

REFERENCE

**THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF FABULATION :
A STUDY OF SELECT WORKS OF
ITALO CALVINO**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in English

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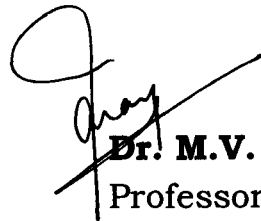
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**The Cultural Logic of Fabulation : A Study of Select Works of Italo Calvino**" submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original bonafide work of research, carried out by **Shri. Shinoj P.V.** at the Department of English under my guidance and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma.

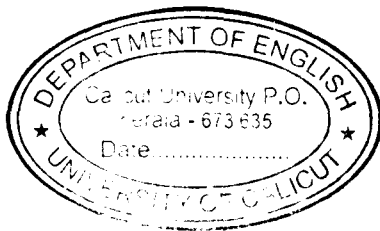
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DECLARATION

I, **Shinoj P.V**, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "**The Cultural Logic of Fabulation : A Study of Select Works of Italo Calvino**" submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original bonafide work of research, carried out by me at the Department of English under the guidance of **Dr. M.V. Narayanan** and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Shinoj P.V.

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Introduction

“[F]ables are real” Calvino announced after his two years of collecting the best Italian fables. This type of conclusion, not only influenced Calvino himself, but also made him one of the pioneers of European postmodernism¹. The practice of blending the opposites —‘fable’ and ‘real’— as existing in a single plane in literature, stamped the postmodern practice of fusing eclectically different elements in narratives.

An inherent nature of Calvino’s work is that it addresses the ‘future.’ In a sense, he was a visionary with an outspoken narrative discourse that reshaped the literary scene of Europe. The vibrations of his literary discourse, through fiction and theory, affected the whole of European and the American literary scenes. Calvino’s engagement was vibrant and total in the theoretical and literary scene, where he formulated his own propositions towards a combinatorial method of narration.

Calvino was the ‘voice’ of European postmodernism in the 70’s and 80’s, so much so that he was invited to the United States to deliver a series of lectures later published as *Six*

¹ Rocco Capozzi calls him a “pioneer of European postmodernism” (71).

Memos for the Next Millennium. It is through the combination and juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory elements in the spheres of literature, culture, history, politics, and astronomy that a reader simulates the idea of 'multiplicity' in literature. The idea of 'multiplicity,' as can be seen in the works of Calvino, points to this type of postmodern combinatory practice. The later works of Calvino, especially *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, *Invisible Cities* and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, demonstrate this method of narrative 'multiplicity.' Calvino narrowed down the margins of the difference between the 'academic' and the 'popular' in literature. His narrative is a cauldron in which these differences are melted.

This thesis tries to analyze two distinct phases of the writings of Calvino²: the first phase is the phase of 'Neorealism,' and the second is the phase of 'combinatorial narrative' and Postmodernism. Herein, how the element of fantasy is influenced by various external forces like culture, history, politics, geography etc. is examined in the light of the analysis of the select texts from both these two phases. Calvino's first

² Annalisa Sacca finds three different narrative phases in Calvino. They are, as she classifies, "anti-Fascist, story telling/science fiction, and postmodern" (1569).

two novels, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and *Marcovaldo* are selected for analyzing the first phase of Neorealism. And, the last two novels, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar* are analyzed to understand his later methods of narration.

Italo Calvino (1923-1985) was born in Cuba, and he grew up in San Remo, Italy. Calvino wrote his first novel in December 1946 at the age of twenty-three. Calvino was a member of the partisan movement during the German occupation of Northern Italy in World War II, and his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (1947), arose from his experiences of war. In his first novel, Calvino adopted a realistic mode of narration. The term 'realism' specifies his association with the literary movement of Neorealism that largely excluded anything of fantastical or experimental in nature. Slowly, Calvino diverted his novels far away from the realistic plane to the pastures of fantasy, starting with the trilogy *Our Ancestors*, wherein he pulled the strings of pure wonder in the readers.

The political conditions and cultural deterioration of the post- World War II Italy prompted Calvino to write critically about society. Calvino, the resistance fighter against Fascist

forces, and Calvino, the resistance writer against Fascist ideologies, did not differ much. The term 'resistance' is widely used in the post-war Italian context to denote any action either at the physical or at the literary level against the Fascist forces. Why Calvino espoused principles of Neorealism to document his own experiences of war into his first novel is not difficult to understand. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Calvino is one who resisted the Fascist invasion simultaneously on two levels: one at the vanguard positions of war, the other, through the written pages of prose. So, the experiences that he narrated are closer to reality than to fiction itself. Neorealist methods offered exactly what Calvino needed to convey these experiences.

Thus, the neorealist film movement of Italy became a convenient medium for Calvino to critically examine society. Neorealism was a movement in Italian art, and it tried to display a new realism in style and content in cinema, literature and other arts based on the actualities of anti-Fascist and post-war Italy. Calvino's neorealist mode of writing, as already stated, slowly started changing with the publication of *Our*

Ancestors. In his 'Introduction' to this trilogy, Calvino assesses his own writing:

I had made efforts to write the realistic-novel-reflecting-the problems-of-Italian society, and had not managed to do so. (At the time I was what was called a 'politically committed writer'). And then, in 1951, when I was twenty-eight and not at all sure that I was going to carry on writing, I began doing what came most naturally to me... (vii).

There are several stages of transition in Calvino's literary career. The theoretical background of Neorealism in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* gave way to the theories of fantasy when Calvino wrote *Our Ancestors*. The element of fantasy is modified into scientific curiosity, when the writer questions the origin of the Universe in a mocking manner in his science fiction novels and stories in the *Cosmicomics* series. This scientific curiosity is later exacerbated by his association with the French literary group Oulipo. The publication of *Cosmicomics* in 1965 marks the abandonment of his earlier literary creeds, which started with the publication of his first novel.

Calvino's career as an experimental writer during the Parisian period was influenced by the French literary group known as Oulipo (Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle, or Workshop for Potential Literature). Oulipo was devoted to experimentation in prose fiction, especially in the invention of complicated, mathematical plots. The Oulipean practitioners tried to infuse mathematical and scientific theories into literature. The concern in Calvino's writing for mathematical and scientific literature started manifesting in the works he wrote during his Parisian stay.

Calvino, in a way, reverted to the mode of 'factual' writing when he aligned himself with Oulipo. There is much similarity between the earliest Neorealistic and the final Oulipean influences on Calvino. They both tried to represent reality, albeit at different levels; one represents the physical plane of blood and sweat of humans in the Neorealist phase and the other, the mental plane of thoughts, facts and philosophy in the Oulipean phase. What connects these first and last phases of his writing is his temporary slippage into fantastical writing. As stated, there is a huge difference between the 'reality' that Calvino portrayed in his first and the final works. The 'realistic'

in the first phase becomes 'factual' in the final phase. The later works of Calvino, though they demonstrate Oulipean structuring principles, exude a unique aura of exquisite fantasy.

The final phase of Calvino, though inextricably linked with the theories of Oulipo with its adherence to scientific principles, can also be seen as a phase of 'scientific fantasy.' The 'scientific' aspect of Oulipo is largely confined to the framework of the novel, and isolated from the subject matter of the novel. Oulipo simply becomes a medium for Calvino to express narratives of fantasy. In this respect, we can safely assume that the literary journey of Calvino is a linear movement from fact to fantasy.

Calvino's concerns during his Italian stay were more rooted in historical realities and the post-war decadence of Italy. The Neorealist movement in films, which emerged as a resistance against the Fascist brutalities, slowly made its way into literature. The early period of Calvino, usually reckoned as including the works published prior to *Cosmicomics*, is connected to this historical experience.

The shift from the concrete realities of post-war degeneration that is presented through the medium of Neorealism, gave way to a more abstract theoretical concern, with his association with the Parisian literary group, Oulipo. The transition from fact to fantasy is, in effect, a transition from the Neorealistic mode of writing to the Oulipean mode of structuring. Neorealism is concrete and hence it represents 'fact'; while Oulipean theories are abstract, devoid of any historical or political roots, and hence, it is a period of 'fantasy'. Calvino depended more on fantasy than on factual representation, when his concerns became more abstract. The novels *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and *Marcovaldo* represent Calvino's Neorealistic phase of writing and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar* give a taste of his final phase of literary theories.

This thesis analyzes and explores the above four novels – *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, *Marcovaldo*, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar*— in terms of the initial and final theoretical concerns of Calvino's literary works, the peculiar element of fantasy in them, and the general mood of the public during Calvino's time.

In a way, Calvino's engagement with Neorealism in the first phase of his writing, and that with the Oulipean group in the second phase, nourished both these theories. Rocco Capozzi observes: "Calvino was hardly an imitator; he was instead interested in finding new possibilities for literature" (*Italo Calvino* 71). The second phase of Calvino's writing is characterized by the implementation of postmodern literary tools, such as *mise en abyme*, or embedding a text within the text, infinite intertextuality and also metafictional narrative strategies. The distinction between these two phases will be elucidated by taking up two representative texts from each phase: *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and *Marcovaldo* to analyze the first phase, and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar* for the second phase.

The present project, though not a comparative study *per se*, nevertheless, compares the four texts taken for the purpose of this study. The first chapter of the thesis, titled 'Theoretical Contexts 1: Neorealism,' gives a thorough theoretical background of the Italian Neorealist movement in both film and fiction, Fascist repressions of World War II film and literature, and Resistance literature. This chapter serves as a

theoretical base for analyzing the novels *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (analyzed in the third chapter) and *Marcovaldo* (analyzed in the fourth chapter). The second chapter 'Theoretical Contexts 2: Oulipo and Combinatory Narrative,' provides an introduction to the Oulipean methods of structuring, their theories and combinatorial methods of narrative structuring. Further, the second chapter serves as a theoretical base for the postmodern analysis of the last two novels of Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar*, which are the subject matter of the fifth and the sixth chapters respectively. The third chapter 'Visions of Innocence and Resistance,' takes up the first novel of Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, and studies it against the backdrop of Italian Neorealism. The fourth chapter 'Struggles: The Body, the Land and the Air,' analyses the novel *Marcovaldo* as a progression or matured form of Neorealism. The fifth chapter 'The Story of Stories: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*,' is an in-depth study of Calvino's celebrated novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. And the sixth chapter 'Vignettes of Existence,' is a detailed study of the philosophical concerns of the eponymous protagonist of the novel, Mr. Palomar.

The study of these novels helps us define with greater precision the stylistic and other transformations that Calvino's work has undergone. It cannot be said that in the mode of "fantasy" (in the sense in which this term is used in this dissertation) that arose in his writings, Calvino was unconcerned with the historicity of existence. Rather, he was attempting to express his concerns, freeing himself from the clutches of history, and undertaking to give a philosophical perspective of existence itself. Such an objective perspective may never be possible, but one can nevertheless attempt it. This perhaps justifies Calvino's shift from fact to fantasy, as his career progressed.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Contexts 1: Neorealism

Defining Neorealism is an intriguing task, in the face of a plethora of different opinions that are raised from varied artistic corners. Hence, it has come to be considered as a movement with a loose, not so well-defined theory. Neorealism tried to replace the old narrative tradition with tenets, which responded to the immediate pulse of the time, and whose subject material was the common folk. Although Neorealism was an aesthetic movement that gained momentum in film, the larger impact that it wrought was not on its viewers, but on the contemporary writers of the period. The major directors who have influenced Calvino were Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica and Luchino Visconti. These directors are considered Neorealist directors, largely because their principal characteristic of visualization was the representation of life in its immediate reality. The large corpus of narratives in Neorealism was a result of the need and obligation that the Italian writers felt to record in realistic mode the calamitous consequences of the disastrous war on their nation. As a trend that emerged simultaneously in film and

fiction, Neorealism came into force without having any stipulations related to structural or thematic limitations. The main concern of the author then turned out to be an observation of the ills of Fascism and the war that ravaged their country.

The vertiginous imagination of a world, in which the perceiver beholds the unreal as real, is exemplified in some of the early short stories of Italo Calvino, which are included in the collection, *Numbers in the Dark*. Stories like *The Man who Shouted Teresa* and *The Flash*, display an inclination towards fantastical narrative in the earlier stories of Calvino. It should also be noted that these stories reveal another important narrative strategy of Calvino: a narration of ‘absence’ against ‘presence.’ The story, *The Man who Shouted Teresa*, shows a man shouting the name ‘Teresa,’ towards the top stories of a building. People gather and shout ‘Teresa’ with him. At last, it is revealed that there is no Teresa in the building, and that their shouting was directed at an empty space, or for an imaginary “being.” The man who led the shouting of comments says: “As far as I’m concerned, we can call another name, or try somewhere else. It’s no big deal” (*Numbers in the Dark* 8). This

story, in a way, gives the gist of Calvino's logic of narration. It shows how Calvino blends the opposite elements of 'absence' and 'presence' in narration.

The other story, *The Flash*, ingeniously reveals the essential chaos embedded in an ordinary incident. Described in the first person mode of narration, the narrator finds himself befogged in the middle of the traffic on the road. He feels that everything is a semblance: the traffic, the lights etc. This sudden revelation rises quickly to another plane of reality. He then finds that everything has again fallen into their proper order. This transitional slippage of one sphere of reality to another form can also be taken as an expression of Calvino's own literary creed. In his theoretical work, *The Literature Machine*, Calvino states:

In a work of literature, various levels of reality may meet while remaining distinct and separate, or else, they may melt and mingle and knit together, achieving a harmony among their contradictions or else forming an explosive mixture. (101)

The poesies of these various levels of reality unify the divergent narratives and thematic practices of Calvino. The first theoretical influence on Calvino is Neorealism, which came from the field of cinema. In fact, the tenets of Neorealism are more illuminated in the earlier works of Calvino. His first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, is an exemplary instance of the Neorealist poetics. The transplantation of a cinematic technique into the realm of fiction is strikingly visible in this novel. Calvino, in his autobiographical work, *The Road to San Giovanni*, states:

There were years when I went to the cinema almost every day and may be even twice a day, and they were the years between '36 and the war, the years of my adolescence. It was a time when the cinema became the world for me. A different world from the one around me, but my feeling was that only what I saw on the screen possessed the properties required of a world, the fullness, the necessity, the coherence, while away from the screen were only heterogeneous elements lumped together at random,

the materials of a life, mine, which seemed to me utterly formless. (37-38)

When the thematic and narrative structure of Italian Neorealist film movement and the earlier narratives of Calvino are analyzed, it is surprising to see, how strikingly simulated and similar they appear to be. In a way, the narrative is simulated because Calvino closely follows the Neorealist tenets of structuring stories such as the depiction of poverty and resistance against Fascism. Moreover, his words, “heterogeneous elements lumped together at random,” hint at the inexorable chaos and unintelligibility of life on the one hand, and the lucidity and the intelligibility of the celluloid world on the other. The unreal planes of film and literature become more fathomable, for these two disparate spheres possess a more or less linear narrative structure. The desire to shepherd stories into a sheltered conclusion, through a calculated plot, buoys up in Calvino from his very first novel itself. But Kathryn Hume assesses that this ordered narration began only in his later career. In her article, “Sensuality and the Senses in Calvino’s Fiction,” Kathryn Hume states:

His later fictions suggest calmness verging on frigidity: the invisible cities are beautiful crystals arranged in a majestic geometric pattern; the tarot cards resemble an iconic crossword puzzle; Palomar's adventures are numerically articulated to reflect three levels of classification. (160)

This argument, although it correctly deciphers the later ordering strategies of Calvino, blatantly ignores the structuring methods of his earlier works. Through a close analysis it will be quite possible to trace the hardly noticeable but latent structuring methods in his earlier narratives. These methods are largely based on the tenets of Neorealism.

Neorealism

The Italian neorealist film movement came into existence as a direct response to Fascism. The term "Neo" prefixed to realism marks a shift in style, and explains how the post-war artists attempted "to create an imagined community to replace the (equally media-constructed) imagined community of the Fascist period" (Restivo 24-25). But Piepergerdes views it as a

continuation of the earlier *verismo*¹ tradition, hence holding it as a collective movement of the Italian arts in general, that began in the 1930s (234). Quoting Rosengarten and Ferretti, Constance Markey argues that Neorealism should not be considered as a literary movement at all, as it was never a collective move towards a unified literary aesthetics. Rather, it is a loosely assembled group of very diverse Italian writers with a 'hybrid' of ideas. Markey further quotes Calvino stating Neorealism as "not a [literary] school but an epoch and a climate" (*Main Currents* 13–14).

This movement of Neorealism, which originally started with films and was later incorporated into the genre of literary fiction, too was connected to the social, political and the economic changes that Italy had undergone during the immediate post-war years. While the Fascist regime eulogized the polished image of Italy, relegating the pervasive presence of poverty into the background, Neorealism, at this juncture, successfully avoided many a trite feature of Fascist film making techniques, and wholeheartedly embraced the use of non-actors, natural lighting, on-location shooting, and the absence of melodrama. The neorealist films gave greater importance to the regional and vernacular realities as well. It depicted the

¹ The period "Verismo" marks the "realist" period in Italian art.

hitherto untold hardships of the working class people, thus putting an emphatic halt to the Fascist portrayals of a pseudo-national image. By projecting the poverty of the rural people, the neorealist films tried to debunk the urban myths based on a Fascist projection of the affluent state. As true of many of the interfaces between neorealist film and literature, this feature of the portrayal of poverty in an urban background remained one of the favourite tropes of neorealist literature. Nicola Chiaromonte defines Neorealism as: “What is usually meant by ‘neo-realism’ when this term is applied both to literary fiction and to a certain kind of motion pictures is a more or less skilful mixture of straight reportage and humanitarian feelings” (245). Calvino himself defined the limits of Neorealism, or the meaning of Neorealism, in the sense in which he assimilated those same parameters into his earlier works, in his famous introduction to his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders’ Nest*.

[...] the explosive charge of freedom which inspired young writers in those days resided not so much in their urge to provide documentary information, as in the urge to *express*. Express what? Ourselves, life’s rough taste which we had just experienced, the

many things we thought we knew or were, and perhaps really did know and really were at that time. Characters, landscapes, shoot-outs, political messages, dialect words, swear-words, lyric passages, violence and sexual encounters, all these were but colours on our palette, notes on our scale: we knew only too well that what counted was the music not the libretto. We were all content-driven, yet there were never such obsessive formalists as ourselves; we claimed to be a school of objective writers, but there were never such effusive lyricists as us.

That was what 'Neo-realism' was for those of us who began writing in that context; and this book represents a typical sample of 'Neo-realism's' virtues and defects, arising as it did out of that naïve desire to create literature characteristic of a 'school'. For the fact is that those who now think of 'Neo-realism' primarily as a contamination or coercion of literature by non-literary forces, are really shifting the terms of the question: in reality

the non-literary elements were simply there, so solid and indisputable that they seemed to us to be completely natural; for us the problem appeared to be entirely one of poetics, of how to transform that world which for us was *the* world into a work of literature.

‘Neo-realism’ was not a school. (Let me be precise about these matters.) It was many voices combined, mostly voices from the provinces, a many-sided revelation of the different Italys that existed, a revelation also – and in particular – of the Italys, that had been least explored by literature. Without this variety of different Italys, each of them unknown to the other or which we believed were unknown to each other, and without this range of dialects and local forms of Italian which were to be leavened and moulded by the literary language, ‘Neo-realism’ would never have existed. (*The Path* 9-10)

Leon-Jones, in her article "Language and Identity in Calvino's *Il Sentiero Dei Nidi Di Ragno*," affirms what Calvino himself said: different languages, speech patterns and regional dialects collectively contribute to make *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* one of the important neorealist works (360). Sitney identifies the immediate post-war period of the late 1940s as one of most active periods in Italian history in which film contributed significantly to the construction and the communication of the changing nation (Sitney ix). The reconstructions of different spheres of politics, society, and economy, and the communication between them, which the nation confronted, correspond with one of the cinematic genres—Neorealism—that have become most representative of Italian national cinema, at the international and national spheres. The observations of Alessia Ricciardi are relevant in this context:

Neorealism in Italy may be said rather to encompass two somewhat different meanings. The term comes to be associated, on the one hand, with the project of reformulating the nation's identity in the period immediately after World War II and, on the other, with the notion of a privileged instrument for the

recuperation of reality either in its immediacy [...] or in a critically mediated form [...]. (483)

Piepergerdes argues that the impact of Neorealism is still predominately encased within a formal or aesthetic analytical shell (232). Director and film theorist Carlo Lizzani says that the most acute unifying factor in these films is their “hybridization of culture” (qtd. in Piepergerdes 232). It is mostly true also in the sphere of neorealist fiction. Calvino calls it as “many voices combined.” The neorealist film and fiction follow a multifaceted narrative structure; these two forms completely negate a singular narrative structure and theme. The neorealist works rather show a propensity towards heterogeneity. As Calvino states, “It was many voices combined” (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* 10). They are amalgams of tried-and-true genre formulas central to pre-war Italian cinema, ranging from melodrama, comedy, and historical epic to documentary and suspense (Piepergerdes 232).

The neorealist movement primarily puts emphasis on the depiction of the Italian scenario with more accurate portrayals of the ‘reality’ which the Fascists tried to hide. This, in turn, became one of the unifying factors of the film and

fiction of the neorealist era. The Neorealist fiction drew much of its inspiration and semblance from the neorealist films so much so that the impact of both upon society can be assessed with similar yardsticks. The Neorealist films paraded the sharp disjunction between the coercive Fascist nationalist vision (which tried homogenizing the North and South and city and country) and the class differences of the people, through the portrayal of these popular counter-arguments. By revealing the gaps in the so called Italian unity through the inclusion of the local and regional social realities into cinema, Neorealism embarked on a debunking of the fallacies of Italian unity. At the same time, it offered a different concept of nationalism based on class consciousness, cultural heterogeneity, and regional co-operation.

It is possible to explain realism, as it was depicted in the Neorealist film and fiction, to outline the central filmic modes of resistance used to counter the Fascist models. The Fascist period witnessed an emphasis on style propelled by a renewed interest in 'pure literature.' The writers then observed a strict avoidance of realistic crudeness, and tried to incorporate matter-of-fact details in their writings. Nevertheless, what is today called Italian realism (or Neorealism), was born precisely in those years, and in reaction to the emptiness of the official

ideology as well as to the strictures of state-controlled writing (Chiaromonte 238).

The Nonrealistic film movement rather consciously made use of two types of elements to symbolically reveal what the Fascists actually did in the physical space. They are the continual alteration and/or renunciation of spectacle, and the iconographic representation of both the physical and the cultural landscape that constitutes a nation. To understand how the Fascists tried to construct the signs and symbols of subjugation, and created a narrative space to project the representations specific to Fascist ideology, it is essential to analyze the resistance arguments against this move from the Neorealist writers. Landy states:

Since neorealism eschewed the monumental and epic dimensions of the historical film that often functioned in the interests of nationalist rhetoric, and since it seemed to offer new versions of the nation, it presented new forms of address and interrogation to film makers involved in postwar reconstruction, decolonization, and reconsiderations of the subaltern [. . . .]

[It] was a movement that aimed to make connections with the Risorgimento, the unification of Italy as a nation, and the unfinished revolution. It was a cinema of anti-Fascism, expressing the aspirations of the Left, focusing on social injustice and the arrogance of power, critical of the clichés and formulas of genre and with the spectacle and rhetoric of the cinema under Fascism (2000, 17, 13).

Restivo also fills the remaining openings of this counter narration of Neorealist writers by connecting it with the historical experiences. He says: “the Italian experience of the immediate post-war was that of history that remained to be written, of meanings that remained to be fixed. For Italians, the post-war period was one of social antagonisms that existed at the level of the *Real* of history” (Restivo 2002, 10).

The Italian Neorealist movement is transformative in nature due to the avoidance of spectacle used in the sense of eulogizing the merits of Italy, through a total negligence of the other side of the nation, which the Fascist propagandist films did, and also because of the absence of artifice and escapism. Rather, the Neorealist movement was faithful in its depiction of

contemporary reality, and gave more importance to mundane life and its problems than to literary ornaments like allusion and metaphor. These methods of Neorealist directors accurately debunked the Fascist claims about the grandiose historical past of Italy.

The key directors who spearheaded this movement were Luchino Visconti, through the films *Ossessione* (1943) and *La terra trema* (1948); Vittorio De Sica through *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948); and Roberto Rosellini through *Roma città aperta* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Stromboli* (1950). It should be noted that these films are united through narrating the ordinary and everyday struggles of working class people in the precarious period of post-war reconstruction. In the hands of these directors, as Manuela Mariani states, even the 'urban landscape' became an additional character (311). The celluloid spectacles created by these directors prompted the popular imagination of the people who were accustomed to melodrama, towards a rational questioning of the inequalities that were present in the society. But it is equally important to note that some of these neorealist directors like Vittorio De Sica have become fantastical in their later works, making a close rapport with Calvino, who adopted a 'fantastical' mode of narration in his later works starting from the trilogy *Our Ancestors*. Walter Metz comments: "De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1950) is studied, usually as a lament to neorealism's decline into fantastical whimsy" (275).

The subversion/alteration of the genre of Neorealism happened not only at the thematic level, it has even percolated into the technical levels of editing. This explains why the Neorealist directors tried to minimize the effects of spectacle. These directors avoided close photography, which gave importance to the minute details, but preferred long shots with minimal editing. The effect of this technique is that it captured the wholeness of life into the frame. As Landy comments, these shots enabled the “viewer to assimilate the character’s specific relationship to the environment” (Landy 161). Also, this realism is directly connected to historical necessities, so much so that these two media of cinema and history are connected, forming a symmetrical “mirror-like relation between ‘cinema’ and ‘history,’” and both these media give a coherent and progressive message at both cinematic and historical levels (Riva 294).

The theme of ‘resistance’ is represented through a number of narrative strategies, in film and fiction. Resistance in Neorealist films is effected through many ways, and one among them is the depiction of ‘crowds.’ In Neorealist films, the narrative space of crowds becomes places of resistance, as opposed to symbols of occupation and submission. It also

symbolically represents a collective will, which tries to empower those who were marginalized under Fascism. The trope of 'crowd' is one of the many features that is commonly used in Neorealist film and fiction. It is used to convey the opposition towards authority, and acts as an instrument for localized unity. Piepergerdes cites the example of the crowd scene in the film, *The Bicycle Thief*, by De Sica. A similar organized resistance scene can also be found in Calvino's first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. The idealized portrayal of urban luxury and Fascist modernization of city space is deconstructed through a realistic presentation of the pervasiveness of urban poverty. The theme of urban poverty gives narrative strength to some of the stories of *Marcovaldo*. The urban poverty is symbolically revealed through the loss of innocence of youth, in the process of reorganizing the traditional familial roles demanded by the post-war situations. Pin, the child protagonist of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, is a perfect example of this feature. Another apt example would be Michelino, in the stories of *Marcovaldo*. The Neorealist treatment of children becomes obvious when going into a deeper analysis of these child characters. The Neorealist depictions locate children outside

the formal educational system, enmeshed in real-world struggles, to survive in the post-war environment. (Piepergerdes 243). Children are stripped off their innocence, left unprotected by the disintegration of the traditional family, often orphaned as a consequence of the war, and forced to fend for themselves. In a sense, it is the disintegration of society itself that is symbolized by the disintegration of the family, as shown through the image of the orphaned children. This image of orphaned children serves as a theme of resistance against the fascist portrayals of 'perfect family' and state. The Neorealist writers project the image of 'homeless children' as a direct outcome of the Fascist repressions and persecutions.

The Fascists tried to combine and equate the cultural and historical past of Italian dominance with the often glorified and monumental aspects of the city. Counter to this undercurrent movement, Neorealist works offered, what Tartagni calls "a great urban periphery" (qtd. in Piepergerdes 241). The use of the term "periphery" acquires tremendous importance in analysis, when it becomes evident that all the lived locations and experiences of the marginalized fall into this group. Further, this periphery is the opposite of the symbols, monuments and artifice associated with Fascism. In an extended examination of this narrative space, it becomes obvious that this space represents both people and places

united through poverty, unemployment and the breakdown of the family. In Calvino's first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, the opening scene of the story in the inn stands as a cogent example of this point. The inn becomes a hub for social outcasts. The movie, *The Bicycle Thief*, by Vittorio De Sica, endorses this point. Set in Rome, this film follows the protagonist Antonio and his son Bruno, as they traverse the city from neighborhood to neighborhood in search of Antonio's stolen bicycle. Throughout their quest, Rome is rendered as stricken with poverty and unemployment.

An important trope that runs commonly through Neorealist film and fiction is the theme of poverty. The inclusion of poverty with its corollary problems, and their destructive and crippling effects, provides a unifying quality to these works. The enhanced focus on the theme of poverty meets two ends: it effectively debunks the Fascist claims of urban and rural prosperity, and works as social equalizer in the war-trodden country where all the citizens, regardless of their class and region, are confronted with the same struggle to survive. The endemic nature of poverty strikes everybody; and in its onslaught, social and regional stratifications are obliterated,

which in its turn leads to the emergence of a totally new national unity that allows the continuation of cultural heterogeneity. The Neorealist cinema emphasizes the economic plight, to narrate the people excluded from the Fascist interpretation of the nation. The images in film and descriptions in fiction, of the downtrodden working class in urban and rural areas, stand as testimonies to counter the Fascist principles of economic advancement.

John Agnew, in his book *Place and Politics in Modern Italy*, details the political developments that Italy witnessed immediately after World War II. He indirectly indicates that the genre of Neorealism, which grew up in a period of total political openness and social uncertainty, influenced the political consolidation of power prior to the year 1948 (Agnew 93). He further states that many a left-wing party came together on a common platform to fight against Christian Democrats, forgoing their ideological differences and resetting their outstanding priorities. This is just a replica of what happened to Neorealism. The post-war period witnessed the triumph of Christian Democrats in Italy. Calvino who began his political life as a resistance fighter against the Fascist forces, grew into that of a

dedicated member of the Italian Communist Party known as PCI. The stories written in the first phase of his Communist career bear the marks of his political convictions. Mariya Laurino comments: "Calvino's early fiction, written after his involvement as a young Italian Communist in the Resistance during World War II, was born from deep political convictions and a powerful sense of social justice" (33).

The Italian public soon grew tired of the popularity of the Neorealist films. By the 1940's, the interest of the public shifted to American melodramatic films. They were reluctant to confront the post-war issues and struggles. The political resentment towards the depiction of the Neorealist projections aggravated the decline of Neorealism. The political parties viewed the projections of poverty and unemployment in negative light. Piepergerdes gave another facet of the decline of Neorealism, which was again intimately tied to political reasons. Neorealism's association with left ideologies soon invited the displeasure of Christian Democrats who enjoyed support from the United States as part of its global fight against Communism. The Andreotti Law of 1949 imposed censorship on films that presented Italian life in a bad light (250). The

popularity of Neorealist films waned gradually, when the reality of unattainable social unity—a society free of class, and ethnic and regional antagonisms— slowly dawned among the public. This did not imply that social unity was unattainable; it simply meant that the unifying realities of the screen failed to convert itself into the real amongst the populace.

Though connected to a specific historical period, Neorealism influenced subsequent directors and writers alike, who questioned the hegemonic structures of society. It became an important tool of socio-cultural interrogation and critique.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Contexts 2:

Oulipo and Combinatory Narrative

The experimental career of Calvino that started with the publication of *Cosmicomics* and extended up to his last work is generally termed as the second half of Calvino's narrative career. This narrative phase of Calvino is completely different from that of his earlier narrative strategies in which he mainly used the Neorealistic narrative methods. Calvino, in his experimental narrative phase, makes use of postmodern narrative strategies. The abandonment of Neorealism was the first step towards this. Carlo Laurenzi comments: "I admired Calvino while he remained a traditional writer. When he went to France and became a companion to the various Queneaus and Perecs, he became an experimental writer" (qtd. in Anna Botta 81). The period he resided in France was marked by drastic changes in his literary production. The changes in the literary production include the incorporation of 'combinatorial' and 'Oulipean' narrative methods. It involved a complete rejection of the ethos of his Neorealistic period. In a way, the key impulses

those propelled Neorealism were lacking in France. Lucia Re states that Neorealism “was an autobiographical and documentary narrative, it was anti-fascist, and it disclosed a subaltern regional reality that fascism had both exploited and covered up” (*Neorealist Narrative* 120). The factors that effected the changes in the narration are the “subaltern regional realities,” which are completely different/absent in France.

It becomes clear that Neorealism carried elements of ‘autobiography’ and it is related to ‘regional’ experiences. In a way, geography influenced Calvino to formulate a literary creed from which he could not escape. Calvino says: “what you read and what you experience in life are not two separate worlds, but one single cosmos. Every life-experience, in order to be interpreted properly evokes certain things you have read and blends into them” (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* 18-19).

Calvino could only write about what he experienced, and the realities that formulated his career. The regional or topographical influences are quite visible in his narratives. The first two chapters of this thesis analyze two novels, *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* and *Marcovaldo* that are set in Italy, as Calvino himself states in his ‘Preface’ to these two novels. But

in contrast, the novels, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar*, do not evince even an iota of any association with Italy. Further, *Mr. Palomar* is replete with images of France, an indication of Calvino's abandonment of his previous literary creeds. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* challenges his Neorealist narrative background by resorting to a more ingenious 'frame narrative' method of combinatory narrative strategy.

In contrast to *Mr. Palomar*, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* offers a different and varied topographical experience. Each incipit of this novel offers a story that is tied down to the culture, language and history of different parts/countries of the world. But, *Mr. Palomar* yields itself to the influence of one country, France. In a way, the sheer proliferation of different localities (locales) and literary genres in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* insulates it from any possible compartmentalization into the strict confinement of any single theoretical formulation of narration or literary form, as the text offers itself to the plurality of interpretation. The last novels of Calvino are not driven by any political or ideological forces. This does not, of course, occlude the undercurrents of combinatorial structuring

methods that surfaced in his later novels. And, this combinatorial narration is not related to any political ideologies. It simply is a scientific method of writing/narration. Starting from the novel *Invisible Cities*, through the last novel *Mr. Palomar*, the methods of narration that come up in structuring the later novels are the methods of 'combination' and 'permutation'.

Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle - The Workshop for Potential Literature) is a diverse group of novelists, poets, mathematicians and others who tried to experiment with writing through infusing scientific/mathematical principles into literature.

The Oulipean narrative principles generally give importance to rules that work to define the territories of the text. As Jean-Jacques Thomas and Lee Hilliker state, Oulipean texts "not only furnish directions for use but also reveal the code that prescribes a general principle of textual production"(26). By giving an introductory note on how to decipher the meanings posited in numbers in *Mr. Palomar*, Calvino defines the narrative territory of the novel. In the first chapter of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Calvino hints that

the text is about the experiences and the problems of 'reading'. There are no predefined rules of writing in Oulipo. The rules that govern the composition of the text are invented by the author himself. The text then becomes an examination of how far the constraints set by the author are respected. The analyses of the two novels, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar*, reveal a stringent adherence to the rules that Calvino sets for both these texts: the former repeatedly frustrating the consummation of reading experience, and the latter elucidating the meanings posited in numbers through the protagonist Palomar.

The acts of reading and writing are no longer the sole activities of humans. The computer or such machines specifically programmed to accomplish a predefined task of writing or reading is quite capable of doing these otherwise 'human' activities. In the process, it strips the 'imaginative', 'inspirational' aspects off the text that were generally generated out of a 'human' author. These types of machine writings become truly what one calls 'mechanical'. The concept of the 'death of the author' is highly exemplified in the text, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Jean-Jacques Thomas and Lee

Hilliker state:

Oulipo leads us into this era, for, before anyone else, it has understood the vast exploratory power harbored in a machine capable of tirelessly mapping out the possibilities of a work whose coordinates have been given to it by an author in search of imaginary solutions. (27)

While the employment of the influence of Neorealism probably had extra-literary reasons behind it, the influence of Oulipean combinatory practices had purely literary rationale behind it. *Mr. Palomar*, written in 1983, was translated into English by William Weaver in 1985. This novel was much influenced by the Oulipean theories and the 'combinatory' practices of literature. As Anna Botta says:

His interest in narratology and structural semantics led Calvino to attend Roland Barthes's famous seminar on Balzac's *Sarrasine* and A.J. Greimas's course at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes.... Yet the most lasting influence on Calvino's writing during the "French period" came from Oulipo, a group of

Parisian literati and mathematicians who experimented with language and the relations between literature and science. (82)

The tenets of Oulipo colour the novel, *Mr. Palomar*. The Oulipeans always invented constraints. Jacques Jouet stresses this aspect when he says that Oulipeans “don't write literature under constraint ... but seek out usable constraints so that literature is written ... The Oulipo is faber, it fabricates tools” (4). This definition is important because Oulipeans always invented their tools or defined their constraints. If they do not define it, “[t]he constraint will in turn define their work for them” (Consenstein 1). The structure of *Mr. Palomar* explicitly shows how constraints are ingeniously weaved in to it. The structure of *Mr. Palomar*, as shown in the sixth chapter of this thesis, clearly indicates its Oulipean nature. The meaning of *Mr. Palomar* lies in its division of contents into three parts. In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino says:

Since science has begun to distrust general explanations and solutions that are not sectorial and specialised, the general challenges for literature is to be capable of weaving together the various

branches of knowledge, the various “codes”, into a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world. (112)

This is a possible explanation as to why Calvino introduced three thematic areas in which various branches of knowledge expressed themselves. Calvino's imposition of this constraint can be watched as a ‘code,’ which is an essential part of combinatorial poetics. Paul A. Harris explains:

Calvino's combinatoric literary creations are organised around three categories: the code, or the self modifying set of rules and conventions surrounding literature; the clinamen, the scientific trope for what disrupts the code and taps what would remain an otherwise invisible potential; the city, the concrete and cultural site of both. (67)

The code is important in the analysis of *Mr. Palomar*. Calvino imposes a code or a self modifying set of rules, according to which the chapter or themes organize themselves. The code is closely linked to the meaning presented; anything marked with “1” invokes visual experience; those marked with “2” invoke anthropological or cultural experiences; and finally,

those marked with “3” invoke speculative experiences. Further, those marked with “1.2.3” or “1.2.2” combine those elements which stand for the numerals. In the case of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, Calvino adopts a more complex set of codes as constraints. Here, the meaning of the novel is not invested in ‘numbers’ as happened in *Mr. Palomar*, but in constantly interrupted chapter beginnings. While any individual chapters or chapter titles of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* do not give out any specific meaning or help to unravel the complexities of the text, but a reading through the titles of the text makes sense.

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 enlance, 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. (If on a Winter’s Night a TravelerI 258)

The constraint becomes clear when the titles are ‘combined’. The constraint is to conclude stories without a

proper 'ending', making the stories wait for an ending in an 'empty grave'. The word 'grave' could mean that these chapter beginnings are not going to get a conclusion.

In *Mr. Palomar*, the meaning of the text is invested in numbers. Calvino does not hide these constraints from the reader. Jacques Jouet says that "the constraint being linked to formal meaning requires that the constraint not be hidden from the reader" (Jouet 6). Also, in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, one could not overlook the chapter headings.

The systematic arrangement of the chapters in *Mr. Palomar* again falls into the Oulipean idea of literature that "a constraint is systematic" (Jouet 4). This systematic arrangement of chapters is meant to involve the reader in the text. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, "what narcissistic narrative does do in flaunting, in baring its fictional and linguistic systems to the reader's view, is to transform the process of making of poesies, into part of the shared pleasure of reading" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 20).

The sudden shift of theme in *Mr. Palomar* in accordance with the number that fixes the theme, constantly reminds the

reader of its 'discontinuity', and it advises the reader to be alert. Also, the constant reading interruptions created by a variety of ingenious excuses in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* make the reader aware of the discontinuous nature of the text. This idea of making the reader implicated in the text is an essential Oulipean idea. Peter Consenstein says: "the active participation of the reader, who mediates and thus becomes implicated in the novel's constraints, is an essential element of the Oulipean concept of literature" (109).

This involvement of the reader is made possible through the working of 'clinamen theory.' Harris explains the term thus: "The clinamen is the term which refers to an unpredictable swerve in the fall of atoms into their place, such that atoms then collide and initiate new formations" (74). Calvino uses clinamen as a metaphor for creativity and sees the clinamen "as the moment in the text which breaks the repetitive or closed code and generate new narrative lines" (Harris 75).

In many parts of *Mr. Palomar*, it can be seen that the clinamen theory disrupting the structuring orders of the Oulipean structuring methods. The chapter that has a numerical value of '1.2.1' which gives it 'observational-cultural-

observational' meaning is disrupted with the injection of the idea of 'eros' into it. This chapter, though it does not refer to 'food,' invokes the idea of eros. This inevitably breaks the code "1.2.1," that is, "observational-cultural-observational." The motif of repeating the same theme is broken in this chapter to evoke Palomar's eros. This infiltrated code of eros opens up the possibility of triggering off other codes. According to Paul A. Harris:

As we saw in the context of his work with the OULIPO group, Calvino used the clinamen as a point of departure to think through the problems of how determinate structures in narrative could be infiltrated, as it were, so that within the code generating a text one could insert a component that would then open up possibilities for other codes to enter the game. (77)

The disruption of the determinate pattern of the plot is a favourite constraint of Oulipean practitioners. They introduce several clinamen in their narrative to deviate from the set pattern of the plot. The introduction of linguistic play and *mise en abyme* are introduced to inject the narrative with

potentiality. As Jacques Roubaud clarifies: “It's known, or should be known, that the goal of the OULIPO is Potentiality” (38). The literary trope *mise en abyme* becomes a powerful tool in Calvino's hands.

The very structuring of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* exemplifies the use of *mise en abyme*. Calvino, narrates another *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* within the novel. Even the individual chapters of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* resort to the use of this technique in various narrative levels. Ample examples of this technique are there in the novel. One strong example is the reference to *Arabian Nights* in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, which invariably invokes the meta-narrative possibilities of fiction. The kaleidoscopic images in the chapter, *In a network of lines that intersect*, gives the example of multiplication of narration through the multiplication of mirror images projected in the kaleidoscope. The chapter *Around an empty grave* presents the same character Faustino Higuera who comes in different dimensions. The ingenious example would be the employment of mirror images of reflection in the eyes of the characters in the chapter, *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon*.

The metafictional nature of *Mr. Palomar* through the application of *mise en abyme* happens in the chapter, "The Infinite Lawn." Palomar visualizes universes within the universe, that is, a plot within the plot. Palomar states: "The universe perhaps finite but countless, unstable within its borders, which discloses other universes within itself" (29).

The combinatory phase of Calvino's literary career reached its zenith in *Mr. Palomar*. Calvino in his 1967 article, "Cybernetics and Ghosts," states:

The number of words was limited, and, faced with the multiform world and its countless things, men defend themselves by inventing a finite number of sounds combined in various ways.... And the more limited were the choices of phrases or behaviour, the more complex the rules of language or custom were forced to become in order to master an ever-increasing variety of situations. (*Literature Machine* 3-4)

The combining of finite variables into infinite combinations is an essential element of Oulipean experiment.

The Oulipean literary experiments are more obsessed with the linguistic permutations and combinations. As Anna Botta remarks:

In Oulipean literary experiments, science is not only used as source of inspiration, it in fact becomes the principle of organization of linguistic and narrative materials. The writer explores the possibilities implicit in his/her language by permuting and combining an already existing set of data and codes.
(81-82)

This “combinatory” process is problematized in *Mr. Palomar*, in the chapter, “Reading a Wave”. The continuous combinatorial operations upon a finite set of elements, in accordance with a finite set of definite rules, are always associated with the phenomena of chaos. So, in “Reading a Wave,” Palomar only encounters chaos. Palomar states:

... you cannot observe a wave without bearing in mind the complex features that concur in shaping it and the other, equally complex ones that the waves itself originates. These aspects vary constantly, so

each wave is different from another wave, even if not immediately adjacent or successive; in other words there are some forms and sequences that are repeated, though irregularly distributed in space and time. (4)

To Calvino, the searching for an order in the flux of chaos is important, as each combination is complex. The appearance of 'some form' and 'sequence' is brought out by a painstaking observation. There is an echo of this principle in Calvino's theoretical work titled *Six memos for the next millennium*. He says:

[The] taste for geometrical composition, of which we could trace a history in world literature starting with Mallarme, is based on the contrast of order and disorder fundamental to contemporary science. The universe disintegrates into a cloud of heat, it falls inevitably into a vortex of entropy, but within this irreversible process there may be areas of order, portions of the existent that tend toward a form, privileged points in which we seem to discern a design or perspective. (69)

Another important Oulipean trait in *Mr. Palomar*, which in fact influences some of the stories in this text, is the use of science to organize linguistic and narrative materials. The theme of combination appears in different forms in this novel. In the chapter, "The Model of Models," the narrator states:

Mr. Palomar's rule had gradually altered: now he needed a great variety of models, perhaps interchangeable, in a combining process, in order to find the one that would best fit a reality that, for its own part, was always made of many different realities, in time and in space. (99)

Palomar understands that he needs many a model in his mind to comprehend the myriads of situations that a human being has to face. Palomar needs a model in his mind to comprehend each situation; and in the face of infinite situations, he decides to resort to the 'combining process.' The chapter, "The Odd Slipper," presents another Oulipean aspect of this combinatory process. As Palomar says:

A mistake can occur only with an absent-minded customer like himself, but centuries can go by

before the consequences of this mistake affect another visitor to that ancient bazaar. Every process of disintegration in the order of the world is irreversible; the effects, however, are hidden and delayed by the dust-cloud of the great numbers, which contains virtually limitless possibilities of new symmetries, combinations, pairings. (91)

This trajectory of his meditations is affected by the mismatched slippers that Palomar bought from a bazaar. Here, Palomar problematizes the whole situation by imagining a continuation of mismatched slippers going down into the future. This continuation will form a new array of “symmetries, combinations and pairings.” In short, this process also contributes to the underlying Oulipean combinatorial process of the novel. The chapter, “The Order of Scaly Creatures,” presents yet another variation of the combinatorial process. While visiting a zoo, Palomar comes across a snake house and notices the ever changing symmetry of their order as they move constantly.

But among the infinite possible combinations only some —perhaps actually the most incredible— become fixed, resist the flux that undoes them and

mixes and reshapes; and immediately each of these forms becomes the centers of a world, separated forever from the others, as here in the row of glass case-cages of the zoo; and in this finite number of ways of being, each identified in a monstrosity of its own, and necessity, and beauty of its own, lies order, the sole order recognisable in the world. (77-78)

The Oulipean way of producing a text is based on revising the past genres and structures of literature. Peter Consenstein observes that Oulipeans “pay tribute to literary history by declaring all structure of all various genres of past eras open to innovation” (1). This Oulipean theory of ‘innovating the past’ acquires importance when we compare *Marcovaldo* to *Mr. Palomar*. The structure of *Marcovaldo* and *Mr. Palomar* at least, are similar, in one respect— both of them have episodic narratives. In *Marcovaldo*, there is no thematic continuation, but there is a seasonal one, and thus a chronological continuity. These two novels have eponymous protagonists. While *Marcovaldo* is concerned more with the worldly realities, *Palomar* indulges himself in intellectual exercises. While

Marcovaldo becomes a silent spectator of the cruelties of the society, Palomar is the one who generates narratives, as the stories in *Mr. Palomar* are the product of his cogitative wisdom. If Marcovaldo struggles against the society to eke out a living, Palomar is pursuing “knowledge,” the product of cognitive ruminations.

In a way, there is a lot of similarity between *Marcovaldo* and *Mr. Palomar*. The framework of *Marcovaldo*, which is episodic, is retained in *Mr. Palomar*. It can further be argued that Calvino actually modifies the structure of *Marcovaldo* in *Mr. Palomar*. Peter Consenstein points out that Oulipeans usually exploit constraints that are:

derived from the physiological act of memory, amplifying and embodying a principle. Oulipean goal which involves measuring the potential of past literary forms, and devising a constraint that not only realizes its potential, but also produces a work that is entirely new. (Consenstein 19)

Calvino uses this very Oulipean strategy to invest ‘potentiality’ to *Mr. Palomar*. Calvino modifies his own past

literary corpus. The past is remembered in *Mr. Palomar*. John Hanny speaks about the inherent similarities and the reworking of structure: “*Mr. Palomar* can be seen as a more profound example of the same paradigm of failure that Calvino had earlier depicted in terms of social oppression in *Marcovaldo*” (80). The conflicts of *Marcovaldo* that are ‘social’ are reworked in *Palomar*, as his conflicts are ‘intellectual’ (Hannay 80). The process of memory is of particular importance to the implementation of the Oulipean constraint of reworking the past. The “traces of the past are left behind; the past is remembered and modified at the same time” (Consenstein 19). According to *Palomar*, the continuance of his own self can be in two ways:

The biological mechanism, which allows leaving to descendants that part of the self known as the genetic *heritage*; and the historical mechanism, which grants a continuance in the memory and the language of those who go on living and inherit that portion, large or small, of experience that even the most inept man gathers and stores up. (112)

Here Palomar stresses the importance of memory, calling in to mind the Oulipean preoccupation with the constraint on memory. The application of mathematical rules to the production of a literary text is an essential Oulipean idea. Peter Consenstein observes that the Oulipeans devise constraints from mathematical conundrums, and attempt to realize their potential by applying them to a text (3). This Oulipean idea is meticulously followed in *Mr. Palomar*, where the index of chapters clearly indicates its combinatorial process as well as the mathematical combining of divided themes. They appear to transgress the boundaries with the mixing of numbers. As in a mathematical form, the text is produced by strictly adhering to the meaning or “value” that each numeral has been assigned with. By combining the numeral “1” which has a “visual” value and the numeral “2” which has an “anthropological” value together produce a “1.2” value that stands for an “anthropological-cultural” theme. The chapter, “The naked bosom” which has a value of “1.1.2” falls into the “observational-observational-cultural” theme. In this chapter, the two values of numerals “1” and “2” are mixed to produce this theme. Palomar observes the bosom of a lady, but the

cultural barriers prevent him from appreciating that spectacle. The chapter, "The Sword of the Sun" which has been assigned the value "1.1.3," mixes the themes that the numerals "1" and "3" stand for. The numeral "3" stands for "more speculative experience, concerning the cosmos, time, infinity, the relationship between the self and the world, the dimension of the mind" (*Mr. Palomar* 116). This chapter mixes the "observational-observational-meditative" themes. In this chapter, Palomar's observations on the rays of the sun lead him to meditate upon the infinity of time and to imagine "that endless world before his birth" (*Mr. Palomar* 15). The chapter, "The loves of the tortoises," has been assigned the value "1.2.1," that is, it mixes the themes "observational-cultural-observational." The narration of this chapter progresses from observation of the mating tortoises, connects it to the cultural sphere of human being, and once again slips back into the observational mode of describing the tortoises.

It is curious to note that the same theme appears again and again in different combinatory forms throughout *Mr. Palomar*. This is a typical Oulipean constraint where the same text repeats itself. Jacques Jouet comments:

One same text is produced indifferently by several different constraints that are not operating as a bundle but in isolation. This would be an Oulipean pathway to pursue: a lipogrammatic translation of a text is also the antonymic translation of another text... n different constraints each elicit the same text. (Jouet 10)

This method of different combinations with the numbers “1”, “2” and “3” leads to the proliferation of texts. But more noticeable are the constraints, in turn, defining the text. The numbers clearly state what the chapter tells, and by reading the chapter one can elicit the numerical value of the constraint. This perfect blending of the text and the constraint is known as “Roubaud's Principle.” Jacques Jouet states:

The constraint can produce several texts, but prefers to produce the text that defines it. It's what the Oulipeans call Roubaud's Principle. There is a fusion of the text and the constraint. It's not exactly the suicide of the constraint, for nothing forbids concurrent proliferation, but this ideal satisfies the most conceptual Oulipeans. (9)

In *Mr. Palomar*, the constraints of numbers work through the protagonist, Palomar. The constraints define Palomar. It is important to note that the placing of the index within the text itself shows the next action of Palomar as indicated by the numerals. As Stefano Franchi observes, “The book thus reflects the conclusions of its protagonist in the very narrative structure itself” (770). If the structure of *Mr. Palomar* is mathematical, and if the constraints imposed by the numbers that indicate themes are resolved, it can be concluded that it necessarily indicates the death of the constraint or the solving of a mathematical problem. In Oulipean writing, literature is always compared with mathematics. Laskowski-Caujolle states: “Oulipo can be characterised by one of the main postulates of its poetics— that of the essential analogy between mathematics and literature” (72). The use of a constraint is to resolve the question or the problem. Jouet states: “[T]o use a literary constraint is to seek a conflictual, question - and - answer situation, a confrontation that is like the Sphinx's question and the candidate's answer. The constraint is the question; the text is the answer” (8).

So, to the questions combined with constraints like “1”, “2” and “3”, the protagonist, who himself becomes a constraint,

in turn gives the answer; the different texts with the same theme are the answers. By the end of the novel, Palomar dies, thus negating all the constraints, or even terminating the perpetuation of constraints, as these constraints cannot be put into action without him. Palomar states:

[E]ach instant, when described, expands so that its end can no longer be seen. He decides that he will set himself to describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all he will no longer think of being dead.

At that moment he dies. (113)

The death of the protagonist happens at the moment he decides to unravel his whole life or to resolve the puzzle. In a way, it is the death of the constraint. Peter Consenstein observes:

The completed novel is the philological result of the constraints logic. The whole, a sum of its parts, is the author's ultimate gift, and the reader's knowledge of the logic is not always necessary. Once a puzzle has been completed it is no longer a "puzzle", a puzzle must puzzle. (103)

The solving of a puzzle is done in a mathematical way. In Palomar, the constraints imposed by the numbers “1”, “2” and “3” come to a full circle with the last chapter, “Learning to be dead.” The ordinal value assigned to it is “3.3.3”, that is, it clears the combinatory game and concentrates only in expounding the infinity or the meditative aspect. Laskowski-Caujolle states: “a text written according to a mathematizable constraint must contain the consequences of the mathematical theory it illustrates” (76). This resolution of a constraint or the death of a constraint, as it cannot be perpetuated any more, is a typical Oulipean anxiety. Jacques Jouet states:

All of the Oulipean users of constraint are caught in the snare of the two extremes of its imaginary world: the much and the little, the all and the nothing. Before making something, (or while doing it), one must consider nothingness, since something can only exist in the face of nothingness, just as meaning only exists in the face of non-meaning, just as Oedipus's answer to the Sphinx's riddle, if it were the only possible answer, would destroy meaning by forever destroying the riddle. The riddle must be

perpetuated. It must be used again and again. If the constraint is the Sphinx, it must ask the riddle anew and elicit a different answer. But the death of a constraint (or its inappropriateness) are part of the Oulipean imagination. (7)

Palomar tries to perpetuate his life, but fails. The postponement of death is not possible. The narrator observes: “after one postponement or another, the moment comes when it is time to wear out and be extinguished in an empty sky” (*Mr. Palomar* 112). This becomes a clear Oulipo constraint, as stated by Jacques Jouet. The ending of *Mr. Palomar* also indicates the continuity of Oulipean constraints. The ending indicates Palomar's search for a meaning to his existence, and also indicates the discovery of ultimate knowledge— his own death. Franchi states:

Death, pervading existence, making it impossible to have a full experience of things or people or events, is overcome, not simply by the death of the protagonist, but also by the coincidence between his death and the end of his search. Mr. Palomar has discovered that, among the people, things, and

events that language and observation cannot reach,
 lies the most important event: his own death. (764)

This profound inability to arrive at the core of existence essentially makes it a typical Oulipean ending. Jacques Jouet says: “I have never seen a single Oulipean-style work... that has not ended by establishing a formal meaning, arrived at, in my view, by a profound necessity” (13). In “Cybernetics and Ghosts,” Calvino himself declares his adherence to the principles of Oulipo:

Literature as I knew it was a constant series of attempts to make one word stay put after another by following certain definite rules; or, more often, rules that were neither definite nor definable, but that might be extracted from a series of examples, or rules made up for the occasion— that is to say, derived from the rules followed by other writers.
(Literature Machine 15)

This statement that Calvino made in 1967 qualifies him to be an Oulipean, even when he was not a member of Oulipo group. Botta observes that Oulipo invited Calvino to “join them

as 'foreign member' in February of 1973" (82). It is a fact that Calvino became an Oulipo writer well before he was admitted into its coterie. This further clarifies the point that he had developed his own constraints independent of the Oulipo group. As Jacques Roubaud points out: "Every Oulipean participates or can participate in all the activities of the OULIPO. But each person has his particular areas of predilection, a family of constraints that occupy a good part of his activities" (37).

Chapter 3

Visions of Innocence and Resistance

In the year 1947, Calvino began to work on his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. Calvino then submitted his novel to a literary contest sponsored by Mondadori publishing firm, but did not get any prize. In 1947, Calvino was awarded the *Premio Riccione*, for this work. Again, in the year 1968, the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* won the prestigious *Viareggio* prize for literary works. The verdict was controversial, being hung upon the vote of one judge. Calvino won, but he refused the prize on grounds, that as J. R. Woodhouse put it, "its acceptance simply helped shore up an outmoded institution, the literary prize" (*Fantasy Alienation* 399). Critics like Martin M. McLaughlin consider that the 1947 *Premio Riccione* prize was not a sufficient compensation for his loss of *Mondadori* competition, so much so that Calvino preserved silence over these prizes, in the subsequent years. McLaughlin even considers that this is one of the reasons for the continuous reworking and editing of his first novel, as he himself considered the text least satisfactory (*Words and Silence*

85). Although this novel did not get placed in the 1947 Mondadori competition, it was then that the famous and influential writer, Cesare Pavese, recommended this novel to the Turin publisher, Giulio Einaudi, who accepted this work. This episode not only marked Calvino's lifelong friendship with Pavese, but also placed him in the Einaudi publishing firm, for the rest of his life as an editor. The staff at Einaudi included novelists like Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese, and Natalia Ginzburg – all leaders in Italy's intellectual vanguard. It was a period in his life marked with many special events. After joining the Einaudi publishers, Calvino began to write prolifically both for Einaudi and for *La Unita*, the newspaper of the Italian Communist party. The general literary atmosphere of Italy that pervaded in the post-war period was one which was deeply committed to politics. Calvino's town, Turin, an industrial capital, became the focal point of these literary/political activities. At this time, Calvino joined the Communist party, and reported on the Fiat Company for the party's daily newspaper, *La Unita*. Lucia Re states that in that period, the most important realization that Calvino observed in himself is the realization that he is not that good a journalist or a

professional politician (155). This factor later turned positive for him, and helped him to dedicate more and more of his time to literary activities.

In the year 1964, Calvino wrote a preface to his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, which is autobiographical, and Calvino identifies himself with the character Kim, the commander of the brigade. This autobiographical introduction is written in the third person, which gives it an air of objective self-appraisal and detachment. Adding a rather lengthy preface suggests a possible simultaneity of the acts of writing and criticizing. In this introduction, Calvino also assesses his affiliation with the school of Neorealism. He says: "Many things grew out of that climate including the tone of my earliest short stories and of my first novel" (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 7-8). This introduction to the novel by Calvino himself, sheds light on many of the narrational and linguistic aspects of the novel. Calvino states:

The fact of having emerged from an experience – a war, a civil war – which had spared no one, established an immediacy of communication between the writer and his public: we were face to

face, on equal terms, bursting with stories to tell; everyone had experienced their own drama, had lived a chaotic, exciting, adventurous existence; we took the words from each other's mouths. The rebirth of freedom of speech manifested itself first and foremost in a craving to tell stories. (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 8)

Calvino hints that the artistic call in this novel is diminutive compared to the pragmatic urgency that grows from an existential and collective need. He confesses: "*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* was born of this sense of total alienation, half suffered by me as a genuine torment, half imagined and vaunted" (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 26). There is also another reason that Joseph Francese identifies as a stimulus for Calvino to write this novel, a reason that seems to echo Calvino's words. He says that Calvino, through writing this novel, had allowed himself to assert his own individuality, to placate his fear of "not existing" (*The Engaged Intellectual* 174). So, it stands to reason to assume that one of the reasons why Calvino focused mainly on portraying the sufferings and compromises that individuals made during and after the Second World War is this type of alienation he suffered at that time, and his attempt to overcome it through expressing himself, and giving vent to the steam of creative energy boiling within him.

Further, as Joseph Francese points out, it is the war that caused him not only to write, but to “adopt a style against his will,” which later defined him as a writer (*The Refashioning of Calvino* 129). The term, ‘a style against his will,’ becomes more coherent, when it is read together with the observation of Pavase, quoted by JoAnn Cannon in her article; she refers to Pavase’s observation that the first novel of Calvino stands out from the other novels of the neorealistic period, primarily with its clear fantastic quality in which the novel is swathed (Cannon, 1985, 3). The novel, in no way, gives a message; rather, it just responds to fascism. In a review article on Kathryn Hume’s book, *Calvino’s Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos*, Lucia Re comments that the works of Calvino, up to the publication of *Cosmicomics*, can be viewed as unsuccessful attempts to put his own cosmos into place, and to set up the oppositional structure, which will be the governing principle of his work after *Cosmicomics* (194). The fabulous undertone of this novel later gives the much needed impetus to his later work, *Our Ancestors*, a trilogy. This theme is further discussed in detail in the later parts of this chapter.

The term 'Resistance fighter,' as it appears in the novel, not only denotes a sense specific to the novel, but also signifies a meaning in the broader context of the war period. These 'fighters' resist the Fascist invasions of land, culture, politics, and language: in the novel, they resist only the Fascist invasions of land, but Calvino, the writer, resists the cultural invasions of Fascists. Kim —the character— defends the proletarian views, which ultimately become a resistance to the Fascist brand of harmonizing politics. John Gutt-Rutter explains the reason for resisting Fascism: "Fascism is resisted, then, not as a typical and inevitable resort of capitalism in crisis, but as a sporadic tyranny, an outcrop of irrationalism in an otherwise rational political universe" (*Calvino Ludens* 320). Calvino makes use of resistance at the level of language, to subvert one of the desired Fascist projections of linguistic unification of the diverse Italian regional dialects; in him, one finds a conscious effort being made to capture the varied linguistic landscapes of Italy. Karen De Leon-Jones, in her article, "Language and Identity in Calvino's *Il Sentiero Dei Nidi Di Ragno*," comments on this linguistic feature of Calvino's writings:

Italo Calvino composed his first novel, *Il Sentiero Dei Nidi Di Ragno* (1947), of voices that faithfully reproduce the varied dialect forms of Italian, regional terms, cadences, rhythms and idiomatic phrasings to create an audio portrait of each character. By (re)constructing the voice, Calvino (re)produces its content (personal, social and political) to the extent that discourse essentially replaces action and plot through the narrative content of the dialogue (360).

Calvino was always against all types of political propaganda, as he felt that it would divert natural energies into vicious unnatural activities. As J. R. Woodhouse points out, Calvino felt that the fascist propaganda conditioned and cultivated in the young such adolescent illusions that perpetuate fanatically nationalist tendencies (406).

Another important narrative strategy of Calvino is to tell the tale through the child protagonist. Of course, this technique is not exclusively attributed to Calvino at the time of Neorealism, but to the larger neorealistic literary narrative tradition. Markey observes that throughout the early narrative

corpus of Calvino, “the child would be a dominant image in neorealistic literature (and films), as well as in early Calvino” (31). The child image in neorealistic narration signifies the innocence unpolluted by the miseries of the war and poverty. This must be the first reason that Calvino selected Pin as his protagonist to show how a ravaging war of this scale that razed the Italian provinces to ground, could also mar the innocence of a child. The war spares no one. The masking of narrative is made possible by using a child protagonist. Calvino effectively undermines the heroic vision of war by employing a child hero. It is also curious to note that Calvino does not provide us with the physical appearance of Pin; rather, Pin only exists in printed, black and white pages. It is as if the printed pages give life to Pin, which sounds very much similar to what Calvino says, “What determines the book is the writing, the material that’s actually on the page” (*Italo Calvino the Art of Fiction* 67). But as Joseph Francese states, in 1964, Calvino repeatedly stressed his remorse for having transfigured his comrades-in-arms into literary characters (*The Engaged Intellectual* 174). Yet, what exudes as peculiar to him from the text is his music, which will be dealt with later in this chapter. But, Pin without

physical description does assume different roles in the novel. He appears as an urchin, singer and entertainer, assistant to a cobbler and a brother to a prostitute. These different dimensions of Pin are united in his songs, which are rendered in accordance with the people, or for the occasions. Through the eyes of a child, reality gets transformed into discovery, everything turns into mystery and game, and he is only an 'observer.'

Although Pin has lost the innocence of childhood, he is not matured enough to partake in adult games. Moreover, it can well be stated that he is naïve in matters related to politics. Franco Ricci states, his characters are often non-participating observers of history, beginning with the 'non-adult' Pin and ending with the 'non-man' Palomar (85). Reality, narrated through the eyes of Pin, turns out to be a fairytale. Annalisa Sacca, in the article "Towards a European Millennium: The Legacy of Italo Calvino," corroborates this with the example of the pistol that Pin steals from the German officer. She states:

The story is narrated with the flavor of a tale, where the protagonist Pin steals and hides a pistol that becomes a kind of talisman, his magic wand in a

magic place that is the path of the nests of the spiders. In his vicissitudes, he comes in contact with the world of the adults, which he does not understand, cannot judge, but in which he witnesses tragedies, sufferings, and love. (1570)

There is also another facet to the employment of a child hero in the works of Calvino. As Markey again observes, the stories in *Adam, One Afternoon* have many stories with child protagonists, giving us a glimpse of 'Calvino's brand of neorealism,' and also an early trace of the characters that would follow in his later works and are all like, "a naïve misfit who loquaciously spins Huck Finn yearns for the reader's amusement or who, like the misanthropic Pin in *Path*, suspiciously withdraws to a world of private fantasies"(31).

It was due to these peculiarities that are specifically related to language, narration and plot settings, which were the hallmarks of Neorealism, that Calvino soon became a part of the influential Italian literary circle. The specific use of Italian dialects attracted the attention of prominent Italian writers like Vittorini and Pavese. Calvino's association with both these writers proved to be productive in the sense that it fostered the

literary career of Calvino (Markey 36). These writers introduced Calvino to the famous editorial house Einaudi, which then was known for its partisan and left-wing political activism. It was Einaudi that published Calvino's first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. It is then no wonder that Calvino dedicated his first work to Pavese. The theme of the early short stories and first novel of Calvino, was not his choice, in the sense that Calvino was simply giving expression to the collective "intellectual consciousness" against "Fascism, German occupation, the Resistance, and the unsettling aftermath of a long war, and an even longer despotic regime," which "were the devils of the day" (Olkin 143).

The Path to the Spiders' Nests deals with the experiences of the Resistance movement and the introduction of a boy named Pin thrown suddenly from his childish pranks into the wider aspects of the mature world. Although the novel occasionally drifts into a fable like narrative, and sometimes even overlooks the ambivalence of Pin towards the central cause of Resistance, critics hailed this novel as one of the important milestones of Italian Partisan narratives (Markey 36).

It should also be noted that although the Neorealist movement in fiction and film share a lot of structural similarities, these two mediums were united in their trenchant attack against the nefarious Fascist imagination and the surreptitious implementation of its ideological and political credo. The medium of film influenced the people at large without social distinctions of literacy while the other medium, fiction, selectively targeted the literati and conveniently avoided the greater number of marginalized people who were denied access to formal education.

The 'nests' in the title of the novel are the nests of the spiders that Pin finds in his wanderings. Pin reveals his secret finding of the nest only to Cugino, the one who proved to be his true friend, towards the end of the novel. It is interesting to note that the tiny tunnels and labyrinths of the nest are revealed only to the one Pin trusts (very much like Calvino himself) who, in his later works, reveals the secret of his narration only to the trusted readers. The novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, narrates one of the decisive moments of Italian history— the period of World WarII. This novel can also be viewed as a reflection of the experiences of young Calvino as a partisan Communist fighter.

Calvino uses the child protagonist, Pin, to explore fascism. Pin lives in the slums of a war-torn Ligurian town with his sister Rina, a young prostitute. Their mother is dead, and

their father has long abandoned them. Pin works as an apprentice to a cobbler, and frequents the local tavern. He is only thirteen years of age, without a friend of his own age. He tries to get acceptance into the adult world. He steals and gets free drinks from the customers at the tavern, whom he entertains with bawdy songs and jokes. The novel opens in a local tavern with a discussion on whether or not to form a partisan resistance group against fascism. Pin, who has been sidelined in the discussion, suddenly claims to have the ability to steal a pistol from a German S.S officer who visits his sister regularly. The members of the group dismiss his claim and challenge him to do the same, saying that until and unless he gets a gun, they cannot give him admittance into the group. Silently, their challenge works as a critical point on which Pin should prove his bravery in order to be at equal terms with the adults. When the next time the German S.S officer comes to visit his sister, Pin hides himself in the room and steals the P38 pistol. Pin does this act of stealing to prove himself as able and equivalent to that of an adult. It is interesting to quote Calvino himself: "Pin's inferiority as a child in the face of the grownups' incomprehensible world corresponds to my own, in the same

situation, as a bourgeois youth” (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* xx). But the people at the tavern by this time have already forgotten about their words to Pin. Or rather, it could be safely assumed that they did not consider the claims of Pin seriously, and had put the challenge just to silence him. The German officer soon realizes that his pistol is stolen, and in the search, they track down Rina’s home and then Pin. The holster, which Pin keeps after hiding the gun, becomes the cue for the S.S officers to nail him. Pin hides the P38 pistol in a riverside spiders nest. Later, the pistol becomes one of the narrative forces of the novel, and the spiders nest symbolically renders a mysterious power and energy to Pin. The narrator says: “Pin decides that he will keep the pistol himself and not give it to anyone or tell anyone that he has it. He’ll just hint that he possesses a terrible power, and everyone will obey him” (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* 51). As Franco Ricci states, the shooting of a rifle is an attempt to possess an object (*Difficult Games* 29). The “object” that Pin tries to possess is only an entrance and acceptance into the adult world. But he remains as an outcast from the “genuine manhood” (Ricci 51).

Pin is soon caught, beaten and jailed in an S.S prison,

where one of the turning points of the novel occurs. Pin meets there an older partisan boy named Lupo Rosso, also known as Red Wolf. Red Wolf plots an ingenious plan to escape from the prison, in which Pin becomes an accomplice. Pin then becomes an ardent admirer of Red Wolf. Joanna Stephens opines that Pin's admiration for Red Wolf comes mainly from the latter's "habit of reiterating formulaic political phrases" (86). After escaping from the prison, Red Wolf does not entrust Pin with any responsibility; rather, he sets him free to select his own way. As Red Wolf goes to organize the Resistance fighters, Pin is left alone in the street in the middle of the night. He soon meets a man with a pistol, whom we later understand as the legendary Cousin, one of the partisans camped in the Ligurian mountains. Cousin, who is a member of the partisan brigade, takes him to the Ligurian mountains, where a unit of the Partisans is encamped. Pin soon joins the infamous band of mountain partisans, headed by Dritto (ex-waiter) in the Ligurian mountains. This partisan detachment is made up of all the rejects from the other units. They include military deserters, psychopaths, and the like. The partisan headquarters and the brigadier Kim do not trust this unit, so

much so that they are not entrusted with any of the major combats. Although Pin does not carry any weapon, he becomes a part of this unit, working as the cook's helper. The leader of the brigade, Dritto proves himself to be a coward and ineffectual, and at times, he himself does not know the reason why they fight against the enemy. Dritto feigns ill when their unit is ordered to fight, and he remains back in the mountain. Soon, he goes to bed with the wife of their cook.

One night, while flirting with Giglia, the wife of the cook, Dritto absentmindedly sets the cabin of the partisans' on fire, destroying their ammunition and supplies. It is amusing to note that it is Mancino, the cook, who is the only worldly and practical man in a band of revolutionaries, who tries for a radical transformation of the society. Mancino has a pet falcon, Beheuf, which is named after the early revolutionary. When Kim orders everyone in the camp to go for an attack against the Fascists, many in their camp consider the falcon as a bad omen, and it is symbolically strangled. Later, Dritto, while dallying with the cook's wife, accidentally sets fire to their hideout. He is then caught by the Party commissars and led off to execution. Their group of fighters is drawn exclusively from

the lower strata of the society. Later, it is known that the reason for such a band which only consists of social outcasts is an experiment by the commander of the brigade, Kim. Although Pin remained aloof in the camp and displayed detachment, he experienced a sense of belongingness among them. As the band did not want any harm to happen to Pin, they did not take him with them, when Kim ordered them to go to the vanguard positions.

The partisans go into deep vanguard, and when the time comes for them to clear out of the mountains, they again leave Pin behind. When he gets left behind, he decides to retrieve the pistol from the spider's nests. But, he returns to the spider's nest to find it is no longer there. Pin then remembers that he had revealed his secret to Pelle, one of the former resistance fighters, who unfortunately decided to bond with Fascists. Pin was disheartened to see the pistol stolen from the spider's nest. Later, Pin sees the same pistol with his sister Rina. She confesses that one of her customers, Pelle, gave that pistol to her. Pin takes the pistol from her and leaves home partly due to the fact that when Pin returned, his sister had become a Fascist informer.

After this incident, Pin again finds himself alone, first rejected by the Partisans, then by his own sister. Another characteristic feature of Pin is also revealed in this scene: he gives the P38 pistol to his cousin Cugino, so he could execute a traitor. The traitor is his own sister, who, by the end of the novel, becomes S.S informer. This shows an unusual mixture of innocence and brutality in Pin. But, it also reveals Pin's staunch support for the tenets that he believes right. As already stated, Pin was mystified by the adult world of sex and power. He looks upon the P38 pistol as a symbol of terrible power. The feeling of alienation, both from the adults and from fellow urchins, makes him an introvert to some extent, so much so that he seldom expresses his thoughts. Towards the end of the novel, Pin becomes distraught and runs into his cousin Cugino, who first introduced Pin into the Resistance movement. This marks the conclusion of the novel, where Pin is thrown again into the streets, but meets his cousin, Cugino, who protects him; they walk hand in hand towards a bright future, hoping that nature would heal the horrors of war. Franco Ricci considers this novel as narrating a "paradise lost whose season

of hope is doomed to evanescence” (*Introversion and Effacement* 334).

It is interesting to note the analysis of Albert Sbragia about women characters in the works of Calvino. In the article, “Italo Calvino’s Ordering of Chaos,” he gives an original analysis of the nature of Calvino’s chaotic narration. The author says that Calvino had always been intrigued by an inclination to create chaos or desire in his narratives. Sbragia states:

This is not to say that Calvino does not experience the attraction of disorder. Several of the later *Cosmicomics*, such as “I meteoriti” and “Tempesta solare” (not translated into English), and “Crystals” (In t zero), eroticize chaos in the form of enticing, elusive, and powerful women. In each of these stories, chaos and women are associated with the Other, both object of desire yet threat to the ideal of order, not unlike the female characters Giglia and Pin’s sister, “the Dark Girl of the Long Alley,” in

Calvino's early neorealist novel *The Path to the Nest of Spiders' Nests* (293)¹.

This analysis of Sbragia is crucial. Rina, Pin's sister indeed behaves out of order thus creating chaos, by spying for the Germans. Pin's sister, an 'enchantress' —one of the enchantresses who surface in the works of Calvino— is a prostitute and a symbol of desire to the Germans. It shows a continuity of the narrative motif of an 'enchantress' which surfaced in his later narratives from his earlier works. The only difference is that in the later works, the motives of chaos and desires get more clearly narrated, compared to the blurred portrayals of these destructive motifs in his earlier works.

Again, the tenuous traces of narrative style burgeoning in the earlier phase of Calvino, can be examined with his first work, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. The clear shift in narration that happened immediately after the neorealist period is not the result of an automatic evolution, but the outcome of a conscious decision. Calvino did not limit himself

¹ See the pages 292-294 for a comprehensive analysis of the idea of chaos that are seen in the works of Calvino. Sbragia, Albert. "Italo Calvino's Ordering of Chaos." *MFS* 39.2 (1993): 283-305.

to the neorealistic traditions of narration; rather, he transformed the narration into what is to be marked as the characteristic feature of his second phase of narrative career, the 'Fantastic Phase.' Eugenio Bolongaro looks into this shift, in his article which analyses the adaptation of Calvino's novel *Marcovaldo* into film. Bolongaro states that after the success of his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, Calvino struggled to develop a more mature personal voice within a cultural landscape still dominated by Neorealism. The stories written in the particular period of the 1940s reflect the writer's experimentations with a wide range of themes and intonations. Although the Resistance experience continued to serve as an important subject, there happened a clear shift of focus from the pre- and post-war realities (Eugenio Bolongaro 5). Bolongaro observes that the shift in Calvino is "from tragedy, to comedy, to idyll, to farce, not only from story to story but often within a single story, clearly looking for a palette of colours, which he can make his own" (5).

The novel is arranged in an episodic way, so that Calvino analyses events through varied coloured glasses of idealism. The eminent view is the one expressed by the commander of the

brigade, Kim. He upholds the proletarian views of revolution, saying that “partisan warfare is as exact and precise as a machine; he has taken the revolutionary impulse matured in factories up into the mountains . . .”(*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* 132). These views not only reflect the general tone of the Resistance movement, but also that of Calvino. These efforts of Calvino to infuse/integrate the political and artistic necessities had provoked controversies during that period itself. As John Ahern states, in 1947, Calvino was advised to omit Chapter XI from the novel (*Out of Montale’s Cavern* 3). The picture becomes clearer, when it is also considered that this novel was for long considered as a propagandist novel by many critics. To cap it all, many years after the publication of this novel, Calvino himself wrote an introduction to the novel. In it, he says:

To satisfy this need for the ideological component, I adopted the expedient of concentrating all the theoretical considerations into a chapter which is different in tone from the others, Chapter IX, the one containing the reflections of the commissar Kim, which almost constitutes a preface inserted in the middle of the novel. (xii)

This blatant admission of Calvino that a whole chapter is included to explain the ideological positions or the nature of 'committed literature,' does not mar the aesthetic quality of the novel. On the contrary, it gets mingled with the resistance background of the novel. Despite having discourses of an ideological nature at certain moments, the real strength of the novel comes not from it, but as Alan Tinkler rightly analyzed it, from "Calvino's acceptance of the constraints of rendering an aesthetic work" (66). These 'constraints' become an important factor in the later works of Calvino, especially those associated with the Oulipo theory of literature. This observation is important as it shows an earlier trace of Calvino's love for containing his narratives into self-imposed rules and regulations. JoAnn Cannon, one of the erudite critics of Calvino, in her article, "Literature as Combinatory Game: Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*," hinted at this experimental practice of Calvino from the very beginning of his writing. She comments: "Since the publication of his first, 'neo-realist' novel, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* (1947), Calvino has experimented, in his highly original and fantastic manner, with a variety of literary models" (83).

I. T. Olken hints at one of the structuring principles of Calvino that has been uniformly followed in many of his works. The outer narrative structure is often paralleled by a similar inner structure. Olken puts:

The internal symmetrical schemata that parallel those Calvino imposes on every external story frame are striking with regard to the “processional” as ritual (with religious or civic motivation, or as part of a personal quest). The formula in the early stories most often involves paired figures or concepts: the child Pin, who follows the path to the spiders’ nesting place, as the adults later do. (*Spira Mirabilis* 166-167)

This opinion clearly evinces some of the difficulties of Pin to understand the adult world of war and sex. The external world of Fascists and war was never fully comprehensible to Pin. He always finds himself lonely, so much so that he tried to create an inner parallel world for himself, in which the spiders’ nests gave him the much needed reassurance. What counts here more is the ability of Pin to travel freely and seamlessly through both these domains. It is relevant here to quote what

Rosetta Di Pace-Jordan says about the Calvino's preference for the combinatory aspects of the novel. She says: "[...] the combinatory aspects of the signs in space are tied to his belief that the eye can lead to the juncture between that which has already been perceived and that which has not yet entered our consciousness" (470). Pin could have been able to find a parallel between the path that leads to the spiders' nests and the physical terrain of the Ligurian mountain. Both constantly branch out into many ways. The constant travel through the physical terrain (the advancement of the Resistance fighters through Ligurian mountain) and the imaginative terrain (Pin's imaginative travels to the spiders' nests) gives the flexibility to Calvino to give us an aerial perspective of both the geographic and the imaginative locations. This aerial perspective, otherwise known as omniscient point of view, allows the author to travel freely from the external to the internal worlds of Pin. The only time in the novel when this omniscient, present tense narration breaks, is in Chapter IX, where the commander of the brigade, Kim, expresses his proletarian views.

Chapter IX is different from the other chapters of the novel in the sense that it exhibits the tenets of neorealistic and

proletarian ideologies. This chapter is important, and shows Calvino's propagandist writing in a conspicuous manner. In the eighth chapter, Mancino, the cook exclaims: "you don't understand anything!' [...] 'Imperialism is caused by over-production!' "(*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 126). Mancino is dismissed as an extremist by Kim, in the ninth chapter. Kim states: "Or if it does it will be born twisted, the product of rage and humiliation, like that cook's extremism" (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 140). The reason for this subversive view is later made clear by John Gatt-Rutter. He analyses this situation and states:

In this, Calvino is writing propaganda: he is supporting the anti-revolutionary policy followed by the Italian Communist Party under Togliatti's leadership, and under the terms of the Yalta understanding between Stalin and his Western allies. (*Calvino Ludens* 319-320)

It is a chapter in distinction, and does not have any apparent connection with the ensuing chapters. It serves to express Calvino's ideological views. But Tinkler considers that this disjunction "emphasizes the dominance of aestheticism

over didacticism”(66). But the intrusion of ideological elements does not overshadow the wonderful prose that captures the spirit of Neorealism of the Resistance period. It, in fact, happens the other way round, that the prose overshadows the ideological overtones. Franco Ricci views the ideological elements of this chapter in another way. He states:

These partisans are not real men, but narrative spaces through which ideology passes. Their actions are a futile attempt at discovering and preserving the self from dissolution. For this reason these war stories, unlike many postwar stories, do not deal with heroic acts, or conquering heroes. They are instead intimate moments of private choice. Even in these early tales, Calvino is exploring realms of the unknown, delving for motivation and meaning. (35)

The partisans are not real, but only spaces, and war is only a background to narrate these stories. Calvino, in his 1964 preface to the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, states that he “had used the war as an alibi, in both the original and figurative meaning of the word” (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* xxi). In a closer analysis, the novel also presents us with a

diametrically opposite view of the world. This happens, when Pin's boyhood imagination comes face to face with real world experiences. One example is that of Pin meeting a boy stricken with tuberculosis, in the German prison. The boy spits blood, and Pin develops an admiration for him:

And he spits out a reddish froth on to the ground. Pin looks at him with interest; he has always had a strange admiration for anyone who manages to spit blood, and always liked to see someone with tuberculosis spitting. (62)

Calvino's child hero, in a way, serves as an agent to narrate events with objective realism. Pin, being a child, his views are not tainted by the rust of ideologies, which normally blinds the vision of an adult. This narration through child-observation renders *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* one of the best in the category of neorealistic fiction. Although Chapter IX emphasizes proletarian ideologies, Calvino does not idealize the partisans. This becomes starkly evident with the analysis of why Pin was banded with the Ligurian partisans. Pin joins with the Ligurian partisans, neither out of any conviction nor of any 'call' to fight against the evil forces, but for the simple

reason to escape from the prison. This is a type of opportunism that surfaces several times in the novel.

Pelle, one of the partisans to whom Pin reveals his secret of the terrible weapon hidden in the spiders' nets, also proves to be an opportunist, when he betrays the resistant fighters and joins the Fascist forces. In another incident, the commander of the brigade, Dritto, when the partisans go to the vanguard positions to fight, goes to bed with the wife of the cook. And, for Pin, he was not moved to join the partisans (as already stated) out of any ideological or moral choice or conviction, but he was groping for an escape route from his basic dissatisfaction with his wretched life, and tries to prove his mettle to secure acceptance into the adult world. These incidents show that the partisans that Calvino recorded are also ordinary humans with flesh and blood, who are susceptible to power, lust and cowardice.

Calvino breaks the continuity of the traditional narrative ethos by attributing many a negative quality to the child hero. Traditionally child heroes are endowed with innocence, but that innocence is stripped off from Pin to show the moral decadence of the society that created a child like Pin. Historically, the use of a child hero, like that of Kim or Jim who fight for the social-political-economical inequality, exudes positive redeeming qualities in the text. Beno Weiss points out

that in selecting Pin as his hero, Calvino purposely eschewed the traditional pattern of the contemporary Italian writers. He further states that Pin does not possess any of the admirable qualities, and is too young to fully comprehend the reality of the situation during the 1943–45 oppression. (*Understanding Italo Calvino* 13). In fact, Pin is well qualified with the nature of an anti-hero. In the novel, the narrator states that Pin does not “know the difference between when there’s war and when there isn’t” (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* 87).

John Gatt-Rutter puts it in a different way. He states: “The boy protagonist, Pin, knows everything —that men fornicate and kill— but understands nothing” (*Writers and Politics in Modern Italy* 47). Here, Calvino presents Pin living in the margins of society, in the company of thieves, and a sister who is a prostitute. This depiction of characters in a negative light, is something in which Calvino invests meaning. Calvino, in the preface to this novel, states that he “found a poetic meaning only in ‘negativity’ ” (xi). Despite having all these ‘negative’ traces, the choice of making an illiterate as the hero of the novel solves many of the problems. First, as Pin is presented as an illiterate, the problem of linguistic compatibility

does not arise. Second, the use of Pin as the hero absolves Calvino from having a thorough retrospective knowledge of the Resistance. Pin helps Calvino represent events as events, without being coloured by the ideological or political transfiguration that the events might suffer, if it had been narrated through an adult focalizer.

Although the Chapter IX stands out in the novel by virtue of its political nuances, the overall tone of the depiction as a serious partisan led movement is undermined, if the overall structure of the novel is considered.

The juxtaposing of the worldly and the fantastical tones starts from the very title of the novel. The title serves many purposes. Firstly, it refers to the 'terrible weapon,' the P38, which Pin always imaginatively fell back upon for support in dangerous situations. Secondly, the path indicates an escape route for Pin to escape from his miserable and outcast life. The idea of the 'path' as an agent of change, is elucidated by Beno Weiss (12). Further, it turns out that the path is not linear, but a circular one. This becomes clear, when Pin and his cousin Cugino come to visit the spider's path, by the end of the novel. In this sense, the inherent symbolization of the path as an

agent of transition or movement happens in between the first and the last visit of Pin to these nests. In other words, it shows the changes that Pin has undergone throughout the period of his adolescent life.

The spider weaving its nests implies, as Beno Weiss points out, the fostering of life (12). Then, the path which leads to the spiders nests, which implies fostering of life, signifies a path that leads to a new life for Pin, in a war-torn country; here, everything is built, destroyed and rebuilt, very much like the spider spins its nest. In a broader sense, this continuous rebuilding indicates an untiring spirit, which gives a sense of redemption both for Pin and for Italy. The nests then become a symbol of power and authority for Pin. He states:

A real pistol. A real pistol. Pin tries to excite himself with the thought. Someone who has a real pistol can do anything, he's like a grown up. He can threaten to kill men and women and do whatever he likes with them. (14–15)

In so far as the nest of the spider signifies a sense of redemption, his cousin Cugino also undertakes such a similar

role. His cousin is a loner who has taken the responsibility of executing the traitors, spies and collaborators in the war period. This act of clearing the unwanted elements of society gives hope to Pin. It is because of these shared feelings that Cugino escapes the sharp sadistic ill-will of Pin. Pin with his scathing tongue spares no one. He “hurt[s] them without any pity” (131).

The Fabulous Undertones of the Novel

The narration of the story through a child hero breaks the realistic rendering of events and colours them with the fantasy of Pin. In addition to this, some other key places and objects also destabilize the realistic tone of the novel. Beno Weiss observes that the weapon (the stolen P38 pistol) and its hiding place (the spiders’ nests) have all the qualities of a rite of passage practiced in primitive societies (13). The narrator states: “There, beyond the bamboos, begins the path of the spider’ nests, the magic place which only Pin knows. There he can weave strange spells, become a king, a god” (178). But the hiding of the weapon in the nest of a spider can be viewed as defiling the purity of nature by putting an extraneous object, a lethal weapon into it. Towards the end of the novel, Pin

reassures himself again, when he learns that Pelle, the only person to whom he confided about the place he had hidden the pistol, is shot dead:

The pistol must be buried under the spiders' nests, thinks Pin; it's still mine, Pelle didn't know the place, no one knows that magic place but me. This reassures him greatly. Whatever happens, there are still the spiders' nests and the buried pistol. (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 167)

Further, it can also be observed that the stealing of the pistol as a secret event, and the spiders nest as its sacred hiding place, work to attenuate the realistic background of the Fascists and the war into a fabulous and enchanted one. This is one of the repeated themes of Calvino. Ricci states: "In Calvino's stories the object is always transformed in a romantic act of personal knowing and discovery" (*Difficult Games* 28). The spider's nest is exactly like this to Pin. Calvino's obsession with the magical and the fabulous aspects of narration later added momentum to his work of collecting the scattered fairy tales of Italy into one collection titled, *Italian Folktales*. In the introduction of *Italian Folktales*, Calvino states: "Taken all

together they offer, in their often repeated and constantly varying examinations of human vicissitudes, a general explanation of life preserved in the slow ripening of rustic consciences” (xviii). This statement hints that there is little difference between reality and fantasy, or the stance that could mean ‘fables are real.’ This could be interpreted as Calvino’s narrative progression towards the next phase of his writing, which consists of the novel *Our Ancestors*, a trilogy of fabulous plots. The relationship between the spiders’ nests and the real world is presented towards the end of the novel, thus stripping off the fabulous facet of the nests. The cousin and Pin go to see the spiders’ nests which were ravaged by Pelle who took the pistol from there. The Cousin says:

‘Don’t you see how much harm has been done to them already?’

‘Say, Cousin, d’you think they’ll remake their nests?’

‘Yes, I think so, if we leave them in peace.’ (182)

The vulnerability of the spiders’ nest is exposed when Pelle, the Fascist, ravaged the spiders’ nest. It also shows that the most ingenious methods of adaptation of the spider which

protects itself through its nests with trapdoors cannot provide it protection from the onslaught of humans. Thus, it symbolically reflects the condition of Italy itself. Calvino himself once explained the reason why the narration shuttles between the two poles of reality and fantasy. In his interview with William Weaver, Calvino states:

When I write a book which is all invention, I feel a longing for writing that deals directly with daily life, my activities and my thoughts. At that moment the book I would like to be writing is the one that I am not. On the other hand, when I am writing something very autobiographical, tied to the particularities of everyday life, then my longing goes in the opposite direction. (*Italo Calvino the Art of Fiction* 78)

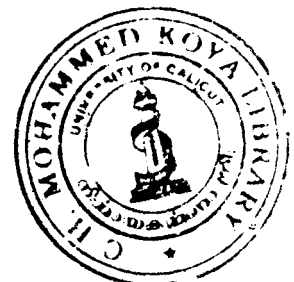
Lucia Re considers this novel a study of memory. This does not mean memory as an accurate retention of the past. The element of memory becomes important in the desire to recover the origin. This desire invariably arises from the attempt to recreate the past in the present. But, in memory, the past never turns out exactly as it was, but comes out in

fragmentary, elusive and sometimes incomprehensible ways. Lucia Re states that when an author tries to recover the past, "The conflicting memory-traces of past events are reworked, rewritten, and rearranged in a way that endows them with an order and a meaning and identifies them as narrative functions" (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism* 171). It is in these unfilled spaces presented by the holes of memory that the element of fantasy creeps into the novel – a juxtaposition of reality and fantasy, memory and its lapses.

Language and Pin

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Language plays an important role in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. The nature, scope and the tone of the language change throughout the novel in accordance with the varied roles that Pin takes up. The tone and impact of the language that Pin uses in the initial parts of the novel changes significantly from the language that he uses towards the middle and final parts of the novel. The specialties of the language used in the novel are thoroughly analyzed by Karen De Leon-Jones in her article, "Language and Identity in *Il Sentiero Dei*



*Nidi Di Ragno*². In the initial stages of the novel, Pin entertains the men at the local tavern with the bawdy songs. This pattern slowly changes the middle phase of the novel and again changes at the end of the novel. In the first phase he sings:

And I touched her hair -

And she said not there

Go down where there's nicer hair:

Darling, if you love me,

Touch me lower down... (*The Path to the Spiders'*

Nests 35)

The bawdy songs, as he thought, will draw the attention of the adults to him, which naturally will make them consider him as one among them. So, these bawdy songs are his stratagem to get admitted into the adult world. Sometimes, instead of songs, Pin also uses his sarcastic quips to counter the arguments. This is one of the ways that he found to defend himself against the world at large. When Pin was caught on the charge of stealing the P38 pistol, he was compelled to join the Black Brigade (the Fascist wing to hunt down the Resistance

² see the pages 361-367 of this article for a detailed analysis of the language and narration of the novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

fighters) by Michel. Pin did not like Micheal and quips. Micheal asks Pin:

‘Why d’you think you’ll be left quiet in prison? You’ll be taken off for interrogation all the time, and beaten till you’re bruised all over. D’you like being beaten?’

‘You, on the other hand, should go to hell.’

‘I’ll send you to hell.’

And Pin retorts:

‘And I you, your father and your grandfather too,’

(The Path to the Spiders’ Nests 60)

Later, Pin was tempted temporarily to join the Fascist people, not because of ideological affinity, but because of the rhythmical tone of music of the Fascist wing of Black Brigade slogan. The song is full of obscenities, and these people sing it in public. Pin states:

There is a song of the Black Brigade which goes: *And they call us the scamps of Mussolini...* followed by various obscenities. The Black Brigade can sing

obscene songs in the streets because they are ‘the scamps of Mussolini’; that’s wonderful, thinks Pin.

(The Path to the Spiders’ Nests 61)

The important factor in all the quips and songs of Pin is that his skills are attuned to pointedly address the concerned situation or the person. He never misses the target. In fact, playing with language is very much a part of Calvino’s style. In an essay titled “Dialects,” which forms a part of his posthumous work, *Hermit in Paris*, he elaborates on how he used language in his earliest works to reflect ‘authenticity.’ He states:

When I began to write seriously, I was obsessed with the idea that my Italian should be calqued on dialect, because as I sensed the fake quality of the language used by the majority of writers, the only guarantee of authenticity which I thought I could achieve was this closeness to the spoken usage of the people. This approach can be detected in my earliest books, whereas it becomes rare subsequently. (*Hermit in Paris* 182)

In the partisan camp, the members often request him to sing, but he does not comply with their requests, and retorts that he does not like to be given orders. He was particularly annoyed by the oft repeated requests of Giglia, the wife of the cook. Pin did not sing, and then Dritto intervenes and threatens to send him on guard duty if he does not obey. Pin selects a fitting song that reflects Dritto's treatment of other members of the brigade. He sings,

'Tis a Moorish captain with all his slaves, with all his slaves,

'Tis a Moorish captain with all his slaves (The Path to the Spiders' Nests 115).

Although Pin is little, and does not understand much the games of adults, he keenly observes what people do in the camp. Everybody intently listens to the song Pin sings, but Pin is observing what Giglia and Dritto are doing. He understands that there is something illicit between them, and marks this in his mind to give a fitting reply to Giglia, next time when she asks him to sing. Pin indirectly presents the illicit relationship of Giglia and Dritto to the group of resistance fighters, who

assembled there to make fun of Mancino, the cook—the husband of Giglia. The conversation goes like this: Pin says,

‘It’ll be able to go anywhere, except in woods...
 expect where there are branches ... where there are
 branches...’

‘Woods ... Ha, ha, ha ... Branches,’ laughs Mancino.
 ‘Why though...?’

‘It would get stuck ... your detachment would ... get
 stuck by your cuckold’s horns!’ (172)

The whole company of brigade laughs out wild, and the cook goes mum. Giglia, who fails to capture what Pin really conveyed, again pesters him to sing, laughingly. About Giglia, Pin thinks: “you wait,[...] you won’t be laughing long”(170). Pin takes this as a chance and sings his song. It is ingenious how Pin debunks the relationship between Giglia and Dritto with this song.

‘*Oili, Oila,*’ ‘The husband goes to war, oilier oilor, and
 leaves his wife at home, oilim oilom!’

[...]

‘Olier, oiler, the wife and the commander, oili oiloo,
what will he do?’

[...]

Oili oilo, to the bushes off they go, oili oilogs, like a
pair of dogs!’ (173-74)

This is the last song that Pin sings in the novel, and Pin thinks that Giglia will never ask him to sing another song. She turns pale on hearing the song as if it sapped off her vital energy. Dritto, on hearing this, tries to retort by singing back, “Oili, Oilore, you’re the brother of a whore!” (173), but Pin has proved his point to everyone assembled there.

Pin has always been fascinated with mysterious words and remote places. He depends on the imagined power that these places or words might give him. The spiders’ nest is always presented with having mysterious power. From the beginning of the novel, Pin was fascinated with the names of organizations like, *Gap*, *Sim*, and *Sten*³. Pin thinks, “*Sten*; another mysterious word; *Sten*, *Gap*, *Sim*, how can anyone ever remember them all? [...] now he can show off too” (76). Pin uses

³ These names indicate the various organizations at different levels against the Fascists.

these words at various instances to show off as he is fascinated with these words. It is curious to note how Calvino too shares this fascination for repeating some of the words in his novels. One of the important translators of Calvino, William Weaver, states this in an interview with Calvino for the journal, *Paris Review*. Weaver states:

Calvino's English was more theoretical than idiomatic. He also had a way of falling in love with foreign words. With the *Mr. Palomar* translation he developed a crush on the word *feedback*. He kept inserting it in the text, and I kept tactfully removing it. I couldn't make it clear to him that, like *charisma* and *input* and *bottom line*, *feedback*, however beautiful it may sound to the Italian ear, was not appropriate in an English-language literary work.

(61)

Calvino was very much conscious of the language in general and its social functions. Arturo Tosi, in his book *Language and Society in a Changing Italy*, details the argument between Pier Paolo Pasolini and Italo Calvino over the changing

use of Italian language that happened in the post-war years⁴. The crux of his argument is that in the post-war period, a new type of language had emerged, that was a mix of traditional Italian and English. Arturo Tosi summarizes the argument of Calvino:

[Calvino] convincingly argued that the so-called new Italian was not a common idiom, nor could it be described as 'technological'. It was rather a linguistic deterioration, and was misunderstood by people like Pasolini, who was liable to mistake complexity for precision: an endemic Italian tendency to complicate language and make it more abstract and obscure (12-13).

Calvino always aimed at linguistic precision in his works. Calvino never trusted words, so much so that he kept on changing words after words to express a particular idea. It is worth quoting what Calvino has to say about his own way of writing.

⁴ For a detailed account of the debate between Calvino and Pasolini, see the pages, 97-100 of the book *Language and Society in a Changing Italy*. In the second part of this book titled "Special Languages: Tradition and Innovations", Tosi gives a detailed picture of how Italian language has undergone tremendous changes especially after the war period.

I write by hand, making many, many corrections. I would say I cross out more than I write. I have to hunt for words when I speak, and I have the same difficulty when writing. Then I make a number of additions, interpolations, which I write in a very tiny hand. There comes a moment when I myself can't read my handwriting, so I use a magnifying glass to figure out what I've written. I have two different handwritings. One is large, with fairly big letters: The Os and As have a big hole in the center. This is the hand I use when I'm copying or when I'm rather sure of what I'm writing. My other hand corresponds to a less confident mental state and is very small: the Os are like dots. This is very hard to decipher, even for me.

My pages are always covered with canceling lines and revisions. There was a time when I made a number of handwritten drafts. Now, after the first draft, written by hand and completely scrawled over, I start typing it out, deciphering as I go. When I finally reread the typescript, I discover an entirely

different text, which I often revise further. Then I make more corrections. On each page I try first to make my corrections with a typewriter; I then correct some more by hand. Often the page becomes so unreadable that I type it over a second time (Italo Calvino, *The Art of Fiction* 65-66).

These words from Calvino himself show the pain of creation and revisions that he exerts on his own art. He always tried to achieve perfection, by emulating writers like Stevenson and Kipling. The major literary influences on Calvino were the figures like Stevenson, Kipling etc. Calvino says, "Certain writers I read as a boy, like Stevenson, have remained models of style for me, of lightness, narrative impetus and energy. The authors of my childhood reading, like Kipling and Stevenson, remain my models" (Italo Calvino, *The Art of Fiction* 74). It is not coincidental that many an aspect of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* reminds us of the familiar narrative strategies of these writers. The beginning of the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, is reminiscent of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, where Pin, like Jim Hawks, tries to get admittance into the adult world. Further, as Beno Weiss finds out, the choice of the

monosyllabic names like Pin and Kim in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* is followed by other famous literary names like Pip, Kim, Jim, Tom, Tim, Huck, Joe, Nick, which are found in the English and American fiction (13). Lucia Re reaffirms this reasoning by stating:

For Pin, his “friends” Red Wolf,[...] Pelle,[...] and even Cousin exist together in an undifferentiated, fabulous temporal dimension, along with Tarzan, Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, and the characters of the anecdotes, folktales, and adventure stories that he has heard in the alleys of the old city. (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism* 179)

This does not imply that his whole corpus of literary writing is emulation. But on the other hand, on the thematic level, some close parallels between these writers do happen. It occurs on the fantastical level. The imaginary world of the children coloured by fantasy, runs common in these writers. What is particular to Calvino is the transfiguration of ordinary incidents onto a fantastical level. He elevates the mundane incidents to the realms of fantasy. He is candid enough to admit that the ordinary experiences that are tied to himself are

transformed into the fantastical realm (Italo Calvino, *the Art of Fiction* 78).

The (un)conscious transformation of reality to fantasy is more confusing, when analyzing a supposedly realist/neorealist text like *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. The whole meaning of Neorealism is lost, when the written letters trespass into the fantastical territory. Rather, Calvino was trying to infuse fantastical elements into the early narratives. This view is substantiated by Dani Cavallaro, when he comments on the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. He says:

The writer himself was dissatisfied with this early piece, regretting its failure to reflect adequately his experimental vision. In fact, even in this context, Calvino was already playing with narrative elements alien to the realist ethos, and thus tentatively reaching toward the fantastic. (7)

The treatment of women in this novel deserves special attention, as the two women of this novel become fantastical imaginations of both friends (partisans) and enemies (Germans). These two women characters —Rina, Pin's sister

and otherwise known as the Dark Girl of the Long Alley, and Giglia, the wife of the cook at the partisan camp— are portrayed in a negative light and as epitomes of immorality. The cousin Cugino even goes to the extent of declaring that the women started the war. In a way, these women characters pose a threat to the order of the civil society. Rina, the prostitute, becomes a Nazi informer towards the end of the novel, thus undermining the concerted onslaught of the partisans against the Nazis. Giglia, the wife of the cook at the partisan camp in the Liguarian mountains, goes to bed with the commander of the group, Dritto, thus making him unavailable to the troop of resistant fighters going to the vanguard position to fight with the enemy. It then becomes clear that these ladies appear as objects of desire and the causes of destruction to some extent. Albert Sbragia states that in the works of Calvino, “[...] chaos and women are associated with the Other, both object of desire yet threat to the ideal of order, not unlike the female characters Giglia and Pin’s Sister [...]”⁵(293).

⁵ See the pages 292-294 for a comprehensive analysis of the idea of chaos particular to Calvino. Sbragia, Albert. “Italo Calvino’s Ordering of Chaos.” *MFS* 39.2 (1993): 283-305.

Pin's desire to kill the step-mother is symbolically revealed through a song which speaks of an ungrateful evil step-mother who was killed upon the return of her son from the war. He sings:

*Forgive me, son, for speaking ill of you, for speaking
bad of you,*

Forgive me, son, for speaking ill of you.

*He drew out his sword and cut off her head, cut off
her head,*

*He drew out his sword and cut off her head. (116-
117)*

It later becomes clear that Pin favours all the cheating women to be executed. As already stated, Pin is not vested with the qualities of a positive hero. It has been pointed out by Karen De Leon-Jones that the killing of the evil stepmother is acceptable from the point of view of a fable or myth, but the psychological and emotional tension leading to the same are complex to analyze (367). The execution of Rina, who stands as a surrogate mother to Pin, by Cugino, might not be an accidental inclusion into the plot, when it is learnt that Calvino attentively read and studied the theories of Freud and Jung.

Calvino says: "I read Freud because I find him an excellent writer . . . a writer of police thrillers that can be followed with great passion. I also read Jung, who's interested in things of great interest to a writer, such as symbols and myths" (*Paris Review* 65).

Pin and Cugino share a mutual hatred for women. Pin hates his sister Rina who works as a prostitute and later becomes a Nazi spy. Pin, who often becomes a mute spectator to his sister's trysts, later contributes his share of information for the execution of his sister, by confiding to Cugino how to reach her. This happens towards the end of the novel, and bears a significant psychological importance. Pin's sister, who stands as mother to him in the absence of their mother, fails to deliver that role and motherly succour in the time of need. Whenever Pin needed motherly attention, his sister was working as a prostitute who spied for the Fascists. It could be these reasons that prompted Pin to turn in his sister for execution. Rina the prostitute, gets executed very much like the mother in the song that Pin sings. Pin gets this idea of execution from the outside world of proletarians and Resistance fighters, when he hears how Red wolf and his team shot the

Fascist Pelle. Until he left home, he never even thought of executing her. The sound of the gun that Cugino shot to execute Rina serves as a narrative shock. I. T. Olken states:

[the] defense against mortality, once they have gone beyond the boundaries of their familiar world, becomes a fragile one, as is Pin's defense against the strange realities he encounters in his ever expanding and furious world. The child/death image of these early stories relates dramatically both to the threat of danger and violence to which they invariably refer, regardless of their surface subject matter, and to an ageless, repetitive pattern. (*Spira Mirabilis* 151)

Cugino hates women because of the infidelity of his wife. Like Pin, he also transfers his hate for his wife towards all women because of her immorality. Cugino believes that it is the war which corrupted his wife and society. He even states that it is the women who even caused the war. He says "Women, women

I tell you, they're behind everything. Mussolini got the idea of the war from the Petacci sisters"(93).⁶

In fact, in a closer analysis, some of the principal male characters turn out to be misogynists to the core, or bear a negative imprint of women in memory. Pelle, who was one of the members of Red Brigade, later joined the Black Shirts —the Fascist wing— shows a violent obsession for both women and weapon. Lupo Rosso, otherwise known as Red Wolf, with whom Pin escapes from prison, abstains from sex, during the war. Cugino, on the other hand, blames women as the root cause for the starting of the war. The hatred for one is then transferred onto women as a whole class.

The novel narrates two opposite streams of world in it: one, the romantic Ligurian mountains, which fosters the fantastical imaginations of Pin, and the other, the earthly and grim reality of war. From the very start of the novel, this Ligurian landscape sets the tone of the novel. Calvino even comments in the introduction of the novel: "My landscape was something jealously mine" (viii). These two streams of reality of

⁶ Claretta Petacci was Mussolini's mistress. She was captured by the partisans and shot on 28 April 1945

war and fantasy of the Pin's imaginations alter in the narration. He cannot take part in the war; the one thing he can do is to play with the pistol and the spider's nests.

The novel is written as a series of episodes that never explode into a powerful climax. In some chapters, the narrative force is debilitated by the insertion of political ideologies. The novel is narrated in the present tense, and filled with repetitions. The repetition clearly evinces the outlook of a child through whose eyes everything is narrated.

In the preface to this novel, Calvino acknowledges the importance of this first novel. He states:

Your first book already defines you, while you are really far from being defined. And this definition is something you may then carry with you for the rest of your life, trying to confirm it or extend or correct or deny it; but you can never eliminate it. (xxiii)

Chapter 4

Struggles: The Body, the Land and the Air

The presence of Neorealistic ideologies had gradually waned, by the time Calvino wrote the novel *Marcovaldo or The Seasons in the City*. This novel can be considered as a transitional one between Calvino's Neorealistic and the second phase of writings that primarily consisted of stories and novels which made use of fantasy. Though the Neorealistic tenets of structuring are not strongly felt in this novel, the presence of the same in it, cannot be completely overlooked. While the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, portrays the war time experiences, *Marcovaldo* tells the life of post-war period. The struggle to resist Fascist ideologies is largely absent in this novel; however, it displays the struggle for survival. Concurrently, the levels of fantasy described in this novel are drastically changed. The self-contained stories of *Marcovaldo or The Seasons in the City* can be divided into two thematic streams. The first stories which were published in the year 1958 evince proletarian concerns, while the later additions of stories that were added into it in the year 1968 are surrealistic

in nature. John Ahern assesses that the second phase of the stories included in *Marcivaldo or The Seasons in the City* shows the “freedom of the artist against the more confining ideology of Marxist engagement” (15). Alan Thinkler states: “With *Marcivaldo or The seasons in the City*, Calvino balances his earlier interest in neorealism and the fantastic”(72). The secondary title of the novella suggests that the series goes through seasons, with the first one starting with spring.

The war-culture produces a particular fabulation, i.e., the making of fantasy, which is intimately connected with weapons. This is one of the main reasons why Pin goes to steal a P38 gun from the German officer. Again, the fabulatory process in the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, revolves around the nests of the spider where Pin hides the gun. So, it is not for the sake of the nest, or for spider, that the nest or spider become important to the narration, but for the sake of the gun. When Calvino leads the reader into *Marcivaldo*, the colour of the fantasy again changes. There are no more guns, ammunition, Fascists or wars. Here, the fantasy revolves around poverty and the struggle to survive. In the novel *Marcivaldo*, making a good living in a poverty-stricken post-war period, modulates the

process of thinking in the hero, Marcovaldo. As Franco Ricci correctly states about this novel, “Life becomes an unending array of gestures which attempt to overcome immediate obstacles, with little success”(Introversion 332).

The novel *Marcovaldo* powerfully portrays the trials and tribulations of a simple Italian worker in a changed post World War II period. Although Calvino wrote it in a realistic mode, the threads of fantasy can also be discerned in this work. Cannon comments, “Marcovaldo is located somewhere between the two poles of realistic and fantastic” (84). This statement is relevant in the analysis of *Marcovaldo*, as some of the stories in it begin with a realistic note and end on a surrealist plane. The twenty stories of this novel can be categorized under two heads— those depicting man’s alienation in an urbanized, inhuman society, and those featuring the contamination of nature.

Through the portrayal of the character of Marcovaldo, the intention of Calvino is to expose social decadence in Italy under Fascism. Though Calvino makes it clear in the ‘Introduction’ that these stories take place in the city of Turin, there is much in the stories that give it universality. Cannon states, “the

descriptions of the city contain nothing which would distinguish it from any other large industrial centre” (84).

The economic boom in the 1950s in Europe changed the lives of people into a materialistic culture, where everybody lost sight of the inherent naturalness of nature, and turned their gaze onto the artificial nature outside. Lucia Re observes:

Around the end of the 1950s, under the impetus of the economic boom, the entire organization of culture in Italy changed radically, for it had to develop the means to meet the challenges of the newly born mass culture. (*Language* 138)

Marcovaldo struggles to reconcile his country habits with urban life. Oblivious of the garish attractions of the town, Marcovaldo is the attentive recorder of natural phenomena. In fact, Marcovaldo conveys the sensuous qualities of life. “This Marcovaldo possessed an eye ill-suited to city life: bill boards, traffic lights, shop windows, neon signs, posters, no matter how carefully devised to catch the attention, never arrested his gaze...” (*Marcovaldo* 1).

Marcovaldo, the protagonist of the novel, is an unskilled labourer who unloads packages, eight hours a day in a warehouse. Further, he shovels snow during winter, transports plants around the city during winter and dresses as Santa Claus at Christmas. He is a functioning member of the society and quite comfortable with his role as a worker. Unlike his children, who know nothing of life outside the city, Marcovaldo is not a native city-dweller. Although he came to the city as a young man, he has still not adapted to its ways. "Marcovaldo is the last incarnation of a series of naive heroes [...] exiled in the industrial city" (Cannon 84).

Marcovaldo is truly an exile. He is a representative figure from the postwar period of Italy, which made people lose their intimate affiliations to the living earth, primarily because the trauma generated by war threw their normal patterns of existence out of gear. He wanders through the city streets, oblivious of the cement and asphalt that surround him. But the few signs of nature that are still evident in the city never escape his notice.

In the first chapter of *Marcovaldo*, the protagonist sees some mushrooms that, quite miraculously, are growing in the lawn near his bus stop. He waits for the rains to pull the mushrooms out of the ground. But, this cache is also known to Amadigi, the street cleaner. After a week of anxious anticipation, Sunday arrives and Marcovaldo and his family go

to pick mushroom. In a spontaneous gesture of good will, he invites the crowd gathered at the bus stop to share in the harvest. A kind of spiritual communion is established among the crowd; there is even a suggestion, which is never carried out, that they all make their feast together. They are united, however, soon enough, in the hospital ward, where they have been taken for treatment for food poisoning.

They saw one another again soon, however; that very evening, in fact, in the same ward of the hospital, after the stomach-pump had saved them all from poisoning. It was not serious, because the number of mushrooms eaten by each person was quite small.

(4)

Cantardo Calligaris suggests that this episode represents “the impossibility of the primordial relationship between man and nature; in the city, the alma mater no longer nourishes its children: it poisons them...”(qtd. in Cannon 84-45). The two poles of nature and city play an important role in the development of this novel. The world that Marcovaldo represents is very much real with its associated problems. Franco Ricci states:

Nature is never simply innocent, nor is industry always lethal. The deceptively simple Marcovaldo tales are an important moment in this existential polarization of semantic fields, for the fanciful play world of the garden is now pitted against the nefarious structures of industrial reality.

Industrial pollution forms the theme of some of the stories in this collection. Despite such warnings, Marcovaldo continues to look towards nature for nourishment and cure. In "The Wasp Treatment," Marcovaldo assumes the role of a doctor, and cures rheumatism by giving the wasp sting to his patients. Word spreads and many throng at his apartment. Once, when too many wasps were needed, Marcovaldo asks his son Michelino to catch more wasps. In his eagerness, Michelino begins hunting it right into the entrance to the nest that causes the wasps to follow him in return. Michelino runs to the apartment, thereby forcing the wasps to give free stings to his father and patients as well. The narrator comments: "Lying on his cot in the hospital, swollen beyond recognition by the stings, Marcovaldo didn't dare react to the curses that were hurled at him from the other cots of the ward by his patients" (25).

Marcovaldo continues to look towards nature for a way of escape from his gray and miserable world. In "Park Bench Vacation," the protagonist hopes to cure his insomnia by spending the night in a park. But no sooner does he settle down to sleep on a park bench than he is disturbed by the flashing yellow of a traffic light, "the false, flashing moon" of the city (*Marcovaldo* 8). Once he manages to block out the light, the silence is broken by the sound of workers repairing the trolley tracks. He drowns the noise out by turning on the water in a fountain, but is shortly awakened by the odour emanating from a garbage truck. In desperation, Marcovaldo runs madly through the park picking buttercups, and finally falls asleep with the flowers pressed to his nose, to mask the stench of the garbage. This chapter, in a way, reinforces the idea that man cannot escape from the incursions of the city upon his freedom. The sensory discomfort caused by the light, sound and smell, further indicates Marcovaldo's rejection of the city life. The irony is brought to the surface by the destruction of Marcovaldo's illusions regarding the purity of nature.

This theme of natural cure is continued in the sixth story, "A Saturday Sun, Sand and Sleep." The city and the nature

cannot coexist: slowly the city's industries consume or defile the last vestiges of man's natural environment. When a doctor prescribes sand bath for his rheumatism, Marcovaldo sets out to explore the banks of a beach, looking for a place where the sand was dry and clean. But everywhere he finds the dredges of the construction companies loading the sand onto their barges. Finally, Marcovaldo hops aboard one of the unguarded boats, and instructs his children to cover him with sand. But his peaceful sand bath is soon interrupted, when the boat comes loose from its moorings and drifts downstream to the rapids.

Calvino obligingly provides us with the moral of these stories in the 'Introduction' which he appended to the novel almost a decade after its first appearance. "In the middle of the city of cement and asphalt... Marcovaldo goes in search of Nature. But does Nature still exist? What he finds is a spiteful, counterfeit Nature compromised by artificial life" (qtd. in Cannon 85).

The chapter, "Where the River is Bluest," presents the most striking image of the contamination of nature by artificiality. The protagonist is appalled by reports of contamination of food supply: cheese made of plastic, fruits and

vegetables full of poisonous insecticides and chickens stuffed with synthetic pills. Marcovaldo goes into the country to search for uncontaminated food for his family. He finally finds, what appears to be a clear, blue mountain stream. As he sets out for home with a large catch, he is stopped by a guard who informs him that the fish is contaminated. The blue of the water is artificially produced by the effluent from a factory that makes blue paint. The destructive forces of the city cannot be contained within its own confines.

The negative effects of rapid industrialization of rural areas are again stressed in the nineteenth story named "The Garden of Stubborn Cats." Due to the continuous encroachment of the city limits onto their natural habitat, the cats were forced to live in a little abandoned park. During Marcovaldo's usual afternoon nap, while the rest of the company finds a little sleep, a cat visits him regularly. Gradually, Marcovaldo follows the cats in the city, to find the still unexplored areas of city, which, he thought did not exist at all.

[...]in this vertical city, in this compressed city[...]a kind of counter-city opens, a negative city,[...]it is a

city of cavities, wells, air conduits, drive ways, inner yards, accesses to basements, like a network of dry canals on a planet of stucco and tar, and it is through this network[...] that the ancient cat population still scurries. (103)

Marcovaldo was enthused to find the garden of cats, where the dispossessed cats of the city found their quarters. This amusement of finding the natural habitat of the animal world did not last for long, as all the trees in that patch of land were chopped down to construct a huge building. This hammering down of nature in the middle of the city can be seen as the ‘implantation’ of the ‘new trees’ that a city requires—huge buildings.

The steam shovels dug down to great depths to make room for the foundations, cement poured into the iron armatures, a very high crane passed beams to the workmen who were making the scaffoldings.
(*Marcovaldo* 111)

In almost all the stories the thematic concerns can be paired as “rural versus urban, nature versus capital, also

correspond to the actantial oppositions Subject - Opponent" (Lauretis 415). Here the opponent of the protagonist is the great city and the rapid urbanization. But in the tenth story, "A Journey with the Cows," Calvino shows the loss of an idyllic romantic life.

It can be said that though Calvino presents the village life in this chapter, the village fails to resist the tentacles of the capitalistic trajectory of constructing profit. This story explodes the nineteenth century myths of technological progress as well as the consolatory myth of the idyllic country. Here, man can no longer find salvation in nature. Marcovaldo's son, Michelino, discovers this, when he runs away to the mountains to become a shepherd, and returns disillusioned and broken by the severity of country life. Michelino says,

I worked like a mule [...]carrying the buckets to the milkers every evening, from one cow to the next, and then emptying them into the cans, in a hurry, always in a worse hurry, until late. And then early in the morning, rolling the cans down to the trucks that take them to the city. And counting ... always

counting: the cows, the cans, and if you made a mistake there was trouble.... (49)

There is no escape from the assembly line of capitalist production; even the pastoral *locus amenus* has been corrupted by the city. This is the pattern, which Calvino's novel *Marcovaldo* precisely follows. It no longer offers the hope of escape into the pastoral. Nature still exists, but the city dweller is no longer capable of recognizing or appreciating it. In "The Good Air," Marcovaldo decides to take his children to play in the mountain fields. As they leave the city, the children ask whether the mountains are like skyscrapers and the fields like the flowerbeds in the city square. The city has become their only point of reference. This is the ultimate alienation that could affect one and one that Calvino could also subtly portray. When they arrive at their destination, Marcovaldo exclaims, "The air is good here," but his children are unimpressed, they ask: "What are you talking about? It doesn't have any taste at all" (42). In "The Forest on the Highway," the family runs out of firewood, and the children go in search of a forest. Having only read of forests in fairy tales, however, they have no idea what to look for. At the side of the highway, they finally discover a 'forest' made up of strange trees with narrow trunks, branches in the form of toothpaste and

razors, and letters of the alphabet as foliage. The children pause reverently to admire the beauty of 'nature' before chopping down the billboards, which they have mistaken for trees.

The story, "Moon and Gnac," is another parable of man's alienation from his environment. In fact, one of the recurring themes of the novel is pollution. In this chapter, it is the neon lights in the night. Other forms of pollution also form the theme of other stories in this novel, like blue paint tainting the rivers, chimneys expelling smog, and waste stinking the air. In this chapter, Marcovaldo is attempting to give his children astronomy lessons from the window of their apartment. But every twenty seconds, their view of the stars is obscured by the flashing of the neon sign, which reads 'Spaak-Cognac.' Marcovaldo explains that the moon is waning when its crescent is pointing to the west. But the children, who are more interested in the neon sign, ask whether the 'c' in the word 'cognac' is waning. Marcovaldo angrily replies that it's not waxing or waning, it's simply a letter put up by the Spaak company. But the children, undaunted, inquire: "what company put up the moon then?" (73). This kind of perversion

of nature is the price that man has paid for 'progress.' Teresa de Lauretis comments: "... the intermittent neon light of a cognac advertisement robs the moon (every twenty seconds) of its timeless symbolism, substituting a technological code for a natural and cultural one" (418). Calvino presents the modern city as a place in which man's natural environment has been completely corrupted by artificiality.

Calvino seems to suggest that city-dwellers cannot escape from the clutches of consumerism or the lure of advertisements; even if one is broken, it will be replaced by another one. The post-war scenario injected such incomprehensible greed into the populace that they were tempted to go after consumer goods that they did not need, or even worse, did not even know. It is relevant to quote the words of Thomas Cragin here. He states "The Economic Miracle introduced a culture in which status and social integration became both more fluid and more dependent upon consumption"(13). The last part of the story justifies this claim. When Marcovaldo and his children successfully pelt the neon lighted advertisement that reads SPAAK-COGNAC, another one soon replaces it, causing more trouble to Marcovaldo. Calvino writes:

And that night, in letters of fire, letters twice as high and broad as before, they could read TOMAHAWK COGNAC, and there was no longer moon or firmament or sky or night, only TOMAHAWK COGNAC, TOMAHAWK COGNAC, TOMAHAWK COGNAC...(Marcovaldo 76)

The indiscriminate conversion of everything into consumer products has even encroached into the treatment that humans mete out to the animals. In the chapter, "The Poisonous Rabbit," the animals as victims of medical experiments are discussed. It is curious that Calvino shows us the trap of urbanized society through a parable in it. The rabbit, which has escaped from a laboratory, wanders on the parapet, and everybody tries to attract it by offering pieces of carrot. Suddenly, it is announced that the escaped rabbit is a poisonous one, and by eating it, one will surely invite death. Everyone closes their windows, and the poor animal is left alone. What is common to Marcovaldo and this rabbit is their rejection of the city: "The rabbit proceeded, teetering on the cornices; this sense of solitude, just at the moment when it had discovered the necessity of human nearness, seemed even more menacing to it, unbearable" (*Marcovaldo* 59).

This same dialectic is also repeated in the last chapter, "Santa's Children." In it, Marcovaldo's company decides to deliver Christmas gifts to every customer at home through Santa. Marcovaldo, impersonating as Santa, fails to amuse anyone, as many companies have already implemented the

same ruse. Marcovaldo's children immediately recognize their papa in the garb of Santa, and decide to deliver their Christmas gift to the son of a rich man. Michelino says:

We didn't have anything left to give, so we took some silver paper and wrapped up a box of kitchen matches. That was the present that made him happiest of all. He said: they never let me touch matches! He began to strike them, and...

"And?"

"... and he set fire to everything!" (119)

The boy soon burns his home down, which illuminated the industrial managers about the possibility of pushing destructive gifts to children. "Hurry up! We have to change all the packages!" The three section chiefs said: "The Society for the implementation of Christmas Consumption has launched a campaign to push the Destructive Gift!" (119). The destruction of the gifts, as the three second chiefs surmised, would propel the consumers to buy new gifts to replace the ones that are destroyed, thus opening the market for quick shopping . "[W]hat's needed to speed up the pace of consumption and give the market a boost ... All in minimum time and within a child's

capacities ... The President of the Society sees a whole new horizon opening out” (120).

The self-disintegration of writing is almost always present in Calvino. Towards the end of *Marcovaldo*, the self-destruction that occurs at the thematic level is paralleled by the self-conscious disintegration of writing (Lauretis 425). The novel ends with the words “only the expanse of snow could be seen, white as this page” (121). Calvino himself has commented upon this self-effacement in his 1967 article titled “Philosophy and Literature”:

Literature seems to make itself manifest as an austere and impassive speculative activity, as far from the outcries of tragedy as from the fantasies of happiness. It evokes no colours and no images other than the whiteness of the paper and the arrangement of black lines. (*Literature Machine* 45)

The absence of writing or the self-effacement of the theme is carried into the novel *Mr. Palomar* as well. The death of Mr. Palomar coincides with the closure of the novel. *Mr. Palomar* ends with the words, “At that moment he dies” (113).

Towards the end of this chapter, the narrative is taken into the surreal plane, where Calvino cryptically narrates a wolf chasing a hare:

The wolf saw the hare's print on the snow and followed them, always keeping in the black, so as not to be seen. At the point where the prints ended there should be the hare, and the wolf came out of the black, opened wide his red jaw and his sharp teeth, and bit the wind. (120)

Although at the primary level it shows the cruel attack of the wolf upon a hare, at a deeper level, it provides the key to this novel: the menacing attack of consumerist culture upon a poor worker.

Apart from a few stories in this book, all others address the issue of modern consumerist culture. The story, "Marcovaldo at the Supermarket," directly addresses consumerist psychology, while "Smoke Wind and Soap-bubbles" elegantly showcases the advertising techniques employed by managers to sell their products like soap powder. Along with newspapers in morning, the soap companies give free coupons

that can be converted into soap powder in a shop. One company begins it, and others imitate the same technique, until a stage is soon reached when every morning newspaper carries a bundle of free coupons. Children collect these coupons and, at last, they dump large quantities of soap powder into the river. City dwellers assemble when the river begins to produce soap bubbles. But then Marcovaldo could only see the smoke belching out from the factories. Calvino writes: "Until, at a certain point, after seeking and seeking in the sky, Marcovaldo could not see the bubbles any longer, but only smoke, smoke, smoke"(96). This chapter shows how advertisements have become more important than real products. Even as early as in the 1950s, the tactics of consumerism was nourished and cherished by the advertisement industry.

A bitterer scenario unfolds in "Marcovaldo at the Supermarket," where Calvino catapults us to the grotesque dimension of the madness that seems to corrupt man and things, corroding every value and reducing life into one single sequence: productions and consumption, without a moment of pause. "Consume! And they touched the goods and put them

back and picked them up again and tore them from one another's hand; Consume!..."(84).

One experiences the capitalistic stratagem of trapping the customers in the net of confusions through the glittering goods in a supermarket. In this story, Marcovaldo goes into the supermarket, only to amuse and sees himself as equal to the others who purchase goods in abundance. Marcovaldo enjoys the pleasures of shopping by filling up a cart only to empty it into the next stack. To Marcovaldo, the supermarket seems to be a new place to meet others, to consume, to walk, and to spend the free time. The narrator comments: "Since they had no money, their entertainment was to watch others go shopping... watching was always lovely, especially if you took a turn around the supermarket"(85).

But Marcovaldo, who has no money, is caught in the snares of consumerist culture against his will, the very moment he enters the supermarket. He cannot resist the sight of a pyramid of jars and finally resigns to the temptations of the beautiful consumer goods. "In other words, if your cart is empty and the others are full, you can hold out only so long: then

you're overwhelmed by envy, heartbreak, and you can't stand it"(85-86).

The man caught in this labyrinth has lost sight of the world outside, and he cannot transcend the gray truth of materialism. Irving Howe remarks: "If the pattern of the nineteenth century fiction forms a spiral to and away from city, it is in the sharpest contrast to later novels in which the city becomes a maze beyond escape" (qtd. in Cannon 86).

This inescapable state of alienation is the theme of the twelfth chapter, "The Wrong Stop." It is symbolically presented through the image of Marcovaldo losing his way in the city. He encounters the same roads and lights everywhere, without any distinguishable marks. One day, while returning home in a tram, after watching a movie, he loses count of the stops and gets down at the wrong stop. He fails to figure out the way home: "He looked around, seeking some reference point. But the few shadows and lights his eyes could discern refused to form any known image. He had got off at the wrong stop and didn't know where he was" (61).

What is interesting about this chapter is that, after watching an Indian movie, he finally boards a plane bound to India. Though he did it by a mistake, his wanderings in the city in search of his house finally end on a plane. He becomes aware of this only much later. The inescapable nature of the labyrinth is stressed here. To Calvino, the duplication of the labyrinth when Marcovaldo loses his way in the city, could also mean that he is attempting to find a way out of the labyrinth of modern city life. Lucia Re argues:

The increased labyrinth-like complexity of the times, [...] requires an even more complex stylistic choice - a style capable of grasping and expressing the epistemological multiplicity of the world... The formal complexity of style cannot limit itself to the imitations or duplications of the labyrinth, and above all, it cannot, should not advocate resignation, surrender to the labyrinth. Attempting to master the labyrinth for Calvino means also attempting to find a way out of it. (Re, *Calvino* 124)

In a way, Calvino was criticizing the society in order to salvage it from the macabre realities of industrialization. In an

interview with Gregory L. Lucente, Calvino makes his position very clear:

... I believed in a kind of objective realism, I quickly understood that in order to say something, including something that had to do with Italian society, [...] it was necessary either to look within oneself or to expose social mechanisms through representations that might very well not be realistic... (Lucente 247)

This inescapable alienation of the modern man could be transcended if he successfully masters it.

In all these stories, Marcovaldo's encounters with nature end in a fiasco. In the fifteenth story, "The Rain and the Leaves," Marcovaldo takes a potted plant from his office to his house for two days. He places it in the open air to feed it with rain. Marcovaldo carries the plant in his bike to chase clouds, "bouncing on the seat of his motor bike, the plant behind him, he studied the sky, seeking a cloud that seemed in the right mood" (81). But suddenly the plant began to grow into a tree. Within two days, the tree sheds all its leaves, and all his efforts were wasted.

The central unifying factor in this novel is the presence of the protagonist Marcovaldo. Each one of its stories can be read separately, as they have no threads of continuity interlacing them. The narrative coherence is achieved at a sequential level, by giving it a linear chronological progression of seasons, each of which is repeated five times. Through these two unifying factors, i.e., the presence of the protagonist and the succession of seasons in the natural order, Calvino coherently assemble twenty stories dealing with varied themes. Calvino uses the third person narrative (or the omniscient narrator) to describe these stories.

Each story or chapter in *Marcovaldo* is a kind of vignette illustrating the realities of life in our modern urban society. The novel is essentially static with no development of plot or character. Each vignette follows the generic pattern of the fable outlined, by Calvino: “a virtuous man realizes himself in an unjust or pitiless society” (qtd in Cannon 87). The story has no happy ending, no escape from ‘the city of cement and asphalt.’ As Alan Thinkler states, *Marcovaldo* is not a diatribe against the drab conditions of an industrial city, as Calvino relates the stories with an uncanny humor that is needed to live and work

in an industrial city. There is awareness rather than despair. The narrative represents a fantastic imaginative exploration, which is different from the imaginative effort displayed in the more traditional neorealistic novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (74).

Chapter 5

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

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 *Iwn* [*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' is 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 mis-bound 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

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.

Looks down in the gathering shadow

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 assess 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 Lunan 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 Marara 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

begins? 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 fictionality 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 enlase*. 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 Higuera. 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 Oquedal. 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 Higuera. Nacho falls in love with another girl Amarantha who he tries to seduce. When Nacho begins to seduce Amarantha, 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 Higuera and Don Anastasio Zamora, Nacho's father. Faustino was killed in the feud. When the fragment of the novel progresses, Faustino Higuera junior comes and announces to Nacho: "I am Faustino Higuera. 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 Anatolin 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 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. (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.

Chapter 6

Vignettes of Existence

The novel, *Mr. Palomar*, shows another facet of Calvino that breaks completely off from the thematic and narrative style of his previous novels. In this novel, the chief concern of the protagonist is for the larger universe and for the contemplative wisdom. Calvino converts description into a story by narrating an observant Mr. Palomar's raised –and subsequently dashed– hope for a fully adequate intersection of language with the sensory world.

The novel comprises a series of brief chapters, each in sets of three, exploring Mr. Palomar's universe. The text is broken into three individual sections, and these sections are further divided into three sub-sections. These sub-sections are divided again into three more sub-sections:

1 1. PALOMAR'S VACATION

3 1.1. Palomar on the beach

3 1.1.1. Reading a wave

8 1.1.2. The naked bosom

- 11 1.1.3. The sword of the sun
- 17 1.2. Palomar in the garden
 - 17 1.2.1. The loves of the tortoises
 - 20 1.2.2. The blackbird's whistle
 - 26 1.2.3. The infinite lawn
- 31 1.3. Palomar looks at the sky
 - 31 1.3.1. Moon in the afternoon
 - 34 1.3.2. The eye and the planets
 - 39 1.3.3. The contemplation of the stars
- 45 2. PALOMAR IN THE CITY
 - 47 2.1. Palomar on the terrace
 - 47 2.1.1. From the terrace
 - 52 2.1.2. The gecko's belly
 - 56 2.1.3. The invasion of the starlings
 - 61 2.2. Palomar does the shopping
 - 61 2.2.1. Two pounds of goose-fat
 - 64 2.2.2. The cheese museum
 - 68 2.2.3. Marble and blood
 - 71 2.3. Palomar at the zoo
 - 71 2.3.1. The giraffe race
 - 73 2.3.2. The albino gorilla

76	2.3.3. The order of scaly creatures
81	3. THE SILENCES OF PALOMAR
83	3.1. Palomar's journeys
83	3.1.1. The sand garden
86	3.1.2. Serpents and skulls
90	3.1.3. The odd slipper
93	3.2. Palomar in society
93	3.2.1. On biting the tongue
95	3.2.2. On becoming angry with the young
97	3.2.3. The model of models
101	3.3. The meditations of Palomar
101	3.3.1. The world looks at the world
104	3.3.2. The universe as mirror
108	3.3.3. Learning to be dead (117-118).

Calvino himself explains the purpose of this structure. The numbers 1, 2, 3 that mark the titles of index, in every part of the book in various proportions, have a function beyond their ordinal value: they correspond to three thematic areas, three kinds of experience and enquiry.

Those marked 1 generally correspond to a visual

experience, whose object is almost always some natural form; the text tends to belong to a descriptive category.

Those marked 2 contain anthropological elements or cultural elements in a broader sense; and the experience involves— besides visual data—language, meaning and symbols. The text tends to take the form of a story.

Those marked 3 involve more speculative experience, concerning the cosmos, time, infinity, the relationship between the self and the world, and the dimensions of the mind. From the confines of description and narrative, we move into the area of meditation (116).

A similar type of structuring strategy can be seen in *Invisible Cities*, another novel of Calvino. This novel is divided into nine sections, and these sections describe cities related with 'memory,' 'desire' and 'signs.' Every section adds a new city into the sub-section. The combinatory method of structuring becomes more explicit, even from the method of naming of the sub-sections.

1

Cities & Memory . 1

Cities & Memory . 2

Cities & Desire . 1

Cities & Memory . 3

Cities & Desire . 2

Cities & Signs . 1

Cities & Memory . 4

Cities & Desire . 3

Cities & Signs . 2

Thin Cities . 1

2

Cities & Memory . 5

Cities & Desire . 4

Cities & Signs . 3

Thin Cities . 2

Trading Cities . 1 (Contents of *Invisible Cities*).

The first subsection of section one introduces *Thin Cities*, and the second subsection adds *Trading Cities* into the novel. The novel *Invisible Cities* is not taken into this thesis, as this work is closer to poetry than to fiction and many consider it as

a work of poetry. *Invisible Cities* challenges the distinct notions of 'fact' and 'fantasy', and confounds and confuses the reader with both these. The book is composed as a series of conversations between Marco Polo, the famous Venetian traveler, and Kublai Khan, the legendary conqueror. Marco Polo recounts to the Tartar Emperor Kublai Khan descriptions of the innumerable cities that he had visited. Language is a bar for them to converse, as both do not understand each other's tongue. Marco Polo initially resorts to an 'intelligible' conversation with the Emperor through gestures, howling and hooting. Gradually, Marco Polo masters the Tartar tongue. The more Marco Polo uses the Tartar language, the less the Emperor understands it. In a way, gestures, howling and hooting prove to be more efficient. Marco Polo delineates a variety of exotic and strange cities to the emperor. Finally, it is revealed that what Marco Polo described are actually different facets of Venice itself. Here, two things are to be noted. One, his own memory from which Marco Polo recounts these stories is highly unreliable. Second, Marco Polo paints the cities that he remembers in the colours with the colours of fantasy. This situation undermines what one calls 'realistic' or 'factual'

presentation of the stories. What is mainly communicated under the label 'realistic' or 'factual' cease to become so and they trespasses into the realm of fantasy. This brief analysis is relevant here, as this exemplifies the use of 'memory' as structuring principle in the Oulipean theory. As stated in the second theoretical chapter of the thesis, the use of memory as a potent constraint to mix fact and fantasy find its expression in *Invisible Cities*.

The combinatory method used in *Invisible Cities* is slightly different from that used in *Mr. Palomar*, where all the values of meaning posited in the numbers '1', '2' and '3' are introduced in the beginning itself. Further, the meaning is changed from words to numbers, when it comes to *Mr. Palomar*. These structuring methods deposit the meaning of the novel/subsection/chapter in numbers and words. But, in the novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the meaning is spread in the titles of the novel. When the titles of the chapters are joined, it gives a meaning. The story gives the meaning according to the titles or the numbers. Again the method of deriving the meaning of the novel is realized in a totally different way, in the novel *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*. In this novel, instead of words

and numbers, the meaning is deposited in tarot cards. Each card represents a meaning like 'war', 'love', 'death' etc. The rearrangement/shuffling of these cards opens up a world of (in)finite possibilities of structuring stories based on narrative permutation/combinations. Calvino juxtaposes tarot cards with the corresponding unit of meaning narrated in the text to create a novel that can be read both at linguistic and pictorial level as well. So, the text is written in such a way that along with words, corresponding tarot cards are also pictured in the novel, for the competent reader to decipher the meaning. Effectively, the reader becomes a detective, and the reading thus becomes an intellectual activity – an active practice that demands the full intellectual participation of the reader. The reader then tries to find out the hidden meanings with the help of the clues left by the author. In *Mr. Palomar*, Calvino makes use of these types of combinatorial methods to create a fluid motion: first visually, then culturally or symbolically, and finally culminating in the broadly meditative method of narration. This cycle occurs in each individual section and within the three larger structures of the novel as well. In this way, the author mimics the perceptions of the character within the form of this novel.





The tarot card named 'The Sun'
(*The Castle of Crossed Destinies*).



The tarot card named 'Love'
(*The Castle of Crossed Destinies*).



The tarrot card named 'The Wheel of Fortune'
(*The Castle of Crossed Destinies*).



The tarot card named 'Strength'
(*The Castle of Crossed Destinies*).

The change of narrative style in Calvino, as can be seen in the style of his earlier works of fiction to the later works, is exemplified also in the change of topography. Calvino no longer talks about the Italian landscape. It shifts to France. In the chapter, "Two Pounds of Goose-Fat" of *Mr. Palomar*, the narrator states, "Mr. Palomar is standing in line in a Paris charcuterie" (61). The chapter titled "The Cheese Museum" opens with the sentence, "Mr. Palomar is standing in line in a cheese shop, in Paris" (64). The chapter, "The Order of Scaly Creatures," opens with the sentence, "Mr. Palomar would like to know why iguanas attract him. In Paris he goes now and then to visit the reptile house of the Jardin des Planetes" (76). In all these sentences, Calvino, through his protagonist Palomar, affirms his affinity to the Parisian culture. Not only did the topography affect Calvino's protagonist, but also attracted his senses to the finest French edibles. In the chapter, "Two Pounds of Goose-Fat," Palomar's attention is directed toward a typical French stew, Cassoulet. Palomar concludes, "... a rich stew of meats and beans, in which goose-fat is an essential ingredient; but neither his palate's memory nor his cultural memory is of any help to him" (61). In the chapter, "The Cheese

Museum,” Palomar thinks: “Behind every cheese there is a pasture of different green under a different sky: a meadows caked with salt that the tides of Normandy deposit every evening; meadows scented with aromas in the windy sunlight of Provence” (66). All these instances show Calvino's shift to Parisian tastes and locales. The shift in Calvino's writings happened during his stay in Paris.

The first stage of Palomar's journey through perception is centered on physical observation. The first chapter, “Reading a Wave,” describes the first stage of Palomar's journey through physical observation. The first object observed by Palomar is an oceanic wave. He is unable to isolate a single wave as it folds upon, and is surrounded by an infinite number of other waves. For Mr. Palomar, this fragmentation of entirety, i.e, isolating a single wave from myriads of other ones, constitutes the key to his understanding.

Mr. Palomar now tries to limit his field of observation; if he bears in mind a square zone of, say, ten meters of shore by ten meters of sea, he can carry out an inventory of all the wave-movements that are repeated with varying frequency within a

given time-interval And it could perhaps be the key to mastering the world's complexity by reducing it to the simplest mechanism. (5-6)

But Palomar fails to completely understand what he sees around him, for when he feels, on the verge of grasping the wave in its entirety, the vision is lost:

No, he feels a slight dizziness, but it goes no farther than that. The stubbornness that drives the waves towards the shore wins the match: in fact, the waves have swelled considerably. Is the wind about to change? It would be disastrous if the image that Mr. Palomar has succeeded painstakingly in putting together were to shatter and be lost. (7)

This instance may be taken as an example of what is common to all the meditations of Palomar. The ultimate entirety or success in his meditations on various objects fails him. The concentrated meditation of a fragment does not mean he abandons the world at large. In fact, his concern is with the cosmos, and he adopts the method of moving from micro to macro. About the wave, Palomar observes: "Only if he manages

to bear all the aspects in mind at once can he begin the second phase of the operation: extending this knowledge to the entire universe” (7).

So the minute aspects of meditations become tantamount to the cosmic, where the former stands as an exact replica of the latter in its essential understanding.

The second chapter, “The Naked Bosom,” describes his meditation on cultural etiquette prompted by the naked bosom of a lady taking a sunbath. Palomar respects her privacy, and quickly turns his head away from her bosom to the void: “... the trajectory of his gaze remains suspended in the void and guarantees his civil respect for the invisible frontiers that surrounds people” (8).

Even in his contemplations, Palomar is not free from the shackles of society and the inhibitions imposed upon him by tradition. The ‘original’ reaction is not possible as it is controlled by the conventions of the past.

[...] I display a refusal to see; in other words, I am finally reinforcing the conventions that declares illicit any sight of the breast [...] In other words, my

not looking presupposes that I am thinking of that nakedness, worrying about it; and that is basically an indiscreet and reactionary attitude. (8-9)

In order to defy the conventions, Palomar again walks towards the woman lying in the sun. But when Palomar looks at her breasts with 'special consideration,' she suddenly springs up, covers herself and goes off. Palomar does not receive a reciprocal attitude from the lady and she misunderstands his noble intentions. Palomar concludes: "The dead weight of an intolerant tradition prevents any one's understanding, as they deserve, the most enlightened intentions, Palomar bitterly concludes" (10).

Indeed, Palomar is blocked from appreciating the 'eroticisation of culture,' and he has to appreciate it with utmost detachment. Calvino, in a 1972 article, titled "Philosophy and Literature" states: "The eroticisation of culture is a game played between signs and meanings, between myths and ideas that can indeed reveal gardens of visionary delights, but it has to be practised with the utmost detachment" (*Literature Machine* 48).

Palomar creates this detachment by placing a 'mental brassiere' between his eyes and the bosom (*Palomar* 8). As the weight of an 'intolerant tradition' blocks his way, Palomar puts a stop to the meditations on eros coloured by the culture, and he relegates "[...T]he bosom again to the semi-darkness where centuries of sexomaniac Puritanism and desire considered as sin have kept it ..." (10).

The chapter, "The Sword of the Sun," is a contemplation of the reflection of the setting sun on the sea. Palomar notices that the sun's reflections transform into a shining sword in the water, stretching from the shore to him. Palomar becomes aware of the gap that exists between him and the sword. As he swims towards it, it retreats and never allows him to overtake it. Palomar contemplates the gap that exists between the world he observes outside of himself and the one he harbours inside his analytical mind. Palomar thinks:

[B]ut inside my head, in the circuits between eyes and brain. I am swimming in my mind [...]

But he also thinks: 'I cannot reach it: it is always there ahead, it cannot be at once inside me

and something inside which I am swimming; If I see it I remain outside it, and it remains outside'. (12)

He envisions his physical self, his 'swimming ego,' as immersed in a disembodied world, a world of geometrical shapes that co-exists with another inferior world where everything is less clear, which for want of an exact term he describes as "a lump, like a clot, like a blockage" (14).

Palomar takes this world as his own, and for this expanded understanding, the rays of the sun become a spur. As common to all his meditations, a single separated object leads his mind to relate the minute phenomena with the cosmos. This contemplation of the rays of the sun triggers his mind into the contemplation of the cosmos and the infinity of time. "Mr. Palomar thinks of the world without him: that endless world before his birth, and that far more obscure world after his death" (15).

Each of the stories in *Mr. Palomar* generates a 'narrative of observation.' This is made possible by minute observation of objects, and as Hannay comments, Palomar moves from "reduction to expansion and indeterminacy" (78).

Instead of making things clear, this microscopic analysis makes things complicated. Calvino states in “Cybernetics and Ghosts” that “... every analytical process, every division into parts, tends to provide an image of the world that is even more complicated...” (*Literature Machine* 9).

Mr. Palomar starts with a simple method for describing what he observes, but soon stumbles and falls. In, “Reading a Wave,” he feels that his description is incomplete and that he has failed in his attempt “simply to see a wave, that is, to perceive all its simultaneous components without overlooking any of them” (4). When he realizes that there are more and more aspects of the wave to be understood, Mr. Palomar begins to reflect upon his limitations both as an observer and a human being. He is “a nervous man who lives in a frenzied and confused world,” who tries “to defend himself against the general neurasthenia [...] to keep his sensations under control as far as possible” (4).

In one of the most beautiful chapters of the book titled “The Blackbirds’ Whistle,” Mr. Palomar compares the infinitely various language of man to the infinitely monotonous language

of the bird – always the same whistle, identical, rhythmical and unmistakable.

It can be taken as example of finest combinatory method. That is, how, with a finite number of sounds of the birds they communicate a variety of maybe infinite ideas. The combination of limited sounds to communicate infinite ideas forms the basis of Calvino's second phase known as the 'combinatory' phase. Palomar contemplates on the birds:

The birds' song occupies a variable part of Mr. Palomar's auditory attention: at times, he ignores it as a component of the basic silence, at other times he concentrates on distinguishing, within it, one song from another, grouping them into categories of increasing complexity: punctiform chirps; two-note trills (one note long, one short); brief, vibrato whistling; gurgles, little cascades of notes that pour down, spin out, then stop; twirls of modulation that twist upon themselves, and so on, to extended warbling. (20-21)

This chapter paints a vivid picture of Palomar's essence. The object of study is a group of birds, and by observing their behaviour and communications he compares them to human language. As common to all the meditations of Palomar, his meditation moves from the study of a group of birds to the study of a single pair of black birds. Palomar's observation of men is paralleled by the conversations he has with his wife while listening to the whistle of the blackbirds. The word 'whistle' in the title denotes the language of birds. The process of communication is theorized by diverting attention on to the silence between two whistles rather than the whistles themselves.

And what if it is in the pause and not in the whistle that the meaning of the message is contained? If it were in the silence that the black birds speak to each other? (In this case the whistle would be a punctuation mark...) A silence, apparently the same as another silence, could express a hundred different notions; a whistle could too, for that matter; to speak to one another by remaining silent, or by whistling, is always possible.... (22)

It can be viewed as Palomar's desire for a usurpation of the limitations of language. It becomes more evident when he communicates to his wife.

...he also tries to send a reassuring message... to this end he emits a series of sighs and grumbles: 'crooked ... for all that ... repeat ... yes, my foot ...': utterances like that, taken all together, transmit also the message 'I am very busy'. (23)

Here, Palomar deliberately creates a vacuum after his each word, so as to imitate the animal communication. The coherence of the world in its all encompassing communication methods should include the language of animals. He tries to bridge the gap between the two worlds through the effective manipulation of the primal silence, i.e., the language of silence.

[F]or him the discrepancy between human behaviour and the rest of the universe has always been a source of anguish. The equal whistle it was and the blackbird now seems to him a bridge thrown over the abyss.

[...]

Mr. Palomar hopes always that silence contains something more than what language can say. (*Mr. Palomar* 24)

Palomar tries to imitate the black bird's whistle, but only a "puzzled silence follows" (25). He cannot overcome the discrepancy between human behaviour and the rest of the universe that has always been a source of anguish for him. The bird-whistler, however, offers no clue that the birds recognize any similarity with his whistle; so, the correspondences remain indeterminate, leading to further and further observations. "They go on whistling, questioning in their puzzlement, he and the black birds"(25). Although Palomar becomes dissatisfied with the correspondences he thinks he discovers, the examination of human language in the light of the black bird's whistle constitutes his reflection on language. Hannay states: "Microcosmic/macrocosmic analogies complement observation in a dialectic process whereby external world becomes a model of self through reflections on language" (81).

The explicit anthropological observations in chapters like "The Loves of the Tortoises," "The Gecko's Belly," "The Giraffe Race," "The Albino Gorilla," frame more minute ruminations of

Palomar. In “The Loves of the Tortoise,” the description of mating turtles in anthropomorphic terms gives the narration an air of strangeness that leads him to bizarre questions such as “what does eros become if there are plates of bone or horny scales in the place of skin?” (18). The meticulous observation of the mating tortoises becomes a stimulus for Mr. Palomar, through which he contemplates the eros of human beings as more complicated:

But what we call eros - is it perhaps only a program of our corporeal bodies; more complicated because the memory receives messages from every cell of the skin ... and multiplies them and combines them with the impulses transmitted by our eyesight and with those aroused by imagination? (18)

Mr. Palomar observes that in contrast to the human eros, the love of the tortoise is more natural and that it adheres to the spiritual laws: “[T]he eros of tortoises obeys absolute spiritual laws, while we are prisoners of a machinery whose functioning remains unknown to us, prone to clogging up, stalling, exploding in uncontrolled automatisms...”(19).

Palomar imitates the animal consciousness, or views everything around him from the position of the object of his observation. His wavering between a subjective position and objective contemplation invariably arises from the problem of language. Margeret Norris states:

Mr. Palomar wavers between viewing himself biocentrically, as part of this bestial heritage, and anthropocentrically, as a producer of images. He is himself as animal, but also a human being that places other animals in an artificial environment so that he may contemplate their similarities and differences. Either view alienates him from this project of description; as animal he rejects language for relating to objects but as human, language becomes a cage. (qtd. in Hannay 80-81)

In "The Gecko's Belly," Palomar gives a very detailed observation of watching the gecko's belly through the show-case window of his living room that opens on to the terrace. As with every one of his observations, Palomar thinks it will also finally lead to some type of knowledge. The decision whether to watch television or to look at the gecko is always hard, as "each of

these two spectacles has some information to offer that the other does not provide" (52). Finally, Palomar decides to observe the gecko as it "represents immobile concentration and the hidden side, the obverse of what is displayed to the eye" (53). It is curious to note that Palomar chooses to watch the gecko, sacrificing the 'visible face of things' that the television offers (52). In a way, the immobile concentration and the hidden state of gecko could correspond to his own nature.

The process of the gecko swallowing is described as "an inferno of grinding and ingesting" (*Mr. Palomar* 54). But the gecko's swallowing of a butterfly reminds him of the massacre he has seen on television: "He sits and stares at the gecko. There is no truce on which he can count. Even if he turned the television back on, he would only be extending the contemplation of massacres" (55).

The classical touch to this story is stressed through Eurydice in the last lines of this chapter: "The butterfly, fragile Eurydice, sinks slowly into her Hades. A gnat flies, is about to light on the glass. And the gecko's tongue whips out" (55). Palomar compares the helpless victims of the gecko to the state of Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus. Orpheus was daring enough

to enter Hades to get his beloved back. But when he looked back at her, she slips back into the underworld. He saw her in the dim light, and he held out his arms to clasp her; but in the instant she was gone. She had slipped back into the darkness. All he heard was one faint word, "Farewell." Desperately he tried to rush after her and follow her down, but he was not allowed. The god would not consent to him entering the world of the dead a second time, while he was still alive (Hamilton 109).

The description of Orpheus trying to bring back Eurydice from Hades matches greatly with the description of the gecko hunting the gnats. Here, gecko's tongue stands for Hades: from this creature, gnats cannot have a second time to escape. They will sink slowly into their Hades. Furthermore, the expression, "the butterfly, fragile Eurydice, sinks slowly into her Hades," aesthetically camouflages the terror and fright of a massacre.

The race of a giraffe whose movements are uncoordinated and inharmonious reminds Mr. Palomar of his own mind's clumsy lack of order and harmony. He becomes aware of a "complicated harmony that commands that inharmonious trampling, an inner proportion that links the most glaring

anatomical disproportions, a natural grace that emerges from those ungraceful movements” (71-72).

This chapter, “The Giraffe Race,” also explores the basic thinking patterns of Palomar. The method that Palomar adopts in “The Blackbirds’ Whistle,” by projecting the silence after each whistle instead of the whistle itself, is stretched out into this chapter, “The Giraffe Race.” Palomar states: “the hide should not be considered spotted, but rather a black coat whose uniformity is broken by pale veins that open in a lozenge design: an unevenness of pigmentation that pre announces the unevenness of the movements” (72).

The obvious is relegated to the background to project the background itself. In the case of the black bird, it is the silence that is projected against the whistling, and in the case of the giraffe, it is the background colour itself in which spots appear.

Palomar seeks harmony in the cosmos and also within himself. Palomar is interested in giraffes because “the world around him moves in an inharmonious way, and he hopes always to find some pattern in it, a constant” (72). Palomar feels that the uncoordinated movements of the mind impel his own

advance. He concludes that his contemplations are “increasingly difficult to fit into any pattern of inner harmony” (72). The anatomical disproportion of the giraffe triggers Palomar’s imagination into the interior disharmony of his own self that creates anxiety in him. Hannay states: “the exodus and return of knowledge, first observing the objective world and then reflecting on subjective correspondence, produces disquieting insights” (81).

In the Chapter, “The Albino Gorilla,” Palomar narrates about a gorilla at Bascelona Zoo, which holds an empty tire tight to himself. The motionless gorilla suggests to Mr. Palomar “an immemorial antiquity, like mountains or like the pyramids” (79). Palomar thinks that the rubber tire which the gorilla presses against his chest might lead him to comprehend all symbols of order in this empty circle. Palomar concludes:

Perhaps identifying himself with it, the gorilla is about to reach in the depths of silence, the springs from which language burst forth, to establish a flow of relationships between his thoughts and the unyielding, deaf evidence of the facts that determine his life. (75)

The tire becomes a metaphor for the ultimate meaning that cannot be expressed in words. "An old, empty tire through which we would like to reach the final meaning, at which words do not arrive" (*Mr. Palomar* 75).

The chapter, "The Infinite Lawn," problematizes the anxiety of Palomar which is paralleled by the portrayal of the external manifestation of the chaotic nature of the universe. Palomar wants to determine whether it is a "regular and ordered cosmos" or a "chaotic proliferation" (29). It is the chaotic proliferation of the weeds that prompts Palomar to think in this manner. Palomar concludes:

The lawn is a sub collection of grasses [...] that includes a sub collection of spontaneous grasses known as weeds; an intersection of the two sub collection is formed by the grasses which have grown spontaneously but belong to the cultivated species and are therefore indistinguishable from them. (28-29)

The chaotic proliferation of countless species of grasses in the lawn undermines the hierarchical, orderly categories of

planted grasses that Palomar imagines might reflect the universe as a whole.

Palomar's mind has wandered, he has stopped pulling up weeds, and he no longer thinks of the lawn; rather, he thinks of the universe. He is trying to apply to the universe everything he has thought about the lawn: the universe as regular and ordered cosmos or as chaotic proliferation (29).

Here, Palomar approaches the universal from the particular. As Sbragia states, "binary tension between order and disorder is a continual preoccupation in Calvino's works" (284). Calvino himself validates this argument in an interview he had with William Weaver: "The conflict between the chaos of the world and man's obsession with making some sense of it is a recurrent pattern in what I've written" (qtd. in Sbragia 283).

In "The Model of Models," the failure to comprehend the reality of the cosmos reaches its culmination. The model is a mental construct, which can be used to measure the external phenomena. Palomar states:

First, to construct in his mind a model, the most perfect, logical, geometrical model possible; second,

to see if the model is adapted to the practical situations observed in experience; third to make the corrections necessary for the model and reality to coincide. (97)

But the gap between reality that lies outside his mind and the model he has in mind begins to widen. The narrator states: “[H]e saw yawning, ever wider, [gap] between reality and principles” (99). Palomar resists the tendency to accommodate the crude realities of the world in his ideal model, but he cannot stall the onslaught of it.

But if for a moment he stopped gazing at the harmonious geometrical design drawn in the heaven of ideal models, a human landscape leaped to his eye where monstrosities and disasters had not vanished at all and the lives of the design seemed distorted and twisted. (99)

The creeping of worldly realities into the design becomes a problem for him, which ‘distorts’ and ‘twists’ the ordered design of the cosmos. As a coherent vision of the cosmos cannot be achieved through these models, he thinks it better to dissolve it

and face the 'monstrosities' and 'disasters' of the world. He states:

If this is how things stand, the model of models Palomar dreams of must serve to achieve transparent models [...] or even to dissolve models, or indeed dissolve itself.

At this point the only thing Palomar can do was erase from his mind all models and the models of models. (99)

This dissolving process is necessary to face the reality which is "hard to master and impossible to homogenise" (99). John Hannay correctly connects this failure to correspond to reality with the inadequacy of language to describe reality itself.

Mr. Palomar confronts not only the failure of models to correspond to reality, but also the tendency of language, in defining its failure, to reify and become a static model of models failing to correspond to a fluid reality (82). But more important are the arguments of Dr. Kerstin Pilz, who views the failure of models as the failure of our Cartesian cogito:

Calvino investigates the possibility, or better, impossibility of overcoming the gap between observer and observed, subject and object in order to arrive at some kind of holistic experience. Rather than allowing a glimpse of this seemingly unachievable ideal status the stories reveal the insufficiency of our Cartesian models of analysis.

(15)

This same operation of Cartesian cogito is stretched out into the three sub sections of the last section titled “The meditations of Palomar.” The failure of his meditations on the cosmos persuades Palomar not to attempt filling the gap between the observer and the observed. In “The world looks at the world” he decides that “his chief activity will be looking at things from the outside,” and he decides to “redouble his attention: First, by not allowing these summons to escape him as they arrive from things; second, to attribute to the observer’s operation the importance it deserves” (101).

The split between the two, that is, his own self and the world, is stated in this chapter. Palomar’s meditations on the world are seen as a world looking at another world, where the

former world stands for his own ego that looks “at the world stretching out before him in all its immensity” (102). The narrator describes the gap between the observer and the observed:

“The world is also there, and for the occasion has been split into a looking world and a world looked at. And what about him, also known as “I”, namely Mr. Palomar? Is he not a piece of the world that is looking at another piece of the world?” (102)

Stefano Franchi looks at this phenomenon not nearly as a split between the observer and the observed, but extending that same procedure, he observes it in the very process of language. Franchi states:

[I]t discovers the fracture between the observer and the observed. Even worse, it discovers that order and lawfulness exist in nature, but are inaccessible to human understanding, still less to human language and its power of description. Indeed, language, in order to function properly should reach

things in their singularity, in their being and in nothing else. Such a goal is not attained. (759)

This split at the level of language is demonstrated in the chapter, "Two Pounds of Goose-Fat." While waiting in line in a charcuterie in Paris, Palomar is overwhelmed by the abundance of smells, colours and images emanating from the cassoulet and galantines, and would like to find a greater union with them. The stimulation of senses from the memory of cassoulet or 'cassoulet' is enough to rouse eros in him. He thinks:

And yet the name, the sight, the idea attract him, awaken an immediate fantasy not so much of appetite as of eros: from a mountain of goose-fat a female figure surfaces, smears white over her rosy skin, and he already imagines himself making his way towards her through those thick avalanches, embracing her, sinking with her. (61-62)

To Palomar, the food items like cassoulet or galantines represent something of past pregnant with cultural associations. These items of food are a link between himself and culture, and their cultural associations are viewed as handed

down by “nature and culture [...] for millennia” (63). Palomar tries to feel the harmony of flavours around him, but he cannot. The real object behind the name eludes him; that is behind everything he finds the name revealing the name itself, nothing more. The object, that is, goose fat eludes him. Language refers only to language. This can be viewed as a type of ‘dictionary trap’ where one is unable to cross into the real world beyond the frontiers of the language.

The chapter, “Two pounds of Goose-Fat,” can also be taken as an example of the principle of the clinamen theory as stated by Harris; it is explained in the second theoretical chapter of this thesis. Here, in this chapter, the principal of clinamen works to break the given numeral value ‘2.2.1’, that is, ‘anthropological-cultural-observational.’ The memory of cassoulet, a stew, invokes eros in Palomar, and the waiting in queue before a charcuterie becomes a flight of fantasy, imagining himself “making his way towards her through those thick avalanches, embracing her, sinking with her” (*Mr. Palomar* 62). Here, Palomar imagines, his eros is consummated. This fulfillment of eros is the clinamen. By the active participation of the cogitative self, Palomar breaks the repetitive code of

uninvolvement in eros. In the chapter, "The Naked Bosom," Palomar does not appreciate even the sight of a naked breast because the "dead weight of an intolerant tradition prevents" him from doing so (*Palomar* 10). This code is broken in "Two pounds of Goose-Fat."

Calvino always associated food with eros. As Gian-Paolo Biasin says in "Italo Calvino in Mexico: Food and lovers, Tourists and Cannibals," Calvino's earlier texts evoke "the connections between food and eros, between the mechanism of desire and satisfaction, between abundance and lack of satisfaction" (77).

This motif is followed up in the novel *Mr. Palomar* also. Palomar does not respond to the naked bosom, as it does not fall under the category of food. But Palomar gets excited at the sight of goose-fat as it is food. If so, the principle of clinamen, as specified, does not happen in the writings of Calvino as a whole. But the novel, *Mr. Palomar*, in isolation, does invoke the working of clinamen principle. In the chapter "The Loves of the Tortoises," the mating of the tortoises becomes a stimuli for Mr. Palomar to contemplate on his own eros. The narrator states:

The sensations of the pair of mating tortoises are something Mr. Palomar cannot imagine.... Eros is a programme that unfolds in the electronic clusters of the mind, but the mind is also skin: the skin touched, seen, remembered. And what about the tortoises, enclosed in their insensitive casing? (18)

Palomar states: "All those delicacies stir in him imprecise, blurred memories; his imagination does not instinctively associate flavours with images and names" (63). The linguistic break or the disjunction between the real object and its name (as seen in the chapter "Two Pounds of Goose-Fat") is carried through these sentences. It can even be considered as an extension of the break that exists in the observer and the observed. Through the erotic aspect, Palomar tries to be one with the object, to erase the boundary, and to fill the gap. In a way, Calvino uses eros to indicate what he calls 'mythical and unattainable.' In his 1969 essay titled "Definitions of Territories: Erotics," Calvino states:

... we may therefore recognise one who uses the symbols of sex to give voice to something else, and this something else[...] may in the last instance be

redefined as another and ultimate Eros, fundamental, mythical and unattainable. (*Literature Machine* 66)

Language does not give a coherent picture, and it refers to something else, implying the Saussurian concept of language that there is no inherent connection between the word and the object. Saussure states:

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. (963)

This linguistic problem of the disjunction between the word and the object comes up again in the chapter titled, "The Cheese Museum." When standing in line in a cheese shop, Palomar is attracted to the strange and various kinds of cheese from different locales of the world. He feels the presence of civilization behind every variety of cheeses. He observes: "This shop is a museum: Mr. Palomar, visiting it, feels... behind every displayed object the presence of the civilization that has given it form and takes form from it" (66).

But Palomar, instead of cheese, “sees names of cheeses, concepts of cheese, meanings of cheeses, contexts of cheeses, psychologies of cheeses” (65). There is no connection between the concept he has in mind and the object outside. To Palomar, the varieties of cheese are like languages, so much so that the connection between the names of cheeses and the ‘object’ behind the names of cheeses do not correspond with each other, and Palomar fails to respond when the sales-girl asks him what kind of cheese that he wants. Like language confuses him, the varieties of cheese also confuse him. Palomar stammers and he falls back on the most advertised and banal cheese instead of the strange one that he had planned to buy. Palomar compares cheese to language:

This shop is a dictionary; the language is the system of cheeses as a whole: a language whose morphology records declensions and conjunctions ... and whose lexicon presents an inexhaustible richness of synonym, idiomatic usages, connotations and nuances of meaning, as in all languages nourished by the contribution of a hundred dialects. It is a

language made up of things; its nomenclature is only an external aspect, instrumental. (66)

Far from calling things up and bringing them to Palomar, names seem to frustrate him by negating their singularity. The name of the cheese always brings myriads of associations with it. Stefano Franchi comments: “names only repeat the incurable fracture, the laceration, the death that separates us from the world” (760).

Palomar confronts chaos in place of order, whether in the field of language or in his observations of things outside. This is continuously emphasized through the presentation of various modes of disorders. In “The Invasion of Starlings,” he watches the turbulent flight of starlings in the sky. Palomar’s quest for an order in the flight of the migratory birds does not succeed as their flight was continuously scattered and dispersed. The imposition of an order on their flight by attributing equal distance between one bird and other is also equally frustrating. He soon realizes that order is only an ‘illusion.’

But this illusion of regularity is treacherous, because nothing is more difficult to evaluate than

the density of distribution of birds in flight, where the compactness of the flock seems about to darken the sky. There, between one winged animal and the next, chasms of emptiness yawn. (57)

In fact, the flight of the starlings serves as an eloquent subject for a linguistic representation of the infinite chaos that surrounds Mr. Palomar and reminds him of the unattainable conception of it. The narrator states: “[H]e soon notices that all the birds that seemed to him to be approaching are in reality flying off in all directions, as if he were in the centre of an explosion” (58).

Although Palomar observes a fluidity of individual birds, there is a formal solidity of the birds as a whole. This illusion too shatters when the flight of birds comes closer and the “pattern has dissolved” (59). Palomar feels the need to communicate to his friends what he has seen, but that too becomes a metaphor for the same sort of chaos. He says: “And so there is a to and fro of messages along the telephone network as the sky is criss-crossed by hosts of birds” (59). The cloud of birds is like the infinite cloud of language. The gaze of one individual cannot simultaneously observe, describe and

contemplate, thousands of flocking birds due to the finite nature of human perception.

The chapter, "The Order of Scaly Creatures," is a contemplation on an iguana caged in the zoo that Palomar visits. The visit to the zoo invariably puts a lot of questions in his mind. He reflects upon the ironies of imitation. The cages are modeled on real places, and animals serve as types of their species. He states: "[E]ach case is only a tiny sample, torn from the natural continuum..." (78). However, they appear surreal, fantastic and almost as if they were constructs of art.

Thus every sample of this antediluvian bestiary is kept alive artificially, as if it were a hypothesis of the mind, a product of the imagination, a construction of language, a paradoxical line of reasoning meant to demonstrate that the only true world is our own.

(78)

Palomar tries to 'peer out beyond the human' by visualising what was before him and what will be there after him, only to realise with his own eyes that "the world of man is not eternal and is not unique" (78). But soon, the visualization

of infinity that lies before and after Palomar tires him out, and he concludes: "The thought of a time outside our experience is intolerable" (79).

The obsession with the continuity of time and problems of disorder or chaos is presented in the chapter "The Odd Slipper." While travelling in an eastern country, Palomar buys a pair of slippers from a bazaar. But after returning home, he realizes that one slipper is wider than the other one and will not stay on his foot. This odd slipper constitutes his conception of infinite time and chaos, because the merchant will always have two odd slippers, and this will be passed on to the next generation, thus creating a continuum of time. He states:

At the bottom of the pile there will always remain two odd slippers [...] and perhaps he will never exhaust it, and after his death the shop with all its merchandise will pass to his heirs and to the heirs of his heirs.

[...]

The unknown companion was limping perhaps in another period, the symmetry of their steps

respondent not only from one continent to another but even over a distance of centuries. (91)

From the unordered proliferation of grass in the lawn to the presentation of unmatched slippers in the chapter "The Odd Slippers," the theme of chaos is emphasized. The chaotic view of things is brought out again in the chapter titled "From the Terrace." Palomar reflects upon the uneven fall in rise of the city roofs and imagines how the birds think when they look down at the earth. Palomar cannot comprehend the symmetry of the city, since only asymmetry is seen manifested to him everywhere. He states:

The true form of the city is in this rise and fall of the roofs, old tiles and new, curved and flat, slender or squat chimneys, arbores of reed matting and sheds of corrugated iron, railings, balustrades [...] and rising arbores all else the rigging of TV aerials, straight or crooked, enamelled or rusting, in models of successive generations, variously ramified [...] but all of them thin as skeletons and disturbing totems. (49-50)

This train of thought is made possible by taking the perspective of a bird. The narrator comments: "This is how birds think, or at least this is how Mr. Palomar thinks, imagining himself a bird" (51).

In "The Contemplation of the Stars," Mr. Palomar consults a confusing array of astronomical charts, seeking the "exact geometry of the sidereal spaces" (41), promised not only by modern science, but also by the wisdom of the ancients. Instead of a timeless, unchangeable perfection, he finds the sky to be a world of uncertainty, a "place of superfluous complications and confused approximations" (41). The uncertainty derives partly from the failure of the maps to accommodate the overwhelming fullness of the heavens and their complexities. The narrator comments: "[O]ppressed, insecure, he becomes nervous over the railroad timetable when he flips through them in search of a connection" (43).

It is ironic to note that Palomar's name suggests the powerful telescope. In the chapter "The Eye and the Planets," the narrator comments: "Mr. Palomar, perhaps because he bears the same name as a famous observatory, can boast some

friendships among astronomers; and he is allowed to put his nose beside the eyepiece of a 15 cm telescope” (34-35).

In “The Universe As Mirror” Palomar reaches the decision that in order to understand his self he must travel within himself than observing the world around him, as “he no longer knows where his self is to be found” (Mr. Palomar 106). The narrator comments:

The road left open to him is this: he will devote himself from now on to the knowing of himself, he will explore his own inner geography, he will draw the diagram of the moods of his spirit, he will derive from it formulas and theories, he will train his telescope on the orbits traced by the course of his life rather than on those of the castellation. (107)

In all these experiments and observations, Palomar is searching for harmony, the harmony between himself and the world outside. In the last chapter, “Learning to be Dead,” which also marks the last phase of his tormented search for harmony, Mr. Palomar tries to learn how to be ‘dead’ even in life. This, indeed, seems to him the only possible way to free himself from

the constant bouts of anxiety. Being dead is not the same as “not being, a condition that occupies the vast expanse of time before birth, apparently symmetrical with the other, equally vast expanse that follows death” (108).

Death, as the end, conclusion, annihilation of his life, should finally free Palomar from his inability to connect himself to the world. Being dead means “resigning himself to the disappointment in finding himself the same in a definitive state, which he can no longer hope to change” (*Mr. Palomar* 110). The ‘same definitive state’ means the postponing of death indefinitely. The postponement of death is possible, as Palomar imagines, by the nourishment of his self through a “succession of generations like the stages in the life of a single person, which goes on for centuries and millennia” (112). Franchi thus summarizes: “Death, thus can be postponed indefinitely from one generations to the other until the end of time, will not even one atom in the universe will be left to support the memory of life” (762).

Palomar suddenly realizes that to defer death beyond the end of time means to defeat it:

'If time has to end, it can be described, instant by instant', Palomar thinks, 'and each instant, when described, expands so that its end can no longer be seen'. He decides that he will set himself to describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all he will no longer think of being dead. (113)

It is precisely when he talks himself into this supreme deceit that Palomar dies. As Stefano Franchi comments:

Death should arrive at the supreme moments, as to the condemned of Kafka's Penal Colony, when the victim, after hours of torture, begins to decipher on his own body the meaning of the sentence and, in a flash that separates him from the end of existence, finally understands its intimate meaning. (761)

"At that moment he dies" (113) with these words, Mr. Palomar's search and his life ends, and with them the novel.

Unlike any other novel of Calvino, *Mr. Palomar* stands out in the literary corpus of Calvino primarily due to the philosophical and cosmological concerns of the hero. The very life of the

protagonist becomes a quest to unravel the mysteries that surround the world outside. The problems related to culture and language feed the cogitative ruminations of the hero.

Conclusion

Italo Calvino's first two novels, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and *Marcovaldo*, are about a familiar, yet gruesome reality specific to Italian history. The Italian readers could easily identify themselves with the plight of Marcovaldo. It is very conspicuous that the French influence was absent in these two earliest novels. The lived experience of Calvino under the Fascist brutality had fuelled his early writings. The absence of such excruciating experiences in his later career is reflected in his writing with his relocating himself from the 'earthly' neorealistic narrative to a 'fabulatory' experimental narrative.

This 'change in narrative' is the major reason for the Italian critics not to take a favourable attitude towards the second half of Calvino's literary career. Fortini considers his use of combinatory and Oulipean practices as "a series of banalities to be used by foreigners; those banalities are presented following the typical American system of index cards; they are good only for people who have no familiarity with our culture

and who do not take into account the historical dimension” (qtd. in Botta 82).

The flight from neorealistic narrative, which is very much tied down to the historic realities, to experimental writing that has no connection with history, spans into decades. The earlier Calvino who wrote fiction out of history, and the later Calvino who wrote fiction as fantasy, can be said to be diametrically opposite, as fantasy is deemed to possess qualities opposite to those of history. The passion that enthused him to write in the beginning of his career was different from that of his later career. What was once fuelled by ideology, now came to be inspired by pure ‘fancy’ of the mind. The element of ‘realism’ which coloured the writings of early Calvino, later gave way to fabulation or the process of creating fantasy.

When one builds his narrative, placing his feet firmly in the historical realities and sets in a realistic background, the possible inclusion of fancy is very much negated. The intensity of the realistic or historical taste is projected more by the participation of Calvino himself in the events narrated. This does not mean that Calvino, in the novel, is representing the history of Italy during World War II. Rather, his own experience

as a Resistance fighter is narrated with a fictional twist. The personal experiences, of which Calvino gives us a glimpse in the preface to *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (the hard realities of the war period experienced in a hard way in the Ligurian Mountains), become the subject matter of his first novel. These harsh realities do not invite a flowery or a language swathed in fantasy. The experiences of life which were bitter yet inspiring are real, and these experiences, to an extent, are featured in the novel. Calvino is assuming the role of a man of action when he goes into the vanguard positions of war against the Fascists. The child narrative is particularly important here, as Calvino also entered into the frantic rat-race of war at an early age. The autobiographical book of Calvino, *The Road to San Giovanni*, gives us a glimpse of how he loved watching films. The first literary imitation of Calvino came from this source – the neorealist cinema, which then shaped the cultural ambience of Italy, and rerouted the narrative curve in Calvino. The narrative of celluloid Neorealism transported into Calvino began to express itself even in his first novel, which evinced heavy bearings of strict strictures of Neorealist tenets. *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* ends with a moral victory: the execution of

Rina, the prostitute, who later turns out to be a spy of the Fascists. The symbolic removal of the treacherous elements of the society, be it Fascists or spies, denotes the fantastical desire of the mind to eliminate the cancerous weeds of the society, in tune with the general historical pulse of the nation. The novel then documents the annals of history in a fantastical ink. The immediate pressure on Calvino to transform the events he experienced in the World War II is to document the struggles of fellow comrades. Obviously, the particular war culture of Italy that resisted the Fascist invasions of land and language (the Fascists tried to flatten out the differences in dialect) played a major contributory role in the creation of the novel. It effectively becomes a cultural fabulation, or the fantasy churned out by a merger of history and culture.

The second work, *Marcovaldo*, which though termed a novel, cannot be called so, as it is more a collection of short stories. The two links which tie these stories together are the protagonist Marcovaldo who appears in all these stories and the orderly transition of seasons. These stories were written separately at different times, at a time that followed World War II. Clearly, World War II is past and buried. Be it in fiction or in

life, the immediate period that follows a devastating war gives rise to poverty, joblessness, hunger etc. When these elements come into fiction, it is represented in a different light. The themes of poverty, hunger, joblessness etc. form the core chapters of *Marcovaldo*. Calvino does not escape into intangible philosophical heights, when it comes to representing ground realities that keep raging around him. But, the principles of Neorealism that are seen at their heights in the novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, cannot be seen to the same extent in *Marcovaldo*. The intensity of the proletarian ideologies in *Marcovaldo* has diminished, compared to those that surface in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. In a way, it marks a clear shift into the next phase of experimental writing that started with the publication of *Cosmicomics*. When *The Path to the Spiders* shows heights of Neorealism in writing, *Marcovaldo* evinces the decline of the same in his onward journey into combinatorial narratives. This again is a product of that Italian culture which Calvino perceived from the viewpoint of a politburo member of the Italian Communist party. Naturally, the common problems that an ordinary man faces become the subject matter of his writings at this stage.

The concept of social realism that the left wing critics advocated suddenly disappeared from the writings of Calvino after his resignation from the communist party. The novels that come after his resignation from the party include *Cosmicomics*, *Invisible Cities*, *The Castle of Crossed Cities*, *If on a Winters' Night a Traveler* and *Mr. Palomar*. The last phase of Calvino that produced all these novels is purely experimental in nature. Rather, he wrote postmodernist novels that employ various methods of combinatory poetics. The second phase of Calvino is also largely influenced by the cultural and topographical influences of Paris.

The shift from neorealistic poetics into combinatory poetics involved several factors. Calvino adopted a simple narrative style in *Marcovaldo*, while in *Mr. Palomar* his philosophical and theoretical postulates are employed in the narration. Palomar tries to understand the world using his intellect, analyzing each phenomenon in its most minute details. This is a typical Oulipean way to analyze texts, not Neorealistic.

Calvino abandoned stories that were directly connected to the history and culture of Italy as he moved to France. Anna

Botta concludes that Calvino's prosecutors and defenders agree on one point. She says: "what is commonly known as 'the last Calvino' —usually the works starting with *Cosmicomiche* (*Cosmicomics*) (from 1965 to the authors' death)— is largely inferior to 'the first and the middle Calvino'"(81). The Italian critics watched Calvino's association with Oulipean theories as a "betrayal of his Italianita" (Botta 82). Franco Fortini, one of the strident critics of Calvino, assesses that Calvino was "poisoned by the French production of that Parisian period" (qtd. in Botta 81).

What these critics missed was the emergence of complimentary tendencies between literary studies and the history of science. John Neubaur, in his 2003 article "Reflections on the 'convergence' between Literature and Science," claims that "the new life of 'Literature and Science' started already in the sixties and early seventies, by now some thirty—not just fifteen years back"(741). This period coincides with the narrative and thematic shift in Calvino, in which he blended literature with science through the Oulipean narrative techniques. Calvino did not allow himself to be chained down to the neorealistic traditions of his novelistic past, but espoused

the emerging challenges that presented itself through the possibilities of combinatory poetics. Calvino observes:

In a particular way today's culture looks at the world, one tendency is emerging from several directions at once. The world in its various aspects is increasingly looked upon as discrete rather than continuous. I am using the term "discrete" in the sense it bears in mathematics, a discrete quantity being one made up of separate parts. Thought, which until the other day appeared to us as something fluid, evoking linear images such as a flowing river on an unwinding thread, [...] we now tend to think of as a series of discontinuous states, of combinations, of impulses acting on a finite (though enormous) number of sensory and motor organs. (*Literature Machine* 7-8)

This transition in Calvino disturbed the Italian critics. But Calvino tried to portray the "discontinuous" and "winding" worlds in their full complexity in *Mr. Palomar*. Calvino achieves the "linear" narration in *Marcovaldo* through the sequential progression of seasons and in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

with an orderly progression of the story. This continuous progression is replaced in *Mr. Palomar* for the sake of the infinite possibilities of combinatory games, and is frustrated in the novel *If on a Winters' Night a Traveler* by the continuous cessations of the frame narratives.

The latest influence on Calvino came not from the revolutionary energy behind Neorealism, but from the combinatory poetics of Oulipo. Marcel Benabou comments: "For Calvino ... the Oulipo meetings and the absolutely unforeseeable exchange they provoke, are first of all a laboratory for ideas, a test for the newest and boldest suggestion" (qtd. in Anna Botta 82).

The Oulipean way of producing a text involves the mixing of science and mathematics, and also the permutation of linguistic materials. The presence of mathematical structure and the blending of scientific data into *Mr. Palomar*, apart from the various other Oulipean constraints that are included in this novel, make it an Oulipean novel. The absence of all these factors in *Marcovaldo* and *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* testifies to their neorealistic, Italian background and narrative immediacy. The Oulipean did not believe in this conversational

immediacy. Anna Botta observes that “for the Oulipo, literature is not the product of an exterior romantic inspiration, but instead the intentional, painstaking creation and invention of new structures or forms from the hidden potential of our everyday language” (83).

The shift in Calvino’s aesthetics is clearly marked by the contesting presence of the two forces, known as Neorealism and the combinatorial poetics of the Oulipean group. Neorealism connected Calvino to a historical period, while Oulipean practices helped him to sever his connections from the Italian past. Anna Botta observes that the “Oulipean aesthetic of formal constraints and permutational play is not a procedure divorced from social and cultural meaning” (87). The narrative shift from *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* (Calvino’s first novel) to *Mr. Palomar* (Calvino’s last novel) clearly indicates the inclusion of historical influences in *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* as well as the compulsion to accommodate a more complex universe in *Mr. Palomar*. The historical influences are born of the ghastly experiences Calvino endured under Fascism and the necessity to accommodate a complex world; and it is the effect of his association with the Oulipo group. True to this, these two

novels voice Calvino's concerns related to these theories. In *Marcovaldo*, Calvino adopts an anti-Fascist narration by reverting to the organizing motifs of oral narration. Through the structure of *Mr. Palomar*, Calvino tries to exhaust the possible combinations of narrative motifs involved in the numbers '1', '2' and '3.' Calvino in "Cybernetics and Ghosts" comments:

Just as no chess player will ever live long enough to exhaust all the combinations of possible moves for the thirty-two pieces on the chess board, so we know (given the fact that our minds are chess boards with hundreds of billions of pieces) that not even in a lifetime lasting as long as the universe would one ever manage to make all possible plays. (8-9)

The chess-like movements of motifs like "observation," "anthropology" and "meditation" are never exhausted in *Mr. Palomar* until these motifs are put to an end by the death of Mr. Palomar himself. Unlike this, *Marcovaldo* is devoid of any of these combinations, and this novel declares its adherence to the historical context of Neorealism through the documentary portrayal of events. Calvino espoused the Parisian tastes, so that he could critically examine his own Italian past. To an

interviewer who asked him to define his position vis-à-vis his native country, Calvino responded: "Among the Invisible Cities there is one city which is on stilts. Its inhabitants watch their absence from the top. Perhaps in order to understand who I am, I have to observe a point where I might be and I am not" (qtd. in Botta 88).

Calvino's involvement in the Parisian culture is seen as a convenient observatory from which Calvino could watch his Italian period. This metaphor of observing by hindsight reminds us of Palomar, who was created during Calvino's Parisian period, because the name "Palomar" invokes the name of a famous observatory in America. To conclude, it is relevant to quote the "Cities & Eyes. 3" of *Invisible Cities* that Calvino alluded to in the interview.

After a seven days' march through woodland, the traveller directed toward Baucis cannot see the city and yet he has arrived. The slender stilts that rise from the ground at a great distance from one another and are lost above the clouds support the city. You climb them with ladders. On the ground the inhabitants rarely show themselves: having

already everything they need up there, they prefer not to come down. Nothing of the city touches the earth except those long flamingo legs on which it rests and, when the days are sunny, a pierced, angular shadow that falls on the foliage.

There are three hypotheses about the inhabitants of Baucis: that they hate the earth; that they respect it so much they avoid all contact; that they love it as it was before they existed and with spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward they never tire of examining it, leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence.

(77)

The above quote creates an enigmatic situation. The traveller is in the city but cannot see the city. At the same time, he is also being observed from the same city which is hidden from his view. Similarly, Calvino's entire literary career from Neorealism to Oulipo is meticulously observed and appreciated by the connoisseur and the critic alike. The progression from *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* to *Mr. Palomar*, or from his first novel to the last novel, may thus be seen as the evolution of

Italo Calvino from a limited subjective discourse to a discourse of the consciousness, which is in the Derridean sense 'always already' divorced from the subjective self.

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