I

The previous analyses of both The French Lieutenant's Woman and Great Expectations have given some indications of the effects created when the mimetic illusion is broken and the authorial audience's usual covert awareness that character is an artificial construct becomes overt. In those narratives, however, the synthetic foregrounding of character is only an occasional feature of the text, and one not much applied to the protagonist. What happens when the synthetic component of the protagonist's character becomes the dominant one? Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler raises this question with a kind of playful vengeance, as its foregrounding of the synthetic leads Calvino's audience to a wonderfully complicated self-consciousness about its own reading activity. Indeed, in a sense, Calvino's narrative also functions as a critical text: by inducing so much reflexiveness into the activity of its own reading, it investigates—or better, puts under a metafictional microscope—the concepts of character, progression, and audience. Thus, even as If on a winter's night a traveler presents a new and challenging example of a narrative where the synthetic component is dominant, its reflexiveness requires a more comprehensive view of the concept of audience than we have yet developed. Furthermore, it can initially be seen to challenge the conclusions of the last chapter about the importance of the affective structure of the narrative text and about the connection between that affective structure and the mimetic component of character. In short, Calvino's narrative will require me both to extend my account of the relation between character and progression and to reflect upon—and revise—some of the theoretical foundations and conclusions of the study so far.

The main issue of the whole narrative is rather disarmingly raised in its first sentence: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, If on a winter's night a traveler." The issue is what it means
to read this narrative, and the sentence itself introduces subtle but significant tensions between author and authorial audience. The use of the second-person, the present tense, and the content of the sentence suggest that it is a kind of "Before the Curtain" address to the flesh-and-blood reader—me and you in all our commonality and idiosyncracy. But other elements of the sentence work against that inference. First, the use of the adjective "new" locates the address—and thus its audience—in time. The "you" of the sentence is not the me rereading this novel in 1987, or the you reading it after it is no longer new. Second, the address is actually after the curtain, part of the novel proper. The addressed "you" is about to begin reading the novel, while we are already reading it. In this way, Calvino's very first sentence asks the authorial audience to take its first step toward self-reflexiveness, and that step seems to reinforce the distinction between authorial and narrative audiences. We (the authorial audience) are reading about a reader (whom, following our usual practice, we'll label the narrative audience, addressed as "you") who is about to begin reading a novel by the same author and with the same title as the one we are reading.

Once we take that step, however, other questions arise. Is the narrative audience's *If on a winter's night a traveler* the same as the authorial audience's? Is Italo Calvino the same for both audiences? The tensions implicit in these questions generate the initial movement of the narrative, as it continues with its location of "you" in a particular reading situation, flashes back to an account of the purchase of the book, begins telling the tale proper in the chapter entitled "If on a winter's night a traveler," and then breaks off when "you" discovers that the book has one sixteen-page signature repeated several times. This discovery, which, as we shall see, is a crucial point in the progression, leads the "you" back to the bookstore and to his initial meeting with the Other Reader.

At this stage of the narrative, the initial tensions appear to be resolved as new ones take their place (why disrupt the narrative in this way?) and as new instabilities develop (will "you" and we ever hear the end of the story? what will happen between "you" and the Other Reader?). Furthermore, at first glance the resolutions of the initial tensions appear to reinforce further the distinction between authorial and narrative audiences. The narrative audience's *If on a winter's night a traveler* is clearly different from the authorial audience's: "you"'s is only that repeated sixteen-page signature, ours contains the story of "you"'s response to that limit. By the same logic, "Calvino" is different for each audience: he speaks to the narrative audience only in that sixteen-page signature, but he speaks to the authorial audience in ev-
every sentence of the whole book. Continuing with this logic, we can also see that Calvino has playfully inverted the author-narrator relationship for the narrative audience. In Chapters 1 and 2, indeed in all the numbered chapters, "you" is addressed by a narrator figure who is distinct from the Italo Calvino named in the book's first sentence and subsequently identified as just the author of the first titled chapter—or so it seems until chapter 12, when Calvino ends the narrative with another twist on the author-narrator-audience relationships, a twist we shall later examine in detail.

This logic, essentially the same as that employed in the discussion of Chapters 13 and 55 of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, helps explain the complicated author-narrator-audience relationships Calvino is establishing in the opening three chapters, but it does not go quite far enough. The logic would be adequate if Calvino had employed either the first or third person. "He is about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler.*" (Notice that one consequence of using the second person is that Calvino can include both sexes in his address.) "I am about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler.*" In each case the narrative voice would evoke the double audience—one implicitly addressed within the fiction, one implicitly addressed outside it—and each audience would recognize the "I" or the "He" as a character distinct from itself. The reading activities of the character and the audiences might coincide (as in the titled chapters) but the distinction between character and audience would always be clear. By using the second person, however, Calvino makes the "you" both character and audience, a situation that in Chapter 2 leads to the eventual separation of "you" not just from the authorial but also from the narrative audience. In other words, by using the second person in combination with the present tense, Calvino in effect makes "you" the addressed party of the discourse without making "you" equivalent to the narrative audience. If I am right about this separation, then Calvino's narrative strategy suggests that we need to recognize an additional possible audience in narrative discourse, what I will call the characterized audience.\(^3\)

The differences between Calvino's strategies and those of first- and third-person narration help explain how his addressed audience, "you," is not identical to the narrative audience. First- and third-person narration presuppose a narrative audience that will be taken in by the narrative, "held round the fire," in James's words, by their insistent desire to see how the instabilities and tensions will be complicated and resolved, by their desire to reach narrative's end. In Calvino's narrative, there is also such an audience implied, although its
separation from the characterized audience is not accomplished until the beginning of Chapter 2. It is this audience that gets caught up in “you”’s double quest—as character—for the continuation of all the narratives he begins and for a union with the Other Reader. In this respect, the narrative audience is as distinct from “you” as it would be if the protagonist were an unnamed “I” or a “he” named, say, Jack Dereader. Yet the use of the second person allows Calvino to begin by merging the narrative and characterized audiences, to separate them later, and then occasionally to merge them again. I shall undertake a detailed consideration of these strategies and their consequences for character and progression in If on a winter’s night a traveler after I explain further this concept of a characterized audience.

I

Most simply, a characterized audience is created whenever a narrator, using direct address, ascribes attributes to his or her audience. From the perspective of the narrative audience, the characterized audience may be either real or hypothetical—that is, it may be an actual character such as Shreve McCanlin in Absalom, Absalom! or any number of figures in epistolary novels, or it may be a construction of the narrator such as the various Sirs and Madams invented by Tristram Shandy. The actual functions of characterized audiences are various, but as we might imagine, the most significant of them involve their role as a screen between the narrator and the narrative audience. Behind those screens author and authorial audience frequently engage in some complex kinds of communication. In cases where the characterized audience is “real,” the possible effects are similar to those created by any dialogue: the narrative audience’s relation to the narrator’s address will depend heavily on what it knows about and how it judges the addressee. When, for example, Conrad has Marlow tell the final part of Lord Jim’s story to the one previous listener who was most interested, Marlow addresses him thus:

I remember well you would not admit he had mastered his fate. You prophesied for him the disaster of weariness and of disgust with acquired honour, with the self-appointed task, with the love sprung from pity and youth. You had said you knew so well “that kind of thing,” its illusory satisfaction, its unavoidable deception. You said also—I call to mind—that “giving your life up to them” (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) was “like selling your soul to a brute.” You contended that “that kind of thing” was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in
whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. "We want its strength at our backs," you said. "We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition." In other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives can't count. Possibly! You ought to know—be it said without malice—you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress.\footnote{Given Conrad's effort to transform the material basis of Jim's story—his jump from the \textit{Patna}, his failure in Patusan—into a narrative that insists on the significance of his life despite the ambiguous meaning of his actions, we can see that this use of a characterized audience functions to foreclose some judgments of Jim that the authorial audience might otherwise make. Marlow, whom both the authorial and narrative audiences view as reliable, declares some of those judgments to be less than pertinent: "The point . . . is that Jim . . . had no dealings but with himself." Furthermore, Conrad implicitly asks the authorial audience to reject the characterized audience's judgments as too easy, based as they are on the suspect attitudes about the superiority of the white race that underlay British colonialism. During this part of Marlow's address to the characterized audience the screen between him and the narrative audience is very thick and significant; when Marlow goes on to tell him the final events of Jim's life, the screen all but disappears.

Some different effects are frequently created when the characterized audience is constructed by the narrator himself. Listen for a moment to a famous eighteenth-century gentleman-narrator:

\begin{quote}
My uncle TOBY SHANDY, Madam, was a gentleman, who with the virtues which usually constitute the character of a man of honour and rectitude,—possessed one in a very eminent degree, which is seldom or never put into the catalogue; and that was a most extreme and unparallel'd modesty of nature;—tho' I correct the word nature for this reason, that I may not prejudice a point which must shortly come to a hearing; and that is, Whether this modesty of his was natural or acquir'd.—Which ever way my uncle Toby came by it, 'twas nevertheless modesty in the truest sense of it: and that is, Madam, not in regard to words, for he was so unhappy as to have very little choice in them,—but to things;—and this kind of modesty so possess'd him, and it arose to such a height in him, as almost to equal, if such a thing}
could be, even the modesty of a woman: That female nicety, Madam, and inward cleanliness of mind and fancy, in your sex, which makes you so much the awe of ours.5

Tristram’s characterization of his audience here is minimal: the relevant attributes of “Madam” are only her sex and its allegedly accompanying modesty—indeed, Tristram’s discourse works in large part on the principle that “Modesty, thy name is woman.” In the first part of the address (down to “modesty in the truest sense of it”), the screen erected between Tristram and the narrative audience by Sterne’s use of the characterized audience is thin and transparent: the information is reliable and Tristram’s manner of delivering it is not significantly altered by the presence of the characterized audience. In the latter part of the discourse, however, the screen becomes thicker and more opaque. Indeed, the narrative audience comes to recognize Tristram’s address as part of his own narrative performance, another indication of those narrative abilities that, along with his foibles as both person and narrator, provide a major center of interest in the narrative. The screen in turn allows Sterne to incorporate different degrees of irony into his communication to the authorial audience: he is least ironic about Toby’s modesty, more ironic about the modesty of women, and most ironic about the relation between the sexes.

Now compare Tristram to the narrator of *Vanity Fair*:

We say (and with perfect truth) I wish I had Miss MacWhirter’s signature to a cheque for five thousand pounds. She wouldn’t miss it, says your wife. She is my aunt, say you, in an easy careless way, when your friend asks if Miss MacWhirter is any relative? Your wife is perpetually sending her little testimonies of affection, your little girls work endless worsted baskets, cushions, and foot-stools for her. What a good fire there is in her room when she comes to pay you a visit, although your wife laces her stays without one! The house during her stay assumes a festive, neat, warm, jovial, snug appearance not visible at other seasons. You yourself, dear sir, forget to go to sleep after dinner, and find yourself all of a sudden (though you invariably lose) very fond of a rubber. What good dinners you have—game every day, Malmsey-Madeira, and no end of fish from London. Even the servants in the kitchen share the general prosperity; and, somehow, during the stay of Miss MacWhirter’s fat coachman, the beer is grown much stronger, and the consumption of tea and sugar in the nursery (where her maid takes her meals) is not regarded in the least. Is it so, or is it not so?6

Here the screen between narrator and narrative audience is erected by the end of the second sentence and maintained throughout the passage. Although the characterized audience is more particularized
than Tristram’s "Madam," the screen does not provide as much distance between audiences as in Tristram’s discourse. Despite the particularization, the characterized audience is still a representative figure: he is a middle-class Englishman with a wife and daughters, a house and servants, and above all a desire to increase his worldly possessions. Partly because of that representativeness and partly because of the tight connection between the point of this passage and the narrative’s central thematic message about the vanity of human actions, the narrative audience recognizes that the narrator intends them to apply the passage to themselves. At the same time, the narrative audience registers the witty creation of the screen as another performance by the Showman of Vanity Fair. The authorial audience, in turn, makes the corresponding inferences about Thackeray. As a consequence of his performance in creating this characterized audience, Thackeray induces his authorial audience to recognize the necessary application of the passage—it's not just Becky, Amelia, and Dobbin, I'm talking about, but you too—without having us feel directly attacked by the narrator.7

As the analysis of these three passages indicates, isolating the characterized audience for critical attention is worthwhile to the extent that that audience acts as a screen or buffer between the narrator and the narrative audience. In narratives such as "Haircut" or Lolita a characterized audience is coextensive with the narrative audience, and the buffer effect does not exist. In fact, in these works the distinction between the two audiences has no analytical payoff, except to the extent that it is helpful to remind ourselves that in Lardner’s tale we need to imagine ourselves in Whitey’s barber chair and in Nabokov’s narrative in the jury box as one of the “ladies and gentlemen” Humbert Humbert so impassionedly addresses. Similarly, such addresses as Jane Eyre’s famous “Reader, I married him,” or the Middlemarch narrator’s various comments to a generalized “you” explicitly acknowledge the importance of the narrator’s relationship to a narrative audience without creating a characterized audience of any significance.

The concept of characterized audience can perhaps be further clarified by considering its relation to Prince’s notion of the narratee and to Rabinowitz’s notion of the ideal narrative audience. Any characterized audience would also be a narratee in Prince’s sense of the term. The difference between the concepts is not so much in their definition but in our respective understandings of the consequences of the concepts. For Prince, the creation of the category of “narratee” means that he does not need a category analogous to narrative audience, whereas for me the importance of the characterized audience arises out of its difference from and relation to the narrative audience. Our
differences become clear in Prince’s argument in his essay “The Narratee Revisited.” Prince claims that the notion of a metanarratee is untenable. “Just as in ‘I ate a hamburger for lunch,’ the character-I is the one who ate and the narrator-I the one telling about the eating, in ‘You ate a hamburger for lunch,’ the character-you is the one who ate and the narratee-you the one told about the eating” (p. 301). Thus, just as the use of ‘I’ allows the double function of acting and narrating, so too the use of “You” allows the double function of acting and receiving the narration. The example supports Prince’s conclusion, but it is not sufficiently representative of the range of narrative communication. As soon as we complicate the example, a metanarratee emerges: “You, who so well know the nature of your stomach, ate a hamburger for lunch and now must face the consequences.” Because the “character-you” is distinct from the authorial audience, that audience adopts a triple perspective: receiving the narration as if it were the “you” addressed (i.e., adopting the position of narratee/characterized audience); receiving the narration while knowing it is not “you,” but nevertheless participating in the illusion that “you” is real and therefore interested in following “character-you’s” story (i.e, adopting the position of narrative audience); recognizing these two previous perspectives as part of the indirect manner of communication between the creator of “you” and itself. Or, to take a better example: in the passage from Tristram Shandy, the effect of Sterne’s irony depends not only on his use of a characterized audience but on the characterized audience’s relation to two others: first, one that believes in Tristram as an autonomous narrator and sees the address to Madam as part of his performance; and second, one that sees both of those audiences as devices for a complex communication from Sterne as orchestrator of the whole discourse. My point, in short, is that what Prince calls a narratee and I call a characterized audience will sometimes be distinguished from a narrative audience, and when that happens the narrative audience will function as a metanarratee. At the same time, Prince is right to resist the notion that all second-person addresses result in the creation of a metanarratee; sometimes the characterized and narrative audiences will, for all intents and purposes, merge.

More generally, I think it is worth noting a key difference between structuralist models of audience like Prince’s and rhetorical models like Rabinowitz’s or Wayne Booth’s slightly modified version of it. The structuralist account remains anchored to the idea that the discourse of the narrative will define the features of the audience, whereas the rhetorical approach considers the presuppositions and beliefs that operate for the different audiences that are always present in the ap-
You have now read thirty pages and you’re becoming caught up in the story. At a certain point you remark: “This sentence sounds somehow familiar. In fact, this whole passage reads like something I’ve read before.” Of course: there are themes that recur, the text is interwoven with reprises, which serve to express the fluctuation of time. You are the sort of reader who is sensitive to such refinements; you are quick to catch the author’s intentions and nothing escapes you. But, at the same time, you also feel a certain dismay; just when you were beginning to grow truly interested, at this very point the author feels called upon to display one of those virtuoso tricks so customary in modern writing, repeating a paragraph word for word. Did you say paragraph? Why it’s a whole page; you make the comparison, he hasn’t changed even a comma. And as you continue, what develops? Nothing: the narration is repeated, identical to the pages you have read!

Wait a minute! Look at the page number. Damn! From page 32 you’ve gone back to page 17! What you thought was a stylistic subtlety on the author’s part is simply a printers’ mistake: they have inserted the same pages twice. (P. 25; emphasis mine)

To appreciate the consequences of this development in the narrative, it will be useful to consider the objection that positing a characterized audience in a second-person narrative may be counterintuitive, especially since the first sentence here supports that view. All four audiences I have posited—the flesh-and-blood, the authorial, the narrative, and the characterized—have been reading the chapter entitled “If on a winter’s night a traveler.” Certainly at least the last three of these are “becoming caught up in the story.” Why then make the distinction? Alternatively, if we make it, how does it help us analyze what is happening in that first sentence? We need to make the distinction, I think, because of what happens in the rest of the passage. The characterized audience becomes a character, whose actions the other audiences read about: “you” compares pages, while neither the authorial nor narrative audiences join him. Just as Elizabeth Bennet does not know—as we do—that she is a character in a novel by Jane Austen, “you” does not know—as we now clearly do—that he is a character in a novel by Italo Calvino (though not necessarily the “new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveler” referred to in the book’s first sentence).

The distinction is useful for even the first sentence of this passage because it helps us understand how Calvino guides the authorial audience to reflect on the activity of its own reading. Calvino’s strategy is to vary the thickness of the screen between the narrator and the narrative audience erected by the use of the characterized audience, and then to take advantage of the second-person narration to make the authorial audience reflect on the nature and significance of that
variation. As we move from the thin, transparent screen in the first sentence to the thick, opaque screen in the second paragraph, we pass through the clauses emphasized in my quotation: “just when you were beginning to grow truly interested, at this very point the author feels called upon to display one of those virtuoso tricks so customary in modern writing, repeating a paragraph word for word.” In these transitional clauses overtly addressed to the characterized audience, Calvino covertly but directly addresses the authorial audience. Just as “you” thinks he is witnessing a “virtuoso trick” on the part of his Calvino, the authorial audience becomes aware that it is witnessing such a trick on the part of our Calvino. The virtuoso trick is the introduction of the device of the repeated signatures, which alters the course of the progression by effecting the separation of the characterized audience from the others. The instability of the narrative now has less to do with the situation of the spy whose adventures we were following in the titled chapter than it does with the experience of “you”’s reading.

The corresponding tension of the narrative now centers on the relationship between Calvino and the authorial audience: why has the author displaced our interest in the titled chapter with this interest in “you”’s experience of reading? Even more significant is a further tension that arises as a result of the previous sentence. There all three audiences are told that “You are the sort of reader who is sensitive to such refinements; you are quick to catch the author’s intentions and nothing escapes you.” Acting upon the implied message here, and attempting to catch the intention of the refinement introduced by the dual communication about virtuoso tricks, the authorial audience begins to reflect on the complexity of its own reading about reading, without yet reaching any firm conclusions about that activity. At this point, the affective structure of the book is not being destroyed but rather redefined. Rather than the characters and our interest in them carrying our affective interest in the whole narrative, the characters will act as a vehicle for a more direct kind of interplay between author and audience: the affective component of the structure comes from Calvino’s setting various challenges for himself to meet and for the audience to decipher—and reflect upon.

The significance of this separation among audiences at the beginning of Chapter 2 can be more fully appreciated by understanding the “retrospective patterning” it produces. Again it will be helpful to look at specific passages of narrative discourse from Chapter 1 and the first *incipit*:

In the shop window you have promptly identified the cover with the title you were looking for. Following this visual trail, you have forced your way through the shop past the thick barricade of
variation. As we move from the thin, transparent screen in the first sentence to the thick, opaque screen in the second paragraph, we pass through the clauses emphasized in my quotation: "just when you were beginning to grow truly interested, at this very point the author feels called upon to display one of those virtuoso tricks so customary in modern writing, repeating a paragraph word for word."

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In the shop window you have promptly identified the cover with the title you were looking for. Following this visual trail, you have forced your way through the shop past the thick barricade of
Books You Haven't Read, which were frowning at you from the tables and shelves, trying to cow you. But you know you must never allow yourself to be awed, that among them there extend for acres and acres the Books You Needn't Read, the Books Made for Purposes Other Than Reading, Books Read Even Before You Open Them Since They Belong To The Category Of Books Read Before Being Written. And thus you pass the outer girdle of ramparts, but then you are attacked by the infantry of the Books That If You Had More Than One Life You Would Certainly Also Read But Unfortunately Your Days Are Numbered. With a rapid maneuver you bypass them and move into the phalanxes of the Books You Mean To Read But There Are Others You Must Read First, the Books Too Expensive Now And You'll Wait Till They're Remaindered, the Books ditto When They Come Out In Paperback, Books You Can Borrow From Somebody, Books That Everybody's Read So It's As If You Had Read Them, Too. (Pp. 4–5)

The great fun of this passage (which continues for another three paragraphs) the first time we come upon it depends upon the merging of the characterized and narrative audiences, both of which are also very close to the authorial audience. (In addition, we may speculate that each of these audiences will be close to virtually any flesh-and-blood reader likely to pick up a book like If on a winter's night a traveler.) As we join the narrative audience, we are asked not just to witness this trip through the bookstore but to imagine ourselves having actually taken it. Moreover, because the authorial audience is so close to the narrative audience here, it endorses the witty accuracy of this description of the trip. In general the description functions as part of the authorial and narrative audiences' charming introduction to the whole narrative. After we get to Chapter 2, however, and discover the separation of the narrative and characterized audiences, the passage—and indeed, the whole chapter—takes on a quite different import. The "you" addressed is not just the narrative audience but the characterized one as well, and so the authorial audience once again has to be conscious of how the discourse of the first chapter has a double application: it is being introduced not just to the situation of the narrative audience but also to the first events of the Reader's story, his trip to the bookstore and his preparations before reading his copy of If on a winter's night a traveler. These opening events take on greater importance as the Reader's story continues, but before I pursue them, let us look at some samples of the narrative discourse in the first incipit.

This chapter, like "Outside the town of Malbork," is different from the other eight titled chapters because of the degree to which it incorporates reflections on its own reading. It opens this way:
The novel begins in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph. In the odor of the station there is a passing whiff of station cafe odor. There is someone looking through befogged glass, he opens the glass door of the bar, everything is misty, inside, too, as if seen by nearsighted eyes, or eyes irritated by coal dust. The pages of the book are clouded like the windows of an old train, the cloud of smoke rests on the sentences. It is a rainy evening; the man enters the bar; he unbuttons his damp overcoat; a cloud of steam enfolds him; a whistle dies away along tracks that are glistening with rain, as far as the eye can see.

(P. 10)

The blurring of audiences continues here: are we reading the actual first paragraph of "If on a winter's night a traveler" or a summary of its beginning? Is the "you" of the first chapter reading something different from what the narrative and authorial audiences of the whole narrative are reading here? Is this narrative itself to be one that induces reflection on its own reading? How are these questions related to the soon-to-be-introduced instabilities of the incipit, the man's possible relation with Madame Marne, and his failure to switch his suitcase with another just like it? Because the transition from the voice of these passages to the voice of the action is virtually seamless, the narrative audience is, I think, inclined to take the chapter as the full replication of the book that "you" is reading and thus to regard the references to the clouded pages and smoky sentences neither as summaries nor as metafictional maneuvers but as devices designed to contribute to the mood of mystery and intrigue that hangs over the narrative. In having this internal function, they are similar to such reflexive passages as the following:

I am not at all the sort of person who attracts attention, I am an anonymous presence against an even more anonymous background. If you, reader, couldn't help picking me out among the people getting off the train and continued following me in my to-and-froing between bar and telephone, this is simply because I am called "I" and this is the only thing you know about me, but this alone is reason enough for you to invest a part of yourself in the stranger "I." Just as the author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character "I" as if to conceal him, not having to name him or describe him, because any other name or attribute would define him more than this stark pronoun; still, by the very fact of writing "I" the author feels driven to put into this "I" a bit of himself, of what he feels or imagines he feels. Nothing could be easier for him than to identify himself with me; for the moment my external behavior is that of a traveler who has missed
a connection, a situation that is part of everyone's experience. But a situation that takes place at the opening of a novel always refers you to something else that has happened or is about to happen, and it is this something else that makes it risky to identify with me, risky for you the reader and for him the author; and the more gray and ordinary and undistinguished and commonplace the beginning of this novel is, the more you and the author feel a hint of danger looming over the fraction of “I” that you have heedlessly invested in the “I” of a character whose inner history you know nothing about, as you know nothing about the contents of that suitcase he is so anxious to get rid of. (Pp. 14–15)

The internal function here is to increase both the mystery of the “I” and the suspense about the coming danger. When, however, we get to Chapter 2, the retrospective patterning gives both sorts of passages a double application. Their potential to function as comments on the act of reading in general is actualized. The first kind teases us into thought about the relation between style and atmosphere, as the sentences themselves produce the smoky effect they appear to be claiming for other sentences. This second passage functions as an invitation to the authorial audience to explore the analogy between the multiple roles of “I”—Calvino, the author of the whole book, “Calvino,” the alleged author of this If on a winter's night a traveler, and the nameless narrator of this version—and the multiple roles of “You”—authorial, narrative, and characterized audiences. Other passages in the incipit offer different specific variations on Calvino's general technique of inducing the double application:

These remarks form a murmuring of indistinct voices from which a word or a phrase might emerge, decisive for what comes afterward. To read properly you must take in both the murmuring effect and the effect of the hidden intention, which you (and I, too) are as yet in no position to perceive. In reading, therefore, you must remain both oblivious and highly alert, as I am abstracted but prick up my ears, with my elbow on the counter of the bar and my cheek on my fist. (P. 18)

Here the authorial audience applies the narrator's directions about reading properly not just to the reading of the incipit but to the reading of the whole narrative—including the passage itself. The authorial audience thus becomes self-consciously aware of its warrant for reading self-consciously.

In summary, then, the opening paragraphs of Chapter 2 do not obliterate either the narrative audience's participation in the address of Chapter 1 or the mimetic reading experience of the first incipit but they do complicate those two acts of reading. As a result of the turn
taken in the progression with those paragraphs, the authorial audi­ence needs in effect both to preserve and uplift those experiences, to recognize each of them as part of the whole narrative’s general con­cern with the nature of reading, including the nature of reading this narrative itself. To see how the narrative further complicates and perhaps resolves this concern, we must consider how Calvino guides the authorial audience’s responses to the character of the Reader and to the subsequent progression of his story.

IV

As we have already seen, much of Calvino’s treatment of the Reader, including of course giving him that name, works to foreground his synthetic component. The narrator, moreover, deliberately refrains from any detailed mimetic portrait: “Who you are, Reader, your age, your status, profession, income: that would be indiscreet to ask. It’s your business, you’re on your own” (p. 32). Nevertheless, the Reader has several mimetic dimensions. In Chapter 1, the narrator tells us,

You’re the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects any­thing of anything. . . . You know that the best you can expect is to avoid the worst. . . . What about books? Well, precisely because you have denied it in every other field, you believe you may still grant yourself legitimately this youthful pleasure of expectation in a carefully circumscribed area like the field of books, where you can be lucky or unlucky, but the risk of disappointment isn’t serious. (P. 4)

This attribute contributes to the Reader’s desire to find the continuations of the various incipits: since reading is the last area of expectation he has, it is all the more important to him that he can find out how the expectations generated by the narrative beginnings he encounters are brought to some resolution. In Chapter 2, when he meets Ludmilla, the Other Reader, another mimetic dimension emerges. He acts like the proverbial boy in a boy-meets-girl narrative: he wants to get the girl as much as he wants to get the continuation of the narrative he began. In the later chapters we see that part of being the proverbial boy is to be jealous of any possible rival for the Other Reader’s affections. This first encounter also reveals him to be an ordinary Reader relative to the extraordinary Other Reader, who has read many more novels than he, and who has much better recall of what she has read. As we see later when he describes himself ex­plicitly, he is in effect defined as the ordinary reader:

“I like to read only what is written, and to connect the details with the whole, and to consider certain readings as definitive; and I like
to keep one book distinct from the other, each for what it has that is different and new; and I especially like books to be read from beginning to end.” (Pp. 256-57)

At the end of Chapter 2, then, the main movement of the Reader's story is established: this ordinary man with the strong desire for the completion of his interrupted reading and a strong hope for the development of his relationship with the Other Reader sets out on his double quest to achieve both his desire and his hope. The narrator's summary of the situation at this point both sets the stage for the rest of the quest and reminds the authorial audience of its own reading activity:

You are bearing with you two different expectations, and both promise days of pleasant hopes: the expectation contained in the book—of a reading experience you are impatient to resume—and the expectation contained in the telephone number—of hearing again the vibrations, at times treble and at times smoldering of that voice, when it will answer your first phone call in a short while, in fact tomorrow, with the fragile pretext of the book, to ask her if she likes it or not, to tell her how many pages you have read or not read, to suggest to her that you meet again . . .

Who you are, Reader, your age, your status, profession, income: that would be indiscreet to ask. It's your business, you're on your own. What counts is the state of your spirit now, in the privacy of your home, as you try to re-establish perfect calm in order to sink again into the book. . . . But something has changed since yesterday. 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. . . . Does this mean that the book has become an instrument, a channel of communication, a rendezvous? This does not mean its reading will grip you less: on the contrary, something has been added to its powers. (P. 32)

The double application here is more intermittent than in some of the passages we have just looked at, but its presence is equally significant. The authorial audience's expectations are not identical to the Reader's, but they do overlap: we are bearing with us the expectation of a reading experience contained in the book, one consisting of both further embedded narratives and of the developing relationship between the Reader and the Other Reader. Furthermore, although the authorial audience is not in precisely the same relation to this narrative and an Other Reader as the characterized audience, the pattern of reflexive reading already established—and reinforced by this
passage—induces the members of the authorial audience to contemplate the effects of reading-relationships, the importance of reading as a social activity, the relation of each one's reading of this book to that of his or her fellow readers.

At this point, the authorial audience's understanding of Chapter 1 takes on a new layer: beneath the ingenuity of the description of the trip to the bookstore, beneath the wit of the merging of the audiences, there also exists the opening step in a story about reading and its conditions. That chapter has in effect presented the Reader one-on-one with the bookstore and with the book. Now the progression is moving us to consider a two-on-one situation, or better, given the reflexiveness already established and the existence of inner and outer narratives, it is inviting us to consider the relations between intertextuality and interreaderality.

The relation between character and progression here is typical of the relation between the two in the whole narrative: the minimal attributes of the character give the narrative movement a slight push, but the most important features of that movement revolve around Calvino's relationships with the narrative and authorial audiences. Consequently, the character fades back into the progression; it is not his drives and desires that we are most interested in following but rather how Calvino manipulates them as he keeps announcing and enacting his concerns with reading. This relationship between character and progression is strikingly different from anything we have seen so far. The other characters we have analyzed have all been given a clear identity, and the progression has affected the functions that those characters perform while preserving that identity. In this narrative, the Reader has a minimal identity, one that is sometimes merged with the generalized portraits of the narrative and authorial audiences. Furthermore, because that identity just is the identity of the ordinary reader, and because the analysis of the progression just is the analysis of the authorial audience's temporal reading, the progression here does not only affect the functions of the character, but it also absorbs or subsumes them.

This point is given further support when we consider the relation of the Reader's thematic component to his mimetic and synthetic ones. As the discussion of the first few chapters of the book indicate, Calvino presents us with the other side of James's coin: where James merges the thematic and the mimetic components of John Marcher, Calvino merges the thematic and synthetic components of the Reader. In *If on a winter's night a traveler*, the primary ideational concerns of the text are about the activity of its own reading. Since these concerns are both announced and enacted as part of the progression of the whole
narrative, to discuss the synthetic component of character and of the narrative in general is to discuss the thematic component as well. Thus, to analyze the relation between the mimetic and synthetic components here is simultaneously to analyze the relation between the mimetic and thematic components. And again, since the mimetic component of the Reader's character is limited to a few traits necessary for a surface narrative underneath which the more significant narrative of our own reading about reading is developed, the detailed analysis of character here can best be done by folding it into the analysis of the progression.

These conclusions reinforce my earlier statements about the affective structure of the progression here. Accompanying the fusion of the synthetic and thematic components of character is our awareness of Calvino's relation to the authorial audience, and this relation becomes more and more playful as the narrative progresses. We ask questions like these: what twist will he give his construction next? Will I be able to follow it? What will that in turn set up? In general, can he meet his own challenges to write this self-reflexive work that induces reflection on its own reading and can we catch all the devices by which he tries? We progress through the narrative enjoying the challenge, wanting to be equal to it, but hoping also that we are not so equal to it that we feel somehow ahead of our playful guide. Whenever we do feel like we're catching up to Calvino, we have not only the satisfaction of meeting his challenge but also the payoff of learning something new—or articulating more clearly something we've already known—about our reading. The story of the Reader becomes the occasion for this serious play.

V

The pattern of the progression after Chapter 2 is in one sense fairly predictable and in another characteristically surprising. The Reader's two quests appear to proceed along parallel lines until Chapter 7. Every lead that the Reader follows to find the continuation of the previous narrative brings him only to the beginning of another new narrative, and the pattern of the opening chapters continues: numbered chapter addressed to characterized audience; titled chapter read in common by the Reader, the narrative audience, and the authorial audience; numbered chapter, and so on. Each lead the Reader follows takes him into a new situation of reading: reading aloud, reading in a university setting, reading followed by academic analysis of it, reading against the backdrop of its production in a publishing house. The result is that the authorial audience is led to reflect on
the variety of situations and relationships that contextualize its own reading.

During this stage, two other sorts of readers are introduced, and these set off how even the ordinary reading of the Reader is defined by a specific set of interests and desires. First, Calvino introduces Ludmilla’s sister, Lotaria, the Utilitarian Reader who wants only to know “the author’s position with regard to Trends of Contemporary Thought and Problems That Demand a Solution” (p. 44). Second, he introduces Irnerio, the Non-Reader who has trained himself not even to read what appears before his eyes. Through the Reader’s interactions with these two and with Ludmilla herself, Calvino maintains the instability surrounding the Reader’s quest for her. During this stage, the Other Reader is far more interested in her reading than in him. In Chapter 7, however, a new stage of the progression begins as Calvino introduces one of his surprises and thereby intertwines the two major instabilities. Ludmilla matter-of-factly invites the Reader “to begin,” and they engage in a reading of each other’s bodies. The surprise here is that Calvino reverses the conventions of the boy-meets-girl, boy-wants-reluctant-girl, boy-eventually-gets-no-longer-reluctant-girl formula that he has been working with until this point. One important consequence of the move is to take the narrative even further away from the mimetic and into the realm of the synthetic: characters need not follow the minimal mimetic characterizations that they are initially given, but may act in new ways at the convenience of the author. At the same time, Calvino’s use of the characterized audience and the metaphor of reading to describe their lovemaking allows the authorial audience to make a personal application of the description if it sees fit.

One effect of this surprise in the progression is of course to comment upon the conventions of the boy-meets-girl plot that Calvino is inverting here. The other is the way it intertwines the two instabilities:

in the satisfaction you receive from her way of reading you, from the textual quotations of your physical objectivity, you begin to harbor a doubt: that she is not reading you, single and whole as you are, but using you, using fragments of you detached from the context to construct for herself a ghostly partner, known to her alone, in the penumbra of her semiconsciousness, and what she is deciphering is this apocryphal visitor, not you. (P. 156)

Since the jealous Reader suspects his rival to be either the translator who injects falsehoods into books, Ermes Marana, or the author who is said to “produce books the way a pumpkin vine produces pumpkins,” Silas Flannery, the Reader is unable to be satisfied in his quest
for the Other Reader until he satisfies his quest for—or at least geto
to the bottom of the mystery about—the continuation of the inte
rupted narratives. Thus, Calvino continues the focus on the produ-
tion, uses, and situations of books and their reading as the Read-
goes first to visit Silas Flannery, and then to an imaginary country in
South America, fruitlessly trying to unravel the “apocrypha con-
spiracy.” Finally, he ends up in a library in his hometown, where ten books he has begun are all catalogued but unattainable. Instead
of getting the books themselves, he gets into a discussion on readir
with seven other readers that eventually leads him to decide to mari
Ludmilla. No sooner decided than done, and the narrative ends wil
one final twist that I shall examine below.

Meanwhile, the story of the Reader’s quest continues to be pun-
tuated by the beginnings of new narratives that always break off. Ju
as the numbered chapters explore different conditions of readin,
these *incipits* explore different kinds of reading experiences, each or
anticipated by a wish of Ludmilla’s: before “Outside the town of Me-
bork,” she says, “I prefer novels that bring me into a world whe:
everything is precise, concrete, specific,” and lo and behold that
just what the narrative is. Similarly, before “Looks down in the gat-
ering shadow,” the story of the man trying to get rid of the corpse of
his rival, Jojo, she says “The novel I would most like to read at th
moment should have as its driving force only the desire to narrate,
pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of
life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like
tree, an entangling as if of barbs and branches” and again that is ju
what we get (p. 92).

In sum, then, there are two main underlying principles of the pr
gression: to explore reading and its multifaceted relationships and
offer a variety of distinct reading experiences. As compared, say,
the principles of progression in *Pride and Prejudice*, these allow
the author considerable freedom. Once Austen establishes the particu
instances of her narrative, she then must carefully select—or situate—those incidents that will contribute to the authorial auc
ence’s greatest satisfaction in the eventual resolution of the inst
bilities accomplished by the engagement of Elizabeth and Darc
Calvino, on the other hand, is relatively free to employ his narrati
ingenuity to use the surface movement of the progression in his e
ploration of reading and its situations. Both the particular way
which he induces self-reflexiveness on the part of the authorial auc
ence and the particular issues that he chooses are only minimal
constrained by the early strokes of the narrative. The constrain
imposed by his general principles are only that he actually display t
foregrounding the synthetic

variety of reading and that he move the narrative further and further into its exploration of the synthetic component of narrative.

The surprises I alluded to above satisfy those constraints, even as they exhibit Calvino's ingenuity and substantially affect the specific development of the progression. The surprise of Chapter 7 is soon followed by the deviation of Chapter 8, where the second-person address to the characterized audience gives way to the diary of Silas Flannery, written in the first person. Furthermore, the status of the diary within the whole narrative situation is not at all clear. At the end of chapter 7, the Reader resolves to visit Flannery, but the narrator never tells us that the Reader actually gets the diary in his possession. Indeed, toward the end of the chapter he appears as a figure in the diary seen now from Flannery's perspective, and the diary continues beyond the Reader's last visit. Thus, for the first time both the narrative and authorial audiences now have access to information about the characterized audience that the Reader himself does not have. Where previously the Reader's actions in effect controlled the narrative discourse—in Chapters 1 through 7 (and indeed, in 9 through 12) the narrator describes and sometimes reacts to or comments further upon the Reader's actions—the discourse in Chapter 8 is quite independent of him. Since the narrator of the other chapters does not appear until the very end of Chapter 8 and does not account for the presentation of the diary, the authorial audience is inclined to take it as a gift from Calvino himself. This inference of course further supports the authorial audience's awareness of the synthetic nature of our reading experience here.

This drive further and further into the synthetic continues with the embedding of the idea of Calvino's own book within Flannery's diary. Characteristically, Calvino also gives a twist to this rather obvious narrative maneuver, and the twist leads to another of the progression's surprises.

I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of the beginnings of novels. The protagonist could be a Reader who is continually interrupted. The Reader buys the new novel A by the author Z. But it is a defective copy, he can't go beyond the beginning. . . . He returns to the bookshop to have the volume exchanged. . . . I could write it all in the second person: you, Reader. . . . I could also introduce a young lady, the Other Reader, a counterfeiter-translator, and an old writer who keeps a diary like this diary. . . .

But I wouldn't want the young lady Reader, in escaping the Counterfeiter, to end up in the arms of the Reader. I will see to it that the Reader sets out on the trail of the Counterfeiter, hiding in
some very distant country, so the Writer can remain alone with the young lady, the Other Reader.

To be sure, without a female character, the Reader's journey would lose liveliness: he must encounter some other woman on his way. Perhaps the Other Reader could have a sister. . . . (Pp. 197–8)

Since Flannery is the author-figure of the narrative, and since the first part of the description encapsulates Calvino's own narrative, the latter part establishes a tension between Calvino and the authorial audience: will this plan be carried out? The tension is resolved in Chapter 9 when the Reader has the following encounter with Lotaria, who has successively appeared under the names Corinna, Alfonsina, Ingrid, Gertrude, and Sheila.

. . . Sheila-Alfonsina-Gertrude has thrown herself on you, torn off your prisoner's trousers; your naked limbs mingle under the closets of electronic memories.

Reader, what are you doing? Aren't you going to resist? Aren't you going to escape? Ah, you are participating. . . . Ah, you fling yourself into it, too. . . . You're the absolute protagonist of this book, very well; but do you believe that gives you the right to have carnal relations with all the female characters? Like this, without any preparation. . . . Wasn't your story with Ludmilla enough to give the plot the warmth and grace of a love story? What need do you have to go also with her sister (or with somebody you identify with her sister), with this Lotaria-Corinna-Sheila, who, when you think about it, you've never even liked. . . . It's natural for you to want to get even, after you have followed events of pages and pages with passive resignation, but does this seem the right way to you? Or are you trying to say that even in this situation you find yourself involved, despite yourself? You know very well that this girl always acts with her head, what she thinks in theory she does in practice, to the ultimate consequences. . . . It was an ideological demonstration she wanted to give you, nothing else. . . . Why, this time, do you allow yourself to be convinced immediately by her arguments? Watch out, Reader: here everything is different from what it seems, everything is two-faced. . . . (P. 219)

The narrator's remarks to the Reader about the freedom that comes with his role as "absolute protagonist" are reminiscent of Fowles's narrator's remarks in Chapter 13 of The French Lieutenant's Woman about the autonomy of his characters, and here too those remarks actually emphasize the synthetic status of the protagonist. Because Calvino's narrator is addressing a characterized audience, however, he creates the effect in a somewhat different way. Although the question is about the character's rights to independent action, it presup-
poses that the Reader knows he is a character, a knowledge that he did not seem to have before this point.

This further foregrounding of the synthetic is effected by another use of the characterized audience: the double applications it invites do allow almost everything in the discourse to be two-faced—at least. Why does the Reader fling himself into it? His action violates the few mimetic dimensions that he has: as the narrator says, the Reader has never even liked Lotaria and what we have seen of his own jealousy leads us to infer that he would regard a sexual encounter with her as a kind of betrayal of his own feelings for Ludmilla. The answer to the narrator’s question is that the Reader has no choice; the event appears to be dictated by the plan in Flannery’s diary, which is itself of course dictated by a plan of Calvino’s. Or to put it another way, the Reader is flung into it by Calvino, who wants his authorial audience to wonder about the levels of reality in the narrative: at this point, in addition to the frame story and the *incipits*, we have Flannery’s diary embedded in the frame and then, in a sense, this episode growing out of that embedded diary: the inside has become the outside, making the former outside an inside—perhaps. The effect of this development is to induce the authorial audience to reflect upon the irreducibly synthetic and wonderfully complex nature of reading fiction, especially this one, a reflection that takes us to the role of the author in controlling the synthesis, and the role of the reader in seeking to detect its “hidden intention.”

As we see in this development of the progression, part of the intention here is to take a character with a prominent synthetic component and minimal mimetic dimensions and make that synthetic component increasingly prominent, even as some pretense about the mimetic consistency and/or autonomy is preserved. This part of the intention is given one of its most striking—and appropriate—twists in the final chapters, but before examining them, I would like to back up and consider the relation of the *incipits* to the progression of the outer story.

As noted above, one of the relations between these *incipits* and the outer story is that each of them (except the first) offers a reading experience that fulfills the wish of the Other Reader. In this respect, their relation to the outer story parallels the relation of the Reader’s encounter with Lotaria to Flannery’s diary: the apparent autonomy of the later development is undercut because it is actually a consequence of an earlier moment in the narrative. (Furthermore, there are certain proper names carried over from one *incipit* to the other that also serve to undercut their apparent autonomy.) At the same time, because Ludmilla’s desires are consistently fulfilled, her way of reading—her
openness to a variety of experiences, her delight in reading for reading's sake, her excellent recall of what she has read—is presented as superior to the Reader's.

Of course, Ludmilla's desires are not so specific that they determine in advance the precise details and developments of the *incipits*. As a result, Calvino sets himself a very challenging narrative project. The challenge, in effect, is to emphasize the distance between the authorial and the narrative audiences and then get us to participate in the narrative audience in spite of ourselves. Although the stories range from following the conventions of realism to invoking the elements of the fantastic, the narrative audience in each is clearly invited to believe in the reality of the events, to get caught up in the developing plots. Of course, as the outer narrative emphasizes the synthetic more and more, the challenge becomes greater: the authorial audience, in effect, has to travel farther and farther to enter the narrative audience of each succeeding *incipit*. Moreover, after the first two or three titled chapters, we enter the next ones knowing that they too will break off before they reach resolution, a knowledge that also inhibits our entrance into the narrative audience. By inducing us to enter these different audiences in spite of these difficulties, Calvino not only displays his own narrative virtuosity, but also teaches something about the power of our own desires for the mimetic illusion. Thus, in a curious way, even the experience of participating in the narrative audience gets transformed by the whole narrative into something that ultimately reinforces the synthetic nature of the whole narrative.

Within this general account of the role of the *incipits*, some further distinctions need to be made. Because the first two are part of the whole narrative setup, introducing the authorial audience to the concern with reading and with the shifting planes of narrative action, they are set apart from the rest by their own use of second-person narration. I have argued above that in "If on a winter's night a traveler" the second-person address appears to be a part of the actual narrative. In "Outside the town of Malbork," the situation is more ambiguous. At first, the evidence suggests that the second-person discourse is a summary made by the narrator of the outer story: 

Here everything is very concrete, substantial, depicted with sure expertise; or at least the impression given to you, Reader, is one of expertise, though there are some foods you don't know, mentioned by name, which the translator has decided to leave in the original. . . . (P. 34)

Then, however, the voice will employ the first person as well as the second and will therefore appear to be a voice within this narrative only:
Every moment you discover there is a new character, you don't know how many people there are in this immense kitchen of ours, it's no use counting, there were always many of us, at Kudgiwa, always coming and going. . . . (P. 35)

The ambiguity within "Outside the town" has its appropriate correspondence on the level of the narrative as a whole: even as we are entering the new narrative audience here, the ambiguity keeps us actively involved in the narrative audience of the frame story: we are again aware of our situation as readers reading about readers reading. Later on, however, when Calvino's problem is to get us to enter the narrative audience of the incipits, he drops this kind of ambiguity and offers more direct mimetic narration. Here, for example, is the beginning of the eighth incipit, "On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon:"

The ginkgo leaves fell like fine rain from the boughs and dotted the lawn with yellow. I was walking with Mr. Okeda on the path of smooth stones. I said I would like to distinguish the sensation of each single ginkgo leaf from the sensation of all the others, but I was wondering if it would be possible. Mr. Okeda said it was possible. (P.199)

We could, at this stage, be reading Hemingway-among-the-ginkgos—or any one of a number of novelists committed to preserving the mimetic illusion.

Interestingly, although the incipits consistently explore themes of identity and of shifting realities and in that sense echo and reinforce the frame story, Calvino does not establish any direct correspondences between the action of any given incipit and the action of the outer story that follows. His interest rather seems to be in keeping the audiences stretching to move from one to the other. One consequence of this strategy is that beyond the shift that occurs in the narrative discourse after "Outside the town of Malbork," Calvino is not especially tied down to the order of these fragments. If "On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon" preceded the third incipit, "Leaning from the steep slope," a story of a naive narrator who gets mixed up in a dangerous situation that he doesn't understand, there would be no significant consequences for the narrative. Similarly, there are no definite limits on the number of such fragments Calvino could incorporate into the narrative. If we had twelve or eight rather than ten, it would work much the same way. At the same time, there are some general limits. At the lower end, he needs to include a sufficient number to give his audiences a significant variety of reading experiences; only in that way can the whole narrative's exploration of the nature of reading be satisfactory. While eight might be enough,
five would doubtless be too few. At the upper end, he faces the con­
straint imposed by his own return to the irreducibly synthetic nature
of reading. He is, I think, able to meet his difficult challenge of induc­
ing us to enter new narrative audiences in spite of ourselves for the
ten incipits he gives us, but he could not do so indefinitely. He is
skillful enough to win us over a few more times if he chose, but by
the fourteenth or fifteenth time, the whole process would doubtless
grow tedious.

Within the incipits themselves, Calvino faces another constraint. He
needs to generate a progression that will in fact catch us up and he
needs to break it off before any resolution is reached. Beyond that he
also needs to provide a partial closure so that we do not end up sim­
ply frustrated that the fragments are never completed. In general, his
strategy is to offer us some initial incident of a narrative, one that
points toward further possible complications even as the incident it­
self is essentially completed. For example, in “In a network of lines
that enlace,” the story of the professor who, while out jogging, an­
swers the phone in an empty house, the audience is taken through
the whole process of his hesitation about answering the phone, his
initial escape from it, his irresistible attraction to it, his answering it
and receiving the message about Marjorie being tied up and in danger
of death, his doubt about whether this could be any Marjorie he
knows, his suspicion that this Marjorie is one of his students, his
sudden decision, when learning from other students that she hasn’t
shown up for two days, to go to the address given in the message.
Then we have the conclusion:

I have already run off. I leave the campus. I take Grosvenor Ave­
nue, then Cedar Street, then Maple Road. I am completely out of
breath, I am running only because I cannot feel the ground beneath
my feet, or my lungs in my chest. Here is Hillside Drive. Eleven,
fifteen, twenty-seven, fifty-one; thank God the numbers go fast,
skipping from one decade to the next. Here is 115. The door is
open, I climb the stairs, I enter a room in semidarkness. There is
Marjorie, tied on a sofa, gagged. I release her. She vomits. She
looks at me with contempt.

“You’re a bastard,” she says to me. (P. 139)

The conclusion resolves most of the tensions and the instabilities: his
neurosis about answering the phone seems to have suited some­
body’s purpose; furthermore, his reaction has proven, at least in one
sense, to be a sound one: we now know that the Marjorie of the mes­
gage is the Marjorie he knows. In short, we have a full incident here.
At the same time, other instabilities remain: Who called him? How
much does the caller know? Why is Marjorie bound and gagged?
Why does Marjorie swear at him, when he has apparently rescued her? And of course, what will happen next? In short, having entered the narrative audience here, we are interested in hearing more, but our desires for resolution have been partially satisfied.

If this analysis of the progression of the *incipits* is correct, especially in its discussion of the number of such beginnings the narrative can incorporate, then it suggests that they cannot establish their own closure, either singly or as a group. Since the Reader's two quests become intertwined in Chapter 7, and since one of the few absolute certainties of the narrative is that the Reader cannot succeed in the quest to find the end of any of the *incipits*, Calvino cannot end the narrative by taking the usual route of resolving the major instabilities.

However, if I am right in saying that after Chapter 7 the progression increasingly emphasizes the synthetic nature of the whole reading experience, then an appropriate ending ought at least to make some gesture toward resolving the instabilities as it also offers some final twist on the issues explored in the synthetic realm. By bringing the Reader back to his hometown library and having him decide to marry Ludmilla, Calvino solves his problem with characteristic ingenuity.

The Reader's discussion with the other readers in the library serves several important functions, but before looking at those, we should note that Calvino has gone so far away from the mimetic that he does not even trouble to explain how the Reader got out of his apparent difficulties in Ircania to return to his hometown. Calvino wants the Reader there, so he puts him there. In effect, the same thing happens with the marriage. He wants to get the Reader and Ludmilla married, so he declares them married—Ludmilla's desires, motivations, possible hesitations, etc. are simply not an issue at this point. The reason the authorial audience does not object to Calvino's doing these things is that they have come to regard the mimetic surface of the narrative as only an occasion for him to explore his concerns with the nature of reading. He can thus manipulate that surface as long as the manipulation pays off on the thematic-synthetic level.

The first function served by the discussion among the readers in the library is to complicate the authorial audience's reflections on reading by introducing each reader's explicit credo about reading. Because these readers discuss their experiences in reading both one book and many books, the authorial audience is led to reflect not just on its own reading of this book but also on the relation of that reading to its reading of other books. As Calvino presents the different kinds of readers here—the one who is so stimulated by reading that he can never read more than a few pages of any book, the one who cannot
take his attention from what he is reading, another who continually rereads, discovering a new book each time, the one who sees all books as part of the same book, and so on—he does not favor one over the others, and he does not favor Ludmilla’s over any of them. Consequently, the authorial audience, having been brought to a heightened awareness of the nature and variety of reading fictional narrative, must now reexamine its own typical habits of reading, and adopt the stance that any one habit may be too limiting. This step goes a long way toward completing Calvino’s exploration of one of the main issues in the narrative.

The second function is to supply a twist on the Reader’s search for the continuation of the incipits, a twist sufficient to help end the quest and thus provide closure. That twist comes through the sixth reader, the one who revels in the moment preceding reading. He takes the step of putting all the titles together:

“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 enlace, 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.” (P. 258)

Although the Reader initially objects that this is not the first paragraph of a book, the authorial audience recognizes it as the final reflexive move of the incipits: here we have a new incipit, constructed out of the titles of the ten previous ones and the fragment from the Arabian Nights included in this chapter. Furthermore, the move sets up the comment by the seventh reader—the one concerned with endings—that leads the Reader to his decision to marry Ludmilla:

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

Suddenly aware of his own developing story, the Reader chooses marriage and life, while the authorial audience acknowledges and admires Calvino’s witty manner of bringing about the resolution of the surface instability. The final stroke of the narrative comes appropriately in its final line.

Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader. A great double bed receives your parallel readings.

Ludmilla closes her book, turns off her light, puts her head back against the pillow, and says, “Turn off your light, too. Aren’t you tired of reading?”
And you say, "Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveler* by Italo Calvino." (P. 260)

This last line of course brings the authorial audience back to the first—"You are about to begin reading the new novel by Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler*"—and functions as a strong signal of closure in the same way that Whitey's "Comb it wet or dry?" signals closure in "Haircut:" it signals the end of the action or situation that makes the narrative possible. At the same time, the line contributes to the appropriate completeness of the narrative because it provides a final twist on the development of Calvino's relations to his audiences.

The similarities and differences between the first and last sentences are revealing of how far the authorial audience has traveled. Whereas the first sentence conceals the distinction between the narrative and characterized audience, the final one overtly plays with the distinction. It remains ambiguous in a way that the first one does not. Once the authorial audience reaches Chapter 2, it must disambiguate the first sentence by reading it as referring to the first *incipit*. That reading of the first line actually reinforces a secondary meaning—and thus, the ambiguity—of this last line: perhaps the Reader has finally obtained the full text of the narrative he began to those many narratives ago and is finally about to reach its end. At the same time, of course, the primary reading of the line is one that interprets it as referring to the book that the authorial audience finishes reading when it finishes the line.

But to hold onto that reading, we must assume that the Reader has in a sense adopted our perspective on himself, i.e., has become the authorial audience for the narrative of his own life, including his final action of discussing his reading of that narrative. This authorial audience recognizes that such a narrative situation leads to an infinite regress of mirrors-reflecting-mirrors, readings-within-readings, but from Calvino's point of view that recognition is a contemplation devoutly to be wished. In this respect, the final line is the culmination of all the reflexive devices of the narrative.

In this reading of the line, we also see the screen erected by the use of the characterized audience expand and contract. By having the characterized audience speak in the narrative that the narrative audience is reading, Calvino is obviously communicating with the narrative audience behind a thick screen. When the characterized audience, however, utters a sentence that can more easily be applied to the narrative audience (the application doesn't require as many mirrors), the screen quickly becomes thinner. Nevertheless, it cannot become fully transparent—the characterized audience presumably has
more to read after speaking, while the narrative audience finishes its reading with that utterance. Thus, Calvino appropriately leaves the authorial audience reflecting on the quickly shifting relationships between the two audiences, relationships that have been crucial to the experience of the entire narrative. In so doing, the line appropriately completes the affective structure of the narrative as well: Calvino's last move is appropriately among the strongest signs of his virtuosity, one that offers in a highly concentrated dose the serious pleasure that has marked the entire developing interchange of the progression.

As its title indicates, this second part of my study has been concerned with showing how different narratives have exploited the synthetic component of character for specific uses in their different progressions. The examples we have looked at in detail are not exhaustive but they certainly represent a broad range of functions for the synthetic component. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* shows how the occasional foregrounding of the synthetic can displace interest from the mimetic to the thematic sphere. *Great Expectations* is an example of how the foregrounded synthetic component of a supporting character can cause a ripple effect through the mimetic and thematic functions of a protagonist. *If on a winter's night a traveler* is above all an example of how the synthetic can subsume the other two functions—and in so doing, establish an admirably inventive kind of progression.

At this stage the principles of the interpretation of character and progression in narrative have been repeatedly exemplified and reexamined. In the next part, I turn to consider another, equally crucial side of the rhetorical transaction of reading narrative: resisting the understanding that these principles might lead one to. My focus will be the character of Catherine Barkley in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, but the actual analysis of her case will draw on most of the principles that have been developed so far. In another sense, though, my discussion of her character is an extension of the concerns of this part of the study: I will be looking at the interaction of the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic functions in this character where the synthetic component remains in the background.