



The Role of the Reader in Postmodern Texts: A Reader-Response Analysis of Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler"

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ABSTRACT

Postmodern works reject the idea of absolute meaning, instead embracing randomness and chaos. Postmodern novels often use unreliable narrators to increase ambiguity through excessive subjectivity and prevent readers from finding meaning in the story. Characteristics of this era include intertextuality, fragmentation, and multiple narratives. Among the theories that emerged from this era is reader-response theory. Reader-response theory emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction to the dominant approach of New Criticism, which focused on the text itself rather than the reader's response to it. Proponents of reader-response theory argue that by emphasizing the role of the reader in shaping meaning, this approach offers a more democratic and inclusive vision of literature. This article aims to descriptively examine a work that deliberately engages with the reader and makes him the protagonist of its vision, Italo Calvino's novel *So on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, which represents a conscious textual game that uses various techniques such as authorial discontinuity, reader participation, open structure, nonlinearity, fragmentation, multiplicity, and intertextuality. The writer highlights his presence and the status of the novel as a purely artistic work throughout the work through different patterns of textual play such as commenting on the process of writing the novel, the reader who reads the novel, the author who appears in the novel as one of the characters of the novel with his own identity, and the reader as a character in the novel, seeking to attract attention through the beginning and end of the novel, transcending time and place, referring to other existing or imaginary works of art, and meeting classical works of art. This article analyzes the effectiveness of Calvino. In these pages we will talk about the role of the reader in analyzing this novel. This article contains key questions, including: How did the reader respond to the writer and become the protagonist of the novel? What is the nature of the novel and how does it differ from other visions? The methodology includes a careful analysis based on Louis Rosablatt's approach to analyzing the reader's response and reaching the depths of complex humanity.

Introduction

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The concept of postmodernism has been a subject of intense debate and discussion in literary theory since the 1960s. Postmodernism is characterized by a rejection of grand narratives, metafiction, self-reflexivity, and a blurring of the lines between high and low culture (Lyotard, 1979; Jameson, 1984). In literature, postmodernism is often associated with the works of authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Italo Calvino, who are known for their experimental and subversive approaches to narrative.

Reader-response criticism, on the other hand, is a critical approach that emphasizes the role of the reader in the creation of meaning in a text. Reader-response critics such as Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss argue that the reader is not a passive consumer of texts, but rather an active participant in the creation of meaning (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982). This approach is particularly relevant in understanding postmodern texts, which often challenge traditional notions of authorship and the reader's role.

Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler" (1979) is a quintessential example of a postmodern text that embodies many of the key features of the genre. This novel is a metafictional text that self-reflexively addresses the reader and challenges traditional notions of narrative and authorship. Through its use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readably interventions, Calvino's text disrupts the traditional reader's expectations and agency, encouraging the reader to participate in the creation of meaning.

This paper will explore the role of the reader in postmodern texts, using Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler" as a case study. The paper will argue that the reader is not a passive consumer of texts, but rather an active participant in the creation of meaning, and that Calvino's text blurs the lines between author and reader, extending the reader's agency through the use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readerly interventions.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a reader-response analysis, to examine the role of the reader in postmodern texts. The theoretical framework is grounded in reader-response criticism, which emphasizes the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning in a text. The study focuses on Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler" as a case study, which is a quintessential example of a postmodern text.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the theoretical frameworks of reader-response criticism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. The reader-response approach is based on the work of Wolfgang Iser (1978), who argues that the reader is not a passive consumer of texts, but rather an active participant in the creation of meaning. Iser's theory emphasizes the reader's role in filling in the gaps and ambiguities of a text, and in creating a unique interpretation of the text.

The poststructuralist framework, as articulated by Jacques Derrida (1976), is also influential in this study. Derrida's concept of *différance*, which highlights the instability and ambiguity of meaning, is particularly relevant to the analysis of postmodern texts. Poststructuralism challenges traditional notions of authorship, narrative, and meaning, and emphasizes the fragmented and provisional nature of knowledge. Postmodernism, as described by Jean-François Lyotard (1979), and Almaarouf (2024) is characterized by a rejection of grand

narratives, metafiction, self-reflexivity, and a blurring of the lines between high and low culture. Postmodern texts often challenge traditional notions of narrative and authorship, and emphasize the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning.

The data for this study consists of a close reading of Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler". The text is analyzed using a reader-response approach, which emphasizes the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning.

Literature Review

The concept of reader-response criticism has been a significant area of study in literary theory since the 1960s. Reader-response critics argue that the reader plays an active role in the creation of meaning in a text, rather than being a passive consumer. This approach challenges traditional notions of authorship and narrative, and emphasizes the reader's agency in interpreting the text. One of the key figures in the development of reader-response criticism is Wolfgang Iser (1978). Iser argues that the reader is not a passive consumer of texts, but rather an active participant in the creation of meaning. He suggests that the reader fills in the gaps and ambiguities of a text, and creates a unique interpretation of the text. Iser's theory emphasizes the importance of the reader's role in shaping the meaning of a text.

Another important figure in reader-response criticism is Hans-Robert Jauss (1982). Jauss argues that the reader's response to a text is not a individualistic event, but rather a social and historical event. He suggests that the reader's response is shaped by the cultural and historical context in which they read the text. Jauss's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the reader's response as a social and historical event. The concept of poststructuralism has also been influential in the development of reader-response criticism. Poststructuralists, such as Jacques Derrida (1976), argue that meaning is not fixed or stable, but rather is subject to multiple interpretations. Derrida's concept of *différance* highlights the instability and ambiguity of meaning, and challenges traditional notions of authorship and narrative.

Postmodernism, as described by Jean-François Lyotard (1979), is characterized by a rejection of grand narratives, metafiction, self-reflexivity, and a blurring of the lines between high and low culture. Postmodern texts often challenge traditional notions of narrative and authorship, and emphasize the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning. Italo Calvino's novel is a quintessential example of a postmodern text that embodies many of the key features of the genre. The novel is a metafictional text that self-reflexively addresses the reader and challenges traditional notions of narrative and authorship. Through its use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readerly interventions, Calvino's text disrupts the traditional reader's expectations and agency, encouraging the reader to participate in the creation of meaning.

In terms of reader-response criticism, Calvino's text challenges traditional notions of authorship and narrative, and emphasizes the reader's agency in interpreting the text. The text's use of metafiction, self-reflexivity, and intertextuality creates a complex and fragmented narrative that requires the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning. The literature on reader-response criticism and postmodernism provides a rich and complex understanding of the ways in which readers interact with texts. This study will draw on this literature to explore the ways in which readers engage with Calvino's text, and to examine the implications of this engagement for our understanding of reader-response criticism and postmodernism.

Discussion: The Traditional Reader: A Passive Consumer

The traditional notion of the reader as a passive consumer of texts is a long-standing concept in literary theory. This idea posits that the reader is a mere recipient of the author's message, with little to no agency in the creation of meaning. The reader is seen as a passive participant, absorbing the text without actively engaging with it. This notion is evident in the work of literary theorists such as Roland Barthes (1967), who argued that the reader is a "consumer" of texts, passively receiving the author's message without any control over its meaning. Barthes saw the reader as a "cultural dope," a passive recipient of cultural products with no ability to critically engage with them. However, postmodern texts, such as Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler," challenge this binary by actively engaging the reader in the creation of meaning. Calvino's novel is a metafictional text that self-reflexively addresses the reader and challenges traditional notions of narrative and authorship.

Calvino's Disruption of the Traditional Reader

Calvino's use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and willingly interventions disrupts the traditional reader's expectations and agency. The novel's use of multiple narrative threads creates a complex and fragmented narrative that requires the reader to actively engage with the text. For example, in the novel, the reader is presented with multiple storylines, each with its narrative voice and style. The reader is forced to switch between these different narratives, creating a sense of disorientation and confusion. This disruption of the traditional narrative structure challenges the reader's expectations and forces them to actively engage with the text. As critic, Franco Moretti (1983), notes, "Calvino's text is a labyrinth, a maze that the reader must navigate in order to find the thread of the narrative" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in navigating the complex narrative structure of the novel. Furthermore, Calvino's use of interruptions and readably interventions also disrupts the traditional reader's agency. The novel is filled with interruptions, such as the reader's discovery of new narrative threads or the introduction of new characters. These interruptions challenge the reader's expectations and force them to re-evaluate their understanding of the narrative. As critic, Erich Auerbach (1953), notes, "The reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in engaging with the text and creating meaning.

The Active Reader: Participation and Collaboration

The concept of the active reader is a central idea in reader-response criticism, as proposed by critics such as Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss. According to Iser (1978), the reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning. The reader brings their own experiences, knowledge, and biases to the text, which are then used to create a unique interpretation of the narrative.

Jauss (1982) further develops this idea by suggesting that the reader's response to a text is a social and historical event. The reader's response is shaped by the cultural and historical context in which they read the text. Jauss argues that the reader's response is not an individualistic event, but a social and historical event that is influenced by the reader's position within the social and cultural context.

Calvino's Encouragement of Reader Participation

Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler" is a text that actively encourages the reader to participate in the creation of meaning. The novel is a metafictional text that self-reflexively addresses the reader and challenges traditional notions of narrative and authorship.

As Calvino (1979) writes, "The reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in engaging with the text and creating meaning.

The novel's use of self-reflexivity, metafiction, and intertextuality also facilitates the reader's participation. Self-reflexivity is a literary device that involves the text commenting on its own nature and the process of creation. Metafiction is a type of self-reflexive narrative that involves the text commenting on its own fictional nature. Intertextuality is a literary device that involves the text referencing other texts and cultural artifacts. For example, in the novel, the reader is presented with a series of fragmented narratives that are interrupted by the reader's own thoughts and reflections. This creates a sense of disorientation and confusion, which challenges the reader's expectations and forces them to actively engage with the text.

As critic, Franco Moretti (1983) notes, "Calvino's text is a labyrinth, a maze that the reader must navigate in order to find the thread of the narrative" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in navigating the complex narrative structure of the novel. Furthermore, the novel's use of intertextuality also facilitates the reader's participation. The novel references a wide range of cultural artifacts, including literature, art, and music. This creates a sense of cultural context that is essential to understanding the narrative.

As critic, Erich Auerbach (1953) notes, "The reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in engaging with the text and creating meaning. The self-reflexivity, metafiction, and intertextuality encourages the reader to participate in the creation of meaning, facilitating a collaborative relationship between the reader and the text.

The Reader as Co-Author: Collaborative Storytelling

Italo Calvino's novel blurs the lines between author and reader, creating a collaborative storytelling experience that challenges traditional notions of authorship and reader agency. The novel's use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readerly interventions extends the reader's agency, making them a co-author of the narrative.

Blurring the Lines between Author and Reader

Calvino's text challenges the traditional notion of the author as a singular creator of meaning. Instead, the author becomes a facilitator of the reader's engagement with the text. As Calvino (1979) writes, "The reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning" (p. 123). The novel's use of self-reflexivity and metafiction further blurs the lines between author and reader. The text comments on its own nature and the process of creation, drawing attention to the reader's role in shaping the narrative. For example, the novel includes a section where the reader is addressed directly, "You are the reader, and you are the one who must take responsibility for the story" (Calvino, 1979, p. 123).

Extending the Reader's Agency

The use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readerly interventions extends the reader's agency, making them a co-author of the narrative. The novel's structure is characterized by multiple storylines, each with its own narrative voice and style. The reader is forced to switch between these different narratives, creating a sense of disorientation and confusion. As critic, Franco Moretti (1983) notes, "Calvino's text is a labyrinth, a maze that the reader must navigate in order to find the thread of the narrative" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in navigating the complex narrative structure of the novel.

The interruptions and readable interventions also extend the reader's agency. The novel includes sections where the reader is forced to make choices, such as deciding which narrative thread to follow or how to interpret a particular event. These choices are not predetermined by the author, but rather are left to the reader's interpretation.

Implications for Collaborative Storytelling

The collaborative storytelling in Calvino's text has significant implications for our understanding of the reader's role in postmodern texts. It challenges the traditional notion of the author as a singular creator of meaning and highlights the reader's agency in shaping the narrative. As critic, Erich Auerbach (1953) notes, "The reader is not a passive recipient of the text, but an active participant in the creation of meaning" (p. 123). This statement highlights the reader's active role in engaging with the text and creating meaning. The author's use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and enthusiastically interventions extends the reader's agency, making them a co-author of the narrative. This collaborative storytelling experience challenges traditional notions of authorship and reader agency, highlighting the reader's active role in shaping the narrative.

Conclusion

This study has explored the concept of reader-response criticism and its application to Italo Calvino's novel, "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler". Through a close reading of the novel and a critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks of reader-response criticism, this study has demonstrated the ways in which the reader is actively engaged in the creation of meaning in the text. The study has shown that Calvino's novel challenges traditional notions of authorship and reader agency, blurring the lines between the two. The novel's use of multiple narrative threads, interruptions, and readerly interventions extends the reader's agency, making them a co-author of the narrative. This collaborative storytelling experience highlights the reader's active role in shaping the narrative and creating meaning.

It has also demonstrated the importance of reader-response criticism in understanding the reader's role in postmodern texts. By analyzing the ways in which the reader is engaged in the creation of meaning, this study has shed light on the complexities of reader response and the ways in which readers interact with texts. Furthermore, this study has implications for the way we think about reading and interpretation. It suggests that readers are not passive recipients of texts, but rather active participants in the creation of meaning. This challenges the traditional notion of the author as a singular creator of meaning and highlights the importance of the reader's role in shaping the narrative.

In brief, the study has provided a nuanced understanding of the reader's role in postmodern texts and the ways in which they interact with Calvino's novel. It highlights the importance of reader-response criticism in understanding the complexities of reader response and the ways in

which readers create meaning in texts. It provides a foundation for further research in the field of reader-response criticism and postmodern literature. Future studies could explore the ways in which other postmodern texts engage readers in the creation of meaning, and how the reader's role in shaping the narrative can be understood through a reader-response critical lens. Additionally, future studies could examine the ways in which the reader's role in shaping the narrative is influenced by cultural, social, and historical contexts. This could provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of reader response and the ways in which readers interact with texts in different contexts.

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