

Italo Calvino

How I Wrote One of My Books

Translated by Iain White

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CHAPTER I



The reader who is there (L) is reading the book that is there (ℓ)
 The book that is there relates the story of the reader who is in the book (L')
 The reader who is in the book does not succeed in reading the book in the book (ℓ')
 The book that is there does not relate the story of the reader who is there

The reader who is in the book claims to be the reader who is there
 The book that is there claims to be the book that is in the book

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CHAP. VII	$L - \ell$ $M - [$	$L - [$ $\ell - M$	$L - L$ $x - \ell$	$L - L$ $x - \ell$	$A^- - \ell$ $L - L$	$L - A^-$ $\ell - L$
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CHAPTER I



The reader who is there (L) is reading the book that is there (ℓ)
 The book that is there relates the story of the reader who is in the book (L')
 The reader who is in the book does not succeed in reading the book in the book (ℓ')
 The book that is there does not relate the story of the reader who is there

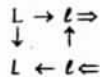
The reader who is in the book claims to be the reader who is there
 The book that is there claims to be the book that is in the book

CHAPTER II



The reader (L) is upset by the interruption of his reading (ℓ^{\wedge})
 The interruption of his reading leads to a meeting with the female reader (L)
 The female reader wishes to get on with her reading (ℓ^{\cup})
 Her getting on with her reading rules out a further meeting with the reader

The reader wishes to see the female reader again
 The interruption of the book becomes the continuation of the book



The reader wishes to continue the book he has begun ($\ell \Rightarrow$)
 The reader is pleased to encounter the female reader (L)
 The beginning of the book started-on ($\ell \Leftarrow$) does not please the female reader
 The book started-on does not wish to continue

The female reader wishes to begin another book
 The beginning of this book seeks another reader

CHAPTER III



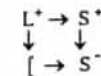
The impassioned female reader (L) relishes the art of the novel (ℓ^{\ast})
 The art of the novel might presuppose a character such as the intellectual female reader (ℓ)
 The intellectual female reader analyses the ideology of the novel (ℓ^{\ast})
 Ideology does not allow for a character such as that of the impassioned female reader

Ludmilla understands her sister Lotaria
 The ideology lacerates the poetry



The reader (L) is seeking a mysterious book (ℓ_x)
 The mysterious book is from the domain of the hyper-reader (L^+)
 The hyper-reader gives the reader an unfinished book (ℓ_{-x})
 The unfinished book is not the one the reader is seeking

The hyper-reader does not read the same books as the reader
 The mystery of a book is not in its end but in its beginning



The hyper-reader finds the sublime (S^+) in written words
 The non-reader (I) finds only silence (S^-) in written words
 The sublime finds its perfect realisation in silence
 The hyper-reader finds his perfect realisation in the non-reader

Not to read does not suffice to arrive at the sublime
 Not every hyper-reader succeeds in reading silence

CHAPTER IV



The quest of the reader (L) arouses the excitement of the professor (L⁺)
The professor's ecstasy intrigues Ludmilla (L)
Ludmilla's being carried away alarms Lotaria (ℒ)
Lotaria's learning embarrasses the reader



The professor's ecstasy alarms the reader
The reader's quest intrigues Lotaria
Lotaria's learning excites Ludmilla
Ludmilla's being carried away embarrasses the professor



Ludmilla's being carried away excites Lotaria
Lotaria's learning intrigues the reader
The reader's quest alarms the professor
The professor's ecstasy embarrasses Ludmilla



Ludmilla's being carried away intrigues the professor
The professor's ecstasy excites the reader
The reader's quest embarrasses Lotaria
Lotaria's learning alarms Ludmilla

CHAPTER V



The professional reader (L_p) envies the lot of the ordinary reader (L)
The ordinary reader gives chase to the author (A)
The author fears he is being plagiarised by the forger (A⁻)
The forger eludes the professional reader



The professional reader gives chase to the forger
The forger envies the lot of the author
The author eludes the ordinary reader
The ordinary reader would not fancy being in the place of the professional reader



The ordinary reader envies the lot of the professional reader
The forger persecutes the professional reader
The forger detests the author
The ordinary reader remains unknown to the author



The author envies the lot of the forger
The author pursues the ordinary reader
The professional reader feels sorry for the ordinary reader
The professional reader won't have anything to do with the forger



The professional reader envies the lot of the ordinary reader
The ordinary reader gives chase to the author
The professional reader gives chase to the forger
The forger envies the lot of the author

CHAPTER VI



The author (A) breathes his truth into his book (β)
The author's book is stolen by the forger (A^-)
The forger breathes his artifice into the apocryphal book (α)
The apocryphal book will be attributed to the author

There is a truth of the author's the forger alone knows
In every real book there is an artifice of which the apocryphal book can take possession



The forger (A^-) endeavours to imitate the style of the author (A)
The author endeavours to express himself in his real book (β)
The real book endeavours to differentiate itself from apocryphal books (α)
The apocryphal books do not endeavour to express the forger's truth

The forger can express a truth that is not his own
The author can produce apocrypha of himself



The forger (A^-) dreams up a super-author (the Father of Stories, A^+)
The hyper-author knows all the novels the author (A) dreams of writing
The author has a nightmare: his novel will be written by a computer (A^E)
The computer will be capable of realising the forger's dreams

The author's dreams and those of the forger resemble one another
The computer-author of novels is a dream of the Father of Stories



The forger (A^-) dreams up the perfect literary computer (A^e)
 The literary computer needs the input of the author (A)
 The author is haunted by the background noise (N) of his mind
 The background noise eludes the forger's grasp
 The computer is scrambled by the background noise
 The forger has not chosen his author well



The Father of Stories (A^+) no longer inspires the author (A)
 The author no longer succeeds in writing the novel he wanted (β)
 The novel to be written is swallowed up in the noise (N)
 The noise is the source from which all stories emerge
 A novel is botched if it does not have a mythic source
 It is in the noise that the author's truth is hidden



The author makes a hash of his real book
 The author is obliged to produce apocrypha of himself (α)
 The forger (A^-) has not the right to write the real book (β)
 The forger can produce all the apocrypha he wishes
 The real book is hidden among the apocrypha
 The author will write the story of the forger

CHAPTER VII



The female reader (L) is never satisfied with the book she is reading (ℓ)
 The books she reads mean nothing to the non-reader (I)
 The non-reader feels at home in a house full of books (M)
 A house full of books contains the story of the female reader
 The non-reader and the female reader are complementary to one another
 It is difficult to find a book in a house filled with books



The female reader is complementary to the non-reader
 The female reader is never satisfied with the book she is reading
 A house full of books is pleasing to the non-reader
 A house full of books conceals the sought-for book
 The female reader has never finished exploring her house
 The non-reader always finds the sought-for book



The reader (L) is finally reading the female reader
 The female reader would finally like to read the book
 The book does not reveal the mystery (x)
 The mystery conceals itself from the reader
 The female reader conceals a mystery
 The book is not finished by the reader



The female reader is also reading the reader
 The female reader still conceals a mystery
 A suspect book is discovered by the reader
 The suspect book does not yield up its mystery

In vain, reader, you pursue that bloody mystery
 In vain, female reader, you pursue that bloody book



The forger (A^-) has hidden a book in the house
 The female reader is not surprised at the hidden book
 The female reader does not yield up her secrets to the reader
 The reader is jealous of the forger

A hidden book arouses the reader's suspicions
 The female reader was well acquainted with the forger



The female reader was well acquainted with the forger
 The forger has crossed the path of the reader
 The reader does not recognise the suspect book
 The suspect book separates him from the female reader

But it is not certain that the suspect book belongs to the forger
 But it is not certain that the female reader belongs to the reader

CHAPTER VIII



The author (A) takes the female reader (L) as his model
 The female reader abandons herself to the pleasure of reading (ℓ)
 The pleasure of reading knows nothing of the fatigue of writing (ϵ)
 The fatigue of writing torments the author

The female reader knows nothing of the fatigue of writing
 The author has forgotten the pleasure of reading



The tormented author (A_t) would like to be the author of the book read by the female reader (ℓL)
 The productive author (A_p) would like to be the author of the book read by the female reader
 The tormented author does not recognise in his own book the book read by the female reader (ℓ_A)
 The productive author does not recognise in his own book the book read by the female reader

The tormented author and the productive author are jealous of one-another
 The read book and the written book are not the same book

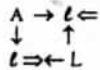


The book he must write (β) eludes the author (A) as an "I"
 The author would like to get out of his "I" to be an impersonal "one" (n)
 The impersonal "one" is capable of writing infinite libraries (B)
 The infinite libraries contain the book of the author as "I"

The author is haunted by the image of infinite libraries
 The impersonal language crystallises in the speech of the book



The forger (A^-) would like to steal the work of the author (A)
The intellectual female reader (\mathcal{L}) would like to lacerate the work of the author
The intellectual female reader would like to differentiate herself from the impassioned female reader (L)
The forger would like to seduce the impassioned female reader
The impassioned female reader is not interested in the person of the author
The work of the forger would be enough for the intellectual female reader



The author manages to write only the beginnings of novels
The reader manages to read only the beginnings of novels
The author does not manage to write a complete novel
The reader does not manage to read a complete novel
The reader does not find the solution of his problems with the author
The complete book is perhaps made up only of beginnings

CHAPTER IX



The reader (L) loses interest in the world (M)
The world assumes the form of an apocryphal book (α)
The apocryphal books are replacing the real books (β)
The desired book still eludes the reader
The world will never be a book
The apocryphal book is the story of the reader



The government in power (P) is suspicious of books (β)
Books no longer find their reader (L)
The reader puts his trust in apocryphal books (α)
The apocryphal books are signed by the government in power
One can no longer distinguish real books from apocryphal books
The story of the reader is determined by the government in power



Only the forger (A^-) understands the logic of the government in power (P)
The book (β) is helpless against the government in power
The forger makes his way by means of apocryphal books (α)
Each book is the apocryphal book of itself
For the forger nothing that is true exists
For the government in power only the false exists

$\mathcal{L} \rightarrow P$
 $\downarrow \quad \uparrow$
 $\alpha \leftarrow L$

Is the female intellectual (\mathcal{L}) for or against the government in power?
Is the female intellectual involved in the business of the apocryphal books?
Can the reader flee from his prison?
Will the reader be able to read anything other than an apocryphal book?
Is the female intellectual the reader's ally or his enemy?
Are the apocryphal books a weapon against the government in power?

CHAPTER X

$L \rightarrow \beta$
 $\uparrow \quad \downarrow$
 $\alpha \leftarrow C$

The reader (L) is still looking for the real book (β)
The real book is banned by censorship (C)
The censorship allows apocryphal books (α) to circulate
The apocryphal books give the reader no respite
The true book is still hidden among the false ones
The reader goes to see the censor

$C \rightarrow A^-$
 $\uparrow \quad \downarrow$
 $\beta \leftarrow L$

The censorship wishes to make use of the forger (A^-)
The forger wishes to get the better of the female reader (L)
The female reader wishes to be captivated by the real book (β)
The real book wishes to frustrate the censorship
The censorship can do nothing against the female reader
The real book is the forger's elusive dream

$C \rightarrow \alpha$
 $\downarrow \quad \uparrow$
 $L \leftarrow \beta$

The censorship keeps watch on the reader
The censorship is taken in by the apocryphal books
The real book is disguised as an apocryphal book
The real book is unrecognisable to the reader
The real book escapes the censorship
The reader believes every book is apocryphal

CHAPTER XI

$$\begin{array}{ccc} L & \rightarrow & L' \\ \uparrow & & \downarrow \\ \ell & \leftarrow & \ell' \end{array}$$

The reader (L) spies on another reader (L')
The other reader is reading another book (ℓ')
The other book is in reality this book (ℓ)
This book is addressed to you, reader

You, reader, you ought to have been reading another book
You, book, you ought to have been read by another reader

$$\begin{array}{ccc} L & \rightarrow & \ell \\ \downarrow & & \uparrow \\ L' & \leftarrow & \ell' \end{array}$$

You, reader, ought to have wanted to read that book
You, reader, you have read the story of another reader
It is another book, the one that tells the story of this book
That other book is intended for another reader

The book read by each reader is always another book
The reader of every book he reads is always another reader

CHAPTER XII

$$\begin{array}{ccc} L & \rightarrow & \ell \\ \downarrow & & \uparrow \\ n & \leftarrow & L \end{array}$$

The reader is engaged in finishing the book
The female reader has emerged from the book
The female reader extinguishes the light
The reader turns to her in the darkness

The reader and the female reader are in bed together
Life goes on going by and the book remains where it is

Italo Calvino

Note

The book in question is *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (Secker & Warburg, 1981). More precisely, the numbered chapters of that book. (The "novels" which are interspersed between these chapters follow other schemata and other constraints.)

The model square is a personal adaptation of the formulations of structural semiology of A.J. Greimas (see in particular *Du Sens*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1970, pp. 137ff.).

Paul Fournel

Suburbia

Foreword by Marguerite Duras
Afterword by François Caradec
Translated by Harry Mathews

*New edition annotated by Maurice Garin, Inspector of the Ministry of Education,
with a supplement for use in schools*

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