The Story of Stories – If on a Winter's Night a Traveler

Chapter 5
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The novel, If on a Winter's Night a Traveler, is structurally arranged in ten fragmentary incipit novels clubbed alternately along with twelve theoretical chapters that narrate the quest of two readers to complete the reading of these novels. These twelve unnamed chapters become a space where Calvino delineates his own theory of narration and metafiction. As O'Hara says, Calvino deals with both the writing and reading of fiction, in this novel (642). But John Morse opines that Calvino deals only with 'reading' in this novel (112). The ten chapters are written by ten different authors, and these show us ten different styles of writing. Calvino spoke about the way he writes, in a lecture he had given at the New York Institute for the Humanities, in 1983, which was later published in the New York Review of Book titled as “The Written and the Unwritten Word”:

I must say that most of the books I have written and those I intend to write originate from the thought that it will be impossible for me to write a book of
that kind: when I have convinced myself that such a book is completely beyond my capacities of temperament or skill, I sit down and start writing it.

That's what happened with my last novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. I started imagining all the kinds of novels I would never write because I couldn't; then I tried to write them and for some time I felt in myself the energy of ten different imaginary novelists. (39)

Again, the idea of this novel haunted him for many years; and as Calvino admits, he even "stopped writing fiction altogether for three years" (Gary1). The combination of unfinished novels frustrates the reader. The quest of the Reader in the novel is interrupted repeatedly by varied causes and reasons. The instruments of frustration turn out to be printing and binding errors, theft, forgeries, political intrigues and conspiracies. The Reader tries to conceive order out of this chaos, "an exact, taut trajectory" (*If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* 27). Every time the Reader gets frustrated, he searches for the remaining part of the story, only to find a different story, which is even more engrossing than the previous ones. But, the
end of the novel debunks these claims, and offers a neat ending with “Just a moment, I've almost finished If on a Winter's Night a Traveler by Italo Calvino” (260). The narrator is trying to create a chaos of narration by bringing together intertextuality, parody, imitation etc. The novel employs two types of literary discourse: traditional and postmodern. The traditional level of the novel works at the level of the male and the female readers, where they search for a closure to the stories and the postmodern, self-conscious narrative that works in the fragmentary repetitions of chapter beginnings. At the postmodern level, the reader is constantly reminded of the artificiality of the text, when Calvino is determined to bare the narrative mechanisms of story-telling. Calvino uses many techniques to bring about this effect. One is meta-commentary or authorial interventions. Inge Fink analyses this carefully; he observes: “Metacommentary in If on a Winter's Night a Traveler is thus carefully balanced by the promise of a strong story line to neutralize the reader's alienation and secure his/her interest” (94).

All the stories of If on a Winter's Night a Traveler have beginnings typical of detective or mystery stories that put
readers on tenterhooks. The narrative strategy that Calvino follows is like this: first, the novelist gives the opening of an interesting story, then he plays with the curiosity of the reader with interesting twists and mysteries. The consummation of reading is interrupted repeatedly by authorial intrusions; and finally, Calvino arrests the progress of the novel at a critical juncture. The reader is always frustrated with the “aroused and dissatisfied curiosity” (Fink 67). The two readers, one a female reader named Ludmilla and the other a nameless male reader who is only addressed as Reader, try to find meaning in this medley of varied genres and narration. Most importantly, as Morse observes, this novel completely disarms the “would-be critic” (112).

In a meticulous analysis, it becomes clear that the novel addresses three basic concerns about a book: writing, reading and production of the text. Calvino elaborately plays with these aspects. These three aspects make a triangle, and alternately form the subject matter of narration in the chapters of the novel. Some of the chapters in the novel present different methods of reading, some give varieties of writing techniques, and other chapters address the issues of producing a text. It is
interesting to note that in the novel, Calvino not only portrays a character named Reader, but also portrays a 'non-reader' named Irnerio, one who is not at all interested in the activity of reading. Irnerio, the non-reader, watches everything that is printed or written as 'raw materials' for sculpturing. He carves different shapes out of them. Here, Calvino debunks the notion of the 'sacredness' of the text that some readers have towards the 'printed text'. The printed text is reduced to the level of raw material from which another artifact is carved out. The author cannot tell directly about the story to the reader. The author needs to go through the long winding methods of the establishment of 'publishing industry' to bring his book to the reader. When the book passes through the publishing industry, it is treated as any other commercial object. As compared to any other commercial-product production line, a book has to go through the hands of editors, printers, artists, designers and others. Calvino also delineates an elaborate taxonomy of different kinds of reading:

[...]you have forced your way through the shop past the thick barricades of Books You Haven't Read [...

But you know you must never allow yourself to be
awed, hat among them there extend for acres and acres the Books You Needn't Read, the Books Read Even Before You Open Them Since They Belong To The Category Of Books Read Before Being Written. And thus you pass the outer girdle of ramparts, but then you are attacked by the infantry of the Books That If You Had More Than One Life You Would Certainly Also Read But Unfortunately Your Days Are Numbered. With a rapid maneuver you bypass them and move into the phalanxes of the Books You Mean To Read But There Are Others You Must Read First, the Books Too Expensive Now And You'll Wait Till They're Remaindered, the Books ditto When They Come Out In Paperback, Books You Can Borrow From Somebody, Books That Everybody's Read So It's As If You Had Read Them, Too. Eluding these assaults, you come up beneath the towers of the fortress, where other troops are holding out:

the Books You've Been Planning to Read For Ages,

the Books You've Been Hunting For Years Without Success,
the Books Dealing With Something You're Working On At The Moment,

the Books You Want To Own So They'll Be Handy Just In Case,

the Books You Could Put Aside Maybe To Read This Summer,

the Books You Need To Go With Other Books On Your Shelves,

the Books That Fill You With Sudden, Inexplicable Curiosity, Not Easily Justified.

Now you have been able to reduce the countless embattled troops to an array that is, to be sure, very large but still calculable in a finite number; but this relative relief is then undermined by the ambush of the Books Read Long Ago Which It's Now Time To Reread and the Books You've Always Pretended To Have Read And Now It's Time To Sit Down And Really Read Them. *(If on a Winter's Night a Traveler 5-6)*
These different kinds of concerns and arrangement in the mind about reading are detailed to address the issue of 'reading'. What kind of a reading does one actually make when one reads a novel? This issue is taken up again towards the end of this chapter. But, apart from the 'actual' readers who read Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, there are some other characters within the novel who also read this novel. The male reader addressed as Reader, Ludmilla, Lotaria and the Arabian Queen are some of the fictional 'readers' that Calvino introduces in the novel. One peculiarity about these different personalities of readers is that each one of them is particular about following a different method of reading a text. Ludmilla is determined to follow the thread of the story to the last, regardless of whatever difficulties the text may pose in the form of 'printing errors' or 'binding errors'. But, the male reader, Reader, is satisfied with whatever story he gets to read, without putting much interest in finding a finite end to the story. Towards the end of the novel, Reader gets more interested in 'reading' Ludmilla, than reading *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. It is also amusing that Calvino not only implants 'human' writers in the text, but also introduces
machine assisted writing in the novel. There is an instance where the novelist within the novel —Silas Flannery— trying to finish his novel with the assistance of a computer, as he experiences 'writers block'. At the same time, Lotaria tries to analyze the text with the help of a computer by spotting oft repeated words and patterns.

Just like various kinds of readers in the text, Calvino features various kinds of writers also in If on a Winter's Night a Traveler. Various writers who make their presence in If on a Winter's Night a Traveler are Calvino (the fictitious Calvino inside the novel), Ermes Marana, Silas Flannery and a host of other writers, whose novels' incipit appear as chapters in If on a Winter's Night a Traveler. While Flannery is featured as an 'original' inspired writer, Marana is characterized as a plagiarist and translator.

The novel begins in an unusual and unconventional manner. Calvino directly addresses the readers. The novel begins this way: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, If on a Winter's Night a Traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade" (3). From the first sentence of the novel, Calvino starts off the
narrative games. The real ‘readers’ outside the text are led to believe that Calvino is addressing the real readers. But, when the narrative progresses it turns out that the ‘you’ is actually a character in the novel. If the word ‘you’ is the name of the character, ‘is’ is the appropriate grammatical usage, unlike when the word ‘you’ used as a pronoun when ‘are’ is needed. Calvino mirrors himself with the title of the novel, at the very inception of the novel. The naïve reader is led to believe that Calvino is directly addressing the ‘real’ readers outside the text. Indeed, the Calvino in the text is not the real person. But, the very feeling that he is, and that the ‘you’ is the real reader provide the novel with a kind of flamboyant power that distinguishes the novel. The confusion regarding the identity of ‘Calvino’, whether he is the real ‘author’ Calvino or a different Calvino as the character in the novel, creates a kind of postmodern indeterminacy. A curious thing to note here is that the Italo Calvino in the text is nothing but a character who, as Inge Fink notes, “is but the first character in the book, soon to be joined by others”(95). The Calvino in the text is talking to ‘you,’ who turns out to be another character, the male Reader. The ‘real’ reader, as Inge Fink notes, gets caught up in the
“complicated system of pronouns and relationships” (95). Here, Calvino is not assuming the role of a silent author where he hides himself in some other character to express his views. Calvino becomes a character in the novel.

The first fragment of the novel begins in a railway station. The traditional reader who expects a traditional novel is reminded of the artificiality of the text, in the very opening of this story. Calvino begins the novel like this: “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” (10). The protagonist of this fragment is waiting in a railway station, is narrating this fragment and addresses the reader directly. This narrator is in the station to exchange a suitcase for another with an unknown man. He introduces himself as ‘I’ and is waiting for another man with a similar suitcase. The chief of the police Gorin arrives, whispers the password ‘Zeno of Elea’ to the narrator and advises him to leave the place immediately. Gorin conveys that Jan who the narrator is waiting for, is killed. The narrator is then advised to catch the eleven o’clock train which will stop there for him. This beginning of the novel ends there abruptly. This incipit of the
novel addresses the reader directly in the first-person narrative. The division between fiction and reality is dissolved in the beginning of the novel itself. Richard Grigg suggests that *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* can be interpreted as "not only suggesting but even effecting the identification of the world with language" (56). In other words, Grigg also supports this narrowing down of the gap between fiction (language)/real (world) in Calvino. In the first chapter Calvino reasons: "The novel here repeats fragments of conversation that seem to have no function beyond that of depicting the daily life of a provincial city" (17). The authorial intrusions completely crumble the realism down.

As stated earlier, the novel ends abruptly, much to the disappointment of the male Reader. Instead of page 33, he finds that the pages from 17 are repeated again and again. Next day the Reader goes to the bookseller to get the defective copy replaced. The bookseller, instead, blames the publisher. Later, it is revealed that the pages of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* are mixed with a Polish novel *Outside the town of Malbork* written by Tazio Bazakbal. The story takes another turn here
with the male Reader deciding to follow the Polish novel instead of Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*.

Calvino uses the first-person ‘I’ and second-person ‘you’ as characters throughout the novel. Calvino implements two important narrative strategies here. In one, by using the second person ‘you’ throughout the text, Calvino wins the reader over and allures him into the snares of narrative deceptions. The reader inside the text and the readers outside the text become identical, when they search for finality to the novels that they read. The second narrative strategy happens when the reader outside the text is reminded of the textuality of the text by the author himself. He comes out of the narrative snares and watches the play of ‘I’ and ‘you’ when Calvino advances the story. Though this seems to be safe for the ‘real’ reader who thinks he is impervious to the narrative nets of Calvino, it is for this reader that Calvino wrote this novel, and the reader submits himself to the temptation to read further. From the first chapter of the novel, Calvino puts the narrative snares into motion, which in turn, initiates the cat and mouse game between the author and the reader. Every time, the narrative abruptly ends due reasons various, the reader of the text has to
assume the role of a detective to find out what really happens to the story, and he searches for finality.

Even when the author is a character in the novel—the cultural situation in which we read the book—we already have an assumption that Italo Calvino is the author of the book. And, when Italo Calvino speaks out from the text, it engenders a certain kind of indeterminacy about whether it is the real author outside the text or the author as character inside the text. The Calvino inside the text states: “Watch out: it is surely a method of involving you gradually, capturing you in the story before you realize it—a trap” (12). Although the reader gets frustrated again and again, he gets repeatedly lured into the narration. This desire to get back into the text is the desire to explore the ‘Other.’ Carl Malmgren analyses this desire of the ‘real’ reader to get back into the text in spite of repeated narrative frustrations, as something driven by an erotic force. He states: “Opening a fictional text, a reader encounters Otherness, Difference; in fact, the Desire for exposure to Otherness, Difference, is essentially erotic in nature” (112). Calvino himself stated this, in an interview with Francine du Plessix Gray:
And of course there is always something sadistic in the relationship between writer and reader. In *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* I may be a more sadistic lover than ever. I constantly play cat and mouse with the reader, letting the reader briefly enjoy the illusion that he’s free for a little while, that he’s in control. And then I quickly take the rug out from under him; he realizes with a shock that he’s not in control, that it is always I, Calvino, who is in total control of the situation. (23)

The male Reader, in the bookshop, meets another female Reader, Ludmilla. She is also there to get her copy of the misbound book replaced. The male and the female readers agree to coordinate their reading. They both search for the completion of the beginnings, completion of the meaning. Ludmilla turns out to be a voracious reader, and the male Reader is overjoyed to get the phone number of Ludmilla.

The mere meeting of male and female readers creates far reaching repercussions in the novel; it changes the process of reading. The meaning derived by the male Reader is now
corroborated by the female reader, which in turn means, he no longer reads for himself. Calvino says:

But something has changed since yesterday. Your reading is no longer solitary: you think of the other Reader, who, at this moment, is also opening the book; and there, the novel to be read is superimposed by a possible novel to be lived, the continuation of your story with her, or better still, the beginning of a possibly story. This is how you have changed since yesterday.... (32)

This is the beginning of an amorous relationship which culminates in their marriage that happens at the end of the novel. The psychological dimensions of the relationship between the Male and the Female Reader (two characters of the novel) are analyzed in depth by Marilyn Migiel1.

The Reader then begins the fresh copy of the novel to find that the “volume’s pages are uncut” (33). He finds that the novel he is reading now has no connection with the one he was reading on the previous day. This begins the second

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1 see pages 57-66 of The Phantasm of Omnipotence in Calvino's Trilogy for a detailed analysis of the psychological relationship between the two readers and how it is connected to the personal life of Calvino himself.
fragmentary novel, *Outside the town of Malbork*. By introducing binding errors, Calvino shows the physical aspects of the novel. Indirectly, Calvino is dealing with the fact that the novel is 'printed'. The material aspects of a book —the physical processes that go into the production of a printed book— are also dealt with here. The book is the ideas it holds, or what the reader derives from it. But, over and above, the book is also a material object which is implicated within a certain production process, implicated within a certain marketing system or a distribution system. A book is a product. And when it is considered as a product, the problems that come up in different stages of its production such as printing and distribution should also be considered to understand the full implications of certain printing and binding errors that Calvino introduced into the novel. It is curious to note that some of the novels that the characters read in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* turn out to be repetition of the same pages after a certain interval. Clearly, this is a printing or binding mistake. But, in the past or in the traditional printing method, 16 pages are printed on a large sheet of paper which is known as a forum. So, the novel repeats, after every 16 pages. It is no wonder that this deep
knowledge about printing made its way into the novel, from Calvino's experience as chief editor at Einaudi publishing firm. Further, it also subtly suggests that everything is arranged in a combinatorial method. That is, the 16 pages printed on a forum do not get printed in the linear order of 1, 2, 3. Pages are ordered in the forum, in a different way that breaks the linear progression, and it gets ordered at the time of binding. It essentially is combinatorial.

**Outside the town of Malbork**

The second fragmentary novel tells the story of the Kauderer family. Gritzwi, one of the members of the Kauderer family, is the narrator of this fragment. The beginning of the novel is filled with the descriptions of the kitchen of the Kauderer family. The scene of action shifts abruptly from the railway station in the first fragment, into a kitchen in the second fragment of the novel. Gritzwi will be leaving for the Kauderer estate in Petwiko, with Mr. Kauderer who had arrived there a day ago. The other character of this novel, Ponkwo, the youngest of the Kauderer family, is introduced here. Gritzwi, who is scheduled to go with Mr. Kauderer to the estate, is reluctant to go, as he has been involved in an amorous relation
with Brige. When parting with Gritzwi’s grandfather, Mr. Kauderer talks about the feud between Ozkarts and Kauderers. It is then learnt that many young men were killed in this feud. This fragment comes to a sudden stop at a moment of greatest suspense, when the Reader tries to know about the fate of Griztwi.

Like the first fragment, Outside the town of Malbrok is also filled with authorial intrusions. In page 39 of the novel, Calvino says: “The page you’re reading should convey this violent contact of dull and painful blows.” Authorial comments like this make the reader conscious of the fictionality of fiction, by shaking him violently out the world created with words. The fragment, Outside the town of Malbork, is a translation by which Calvino introduces another narrative technique: translation. As has been stated earlier, all of the fragments begin with suspense or with mystery. This fragment of the novel keeps the sense of suspense till it ends. The nature of the stories told through the fragments gets changed. In the first fragment, it gives the air of a detective story; in the second, it tells the tale of a family feud.
Outside the town of Malbork comes to an end, when the Reader finds only blank pages there in the text. Immediately the male Reader contacts Ludmilla, the female Reader. It is interesting to note that Calvino uses the term 'Other Reader' for Ludmilla. Her copy of the novel is also similarly 'defective' and they agree to consult the encyclopedia, as the names like Brigd, Griztwi and Kauderer do not sound like Polish. To their amusement, they find that the novel they had been reading is probably written in the Cimmerian language, a language belonging to the Bothno-Ugaric family. They go to the University to meet Professor Uzzi-Tuzii, who is an expert of Cimmerian language. Lotaria, sister of Ludmilla, and Irnerio who is introduced as a 'Nonreader,' make their entry into the novel here. But Lotaria fails to turn up. Irnerio has an aversion to what is written, and tries to escape from everything that is written. He says:

“What do you read then?”

Nothing. I have become so accustomed to not reading that I do not even read what appears before my eyes. It is not easy: they teach us to read as children, and for the rest of our lives we remain the
slaves of all the written stuff they fling in front of us. I may have had to make some effort myself, at first, to learn not to read, but now it comes quite naturally to me. The secret is not refusing to look at the written, words. On the contrary you must look at them, intensely, until they disappear. (49)

Calvino here seems to accommodate all possible types of 'readers' and 'nonreaders.' Irnerio is a foil—a nonreader—on whom voracious readers like the Male Reader and Lotaria can be assessed. It is relevant to implant a nonreader in a text that deals with reading. Irnerio stands apart, with his nonconformist attitudes—an aversion against everything that is written. He defies the rules of the game. The structure of meaning is broken. Nonetheless, it is as the reader says, impossible for Irnerio to escape a "world dense with writing that surrounds us on all sides" (49).

The Reader and Ludmilla go to the department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages and meet Professor Uzzi-Tuzii. In fact, he is a professor of a dead language, Cimmerian. The professor comments: "This is a dead department of a dead literature of a dead language" (52). Nobody visits this department, and Irnerio
even opines that this is a perfect place for Ludmilla to hide. The Professor comes to life when Reader enquires about the characters. But, Calvino uses this juncture to begin another fragment of the novel. The Professor states that the novel they had been reading was "unquestionably *Leaning from the steep slope,*" a novel written by Ukko Ahti. Professor Uzzi-Tuzii then translates the novel, *Leaning from the steep slope,* to them.

*Leaning from the steep slope*

The third fragmentary novel, *Leaning from the steep slope,* is presented in the form of diary entries. The protagonist narrates the story from Kudgiwa. This third incipit of the novel explores a different narrative method. The railway station is the scene in the first fragment of the novel and the kitchen is in the second fragment. The scene of the story shifts to a prison in this third fragment of the novel. The incipit of the story tells about a prisoner who tries to escape from the prison with the help of his lover. The story is narrated by a man who is recovering from an illness by living in a seaside town, upon the advice of his doctor. Miss Zwida is the lady love on whom the prisoner places his trust to help him get out of the jail. This section of the novel becomes ostensibly conscious of the
element of reading. The narrator feels that he is not only able to read texts, but everything in the nature outside also. The nature, he feels, is providing him with so much reading materials, that he will be able to decrypt any encrypted messages sent to him. The fragment opens like this: “I am becoming convinced that the world wants to tell me something, send me messages, signals, warnings” (54). The narrator tries to strike a conversation with Miss Zwida. But he retracts himself from that, citing many reasons. The narrator then takes up the position of a meteorologist when Mr. Kauderer goes on leave. The new found job of the narrator inspires him to talk to Miss Zwida. When time progresses, Miss Zwida asks the narrator for a grapnel, which she explains could be used as a model for painting. He searches for a grapnel, but everyone watches him with suspicion. The shopkeeper says: “Not that I suspect you, but it would not be the first time somebody threw a grapnel up to the bars of the prison, to help a prisoner escape...”(65). The fragment comes to a sudden end when the narrator is at the meteorological observatory. A bearded man with pale eyes comes to him and say: “I have escaped” (67).
This incipit chapter then becomes a space for contention between Professor Galligani and Professor Uzzi-Tuzii. Professor Galligani from the department of Cimbrian states that *Leaning from the steep slope* is a Cimbrian novel written by Vorts Viljandi. Professor Galligani says that Viljandi also published the first chapter of the novel in the Cimmerian language in the name of Ukko Ahti. This view is agreed upon by Lotaria and her friends. Subsequently, Professor Galligani accuses the Cimmerians of suppressing the copies of Vorts Viljandi’s works in Cimbrian language. This is countered by Professor Uzzi-Tuzii as a forgery done by the Cimbrians during the anti-Cimmerian uprising. It becomes clear that the two professors are not just motivated by pure academic interests. Politics, culture and history are also at stake here.

Lotaria, along with the group of people, arrives there, and they decide to study the book or rather, put it to a debate. Both the male and the female Readers are invited to take part in the discussion. The male Reader hopes to get a complete copy of the work, in order to finish reading the novel. The study group, interestingly, decides to dissect different aspects of the novel, which include reflections on production methods, the process of
reification, the sexual-semantic codes, metalanguages of the body, transgression of the roles in politics and in private life, and so on. Lotaria begins to read, and this new novel has no connection either with *Leaning from the steep slope* or with *Outside the town of Malbork*. It turns out to be a completely different novel titled *Without fear of wind or vertigo*.

**Without fear of wind or vertigo**

This fragment of the novel moves through the turbulent period of a country where the revolution has completely changed the priorities of the people. Alex Zinnober recounts the story of the roles of Valerian and Irina Piperin, played out in parts of this novel. The narrator is working in the military as a lieutenant and he has a mission to complete: to identify a spy who managed to infiltrate into the echelons of the Revolutionary committee and who is about to deliver the city into the hands of the Whites. The state has changed politically and culturally. Irena states: “I’m Irina Piperian, as I was also before the revolution. For the future, I don’t know”(84). Irena keeps the opinion that revolutions are meaningless until and unless they overthrow the patriarchal systems of society. When Valerian comes to Irena’s place, Alex manages to search Valerian’s
pocket to find a piece of paper. The climax of the novel is reached here. The novel ends like this: “I find the paper, folded double, with my name written by a steel nib, under the formula of the death sentence for treason, signed and countersigned below the regimental rubber stamps”(90). The novel fragment leaves the reader in a confused state, where he is not sure whether Alex is a traitor or not.

The Reader and Ludmilla try to find the rest of the novel. Lotaria informs that the novel is split into many parts for different study groups. They discuss varied topics like:

“The polymorphic-perverse sexuality...”

“The laws of a market economy...”

“The homologies of the signifying structures...”

“Deviation and institutions...”

“Castration...” (91)

Ludmilla and the Reader are frustrated. They want to continue the reading before getting into discussion. The novel that they want to read is something unpolluted by any type of ideological exhortations. Ludmilla says:
The novel I would like to read at this moment should have as its driving force not only the desire to narrate, to pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves... (92)

Lotaria and the study groups indulge in discussion on the above topics. The Reader and Lotaria are incapable of participating in the discussion without reading the novel. Lotaria comments: "Listen, there are so many study groups, and the Erulo-Altaic Department had only one copy, so we've divided it up; the division caused some argument, the book came to pieces, but I really believe I captured the best part" (91). Lotaria and her study group are of the opinion that a complete novel and the reading of the same is not necessary; one chapter is enough.

They decide to go to the publishing house and demand an explanation. As Ludmilla is reluctant to go to the publishing firm, the Reader informs that he will go to the publishing house. Ludmilla does not want to break the tender line that divides a reader/publisher. She states:
There is a boundary line: on one side are those who make books, on the other those who read them. I want to remain one of those who read them, so I take care always to remain on my side of the line. Otherwise, the unsullied pleasure of reading ends, or at least is transformed into something else, which is not what I want. The boundary line is tentative, it tends to get erased [...] I know that if I cross that boundary, even as an exception, by chance, I risk being mixed up in this advanced tide; that's why I refuse to set foot inside a publishing house, even for a few minutes. (93)

The Reader goes to the publishing firm and meets Mr. Cavedagna, who is in charge of the firm. It is at this point that the infamous translator Ermes Marana is introduced into the novel. Mr. Cavedagna informs the Reader that Ermes Marana is the central cause of all the confusions related to translation of various novels. It is then learnt that Ermes Marana claims himself to be a translator of Cimbrian language; but actually, he does not know a single word of Cimbrian language. Cavedagna informs that Marana makes constant headaches to
the publishing house. He puts the whole industry in danger. Cavedagna then reveals that the novel, *Looks down in the gathering shadow*, translated by Marana, is not a Cimbrian novel, but a trash French novel written by an almost unknown Belgian author. When questioned, Marana justifies his claims. He replies:

> What does the name of an author on the jacket matter, let us move forward in thought to three thousand years from now. Who knows which books from our period will be saved, and who knows which author's names will be remembered. Some books will remain famous but will be considered anonymous works, as far as the epic of Gilgamesh; other authors' names will still be well known, but none of their works will survive, as was the case with Socrates; or perhaps all the surviving books will be attributed to a single mysterious author, like Homer. (101)

The Reader then settles down to read *Looks down in the gathering shadow*, in the office of Cavedagana.
The Reader manages to secure a photocopy of the novel from the publisher. This is the story of a person called Reudi who kills Jojo, with the help of Jojo’s girlfriend, Bernadette. The story then narrates their attempts to dispose of the body. From the narration, it becomes clear that Reudi is a gangster. He tries his best to erase his past, yet the past haunts him. He watches it as an accumulation of stories. He says: “all I did was to accumulate the past after past behind me. [...] I’ll turn the mileage back to zero, I’ll erase the blackboard” (106). Jojo and Reudi were friends and they met in Japan. The cause of the murder is assumed to be Jojo’s cheating on Reudi. To fulfill his end, Reudi seeks the help of Bernadette. She instantly agrees with his plans, unaware of his ulterior motives. She agrees largely because she is fed up with Jojo. While Jojo and Bernadette were in bed, Reudi kills him. The novel actually opens after the murder scene, where they frantically try to fit Jojo’s body in a plastic cover; but the body doesn’t fit in the cover. They plan to dispose of the corpse in the forest. They put the body in the car and drive away. The car stops as it has run out of gas. Then they take the corpse on to the terrace of a huge
building and put it down. The twist of the story happens here, when they come down the elevator. They are apprehended by the could-be police officers.

Though the first-person narrative in *Looks down in the gathering shadow* does not offer any stark self-reflexive statements, the ruminations of Reudi do offer some valuable tips. These ruminations, in fact, offer some points by which one can asses this novel:

I'm producing too many stories at once because what I want is for you to feel, around the story, a saturation of other stories that I could tell and maybe will tell or who knows may already have told on some other occasion, a space full of stories that perhaps is simply my lifetime, where you can move in all directions, as in space, always finding stories that cannot be told until other stories are told first, and so, setting out from any moment or place, you encounter always the same density of material to be told. [...] it is not impossible that the person who follows my story may feel himself bit cheated, seeing that the stream is dispersed into so many
trickles, and that of the essential events only the
last echoes and reverberations arrive at him; but it
is not impossible that this is the very effect I aimed
at when I started narrating, or let's say it's a trick of
the narrative art that I am trying to employ, a rule of
discretion that consists in maintaining my position
slightly below the narrative possibilities at my
disposal (109).

Two points are of relevance here: one, a person can be
'cheated' by seeing a narrative that is 'dispersed into trickles,'
as in this novel, and the second, the narrator can freely apply
his 'rule of discretion' to twist the story into whatever manner
he likes. The narrator is trying to escape the burden of past
stories. Though this fragment tells the tale of a murder plot and
the efforts of the Reudi to erase all traces of it, what is
foregrounded in this little fragment is his conception of life. He
beholds life as a series of stories accumulated from the past
that continue into present and future. He feels that his life has
become a sort of space for these stories to combine, permute
etc. He tries in vain to escape this by changing his wife, his city
and even his country. This rumination presents a serious
juxtaposition of life with 'stories'. Stories mean written words confined in a plot. Just like Calvino uses various genres of fiction and different levels of narration that combines and permutes to make new model of structuring, here Reudi is also doing the same by changing his wife, city and even country. Neither Bernadette nor the readers are aware of the reason why Jojo is murdered. As already stated, the narrator, Reudi, is obsessed with stories that emanates from his past. He thinks that Bernadette is in the dark about the real story behind Jojo's murder. Like a Chinese box, Reudi relates another story within a story, *Looks down in the gathering shadow*, that features in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. He tells the story of his estranged wife and his unsuccessful efforts to keep his daughter away from his wife. At this moment, the photocopied pages of the novel *Looks down in the gathering shadow* stops. The Reader goes to meet Mr. Cavedagna. He hopes in vain that somewhere a complete volume must exist. Cavedagna tells him about the intrigues that Marana perpetrates. The narrator says that the Reader suddenly loses his comfort of a passive reader.

Now you understand Ludmilla's refusal to come with you; you are gripped by the fear of having also
passed over to "the other side" and of having lost that privileged relationship with books which is peculiar to the reader: the ability to consider what is written as something finished and definitive, to which there is nothing to be added, from which there is nothing to be removed. (115)

The Reader's hope of reading the rest of the novel is completely frustrated when the editor says, "All the papers in the Marana business have vanished. His typescripts, the original texts, Cimbrian, Polish, French. He's vanished, everything's vanished, overnight" (115). Once again, the Reader is interrupted in his quest for discovering finality to a novel. Ermes Marana has created a maze of unfinished stories, out of which it is not easy to escape.

The narrative unity of the novel is interrupted in many levels both by Calvino and by the fraudulent fictional character Ermes Marana. Marana is determined to break the normal chronological and geographical unities. Cavedagna explains about the letters written by Marana to the Reader:
The letters are addressed from places scattered over five continents, although they never seem to have been entrusted to the normal post, but, rather, to random messengers who mail them elsewhere, so the stamps on the envelopes do not correspond to the countries of provenance. The chronology is also uncertain: there are letters that refer to previous communications, which instead are found in the pages dated a week earlier. (116)

Marana's letter from Cerro Negro tells the story of a local legend known as Father of Stories. He is blind and an illiterate man who uninterruptedly tells stories that take place in countries and places completely unknown to him. Many novels published by famous authors had been recited by him many years before their appearance. What is suggested here, is the unimportance and the irrelevancy of the 'author' himself. Moreover, the inclusion/reference to this character invariably suggests that there are only a limited number of basic story structures. One cannot create anything new, or, nothing is new. There are so many stories in this world, and what every story teller does is to take some structures and then give it a local
colour. Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* amply theorizes this principle. He identifies a sequence of 31 functions that sparks off after the opening of a story/narrative. Further, Dennis Luncan states that “Calvino’s model of narrative analysis is by definition Proppian in that it subjects literature to a compositional analysis” (98).

Cavedagna gives accounts of Marana’s letters. In one letter written from the headquarters of OEPHLW (Organisation for the Electronic Production of Homogenized Literary Wroks), Marana describes about a certain crisis of the novelist, Silas Flannery. The novelist started to write a novel, but was unable to continue. Marana secures the beginning of the novel from Flannery, assuring him that their computers would complete the rest of the story easily with “perfect fidelity to the stylistic and conceptual models of the author” (118). Another episode narrated by Marana relates to OAP (Organization of Apocryphal Power). The OAP tries to capture the manuscript from Marana. But the way Marana talks to OAP makes clear that there is a bond between Marana and OAP pirates.

Marana then gives a detailed account of a ‘spiritual crisis’ that happened to the Irish writer Silas Flannery. For several months, he could not write a single line. He had been paid by advertising agencies to portray the brands of liquor to be drunk by the characters, the tourist spots to be visited, and
furnishings to be used through contracts signed. The crisis jeopardizes this whole programme, and a team of ghost writers who are experts in imitating the master's style in all its 'nuances and mannerisms' come forward to plug the gap. It is at that juncture that Marana, posing as the representative of OEPHLW, meets Flannery to offer him technical assistance to complete his novel. Flannery does not agree with it, saying "No, not that, I would never allow it" (122). The Flannery episode does not end here. It takes fantastical turns and travels to the sultanate of the Persian Gulf.

**Postmodern Parody**

The numbered chapter 6 that comes after the incipit *Looks down in the gathering shadow* presents the parody of *Arabian Nights*. A certain clause in his marriage contract prevents the Sultan from denying books to the Arabian Queen. She must never remain without the books that she likes. She has been forced to abandon the novel, *Looks down in the gathering shadow*, because of a production defect in her copy. She desperately wants to complete reading the novel. But the Sultan is now against books, as he suspects that some are spreading revolutionary ideas and plots among the populace.
He even suspects that the Sultana is conniving with the revolutionaries. He orders the confiscation of all Western books in his kingdom and also bans any imports of any books further into the Sultanate. The secret service of the sultanate learns that Ermes Marana translates the novel into the lady’s native language and persuades him to move to Arabia. The Sultan learns that the conspirators are waiting for a sign from the Sultana to begin the revolution, but she has given orders not to disturb her while she is reading. So, to prevent a revolution and to protect the clause in the marriage contract, the Sultan should always provide her with books. Marana proposes a stratagem “prompted by the literary traditions of the Orient.” He says:

He will break off this translation at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel, inserting it into the first through some rudimentary expedient; for example, a character in the first novel will open a book and start reading. The second novel will also break off to yield to a third, which will not proceed very far before opening into a fourth, and so on.... (125)
This is exactly what Calvino does here in this novel, with the same patterns repeating in the fragmentary beginnings of the chapters in the novel. This is not only an exemplary parody of *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, but it also repeats the narrative strategies of Scheherazade. The confusion of whether this is a parody or travesty is a question to be decided. However, one cannot miss the reversal of the roles that Calvino orchestrates in the novel. The Arabian Queen in Calvino stands for Scheherazade of the *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Like Scheherazade provided incessant stories to keep the thread of her life intact, it is now the onus of the Arabian Sultan to provide the queen with stories uninterruptedly lest his marriage be broken. Just like Scheherazade feared for her life, the Sultan now fears for the safety of his marriage. Scheherazade becomes a reader and the Sultan a provider of stories. Now, Calvino not only reverses the roles, but the fears and anxieties also. This reversal of roles and the exemplary parody of *Thousand and One Arabian Nights* remind the readers of Umberto Eco’s similar parody of Nabokov’s *Lolita*. In the chapter “Granita,” included in the book, *Misreadings*, Eco reverses the age and roles of the leading characters of Nabokov’s *Lolita*. It is into this vacuum
that Marana comes to provide stories to the Sultan. It now forms a triangle, or an uncanny similarity among Scheherazade, Calvino and Marana. What Calvino does in this novel, Scheherazade in *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, and Marana to the Sultan are the same. Each one begins a novel and stops the narration at the highest point of suspense.

The Reader is in a confused state. He waits for Ludmilla in a café. He then begins to read the novel *In a network of lines that enlace* written by Silas Flannery, sent to Cavedagna by Marana.

*In a network of lines that enlace*

This fragmentary novel narrates the paranoiac experience of a professor. The title, *in a network of lines that enlace*, deserves special attention; it poses problem to the reader, for the multiplicity of meanings it evokes. Network means interconnection at a fixed distance or to a point. So, how could a network of lines ‘enlace’ when the meaning of enlace is also similar. Further, this fragment addresses the predicament of professor who receives phone calls from different houses when he goes for jogging. The phone calls also make a network as
these come at a fixed time and from a fixed distance. The theme of the ‘network’ points to the underling combinatorial aspects of the novel. Every morning, before the classes begin, he goes for jogging. He thinks, the telephones that ring around him are meant for him. He even suspects that the telephone ring of his neighbour’s house is for him. He gets upset at the telephone ring. He thinks: “Does a deaf man perhaps live there, and do they hope that by insisting they will make themselves heard? Perhaps a paralytic lives there, and you have to allow a great deal of time so that he crawls to the phone” (135).

Once, while on his usual jogging sessions, he hears a telephone ring following him. The farther he moves, the louder gets the sound of the ring. He picks up the call to hear the news about a certain Marjorie who is tied up in an unknown place. The kidnapper gives him an address and threatens that if he fails to turn up, they will burn her. The professor recognizes Marjorie as one of his students. He goes to the campus and enquires about Marjorie Stubbs. He learns that she has not turned up in the campus for two days. He goes to the given address and finds Marjorie gagged and tied on a sofa. The
fragment of this novel ends when Marjorie calls the professor "you're a bastard" (139), as he releases her from the knots.

The Reader is now waiting for Ludmilla in a café. He is preoccupied with two simultaneous concerns: one, reading and the other, Ludmilla. These two concerns are later confused, and the intrinsic attributes of both reading and lovemaking are interchanged and intermingled. This happens when the Reader begins to 'read' Ludmilla in a later part of the novel. The act of love making is described as in terms of the act of reading:

Ludmilla, now you are being read. Your body is being subjected to a systematic reading, through channels of tactile information, visual, olfactory, and not without some intervention of the taste buds [....] the Other Reader now is reviewing your body as if skimming the index, and at some moments she consults it as if gripped by sudden and specific curiosities[....] the accidentally discovered detail is excessively cherished – for example, the shape of your chin or a special nip you take at her shoulder – and from this start she gains impetus, covers (you
cover together] pages and pages from top to bottom without skipping a comma. (155-156)

The Reader waits for Ludmilla in a café; and as she will be late, she instructs him to go to her house. The Reader is elated. Also, the narrative focus that Calvino gave to the Male Reader, up to this point of the novel, has been shifted to the female reader, Ludmilla. In short, the novel becomes a female centric one.

What are you like, Other Reader? 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. (141)

The act of ‘reading’ appears in myriad facets of its manifestation. Reader tries to read the personality of Ludmilla
by scanning her kitchen. Kitchen can tell many habits and personality traits of one, including 'whether you cook or not.' Here, the act of reading as a practice come to stand for (become a metaphor for) every other practice in the world. It becomes a meta-practice.

The Reader is made jealous by the appearance of Irnerio at Ludmilla's house. He is searching for some books at her residence. It is revealed that his attachment to books comes not from the interest to read them as he is a Nonreader, from a desire to make sculptures out of them. He is a sculptor, and he makes statues, pictures etc. with them. He carves them, makes holes in them. He says, "a book is a good material to work with; you can make all sorts of things with it" (149).

Calvino here debunks the superior aura related to the 'book.' It effectively debilitates the traditional status of a book as a 'store houses of knowledge.' A book now is relegated to a 'material' to work with, not for the purpose it is conventionally intended, but for something long considered it is not meant for, as Irnrio uses it so. In another way, Irnerio appears to be a parody of a critic, who will lacerate the text with trenchant
criticisms and will attribute it with unknown and unfound images and meanings.

Leafing through the books at Ludmilla’s place reveals another shocking truth that pains the Reader—Ermes Marana’s connection with Ludmilla. The Reader is gripped with jealousy, suspicion and distrust. Again Calvino connects the symbolism of reading a book with that of reading Ludmilla. The narrator comments: “The pursuit of the interrupted book, which instilled in you a special excitement since you were conducting it together with the Other Reader, turns out to be the same thing as pursuing her, who eludes you in a proliferation of mysteries, deceits, disguises” (151).

Irnerio voices his suspicion of Marana; he says that whatever he ‘touched’ turns out to be false, and his stories are ‘saturated’ with falsehood. It is now, as a direct address to Ludmilla, that Calvino deals with the question of how to begin a novel. If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler deals with novel ‘beginnings’ assumes importance in this context.

To begin. You’re [the] one who said it, Ludmilla. But how to establish the exact moment in which a story
began? Everything has already begun before, the first line of the first page of every novel refers to something that has already happened outside the book. Or else the real story is the one that begins ten or a hundred pages further on, and everything that precedes it is only a prologue. (153)

Up to this point, the motives of Ermes Marana are completely unknown. Marana is mainly fuelled to counterfeit books because of jealousy. He cannot bear the thought of authors or "the silent voice that speaks to her through books" coming between him and Ludmilla (If on a Winter's Night a Traveler 159). He is determined to frustrate her readings. Marana does not simply try to neutralize authors, but the functions of "the idea that behind each book, there is someone who guarantees a truth" (159). When his relationship with Ludmilla became more critical, he took the task to counterfeit literature. The narrator says, "Ermes Marana dreamed of a literature made entirely of apocrypha, of false attributions, of imitations and counterfeits and pastiches" (159). Everything about him is shrouded in falsity. Sieving through the correspondence that Cavedagna gave, the Reader feels as if
trapped in a labyrinth. Marana makes no distinction between fact and fiction. He even tries to convince Ludmilla that there is no difference between fact and fiction. He says that "the difference between true and false is only a prejudice of ours" (152). One more reason why the author pokes his nose into the fiction, to remind the ficionality of the fiction, is subtly suggested here when Marana asks a question: "How is it possible to defeat not the authors but the functions of the author" (159). The relationship between Marana and Ludmilla can be seen as a meta-parallelism to the story of the Arabian queen and the Sultan. Like the Sultan, who tries to feed the queen with fake translations and incomplete novels, Ludmilla's reading is also similarly frustrated by Marana.

Here, what is happening is the negation of the author, who is traditionally viewed as the one who puts meaning into the frame of character and plot. The author is dead; or, it can also be surmised as the birth of the reader. Roland Barthes states, "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said,
the author” (148). The meaning of the text is deciphered by the readers. Barthes again states that it “is language which speaks, not the author” (148), further relegating the author into the background. Silas Flannery, an author in the novel, is trying to “annul himself in order to give voice to what is outside him” (181). If this is to be taken at its full value, then one can safely assume that the reader is also a function of book, just like the author is a linguistic function of a book. The author becomes a linguistic function, not when the author speaks the language but when the language speaks him. The function of the language becomes the speaker. The ‘existence’ of the author comes into being in the ‘act’ of ‘writing’. This ‘act’ is further created by the language, and this makes the author. Thus, one can safely assume that the ‘author’ does not exist before or after the ‘act’ or writing. In the same way a reader does not exist before or after the ‘act’ or reading.

The final chapter of If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler, that only has one paragraph, again superimposes the importance of the reader when it says: “Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader. A great double bed receives your parallel readings” (260). Calvino creates two readers who try to find the
meaning of the text. As Carolyn Springer states, "By postulating a pair of naive readers who work their way empirically through a labyrinth of interlocking texts, Calvino playfully rehearses our own struggle as empirical readers to disambiguate the text in which we become entangled" (289).

**Micro Images**

The Reader turns the pages and begins to read the new book contained inside the same cover, where he found the novel, *In a network of lines that enlace*. The new novel is titled as *In a network of lines that intersect*, the latest best seller of the novelist, Silas Flannery.

This fragment of the novel describes a business magnet who is obsessed with kaleidoscopes. He copies the principles of the kaleidoscope into his life and business. He builds his business empire on the principles of kaleidoscopes that multiplies everything. The multiplication of images in kaleidoscope is paralleled in his business, like companies without capital enlarging credit, and "making disastrous deficits vanish in the dead corners of illusory perspectives" (162). This businessman is encircled by enemies. He creates multiple
mirror images of his house in different parts of the city, employs his own dummies, similar cars etc. He is in love with a girl, Lorna. The businessman is threatened constantly with kidnapping. To protect his mistress, Lorna, he makes multiple yet simultaneous amorous encounters involving the dummies, making it confusing for his kidnappers to distinguish the real and the fake. Like he feared, the kidnapping does happen. He plans kidnapping himself before his rivals do it on him. His plan was to do it five hundred meters before the rivals may kidnap him. But he realizes soon that his counter-plan was frustrated by a counter-counter plan by someone whom he does not know. This again shows the mirror/fake images working on a different scale. It is later learnt that the counter-counter kidnapping was done by his wife, Elfrida, who suspected a plot to kidnap him. She kidnapped her husband five hundred meters again before the counter kidnapping.

The use of kaleidoscope presents a variety of interpretive openings. One, it points to the fact that whatever image one beholds through a kaleidoscope is bogus. Beyond any image, there are no concrete facts, but only images reflecting multiple kaleidoscopic images, which in turn, means vacuum. The play
of these micro images amplified into multiple images hits at the narrative strategy that Calvino generally followed in his final fictional works. A mere shaking of the kaleidoscope rearranges the image that it projects and presents the viewer with another totally different reworked image. In short, a single image in a kaleidoscope can create multiple images. Like this, Calvino shakes a single narrative thread to create multiple chapter beginnings in this novel.

The next chapter, chapter eight, gives a detailed analysis of the functions of the author. This part narrates the spiritual block that the writer, Silas Flannery, faces. The chapter progresses through the writings of the diary of Silas Flannery. Apart from Flannery, one more writer is introduced in this chapter. Later, a research scholar tries to find meanings and pattern in the novels of Flannery through the introduction of computers to analyze oft repeated words.

Flannery spends most of his time watching a young woman, who reads on the terrace of her flat. Flannery is more interested in her disinterested approach to a text. He surmises that such readers can enjoy the pleasures of reading. She is not
aware of the problems and creative blocks of an author. Flannery explodes:

How many years has it been since I could allow myself some disinterested reading? How many years has it been since I could abandon myself to a book written by another, with no relation to what I must write myself? I turn and see the desk waiting for me, the typewriter with a sheet of paper rolled into it, the chapter to begin. Since I have become a slave laborer of writing, the pleasure of reading has finished for me. (169)

As he is not able to write anything creative, he writes a diary. He desires to be read by the young woman whom he regularly watches through spy glasses. The thought that what the lady is reading is written by him grips him terribly. It is an anguished cry of an agonized writer whose creative rivulets have been drained, but still hopes to be read. Flannery exclaims:

At times it seems to me that the woman is reading my true book, the one I should have written long
ago, but will never succeed in writing, that this book is there, word for word, that I can see it at the end of my spyglass but cannot read what is written in it, cannot know what was written by that me who I have not succeeded and will never succeed in being.

(170)

Ideas and plots of the stories surge in his mind, but he is not able to write anything. Finally, Flannery gives a sketch of the story he plans to write. It describes two writers who live in two chalets on opposite slopes of a valley. These two writers observe each other alternatively. One of them writes in the morning, and the other writes in the afternoon. Flannery calls one the productive writer, and the other the tormented writer. These two writers constantly watch a woman reading a book on the terrace of a chalet in the bottom of the valley. The greatest desire of the tormented writer is "to be read the way that young woman is reading" (174). This is also the dream of the productive writer. Both of them give her finished copies of their works, which turn out to be copies of the same novel. The story gets complicated when they think of alternative endings. They surmise that the young woman may have got the
manuscripts mixed up, or a gust of wind may have shuffled the two manuscripts.

Flannery ruminates over how to write a novel, so much so that he thinks of writing a book which only comprises of 'incipit.' He muses:

I would like to be able 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. But how could such a book be constructed? Would it break off after the first paragraph? Would the preliminaries be prolonged indefinitely? Would it set the beginning of one tale inside another, as in the *Arabian Nights*? (177)

This is exactly the pattern that Calvino follows in this novel— a novel only with 'incipit.' This can be taken as an example of the book 'mirroring' the book itself. The concept of 'copying' the structuring method of *Arabian Nights* then gives way to a more blatant form of copying. Importance is given only to the beginning and not to the ending. The narrator says, it is possible to “pursue the whole [book] through its partial images”
(181). Calvino offers only the fragment, thus giving the rest of the stories to be created by the readers, and giving the reader the role of a maker of meanings. But, Sorapure comments: "Calvino includes so many misreaders in his novel, characters with flawed, obviously misdirected approaches to reading, clearly indicates that he does not confer an absolute authority on the reader" (705). Calvino does allow the reader to construct meanings, but he does not give him absolute authority.

Flannery then begins to write a novel which turns out to be exact copy of the novel, *Crime and Punishment*. He comments: "I stop before I succumb to the temptation to copy out all of *Crime and Punishment*" (178).

The process of reading is not given any importance when Lotaria comes to meet Flannery. She is writing a thesis on his novels; but surprisingly, she announces she has not read any of his novels. Instead, she explains that a suitably programmed computer can read a novel in a few minutes, and can come up with thematic recurrences. She is searching for supportive meanings and patterns in the text, which she has formed in her mind even before reading a text.
The reader comes to visit Flannery to complain about the defective copies of the novels. Flannery tells him that the novel he was reading was actually a Japanese novel, *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon*, by Takakumi Ikoka. Flannery lends the Reader a copy of *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon*, which he begins to read.

**Reflections of Metafiction**

The concept of 'image' plays the central part in this incipit. It can be seen that the various levels of meanings associated with the concept of 'image'—traditionally and also in the context of postmodernism—fit into this chapter. Here, the postmodern narrative strategy of *mise en abyme*, or what is more commonly known as Chinese Boxes, is employed in an ingenious way. Towards the end of the chapter, the image of Ms. Makiko is reflected in the eyes of the student, while that of Ms. Makiko is reflected in the eyes of Mr. Okeda. At the same time, the eyes of Madame Miyagi reflect the image of the student. It forms a circle where everyone reflects each other's image in their eyes.
The chapter titled *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon* tells the tale of a man who studies under Mr. Okeda. This novel is written by a Japanese novelist, Takakumi Ikoka. In a way, it could well be said that here Calvino is parodying Japanese erotic writings, specifically the works of writers like Junichiro Tanizaki. The student comes to live with Mr. Okeda’s family. There he finds Madame Miyagi, wife of Mr. Okeda and Ms. Makiko, the youngest of Okeda’s daughters. The student who narrates the story wants to make use of the profound knowledge of Mr. Okeda regarding human sensations. In the house of Mr. Okeda, the narrator gets attracted to Makiko, and he tries to seduce her. His efforts are partly rewarded, but the circumstances turn out to be in a different way that his pursuit for the daughter ends up with the mother. Or, rather, Madam Miyagi seduces the narrator. Calvino shows another facet of metafictional narrative by introducing a Chinese-box like narration of seduction and counter seduction. The mirror images make their appearance when the images of the characters involved in sex are reflected in their eyes. The respect for relationship is lost in the fire of lust. While the narrator breaches the trust of his teacher, the teacher breaches
the sacredness of father-daughter relationship. The narration becomes a power-play of contesting emotions in which nobody wins, and the abrupt ending of the novel leaves the reader wondering the final fate of the characters. The narrator says:

My appeal to Makiko had not gone unheard. Behind the paper panel of the sliding door there was the outline of the girl [...] her eyes widened, following her mother’s and my starts with attraction and disgust. But she was not alone: beyond the corridor, in the opening of another door, a man’s form was standing motionless. [...] He was staring hard, not at his wife and me but at his daughter watching us. In his cold pupil, in the firm twist of his lips, was reflected Madame Miyagi’s orgasm reflected in her daughter’s gaze. (208)

This type of metafictional narration is most common in the oeuvre of Calvino. In the story titled “The Adventure of a Photographer” which appears in the book Difficult Loves, the photographer Antonino Paraggi realizes that the only thing that is left to be photographed is photographs themselves. “Having exhausted every possibility, at the moment when he was
coming full circle, Antonino realized that photographing photographs was the only course that he had left, or rather, the true course he had obscurely sought all this time” (52).

This fragment of the novel is narrated in the first-person narrative, and it comes to a sudden close when the plane in which the Reader is in lands in Ataguitania. The plane is landing and the Reader has not managed to complete the reading. The book is then confiscated at Ataguitania airport as it is a banned book. The Reader is there to find Ermes Marana. Another traveler who introduces herself as Corinna offers him a copy of this Japanese novel with a fake dust jacket. Instead of the Japanese novel which he has been reading, the new novel turns out to be *Around an empty grave* by Calixto Bandera. He soon realizes that everything in the country Ataguitania is false. Corinna says, “Once the process of falsification is set in motion, it won’t stop. We’re in a country where everything that can be falsified has been falsified” (212). Soon, Corinna assumes different names to dodge the police. She becomes Gertrude, Ingrid, Corinna, Alfonsina, Sheila and the like. Their car has been followed by cops, fake or real. She later claims to be a ‘real’ revolutionary who has infiltrated into the group of false
revolutionaries to discover their plans. Gertrude-Ingrid-Corinna is soon arrested and taken to the prison library. The prison authorities want the help of the Reader to determine whether his opinions match with the results of the reading machine. Everything in the prison turns out to be bogus and the prison library is filled with counterfeited books. Sheila alias Corinna comments, “Where should banned books be found if not in prison” (215). What is ‘real’ is lost in what is ‘fake.’ It is a world of duplicity and multiplicity where not only the narration, but also the characters are counterfeited. The Reader comes to Ataguina to find the counterfeiter Ermes Marana, but he encounters and perceives the whole country as built upon falsity. The narrator comments: “you have come all the way to Ataguitania to hunt a counterfeiter of novels, and you find yourself prisoner of a system in which every aspect of life is counterfeit, a fake”(215). The Reader then begins to read the electronic version of the novel, *Around an empty grave*, by Calixto Bandera given to him by the prison library.

The readers get confused about the identity of the ‘Reader’. One idea is that the character, ‘Reader’, is a creation
of the author. But this view is completely negated here, when the Reader makes love to Lotaria. The narrator asks:

Reader, what are you doing? Aren’t you going to resist? Aren’t you going to escape? [...] You’re the absolute protagonist of this book, very well; but do you believe that gives you the right to have carnal relations with all the female characters? [...] Wasn’t your story with Ludmilla enough to give the plot warmth and grace of a love story? (219)

This meta-commentary suggests that the Reader has an existence independent of the author. The Reader then confuses the readers of the novel with his double personality: one, controlled by the author and the other, an existence independent of the author.

**Around an empty grave**

The fragment of the novel, *Around an empty grave*, narrates the feud between the families Zamora and Higueras. This is described in the first-person narrative. Don Anastasio Zamora, on his death bed, instructs his son Nacho to go to a village called O quedal. Nacho, who has been raised without a
mother, then sets out to the village to search for his mother. The journey to the remote Indian village was not easy. Nacho, not knowing of the family feud, meets Anacleta Higueras. Nacho falls in love with another girl Amarantha who he tries to seduce. When Nacho begins to seduce Amaranta, Anacleta sends him to Don Jazmina, the person Anacleta claims could tell the blood relations of Nacho. It is later revealed that Anacleta is the mother of Nacho. Then Don Jazmina tells the history of the fight between Faustino Higueras and Don Anastasio Zamora, Nacho's father. Faustino was killed in the feud. When the fragment of the novel progresses, Faustino Higueras junior comes and announces to Nacho: “I am Faustino Higueras. Defend yourself” (233). The fragment of the chapter ends here.

The next chapter describes the efforts of the Reader to free himself from the Ataguitanian prison. The Ataguitanian High Command promises to free him, provided he completes a diplomatic mission to another country Ircania. The Reader meets Arakadian Porpyrich, the Director General of the State Police Archives, and explains that the mission assigned to him is “limited to contacts with officials of the Ircanian police,
because it is only through your channels that the opponents’ writings can come into our hands” (236). The Director then explains the difference between the banning of books in Ataguitania and in Ircania. The explanation turns out to be a narrative of metafiction: “The books banned here are super-banned there, and the books banned there are ultra-banned here” (236). The Reader then searches for the Ircanian translation of Calixto Bandera’s *Around an empty grave*, translated by Anatoly Anatolin. The Reader contacts Anatoly Anatolin himself and they agree to meet in a park. Anatoly Antolin is writing a novel titled *What story down there awaits its end?* The Reader expresses his wish to get a copy of the novel from Anatoly Anatolin himself. The novelist gives him bundles of manuscripts from the pockets of his long coat and pants. The novel gets shuffled when he transfers it to the Reader. Also, the Ataguitanian police tails Anatoly Anatolin down at the exact moment of transferring the novel, thus confiscating the rest of the novel. The Reader then begins to read the parts of novel that he managed to get.
What story down there awaits its end?

The unnamed first-person narrator of this fragment has a strange habit: he erases everything that is unpleasant and strange in his fancy. He erases banks, government buildings, vehicles etc. The only person he is comfortable with is Fransizka, with whom he is in love. They often meet outside buildings when he goes for a walk. He spots Fransizka, but cannot get close to her. He has erased everything that connected them. Further, he meets officials of section D, who come in between him and Fransizka. They are agents of erasure, employed by the state. Finally, when Fransizka recognizes him, she asks him to invite her to a café. The last fragment of the novel ends here.

The next chapter opens with an authorial intervention: “Reader, it is time for your tempest-tossed vessel to come to port. What harbor can receive you more securely than a great library?” (253). The Reader, finally, finds all the novels that he has been reading appear in the catalogue. But again, the Reader is frustrated, as he was denied these books for one reason or another.
You compile a first request form and hand it in; you are told that there must be an error of numbering in the catalogue; the book cannot be found; in any case, they will investigate. You immediately request another; they tell you it is out on loan, but they are unable to determine who took it out and when. The third you ask for is at the bindery; it will be back in a month. The fourth is kept in a wing of the library now closed for repairs. (253)

When the Reader goes into the library, he meets various readers. They explain how they read a text. The first reader explains that the 'book' as such is only a stimulus from which he follows his own trail of thought:

If a book truly interests me, I cannot follow it more than a few lines before my mind, having seized on a thought that the text suggests to it, or a feeling, or a question, or an image, goes off on a tangent and springs from thought to thought, from image to image, in an itinerary of reasonings and fantasies that I feel the need to pursue it to the end, moving away from the book until I have lost sight of it. (256)
The second reader then analyzes reading as a ‘discontinuous and fragmentary operation’ (254). The reader then isolates a part of the text such as some segments, juxtapositions of words, metaphors etc. to follow its meaning to its end. This reader is reluctant to detach his attention ‘from the written lines even for an instant’ (255). He is not sure when the digging on the clumps of words in a text may yield meaning or some other valuable clues. The third reader intervenes and says that every reading is a new reading, as the re-reading yields a new reading. He comments: ‘at every rereading I seem to be reading a new book, for the first time’ (255). This reader tries to penetrate further and further into the core of the meaning of the text in each of his re-readings. Finally, he concludes that “reading is an operation without object; or that its true object is itself. The book is an accessory aid, or even a pretext” (255). The fourth reader says that every book that he reads becomes a part of that overall and “unitary book that is the sum of my readings” (255). The fifth reader offers a slight variant to the thoughts expressed by the fourth reader. The fifth reader says that all the books that he read lead to a single book. The fifth reader, in fact, is seeking the book that he had
read in his childhood in all his readings. The method of reading of the sixth reader becomes relevant for the Reader. To the sixth reader, what is important in reading is the moment "that precedes reading." He continues: "At times, a title is enough to kindle in me the desire for a book that perhaps does not exist. At times it is the incipit of the book [...] I require even less: the promise of reading is enough" (256). The seventh reader then speaks. The position that the seventh reader holds is diametrically opposite to the views held by the sixth reader. To the seventh reader, what counts most is the "ending" of the novel. He says, "it is the end that counts" (256).

It becomes clear that Calvino is not dealing with 'reading' in If on a Winter's Night a Traveler, but 'readings'; a single text lacerated by different methods of reading that are intimately connected with the emotional backgrounds of the readers. The two characters hunt for the manuscripts that do not exist. This proliferation of reading dismantles and demystifies the act of reading and writing. The constant detours created by unfinished beginnings of novels, through a series of innovative ruses, work as a frame for the male and the female reader. Mariolina Salvatori gives another aspect of the novel here:
Their desire becomes the *raison d'être* of *If on a winter's night a traveler*, since the plenitude, the fulfillment, of that desire would have resulted in the scarcity - the absence - of the novel. Conceived as characters who are flawed, at their very inception, by the inability to reflect on what constitutes their flaw, they are framed and condemned to suffer repeated frustrations. (188)

These two readers read through these fragments to find a closure. Their desire to find a closure could have resulted in the non-existence of the text, if it succeeded. The fifth reader then consoles the Reader that what is important is the beginning, like in the *Arabian Nights*. The Reader is 'anxious' to hear the story. The sixth reader then says that it is from this anxiety that stories come into being. He reads out a paragraph:

*If on a winter's night a traveler, 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 enlace, 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. (258)

This, actually, is the collection of all the titles of Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. Although the titles of the stories do not give a complete grammatical sentence or meaning, in the process of combination of the titles, they do offer a meaning—the desire to hear stories. The last fragment of the novel titled “What story awaits its end?” is a teasing question, for the closure of these stories recedes further and further when the Reader reads forward. In a way, as Mariolina Salvatori says, the game of reading destroys the illusions of autonomy in the readers (195). Calvino here debunks the traditional notions of reading, by offering varieties of reading methods. These eight readers in the library offer a kaleidoscopic view of the act of reading. The seventh reader asks:

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. (259)

When the Reader understands this, in that instant, he decides to marry Ludmilla. They are married to each other and their readings continue. Ludmilla asks:

Turn off your light, too. Aren’t you tired of reading?

And you say, “Just a moment, I’ve almost finished *If on a winter’s night a traveler* by Italo Calvino. (260)

This ending, in a way, debunks the claims of fragmentary beginnings of the chapters of this novel. This novel too ends in a traditional manner. Yet, the *mise en abyme* created in *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* undermines the feasibility of a traditional ending by effectively dismantling the Aristotelian poetics of plot and time. This novel then parades pages filled with mirror images that confuse and control the act of reading.