The construction of gender, sexuality and desire
in
Italo Calvino's works

Dissertation submitted by
Judith Patricia Wooller, B.A. (Hons) (Rockhampton)
in October 1998

in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in the
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ABSTRACT

Many feminists argue that postmodernism is gender blind and that the deconstruction of metanarratives by postmodernism does not extend to the gender roles. In order to test that statement this dissertation will examine four texts written by the lauded postmodernist novelist, Italo Calvino. The major focus will be on the construction of gender, sexuality and desire within a selection of Calvino's texts covering a thirty year time span. The texts were chosen arbitrarily commencing with one of Calvino's early texts, *Difficult loves*, which is a classic realist text. The next *Baron in the trees* is the middle novella of *Our Ancestors*, and is representative of the fantastic/fairy story genre. The final two texts *Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*, move into the modernist/postmodernist forms.

An examination of the postmodernist/feminist debate will be undertaken in order to provide a methodology. This debate reveals the differences between these two radical groups and the critique of postmodernism by feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Patricia Waugh and others will serve as a framework by which to examine the texts. The focus of this dissertation, while engaging with postmodern concerns, will be on the lack of contestation of the gender roles within Calvino's works. While it can be argued that his texts progressively point to the construction of knowledge and meaning; the displacement of subject positions and the instability of narrative authority, there is no similar problematization of female subjectivity, sexuality and desire as these have been traditionally constructed within patriarchy. Calvino, like many postmodern writers, does not contest gender roles or when he does, it is superficial and from a masculinist point of view.
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

J.P. Wooller.
20th October 1998
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INTRODUCTION

When I first read Italo Calvino's works in the late 1980s I was intrigued by his narrative style which was so different from anything I had read before. My interest in his works continued as I began to comprehend what seemed to me his attempts to explore how individuals make sense of their lives and societies. His focus on fairy stories, myths and legends, and his examination of the signs and their signification, which were at the core of his account of human understanding, fascinated me. His deconstruction of epistemology with its inherent destruction of traditional beliefs and the way that knowledge was constructed excited me. Then I became aware, through feminist theories, that this apparent deconstruction tended to ignore the construction of the gender roles; that in the works of this lauded postmodernist writer the discourse was still masculinist; that the postmodern playing field was still controlled by men and despite the postmodernist apparent focus on difference and marginality, women still did not have voice or agency. This dissertation, then, will examine four of the works of Italo Calvino: Difficult Loves (DL), Baron in the trees (Baron), Invisible cities (IC) and If on a winter's night a traveller (IWNT), in order to argue that the representation of women within these texts is still traditional and that this particular postmodern deconstruction of metanarratives ignores gender.

In the fall of 1985 the Italian writer, Italo Calvino died. The oeuvre he left behind is considerable including novels, short stories, fairy tales and literary essays. Throughout his life he experimented with many forms. His later works are considered to be experimental and have been labelled by many as postmodernist. I will argue, as have other critics like Friedman, that postmodernist tendencies are apparent even in his earlier works. However, the focus of this dissertation, while engaging with postmodern concerns, will be on the lack of contestation of the gender roles within his works; that while it can be argued that his texts progressively point to the construction of knowledge
and meaning, the displacement of subject positions and the instability of narrative authority, there is no similar problematization of female subjectivity, sexuality and desire as these have been traditionally constructed within patriarchy. Calvino, like many postmodern writers, does not contest gender roles or when he does, it is superficial and from a masculinist discourse.

There is certainly no lack of evidence when it comes to declaring Italo Calvino a postmodernist writer. While most critics tend to focus on his later experimental and postmodernist works there is considerable interest in all his novels, novellas and short stories. While some critics focus on his entire canon in order to find some sort of all embracing pattern, others examine particular texts. In the main the search for meaning by these critics within Calvino’s variety of texts, whether considered in total or individually, appears to attempt to encompass these within a particular theory. On the other hand the discursive nature of the works leads to a vast array of theories which have been drawn from disparate disciplines as far apart as science and politics, history, philosophy and mathematics, all in an attempt to reveal Calvino’s alleged intentions. Others tend to psychoanalyse Calvino the man in order to analyse his writings. Very few, while lauding the deconstructive nature of the texts, and their location within the postmodernist mode, consider the absence of the deconstruction of the metanarrative of gender.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, literary criticism has embraced post structuralist forms, and seems intent on revealing the deconstruction of metanarratives and the displacement of subjects, recreating a world given over to chaos with only language as the controlling principle that constructs meaning and knowledge. It is just such concerns that the critics bring to Italo Calvino’s works. While the critics discuss this rejection of Modernist grand narratives, which placed ‘man’ as the centre of the universe, the creator of knowledge, it will be argued that ‘man’ has only slightly shifted
for many of these critics because he is still the controller of discourses, which is an issue that is not discussed. Many of the issues raised by the critics are tempered by a goal that appears to be taken from the enlightenment, a desire by the critics to link Calvino's works to his life experiences in an attempt to find a core, a source within the texts. So while on the one hand they embrace poststructuralist terminology, on the other hand they see Calvino as being the source of authority in the texts. The death of the author does not seem to be an accepted part of their poststructuralist positions. Neither, except for a few feminists, is the misogyny within this writer's canon examined or even raised.

Critical reception of Calvino's texts can be placed into three categories although the distinctions between them are not clear cut and tend to overlap. The first comprises articles/books which look at the earlier, more realist texts and focus on Calvino's involvement in post-war politics in Italy. These critics tend to be more Leavisite or New Critical. The second section consists of analyses of the later texts. The critics here follow diverse schools of criticism from Leavisite to poststructuralist. Finally there are studies of his oeuvre, in retrospect, usually post structuralist which, as Ricci states, gives "modern, cutting edge perspectives on the author's work which seek to move in new critical directions" (1989, p. 8). The latter group tends to attempt to find a thread running through Calvino's corpus but at the same time acknowledge shifts in both his position and point of view.

Very obvious in many of the critical articles and books on this writer's works is the linkage between Calvino the man and his texts. This linkage tends to cross all three categories. The main thrust of the critics' arguments appears to be a search for Calvino's intentions with that quest being grounded in his life experiences. Calvino has left behind a vast number of lectures about writing and as Salvatore states: "Critics verify their readings by calling on the authority of Calvino himself" (1986, p. 192). For instance, critics like JoAnn Cannon, when giving an overview of Calvino's later works,
refer repeatedly to his series of lectures on literature collected in *Una pietra sepra* in order to discuss the driving force behind his works. She also declares that "Calvino and his friends would like to write the history of the interpretive attempts of the ... [human coordinator], to investigate the mechanisms whereby man imposes sense on the world" (1989, p. 52-3). The use of the universal man hiding gender construction and the domination of women is not significantly raised by her. Similarly Jill Margo Carlton, in her article "The Genesis of *Il barone rampante*", while intent in pointing to the self-reflexivity of the text still declares "Calvino is playing with the notion of point of view" (188) and "It is Calvino's design" (199). So on the one hand Carlton is revealing the postmodernist devices and at the same time declaring author's intention. In a similar fashion Mary Jo Muratore declares that "Calvino sets out to conflate ad infinitum the narrative experience" (1994, p. 12). So paradoxically while these critics do examine Calvino's works and focus on postmodernist elements, they are still using Calvino and his intentions as the voice of authority. This could be, in part, due to the fact that Calvino's texts are all so different. J.R. Woodhouse suggests that "The one single factor which characterizes Calvino's literary productions is that they cannot be categorized dogmatically by literary critics, try as they might" (1989, p. 433). But Woodhouse, while not linking Calvino's works directly to Calvino the man, nevertheless, still explores the novels over the first twenty year period by drawing on Calvino's life, and his involvement in Italian culture's political movements and lining these up with his works. For Woodhouse the political is the focus. He sees within the trilogy *Our ancestors* the raising of many social issues. Interestingly in his discussion of *Baron in the trees* he mentions the crazy sister and Cosimo's love for Ursula, but ignores the great love of Cosimo's life, Violante. For Woodhouse then, women are insignificant and still within patriarchal boundaries, while the idealised abstract political issues are more important. Feinstein in fact sees Ludmilla in *If on a winter's night a traveller* as an alter ego of Calvino (1989, p. 147) which removes the gender issue by ignoring difference altogether and reinforces feminist arguments that gender is not deconstructed, nor is the
universality of the male pronoun contested. Therefore, the use of Calvino the man/author to encompass his writings reflects both the lack of conformity within his works and the difficulty of attempting to use one theory to explain or analyse those works. The one thing that is constant, and that is ignored by these critics, is the failure of this writer to examine the naturalisation of the gender roles.

Most of the critics undertaking a psychoanalytic study of Calvino's texts rely heavily on the author's psyche through Freudian analysis of Calvino the man. One of the texts not examined in this particular study, *Mr Palamor* is discussed by Marilyn Schneider. She argues that Mr Palamor is a reflection of Calvino, and thus states that this text is "his fictionalized autobiography" (1989, p. 72). Cristina Mazzoni draws on Freudian theory to analyse the incipits of *If on a winter's night a traveller* and finds a distinct parallel between Calvino's text and Freud's *Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis*. Both, according to her, lead back to Oedipus, and all stories back "to the Readers [sic] childhood" (1993, p. 62) as well as Calvino's.

From *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* the critics' focus tends to swing to traditions of the narrative and the deconstruction of these literary traditions. Warren F. Motte Jnr, for example, sees this structural device as a deliberate attempt by Calvino to promote the idea that "all literature is combinatoric, all combinatoric activity is play, therefore all literature is play" (118). But it is play, according to Motte, which is based on Calvino's involvement with the Oulipo group comprising mathematicians and literary experimentalists who see the literary text as a "product of systematic artifice" (130). Again it is Calvino's purpose that is the focus of Motte's article. But despite raising the issue of problematic narrator here there is no engagement with gender. Indeed, Paul Perron, while applying a firm methodology to the link between narrativity and eroticism, attempts to argue that women in Calvino's texts are raised to subject positions. But his
argument fails to consider in any way the politicisation of the gender roles. He, like many postmodernist writers, is gender blind.

The reader is the focus of some critical articles but no differentiation is made between male and female readers. Obviously *If on a winter's night a traveller* receives much attention from the critics because of the consistent manner in which it looks at the relationship between readers and writers. "The role of the reader", according to Motte, "is singularly privileged in The Case of crossed destinies" (127). This argument can also be related to both *Invisible cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Motte goes on to say that, despite the obviousness of the narrator, the "subversion of the traditional separation of labour in literature [reader as narrator, narrator as reader] is located precisely on the highest level of the game; it is the dynamic of articulation" (127). This results in the primacy of articulation. The male speaking voice is, therefore, in control despite the problematization of the narrator's authority. The relationship between the reader and the text is also the focus of Cristina Mazzoni who reveals that *If on a winter's night a traveller*, in particular, allegorises reader response theory in which the text "anticipates the reader's participation in its actualization" (1993, p. 54) and while she raises the point of the different readers, and different reading styles she does not address the absence of female readers. This absence reinforces the negation of gender difference. Using Gadamer's *Truth and method* and *Philosophical hermeneutics*, Mariolina Salvatore also explores the relationship between readers and writers in IWNT. Salvatore's thesis rejects some elements of Gadamar's theories but explores reader or writer authority within this Calvino text in some depth. She does not, however, question Gadamar's use of the universal 'he' which is very much linked to the ludic 'I' within this text. She does discuss the male and female reader characters within the text but very much privileges the male protagonist Reader. Her thesis promotes his progression as active reader and dismisses Ludmilla's preferred reading style as "based on a technique of pre-reading or skimming" (1986, p. 198). Her argument, which is focused on how the
text is constructing readers to look for and critique what is being presented by the narration, tends to once more dismiss women's difference.

Conversely, Inge Fink dismisses the notion of reader authority altogether and sees in IWNT a reinstatement of author authority with the proviso that Calvino is a "story telling jester" (1991, p 103) who ultimately exposes that "we cannot resist the temptation to read and that it is essentially our desire for the text and its pleasures that will ensure the existence of narrative discourse" (1991, p. 104). The problem here is that the narrative discourse is very masculinist which is something that Fink does not meaningfully acknowledge. Fink states that we must not "write him [Calvino] off as the ultimate male chauvinist" (1991, p. 103) because of his playfulness. However, for this critic as well as Calvino there is no significant acknowledgment that the texts are indeed still masculinist discourses in which women's voices are silenced.

Attempts to locate a core in Calvino's texts are broad. Katherine Hume explores the labyrinth in her book *Cosmos and Chaos* in an attempt to explain the focus of his writings. Friedman sees an overwhelming link to love; a constancy in his range of books that promotes love. She explores the representation of women within various texts but always from the viewpoint of traditional symbolic roles and lauds Calvino for his categorisation of women. Friedman does not refer to postmodernism at all. While I see problems with Friedman's work in some ways, it reinforces my argument that the texts are gender blind with no problematization of the gender metanarrative.

Comprehension of Calvino's oeuvre is overwhelmingly determined by an acknowledgment of the paradox which underlies all his works. JoAnn Cannon suggests that his works dramatise the dual potential of the literature of the labyrinth as a challenge to comprehend the works or as invitation to surrender (1989, p. 62). This view is reiterated by Kathryn Hume when she states that what emerges within his texts is "the
tug of war between order and disorder ... Between man's need to order flux and the flux's imperviousness to that need" (1989, p. 98) which can be seen in two ways. On the one hand Hume is only considering "man's" need which could be revealing that there is no questioning of women's need as different to man's while, on the other hand, Hume could also be taking 'universal man' to encompass both sexes. One constant according to Hume is desire (1989, p. 98). But it is always the female as desired object of the male which is revealed. While there may be consideration of the construction of male desire, it is always from a masculinist point of view and, despite the various male narrators, the construction of the actual gender roles is not problematized, there is no subversion of these roles.

The one source that could be seen to unify Calvino's works is the close theoretical link evidenced within the texts. As contemporary theory changed so too did Calvino's texts. An examination of his canon shows the structure of these works shifting from Classic Realism to Structuralism to Experimental, and finally to Poststructuralism, seemingly in order to embrace new theoretical positions. Franco Rikki comments that criticism of Calvino's works focuses on "his eclectic, often provocative, use of a wide range of modern literary theory" (1989, p. 190). Rikki then reverts to the iconographic, stating that this writer uses: "interpretations of the world (paintings) as sources of inspiration" (1989, p. 190). The result is a transcodefication (Rikki's word) of "these paintings into tense metanarrative monologues achieving a dramification of art. The result is breathtaking" (1989. p. 190). Certainly this can be seen in Invisible Cities. In fact Gans writes a full article linking various descriptions of the cities to works of art and regards the cities as the major metaphor, disregarding the fact that the cities all bear women's names.

In her dissertation on Calvino's The castle of crossed destinie, Michele D'Uva draws attention to Calvino's engagement with fairy stories and his "distinguished use of fairy
tale techniques" (1992, p. 1). It is my contention that use of these techniques not merely fails to interrogate gendered roles, but in fact reinforces them. Many of Calvino's works are focused on short stories, or the translation of fairy stories. Even the selection of texts chosen for this study, with perhaps the exception of IWNT, are mostly short. One sustainable reading of his texts could be the desire to show how all our lives are composed of neverending short stories. A link then can be drawn from fables, and fairy tales with their uncontested gender roles to *If on a winter's night a traveller* and the traditional way gender roles are presented. The exploration in this text of the deconstruction of epistemological beliefs shows further that the metanarrative of gender is regarded as inconsequential within patriarchal discourses and presented as unproblematical. Bourdieu's habitus provides illumination for this where he argues that the construction of the gender roles has become so subjugated that they are not even considered as a metanarrative (1984, p. 55).

One of the few critics who does explore women's lack of voice within literature is Teresa de Lauretis. Her exposition of some of the Calvino texts within this study reveals the failure of postmodern texts to question gender construction. Fink sees her arguments as persuasive but ultimately rejects Calvino as "the Rambo of narrative discourse" (1991, p. 103) because for Fink this is just a role Calvino has chosen to play (1991, p. 103). Despite this I would argue along with de Lauretis that the gendered roles are consistently traditional throughout the texts which are analysed.

Calvino's works are extremely diverse with the movement within his canon from realism to fantasy, to postmodernism and it seems that the complexity of his writings has encouraged critics to try to find sources or a source rather then to engage meaningfully with individual texts. There seems to be a desire by critics to give a definitive reading of his life's work now that he is dead. But a failure for both this postmodernist writer and the critics of his work (with the exception of de Lauretis) is to really consider the
politicisation of the gender roles or to reveal the ramifications of the lack of interrogation of gender construction in his works.

The huge body of theory surrounding the term postmodernist is all concentrated on deconstructing Enlightenment beliefs, breaking boundaries in areas as diverse as architecture and mathematics, science and the arts, and originate from, according to Patti Lather, "architectural criticism. It [postmodernism] is now widely used as a periodizing concept and as a description for both a cultural aesthetic and a philosophical movement" (Jameson qtd Lather 1991, p. 20-1). As a cultural aesthetic postmodernisms are responses from the perceived "contemporary crisis of representation" (Lather 1991, p. 21) which problematizes all notions of social reality. The instability of that social reality has led to a questioning of epistemology and philosophy. The rejection by postmodernism of the dualisms resultant from the language system, which relies very heavily on the binary system, encompasses all facets of the disciplines and institutions which create knowledge within Western society. However, despite the resultant deconstruction of all forms of knowing there are indications that the subject ostensibly displaced by most postmodern theories, as the source of all knowledge is still covertly present. There has been no displacement of the binary system that privileges male over female and as a result, the white, middle class male is still in control of the discourses. Although decentred, the voice of authority and agency is still masculine.

All of Italo Calvino’s texts under consideration exhibit an exploration of how meaning is made, how individuals create meaning for themselves through signs and images, experience and cultural contexts. It is my contention that this is subjugated within the earlier texts to the techniques of story telling and overt in the later texts by the fragmentation of that story telling, as this is the device through which Calvino's texts tend to work. At the same time, the focus will be on his postmodernist problematization of metanarratives which fails to engage in the contestation of the gender roles. He
ignores the politicisation of the gender roles. It will be argued further that gender is an extremely insidious metanarrative devalued as such by postmodernists who tend to subsume it under 'difference' which embraces, among other things class, race and ethnicity which in effect hides the domination of women. That the texts do question how meaning is constructed through semiotic conventions, institutions, images and history is not disputed. What is suggested is that the subversion or the deconstruction of the naturalisation of the gendered roles is not attempted. While there is some attempt, in his texts, to question subjectivity it is always from a masculine point of view. It could be argued that questions are raised about both sexuality and desire, but in the main these are recontextualised. The gender roles are traditional and remain so. Irony certainly is used but not to draw attention to the construction of gender roles, female subjectivity, sexuality and desire because women are still seen metaphorically, therefore their subjectivity, sexuality and desire are seen as the same or similar to that of 'man's'. While the subject is seen as decentred, the male subject is still regarded as the universal.

Gender is seen as a simple categorising issue. What does it really mean to be branded male and female and what are the ramifications of this categorization for individuals? For feminists this is a crucial question because of the lack of political and economic power these gender positions give women and has led to the feminist critique of postmodernists for not deconstructing the gender roles. For feminists, then, these are the questions that postmodernist writers like Italo Calvino should be raising but which appear to be absent within this writer's works. The complexity of discourses which impinge on the symbolic positioning of gendered bodies is vast. Gender can be viewed in Lacanian terms as the culturally defined role that the different sexes are expected to embrace. If you are a woman you are expected to behave in certain ways; passive, nurturing, subservient to men. Man is seen to reside in the opposite values of active, political and dominant. So while postmodernism rejects metanarratives, the metanarrative of gender in the Calvino's works under consideration shows little real
evidence of the deconstruction of these traditional gender roles. As Hekman states, "feminism can contribute to the postmodern position by adding the dimension of gender, a dimension lacking in many postmodern accounts" (1990, p. 3). Postmodernism rejects metanarratives yet it will be argued that in this postmodernist writer's works there is a refusal to regard gender as a metanarrative, thus disregarding the political effects of the dualism male/female.

The postmodernist decentering of the subject is presumed to cover both sexes, thereby effectively masking the object position in which the female is traditionally placed. Women within patriarchy have rarely been allowed the position of subject. Invariably they have always been presented as the object or 'the other' so that while the subject may be decentred the object position regulated to women remains in place. The problematization of the subject position as displayed in Calvino's four texts could be seen to draw attention to the way that masculinist subject positions have been constructed but with no corresponding decentring of the object position which men do not assume but in which women are still left. The assumption that women are similar to men is thus sustained and so metaphorically women's desires are perpetuated as the same as men's, which ignores difference. So that while metonymically bodily difference is focused upon to regulate women to the secondary side of the binary, representation of the gender roles has not really changed but is recontextualised. For instance in *Invisible Cities*, one of the texts under consideration, women's bodies are used to promote difference but actual women within the vignettes are still presented traditionally. Therefore difference is not given any political power.

Conversely, and this is the focus of this paper, it can equally be argued that through all the four texts analysed, while there is certainly an examination of the way individuals assess and give meaning to their worlds, this is always through masculinist discourses; that while the gaze or at least visual appreciation in the construction of that meaning is
addressed it is again always masculinist. Feminists criticise the assumption that men and women are the same and the lack of exploration of the gender roles, which leaves no room for negotiation that could empower women and works to mask the domination of women within the political world. That the texts all focus on masculine desire is reinforced by John Barth who states: "along with the nebulae and the black holes and the lyricism, there is always a nourishing supply of ... good-looking women sharply glimpsed and gone forever" (qtd Biasin 1989, p. 163) to which Biasin retorts: "while the good-looking women ... have become even more unreachable ... and are therefore even more desirable and desired" (1989, p. 163). This is indeed how women are portrayed in Calvino's texts. Their visual representation is still determined by the gender metanarrative which has not been deconstructed at all by Italo Calvino as a postmodernist writer. Calvino has drawn attention to a number of dualisms and there is some shifting between subject and object positionings, but always it is the male who reverts to the subject position with the woman being left the object of that gaze.

Gender is a vitally important metanarrative and one that Calvino does not deconstruct. Epistemologically and ontologically gender positions bodies within all types of relationships, both public and private. The discourses that predicate individuals' beliefs and 'knowing of self' are diverse yet together construct gender positionings within society.

To begin my detailed account of Calvino's works, there will be an examination of the two major forces within criticism of the late 20th century: postmodernism and feminism. While both of these are radical movements examining enlightenment assumptions about the world and individuals within that world, there is significant disagreement between them. Postmodernists focus on dualisms, as do feminists, but the latter claim that there is "gender blindness [in] most postmodernist writing" (Hutcheon 1990, p. 20). This view is reiterated by Luce Irigaray in Speculum where she discusses...
how the rhetoric surrounding Science and the blind acceptance of Freudian analysis of sexuality has indeed marginalised women. Authoritative masculine discourses have positioned women without any significant input from women. According to her then, gender is: "the blind spot of an old dream symmetry" (1985b), a blind spot that has not been obliterated by postmodernism. While these can be seen as very universal statements, I will show that in four of Italo Calvino's texts, at least, these statements are valid.

Chapter one will concentrate on the debate between these two schools using a number of feminists like Susan Hekman, Luce Irigaray, and Teresa de Lauretis who consider that one of the flaws of postmodernist theories is the lack of contestation of gender roles. In contrast Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh, as advocates of the postmodern problematizing of enlightenment beliefs, will also be considered. Neither of these latter writers engage in any great depth with feminism although later writings of Waugh's do show evidence of a shift within her argument. Postmodernists, like Lyotard, dismiss gender as a metanarrative. I will provide evidence to show that it is indeed a highly politicised metanarrative. The postmodern standpoint view will also be considered as this is, in many ways, the crux of the feminist critique of postmodernism. Issues raised will be gender, sexuality, desire and subjectivity.

The next four chapters will be an analysis of four of Calvino's texts drawn rather arbitrarily from his canon. A number of theories will be used to examine these texts mainly because he merges a number of theories in them. In my opinion any attempt to utilise one theory to demystify these texts would be a useless exercise which would ultimately lead to privileging one theory over the others, and would be defeatist given the fact that Calvino structured each text around divergent and different theoretical positions in order to bridge the gap between the real and the symbolic.
In Chapter two the first of the Calvino texts, *Difficult Loves* will be examined. This text is a compilation of short stories written over a nine year period and includes some of Calvino's earlier stories. Unfulfilled desire is revealed within most of these stories. In order to examine this text I have focused on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the appropriation of these theories by feminists like Luce Irigaray. While I acknowledge that there are attendant problems in using psychoanalytic theory to reveal how, in this case, desire is constructed, it does provide a framework in which to examine the masculinist construction of desire for both sexes. Desire is a prominent feature of all the texts under consideration, not only sexual but also for knowledge and the source of human understanding.

The middle novella from *Our Ancestors* entitled *Baron in the trees* will be considered in Chapter three. The focus here will be on the fairy story/fantasy genre which to a degree reveals why gender is not considered as something to be deconstructed by this writer. Like Northrop Frye, whom Calvino respects, there is an ultimate examination of how myth and legend as encapsulated within fairy stories, constructs ideologies within cultures but once more the gendered roles are ignored as well as the implications of the construction of these symbolic roles politically. It is the macrocosm that is the focus and this is then extended down to the male protagonist not the female

These two early Calvino texts reveal the postmodern devices which strengthen within the two later texts in this study. Structurally these two later texts are different from the two earlier ones. Critics like Kathryn Hume see the watershed between the early and later Calvino texts as *The castle of crossed destinies* in which there is a dramatic change in presentation. Two levels of discourse are presented in which an examination of the relationship between the sign and signification occurs. This structure forms the basis for both the later texts under consideration, *Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller. Castle* and these two both utilise the frame story. In *Invisible Cities* the
frames are cities, which all have women's names, through which the discursive nature of signification is revealed. In *If on a winter's night a traveller*, unfinished stories are the frames by which genres and narrative traditions are questioned.

The first, *Invisible Cities*, sits precariously on the modernist/postmodernist divide, modernist in the search for source, postmodernist in the exploration of the discursiveness of the sign. It is an exploration of the way meaning is constructed by individuals and for individuals. Ignored by most critics and I would suggest by most readers is the utilisation within this text of women's bodies to reveal how physical signs construct meaning. However, the representation of women in the text still situates them within traditional roles. A discussion of the link between textuality and sexuality is undertaken which is further linked to epistemology and the mind/body binary. Of major focus are the Lacanian concepts of metaphor and metonymy.

The final text under discussion is *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Calvino's most proclaimed postmodernist text. In order to analyse this text, an amalgamation of the theoretical tools used to examine the three previous texts will be employed to reveal the construction of desire both sexually and textually: literary conventions and reader expectations. While it could be argued that women are more empowered in this text, their representation reverts ultimately to the traditional.

The focus of *Difficult Loves* is on desire as it is in *If on a winter's night a traveller*. The two texts in the middle, *Baron in the trees* and *Invisible Cities*, also seethe with desire but other concerns are raised in them. So for the purpose of this study Calvino's works are framed by the construction of desire. While Calvino wrote a large number of other stories, both long and short, only four of his texts are used because analysis of more would far exceed the limits of this particular study.
CHAPTER ONE

THE POSTMODERNIST FEMINIST DEBATE

As the postmodernist writer Italo Calvino's works are the focus of this dissertation, which argues that postmodernism is gender blind, then some exploration of the incompatibilities between postmodernism and feminism is necessary. This will serve to isolate both the core of the disagreement and to reveal the methodology which will be used to validate this assertion. The major focus of this debate will be on the construction of gender because of the political ramification of these symbolic roles and how the construction of identity, subjectivity, sexuality and desire are determined by gender. While other signifiers exist and are discussed later in the thesis gender is prioritised here to reveal how, in some instances, it can become subjugated to these other signifiers. Consequently, feminist theories of gender will be utilised as a major tool in revealing that Italo Calvino's works under discussion are gender blind.

While gender is seen as a methodological tool by some feminists, it is not considered by postmodernists as such. Gender, to postmodernists, is just another system of marginalisation, the same as class, race and ethnicity and therefore should not be singled out, but examined in conjunction with these other forms of discrimination. For feminists this is unacceptable because for them this negates the possibility of any examination of the politicisation of gender roles which leads, they argue, to the domination of women by men. So that while postmodernism and feminism have much in common, this basic difference problematizes the relationship between the two. Gender is, for feminists, at the heart of the disenfranchisement of women within patriarchy. The postmodern deconstruction of metanarratives, according to feminists, does not acknowledge gender
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as an important metanarrative. This lack of acknowledgement of the gender metanarrative by the postmodernist writer Italo Calvino is the focus of this dissertation.

Feminism is both a theory and a mode of writing which attempts to empower women. Their major critique of postmodernism is that while questions are raised about marginalisation no answers or alternatives are promoted. One of the flaws in postmodernism, according to feminists, is the lack of liberation or any avenue by which liberation can be negotiated from this postmodern relativist position. Labelled by feminists as the postmodern 'standpoint view', this lack of promotion of any political action is rejected. By taking this abstract stand postmodernism, in their eyes, ignores the silencing of women's voices which leads to their domination within patriarchy, a situation that is thus reaffirmed within postmodernism. As Habermas states, "postmodernism leads to a form of conservative reaction; at its best it maintains the status quo and thus serves to perpetuate the injustices of the existing system" (qtd Hekman 1990, p. 154). This conservative reaction can be seen as the postmodernist standpoint view and is reflected very heavily in Calvino's works under consideration. In both *Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller* the link between textuality and sexuality can be seen as a conservative reaction that certainly reinforces the status quo. The attendant results of this re-entrenched domination leads to the continued exploitation of women, both in the public and private domains, and subjugates the violence perpetuated against women by ideology, culture, men and masculinist discourses. It will be argued that women's voices are silenced in Italo Calvino's texts under consideration, and that the patriarchal gender roles are recontextualized. It is my contention that women are still represented within the old boundaries in the Calvino texts.

Postmodernism and feminism are both radical movements and "both ... challenge the epistemological foundations of Western thought and argue that the epistemology that is
definitive of Enlightenment humanism ... is fundamentally misconceived" (1990, p. Hekman 7). Yet "Few feminists are willing to label themselves postmodernist and similarly, many postmodernists are profoundly sceptical of the feminist movement" (Hekman 1990, p. 2); a view shared by Fraser and Nicholson who suggest that: "Feminism and Postmodernism ... have kept an uneasy distance from one another" (1990, p. 19). While they both seek to determine new paradigms of social criticism, they each do this from a variety of different perspectives. The major difference here is that while feminists are engaged in empowering women from a social perspective, postmodernists are exploring philosophical questions which they then extend to embrace social criticisms (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 20). These social criticisms generally are concerned with the deconstruction of beliefs surrounding subjectivity, identity and truth but they are abstract theories which do not allow for empowerment or any real negotiation whereas feminists' work focuses on empowerment and liberation for women. As Hutcheon states:

The difference between the postmodern and the feminist can be seen in the potential quietism of the political ambiguities or paradoxes of postmodernism. The many feminist social agendas demand a theory of agency, but such a theory is visibly lacking in postmodernism ... It has no theory of positive action on a social level; all feminist positions do. (1990, p. 22)

Feminism, as Hekman states: "is a political as well as a theoretical movement unlike postmodernism" (1990, p. 6), a view supported by Miranda Fricker. Postmodernism, she suggests should embrace political ambiguities which should result in a "project involving both deconstructive and reconstructive phases - we cannot tear down the house and build nothing in its place" (1994, p. 95). For feminists this is virtually what the postmodernist standpoint view does, it critiques structures but provides no strategies for change. Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities exemplifies just this. In that text, on the one hand, women's bodies are used as metaphors through which representation is revealed thus appearing to pull down the 'house', the 'house' representing epistemological foundations based on dualisms. On the other hand, the 'house' or the framing of the gender roles is reinvented within the descriptions of the cities. From the latter
perspective the authority is still very much invested in the masculine narrators while women are presented as part of the scenery mainly as sexual icons. So the replacement again reinforces the naturalisation of those roles.

Postmodernism is active in deconstructing, in particular, epistemological beliefs but inactive politically, because this would threaten the status quo where phallocentrism still controls the discourses, whereas, feminism is active in attempting to shift the power of those discourses in order to gain equality and agency for women. The lack of women’s equality and agency is very much reflected in the Calvino texts where, I will argue, the status quo is maintained and the masculine discourses are not displaced. Like postmodern theorists and literary critics, the selected works disregard gender but also, because the discourses are masculine, still controlled by patriarchy, feminists’ attempts to empower women are devalued and trivialised.

Postmodernism rejects feminism’s attempts to promote an epistemology for women in order to escape the dualism of rational/irrational, subject/object because this would ultimately be in danger of replacing masculine epistemology with a feminine one (Hekman 1990, p. 5), which the postmodernism position rejects along with a number of feminists. At the same time the association between rationality and masculinity and irrationality and femininity, if not critiqued, will leave women still positioned as inferior (Hekman 1990, p. 39) with their voices still silenced. It is Fraser and Nicholson’s argument that even though postmodernism devalues philosophy it still retains structural privilege, because the changed conception of philosophy still determines the changed character of social criticism. Thus philosophy is still the independent variable while social criticism and political practice are still the dependent variables. (1990, p. 21). Feminist theorists, on the other hand, reverse this, more intent on placing social criticism as the independent variable. Yet, according to Hekman, both
groups fail in escaping "the modern episteme" (1990, p. 8) or, as Harding suggests each have "one foot in modernity and the other in lands beyond" (1990, p. 100).

Postmodernism critiques and deconstructs all metanarratives which come from modernism, such as subjectivity and the inherent dualisms which promote essentialist humanism and the idea of transcendental truth which man can discover. The various varieties of feminism, however, are intent on examining these metanarratives, particularly that of gender, in order to empower women by revealing how gender, a social construct according to Lacan, has been used politically to disempower women. So that while postmodernism rejects dualisms, feminists argue that dualisms and the effect of those dualisms on gender need to be examined rather than rejected, to see how they construct identity which leads to women's domination and marginalisation. For feminists any deconstruction of metanarratives should concentrate on social criticism which looks at:

- social organisation and ideology, empirical and social-theoretical analyses of macrostructures and institutions, interactionist analyses of the micropolitics of everyday life, critical-hermeneutical and institutional analyses of cultural production, historically and culturally specific sociologies of gender and so on. They have called into question the dominant philosophical project of seeking objectivity in the guise of a 'God's eye view' which transcends any situation or perspective. (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 24)

According to Fraser and Nicholson one of the noted theorists of postmodernism, Lyotard, does not include gender as one of these stratifying systems. Their major criticism of Lyotard's thesis of metanarratives is that the focus is far too narrow and:

- his justice of multiplicities conception precludes one familiar, and arguably essential, genre of political theory: identification and critique of macrostructures of inequality and injustice which cut across the boundaries separating relatively discrete practices and institutions. There is no place in Lyotard's universe for critique of pervasive axes of stratification, for critique of broad based relations of dominance and subordination along lines like gender, race and class. (1990, p. 23)

Unlike Foucault, Lyotard makes no attempt "to discern larger synchronic patterns and connections" (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 24) as "he rules out the sort of critical social theory which employs general categories like gender, race and class" (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 24). It could be argued then, that his theory is not broad enough to
give an adequate critical grasp of gender dominance and subordination (Fraser & Nicholson 1990, p. 20). While Foucault does indeed look at synchronic patterns, he also does not really consider gender and while focusing on dominance fails again to consider gender. Many men of the New Left argue that gender issues are secondary because they are subsumable under more basic modes of oppression namely, class and race (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 25). It could be argued however, that by combining gender with race and class, postmodernism successfully erases any attempt by feminists to try to explore the powers that lead to domination of women.

Both schools of criticism then, while intent on deconstructing metanarratives, approach their goals from different perspectives. As Flax states:

Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture. (1990, p. 41)

Feminists are also interested in deconstructing these beliefs "to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lie beneath their neutral and universalizing facades" (Flax 1990, p. 42). But because feminism has focused on gender as the source of women's oppression and domination within patriarchy, they are charged with essentialism by postmodernists who are intent on deconstructing the enlightenment liberal humanist dualisms and see examinations of gender as perpetrating them. (Hekman 1990, p. 5). As a result postmodernism is seen as antifoundational and antiessentialist. Flax rejects charges of essentialism levelled at feminist gender theories. As she states, "Feminist notions of the self, knowledge and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment to be contained within its categories" (1990, p. 42), and thus give a theoretical structure by which to examine difference. Feminists such as Luce Irigaray deconstruct the notion of 'woman'. Her arguments are intent on showing not a unified position of either woman or gender but one that is always shifting, a multiplicity of positions. Susan Bordo also regards gender coming "not from monolithic design but from an interplay of factors and forces, it is best understood not as a discrete definable
position" (1990, p. 135). While I am not contesting the idea that there are some feminists who do see gender as fixed, it is clear that poststructural feminists contest this. If this multiplicity of thought is then considered, how can gender, as a theoretical tool, be essentialist and not merely a device utilised to reveal the domination of women?

Postmodernism fails to acknowledge feminist contribution to the critique, seeing the feminist position as an attempt to privilege females over males. (Hekman 1990, p. 8). Hekman argues that "The postmoderns see the error of the Enlightenment dualism but the feminists complete the critique by defining these dualisms as gendered. The two movements are complimentary and mutually corrective. Feminists see the gendered basis of Enlightenment thought but postmodern thought expands and concretizes that vision" (1990, p. 8), however only from a masculine perspective. A masculinist perspective as evidenced in the Calvino texts which certainly concretize a vision but a vision in which the gendered roles are traditional.

Although Calvino's four texts demonstrate an increasing examination and deconstruction of the modernist metanarratives, there is a failure in these texts also to deconstruct gender. Certainly, particularly within the later texts, there is a movement towards considering gender positions but only superficially. In Invisible Cities, where cities are used as metaphors to reveal the instability of truth, and to promote difference, the fact that the cities all bear feminine names could lead to the deconstruction of the gendered roles but no such deconstruction occurs as women's representation does not change from the symbolic.

Hutcheon believes that postmodernism is not a nostalgic return to foundations, because it rejects all idea of source. It is a critical revisiting (1988, p. 4), and she goes on to say that:

What postmodernism does, as its name suggests is confront and contest any modernist discarding and recuperating of the past in the name of the future. It
suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present. (1988, p. 19)

At the same time, however, she argues that

literary discussions of postmodernism often appear to exclude the work of women (and one might add, often blacks as well), even though female (and black) explorations of narrative and linguistic form have been among the most contesting and radical. (1988, p. 16)

This is a clear example of the way in which feminist voices are silenced.

For feminists one of the problematical issues they confront is the question of gender. How much effect has gender determination had on the way individuals shape their behaviour? What started out, for some feminists, as a simple examination of the relationship between gender, sexuality and self has become a complicated and controversial debate which raises numerous questions. In her book Gender Trouble Judith Butler queries, "is there 'a' gender which persons are said to have or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to be" (1990, p. 7). This question is a challenging one, one which has divided feminists into two broad groups. The question asked here is whether gender is biologically determined or culturally constructed. She also queries the mechanisms of gender constructions. Her arguments circulate around the inferred prior determinism of the gendered roles, and the universality of the law that cannot be seen to have human agency. Butler states:

The notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law. (1990, p. 8)

While contemporary and queer theory rejects the idea of passive bodies, nevertheless the symbolic structuring of gender with its demarcation between male and female certainly plays a large role in the structure of identity. As Flax states, "Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience" (1990, p. 40) and in so doing create identity. She believes that:

The study of gender relations entails at least two levels of analysis as a thought construct or category that helps us to make sense of our particular social worlds and histories, and of gender as a social relation that enters late and partially constitutes all other social relations and activities. (1990, pp. 45-6)
Taken from this perspective the two levels reflect upon each other and, while they may work differently within specific cultures and individuals, they are determinate upon specific cultural laws which structure the gender roles. Sandra Harding suggests that gender has three dimensions: "symbolic gender, the division of labour by gender and individual gender" (1986, p. 53). Symbolic gender in Western Society still places women in the carer role, responsible in the main for all domestic tasks. While this is a universal statement there have been enough contemporary studies to show that women are still bearing this load. The division of labour by gender then is the result of and flows from the symbolic gender roles. Similarly, while women may rebel over being expected to carry this burden it does still have ramifications on individual gender. Both Flax and Harding therefore refute to a degree Butler's position by broadening the concept of gender and in theory at least escape essentialism. Perhaps Michel Foucault's subjugated knowledges can be used by feminists to reveal how gender has been ignored. This theory could be useful too to reveal how the Calvino texts under consideration ignore to a large degree gender construction and may thus be one way through which the gendered roles could be examined.

In *Power/Knowledge* Foucault considers ways in which power shifts within discourses. One of the problems with Foucault's writings is that he really does not consider gender difference, but his work can be utilised by feminists to examine the hidden or ignored phallocentric philosophical base of knowledge. According to him, subjugated knowledges work in two ways; on the one hand:

> to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation ... and ... a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (1977, pp. 81-82)

In the first instance the naturalisation of the gender roles has been hidden politically to ensure the functioning of the capitalist system and, in the second, any questioning of these roles by women is seen as trivial.
Studies of gender, in the main, are trivialised and accused of bias today (Flax 1990, p. 45). They are seen as inconsequential by many, and absent from discussions on postmodernism by theorists such as Brian McHale in *Constructing Postmodernism* and Christopher Norris's *The truth about postmodernism*. As Patricia Waugh states, "The exclusion of gender from postmodern discussions has left its theorists largely blind to the possibilities of challenging autonomy through a relational concept of identity" (1992a, p. 203). Ann Brooks suggests that feminists have become distracted by gender to the extent that they have not taken up the postmodern challenge to develop an alternative position. (1997, p. 99). Yet how can they find an alternative if there is no real understanding of how gender plays a significant role in positioning women in inferior positions? Christine Di Stefano believes that "gender seems to be a nearly universal feature of all societies" (1990, p. 60). Nevertheless she contests the use of gender as a way for feminists to explore subjugation of women as she believes that gender and its cohort of core assumptions and terms are guilty of the same totalisation with which humanism is charged (1990, p. 65). Certainly this is one critique that is levelled at the use of gender as a theorising device and certainly it is valid to argue that some feminists have used it as such. Hutcheon believes that postmodernism is paradoxical because it both supports and deconstructs. The focus by feminists on gender as a tool to examine the source of their oppression, which is the symbolic gender roles and the effects this has on identity, then locating discourses that inform that construction in order to reveal that the naturalisation of the gender roles is constructed, surely has validity. When gender relations "have been (more or less) relations of domination ... controlled by one of their interrelated aspects - the man" (Flax 1990, p. 45) then these relations for women, attempting to empower themselves in order to escape from their underprivileged position, must be examined. The position taken by male academics, suggests Flax, where they "do not worry about how being men may distort their intellectual work" (1990, p. 45), reflects their bias but also serves to emphasise how the
masculine discourses are still very much in control. As Bordo states, "abstractions or
generalizations about gender are [not] methodologically illicit or perniciously
homogenizing of difference" (1990, p. 150) because "[t]he experience of gender, of
being a man or a woman inflects much if not all of peoples lives" (Grimshaw qtd Bordo
1990, p. 149). The labelling can be seen then to determine throughout life, through age,
class and changes in lifestyle the way people think, make sense of their world and act.
Postmodern focusing on plurality in which no person/group is privileged over the other
ignores the way that gender difference determines power relations. As Martin Jay points
out, there is a failure to grasp the "tenacious rootedness [of gender] in the objective
world created over time and deeply resistant to change" (qtd Di Stefano 1990, p. 78).
According to Hutcheon: "postmodern's initial concern is to denaturalise some of the
dominant features of our way of life" (1990, p. 2) and therein lies the problem for,
while postmodernists like Italo Calvino certainly question many of the 'truths' society
has accepted as natural, they fail to contest the gender roles. As Luce Irigaray states:

Sexual difference is a derivation of the problematics of sameness, it is now and
forever determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation
of the same. The 'differation' into two sexes derives from the a priori assumption
of the same. (1985b, pp. 26-7)

As is suggested in Elizabeth Grosz's reading of Luce Irigaray, "Women can be
represented only 'by means of violence that contains them and their differences within
masculine sameness" (1989, p. 107). Lacanian concepts of metaphor and metonymy, as
discussed earlier, are useful here, particularly in terms of language structures. However,
like postmodernists, Lacan takes a standpoint view. This is probably why gender is not
considered in a number of postmodern texts because no acknowledgment is made of an
all encompassing difference which includes anything that is not white, heterosexual,
middle class male, sexual difference gets lost along with the politicisation of the sexual
roles. Neither is there any real consideration of the gender bias in language.

As Patricia Waugh states, we see the world through frames (1984, p. 28). Gender is one
of the frames but it has ramifications for other frames as well. If, as Flax suggests,
gender constitutes all other social relations (1990, pp. 45-6) - and Harding's three dimensions are considered here in conjunction with Foucault's subjugated knowledges - then gender construction has political ramifications which cannot and should not be dismissed. While Flax's position could be seen as deterministic and essentialist in its assumptions, nevertheless, the dismissal of gender as a major signifier fails to problematise these roles. The results can be seen to be reflected within the four Calvino texts. Women's representation within all texts is not contested, they are given no political positions, no space from which to speak. The discursive nature of meaning and knowledge is certainly addressed but always from the masculinist point of view.

Feminists use gender as a theoretical device to reveal how bodies have been constructed differently. Postmodernism, according to Linda Hutcheon: "retains and indeed celebrates differences" (1988, p.61). For postmodernism, "difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality rather than binary oppression and exclusion" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 61). *Invisible Cities* is a good example of an exploration of difference, with each city having unique features which makes it distinguishable from others. While heterogeneity and plurality tend to be revealed rather than homogeneity, I would suggest that binary opposition has not disappeared particularly when it is revealed that the description of each city has a source in one city, Venice. Adherence to this source counteracts Hutcheon's argument but also that of de Stefano where she states that "Postmodernism renders representations as arbitrary and promotes politics of disbelief towards language of rights, rationality, interests" (1990, p. 63). Certainly *Invisible Cities* is an example of an attempt to escape dualisms yet inherently adopts them by choosing one half of the mind/body dualism through which to theorize the cities, thus reinstating the binary system. While not all feminists see difference as a tool many do, arguing that: "domination [is] based on differences [which are] seen as natural" (Haraway, 1991, p. 8). *Invisible Cities* must return to the promotion of one side of the binary, the masculine over the other, as it does, in order to make meaning. In
fact, by having men visit, live in and use these passive, female cities, this binary is reinforcing exploitation. So despite displaying a mistrust of language, postmodernism must return to the language system which cannot be displaced. Locating difference as a resource by which to examine domination, feminists like Jana Sawicki draw on Foucault's subjugated knowledges in order to explore the domination and devaluing of women (1991, p. 26) that is evidenced in the language system.

Since the Enlightenment or as Donna Haraway states: "Throughout the early period of the industrial revolution, a particularly important development of the theory of the body politic linked the natural and political economy on multiple levels" (1991, p. 7). The body then took on naturalised gendered significance and, as Butler states: "The effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body" (1990, p. 140) and from the stylization of the body sexuality is determined and is reinforced by the binary system with men taking all the positive attributes and women the passive, or Flax's 'thought construct'. Foucault states: "the deployment of sexuality is the body" (1978, p. 107) and in his discussion links the body to power (1978, p. 107). The result is, as Grosz states, that genitalia have social significance (1994, p. 82) and that the male experience is the norm (Grosz 1994, p. 82). The body image, according to Grosz, is "a map or representation of the degree of narcissistic investment of subject in own body parts" (1994, p. 87). It is the parts of the body that give subjectivity, sexuality and desire and as the male is the norm, women are seen as a flawed reflection of this. No value is given to alternatives; to other areas of thought. So when "Inscriptions on the subject's body coagulate corporeal signifiers into signs producing all the effects of meaning, representation, depth, within or subtending our social order" (Grosz 1994, p. 141) women's difference is given no voice. As Foucault states: "the body is inscribed by language and events and is the materiality on which power operates" (1978, p. 146) and "[p]ower deploys knowledge/discourse onto bodies" (Foucault 1978, p. 149). So that
although woman's body is used to inscribe, it is devalued through the language system which informs all discourses of knowledge and power.

The relationship between gender and self (whether male or female) is an ever present one and the way it determines subjectivity is not inconsiderable. Sara Ahmed believes that:

psychoanalysis, postmodernism and feminist theory appear to intersect in the challenge they pose to the Cartesian model of subjectivity. This challenge defines what could be called a crisis of the subject, which marks out a theoretical interrogation of inherited Enlightenment assumptions of an instrumental relation of subject to object world, the dichotomy of mind and body, and a consciousness that is full, autonomous and present to itself. (1995, p. 9)

Lacan posits the notion that the subject is constructed entirely by language and that "each subject takes up his or her place only with reference to the master signifier, the phallus" (Lacan in Grosz 1989, p. 147). Susan Hekman reiterates this view when she states: "Lacan's central thesis is that the phallus is the signifier in our symbolic universe" (1990, p. 84). Certainly postmodernism takes the view that the subject is constructed by language, or in Hutcheon's terms 'de-centred', no longer the voice of authority. Postmodernism seeks to reveal and then subvert the notion of Enlightenment thought that revolved around the positioning of the subject. Politically the subject was encouraged to believe in individual autonomy, in equality, yet at the same time the Enlightenment split into gender difference by segregation, that of public/private which hinged on biological determinants. The public was man's province, a world of science and reason; whilst women were locked into the private, linked to nature and the emotions. This implied that subjects, whatever sex, were passive. Postmodernism determination to break this bondage, by subverting sameness to reveal difference, still cannot escape the binary system that privileges one side over the other. As Patricia Waugh states: "for a feminist the first difficulty must surely be [that] a woman ... even if she is constructed to expose the dehumanizing effects of idealistic patriarchy she always perpetuates them in her very form" (1992, p. 123), and Hutcheon comments that "it is the feminist need to inscribe first - and only then subvert - that I think has influenced
most the postmodern complicitously critical stand of underlining and undermining received notions of the represented subject" (1990, p. 39). However, Hutcheon also states that "there is also a very real sense in which the postmodernist notions of difference and a positively valorized marginality often reveal the same familiar totalizing strategies of domination ... though masked by the liberating rhetoric" (1990, p. 38).

So what of women's subjectivity? It could be argued that women have always been decentred, never being allowed to take the subject position. As Waugh comments, "Those [women] have been systematically excluded from the constitution of that so-called universal subject ... for reasons of gender" (1992. pp. 124-5). The postmodern critique of the Modernist subject position should then liberate women because men would not, theoretically at least, be placed in the same position as women because, as Hutcheon states: "Human reality, for both sexes, is a construct" (1990, p. 159).

Therefore the promotion of subjectivity by Enlightenment Humanism was a myth that postmodernism declares it deconstructs. But "the constituted postmodern subject entails political inaction" and is still "phallocratic" (Hekman 1990, p. 81), whereas feminists argue that in order to empower women there has to be political action. As Irigaray states: "We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine' (1985b, p. 133). So, whether subjectivity is a myth or not, men still retain political power and control of all discourses, even postmodern texts.

Of course women do have to take on the subject position at times. In order to communicate in patriarchal society they have to become the subject, but the moment they have spoken they retreat to the object position once again. Women have "always experienced themselves in a 'postmodern' fashion - decentred, lacking agency, defined by others" (Waugh, 1992, p. 129). Psychoanalytic theory tends to always posit the
woman as 'other', a term defined by Lacan, which fixes a position with no room for negotiation. Yet as Waugh states: "the self is both constant and fluid, ever in exchange, ever re-describing itself" (1992, p. 134), a position constantly focussed on by Luce Irigaray. For Lacan each subject takes his or her place only with reference to the master signifier, the phallus (Lacan in Grosz 1989, p. 147), which places women in the inferior position. As Grosz states:

The processes by which the phallus, a signifier, becomes associated with the penis, as organ, involves the procedures by which women are systematically excluded from positive self-identification and a potential autonomy, (1994a, p. 116)

So following this argument women can never take a subject position which is why

Magali Michael declares:

This postmodernist tendency to reduce individual agency to corporate agency and socio-political and historical forces to chance and patterns of co-incidences has understandably drawn sharp criticism from feminists and unfortunately, has also led many to a wholesale rejection of postmodernism. (1982, pp. 3-4)

At a time when women are looking at subject positions in order to deconstruct and renegotiate representation, postmodernism de-centres that subject position. Any attempts to re-instate a subject position for women in order to deconstruct that position and negotiate agency meets with cries of derision from postmodernists, who see this as essentialist, thus successfully silencing women's voices and retaining a subject position for themselves which, while decentred, is reinstated as the voice of authority.

Is the woman's role as object subverted by postmodernists and, if it is, how is this achieved? Sarah Woodcroft in John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, while presented as an object, refuses to take the symbolic role. She continually negotiates new positions, thus subverting the naturalised gendered role. Angela Carter, according to Hutcheon, challenges the evasions of representation by deconstructing the traditional position of women (1990, p. 98). The rise of 'Queer' theory also attempts to reposition and escape homophobic discourses. Yet even here, as Butler states, there "will always be ... tension with the democratic contestation ... which works against its deployment" (1993, p. 229). However, there is always room for agency, for action, and it is at least
possible to renegotiate positions. In Italo Calvino's texts there is little evidence that any confrontation occurs, or any renegotiation. It will be argued that women in this writer's texts are always represented only as a masculine model which is still presented as a metanarrative.

Postmodernism refuses to acknowledge gender as a metanarrative, thereby ignoring the role gender plays in positioning women economically and socially. At the same time postmodernism, according to theorists like Hutcheon, acknowledges 'difference', advocates and examines marginality in order to deconstruct and reveal how language, among other things, promotes and devalues difference. However, the gender roles within this deconstruction appear to have been ignored with 'difference' between the sexes still contingent on the 'old dream symmetry', which positions women as inferior to men. Sexuality and desire, as determined by the body and gender, are still ultimately constructed by the masculine discourses. Many theorists who can be labelled constructionists, like Lacan (language) and Foucault (discourses), focus on how sexuality is not biologically determined but socially constructed which leads to the exposure of sexuality as neither fixed nor natural. According to Alison Allister, "There is not, according to constructivists, speaking in a postmodern vein 'a' sexuality, rather there are sexualities, constructed by a multiplicity of 'discursive practices"" (1996, p. 129). Calvino in these texts certainly looks at a multiplicity of discursive practices for his examination of knowledge and how the individual makes sense of their world. But there is no real analysis or deconstruction of the gender roles in this exercise. Foucault argues that "Sexuality must not be thought of as a given" (1978, p. 105) and goes on to show how historically the 'treatment' of sexuality has been carried out through cultural discourses. According to his thesis, control of sexuality is implanted through "the system of law, the symbolic order and sovereignty" (1978, p. 150). The law is the law of the father which constrains sexuality; insists on heterosexuality. This is reinforced by the symbolic order, which hinges on reproduction, and through sovereignty of the master
over the slave. In Western society this slave is the woman. Thus the binary master/slave has become man/woman. It is through ideology that this is "implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principal of classification and intelligibility, established as a raison d'être" (1978, p. 44). The classification then gives rise to the symbolic representation and signification of the gendered roles which determine sexuality. This classification, considered in light of Harding's belief in the three dimensions of gender, then reveals the symbolic to be perpetrated by heterosexuality through the law of the father, which reiterates the master/slave pattern wherein women are placed as the possession of men, with their only value being reproductive and their only desire to please men and raise children. This further places them firmly within the domestic or private sphere which is extended into the work place where they are positioned in lower paid jobs. Because of this construction of their space, women are brought up to see themselves only within this traditional role which at the same time constructs for them their sexuality and desire. The results of this positioning for women becomes obvious when Italo Calvino's texts are examined. In DL, for example, the desire of the male protagonists for the females is consistent throughout. The assumption that a female's desire is always for, and the same a, male's is reinforced with no problematization. The absence of women's voices is consistent in all the texts analysed. The most glaring example is in IC where their silence is absolute. Even in IWNT where females are allowed a voice, that voice is muted and disappears as the love story unfolds.

It was Sigmund Freud who linked sexuality to bodies with his examination of sexual drives. In both "Instincts and Vicissitudes" and "Totem and Taboo", he discusses and argues the naturalisation of heterosexuality. Again the binary is reinforced with man the hunter and the female, the gatherer, the nurturer and, as Grosz states:

Women's bodies and sexualities have been structured and lived in terms that not only differentiate them from men's but also attempt, not always or even usually entirely successfully, to position them in a relation of passive dependence and secondariness to men's. (1994, p. 202)
Grosz goes on to argue that: "the only socially recognized and validated representations of women's sexuality are those which conform to and accord with the expectations and desires of a certain heterosexual structuring of male desire" (1994, p. 202), an approach strongly reflected in Invisible Cities. Luce Irigaray's deconstruction of the Freudian thesis reveals how woman's sexuality and desire are determined in relation to the penis and males. She states that "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects. Which implies that there are not really two sexes but one" (1985a, p. 86) and that one is always masculine. The feminine is defined by anatomical differences from the masculine or, in Lacanian terms, metaphorically yet Metonymic. This is the focus of the debate between postmodernism and feminism, which is ongoing, and which will continue while gender is not considered as a metanarrative which disadvantages women economically and socially and promotes violence in order to silence and restrain women.

The debate between postmodernism and feminism reveals that the metanarrative of gender is virtually ignored by some postmodernist writers and theorists. By ignoring gender construction as an area to be deconstructed, the roles of males and females remain fixed in tradition and this is certainly evidenced in Italo Calvino's texts. While Calvino draws attention to the centred subject through his exploration of how the individual makes sense of 'his' world, sexuality and desire remain locked into the symbolic. Feminists like Teresa de Lauretis focus on and deconstruct this postmodernist writer's texts to reveal how this author uses women's bodies to construct meaning while doing nothing to contest that position. While it could be argued that by doing this Calvino draws attention to how women's bodies have been used in this way, and therefore this postmodernist is using irony to draw attention to this construction, it is very much the postmodernist standpoint view which does nothing to change the traditional patriarchal structuring of the gender roles.
CHAPTER TWO

DIFFICULT LOVES.

In this chapter I want to focus on the construction of female desire in Italo Calvino’s *Difficult Loves*, a series of short stories written over the period 1949-1957. As one of Calvino’s earlier texts *Difficult Loves*, is more neorealist than postmodern. There are, however, elements within the stories that herald the postmodernist deconstruction of metanarratives; specifically in this collection the multiplicity rather than the unification of the emotion 'love'. As the title suggests, the focus of these stories is on that all embracing concept of love which is revealed as fragmentary, fleeting and de-elevated.

At the same time it will be argued that the presentation of the gender roles in these stories is naturalised: women are still seen as objects of desire, and that desire is a masculine prerogative. Desiring female voices are absent, thus acceding to the proposition that female desire and sexuality are predicated upon masculinist discourse so that, while some attention is drawn to the construction of love in a way that appropriates the postmodern, the gendered roles are still considered as natural.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first will examine theories which address the politics of the gendering of desire and sexuality. Also considered will be the use of irony and parody, devices which are used by postmodernists to draw attention to the construction of metanarratives in order to deconstruct these narratives. The second will focus on how desire and sexuality are reproduced in the structure of *Difficult Loves* and the third will analyse, in detail, three of the stories from that collection. Some reference will be made to a fourth story, mainly because it heralds the self-reflexive strategy which becomes a major focus in *If on a winter’s night a traveller*. 
Pierre Bourdieu, describing the process whereby power relations are produced and reproduced within cultures, places great emphasis on what he calls 'habitus' which he defines as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1984, p. 53). In other words the assumed naturalisation of the gendered roles becomes the basis of the structuring premises of ideology because "the principles which generate and organise practices and representations...can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends" (1984, p. 53) like Foucault's subjugated knowledges. The silencing of women's voices, then, occurs unconsciously through habitus, which is further reinforced by phallocentrism which, as Elizabeth Grosz states: "treats the two sexes as if they were variations of the one sex" (1989, p. 174). This is similar to both the deprivileging of gender by grouping it with other discriminatory practices in Western culture such as class, race and ethnicity, and the recontextualization of difference by postmodernists. Grosz's argument is that the sexes are not the same and that what actually occurs is that the differences between the sexes are reduced to similarity which positions woman as man's inferior (1989, p. 174). This effectively silences any contestation of the metanarrative of gender.

Luce Irigaray believes that women do not speak the same way as men and consequently women are not heard. Irigaray states:

"And there you have it Gentlemen, that is why your daughters are dumb." Even if they chatter, proliferate pythically in works that only signify their aphasia or the mimetic underside of your desire. And interpreting them where they exhibit only their muteness means subjecting them to a language that exiles them at an ever increasing distance from what perhaps they would have said to you, were already whispering to you. If only your ears were not so formless, so clogged with meaning(s), that they are closed to what does not in some way echo the already heard. (1985a, p. 112)

Woman's desires are different from those of man but are not addressed because she is silenced and her desire has been constructed for her within the symbolic order as the same as man's because, as Irigaray suggests: "man would find no possible meaning for 'female libido'" (1985b, p. 43).
It is from a male perspective then, that female sexuality and desire is usually explored. In his lecture on "Femininity", for instance, Sigmund Freud declares:

Throughout history people [men] have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity...Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem - those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply - you are yourselves the problem. (1972. p. 146)

Even in the postmodern world women are still regarded as a problem but one which they have to solve. It is up to women to seek value. An examination of the construction of the gender roles was the strategy that was adopted by some feminists to address the lack of women's voices, as well as their lack of political power, which has subsequently come under a large amount of criticism so that, although lip-service is given to difference in regard to gender, there has been little actual ideological change.

Women are excluded from consideration as speaking and desiring subjects because their desire is always problematical, and must be addressed and solved by men. According to Luce Irigaray:

The enigma that is woman will therefore constitute the target, the object, the stake, of the masculinist discourse, of debate among men, which would not consult her, would not concern her. (1985b, p. 13)

This sentiment is also expressed by Teresa de Lauretis who states:

What Freud's question really asks, therefore, is 'what is femininity for men?' In this sense it is a question of desire; it is prompted by men's desire for women, and by men's desire to know. (1987, p. 111)

It could be argued that this desire to know is a desire to possess and control, as Luce Irigaray posits: "there can be only one desire: the desire to ensure domination" (1985b, p. 58). This is a view that is shared by Michel Foucault who declares that: "where there is desire: the power relation is always present" (1978, p. 81). While Foucault often suggests that power relations are unstable the avoidance of gender in all his writings no consideration of these relations between sexes. Through habitus, subjugated knowledges and the binary system the desire that is privileged and acts as a signifier is predominantly predicated by masculine discourse.
One of the major foundations of Freudian psychoanalytic theory is the Oedipus complex, and it is this theory which is most frequently critiqued and contested by feminists, because the focus is on man as the social being who is the founder of the social order (de Lauretis 1987, p. 112). In order to keep this power, man must control the meanings, discourses, codes and rules that constitute the Lacanian Symbolic order. As Luce Irigaray suggests, by privileging the male sexual organ, by making the penis the archetype of sex, and the penis the representational equivalent of the idea of sex, there can only be one desire (1985b, p. 58). Consequently, according to this argument women can have no desire other than that given to them by men. The refusal to acknowledge that woman's desire could possibly be different to that of man's constitutes a type of violence that has ramifications other than just the silencing of a voice, or a multitude of voices. Politically, women are devalued and degraded, and women's concerns and issues are relegated to the margins. The result is both a lack of power and abuse. The women in the stories under consideration in Difficult Loves exhibit this lack of power and virtual lack of identity, and there is evidence of the masculine power to control and exclude any other desire but that of man's. Possibly it could be argued that the stories, by dismissing women's voices and showing them as objects is in fact revealing women's secondary position. However, the roles are traditional, and the various male narrators authoritative, with the focus on different aspects of love which is revealed as unstable and fragmentary. The stories promote the difficulty of love between individuals who are still situated within their symbolic roles.

It could be argued that this selection of short stories reveals the irony of what is considered as central to human beings, 'love'. In fact the blurb at the front of the collection states that "the irony of the title is deliberate". The exploration of love within the stories is shown to be contrary to popular belief. Is then Calvino, whose works, according to Miriam Friedman, are "striking for the way they fit so nicely into the
modern scheme of literary criticism" (1983, p. 117), pre-empting the postmodernist
deconstruction of metanarratives in his interrogation of 'love' as an all empowering
passion? There is certainly evidence within the stories to reveal different kinds of love,
evidence too that masculine desire is more lust than love, but virtually no evidence
which reveals any form of deconstruction of the gender roles.

While Linda Hutcheon argues that Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses,
for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it produces, it also
forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with the
postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions (1988, p. 11). She goes on
to state that:

it is precisely parody - that seemingly introverted formalism - that paradoxically
brings about a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the
aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of
socially defined meaning systems. (1990, p. 22)

In Difficult Loves what is paradoxical is love, not the gender roles which are naturalised.
There is no concrete questioning of women's lack of agency or their muteness.

The stories in Difficult Loves reveal the multifaceted nature of this emotion and its
importance to human beings within patriarchal society. Each story exposes that love is
in many ways unattainable; and even if attained, fleeting. But then there seems to be a
gap or a void, where are the answers? Where is the liberation? Is there a liberating
change to the "Profanation of the myth of romantic/modernist originality"? (Portoghise
in Hutcheon 1988, p. 26). Love may be shown to be a myth by the use of irony and
parody, however, are the gender roles, which are central to the modernist tradition also
shown to be a myth or are they recontextualised within the masculine discourse? While
the stories on one level reflect reality, thus exposing the romantic myth of love, they
could still be regarded as fairy stories because of the traditional gendered roles.
Hutcheon argues that parody and irony are classic conventions which offer a set of references that are meaningful to the public (1988, p. 34). However, she redefines parody in postmodern terms as "repetition with critical distance that allows for ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (1988, p. 26). This is evidenced when an analysis of the various stories within *Difficult Loves* reveals that the loves are indeed different and multifaceted. The common perception that love is an emotion which brings happiness and a sense of unity between males and females is not apparent within these stories, neither is there a critical distance that allows for any sort of signalling of difference within the relationships. The revelation of the multi layers of love, however, could reflect the postmodern deconstruction of traditional beliefs. Even within these early stories, then, Calvino is pre-empting postmodernism.

The stories, however, all place women in the traditional symbolic roles which do not liberate or reposition them. Their difference to man is revealed particularly in the binary terms of active versus passive. The women here are all passive and voiceless. So, in these terms, there is no "signalling of difference at the heart of similarity" because these women are given no agency, and the difference between the gender roles is still traditionally presented. The desire and sexuality of woman is still kept firmly subjugated, and man is still in control with power over discourses. The irony focuses on 'love' and the various differences, not on the gender roles. In fact Hutcheon goes on to say that "Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows the artist to speak to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it (1988, p. 35). The discourse that is being spoken to within these stories is 'love', not the gendered roles which do not have to be recuperated within these stories because they are never challenged.

Although Hutcheon argues that the postmodern use of parody cannot be seen as a nostalgic return because of "the inscription and ironic challenge of various values"
(1988, p. 204), the refusal to interrogate gender as a metanarrative tends to undercut any ironic challenging of masculine/feminine roles and this is evidenced in the construction of these roles in *Difficult Loves*. If, as Hutcheon states: "Postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation" (1990, p. 98) how is this achieved in *Difficult Loves*? By fragmenting the abstract term of love, attention could be drawn to the discursive nature of discourses of love, however, the gendered roles remain the same. Women and men are not shown to extend past the symbolic roles, a familiarity that is not disturbed or reconstructed.

There are eleven stories collected under the heading of *Difficult Loves*. Women are featured in the title of only two: 'The adventure of the wife', and 'The adventure of the married couple'. In neither is the woman allowed an identity of her own, but is defined in terms of her relationship to a male. One of the stories, 'The adventure of the bather' appears to be told by a woman, yet the narration is again essentially masculine. A full analysis of this story appears later in this chapter. In some of the stories the woman is not even given a name, and even when she is, she has no identity, no voice. According to the leaf jacket of the book, Italo Calvino selected the title for this collection of short stories in which the irony is deliberate. "Where love - or loves - are concerned, the difficulties are minor" states the blurb. If love is perceived to be reciprocal, then, it could be suggested that love, as explored in these stories is impossible because the woman is inarticulate, she is not allowed to speak so her desire is assumed to be the same as man’s. This is reflected in Freudian theory.

In her passage through the Oedipus complex, a girl is forced to give up her first love object in order to fit into the heterosexual matrix. She is forced to conform to the dictates of phallocentric society, to have only one position, "that of being as much as possible like man's eternal object of desire and ... of correlating her own pleasure with
her success in this operation" (Irigaray 1985b, p. 32). Therefore, there is no unification of the two desires. Traditionally, love is perceived to be the meeting of two people of different genders who desire each other, yet what is promoted by phallocentrism is only one desire, the masculine; there is no such thing as female desire.

It could be argued, then, that the difficulty of love is not minor, it is an impossibility. According to Elizabeth Grosz, Lacan sees "no direct, unmediated relation between the sexes" (1990a, p. 137) but "a demand for an impossible harmony" (1990a, p. 138) which can never occur, for the desire is only man's for the Other which no woman can ever be. Grosz further argues that for Lacan "The desire for the One is, the desire of the Other, the Other beyond the other" (1990a, p. 137). This is evidenced in Difficult Loves where women can have no access as subjects of love: their only access is to become the object of male desire.

The blurb at the front of the book also states that at the "heart of most of the stories there lie the difficulties of recognition, of communication". Although Friedman argues that, in Difficult Loves, non-verbal communication is established between the various couples by way of external forces, for example, the train movement in 'The adventure of the soldier', in effect little communication occurs at all. Friedman tries to show unity within the stories linked through the human need for love (she sees love as a constant theme throughout Calvino's work). What is indeed revealed through these stories is disunity or a postmodernist deconstruction of the metanarrative of 'love'. an exposure which ironically reveals the difficulties of recognition, of communication but not exploring the uneven differences within gender relationships which, because sexual difference is not addressed, give women no voice to articulate their needs.

As there is only one desire operating there can be no communication, as only one party has a voice. If phallocentrism needs the woman only as the signifier of the male other
where "man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of women" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7), then there can be no communication. Masculine discourses do not allow women a voice: woman has to be silent in order for man to be the bearer of meaning (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7), and this is reflected in the list of the contents of Difficult Loves. The title of each story announces that it is an adventure of a specific protagonist who is not identified by name, but only by a position which could be taken by either sex, thereby masquerading as non-sexist, non gender specific; but on examination the narration proves in each case to be male, with the female voice silenced.

In all the stories woman is represented as the possession of man. In some, such as 'The adventure of the photographer' and 'The adventure of the near-sighted man' this is overt: in others, it is hidden or covert. In both the above, the domination comes from 'the gaze' which is a prominent feature of most of the stories. In none of the stories is the female seen as anything other that mother, wife, or whore. An analysis of three of the stories with some reference to a fourth will evidence this.

In 'The adventure of the soldier' the woman, unnamed, is presented as an enigma, a mystery which the young soldier Tomagra cannot read. Despite this he uses her, makes no attempt to understand her, but places her in the allotted role of mother, a mother whom he has to possess. At no time in the story does the woman have voice or is her desire addressed, she is presented as passive, tied to nature in the guise of earth mother.

Freudian concepts of the enigma, that is woman, are extended to embrace the representation of the mother who "is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; that is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence in all human relationships" (1972, p. 168). In Freudian terms then, what this story of Calvino's represents is the picture of the mother supplying nurture to this young soldier, satisfying
his desire and in so doing satisfying her own. For the woman does not speak and satisfaction seems not to be evident as her demeanour does not change. The relationship is perfect for the male because it is only his desire that is considered and seemingly met.

According to Freud, women by the age of thirty are tied into their roles as mothers and can develop no further:

A man of about thirty strikes us as youthful, somewhat unformed individual, who we expect to make powerful use of the possibilities for development opened to him by analysis. A woman of the same age, however, often frightens us by her psychical rigidity and unchangeability. (1972, p. 169)

The woman in 'The adventure of the soldier' is over thirty, therefore locked into the representation of mother, seeking to re-create this position. Tomagra, while tentative in his actions, does not succumb to the fear as he pushes forward in an attempt to arrive at the fulfilment of his desires. In fact, Freud suggests that the "aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women's consent" (1972, p. 168). Therefore, according to Freudian theory, the woman is expected to be passive in order to satiate Tomagra's desires.

Right from the commencement of the story the woman is allotted her place. She is a widow but dressed with the usual "useless frills and furbelows" (1983, p. 3). Instead of taking one of the empty seats, she chooses to sit next to a coarse soldier, thus inviting the advances and intimacies that follow. In fact Friedman states that the widow has orchestrated the whole seduction (1983, p. 123). According to her "The widow herself, from a desire to break out of her object-like state, but unable to do so, allows the soldier to seduce her, thus enabling her to make contact and become human" (1983, p. 123). Friedman's thesis, like the presentation of woman in this story, echoes Freudian dictates. Freud states that "women will not choose, or desire, an 'object' of love but will arrange matters so that the 'subject' takes her as his 'object' (1972, p. 166). According to Luce Irigaray, by phallic mandate this is her only choice (1985a, p. 118). So in 'The
adventure of the soldier' the widow chooses to sit beside Tomagra in order to encourage him to choose her as his object of desire, because phallocentricism decrees that this is her only avenue for acquiring the penis. For Friedman, this act, though brief, has made each a little more human (1983, p. 123). So the widow is only human when her body is mauled and penetrated by Tomagra and he when he violates and takes possession of the widow's body.

It is Tomagra who makes all the moves; the lady is only a body passive and servile. There is no reaction from her when the soldier paws her body. His tentative movements take on an aura of exploration with the male as both the explorer of the dark continent and the predator who will subdue it. His movements are likened to a crab (1983, p. 8), his hand an octopus (1983, p. 8) and the movement of his leg and hers together like "two sharks grazing each other" (1983, p. 4). Her description is a mixture of the sensual "body in full bloom" (1983, p. 3) but at the same time, square. Her complexionis "both marmoreal and relaxed" (1983, p. 3). He senses a reaction from her "like the motion of distant marine currents through secret underwater channels" (1983, p. 10) which links her to nature and the earth and, as man needs to conquer the earth, so he desires to conquer woman. By tying the widow firmly to nature, the text, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis, reinforces "the symbolic boundary between nature and culture" (1984, p. 109) which sustains the binary promoted by phallocentricism. Historically, this symbolic boundary between nature and culture has always correlated woman with nature and man with culture. Because women bear children they are close to nature. Culture is of course the privileged side of the binary and therefore man's province.

The woman is taken as Tomagra's object, he actively fondles her and, while continually wondering if she is going to reject his advances, nevertheless, proceeds in his exploration of her body. The third person narrator reinforces the inactivity of the lady through the mind of Tomagra, who takes a vein throbbing in the widow's neck to be a
sign of her acquiescence. She is, to him, like the Sphinx (1983, p. 8) which ties directly to the idea of woman as an enigma, impossible to read. Teresa de Lauretis suggests the Sphinx is silent, the story is not her own. She is taken as a marker "through which the hero and his story move to their destination" (1984, p. 109). The widow can be seen as the marker for Tomagra as he moves to his destination. Luce Irigaray in her problematization of the Freudian Oedipus complex and its phallocratic base exposes the psychoanalytic masculine bias within. She also sees women as having no voice in any discourse but at the same time the women's body is used as a reference (1985a, pp. 66-70) or, in Grosz's terms, her body has been inscribed. This is evidenced in this story where women's position is shown to be inactive, predicated by masculine desire.

In patriarchal discourses women always represent the void, the Other and that is what Tomagra feels as his hand travels down the widow's leg where "the fingers were running along the hem of the skirt, beyond there was a leap to the knee, and the void" (1983, p. 9). The void, which once entered will trap him, but which he enters to find his hand "in a sealed den" (1983, p. 9) in which he kept "the contact alive and burning" (1983, p. 9) but the widow was impervious, in fact asleep so Tomagra withdrew his hand, afraid to continue as if fearful of rejection, but also of penetrating into the unknown.

It is through the omniscient narrator that the widow is revealed. From the first lines she comes under both the narrator's and Tomagra's gaze. The complicity between the masculine narrator and Tomagra reinforces her object position and the domination of the masculine gaze. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that "Sartre (1974) recognised, the look is the domain of domination and mastery" (1989, p. 38). The widow will not meet the soldier's gaze, each time "the gaze had gone past him, [directed] at something, at nothing" (1983, p. 8); her "gaze beneath the veil was impenetrable" (1983, p. 7). Even at the end, after the sexual encounter she retained "her clear, stern gaze" (1983, p. 12) but not at Tomagra. While Tomagra gazes at her, thus fixing her position, she refuses
to look at him. It could be argued that she is rejecting her allotted role as object of the male gaze. Yet her compliance with and lack of action at his possession of her body tend to reinforce completely her subjugation to male domination. While to Tomagra she is an enigma or, like the sphinx, forever mysterious, the role she plays is the one given to her by ideology and masculinist discourses. The focus is then, on woman as an enigma, as a sphinx, who is forever mysterious. Consequently, there is only a reinforcement of woman as passively accepting her position as the object of the male desire, as the phallus. On the other hand Tomagra's desire is addressed, when he "[stands] over her (1983, p. 11), leans over her in order to close the blinds he shows her "all his own, compelling condition of desire" (1983, p. 12), obviously the visible signs of his erection and in order to repay her for her kindness in allowing him to maul her he, in "the urgency of his madness managed also to grasp its mute object: her" (1983, p. 12). At the end of the story Tomagra is amazed that he could have "been so daring" (1983, p. 12). Perhaps this could be viewed as ironic. Friedman states the widow's passivity and form is the challenge which inspires Tomagra to seduce her (1983, p. 123), but where is the challenge? The only challenge here is the traditional one for the male. His treatment of the woman was one which had been made acceptable by phallocentricism. Women are treated as vessels for men's desires. The naturalisation of the role of woman has not been contested in this story. The widow has no desire of her own, only male desire is represented.

Unlike the previous story, 'The adventure of the bather' appears to be told through Signora Isotta's subconscious. The omniscient narrator, however, could be presumed to be masculine, not feminine. Isotta is not the subject but the object of many masculine gazes. She is presented as locked into phallocentricism; alienated from the members of her sex, and her own body; in need of masculine protection and guidance. She has no control over her fears and once again she is tied very firmly to nature.
All cultures, according to Roland Barthes:

have their narratives, enjoyment of which is often shared by men with different, even opposing cultural backgrounds ... narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (1977, p. 79)

So narrative is naturalised with no interrogation of what it constructs. In *The Pleasures of the Text* John Barth states that "every narrative lead[s] back to Oedipus" (1975, p. 47). This is a position which declares that all narrative is masculine, and that the desire portrayed excludes the feminine. Storytelling, according to Barth, is "always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflict with the Law" (1975, p. 47). There is no conflict with the Law in 'The adventure of the bather' because the woman is represented as adhering to the Law of the Father, a law which, as Helene Cixous states, has driven women violently away from their bodies (1976, p. 875) and, as Luce Irigaray declares:

> [the woman] remains forsaken and abandoned in her lack, default, absence, envy etc, and is led to submit, to follow the dictates issued univocally by ... the law of the father. (1985b, p. 49)

Signora Isotta is shown to be following the law of the father in that she feels abandoned by the absence of her husband and therefore has no protection. She rejects asking for help from other women because they "were jealous, inaccessible" (1983, p. 25). They are inaccessible because:

> Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies. (Cixous 1976, p. 878)

This is reflected in 'The adventure of the bather' for the narrator states:

> Isotta realized ... how alone a woman is, and how rare, among her own kind, is solidarity, spontaneous and good ... which would have foreseen her appeals and come to her side at the merest hint in the moment of a secret misfortune no man would understand. Women would never save her: (1983, p. 25)

So Isotta has only men to turn to for protection, the position that is given her by the symbolic and the law of the father. This, then, gives credence to Barth's declaration that the narrative is always Oedipal, thereby giving women no voice. Neither John Barth nor Roland Barthes critiques the symbolic roles, but they do draw attention to the fact that the discourses are always masculine.
The woman's body is the site of her sexuality, the signifier of her gender, yet women are taught that their bodies are for their husband's eyes alone and therefore must be hidden from all other gazes, even their own. When Signora Isotta loses part of her two-piece bathing suit she becomes distraught: "she tried to hide it from her own gaze" (1983, p. 22). She regards her body, according to the narrator as "offensive" (1983, p. 23). "We've been turned away from our bodies," according to Cixous, "shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty" (1976, p. 885) while only men can enjoy them. The narrator refers to this body of Isotta as "rich and impossible to conceal", as "a glory of hers, a source of self-satisfaction" (1983, p. 23) yet it is a self-satisfaction that Isotta seems to be unaware of as she sought to flee her own body (1983, p. 23), a body whose "nakedness hardly belonged to her" (1983, p. 23). Who, then, did her body belong to? Firstly to her husband and then to all other men who give her identification through the gaze as the phallus.

Paradoxically the woman via the narrator is shown to be narcissistic, while at the same time rejecting the object of her narcissism. Freud informs that:

we attributed a larger amount of narcissism to femininity ... the effect of penis-envy has a share ... in the physical vanity of women, since they are bound to value their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority. (1972, p. 166)

Yet Isotta certainly shows no form of vanity, sees no value in her charms. Helene Cixous believes that the male order has "made for women an antinarcissism" (1976, p. 878) in that the woman rejects her body as is evidenced in 'The adventure of the bather'.

It is the narrator who discovers that after marriage Isotta had accepted that she owned a body "like someone who learns he can command a long yearned-for property" (1983, p. 23) (my italics) so even here although the woman thinks she has taken control of her body, she had to adopt the masculine position in order to have that control. So like women's double lack via Oedipus there is also a double lack here. Isotta misrecognizes
her ownership of her body after marriage because possession has passed, as it has to, according to the Law, to her husband. The outrageous disguise she adopts during the "secret carnival between husband and wife" (1983, p. 23) is the mask of both autonomy and submission. The fable is played out in the carnival of love, in the unification of two equal partners, whilst in effect all that occurs is the submission of the female to the male, in some ways similar to the widow’s submission to Tomagra.

The fear of her body is now exacerbated by a lack of protection. Her protector and owner of her body is absent. Phallocentricism demands that the woman be the phallus, and this is what Isotta is. She is placed as the object by the masculine narrator who constantly, throughout the eleven pages of the story, gloats on her nakedness and her white body: "the skin of the pale revealing belly gleamed, between the tan of the bosom and the thighs" (1983, p. 22). As Cixous argues "the act of writing is equivalent to masculine masturbation" (1976, p. 883).

The objectification is reinforced by all other men on and in the water:

Her need for trust was met by rising barriers of slyness and double-entendre, a hedge of piercing pupils, of incisors bared in ambiguous laughter. (1983, p. 24)

The desire being represented here is masculine. The naturalisation of the gender roles is enforced because Isotta is fearful of the male gaze and so swims away from it: "There was no way out: the front of preordained male insinuations extended to all men, with no possible breach" (1983, p. 24). It could be argued that masculine representation is hinted at here, but at the same time it is recontextualised as natural. The alienation of women from their own sex, as decreed by Oedipus, is focused on and further reinforces the dependency of Isotta on her husband. She is saved from drowning by a "buoy" (1983, p. 25) which reinstates the female position of reliance on the male; of the lack of independence.
To complete the naturalisation of the female as weak, Isotta is tied as heavily to nature as the unnamed female in the previous story. The narrator states that she liked swimming because she liked the feel of "the intimacy with the water, feeling herself a part of that peaceful sea" (1983, p. 21).

Like Eve, who was the cause of man's downfall, Isotta also is shown to consider herself as adopting the burden of the original sin. The narrator declares that she believes that her purchase of the swimsuit and her "desire to swim alone" (1983, p. 26) was caused by "the defiance of an inclination to sin" (1983, p. 27). The fact that she found herself in this state of nakedness was "like the chastisement of a sin" (1983, p. 26), "the presence of an evil [within] against which she had not sufficiently armed herself" (1983, p. 27). While she could not "understand why this nakedness that all people carry with themselves forever should banish her alone" (1983, p. 27), Isotta nevertheless condemns her own nakedness because it does not fit into the representation of femininity decreed by the Law. As Cixous posits, "the superegoized structure [of patriarchy] in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty" (1976, p. 880) forces women to accept that they are "guilty of everything" (1976, p. 880). Isotta's desire for freedom must be repressed and never voiced, and her body must be always seen as evil and not her own.

While it could be argued that there is an ironic undertone in this story, it is my contention that there is none because of the inscriptions placed by Isotta on her own body, and her reading of others' reactions to her nakedness. This representation of woman adheres to the naturalised female role, one that has been accepted universally, one that was accepted within Western society. Isotta's behaviour is unacceptable and so she is punished for it, she is not free to make choices and so is entrapped within phallocentrism. The narrator is therefore complicit with the position given women within patriarchy. It is a male narrator who is assuming authority to read a woman's
mind. He appropriates her difference within a masculine discourse which reinforces women's instability and guilt, and reveals her dependence on the male.

While there is no real questioning of the naturalisation of the gendered roles in this story, there is the beginning of the deconstruction of subjectivity which becomes an important issue in postmodernism. Attention is certainly drawn to how identity is constructed through outward appearance. Although feeling uncomfortable in her new two-piece, because the people on the beach may perhaps get the wrong idea about her, "for example, that she was athletic, or fashionable, whereas she was really a very simple domestic person" (1983, p. 21), Isotta was sure that they would modify their opinion when they got to know her. Yet this concern with outward appearances and identification was to continue and indeed be a part of her trauma. Friedman suggests that her self-assured position as a married woman, albeit one owned by her husband as I have argued, will be threatened by her nudity (1983, p. 155). The question of how identity is constructed is raised here from the usual postmodern standpoint view, that is, the issue is raised about identity construction but then recontextualised. On the other hand, because the narrator is assuming that he can read a woman's mind, he is actually reinforcing the natural acceptance of woman's narcissism. This decentering of subjectivity will be discussed in both Baron in the trees and Invisible Cities where it is further developed and becomes the focus of the text.

Italo Calvino states that "all literature is erotic" (1989, p. 66). The adventure of the bather' shows that eroticism comes from Oedipus which divorces women from their own bodies and, at the same time, sees no difference between masculine and feminine desire, effectively excluding women's desire from the discourse.

According to Teresa de Lauretis, Italo Calvino sees a "core of silence at the bottom of human communication" (1987, p. 71). This core of silence is evident in 'The adventure
of the reader' in which there is a lack of communication. The male protagonist's only desire, in this story, is to complete a book. This is to become the theme of a later novel of Calvino's, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. The woman is serviced on the beach because this is what is expected when a man and woman meet, it is 'natural'. The woman, unnamed, is a body waiting to be serviced. Amedeo is presented by the narrator as far more interested in reading, an intellectual endeavour. In patriarchy, as Anne Cranny Francis states "'male' is aligned with 'mind'" while "'female' comes to be aligned with ... 'body'" (1995, p. 24), and this is evidenced in this text. Friedman is complicit with this when she states that "she [the unnamed bather] is interested in more than conversation, and she manoeuvres to get Amedeo to make a pass at her" (1983, p. 144). Like the woman on the train, her desire once more is never voiced; her body is fragmented; she is the recipient of Amedeo's gaze, and the construction of her desire is not questioned but neither is Amedeo's. Both characters are presented by the narrator as playing traditional roles. What is being questioned by the narrator is the lack of communication between them as they play out their allotted roles.

The protagonist, Amedeo Oliva, is an avid reader who, when on holidays, comes to the beach to read. In this story the male is shown to be not a part of nature, as are the women in the two previous stories, but in control of nature. He lay on and indeed "felt he was one with the rock" (1983, p. 69) but he is on top of the rock, in a superior position. When he swims he reads the sea as he reads a book to take pleasure, not become a part of nature. He enjoys, most of all, large books because of "the physical pleasure of undertaking a great task" (1983, p. 69). He becomes so immersed in the language of the text that he rejects life, sees it as a pale comparison. The text allowed him to enter "a world where life was more alive than here, on this side" (1983, p. 69), possibly more satisfactory because of the fulfilment of desire in the novels he reads. But his reading, on this occasion, was interrupted by a woman, unnamed, sunbathing, to whom his eyes were continually drawn. Teresa de Lauretis states that Amedeo was:
torn between the pleasures of the imaginary and the demands of the symbolic (for his socialisation as a young male requires him to take an interest in that female body there on the beach). (1987, p. 72)

As an excuse to get more comfortable, Amedeo shifted his position closer to the woman. His gaze on the lines of the page now "encountered, every time he had to start a new line, just beyond the edge of the page, the legs of the solitary vacationer" (1983, p. 72). So now Amedeo's pleasure in the book was extended to embrace that of the tanned woman who "did not mar the pleasure of reading, but was inserted into the normal process" (1983, p. 72). As de Lauretis comments, "The two pleasures, looking and reading are thus for a moment parallel and in perfect equilibrium" (1987, p. 72). The world of the imaginary within the book reflects the imaginary order which "originates in the pre-oedipal, two person self-other relation" (Grosz 1989, p. 22) which are the "preconditions of social and sexual identity" acquired by the subject "as a result of the oedipal or symbolic reorganisation of the imaginary dyad" (1989, p. 22). So when the unnamed woman is inscribed in the text Amedeo is reading, she loses all identity. If, as Barth believes, all texts are Oedipal, governed by the double lack of the female, then the contents of the nineteenth century novels, which Amedeo prefers, would position the woman into the role of seeking the penis to compensate for her lack. She is certainly read this way by the reader who: "evaluated the amount of lazy sexuality and of chronic frustration there was in her" (1983, p. 71). The woman is perceived to be "not very young, nor of great beauty ... an independent woman, on holiday by herself" (1983, p. 71). Therefore, Amedeo reads that she was obviously looking for someone who would alleviate her sexual frustration: someone who would fulfil her desire for the penis which she lacks. Reluctantly, because it is expected of him by the symbolic, Amedeo allows himself to be placed in the situation of servicing her.

It is a medusa washed up on the beach that causes the first contact between them, which is forced by Amedeo. The woman and two young boys are examining the creature, a situation which Amedeo views with suspicion: "He thought for a man seeking romance,
that dialogue between her and the fisher-boys would have been a 'classic' opening” (1983, p. 73) but he was not interested. Using masculinist rationalisation he decides that it would be foolish to miss examining the medusa just to avoid the woman, perhaps he feared that she would turn him into stone like the Grecian Medusa. But it is to the woman that he is drawn who, like the heroines of all misogynist literature, fears him. Like Isotta, she "covered her bosom with her arms, in a useless shudder and cast almost furtive glances first at the supine animal then at Amedeo” (1983, p. 74). She is presented by the narrator as firstly attempting to cover her breasts in an effort to hide her body, which she rejects and, at the same time, glances furtively at Amedeo which he obviously sees as an invitation or perhaps a responsibility to possess that body.

The ritual of intercourse is played out between Amedeo and the woman to neither’s satisfaction. Amedeo performs his role while still reading. He, eager to complete the act fell on her, "one finger between the pages ... Even in the ecstasy of his embraces” (1983, p. 80) he was eager to keep reading. The tentative actions of the unnamed woman for companionship are not met as "she turned her face towards him: and it was a sad face, with a bitter curl of the mouth” (1983, p. 80). He could not really understand the woman's gaze of "reproach, commiseration, dejection", which seemed to say, "Stupid, all right, we'll do it if it has to be done like this, but you don't understand a thing, any more than the others” (1983, p. 80). Woman, according to Irigaray, "is not listened to" (1985a, p. 112) and the woman in this story is certainly neither listened to nor heard. She asks for conversation, communication, but what she gets is the violation of her body by a disinterested male The woman is seen to be the passive recipient of his penis, a position decreed as natural by the symbolic. Her desires are constructed for her. The narrator draws attention to her lack of enthusiasm or pleasure that she gains from the sexual encounter. Amedeo’s actions also show a certain amount of disinterestedness as he would rather read his book while at the same time performing his role of possessing a woman’s body. The correlation between the inanimate book and the animate, but
passive, woman’s body reveals the naturalisation of the gender roles and, while the narrator may draw attention to the woman’s dissatisfaction and Amedeo’s disinterest, it is not the gender roles so much that are being critiqued but the ritual of intercourse that is being problematized. Amedeo’s assumptions that the woman is looking for a sexual encounter reflects the representation of women as sexually voracious. What is being questioned is the lack of communication between male and female. It is love that is being problematized or, in this case, lust. By the end of the story Amedeo has forgotten her as he "counts how many pages were left till the end" (1983, p. 81). The woman has been attended to as custom decreed and the woman’s particular needs have been “figured in relation” (Cranny Francis 1995, p. 24) to man’s conception of these needs. Amedeo, representative of the mind, has returned to his book. He has done his duty and can now get back to the much more important task of servicing his mind.

At the heart of this story there certainly is a lack of communication. Amedeo is more concerned with discovering life through the pages of nineteenth century novels, he is unconcerned about the woman he has intercourse with, he has no desire to communicate with or know her. The narrator interpellates the reader to see the unnamed woman as an extension of the book Amedeo is reading and as something that he can take possession of, just as he takes possession of the words he is reading. She is seen as the phallus and, as the symbolic decrees, forever demanding the penis which she lacks; she is an object with no voice, to be used and discarded. There is no critique of this by the narrator, instead it is love that is the focus, and the core of silence that is at the heart of intercourse which is critiqued. The text positions both Amedeo and the woman within a patriarchal context. The difficulties of love are minor in this story because love is non-existent.

There is, as Friedman states, a similarity of structure in the stories in this collection. According to her, the formula is "protagonist/doer-thing/intermediary person/receiver or
subject-verb-object" (1983, p. 147). The subject is in the main male, the verb is the action, usually sexual and the object, female. Translated to the stories analysed, the equations would be: Tomagra/lust/the widow: all males on the beach/the gaze/ Isotta and Amedeo/disinterested sex/the woman. It is for this reason that I have chosen only three stories to analyse as they are representative of the positioning of the gendered roles within Difficult Loves. However, reference does need to be made to one other story, 'The adventure of the photographer', not because women are positioned differently, but because elements in this story presuppose the use of mise an abyme, a device that reflects back on the text within the text, thus drawing attention to the construction of the work. Albert Sfragia states that this is Calvino's "first fully metanarrative use of it" (1993, p. 297). The protagonist becomes enamoured with the camera as a vehicle to reveal truth and essence, the modernist idea of making a presence out of an absence. The gaze of the camera is on Bice, a model, later to become the photographer's wife. Through the lens of the camera Bice becomes something other than a familiar figure to the photographer: "She had a docility that promised something hidden" (1983, p. 46). She is an enigma as are both the widow and the woman on the beach. Like Amedeo, the photographer wants to read woman as text. He wants to capture her totality. To that end he follows her around taking photos endlessly until, as Sfragio says, she is "Assaulted by the continual artistic mutilation of her body" (287) and leaves. The photographer now believes that only through Bice's absence can he photograph her presence. In the end he resorts to taking photographs with the realisation that this "was the only course that he had left, or rather, the true course he had obscurely sought all the time" (1983, p. 52). Sfragio sees this as a "turning point for Calvino, who breaks with neorealism for his own true course towards a more metaphysical and metanarrative fiction" (298): fiction that takes metanarratives in an attempt to deconstruct them, thus revealing their fictionality. At the same time the focus tends to revert back to an esoteric exploration of how meaning is constructed for and by individuals. Just as Calvino, in some of his works, concentrates on myth and fairy stories to locate patterns
of the way these structure meaning for individuals, there is a continual folding back to these sources. So paradoxically, while on the one hand there is an examination or a problematization of the metanarratives contained within myths and fairy stories, there is also a reinstatement of the gender roles which are not questioned. The use of mise en abyme becomes highly developed in IWNT, but even in this postmodernist text is does not extend to gender.

The lack of female desire within these stories is obvious. Both 'The adventure of the soldier' and 'The adventure of the reader' show women as passive recipients of male desire, neither are given space to voice their needs. In 'The adventure of the bather' Isotta rejects her body while the males claim it as their possession in a voyeururistic fashion. While the Western/romantic view of love is questioned and problematized the gender roles within this problematization stay the same. Love is deconstructed and shown as fragmentary/fleeting within the various relationships, and certainly the effects of lack of communication within these relationships is revealed by the multiple male narrators, but the desire within is still metaphorical and masculine. There is no place for female desire as it is not addressed in any of the stories in Difficult Loves of which these are representative.

Absent from the stories is the lack of questioning of the construction of the gendered roles. Postmodernisms celebration of 'difference' is non-existent within this text. What is evident are some postmodern concerns like the questioning of subjectivity and the deconstruction of the metanarrative, 'love'. Also evident is irony, but this irony is directed towards 'love', not the construction of female desire and subjectivity. Of course this group of short stories was written prior to the sixties, a period of conventionalism during which the concept of giving value to difference was not considered. Yet there are elements in these short stories that herald a change and which are developed more fully in the later texts under consideration.
CHAPTER THREE

BARON IN THE TREES

In relation to *Difficult Loves* it was argued that there was evidence of postmodern elements, a trend which is further developed in the middle novella of *Our Ancestors*, entitled *Baron in the trees*. But while there is certainly a progression towards the deconstruction of metanarratives, focusing in particular in this text on the construction of identity, the shifting of the subject positions and notions of the 'real', the gender roles, while appearing at times to be reversed are once again fixed firmly in place.

*Baron in the trees* was written in 1957 and was advertised, according to Michelle D'Uva, as a story for children and young adults (1992, p. 154). The novel was published just after *Fiabe Italiane* which is a collection of fairy tales from many dialects which had been transcribed by Calvino (D'Uva, 1992, p. 153). This influence can be seen within *Baron in the trees* as elements of both the fantastic literary mode and the Fairy Story genre are used to explore, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis, "Cosimo's ek-centricity (sic) in relation to the world" (1975, p. 416). At no time, however, are the patriarchal discourses disturbed. While these genres are used to, at times, break boundaries which, according to Linda Hutcheon is what postmodernist texts usually do (1988, p. 9), the conventions of the genres are not "played off against each other" (1988, p. 9) in this text in which there is an "unproblematic merging" (1988, p. 9). The fantastic and the fairy story come together and support each other. There is no deconstruction of either genre. In particular the gender roles ultimately remain traditional.

Cosimo is the major protagonist who chooses to live his life in the trees. Within the text there is a slight shift in the gender roles initially, but no real contestation of these roles
occurs, in fact it will be argued that these are recontextualised. The dichotomy between the public and the private has been subverted because the Baron (as Cosimo becomes) has relinquished his position in the public sphere, but at the same time he still holds the cultural capital. The male role of predator and hunter is held firmly in place. The desire promoted is masculine and the mind/body binary is reinforced with the mind being left in the privileged position. Some questions are raised about the 'real' as well as how subjectivity/identity is constructed, but no real attempt is made to examine the politicisation of gender roles and the woman's voice, while not totally non-existent, slides ultimately into silence.

While discussing one of Angela Carter's books, Linda Hutcheon makes this comment in relation to postmodern elements within that text:

> it straddles the border between the imaginary/fantastic ... and the realistic/historical, between a unified biographically structured plot, and a decentred narration, with its wandering point of view and extensive digressions. (1988, p. 61)

These comments could also be used to describe Baron in the trees with one substantial difference: digressions there are and to a degree there is a wandering point of view but that wandering point of view does not disturb the gendered roles, which are dislocated for a time but are firmly recontextualised at the end. The text does straddle the border between the imaginary (fairy story) and the fantastic, the 'real' and the historical which are actively complicit in keeping the gender roles in place.

The narrator is Cosimo's brother Biagio. As a narrator he is a little problematic in that he selects, from a variety of sources, one version of an incident (the pirates capture (1980, p. 189)) which is then promoted as truth. This then raises questions about both the authority of the narrator as well as the construction of the truth. Biagio's point of view consequently shifts, which is consistent with postmodernisms' problematization of the narrative voice. However, as in Difficult Loves the voice is very masculine. No female point of view is presented, The assumption, then, is that women, while present,
have no differing voice, indeed no point of view that could be different from the masculine discourses because “the male body is constituted as some kind of ‘universal’” (Cranny-Francis, 1995, p. 24) and therefore men can always speak for women.

In her book *Fantasy: The literature of subversion* Rosemary Jackson, in her historical examination of this genre, reveals the neutralisation of fantasy and its images of impossibility and desire (1981, p. 173) always pushed to the margins and “rewritten, in transcendental rather than transgressive terms” (1981, p. 173). She sees fantasy as deconstructing the dominant structures but argues that this potential has always been silenced (1981, p. 163) by traditional literary criticism. Jackson presents a persuasive argument and her discussion links fantasy’s subversion very much to postmodernism. She suggests that fantasy attempts to find the ‘other’, to break conventional barriers, but at the same time it could be argued that it is "still linked to the real and the rational" (1981, p. 19). This point is also raised in feminist critiques of postmodernism. In their case the focus is on the postmodern failure to regard gender as a metanarrative because of the political ramifications for women. The postmodern rejection of dualism does not allow for the subversion of these dualisms or an examination of them which, feminists argue, would have the potential to reveal how the domination of women has become constructed within language and society. So, like fantasy, postmodernism has the potential to deconstruct barriers but reverts instead to the rational, an area dominated by men which makes language and postmodernism complicit with that domination. While *Baron* does appear to subvert the boundaries, it is still linked very much to the real and the rational.

Anne Cranny Francis also believes that fantasy has the potential to be a subversive literary form, subversive "...of the means by which we construct and verify the real" (1990, p 76); that it can show "the fragmentation of the real, revealing the real as a negotiation of conflicting discourses" (1990, p. 76). While it could be argued that the
narrator of Baron does draw attention to the way myth and legend are used to construct identity, and there is fragmentation within his point of view, ultimately that fragmentation resolves itself by presenting the male protagonist as a ‘larger than life’ character. The construction of Cosimo’s identity, from different perspectives becomes a part of both the fairy story and the fantastic, and is hidden by these genres, thereby eliminating any contestation of the real which remains in place. While the world of Cosimo is located in the unreal, his life parallels the real and is still linked with it.

Fantasy is “free-floating [with] escapist qualities” (Jackson, 1981, p. 1), and there is plenty of evidence of this as Cosimo turns his back on the public sphere, or the real, and ascends into the trees. Jackson states that fantasy is also “a literature of desire which seeks that which is experienced by absence and loss” (1981, p. 3) as well as “an impossible attempt to realise desire” (1981, p. 4). Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan believes that the search for the ‘other’ is a never ending one, and that desire for the ‘other’ is never appeased. However, it will be argued that Cosimo does in the end fulfil his desire to never set foot on earth but only because the text, in this instance, is located in the fantastic. However, his sexual desire is not appeased but becomes secondary to his desire for knowledge. Questions of woman’s desire are not raised. All the women are left at the end in their traditional roles. The Generalessa dies, Battista and Violante are married and Ursula, while resisting, descends out of the trees to go home to Spain.

Jackson locates the fantastic as a literary form, placing it between the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic. According to her: "The world of fairy story, romance, magic, supernaturalism is one belonging to marvellous elements" (1981, p. 33) while the mimetic claims "to imitate an external reality" (1981, p. 33). The fantastic is located "between the extravagance of one and the ordinariness of the other...belong[ing] to neither...without their assumptions of confidence or presentations of authoritative truths" (Jackson, 1981 p. 35). It will be argued that Baron displays elements of both but that,
in the main, the extravagance of the marvellous, where the fairy story is located, as well as the ordinariness of the mimetic, are both used. I will also be agreed that the assumption of confidence in a truth is not substantiated because of the narrator’s position but, at the same time, there is no real contestation of the construction of the real nor the naturalisation of the gender roles. The Baron can be seen as a Fairy Story in that the narrator’s voice is impersonal and there is little actual disturbance apart from the non-traditional domicile (Jackson, 1981, p. 33). There is a passive relationship to history and as Cosima dies, the traditional happy ending is not achieved but, even in death, he does not descend to earth for he flies off into oblivion, thus reinstating the fulfilment of his desire which is never to set foot on earth. For him, at least, the end is satisfactory.

The women in this text are peripheral characters, only there because of their relationship to Cosimo. There are a number of women who apparently service Cosima in the trees and who are only fleetingly mentioned by Biagio. The relationship between Ursula and Cosimo is of short duration but of all the females, she is presented by Biagio as the traditional fairy story heroine: “She was a girl with lovely eyes the colour of periwinkles, and sweet-smelling skin” (1989, p. 200). In comparison the three major females: Battista, The Generalessa and Violante are unlike the usual heroines of the traditional fairy story, who, according to Anne Cranny Francis are “invariably beautiful, passive and powerless while female characters who are powerful are also evil and very often ugly and ill-tempered” (1990, p. 85). While none of the women is ugly, both Battista and Violante are ill-tempered at times, neither is passive, therefore breaking with the symbolic female role of the fairy story. In this they could be seen as characters of the fantastic because they are breaking the gender stereotype, but they are not allowed to sustain this position. These women appear not to be defined in a patriarchal discourse but are presented in a postmodernist paradigm. However, the reader is not encouraged by the narrative voice to envisage these women in a complimentary fashion,
rather they are seen as ‘strange’ and in need of punishment for acting in non-traditional
days. As Rosemary Ruether states:

The woman who tries to break out of the female sphere into the masculine finds
not only psychic conditioning and social attitudes but the structure of social
reality itself raged (sic) against her. (1979, p. 44)

Certainly the structure of social reality is raged against both Bassista and Violante, who
are both forced finally to go back into the traditional roles. There is some evidence that
the females take subject positions that are inconsistent and contradictory, however, the
end result is one of male domination with all the females objectified and locked into the
object position.

The love affair between Cosimo and Ursula started, according to the narrator, right from
their first meeting: “So began their love, the boy happy and amazed, she happy and not
surprised at all ... it was the love so long awaited by Cosimo” (1980, p. 201). However,
Ursula passes into the background while Cosimo becomes part of the community living
in the trees where the men play all the political roles. She is reduced to an object, a
possession of her family when her father questions Cosimo about his intentions. While
Cosimo is willing to engage in a love affair, he is not willing to marry Ursula. As
Biagio comments, it was not “desired...by my brother” (1980, p. 205). Cosimo’s reply
of “I’ll think it over” (1980, p 205) demonstrates his lack of commitment. She is
acceptable as a body but nothing else. Ursula had not been consulted in these
arrangements of her life. The males determined her future. She had no voice in these
male discussions which ultimately would control her future life.

Unlike Ursula, Battista is revealed to be sexually unstable and, as a result, has become
caged within the house, very much locked into the private. The son of an enemy of the
family, the Marchesino della Mella, was accused of the attempted rape of Battista yet,
according to the narrator, he was the one with "his knee-breeches torn to strips as if by
the talons of a tiger" (1980, p. 82) and he was the one who "shouted for help" (1980, p.
82). Before this incident Battista searched for power, she always succeeded in "beating the stable hands at competitions in elbow-power" (1980, p. 82). So, on the surface at least, Battista stood outside the boundaries of the traditional feminine role. Here is no passive creature. This is balanced with the fact that she is an innovative cook, a very traditional role for women. However, what she cooks is not so traditional: rats' liver pate: grasshoppers' claws: pigs tails: cauliflower heads with hares' ears set on a collar of fur. Her culinary achievements were of an artistic nature, "works of the most delicate animal or vegetable jewellery" (1980, p. 83). Again, she breaks boundaries, for it is the role of women to give sustenance. The food she prepares is artistic rather than edible. So Battista is presented as outside the norm. She is strange but in the end she succumbs and marries, and virtually disappears from the novella. While she may have broken the stereotype, in the end she is pulled back into the patriarchal gender role for women. She is there precisely as the catalyst that sends Cosimo into the trees and, as such, is seen as evil because her actions have forced a male to flee.

Cosimo's mother, the Generalessa, was also unusual in that, as a child she had accompanied her father, the General Konrad von Kuriewitz when he went to war. Legend had it that she also accompanied him into battle, but according to the narrator, this was false (1980, p. 80). In fact she was "an ordinary little woman with a rosy face and a snub nose, in spite of that inherited zest for things military" 1980, p. (80). She, however, did attack problems in a military way. She used military phrases and had "brusque military manners, 'So! Noch ein wenig! Gut!'" (1980, p. 79). In this she was more masculinist than the Baron, adopting the masculinist discourses for herself. It was the Generalessa, not the Baron, who sought practical solutions to problems. In order to keep Cosimo in sight she unearthed a telescope and plotted his movements on a map. She kept in touch with him by using coloured flags (1980, p. 112). While the Baron (Cosimo's father) was very much concerned with the political position of the family, she was the one that controlled the household. In this she was very firmly tied to the
traditional female role. The narrator reinforces this when he states: "I must say, though, that in spite of all her tools of war, she remained a mother" (1980, p. 112). She forever engaged in "doing lace and embroidery and petit-point" (1980, p. 79) which are perceived as acceptable female occupations. She appears to have more power than the Baron, but many of her characteristics fit into the symbolic female role. The link between mother and son is particularly strong in the end, with Cosima in the trees outside her window during her last fatal illness.

It is Violante (Viola) who is portrayed as the temptress. Like Battista, she too plays a power game. She positions both Cosimo and the fruit boys as her slaves. Right from her first meeting with Cosimo, not long after he had ascended into the trees, she seeks to control him, challenging him: "...if you touch the earth just once with your foot, you lose your whole kingdom and become the humblest slave (1980, p. 94). She leads the fruit boys, standing guard while they rob the trees of fruit, yet in the end she wantonly betrays them (1980, p. 110). This action admittedly occurred while she was a child and it could be argued that she was behaving like the little Freudian man that she was before puberty or perhaps as "the sassy little girl" (Cranny-Francis 1992, p. 125) of patriarchal discourses. Yet even in adulthood she still seeks to dominate. As Cosima cannot come down she controls the relationship after she returns, widowed. Cosimo cannot go to her, so she has to go to him. She in fact sets the terms of the relationship. Yet at the same time she makes the same old traditional demands of him: "And will you always love me, absolutely, above all else, and will you do anything for me?" (1980, p. 226). Despite all this she is in the public world, not Cosimo, and because of that appears to break the gender role. Her actions are very much within the stereotype of emotional instability, as she is violent in her lovemaking which is carried on with the traditional backdrop of nature mirroring the consummation of their love:

The horizon opened wide and high and the blue was taut and bare without a sail and they could count the scarcely perceptible crinkles of the waves. Only a very light rustle, like a sign, ran over the pebbles on the beach. (1980, p. 227)
The lovers are cradled in the arms of nature both spiritually and physically.

Unlike the women in *Difficult Loves*, Violante has a voice, a voice that on the surface appears to be in control. Yet is it? She certainly dominates the fruit boys and to a degree Cosimo, particularly in their early relationship. She is unlike the traditional heroine in the Fairy Story who succumbs to the masterful hero. Yet at the same time she cannot keep away from Cosimo. She acts out the role given her by patriarchy of alternatively taunting and teasing, reacting to Cosimo's infidelity in her absence by slapping his face and then reverting to gentleness. These mood swings puzzled Cosimo, according to the narrator: “She was gentle now, and Cosimo never ceased to be surprised at these sudden changes of hers” (1980, p. 228). She is an enigma to both Biagio, as the narrator and, through his eyes, to Cosimo, much in the same way as the unknown woman on the beach was to Amedeo. In this she is shown as emotionally unstable, therefore traditional. When their love is consummated the narrator states:

> They knew each other. He knew her and so himself, for in truth he had never known himself. And she knew him and so herself, for although she had always known herself she had never yet been able to recognise it as now. (1980, p. 228)

A true Fairy Tale ending, where the unification of two people into one, through love, is achieved. The myth of patriarchy has once more been reiterated. The communication between the bodies is not problematized, as it is in *Difficult Loves*, yet the result is similar as the union is not for life, for this is not the end of the story. Cosimo tries to possess and dominate Violante in the traditional fashion, which she will not allow. Ever since a child she has "always done what...[she]... liked" (1980, p. 226) and she wants that to continue. Even in her first marriage she had not been forced to marry Tolemaico, but chose to do so because he was "the most decrepit suitor I could find" (1980, p. 226) and therefore would die sooner. She plays with Cosimo's devotion, at times appearing to adopt the masculine role as subject and then reverting to the object position. She is Cosimo's 'other' when she allows him to adopt the dominant role in their lovemaking, but she is also subject when she plays with that love and flaunts other
suitors before him. At the same time she is object for the men who fight over her for her body. As Anne Cranny Francis states: "the patriarchal feminine woman is prepared to occupy the object role in the competition between men, reading her positioning as power" (1992, p. 135). She is in the public world, one which Cosimo has rejected and cannot enter. But her desire is not fulfilled as she seeks the other. The narrator believes that the "Marchesa tormented others because she wanted to torment herself" (1980, p. 244). She continually regales Cosimo with tales of the devotion of her other suitors, two of whom desert their ship to be near her. It is almost as if, by parading this in front of Cosimo, she is trying to force him to come down from the trees, much as she attempted to do at that first meeting. In Freudian terms it could be argued that she is on a never ending search for the penis. She acknowledges that though they have "given me the greatest proofs of love... it is]... not enough for me" (1980, p. 245). She states: "Don't you think that love should be an absolute dedication, a renunciation of self?" (1980, p. 245). This is a belief that is perpetuated and sustained by Western ideology, yet she is not willing to renunciate self. Cosimo answers: "There can be no love if one does not remain oneself with all one's strength" (1980, p. 246). In this Cosimo is stating the Caucasian belief in man's individuality. Therefore here the positioning of the gender roles is revealed. The female is constructed as submissive, reflected in Viola's belief of the suppression of the female by love and Cosimo, the subject position of man, divorced from emotion. Yet both are subverted by the text. Viola refuses to stay in the private, and Cosimo is forced to.

But for all Viola's claiming of a subject position, in the end she reverts to the traditional and marries an English peer, but she never forgets Cosimo for she is forever pictured as looking "out over the forests, the trees even stranger than those of the gardens of her childhood: every moment seemed to see Cosimo moving apart the leaves" (1980, p. 246). So, despite the role changes, Viola too reverts to the symbolic role, locked into the private, forever searching for something that she can never have.
It could be argued that throughout this text Viola negotiates continuously for power and the result is a sliding between subject and object positions; that her role is in continual movement as is her situation in both the public and the private. Anne Cranney Francis states that the "subject's experience is marked by conflicts and contradictions generated by differences between her/his discursive positioning[s] and the social practices she/he negotiates in the course of everyday life" (1992, p. 12-13) thus revealing the instability of the subject and contesting the modernist centring of the unification of the subject. Anne Cranny-Francis regards this contestation as empowering (1992, p. 13). A connection can then be made here to postmodernism and Hutcheon's belief that this mode of writing both constructs and deconstructs. However, is this what is happening to women's position in *Baron in the trees*? By the final positioning of the three women in the symbolic roles, the subversion of the gender metanarrative is reconceptualised into the masculine ideology, or in other words, is brought back into the traditional fairy tale mode.

Cosima is the major protagonist but his character is not explored in any great depth. Indeed Calvino states: "Writers like me...are not attracted to psychology, to analysis of feelings or to introspection" (1989, p. 34). There is always a distance between the characters and the readers of this novella, a postmodernist trait. The reader never gets to know Cosimo or indeed any of the other characters, although there is some empathy with him, because he has achieved an escape from the mundanity of life. This is typical of a fairy tale which usually is about escape.

The story of Cosimo is told through the eyes of his brother, Biagio. Gone is the omniscient narrator reminiscent of all fairy stories. In his place is a narrator who is unreliable, and who draws attention to the construction of identity. A large percentage of Cosimo's story comes from second hand knowledge as the narrator states: "...what I
am about to tell, as also much else in this account of his life, he described to me afterwards, or I have put together from a few scattered hints and guesses" (1980, p. 89). Repeatedly throughout the text attention is drawn to the narrator's lack of knowledge of Cosimo, which raises questions as to the voice of authority as well as to the source. The problematization of what is the truth is further reinforced by the exposition of the way in which myth and legend is constructed and which in turn constructs identity. Many of the stories told of dei Brughi, for example, are revealed to be false. All the robberies being attributed to him were not carried out by him (1980, p. 158). However, what this did was to elevate Gian's reputation, to give status to a man who really did not deserve it and who was a bungler and not a successful brigand. The tales told of Cosimo's participation in the pirate's capture are equally unstable as the narrator states:

The story I am about to tell was narrated to me by Cosimo in a number of different versions; I am keeping to the one which had the most details and was also the least logical. My brother when describing his adventures certainly added many out of his own head, but I always try to give a faithful report of what he told me, as he is the only source. (1980, p. 180)

The question raised here has vast ramifications. Which truth is the 'real' truth? While it could be argued that as this is just a fairy story, there is no necessity to tell any sort of truth and this holds for a story written within the fantastic mode as well, nevertheless this certainly draws attention to the way meaning and identity are constructed; how tales are used to construct a reality and in this case an identity for the reader. While the unreliability of the narrator causes tension by the loss of an authorititative voice, this tension is dissipated by the naturalisation of the gender roles which are ultimately kept in place by the adoption of the fairy tale mode. The improbability of the events that occurred during the pirate's capture is also dissipated by this mode. The pirate's ultimate defeat was orchestrated by a man who would not step on the ground. Even on the boat Cosimo stays clutched to the mast and the wind returns the vessel to the shore (1980, pp. 185-189).

Story telling and how meaning is constructed through myth and legend is a major concern of Calvino's and one he develops in a number of his texts. In an article Calvino
states: "It all began with the first storyteller of the tribe" (1989, p. 3) who made up stories "in order to extract an explanation of the world" (1989, p. 4). This sentiment is echoed by Carole Pateman when she states that: "Telling stories of all kinds is the major way that human beings have endeavoured to make sense of themselves and their social world" (1988, p. 1). Pateman, however, raises the point that as the discourses are all masculine these same stories are complicit in reinforcing the gender roles and give women little, or no voice. Indeed in Calvino's discussion of storytellers, they are all male.

In the *Baron* it is Cosimo who first listens to stories and then starts telling them himself. These stories are used as a device within this text to reveal how human beings make meaning in their lives:

In fact he was swept by that mania of the storyteller, who never knows which stories are more beautiful; the ones that really happened and the evocation of which recalls a whole flow of hours past, of petty emotions, boredom, happiness, insecurity, vanity, and self-disgust, or those which are invented, and in which he cuts out a main pattern, and everything seems easy, then begins to vary it as he realises more and more that he is describing again things that had happened or been understood in lived reality. (1980, p. 193)

This raises a number of questions about the real and the fictionality of the real, but the real from whose perspective? Cosimo does not understand women, therefore these stories told in engendered language universalise and promote the naturalisation of the gender roles. During the early days of his barony Cosimo tells tales to the villagers, taking on the role of seer and philosopher.

It was to Cosimo that the people turned for knowledge, to get him "to explain the news, for he received newspapers by post..." (1980, p. 260). It was also suggested that it was Cosimo's prompting that encouraged the peasants to revolt (1980, p. 264). His position of power is reinforced by the deference paid to him by the villagers and he retains his cultural capital.
The Cartesian privileging of the mind over the body is reinforced within *Baron*. Viola appears twice in the novella, in the beginning just after Cosimo had ascended into the trees and about half way through the text. After she departs for school Cosimo turns to education, to the pursuit of knowledge. His education was intermittent and played second place to hunting however. The advent of Gian, the brigand, changed this and he was the catalyst for Cosimo's thirst for knowledge which was to extend to the end of his life. Viola re-enters his life just as he began to feel dissatisfaction. Their re-union is passionate and violent but ends. With Viola's departure Cosimo is inconsolable and becomes destructively violent, destroying his kingdom by stripping the trees of leaves, breaking branches and whittling off the new shoots (1980, p. 247). The narrator states that "this time Cosimo really had gone mad" (1980, p. 247). By letting his desire and love for Viola control his life he had lost his ability to reason, and love in this instance was shown to be destructive. On the other hand by violently assaulting the trees Cosimo could be seen as reasserting his domination over nature. He could not control Viola so, in order to reinstate his position, he has to impose his power on something he felt that he could dominate. Viola's body was the cause of Cosimo's fall from reason, and nature was to be Cosimo's way back to authority. He relinquishes the role of hunter and returns to the pen, writing firstly treatises privileging the natural, in this case birds over humans but over the years it was Cosimo's knowledge that reinstates his privileged position. So what is revealed in the text is the evil of woman's body which has the ability to destroy man's reason. As the narrator states: "Everything done with reasoning grows in power" (1980, p. 238). The mind is privileged. Within *Baron* there is no contestation of this position.

For Rosemary Jackson the fantastic genre can become a site for the deconstruction of the real (1981, p. 21). The character of Cosimo could be seen as the locus for a deconstruction of masculinity. The environment in which Cosimo has chosen to exist is in the trees, cut off from the 'real' world and presumably from all cultural capital.
Because of the locale it would appear that he is also locked very much into the private, for the public world must surely be on the ground where political power is exercised. However, the character of Cosima really does not contest the construction of masculinity as he adopts many of the attributes of the sociocultural construction of this role which therefore perpetuates the mimetic. It could be argued that he is closer to the male character usually found in fairy stories. He is a hunter, more active than passive, competitive with masculine desires for freedom, knowledge, power and women. This is similar to the way the female characters ultimately revert to their traditional roles.

The narrator discusses Cosimo's domestic arrangements in some detail in order to show that despite his unusual residence Cosima still adhered to sanitary practices as if he were on the ground. In order to do this he invented both a method for obtaining water for drinking purposes as well as washing and ablutions (1980, p. 143). Even his daily duties, which at first he did wherever he was, became governed by the hygienic practices he had learned. "[H]e realised this was not very nice" (1980, p. 144) and so devised a way to deposit his slops straight into the river while not descending to earth. Cosimo, therefore, does not revert to primitivism so he retains his cultural capital.

The forest provided him with meat and he even found a way to "roast on a spit the game he caught" (1980, p. 143). In the traditional role of hunter he proved to be very proficient. He even acquired that necessary component of the huntsman's life, a dog (1980, p. 145). In order to sustain himself, however, he does need to have some vegetables, but he does not become a gatherer, a traditional woman's role. Milk he obtains from a goat who climbs the tree to be milked, and every second day a chicken conveniently lays an egg for him in a specific place (1980, p. 144) which once more locates this text in the fairy tale mode. If he needs anything else he barters with the peasants. Thus while he has alienated himself from the earth and therefore society he still follows a traditional masculine role.
The narrator proclaims that he does not really know the reason that Cosimo decided to leave earth, yet he then proceeds to state that Cosimo "harboured a grudge against the family (or society? or the world in general?)" (1980, p. 81). In the first chapter the family situation is explored which could provide plenty of reasons. Cosimo's parents were living in the past. The narrator states that:

at heart...[we]...were still living in the times of the Wars of Succession, she with her artillery, he with his genealogical trees; she dreaming of a career for us boys in some army, no matter which, he on the other hand, seeing us married to a Grand-duchess and Electress of the Empire. (1980. pp. 80-81)

Cosimo and his brother were forced to dress as if royal company may at any time visit and thus restore the family status. The family had to endure the questionable culinary talents of Battista. The two boys escaped whenever they could into the forest because there they were not controlled and could exist in another world where they could be "both indifferent to the manias of adults, both trying to find paths unbeaten by others" (1980, p. 81). The narrator stays firmly on the ground but Cosimo ascends into the trees.

It could be argued that his action was a desire to remain free, free from adult constraints, an attempt to divorce himself from the real. In this aspect Cosimo takes on the role of a fantastic character, one who attempts to break boundaries, to marginalise himself. The catalyst was an order from his father to eat the meal his sister had prepared of the snails which he and his brother had attempted to free. It could also have been a desire for freedom which he had enjoyed while playing in the trees, and indeed this is reinforced by the text. On the first night Biagio attempted to persuade Cosimo to come down out of the trees but Cosimo did not respond as he was contemplating the "wall of the Ondariva garden, just where the white magnolia flower showed, with an eagle wheeling beyond it" (1980, p. 99). The symbol of the eagle flying free in the sky could reflect Cosimo's wish for freedom.
With the declaration to both his father and Violante that he would never set foot on earth again (1980, p. 86, p. 94) Cosima is virtually forced to stay in the trees. To return to earth after such a declaration would have been to lose face, to reject entirely his independence and lose the sense of power he had acquired, because once on earth he would have still been under the control of his father the Baron, his teacher the Abbe Fouchelelefleur and his uncle the Cavalier Avvocatto Enea Silvio Carrega, but also Viola. Because Cosima is now in the trees he obtains freedom earlier than if he had stayed on earth. He and his father now look "straight at each other" (1980, p. 130). The gaze is now on level terms.

Having lost all power on earth, Cosimo immediately declares his possession of all the trees. When he first meets Viola not long after he ascends into the arboreal he states: "On the branches it's all mine" (1980, p. 94). From the enlightenment man has sought to possess and dominate nature, and Cosima reflects this as the narrator states how the first few days that Cosimo spent in the trees "were dominated entirely by the desire to know and possess his new kingdom" (1980, p. 117). Throughout the text this is evident, as he uses the trees as his roadway as well as his dwelling place. He assists in judicial burning and pruning of the trees. The narrator states that Cosimo became "forthright to the point of hurting, wounding and amputation so as to help growth and give shape" (1980, p. 172). The trees are his fortress and at one stage in the text, in order to impress Viola, he boasts that from the trees he could "make an army...and bring the earth and the people on it to their senses" (1980, p. 94). The naturalised male role is further reinforced by the narrator when he describes Cosimo waking up. "In the morning...from the bag would come a pair of clenched fists..." (1980, p. 143), which is a gesture signifying control and power. The masculine quality of domination and aggression is evident here, therefore no contestation of masculinity occurs.

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According to Susan Hekman, Francis Bacon's central principle in *New Philosophy* was the domination of nature (1990, p. 115). In Western thought this came to be extended to women as well. Cosimo seeks to assert his authority in the trees, and he seeks also to dominate Viola. It is Viola who rejects this domination because in some ways she is shown to be outside the traditional role. At the same time she is also portrayed as capricious and sexually unstable which is one way that women are stereotyped within masculine discourses.

Cosimo needed to assert his power over the trees because this was now his world. He had to draw his identity from this world, to become a part of it, to bind himself "to each leaf and chip and tuft and twig" (1980, p. 121). This possession was a necessity for Cosimo for self identification. The link between Cosimo and his habitat is further reinforced by his change of stature as his legs lost "their straightness from his habit of moving on all fours or in a crouch" (1980, p. 143). He was now in an alien place, admittedly one that he had chosen but one in which he had no real identity. On earth he would have taken his identity from his family position and his status in society but up in the trees there were few possibilities for socialisation, for him to measure his subjectivity. Althusser's theory reveals how the subject is always displaced in capitalism. Hutcheon states that the subject is always ex-centric. Cosimo lives in the trees, where there is little institutional control. Then how could these external forces displace his authority? An examination of Lacanian theory reveals that language constructs the individual. When he made the choice to live in the trees, Cosimo was articulate, well versed in the language, so instead of having escaped the construction of his individuality and subjectivity he had already adopted the illusion promoted by his society. His life in the trees is little different to that which he lived on earth.

When Cosimo took possession of the trees and believed that he had acquired power over nature, the illusion of subjectivity was not challenged. While he does not have
many opportunities for social intercourse, in the trees he does talk to others. He is away from their direct gaze but it could be argued that because others have to gaze up at him he could be considered as superior to them. It is the peasants gaze that he mostly encounters and these peasants still look up to him, still give him homage, thus ensuring his cultural capital. Even when he becomes mad and then old, the peasants still treat him with reverence.

Identification for the male also comes from being superior to other males, so Cosimo continually challenges men on the ground to competition. The narrator states that this was to "try out his capacities and discover just what he could manage to do up there on the tree-tops" (1980, p. 130). Despite his unusual domicile he does prove his superiority when he fights and kills his enemy from Olivabassa, the Jesuit, Don Sulpicio (1980, p. 259).

While Cosimo is divorced from the land and social practices, he is still governed by the search for love that is seen as natural. For the hero of a fairy story this is the usual goal. When Cosimo first met Viola he was drawn towards her. He boasted about the power he had in the trees and used these trees to follow her around. His first kill in the trees was taken to show Viola in an effort to impress her but also to bathe in the glory of her admiration: "He made a triumphant appearance in the Ondariva garden with the dead animal in his hands" (1980, p. 124), but Viola was in the process of departing for school and "turned round with her nose in the air and an air of contempt and boredom" (1980, p. 124), seemingly little interested in Cosimo's trophy. For some time after this Cosimo showed little interest in love but eventually he realised that there was something missing in his life. He watched girls and young ladies passing by, but Cosimo was "unable to understand why something that he was looking for was there in all of them but not there completely in any one of them" (1980, p. 193). Perhaps he was forever searching for someone to replace Viola. The narrator states: "Cosimo did not yet know love" (1980,
p. 193). He dreamt about love, watched like a voyeur, couples in the forest, and animals making love. He fantasised about love but despaired that he would ever be able to make love in the trees. His problems were solved at Olivabassa where there was a tribe of Spaniards living in the trees.

Cosima travelled to Olivabassa and met Ursula and, as in all true fairy stories immediately fell in love in an instant (1980, p. 201). Once the Spaniards were pardoned and allowed to once more inhabit the earth, Cosimo refused to descend and so Ursula left him but not before Cosimo discovered how to make love in the trees. Once back on his home ground rumour had it that Cosima formed a few casual relationships with women. Then Viola returned and departed, sent away by Cosimo's possessiveness.

But is Cosimo's desire really ever appeased by women? Lacan believes desire is never fulfilled because the male search is always for the 'other'. When Cosimo and Viola made love they were always cocooned in the arms of nature, in the trees, almost in a womblike setting. Cosimo returned to the womb every night for he slept in "a sleeping bag with fur inside, the outside world vanished and he slept tucked up like a child" (1980, p. 141). Cosimo's last days were spent curled up in a sleeping bag nestled in the arms of the trees. If the Lacanian belief that males desire always to return to the womb is true, then in this instance it could be argued that desire has been fulfilled but only because of the elements of the fantastic. Similarly Cosimo's desire to never put his foot on earth is also fulfilled in the end. When he was dying he jumped and grasped the trailing rope of a balloon which flew over the tree in which he was resting. The balloon flies over the sea. But when the balloon landed only the anchor was at the end of the rope (1980, p. 283).

But there is another form of desire addressed in this text and that is the desire for knowledge, because once knowledge is acquired then this leads to power. Men have
always sought knowledge but from the enlightenment that pursuit of knowledge became a masculine trait. Women became very much silenced. Both Philosophy and Science became masculinist and men took control of the discourses of both. None of the women in this text are shown to be intellectual in any way.

In the introduction to the novella Calvino states that the \textit{Baron} explores the "problem of the intellectual’s political commitment at the time of shattered illusions" (1980, p. x). The fact that Cosimo detached himself from the institutional power that would have been his on earth, distanced himself from both society and his family, could be seen to signal disillusionment, a very modernist disillusionment. Once he has secured his power base within the trees and the distraction caused by Viola had passed, he returned to his studies with the Abbe Fauchelefleur. Jackson states that the fantastic parallels the 'real' and this is certainly the case here. Cosimo may live in the trees but he brought institutional education back into his life. The Abbe is encouraged to physically teach Cosimo in the trees.

Cosimo learned all the Abbe could teach him and this was of benefit when he met Gian dei Brughi, the bungler brigand, who is shown to be more interested in stories than in actually robbing anyone. Gian was an avaricious reader and Cosimo becomes his supplier of books. In order for Cosimo to wield the power of knowledge over Gian he was forced to read more and more. It is Cosimo who takes on the role of teacher, the purveyor of knowledge. When Gian was finally captured, Cosimo found a tree near the condemned cell and was with Gian, reading, until Gian was hanged. The narrator states that "From this period in the Brigand's company Cosimo had acquired a passion for reading and study which remained with him for the rest of his life" (1980, p. 169). As Cosimo became a teacher to Gian his relationship with the Abbe also changed. Now he is the teacher "he would go and look for the Abbe Fauchelefleur to give him lessons, to
It is Cosima's reading habits and the fact that the Abbe ordered and collected the books for him that resulted in the Abbe being taken away for reading forbidden books. Cosimo now read the new philosophies which were forbidden. (1980, p. 171). His escape into the trees allowed him the luxury of reading these books. In this Cosimo appeared to be outside the law, his habitat in the trees gave him a godlike status. The slide here into the fantastic gives the narrative credibility.

The new knowledge acquired by Cosimo also had a practical use. The trees were a source of knowledge that would not have been available to him on earth (1980, p. 141). There is a privileging of nature here which is reflective of much of Emile Rousseau's writings that Cosimo read. This practical knowledge combined with his intellectual readings give Cosimo both the ability and the power to help the owners of the properties and the peasants. It was Cosimo who directed the groups who fought the fires (1980, p. 176).

In the beginning it is Cosimo's ascribed status that gives him cultural capital, and he does not lose this even though he changed his habitat from earth to the trees. Once his father gave him the sword, his superior position is assured in more ways than one. The sword is the symbol of inherited status and the fact that Cosimo literally is above everyone else only reinforces his position of superiority. Viola may have property, both from her biological family and from marriage, but this does not give her the same status because she is female. Cosimo's behaviour was not considered strange by the peasants, who just believed that he was playing a game, and they only saw him as being slightly eccentric. According to the narrator, they "seemed to find the game he was playing up
there no better and no worse than so many other games they had seen the gentry play" (1980, p. 136).

It was his strange domicile that allowed him to get closer to the peasants than he would have if he had lived conventionally. By taking the leadership at the time of the fire Cosimo earns the respect of, not only the owners but also the artisans, the peasants and even the people living in the forest. His accumulated goodwill encourages his father to relinquish the sword and the title. It was the capture of the pirates and the distribution of the property to the rightful owners that cemented Cosimo’s position as the Baron. After his father died he took over the running of the family interests: "The people treated him with great respect, called him "Lord Baron''" (1980, p. 191). Once Biagio turned twenty-one, however, Cosimo gave him Power of Attorney to run the estate in return for a monthly allowance. After Viola leaves he becomes mad but even so he still attains his position. The villagers still respect him (1980, p. 249). He regains his senses and works to promote a universal society. Through many role changes his cultural capital is still held in place.

The result is an improbable story of a man who lives his life in the trees, who has Robin Hood type of adventures and Cosimo does have them, a story of escapism, one that appears to break boundaries but one that does not break gendered roles. The Baron escapes the confines of the earth and once up in the trees never sets foot on land again. The ‘real’ world is inhabited by all the other characters. While it can be argued that the reader’s position here is not passive, because of the improbability of a man spending his whole life in the trees, it could equally be said that this text does not disturb the real or the gender positions, because of the use of the fantastic and fairy story modes.

It could be argued that the Baron does indeed fulfil his desire. Certainly the quest for freedom is achieved. He fails to hold Violante but in the end his desire for the ‘other’
seems to be fulfilled not from human sources but from the trees which shelter and nurture him, and he is held in a sleeping blanket cradled in the trees branches, womblike.

While Fantasy can tell of desire it can also dispel it. Baron does use elements of the fantastic mode in that, for a short time, the gender roles are reversed, particularly during Viola and Cosimo's affair as well as in Cosimo's resulting temporary madness but, as Rosemary Jackson states "nearly all literary fantasies eventually re-cover desire, neutralising their own impulses towards transgression" (1980, p. 9). This text does this.

There is an appearance only of strangeness. The discourses are those of the dominant hegemonic bloc, a cursory play with the conventions of realism serving merely to underline and confirm, (Cranny-Francis 1990, p. 78), so that, while questions are raised which ultimately will be classified as postmodernist, the gender roles are not problematized. The fantastic potential for subversion is not realized in this text.
CHAPTER FOUR

INVISIBLE CITIES

In the last two chapters I argued that while there were hints of postmodern concerns in both *Difficult Loves* and *Baron in the trees*, there was no change in the rigid gender divisions. In *Invisible Cities*, written in 1972 and translated in 1974, there is a progression of the postmodern problematizing of metanarratives but it will be argued that this makes little difference to the gender roles. Many of the devices of postmodernism are obvious and become part of the structure of this novel, if indeed it can be classed a novel. Elements of the fantastic are evident when Marco Polo's dream cities are described, not so much for their distinctive physicality, but rather for their signification and the ways in which that signification determines meaning. But again it is meaning considered always from a male perspective, because representation of women, within this text, is very traditional, that is, they are bodies without voices. Epistemology is questioned, particularly the mind/body dualism with Kablai Khan and Marco Polo as representative of the intellectuals, and the descriptions of the cities, which all bear women's names, are the body. However, there is no real problematizing of this binary. What does occur is a questioning of how knowledge is constructed from a male perspective without women entering into the discussion. The universal 'he' is used presumably to cover both sexes. It could be argued that by raising questions about knowledge construction and using women's bodies to examine different perspectives (male), that this text is in fact drawing attention to how women's bodies have been inscribed in Western society, however, it will be argued that this does not occur. Both the Freudian analysis of dreams and the literary devices of metaphor and metonymy will be used to reveal that in *Invisible Cities*, despite the deconstruction of some metanarratives, the gender roles are still patriarchal.
There is an obvious difference between *Difficult Loves, Baron in the trees* and *Invisible Cities*. The first two texts are traditional narratives, in that they tell stories, and focus on the human condition. *Invisible Cities* is a fragmented text with only two named characters, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan. There are two different levels: one is the dialogue between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan and the other is the description of the cities. A dialectic works between, on the one hand, the 'real' historical characters of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, and the imaginary/fantastic/dream cities, all bearing women's names, described by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan. These cities are in turn further divided into nine sections, each separated by an italicised introduction and conclusion, which appears as dialogue, both oral and mental, between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. The juxtaposition of these two levels creates a tension between the 'real' and the imaginary or, as Marilyn Schneider suggests, "subjective and erotic ways of seeing intersect with objective ways of seeing" (1989, p. 172). The visible (the cities) then becomes the invisible (lack of women's voices), like Foucault's subjugated knowledges. Similarly Butler suggests the text could be seen to "vacillate between materiality and the imaginary" (1993, p. 17). The dialogue is the section that James sees as narrativity, the contents of the nine sections she relates to seriality. The first and the ninth sections are longer than the rest, each with ten cities discussed, while the rest have five each. In total there are fiftyfive cities described. Women's presence appears in only twentyfive where she is nothing but a peripheral part of a city, just one of the objects or artefacts. I do not intend to go heavily into this structure. Carol James sets out, in her article, the numerical system of the eleven types of cities. A loose narrative link is formed through the dialogue but even here fragmentation occurs because it is not always possible to locate the speaking voice as much is told in the third person. As James comments: "There is no self-named narrator here" (1982, p. 151). Disconcertingly, even within the description of the cities, which the reader is led to believe is being told by Marco Polo, the narration slides from first to third person. Peter Christensen believes that there is not necessarily a relationship between the two sections
as the descriptions of the cities appear at times to be "Told by no one named to no one named ... [they are] a floating part, unhooked" (1985, p. 18). What they are not unhooked from, however, are women's bodies. At times it appears as if one mind is in control as Khan's and Polo's thoughts seem to be following one pattern: "between the two of them it did not matter whether questions and solutions were uttered aloud or whether each were pondering in silence. Marco Polo imagined answering (or Kublai Khan imagined his answer)" (1979, p. 24). As Kathryn Hume suggests: "they are a joint cogito that cannot doubt their other halves ... a single mind" (1992, p. 149). While that single mind is debating, in perhaps a dream debate, the fact that the images are understood between them, even though different contexts and languages are used, reveals a comprehension of universal meanings. One of the frames of reference is women's bodies and the representation and stereotyping of those bodies which is regarded as natural by this one mind, so natural that examination of that representation is ignored.

While Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, is a structuralist text drawing attention to the relationship between sign and signification, *Invisible Cities* progresses past that point to become an abstract discussion in which signs become overpowered by the signification and as Renato Barilli states: "there is an imbalance between the semantic and the syntactic dimensions. The narrator limits himself to listing and aligning these marvellous conceived cities, seemingly unable to move beyond them" (1989, p. 14). In other words, the text draws attention, through the descriptions of the various cities, to the many different ways meaning is created but that is all that it does. As the cities all bear women's names, it is women's bodies that are used to explore the relationship between sign and signification, yet women within the cities remain within the traditional phallocentric framework. While the text exposes how women's bodies have been used for signification, women's roles as represented within the actual descriptions of the cities do not mirror any changed positions. Also unacknowledged or reflected are
the different value systems which are hinted at in the different perspectives of signification advocated in the descriptions. This postmodernist standpoint view is unacceptable to feminists as, by its construction, it eliminates any avenue of liberation for women. In fact as Cranny-Francis states: "Man [is] primary and positive as long as woman is secondary" (1995, p. 6), and this is what occurs in *Invisible Cities* as Khan and Polo are primary and positive, even though the focus, in the italicised section and then juxtaposed and paralleled in the descriptions, is on the illusionary nature of both knowledge and power. Women are very much secondary and silenced and divorced from participation in the discussions of knowledge and power between these intellectuals. There is no overt or covert reference to gender *per se* within the dialogue between Khan and Polo. While it could be argued that the focus on difference would embrace gender, ultimately according to feminists this hides the political effects of gender construction which then results in reinstating the gendered roles.

In this text women have little obvious presence although the corporeality of their bodies is used to describe Marco Polo's dream cities. It will be argued that in this novel the city is a metaphor for woman: that the woman's body is text; the site of source, origin and representation. At the same time what is revealed, in the discourse, is that women have no subjectivity, sexuality or desire, other than that constructed for them by masculine discourses; that women's bodies have been taken over and included within the ontology and the discourses; that her silence, and in this text her absence, is revealed. Kublai Khan desires knowledge as a base to establish his power; Marco Polo seeks to subvert notions of power by using the woman's body/city as his frame of reference, as the representation through which desire is mediated. This does not mean that the text in fact reveals construction of gender. On the contrary, the woman's body is an object through which man can attempt to gain knowledge and create meaning. The fact that women's bodies are used in this exploration becomes hidden within a discourse that almost celebrates differences but from which women are excluded. This is also reflected
in the absence of critical attention to the appropriation of women's bodies within this text. For example, Peter Christensen's discussion of Utopia focuses on cities as does Illiam H. Gass who suggests that *Invisible Cities* is a "profound study of the character of the city" (1987, p. 137).

Epistemological questioning is evident within *Invisible Cities*. Postmodernism challenges, according to Hekman, "epistemological foundations of Western thought" (1990, p. 7). Hekman goes on to state that this challenge focuses on "among other things, the dichotomies of Enlightenment thought" (1990, p. 2) but that postmodernism, in doing so, tends to ignore gender: "a dimension lacking in many postmodern accounts" (Hekman, 1990, p. 3). Kublai Khan, in his search for 'truth' and 'knowledge', is continually thwarted by Marco Polo, who suggests that there is no unitary knowledge but a series of positions/emblems which cannot be reduced to one source (although this is problematical in this text as will be discussed later), and that knowledge is a social construction and cannot be based on either logic or rationality. The construction of gender does not receive the same treatment.

Examined in *Invisible Cities* is the way meaning is unconsciously made through women's bodies. This does not emancipate these bodies but secures women even further into the position given them by patriarchy, as they are given no agency or voice and are represented in the description of the cities in a very traditional way. The text epitomises why some feminists reject postmodernism as liberating for women. Metaphorically women's bodies are subjected to the male gaze of Marco Polo and the male traveller, so that while the focus, in the descriptions, is on multiplicity and difference, the outcome is reduced to source, in this text, women's bodies. The fact that women's bodies are used to explore how knowledge and meaning is constructed becomes subjugated to the quest for knowledge, hidden from the reader, who is also seeking some familiar pattern to construct meaning.
In order to deconstruct any unitary truth postmodernists ostensibly displace metanarratives. One way of doing this is to eliminate the binary system upon which Western language and thus epistemology rests. If, as JoAnn Cannon suggests, "Invisible Cities is informed by a distinctly postmodern mistrust of language" (1989, p. 57) then this mistrust could be reflected in the deconstruction of various dualisms. Katherine Hume also believes that Calvino uncovers the limitations of language in this text (1992, p. 145). Cannon suggests that this distrust of language is evidenced by the lack of communication initially between Polo and Khan because of the language barrier. Polo relates his descriptions of the cities by mime and the message is apparently understood: "He could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder ..." (1979, p. 20) and Khan read these signs. The Khan was enhanced by "the space that remained around it, a void not filled with words" (1979, p. 32), almost the modernist presence (women's bodies) out of absence (women's voices). It is through women's bodies that the essence of the cities must be found (Cannon 1989, p. 56). Or as de Lauretis suggests, the cities "built to capture men's dreams finally only inscribes woman's absence" (1984, p. 13). This is what the descriptions of the cities try to encapsulate. By using the cities as metaphors for women's bodies it would appear, on the surface, that the text was problematizing the naturalness of the representation of women. Yet, by then going on to represent women as prostitutes, (Melania 64) girl gone mad for love (Adelma 74), dancing girls (Marina 85 and Despina 17), girls with umbrellas (Chloe 43 and Maurilla 27), nubile (Dorothea 12), objects of exchange (Eutropia 53) and so on, they are all still seen as objects for the male gaze both within the text as well as by the reader. Women certainly do not have a voice to fill the void. So the displacement of the binary does not occur. Other metanarratives, such as unitary truth, however, are contested with the emphasis in both the italicised section and a large number of the descriptions of cities being presented from different perspectives, with mirror images that are not the same.
Yet, again, no attempt is made by any of the masculine narrators to allow a woman’s voice to fill the void.

Presupposed in *Baron*, but extended in *Invisible Cities*, is an attempt to deconstruct one of the dualisms of the enlightenment, the mind/body binary. As Hekman states: "the postmodern argument [is] that ... dualisms must be dissolved" (1990, p. 5). However, according to Anne Cranny Francis: "Postmodern interrogations of 'the body' have tended to focus on women’s bodies. In one sense this phenomenon reproduces mind/body dualism ... with 'body' being read as 'woman'" (1995, p. 14). So that while *Invisible Cities* could be seen as a parody which exposes the flaws in epistemology, "as the study of knowledge acquisition that was accomplished through the opposition of a knowing subject and known object" (Hekman, 1990, p. 9), it could equally be seen as a critique of metanarratives of representation of the female body and thus gender. However, like many postmodern texts it halts or takes a standpoint position which as Hekman suggests does not extend to gender. It is a postmodern assumption that to subvert this dualism would be to maintain the privileging of one side of the binary but in reverse, a position which some radical feminists favour but one that is rejected by a number of other feminists. If the body were to be privileged over the mind, then women would receive more value than men and thus there would be a reversion, once more, to essentialism. This is where postmodernists and feminists are in agreement but their theoretical positions separate, for in order to empower women many feminists have focused on the body to show how the female body has been used to disempower females. Postmodernists, by their insistence that dualisms must be dissolved and their refusal to examine the political effects that the male/female binary has on gendered bodies, have kept the sexual boundaries in place. In this text the result is not only a further re-entrenchment of the dualism but also a lack of any space to renegotiate any form of liberation for women.
It is from the foundational philosophy of the Greeks that the mind/body dualism comes (Cranny-Francis 1995, p. 3) and the effects are wide reaching. Shilling suggests that it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the birth of the natural sciences, that this distinction was used to "reassert the superiority of men and the inevitability of female subordination" (1989, p. 45). The result was the firming of the gender division. The body changed from "being the manifestation of self identity and difference [to] the very basis of human identity and social divisions" (Shilling, 1989, p. 44). From the eighteenth century, and indeed even today, the position of women has been defined on their unstable bodies which dominate and threaten their unstable minds (Shilling, 1989, p. 44). An examination of Freudian texts shows this.

Men were aligned with the privileged side so that the divisions of culture/nature, active/passive, rational/irrational and mind/body, to name a few, promoted the positive attributes of masculinity as compared to the lesser side of the binary which were the adjectives used to describe women. While an examination of this division is problematic in that all men do not have power, the entrenchment of these abstract values became institutionalised within the political system. As a postmodernist text Invisible Cities could be seen as an attempt to displace the mind/body dualism. The italicised sections wherein Polo and Khan, as protagonists debate, silently, verbally and through a third person narrator are representative of the mind. As Christensen states: "It is not true-to-life characters that count here, but their totally intellectual models of vision [as they] don and discard ideas about city/text production" (1985, p. 19). Or as Ahmed suggests Invisible Cities "celebrat[es] women's status as signs/commodities circulated by and for male spectators" (1995, p. 19) while at the same time refusing to acknowledge the ramifications of this for "real' women. Christensen, in his discussion of Utopia in relation to Invisible Cities, ignores the implications of the cities all having women's names. If the text is a search for Utopia, it has been done through women's bodies, which would link with the Freudian/Lacanian belief that masculine desire is
predicated by a search for the 'other', a search that is destined to be never-ending. It will be argued that while this does illuminate how women's bodies have been used to represent signification for both genders, the appropriation of women's bodies occurs and she is given, via her body, all the negative passive qualities and is thus subordinated to and by masculine discourses. While sections of the intellectual debate between Polo and Khan touch on issues pertaining to the construction of the female gender role, these are ignored. For example, at the end of section six "Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone" (1979, p. 66). Khan asks him which stone actually supports the bridge to which Polo replies: "The bridge is not supported by one stone or another... but by the line of the arch that they form" and "without stones there would be no arch" (1979, p. 66). Women's identity is like an arch which enfolds her, and keeps her silent. The stones are the elements of biology, ideology, language and society which inscribe her body but give her no voice or value. These issues are not explored within the text. Perhaps this could be seen as ironic, 'tongue in cheek' but during the debates when questions of identity and subjectivity are raised no mention is made of the gender roles at all. The cities are used to examine how meaning is made, and how knowledge is constructed very much from a masculine point of view. The text might be questioning epistemological beliefs but certainly does not even consider the gender roles.

As the sociologist Chris Shilling argues in *The body and social theory* that while it is contemporary for an examination of bodies, this has been done in an abstract way by sociology as well as society. Nowhere is there a discussion of how the effects of biology and social conditioning become embodied in human bodies and the effects this has on actual real life bodies. So that while this text does examine the position, there is no hint of emancipation, in fact, when women are discussed as being positioned in the cities they are very much within traditional roles, a point reinforced by Katherine Hume when she states that "Women exist as sexual objects, beautiful, mostly distant and beyond reach but occasionally willing to pleasure strangers" (1992, p. 151). Isidora is a
dream city for the masculine traveller because "a foreigner hesitating between two
dream city for the masculine traveller because "a foreigner hesitating between two
women always encounters a third" (1979, p. 11). The assumption is that women are
plentiful in Isidora and are there primarily to give men pleasure which is their allotted
role in life. This lack of room for negotiation is one of the critiques of postmodernism
made by sections of the feminist movement. *Invisible Cities* does not allow women any
space for negotiation whereas the debates between Polo and Khan certainly reveal how
men acquire knowledge through memory. As Polo states: "Everything I see and do
assumes meaning" (1979, p. 82) and the meaning it assumes is an extremely masculine
one, a view shared by Marilyn Schneider who comments that "male voices dominate"
(1979, p. 177). However, the gendered construction of memory is not addressed in the
text, what is acknowledged are different masculine perspectives of memory. Khan
accuses Polo of giving descriptions that are different to other ambassadors to which the
narrator comments: "Marco’s answers and objections took their place in a discourse
already proceeding on its own, in the Great Khan’s head" (1979, p. 24). Polo suggests:
"I speak and speak...but the listener retains only the words he is expecting" (1979, p.
106). No consideration is given to the words a woman may be expecting or that women
could possibly bring different perceptions to this problematization of metanarratives. In
other words this is ‘men’s talk’, which is reflected by the use of the universal ‘he’
which hides the absence of women’s voices.

The focus of much of Foucault's work is on bodies and how they have become
appropriated in language. In *Discipline and Punish* he explores how the body is located
within society and positioned within that society by a series of laws. Or as Shilling
states: "Once the body is contained within modern disciplinary systems, it is the mind
that takes over as the location of discursive power" (1993, p. 80). *Invisible Cities* is a
representation of the male mind which holds and retains that discursive power. This is a
point which is raised in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* where the focus is also on
the body and how that body has become inscribed within the language system and the
discourses of society. Foucault is only interested in bodies, not the gendered positions. But once the mind/body dualism is discussed, it is always the man who is associated with the mind and the woman the body, a position entrenched within modernism and not really contested by postmodernism despite its deconstruction of metanarratives.

Hutcheon states that postmodernism does not deny metanarratives but interrogates them (1988, p. 57). She goes on to declare that the methodology is to install and then to withdraw the notions (1988, p. 57). In Invisible Cities, however, the withdrawal comes first: that is, the cities/women's bodies are presented and through this, the way meaning is constructed is shown to be diverse, multiple. However, while the cities promote difference, the female presences within the cities are sexual icons. On the one hand then, representation is shown as unstable yet, on the other hand identification of the gendered roles, particularly those of women, is revealed as fixed rigidly in the symbolic gender role. While it could be argued that within this text postmodernism expands boundaries, which it does, it does not then proceed to an examination of gender but halts (Harris, 1990, p. 69). As Judith Butler states: "because such terms [man/woman] have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims" (1993, p. 123). While on one level it could be argued that by using women's bodies to explore how individuals construct their world there is displacement of the gender roles, however, the representation of women as sexual icons within the descriptions of the cities reveals the stability of the naturalised role of women and a 'true' representation of that role, in other words, the postmodernist standpoint view. Hutcheon states that postmodernism does not bring the marginal to the centre (1988, p. 69) which is a valid comment because to bring the marginal to the centre would be to dislocate the masculine discourses which postmodernism does not do, in fact it is driven by these discourses.
By concentrating on women's bodies to deconstruct how meaning is constructed the text draws attention to how bodies are inscribed. As Grosz states: "Every body is marked by history and specificity of its existence. It is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body" (1994, p. 141). This can be related to the description of the cities, for each city is shown to be both different and yet the same. The revelation that Marco Polo is describing always the same city, Venice (1979, p. 68), reflects this. So while difference is revealed everything still comes back to the one source, women's bodies. Therefore, the discourse is centred. So similarly is the objectification of women. Woman's bodies are the source of her objectification and by reinstating that position within the descriptions of the cities the naturalisation of the female role or position in the symbolic is not deconstructed.

"In many recent texts", according to Elizabeth Grosz, "the body has figured, as a writing surface on which messages can be inscribed" (1994, p. 62). She discusses how the analogy between bodies and texts is very closely connected as the body has been shown to be inscribed by language, and politicized in discourses, which is not surprising. However, while it could be argued that both male and female bodies receive this treatment, it is the woman's body that has been inscribed and represented within the masculine discourses which allow women no voice or agency. Teresa de Lauretis discusses this in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* where she declares that "Woman is then the very ground of representation, both object and support of a desire which, intimately bound up with power and creativity, is the moving force of culture and history" (1984, p. 13) but a moving force that is never acknowledged in culture, history, language or discourses.

If a commonsense reading were given to *Invisible Cities*, one could see this book as a quest for origin, as well as Kublai Khan's desire for power and control. Carol P. James discusses this:
A traditionally thematic reading of *Le citta invisibili* would unhesitatingly point to an origin of the cities in the humanistic themes which seem to motivate the Polo-Khan dialogue: death and desire sublimated as voyage, alienation, the clash of east and west, apocalypse - all emblematised as cities (human constructs) in varying stages of physical, moral and rhetorical decay. (1982, p. 158)

Although James does not confront the politicization of gender construction, her statement can be extended. The cities are indeed emblematised but are also gendered. It is not the male body that has been metaphorized.

James declares this text to be situated on the Modernist/Postmodernist divide. On the one hand, there is the notion of a search for truth: on the other the destruction of the truth by the interplay of the two levels of discourses or the narrativity and seriality structure of the text. She states:

> The book does not form a narrative whole but exists on two rhetorical levels which constantly slip by each other. These two levels correspond to the modern and the postmodern: the narrative which puts itself into question while seeking to recuperate its fragments into a whole - a dialectized economy of exchange and representation - as opposed to the numerically generated set of separates which do not add up but exist as being relative to one another. (1982, p. 155)

By bringing into play the dialectized economy of exchange and representation, the text can be seen as a metaphor for woman who is both object of exchange and the focus of representation within Western culture. Seen from another perspective "the male voices of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan discourse, giv[e] birth to the female cities. Each city inscribes an erotic relationship between itself and the men who build and inhabit it" (Schneider, 1989, p. 178). There is another form of domination represented here, that is ownership of the female by the male who has appropriated her body and constructed her within his discourses. This gives credence to de Lauretis's declaration that in *Invisible Cities* : "The city is a representation of woman: woman, the ground of that representation" (1989, p. 12); and "The city is a text which tells the story of male desire by performing the absence of woman and by producing woman as text, as pure representation" (1989, p. 13).
The descriptions of the cities/women's bodies is framed throughout by the italicised sections which at times are presented as pure dialogue, at others, narrated by a third person. Within the narrativity, to use James's term, the historical figures of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan are representative of authority and the discussion within is intellectual, focusing on power and the search for knowledge, male power and male knowledge. This is juxtaposed with the seriality of the descriptions which as James states: "bears close relation to dream where, as Freud noted, sequence replaces cause and effect as a 'logical relation' in the mechanism of dream formation" and "Dream also provides a psychological accounting for a state of aporia and the rhetoric a novel can engage in to represent a simultaneous presence and absence or contradiction in modes of existence" (1982, p. 151). To a large degree this is what occurs in *Invisible Cities*. There appears to be no pattern in the descriptions of the cities, although the pattern could be seen to be the appropriation of the female body as text. In *Speculum* Luce Irigaray discusses how phallocentrism is dependent on Freudian dream symmetry, which uses women as the basis of representation but then refuses to give women a voice in the public.

In "The Interpretation of Dreams" Freud discusses the mechanisms of dreams. He focuses on condensation and displacement. The dream itself is "meagre, paltry and laconic in comparison with the range and copiousness of the dream thoughts" (1952a, p. 253). So the images are condensed, in some ways like the descriptions of the cities but, as Freud discovered, there is also displacement: "That which is obviously the essential content of the dream-thoughts need not be represented at all in the dream" (1952a, p. 262). Freud used this framework to show the repression of desire. Lacan, according to Elizabeth Grosz, extended this using the work of Roman Jakobson and the way he deployed the metaphoric and the metonymic. Grosz declares that "Metaphor and metonymy are probably the two central terms of his [Lacan] analysis of unconscious production" (1990, p. 98). For Lacan:

The creative spark of metaphor does not spring from the representation of two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualised. It flashes between two
signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain. (qtd Grosz 1990, pp. 99-100)

Grosz then discusses how Lacan ties metaphor to condensation and metonymy to displacement (1990, p. 100). If considered in this light, it can be argued that the binary distinction between men and women is metaphoric. Phallic man is always a signifier, non phallic man or woman (no-man) can never be a signifier within phallocentricism, her identity is always sliding under his, predicated by the whole acceptance, in psychoanalytic theory, of the self-same positioning of the genders, a position that is not contested in *Invisible Cities*. As the metonymic, in Lacanian terms, is "based on the connection between a term and what substitutes for it" (Grosz, 1990, p. 100), it can then be argued that this is predicated on displacement or difference. The culturally determined term 'woman' can be seen as designated as both a condensation (self-same) and a displacement/difference which is metonymic. Her difference or lack of penis is used to place her as inferior to man, which establishes the 'truth' or the naturalness of the gendered positions. This is so natural that it is ignored by many postmodernists or perhaps, in Foucauldian terms, it has become subjugated.

The cities/women's bodies can be seen as the site of two forms of desire, encapsulated within a dream symmetry. Both can be seen as a search for the 'other'. Luce Irigaray equates this search to the patriarchal order:

> Still incomplete is the enumeration, and of course, the interpretation of the faces, the forms, the morphologies that can be taken on by that old dream of "the same" which has defied the most prescient diviners, since their method did not question the credits that the method itself had already invested in that dream. (1985, p. 27)

Nowhere did Freud consider the ideology involved in the method used to interpret and analyse these dreams, nor see this as gender determined in masculine discourse. Lacan did reveal how language constructed this method and revealed, via metaphor and metonymy, how women were positioned, but at the same time he did not consider difference as a valid venue for contestation. Neither does Calvino within his texts.
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Lacan leaves women in the inferior position and while his work shows how she has been placed there, he in many ways accepts that placement as Calvino does. Like Freud, both Lacan and Calvino can be included in Irigaray's definition of the old dreamers: "Since, after all, the most able of the interpreters were also the most gifted, the most inventive dreamers, those most inspired by what was liable to perpetuate, even to reactivate the desire of the same" (1985b, p. 27). The desire for the same is evidenced in *Invisible Cities*. Marco Polo and the multiple narrators, who give the descriptions of the cities, all draw on other memories through which to read each city. In Zaira, Marco Polo suggests that every city is read through “the relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of the past” (1979, p. 13). The attraction for Euphemia is not so much the trade but the memories evoked while sitting around the campfire with other male travellers telling stories (1979, p. 31). Memory is evoked by exploration but as Irigaray states this exploration is always “Under the direction of man” (1985b, p. 27), who is seen as the yardstick which is symbolized in this text by Polo and Khan. Men, she suggests are prisoners “of a certain economy of the logos, of a certain logic, notably or desire” (1985b, p. 28) so that “he defines sexual differences as a function of the a priori of the same” (1985b, p. 28). The result is that women are read metaphorically, therefore they have the same desires as men. So while in *Invisible cities* the focus is on difference, the old dreamers do not consider women have different needs or wants than men.

The metonymic difference can then be reworked in order to explore origin. Luce Irigaray suggests that "Out of this difference will be lifted one of two terms ... and this one term will be constituted as 'origin' ... by ... whose differentiation the other may be engendered and brought to light" (1985b, p. 21). This origin only concerns the masculine: woman is allowed no origin because she is not given value in the Symbolic. She can have no origin other then the one decreed for her by men because of the phallic economy which constructs the Law: "for boy, you will want, as soon as you reach the
phallic stage to return to the origin, turn back toward the origin - possess the mother - for the girl no return is possible unless you have a penis - girl herself is the place of origin" (Irigaray 1985b, p. 41).

By thus appropriating metonymic difference, then, man can remain the master, who has the power and control. According to Susan Hekman, Foucault reveals how "a particular discourse ... displays a particular regime of knowledge/power" (1990, p. 118) which it will be argued Invisible Cities does. However, like Foucaudian discourses, this text does not really interrogate the gendered positions. Unlike this Calvino text however, Foucault does reveal how sexuality has been constructed by western society, as a means by which to gain power and control and has become deployed within the language system and hence into the discourses; an argument which can be seen as a progression from the Freudian 'Law of the Father': the Law which controls and constrains femininity: the law that gives women no voice and no position: the law that relegates woman to the private sphere and will not allow her a place in the public. Invisible Cities does not consider the private sphere at all because this is traditionally women's province where there is no political power. Rarely seen, are the inhabitants of the numerous cities, bearing feminine names, but when they are the majority are all masculine. What is revealed through Marco Polo's eyes is a public sphere in which "the principles that govern it are seen as separate from, or independent of, the relationships in the private sphere" (Pateman, 1988, p. 119). According to Carole Pateman this separation between the public and the private was contained in Locke's Second Treatise (1988, p. 120), which feminists have criticised as, among other things, tending to universalise. Invisible Cities can be seen as an example of this definite exclusion of women from the public sphere. However, at the same time, their bodies are taken as the text and as Teresa de Lauretis states: "Thus the city, which is built to capture men's dreams, finally only inscribes woman's absence" (1984, p. 13). Thus only one set of dreams is being described and one set of pleasures evident. Where are women's pleasures and dreams?
By the rejection of women from the public sphere as well as relegating them to the invisible private, this text effectively silences their voices and hides sexual difference.

Like *Castle of Crossed Destinies* the focus in *Invisible Cities* is on sign and signification and the arbitrary relationship between them. Each group is concerned with this in a different way. James compares the cities to postmodern works of art and states: "Functioning according to set theory in mathematics, seriality is a way of making art without concentrating on an object. The art lies in relationships, not in material entities" (1982, p. 145). It could equally argued that there is an object here, which is material and that is the woman's body which is used as text to reveal the masculine desire of Kublai Khan to dominate. The concentration of that object of body/text only further re-entrenches women's voice.

Throughout the text difference is revealed through a concentration on the sign and the different meanings attributed to the image, which becomes an emblem. As the third person narrator states: "The new fact received a meaning from that emblem and also added to the emblem a new meaning" (1979, p. 21). But where is the new meaning for women who are all portrayed in traditional roles and for that matter for men who are all travellers, traders? Despite women's bodies being used as the site of signification there is no reversal here of the traditional roles as the signifier is still male. In Diomere, for example, the love of pleasure is not the physical/material beauty of the town, but the night lights and the sound of "a woman's voice [which] cries oohl" (1979, p. 11). In Tamara the quest is for meaning as the third person narrator attempts to "penetrate" (1979, p. 15) this city:

> The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things ... the embroidered headband stands for elegance; the guilded palanquin, power; the volumes of Averroes, learning; the ankle bracelet, voluptuousness. (1979, p. 15)

The metaphoric nature of language is revealed here. The signifiers: headbands, palanquins, volumes and ankle bracelets are seen as emblematic metaphors denoting
elegance, power, learning and voluptuousness. But the relationship is also metonymic, based on antithesis or difference. It is within this gap that Lacan positions desire and Irigaray situates the void; the only space where women can have any position. The arbitrary relationship is examined, but the gendered nature of it is not contested. These four examples of signification encompass the emblems of man's domination: power, knowledge and women. As the discourses are masculinist, man has control over knowledge and learning. As Grosz says: "women's bodies and specificities serve to underpin and found knowledges" (1989, p. 223). The headband and the ankle bracelet can be seen as emblems or signs of women. Both are restrictions on her body, and both are signs of the construction of her sexuality and desire within the masculine discourse.

The first person narrator of Zirma reveals the static nature of repetitive representation through images. His memories of this city are distinct, black men, lunatics and "a girl walking with a puma on a leash" (1979, p. 18). The images repeat themselves in his mind. In Diomara the comment is made of the similarity of cities: "All these beauties will already be familiar to the visitor, who has seen them in other cities" (1979, p. 11). As these images, via memory become fixed, they become 'redundant'. "It repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist" (1979, p. 18). Only through memorised repetition can meaning be made; through emblems and symbols; only then can the city and women come into existence. Only in this way can identification be achieved and only through the male gaze do the cities come into existence. The traveller entering an unknown city will become acclimatised when "his eye penetrates the pine cone of pagodas and garrets and haymows" (1979, p. 21). Irene only comes into existence through the gaze (1979, p. 99). The narrator reveals this as fact. What is not revealed, however, is the gendered construction inherent in the way knowledge and meanings are made. Khan sees in Polo's accounts "the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape" (1979, p. 10). The pattern that is there is indeed subtle, one that is not considered or contested; the way women's voices have been silenced by discourse. Her body is used as the source of
origin, but she has no control over that body and the way that body is constructed for her by ideology, language and the male gaze or its sexuality and her own desire.

Luce Irigaray positions woman in phallocentrism as having no origin but her body is used as the site of origin. Isaura's existence is dependent on water lying under and confined within the boundaries of her perimeters. As the city is used as a metaphor for woman, the subterranean waters existent in the city's depths reveal how the body is the source of life for that city. These waters are confined to the boundaries of the city/body, while "an invisible landscape conditions the visible" (1979, p. 19) and reveals the engendered nature of the discourses. The invisible landscape is the woman's body. This is not interrogated. Its acceptance as natural representation reveals how the language/discourses are closed to women's voice. It also locks women into the invisible or the private section, where no value is given to her. She is as absent as the primordial mother is from Freudian theories, and as such is absent from the public. Her lifegiving waters are drawn off by man-made objects. The "buckets that rise ... the revolving pulleys ... the windlasses ... pump handles" (1979, p. 19) etc. While some see the god as living in the depths, it is a god not a goddess. Nowhere is she given value except, perhaps, as an object of exchange.

In patriarchal societies, according to Luce Irigaray:

exchanges take place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another; if it were otherwise, we are told, the social order would fall back upon incestuous and exclusively endogamous ties that would paralyse all commerce. (1985, p. 192)

This raises a number of issues: firstly that women have no identity or subjectivity; that they are a possession of man to be traded as commodities but also to perpetuate the race. Women's bodies are regarded as baby machines. As Cranny-Francis suggests: "This complex contestation and exploitation of maternity is a powerful example of the ways in which gendered embodiment is not just a matter of abstract delineations of identities. It is also incorporated semiotically into the discursive and material reproduction of western
society” (1995, p. 23). Secondly, that if this were not so, the structure of society would collapse; a view that was encapsulated in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* where the primacy of the Law of the Father and heterosexuality are promoted as the only way by which society should be constructed. The city of Dorothea is first described physically as a very patterned city. Its growth is dependant on the reproductive powers of women:

And bearing in mind that the nubile girls of each quarter marry youths of other quarters and parents exchange the goods, that each family holds in monopoly ... you can then work from these facts until you learn everything. (1979, p. 12)

Everything about how the economy is dependent on woman's bodies to produce and reproduce. They are like goods themselves, offered in exchange for trade; bartered for wealth; be it individually or on a commercial scale. In Anastasia, the narrator lists the wares that can be purchased. Among these goods, which are praised and about which tales are related, are "the women I have seen bathing in the pool of a garden" (1979, p. 14). Euphemia is a city where memory is traded along with the goods of the earth: "ginger and cotton" for "pistachio nuts and poppy seeds" (1979, p. 31). What is most memorable about this city is the exchange of tales about "sisters ... lovers" (1979, p. 31). The traders are all male, and the tales have at the base a dream symmetry, in which women are not articulate. To a degree their bodies are represented as having a voice, but this voice is not theirs. Zobeide is seen as a "white city, well exposed to the moon" in which the "streets wound about themselves as in a skein" (1979, p. 39). It could be argued that the representation of women's bodies, within the symbolic, have the images of the symbolic wrapped around them like a skein. As Zobeide is a metaphor for women, the skein encaging is the Law of the Father, which refused her speech, sexuality or desire other than that predicated by the masculine discourses. The tie between women and the economy is perpetuated by the masculinist discourse to the extent that the construction has been hidden. No woman's voice is allowed within this discourse because she is regarded as an object and therefore has no subjectivity. While it could be argued that the text by treating women in such a way is certainly revealing that women have no power and how their bodies have been constructed by masculinist discourses,
this is certainly from the postmodernist standpoint view. This position does not empower women but leaves them very much in their place. The unimportance of sexual difference is evidenced by the number of cities where there are few physical signs of women at all.

The plurality of meanings revealed in *Invisible Cities* is focused on in Fedora, where the citizen can choose "the city that corresponds to his desires" (1979, p. 28) from the different images reflected in the glass domes. The physicality/body of Fedora is reflected in the domes, as in a mirror. The text encompasses the Lacanian mirror theory. The reflection in the mirror gives identity, subjectivity, but only in the imaginary, that subjectivity is revealed as an illusion. However, in order to speak subjectivity is necessary, according to Lacan, thus women's voices are silenced or perhaps not listened to as Irigaray suggests. Freudian theory in the pre-oedipal stage promotes sameness, the female is the same as the male. Only when the Oedipal stage has been traversed does difference appear. Within phallocentricism the woman's sexuality and desires can be seen as metaphoric and metonymic, as a reverse reflection of masculine desires. As heterosexuality is promoted as natural, it is assumed that as the male desires the female, then she must desire the male. This is like the reflection in a mirror, where everything is reversed. The symbolisation of this can be discovered in Valdrada, the first city of the Eyes. The 'real' or physical city towers over a lake in which it is reflected: "the city was so constructed that its every point would be reflected in its mirror" (1979, p. 43). Every action was reflected, with one difference, it was always in the reverse or the opposite, metaphoric but metonymic. "At times the mirror increases a thing's value, at times denies it" (1979, p. 44). If this inverted mirror is seen in Lacanian terms, with the link to the old dream symmetry, with woman as the reflection of man in the water, then her link to nature is established. The value accorded to her reflection is that of (m)other. Although for Freud this would be given no value at all, her value as the carer, nurturer, bearer of children, is in the private sphere. The value accorded to 'the real' material city,
the city where trade and commerce and therefore the exchange of women takes place is patriarchal value with the power to exchange and possess.

The narrator sees the inequality of the twin cities in Valdrada between the physical city and its reflection (1979, p. 44), as he states: "nothing that exists or happens in Valdrada is symmetrical" (1979, p. 44) but "The two cities live for each other, their eyes interlocked; but there is no love between them" (1979, p. 44). Awareness of the inequality of the genders contained with this statement does not mean that the construction of gender, sexuality and desire is being subverted. On the contrary, like Lacan's theory no avenue of escape is given to women. The traditional conception that women and men are not complete without each other is reinforced. It is through the gaze that subjectivity for the male is established, for he needs women's to establish his ego, while for the female her object position is given her by the male gaze. There can be no love between them as is shown in *Difficult Loves* for she has no libido.

The new mirrors the women have in Armilla (1979, p. 41), with new reflections, could appear to be liberatory. These nymphs and naiads are released from the underground veins by the largesse of male plumbers and bricklayers. Their bodies are lusted over by the male narrator who states:

> at any hour, raising your eyes among the pipes, you are likely to glimpse a young woman, or many young women, slender, not tall of stature, luxuriating in the bathtubs or arching their backs under the showers...washing or drying or perfuming themselves, or combing their long hair at a mirror. (1979, p. 42)

As the narrators are all masculine, then this particular narrator is gazing voyeuristically at these nude women in bathtubs. They are narcissistically admiring their reflections and adorning themselves in acceptable ways. Their new images in the mirrors are all of beauty and femininity. The only way these reflections or mirror images can be broken is to remove staticity or at least the representation of femininity that is generally accepted as 'true'. Only if, as Irigaray suggests: the "Mirror [was] made of matter so fluid"
In spite of being labelled a postmodernist text *Invisible Cities* still attempts to find a source. Many postmodernist devices are utilised in the deconstruction of dualisms that are located in epistemology with the obvious omission of gender. Ultimately, however, the text goes around in circles, presenting a fragmented narration which basically ends up where it starts. Khan and Polo as the intellectual authorities discuss, in abstract, how knowledge is constructed. The use of women's bodies in the guise of cities to do
this does not disturb the dualism which is recontextualized. The privileging of male authority is sustained and women are still placed in the object position.
CHAPTER FIVE

IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELLER

This examination of Italo Calvino's works started with *Difficult Loves*, the compilation of a number of short stories written between 1949 and 1957, (translated into English in 1983) and it ends with *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (IWNT), a novel written in 1979 (published in English in 1981). This spans a rough twenty year period. Both these texts focus on desire, unfulfilled in the early text but seemingly fulfilled in the latter. It is as if this writer's works have come full circle just as the text of IWNT does. While Calvino published other works after this, for the purpose of this study the circle is almost complete. Similar to *Invisible Cities*, this is a postmodernist text with metafictional elements. *If on a winter's night a traveller* is a self-reflexive novel which raises questions about reading practices: deconstructs notions of subjectivity: problematizes narrative authority and, it could be argued, 'rapes' literary conventions. As might be expected, then, it is working also to reject metanarratives, revealing how they have been constructed, but this excludes the metanarrative of gender. Like *Invisible Cities*, indeed all the Calvino texts under consideration, it is a masculine discourse and while women in IWNT appear to have more presence, once more they are given no real voice and no agency. There are no attempts to interrogate naturalised gender positions. As literary conventions within the text are raped so, in many ways, are the women within it through an act of violence that deprives them of any power.

Many critics, like Hume and Friedman, are intent on finding a consistent pattern in the very different works of Italo Calvino. In the four texts considered within this study one of the patterns revealed lies in their postmodernist elements. Of more importance, however, is the consistent failure to deconstruct the metanarrative of gender which, it is argued, is traditional and reasonably consistent across these works. At times it is
problematized but then it is always recontextualized. In fact Kathryn Hume believes that the male and female roles are among the most conventional elements of Calvino's fictions (1992, p. 48).

It could be argued that because IWNT is a postmodernist text which reveals, through irony, the construction of belief systems by ideology, institutions and language so that a contestation of the gender roles must also occur; because everything is questioned gender must be included. Calvino states:

All parameters, categories, and antithesis that we once used to define, plan, and classify the world have been called into question. And not only those most closely linked to historical values, but even the ones that seemed to be stable anthropological categories - reason and myth, work and existence, male and female - and even the polarity of the most elementary combinations of words - affirmation and negation, above and below, subject and object. (1989, p. 91)

In other words, all dualisms are to come under scrutiny, including gender. So the framework is set for an ironic view of the gendered roles to reveal that they are indeed constructed and not natural. However, an examination of the representation of those roles in this text that questions identity and authority will reveal that these gendered roles remain extremely traditional. A slight shift has occurred similar to the one in Invisible Cities and acknowledgment is made of the necessity of woman's body to men, both physically and ontologically. However, while on the one hand as de Lauretis states: "Calvino ... feels the necessity ... to engage or deal with feminism ... on the other he ... put[s] us [back] in our place" (1989, p. 144). There is an absence, within this text, of even an ironic questioning of the gender roles. Both sexes play very traditional roles in both the love story and the incipits. In fact de Lauretis discusses how the love story in IWNT is vastly different to the stories in Difficult Loves because love is missing within all the stories in this collection. She makes the comment that in IWNT "love ... is all too easy" (1987, p. 70). The love story between Ludmilla and the Reader proceeds along traditional lines. The sexual relationships within the incipits are also very conventional. Instead of a valuing of difference there is an absence of an examination of sexual difference or, as Waugh suggests, an 'indifference' (1992, p. 197) to gender
construction. As IWNT and "postmodern theory increasingly draws on a highly idealised and generalised notion of femininity" (1992, p. 195), the artificiality and the fictionalized version of the symbolic roles is brought into question and is trivialised. What is not problematized by the ironic exposure is the dismissal or disregard of gender construction. As Waugh states: "I have been amazed at the number of general accounts of Postmodernism which do not even mention gender when clearly one of the most obvious and radical shifts in late modernity has been in the relations between women and men" (1992, p. 195) which has been reflected in feminist theory. So that while acknowledgment is given to the positioning of women in an abstract fashion, there is basically no change in the relationships between the protagonist Reader and Ludmilla or the sexual relationships within the incipits. The postmodern obsession of collapsing frameworks with the exception of the 'real' gender roles can be seen, as Patricia Waugh does, as "registering, unconsciously and metaphorically, a fear specifically of the loss of the legitimacy of western patriarchal grand narratives" (1992, p. 197) or, as de Lauretis suggests, "threatening the status quo" (1989, p. 144). By paying 'lip service' to feminism IWNT fails to deconstruct in any real sense the metanarrative of gender.

The postmodernist devices that have emerged throughout the earlier texts are unquestionably strengthened in IWNT. Modelled on one of the short stories in Difficult Loves, 'The adventure of the reader', the link between textuality and sexuality becomes, as Mary-Jo Muratone states, "one of the controlling metaphors in this text" (1975, p. 16). This view is reinforced by C. Nella Cotrupi who states that Ludmilla functions "actantially as the object of the male reader's erotic desire and allegorically as the human metaphor for the desired ideal readerly experience" (1991, p. 283). Mazzoni also supports this view when she discusses how text and body become intertwined (1993, p. 60). The body/mind binary, explored in Invisible Cities to expose how meaning is made, is extended in this text to reveal multiplicity of reading styles. The complacency of the reader is dislocated by the intrusive narrator who draws attention to himself,
addresses the reader of IWNT and thus distances the reader, which interferes with reader interpellation into the text. This results in drawing attention to textuality and the self-reflexiveness of the text. As de Lauretis suggests: "All the elements of fiction are there: the nuts and bolts of storytelling; the chassis and the engine, narrative frame and driving force of narrative; down to the rear-view mirror and vinyl seat covers of the novel as desiring machine" (1989, p. 143). Or as Travers states: "The novel plays ... with all the conventions of the discourse of fiction: psychological characterisation, linear narratives, the assumption of the real world that is being transcribed" (1989, p. 211).

Both these writers have, in different ways, referred to why gender considerations are ignored by this text. The nuts and bolts of storytelling rely on a language system that is engendered. In Baron reference was made to the conventions of story telling based on both myth and legend which kept the gender roles in place. While the lines between the 'real' and fictionality are blurred in IWNT, and while this text plays with the assumption of the 'real' world being transcribed within texts, the gender roles in both the love story and the incipits meet reader expectations. The emphasis on theory, and the foregrounding of postmodernist theorising that the text relies on, silences any interrogation of the gender roles. While multiple narrators, who are all male, foreground the structure of narratives, the sexuality and the desire of both males and females are not questioned. The representation of women and men within both the incipits and the linking love story are presented as natural and traditional.

In contrast to Difficult Loves in which the majority of the females were not named, those in IWNT are all named. The male protagonist is, on the other hand, given the general title of the Reader. The narrator gives the following reason for this: "The book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read: this is why he is not given a name" (1981, p. 113). Are women also then, supposed to identify with the Reader? But more importantly the inference is that there is a universal reader, one who identifies with the
narrative voice because of the use of either ‘you’ as well as the ‘I’ in the incipits. Indeed the narrator goes on to say that if the Reader was given a name it would "automatically have made him the equivalent of a Third Person" (1981, p. 113) and thus reduce his authority. However Madeleine Soropore believes that:

In the world of Calvino's novel, readers, like authors, are not idealized or imagined in a position outside of the text, forming a unity out of the multiple peculiars, but are in the midst of the text, forced to exist in fragmentation and disorder. (n.d., p. 705)

Considering the different reading styles discussed this would appear to question the Modernist belief in one pure interpretation of any text. While the problematization of one truth emanating from any text foregrounds difference, there is still the use of the universal male pronoun to cover all of humanity. There is no doubt at all which side of the man/woman binary is paramount here. The female is there as a secondary character unlike the women in IC who are just part of the descriptions of the cities. A female reader of IWNT then, is not supposed to identify with the ‘you’ or the ‘I’ in the text or even Ludmilla because of the name. For six pages Ludmilla does have the honour of being addressed as ‘you’ when the narrator reads her mind during the sexual act. This will be discussed during the analysis of her role. In fact de Lauretis suggests that Calvino seems unaware that there are women readers (1989, p. 139). If knowledge is acquainted with power as promoted by Foucault's discussion in Knowledge/Power and Cosimo (Baron), then women are clearly excluded from access to books and the gaining of knowledge. What can be seen as ironic is the deconstruction of the Levi Strauss position of the elevation of the author as a person of special intelligence, knowledge and authority, when computers are used to churn out books (1981, p. 172). There is no irony when considering gender roles in the context of a novel which repeatedly gives women no value and promotes the majority of them as evil, as evidenced within the incipits and also with Lotaria. Ludmilla, on the other hand, is the good woman who is a sexual object.
Littered throughout the novel are references to its own textuality and construction promoted through the voice of the narrator. The assumed reader is addressed continually, told how to read, how he (the female reader is disregarded) settles himself in order to read with instructions such as: "Find the most comfortable position, seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat" (9). Critics like Madeline Soropure and Mariolina Salvatori have written many articles explaining this interplay between readers of the book and the protagonist Reader. The question of the gendered roles, however, receives little attention. Although Flannery sees Ludmilla as the ideal reader (1981, p. 147), Caputi the desiring ideal (1981, p. 283), for Sorapure she is the privileged reader as she, "Unlike the Male Reader ... remembers the content of books which she has read" (n.d., 706). However, when a comparison is made with the variety of readers in Chapter eleven there is little difference between Ludmilla's catholic tastes and theirs. So that while she may indeed be seen as the desired reader, both erotically and physically, by the Reader and Flannery, this elevation is sexually motivated rather than in terms of giving value to female readers. As Chris Weedon suggests, women are seen as equal but different. Their role is subordinated to men and their behaviour is defined in relation to the norm which is male (1987, p. 2). Metaphorically it has been accepted that women's pleasures and attitudes are the same as men's, yet they are still regarded as inferior and not given the opportunity to voice their needs. So that critics as well as postmodern writers like Italo Calvino ignore difference in terms of the gendered reading patterns and assume that these same reading patterns are different but ungendered. This position is reflected in the assumption that the protagonist Reader's desire for Ludmilla is reciprocated. There is no indication in the text that Ludmilla desires the protagonist Reader. She is there, desiring a book and this is what links her to the male reader but, as she really has no voice and fits into the idealised role of woman, there is no evidence to suggest, within the text, that she feels anything for the Reader. Certainly there is the love scene in which the omniscient narrator gloats over bodies but even here there is no actual emotion just analysis, very much the postmodern standpoint view.
The structure of this text is similar to that of *Invisible Cities*. There are two levels of discourse: the numbered chapters and the chapters with titles. The numbered chapters are the narrative, the search for a completed book and the quest for Ludmilla. The ten titled incipits are beginnings of stories, none of which are ever completed to the Reader's satisfaction. His pursuit for a completed story appears never ending until the final chapter, where he is about to finish a completed book entitled *If on a winter's night a traveller*, which was the title of the first incipit that he read in the beginning of the book. According to de Lauretis this ending of IWNT mirrors that of *Jane Eyre* (1989, p. 139). Beside him is Ludmilla who the narrator states: “you [the Reader] decide you want to marry” (1981, p. 204). So the love story does come to a traditional end. Also the Reader's search for a completed text is apparently appeased.

While the whole focus of this text has been upon stories within stories, the Chinese boxes of metafiction and the postmodern problematizing of conclusions, as de Lauretis states: “there is an ending to the stories after all” (1989, p. 139). So that while Muratore declares that:

> From Calvino's perspective, the ideal narrative is one which negates the very necessity of terminality, one in which narratives engender either narratives in an infinite sequence of unfolding plots that coalesce and mutate into a kaleidoscope of intertextual fragments (1994, p. 112),

terminality does occur. Even within the incipits, which are fragments/beginnings of books, some sort of conclusion is actually reached. This will be discussed in more detail later. The infinite sequence of unfolding plots does overlap into other plots metafictionally, but the whole exercise dissolves because the actual text has to end. Certainly this draws attention to the lack of singular truths or one reality which is neatly compartmentalized. However, there is a heavy reliance on the reader to construct some sort of meaning. But the reader is, in fact, aided by the lack of contestation in the gender roles in these incipits in that they are so traditional. All the women are whores or sirens and objects of desire. The familiarity of the actions of both the genders as well as the
modernist endings placates reader expectations. Actually the absence of any confrontation with the gender roles, which are represented within the numbered chapters, the linking love story, and the incipits in very traditional ways, validate feminist statements that postmodernism is gender blind.

While the incipits fragment the love story, the text is, in many ways, heavily structured. Feinstein sees it as an "intertwining of postmodern theorising and traditional story telling" (1989, p. 147). She suggests that the postmodern theorising occurring in the numbered chapters and the storytelling in the incipits results in there being little difference between the numbered and the named chapters (1989, p. 151). Certainly there is little difference in the positioning of the gendered roles in this deconstruction of genres. Mary-Jo Muratore believes that IWNT "reveals itself to be unabashedly self-flexive text consumed with celebrating the autotelic nature of its own narrative production" (1994, p. 11). But it is still a narrative production that comes back and utilises the naturalised gender roles which become subjugated or hidden underneath the self-reflexivity of a text intent on revealing its own fictionality as a novel, but not the fictionality of the gender roles.

Repeated use is made throughout IWNT of the mise en abyme to draw attention to the text's construction. The most striking example occurs towards the end of the book where the titles of the incipits are put together (1981, p. 204). There is also a number of other examples. In one of the incipits, 'Looks down in the gathering shadow', reference is made to stories around stories (1981, p. 88). Marana decides to break off one translation "at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel" (1981, p. 100). Silas Flannery declares he would "like to be able to write a book that is only an incipit, that maintains for its whole duration the potentiality of the beginning" (1981, p. 140). He states further: "I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels. The protagonist would be the Reader" (1981, p. 156). This
metafictional device is used to draw attention to the construction of novels, and their fictionality, and thus distance the reader by revealing that the novel is not a representation of 'real' life. At the same time because the gender roles, as I have argued, are not in any sense deconstructed, the reader is still positioned within the naturalisation of these roles. The assumption that because the boundary between fact and fiction has been blurred, the reader will automatically extend this to the gender roles, is questionable, considering those roles are still very familiar. The blurring between the two levels of discourse, while confrontational to the actual reader because of the fragments of stories interspersed with the romantic quest, still interpellates the reader because the gender roles are familiar. So that while it could be argued that the boundary between fiction and reality is deconstructed, and therefore, leads to a questioning of the structure of the 'real', at the same time gender is not considered by the text as a metanarrative worthy of attention. The narrator states that "Through an error of the bindery, the printed signatures of that book become mixed with those of another publication" (1981, p. 27), just as the lives of the Reader and Ludmilla become mixed. They are brought together through defective books but their lives also become mixed up with other publications as well as revolutions, as they search for a complete book. There is, however, no real equality in interrelationships within this quest as it is the male Reader who is the most adventurous, travelling the world in an effort to reach his goal. Ludmilla is a very shadowy figure in this quest. She is represented as the woman behind the man which gives her no real public power at all. There is a failure to consider the relationship between the protagonist Reader and Ludmilla because it is presented as 'normal'. The subject, in this case, the protagonist Reader, although in some ways decentred, still retains power and remains firmly the focus. Ludmilla retains her object position promoted as natural by the text. Postmodernism tends to still regard women as different metonymically in terms of power where they are not given value or voice, yet still metaphorically treats them as mirror images when it comes to, in this case, reading practices and desire.
Despite the various labels that critics have given to this text: Postmodern (Barth, Muratone, Soropure), Metafiction (Waugh), or Hypermetafiction (Capruti) no where is there a substantial deconstruction of gender roles in these critic's discussions of IWNT. The major focus is on the deconstruction of metanarratives exposed by Lyotard's analysis of epistemology which, as I have already argued, is gender blind. The allotment of these various categories or theoretical brand names to this text ignores the traditional positioning of the gendered roles within the text, which in effect disregards the politicisation of these roles that culturally disadvantage women. These critics of Calvino's works are then also gender blind.

In *Invisible Cities* the vignettes or descriptions of the cities were explored, and the different ways meaning is structured, utilising women's bodies as frames of reference, but not to reveal the construction of the gender roles only to discuss, in abstract terms, the multiple ways signs are read. According to Waugh: "Modernism and postmodernism begin with a view that both the historical world and works of art are organised and perceived through 'frames'" (1984, p. 28). It is through frames of reference that meaning is constructed both in 'real' life and in novels: "In life they operate like conventions in novels" (Waugh 1984, p. 30). Metafictional novels foreground and analyse these frames in order to show that nothing, either fiction or reality, is unmediated or non-linguistic (Waugh 1984, p. 30). This is similar to the inscription of bodies. The obvious narrator of IWNT foregrounds his presence in order for an examination of his framed authority. The different literary genres, acting as frames, in the incipits are used to show the obvious devices by which they have been historically constructed. The links between the named and numbered chapters work to reveal the similarity between the frames by which 'real' life and art are read. It could be argued that because IWNT exposes these frames then gender must be included as one of the frames that is exposed. However, considering the naturalisation of the gender roles
and the lack of confrontation with the gender narrative, this does not occur. The difference between postmodernism and feminism is particularly obvious here. While IWNT is intent on the postmodern deconstruction of the frames of reference by which individuals make meaning, the text thus works to destroy foundational beliefs but leaves no room for real negotiation by the individual. Feminism, on the other hand, while also deconstructing frames is more focused on gender construction as the site of the disempowerment of women. It is, therefore, not content just to reveal construction but seeks to instigate political action and changed positions. IWNT does not achieve this because certainly there is no real problematization of the roles and Ludmilla and the females in the incipits are consequently given no agency.

Obviously the fragmentation of the literary genres within the named chapters are the frames that are broken. Waugh states: "Metafictional novels often begin with an explicit discussion of ... beginnings" (1984, p. 29) which is what IWNT does with the reader beginning to open a novel entitled If on a winter's night a traveller. Each of the named chapters are the beginnings of different stories. The protagonist Reader is thwarted because, for him, none of the stories finish, yet is this quite accurate? is there any need for these stories to continue? 'Looking down in the gathering shadow' is a story concerned with the disposal of a body which ends with the assumed arrest of Jo-Jo's murderer. In fact an examination of most of these incipits reveals some sort of ending. For Fink, while the text "undercuts contemporary theories [it] re-establishes traditional hierarchies of literary discourse" (1991, p. 94). One of these hierarchies is the patriarchal construction of gender roles. The incipits do nothing to break actual gender frames. There is a variety of forms and styles used in the ten incipits ranging from Classic Realism ('Outside the town of Malbrook'), to Crime ('Looks down in the gathering shadows'), Pornography ('On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon') and others. As Cotrupi states: "the incomplete and tantalising narrative fragments are clearly proffered as a smorgasbord ... as a whirlwind tour of the styles, genres and
historical periods of fiction" (1991, p. 282), but it cannot be argued that the gender frames are broken because the male and female roles within these named chapters are all very traditional. The concentration is focused on the deconstruction of traditional literary conventions. The gender roles are so much a part of the discourses and the language that they are hidden and remain so. Perhaps frames are broken in the numbered chapters and certainly here, there is a problematization of the authority of the author, the omniscient narrator, the ideal reader and actual closure. Yet the love story is the inevitable triangle or perhaps a quadrangle as the Reader, Silas Flannery and Ermes Marana pursue Ludmilla. This is the frame that holds the text together but it is not a frame that is broken. The inevitability of the desire of the protagonist Reader, the writer and the translator's pursuit of Ludmilla is not problematized as all three pursue her for her body. The Reader's pursuit for a complete book becomes of secondary importance to his pursuit of Ludmilla. To Silas Flannery she is the ideal reader, who is a necessity for him as de Lauretis comments: “that for Calvino’s Writer, it is necessary to have a Woman Reader” (1989, p. 137) or, as Flannery states: “At times I am gripped by an absurd desire: that the sentence I am about to write be the one the woman is reading at the same moment” (1981, p. 134). He alternates between gazing at this woman reader through a spyglass and writing with her body in mind. Ermes Marana’s pursuit of Ludmilla is seen through the eyes of the male Reader who considers Marana as a rival, an invisible rival because through the books Marana does not write but produces, while he is “the silent voice that speaks to her through books” (1981, p. 126). Both the Reader and Flannery want to possess Ludmilla as object, whereas the Reader sees Marana as taking over Ludmilla’s mind.

Even the structure of the text encages Ludmilla. While chapter seven is devoted to her, both the surrounding chapters (six and eight) have a very distinct masculine focus. Chapter six belongs to Marana and Chapter eight to Silas Flannery. So Ludmilla is framed by the text as well as by males. Feinstein believes that these chapters frame the
whole novel (1989, p. 147). Mazzoni suggests that what is being scrutinised is the framing function of plot which reveals the definition of boundaries (1993, p. 56). But which boundaries? from this perspective all that is being problematized, by this deconstruction of boundaries, is the literary device of the plot which is basically a very traditional love story. Even within the incipits, although the traditional devices utilised by the various genres are revealed, the participants within all function in the accepted fashion. In each of the incipits the male narrators pursue various females as objects of desire.

If postmodernism deconstructs metanarratives and as I have argued, gender is a very significant political narrative, then what is the representation of women and indeed the gender roles in this acclaimed postmodern text? As de Lauretis states, it is basically a love story (1989, p. 131) in the traditional western romance genre. Boy meets girl, pursues her and in the end marries her and this is what happens in IWNT. Ludmilla, the object of the Reader's pursuit, is almost silent. Yet both Hume and Salvatori suggest that the types of stories which Ludmilla requests in the numbered chapters appear in the next incipit. Hume states: "In each numbered chapter, Ludmilla describes the kind of book she would like most to read - and that is what we get in the next incipit" (1992, p. 123) and Salvatori comments: "it is Ludmilla's insatiable desire for reading that generates ... the particular narrative" (1986, pp. 199-20). However, this is not quite accurate. Certainly at times this occurs, particularly in the early part of the book and the final incipit. In the middle section, however, Ludmilla almost vanishes as the focus is on the Reader's journey to find a complete book and so a number of the beginnings of stories are unread by Ludmilla. After stating that:

The novel I would most like to read at this moment ... should have as its driving force only the desire to narrate, to pile stories upon stories, without trying to impose a philosophy of life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves (1981, p. 76).

she does not read 'Looks down in the gathering shadow'. As she is absent from chapter six she has no control over the next story. The content of 'In a network of lines that
enlace' therefore does not reflect her taste and is out of her supposed control. At the same time her request for stories to be piled upon each other appears to be the controlling force of the book. The self reflexivity of the text is determined by Ludmilla's desire through this mise en abyme. But even though, in this case, her desire appears to be fulfilled, she does not go on to read half the stories. She is being used as a tool that appears to be in control, because her desires are being met, but she disappears as soon as she makes this wish.

Juxtaposed with Ludmilla's apparent control is Marana's use of women as book critics. Yet here again women are given no voice as their bodily reactions are used to judge a book:

The reader is soldered to the chair at the wrists, with pressure manometers and a stethoscopic belt, her temples beneath their crown of hair held fast by serpentine wires of the encephalogram that mark the intensity of her concentration. (1989, p. 103)

The controller goes on to state that "All our work depends on the sensitivity of the subject at our disposal" (1981, p. 103) and that subject is a woman, who is used by men, and her sensitivity appropriated by them. She is treated as a tool, an object rather than a subject. The protagonist Reader wonders: "What will her fate be?" (1981, p. 103). Women's fate in this text is to stay within the boundaries set for her by the symbolic, like Ludmilla, or be promoted as sexually unstable, causing man's destruction.

It is only through the Reader's eyes that Ludmilla is presented. She is objectified from her first appearance, by the physical evaluation of her through the protagonist Reader's eyes: "Huge, swift eyes, complexion of good tone and good pigment, a richly waved haze of hair" (1981, p. 28). As the narrator informs the Reader "you have entered a magnetic field" (1981, p. 28). The evaluation of Ludmilla is extended to her possessions and house. As de Lauretis suggests, the Reader explores Ludmilla's house and reads her through her possessions much as he reads her body as text (1989, p. 140). It is interesting that the kitchen, according to the narrator, is the room that tells the Reader
the most about Ludmilla (1981, p. 113), and that the state of the kitchen could be enough to make a man fall in love with her. This is a cliche for the position of women in western society and a parody, yet given Ludmilla's role within IWNT and her subsequent marriage, this appears to be a reinforcement of the symbolic female role. Perhaps it could be argued that the text is working to expose ironically the way society constructs women and their roles. If so this only lasts for six pages because the narrator assures the Reader that the focus is back on him again as he states: "(Don't believe that the book is losing sight of you, Reader...)" (1981, p. 117). Ludmilla is only secondary here and continues to be so. She is peripheral to the protagonist Reader and his quest. She is only important in so far as she becomes the object of the Reader's quest. Nowhere is she allowed agency; she is not important enough for the deconstruction of her role. The protagonist Reader decides he will marry her at the end. Ludmilla has no say at all apparently in this, as she is placed very firmly within the symbolic role of wife.

Ludmilla is identified and classified by the way she looks, the spaces she occupies, her possessions, the decor and the arrangement of her rooms. But neither the reader of this book nor Ludmilla is given the opportunity to read the protagonist Reader's identity in the same way. The male Reader occupies nine chapters in this book; his personality is revealed through the narrator as well as through his physical actions. He is given no locality or any physicality. His body is not revealed in sexist terms. The reader is led to assume that the protagonist Reader is object of Ludmilla's desire but this is not revealed within the novel because Ludmilla, heavily located within her house, and objectified, has no voice. The protagonist Reader's role as male is not discussed nor is it problematized or considered. It is not necessary to give him physical attributes because he is fulfilling his role as the figure in authority. The discursiveness of the text does not extend to a confrontation with the masculine role, therefore the female is represented in patriarchal discourses that are not contested.
If on a winter's night a traveller is Calvino's happiest work and it does end happily for the Reader and presumably for Ludmilla. Chapter two of this study, an examination of Difficult Loves revealed unfulfilled desire. If on a winter's night a traveller combines a search for a complete book which becomes intermingled with the desire for a woman. In this text apparently both the male Reader's desires reach fruition as he settles down in the end to complete the original book which he attempted to read in the opening. Beside him is the woman he has pursued throughout who is now his wife. A paradoxical fairy tale ending considering the problematization of closure advocated in the rest of the text. But nevertheless, it is an ending that meets with reader expectations, in that IWNT is almost finished, which infers that a complete book has been found, Ludmilla is beside him in bed so all is back to normal. The metafictional theorising within the text, far from being ironic, has collapsed. Certainly critics can laud the deconstruction of metanarratives, but that has been reappropriated by the traditional. Both literary genres and gender roles have been recontextualized.

Ludmilla's desire for the Reader is assumed throughout, nowhere does she exhibit any real pursuit of the Reader. As Hume states: "Ludmilla [is] motivated by her love for books and we sometimes wonder why she tolerates the somewhat boorish Reader" (1992, p. 122). Why indeed, because at the end she has been left with no fulfilment at all. She is, of course, married which is acceptable for women within Western culture and which, feminists argue, hides women's lack of power. Despite Ludmilla's elevation at the end of the book where the narrator states: “Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader” (1981, p. 205) (note her promotion to Reader with a capital R), she has in reality been “attained, captured and safely married off to the hero” (de Lauretis 1989, p. 139).
The Reader's pursuit of Ludmilla is constant throughout the numbered chapters and takes precedence over the search for a complete book. Indeed as Muratore states:

For the Lettore [the Reader] the seductive foreplay of narrative has penetration and climax as its desired and fundamental goal. The book in fact is nothing but a convenient pretext designed to facilitate the sexual conquest for Ludmilla. (1994, p. 16)

The search for the completed book is certainly the focus in the beginning of the quest but becomes of secondary importance with the appearance of Ludmilla. The link between sexuality and textuality are very evident within this text and have been discussed in earlier chapters. The very close link between the pleasure of the text and the pleasure of woman's body is obvious. The narrator almost salivates over the pleasure of the text:

Of course, this circling of the book, too, this reading around it before reading inside it, as a part of the pleasure in a new book, but like all preliminary pleasures, it has its optimal duration if you want it to serve as a thrust toward the more substantial pleasure of the consummation of the act. (my italics) (1981, p. 13)

When cutting the pages with a knife he states:

Process in reading is preceded by an act that traverses the material solidarity of the book to allow you to access to its incorporeal substance. Penetrating among the pages from below the blade vehemently moves upwards. (1981, p. 38)

So an act of violation is committed on a book as if it were a woman's body. The narrator of the text endorses this view. The book is inanimate, whereas women are alive but are not allowed to speak. The pleasure that comes from penetrating both a book and women's bodies is all masculine. Where, in this text, has the position been deconstructed? As de Lauretis comments: "in this book reading, like writing, is a function of desire, literally" (1989, p. 137). The eroticism of writing discussed in chapter two has been extended in this text to the desire to read a complete book by the protagonist reader. In Invisible Cities the desire for source was explored through cities with women's names. Desire is, in all three texts, linked to women as text without women being given any voice. While there is the opportunity in all three to consider the engendering of both discourse and language they all halt, failing to extend into a contestation of gender roles. The argument that the link between textuality and sexuality
is part of the problematization of the gender roles is undercut by the postmodern tendency to ignore sexual difference, to use 'he' to cover all. Moreover, to tie penetration to eroticism gives women no space for their pleasure, as they are not the ones to penetrate during the sexual act. Their bodies are the recipients of the penis, man's supreme instrument of manliness or masculinity; the instrument that gives him the power to control discourses as well as women.

Ludmilla's position as object, empty and passive is reinforced by Silas Flannery's perception of her as necessary object:

Perhaps the woman I observe with the spyglass knows what I should write; or rather, she does not know it, because she is in fact waiting for me to write what she does not know; but what she knows for certain is her waiting, the void that my words should fill. (1981, p. 136)

Teresa de Lauretis believes that this "is a notorious cliche of Western literary writing" (1989, p. 137). Ludmilla is deliberately framed as the passive space waiting for the male to fill the emptiness within with his superior knowledge and his command of the discourses. On the other hand it could be argued that Flannery is dependent on this woman reader (de Lauretis, 1989, p. 137) which gives her power. However, she really has no more control than the electrified women readers previously mentioned. It can be assumed, as some critics have, that the woman voyeuristically gazed upon by Flannery is Ludmilla, although she is unnamed. Is it not, then, back to the very traditional concept of woman as the object that gives man his identity? Thus no real value is given to her actual desire for a particular story.

The narrator states: "Let us see, Other Reader, if the book can succeed in drawing a true portrait of you, beginning with the frame and enclosing you from every side, establishing the outlines of your form" (1981, p. 113). The book is very successful in drawing a picture of Ludmilla as the other reader, very firmly establishing her outlines but why only the other reader? why not the protagonist Reader as well? On the other hand, this could be seen to epitomise Scholes' belief that writing is equivalent to the
male sexual act (qtd de Lauretis 1989, p. 137), a point of view that has also been reiterated by John Barth. Ludmilla is only "a character in man's fiction" states de Lauretis, "reduced to a portrait, an image, a figure of male imagery" (1989, p. 143), so much so that for the protagonist Reader she represents all readers (1981, p. 103). She is once more an object without voice, pure representation of the female role.

Only once in the whole book is Ludmilla addressed as 'you' and that is in chapter seven, the only numbered chapter that really focuses on Ludmilla. In fact, as de Lauretis points out, "for six pages ... the Woman Reader [is given] the honor of the second-person pronoun ... of being, that is, the protagonist" (1989, p. 139). Admittedly, and for the only time in the text, she is placed in the position of protagonist, but only so that the omniscient narrator can read the protagonist Reader's body. According to the narrator, Ludmilla reads the Reader's body in the same way that he reads hers. Questions are raised about the impossibility of reading "by which one human being believes at certain moments that he is reading another human being" (1981, p. 124), again the universal 'he' in the middle of a section in which Ludmilla is the focus of the narration. The Reader also queries, through the omniscient narrator, as to how Ludmilla reads him: "you begin to harbour doubt: that she is not reading you, single and whole as you are ... but using fragments ..." (1981, p. 124). This passage then reinforces the postmodernist decentred subject. But which subject? certainly not the female because women are never the subjects within this text, only objects. This is similar to the postmodern refusal to focus on gender as a metanarrative by grouping women with other marginalised groups, which successfully eliminates the possibility of the deconstruction of the gender roles. Again there is a lack of acknowledgment of both the politicisation of these roles, as well as a denial of the metonymic while privileging the metaphoric. As Waugh states: "The exclusion of gender from postmodern discussions has left its theorists largely blind to the possibilities of challenging autonomy through a relational concept of identity" (1992, p. 203). While subjectivity is problematized, it is always on male terms with the male
still in the position of autonomy. The male narrators in IWNT may be multiple, but they all control the discourses.

The male narrator, using the myth of unification of two individuals through the act of love, addresses the protagonist Reader: "So the moment has come to address you in the second person plural, a very serious operation, because it is tantamount to considering the two of you a single subject" (1981, p. 122). It is the male protagonist's loss of authority here that disturbs the narrator, a serious problem indeed. Certainly throughout this passage, when each reads the other's body as text, there are significant references to separate beings with "returning from separate universes" (1981, p. 125) and "one to one side one to the other" (1981, p. 125). What is then being deconstructed is the concept of love uniting two people, making them one entity. This was part of the focus in *Difficult Loves*, where the concept of love was problematized. Ignored is the gender role and the different experiences and perceptions that the role places on the differently sexed bodies. Where is the celebration of difference that theorists like Hutcheon declare that postmodernism promotes? While, in this text, different reading practices are promoted, there is no interrogation instigated or even implied of the effects that gender may have on the way men and women read. The different reading practices are universalised within masculinist discourses.

Ludmilla is the good woman who acts in a very traditional way, and adopt[s] the symbolic gender role of handmaiden. Her mirror image, Lotaria, is the non-feminine woman (de Lauretis 1989, p. 137) or, perhaps, the pseudo man who rapes literary texts and castrates them, according to Hume (1992, p. 122) and de Lauretis (1989, p. 139), in much the same way as Calvino does with this text.

If chapter seven focused on Ludmilla, then chapter nine is Lotaria's in which she takes on multiple identities. Within this chapter the Reader, in his search for a completed
book, is met by a woman at an airport. She is first identified as Corenna, although she
does bear some resemblance to Lotaria (1981, p. 167), then her name proceeds to change
as she is identified as Gertrude, then Alfonsina, Ingrid and finally Sheila. The Reader,
angry, challenges this female: "It's no use your camouflaging yourself, Lotaria" (1981, p.
172). It is this female, echoing the central issue of Invisible Cities who then declares:
"The body is a uniform! The body is armed militia! The body is violent action! The
body claims power! The body's at war! The body declares itself subject. The body is
an end and not a means" (1981, p. 173). The body is a uniform which positions
individuals into gender roles. Those who possess a penis have power, and those
without are relegated to the secondary position. The body as armed militia is the site for
violence and struggle, not just physical but political. The good woman protects her body
but the bad woman uses her body to destroy men. For her the body is used as a means to
momentarily gain power. For the man the woman's body is the end, or so he thinks, of
his quest for desire fulfilment. However, is Lotaria really a woman or does this text
situate her as a pseudo male? as non-feminine? She is the writer, the one that analyses
texts. As a critical feminist reader, she is seen, as de Lauretis does, as "non-feminine"
(1989, p. 138). She is writing a thesis on Flannery's works. Writing is taken, by the
patriarchy to be a masculine pursuit (de Lauretis 1989, p. 141). So Lotaria is presented
as masculine by this text. As Shila/Lotaria she uses her body to attack the Reader, who
almost succumbs to her blatant sexuality. Her speech on the body can be viewed in
masculine terms. The narrator is then not drawing attention to the way gender is
constructed, rather he is proclaiming the masculine perception of the female body which
is a reflection of masculine beliefs.

The Reader is, however, reminded by the narrator that he is after all "the absolute
protagonist of this book" (1981, p. 173), a position that is continually reinforced by this
omniscient narrator. As the absolute protagonist the Reader is reminded that he does not
have to succumb to the act of intercourse if he does not want to (1981, p. 173). But the
Reader does not have to make that decision as he is saved from this emotionally unstable female ironically by a photographer, a perpetrator of framing par excellence (1981, p. 173),

Here are the sisters, one feminine, one non-feminine. The good one, Ludmilla, reaps her reward (or what is seen as a reward in Western society) and ends up with the Reader, a silent object in his bed. Lotaria, the non-feminine, sinks into oblivion, never to be referred to again after her unsuccessful attempt to seduce the Reader.

According to Jo-Anne Muratore, women in IWNT exhibit sexual and textual aggressiveness; the "traditionally passive roles of reading and feminine sexuality assume active, if not controlling postures" (1981, p. 117). Ludmilla, although superficially appearing to control the texts, really does not. She is a passive reader. As the narrator states: “for Ludmilla authors are never incarnated in individuals of flesh and blood, they exist for her only in published pages, the living and the dead are there always ready to communicate with her, to amaze her, and Ludmilla is always ready to follow them” (1981, p. 126). Lotaria makes the same point when she says: “Ludmilla reads one novel after another but she never clarifies the problems” (40). Ludmilla does not want to write according to de Lauretis who believes: “She wants to remain a reader, “on principle”” (1989, p. 141). Lotaria, on the other hand, analyses and emasculates texts, both as a university student and in the role of Shila. She is more masculine than feminine and thus Muratoee’s statement cannot refer to her. However, this statement does refer to the women, within the ten incipits, who are portrayed as evil, the catalysts who all perpetuate violent acts. They do not carry them out themselves but influence the male protagonists to commit violence. In other words it is their fault, they are the reason for the men's destruction. This is a very conventional gender role for women, one that has been continually represented down the centuries.
Kathryn Hume believes women, particularly in Calvino's early works, were minimal units (1992, p. 23). She argues that a change occurred in the later works (1992 44). When compared to *Difficult Loves* the women in the ten incipits do appear to have more presence. Certainly in IWNT they are much more domineering and aggressive but it is questionable if this extends any further than some very obvious exploitation of men which is in the best tradition of patriarchy (Cranny-Francis 1992, p. 130). In an interview with Francine du Plessix Gray, Calvino stated of IWNT:

It shares something else with most of my fiction; It concerns individuals confronted by a menace which comes from a powerful collective, anonymous source of evil, individuals who have involved themselves in this danger because of the attraction of a female character. (1981, p.22)

This could be seen as a statement reflective of Jean Jacques Rousseau which can be traced in Enlightenment philosophy. If the source of evil is sexual desire, evil because it destroys man's rationality then in a heterosexual society women are the source of that evil as identified in this statement. In an analysis of fairy stories Jack Zipes states:

In the [patriarchal] male imagination it was the woman who was devious,. sinful and subversive; her sexual appetite interfered with male institutionalised relations; she was the instigator. (qtd Cranny-Francis 1992, p. 123)

This is evidenced in the named chapters. Women are evil because they have transgressed against the attributes of passivity, decreed as natural by the construction of femaleness dictated within patriarchy. Because these women usurp the masculine role they are judged by the reader as evil.

Dominatrix women abound in the ten incipits, forcing seemingly reluctant men into sexual encounters. Is this then a role reversal? or is it similar to Violante's role in *Baron in the trees* where there appeared to be on the surface a role change? As the stories are unfinished it is difficult to determine. However, these women in the main are shown to be evil temptresses determined to manipulate men in order to reach a goal, much like the witches in Fairy Stories.
Similar to the desire of the protagonist Reader for Ludmilla, as the female form, the various male narrators within the incipits perform actions in order to please/attract/gain the attention of a female. In 'Leaning from a steep slope' the unnamed convalescent male protagonist is attracted to Miss Zwida who is staying in the area. At first hesitant in addressing her, "because everyday something deters me" (1981, p. 48), the narrator at last, through a mutual interest in shells, becomes acquainted with her. She then proceeds, through his obvious desire for her, to make him an accessory in her lover's escape from prison. Ruedi, the Swiss, the male protagonist and trader in girl's flesh (1981, p. 85) in 'Looks down in the gathering shadow', desires the death of an old enemy Jo-Jo and uses Bernadette to help him. Bernadette is portrayed as promiscuous. Having been interrupted during intercourse with Jo-Jo because that is when Ruedi kills him, she forces Ruedi to service her in the car right next to Jo-Jo's body: "She sat astride my knees and almost smothered me in her bosom as in a landslide" (1981, p. 88). The inference at the end of this incipit appears to suggest that, as well as betraying Jo-Jo she also has betrayed Ruedi, for the men outside the elevator apparently waiting for them and Jo-Jo's body, know her. Ruedi, in his desire for revenge as well as his desire for Bernadette, has been betrayed by her. The role of Bernadette as promiscuous and treacherous very much reinforces the traditional structuring of the female role.

Irina, in 'Without fear of wind or vertigo', is the domineering woman controlling both Valerin and Alex, who despite being soldiers involved in a revolution, are scared of her. She "truly took possession of the two of us, and however mad the things she would drive us to do once her magic circle had closed ... imprisoned us" (1981, p. 66). It is Irina who dominates the sexual act but also death: the death of Alex the narrator who, ostensibly searching for a traitor, is named the traitor himself. Irena is thus given the position of Hecate or perhaps Medusa.
Betrayal also is reflected in "In a network of lines that intersect' where the male narrator sets up elaborate strategies to protect himself from being kidnapped by business competitors. In the end his plans are no protection from his wife Elfrida, who instigates a successful kidnapping. She states: "I knew of the danger threatening you and I managed to save you" (1981, p. 133). But save him from whom? his enemies or his current mistress Lorna who is bound on the floor in his own room of mirrors where he had been placed? Within this room, built by him to confuse assassins, he is now also lost. The only images he can see are fragments both of Elfrida's (with the gun in her hand) and Lorna's bodies which merge like "landscapes of flesh" (1981, p. 133). It is not the male body that loses identity as he now considers himself "to become the whole" (1981, p. 133). It is the female body with no subjectivity, the female body as object which betrays.

The unnamed student in 'On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon', although pursuing his tutor's daughter, is seduced by Madame Miyagi, her mother (1981, p. 164). This incipit mirrors the focus raised in Invisible Cities where the mind/body binary is problematized but where in the end the mind is still privileged over the body. This incipit again reinforces the enlightenment belief that desire is destructive, particularly as it corrupts the mind of a serious student considering, from an objective point of view, sensations when viewing ginkgo leaves, abstract thoughts which will bring knowledge to the student. While this could be seen as ironic, raising questions about abstract academic theories, at the same time, this dedicated and objective student allows himself "to be overcome by voluptuousness" (1981, p. 163) which is evidenced in female bodies. However, it is always from a scientific distance. The Cartesian ego is still in control. Of major concern to him was that both the daughter Makiko and the mother, Miyagi, would "make me pay cruelly" (1981, p. 164). So that while he had been seduced he could still "concentrate and subdivide the generic sensation of [his] sex pressed by the sex of Madame Miyagi into the compartmental sensations of individual points of me and her"
(1981, p. 164). So instead of distracting him from his study of the female body and its insatiable desire for the penis, it had in fact helped him in his project. The result was a privileging of the male mind over the woman's body which had been used as object and tool. All perceptions of these two females, the innocent, shy but sexually enticing Makiko and the sexually promiscuous Madame Miyagi were revealed by the unnamed male student as a reflection of the symbolic role of women. From one point of view the student could be seen as victim, but ultimately he became the winner while the silent women were reduced to bodies.

This incipit is pornographic, which to Angela Carter, "is a regime of representations of sex ... pornography is not generally an act but a representation" (1979, p. 11), which promotes complicity in the violation of women's own bodies and demand for sexual fulfilment. Man, however, with his superior mental capacity and knowledge is able to move beyond the body.

There has been enough written about pornography by feminists and it is not my purpose here to enter into this debate. Of more interest is the link between pornography and eroticism. Reference has already been made to the eroticism of IWNT. A parallel can be seen with 'The adventure of the bather' from Difficult Loves here. The focus there was on the woman bather's body, while here it is on the sexual act itself and the sensations roused for the narrator and by his observation of the reactions of Miyagi's body to his fingers and penis. The student states:

I conducted this delicate tactile reconnaissance not only with my fingertips but also by arranging in the most suitable fashion for my member to glide over her bosom with a grazing and encircling caress ... and since she indicated her liking and her encouragement by authoritatively guiding these routes. (1981, p. 163)

In his judgement of her reactions the narrator is also defining his own masculinity. He is standing over her, in control. Throughout Miyagi is silent, a piece of meat for his scientific examination of sensations. The student's reading of her body, of her sensations, proclaims for him a reality. As Belsey states: "Realism is plausible not
because it reflects the world, but because it is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar" (1980, p. 47). Realism reflects the symbolic world in which the gender roles are seen as naturalised. The enlightenment belief that women are sexually insatiable or, in Calvino's words, 'evil' is reflected in this story that does not examine or attempt to deconstruct gender roles. That the temptation comes from a woman is a reinforcement of the instability of emotional females.

In the fantasy, 'What story down there awaits its end', the male narrator imagines that he has the power to eliminate all things that are unpleasant to him. These can be buildings, institutions and people because "In a simplified world I have greater probabilities of meeting the few people I like to meet: Franziska, for example" (1981, p. 192). In an effort to force a different relationship with her, the male narrator commits violence by destroying everything so that his "meeting with Franziska should be even more beautiful and enjoyable" (1981, p. 194). So he deconstructs the world, not primarily, he states entirely for himself but for the good of everybody: "I believe their existence is damaging or superfluous to the harmony of the whole" (1981, p. 194). By destroying everything and everyone the harmony of the whole is enjoyed only by himself and presumably Franziska. He soon finds, however, that by this destruction he has put her in danger and, like the traditional hero, he goes to her rescue. He struggles towards her, crossing "an abyss! I leap from one side to the other, and below I see no bottom, only nothingness which continues down to infinity" (1981, p. 198). She is oblivious to all the violence committed because of her body, uncaring and greets him, requesting that he takes her for a drink. As the protagonist Reader in the numbered chapters, who sees Ludmilla's face on all readers, this protagonist takes that a step further by destroying all others who resemble Franziska, all men who might attract her. In each case women are shown to have no agency of their own, no desires other than those given to them by males, metonymically different by body structure, metaphorically the same in regards to
emotion and desire, they are presented as the catalysts who cause violence to erupt, and threaten men's rationality.

Repeatedly through all the incipits women are represented as aggressive, where the blame for masculine perdition is placed on them (Cranny-Francis 1992, p. 124). Even the silent Brigd going about her duties in the kitchen in 'Outside the town of Malbork' causes a fight between the narrator and Ponko. But in each case, while within the incipits the deconstruction of subjectivity, the questioning of the reader position, the narrator's authority, the author's complicity and the blurring of the boundary between truth and fiction occurs, nowhere are the gender roles disturbed or interrogated. They are kept in place, traditional, conservative and natural. While it could be argued that in the main the unnamed male protagonists are passive, their actions are necessary to perpetrate what occurs. They are the individuals influenced by evil forces in order to attain women's favours. They are also the voice of authority in each incipit. Looked at from this perspective where indeed is any role reversal or deconstruction of the gender metanarrative?

Whether IWNT is postmodern, metafiction or hypermetafiction really is of no concern when a consideration of the position of women in the incipits as well as the narrative within this text remain unchanged. Even though a libertarian would argue that the aggressiveness and domination signals a role reversal, an examination of the myth pertaining to the construction of the female role within Western society would reveal that this is a spurious argument, one that seeks to ensure that women are seen as destructive and who must be controlled in order for patriarchy to remain in place.
CONCLUSION

Throughout the preceding chapters I have argued that Italo Calvino's *Difficult Loves, Baron in the trees, Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller* are texts that exhibit gender blindness. The consistency of all these texts in ignoring the naturalisation of the gender roles is remarkable considering that they all problematize to a lesser or greater degree the grand narratives of the Enlightenment.

In an interview with Francine du Plessix Gray, Calvino's wife accuses him of being "macho" (1981, p. 23). Calvino replies: "The attitudes of a man have to be improved little by little in our century ...I am always trying to apologize, my entire life and work have been coloured by the crises of women" (1981, p. 23). There is little evidence to show that these crises had any real effect on the representation of women in the four novels under discussion. To a large degree, it appears to me, there is a real avoidance of confronting any sort of engagement with women and their problems of empowerment within patriarchal society. The texts, as Kathryn Hume suggests, are populated mainly by men who are trying to make sense of their world (1992, p. 46), but it is essentially a male world. Women do not have enough representation within his works to show that they are also trying to make sense of their world. Man is still the focus, while woman is there to service him and only to fulfil his desires. The universal 'he' is still utilised, in these texts, to stand for both sexes.

Having said that, progressively across the four texts there are certainly some major shifts in style and adherence to contemporary theoretical positions, which position Italo Calvino as a postmodernist writer. However, any shifts that occur in the gender roles are not sustained and are recontextualized.
The first two texts were mainly written from a realist perspective. The focus in *Difficult Loves* was on the lack of communication between the sexes in intimate personal relationships. What was exposed was a core of silence which the male attainment of desired objects (women) could not dissolve. Women were in each of the stories but mainly unnamed. They were there because of their relationship to the men but only as cut-out figures or objects of desire. While in *Baron in the trees* women may have slightly more presence, they have far less actual space devoted to them, in this novel. Again they are there only in relation to the major protagonist Cosimo and their part in the developments in his life.

A large shift occurred in the next two texts. In *Invisible Cities* women as individuals vanished entirely. Their bodies, as the ground of representation, were utilised but they reverted to shallow stereotypes or sexual images which were part of man's memory, nothing else. In the final text, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, women graduated a little, they were given names but their presence within both levels of the narrative finally revert to the same traditional roles. The women within the incipits, although named, are not all that different from the women in the stories in *Difficult Loves* although they are considerably more aggressive. Ultimately, however, their roles portray them as the evil, sexually unstable women of traditional narratives. The sisters, Ludmilla and Lotaria from the love story which is the major narrative, are more visible, particularly Ludmilla but their roles also do not change in any appreciable way.

While the postmodern problematizing of metanarratives, particularly in *Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*, come very close, at times, to revealing the construction of the gendered roles, the deconstruction halts before it extends to gender. It is this lack of extension that separates postmodernism and feminism and which makes feminist theorists state that postmodernism is gender blind. A number of feminists consider the impossibility of there ever being a union between these two schools,
because postmodernism leaves no avenue for a negotiated change to occur that would empower women or change the symbolic structuring of the gendered roles.

Postmodernism attempts to collapse dualisms, whereas feminism is more intent on examining those dualisms in order to reveal how women have been disempowered by those dualisms in order to promote change. One of the methodologies feminists use is an examination of gender roles in order to reveal the source of women’s oppression and domination by men. Criticised, because of this focus on gender by both postmodernists and some feminists as reverting to a source, i.e. ‘woman’, feminist theory has been sidelined by many postmodernist writers as inconsequential.

Once again Bordieu’s concept of habitus and Foucault’s subjugated knowledges are reflected in the stereotyping of women in some postmodernist writings such that the roles are not even considered as a metanarrative.

The focus of this dissertation has been on the lack of contestation of the gender roles in four of Italo Calvino’s texts. These particular works exhibit little change occurring in the representation of women despite their postmodern problematization of metanarratives. The feminist argument that postmodernism is gender blind is validated in these four texts.


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