Reconciliation Between the Author and the Reader in Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller*

Key Terms: Metafiction, Overt Representation, Role of Readers, Creative Possibilities

In Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller*, the author plays with the readers making explicit the presence of author and the reader within the novel to explicate the difficulties of representing the process of construction of a novel. The metafictional techniques place the act of reading at the centre and brings the writer and the reader together from the two ends. Metafiction is not a new experimentation in novelistic tradition but Calvino's book is a radical one as it revolves around the reader's experience of being in the novel or reading a text. From the beginning to the end, the readers are left with several difficulties; they even cannot distinguish presence from pretense, reality from illusion and art from life. This is because the narrative is a fictional one but the readers have to go through the real experience of creating it.

The narrative from the very beginning places the reader at the centre. It addresses the reader from the first line, which at first seems that the reader is the actual reader. "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino' new novel *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller.* Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought" (3). But eventually it is known that the Reader is the protagonist of the novel. The novel in the beginning has two references to the reader- first, the immediate or the actual reader who takes up the act of reading and the second, the reader in the novel itself/ textual reader who is the protagonist thus, the act of reading remains pivotal.

Calvino's novel makes its own presence explicit from the very beginning and the novel itself is the subject of the book. The dominant presence of reader and his/her role in the process of making the novel contradicts or replaces the fictional world. The novel itself presents both the pleasure and exasperation readers go through while reading this particular

book where various elements cross each other, become double and complicate the efforts of representation and comprehension. The author hooks the readers in a labyrinth by manipulating the novel and making them the collaborators in crafting a novel that they are reading.

The writer also provides critical commentaries on the act of reading through the narrative that pushes both the extra- textual (us) and intra-textual readers (the Reader and the Other Reader) into new experience of reading. The reader with the very act of reading materializes the course of the novel. So, there is a shift of power and authority traditionally assigned to the writer to the reader. "It's not that you expect anything in particular from this particular book. You're the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything" (4). The author dictates about the nature of the reader, in doing so he is creating a fictional character and simultaneously affecting the actual reader's way of thinking. The active role of the reader is required. Patricia Waugh elucidates on this,

> Calvino's novel, *If O A Winter's Night a Traveller,* addresses the reader in the second person and explicitly discusses the supremacy of his or her activity in realizing the text imaginatively. The 'Dear Reader' is no longer quite so passive and becomes in effect an acknowledged fully active player in a new conception of literature as a collective creation rather than a monologic and authoritative version of history. (43)

The subject of Italo Calvino's novel tends to problematize the very problem associated with the act of reading. "So here you are now, ready to attack the first lines of the first page. You prepare to recognize the unmistakable tone of the author. No. You don't recognize at all" (9). Again, the author talks about himself, giving the reader glimpse of his nature as a writer- "known as an author who changes greatly from one book to the next. And in these very changes you recognize him as himself. Here, however, he seems to have absolutely no

connection with all the rest he has written, at least as far as you can recall" (9). The author even describes the exasperation readers might have felt reading this particular book. Nevertheless, he manages to hook the readers' attention stating what he is feeling at that particular point of time while reading the particular lines. It does not offer any alternatives rather simply aims to subvert many of notions attributed to the act of reading/writing and the subsequent act of meaning-meaning making.

If On A Winter's Night A Traveller holds the remarkable place in the novelistic tradition as the book is about the book itself. Cathrine Burgass's remarks about this book, "Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* is most radically and structurally metafictive" (Burgass 183). Linda Hutcheon's theorization on such metafictional texts in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* becomes very crucial to understand the attributes of Calvino's strange novel. For Hutcheon, "Metafiction, as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction-that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity (1). Italo Calvino deliberately sets to structure the book in such a way that it seems that the book speaks for itself.

Linda Hutcheon uses the term narcissistic narrative owing to the Greek mythology of Narcissus to describe the novels that are deeply conscious of their own existence as fiction and hence draw the full attention towards their own process of storytelling. In this situation, the readers are placed in a strange yet active role as the co-creator of the fiction. Hutcheon uses "many other adjectives to describe the modes of narcissism", namely "self-reflective, self-informing, self-reflexive, auto-referential, auto-representational" but for her "these are not exactly synonymous" (1-2). She discusses lots of works in association with these words. However, the most important point she makes is about the choice of her word. "Perhaps the negative connotations of the very language we have been forced to use here-narcissism, introverted, introspective, self-conscious- suggest a strong desire to keep criticism as a

separate domain; fiction which constitutes its own literary analysis is, to the critic, naturally somewhat suspect (20). Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* most of all talks about itself and often critiques its own existence and makes use of the various literary musing and critical analysis in the narrative discourse.

The novel does not have apparent plot other than the act of reading which makes the whole plot of the novel. There is the Reader who buys a copy of Calvino's novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. But after reading for a while he finds that it is the defective one. The Reader finds that the copy of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* has only the first sixteen pages that are repeated. The Reader, then, goes to the publisher where he meets the other Reader, a young woman, Ludmilla. The two readers, the Reader and his new reader-friend, Ludmilla persistently search for the complete novel they were reading, for their copies of the text merely had the beginning. The Reader finds out from the bookseller that he novel he was reading was *Outside the Town of Malbork* . He preferred to take the whole text of Malbork over the misprinted book. But it is exasperating for him to find again that this book is not the same novel he has been reading earlier; it had defective binding. The act of reading of the Reader is interrupted once more.

Here, the definition provided by Patricia Waugh, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, becomes helpful to uncover the implication of such works.

> *Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (2).

The Reader is accompanied by the other Reader, Ludmilla in pursuit of a complete novel. After this, the narrative gets further complicated as there is an overlapping between the between the course of their reading, and their life. It becomes impossible to determine whether it is the act of reading that is establishing the course of life or vice-versa.

They take help of the Professor Uzzi-Tuzzi, of the Department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages to find the book- *Outside the Town of Malbork*. He gives the translated copy of that book but again, they find out that it is the other novel, *Leaning from the Steep Slope*. Their journey ahead continues, first to the publisher, then to an author named Silas Flannery, again to a revolutionary state in South America and finally ends in a library. The Reader decides to marry Ludmilla and live happily ever after. It is easy to see that the Reader applies the logic of the text to life.

The novel presents several ideas about reading and writing that apparently echo the multiplicity generated by postmodernism but it would not be a justice to examine the book in such terms. This paper aligns with Hutcheon's expression, "the term "postmodernism" seems to me to be a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction" (2). Because for her, "Most discussions of "postmodernism" are concerned primarily with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes, of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture" (3). Thus, the examination of this book is not done in relation with postmodernism but the terminologies attributed to postmodernism are used when necessary.

This research particularly unravels 1) how Calvino experiments with various elements of traditional/conventional fiction and what is the effect of such manipulation 2) why he makes the reader's role pivotal and its implication. This paper attempts to answer these questions because it gives the readers heuristic insights about various experimental techniques and their relevance in contemporary literary theories.

Primarily, the ideas and theories on meta-fictional works by Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon are incorporated while writing this paper. It should be noted that there have not been sufficient studies on such works. This could be because meta-fictional works always speak for themselves. This happens in such a way that, "the simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable" (2 Waugh). Language is volatile than ever in Italo Calvino's remarkable metafiction.

In Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller,* language functions merely as a fragile means which sublimates before achieving any ends. For instance, the second chapter begins in this way, "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 Calvino). As we read these lines, one is drawn towards the ambiguity of the language. The fictionality of the novel is expressed as if it is real. The correlation between fiction and reality is explored.

Patricia Waugh defines the prefix 'meta' before setting out to explore the concerns of meta-fictional works.

> Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction. In a sense, metafiction rests on a version of the Heisenbergian uncertainty principle: an awareness that 'for the smallest building blocks of matter, every process of observation causes a major disturbance' (Heisenberg 1972, p. 126), and that it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed. (3)

Calvino in *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* situates the readers in midst of the dilemma. He explicitly makes it clear for the readers that the strange experience of reading they are going through is made that way deliberately. The author knows what the reader is going through. The very act of reading changes the course of the novel similar to the analogy provided by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

The reader is lost because the author puts the reader into the labyrinth. The use of second person pronoun to address the Reader as a character and the actual reader of the book makes it almost impossible to separate otherwise discrete persons. "The distasteful fusion perceived by the narrator between the story of the novel and the story of the R/reader has a parallel in the confusion which develops and finds its material support in the character of the Reader protagonist, who is at once a literary character, an allegory of the "implied reader" (in Iser's sense), and a possible representation of the actual reader, the addressee of the text" (Mazzoni 59-60). Calvino plays with readers' psyche- their faith in author and expectations from the book. " The lights of the station and the sentences you are reading seem to have the job of dissolving more than of indicating the things that surface from a veil of darkness and fog" (11). Even the light functions as a means of distortion. This scientifically accepted principle has been applied to the writing. The writing, the language and the words are the tools of concealment rather than revelation.

The more the reader reads, the less he knows. For Patricia Waugh, "the concerns of metafiction are even more complex" (Waugh 3) than Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. "For while Heisenberg believed one could at least describe, if not a picture of nature, then a picture of one's relation to nature, metafiction shows the uncertainty even of this process. How is it possible to 'describe' anything? (Waugh 3-4). While the regular fiction writers do not dwell on this meta-level, they simply opt out the uncertainty in favor of coherence and certainty, the metafictionists are "highly conscious of a basic dilemma: if he or she sets out to 'represent'

the world, he or she realizes fairly soon that the world, as such, cannot be 'represented. In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to 'represent' the *discourses* of that world" (Waugh 4). Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* experiments with the representation laying bare open it's process. Even so, the readers fail at grasping the unity of narrative. "I am the man who comes and goes between the bar and the telephone booth. Or, rather: that man is called "I" and you know nothing else about him, just as this station is called only "station" and beyond it there exists nothing except the unanswered signal of a telephone ringing in a dark room of a distant city" (11). Again, the author sets out the dialogue between the reader and himself dictating what the words mean. For Hutcheon, metafiction "reforges" the "vital link" between "life and art", "on a new level- on that of the imaginative process (of storytelling), instead of on that of the product (the story told). And it is the new role of the reader that is the vehicle of this change" (3 Waugh). The whole experience of reading is an exciting one because the role of the reader becomes evidently pivotal. The reader is also aware of the author's voice over his/her shoulders, often telling him/her how to think or rather how not to think at those particulars incidents, expressions or words.

In "The Power behind Pronoun: Narrative Games in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*" Inge Fink shows that the narrative strategies of Calvino go beyond the "postmodernist notion of self-conscious text, the death of author and the absence of the univocal textual message" (94). For her, Calvino "reestablishes the traditional hierarchies of literary discourse" (94) as he places the reader in the centre but it is only a trick rather he is in "total control of the situation" (94). He uses the second person pronoun you to designate the character and the reader simultaneously, "a jungle of pronouns almost too thick to penetrate" (96). The implication behind such shifting of the attributes is related to the creation of the text and the meaning-making process.

The narrative plays with the readers' mind and simultaneously makes aware that the author is playing. He even warns, "Watch out: it is surely a method of involving you gradually, capturing you in the story before you realize it—a trap. Or perhaps the author still has not made up his mind, just as you, reader, for that matter, are not sure what you would most like to read" (12). However, this revelation of the fact that he is playing with readers' intellect does not lose the attention rather intensifies it as he himself makes it evident. Linda Hutcheon writes that art and life are not separate things rather for her, "Reading and writing belong to the processes of "life" as much as they do to those of "art". It is this realization that constitutes one side of the paradox of metafiction for the reader" (Hutcheon 5). The reader is taut among the two forces. "On the one hand, he is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the "art", of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience. In fact, these responses are shown to be part of his life experience" (Hutcheon 5). In *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller,* the authorial figure describes himself. Calvino makes it explicit that it is he who is speaking. In the novel, the author describes Madame Marne yet all that description nullifies. The reader is abruptly drawn out of the fictional world and again involved in a discourse. The author again shows that he knows that the reader's attention is "completely concentrated on the woman, already for several pages you have been circling her" (20). It is because of the readers expectation, the author writes that he goes to the female character, Madame Marne, to know about her. Here, the reader simultaneously acknowledges the fictiveness of the story yet he is made the "co-creator" (Hutcheon 5) requiring an active mental process, at times strenuous effort, while reading the book. Fiction becomes the medium for the reader to experience the real-time issues of his own life and state of mind.

In the second chapter, which actually takes a different direction, the author addresses the reader once again without giving continuity to the narrative of the first chapter. "You have now read about thirty pages and you're becoming caught up in the story" (25). Calvino addresses the readers in such a way that it is impossible for the actual readers not to fully identify with the reader as a character- a fictional persona. The Reader finds that "the narration is repeated, identical to the pages" that he has "read" (25). The author writes that this was not "a stylistic subtlety" on his part rather "simply a printer's mistake: they have inserted the same pages twice" and "the mistake occurred as they were binding the volume" (25). The novel is Calvino's structurally radical book as well. It is the structure of the novel that determines various issues and further problematizes the existence of the novel. Calvino has deliberately made such structure that the very novel the Reader is pursuing is infact missing. The narrative continuity gets violated from the second chapter. The novel is unreal but the Reader's experience of reading it is real.

The novel is an eclectic of discourses on novels as well as the act of reading. Thus, the interplay of the ambiguities and the multi-layered awareness of its fictionality allow the author to incorporate various pertinent discourses related to fiction. "What you would like is the opening of an abstract and absolute time and space in which you could move, following an exact taut trajectory; but when you seem to be succeeding, you realize you are motionless, blocked, forced to repeat everything from the beginning" (27). The Reader's expectations are turned upside down when he instead of finding the novel linear finds it interrupted. "Throughout we are reminded of the status of the book as an artifact through references to missing pages, pages stuck together, disordered pages. We are reminded also of its intertextual existence through the fragments of novels, stories and narratives embedded within the outer frame" (Waugh 47). Calvino subverts the Aristotelian notion of the plot or the unity of actions. Calvino's novel gives us evidence that the readers do not perceive the

novel as a live creative process happening before them without any mediation. The readers undergo a complex process of contemplation in which they realize various processes of pretense, construction and manipulation involved in it.

Linda Hutcheon provides the typology of such metafictional texts in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. For her, such typology "is not to be seen as a rigid, externally, imposed organization but rather it is the result of an inductive approach to individual texts and a subsequent generalization from them" (6). The importance of studying the metafictional works is highlighted by Patricia Waugh. "This form of fiction is worth studying not only because of its contemporary emergence but also because of the insights it offers into both the representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as genre. By studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity" (5). But the analysis of *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* becomes difficult because it is problematic, multi-layered and enigmatic where the reader is left with multiple questions and suspicions about the nature of text they are faced with. The unpredictably of the narrative and plot structure always looms around.

Calvino in his novel manipulates the form and content of the traditional fiction by playing with elements, situating the readers as the protagonist themselves. He projects the strange yet genuine relationship that the author and the readers share through the interation within the novel itself. His overt manipulation of the traditional novelistic devices should be attributed to his discomfort with the naturalistic modes of representation. "Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (Waugh 6). His novel projects the modernist search for a new kind of aesthetics in conflict with realist and naturalist theatre and provides an occasion to study the complex interaction between the author and the readers.

In *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller,* the character, the Reader finds the other Reader, Ludmilla who also faces the similar situation. She too is in search of the complete book. Now, both of them want to finish the misprinted book that they were reading. Infact, the book they were reading was not Italo Calvino's book rather written by a Polish writer. The Reader indulges in the imagination of the other Reader and he has been transformed after he encountered her the other day. "This is how you have changed since yesterday, you who insisted you preferred a book, something solid, which lies before you, easily defined, enjoyed without risks, to a real-life experience, always elusive, discontinuous, debated. Does this mean that the book has become an instrument, a channel of communication, a rendezvous" (32)? This novel takes into consideration the enigmatic relation between fiction and life. It brings the writing techniques and the reader at the center of the novel. It is a fiction about the creation of fiction. It has no straightforward structure, rather is interrupted many times.

> The metafictional novel thus situates its resistance *within* the form of the novel itself. Saussure distinguished between *langue* and *parole*: between the language system (a set of rules) and any act of individual utterance that takes place within this system. Each metafictional novel self-consciously sets its individual *parole* against the *langue* (the codes and conventions) of the novel tradition. (Waugh 11)

The author is aware of the expanded expectation of the Reader so he deliberately avoided the traditional form and rather constructed the discrete chapters devoid of any resolutions. "The very activity of the novelist seems to alter in direction when he becomes aware that he has been the unconscious producer of a synchronic model or sign-system; then perhaps he decides to do so consciously and self-consciously. Similarly, the activity of the reader is not one of being a consumer of stories, but rather one of learning and constructing a new sign-system, a new set of verbal relations" (Hutcheon 14). For Patricia Waugh, the rise of

metafiction was because "the continuance of traditional literary forms like realism are no longer adequate vehicles" to convey the "genuinely felt sense of crisis, alienation and oppression in contemporary society" (11). The novel makes an attempt to unfold the natures of the fictional Readers each of them having discrete preference over the type of the novel they would like to read.

The Reader says, "I rather enjoy that sense of bewilderment a novel gives you when you start reading it, but if the first effect is fog, I'm afraid the moment the fog lifts my pleasure in reading will be lost, too" (30). However, the other Reader has different taste. She prefers "novels that bring me immediately into a world where everything is precise, concrete, specific. I feel a special satisfaction in knowing that things are made in that certain fashion and not otherwise, even the most commonplace things that in real life seem indifferent to me" (30). When meticulously examined, the novel can be identified as an undertaking to obliterate the authorial power perpetuated by conventional fictions and as a new venture to revive power in the activity of reading.

In Gregory L. Lucente's "An Interview with Italo Calvino", Calvino remarks that this book he "made up of a kind of encyclopedia on the art of reading" (248). His asserts that "only the fact of writing implies an order" in the otherwise "the most chaotic of realities" (253). "The First and Other Persons" by Gilberto Perez reads the characters of Calvino's novel in terms of absence presences, both the fictional "I" and fictional "You" are actualized as though they are real. Perez considers "frustrations in our reading, interruptions we have endured" (611). In "Reconstructing the Incipit : Narrative beginnings in Calvino's *If in a winter's night*" Cristina Mazzoni discovers that "the power of narrative beginning run a serious risk of becoming a black hole that denies existence to the rest of the text. *Winter's night* is very well aware of this possibility" (54). There is "a complex semiotic function" (57) of the narrative beginning in Calvino. The narrative drives only towards plural beginnings.

This is because the very mode narrative is embedded in the uncertain trajectory. The self reflexivity demands more self reflexivity to ad infinitum.

The novel leaves open to the reader outside the text the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is being read. "Who you are, Reader, your age, your status, profession, income: that would be indiscreet to ask. It's your business; you're on your own" (32). For this reason, the Reader is not endowed with a name but with a pronoun- suitable for any attribute and action.

When the Reader tries to read the book that he had exchanged. The second chapter ends this way. "Then from the very first page you realize that the novel you are holding has nothing to do with the one you were reading yesterday" (33). Thus, it's evident that "narcissistic narrative, then, is process made visible" (Hutcheon 7). In the novel's next chapter, the narrator describes the Reader's feeling. "so this sense of concreteness that you perceived from the very first lines bears in it also the sense of loss, the vertigo of dissolution, and you realize that you perceived this, too, alert Reader that you are, from the first page, when, though pleased with the precision of this writing, you sensed that, to tell the truth, everything was slipping through your fingers" (Calvino 37). Since, Linda Hutcheon's theorization "is not a part of the modern critique of representation; it does not partake of the Derridian post-structuralist discourse" (6). Also, Patricia Waugh is against the negative interpretation, understanding and criticism of the metafictional texts.

> Hence critics have discussed the 'crisis of the novel' and the 'death of the novel'. Instead of recognizing the *positive* aspects of fictional self-consciousness, they have tended to see such literary behaviour as a form of the self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of any artistic form or genre. Could it not be argued instead that metafictional writers, highly

conscious of the problems of artistic legitimacy, simply sensed a need for the

novel to theorize about itself? (10)

C. Nella Cotrupi in "Hyper-metafiction: Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler"*

examines the attributes of Calvino's metafiction, "the text's self-centeredness or self-

preoccupation" (280). It discusses how Calvino looks at relationship between fiction and

reality, writer and reader, reader and text in his novel. Calvino "actually puts into fictional

play many contemporary theories that deal with these relationships" (280). Calvino , a well-

informed writer engages the reader incorporating literary criticism in the literary project.

"Calvino's text may be seen, therefore, to raise the novel not just to the second degree, that of

metafiction, but to a third degree, to what we may call the degree of hyper metafiction" (281).

The novel can thus, be regarded as the reaction to the traditional fiction. "John Barth has

called this fiction a "literature of exhaustion"; similarly, Ortega y Gasset refers to the

"dehumanization of art'' Yet neither of these terms is as negative a description as its

immediate associations might suggest. Both are linked to parody and to an attempt to exhaust

literary possibilities- without succeeding" (Hutcheon 20). For instance, in the novel the reader

is cutting the pages that have not been cut in the printing house. The novel you are reading

wants to present to you a corporeal world, thick, detailed. Immersed in your reading, you

move the paper knife mechanically in the depth of the volume: your reading has not yet

reached the end of the first chapter, but your cutting has already gone far ahead" (Calvino

42). Although there is no clear cut distinction between various forms of metafictional novels,

this paper explores the interconnectedness of pretense and presence in creating fiction that is

parody in nature. Patricia Waugh further writes about this, "Only in this way might the genre

establish an identity and validity within a culture apparently hostile to its printed, linear

narrative and conventional assumptions about 'plot', 'character', 'authority' and

'representation'. The traditional fictional quest has thus been transformed into a quest for

fictionality" (10). Calvino successfully transforms the traditional conventions into a radical one. He goes for the incoherent amalgamation of plots and narratives to construct the fiction.

Linda Hutcheon makes clear what a parody is. "Parody, according to the formalist theoreticians, is the result of a conflict between realistic motivation and an aesthetic motivation which has become weak and has been made obvious. The consequence is the unmasking of the system or of the creative process whose function has given way to mechanical convention" (24). Calvino constantly engages the Reader and the readers in the process of "unmasking" (24) the process of manipulation in creating a work of fiction. Calvino tries to put forward that fiction must be a collective act of imagination between the author and the reader rather than the separate actions. But to achieve this, the novel needs to present the playful relationship between the reality of reading the book and unreality of its fictional properties.

The "unmasking" (24) of the process of construction of illusion itself in the novel is is made explicit in Calvino's work which can be attributed as the reaction against the conventional realist fictions. Hutcheon expounds upon the effect of such fiction on the readers.

> Another operation is at work in metafictional parody, however, and this the formalists called "defamiliarization". The laying bare of literary devices in metafiction brings to the reader's attention those formal elements of which, through over-familiarization, he has become unaware. Through his recognition of the backgrounded material, new demands for attention and active involvement are brought to bear on the act of reading. (24)

Hutcheon's discussion on how metafictional parody can demystify the authenticity of a single authority of the author without allowing an interaction between author, text and reader is very relevant in regard to the study of Calvino's work. "Overtly narcissistic texts reveal their self-

awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic identity within the texts themselves. In the covert form, this process is internalized, actualized; such a text is self-reflective but not necessarily self-conscious" (7). Hutcheon's typology of metafiction is one of the tools used in this paper to study Calvino's work.

In Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* the narrative direction gives broad view on the act of reading. The Reader and the other Reader are once again in search of the novel whose first chapter they had read. A new creative possibility is opened by Calvino in this book. The use of metafictional techniques came as a reaction to the modernity's new demand. "The role of the reader began to change. Reading was no longer easy, no longer a comfortable controlled experience; the reader was now forced to control, to organize, to interpret. He was assaulted from all sides, often by a self-conscious literary text" (Hutcheon 26). The author makes the fiction discursive; its plot is always in flux with no continuity and closure. In order to give the impression of the fictive nature of the book, the readers are made to go through the "works of art which are ephemeral and even trivial" because the writers "attempt authentically to represent conditions of rapid social change" (Waugh 12). The workings of the novel is further emphasized by Calvino giving the sense that there is someone behind the pages who operates on the novel. The artificiality of fiction writing is further exposed to the readers. The act of fiction making is not something happening autonomously rather it is a well-planned action. The Reader's and the other Reader's third attempt to find the novel who had read only one chapter goes into vain. "One thing is immediately clear to you: namely that this book has nothing in common with the one you had begun" (53). They take help of the professor, who convinces them that the chapter that they had read was the translation from Cimmerian novel.

The readers have to be involved and engaged with these types of interrupted reading. The more the readers participate imaginatively with the author, the more the novel moves

away from realistic notion towards self-conscious act of reading. Instead of creating the exact

verisimilitude of as in the case of traditional realist novels, this work demonstrates the novel

in a constant state of becoming that subverts the very notion of writing fiction. The author

does this overtly.

> I would like this hovering of presentiments and suspicions to reach the person
> who reads me not as an accidental obstacle to understanding what I write, but
> as its very substance; and if the process of my thoughts seems elusive to him
> who, setting out from radically changed mental habits, will seek to follow it,
> the important thing is that I convey to him the effort I am making to read
> between the lines of things the evasive meaning of what is in store for me. (61)

This way of attributing the readers to the author's state of mind while reading the fiction

gives the readers the artistic stimulus to go through mental process of making the fiction

themselves. Novels as a literary genre have to undergo a various stages of construction and

manipulation. Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* departs from the traditional way

of telling the story and "discovers a more effective way out of this endlessly permutating

system: the use of overtly metafictional, and in particular parodistic, devices. The novel

opens with a direct address to the reader in the situation of reading, and a metalingual

discourse upon the construction of the plot and the relation of *histoire* to *discours"* (Waugh

47). In his diary, the Reader at point writes that, "Every Every evening I spend the

first hours of darkness penning these pages, which I do not know if anyone will ever read"

(Calvino 61). The initial conflict that both the writer and readers go through makes it clear

that they are discussing about the medium of representation. The discussion about the process

of creation of a fiction reveals the conscious creativity and imagination required in the

creation of it and delights the readers.

The readers in these types of "overtly narcissistic narrative" (Hutcheon 7) would not confuse the fictional world as reality but and perceive it in the very process of making. The sense that the fiction is an imaginative construction clearly differs from the traditional realist tendency where the detailed illusion of the fictional world hides its process of masking. The reading of Calvino's novel is the game of pretense but genuine in its depiction of that pretense.

The Readers in Calvino's book are repeatedly subject to forgery. They are not able to find the book they are searching for. Professor Uzzi-Tuzii explicates about his idea of reading.

> "Reading," he says, "is always this: there is a thing that is there, a thing made of writing, a solid, material object, which cannot be changed, and through this thing we measure ourselves against something else that is not present, something else that belongs to the immaterial, invisible world, because it can only be thought, imagined, or because it was once and is no longer, past, lost, unattainable, in the land of the dead" (Calvino 72).

Calvino's novel like the other works of metafiction "seems aware of the fact that it (like all fiction, of course) actually has no existence apart from that constituted by the inward act of reading which counterpoints the externalized act of writing" (Hutcheon 28). In order to investigate how the elements of fiction are constantly interacting, we have to minutely study "the diegetic" and "the linguistic modes" of the overtly metafictional narratives. The novel is not about the Readers but their impossible journey of reading after they stumble upon Calvino's book. Their sensation of being the fictional characters and not having a concrete novel makes them sensual being which cannot be seen but only sensed or perceived. "The novel I would most like to read at this moment," Ludmilla explains, "should have as its driving force 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). The Reader complies with Ludmilla's assertion and asks her to accompany him to the publishers to dig the truth about the book. However, she "refuses to set foot inside publishing house" (93) because for her,

> There's 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. This boundary line is tentative, it tends to get erased: the world of those who deal with books professionally is more and more crowded and tends to become one with the world of readers. (93)

Linda Hutcheon makes the "distinction between the two modes of narcissism within this overt form" (28) of metafictional narrative. In Calvino's novel the 'diegetic mode' is made more dominant than the 'linguistic mode'. Hutcheon differentiates between these two modes of overt metafictions as in the case of *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller*. In the diegetic mode, "the reader is made aware of the fact that he too, in reading, is actively creating a fictional universe. Often a parodied, backgrounded narrative code will guide his awareness of this fact" (28). This is exactly the case in Calvino's self-conscious and self-referential work of fiction. Hutcheon further writes that, "in diegetic narcissism, the text displays itself as narrative, as the gradual building of a fictive universe complete with character and action. In the linguistic mode, however, the text would actually show its building blocks-the very language whose referents serve to construct that imaginative world" (28-29). In all the accounts, the Readers as characters are guided by their passion and love for reading. Their perception of the world and themselves motivates them to involve themselves in the fictional world of literature. They are more emotionally present than

physically. Indeed, the character's presence is vivid and mesmerizing because they are guided by the typical sensation.

The readers after knowing the psychology of the characters can stand on their shoes and take part on the making of the imaginative fiction. However, this is not a simple task because "its structure prevents this as each false fictional start is arrested, suspended, and then succeeded by another. If on a winter's night a traveler would be likely to irritate or frustrate a recreational reader to the point that he stops without going forward and simply puts the book down" (Burgass 185). The exasperation on readers' part is due to the "frustration of the writer when faced with the need to present, only through language, a world of his making that must be actualized through the act of reading" (Hutcheon 29). The Reader meets the personnel of the publication who encounters the authors very often- "he knows their fixations, indecisions, susceptibilities, ego-centricities, and yet the true authors remain those who for him were only a name on a jacket, a word that was part of the title, authors who had the same reality as their characters, as the places mentioned in the books, who existed and didn't exist at the same time" (101). The understanding and interpretation of this creative meta-fictional work requires the engagement with the contemporary literary theories. The reading of the fiction which has blurred the boundary between fiction and criticism requires strenuous effort. "In both the linguistic and diegetic modes the focus is as much on the creative processes of the reader as it is on those of the writer" (Hutcheon 29). The author is able to step on the two boats and demands the same from the readers, in order to convey both the possibilities and limitations of such approach. The largest problem arises with the question, how to reconcile the author's creative mode of writing with readers' act of reading.

Patricia Waugh brings the concept of "the death of the author" by Roland Barthes but for her "it is a paradoxical concept, as metafiction shows. The more the author appears, the less he or she exists. The more the author flaunts his or her *presence* in the novel, the more

noticeable is his or her *absence* outside it" (134). She even makes the bold statement applying Barthes' ideas to Calvino's work.

> Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is a fictional completion of Barthes's statement: that the *death* of the author makes possible the *birth* of the reader. It is suggested that the narrator, the traveller, is an 'I' who is possibly the 'I' of the author addressing his readers ('by the very fact of writing "I" the author feels driven to put into this "I" a bit of himself.' He is also an 'I' who talks to the characters *in* the novel, and therefore exists at the level of story *and at* the level of discourse. Finally, as an 'I', he becomes part of the reader's own subjectivity. (134)

The plurality, fictionality and partiality of the literary theories are critiqued through the novel. This work problematizes the authority claimed by the literary critics and transfers such authority to creative writers. The relationship between the critics, the writers, the text and the reader has reached to a more sophisticated level, each contributing and dismantling the other. When the writers experiment with ideas and theories about literature, it is to examine the dependability and plausibility of such literary theories. The contention of this paper is that through the critical interference in the creative writing, Italo Calvino makes an attempt to settle the position of the author along with the reader as dynamic participants in the interpretive process. Patricia Waugh's remarks align with this conception. She writes that, "'Authors' work through linguistic, artistic and cultural conventions. They are themselves 'invented' by readers who are 'authors' working through linguistic, artistic and cultural conventions, and so on" (134). The study of Calvino's metafiction leads to the conclusion that as much as the reader's imagination is determined by author's ways and vice-versa.

This symbiotic relationship between the author and the reader dissolves the give and take relationship and marks the advent of new kind of bonding among them. "Such novels

supposedly expose the way in which these social practices are constructed through the language of oppressive ideologies, by refusing to allow the reader the role of passive consumer or any means of arriving at a 'total' interpretation of the text" (Waugh 13). There are several other characters, besides the Reader and Ludmilla, that have discrete ideas and attitudes about the act of reading. For instance, the Reader and Ludmilla care for the innocent pleasures of reading whereas Lotaria emphasizes on the textuality of the work and Irnerio has disdain for the things written on paper. Thus, reading itself is the central preoccupation of the novel – it has the Reader as the protagonist and through the aid of several others it makes serious self-reflexive comments on reading. The act of reading is metaphorically appropriated to the act of living and making sense of the otherwise chaotic world.

The novel places the author at the other side of the sea-saw. It works against many conventions of authorship. The book cannot be attributed to a single author. The self-reflexive commentaries dethrone the author from his power and authority. Diverse characters put forward their radical convictions about the authorship. For instance, Cavedagna purports that the figure of the author is plural; Ermes attaches less value to the individuality of authorship; Marana declares confidently that the name of the author on the jacket of the book is insignificant; Silas Flannery's diary jottings reveal some important characteristics of an ideal authorship that he dreams.

Calvino through his fiction responds and critiques the literary theory. This shows that there is give-and-take relationship between the fiction and the movements in literary theory, particularly the Barthes's notion of Death of the Author and several other positionalities perpetuated by reader response theories. The implications of taking the reader out of the conventional place, which is outside the text and placing him/her within the novel demands the rigorous discourse on the act of reading, such novel. For Hutcheon, "those increased

demands made on the reader" are not "really new, as Wolfgang Iser's The Implied Reader has revealed" because for him "reading and writing are both active, creative exercises and always have been" (37). The text exposes the mechanisms of reading and writing the novel and the ways of understanding. However, this paper does not essentially bring the theorist of reader-response to examine the work because no single theorist would suffice. So, this paper largely relies on Waugh's and Hutcheon's theorization.

It is clear that Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller,* is an 'overtly narcissistic novel' with "diegetic and linguistic modes' of operation but not anti-mimetic in nature.

> Overtly narcissistic novels place fictionality, structure, or language at their
> content's core. They play with different ways of ordering, and allow (or force)
> the reader to learn how he makes sense of this literary world (if not his own
> real one). Such texts are not outside the mimetic code. Twentieth-century
> realism allows for a mimesis of dynamic process, as well as static product, or
> object. (29-30)

The research work does not aim at exploring the copious literary theories dispersed throughout the novel but rather uncovers implications of such literary endeavor. The challenge and the rewards of such fictions are brought under discussion. The kinship between literary works and theories, and the relationship between the author and the reader have been meticulously analyzed. The creative possibilities can be generated by incorporating techniques of metafiction. Calvino himself makes this clear in his commentary on this book.

> This book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading
> the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read: this is why
> he was not given a name, which would automatically have made him the
> equivalent of a Third Person, of a character (whereas to you, as Third Person,

a name had to be given, Ludmilla), and so he has been kept a pronoun, in the

abstract condition of pronouns, suitable for any attribute and any action. (141)

The reader is caught up in the "paradoxical position of being forced by the text to

acknowledge the fictionality of the world he too is creating, yet his very participation

involves him intellectually, creatively, and perhaps even affectively in a human act that

is very real, that is, in fact, a kind of metaphor of his daily efforts to "make sense" of

experience" (Hutcheon 30). Thus, it is not anti-mimetic in nature and its overt assertion of its

fictional attribute makes the pleasure of reading more genuine. There is the mimesis of the

process not the product only.

The more the novel unfolds, the more the readers realize that whatever they are

witnessing is only the series of pretense to make something called fiction. The whole course

of novel is full of expository narratives. The prolonged narrative does not only provides the

raw material of the novel but also traces the story behind the story of the novel. The

multiplicity of sensations and perspectives presented through long narrative paves the path

where the readers' role is sustained rather than being suspended as in traditional realist work

of fiction. The explicit discourses on the nature of literary production and its unmasking of its

own process of creation, makes it paradoxical. The readers are caught up between the

freedom and imprisonments when the author himself becomes the accomplice in *If On A*

Winter's Night A Traveller.

> The reader and writer are engaged in acts which are parallel, if reversed in
>
> direction, for both make fictive worlds in and through the actual functioning of
>
> language. This is the responsibility, the almost existentialist freedom in
>
> responsibility, that metafiction offers and requires of the reader. This is a
>
> freedom which operates inside, of course, the bounds of that internalized
>
> grammar or code that genre expectations establish. In overtly narcissistic texts,

> the emphasis is upon bringing both this liberty and this duty to the reader's
>
> attention. (Hutcheon 30)

In the novel, Calvino illustrates the tussle between the two bodies, i.e., the semiotic or the fictional body of the Readers as characters and the phenomenal or literal body of the actual readers. The readers have their own experience but this is mediated in association with the narrative of the fictional Readers. "The creative dynamism and the delight in infinite interpretative possibilities that once were the property of the writer are now shared by the reader in the process of concretizing the text he is reading. In overt narcissism, this new role is taught; it is thematized" whereas in covert form, "it is actualized" (Calvino 34). The use of second person pronoun to designate the Reader helps the author to teach the actual readers about their "new role" (34). Now, comes the question, "is the novel dead when the reader actually becomes a writer, or "producer"? (34). Linda Hutcheon derives from Ricardou's terminology that "the inner linguistic mirrors are not destructive, but rather the doubling forms the "fiction" itself; the objective is unification, not disruption. Representation is not annulled but turned in on itself, and the "narration" invades and pervades the "fiction" (35). This is done with by "unmasking of dead literary conventions and the establishing of new literary codes" (38). In the conventional codes, "the reader is required to identify the products being imitated- characters, actions, settings- and recognize their similarity to those in empirical reality, in order to validate their literary worth" and hence " the act of reading is seen in passive terms" (38). Implicitly or explicitly, the readers notice the presence of many entities involved in the fiction- making. The author, the characters, the readers and the text time and again are involved in the discourse on how to produce this particular novel. These dialogues and the interaction help to create a strong sense of experience of reading. It is evident that the interaction between actors, text and audience can itself become the subject matter of the fiction.

Calvino projects us how the readers should work together with the author in order to achieve the unique pleasure associated with active reading. The failure or the impossibility in achieving the closure actually engages the readers to perceive a new form of their own reflections. "The novel no longer seeks just to provide an order and meaning to be recognized by the reader. It now demands that he be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader who, in Ingarden's terms "concretizes" the work of art and gives it life" (Hutcheon 39). Thus, the interaction between the various agents and subjects of fiction making can evoke a strong sense of illusion but also incorporates various complexities faced by the author, the actors and the directors while making a fiction. It is also clear that Calvino does not allow any of the readers to hold the complete autonomy and authenticity because there is nothing as such rather the novel is full of ambiguities, paradoxes and gaps.

> The act of reading, then, is itself, like the act of writing, the creative function to which the text draws attention. That this process is now the object of imitation does not alter the essential nature of the novel as a mimetic genre. Metafiction is still fiction, despite the shift in focus of narration from the product it presents to the process it is. Auto-representation is still representation. (Hutcheon 39)

The various writers at different point of history were claiming their authenticity through fiction. This paper explores how these multi-layered presence of readers and Readers in the process of making novel infact reiterates the author's position not as a sole creator but an accomplice in this literary endeavor. The very contradictions and the conflicts that make fiction allow the readers to engage imaginatively and perceive the act of reading as pivotal as the act of writing. This renews the vigor in readers part. This is how the metafictional works like Calvino's have been able to rekindle the interest in literary fiction and the intricacies

involved in its creation. Hutcheon claims that these types of fictions allow " a re-evaluation of the novels of the past" which were based primarily on the "product mimesis alone" (39) and reiterates the notion of a process mimesis (making of the fiction).

> Metafiction merely makes this fact conscious and functional by revealing the conventions that "traditional realism" sought to conceal, or even deny. The writer has always had to try rhetorically to unite shared language and his private imaginative experience. The reader then approached that same language, bringing to it all his own experience of life, of literature, and of language, in order to accumulate enough fictive referents to bring the autonomous fictional universe into being. This has always been the case. (41)

Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* departs from the representational art where the preference is given only to the product. Calvino supersedes the inner workings of the fiction making along as opposed to the traditional form of representation of the product not the process of creating it. If we study novels only by looking at their representation or the product, we would surely miss a great deal of operation going on in its creation- which can be fore-grounded bringing the reader attention to its act of making. Only then, the readers can participate in the meaning making process.

Even the rereading of the same book can invoke profoundly different realization. "At every rereading I seem to be reading a new book, for the first time. It is I who keep changing and seeing new things of which I was not previously aware. Or is reading a construction that assumes form, assembling a great number of variables, and therefore something that cannot be repeated twice according to the same pattern" (Calvino 255)? This makes it clear that even though the book is conveying same things, the readers grasp the different meaning at different course of time. "Diegesis and mimesis, can indeed go

together. This fact is most clearly seen in that mode and form of narrative self-consciousness which has been called overt diegetic narcissism" (Hutcheon 48). Thus, the meaning does not solely rest upon the author or the text that he has produced but on the reader's shoulders (responsibility) and imagination.

Calvino's attempt corresponds with John Barth's claim that "one way to come to terms with the generally supposed discrepancy between art and the world we live in is to affirm the artificial element in art- "you can't get rid of it anyhow"- and make it part of the point of the work (Hutcheon 48). Both the writer and the reader must acknowledge the fictionality of the work in hand. "Distanced from the text's world in this way, the reader can share, with the author, the pleasure of its imaginative creation" (50). This form of art is parodic in nature as it deviates "from the norms" and simultaneously "includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material" (50). There is one reader who views stories in different way. "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 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" (Calvino 259). This is all about the conventional form of storytelling which the author has rejected or simply distorted but to achieve some ends. The author further writes, "You stop for a moment to reflect on these words. Then, in a flash, you decide you want to marry Ludmilla" (259). The rejection of conventional form and the embracement of parody allocates the new role for the reader. "For the reader/critic of metafiction, overt diegetic narcissism seems to involve the thematizing within the story of its storytelling concerns parody, narrative conventions, creative process- with an eye to teaching him his new, more active role" (Hutcheon 53). The novel can be regarded as the novel of the readers. . Each and every one present in the novel has a role which s/he must perform. Apart

from that, they also have their own reality and they spontaneously play that part too. Thus, the novel ends raising many questions for the readers to answer.

It is not the question of fiction or reality/ truth or lie but the blurring of their distinction. "In metafictional texts that employ contradiction, there can be no final certainty (no FINAL CURTAIN either), only a reworking of the Liar Paradox, which might run something like this: '"All novelists are liars," said the metafictionist, truthfully" (Waugh 138). In the novel, Calvino is able to relocate the readers position alongside the author but even in doing so the author's authority does not diminish rather it is fortified. The author is able to show the relationship and tensions between the text, author and the readers. The very interesting issue about this book is that it illustrates the problems associated with the traditional realist novels and outlines how the modern writers can play with those problems and impossibilities- by laying bare the process of its creation and its operation.

Novel as shown by Calvino provides us an occasion to conceptualize the complexities and difficulties of making the novel itself. The investigation concerning the making of such metafictional texts makes it almost clear that novels can engage the readers in an imaginative speculation by highlighting the their role. The intimacy the readers feel in novels is not always achieved through a detailed illusion of the fictional world but through emphasis on the difficult process of its construction. Indeed, metafictional techniques in many ways makes the readers notice the pretense that the author is creating. This way the readers can invest their creativity more and the act of reading becomes more rewarding.

Calvino makes an attempt to dramatize many complexities, impossibilities and absurdities of fictional representation. The contemporary readers like the readers of the traditional narratives should not always focus on the exploration of the fictional world or the story but must examine the work of art in its very process of representation. This deviates from the traditional notion of mimesis but it is still a mimesis- not of the finished product but

of the raw process of its making. And the explicit demonstration of such process

problematizes the traditional role assigned to the reader and the writers. This entails more

intimacy, immediacy and creativity on reader's part.

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