

# **If on a Winter's Night a Traveler Study Guide**

**If on a Winter's Night a Traveler by Italo Calvino**

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## Plot Summary

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler by Italo Calvino is a tale of mystery, intrigue, and a blending of literary styles that leaves the reader seeking not only the ending for the main story, but also the ending of ten different novels. Calvino uses different plots, styles, and voices to create a whirlwind novel that leaves the reader confused at times, but also intrigued. His mastery of second-person writing along with the ease in which Calvino is able to switch plot lines amounts to an excellent novel filled with new twists at every turn.

The book begins in second-person with a single reader, you, having just purchased the new Calvino novel. As the reader nears the end of the first chapter, however, he realizes the book is misprinted and does not contain the entire novel. The reader returns the book to the store only to be given a different novel, *Outside the Town of Malbork*, as the one he originally began to read is discovered to be another book completely. The reader meets the "Other reader," Ludmilla, who has had the same experience. However, the two soon learn *Outside the Town of Malbork* is not the first book they began to read, and the two set off on a journey to find at least one complete novel.

After discovering the second book is also defective, the two meet with a professor of literature who assures them the second book is really *Leaning from the Steep Slope*. On hearing the professor translate it, however, they discover *Leaning from the Steep Slope* is a completely different book as well, but interesting. When the professor tells them the book is not complete, Lotaria, Ludmilla's sister, tells them they can find the complete book within *Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo*. On listening to a reading, however, the two realize this, too, is an incomplete book. The reader travels to the publishing house only to discover a web of mystery surrounding a translator, Marana, and a complicated plot to flood the world with apocrypha. As the reader unravels the thread of Marana's past, he soon discovers Ludmilla is the center of Marana's crimes and the focus of a writer, Flannery, in his own attempt to write a novel that several underground organizations wish to obtain for their own needs. Lotaria, too, is involved in a revolution to spread falsehood amidst the literary world, and the reader finds himself in a position of a double agent, just to secure his own freedom and to find a single complete book. In the end, the reader is reminded of why people read, and learns that the really good books of the world never end, but live on in people's minds forever.



# Chapter 1 and If On a Winter's Night a Traveler

## Chapter 1 and If On a Winter's Night a Traveler Summary

If *On a Winter's Night a Traveler* is the story of one reader's journey to finish reading a complete novel in a world full of obstacles designed to stop him. Through a variety of literary styles, author Calvino takes readers along to discover the truth behind readers, writers, and the fine line between the two.

Chapter 1 finds the author of the book speaking directly to the reader of the novel, you, as the novel is written mostly in the second person. However, the author assumes in his writing throughout the book that the reader of the tale is male. The author tells him how to read this novel comfortably and discusses how he probably found this book. The author assumes he went to the bookstore, made it past books the reader has read, will read, want to read, and does not want to read, and grabbed the new book, enthralled in its newness. Calvino surmises the reader then either begins to read the book on the bus or is blocked by the cellophane wrapping. He also guesses the reader takes the book to work and chastises that action. He then tells the reader to relax at home and examine the book thoroughly. He explains how the reader begins to read, not knowing what is in store, not even recognizing his writing style. The author states the reader prefers it this way.

If *On a Winter's Night a Traveler* begins in a railway station as the steam of the train and the smoke fills the station. A man walks between the telephone booths and the station bar and notes to the reader that he is just like any other "I" character in a novel. The man notes he would like to turn back time, so his train is not late. He states he should have seen his contact upon exiting the train, spoken with the contact briefly, and left after slyly changing his own suitcase for his contact's identical, but empty suitcase. He sits in the café and tells the reader about the conversations around him. The man joins in the conversation and finds himself talking to the former Madame Marne, the ex-wife of one of the people about whom the patrons are talking. She offers to allow him to leave his suitcase in her shop overnight, and leaves, telling the man how to find her. Soon after, the chief of police enters, and gives the signal to the man for which he was waiting. They move away, and the police informs him "Jan is dead," and that he is to take away the suitcase. The man notes that the organization is powerful and can employ the police, the rail yard, and citizens at their will. The chief tells him there will be another train, although none are scheduled. When it arrives, the man boards.



## Chapter 1 and If On a Winter's Night a Traveler Analysis

The book opens with a very personal experience in reading, forming the basis for the primary theme of the novel, that of the experiences of a reader as he or she reads. In chapter one, written entirely in the third person, the author addresses you, the reader, throughout, making the words seem directed in a highly interactive way. As the author tells the reader how to read, and explains the experiences of the "you" within the novel, the reader does begin to feel a sense of personal involvement. This technique, rarely used, is highly successful due to the author's skill in its execution. In addition, the first chapter discusses several other themes used in the novel, such as the variations of books available in the world. These consist of several categories to which most readers can relate. Finally, this chapter serves to foreshadow the format of the rest of the novel, that of a chapter directed at the reader, followed by a snippet of a book.

In the second chapter, titled the same as the book the reader purchased in chapter 1, the story begins by explaining its own vagueness. Given a very vague description of location and character, the reader is allowed to picture something personal, again drawing the reader into the story, as the main character himself points out to the reader. The main man is given few descriptive characteristics, blurring any author-constructed image. Instead it is up to the reader to form such an image. The character speaks several times to the reader, forcing the "you" reading the novel to make decisions about the writing. It is clear the man is part of a large organization, and has missed his appointed contact. As a result, he is restless and anxious, having beside him a suitcase with a content unknown to the reader but suggested to be something either illegal or dangerous. This feeling of anxiety is lessened when the man is offered a place of rest for the suitcase, but is renewed when the chief of police turns out to be a, if not the, contact. When the chief tells him someone is dead and that the man is to board a train that shouldn't even be at the station, it is even more clear this organization is dangerous. Throughout the story, the author gives little description, allowing the reader to personally experience the work. As in chapter 1, this technique is used well. The combination of first and second person leads to a direct and personal reading experience.



# Chapter 2 and Outside the Town of Malbork

## Chapter 2 and Outside the Town of Malbork Summary

Chapter 2, which is the third section of the book, switches back to the conversation between the author and the reader, or "you." The author explains that the reader has now read almost thirty pages, but suddenly realizes the book has started over. He describes a violent reaction as the reader throws the book to the floor only to pick it up and dust it off. He sleeps restlessly and returns the novel the following day. The bookseller explains that the novel is actually a novel by Tazio Bazakbal called "Outside the Town of Malbork," and that the publisher simply mixed up the two and only printed the first signature pages of the Bazakbal title within the jacket cover of the Calvino book. The reader explains that he wants to finish the novel he started so he receives the Bazakbal title from the seller. The bookseller tells him the young woman in the corner of the store had the same issue and warns him he can't guarantee the copy he is about to receive is without defect either. The reader goes to speak to the woman, whom the author now refers to as the "Other Reader," and find himself attracted to her. The two speak of books for a while, and the reader discovers the "Other reader" has a love for books that takes the reader immediately into a concrete existence. He suggests that they exchange numbers to compare experiences with the book, and the other reader agrees. The reader leaves the bookstore, returns home, and begins reading after slicing the uncut pages, only to find this novel is not the same as the one he began to read.

"Outside the Town of Malbork" begins with a textual description of a food called schoeblintsjia. Brigd is explained intimately. The author then explains the other people in the room, noting that they are beginning to take shape in the reader's mind, but that he himself is still formless. This is the main character's final morning at Kudgiwa, and he realizes that even on his return, nothing will be the same, since he himself will have changed. He is to spend the season learning to use drying machines for rye on Mr. Kauderer's estate while Ponko Kauderer will learn how to graft rowans at Kudgiwa. The author notes a picture of a pretty girl lies in Ponko's pocket, and the boy is curious about her. He asks about her and immediately pictures Ponko with Brigd and feels jealousy. The two begin to brawl as Ponko resents the boy's attempts to take the picture, which says "to remind you of Zwida Ozkart." The author notes he is trying to convey through his description of the fight a true sense of violence. The two break away, and the boy arrives in the kitchen to hear his father and Mr. Kauderer talking about a feud between themselves and the Ozkarts. Kauderer admits the feud is never ending and causes much death, but assures the father that Gritzvi, his son, and the author, will be safe.



## Chapter 2 and Outside the Town of Malbork Analysis

In the third section of the book, the reader is disappointed to find himself back at the beginning of the book due to a perceived publisher fault. On returning the novel, however, he meets the Other Reader, a character used throughout the rest of the novel. This other reader is a female, and the main reader is attracted to her. Although he is clearly uncomfortable, he does succeed in gaining her phone number. Again the use of second person in these scenes puts the reader directly into the story. The uncut pages, however, foreshadow a problem with this novel that rivals the problem encountered with the first. Additionally, the fact that the reader discovers this novel is completely different from the original suggests a format that is used throughout the novel, that of a chapter between author and reader, followed by the first chapter of a new novel. This also foreshadows the plot line of the novel, that of the reader's search for the complete book.

The second story portion of the novel again begins with an explanation of the main character, who is again speaking to the reader. The setting is in a kitchen of sorts, with descriptions focusing primarily on the sense of smell, showing the story to be similar to those the other reader, Ludmilla, says she enjoys. This allows readers to be able to imagine, visualize, and almost smell the foods and odors, as the author predicts. Brigd is described with high detail, showing the author cares for this character. There is a sadness surrounding Gritzvi as he prepares to leave his childhood home, but the reader soon finds the boy is ready as he fights and realizes he cares for Brigd. During the fight, the author uses a high level of violent verbiage and imagery to attempt to convey the violence but admits this is not a highly successful method, since what the boy really wants to feel is Brigd beneath him, and that his violent outburst is simply a symbol for the jealousy within himself. The author again uses vagueness and a combination of first and second person voices to bring the reader into the story, and uses detailed and vivid descriptions to allow the reader to visualize the storyline, creating a very personal style of writing.



# Chapter 3 and Leaning from the Steep Slope

## Chapter 3 and Leaning from the Steep Slope Summary

Chapter 3 first explains to the reader that the act of cutting apart pages with a paper knife occupies all senses. However, on turning the page, he finds nothing but blank pages. The author explains the reader has again found a defective book. He looks up the settings in an atlas to find the areas in the book are on a piece of land divided by war. Cimmeria, an independent country, was divided by other nations to the point that it no longer exists. He calls the Other Reader, whose name is Ludmilla, but instead reaches her sister, Lotaria. Lotaria explains she likes to read books that clarify issues and have tone and meaning; whereas, she feels Ludmilla reads only for pleasure. Ludmilla gets on the other line. The two speak of the novel's mistake and agree they should uncover the mystery, although Ludmilla admits she likes a book where there is at least something questionable. Ludmilla tells the reader to meet her at the university to speak with Professor Uzzi-Tuzii, who teaches Cimmerian literature. As the reader is attempting to locate the professor's room, he is met by a young man, Irnerio, who appears to be a friend of Ludmilla. Irnerio admits he makes a conscious choice not to read, which places him as a direct opposite of Ludmilla. He walks you to Uzzi-Tuzii's office and leaves. When the reader explains to the professor that he is supposed to meet Ludmilla, the professor becomes nervous, but when the reader asks about the novel, the professor claims immediately to know of it. He says it is a novel called "Leaning from the Steep Slope" by Ukko Ahti. He begins translating a copy he has near to the reader, who realizes quickly this book is not the one he had read, but does have some similar proper names.

Leaning from the Steep Slope begins with a man who explains he believes the world is trying to tell him something. He walks along the harbor every day near a prison, and sees a young woman named Miss Zwilda who draws seashells and stays at the Hotel of the Sea Lily. The man speaks occasionally with a meteorologist, Mr. Kauderer, who on this day asks if he would be willing to take the readings for a few days while he travels abroad. The man agrees and the following day, finds himself speaking with Miss Zwilda as he takes the readings. The following day, the man sees Zwilda in line to visit the prisoners. She tells him later she has a pass to sit in on visitations and draw the subjects. She says she would most like to draw a grapnel, and asks if the man can get her one. He replies he can try, however, the man finds as he tries to secure one for her that no one in the area wants to give him one, since they are often used in prison escapes. Saturday evening, the man is summoned to meet Mr. Kauderer in the graveyard, and is told he should be patient, and that "they" don't believe in individual escape attempts, but instead have a long term plan. He also tells the man he is fired from his observatory position. The man walks to the observatory for the last time, and hears a man beneath. He looks to find a prisoner, who tells him he has escaped, and that he needs the man to tell a woman at the Hotel of the Sea Lily.





## Chapter 3 and Leaning from the Steep Slope Analysis

Chapter Three finds the reader again left with the beginnings of a book, but not a complete edition. Not only that, the reader discovers that the story is not even the book he started in the last chapter. The reader shows a quick intelligence as he attempts to discover the origin of this new book in an effort to help himself locate the pieces needed to complete the novel. On calling his resource Ludmilla, however, he feels momentarily lost as her sister, Lotaria, attempts to make him scrutinize the novel more carefully. This nature of Lotaria foreshadows events later in the novel as Lotaria becomes a more important character. When Ludmilla does come onto the phone, she is clearly interested in the reader's theories but still seems a bit reluctant to meet him, choosing instead to meet him in a place with which she is familiar. This tendency shows she does not trust the man completely yet. She also states she likes novels with a bit of mystery surrounding concrete theory, which explains the following story. Additionally, the character of Irnerio appears to suggest an already-existing relationship in Ludmilla's life, although this relationship is unclear. When the reader finally does meet the professor, he is yet again led on the wrong path. This ties in to the theme of the novel. The writing style of this chapter again serves two purposes, that of bringing the reader personally into the book, as well as to use words alone to entice sensations of touch, taste, and smell from the reader's own mind.

In *Leaning from the Steep Slope*, the main character of the tale is a fragile, kind man whose interests are varied and include a young woman with whom he has not yet conversed. His mannerisms suggest he is really an innocent thinking man who does not do well in social situations. However, his meeting of a meteorologist allows him the chance to speak to the woman he likes. The woman, opposite to him in her search for perfection, is kind, but uses him to gain access to a grapnel. She claims to visit the prison to draw, but it is clear to the reader her intentions are to free a prisoner. The man, however, is naive enough not to see the underlying reasons for the woman's desires. Further, it is clear Mr. Kauderer is involved in a mass plan to help the prisoners escape, but because of the spotlight the main character has placed on the grapnel he was obtaining for the woman, Kauderer is forced to remain in hiding. In the end, the man is forced to realize he was being used and that his opinions of the world as an imperfect, cruel place are accurate. This book is exactly as Ludmilla stated she wanted, as the concrete descriptions are blended with a hint of mystery and suspicion.



# Chapter 4 and Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo

## Chapter 4 and Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo Summary

Chapter 4 finds the reader listening to Uzzi-Tuzii as he reads *Leaning from the Steep Slope* aloud. The reader notes that listening to someone read, particularly when translating, is much different than reading personally. The reader suddenly notices that Ludmilla has arrived and is listening, also. Uzzi-Tuzii abruptly stops, noting that *Leaning from the Steep Slope* is incomplete, as the author committed suicide. The professor says that all books written in the Cimmerian language continue in the beyond, as it is the language of the dead. Ludmilla notes that she prefers to read books she knows will always exist to which the professor responds that all of reading measures a material object, the reader, against an immaterial world. Lotaria suddenly appears to tell her sister she has located the book for which Ludmilla is hunting. She says she believes it is the same book Uzzi-Tuzii states, but that the novel is Cimbric, was changed later to be titled *Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo* and is by Vortus Vijandi. Uzzi-Tuzii says that book is apocryphal and was used by nationalists during anti Cimmerian campaigns. Galligani, another professor, enters the room and states he believes the authenticity of the book has been proved. Ludmilla and the reader follow Lotaria to her study group to discuss the novel. Galligani begins the discussion by noting authors such as Vijandi wrote in both Cimmerian and Cimbric. The Cimmerians concealed those written in Cimbric. This book was eventually chastised for its revolutionary content. Once Lotaria begins to read it, however, the reader and Ludmilla both agree the book is not a continuation of *Leaning from the Steep Slope*.

*Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo* begins during a military setting with a crowd of individuals following a band who has just finished playing down a public street. As the crowd breaks up, three individuals, Valerian, Irina, and the main character, Alex, break away from the group. Irina is described as being in possession of the two men and has them descend into madness with her at her will. The author, Alex, explains he is narrating with detail to explain not only the events but also the period, so readers can understand the confusing setting of a combination of death, military establishment, and sexual enticement. The main character is part of the military and had met Irina as the front collapsed. Irina became dizzy on crossing the bridge, and Alex assisted her, only to find her ungrateful and somewhat terse. Alex continues his military assignments and finds himself at the desk of his friend, Valerian. After a friendly conversation, Alex is surprised to hear Irina join the conversation. She walks in, and it is apparent she knows Valerian. She picks up a revolver, loads it, and points it at Alex. After telling him arming women will help put men in their place, she leaves. Now, the three are in Irina's bedroom, nude, writhing together. Alex admits to the reader he is there to discover a spy who has infiltrated the Revolutionary Committee. Alex has become involved with a cult



that Irina heads, and sexuality is clearly a part of it as the men take turns satisfying her while the other watches. As Alex watches Valeria and Irina, he is able to sneak over to Valerian's wallet, where he finds a piece of paper with his own name on it, under a death sentence for treason, signed by the government.

## Chapter 4 and Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo Analysis

In Chapter 4, Calvino introduces another layer to the plot line, that of the fighting among languages, primarily those of the Cimmerian and the Cimbric. The author uses descriptive language to explain the variations of reading, being those of personal readings to translations to reading aloud. Additionally, Calvino again uses the theme of erasure, as he discusses both how Ludmilla enters the room and how the professor seems to disappear among the stacks. Also, Uzzi-Tuzii's explanation of the language of the dead suggests a clear symbol of the novel as the never ending story. Calvino, in this chapter, introduces the idea of apocrypha, which foreshadows the rest of the novel. Additionally, Ludmilla's comments about reading books that will always remain to be read explains the following tale, as titles with such a history tend to remain vital to society.

Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo is written using a military background and very descriptive tones, unlike the segments of the other novels. Additionally, there are several phrases in the book that suggest this is precisely the type of novel Ludmilla states she wishes to read in the previous chapter. There are numerous references to the concept of the void, as in previous chapters, and a sense of two warring forces, which is also mentioned in the previous chapter. Irina as a character seems much like Lotaria, in that she is a strong, passionate, and somewhat forceful character. Positioning her in this warlike atmosphere foreshadows events later as Lotaria is found on one side of a battle. A sense of vertigo is mentioned several times in the novel, tying it back to the title, but also suggesting a sense, at this point in the novel, of confusion. The use of sexual innuendo combined with descriptive sections of detailed graphical explanations serves to allow the reader to imagine the scene, just as violent verbiage was used in the previous snippet of storyline. Again, this shows Calvino's use of a variety of methods to achieve the same goal, that of user comprehension and visualization throughout the novel.



# Chapter 5 and Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow

## Chapter 5 and Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow Summary

In Chapter 5, the reader and Ludmilla find themselves waiting to hear more of *Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo*, but Lotaria tells them they only have a small piece of the novel. Again, Ludmilla says she likes yet another kind of book, that which allows one to observe the growth of the book just for fun, without underlying meaning. The reader suggests they go to the publisher to demand answers, and while Ludmilla agrees, she states she would rather not go. She believes there is a line between reader and person who makes books, and that to cross that line would be to erase it, which would take away some of the joy of reading. The reader decides to go on his own and report back to Ludmilla. When Cavedagna, the desk clerk at the publishers, discovers the reader is not a writer, he is excited, and pulls him down the hall so they may speak privately. He admits the publishing house knows about the mix ups and also admits they can't make heads or tails of the situation either. He states that if, at any point, something goes awry between the writer and the printing of a complete novel, the disorder spreads rapidly, and chaos begins. He explains it as vertigo.

Cavedagna states the problem began when a man, Ermes Marana, came to the publishing house claiming to be a translator. With him, he had a book called *Leaning from the Steep Slope* by Ukko Ahti that he claims to have translated. Marana then proposes to translate *Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo* by Vijandi. The publishing house schedules it; Ermes keeps handing in translated pages, and everything seems fine until questions begin to arise about inconsistencies in the translations. Marana finally admits he can't read Cimbrian. They ask what novel he has been translating, and he claims it is *Outside the Town of Malbork* by Tazio Bazakbal. The publishing house, already knee deep in printing, simply changes the title page, and continues. However, days later, they discover the book was actually by Bertrand Vandervelde and is called *Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow*. However, as the reader flips through the manuscript Cavedagna gives him, he realizes this is not the book he started in the last chapter. When the publisher demanded answers from Marana, he reasoned that authors of books didn't matter, and that it probably won't matter the title, either, since only time dictates which novels survive time. Cavedagna admits Marana may be right. He is called back to work, and the reader hesitates to tell him the book is not the one he is seeking. Instead, he sits down to read.

*Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow* begins with a scene of a man trying to get Jojo, a dead man, into a sack that is too small for the job. Bernadette mentions the need for another sack, but the man knows even another sack wouldn't hide the fact this was a dead body the two needed to dispose. The author notes the two have been driving



around with him as a passenger all night. The two attempt to find a place to burn the body, but the author notes he himself has spent years trying to erase his history time and time again only to have his multiple histories creep up on him. He met Bernadette while tracking down Jojo and convinced her to be on his side. While she made love to him, the main character sneaked up on the two and killed him. The author notes he is telling a jumble of stories because he wishes the reader to sense all the other tales in the man's life. Back in the car, the man is shocked to have Bernadette climb on top of him, claiming that he had killed Jojo before she could orgasm. The two make love, although the man admits he killed Jojo because of a woman. The two individuals throw Jojo over a terrace and then take the elevator down. At the bottom, three men in suits greet them, and find Jojo's show in the bag in the main character's hand.

## Chapter 5 and Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow Analysis

Chapter 5 further explores the idea of apocrypha, detailing just exactly how Marana became so entrenched into the forgery business, and how the publishing agency became so rapidly involved in it as well. Ludmilla's description of the story she would like to read foreshadows the type of story shown in the next section, that of a fun story without hidden meaning. Ludmilla also discusses the erasing of the line between author and writer, thereby again using the theme of disappearance and erasure. The convoluted story behind Marana's deception serves to introduce readers to the character and the beginnings of his fraud, all of which are important throughout the rest of the story. Also Cavedagna appears to be an extension of Calvino, in that the author himself seems to know there is a line between readers who read for pleasure and those who read for hidden meaning.

Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow is exactly the type of tale Ludmilla likes in Chapter 5, that of a fun story that is allowed to grow without hidden meaning. The main character is a criminal who has spent much of his life trying to erase the past, only to find it catching him. His daughter, Sibylle, has become involved with her mother, a woman who, along with Jojo, tried to end the main character. As a result, he has killed Jojo with the help of Bernadette. However, at the end, the two are caught. This story is void of hidden meaning, although it is highly entertaining, and fits in with what Ludmilla claims in chapter five to want in a novel.



# Chapter 6 and In a Network of Lines that Enlace

## Chapter 6 and In a Network of Lines that Enlace Summary

In Chapter 6, the reader finds himself at the end of the copy, and begins to hunt for the rest of the manuscript. Cavedagna gives the reader the Marana file to look through, and the reader finds Marana always writes letters to delay his submissions. The letters come from five continents, seem chronologically out of order, and often hold contrasting views of surrounding areas. The latest letters offer Cavedagna the translated novel by Silas Flannery called *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*. Another letter tells of the Father of Stories, an old Indian man who tells stories of countries and time frames unknown to him, and often tells stories that appear years later by a different author. In another letter, Marana speaks of the headquarters of the OEPHLW, Organization for the Electronic Production of Homogenized Literary Works, and claims he is using the organization's programs to automatically generate the rest of the Flannery novel. He claims he is kidnapped by the OAP, or the Organization of Apocryphal Power, which Marana himself started. Marana explains the organization has broken into two parts, that of the Wings of Shadows and Wings of Light, both of which see Marana as a force to be destroyed, and both want the manuscript of Flannery's. Marana admits he knew Flannery was having a writing crisis, and at the time could only write in his diary consistently. The reasons Marana visited Flannery are unclear, but explained as either offering assistance through the program of OEPHLW or defending a Belgian writer, Vandervelde, who believes he was plagiarized by Flannery.

Apparently, Marana, at one point, was summoned by the wife of a Sultan of Arabia who had a lust for reading. As a result, the Marana is hired to break off translation of one novel at a portion of great suspense only to start a new novel, thereby ensuring the Sultana will have a constant flow of reading material. The letters continue, and Marana discusses a conversation with a woman on the beach who states that her preferred novel is one that makes a person uneasy from the first page. From there, the letters jump to a discussion of Silas Flannery's obsession with a woman reader he spies on each day through his telescope. He claims to write what her expression asks for, and Marana claims to tell him he is plagiarizing the novel she is reading, that of the Vandervelde novel, *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*. Marana explains a woman in New York is being held to a chair, forced to read, while machines record her level of intensity. The scientists decide their program for automatic novel generation is not working, since the woman is not constantly attentive to the books.

The reader notes there has been a constant flow of information about a changing female reader throughout Marana's letters, and the reader wonders if the woman is the same person. He himself constantly sees her as Ludmilla. He has determined that the



Wings of Light follow the Archangel of Light and believed that among the false novels of the world, they can locate the two or three that hold true, perhaps extra human truths. The Wings of Shadow follow the Archon of Shadow and believe that only falsehoods can represent the "absolute value." Marana finds himself in an elevator with a member of the Light, who takes Flannery's manuscript, believing it to be his diary. The reader sets out for the café to meet with Ludmilla to explain all of this and begins to read the supposed Silas Flannery novel, translated by Marana, called *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*.

*In a Network of Lines that Enlace* tells the story of a man who has a highly nervous state of being in terms of telephones. No matter where the telephone is, the man seems to think the call must be for him. If he hears a ringing phone while jogging, he is afraid the phone call is for him, and that individuals have followed him and are calling every phone in each house he runs by. The man is a professor and is out jogging before class one day when he hears a phone incessantly ring. He enters the yard of the home and sees the phone by an open window, but a barking dog forces the man to run on. However, on his way back, he runs by the house again to hear the phone still ringing. He answers, and is informed that Marjorie is being held captive in a home that will soon be on fire. The professor at first decides to ignore the problem but soon wonders if the call really was for him, relating to a student of his he likes, but had a misunderstanding with in his home. After he discovers the Marjorie he knows has been missing for two days, the man runs to the address given during the call to find his student tied and gagged. He releases her, and she calls him a bastard.

## **Chapter 6 and *In a Network of Lines that Enlace* Analysis**

Chapter 6 is a highly confusing chapter that gives a vast amount of important information, provided one is able to piece together the chronology of the letters of Marana. There is a clear link in these letters between Marana and a young woman who seems to symbolize Ludmilla, although the reader wonders if it is, in fact, Ludmilla, foreshadowing this discovery later in the novel. Further, the machine owned by OEPHLW discussed by Marana appears to produce exactly what Calvino as a writer is complaining about: the meaningless writing that can be mass produced by anyone. On the other hand, Calvino also appears to be saying something against the analysis of writing to find the hidden truth. Marana's creation of the Organization of Apocryphal Power has led him to be in the middle between two factions, with him siding with neither. This chapter also sets up the next story with the woman claiming to like novels that make one uncomfortable from the beginning.

*In a Network of Lines that Enlace* begins just that way, by explaining the obsessive compulsive, nearly schizophrenic character of the professor. His obsession with phones leads him into perilous states of anxiety. However, in this story, his suspicions turn out to be realistic as the person calling does appear to be wanting to speak to him directly. Although it is unclear of the relationship between himself and Marjorie, it is clear she thinks nothing of him. While he does save her in the end, she is obviously angry with

him for their previous encounter. The story certainly fits the role of making one uncomfortable from the start. Further, Calvino's use of a frantic sort of descriptive writing leads the reader to feel as frazzled as the runner in the story.





# Chapter 7 and In a Network of Lines that Intersect

## Chapter 7 and In a Network of Lines that Intersect Summary

Chapter 7 finds the reader concerned that Ludmilla is late for their meeting. She calls the café and tells him to meet her at her home, where he can find the key under the mat. Soon after, Calvino begins writing to the "other reader" in the book, who he notes was introduced as a third person in chapter two but who now must become second person. Calvino speaks to Ludmilla, examining her character in depth. He explains that the second person character, "you," examines Ludmilla's kitchen to discover she cooks often and enjoys it. He claims the kitchen shows Ludmilla is an extroverted, sensual, methodical and imaginative woman. The reader examines the rest of the house finding many things that represent Ludmilla and locating a book collection that is small but personally organized. Soon, however, the reader hears a key in the lock, and Irnerio enters. Irnerio admits he makes things from books, such as sculptures. Irnerio looks through her books and takes one to use. The reader stops him, since the book is actually *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*, and hands him a book that looks similar. On closer inspection, it shows to be a translation by Ermes Marana. Irnerio states he thought there "weren't any more of those around" and on questioning, admits that Ludmilla and Marana had a relationship once. Irnerio throws the book into a storeroom that appears to house many more of Marana's things and tells the reader that Ludmilla stopped reading when Marana was there and fled to escape him. When asked what Ludmilla would do if Marana returned, Irnerio says he believes she would flee to Switzerland, to Flannery, who makes Ludmilla feel as though there is truth in writing. Ludmilla enters; Irnerio leaves; the two have tea, and Ludmilla asks if the reader is jealous. She says if he is, it is best "not to begin." The two make love. Afterward, the reader attempts to show Ludmilla the story *In a Network of Lines that Enlace* but can't locate it. Ludmilla notes she likes stories where all mystery passes through a cold and calculating mind. You hand her the copy Irnerio threw into the storeroom and ask about Marana. Ludmilla admits Marana was obsessed with her because her reading was the one thing he could not bear. Her authors told her truths, and in retaliation, Marana fills her reading world with falsehoods. However, on looking at her copy, the reader realizes this is not the same book as *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*. The reader decides he will visit the author, Flannery, to see which book, if either, is the real one.

*In a Network of Lines that Intersect*, a man is obsessed with kaleidoscopes. His entire life, including his wealth and his power, is viewed by him as angles and refractions, thereby making him successful. The man chooses to conceal his true self by multiplying his images. He has doubles he uses to fool those who would wish to kidnap him and often uses his numerous selves to make his enemies fight one another. He also hides his mistress by visiting, and having his doubles visit, several beautiful women each day,



so his enemies do not know which the true mistress is. He finds a company that protects against kidnappings and discovers the underground is planning to kidnap him. He forms a counter plan, only to discover there is a counter-counter plan. The kidnappers take the man to his home and lock him in his catoptric room. Seeing his own reflection on all sides, he begins to become confused, unsure of his sanity. On the floor of the room is his mistress, whose movement reflected in the hundreds of mirrors become grotesque. His wife enters and tells him she has saved him but now cannot find the way out. She holds a revolver. In the end, the man can no longer discern himself from his surroundings.

## Chapter 7 and In a Network of Lines that Intersect Analysis

In Chapter 7, the reader learns a great deal about the relationship between Marana and Ludmilla, as well as about Ludmilla herself. Calvino again uses a unique writing style, in that this chapter shifts the focus of the second person to Ludmilla, with the "you" character now occupying the third person position through much of the beginning of the chapter. This allows the author to help explain the emotions and feelings, as well as the observations, of the reader in terms of Ludmilla from a third person standpoint, instead of being forced into the second person observation had he not changed focus. The relationship between Irnerio and Ludmilla is also explained, although this relationship now seems more personal and reciprocal than previously, as the two personalities compliment one another. It is clear, however, by the end of the novel that Ludmilla is interested in the reader, since the two of them make love. The entire scene of love making also shows a talent of Calvino's in that his use of words to explain the sensual pleasures of these characters is a personal, very passionate description, where the two individuals "read" one another's bodies, creating a very sexual, sensual read. It is now clear that Ludmilla is the subject of Marana's letters, as well, and perhaps the subject of Flannery's diary. This discovery foreshadows the discovery of this as truth later in the novel. Additionally, the reader's decision to visit Flannery to discover which book is real foreshadows his meeting of Flannery and their mutual discoveries later in the novel. Finally her note about wanting stories to pass through a calculating mind foreshadows the next tale.

In a Network of Lines that Intersect is an entertaining tale about an obsessed man whose life has been dedicated to erasing or hiding a true self in a mix of falsehoods or mirror images. His entire life is spent creating copies, and in the end, he finds even himself unable to discern between the copies and the real thing. He loses himself as well as the line between his mistress and his wife among the mirrors that have become his life, and the line between reality and his mirror images fades. This coincides with the apparent goal of Marana, as he, too, seeks to create complete falsehood from the literary world so there is no barrier between himself and Ludmilla. Finally, this story fits Ludmilla's desire to read a story where all mystery goes through a cold mind, as the main character is unable to process information without passing first through the coldness of the mirror world in which he lives.



# Chapter 8 and On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon

## Chapter 8 and On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon Summary

Chapter 8 begins as snippets from the diary of Silas Flannery, who appears to have writers block. Every day, Flannery watches a woman reading on a terrace below and is obsessed with her reactions to what she reads. He feels caged by the expectations of his readers and by his own style. He imagines a story where two writers spy on one another as they work. Flannery comes up with a multitude of story lines surrounding these writers, all of which involve a woman reading both their works. He contemplates the idea that stories write themselves and notes that reading is an individual act; whereas, writing is only what it is after being interpreted by a reader. He is soon called on by Marana, who claims that the Japanese have developed a system that can write novels in the style of a famous author and that Flannery himself is a target of this practice. Marana tells him he believes authors create an invisible character in all books, that of the "I" that tells the tale of the story, and that Flannery may be capable of creating the perfect apocrypha. Flannery admits he would like to reinvent the "I" with each book but really wants to capture a book without any "I." Flannery also notes the "total writer" Marana speaks of could be a ghost writer who simply writes as the form of someone else. He is soon visited by Lotaria, who claims to be doing her thesis on his novels. Lotaria notes that what Flannery wants is for all reader to read passively; whereas, she reads to discover the hidden truths. She admits she does not read books, but instead analyzes them by focusing on words used most and least often. That night, Flannery sees someone escaping his room and finds pages missing from his unfinished manuscript. Soon, Ludmilla visits Flannery, claiming she sought him out, believing him to be the one author for whom writing is natural. The two talk, and Flannery mistakes Ludmilla's comments about his writing as personal, and attempts to touch her. She explains she is not interested in him as a man but as a writer. She tells him she likes novels that create an illusion around human relations. Flannery finds himself wanting to find Marana to partner with him to flood the world with apocrypha. Ludmilla tells him she is leaving. Flannery begins watching a young man through his telescope, and when fans who believe the young man is blocked by a UFO come to see Flannery, he tells them the book the young man is reading is the one they are after.

Soon, a reader visits Flannery, telling him he has seen two books that claim to be Flannery's. Flannery tells the reader the book was *On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon*. The two talk, and Flannery begins to believe the reader is involved with Ludmilla, making him jealous and unwilling to help. Flannery wonders if the young man has to stop reading each book because he consumes it all in the first chapter. Flannery begins to ponder the idea of writing a book about a reader who is constantly forced to stop reading novels due to printing mistakes. He believes he could write it in second



person, could introduce a female other reader, a translator, and an old author who keeps a diary. He notes the reader leaves and takes *On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon*.

*On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon* is the story of a young man who is learning from a Japanese teacher, Mr. Okeda. The man is physically attracted to Makiko, the daughter of Okeda, of which Okeda is aware. Shortly thereafter, Okeda, his wife, Makiko, and the man are walking outside when Miyagi, the wife, asks the man to gather water lilies for them. The man does so, with Makiko on one side and Miyagi on the other; the man feels Makiko's breast. The man and Okeda again discuss sensations, and the man compares them with the reading of a book. The man finds himself alone one day with Makiko and frightens her with his actions. She leaves, and he follows, only to find Miyagi in the next room. Miyagi begins to sexually tease the man, who finds his hand on her breasts. He describes the sensations and becomes aroused when Makiko comes in. She quickly leaves, but Miyagi, sensing the feelings between the two, pulls the man on top of her. As they make love, Makiko watches, as does Okeda. The man realizes he will be trapped with Okeda forever.

## **Chapter 8 and *On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon* Analysis**

Chapter 8 is one of the most important in the novel and discusses many aspects of the story that have as of yet remained hidden. Readers meet Flannery, who appears to be a central figure in the apocryphal problem. This chapter explores the themes of reading and writing from a different perspective than in other chapters. Whereas previously readers only saw reading from the reader standpoint, this chapter expounds on the ideas of reading from the viewpoint of the author, which shows a profoundly different situation. Flannery sees readers as vampires, sucking ideas and thoughts from him and leaving nothing in their wake. While he dreams of writing the perfect book, he feels violated by readers and other authors. He can relate to the idea of plagiarism in that those individuals can still appreciate reading; whereas, he has lost his love for it. He understands, too, the line between readers and writers, and although he crosses it with Ludmilla, he also knows he used to be able to read and can no longer do so because he is an author.

Flannery admits he would like to reinvent himself with each novel but also knows that to do so would go against what his readers expect. He seeks, instead, to create a book without any reflection of himself. His meeting of Lotaria, along with her descriptions of machines used to read books and her belief in reading not as a pastime but as an investigation, foreshadows her character later in the novel. Additionally, the meeting of Ludmilla and Flannery suggest several times that the woman he is watching is Ludmilla. True to her beliefs, Ludmilla regrets meeting Flannery, as he forces her to cross the line and see him as a human male, rather than simply as a mechanism of words.

The final pages of Flannery's diary appear to be about his meeting with the reader of the story. The reader appears to have started his quest for Marana and has come to

Flannery seeking information. However, Flannery, true to his current belief that apocrypha is vital, gives to the reader a book that has nothing to do with either of the supposed Flannery titles. The reader admits his copies have been stolen, foreshadowing events later in the novel. Flannery's take on the reader's problems finishing the books show not only his lack of attention to what the reader said, but also again show a vast difference between readers and writers. Flannery's discussion of his ideas for a book suggests Flannery is, in fact, writing the very book we, as readers, are reading.

On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon is a short tale that uses words to again describe sensations of the characters within the story. Nature is used as a substitute for graphic details, and the sensations are depicted using a combination of words to explain touch, taste, smell, and sight. The male in the story discusses how each leaf is an isolated object, defined by its own characteristics and its separation from other objects, which seems to symbolize the author's opinions on books as single units. The man's comparison of life and the reading of a novel symbolize Calvino's opinion that reading can simulate life only as far as the reader's imagination allows.



# Chapter 9 and Around an Empty Grave

## Chapter 9 and Around an Empty Grave Summary

In Chapter 9, the reader is traveling, reading *On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon*. He is on a bus when police officers confiscate the book, stating it has been banned in Ataguitania. A woman tells you to stop protesting and to follow her. Once off the bus, she takes the first taxi, and the reader takes the second, both of which stop in the countryside, where the two meet. The reader believes the woman is Lotaria, but she says to call her Corinna. The book she gives him, however, is not the one confiscated, but one titled *Around an Empty Grave*, which she claims is the same book. The reader questions why everything is fake, and Corinna notes they are in a country where all things are fake, and the revolution and counter revolution have insured the organization will win. Corinna notes there is a taxi following, but she is unsure if it contains real policemen or the organization. The reader notes there is a third taxi. The two are arrested by those in the second taxi, who are promptly arrested by those in the third. Corinna tells the second police her name is Gertrude, and that she is to be taken to headquarters, and tells the third she is Ingrid, and is to be taken to command. At the station, Ingrid explains that infiltrators made the two fall into a police trap, but that revolutionaries that have infiltrated the police have pretended to recognize her, so she can escape. The reader will be put into a prison run by the revolutionaries, so that he, too, can escape. Ingrid admits that no one in this country is who they say they are and that all people must be suspects, and notes that her sister likes novels with power. In prison, the reader is led to a room to discuss his impression of *Around an Empty Grave*. A woman named Shelia, who is the same as Ingrid, is running a machine that is supposed to be reproducing the novel, but upon seeing the pages, the reader notes it is not the same novel. The reader decides he has been passive long enough and confronts Shelia, who eventually rips off her clothes and begins to have sex with the reader while the author questions the reader's motives. A flashbulb goes off, and Shelia/Lotaria admits working for two combating forces at the same time is tiresome. The book the machine was printing malfunctions and stops.

*Around an Empty Grave* tells the story of a young man whose father has just passed away, taking with him the knowledge of the identity of the boy's mother. He travels to Oqiedal, as directed by his father, and locates the palace of the Alvarado family. The mistress refuses to see him, but the slaves admit they know of his father, who used to gamble at the palace. When left alone with Amaranta, the daughter of Anacleta, sister of Faustino, the young boy tries to molest her, but is sent back to the mistress. Dona Jazmina tells him of his father and his drunken way with women. Left along with Jacinta, Dona's daughter, he tries again for sex but is sent away with the knowledge Anacleta is, in fact, his mother. Anacleta tells him his father and Faustino fought to the death, and that Faustino was killed. His body, however, disappeared. Now, the young boy sees Faustino approaching, and prepares to defend himself.



## Chapter 9 and Around an Empty Grave Analysis

Chapter 9 shows the true ramifications of the falsifications. In this chapter, Lotaria becomes at least five different people, all of whom are working for other agencies in an effort to spread false concepts throughout the land. Her actions do save the reader, however. The theme of erasure is again seen as Lotaria consistently attempts to erase her past. Calvino changes the reader here by taking his personality from a passive reader to an action-oriented character, one who not only follows the story but actively participates in it. Her insight about her sister liking books with powerful figures foreshadows the tale in *Around an Empty Grave*.

*Around an Empty Grave* is a fairly straight forward story, showing the power of two families and their history. Several times the author uses powerful language to explain the situation, as the young boy nearly rapes two women, one of whom turns out to be his sister. The sins of the father are also the sins of the son and punishable in the same way as those of the father. Faustino apparently did not die at the hands of the young man's father, but instead lived to duel others. The story fits the bill for Ludmilla's power story, as foreshadowed in the previous chapter.



# Chapter10 and What Story Down There Awaits Its End?

## Chapter10 and What Story Down There Awaits Its End? Summary

The reader is talking with the Director General of the State Police Archives. He has been given an assignment by the Ataguitanian authorities, conditional for his release. The Director admits censorship is not uniform around the world and that books banned in one area are super banned in others. The governments purposefully send banned books to other areas to entice revolution. The Director notes he himself reads for pleasure, but that to catch the head of the conspiracy, they had to understand that he sought to prove to Ludmilla that the world outside the written page was a void. However, the woman read for pure enjoyment, leaving the man to continue his falsities without cause. He was allowed to escape. The reader asks the Director for a copy of *Around an Empty Grave*. Instead, he arranges to give him *What Story Down There Awaits Its End?* by Anatolin, another banned writer. The reader plans to contact Anatolin personally. That night, he dreams of being on a train trying to catch Ludmilla and explain things to her. She tells him she likes a book that explains the end of the world. The following day, Anatolin delivers the manuscript but is arrested before he can give it all.

*What Story Down There Awaits Its End?* is the tale of a man who mentally erases the entire world in an effort to limit his view to a young woman, Franziska, who he wants to see. He soon encounters agents from Section D who inform him that there are Others who want to tear down the world, only to bring it back up. The man has been chosen to work as a go between, telling the Others how to reform the world. He fights to reach Franziska, and as he does, she begins to speak as though nothing is wrong.

## Chapter10 and What Story Down There Awaits Its End? Analysis

Chapter 10 shows the reader moving from an innocent reader to a double agent. The Director ties up the story line by explaining what happened with Marana, in that Marana finally realized there is something about reading that cannot be explained, regardless of the author or the book, something that goes beyond the simple plot to hit an individual chord with each reader. The reader himself is relieved to know that those in charge of censoring novels read them in the same way Ludmilla reads stories, for joy and pleasure. As in other chapters, the tale ends with one final lost novel, that of the first portion of Anatolin's new novel. Additionally, this chapter shows clearly Calvino's opinions against censorship, and the problems such a practice brings about.





The tale, like the previous chapter, ties together the major themes of the novel, primarily those of erasure, the void, and the changing of the world. The main character of the tale, like the reader in the story, has one primary goal in mind, that of meeting the woman, Franziska. He erases everything in the world piece by piece, until the only thing left is the void and the female, or so he thinks. The intrusion of the people in Section D, however, implies the man is not alone in his quest, but is simply a tool to a larger puzzle, like the reader is in the main tale. Those in section D warn the main character that his input will be vital in the recreation of the world and tell him to be careful in telling the "Others." This concept of being under the power of "Others" ties in with the main novel as the main character finds himself at the will of other individuals. The man in the story has to fight the void to reach the woman, but against all odds, eventually finds her, symbolizing the main character's similar circumstances.



# Chapter 11 and Chapter 12

## Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 11 finds the reader in a library, hunting for any of the novels he has encountered on his journey. However, at every turn, he finds he is unable to get the books, for a variety of reasons. There are readers around a table who discuss among themselves how each of them reads. These stem from a man who reads a few lines at a time, one who rereads books repeatedly to gain all possible knowledge, one who finds a new novel each time he rereads an old book, one who finds all books blend into one another, one who reads simply to read the beginnings, and one who reads simply to achieve endings. The reader states he likes to read what is written, to create a whole picture, and to keep one story distinct from the other. The fifth person speaks of a particular story about a man who, through a course of events, is chosen to kill himself. The reader writes the title of this forgotten story as "He asks, anxious to hear the story." The sixth person takes the list of titles from the reader and reads them as in a sentence, "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." The reader begins to protest that it is not a paragraph, but individual titles. The seventh reader notes that all stories are either a continuation of life or an eventual death. The reader decides to marry Ludmilla. In Chapter 12, the reader and Ludmilla are married. They are reading in bed, and the reader has nearly finished reading *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

## Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 11 gives the deepest insight of readers found throughout the novel. The readers in the library each go through their own personal reasons ways of reading a novel. Each has a distinct way of reading that defines him or her and symbolizes the different readers in everyday existence. Each uses the novel and the characters within in ways that suit their own lifestyles showing again that reading is a highly personal experience. It is also revealed in this chapter Calvino's sly creation of a complete sentence through his novel titles within the book. The overall complete sentence asks the question of what story lies underneath, the question Calvino has asked throughout the entire novel. The marriage of the reader and Ludmilla, foreshadowed throughout the novel, confirms the ending of the story and the completion of the novel.

# Characters

## The Reader

The main character of the story is "you," the presumed male reader of the book. The entire novel is written as though the author is speaking directly to the reader, who is male, and who is attempting to discover the truth behind a mass of fictitious books being brought into the literary market. The reader is clearly shy but does have a strong sense of value and worth. He places a large value on reading for pleasure but less so on reading to find a hidden inner meaning. This character is brave, traveling across the country to discover the truth and also bold in his efforts to win over the heart of Ludmilla. He intrudes on writers, is kidnapped, held hostage, forced into becoming a double agent, is lied to, used, and abandoned several times throughout the novel, and yet still persists in his pursuit to find the complete novel which he began reading at the beginning of the book. Because the author wishes for the true reader to identify with the "you" character, there are no features or tendencies discussed, since to do so would remove the ability for anyone to identify.

## Ludmilla

Ludmilla is the other reader throughout the novel. In the beginning, Ludmilla is a reader not unlike the main readers, whose life has been momentarily affected by a mistake at the printer's office. As the main reader and Ludmilla become closer, however, Ludmilla turns out to be a much more involved character than previously realized. Ludmilla once dated a man named Marana, but Marana could not understand her addiction to reading. He became jealous that her authors became much like trusted lovers, and to escape him, Ludmilla fled to Switzerland. There, she met her favorite author, Flannery, whom she permanently affected. Flannery simply wanted to be able to write novels that Ludmilla would pour over but lacked the knowledge of how to do so. Ludmilla then returned home, where she clearly has an impact on Irnerio, who becomes the opposite of her, in that he stops reading entirely. Ludmilla's tastes change, and with each shift in her desires for books, the plot of the novel changes slightly to appease. Her character is seen as independent, outgoing, extroverted, and sensible with a strong sense of herself, and a high intellect. As the "other reader," she is again not given particular physical characteristics other than a slenderness of build and a lighter color of hair. Again, as an anonymous counter character to the protagonist, this vagueness of description is necessary.

## Lotaria

Lotaria is the sister of Ludmilla and a primary character in the apocryphal revolution. Lotaria is convinced that all reading should be done to find a deeper meaning, not simply for fun. Her version of reading involves an analysis of the number of words used



in a book. She believes this will show her the major and minor themes of the book. She also believes this will show her the type of book it is, simply by word choices used by the author. Lotaria appears in the novel as several characters, including a revolutionist, a police officer, a printer, a computer technician, the leader of a book group, and as a student. In all her roles, however, Lotaria never ceases to attempt to overthrow literary society with false books in an effort to find the one true novel. Completely opposite of her sister, Lotaria's goal is not to read a novel for fun but to examine every novel to find a hidden meaning.

## **Ermes Marana**

Marana is the novel's bad guy, although on inspection his character is more mischievous than bad. Having fallen in love with Ludmilla, Marana becomes jealous at the readers who Ludmilla identifies with so passionately. He feels she believes in the truths of these writers more than in him, and as a result, begins a quest to prove that nothing exists beyond reality but the void. Marana begins a quest to flood the world with apocrypha so nothing in literature can be trusted. In the end, however, he realizes that the name or title of the book is not important to Ludmilla, but the enjoyment she receives from reading, regardless of the content, is something very real. His founding of the OAP eventually betrays him as he finds himself a pawn between those who want truth and those who want to find a lack of truth. In the end, he realizes he has lost Ludmilla.

## **Mr. Cavedagna**

Cavedagna is a worker at the publishing house who first worked with Marana. He is passionate about books and reading and recognizes that a world full of false books can never fully be corrected. Although he condemns what Marana did, he also agrees with him that two hundred years from now, the author and the title of a book may not even be remembered. Cavedagna helps the reader to discover the truth about Marana, as well as to find Flannery.

## **Silas Flannery**

Flannery appears to be the author at the center of the controversy. Ludmilla saw him as the perfect author, or the author who wrote effortlessly. As such, Marana sought him out to try and trick him into giving him the first part of his book. Marana had written a program that claimed to be able to complete a book in the same style as the author, thereby proving Ludmilla wrong. However, Flannery has a great respect for the written word and a belief that writers are only a tool of the reader. He understands the line between reader and writer and envies Ludmilla for her ability to read a book without any effort. Flannery finds himself obsessing over a woman reading and discovers he can see ghost writers as the most free authors in the world, since they are able to read and write without any containment.



## **Professor Uzzi-Tuzii**

Professor Uzzi-Tuzii is a professor of the Cimmerian language. He is convinced the Cimmerian language is a language of the dead, and novels written in Cimmerian continue beyond death. He believes the Cimbrian people hid Cimmerian authors and books following the war and often used their works, claiming them to be Cimbrian in origin. It is clear that Uzzi-Tuzii has a strong passion for literature and a strong sense of right and wrong in terms of the use of apocrypha in literature.

## **Irnerio**

Irnerio is a friend of Ludmilla's who has taught himself not to read. Irnerio believes that reading is a forced method of communication and one that should be thrown away. He enjoys watching others read, but for himself chooses not to read. He uses books as materials for his art, however, showing he does hold a certain love for them. He is the one who tells the reader first of the relationship between Marana and Ludmilla and gives the reader insight into the character of Ludmilla.

## **Galligani**

Galligani is a professor of the Cimbrian language. Unlike Uzzi-Tuzii, Galligani believes the Cimbrian were the ones whose works were destroyed by the Cimmerians. He, too, has a strong sense that the writers of the Cimbrian language have more inspiration and better use of language and therefore have a better selection of novels in the native language.

## **Director General of the State Police Archives.**

Arkadian Pophyrich is the Director General of the State Police Archives of Ircania. His function is to house, catalog, and keep all the books marked as banned within Ircania. He is a bright, intellectual man who freely admits to the reader that he still reads these books for pleasure. He also admits that he let Marana escape from Ircania after he determined Marana had already realized he lost the bet with Ludmilla. Pophyrich believes people like Marana are needed in society to serve as a constant force that eludes people.



# Objects/Places

## Petkwo

A town in the north that once belonged to the country of Cimmeria and is the setting for the book *Outside the Town of Malbork*.

## Cimmeria

The name of an area torn apart by war in ancient times and the setting for the book *Outside the Town of Malbork*.

## Kudgiwa Pension

The place of the main character's rest at night in the book *Leaning from the Steep Slope*.

## Cimbrian

The civilization who overtook Cimmeria, and whose language overpowered Cimmerian.

## Cerro Negro, South America

The small village in South America Marana fled to following his problems in the Arab countries. Also the area the Father of Stories and Indian man who knows all stories written and unwritten, is said to reside.

## Ataguitania

An area with a high level of censorship and the headquarters for the revolution attempting to fill the world with false literature.

## Ircania

The country to which the reader is sent by Ataguitania to perform a secret mission, and where the reader learns the fate of Marana.

## Prospect

The main area of the town in *What Story Down There Awaits Its End?* where the main character erases all buildings, people, and surroundings in order to simplify the world.



## **Apocrypha**

Apocrypha are any works from an unknown origin. In the book, all titles are determined to be apocryphal since no true source can be determined, as Marana has flooded the world with false books.

## **Organization for the Electronic Production of Homogenized Li**

An organization founded by Marana whose computerized systems can generate novels with the same style as popular writers to the point the book can no be distinguished from the author's true works.

## **Organization of Apocryphal Power**

An organization founded by Marana whose focus is to falsify literature to the point of saturation.

## **Wings of Light**

A sect of the OAP, the Wings of Light follow the Archangel of Light and believe that among the false novels of the world, they can locate the two or three that hold true, perhaps extra human truths.

## **The Wings of Shadow**

Another sect of the OAP, the Wings of Shadow follow the Archon of Shadow and believe only falsehoods in literature can represent the "absolute value" of a book.



# Themes

## Erasure

Throughout the novel, Calvino uses the theme of erasure to discuss a variety of topics. In *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the idea is used as a wish to erase time in an effort to remake history. In Chapter 4, erasure is used when discussing how the Cimmerian civilization was virtually erased as a result of war and assimilation. In Chapter 5, the reader discovers the lengths to which Marana would go to erase his path, as he winds country by country, erasing his past each time he recreates his existence. Also in this chapter, Ludmilla discusses the danger of erasing the fine line between reader and author and between fiction and reality. The main character in *Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow* does the same, in that he spends much of his time trying to erase his past, since he is a criminal. However, he, like Marana, finds his past always catches up to him in the end. Chapter 7 finds Ludmilla and Irnerio both attempting to erase any trace of Marana in the house, even though he is a vital part of their past. In *a Network of Lines that Intersect* discusses the main character's attempt to erase his true identity through a series of mirrors and double images, only to find those images turning against him. Lotaria's character throughout Chapter 9 erases one self after another in an effort to play both sides of the revolution. The main character in *What Story Down There Awaits Its End?* takes this sense of erasure to an extreme by erasing the entire world, save for himself, a young woman, and the other members of his destruction team. It is clear Calvino's theme of erasure is present throughout the entire novel.

## Apocrypha

The theme of apocrypha is one of the most prominent and vital themes throughout the novel and serves as the basis for the main plot line. Although not brought up as a phrase until Chapter 4, apocrypha is the cause of the problems of the main character. While modern language often associates apocrypha with religious text, the true nature of the word is simply statements or writings of questionable authenticity. Throughout the entire novel, readers see examples of this from Ludmilla's changing statements about her dream books to the vast multitude of fake titles flooding the literary market to the stories of Marana to Lotaria's revolution. Each character at some point in the novel uses false statements and false pretenses to achieve a goal. Ludmilla uses consistently false statements to hide her past with Marana. The main character uses false statements to attempt to locate *Around an Empty Grave*, as well as to draw information out of other characters. Lotaria uses a vast multitude of false statements to help the revolution as they try to create fact through falsehood. Marana purposefully places apocryphal literature throughout the world to take away the feeling of truth one achieves from reading. Clearly, the concept of falsity in writing is prominent to the novel and suggests Calvino is making a statement for the idea that all novels have a hint of truth to them, including fiction novels, because the author cannot help placing a bit of him or her self into the novel.





## The Power of Women Over Men

The power of women over men is a recurring theme in this novel, as well. Calvino appears to be making a statement for the idea that women consistently show a power over men they are incapable of battling, which can sometimes create insurmountable problems. From the very beginning, Ludmilla holds a power over the main character as he finds himself falling in love with her even before he truly knows her. The man even travels across the world for her and becomes a double agent. Ludmilla also held power over Flannery, as he was unable to write because he was so addicted to watching her read. This passion for reading also causes Marana to be overpowered by Ludmilla, as her reading slowly consumes his entire life. The Sultana in Chapter 6 had complete control over her husband, even to the point of causing war. In *Outside the Town of Malbork*, even the thought of Ponko with Brigd causes the main character to become violent. In *Leaning from the Steep Slope*, the fragile man is taken advantage of by a woman wishing to free a prisoner. In *Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo*, the main character, Alex, as well as his friend Valerian, are overpowered by Irina, and through her actions, the main character discovers his own demise. In *Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow*, it is a woman that forces the main character to kill Jojo, and a woman who causes the two to be captured in the end. Marjorie, in *In a Network of Lines that Enlace*, is the cause of a conspiracy to trap the professor by phone. The wife and mistress of the man in *In a Network of Lines that Intersect* help to send him over the edge, lost in his own attempts to conceal his behavior from them. Both the mother and daughter in *On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon* hold strong sexual power over the main character and as a result, trap him in a house for eternity. In *Around an Empty Grave*, it is women who control society and women who cause men to fight to the death. In *What Story Down There Awaits Its End?*, it is a woman for whom the main character erases the world. It is clear that Calvino uses women in the story to give a life to the men and force their actions in one direction or another.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in the novel changes from second person to first person. In the numbered chapters, the tale is often told in second person, as conversations between the author, Calvino, and the reader, "you," who in the book is a male reader. This style allows the author to make the reading a highly-personal adventure, as is his point throughout the novel, that reading is personal and makes a book what it is. In the named chapters, which are snippets of novels, the story is often told from a first person viewpoint, or in some cases, again in second person. Changing this view allows the author to tailor the reading between the personal, when the reader is to feel highly involved, and the impersonal, when the reader is to be simply a bystander. This change in voice is highly successful and allows a much broader range of character analysis than using a single point of view throughout the entire novel.

In addition, the story is told as a combination of dialog between characters, between author and character, and narrative about the act of reading and writing. This method is used to switch the focus of the reader from the main plot, that of the adventures of the reader, and the subplots, those of the individual novels throughout the book. The main reader spends much of his time in pursuit of the Other Reader, or in seeing the Other Reader enter his vision through other characters, and the narrative dialog is necessary in those areas to explain what the reader is thinking. Conversely, the other characters in the story may not have any link to the main characters other than through plot lines, and in those areas, dialog may be needed to show a link to the main story line.

## Setting

The novel is set in a variety of locations, since there are ten stories along with the main story. The main plot begins in an undisclosed location that could be any major city in any industrialized country. The main character travels to Switzerland, Ataguitania, Ircana, and eventually back home in his journey. This change of setting consistently allows the author more flexibility in relating the mini-novels in the story to the main characters, as well as allows for a wider selection of themes and a broader space in which to use them. The mini-novels also range from everyday cities to Cimmeria, Paris, South America, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, and other exotic locations. Again, these shifts in location allow the author to use a number of vastly different themes and characters to tie the main story, that of the fine line between reality and fiction, to the mini-novels throughout the book. In addition, not only do the cities change, but the locations change to fit the story line as well. The mini novels shift between train stations, kitchens, a prison, a war zone, the outdoors, a library, and several other settings. Each is used for a precise purpose in the novel as Calvino takes readers on journeys that force them to think outside the novel and to associate with these areas as though they are physically within them.



## Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the novel differ vastly from one mini story to another, showing the author's complete range of talent. When narrating as the author Calvino, the language of the book is simplistic, easy going, and light, with a sense of humor. This changes, however, when the focus shifts from the main story line to the mini novels throughout. In some of these stories, such as in *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow*, the narrator is a criminal, or at least a shady character, and the language shifts to a darker, heavier tone. The language also changes to represent a higher danger, less comical ambiance. In other stories, such as *Without Fear of Wind* or *Vertigo* and *In a Network of Lines that Intersect*, the author becomes a person with a specific role, such as in the military or a financial officer. As such, the language becomes colder, symbolizing the character's shift from the emotional to the non-emotional, less involved. When writing as Silas Flannery, there is a distinctive use of more educated, yet seemingly depressed, language. These constant shifts of language allow the author to tell eleven stories simultaneously, presenting each as differently as though it were by a completely different author.

## Structure

The structure of the novel is as inventive as the novel itself. Each part of the novel is separated into two portions, those of the story of the main character, which are numbered chapters, and the new novel he finds himself reading, which are worded chapter titles. This structure allows the author to switch between the main story and the sub stories with ease, while still allowing the reader to understand each shift. The chapters are not of the same length, but readers will notice the longest numbered chapter is the heart of the novel, that of the diary of Silas Flannery. It is only in the end that the final two chapters are numbered, showing an end to the chase for the complete novel. The book is 260 pages in length. Any necessary breaks within individual chapters, such as those between entries in Flannery's diary or those between Marana's letters, are signified by spaces between the paragraphs.



## Quotes

"You prepare to recognize the unmistakable tone of the author. No. You don't recognize it at all. But now that you think about it, who ever said this author had an unmistakable tone? On the contrary, he is known as an author who changes greatly from one book to the next. And in these very changes you recognize him as himself." - Chapter One, page 9.

"Your attention, as reader, is now completely concentrated on the woman, already for several pages you have been circling around her, I have - no, the author has - been circling around the feminine presence, for several pages you have been expecting this female shadow to take shape the way female shadows take shape on the written page, and it is your expectation, reader, that drives the author toward her, and I, too, though I have other things to think about, there I let myself go, I speak to her, I strike up a conversation that I should break off as quickly as I can, in order to go away, disappear." -If On a Winter's Night a Traveler, pg. 20.

"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." - Chapter Two, pg. 33.

"The page you're reading should convey this violent contact of full and painful blows, of fierce and lacerating responses, this bodiliness of using one's own body against another body, melding the weight of one's own efforts and the precision of one's own receptivity and adapting them to the mirror image of them that the adversary reflects." - Outside the Town of Malbork, pg. 39.

"I've become so accustomed to not reading that I don't even read what appears before my eyes. It's not easy: they teach us to read as children, and for the rest of our lives we remain the slaves of all the written stuff they fling in front of us." - Chapter Three, page 49.

"In any case, the person who finds this diary will have one certain advantage over me: with a written language it is always possible to reconstruct a dictionary and a grammar, isolate sentences, transcribe them or paraphrase them in another language whereas I am trying to read in the succession of things presented to me every day the world's intentions toward me and I grope my way, knowing that there can exist no dictionary that will translate into the words the burden of obscure allusions that lurks in these things." - Leaning From the Steep Slope, pg. 61.

"Reading...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." - Chapter Four, pg. 72.



"You can't change your past any more than you can change your name, in spite of all the passports I've had, with names I can't even remember, everybody has always called me Ruedi the Swiss. Wherever I went and however I introduced myself, there has already been somebody who knew who I was and what I had done..." Looks Down in the Gathering Shadows, pg. 107.

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

"Style, taste, individual philosophy, subjectivity, cultural background, real experience, psychology, talent, tricks of the trade: all the elements that make what I write recognizable as mine seem to me a cage that restricts my possibilities." - Chapter Eight, pg. 171.

"...He adds that in the final analysis there is nothing to be shocked about, since, in his view, literature's worth lies in its power of mystification, in mystification it has its truth, therefore a fake, as the mystification of a mystification, is tantamount to a truth squared." - Chapter 8, pg, 180.

"Do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end? In ancient times a story could end only in two ways: having passed all the tests, the hero and the heroine married, or else they died. The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death." -Chapter 11, pg. 259.



## Topics for Discussion

Throughout the novel, Calvino refers to erasure in various settings. Choose three of these and compare and contrast the concept's use, making sure to quote from the book to support your statements.

In every mini-novel, as well as in the main plot, Calvino has women as the stronger characters. Choosing three strong female characters, explain the motivation behind the women's strengths and why they are important to the novel.

A major theme in the book is the differences in how individuals read. In Chapter eleven, seven readers discuss how they read. Choose one of these readers to identify with and explain how your style of reading is either similar or different.

Flannery states he sees readers as vampires who suck the story from the writer. Create your own analogy in terms of how you view readers and explain that analogy.

At the end of Chapter Nine, Lotaria flings off her clothing and attempts to sleep with the main character. Why do you think Calvino included this in the story? Please explain your answer.

Do you think the main character is reading too much into Marana's letters, or do you believe the young woman in all the letters is Ludmilla? Be sure to support your answer using examples from the text.

One of Calvino's goals in writing this novel appears to be to blur the line between fiction and non-fiction by writing the novel in the second person, and by including "you," the reader, in the story. Do you think his technique is effective? Explain why or why not.