you' is used to identify and directly or indirectly address a protagonist. Traditionally, the employment of the second-person form in literary fiction has not been as prevalent as the corresponding first-person and third-person forms. You-narratives are special forms of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives. It is a mode in which it is unclear whether the 'you' is a character, the narrator, a reader/narratee, or no-one in

particular - or a combination of these - so that readers find 'second-person' utterances at once familiar and deeply strange.

The second person can produce an experience of reading quite unlike that of reading traditional first and third-person narrative. Essentially, this unique experience comes about because the Protean-'you' neglects to constitute the stable modes of subjectivity that readers expect to find within narrative textuality. "The 'second-person' narrative complexly provokes the reader's participation in the novel in an ambiguous reader-narrator-character relationship in which the reader oscillates in identifying with the implied reader, the 'you'-character, and the voice speaking the 'you'" (Oppenheim 33).

.... This book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read: this is why he was not given a name, which would automatically have made him the equivalent of a Third Person, of a character (whereas to you, as Third Person, a name had to be given, Ludmilla), and so he has been kept a pronoun, in the abstract condition of pronouns, suitable for any attribute and any action.(*IWNT* 141)

Jonathan Culler claims that in any literary text "our major device of order is, of course, the notion of the person or speaking subject, and the process of reading is especially troubled when we cannot construct a subject who would serve as the source of the . . . utterance . . ." (Culler 170). In the You narrative the referent of the 'you' utterance is ambiguous and hence it can make uncertain the stability and therefore the authority of the narrative origin. The notion that this might present a particular problem for reading narrative is supported by Uri Margolin's observation that "whenever the identity of the textual speaker is unclear or shifting, the domain of reference of his [or her] speech will automatically be destabilized, as an ambiguity is thereby created concerning the persons and times being referred to" (Margolin 187).

...Don't believe that the book is losing sight of you, Reader. The you that was shifted to the Other Reader can, at any sentence, be addressed to you again. You are always a possible you. Who would dare sentence you to loss of the you, a catastrophe as terrible as the loss of the I. For a second-person discourse to become a novel, at least two you's are required, distinct and concomitant, which stand out from the crowd of he's, she's, and they's. (*IWNT* 147)

When "the origin of the discourse is no longer ascertainable," writes Margolin, for instance when "indexical indicators contained in the text are insufficient, unstable, incompatible or first introduced and then cancelled," as occurs time and time again in Protean second-person narrative, "the notion of the subject no longer finds any application" to textual discourse (Margolin 208). All that have been left is the text. But having undermined its own status as 'centre' and constituted for itself an unstable domain of reference, an unstable text-world, it is not only the Protean narrator's epistemological authority that is brought into question. The narrator also loses its ontological authority, its authority to posit anything at all - itself as well as the text-world

Calvino makes the novel addresses the reader as "You." The pronoun signifies a protagonist (narrative-"you") and a recipient of direct address, the metafictional-'you.' Metafictional-'you' involves a 'you' that is implicated in processes beyond the fictional realm of the story. It designates an implied reader who knows that s/he is reading a work of fiction. Furthermore, by its very definition, this class of the second person is ideally experienced by the actual reader as direct address. The metafictional 'you' implicates a self-aware reader, who stands on a higher ontological level than the story and the world of the text.

Because the narrator, the Reader 'You' is so covert, the text projects a sense of 'directness' and 'immediacy.' By addressing the reader directly, Calvino makes us aware that the addressee has a control role, as the implied reader, the actual reader, and also as the Reader-protagonist, the principal character within the fictional frame of the novel. In a statement like, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*" Calvino is trying to fix on the referent of the you (let alone decide upon a credible narrating situation). It "depends on a clear and stable distinction between an intrinsic, textual 'you' - a narratee - protagonist - and an extrinsic, extra textual 'you' - a flesh and blood reader" (Phelan 350). The reader is expected to choose between these two distinct positions within successive instances of the second-person pronoun.

Bruce Morrissette states that, "in order for 'second person' narrative to achieve a properly 'literary' status in narrative, it must fulfill certain classical definitions of narrative, such as dual time" (17). Traditional definitions of literary narrative insist that narrative necessarily involves this duplicity of time, which serves to establish a story-telling situation in the mind of the reader. The reader recognises that a narrative is being delivered. Within this story-telling situation, there is what can be called the "time of the narrating," the moment or period in which the

narrator speaks or tells the events of the tale to whoever might be listening or reading. Then there is the time of the events of the story, the time in the near or distant past when the events occurred.

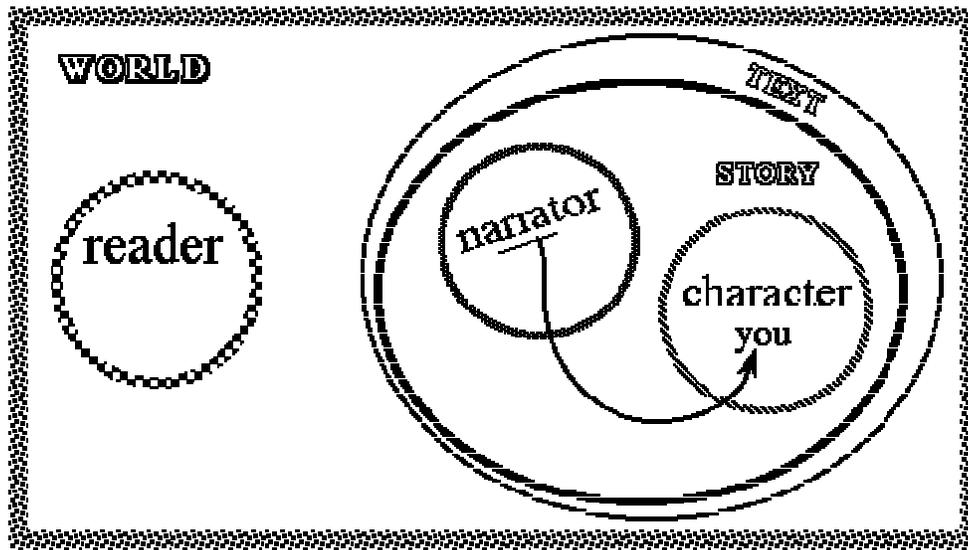
Calvino's penchant for present-tense narration makes the dual time traditionally held to be inherent to narration, the 'time of the telling' and the 'time of the told,' into one phenomenological moment characterisable as the projection of a 'continuous present'. To consider the passage of time in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* in terms of the traditional concept of time is to ignore what Calvino has referred to as the superimposition of several 'times.' The concept of past, present and future give[s] way in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* to a phenomenological notion of time as a continuous present.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller's non-linear temporality and its collapse of time into a "continuous present" are "a criticism of linear reading and of the lack of self-awareness in the reader of his or her own necessary participation in literary texts," and that they are an "attack on the naiveté of the passive uninvolved reader" (Oppenheim 158). The second person narrative pronoun, "in forcing the reader to move with the Reader through a continuous present (which is paradoxically perceived through the fragmentation of time), Calvino is obliging the reader to be aware of his own experience" (Oppenheim 158).

As Jonathan Culler observes, whenever we read narrative there is a need for "the strange, the formal, the fictional [to be] recuperated or naturalised, brought within our ken, if we do not want to remain gaping before monumental inscriptions" (134). In our habits of reading, then, we will bring to bear on these sometimes baffling, even unnatural texts whatever hermeneutic frames, whatever interpretive keys, come to hand, casting around for ways of making 'second-person' utterances in narrative discourse seem familiar.

We can always make the meaningless meaningful by production of an appropriate context. . . .Certain dislocations in poetic texts can be read as signs of a prophetic or ecstatic state.... To place the text in such frameworks is to make it legible and intelligible. When Eliot says that modern poetry must be difficult because of the discontinuities of modern culture, when William Carlos Williams argues that his varied foot is necessary in a post-Einsteinian world where all order is questioned, when Humpty-Dumpty tells Alice that 'slithy' means 'lithe' and 'slimy,' all are engaged in recuperation or naturalisation. (Culler 138)

It will be useful to sketch the narrator-character-narratee-reader complex implicit as a powerful hermeneutic frame in the second-person narrative of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* in two figures.



The defining characteristic of the You narrative of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is a "direct address to a 'you' that is at times the actual reader of the text and whose story is juxtaposed to, and can merge with, the characters of the fiction" (Richardson 320). As implied in the above figure, the reader knows that he or she is extra diegetic, outside the narrative, and only assumes identity with the main character as part of the act of play in which reading consists. As John T. Kirby explains, "Calvino's sophisticated strategy is to catch you, the extra diegetic reader, off guard, and make you the subject of diegesis, thereby spiriting or abducting you into the narrative" (11).

...Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your back, on your side, on your stomach. In an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed. You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position. With the book upside down, naturally. (*IWNT* 1)

Here, Calvino designates the most likely settings that the reader has already just chosen. With the exception of this slight temporal gap, the 'you' of the text continues to correspond with the actual reader of the book. A kind of game now begins; as long as Calvino accurately depicts the actual reader's physical position or mental response, he is addressing the actual reader in an uncomfortably proximate manner. The text, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is so strictly aligned with the Reader's spatio-temporal co-ordinates of perception that the reader is drawn into the story and is invited to co-experience what it is like to be a participant -- this particular participant -- in the unfolding events.

When the first line states, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel," in the absence of a clear referent for the pronoun, that pronoun might easily be taken up by the reader. Indeed, before the fictional character arrives on the scene, the only way for the reader to

make sense of the statement is to situate him or herself as the subject of speech, the "you" of the utterance, as the only subject available to fill it, so that "the rest of the sentence . . . organises itself around the reader, locating him or her in the narrative space in the moments before the protagonist has come to claim it" (Silverman 49). And having been called into that space, having been interpellated as that subject, Silverman argues, "the reader permits his or her subjectivity to be carried forward by the figure of the protagonist" (49-50).

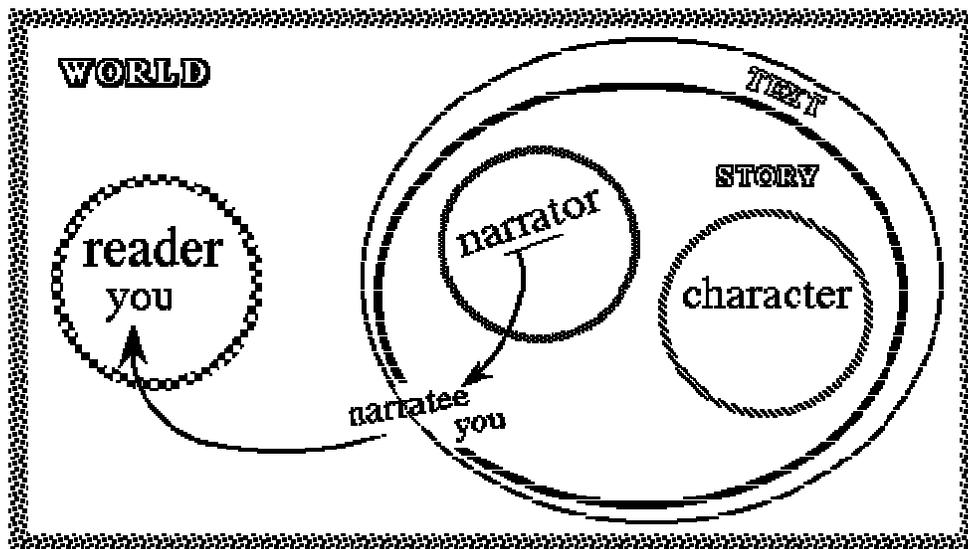
"The second person provokes the reader's participation not only by facilitating the reader's identification with the character and/or the narrator's voice through its vocative appeal, but also by implicating the reader in the existential experience constituted by the text" (Oppenheim 32). Not only does the "second person" as it is used in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* draw the reader into the text through its "unique form of identification," making the reader "an accomplice in the action of the novel," but it also names the reader as the protagonist in a very specific manner (Oppenheim 31).

....So, then, you noticed in a newspaper that *If on a winter's night a traveller* had appeared, the new book by Italo Calvino, who hadn't published for several years. You went to

the bookshop and bought the volume. Good for you. (*IWNT*

4)

The next relationship is the mode in which the narrator directly addresses the (implied) reader or a more or less specified narratee. The following figure designates such a state.



In another passage, Calvino writes: “So here you are now, ready to attack the first lines of the first page” (9). This is directed to the narratee, since the actual reader has begun the novel several pages earlier. Calvino continues: “You prepare to recognize the unmistakable tone of the author. No. You don’t recognize it at all. But now that you think about it, who ever said this author had an unmistakable tone?” These lines too are addressed to a narratee; the implied reader has already perceived the Calvino touch—the sly irony, the undermining of narrative

conventions, the relentless reflexivity. The author now raises the stakes: “On the contrary, he is known as an author who changes greatly from one book to the next. And in these changes you recognize him as yourself” (*IWNT* 9).

The actual reader will probably concur with the first of these statements, while the implied reader will see in the second sentence another version of the theme of identity—of individuals, of narrative situations, and of the book itself—that permeates the text. When Calvino goes on to observe, “Perhaps at first you feel a bit lost” (*IWNT* 9), the allusion may simultaneously refer to all the different readers (narratee, implied, and actual) that traditional narratology attempts to keep separate in theory, as well as a character called the Reader. “Throughout the text, the “you” continues to move, shift, double back, and change again, addressing alternately the real reader and the narratee” (Margolin 441–42).

The forms of second-person narrative might be thought of as points of a continuum. At one end, the figure addressed is a fully dramatised and psychologised protagonist; further along, the identity addressed as you is an undramatised but story-embedded narratee; and further still is the reader him or herself.

...The you that was shifted to the Other Reader can, at any sentence, be addressed to you again. You are always a possible you. Who would dare sentence you to loss of the you, a catastrophe as terrible as the loss of the I. For a second-person discourse to become a novel, at least two you's are required, distinct and concomitant, which stand out from the crowd of he's, she's, and they's. (*IWNT* 147)

Kacandes suggests that part of the pleasure of reading the opening lines of *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* arises precisely "because of the tensions generated between the felicity and infelicity of performatives at the level of reading" (Kacandes 169). In the first instance, as actual readers, "we felt the surprise of an unwilled performative," but if we consider the line a moment, we soon realise that the statement is not entirely felicitous (Kacandes 169). The case is not that "[y]ou are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*" a beginning, incidentally, that the narrative substantially defers - because the actual reader has already begun Calvino's new book. "For the attentive reader, then, what this opening line accomplishes is both a seduction to feel addressed and a realisation that the call is not quite accurate . . ." (Kacandes 170).

The unfolding of the text is not merely an experience projected onto the figure of the character. Rather, it is also experienced both by the writer in the act of producing the text, and by the reader in the act of reading it. The text is intersubjective because both the writer and the reader partake of the experience of the text.

The narrative meaning of the text is not primarily constituted by a text's representation of a world and of persons mobile in that world: there is the reader's experience of the world, "the journey of the words through the person, their course or their arrest, their spurts, delays, pauses, the attention concentrating or straying, the returns, that journey that seems uniform and on the contrary is always shifting and uneven" (*IWNT* 169), the reader's experience of the text (over time) and of criticism and/or prior readings of the text, and the text's (mimetic) relation to the world.

Oppenheim argues for the importance of the reader's participation and the degree to which his or her participatory role "is required in the ultimate constitution of the text" (Oppenheim 157), because only with the involvement of both reader and writer can the "passage of the creative enterprise from one to the other" come about (Oppenheim 159). She also sees the reader's participation in terms of what he/she brings to the text of his/her own understanding of reality, seeing this as vital to the text's "ultimate completion" (Oppenheim 163). Oppenheim characterises this

participation as "an author-character-reader intersubjectivity resulting from the intentional structure of consciousness" (157).

Ross Chambers's notion of the "narrative function," offers a useful way of reading the text that resolves the conventionally absolute need to attach the narrative utterance to a speaker. He proposes that rather than focusing on "discovering" the "distinctions between subjects that are in effect versions of one another" (Chambers 28) - that is, on the supposed play between actual and implied authors, narrators, narratees, and actual and implied readers - we should concentrate on distinguishing the text between three crucial contextualising functions. Thinking of narrative "as an articulation of 'functions,'" he argues, "can throw light on the question of authority" (Chambers 36).

Chambers writes that we should distinguish between, firstly, the text as language, as a referential system, secondly, the text as discourse, as a communicating practice, and thirdly, the text as object of reading, as an interpretive relation. For instance, reading for the first context, we will understand the text in terms of its reference to fictional and actual worlds. Read in the second context, we make sense of the text in terms of what we make of "the narrator" and of the narrator-narratee relationship. To read in terms of the third context, on the other hand, is to allow the text to "represent itself" (Chambers 28). Reading, Chambers argues, "as the

production of meaning, is a phenomenon that is different in kind and has a different object from the reception of information (as 'narratee'). . .” (Chambers 32). He concludes that, as a consequence, we need to "distinguish between a 'narrative function' of discourse, defined in terms of the narrator-narratee relation, and a 'textual function,' defined as a relation of a reading to writing” (Chambers 32).

In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* not only does the narration alternate between the two forms of narrative person, but there is also a slide in the identity of 'you.' Calvino shifts from the male 'Reader' perspective to the female 'Other Reader' perspective, whereby the pronoun 'you' serves as a cipher referring to Ludmilla “in the abstract condition of pronouns, suitable for any attribute or any action” (*IWNT* 141). This concept of altering points of view creates a tangled temporal web. 'Gender' is rather understood as an identity tenuously taking shape through time; but here the very notion of continuous alteration and transition leads to the denial of this identity as such.

Despite Calvino's shift in perspective, he has still managed to fully integrate the Reader.

...Don't believe that the book is losing sight of you, Reader.

The you that was shifted to the Other Reader can, at any

sentence, be addressed to you again. You are always a possible you. Who would dare sentence you to loss of the you, a catastrophe as terrible as the loss of the I. For a second-person discourse to become a novel, at least two you's are required, distinct and concomitant, which stand out from the crowd of he's, she's, and they's. (*IWNT* 147)

In a discussion of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, a postmodern novel that blurs the same kinds of temporal boundaries as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, McHale looks at a number of interpretations that seem to have asked: how can one say what the story is really about if one cannot accurately describe the fundamental relationship between the speaker and the 'you'? He proposes that "readers of *Gravity's Rainbow* and similar works should embrace the "you"-referent's undecidability and shape-shiftness as essential to the mode's most striking effects - and therefore as something to celebrate" (McHale 16). The second person contributes a great deal of what makes this story a superb example of what one may consider to be the postmodernist tendency to subvert the realistic, representational mode.

In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* there is the co-presence of the first person with 'second-person' narrative utterances in which the 'first - person' strand seems to be successfully incorporated back into the

‘second-person’ point of view's Protean oscillations. The framed stories in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* offers various first person narratives which conventionally produce particular experiences of subjectivity in the reader, sponsoring the reader's close identification with, and sense of identity as, "a self that is coherent, stable, and knowable [and that] provides a centre of fixed truth" (Siegle 7). Not only in literary texts, but also in ordinary conversation between social subjects, "I is no longer a pronoun, but a name, the best of names: . . . it gives one a biographical duration, it enables one to undergo, in one's imagination, an intelligible 'evolution,' to be signified as an object with a density, an object in time" (Barthes 68).

In his discussion on the process of fiction writing, Calvino explains that what happens is “the person ‘I’, whether explicit or implicit, splits into a number of different figures: into an ‘I’ who is writing and an ‘I’ who is written, into an empirical ‘I’ who looks over the shoulder of the ‘I’ who is writing and into a mythical ‘I’ who serves as the model for the ‘I’ who is written. The ‘I’ of the author is dissolved in the writing. The so-called personality of the writer exits within the very act of writing: it is the product and the instrument of the writing process.” (Calvino, *The Hermit in Paris* 15)

... I am not at all the sort of person who attracts attention; I am an anonymous presence against an even more anonymous background. If you, reader, couldn't help picking me out among the people getting off the train and continued following me in my to-and-fro-ing between bar and telephone, this is simply because I am called "I" and this is the only thing you know about me, but this alone is reason enough for you to invest a part of yourself in the stranger "I." Just as the author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character "I" as if to conceal him, not having to name him or describe him, because any other name or attribute would define him more than this stark pronoun; still, by the very fact of writing "I" the author feels driven to put into this "I" a bit of himself, of what he feels or imagines he feels. Nothing could be easier for him than to identify himself with me;(*IWNT* 15)

Here the speaker, by virtue of being the speaker, "casts himself in the role of ego and relates everything to his viewpoint" (Lyons cited in Jones 27-28). "The word "I" is positioned at some source of the coordinate system of subjective orientation and is therefore assumed to be egocentric" (Jones 38). Egocentricity is temporal as well as spatial, since

the role of speaker is being transferred from one participant to the other as the conversation proceeds, and the participants may move around as they are conversing: “the spatiotemporal zero-point (the here-and-now) is determined by the place of the speaker at the moment of utterance” (Lyons cited in Jones 38).

Even though the narrative adopts a game-like repetitive and self-referential quality, beneath the surface of the novel, lays a complex mechanism guiding the appearances of each character in the book. Since Calvino never makes mention of this mechanism, a reader is hard pressed to notice the constraining principle.

In his separate article "How I Wrote One Of My Books," Calvino details the method of construction, explaining an elaborate series of relationships among characters in each of twelve chapters. It reads like a mathematical formula, as an algorithmic description of the book's structure. Calvino offers the following diagrammatic representation of the relationships among the entities within the novel:

CHAP. I	$L - \ell$ $\ell' - L'$					
CHAP. II	$L - \ell^{\wedge}$ $\ell^{\vee} - L$	$L - \ell \Rightarrow$ $L - \ell \Leftarrow$				
CHAP. III	$L - \ell^*$ $\ell^* - \ell$	$L - \ell_s$ $\ell_s - L^*$	$L^* - S^*$ $[- S^*$			
CHAP. IV	$L - L^*$ $\ell - L$	$L - L^*$ $\ell - L$	$L - \ell$ $L^* - L$	$L - \ell$ $L^* - L$		
CHAP. V	$L_p - L$ $A^* - A$	$L_p - L$ $A^* - A$	$L_p - L$ $A^* - A$	$L_p - L$ $A^* - A$	$L_p - L$ $A^* - A$	
CHAP. VI	$A - \beta$ $\alpha - A^*$	$A^* - A$ $\alpha - \beta$	$A^* - A^*$ $A^* - A$	$A^* - A^*$ $N - A$	$A^* - A$ $N - \beta$	$A - \beta$ $\alpha - A^*$
CHAP. VII	$L - \ell$ $M - [$	$L - [$ $\ell - M$	$L - L$ $x - \ell$	$L - L$ $x - \ell$	$A^* - \ell$ $L - L$	$L - A^*$ $\ell - L$
CHAP. VIII	$A - L$ $i - \ell$	$A_t - \ell_L$ $\ell_A - A_p$	$A - n$ $\beta - B$	$A - \ell$ $A^* - L$	$A - \ell \Leftarrow$ $\ell \Rightarrow L$	
CHAP. IX	$L - M$ $\beta - \alpha$	$P - \beta$ $\alpha - L$	$A^* - P$ $\alpha - \beta$	$\ell - P$ $\alpha - L$		
CHAP. X	$L - \beta$ $\alpha - C$	$C - A^*$ $\beta - L$	$C - \alpha$ $L - \beta$			
CHAP. XI	$L - L'$ $\ell - \ell'$	$L - \ell$ $L' - \ell'$				
CHAP. XII	$L - \ell$ $n - L$					

For example, in chapter one, Calvino elaborates: The reader who is there (L) is reading the book that is there (i). The book that is there relates the story of a reader who is in the book (L'). The reader who is in the book does not succeed in reading the book in the book (i').

The temporal manipulations allow Calvino to satisfy his needs as a storyteller, and at the same time it allows him the opportunity to insert his own thoughts and opinions on theories of reading and writing. He fractures time into multiple versions of itself by means of intricate structures leaving the readers without a firm hold on past or present. Ultimately we have the sense that this is a novel where Calvino is in total

authorial control, not only in the sense that he controls the characters, the plot, the structure of the novel, etc., but also in the sense that he controls us as readers of the novel.

Fragmentariness as a narrative strategy to distort temporality

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller fully exploits the potential of fragmentariness as a narrative strategy to distort temporality. The fragmentation destabilizes the narrative construction of a unitary-finite type, i.e. the novel characterized by continuity, coherence, and closure. At the same time, the proliferation of narrative fragments and loose threads mystifies the reader. The narrator himself draws attention to “how much the word contains and conceals: you cut your way through your reading as if through a dense forest” (*IWNT* 42).

Fragmentariness frustrates the readers' expectations (both intradiegetically — the Reader as protagonist — and extradiegetically — the real reader), as the narrator casually points out by means of an ironic metanarrative observation: “here is a trap-novel designed (...) with beginnings of novels that remain suspended” (*IWNT* 125). Consequently, fragmentariness works here on the two levels identified by Iser in *The*

Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach, namely the “artistic” and the “esthetic.” In Iser’s view

...the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization [Konkretisation] accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. (105)

Thus, at first glance, fragmentariness at the “artistic” level is achieved by means of an intricate pattern of suspended incipits embedded in the frame story of the Reader caught up in an impossible quest for the missing narrative fragments. At the “esthetic” level, that of the “realization” of the text effected by the reader, fragmentariness appears as an inherent feature of the reading process, as it depends on time and is subject to interferences and intrusions from the world outside the book, a fact duly noted by one of the anonymous reader-characters in the novel: “Reading is a discontinuous and fragmentary operation” (*IWNT* 248).

The novel is so fragmentary that reader’s attention is almost exclusively occupied with the search for connections between the fragments. This holds true both for the Reader-protagonist and for real

readers. As a result, we-as-readers experience a similar frustration at the taunting incompleteness of the fragment-stories as the Reader-protagonist. Fragmentariness in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* has a unique effect: it reduces to a minimum the distance between the real world and the fictional one by means of this mirroring or mimicking of the circumstances of the reading process.

The narrative tries to give a plausible explanation for the fragmentariness, blaming it on the translator, Ermes Marana. Fragmentariness is motivated by “the translator’s machinations” (*IWNT* 158), who is possessed by a compulsive need, borne out of jealousy, to “affirm his presence” (*IWNT* 159) in every book by altering it, insinuating himself into it, subverting the very idea of authorship. Marana is “a serpent who injects his malice into the paradise of reading” (*IWNT* 125), a “treacherous translator” who dreams “of a literature made entirely of apocrypha, of false attributions, of imitations and counterfeits and pastiches” (*IWNT* 159), hoping to shake the very “foundations” of literature, “where the relationship between reader and text is established” (*IWNT* 159).

The translator “injects his malice” into the books of the Irish novelist Silas Flannery, the writer who is facing a writer’s block, producing only fragments, and blaming the language itself for this

fragmentariness: “I do not believe totality can be contained in language; my problem is what remains outside, the unwritten, the unwritable” (*IWNT* 181). Flannery is responsible for the narrative incompleteness as he experiences writer’s block, being unable to go beyond the incipits of the novels he has begun writing. It is Silas Flannery, Calvino’s obvious alter ego, who offers a “perfect iconic double” (McHale 126) of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* in his diary, by means of mise en abyme:

I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels. The protagonist could be a Reader who is continually interrupted. The Reader buys the new novel A by the author Z. But it is a defective copy, he can’t go beyond the beginning. ... He returns to the bookshop to have the volume exchanged. ...I could write it all in the second person: you, Reader ... I could also introduce a young lady, the Other Reader, and a counterfeiter-translator, and an old writer who keeps a diary like this diary. (*IWNT* 198).

Fragmentation, as opposed to organic completeness and wholeness, is the principle that informs the ethos of the narrative. The narrative frames do not work synergetically to construct an organic diegetic world, but they assert their individuality, their separateness from each other, pointing to hybridity as the only possible nature of the end product, and

only partly sheltering the reader from the vision of the chaos of experience which lies beneath. By fragmenting the linearity of the narrative Calvino rejects or resists completeness, thereby deconstructing the very notion of closure, of what Kermode calls “one of the most powerful of the local and provincial restrictions,” the narrative “tabu” “that a novel must end”(Kermode 56).

The Ludic mode and Temporal distortion

Ludism and ludic are often used interchangeably in English with *play* and *playful* by the writers influenced by deconstructionist ideas. Ludism comes from a Latin root meaning to play. Ludism may be simply defined as the open play of signification, as the free and productive interaction of forms, of signifiers and signifieds, without regard for an original or an ultimate meaning. In literature, “ludism signifies textual play; the text is viewed as a game affording both author and reader the possibilities of producing endless meanings and relationships” (Goring 262).

The deconstructionist ideas of Foucault, Derrida and Barthes have been most clearly advanced in the discourse of play in literature by Brian Edwards in *Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction*. Edwards surveys historical approaches to play and concludes: “Of all developments in

critical theory and practice over the last two decades, deconstruction makes the most significant contribution to play theory in its application to literature” (55). He agrees that there is much slippage in the term play, and describes it variously as “the principle of energy and difference which unsettles arrangements, promotes change and resists closure” (xiii). This concept of play does not privilege the author over the reader; there is no automatic assumption of hermeneutical dominance by one party. Rather, the play of *différance* in the text is the site where play occurs, where the author and reader meet to find meaning and pleasure.

The metaphor *game*, properly operationalized, constitutes a viable concept for the textual study of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Intuitively, playing games and reading narrative literature seem to have something in common. This section will attempt to come to terms with the concepts of narrative and game in a more literary context by analyzing the intuitive observation that Calvino's novel invites both highly immersive 'reading for the world' and playful 'reading as a game.'

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller invites the reader to *partake* in the play. Coming to terms with the characterization of the novel presupposes playful involvement in the novel. The novel actualizes the game, and literalizes the metaphor of *game*, by forcing the reader to adopt a playful, interactive attitude toward reading. The playing of the game is

thematized and thus internalized by the text itself. The reader is invited to take part in the textual play in somewhat more concrete fashion.

While analyzing the ludic mode we can distinguish between a micro-level narrative (at the level of the individual chapters) and a macro-level chronology (the text as a whole). The time-line in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is de-stabilised by the incursion of the telescopic moments-in-time narrated in the present tense, and by the embedded stories. The uneasy interplay of these two temporalities in the text renders to ludism, which is characterised by freedom, reflexivity and subversion. The ludic mode unsettles arrangements, promotes change and resists closure. It is also an interactive field where the author and reader meet to produce new meanings in an open play of signification.

The reader literally has to play the text in order to comprehend it, even in the most basic sense of figuring out the relationships among the narrative levels. The playful and transgressive narrative strategies of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* allow it to include embedded plot-sequences that dramatically enhance its tellability. The reader is required to play the text in order to become immersed in the bizarre world of narrative transitions in the first place. And once happily immersed, he or she is likely to discover that the outcome of his or her struggles, a more or less

coherent fictional world, presents itself as yet another puzzle to be played with and, hopefully, solved.

Since the ludic mode is a dynamic process, its manifestations are specific rather than generalized. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* can be explored to see its ludic mode at work on many levels—the lexical, the textual and the metatextual. The ‘nesting’ of languages is a playful coding by ludic authors, affirming freedom and possibility. Calvino’s delight in the play of language, in its flexibility and potential, expresses itself through the ludic mode on the lexical level. The main female character in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is named Ludmilla. As she is a reader, “Would it be far-fetched to discover lurking inside her name, the Hebrew ‘mila’ which means ‘a word’?” (Brink 319).

In ludic fiction, setting represents an invitation to play in a literary world that celebrates its fictionality. This process begins immediately in the opening lines of the text: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a winter’s night a traveller*.” The effect is to disrupt the presence of the first person voice and to create a ludic space, a storytelling arena, rather than reinforce a realist perspective that this is a straightforward linear account.

The reflexive treatment of space in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* fuses the narrative location with the literal text: “The novel begins in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph” (*IWNT* 10). The customary frames that divide the text and the story dissolve in this play, destabilising the vantage point of the realist mode, and through reflexivity, exhibiting its discontinuity. The vantage points are further disrupted when the chapter itself, as opposed to the train, threatens to leave the station:

...The city outside there has no name yet, we don't know if it will remain outside the novel or whether the whole story will be contained within its inky blackness. I know only that this first chapter is taking a while to break free of the station (*IWNT* 14).

Another example of plot discontinuity occurs later in the novel when the reader-character receives two manuscripts by two different authors. Instead of offering one narrative development of this action, as a realist author would, Calvino offers six. One possible development is that both manuscripts are identical. Another option is that the wind shuffles the two manuscripts together. When that happens the “reader tries to reassemble them. A single novel results, stupendous” (*IWNT* 175). This

example demonstrates how the ludic mode restricts closure. The principle of energy and difference manifests in the open expression of plot, which is also a play offering from Calvino to the reader to see his distinct narratives as part of a magical whole.

Calvino engages in the ludic play of 'I' to affirm the open play of signification. "...man who comes and goes between the bar and the telephone booth. Or, rather: that man is called 'I' and you know nothing else about him, just as this station is called only 'station'" (*IWNT* 11) 'I' could in fact be anyone. Is it the author? Is it Calvino? Is it the narrator? Is it the protagonist? As each of the narratives contains its own 'I', the ludic mode, as it is used here, unsettles the arrangements of realist fiction by endlessly deferring and resisting closure concerning the identity of 'I'.

The second pronoun employed in the service of destabilising character in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is 'you.' The strategy uses the direct mode of address to snare the reader's identification, to win our trust. This happens from the famous first sentence of the novel "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller.*" It seems that 'you' are a character in the novel when you believe yourself to be a reader of it—but Calvino disrupts even this complex relationship by introducing two additional reading characters: the Reader, and the Other Reader. He constantly plays with the use of

‘you’ and ‘reader’ in order to affirm the freedom and possibility of fictive language. Unsettling the cosy arrangements of reader identification with his characters, he mocks the reader’s attachment:

...Reader, what are you doing? Aren’t you going to resist? Aren’t you going to escape? Ah, you are participating... Ah, you fling yourself into it, too... You’re the absolute protagonist of this book, very well, but do you believe this gives you the right to have carnal relations with all the female characters? (*IWNT* 219)

The reader of Calvino’s truly ludic novel is engaged in a deeply complex literary artifice that alternates between traditional and reflexive modes, both encouraging identification with the characters and exhibiting the discontinuities that disrupt this presence. By destabilising the vantage points of realist fiction, and by reflexively showing its artifice, the ludic mode encourages the productive interaction of new forms.

Ludic play at the metatextual level works specifically through allusions, burlesque, author-ity play, and stories-within-stories. Of the three qualities that characterise the ludic mode—freedom, reflexivity and subversion—it is the quality of reflexivity that is the dominant trait at the metatextual level.

Author-ity play arises in myriad manifestations in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Its discontinuous narratives are claimed by a series of authors: a Belgian, Bertrand Vandervelde; an Irishman, Silas Flannery; and a Japanese author, Takakumi Ikoka. Further, the stories in the novel are also being variously translated or read aloud by the narrator or Professor Uzzi-Tuzii or Lotaria or Ermes Marana. The effect of this ludic author-ity play is to disrupt the presence of the single author, to unsettle the arrangements of authorship, and to foreground the artifice. The stories “are all mediated, which is just another way of saying that they are fabricated, that is, falsified [...] This, Calvino conveys to his reader, is how language works” (Brink 317).

One ‘author’ in the text, the character Silas Flannery, makes a passionate plea for an impossible authorship, and it has become a celebrated text of metafiction:

...How well I would write if I were not here! If between the white page and the writing of words and stories that take shape and disappear without anyone’s ever writing them there were not interposed that uncomfortable partition which is my person! Style, taste, individual philosophy, subjectivity, cultural background, real experience, psychology, talent, tricks of the trade: all the elements that

make what I write recognizable as mine seem to me a cage that restricts my possibilities. (*IWNT* 171)

Since it is not possible to de-nature an author in this way, Calvino has done the next best thing; by multiplying the authors he has multiplied his options, expanding the scope of possibilities — a truly ludic solution that acts to affirm freedom and endless meanings. By highlighting the artifice of author-ity, Calvino has subverted the presence conveyed by the solitary ego of the writer, and asks readers to question the nature of authorship. Far from being the master manipulator, the god-like figure of author-ity, the author is conceived of as a temporary mask or a role that can be assumed, dropped or changed. As Calvino himself said, “The author is author in so far as he assumes a part, like an actor, and identifies himself with that projection of himself in the moment in which he writes” (qtd. in Benedetti 66).

The ludic play demonstrates the fictionality of fiction through its celebration of the story-within-the-story, and through parody it affirms freedom and possibility. The metatextual play of multiple, interrupted narratives constitutes a potent ludic mode that disrupts the presence of realist fiction. It erodes the reader’s sense of certainty provided by conventional texts, resists closure and remains open to free signification. Above all, it foregrounds the reflexive nature of fiction, which is the

meeting place of author, text and reader. In the words of Edwards, “...tracking a narrative through defective editions, translations, photocopies, fragments, academic disagreement and divergent interpretations, the reader/narrator is a metatextual figure for the activity of every reader” (39).

John Barthe’s central figure, ‘the funhouse of language’ can be aptly applied to *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*. The notion of artist as funhouse proprietor, creating and lost in a funhouse composed not of bricks and glass but of words, while specifically emphasizing the linguistic medium, give possibilities for play in the creation of text. Calvino’s multiple narratives create a ‘fun house’ of language, with its suggestions of labyrinthine ways and boundless possibilities. Calvino presents his cosmopolitan collection of story fragments within the frame of another, which like them, is a fragment but in addition their container and funhouse.