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‘A CATAclySM OF TRUTH FROM A CRISIS OF FALSEHOOD’: READING HABERMAS ON CALVINO

Geoff Boucher

The debate on Habermas and literature, recently reignited by contributions from Pieter Duvenage,¹ Lambert Zuidervart,² Nikolas Kompridis,³ David Coclasure⁴ and Nicholas Hengen-Fox,⁵ has sparked considerable interest amongst literary critics. The Frankfurt School is, after all, one of the major progressive alternatives to Francophile post-structuralism and its sequelae, a real “road not taken” in Anglo-American literary-critical discourse. In particular, the positions worked out by Habermas represent a sophisticated, emancipatory social philosophy, one that defends not only the “specificity of the aesthetic,” but indeed the possibility that literature is rational. At the same time, efforts to develop a literary criticism from communicative premises have lately been sharpened by recognition that his aesthetics represents an acutely problematic region. In particular, the question of the nature of literature focuses theoretical difficulties that radiate outwards into Habermas’ main area of present engagement, in hugely influential recent contributions to the philosophy of religion.⁶ At least within the Frankfurt School’s research program, then, literary criticism and philosophical inquiry both have a significant interest in working out the relation between communicative action and the literary work.

The main problem for anyone working on the topic of literary rationality, however, is that Habermas has not one, but two different positions on the nature of the literary work—and he believes that they are antithetical. Initially, he positioned literary works as forms of reflexive critique, making contributions to a distinctive aesthetic rationality by staking claims to be authentic works of art. Subsequently, Habermas decided that they engage in an imaginative form of language-use entirely unlike reasoned dialogue, releasing the rhetorical and figurative potentials of language in order to disclose new “worlds” of meaning and perception. The first proposal involves a domain of truth within the differentiated validity claims of communicative reason, specifically, articulations of the validity claim to aesthetic authenticity. The second suggestion relates literary works to the “truth potential” of imaginative disclosures, which do not directly represent truth claims, but perhaps facilitate the making of such claims.

Accordingly, and despite Duvenage’s proposal for the reciprocity of critique and disclosure,⁷ debate has tended to polarise around the apparently opposed alternatives outlined by Habermas. Locating literature within communicative action brings it into contact with the possibility of influencing the public sphere, because it can be seen to articulate new interpretations of the subjective world of modern agents that might lead them to reformulate general interests in democratic deliberations.⁸ Identifying literature with imaginative “world-disclosure,” by contrast, connects its holistic representations of experiential complexes to the experimental process of semantic innovation, as well as to the participatory construction of meaning best articulated by reception aesthetics.⁹ The weight that Habermas himself gave to critiques of his communicative perspective on literature by Martin Seel and Albrecht Wellmer, added to the influential misreading of his position by Jonathan Culler and John B. Thompson as involving embarrassingly outdated reference to authorial sincerity, make defending the idea of literary truth claims seem like a difficult task.¹⁰ Yet it can certainly be argued that artistic rationality is not only an integral part of the architecture of communicative reason, but that the validity claim to aesthetic authenticity can be defensibly reconstructed. There can be no doubt that literary works disclose worlds. But—contra Habermas—their reception as contributions to the “republic of letters,” articulating a specific kind of critique of matters of public interest, is not thereby negated. Frustrated by what I see as a false dichotomy between literature as rational critique and literature as imaginative vision, I have already philosophically defended the positioning of literary works within rational argumentation as a legitimate moment of a communicative literary criticism.¹¹ In this article, a companion piece to the earlier essay, I want to show how the proposed critical approach works in mainly literary terms, while extending the philosophical reasoning of the initial piece. Now, the most efficient way to simultaneously exhibit the philosophical stakes involved here while showing that this approach constitutes a plausible literary-critical method is to return to the moment when critique and disclosure diverged in Habermas’ work. As is well known, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas criticises Derrida’s strategy of deconstruction on grounds that it drastically inflates linguistic world-disclosure, thereby transforming philosophical argumentation to a species of literary rhetoric.¹² Less well known is that Habermas thinks that Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* (hereafter, *WN*) is a more consistent application of this programme than Derrida’s philosophical interventions.¹³ Practically unknown is the fact that this reading of Calvino was the moment in which Habermas definitively excluded narratives—including, as it turned out, both literary fictions and religious mythologies—from the domain of reasoned argumentation. On Habermas’s interpretation, Calvino’s novel attempts to exploit the potentials of literary disclosure in order to create a “generalised textuality” that swallows the world whilst subverting efforts to ground any determinate reading in aesthetic authenticity or authorial sincerity. For Habermas, the novel not only executes the deconstructive program in a literary form—it also hilariously debunks the idea of literature as critique. As the fabricator of apocryphal texts in the novel, Marana, notes of the author of inauthentic literature, Flannery: who on earth, in a vertiginously self-reflexive world composed entirely of literary fictions, would expect a “cataclysm of truth” to emerge from the “crisis of falsehood” (131)?¹⁴

An interpretation of the novel as a sustained meditation on the connection between authentic literature and the desire to read, then, might seem rash¹⁵—yet that is exactly what I propose to do here. But in a novel composed of ironic reversals, literary auto-referentiality and metafictional self-reflexivity, we should not be surprised if the perspective of Marana and Flannery is not exactly the last word in what makes literature worthwhile. If this (extremely demanding) instance of contemporary literature can plausibly be interpreted from the communicative perspective, then this will not only clarify how the authenticity claim might work under difficult circumstances, but it will also show what is missing from Habermas’ exclusive focus on literary world-disclosure. Literature is not just about exploring language for its own sake. It also clarifies those authentic desires that have been silenced in contemporary cultural formations. To arrive at this point will require detailed engagement with the rigorous protocols of both literary criticism and philosophy, but I will attempt to explain terms of art and to signpost the disciplinary significance of key moves throughout. Fortunately, once we get there, it will turn out that one other interpreter of *WN* does agree with the proposed perspective, but the reader will have to wait until the end to discover who it is.

LITERARY RATIONALITY — TRUTH CLAIMS, OR IMAGINATIVE DISCLOSURES?

To fully grasp the intellectual stakes in the proposed reading of Calvino, it is necessary to understand the supposed opposition between literature as critique and literature as disclosure in philosophical terms.

According to Habermas’s position on communicative reason, literary works are forms of reflexive critique that explore the nature of subjectivity and the means of its expression, thereby staking aesthetic validity claims to artistic authenticity. This position involves a claim that contemporary literary works contribute to cultural rationalisation by experimenting with post-traditional need-interpretations, thereby facilitating learning processes that develop the ego maturity of modern individuals. The argument here is that:

The power and significance of autonomous art is its capacity to bring into communicative circulation those linguistically excommunicated need-interpretations, those desires and feelings, which were split off in the process of socialisation. This happened because socialisation involved the internationalisation of the expectations of others, framed not as intersubjective agreements, but as quasi-natural imperatives backed by superego recriminations. The strong feelings that autonomous art unleashes are the product of its expression of these needs in ways that interrogate quasi-natural cultural traditions and rigid ego identities, thereby potentially catalysing a dramatic alteration in the motivational dispositions of modern individuals.¹⁶

On this kind of interpretation, although literary works contain complexes of cognitive, normative, ethical and expressive elements, the evaluative task of literary criticism is to assess these complex wholes as proposals about the links between need-interpretations and legitimate forms of self-realization.

Yet, as we have seen, according to the position that Habermas subsequently adopted, literary works are forms of imaginative world-disclosure, a release of the rhetorical and figurative potentials of language through poetic and narrative devices. This results in semantic innovation and a refreshment of perception, but it is difficult to reconcile to the analytic argumentation characteristic of critique, because disclosure involves the holistic presentation of vicarious experiences that contain truth-potential, instead of implying validity claims. In acknowledging a critical point made by Albrecht Wellmer, Habermas sums up the problem like this:

The aesthetic “validity” or “unity” that we attribute to a work of art refers to its singularly illuminating power to open our eyes to what is seemingly familiar, to disclose anew an apparently familiar reality. This validity claim admittedly stands for a potential for “truth” that can be released only in the whole complexity of life-experience; therefore, this “truth-potential” may not be connected to (or even identified with) one of the three validity-claims constitutive for communicative action, as I have previously been inclined to maintain. The one-to-one relationship which exists between the prescriptive validity of a norm and the normative validity claims raised in speech acts is not a proper model for the relation between the potential for truth of works of art and the transformed relations between self and world stipulated by aesthetic experience.¹⁷

At the intuitive level, the difficulty is that there appears to be a considerable difference between the literary work considered analytically as a disciplined exploration of contemporary subjectivity—say, in critical discourse (critique)—and the imaginative participation in the fictional world that happens in aesthetic reception—say, in everyday reading (disclosure). In advocating a disclosive model, it appears that Habermas thinks that the situation of a literary work is the totality of a holistic pre-understanding of the world that is invoked by a disclosure and whose truth potential is redeemed as a possible form of existence through its integration into the life histories of individuals.¹⁸ The problem, as Habermas sees it, is that if aesthetic reception involves holistic experience, “then aesthetic reception cannot also involve rational critique, because rational critique is—for Habermas—specialised with respect to a validity claim and specific to the world modality—subjective, social

or objective—thereby constituted as its extensional domain”.¹⁹

Granted, there can be no doubt that literary works involve linguistic disclosure and that the act of reading engages holistic experiences based in imaginative participation, as specified by reception aesthetics.²⁰ The question is whether acknowledgement of this fact logically excludes the possibility that literary works simultaneously involve critique. That is, does recognition of semantic innovation in the intensional totality of the work preclude the existence of an extensional domain? In terms of the way that Habermas has set the problem up, this reduces to the following: given that reading involves the experience of holistic meaning complexes that fuse cognitive, normative, ethical and expressive validity claims, is there any way to analytically separate these claims and evaluate their accuracy, rightness, appropriateness or truthfulness? Simply put, does literature, in the process of imagining worlds, *represent* anything at all—or is it pure linguistic self-reference?

The problem can be resolved once we see that validity claims are *specialised*, not exclusive, and that authenticity claims involve a complex interplay of other types of validity claim. A differentiated cultural value sphere, such as that of modern autonomous art, does not *exclude* questions of the accurate representation of the world or the normative rightness of ethical values. It simply prevents these validity claims from disruptively predominating in the logic of value enhancement in the aesthetic domain, by refusing the evaluation of literary works in, say, ethical terms. So, for instance, the struggle of literary criticism from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, to protect works from obscenity trials and then from censorious judgement, is not about the claim that works have no ethical dimension. It is about the claim that a work’s morality is not the basis for its value. Authenticity claims are a complex kind of meta-claim that, although they have genetic roots in self-expression, work quite differently to claims to subjective truthfulness. What is at stake in an authenticity claim is the historical legitimacy of a form of individual or collective self-realization: this depends on establishing a relation between cultural interpretations of (historically variable) human needs and the socially accepted forms of self-realization supposed to satisfy these needs in light of shared values.²¹ While authenticity claims can involve conformity to accepted standards, in modernity they generally involve the claim to have broken the rules in an exemplary way, in a way that while releasing new potentials for selfhood also sets new standards which should be acceptable to all (within a community).²² Artistic authenticity involves a representation of the connection between interpreted needs and ways of life that, in literary works, takes advantage of ironisation and equivocation to experiment with possibilities rather than to advance propositions. This sets in motion a potential critique of the relation between cognitive, normative and expressive components of an historical situation, under the predominance of an exploration of subjectivity. The role of literary criticism is to:

argumentatively redeem the authenticity claim that artworks implicitly (“mutely,” Adorno would say) articulate, by exhibiting these before a potentially universal audience as well-formed and intelligible instances of cultural need-interpretations, whose legitimacy potentially transcends this or that particular community. Once the artworks in question themselves articulate post-traditional need interpretations, then the interpretation of these works as symbolically coherent and culturally legitimate has directly universal implications ... The contemporary form of the authenticity claim that art criticism redeems is therefore the claim that a symbolic construct: (1) innovatively presents a post-traditional need interpretation; which, (2), everybody can potentially feel, irrespective of cultural background.²³

Literary authenticity means an exploration in depth of a real aspect of subjectivity or a new aesthetic possibility that deserves public attention, because, in essence, it interprets needs in a fresh and important way.

Now, given that this approach is not too distant from that of Habermas himself,²⁴ it is worth asking why he rejects it in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. The answer, surely, is that his argumentative strategy is to drive a wedge between literary rhetoric and philosophical truth. As Habermas understands it, Derrida seeks to escape from the performative contradiction inherent in the total self-critique of reason, by relaxing the consistency requirement on philosophical discourse.²⁵ The collapse of the distinction between logic and

rhetoric that deconstruction engages in is achieved through an intermediate step, which involves denying the distinction between literary criticism and literature itself.²⁶ In turn, this aestheticisation of reason means a conflation of the world-disclosing function of poetic language with the prosaic coordination of action through everyday communication. The result is a drastic inflation of world-disclosure into a world-constituting capacity of poetic language, in a way that prevents the correction of false knowledge through scientific research and moral argumentation.²⁷ The materiality of the world is swallowed by a “general text” that engulfs the speaker, the interlocutor and the referent, releasing a para-literary semiotic playfulness that licenses scepticism at the expense of argumentatively redeemable truth claims.

Keen, then, to assign disclosure to literature and critique to philosophy, Habermas is prepared to accept the “collateral damage” to his communicative position on literary works that this entails.

Additionally, in Calvino’s *WN*, Habermas appears to think that he has encountered a text that engages in an exemplary disclosure of how, in literature, it’s “inauthenticity all the way down”. Against the background of Calvino’s literary criticism, and reading *WN* philosophically, Habermas argues that the writer’s effort is directed to exploring a deconstructive generalised text. Calvino, Habermas argues, “who participates above all in the French discussion” around the world-disclosing potential of poetic language, “is interested in the question of whether a text could be reflexive in such a way that it could ... absorb everything that is real ... [and] expand into a totality”.²⁸ Notoriously, Calvino’s novel includes the reader in the text as a character (the Reader), and directly addresses the reader in the text while speaking in the first person (“I,” “you”). Furthermore, *WN* is a book whose fragmentary narrative and metafictional commentary seem to deliberately frustrate any interpretive strategy that seeks to locate a master-code on which to base an argument about the novel’s referent. For Habermas, this programme—to include the world in the text—is announced in the novel’s celebrated opening, (“You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought” (9)), and it is apparently summed up by the ludic postmodern *cogito* proposed in the work: “it writes ... I read, therefore it writes” (139).²⁹ For Habermas, Calvino’s novel is nothing less than a literary experiment in the realization of the post-structuralist intellectual programme.³⁰

But, Habermas announces triumphantly, Calvino’s effort to include the world in a general textuality that levels out distinctions between reflexive argumentation, everyday speech and literary language, is forced to announce its own limits in problems of address that vitiate the novel’s conclusion. On Habermas’s interpretation, the experiment fails because the narrative cannot sustain the resulting tension between the (extra-textual) reader as potentially anyone and the character of the reader as a specific individual.³¹ The “dynamic of the action ... moves the second-person pronoun further and further into the vicinity of a proper name,”³² something that the grammatical splitting of the reader into male and female readers, resulting in two characters, does not solve. Instead, with the character of the female reader, Calvino merely *depicts*, but cannot perform, the disappearance of the extra-textual reader into the world of the text.³³ Fundamentally, the character of the Reader, the one who reads the character of the Other Reader in the text, cannot be at once a character in the novel and the person external to the novel who reads it.

CROSSED HIERARCHIES AND NESTED ONTOLOGIES—ON LITERARY WORLDS

As a moment in an argument about the non-literal and metaphorical nature of literary rhetoric, there is something surprisingly literal about Habermas’s reading of *WN*. This is all the more astonishing in light of the fact that *WN* positively screams its fictional status as an encyclopaedia of literary forms with the capacity to generate bewildering ontological loops, within what appears to be a combinatory aesthetic. By the term of literary-critical art, “ontological loops,” I mean the way that the narrative systematically violates the normal distinctions and relations between the author, the narrator, the characters, and the characters that these characters invent and narrate. By a “combinatory aesthetic,” I mean a recognised, specific form of contemporary literature that explicitly adverts to its own narrative as a set of permutations and combinations of some elementary formal possibilities. It would therefore seem useful to read Calvino’s novel *as literature* for a moment, before

stampeding to extract some philosophical propositions from its logical self-immolation. This will provide some preliminary grounds for thinking that the communicative reading of the novel might be plausible after all, while also serving the valuable end of describing the narrative for those who have not had the opportunity to study *WN* in detail.

A helpful starting point in analysing the novel is provided by Brian McHale’s notion of “limit modernism,” as defined by the moment when an epistemological dominant is radicalised to the point of ontological instability within the novelistic diegesis.³⁴ Calvino’s book can be described as consisting of three hierarchical ontological levels. It is the purpose of the radical epistemological uncertainty around the narrator’s identity, and around what the relation is between nested narrative fragments and the main world of the novel, to systematically confuse, or at least, complicate, this ontological hierarchy. I am going to refer to these three levels from now on as frame narrative, primary diegesis and secondary fragments. In the frame narrative, “I,” the narrator who is perhaps a proxy for the author, tells “you,” the extra-diegetic reader, that he (probably he, for reasons explained below) is recounting Italo Calvino’s new novel, *WN*. Within the primary diegesis of the novel, “you,” a reader, become a character, the Reader [*Lettrice*], who in the course of trying to find the continuations of the beginnings of ten books, encounters a host of characters. The sequence passes through the Other Reader [*Lettrice*] (the love interest, Ludmilla), the Other Reader’s sister (the romantic distraction, Lotaria), Iriverio, a luddite Non-Reader, Marana, an apocryphal translator and Flannery, an inauthentic author, before finally marrying the Reader off to the Other Reader and concluding—as “you,” a reader again—Italo Calvino’s novel. Finally, the novel partly consists of ten beginnings of conventional narratives that break off at the moment of suspense, when romantic possibilities have appeared in a constellation with the potential for sudden death and the likelihood of rivalry in love. The contamination of ontological levels in the novel happens exclusively between the primary diegesis its adjacent levels, so that the aborted beginnings turn out to be writings by the inauthentic author, Silas Flannery, and forgeries by the apocryphal translator, Ermes Marana, while the frame narrative is anticipated by both (and so might be told by either).

Because this is potentially confusing, and because on my reading everything hinges on the relationship between levels, I am now going to recapitulate this in an expanded way, starting at the bottom, while bringing out the details necessary to my interpretation.

The secondary fragments—the ten beginnings of novels—are a hilarious trail of falsehoods: a falsified copy of Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* gives way to the Polish novel *Outside the town of Malbork* by Tazio Bazakbal. But Bazakbal’s novel is incomplete, and yields to a rare classic of the literature of the imagined Eastern European land of Cimmeria, *Leaning from the steep slope* by Ukko Ahti, which itself turns out to be but a fragment of the classic of the majority language of Cimbrian, Vorts Viljandi (formerly Ukko Ahti)’s *Without fear of wind or vertigo*. And on it goes, in an increasingly delirious spiral of forged novels in mendacious translation under falsified editions, all mere beginnings broken off at a structural point that only creeps forward across the ten fragments, until it transpires that this trail of fabricated world literature is actually the result of the conspiratorial activities of the apocryphal translator Ermes Marana, in competition (or perhaps in collusion) with the inauthentic writer of popular fiction, Silas Flannery.

The secondary fragments are lodged within a primary diegetic world, and the relationship between primary and secondary levels is twofold. The key to the relation between secondary fragments and primary diegesis is that each aborted beginning responds exactly to Ludmilla’s (the Other Reader’s) declarations, in the previous chapter of primary diegesis, about her reading preferences. As Nella Cotrupi comments, Ludmilla’s “apparently insatiable, heterogeneous, and catholic literary appetites provide the spur and the blueprint for each of the text’s novelistic fragments,”³⁵ so that, as Marilyn Orr puts it, “the *incipits* begin to be designed specifically according to her expressed formulation of ‘the book I would like to read now ...’ as it develops from chapter to chapter”.³⁶ Ludmilla comments, for instance, that “I prefer novels ... that bring me immediately into a world where everything is precise, concrete, specific. I feel a special satisfaction in knowing that things are made in that certain fashion and not otherwise, even the most commonplace things that in real life seem indifferent to

me” (28). In response to her declaration, in *Outside the Town of Malbork*, “everything is very concrete, substantial, depicted with sure expertise; or at least the impression is given to you, Reader, is one of expertise” (32). This is the structuring principle of the relation between the primary diegesis and the secondary fragments (see, e.g., 76 and 88).

But the existence of this structuring principle is accounted for in the primary diegesis through Marana’s desire for the Other Reader, because “the secret spring [of Marana’s flood of apocryphal novels] was his jealousy of the invisible rival who came constantly between him and Ludmilla, the silent voice that speaks to her through books” (126). To interpose himself, Marana brilliantly introduces into her reading an experience designed to destroy “the idea that behind each book there is someone who guarantees a truth in that world of ghosts” (127). This intercepts Ludmilla’s desire to read with a perfect anticipation of what she demands—albeit as forgery rather than truthfulness—something intended by Marana to wean her from reading altogether, and win her back to him. Not surprisingly, Marana is aided in the primary diegesis by the complicity of the Non-Reader, Imerio, a person whose relationship to literature is exhausted by the materiality of books, which he uses as raw materials for sculptures.

The primary diegesis, then, is a romance narrative between Reader and Other Reader, one with a highly conventional telos in love and then marriage, in which suspense is generated by a proliferation of rivals (Marana, Flannery, Imerio) and the distraction of the Other Reader’s politically militant sister, Lotaria. The Reader constantly searches for the continuations of the secondary fragments, which in his world are novel beginnings, as pretexts for maintaining a relationship with the Other Reader. As he does so, he discovers that the plots (conspiracies) of his rivals are the plots (emplotments) that he reads, traps designed to stop him reading and to enable the rivals to read (or be read by) Ludmilla. Overcoming the obstacles in the path of desire and continuing to read are thus one thing, as is successfully managing to read the Other Reader by avoiding the vertiginous non-identity that is the Other Reader’s sister. This achievement of a conventional novelistic telos is paradoxically represented in a scene of marital bliss as (what else?) conjoint yet separate reading, in which “you lie down in the same bed like a settled couple ... [where] two parallel readings ... accompany the approach of sleep” (125). Just as the secondary fragments are constantly punctuated by ontological intrusions that represent the Reader’s reading experience (“The novel begins in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph” (14)), so too the primary diegesis is continually interrupted by metafictional commentary on the Reader’s relationship to the other characters. These comments performatively enact the narrative development within the primary diegesis: “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” (30). This ironic performance of what is otherwise a conventional romance accounts for the extraordinary charm of the narration. But unsettling excursions from the frame narrative, in which a reader—“you”—is/are reading the primary diegesis and its nested secondary fragments, are common at both primary and secondary levels, thanks to the ambiguity of the second person singular as universal shifter (you, a reader) and as deictic indicator (you, the Reader). The structure of a second person address that reflexively anticipates its own actual reading culminates in the novel’s final words: “Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader. A great double bed receives your parallel readings. ... And you say, ‘Just a minute, I’ve almost finished Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’” (205).

Now, the frame narrative, in which “I” seem to be narrating Italo Calvino’s novel to “you,” is present, as has already been said, at the beginning and end of the book, and in the moments where personal pronouns work an ontological destabilisation of narrative levels. But it is also present, in the form of self-reflexive moments that anticipate the form and content of the actual novel, *WN*, in the primary diegesis. It turns out that both Marana and Flannery, albeit in different ways, have plans for a book that either closely resembles, or is identical with, *WN*. It seems to me that this strand is indeed privileged, for here we touch on the novel’s main plot—in the sense of trap, conspiracy. For the notion that “I” am narrating *WN* to “you,” in the context of a self-reflexive diegetic anticipation of this act in the text by characters who are a falsifier of translations and an inauthentic

author, seems to pose the question: who am “I,” the author/narrator, and can “I” be relied on? This question about the relation between the author and the work—an epistemological puzzle in a trap narration about the lack of authorial originality or sincerity—is a perfect diversion from a better question, posed equally insistently but with less romantic ballast, about the relation between the reader and the text: who are *you*, the reader, and what do you want? As Marie-Anne Visoi notes, although “the narrative voice annihilates authorial power” and the reflexivity of the text implies a parody of the reader-as-hero, the ultimate reference of this self-reflexive structure is to “our own way of reading”.³⁷

In fact, Calvino’s novel is saturated with the motifs of reader-response criticism, which is the basic idea that reader and writer cooperate in the co-production of a “text” from the literary work, since in light of the under-determination of meaning that is inevitable in literary diegesis, literary experience can only be completed through an active process of interpretation that *generates*, rather than receives or decodes, meaning. The reader response idea of an author-work/text-reader dichotomy provides a useful way to bring out the conceptual implications this proposal that the author-work relation is a diversion from the text-reader relation.

Starting on the “author-work” side of this opposition, then, *WN*, in a fairly obvious way, is all about how authorial sincerity is irrelevant to questions of literary authenticity. In particular, the dialectic between Flannery and Marana foregrounds the impossibility of grasping a determinate meaning with reference to authorial sincerity. On the one hand, the novel trades amusingly on the ambivalence of plot as emplotment and as conspiracy, so that the secret society instigated (but no longer run) by Marana means that, for the Reader, “here is a trap-novel designed by the treacherous translator with beginnings of novels that remain suspended” (101). Meanwhile, although Flannery dreams of a work of convulsive disclosure by contrast with which the rest of his work would appear as the fake that it is, this work would be a piece of paradigmatically late modernist writerly écriture, something that would be the opposite of authorial sincerity because a form of automatic writing (139). Their plots, in other words, militate against authorial intentionality. On the other hand, the novel also trades on the etymological ambiguity of “apocrypha,” as falsification and as the revelation of hidden secrets. Marana produces fake translations to defeat the “function of the author”: he dreams of “a literature made entirely of apocrypha, of false attributions, of imitations and counterfeits and pastiches” (127). At the same time, completely blocked for inspiration, Silas Flannery considers not only an anonymous writing, but that he must write “a crime that is horrible, but which somehow ‘resembles’ the butterfly, which would be fine and light like the butterfly” (136). This crime is foreshadowed in the notion that the “author of every book is a fictitious character whom the existent author invents to make him the author of his fictions” (142). At this point comes the moment in which Flannery considers partnership with Marana “to flood the world with apocrypha,” “because writing always means hiding something in such a way that it is then discovered ... because there is no certitude outside falsification” (152). The twin plots against authorial intentionality, although they have the surface form of falsification and automaticity, have the hidden meaning of a murder—the (by now, banal) death of the author.

Or rather, this horrible crime is a sort of suicide, for significantly, these meditations on Marana’s plan to replace literature with apocrypha, and Flannery’s dream of an automatic writing that would be the unconscious transcription of the unsaid, both lead toward *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. Marana proposes “a stratagem prompted by the literary tradition of the orient: he will break off his translation at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel ... [which] will also break off ... and so on...” (100). The intention here is to fundamentally disturb the reader’s relation to the author, for “if this idea ... succeeded in imposing itself, if systematic uncertainty as to the identity of the writer ... kept the reader from abandoning himself with trust ... something would have changed forever” (127). Similarly, Flannery plots “the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels” (156). Flannery goes on, in fact, to outline the entire narrative strategy of *WN*, up to and including the structure of second-person address and the primary diegetic romance narrative between the Reader and the Other Reader.

THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR AND THE BIRTH OF THE READER

A first conclusion therefore imposes itself: *WN* is about the death of the author as an intentional centre whose sincerity guarantees expressive truthfulness. The effect of this, as both Inge Fink and Teresa de Laurentis have noted, is the author’s transformation into a function within a combinatory aesthetic.³⁸In literary-critical terms, the problem here is that of the “intentional fallacy,” the fallacy of supposing that authorial intention governs the meaning of a literary work. Reader-response criticism conclusively demonstrates exactly why the “indeterminacy of the stratum of presented objects” (i.e., the incompleteness of every literary world) means that this simply must be the case. In line with this, Calvino’s novel ridicules the Reader’s anachronistic efforts to read the world in terms of authorial sincerity. But this is not the same as the impossibility of authentic art, because expressive sincerity is not equivalent to literary authenticity.

In the philosophical framework of Habermasian theory, the issue is that the literary work does not directly invoke the validity claim of expressive truthfulness in the same way that argumentative dialogue about a report on the subjective world of feelings does. Instead, literary works non-propositionally suggest that a certain interpretation of the subjective world is plausible—by imaginatively representing it as un-/desirable possible reality—while taking advantage of ironisation and equivocation to distance the author from propositional engagement and to facilitate multiple potential readings. Literary criticism articulates this as worthwhile by reading the non-propositional suggestions of the literary work as a culturally-legitimate interpretation of subjectivity. At the same time, literary works—as *artworks*—are positioned in the space of aesthetic value, where criticism must demonstrate works’ implicit claims to artistic innovation. In short, the literary critic—a specialised kind of reader—redeems the authenticity claim, not against authorial truthfulness, but against the validity of the work’s representation of new possibilities for cultural subjectivity, as coordinated with the work’s innovative development of the means of artistic expression.

This is why it is crucial not to fall for the lure of Flannery’s diary in the middle of the book, as Habermas arguably does.³⁹ Nothing is more tempting than the trope of authorial sincerity, especially for the inauthentic writer in the midst of a spiritual crisis that in part testifies to the persistence of these romantic (and inverted romantic) conceptions of literature. The diary records Flannery’s ruminations on reading and writing in terms of a desire to break through the dialectic of sincerity and insincerity (the “tormented” and the “productive” authors of Flannery’s imagination). For Flannery, this means either a devastating revelation that would annihilate falsehood to such a degree as to escape representation altogether, or a purely automatic transcription process. Yet this is parodically handled in the chapter itself, for it is a sect who believes in UFOs who expect a cataclysm of personal sincerity from this crisis of falsehood, while the alternative turns out to be a computer that completes novel beginnings through permutations of its library of literary data. Thus, if the frame narration is the level at which truth emerges in *WN*, that truth is most certainly not a rehabilitation of authorial sincerity through a sort of liar’s paradox, in which truthful self-expression would reflexively return from the very midst of a novel about falsification and insincerity.

The apparent reduction of the author to a selection function within a combinatory aesthetic means the liberation of the reader—but only under highly specific conditions. It is perhaps to be expected that a novel about the love of reading foregrounds reading strategies as a particular concern. *WN* is, among other things, an almost exhaustive inventory of critical methods and readers’ approaches. These approaches range from the doctrinaire impositions of structuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxism represented by Lotaria, through the plastic yet naïve attitudes of Ludmilla, and the nihilistic rejection of literature by Ludmilla’s friend, Irnerio the Non-Reader, all the way to the stubbornly conventional line of the Reader. Particularly in the way that Ludmilla’s readerly demands elicit the secondary fragments, the novel literalises the fundamental insight of reader-response criticism, that “reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character” because the act of reading realises a meaningful text from the mere signifying potential of the work.⁴⁰ In this light, we can speak of the strategies of Flannery and Marana converging from opposite directions, complementary to their mutually reinforcing conclusions. For Marana, the key task in the annihilation of the author is the destruction of the Other

Reader’s reading, through the devastation of any possible recourse to authorial intentionality. By contrast, for Flannery, the union of the authorial function and the ideal reader means a communion of minds that short-circuits representation completely: “at times I am gripped by an absurd desire: that the sentence I am about to write be the one the woman is reading at that same moment. ... [W]hatever I may write will be false, a fake, compared to my true book, which no one except her will ever read” (135). There is a strong sense that *both* are right: Ludmilla generates the novel fragments directly from her expectations, as these expectations play across a repertoire of conventional narrative beginnings.

But that is not all at what is meant by the liberation of the reader, for these conventional beginnings are parts of a trap-novel. The sense in which these ensnare the reader is brought out by Flannery, for whom “for some time now, every novel I begin writing is exhausted shortly after the beginning, as if I had already said everything I have to say” (156). In other words, the narrative telos latent in the beginning threatens to engulf the narration, catapulting the start forward into the end. It is as if the author and the reader are expert chess players for whom the developmental combinatory of openings and endgames is so thoroughly internalised that, after a determinate number of moves in any contest, there is no longer any need to play out the empty formality of the game itself because the result has become inevitable. Once the beginning itself becomes the object of readerly desire, the trap has been sprung.⁴¹ In other words, the fact that Ludmilla’s readerly expectations generate Marana’s apocryphal fragments, which consist of highly conventional narrative beginnings, is not a solution—it is a statement of the problem itself. Again, it is Flannery who brings this out. On the one hand, “I [Flannery] am convinced there is nothing better than a conventional opening, an attack from which you can expect everything and nothing” (140). On the other hand, “the romantic fascination produced in the pure state by the first sentences of the first chapter of many novels is soon lost in the continuation of the story” (140). It is precisely in order to *defeat* such an exhausted conventionality—which also means, diegetically, to defeat Marana’s machinations and win the Other Reader from the Reader—that Flannery dreams that he “would like to be able to write a book that is only an incipit, that maintains for its whole duration the potentiality of the beginning” (140). As Christina Mazzoni notes, *WN* represents just such a strategy for sustaining the desire to read, which is equivalent to maintaining the potentiality of the beginning, by continuously raising and then defeating conventional expectations for as long as possible.⁴²

A second conclusion therefore appears: that beyond the “death of the author” is supposed to lie the birth of the reader—but only on condition that the “author function” manages to sustain the desire to read through literary innovation, which means, through raising and then defeating the reader’s conventional expectations.

To say that narrative development is a question of sustaining the desire to read by raising and then defeating conventional expectations is to say that, in a novel that had seemed to open up a typical self-reflexive *mise-en-abîme*, we have suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly struck bedrock. Although many critics have commented on the centrality of desire in the plot dynamics of *WN*,⁴³ this has not really been connected in the critical debate to the question of the conditions of possibility for the novel as a form. Instead, the conclusion reached relatively early on in the debate, that parody implies a negative gesture of demystification without any reconstructive moment,⁴⁴ has remained virtually unchallenged. An exception to this rule—a rule that Habermas too follows in his reading—is Fink, who argues that despite “the death of the author, and the absence of any univocal textual message, Calvino in fact undercuts contemporary theories and re-establishes the traditional hierarchies of literary discourse”.⁴⁵ But Fink’s conclusion is in tension with her recognition that Calvino’s strategy is a conventional game played with unconventional means, which implies that his negative gesture opens the space for something other than *traditional* literary discourse. The conflation of an exploration of narrative conditions of possibility with a return to tradition is precisely, on my reading, what *WN* resists.

On this reading, then, Calvino’s *WN* is not about a particular interpretation of subjectivity linked to a specific innovation in the means of its aesthetic expression. It is a sort of “quasi-transcendental” novel, about the conditions of possibility for the novel as a form, where the form of subjectivity involved in reading is connected to an innovative form that expresses a compendium of reading positions. More simply, *WN* is about the problem

of sustaining the desire to read.

Sustaining the desire to read as the fundamental problem of narrative is thematised in two ways in *WN*. On the one hand, it is implicit in the secondary fragments. As the topology of romantic encounter in the context of hidden danger risks exhaustion, the fragments gravitate toward a new constellation of possible betrayal linked to deadly danger for the protagonist. Then, this cedes place to a science-fiction-like threat of annihilation by nothingness as words lose their power to sustain literary worlds, and to the self-reflexive trope of the empty grave that awaits the protagonist as/at the narrative’s conclusion. The fragments get shorter and shorter, struggling to maintain any suspense as they move in the direction of the tragic motif of the lethal destiny inscribed in the reader’s identity.⁴⁶ Working against this fatal telos in order to sustain desire is the constant alternation of romantic betrayal and sexual confusion, that is, the story of the difficulties that stand in the way of the realization of Eros, on its way to a goal that converges on death insofar as it must climax, which is to say, conclude. On the other hand, this motif of the dialectic of the desire to read as a metaphor for the dialectics of love and death is openly confirmed in the way that the primary diegesis literalises the metaphor that all reading involves a seduction of the reader. In relation to love, the tropes of courtship, foreplay, love-making and climax structure both the relationship between the Reader and the Other Reader, and the narrative progression of the text, for both are one in *WN*. When the Reader and the Other Reader make love, this is a process of “systematic reading” (123); like reading, love-making involves “a direction [that] can be recognised in it, a route to an end, since it tends toward a climax, and with this end in view it arranges rhythmic phrases, metrical scansion, recurrence of motives” (124). In relation to death, the conclusion of every reading experience as a death of the reader, the paradox that the satisfaction of desire is its extinction, is metaphorically represented in the “empty grave” of the secondary fragments. Indeed, in the final five secondary fragments, the narrative represents an increasingly desperate “attempt to counter impending doom with scenes of last minute rescues”.⁴⁷ This metaphorically represents the threat, lethal to readerly desire, that completion of the novel fragments would coincide with the attainment of Ludmilla in a way that would permit no sequel.

DESIRE IS THE DESIRE OF THE OTHER READER

We can make sense of this psychoanalytically, provided that we remain at the most abstract level of the generalities of a theory of desire. Desire, Lacan argues, is the desire of the Other; conversely, unconscious desire is the discourse of the Other. What is meant by this is that desire is self-reflexive and intersubjective. Desire is self-reflexive: desire for the other person is desire to be desired; the desire of the other person structures the person’s desire insofar as a condition of being desired is to coincide with the object of the other’s desire. Desire is intersubjective: the reciprocally shared desire of the person and the other person, which is ultimately the desire of both to be recognised as desiring, is misrecognised as desire for an object that is a culturally accepted symbol of successful desire. This symbol is a conventional placemaker for that combination of power, desirability and legitimacy that Lacan calls the phallic signifier.⁴⁸ The desire to be recognised as desiring, Lacan maintains, is unconscious, repressed, because it implies the “desolation of narcissism,” the evacuation of the empirical personality of the individual before the empty, non-empirical, context-transcending part of the subject. This is the part of the subject for which authenticity is always a question, because no empirical realization of desire would ultimately satisfy it.⁴⁹ The dialectic between the unconscious desire to be recognised as desiring and the cultural symbols of the successful realisation of desire create a scission, experienced by the subject as anxiety, between desire for such an object, and the desire to postpone the final encounter, because the realization of desire would mean, in fact, the death of the subject as desiring.

All of this plays out in a transparent way in *WN*, between the Reader and the Other Reader. If the secondary fragments are structured by the Other Reader’s demands, the primary diegesis is structured by the Reader’s desire (the Reader’s desire to read, which is also a desire for, and of, the Other Reader). The Reader’s desire is stubbornly linear, which is exactly what keeps him on the twisting path created by the obstacles to desire: “I like to read only what is written, and to connect the details with the whole, and to regard certain readings as definitive,” he says; and yet, he is forced to admit that “for a while now, everything has been going wrong for

me: it seems to me that in the world there only exist now stories that remain suspended or get lost along the way” (203). The Reader desires closure. Specifically, he desires the closure of the novels that the Other Reader reads/generates, because these will allow him to read her desire. What he must learn—for this conventional romance is also another conventional sort of novel, the *Bildungsroman* that narrates the (reading) education of the protagonist (reader)—is that closure only arrives at the absolute end of any narration, looking backwards from death on a life history that has become narrative through its conclusion. Otherwise, desire remains open, by postponing closure; when one story ends, another begins.

All of which is to say that, in this comic novel, for generic reasons, love must cheat death. It does so through a completion that evades closure, thus keeping open the desire to read. Toward the conclusion of the novel, the narrator speculates that “now it is the stories that you [the Reader] live that break off at the climactic moment; perhaps now you will be permitted to follow the novels you read all the way to the end” (174). When the end arrives, however, it lacks closure, for in the library where the Reader tries to locate all ten fragments, one of the seven readers in the library mistakes the list of titles for the opening of another novel, a list whose final clause, supplied by the Reader, indicates the desire to go on:

If on a winter’s night a traveller, 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 a 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 (204).

This moment, where retroactive comprehension precipitates anticipation of a future prolongation, an end without closure, pointing to a new beginning, catalyses a moment of truth in the novel. “The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer,” the elderly seventh reader announces, “has two faces: the continuity of life; the inevitability of death” (204). Is this a moment of only apparent truth that is instantly ironised by the conventional (and inauthentic) romantic telos of the primary diegesis?

I don’t think so, for three reasons: (1) the novel links sustaining the desire to read with literary innovation; (2) it is literary innovation that allows the novel to indicate beyond itself to the unsaid, to the existential realities of love and death beyond representation; (3) this capacity of literature to innovatively illuminate human needs through allusion refers us to the literary tradition, so that literary authenticity is not about absolutely fresh departures (rules without a game), but about unconventionally refreshing conventional departures (new rules for the old game).

That is not to say that *WN*, as a novel about reading, lacks any empirical reference. The desire to read that sustains narrative development can only succeed through literary innovation, and “innovation” is inescapably historical and relational. *WN* thematises this in the opposition between Flannery and Marana, and especially in the way that, although both anticipate *WN*, only Flannery, seeking to escape inauthenticity, fully conceptualises the novel’s structure. Thus, Flannery is the best candidate for narrative voice, perhaps with Marana’s fragments nested within the diegesis as subordinate moments. Calvino’s novel locates the problem of literary inauthenticity in a particular social and historical context. The opposition between Marana and Flannery is located very precisely in the Europe of the late 1970s—a bourgeois society beginning to engage in processes of globalisation that are driven by that combination of commodification and technology which, in the literary field, appears as a new, global form of the culture industry. On the one hand, there is the translator/agent Marana who floods the market with a generic world literature manufactured through the exploitation of a combination of exotic locations, distant languages, remote customs and strange authorial names, together with hackneyed narrative clichés drawn from the innumerable threads of a culture that can be compiled into a database. The truth of this practice is Flannery, a best-selling author whose novels are product placement devices (98). On the other hand, there is the inauthentic “productive” author Flannery, from whom novels appear to grow organically and automatically, like pumpkins from a vine, in response to the ever-same demands of the mass literary

public. The truth of this practice is Marana’s machine, which works to select narrative sequences to complete novel beginnings by exposing a reader, who is strapped to the device, to sufficient combinatorial possibilities to gauge the best choice based on the reader’s encephalogram. The irony is, of course, that neither strategy of the Organisation for the Electronic Production of Homogenised Literary Works, works: Flannery cannot write because he has nothing meaningful to write about; Marana’s machine consistently fails to elicit a response from the constrained reader. The additional irony is, of course, that even Flannery and Marana do not regard this as a literary practice: for Marana, the homogenisation of literature is designed to defeat “the invisible rival who came constantly between him and Ludmilla, the silent voice that speaks to her through books” (126), by destroying the literariness of literature and thus eliminating the need for the author; Flannery, confronted by the demand to satisfy the terms of his contract by handing the work over to Marana’s machine, “turned pale, trembled, clutched his manuscript to his bosom— ‘no, not that,’ he said, ‘I would never allow it’” (98).

In this respect, it is worth contrasting Flannery and Marana’s plots, for what is missing from Marana’s outline for *WN* is the conventional romance between the Reader and the Other Reader. Thus, Marana is excluded as a candidate for narrative voice, and the narrative voice therefore escapes from mere conventionality. This is true even though Marana’s narrative fragments are included in the novel’s texture, even though the primary diegesis involves conventional tropes of romance, and despite the fact that the frame narrative draws upon a literary source so ancient as to be one of literature’s (at least provisional) foundations. The implication of these characteristics of the novel is the very opposite of what a lazy postmodern reading might take it to be, namely, an exposure of the conventionality of the frame narrative as one final sceptical move in a game designed to render all meaning indeterminate because epistemologically “undecidable”. For if readerly desire can only be sustained through the representation of desire in terms that involve staying one jump ahead of convention, but this “one jump ahead” refers us back to the beginnings of literary canon formation in fairytales and folk tales, then this is because even a radically experimental, narratively innovative story needs to have content. Formal innovation is not enough. Literature must have substance, or formal experimentation collapses into an empty formalistic game without the potential for semantic innovation, something that is no different to the dull combinatorial aesthetic of Marana’s machine. In the chess game played between author and reader, a game that is all about the representation of desire, new moves that break the existing rules are the necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for sustaining the development from opening to endgame—for this representation of desire must refer to something.

The author might be a function within a combinatory aesthetic—but this function is one of selection. Selection is both formal and substantive. Formally, it involves innovation—for instance, the radically experimental, self-reflexive narration of *WN*. Substantively, it involves allusion to existential realities located in the human body, which can be conveniently adumbrated by love and death. And there is a link between form and content built into modern literary history, something that Peter Brooks’ Lacan-influenced Freudian theory of literature brings out. All works, he contends, have a libidinal economy that structures the desire to read through the representation of the dialectics of desire and repetition. Ultimately, the erotics of the realization of desire after a series of delays is in the service of a lethal—because quiescent—closure; and this closure is related to the authority of death precisely insofar as what makes something narratable is the finality conferred on a life history by its termination. The realist novel of the nineteenth century rushed confidently forward towards the realization of desire, only to discover, as conventional repertoires became exhausted, that the delays on the way to closure evidenced a structure of repetition working against desire. In twentieth century modernism, narrative becomes increasingly reflexive, which is to say, suspicious, about these repetitions, in a shift (if you like) from desire to drive:

The plots of narrative have become extraordinarily complex, self-subversive, apparently implausible. They have been forced to abandon clear origins and terminations in favour of provisional closures and fictional inceptions; their causes may work by delayed action and retroaction; their connections are probable rather than logical; their individual dramas stand in uncertain tension with transindividual imaginings. But if plot has become an object of suspicion, it remains no less necessary: telling

the self’s story remains our indispensable thread in the labyrinth of temporality. It is of overwhelming importance to us that life still be narratable, which may mean finding those provisional, tenuous plots that appear to capture the force of a desire that cannot speak its name but compels us in a movement—recursive, complex, unclosed—toward meaning.⁵⁰

WN arrives late in this process where, in the multiple detours that constitute novelistic desire, something speaks in the repetition compulsion that structures these folds. Unsurprisingly, Flannery is preoccupied precisely with this “unsaid” to which literature insistently alludes without actually being able to explicitly describe: “the book should be the written counterpart of the unwritten world; its subject should be what does not exist and cannot exist except when written, but whose absence is obscurely felt by that which exists, in its own incompleteness” (136). But it is the Other Reader who outlines the reading strategy that would elicit the unsaid from the written, by abandoning “every foregone conclusion, to be ready to catch a voice ... from somewhere beyond the book, beyond the author, beyond the conventions of writing: from the unsaid” (188-189). Is it necessary to add that the unsaid only emerges from the dialectic of desire, itself connected in literary representation to the question of aesthetic innovation?

CONCLUSION

That is why, in conclusion, we should be wary of the assumption that, because the frame narrative is based on the *Arabian Nights*, yet another explicit thematisation of the link between desire and reading, that this renders *WN* as a whole inauthentic, because unoriginal. On the contrary: once romantic originality and authorial sincerity are disposed of, the author as selection function invests this decision with the dignity of a reference to the perennial interests of all authentic literature. The implication of the continuity between the beginning of all narration in fairytale and its latest self-reflexive incarnation in postmodern metafiction is that the representation of desire as including reference to existential reality is an unavoidable condition of literature. In other words, what is parodied in the primary diegesis is self-reflexively endorsed as a formal condition in the frame narrative. It is not that the novel advocates bourgeois marriage and conjugal life (Ludmilla), as opposed to, for instance, sexual adventures and revolutionary collectivities (Lotaria), but rather that it suggests that love and death are the existential horizon of the novel as a form. In this respect, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* is probably the most typical novel in world literature.

Perhaps it is significant, although by no means decisive, that the well-known Italian writer, Italo Calvino also agreed that literature’s unique function lies in conjecturing future values in light of what he calls “the unsaid,” something that relates to an exploration of subjectivity within speculation on the nature of human existence.⁵¹ As Calvino says, this “projection of desire” involves “the creation ... of a model of values that is at the same time aesthetic and ethical, essential to any plan of action, especially in political life”.⁵² If contemporary literature indeed engages a combinatorial aesthetic, then this death of the author and birth of the reader is fundamentally undertaken in order to release “the relationship between combinatorial play and the unconscious in artistic activity”.⁵³ The aim, then, is not a curious short-circuit from deconstruction back to Romanticism, in which the text engulfs the world, but to find a voice for “preconscious subject matter”—that is, for an authentic articulation of desire.

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NOTES

1. Pieter Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).
2. Lambert Zuidervart, *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse and Imaginative Disclosure* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
3. Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2006).
4. David Colclasure, *Habermas and Literary Rationality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).
5. Nicholas Hengen Fox, ‘A Habermasian Literary Criticism’, *New Literary History*, 43/2 (2012), 235-54.
6. See Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure* at 78-79 and 125-139 and David Ingram, *Habermas: Introduction and Analysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010), 307-328.
7. Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason* at 183-85.
8. Colclasure, *Habermas and Literary Rationality* at 91, Hengen Fox, ‘A Habermasian Literary Criticism’, (at 244.
9. Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*, Zuidervart, *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse and Imaginative Disclosure*.
10. See Jürgen Habermas, ‘Questions and Counter-Questions’, in Maeve Cooke (ed.), *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 403-33, Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), John B Thompson, ‘Universal Pragmatics’, in John B Thompson and David Held (eds.), *Habermas: Critical Debates* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 116-33, Jonathan Culler, ‘Communicative Competence and Normative Force’, *New German Critique*, 5 (1985), 133-44. On Seel’s critique, see David Ingram, ‘Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment’, *ibid./53* (1991), 67-103.
11. Boucher, Geoff (2011), ‘The Politics of Aesthetic Affect: A Reconstruction of Habermas’s Art Theory’, *Parrhesia*, 13, 62-78.
12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).
13. Hereafter *WN*
14. Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1981) at 131.
15. My reading contradicts several influential readings of the novel as a parody of the effort to relate literature to ideals such as authenticity and veracity. See, for instance, Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985) at 89, Madeleine Sorapure, ‘Being in the Midst: Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 31/4 (1985), 702-10 at 702.
16. Boucher, ‘The Politics of Aesthetic Affect: A Reconstruction of Habermas’s Art Theory’, (at 68.
17. Habermas, ‘Questions and Counter-Questions’, at 237.
18. See David Ingram, *Habermas: Introduction and Analysis* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2010) at 320-28. for a full discussion.
19. Ingram, ‘Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment’, (at 90.
20. See especially, Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) at 180-231. on the participatory constitution of a work from the text.
21. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols. (1; Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) at 20.
22. Alessandro Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity: Rethinking the Project of Modernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).
23. Boucher, ‘The Politics of Aesthetic Affect: A Reconstruction of Habermas’s Art Theory’, (at 73.
24. Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, trans. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1998) at 412.. See Boucher, ‘The Politics of Aesthetic Affect: A Reconstruction of Habermas’s Art Theory’, (at 74. for discussion of this point.
25. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* at 186-88.
26. *Ibid.*, at 190-91.
27. *Ibid.*, at 205.
28. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* at 210-11.
29. *Ibid.*, at 216.
30. *Ibid.*, at 214.
31. *Ibid.*, at 220-21.
32. *Ibid.*, at 221.
33. *Ibid.*, at 222.
34. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) at 12-13.
35. Nella Cotrupi, ‘Hypermetafiction: Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Style*, 25 (1991), 280-90 at 283-84.

36. Marilyn Orr, ‘Beginning in the Middle: The Story of Reading in *Calvino’s If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 21 (1985), 210-19 at 211.
37. Marie-Anne Visoi, ‘Parody in the Postmodernist Novel’, *Modern Language Studies*, 27/3-4 (1997), 159-73 at 162, 71.
38. Inge Fink, ‘The Power behind the Pronoun: Narrative Games in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37/1 (1991), 93-104; Teresa De Laurentis, ‘Narrative Discourse in Calvino: Praxis or Poesis?’, *PMLA*, 90/3 (1975), 414-25.
39. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* at 214, 16.
40. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) at 275.
41. Cristina Mazzoni, ‘(Re)Constructing the Incipit: Narrative Beginnings in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and Freud’s Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 30/1 (1993), 53-68 at 59.
42. *Ibid.*, at 59-61.
43. Cotrupi, ‘Hypermetafiction: Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, (at 283-84, P. J. Klemp, ‘‘She Made Us Do What She Wanted’’: Desire and the Other Reader’s Reading in Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Quaderni d’italianistica*, 20/1-2 (1999), 71-90 at 77, Carl Malmgren, ‘Romancing the Reader: Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 6 (1986), 106-16 at 107, Mazzoni, ‘(Re)Constructing the Incipit: Narrative Beginnings in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and Freud’s Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis’, at 59-60.
44. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* at 89.
45. Fink, ‘The Power Behind the Pronoun: Narrative Games in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, at 94.
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