



The threat

Description

“You told me you would start writing now you have time on your hands. You have plenty to write about since you came out of confinement.”

I took that as a threat. If I didn't give an account I could end up inside again. Then it dawned. My inquisitor was writing everything down.

“Do you want me to take over?” I said, “I can turn this conversation into a story for you.” He was mute, just staring at the screen of his phone, continuing to tap out this account of our meeting. Was he writing about himself?

The threat motif was borne of personal recollection. His superior warned him about overpromising, and the risk of exposure. He was a new recruit, a subordinate.

I think I was that subordinate. As he tapped out these words, he felt like erasing them. No one uses words like “subordinate.”

I doubt I could continue this story much longer. I've just read the first 35 pages of Italo Calvino's expert metafiction *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

In what I read, Calvino's character returns the novel to the bookseller as some pages were misplaced in the print run.

Mirroring the events of the story, I thought I was reading the complete novel, but the free download omitted the remaining 142 pages. I failed to recognise the artifice of my download as I read the incomplete story.

But I didn't read the text. I was listening to the actor John Rhys-Davies recite it synthetically and with feeling via a reading app.

(I'm adept at telling from context whether “read” when recited as “reed” is meant in the present or past tense, as for “live” pronounced as a verb in most auto-readers.)

If this post is metafiction, it obscures what I want to say. It also obscures that I don't know what to say. I'm resorting to reflection about process, state of mind, including confessions of self-doubt.

But why would anyone want to read a dabbler in metafiction? That's the art. To sustain interest. One trick is to keep it short. Terminate the process before boredom sets in.

This post is based on actual events. No AI was recruited in its composition or correction.

I'll reprise my post from 12 October 2013 on saying what you mean. It's about the myth of *authorial intent*.

165. [What I really meant to say](#).

Here it is, including the text above, each read by a synth voice.

Reference

- Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.

Note

- Featured image is by ChatGPT: Please generate a picture of an open book on top of a tattered suitcase with some of the pages ripped out, at a post-apocalyptic train station.
- Later on in the book, Calvino refers to the reading voice: "Listening to someone read aloud is very different from reading in silence. When you read, you can stop or skip sentences: you are the one who sets the pace. When someone else is reading, it is difficult to make your attention coincide with the tempo of his reading: the voice goes either too fast or too slow. And then, listening to someone who is translating from another language involves a fluctuation, a hesitation over the words, a margin of indecision, something vague, tentative. The text, when you are the reader, is something that is there, against which you are forced to clash; when someone translates it aloud to you, it is something that is and is not there, that you cannot manage to touch." [p.68]

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