

## حكايات لا منتهية: سعي كالفينو نحو النص اللامتناهي

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## Endless Tales: Calvino's Quest for the Infinite Text

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#### مستخلص

تدمر رواية إيتالو كالفينو "لو في ليلة شتاء مسافر" (1981) فكرة الإغلاق السردية من خلال متاهة تُعطي من قيمة الإمكانية النصية والانفتاح في الأدب. يناقش هذه المقال كيف يشيد كالفينو السرد اللانهائي في هذه الرواية وكيف تولد المقاطعات والنهايات المؤجلة قصص متكاثرة. فالرواية، التي تحاكي نموذج "ألف ليلة وليلة" وتجارب مجموعة أوليبو التوافقية، تحوّل تجربة القراءة إلى بحث مفتوح النهاية. من خلال النظر في استخدام الرواية للمقاطع، والانزياح الزمني، والجدلية بين رغبات الشخصيات والبحث السردية، يكشف هذا المقال أن السرد ليس نتاجاً ثابتاً، بل حدثاً متواصلاً يتغذى من رفضه للنهاية. علاوة على ذلك، يبرز التحليل مفهوم الخلطة الزمنية، مبيّناً أن الرواية لا تقدّم الزمن كاستمرارية متماسكة، بل كمنظر محطّم من لحظات متقطعة، يعكس الطبيعة المجزأة للسرد والحياة معاً. كما يوضّح التحليل الجدلية القائمة بين رغبات الشخصيات ومسعاها السردية؛ إذ يجسّد البطل، القارئ، الرغبة الشهريرية في النظام والتماسك والوصول إلى خاتمة، وهي رغبة تُحبّط على نحو منهجي. في المقابل، تتطوّر

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القارئة الأخرى، لودميلا، لتتبنّى جاذبية اللايقين والإمكان. يكشف هذه المقال أن كالفينو، عبر هذه الجدلية وابتكاراته البنيوية، يقدّم السرد لا كمنتج ثابت، بل كحدث مستمر يزدهر من خلال رفضه أن يُختتم. و ان التصميم المعماري للرواية يتحول الى بيان فلسفيّ لكالفينو حول الأدب بوصفه فضاءً عضويًا بلا حدود للإمكانية الكامنه. ومن ثمّ، فالمعنى ليس أبداً نهائياً، بل يظلّ دائماً في حالة صيرورة.

### Abstract

Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1981) demolishes narrative closure through a labyrinth that privileges the textural potentiality and openness of literature. This paper argues that Calvino constructs an infinite narrative where interruptions, and deferred endings generate proliferating narratives. The novel shadows *The Arabian Nights* and the combinatorial experiments of the Oulipo group, transforms the reading experience into an open-ended quest. By examining the novel's use of interruptions, temporal dislocation, and the dialectic between the characters' desires and narrative quest, this analysis demonstrates how Calvino destabilizes linearity and teleological resolution. Further, it shows the temporal dislocation, arguing that the novel presents time not as a coherent continuum but as a shattered landscape of discontinuous moments, mirroring the fragmented nature of both narrative and life. Moreover, the analysis makes explicit the dialectic between the characters' desires and their narrative quest. The protagonist, the Reader, embodies the Shehryarian desire for order, coherence, and an ending, a desire that is systematically frustrated. In contrast, the Other Reader, Ludmilla, evolves to embrace the allure of uncertainty and potentiality. This paper reveals that through this dialectic and its structural innovations, Calvino presents narrative not as a fixed product but a continuous event thriving on its refusal to conclude. The architectural design of the novel becomes a manifesto for Calvino's philosophy of literature as an organic boundless space for potentiality. Therefore, meaning is never finite but is perpetually in a state of becoming.

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Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1981) stands as classic cornerstone of postmodern literature. Although critical attention of the novel has been productive, it mostly centered around meta-fiction (Waugh 1984; Cotrupi 1991), the author-reader debate (Salvatori 1986; Watts 1991; Wood 2009). Very few scholars have tried to thoroughly





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extrapolate its structure, an issue that Calvino himself was concerned about, which is the concern of this article.

This novel is an interrogation of narrative itself because its metafictional labyrinth dismantles the illusion of closure while celebrating the openness and potentiality of narrative. The novel itself contains within it ten novels, each interrupted, none ever completed. Further, each of these ten novels is preceded and followed by a chapter, and those twelve chapters in total form the frame of the novel. Within this frame, the protagonist, Reader, is searching for the end of *If on a winter's night a traveler* – the first novel within the novel. As a whole, just like its own title which has no end- because the 'if' sentence must have two clauses- the novel is an open work. It is an invitation into a world where narratives proliferate and endings perpetually recede. With *The Arabian Nights* as a model, and employing his own narrative strategies, Calvino creates a work that is infinitely open. Moreover, the infinite form is achieved through interruptions, destabilizing linearity and teleological resolution, leaving the narrative suspended in a state of potential becoming. It is what motivates the narrative and allows it to continue endlessly. Calvino's novel implements an explicit sense of openness not only in its structure but also in its characters. Moreover, the novel is aware of its subjective and open temporality that allows it to take shape in an organic dynamic manner. His narrative architecture is investigated below to show how all of this achieved.

### 1. If on a Winter's Night an Arabian Tale

*The Arabian Nights* serve as a clear model for Calvino's work, as we shall see, which he uses to create his "potential literature". Indeed, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* constructs a labyrinth of stories resisting closure and alluding to infinity. During his time in Paris, Calvino was introduced to the Oulipo (which is short in French for what in English is "workshop of potential literature"). This was a movement by a group of writers and mathematicians dedicated to exploring literature's infiniteness through constraint and combinatorics. Indeed, as Anna Botta states, it was "the most lasting influence on Calvino's writing during the 'French period'," which he joined in 1973 (1997, 82). To this group of authors, literature was not a fixed product but a field of potentialities. This is what Raymond Queneau called "the search for new forms and structures which may be used by writers in any way they see fit" (quoted in Motte 1998, xiii). This resonated deeply with Calvino, who was already influenced by Borges, so his fascination with openness grew to a fascination with the infinite that could be approached with potentiality. Of course, this could

not be made literal - an impossibility in print- but through a poetics of the open and infinite.

Calvino was inspired by *The Arabian Nights* as it offered him a model with which to approach this novel. The master of the labyrinth himself, Borges, might have been the first to introduce Calvino to *Nights*' deeper literary value. John Barth shows the "parallels" between the two in his essay "The Parallels! Italo Calvino and Jorge Luis Borges" (2012). Both share a fixation for the open in one way or another, as manifested through the infinite, for instance, forking paths, labyrinths, etc., as seen in Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths," allowing Calvino to translate this into a novel that refuses to end. This is because *The Arabian Nights* "unifies an unlimited number of stories in a harmonious structure (Hashim 2020, 41).

*If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* becomes a blueprint for the literature that thrives on its own refusal to conclude. This narrative constantly frustrates the reader's (and the Reader's) need for closure. The novel offers a narrative that thrives on its own refusal to end, embodying the complexities and multiplicities found in our world. This openness, like that of the novel(s), remains full of potential and deferred possibilities. Similar to *The Arabian Nights*, the tales in this novel branch out into other tales, and completion is perpetually postponed. Therefore, 'You' and the 'Reader' are on a journey to find the end of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Much like real life, the characters, at least those in the frame, including 'You', desire the completeness of the narrative, while at the same time that is exactly what the book refuses to give. The novel defies closure and resists any singular, teleological reading. It has no endpoint; each new narrative begins just as another stops. 'You' and the 'Reader' are forced to abandon the old narrative for the new in hopes of a conclusion. But alas! it is a Shehryarian pursuit that will not be reached.

Reader is on a mission seeking "a message", "order, coherence, and a pattern", "an end", and "a real beginning" (Calvino 1981, 9, 27, 31). He approaches reading as a "carefully circumscribed area" where disappointment is not "serious" (ibid., 4), much like Shehryar, who initially treats storytelling as a temporary diversion before the inevitable conclusion. However, the novel is a Scheherazade forestalling its end, frustrating Reader with its proliferation of narratives. It sets within each novel the beginning of another rather than the end of that novel.

Calvino goes as far as inserting the frame of *Nights* into one of his chapters. Chapter 6, which alludes to the "storyteller of the *Arabian Nights*" (1981, 117), is in fact about a Sultana who summons the translator Marana to Arabia. Arriving there, he is forced to stay to





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continue his work in order to alleviate her frustration with his unfinished translations. However, he soon realizes that he is exactly like Scheherazade, for he has to continue translating in order to maintain his position. Similarly, the Sultan, her husband, finds himself in a predicament, for his wife has a clause in their marriage contract that requires him to provide her with a story every night to keep her entertained.

For this reason, Marana makes a deal with the Sultan for the latter's convenience, because the former can keep the Sultana reading endlessly and profit in the process. Marana proposes to the Sultan that:

he will break off this translation at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel, inserting it into the first... a character in the first novel opens a book and starts 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. ... (ibid., 125)

Therefore, the way to save the Sultan's marriage is to provide an infinite narrative for his wife.

In the novel, there is a futile search for completeness and meaning in the unattainable closure. What the Reader wants is an ending, and what the novel offers the infinite. All the novels remain open, leading to no closure whatsoever. It makes you "sens[e] at once that in the perfect order of the universe a breach had opened, an irreparable rent" (ibid., 67). *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* brings our anxiety about the end to its most explicit state. The Male Reader demands and pursues "an exact, taut trajectory" (ibid., 27). He wants a structure to impose his experience onto, seeking in his literary experience a way out of life's elusiveness. He wants a fiction that would give him an antidote to life, to the uncontrollable flux of life. But much to his dismay, he finds no such thing as his mission is constantly frustrated when he is denied the stable narrative he wants.

Reader is a Shehryar, seeking the end, but Calvino uses his journey to expose the limitations of such a mindset. This desire, Calvino and his narrator suggest, is to attain the unattainable, to escape the inescapable, which is our temporal, contingent position. Therefore, he defers every narrative within the frame, and in the frame to force all of his readers to grapple with this limitation first and second hand. By frustrating his Reader, Calvino's narrative critiques the mindset people have for totality and a singular order. Because, like his characters, people try to impose the same mindset upon life and text. He places his Reader in the midst of



the unpredictability and multiplicity of the literal narrative, not outside of it as he expected, to reveal to him that his ideals are not compatible with life and the nature of narrative. Reader would go to such lengths to avoid being in the middle, and the more he tries, the more he finds himself thwarted by the novel(s). Therefore, his attempts to transcend time and pluralistic narrative prove futile because these narratives confront him by leading him into a labyrinth of unresolved paths.

### 2. Interruption as Method

Interruptions in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* are transformed into a technique, deployed to resist closure and amplify openness and potentiality. The title of the novel is the first thing that is interrupted: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* .... It is an unfinished sentence that foreshadows the novels within in its renouncement of completion. The lack of a verb or action in the half sentence is a syntactic suspension that leaves the possibilities open for what the end might be.

The ten novels within the novel are interrupted in a way that is designed to destabilize teleology. For example, the first breaks off due to an error in printing, the second is full of blank pages that lead to fragmentation, etc. Reader pursues the first novel in order to reacquire assurance over the sense of an ending that assumes for a narrative. He wants "to erase the disturbing effects of that arbitrariness or distraction, to reestablish the normal course of events" (Calvino 1981, 27). This is due to his desire for coherence and closure in order to impose an order on narrative chaos. While some critics argue that "Calvino's novel contains successive false narrative starts, whose lack of success constitutes his completed successful novel" (Bondanella 2003, 175), others see that the novel is "about the problem of sustaining the desire to read," which is successfully achieved by allowing "novel to indicate beyond itself to the unsaid" (Boucher 2015, 31-33). Indeed, as Calvino himself writes, each failure emphasizes the futility of the endeavor because his "satisfaction cannot be complete until the spell of the interrupted readings is broken." (1981, 241). The novels-within-the-novel further frustrate this desire through their metafictionality as their narrators, reflecting on their own narrative openness, doubt their own teleology. This self-consciousness amplifies their obsessive reluctance to end.

Moreover, Reader's journey is full of struggles against the incomplete nature of the novels he encounters. In the early novels, Reader clings to traditional expectations, such as linearity, unity, and resolution. He demands "a message", "order, coherence, and a pattern", and "a real beginning" (ibid., 9, 27), treating books as closed, safe spaces where "the





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risk of disappointment isn't serious" (ibid., 4). Reader goes to such lengths to find closure. He roams the world, puts his life in danger, only for the purpose of finding closure for the stories. But much to his disappointment, the novel's interruptions force him to confront the artifice of these constructs. However, Calvino, who describes himself as "a more sadistic lover than ever," denies him any chance of closure or completion. He reasons:

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 is not in control, that it is always I, Calvino, who is in total control of the situation (Du Plessix Gray, 1981)

Reader eventually abandons his approach to lean into that of the Other Reader, Ludmilla, who is the cause of this shift. Because of her embrace of textual potentiality, she influences him into a new mode of reading. He transcends his closed model as his obsession with closure gives way to a pursuit of Ludmilla herself, as we shall see next. The novel's ability to produce proliferating narratives through interruption is included in the titles of the inserted novels. The first of these inserted novels, which shares the title of the novel itself, appears at the end as the first clause in an opening sentence. In total, with the other titles of the novels within the novel, they form a sentence that gives way to another possible story:

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. (Calvino 1981, 258)

In the same manner, it is possible that the last clause "anxious to hear the story" might be the title of an eleventh novel. Moreover, as Martin McLaughlin (1998) suggests, "The implication is that each opening sentence we read in any novel may contain ten other novels beneath it, and even the concluding words of Calvino's novel may contain further stories in the interstices. Once again Calvino forestalls closure" (123).

Calvino's infinite narrative is not established through the unfinished but the interrupted. The difference lies in the latter's potential as it signals its own continuation, but the former lacks this quality because "an unfinished story leaves an abyss out of which the narrative

cannot climb. An interrupted story, on the other hand, is one which tells the reader that there is still more to come” (Habegger-Conti 2007, 80). In other words, Calvino's interruptions have a generative function, constituting a tension that promises narrative proliferation. Therefore, “What story down there awaits its end?”, its title and interrupted narrative, emphasizes the inexhaustibility of literature through.

### 3. The Desire for the End, The End as Desire

Desire for the end operates as a double helix in *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Between Reader and the Other Reader, Calvino constructs a world of narrative labyrinth where the pursuit of endings becomes elusive from chapter to chapter. As they read the inserted novels, the end ceases to be a goal or a destination, and it becomes a mirage that recedes with each step forward. What is interesting is that these two characters have different *ends* in mind; their divergent paths expose the paradox in the impulse to resolve narratives and the need to sustain it.

Ludmilla evolves in the novel from desiring narrative certainty to being charmed by the allure of the open and uncertain. Early in the novel, she craves precision in the “concrete” and “substantial” (ibid., 30). This is not unlike Reader's desire for the end; both long for a completion of *If on a winter's night a traveler* which stems from our Shehryarian impulse. However, soon she gets tired and realizes that theirs is a futile pursuit. Instead, she gives in to the impossibility of finding any closure: “I would like to feel a presence around them, something else, you don't quite know what, the sign of some unknown thing. ...” (ibid., 46). Her transformation comes with a growing appreciation for the infinite, which contrasts sharply with what she desired earlier in the novel and with Reader's determination to reach the end.

The novel that follows immediately, *Leaning from the steep slope*, does not make sense of its own narrative structure. The narrator struggles to pin down any meaning, confessing that “the important thing is that I convey to him the effort I am making to lead between the lines of things the evasive meaning of what is in store for me” (ibid., 62). However, he fails to fix that meaning, which leaves him trapped in the very indeterminacy Ludmilla desired. Nevertheless, she is unsatisfied in finding that the novel “ends by sinking into itself” (ibid., 71). Moreover, her restlessness escalates as she reads on, and her preference changes once again. She “would like to read now is a novel in which you sense the story arriving like still-vague thunder, ... a novel that gives the sense of living through an upheaval that still has no name, has not yet taken



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shape..." (ibid., 72). From here we follow the next narrative, *Without fear of wind or vertigo*, which moves from piled stories that grow endlessly to one that produces "too many stories at once" (ibid., 109). Ludmilla's preferences change again to novels that "make you feel uneasy from the very first page...." (ibid., 126). However, when she is presented with exactly that in the novel *In a network of lines that enlase*, her mind changes yet another time.

As Ludmilla progresses through these novels, her trajectory culminates in the apocalyptic fantasy of a narrative where "the only thing there is in the world is the end of the world" (243). Her desire for total finality is conveniently followed by *What story down there awaits its end?* which aims to erase itself. Ludmilla's shifting desires expose the paradox at the heart of narrative. Because of the novel's illusory patterns, her journey reflects the novel's own confrontation with narrative potential. The novel shows how the pursuit of endings amplifies unrest while acceptance of the open offers solace. As Mariolina Salvatori shows, the novel keeps "them from fulfilling their desire to bring their reading to closure" (1986, 188). The novel shows how the pursuit of endings amplifies unrest while the acceptance of openness offers solace.

Reader's desire for the end of *If on a winter's night a traveler* is replaced after the second chapter with a desire for the Other Reader, Ludmilla, because "something has changed" after meeting her. In other words, his initial Shehryarian impulse for closure clashes with the intention to prolong the narrative's openness and unrest to sustain their readerly courtship. The narrator mocks him for this:

Your reading is no longer solitary: you think of the Other Reader, who, at this same 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 possible story. 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. (ibid., 32)

Therefore, Reader's the pursuit of narrative closure in the frame is motivated by a different desire. It becomes inextricably linked to this pursuit of love. And what began as a literary obsession, a quest for completion, turns out to be a proxy for his growing attachment to her. The act of reading is thus transformed into a shared experience, "a channel of communication, a rendezvous?" (ibid.).



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His fixation on the endings of unfinished novels becomes confused with a longing for *her*. “You can no longer distinguish your interest in the Cimmerian novel from your interest in the Other Reader” (ibid., 51). The unresolved tension of unmet narrative closure merges with the anxiety of romantic uncertainty. Moreover, the struggle to find closure becomes an excuse for him to get closer to Ludmilla. The structure of the novel provides a channel that reinforces this entanglement. Because of the proliferation of the fragmented narratives Reader has a pretext to seek Ludmilla repeatedly since both of them demand resolutions to the novels at one point or another. This pretext ensures that their paths cross, their conversations deepen, and in this process, their relationship can evolve. The frame narrative is a subtle romance moving forward because of the lack of closure in the stories sustaining the connection. In the chapter involving Marana and the Sultana, Reader’s imagination conflates Ludmilla with the description of the Sultana reading:

You cannot help giving the faceless lady evoked by Marana the features of the Other Reader whom you know; you already see Ludmilla among the mosquito nets, lying on her side, the wave of her hair flowing on the page...(ibid., 125)

The tenth novel is the only narrative they read that suggests a possible happy ending for them. Ironically, however, it is an apocalyptic novel with a narrator who controls the end of the world. He aims to destroy the current world to “nothingness”, but he has no strength to do it. What he has the strength for is to finally meet Franziska, and begin a life with her. Though the novel ends before that, it is the only novel within our novel that foreshadows the ending in the frame. Indeed, the final chapter of our novel shows our readers together ‘finishing’ *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Thus, the tension is not resolved but reframed because of the subtle romance that is contingent on the narrative’s refusal to conclude. It is shown to be intrinsic to human experience as we crave closure but thrive in the potentiality of openness. This is because, as Inge Fink (1991) argues, “When he is told that there are only two alternative endings for a novel- ‘the continuity of life [and] the inevitability of death,’ he chooses the former” (101). Indeed, the final chapter of the novel shows the two readers together ‘finishing’ *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Incompleteness and openness are shown to be intrinsic to human experience. Further, this final chapter, which is half a page, breaks the pattern of the novel because every chapter prior to this is followed by a novel-within-the-novel. This one follows a chapter; therefore, as Martin





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McLaughlin (1998) explains, it gives “a definite hint that this is also a micro-novel” (124).

### 4. Time and Temporality in the Novel

Any concern for the end is a question of time and temporality. In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Calvino's characters are disoriented with life, confronting a fractured experience of temporality. Like the fragmented nature of the world, the novel lacks temporal coherence and linearity. Instead, it presents a narrative that is a subjective, fluid continuum that is constantly breaking down from the onset, a labyrinth of temporal fragments. “The dimension of time has been shattered, we cannot love or think except in fragments of time, each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears” (Calvino 1981, 8). The disintegration of time is a struggle for the characters who read with the prescribed traditional structure, i.e., the conventional, linear one.

Because of the novel's lack of a teleological plot, randomness pervades, and the characters feel like they are “at the mercy of the fortuitous, the aleatory, the random, in things and in human actions” (ibid., 26). This is why they feel like they are constantly on the verge of tripping into chaos. It is the pervasive uncertainty that evokes “a kind of vertigo” as the one character describes it (ibid., 54). The novel is full of false starts, interrupted stories, and perspectival shifts that render the characters, who are readers, and the readers in a state of confusion. The continuum in Calvino's multi-universe leaves the characters in every level adrift in a labyrinth of discontinuous moments. Because of their desire for the linearity of time that might bring the end with it, the novel's temporal instability immerses both his characters and readers in a disoriented state. In the first novel, the traveler embodies the experience of time/temporality. He attempts desperately to “swim against the stream of time” by returning to an earlier moment. He struggles to rid himself of all spatial elements or associations, in a futile effort against time:

But every moment of my life brings with it an accumulation of new facts, and each of these new facts brings with it its consequences; so the more I seek to return to the zero moment from which I set out, the further I move away from it... (ibid., 15).

His predicament is that he resists time because he desires an old beginning rather than an end, or even an unend. Eventually, he discovers that in the self-defeating nature of his goal, “every move to erase previous events provokes a rain of new events” (ibid., 16).





In the metacommentary throughout the frame and the novels within the novel, Calvino makes shrewd comments on the experience of time and how it is not a continuous process but “out of joint”. Calvino’s novel is a space where temporality is consciously enacted, where linear time and teleological narratives cannot be applied. His is a temporality that ruptures; it explodes into fragments that make continuity inevitable. Further, there is a nostalgia for an orderly, neat world sensed in the novel, but it is only troubled by the recognition that it is only illusory and that reality cannot operate in such a way. Time and narrative explode into episodes that refuse to be woven into a coherent story. Continuity and totality are truly fictions in a disjointed, open-ended world. The characters and the novel(s) must navigate an infinite world where time and narrative are unpredictable and incomplete. His characters learn to contend with such a world eventually, not for lack of trying, but because the novel would not offer to bring anything to a close.

Because of the inescapability of such temporality, a character discerns that time is “like a tapeworm, constantly growing, which I carry curled up inside me” (ibid., 106). This simile signifies how temporality expands, how time is not self-contained but an ever-expanding presence that flows into the present, informing the future. Calvino describes the past, and time by extension, as living, growing, and multiple. He makes this point obvious not only through such lines but within the very structure of the novel as well. The reading journey the readers go through is similar to their lives and ours. The narrative is like the “tapeworm” that grows continuously, depicted here explicitly as the novel rejects traditional paradigms.

### 5. Calvino's Philosophy of the Open

Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* represents a manifesto for his narrative potential. It is a philosophical and theoretical approach that privileges openness over any illusory closure. Like his fictional novelist, Silas Flannery, who crafts incomplete stories, Calvino designs the novel so that the reader (and Reader) cannot find closure. The novel does not present the satisfaction of the closure of an endpoint; instead, it indulges itself in the infinite possibilities generated by its own labyrinth of interruptions. As Carlos Fuentes observes, Calvino's "open work" denies the conventional “pleasure of knowing how it will end, offering us instead the even more pleasurable chance of imagining how it all will not end; that is, how it all will renew itself”. The act of reading becomes less about predicting that the end brings closure, and more of an active collaboration, where the text becomes a “continuous event”. Further, the





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novel is structured in a way that each unfinished story relates to the others, "creating previously unsuspected constellations of meaning" (in Habegger-Conti 2007, 85).

Literature - perhaps this piece more explicitly than most- is patterned toward the openness which exists in the world it imitates. Calvino's novel, with its fragmented incipits, each abruptly severed before resolution, is an invitation to narrative proliferation reflecting the *Arabian Nights*' recursive structure, where tales branch into tales without finality. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* is less a book than a machine for generating narrative potential. The act of reading itself shifts from passive consumption toward the predictable pattern to active participation, with the text functioning as a "continuous event" that invites readers to co-author its meaning: "Calvino wished to capture within a book the unread but not unreadable part of the universe." (ibid., 74). Calvino's belief that literature's highest purpose is not to conclude but to continue and flourish.

Openness in a literary work is what allows the work of art to be a dynamic and evolving entity. Calvino describes the literary work as "one of these minimal portions in which the existent crystallizes into a form, acquires a meaning—not fixed, not definitive, not hardened into a mineral immobility, but alive as an organism (1993, 70). His organic conception of literature, as well as the interest he displays for form, represent his vision for art. The structure he envisions is not a closed geometric form but rather an open matrix capable of infinite expansion. This vision of the growing organism Calvino has for literature is paired by another complementary concept, that of the "open encyclopedia." He observes that this is the idea of an open encyclopedia, an adjective that certainly contradicts the noun 'encyclopedia,' which etymologically implies an attempt to exhaust knowledge of the world by enclosing it in a circle" (ibid., 116). Both are in fact manifestations of Calvino's poetics of the open. Through such a vision he aims to reflect real-world narrative by subverting the traditional poetics rooted in closed world views. Therefore, it is this open form that rejects closed conceptions of literature in favor of a model that is "potential, conjectural, and manifold" (ibid.).

Thus, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* becomes a living statement to Calvino's theoretical views, where every interruption is an invitation to begin anew. Important to note that it is not a rejection of form that Calvino is after. In fact, he emphasizes his interest in structures because "it is precisely this idea of forms that evokes the idea of the endless" (ibid., 68). In the end, Calvino's conception of literature is a shift from



the closed form of a sealed artifact to show the boundless dialogue and the labyrinth of possibilities in it

Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* is far more than a postmodern experiment. It is in fact, a reimagining of narrative that dismantles the telos-driven forms that dominated Western storytelling. Calvino's quest does not lie in denying closure but in revealing how narrative thrives in openness and potentiality. By constructing a literary cosmos, every narrative ruptures to give birth to potentiality, and every beginning becomes a testament to literature's infinite generativity.

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