Reading Between The Lines: Character Spaces

Part Two

Character Spaces, Wolfgang Iser and Junot Diaz's The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao – An Exegesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Matthew Hooper

School of Media and Communication
RMIT University
March, 2011
The whole of anything can never be told.

Henry James, Notebooks
Introduction

This exegesis explores a component of reading literary texts that is often forgotten. That is, the inherent ‘spaces’ that exist, in any fictional text. I will argue that these ‘spaces’, in their many forms, guises, and contexts, contain within them a fascination that is an important catalyst in the pleasurable and painful ‘feeling states’ which are often associated with reading.

In the first instance I intend to discuss selected aspects of Wolfgang Iser’s work *The Implied Reader* (1974) in which he discusses the ‘spaces’ or ‘gaps’ between sentences in literary texts. As a starting point I look at Iser’s theories about the ‘spaces’ between sentences. These theories will then be adapted in order to broaden the examination to one which analyses the ‘spaces’ between characters. In conjunction with this, and to a lesser degree, I also refer to Erich Auerbach’s discussion of ‘spaces’ in his seminal text *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953), using his subtle insights to add weight to, and provide a counterpoint to, my engagement with Iser. Both of these texts are used here with a focused purpose, which is to assist in the response to the central question examined in this research: How are spaces between literary characters created, understood, and then employed to provoke feeling states within the reader?

Before tackling the question above it will be necessary to present a working definition of ‘spaces’ in literary texts. I point out here that due to the complexity of ‘spaces’ this working definition will be rudimentary and cursory at this early stage. The nature of ‘spaces’ will be more fully articulated by this project as a whole, and via the analytical engagement with specific textual examples.

What is common to all ‘spaces’ in literary texts is that they create “indeterminacies.” This means that the text itself leaves things out and in so

---


3 *The Implied Reader*, p. 275.
doing a space, where the reader is able to ask questions which are not answered (not determined) by the text itself, presents itself. Of course the places in texts which leave things unsaid, can occur at multiple levels. They can occur within the language itself as a result of grammar, they may be related to the meaning of words, or to the juxtaposition of words and sentence constructions. They can occur at the level of narrative, as temporal, geographical, and metaphorical spaces. They can occur at a visually discernable level, as typographical spaces on the page. They can occur between chapters or ‘character parts’. The list could be extensive, and it is beyond the scope of this research to examine spaces in all their forms.

At the level of sentence ‘spaces’, may be described by a simple example. Consider the following very short story: ‘It was a cold day. We went to the store. We purchased some food’. Within these three simple sentences there are many ‘spaces’ at what may be called an ‘intranarrative’ level. That is, the spaces occur ‘within’ this narrative. Examining the spaces within the narrative of this short story we are able to consider – It was a cold day, but how cold was it? We went to the store, but who does ‘we’ refer to and how far away was the store? We purchased some food. What kind of food? How much was the food?

Another example that illustrates a ‘space’ at the level of sentences, while at the same time referring to language, its opacity or specificity, may be found in Paul Cobley’s discussion on Iser in his seminal book Narrative: A New Idiom (2001). Referring to Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and quoting Leavis and Prickett Cobley states “the continual reference [in Heart of Darkness] to ‘unspeakable rites’, ‘unspeakable secrets’, ‘monstrous passions’, ‘inconceivable mystery’, and so on” are places within Conrad’s text where there is a ‘space’ held in the ‘indeterminate’ nature of the words themselves. What does Conrad mean by ‘unspeakable secrets?’ The text itself never tells us. It alludes to something beyond itself and we are left to imagine. Cobley refers to Prickett’s views on the passages stating that for Prickett Conrad is “constantly groping after ineffable mysteries seemingly just beyond the reach of language”. What is clear in this case, whether language

---

5 The Implied Reader, p. 276.
is limited in and of itself or not, is that these non-specific words used by Conrad create a ‘space’ in his text. I discuss both these kinds of spaces (at the level of sentence and language) extensively in Chapter One referring to the opening of William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*.

The ‘spaces’ outlined above, at the level of sentence and grammar may then be compared to larger spaces – those that appear at a structural, chapter, or ‘character part’ level. These spaces are often typographical, and are often associated with temporal jumps, geographical jumps, point-of-view changes and so on. They are often evident as a ‘four-line-space’, a page break, a ‘dinkus’, or as a ‘part’ or ‘section’ in a novel. An example of these spaces are the chapter structures in novels such as William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1935); Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), Peter Carey’s *Theft: A Love Story* (2006), and Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). These spaces, as chapters or ‘character parts’, often occur in novels written from multiple perspectives. The possibility that these larger spaces may be analysed using Iser’s model for analysing spaces between sentences, and the effect these spaces have on the reading process, is the central concern of this research. It is worth mentioning briefly at this stage that these larger or ‘character part’ spaces are often connected to ‘separate’ narratives or ‘separate’ points-of-view within one novel.

Thus, there are often ‘spaces’ between narrative streams, or ‘character parts’, and these may be referred to as ‘internarrative’ spaces, because they are spaces that occur between different narratives, yet within one novel. Like the spaces between sentences, or within the language, these larger ‘character part’ spaces are often also associated with places in a narrative where a plot aspect is left in abeyance, or a plot aspect is hidden from a character yet visible to the reader; they simply occur at the level of ‘character part’ rather than at the level of sentence.

---

Spaces, in all of their forms may also be thought about as ‘omissions’ that the writer has been conscious of. It must be said, that these omissions or delays of resolution within a text are powerful ways of stimulating the imagination of the reader, thereby inviting the reader to imaginatively ‘invest’ in the fictional work. It is argued here, that in this way, spaces are an intrinsic aspect of the fascination with reading, and the pleasurable and painful ‘feeling states’ that often accompany it.

**Spaces Between Sentences and Intentional Sentence Correlatives**

In Chapter One I look at some of the components of Iser’s theory that relate to the understanding of spaces between sentences in literary novels. I discuss Iser’s use of the poles “artistic” and “esthetic” as well as heralding a discussion of the poles of “anticipation/expectation” and “frustration” used by Iser (that I discuss in Chapter Two). In Chapter One I also discuss how spaces, which, as stated, Iser also calls “indeterminacies” in literary text, are “actualized” by the reader’s imaginative engagement with them.

**Spaces Between Characters**

In Chapter Two I pick up on the ‘tone’ or ‘feel’ that Iser suggests exists *between* sentences, called “intentional sentence correlatives”, or “the world presented” by a text, and I adapt it with the aim of using it to further an understanding of the *spaces between characters*. The resulting model I have named ‘intentional character correlatives’. In Chapter Two I also briefly look at the work of Auerbach and

---

8 While it is premature to go into this concept in any depth here it is worth mentioning Iser’s reference to the concept in *The Implied Reader* and its connection to Roman Ingarden. Iser states in the *Implied Reader*: “As a starting point for a phenomenological analysis we might examine the way in which sequent sentences act upon one another. This is of especial importance in literary texts in view of the fact that they do not correspond to any objective reality outside themselves. The world presented by literary texts is constructed out of what Ingarden has called *intentionale Satzkorrelate* (intentional sentence correlatives)”. This acting of sentences upon each other at the level of implication is an important component in Iser’s conceptualisation of spaces as these ‘links’ between sentences guide the reader’s imagination in a particular way. It will be shown that this is integral in the concept of “intentional character correlatives” which is outlined below.

9 The adaptation of Iser here was influenced by Elizabeth Wright’s article ‘The Reader in Analysis’ in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds* Macmillan Education Ltd, p. 163 where Wright states: “The main element that both Iser and Jauss ignore is the affective side of reading.” She goes on to discuss that Norman
his discussion of spaces in the introduction to *Mimesis*, which is used here to deepen an understanding of what literary spaces are.

In Chapter Three the key findings of Chapter One and Two are applied to the 2008 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz. I outline and analyse the various ‘character parts’ in the opening section of Diaz’s novel, referring to spaces that occur between these narratives or the internarrative spaces. I also look at the spaces that occur within each ‘character part’ or intranarrative spaces. I analyse these spaces in much the same way as I analysed the spaces in *As I Lay Dying* in Chapter One. In this endeavour I take my lead from the presentation I make of Auerbach’s discussion of spaces in Chapter Two. I also discuss how Diaz uses spaces in his text, referring to Diaz’s own comments about this as well as a number of theorists who have discussed this issue in his work. The essential aim of Chapter Three is to demonstrate that the adaptation of Iser’s “intentional sentence correlative” model to my own theory of ‘intentional character correlatives’ may be applied to a detailed analysis of a novel written from multiple perspectives. The aim of this Chapter Three is also to illustrate just what a significant effect spaces at an internarrative level can have on the structure, aesthetic and stylistic tone of a novel.

In the Conclusion the action of ‘omitting’ written material including characters and ‘character parts’, is discussed in relation to the exegetical research, and in relation to my own novel *My Father’s Notebook*. The Conclusion also deals with the other key finding of this research, which considers the possibility of the ‘conscious sequencing’ of spaces in literary texts in order to create ‘affect’ or feeling states within the reader.

Holland in fact looked at the question “how does the text affect us?” It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with Holland’s thought in this area, as this avenue was discovered after my adaptation of Iser. It is however noted that this line of enquiry may serve as a useful follow up to the concept of “intentional sentence correlatives”. For Iser and Ingarden, literary texts present a world, constructed of “intentional sentence correlatives”.

Chapter One

Wolfgang Iser and Sentence Spaces on the Way to Character

One of Wolfgang Iser’s fundamental contributions to literary theory is his privileging of the relationship between text and reader. This concern is important here because Iser’s theories about this relationship specifically relate to the implicit spaces he claims are inherent in all literary texts.¹¹

For Iser the spaces or “indeterminacies”¹² in texts are serious and vital components that open the opportunity for the reader to participate in the production of textual meaning. He states:

The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. […] The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination.¹³

Iser supports his privileging of these spaces with an involved theoretical engagement with them. He analyses what they are, how they are constructed and how they work. His theories are in fact one of the late-twentieth century’s most pre-eminent forums when it comes to a discussion of spaces in literary texts.¹⁴

¹¹ The Implied Reader, p. 280
¹³ The Implied Reader, p. 278.
¹⁴ Albertson, David Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts, 2000. Stanford University. (http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/iser/index.html), date sighted, Sept, 2009 “Stanley Fish wrote a review of Wolfgang Iser’s work in 1981 claiming that two of Iser's books outsold every other book in literary theory that year at John Hopkins University Press, except Derrida’s Grammatology—a book, Fish added, perhaps more often purchased than read. Iser’s work continues to exert a far-reaching, if quiet influence in literary studies. Many students (and scholars), not unlike apprentices in the master artisan's studio, are scarcely aware of the existence of the influence, much less the source. And yet however quietly, Wolfgang Iser undoubtedly stands among the most prominent literary theorists of the late twentieth century (The Implied Reader, 1972) and one theoretical (The Act of Reading, 1976). These works provided a rigorous grounding for the paradigm shift of the late 1960s in Germany that redirected the attention of literary theorists from the author to the reader. Instead of asking what the text means, Iser asks
It is acknowledged here that spaces in literary texts exist on multiple levels. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with anything more than a narrow band of this field, with the focus being on spaces between ‘character parts’.

The ‘character part’ spaces, which are often an ‘actual’ space, appreciable at a visual level on the page; is central to the discussion that follows. Part of the reasons for this is that these spaces are clearly discernable and easily created during the writing process. At this typographical level it is also worth what the text does to the reader. Within a few years Iser published two books that further developed the project. (The Fictive and the Imaginary (1993), his greatest theoretical labor since The Act of Reading, expounded in a philosophical mode many of the same topics presented in Staging Politics (1993), a study of Shakespeare’s histories. "Staging," for example, is one of several anthropological categories Iser derives from the human propensity to "fictionalize".

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to link Iser’s theories on spaces with the study of semiotics, it is worth mentioning a few rudiments of that area of theoretical endeavour as some of the concepts have significant bearing on the discussion that follows. For an excellent book on semiotics and representation see Hall, Stuart (Ed.), 2003. Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. In semiotic terms the relationship between the signer and the referent is arbitrary. It is product of language. We ‘read’ an image through decoding the ‘play’ of signifiers, some of which are words and narratives. The relationship between signer and referent is not always conventional, and as well as this the relationship is predicated on social agreement or convention. Iser is very specific about this when he discusses the agreed ‘codes’ within language. Eagleton, T. 1985, Literary Theory: An Introduction. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. UK, pp. 54-127 offers a very good examination of this point in relation to reader response theories. Some terms that come to us from Roland Barthes Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices pp. 164-65 are worth pursuing for those interested in the connection between semiotics and spaces in literary texts. He states that the rhetoric of the image consists of the three elements: 1. Things in themselves, that is, non-coded iconic messages; 2. Visual signs, that communicate a visual message; 3. Linguistic signs, that create a linguistic message. Barthes argues that at the same time as we identify what is denoted, we “simultaneously” begin to read the cultural message or visual signs embedded in the image. The ‘Linguistic Message’ Barthes argues serves a two-fold purpose, anchorage and relay: Anchorage as in “anchors”, which “directs” us to preferred readings. In advertising anchorage directs us to particular readings in what was an ambiguous image with many possible readings. Relay, in which the text and image stand in complementary relation, so that the text builds on and extends what is signified by the visual signs. There are also the issues of denotation and connotation. What is denotation is what Barthes calls a “message without code”. Connotation obviously has a significant connection to spaces at a metaphorical level. At the level of signs it is also worth having a cursory understanding of the different type of signifiers, all of which effect the space around an image or linguistic structure at the interpretative level. Iconic Images - where there is a relationship of resemblance between the signer and referent. Symbol - where there is a conventional or arbitrary relationship with the referent. (A peace sign is an example of this, in that the understanding of its meaning operates through agreed convention). Index – where a causal relationship between the signer and referent. (Such as smoke and fire). There are also visual tropes, some of which work in the
mentioning again the ‘four-line’ space that is used as a section break in a text to indicate change of time, space, narrator, geographical location, etc. These spaces may be used with or without a ‘dinkus’ or an asterisk.16 ‘Chapter’ and ‘character parts’ most frequently come under this subset, especially in novels with the overt use of multiple narrators. What I would like to point to at this early stage is that spaces at these ‘character part’ or ‘chapter’ levels are very consciously chosen, created by the writer as s/he starts and finishes chapters or ‘characters parts’ (in novels written from multiple perspectives). They are points at which Iser’s theories on spaces between sentences may be directly related to spaces between characters. Thus, when considering Iser’s theories on spaces between sentences it is important to keep in mind here that those theories will be applied to the larger spaces between ‘character parts’.

For Iser there is a “convergence of the text and the reader”,17 a blurring or, rather dovetailing of the boundaries between the text and the reader’s imagination, which occurs precisely because the spaces are areas of ‘indeterminacy’ in a text. Making meaning from a text becomes an action that involves “a […] degree of co-partnership” between the text and reader. It is, in other words, “a collaboration”.18 This collaboration is enabled by spaces in the text, and spaces, according to Iser, are always part of literary texts. As Cobley says, “Iser argues that ‘indeterminacies’ constituted by gaps [or spaces] are absolutely integral to narrative”.19 This point is vital to my aim, as it gives the writer a very specific task, which is for him or her to be aware that part of the writing technique necessarily involves the management and conscious creation of spaces, or omissions within the written material. What the writer is able to do is to make choices about where and in what way to leave spaces in a text. In the first

---

16 The use of dinkus have become very prevalent in novels, and take the form of symbols such as stars, asterisks, etc. For an excellent example of a dinkus (using the symbol of a feather) see Rippin, Sally, 2011. Angel Creek, Text, Melbourne.

17 The Implied Reader, p. 274.
18 The Implied Reader, p. 275. (My italics.)
instance these conscious omissions are most easily identifiable at chapter or ‘character part’ breaks in the text. These points are usually areas where there is an overt rupture or interruption in the flow of a narrative – a jump in time, place, character, voice, etc. They are therefore sites where the reader is forced to imagine ‘into’ the narrative in order to connect the ‘two sides’ or ‘two edges’ that straddle the space. The spaces of this nature occur throughout a text, therefore an attempt to consciously make a sequence of them is worth considering. However, before considering the sequencing of spaces I refer to Iser’s referencing of Laurence Sterne’s comments on the text’s de-privileged position in his [Sterne’s] thinking in relation to spaces and the writing process:

…no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good-breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own.20

Sterne conceptualises the literary text as “something like an arena where the reader and the author participate in a “game of the imagination”.21 From this short extract we are not given a chance to understand exactly what kind of spaces Sterne is referring to. However, we do have two phrases within the quote that emphasise his position. He, as the author, does “not presume to think all”. He also says he will leave, or omit something, and in so doing give the reader a task to perform while reading. It is clear Sterne is articulating an action he, as the author, takes while writing; that is, the action of omission, the action of being conscious about the spaces in the texts he is writing.

Drawing on Sterne in The Implied Reader, Iser emphasises and indicates just how seriously he takes the role of spaces within a literary text. Not only are the creation of spaces (and at this point we are talking generally about any kind of space) very much part of the writer’s task, but their creation, as Sterne emphasises, offers the reader and the reading process a significant role in the creation of meaning inspired by a text. I would actually go so far as to say that for Iser, though he does not state it explicitly, the spaces in the text, and the

20 The Implied Reader, p. 275. (My Italics).
21 The Implied Reader, p. 275.
reader’s imaginative action they allow, are actually part of the text.22 Cobley is again clarifying on this point saying “… it is the nature of textuality that indeterminacy can never be fully abolished … a narrative will be conditioned by the fact that it will be enacted by a ‘gap-filler’”.23 I emphasise again here that while Iser is discussing the spaces between sentences the central concern of this research is the spaces between chapters or ‘character parts’. If these spaces are in fact areas where the reader is ‘part of the text’ then it is worth considering that the conscious sequencing of these spaces by the writer may be considered as a powerful technique to consider during the writing process.

Iser – The Spaces Between Sentences – As I Lay Dying

The degree to which spaces infuse a written text at the level of grammar and language (intranarrative spaces) may be demonstrated by analysing, for example, the first six lines of William Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying, a modernist novel written in 1935. The analysis of Faulkner’s text is used here specifically to engage with Iser’s theories at the intranarrative level. It is important to keep in mind that this analysis is presented here with a focused purpose. That is the presentation of a model of textual analysis that will be taken and applied to larger spaces, ‘character part’ spaces, in the chapters that follow. The opening of As I Lay Dying reads:

Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see Jewel’s frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own.24

---

22 It is important to note that Iser’s theories have their detractors. One of these worthy of mention at this point is Eagleton, Terry, 1985. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. UK, p. 81. Eagleton comparing Iser to his predecessor, Roman Ingarden, notes that “Iser is a much more liberal kind of employer, granting the reader a greater degree of co-partnership with the text: different readers are free to actualize the work in different ways, and there is no single correct interpretation which will exhaust semantic potential. But this generosity is qualified by one rigorous instruction: the reader must construct the text so as to render it internally consistent. Iser’s model of reading is fundamentally functionalist: the parts must be made to adapt coherently to the whole. Behind this arbitrary prejudice, in fact, lies the influence of Gestalt psychology, with its concern to integrate discrete perceptions into an intelligible whole. […] There is absolutely no need to suppose that works of literature either do or should constitute harmonious wholes, and many suggestive frictions and collisions of meaning must be blandly ‘processed’ by literary criticism to induce them to do so”.

24 As I Lay Dying, p. 1.
A reader can quickly appreciate a scene occupied by two characters, Jewel and Darl. The narrator of this particular section of the novel is Darl and his narration (indicated by a typographical chapter heading “DARL”) runs over pages one and two. In this opening we can see that some relatively simple sentences in fact leave out a great deal.25 The narrator refers to Darl and Jewel ‘coming up from the field’. But which field? They are in ‘single file’. But we don’t know why. Is there a dispute between them? Is the path too narrow to walk abreast? These are all spaces in the text.

As well as these ‘direct’ spaces,26 there are more subtle spaces, similar to the spaces Cobley discusses in Heart of Darkness mentioned above. The position of ‘who’ is observing the scene comes into question. Darl’s position as a present, embodied, narrator occupies the space “fifteen feet ahead” of Jewel. Then, from this narratorial position on the path, Darl adds “anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see Jewel’s frayed and broken straw hat…”27

In this observation Darl both imagines another position, and implies that he, at least partially, imagines occupying that position himself. The evidence for this is that he makes a factual observation from that position – the observation that Jewel is taller. At the moment the possibility of the perspective from the cotton house is introduced Darl becomes both a character experiencing the immediate situation, and a narrating presence able to make omniscient observations; that is, see himself and Jewel from the ‘cotton house’. The reader is invited to take up this ‘outside’, ‘exterior’ position as well, and so the reader, like Darl, is encouraged to occupy two positions, or oscillate between them. There is a narrator/character dichotomy at work here. As the novel progresses we discover that the reader is in fact encouraged to oscillate or occupy many different positions in As I Lay Dying. It is in this way the grammatical spaces in the opening lines reflect the structure of the novel as a whole.28

25 Narrative: The New Idiom, p. 136
26 For a very good discussion on the way intra-narrative spaces are articulated see Narrative: The New Idiom, p. 136.
27 As I Lay Dying, p. 1
28 A brief analysis of the early chapter structure of As I Lay Dying will illustrate this point, as the chapter structure continues in much the same way throughout the entire novel. The narrating voices in these early chapters and the page numbers connected to their
Darl’s comments about the cotton house, while they seem a natural or casual thought, coming from his own interior limited perspective, also draws his own narratorial position, and the reader’s attention, out of his body, out of his perspective, and into a more omniscient place where Darl and Jewel can be seen in one view and compared at the level of stature. The possibility of Darl occupying this position imaginatively, and his more omniscient capacity to see both characters, is further reinforced when we consider that Darl, while occupying a narratorial position only inside his body, would not be able to see Jewel who is behind him. To make the omniscient comparison he has to leave his embodied narratorial position, and take up a virtual residency in the position of the cotton house.

Between these positions there is a space. It is a space at the level of representation and subjective position. These ‘dual’ positions, and the space between them, offered to the reader, in fact held over the reader, work in the service of the novel’s general ‘feel’;²⁹ or to use Iser’s term, in the service of the novel’s ‘presented world’,³⁰ held within the “intentional sentence correlatives”. Between the words, and between the concepts and images held within the words, there are ‘links’ or implied connections, (“intentional sentence correlatives”) that are ‘beyond’ the narrative itself yet exist at the level of space in language.

²⁹ It is not strictly correct to describe this “tone” or “feel” held in the spaces between sentences in a literary text as ‘genre’, however, Iser does make reference to this ‘tone’ or ‘feel’ stating in The Implied Reader, pp. 276/277: “Sentences link up in different ways to form more complex units of meaning that reveal a very varied structure giving rise to such entities as a short story, a novel, a dialogue, a drama, a scientific theory . . .” It is important to note the ‘codes’ or conventions in literature that manufacture of a particular ‘tone’ or ‘feel’. Iser refers to this in saying “One might simplify by saying that each intentional sentence correlative opens up a particular horizon. […] The intentional correlatives disclose subtle connections which individually are less concrete than the statements, claims, observations, even though these only take on their real meaningfulness through the interaction of their contents. […] How is one to conceive the connection between the correlatives? It marks those points at which the reader is able to ‘climb aboard’ the text. He has to accept certain given perspectives, but in doing so he inevitably causes them to interact”.

³⁰ The Implied Reader, p. 275.
These connections are beyond the narrative itself because, and precisely because they are indeterminacies. The indeterminate nature of the two positions discussed here is evidenced in the text. We are not sure if the position in the cotton house is occupied. There is no definitive character there to cement that perspective. There may be someone there, there may not be. It is an ‘indeterminacy’, a space, and thus the reader is able to imagine into it freely. The nature of what the reader may possibly imagine is vast, but the reader is arguably encouraged to imagine that this space has something to do with the narrator (Darl’s) sense of the difference between himself and Jewel. It is a space that is actually and metaphorically a participant and observer of the separation between the two characters.

The space, having been pointed to by Darl’s narrating voice, is partially connected to his character, and, we feel, the observations potentially made from the cotton house, while they are not directly Darl’s observations, are nevertheless intoned with Darl’s sense of himself. Although Darl is fifteen feet ahead of Jewel, Jewel is still taller. Jewel is taller, and the narrating voice of Darl cannot forget this, even when Jewel is behind him. He takes his narratorial position to a place where he is aware of the difference between them, where he can see it in his mind’s-eye. Not only this, but the cotton house serves as a site for further juxtaposition in Darl’s and Jewel’s positions relative to each other. Further down the page, Darl as narrator describes with a wry humour how Jewel “steps in a single stride through the window”31 of the cotton house, while Darl goes around it. Jewel, having larger strides and having travelled a shorter distance ends up in front of Darl.

As stated, on a number of levels the ‘feel’ or ‘tone’ held within spaces of these opening passages, and chapters, sets up the aesthetic and structural tone of the novel as a whole. I will emphasise this point in greater detail in Chapter Three when I discuss The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Yet here, it is worth emphasising that at a structural level the space between the two positions offered by Darl’s narration helps to set up and create the novel’s aesthetic principles,

31 As I Lay Dying, p. 1.
which revolve around it being presented from the perspective of multiple narrators who are in constant opposition to each other’s positions.  

The novel’s aesthetic is set up in the first six lines by the understanding it gives the reader that the precise position of the narrator has become difficult to determine. When Alex Woloch states: “[C]ompositional unity can be threatened by our arrangement of the fictional characters within the narrative world” he could be describing Faulkner’s modernist aesthetic vision. The continually changing narratorial positions in *As I Lay Dying* do threaten compositional unity, but we understand that this is most probably deliberate. There is intranarrative space set up in the first six lines that is echoed throughout the novel at intranarrative, and internarrative level. That is, the narratorial position in *As I Lay Dying* is drifting and unstable. This space is pivotal to the novel’s narrative in which we learn that Jewel is a child born of a love affair Darl’s mother has had with the local priest. Jewel is separate and different from the other family members, whose separateness, among themselves, is also a significant theme of the novel.

If Iser was analysing *As I Lay Dying* he may say that these spaces in this novel are where the reader has to participate in making meaning in the story of the Bundren family. And Cobley, in his discussion of Iser’s theories and referring to textual analysis in general, states “…the ‘meaning’ of the text is not a forgone conclusion … the work of the reader is a necessary part of textuality…” Cobley goes on to quote Iser’s analogy of a text being like stars, the reader the agent “drawing astronomical constellations: The ‘stars’ in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable”.

---

32 For example on page one and two of Faulkner’s novel we are given the point of view of Darl, a member of the Bundren family. Darl describes coming up to the house with his brother Jewel. It seems hot, Jewel drinks from a gourd. Darl hears Cash another one of his brothers, Cash, using a wood saw. Later we learn that this sound of carpentry is Cash making a coffin for his mother who is on her death bed. On page three there is a new chapter heading and we are given the perspective of Cora (who we later discover is a neighbour of the Bundren’s). She tells us about eggs and chickens and snakes and baking and about how sick Mrs. Bundren looks, and the sound of the saw and the adze that sculpt her coffin.


34 I am not aware of any example of Iser analysing this text.

35 *Narrative: The New Idiom*, p. 137.
Of course if we continue to read Faulkner some of these questions or indeterminacies in these opening lines may be answered by other sentences. However, those sentences invariably open up other questions, present new spaces for us as the reader to imaginatively actualize, and so on. And in this way a collaborative relationship opens between the reader and the text.

The detailed analysis of the first five lines of *As I Lay Dying* is what Iser suggests many readers do at an almost unconscious level while reading. This imaginative ‘work’ is, to some degree, what makes the reading (and writing) of fiction so fascinating and is important here as it illustrates how spaces can contain within them, within what they do not articulate, a feeling or tone that underlies a novel’s overt narrative.

What I am emphasizing here is a component of Iser’s theories that focus directly on the spaces in literary texts. His models for understanding these spaces are at once simple and complex. And yet, as this research unfolds, it will be shown

---

36 Cobley, in *Narrative: A New Idiom* states, p. 137: “a narrative will be conditioned by the fact that it will be enacted by a ‘gap-filler,’ and thus each “collection of sentences” as the one above, when assembled into a fictional work, will therefore have what Iser calls an ‘implied reader’. Paul Cobley’s discussion on Iser makes the point that “It is important to be clear about this since it would be easy to imagine that an authorial intention somehow creates a particular kind of reader or reading by means of simple ‘transmission,’ through the medium of narrative, from one pole to another, from a sender to a receiver. Iser, however, insists that the signs in narrative constitute a re-presentation and that narrative, necessarily, as a result of the reader’s gap-filling activity, renders a world which cannot be analysed by reference to a belief in the unitary consciousness of an author and a reader”, p. 137.

37 Eagleton, Terry. 1985, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. UK, p. 79 emphasizes the aspect of Iser’s work stating: “The most effective literary work for Iser is one which forces the reader into a new critical awareness of his or her customary codes and expectations. The work interrogates and transforms the implicit beliefs we bring to it, 'disconfirms' our routine habits of perception and so forces us to acknowledge them for the first time for what they really are. Rather than merely reinforce habits of perception, the valuable work of literature violates or transgresses these normative ways of seeing, and so teaches us new codes for understanding’.

It is important to note that Eagleton focuses to some degree on the way all texts require at least some knowledge of ‘codes’ or signifiers. In this way the text can imply something, in short hand, to a subject who is familiar with the ‘codes’ of meaning used in particular social or fictional contexts. The spaces Iser privileges are precisely about using the knowledge of codes effectively. A code modifies the need to be explicit. The first comment made by Paul Cobley in *Narrative: The New Idiom*, p. 136, about Iser, who he discusses extensively is: “Iser argues that ‘indeterminacies’ constituted by gaps are absolutely integral to narrative”. For him, [Iser] “the literary text is defined by this condition: it is a text’s ‘indeterminacy’, the fact that it is theoretically ‘unfinished’ or only ‘partly written’ and shot through with ‘gaps’, that means the reader must ‘fill’ what is left unsaid”.

---
that the complex nature of spaces at a grammatical or sentence level (intranarrative space) may be utilized to understand spaces between ‘character parts’, or internarrative spaces. The explicit hope is that the increased understanding of spaces between ‘character parts’ may then be considered as sites the writer is able to consciously sequence, especially in novels written from multiple perspectives.

**Iser – ‘Artistic’ and ‘Esthetic’ Poles**

One way of further exploring the nature of the spaces in literary texts and what they meant for Iser, is to look at his concept that reading, as a game of the imagination, occurs between several sets of poles. The first of these sets of poles is the “artistic” and the “esthetic”. The ‘artistic’ pole is ‘the text’ itself, created by the author with its gaps. The ‘esthetic’ pole is the “realization accomplished by the reader” by “actualizing” the “indeterminacies” within the text. The admixture of these two poles produces the collaborative action resulting in meaning being bought forth from the text. In other words: the act of reading occurs between the ‘artistic’ and ‘esthetic’ poles and involves the “convergence of the text and the reader”. The reader processes the information in the text, while simultaneously interpreting the text and thus the reader is both acted upon by the text, and acting upon the text. The ‘artistic’ text offers the reader ‘patterns’ or schematized views to ‘esthetically’ respond to. These schematised views are the related components in the text, and it is their relatedness which encourage and invite the reader to imaginatively tie them together in a particular way. This action, stemming from the reader’s relationship with the text, “set[s] the work in motion”, giving the work/text its power to act.

---

38 *The Implied Reader*, p. 274.

39 Throughout this project I will spell ‘esthetic’ the way it appears in Ingarden and in Iser (1974). It is important at this point to understand as articulated by Wright, Elizabeth, ‘The Reader in Analysis’ in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds* Macmillan Education Ltd, p. 159, that Iser’s views on reading and the imagination are connected to phenomenology. As a phenomenologist Iser considered how the “mind” constructed “assumptions” about experience, including the experience of reading. This involved a “continuing adjustment of percepts [an object of perception, or consequence of that perception] and concepts. Gestalten – unities of understanding – are projected onto experience, and these are capable of endless adjustment according to the new experience that results from their employment.” (My addition in parentheses). In other words, when we experience something (perception) there are unified internal aspects of ourselves that interact with the external world. The combination of these internal concepts and the perception of the outside phenomena bring assumptions to
Iser states:

Central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure (artistic) and its recipient (esthetic). Therefore an exclusive concentration on either the author’s techniques or the reader’s psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself. This is not to deny the vital importance of each of the two poles, yet separate analysis would only be conclusive if the relationship were that of transmitter and receiver, for this would presuppose a common code, ensuing accurate communication since the message would only be travelling one way. In literary works, however, the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader ‘receives’ it by composing it. There is no common code; at best one could say that a common code may arise in the course of the process.\(^{40}\)

Iser states: that the “reader receives it [the meaning of the text] by composing it”, and this is central to his theory of reader response.\(^{41}\) For Iser there is no clear defining line between the text and the reader. This is because the ‘codes’ of communication are not ‘commonly’ held. It is up to the writer to some degree to set the codes in his or her novel.\(^{42}\) The writer’s construction of the text and conscious omission of written information at the level of character, narration, grammar, etc. has, to some degree, an influence over the reader’s imagination in each particular text.

In this way it is important not to completely over-value the reader’s imagination (esthetic) and undervalue the ‘words’ or ‘text’ (artistic). For Iser, it is in the structuring of the words into sentences that creates a specific outline or

\(^{40}\) Narrative: The New Idiom, p. 137-38. (My italics, my additions in parenthesis.)

\(^{41}\) It is beyond the scope of this project to discuss Iser’s position in the literary field as a phenomenological reader response theorist. For an excellent summary of Iser’s position in the field see Elizabeth Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991, pp. 158-167; and Ed Suleiman, R. & Crosman (I), 1980. The Reader in the Text, Princeton University Press, New Jersey; Guildford, Surrey, pp. 4-25.

\(^{42}\) Wood, James. 2009, How Fiction Works Vintage, Random House, London, pp. 93-94, points to a similar issue when he states: “I think that novels tend to fail not when the characters are not vivid or deep enough, but when the novel in question has failed to teach us how to adapt to its conventions, has failed to manage a specific hunger for its own characters, its own reality-level.” Wood goes on to say, in relation to spaces at the level of character “[E]ven the characters we think of as ‘solidly realised’ in the conventional realist sense, are less solid the longer we look at them.”
‘constellation’ for the reader to imagine into, within some limits. As I have emphasised, Iser was never reticent to use the thoughts of writers themselves in his work. Quoting Sterne and other writers connects his theories and understanding to writers and the writing process. He is continually making reference to the writer’s activity and it is for this reason that his theories are particularly relevant when, as writers, we consider how to understand and manage spaces between sentences and characters. Consistent with his focus on the writer and writing process as well as the textual product, Iser states:

In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far so we may say that boredom and over-strain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play.

This quote emphasises that for Iser the writer needs to continually keep the spaces in the texts in mind and that the reader’s engagement with the text is an engagement with far more than just the words. This seems like an obvious point, but at the same time, as writers we are seldom taught about spaces and how to construct them. An ignorance of this Iser suggests runs the risk of creating texts that either bore or strain the reader.

**Iser’s use of Virginia Woolf**

Iser quotes Virginia Woolf’s study of Jane Austen to articulate this balance between the set of poles ‘artistic’ and ‘esthetic’ very succinctly. The quote (that follows) also introduces here another set of poles Iser relates to the spaces in literary texts. That is, the set of poles ‘anticipation and disappointment’ that the

---

43 I take this point up later and it is important to note that Iser has been criticised for assuming that the text has such a controlling influence, yet his critics never entirely deny the dynamic he suggests. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with Iser’s detractors, though I do recognize their importance in the consideration of his theories. For an excellent example of a counterpoint to Iser’s essential arguments see ‘Phenomenology: Wolfgang Iser, ‘A Conversation with Wayne Booth’, in McQuillan Martin (Ed.), 2000. The Narrative Reader, Routludge, pp. 244-250; and Elizabeth Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991, pp. 158-167. Of course the nature of written language itself, with its grammatical and narrative conventions and constructions will always, and by definition, have spaces within it. However, it is vital to note here that within the parameters language itself provides there is a vast degree to which spaces in written texts may be either maximized or minimized. An extreme example of this would be to compare, for example the modernist text of Ulysses by James Joyce with a scientific manual. The one text leaves many spaces, so many in fact that it is at times difficult to follow the text, while the other text is so rigid there is very little space to imagine into.  

44 The Implied Reader, p. 274.
spaces in literary texts, considered broadly or specifically, cause in the reader. The Woolf example presented here also heralds the fact that my discussion of Iser’s theories on the inherent spaces between sentences, will be adapted and used to examine the spaces between characters. These categorizations are of course simplifications; however they do provide a continuing reminder that there exist many different types of spaces, which function on different but related levels in literary texts.

In relation to the issues of the spaces in texts and their effect on the reader, specifically how spaces separate or divide a reader’s attention, Iser quotes Virginia Woolf’s comments on the spaces in Jane Austen:

> Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, ['artistic' – the words themselves] yet is composed of something that expands the reader’s mind ['esthetic' – interpretation] and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial. *Always the stress is laid upon character* . . . the turns and twists of the dialogue keep us on the tenterhooks of suspense. Our attention is *half upon the present moment, half upon the future*. . . . Here, *indeed, in this unfinished and in the main inferior story, are the elements of Jane Austen’s greatness*.45

As Woolf outlines, one aspect of the effect of these (intranarrative) spaces on the reader, is to ‘disrupt’ or ‘rupture’ the flow of the narrative. This disruption is part of what creates the spaces in literary texts and is another important component in the adaptation of Iser’s theories on sentence spaces to a theory on character spaces that follows in Chapter Two. This rupture in the flow of the narrative will be examined in Chapter Two when I look at Iser’s concept of ‘sentence thought’ and in part of Chapter Three when the parallel narratives in Junot Diaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are analysed.

To reframe the dynamic referred to above in the Woolf quote we are able to say that the spaces in the text, which, as has been demonstrated, allow the reader to imagine, also incite the reader to make assumptions and to have expectations. These assumptions and expectations are part of the reader’s imaginative engagement with the text and are essentially imaginings about where the narrative

---

45 *The Implied Reader*, p. 276. (My italics and my additions in parentheses.)
These assumptions and expectations are driven and encouraged by the text itself, by what the sentences themselves foreshadow, by what they allude to. And this allusion or foreshadowing delivered by the sentences is, of course, partially present due to the spaces in and between the sentences.46

After offering a particular kind of space for the reader to imagine into, a text can then frustrate the reader’s imagination, when it unfolds in directions that are often surprising to the reader. Because of this the reader must continually adjust what s/he expected from the narrative. So while being a collaborator with the text in making meaning, the reader is also to some degree kept on a rein, or an imaginative leash.47 The ‘artistic’ pole of the text itself always has this paradoxical limiting and liberating function. This creates what Iser calls a “wandering viewpoint”, (where the reader is continually moving between his or her expectations about the text and the limitations that the text places upon those expectations). Clearly the example used above of As I Lay Dying and the two positions referred to there may be aligned with this point.

When I come to examine ‘character part’ spaces in Chapter Three, using my adaptation of Iser’s model of the spaces between sentences it will be shown that this structural ‘artistic’ limitation on the reader’s imagination can play a vital and very significant role on the entire tone and aesthetic nature of novels. The reason for this is that the expectation and anticipation that can be set up in a ‘character part’, as opposed to a sentence, is far greater due to the fact that an entire narrative arc can be developed within a ‘character part’. These ‘character parts’, which Woloch calls “character systems” have a functional role in a narrative.

46 We saw these spaces in operation in the analysis of As I Lay Dying in which it was shown that some of the questions that text incited were questions about what was going happen in the narrative. In that particular example the suggested, but not explicitly stated direction of part of the narrative, was a division, separation, and disjunction between Jewel and Darl.

47 There are many theorists who criticise Iser on this point, and justly it must be said. Iser’s views of the reader’s imaginative scope and engagement with the text do assume an ‘ideal’ reader and do not take into account issues such as alternate reading practices (reading in a non-linear fashion for example). Nor does Iser give much credence to issues such as the background of a reader, or historical circumstances, all of which may have some bearing on how readers engage with texts at an imaginative level. For excellent discussion on these issues see Cobléy, Paul, 2001. Narrative: the New Critical Idiom Routledge London; Eagleton, T. 1985, Literary Theory: An Introduction. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. UK; Ed Suleiman, R. & Crosman (I), 1980 The Reader in the Text, Princeton University Press, New Jersey; Guildford, Surrey; Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds Macmillan Education Ltd.
structure. The contention here is that this role may be considered in the same way Iser considers the role of sentences; and yet, it is argued here that ‘character parts’ in fact carry within them a greater opportunity for the writer to create spaces, because ‘character parts’ are more complex than sentence parts and are sites in a text where the creation of empathy is more readily possible.\(^{48}\)

\(^{48}\) The One and the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel, p. 17. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with questions such as what is a literary character? Or what is the difference between a literary character and a human character. It should be pointed out however that the basic split in literary theory between the structuralist and humanist positions in which characters are textual functions or mimetic representations of ‘real people’ is, in my opinion, successfully negotiated by Woloch by his term and explanation of characters as “character systems”. For an excellent discussion on what a character is in literary fiction that relates to the spaces around characters also, see Woloch pp. 1-41. Woloch’s comments on p. 14-15 relating to the general neglect of theories on character in literary theory, quoting, Bal, Chatman, and many others have particular relevance to this research.
Chapter Two

Iser: ‘Expectation’ and ‘Anticipation’ – The Implication of a “Presented World” between Characters

I now turn to Iser’s concept of the “world presented” in literary texts, a world whose ‘feel’, Iser argues, is created by what he calls the “intentional sentence correlatives”, or the implied correlation found in the spaces between sentences in any given literary text. In this chapter I will adapt Iser’s theory on sentences, arguing that there is an implied correlation in the spaces between ‘character parts’ or ‘chapter parts’ in any given text, especially those written from multiple perspectives.

In relation to the concept of “intentional sentence correlatives”, Iser suggests that we must examine the way in which sentences act upon each other, follow one another, and create expectation and anticipation in the reader. This aspect of Iser’s theory about spaces is one of the core elements that enabled me to consider making an adaptation of his “intentional sentence correlatives” to ‘intentional character correlatives’. The essential correlation is that characters, like sentences, act upon each other and may therefore be analysed in similar ways. The examination of the space between ‘character parts’ via the articulation of a clear

49 It is beyond the scope of this project to fully engage in literary theory’s discussion of character and definitions of literary characters. However for a cursory discussion on this subject, which includes a good summary of the history of literary theory in this area see: “Spectacle Binding: On Character in Poetics Today, pp. 228-249, which, drawing on Hamon gives a very good cursory definition of characters in literary fiction as “(a) by the way it relates to the functions it fulfils; (b) by it simple or complex integration in classed of character-types, or actants; (c) as an actant, by the way it relates to other actants within well-defined types of sequences and figures (for example “quest” or “contract”); (d) by it relation to a series of modalities (“wanting”, “knowing”); (e) by it distribution within the whole narrative; (f) by the bundle of qualities and thematic “roles” which it supports. The theoretical consequence of this definition is that, insofar as character is “a recurrent element, a permanent support of distinctive features and narrative transformations, it combines both the factors which are indispensable to the coherence and readability of any text, and the factors which are indispensable to its stylistic interest”. This then leads to a final definition of character: as “a system of rule-governed equivalences intended to ensure the readability of the text” and the question of the system of values which make a text readable is dealt with through a definition of the hero as the bearer of restrictions and combinations at the stylistic and cultural levels”. pp. 231-232.
theoretical distinction between one ‘character part’ and another, at an internarrative level, is considered here as distinctly possible using Iser’s model of “intentional sentence correlatives” and is employed here in addressing the central research question mentioned in the Introduction – *How are spaces between literary characters created, understood, and then employed to provoke feeling states within the reader?*

The ‘feel’ or ‘tone’ of the spaces between *characters* and the writing that sets this feel or tone is difficult to articulate. In the analysis of the opening to William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, I have shown that there are technical devices at the level of grammar and narratorial position that open spaces in a text at an intranarrative level. I introduced the idea that it is possible to consider this ‘feel’ or ‘tone’ between sentences as being a product of the way language and narratorial positions are used in a text. What I suggest now is that the examination of spaces between characters in this ‘invisible’ or ‘implied’ region may be tackled in a similar way.

As I now turn my attention to characters in literary fiction, or more specifically the spaces between ‘character parts’ it will be necessary to acknowledge that it is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the finer points about what literary characters are.  

Characters are defined in this instance simply as a ‘speaking position’, or a ‘voice’, that constitutes a ‘character part in a novel. It is acknowledged here that the subtleties of characters’ functions, and creation, has been explored to some degree in literary theory, yet it still remains an area that is underdeveloped. The research that follows in a small way contributes to that lack and it is worth pausing for a moment to consider what some major literary theorists say on the subject of the dearth of discussion in literary theory on issues of character. Woloch, quoting Jonathan Culler states:

> Character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating.

---

50 For a thorough and fascinating examination of characters in literary texts and an examination of their history in literary theory, as well as the way psychoanalytic and cinema theory may be combined to examine how characters are ‘sutured’ into texts see: “Spectacle Binding: On Character in Poetics Today, Vol. 7:2 pp. 227-250. For a very good discussion on the space that a central character in a narrative occupies in relation to minor characters see: *The One and the Many*, pp. 1–42.

51 *The One and the Many*, p. 14.
He goes on to quote Chatman:

It is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism.\(^{52}\)

And Rimmon-Kenan:

Whereas the study of the story’s events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not. Indeed, the elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met.\(^{53}\)

And Bal:

That no one has yet succeeded in constructing a complete and coherent theory of character is probably precisely because of this human aspect. The character is not a human being, but resembles one.\(^{54}\)

It is my contention that the adaptation of Iser in this project offers the rudiments of a new approach to the study of characters, and that narratorial constructions in the area of character(s), specifically the spaces surrounding and between characters, may be considered by writers as a way to influence the feeling states characters are able to incite in a reader. One of the reasons I believe the model to be a successful construction is because it has its structural components firmly grounded in the work of a major literary theorist. It is therefore a model built around this theorist’s (Iser’s) complex understanding of literary texts. Other approaches to this issue, while still having significant applicability, are often theories imported from diverse areas of cultural studies, and at times therefore appear to be a little out of place.\(^{55}\)

\(^{52}\) The One and the Many, p. 14.

\(^{53}\) The One and the Many, p. 14.

\(^{54}\) The One and the Many, p. 15.

\(^{55}\) I have to acknowledge that some to the concepts surrounding the construction of “intentional character correlatives” have come from the psychoanalytical concept of transference. Elizabeth Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds Macmillan Education Ltd connects Iser with psychoanalysis very successfully. One justification for employing psychoanalysis as an adjunct to Iser is that Iser wrote The Implied Reader in 1974. Iser himself drew attention to the limitations of psychoanalysis in literary theory, stating: “[F]or this purpose [how far the reading process can be described]… a phenomenological analysis recommends itself, especially since the somewhat sparse observations hitherto made of the psychology of reading tend mainly to be psychoanalytical, and so are restricted to the
An introduction to sentence thought

In order to bridge the gap between the spaces between sentences in literary texts and the spaces between characters it will firstly be necessary to consider Iser’s theories on “sentence thought”. As is illustrated in the Virginia Woolf quote, Iser conceptualized sentences as playing two closely related, interdependent roles. Sentences direct the reader’s attention and imagination forward. They refer to something beyond themselves. This is because in and of themselves sentences, as components of the larger tapestry of narrative, are always incomplete. Yet, as well as providing space for the reader to imagine into, sentences also contribute to creating a bounded space, so the scope of the reader’s imagination is always guided to some degree. The spaces belong to the reader; however, as stated illustration of predetermined ideas concerning the unconscious. (Iser, 276). It is important to note here that Iser’s comments regarding psychoanalysis were made in 1974. Psychoanalytic theory and the conceptualizations around its central concept in analytic theory, transference, have changed a great deal. Sigmund Freud’s invention of the concept of transference (c. 1906-10), cited by Dorpat, Theo, and Michael Miller, 1992. Clinical Interaction and the Analysis of Meaning: A New Psychoanalytic Theory, London, The Analytic Press, p. 227, is a phenomenon whose rudiments deal with the mistaking of one person for another, in an analytic situation, introduce some fascinating, if complicated, insights about the subjective perception of reality. It is quite possible and in fact in perfect keeping with the material sought out by psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners to extend subjective perception of reality to the reality of the literary text. In considering the gaps between characters I originally attempted to combine the psychoanalytic concept of transference to Iser’s theory of “intentional sentence correlatives”. The psychoanalytic concept of transference, and it’s dependence on theories of identification, lends itself beautifully to a discussion of gaps between literary characters, however, while this avenue of research may be beneficial in another forum my attempt to marry psychoanalytic theory with Iser’s theories became problematic, as the conceptual realms involved, and the analysis of these conceptual realms, became overly complicated. Transference is, in many respects, about the analysis of the space between two people, its origins, and its ‘affect’. This ‘behavioural code’ in transference is very much like the “world presented”, that Iser points to as existing in literature, in the gaps between sentences. Transference, like spaces in literary texts is not something that is explicit in the language that surrounds its manifestation. Yet, to discuss the spaces between characters in the way I desired I hoped for and aimed for a simpler, more accessible model, which I believe I have found in the model of “intentional character correlatives”. For fascinating discussions on psychoanalysis, transference, and transference and literature see Frow, John 1986, “Spectacle Binding: On Character in Poetics Today, Vol. 7:2 pp. 227-250; Fuss, Diana Identification Papers, 1995 Routledge London, NY, pp. 1-19; Joseph, Betty, 1985. “Transference: The Total Situation”, in The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 66: 447 – 454; Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds Macmillan Education Ltd, pp. 158-167. Elizabeth Wright takes issue with Iser for his dismissal of psychoanalysis in this way, stating: “Iser is not interested in the unconscious at all”. (Wright 1991: 166). At the time Iser wrote The Implied Reader, 1974, he rightly refers to the lack of material on the psychology of reading. He refers to the psychoanalytic approach that privileges the unconscious.
above s/he does not have carte blanche. His or her imaginative engagement with the work must be continually modified in response to the ‘data’ that unfolds via the words themselves, which at one and the same time provide an opportunity or a space to imagine into while they simultaneously put a boundary around that space. In relation to inciting the reader’s imagination, Iser states that:

[In] their capacity as statements, observations, purveyors of information, etc., they [sentences] are always indicators of something that is to come, \textit{the structure of which is foreshadowed by their specific content}… [T]he sentence does not consist solely of a statement – which, after all, would be absurd, as one can only make statements about things that exist – but aims at something beyond what it actually says”. 56

Thus, sentences perform actions, on the reader, which create, within him or her, anticipation and expectation. The \textit{possibility of this exists} because, and only because, there are spaces between the sentences. A reader is afforded the opportunity to imagine into and about that which has been “foreshadowed”, but not explicitly stated, while at the same time having his or her imagination kept in check by the fictional ‘facts’ the text presents page after page. This is a simple but key point, worthy of emphasising again. There must be spaces between the sentences for any foreshadowing to occur, and the spaces may not be overly extensive – the reader must be able to follow the logical flow of the writing.

When this concept is applied to the spaces between characters, instead of sentences, we see very clearly that issues regarded from the position of the writer – such as plotting, characters in action, and the internal psychological states of the characters (to mention a few) – are almost always alluding to something beyond themselves and that this is almost always related to the spaces that surround characters.

We are able to see, then, that there are many parallels between the ways in which characters and sentences may be thought about and conceptualised in literary texts. In Iser’s discussion on sentences what the sentences foreshadow and allude to is counterbalanced, and in fact caused, by their lack of capacity to give a ‘full’ picture. The same is true of ‘character parts’. All character descriptions in

56 \textit{The Implied Reader}, p. 275 (My italics).
literary texts are necessarily lacking. It is impossible to fully describe any character.\footnote{In \textit{The One and the Many}, p. 7, Woloch’s mention of Auerbach’s summation of literary character is worthy of consideration here in that it both heralds the later discussion on Auerbach and indicates a central paradox at the centre of literary character, that is, literary characters are often both necessarily lacking, while seeming to be complete: “In one of the most important twentieth-century theories of characterization (before the question of character […] drops out of literary theory), Erich Auerbach argues that Dante transformed the nature of the literary character by making his fictional figures into the fusion of the particular and the essential, the transient and the permanent. The rich particularity of Dante’s characters somehow erupts out of their atemporal destinies: the figures in the \textit{Inferno} […] exist in a static world where time has essentially stopped, but are still paradoxically recognizable as their own secular, contingent selves. Auerbach further suggests that Homeric characterization—which seizing on the essential characteristics of specific and varied individuals—anticipates the way Dante will construct persons as both delimited and unique and complete”.

Having established that there were spaces between ‘character parts’ in literary texts, and having established that they may be literally seen on the page when there are chapter breaks or spaces represented typographically, and having established that they could be considered by adapting Iser’s theory on the spaces between sentences, it was then almost natural to consider, as a writer, what the next step was in relation to the central research question of this project – \textit{How are spaces between literary characters created, understood, and then employed to provoke feeling states within the reader?} I began to consider an approach to characters in my own writing that could be implemented at the level of consciously structuring, or sequencing the spaces and thereafter considering them at the level of an emotional subplot.

I began to consider that just as the sentences and the spaces between them in any given fictional text work together and work upon one another in sequences, ‘linking up’ via their indeterminancies, so do ‘character parts’ work together in the same way to make up the more anthropomorphic sized spaces that are part of a novel. These connections could perhaps be understood as underlying the individual content of the ‘character parts’ themselves. The underlying ‘tone’ or ‘feel’ between ‘character parts’ are the ‘intentional character correlatives’ and are conceptualised here as those spaces in a text where the felt nature of a relationship between ‘character parts’ is evident at the level of implication.
The Key Correlation Between Sentences and Character Parts

A central aspect of Iser’s “phenomenological analysis” is his examination of “...the ways in which sequent sentences act upon one another”59 This acting of different (sentence) components of the text upon one another is intrinsically tied to the spaces between the sentences and is key to the analysis of the spaces between characters. At the level of the sentence this concept can be summed up by looking at a component of Iser’s work that draws its inspiration from his predecessor Roman Ingarden. From Ingarden, Iser inherits the concept that “the work presented in literary texts is constructed out of intentionale Satzkorrelate (intentional sentence correlatives): Iser’s conceptualization of sentences states:

Sentences link up in different ways to form more complex units of meaning that reveal a very varied structure giving rise to such entities as a short story, a novel, a dialogue, a drama, a scientific theory... In the final analysis, there arises a particular world, with component parts determined in this way or that, and with all the variations that may occur within these parts – all this as a purely intentional correlative of a complex of sentences. If this complex finally forms a literary work, I call the whole sum of sequent intentional sentence correlatives the ‘world presented’ in the work.60

These intentional correlatives that exist between the sentences “disclose subtle connections” that are quiet, indistinct, and cannot be concretely objectified or observed. Yet, these intentional correlatives give the real meaning to the more concrete aspects of the sentences or ‘character parts’ themselves. Thus, the ‘world presented’ by a literary text is constructed by sentences or parts, but these are not “the sum total of the text itself”. It is through their interaction that “their common aim is fulfilled”; and, their interaction is intimately connected to the reader’s imagination, because, to a large degree it is the combination of the

58 It is beyond the scope of this project to discuss Iser’s position in the line of phenomenological theorists. For an excellent discussion on this subject see Literary Theory: An Introduction, pp. 54-90. Also see “The Reader in Analysis” in Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds, pp. 158-168. It is worth mentioning at this point to emphasise Iser’s importance in the field again, that, according to Wright: “Wolfgang Iser uses a phenomenological approach in order to answer the question how a reader processes a text.” Wright goes onto say: “There was no theoretical concept of reading before phenomenology.” p. 159 (My italics).
59 The Implied Reader, p. 276.
reader’s imagination and the “intentional sentence corollaries” that, for Iser, brings the work to life.61 In the example from *As I Lay Dying* it was shown that there was an emotional ‘tone’ or ‘feel’ of separation between Darl and Jewel that while only partially articulated in the language was certainly present in the narratorial position, the grammatical constructions, and was later reflected in the structuring of that novel as a whole.

When Iser says there is a common aim being fulfilled by the interacting of sentences, which show subtle connections, he is referring to these implied aspects of the text. This is exactly what led me to consider adapting Iser’s theories to character. Characters in literary fiction are almost invariably interdependent. This interrelatedness of characters, and the space between them is summed up by Woloch in his discussion on characters:

> In each instance, the character’s referential personality—the unique sense and abiding impression that the character leaves us with—emerges in-and-through, not despite, his textual position and the descriptive configuration that flows out from this position. [...] the way [...] narrative progresses always entails a series of choices: each moment magnifies some characters while turning away from—and thus diminishing or even stinting—others. Such a process runs implicitly through any number of narratives and occasionally breaks out to the surface of the fiction itself.62

Characters’ aims and functions almost always require of them that they interact with other characters. And at the same time characters are, like sentences, by definition, always adumbrations or sketches. Their coming to life in words always involves elements of unarticulated space or aspects of themselves that a writer may not or cannot explain. As the Woloch quote also points out, these unarticulated spaces are created by the foregrounding of one character or ‘character part’, and the recession of another. This foregrounding of one character and the subsequent recession of another character, and the point at which it occurs in the text, almost invariably creates a space in the text. These spaces are very much associated with an ‘interruption’ of one character’s part, and change in point-of-view, in the narration to another character’s part. It is worth comparing this interruption in ‘character parts’ (that will be discussed extensively

---

61 *The Implied Reader*, p. 276, 277.
62 *The One and The Many*, p.12.
in Chapter Three) with Iser’s concept of the interruption of sentence thought. This aspect of Iser’s theory is essential to the concept of ‘intentional character correlates’ as it connects to anticipation and expectation that are essential to the structuring and positioning of character parts in novels. Of this interruption to sentence thought Iser states:

Once we are immersed in the flow of Satzdenken (sentence thought), we are ready, after completing the thought of one sentence, to think out the ‘continuation,’ also in the form of a sentence – and that is, in the form of a sentence that connects up with the sentence we have just thought through. In this way the process of reading goes effortlessly forward. But if by chance the following sentence has no tangible connection whatever with the sentence we have just thought through, there then comes a blockage in the stream of thought. This hiatus is linked with a more or less active surprise, or with indignation. [I have used the word frustration in relation to this aspect of Iser’s thought]. This blockage must be overcome if the reading is to flow once more.\(^{63}\)

This is similar to the concepts raised in the Virginia Woolf quote. The anticipation set up by a sentence is not always fulfilled. Nor is it the case that the reader is necessarily exasperated if that anticipation is not fulfilled. In fact the ‘frustration’ of the reader’s expectations are part of the “game of the imagination” that makes the reading process fascinating and pleasurable. Iser says “…literary texts are full of unexpected twists and turns, and frustrations of expectations”. There is no story, no matter how simple that does not have some kind of blockage, “if only because no tale can ever be told in its entirety…. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism”.\(^{64}\)

**Iser and The Construction of Literary Texts**

The ‘personality’ of literary characters or ‘character parts’ at a structural level, like at a sentence level, and the way they change at regular intervals (especially in texts written from multiple perspectives) almost invariably requires of the reader that s/he has his or her ‘character thought’ interrupted. When the flow of a story is interrupted, openings occur that the reader often does not anticipate and in this

\(^{63}\) The Implied Reader, p. 279. (My italics.) Iser goes on to point out that the “hiatus” that blocks the flow of sentences” is for Ingarden a chance occurrence. Ingarden with his “adherence to the classical idea of art”, sees these blockages as flaws. But, for Iser sentences are not necessarily an easy and flowing progression one to the next.

\(^{64}\) The Implied Reader, p. 279.
way the reader is often led in unexpected directions. At these points in texts the reader is gifted the chance to enjoy and play with his or her own “faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself”. The spaces are, to some degree, a result of the indeterminate nature of the text that invite the reader, to “shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations” in the text. Then what occurs, according to Iser, is that these gaps “take on a reality of their own”. This collaboration the reader has with the text and its spaces thus “endows it [the text] with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own”, because the reader’s imagination is working at connecting what the spaces imply at both an individual and collective level.

The most significant point here, coming from Iser and the adaptation of his work, is that the writer may develop an awareness of how and when to consciously use spaces in order to manipulate the feel of the text, its narrative drive and its plotting. I have already mentioned that the spaces between characters and the links between them will be considered in the later chapters of this project at the level of an underlying emotional sequence or sub-plot. Yet, firstly, I will turn my attention to the work of Auerbach and his discussion of the spaces between two literary texts. Auerbach’s thought and close-analysis of texts serves two functions at this time. It provides a very succinct example of how spaces work at an inter-narrative or grammatical level, and sets up a template for the analysis of the literary text under review in Chapter Three, Junot Diaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

---

65 *The Implied Reader*, p. 279-80. (My italics.)
66 *The Implied Reader*, p. 276.
Auerbach as a Contradistinction to Iser - example I

Auerbach compares two texts in his seminal book *Mimesis*. The comparison is made between the Homeric poems and the “so called Elohist”. Put very simply, Auerbach argues the Homeric poems are texts with very few spaces while the Elohist writings, he argues, have many. To use Iser’s terms, Auerbach suggests that the Homeric poems are texts that use the ‘artistic’ to limit the possibility of the ‘esthetic’. In almost complete contradistinction to the views of a writer such as Laurence Sterne, Auerbach suggests that Homer allows the reader’s imagination little if any compliment, or space. Auerbach begins with a chapter entitled “Odysseus’ Scar” where he recounts in detail a scene from book 19 in which “Odysseus has at last come home”.

Auerbach illustrates his point about Homer’s ‘telling everything’ by discussing the issue of the “retarding element” in Homer’s poetry and contrasting it with more modern conceptualizations of suspense. Auerbach refers to a “whole series of verses which interrupt” the meticulous descriptions of Odysseus’ feet being washed by Euryclea. In this foot washing process, Euryclea, Odysseus’ “old house keeper recognizes” Odysseus (who is trying to hide his identity). She recognizes him by a scar on his foot sustained in a boyhood accident. As Odysseus’ feet are washed by Euryclea the two have a private interaction, in which Odysseus enforces Euryclea’s silence. This private interaction occurs as a kind of parallel narrative, which diverts the reader’s attention from the main narrative.

The present-tense descriptions of Odysseus’ return after a long absence, is put in abeyance by descriptions of how Odysseus got the scar as a youth. However, Auerbach argues, this device used by Homer is not employed to create suspense, or to ‘foreshadow’, or to create ‘expectation’ and ‘anticipation’ in the reader. To emphasise his position on the interpretation of Homer, Auerbach refers to letters exchanged between Goethe and Schiller in April of 1797 in which they discuss the “retarding element […] in the Homeric poems in general”. Auerbach states “the “retarding element”, the “going back and forth” (from one narrative to its

67 Elo · hist (eˈlɔ ˈhist, e ˈloʊˈ-) noun, the unknown author of those parts of the Hebrew scriptures in which the name Elohim, instead of Yahweh (Jehovah), is used for God.
68 Mimesis, p. 3.
parallel counterpart narrative) by means of episodes, seems to me, too, in the Homeric poems, to be opposed to any tensional and suspense striving toward a goal…”

Auerbach is suggesting something present in Homer that is almost absent of spaces: a different aesthetic, a different literary sensibility. The concept of keeping the reader’s imagination busy as Stern and even Virginia Woolf encourage in Iser’s estimation, is almost an anathema. Leaving the reader something to imagine is not what Homer is about. The reader’s imaginative involvement with the text, his or her expectation incited by suspense, or the idea of sentences referring to ‘something beyond themselves’ is not present. What Homer gives us instead is “simply the quiet existence and operation of things in accordance with their natures”.

Auerbach pushes this point even further claiming the Homeric text was not “directed by aesthetic considerations” but “in the need of the Homeric style to leave nothing which it mentions in half darkness and unexternalized”, or, in other words, there are no spaces. Describing the scene of Odysseus’s return and the washing of the scarred feet Auerbach states:

All this is scrupulously externalized and narrated in leisurely fashion. The two women express their feelings in copious direct discourse. Feelings though they are, with only a slight admixture of the most general considerations upon human destiny, the syntactical connection between part and part is perfectly clear, no contour is blurred. There is also room and time for orderly, perfectly well-articulated, uniformly illuminated descriptions of implements, ministrations, and gestures…Clearly outlined, brightly and uniformly illuminated, men and things stand out in a realm where everything is visible; and not less clear—wholly expressed, orderly even in ardor—are the feelings and thoughts of the persons involved.

Auerbach continues, “all is narrated, again with such complete externalization of all the elements of the story and of their interconnections as to leave nothing in obscurity”.

And again on the same theme:

---

69 *Mimesis*, p. 5.
70 *Mimesis*, p. 5.
71 *Mimesis*, p. 5.
72 *Mimesis*, p. 3.
73 *Mimesis*, p. 5.
...the basic impulse of the Homeric style: to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations. Nor do psychological processes receive any other treatment: here too nothing must remain hidden and unexpressed.\footnote{Mimesis, p. 6. Auerbach’s reference and earlier part of quote from Homer.}

What is illustrated in Auerbach’s example is the exact inverse of what Iser refers to as spaces. In a text with spaces all is not narrated, there are not complete externalisations of all the elements of the story, there are obscurities, undetermined components, and many things are hidden and unexpressed, especially psychological processes. This is the entire point. The reader’s imagination is given latitude, given freedom to engage with the text. \textit{The reader’s imagination is in fact part of the text, at the level of collaboration.}\footnote{Mimesis, p. 8.} Auerbach’s use of the Homeric poems as a text essentially devoid of room for the reader in the way we are discussing here provides a vital counterpoint to Iser, and illustrates, by inverse example, what Iser means by spaces in a text.

\textbf{Auerbach as a Support to Iser – Example II}

I would now like to turn to Auerbach again and look at his comparative discussion of the texts of the Elohist. Unlike Homer, Auerbach suggests the authors of the Elohist left many ‘indeterminacies’ within the text. To illustrate this he used the example of Abraham and Isaac from the King James version of Genesis 22:1:

\begin{quote}
And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! and he said, Behold, here I am.\footnote{Mimesis, p. 6. Auerbach’s reference and earlier part of quote from Homer.}
\end{quote}

Auerbach analyses this passage as I analysed \textit{As I Lay Dying} above, albeit in a more sophisticated fashion stating:
Where are the two speakers? We are not told. The reader, however, knows they are not normally to be found together in one place on earth, that one of them, God, in order to speak to Abraham, must come from somewhere, must enter the earthly realm from some unknown heights or depths. Whence does he come, whence does he call to Abraham? We are not told… Nor are we told anything of his reasons for tempting Abraham so terribly… nor have the deliberations in his own heart been presented to us; unexpected and mysterious, he enters the scene…

Auerbach goes on to describe the way the story itself unfolds. I quote his analysis in full here as this perspective provides a clear expression of the spaces that may be left in a text by the omission of detail. This point becomes vital in Chapter Three where I consider how the elements between ‘character parts’ may be omitted in the same way as in the Auerbach example of the Elohist texts:

In this atmosphere it is unthinkable that an implement, a landscape through which the travellers passed, the serving-men, or the ass, should be described, that their origin or descent or material or appearance or usefulness should be set forth in terms of praise; they do not even admit an adjective: they are serving-men, ass, wood, and knife, and nothing else, without an epithet; they are there to serve the end which God has commended; what in other respects they were, are, or will be, remains in darkness. […] But any such subjectivistic-perspectivistic procedure, creating a foreground and background, resulting in the present lying open to the depths of the past, is entirely foreign to the Homeric style; the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present…

Thus the journey is like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent, a holding of the breath, a process which has present, which is inserted, like a blank duration, between what has passed and what lies ahead, and which is yet measured: three days!

Auerbach’s analysis of these texts alerted my attention to the distinction between intra-narrative spaces and structural or ‘character part’ spaces. Yet even with his analysis of spaces held within the narrative, in Homer and in Genesis, Auerbach’s examples and analysis of them illustrates very succinctly that intra-narrative

---

77 *Mimesis*, p. 8. It’s worth noting that Auerbach considers the possible objections to his analysis vis a vis the Jewish concept of God. He replies to these objections by stating in his view: “The concept of god held by the Jews is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things”.

78 *Mimesis*, p. 7.

79 *Mimesis*, p. 10.
spaces are in many ways defined and created via the conscious omission of written material or explanation.

**Point-of-View and Character/Character Spaces**

In Auerbach’s analysis of the Elohist texts, and in my own analysis of *As I Lay Dying*, and the analysis of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* that follows in Chapter Three, the position or point-of-view that the reader is able to occupy is unstable. The lack of one omniscient narrator changes the reading experience. Characters’ opinions and actions, and indeed the very sound of their voices, are called into question. Their perspectives are made to appear potentially unreliable. Their points-of-view are very clearly distinctly subjective in relation to the broader narrative they play parts in. Therefore, while acknowledging that experiencing different points-of-view within a narrative means to be given ‘more information’, or a ‘broader’ perspective, it seems that it also has the effect of destabilizing the reader as s/he continually shifts from one perspective to the next.\(^8\)

What follows in Chapter Three is an application of the understandings I have gained to the literary text of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. As stated, I want to add to Iser, adapting “intentional sentence correlatives” to my own concept of ‘intentional character correlatives’. With reference to specific examples in the text I illustrate in Chapter Three that in *Oscar Wao* there are spaces at the level of sentence, narrative, and grammar, as well as spaces at the more macro level of ‘character parts’. I illustrate with reference to *Oscar Wao* that

---

\(^8\) Thinking about character parts in my own novel in the light of the findings presented above allowed me to question the way that text was constructed on a number of levels. How long did I allow one character to hold the stage before absenting himself or herself? When did I put the characters together in dialogue and when did I allow them soliloquy-type parts? Did the next character’s part need to follow on the narrative, or could it be about something completely different? How different did the next character’s voice have to be? If it was different was the next character’s voice too discordant in either form or content? Was it not discordant or distinct enough? Should I put character A’s part directly after that of character B? Or, should I put a character C’s part between them? Should I jump directly from red to blue; should I blend red into blue with a mauve central area; should I delineate the two with a black line (a chapter heading)? The questions that kept challenging me were all to do with the spaces between the characters. I resolved therefore that I would have to develop a better understanding of spaces in literary texts. Iser’s theories on the spaces between sentences have been an integral part of my capacity to articulate an approach to the spaces between characters.
the more anthropomorphised-sized gaps potentially play a significant part in the way readers will respond to that text. I argue these larger spaces offer a closer connection with how the reader really relates to a text, due to the ‘affect’ present in the reader while engaged with literary characters, a factor Iser largely ignores.\footnote{For an interesting discussion on ‘affect’ and Iser see Wright in Donald, James (Ed.) 1991. \textit{Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds} Macmillan Education Ltd., p. 163.}

I also discuss that these spaces may be examined at the level of their sequence in \textit{Oscar Wao}.

At the level of character the world presented \textit{in the spaces} in \textit{Oscar Wao} is a psychological world. It is the third entity that exists \textit{between} characters. There \textit{are}, I have found, spaces between characters, there are ruptures, created by their interaction, by their voices, by their difference, by the characters’ ‘characters’. These spaces create and intone, the psychological “world presented” in that novel and a writer’s awareness of this world in his or her own work is, I argue, essential.
Christ have mercy on all sleeping things!
From that dog rotting down Wrightson Road
to when I was a dog on these streets;
if loving these islands must be my load,
out of corruption my soul takes wings,
But they had started to poison my soul
with their big house, big car, big-time bobbobl,
coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole,
so I leave it for them and their carnival —
I taking a sea-bath, I gone down the road.
I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
a rusty bead sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.
I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.

Derek Walcott
Chapter Three: Character Spaces in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

In this chapter I will analyse Junot Diaz’s novel, *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, discussing how spaces between the ‘character parts’ or narrative streams in that novel are readily discernable and have a palpable effect on the novel’s style and aesthetic tone. I examine how these spaces and their sequencing work in balancing the complex subject matter in the novel and I demonstrate how these spaces work to imbue *Oscar Wao* with added emotional content, while creating textual and narrative contrast, additional narrative drive, and suspense.

**Walcott Proem, Prologue, Footnotes, Part I, Chapter One – pp. 1-18**

Due the complexity of *Oscar Wao*, and the complexity of reading spaces between characters, or ‘character parts’ within it, I will limit my analysis of the text to the first chapter of the novel. I will focus specifically on the space between Oscar’s past and present selves; the prologue; and the unusual use of footnotes (that play a significant role in this first section of the novel). I will also discuss, in some

---

82 Celayo, Armando, and Shook, David, March-April 2008. “In darkness we meet: a conversation with Junot Diaz” in *World Literature Today* Number 82, Volume 2, p 3. quote Diaz in saying that he purposefully “was trying to see how far I could push English to the edge of disintegration, but still be, for the large part, entirely coherent. In other words, could I make the unintelligibility gap for any one reader as wide as I could, but still have it hold together, still be able to communicate the experience?” This point is worth comparing to the point quoted in Chapter Two on page 20 in which Iser discusses the importance of boundaries in a text being a balance between boring the reader with too few spaces and over-straining him or her with too many spaces in a text.

83 From this point forward *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* will be referred to as *Oscar Wao*, and its main protagonist referred to as Oscar Wao.

84 In *Oscar Wao* Diaz uses a significant number of footnotes to great effect. These play a significant role throughout the entire novel. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with more than the first 18 pages of the text in detail. In the prologue (pp. 1-7) there are 150 lines of regular text. Taking up a significant proportion of the available white space on the pages there are 50 lines of footnotes. In the first part of Chapter One over 8 pages, there are 250 lines of text and 20 lines of footnotes. Yet this is not a reflection of how extensive the footnotes in *Oscar Wao* are. In parts three to five of Chapter Three (pp. 89-113) there are approximately 630 lines of regular text and over 100 lines of footnotes.
detail, the poem by Derek Walcott that acts as a proem to the novel. These opening sections make up pages 1-18, and, just as I argued with As I Lay Dying, it will be shown that within these opening pages Oscar Wao’s structure and aesthetic tone is set and defined.

The ensemble of voices occurring so early in the text allows us to understand that Oscar Wao will be a text delivered via many narrative streams, narratorial positions, or as I call them here, ‘character parts’. In relation to the aims of this project and in addressing the central research question – How are spaces between literary characters created, understood, and then employed to provoke feeling states within the reader? – such a text is ideal for a close reading. Diaz, I argue, is the most interesting contemporary example I have encountered so far of a literary text that uses spaces between characters (or ‘character parts’) that require ‘actualizing’ by the reader. There are several reasons for this that are the subject of this Chapter. In saying this of Diaz, I realize that many other texts could be analysed in this fashion. For example William Falkner’s As I Lay Dying (1935); Milan Kundera’s The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1984); Barbara Kingsolver’s The Poison Wood Bible (1998); and Peter Carey’s Theft: A Love Story (2006), to name a few. Clearly I have to limit my endeavour, but Diaz, in my estimation offers a wonderful example in Oscar Wao.

85 This proem by Walcott will be discussed in detail later. The poem is important for a number of reasons. Firstly it firmly links Oscar Wao to: Diaz, J, 1996. Drown, Faber and Faber, Chatham, Kent. At the beginning of Drown, (a collection of short stories) the poem by Gustavo Perez Firmat reads: The fact that / I am writing to you / in English / already falsifies what I / wanted to tell you. / My subject:/ how to explain to you that I / don’t belong / to English / though I belong nowhere else. The sentiments reflected by Perex are echoed very strongly in the Walcott proem. This poem is a complex statement; a critique of Empire and colonialism and its affects on people’s identity, language and freedom. And, all of these themes are strongly prevalent in Oscar Wao. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with the serious political issues Diaz raises in Oscar Wao and Drown and I am unaware of any study in this area in the case of Oscar Wao. It is also worth noting that the narrator of Oscar Wao is a character from Drown named Yunior. It is also beyond the scope of this project to fully engage with this narrating voice/character, and his links to Drown however it will be mentioned from time to time in the footnotes.

86 Danticat, Edwidge, 2007. “Junot Diaz”, in Bomb, Issue 101, (Fall), p, 1, refers to Oscar Wao as “epic, not only in its historical rendering or heartbreaking violence, of a cross-generational, exiled family, but in its language: a courageous patios from the streets of New Jersey, via the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, flying right up and into the face—and the canon—of great literature”. This overt reference to the novel’s fragmented nature, and different components signals, implicitly, that there are spaces within the novel, between the components, and that is the focus of this Chapter.
Four Elements

In the opening pages of Oscar Wao the four elements mentioned above are specific in both content and style. They are different narrative streams or ‘character parts’ with distinct voices, and as such they work together from different angles to articulate, separate and splice the main themes of the novel. The ‘parts’ of Oscar Wao selected and their essential themes are: (a) The story contained in the footnotes (the political history of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic from 1930-1961); (b) Oscar’s ‘past’ story (his childhood, which is continually juxtaposed against his lesser present self); (c) the story of the “Fuku” curse contained in the prologue (the curse born in the slave trade coming out of Africa in the 17th and 18th Centuries); and, (d) the story contained in the Walcott poem which acts as a proem for the novel (the story of Sabine, a post-colonial subject partially defined by the language of his oppressors).  

The glue that holds these narrative streams together is arguably the character of Oscar. He is the site upon which these elements project themselves, manifest and mingle. Or, in other words the ‘character parts’ are stories that surround Oscar while having a very significant implied effect upon him. Oscar’s centrality in the text, delivered by the title of the novel itself, and the first chapter, heralds his connection with these ‘character parts’. Oscar’s character becomes all the more significant, too, because it is firmly placed within an atavistic and historical context. And yet, the structure of the novel also decentralises and destabilises Oscar’s character at the same time. Oscar is a ‘product’ more than an ‘occurrence’. And it is these external circumstances that largely define his life, character, identity, and eventual death; while at the same time having their emotional accessibility enhanced by Oscar’s relationship to them. The traumas and pain associated with Oscar’s family’s past and the spaces created by the

---

87 It is interesting to note that Diaz uses a fifth element as an epigraph to the novel, a short quote from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, 1966. Fantastic Four, Vol. I, No. 49, a popular American children’s book. It states: “Of what import are brief, nameless lives . . . to Galactus?” It is beyond the scope of this research to engage with this but it is dealt with thoroughly in Hanna, Monica, 2010. "Reassembling the Fragments": Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Diaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”, in Callaloo, Volume 33, Number 2, (Spring 2010), p. 499.
narrative’s articulation of these are succinctly summed up by Monica Hanna in her article "Reassembling the Fragments" when she states the narrator of Oscar Wao:

…attempts to uncover both the story of the family and the history of the nation, he [narrator] is continually confronted with silences, gaps, and "páginas en blanco" left by the Trujillo regime. [The narrator] often explicitly rejects the possibility of recovering an original, whole story because so much of the history he wishes to recover has been violently suppressed and shrouded in silence. 88

As Hanna points out, the relationship between Oscar and his past and the narrator’s capacity to articulate it involves space. Oscar’s character is, initially at least, set at an arm’s length from these other elements. The space between Oscar and the Walcott poem, between Oscar and the prologue, between Oscar and the footnotes – allows the novel to deliver its message via his story; and, in turn allows his story to remain vital and interesting while being played out next to some very significant events and themes without being totally subsumed by them.

The Prologue

The first thing we read when we open Oscar Wao (after the Walcott poem) is the prologue; and it is immediately disturbing. It is all the more disturbing because on page two of this prologue there appears a slab of footnotes with a different tone and content but which addresses the same difficult, horrific subject matter. While the footnotes are instructive, quoting ‘historical facts’ about the Dominican Republic’s oppressive past, the prologue is speculative and unsure. It speaks of “Demons”, and “… the Curse and Doom of the New World”. The prologue is about magical curses and “the screams of the enslaved” that accompany Dominican history. It is about “the Admiral”, and about the Antilles, about Europeans in Hispaniola, and the curse they bought with them. The prologue is about what the narrator calls “[O]ur then dictator-for-real life Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina”, who was “one of the twentieth century’s most infamous dictators” ruling “the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961

88 “Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”, p. 498
with an implacable ruthless brutality”. If we are wondering how brutal the Trujillo dictatorship was we do not have to wonder long. The narrator tells us in the footnotes that “Trujillo was Mobutu before Mobutu was Mobutu”. And in this way the ‘character parts’ or narrative streams of the prologue and the footnotes have space between them. This is an internarrative space and I argue that its presence is vitally important as it allows these two ‘character parts’ to work on the reader separately.

Within the prologue there are also many colloquialisms. Like the footnotes it is also a history lesson, but not one as rigorous as the footnotes seem to be. The prologue speaks of the assassination of JFK in terms of the “fuku” curse. It calls JFK “cap’n”, his killers are “dudes”, (used pejoratively). There is also the use of direct first person. The narrator states: “Let me your humble Watcher, reveal once and for all the God’s Honest Truth…” The tone, content, and narrative style are very different from that of the footnotes. This difference, as well as the structural separation, creates a palpable space between the ‘character’, or ‘voice’, of the prologue and that of the footnotes. The opening lines of the prologue read:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was the demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles.

There is a lyricism about this language that is less present in the rest of the novel, including the footnotes. This lyricism at once reminds us of the Walcott proem (which precedes the prologue and contrasts with the more matter of fact language in the footnotes) and contrasts as well with the more immediate story of Oscar told in chapter one. In other words the prologue, the footnotes, the Walcott poem, and the main text of chapter one all have a definitive narrating

---

90 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 3.
91 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 3.
92 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 4.
93 The Taínos were the people who inhabited the Bahamas, Greater Antilles, and the northern Lesser Antilles before Christopher Columbus.
voice or character. The novel’s structure is designed in such a way that it links or correlates these different ‘character parts’, while at the same time maintaining their separateness.

On a structural level the prologue’s second page has 21 lines of footnotes. This is mirrored in the novel when on its second page we find 19 lines of footnotes. Thus, structurally, at a narrative and language level, the novel, and the prologue, and the footnotes, while different in tone and content are strongly interrelated. They are narrative parts and between them are internarrative spaces. There is both a structural and narrative ‘bridge’ or ‘link’ between all these components of the novel. The story in the prologue, and Oscar’s story in Chapter One literally occur on top of the footnotes’ story. Their closeness, and their separation are visually discernable on the page at a typographical level. This structural composition convincingly links the different parts of this first section of the novel, because it is mirrored, on page two of the prologue and the novel proper.

The prologue also sets up the space between Oscar and the rest of the novel. Oscar’s character is mentioned on page one in the prologue. Yet he appears in parentheses. The line that involves Oscar’s character in the prologue reads Santo Domingo is “(what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World)”. Oscar is literally ‘held’, on a narrative and structural level, inside his family’s country of origin and its traumas, by his name and his first sentiments being uttered and represented in parentheses. His existence and story is necessarily, ineffably bracketed, bookended, by what surrounds him and his family. Oscar is spliced with Santo Domingo, and it seems this connection means he is doomed. The phrase “at the end” tells us that and the ‘bracketing’ of his character makes his character secondary to some degree. His character is

Danticat, Edwidge, 2007. “Junot Diaz”, in Bomb, Issue 101, (Fall 2007), p. 6, in an interview with Diaz, discusses the breadth of Oscar Wao in the deeply painful themes that all the components of the novel deal with. He states: “Both Fanon and Glissant discuss the use of language as a manifestation of different types of pains, personal and communal traumas. Glissant talks in his particular context about delire verbale, verbal delirium. This book [Oscar Wao] is epic in so many ways, with a canvas as broad as the Americas and beyond. […] The range of experience and characters are simply breathtaking. […] Like Oscar you needed your personal pantheon to tell this huge story”. In this project the deeply painful and traumatic places Diaz’s takes the reader to in Oscar Wao have not been fully explored, but Danticat’s article is worth looking at in relation to these themes in Oscar Wao.
surrounded by something far more serious than the story of his fat, unconfident, bumbling self. If we want to know how serious the Dominican situation is we don’t have to wonder for long. Diaz tells us “Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq.”

**The Footnotes**

Arguably, the most significant ‘character part’ in *Oscar Wao*, that in many ways contributes to the sense that Oscar’s struggle is not just with himself, but external forces, is the narrating stream or ‘character part’ of the footnotes. They articulate the same disturbing story that was presented in the prologue, but in a different voice, a smaller font, and in a ‘secondary’ position on the page. The distinct tone and content of the footnotes, as well as their typographical position, is both instructive and authoritative, differentiating it from the Walcott poem and the prologue. While the prologue’s tone was lyrical, almost superstitious and nebulous in its reference to time, the footnotes are down to earth and almost angry in their confidence:

> For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: Trujillo, one of the twentieth century’s most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961.

Both at a structural and at a narrative level we immediately understand these footnotes are very significant. They begin to tell a dramatic story, and they will...

---

96 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 34.
97 As stated, it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss the narrator of *Oscar Wao* in detail. It is however important to mention that the narrating voice, who overtly names himself on p. 4 as “your humble Watcher, and who narrates Part III (p. 311) in the first person is also present in prologue, the footnotes, and the main text at the level of narrative style.
98 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 2.
99 It is interesting to note Hanna’s comments about the footnotes in “Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Diaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”, p. 502, where she makes reference to the historical ignorance many people have about Dominican history. One of Diaz’s main points in this novel seems to be a desire to alert the reader to this. Of these early footnotes Hanna states: “This footnote, which goes on to describe several idiosyncratic features of Trujillo’s biography, indicates many key elements of the story. First, there is the prefacing of historical "facts" of Dominican history with the assertion that this history is not well known. Second, there is the assumption that the "mandatory two seconds of Dominican history" would necessarily include a discussion of Trujillo. The "you" invokes the reader's complicity in the historical ignorance surrounding Dominican history..."
back up (just as they do in the academic texts they remind us of) the more lyrical, poetic, and colloquial main body of text, which has told the story in the prologue, and which tells the story of Oscar’s character when chapter one begins. We understand that Oscar’s story will be made up of these components, and in the case of the footnotes especially we are encouraged or almost forced into making imaginative connections between Oscar’s story and its relationship to the story told in the footnotes. In other words we as readers are encouraged to imagine into these internarrative spaces. And what is the work our imagination has to perform? We can believe that the “screams of the enslaved” which refer to the slave trade of the seventeenth century connect to “one of the twentieth century’s most infamous dictators”. Yet as readers we are also invited to make the connection between these and a novel entitled *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which tells the story of an under-confident, sexually frustrated teenager. How will Oscar’s story sit next to such horrors without being subsumed by them? These are potentially the imaginative leaps the narrator is asking the reader to make. These are the “intentional character correlatives”.

What makes our engagement with the text fascinating is that our imagination will, in some ways, be guided by Diaz’s text, and yet it will also be allowed enough space to have its functioning remain not overly inhibited. This is true of all novels, yet what is definitive in *Oscar Wao* is that the spaces, the different ‘character parts’, are clearly definable as separate, at a narratorial, tonal, structural and typographic level. In relation to this point Hanna states of Diaz that:

…he includes the reader in this process of reconstruction; there is much that is explicitly left up to the reader’s interpretation. This is another strategic move on the narrator's part; by emphasizing the constructed nature of all histories and narratives in general, the narrative compels readers to examine the power structures behind the act of telling.\(^{100}\)

The text of *Oscar Wao* creates a space around the “nature of all histories” that make an inquiry into the ways these histories are represented almost inevitable. We begin to wonder who Oscar is, and how his story is able to bring out so much from not only the interior of his history and soul, but from our own as we read. In many cases *Oscar Wao* will affect us very deeply because Oscar’s

---

\(^{100}\) “Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz’s ‘The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao’”, p. 500.
suffering, while it initially seems like the normal angst of an under-confident teenager, is shown to be connected to his ancestral history. The lineage of suffering and abuse is handed down to him, and its affect on him is palpable in his current life. The contention here, is that what incites such emotionally ‘affected’ reactions to this text, are the spaces between the narrative streams/‘character parts’, or characters mentioned. Diaz never directly states that Oscar is a product of political oppression and we understand very clearly that Oscar Wao would be an entirely different story if, for example, the content of the footnotes was elevated and spliced into the main text. At best the juxtaposition would be similar to a film such as Pan’s Labyrinth (2006)\(^\text{101}\) in which two narratives play out in almost separate dimensions. Part of the success of Oscar Wao is that Oscar’s teenage angst is not subsumed by the stories of political horror that surround it; quite the reverse. Diaz somehow has us believe that the narrative stream of Oscar’s girl troubles is equally important to (while being interconnected with) the narrative stream of the political oppression represented in the novel in the footnotes, the prologue and the Walcott poem. It is precisely because we believe him that all the narrative streams, which are separated by the internarrative space between them, enhance each other adding significant emotional impact to the novel.

**Oscar’s Childhood and Language – Internarrative Spaces I**

From the beginning\(^\text{102}\) Oscar Wao’s character is ‘thrown forward’ from the outside. That is, the initial descriptions of Oscar are delivered as though Diaz is sculpting, adumbrating this fictional personage via a process of ‘carving away’; a process of articulating the ‘negative space’ around Oscar, who is defined at this early stage both by what he is not, and what he used to be. In this way Oscar is immediately set against the possibility of interpretation. The narrator’s, the reader’s, even Oscar’s own capacity to understand who he is must be deferred. The opening line of the first chapter,\(^\text{103}\) states:

\(^{101}\) *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Guillermo del Toro.

\(^{102}\) Chapter One, Part One (pp. 11-19).

\(^{103}\) The first chapter is entitled “GettoNerd at the End of the World 1974 – 1987),
Our hero was not one of those Dominican cats everybody’s always going on about—he wasn’t no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero, not a playboy with a million hots\textsuperscript{104} on his jock.\textsuperscript{105}

The phrase “[O]ur hero” seems to be a self-reflexive nod from the narrator to the reader about his main protagonist. It places Oscar at a ‘once-removed’ level from the narrator’s voice.\textsuperscript{106} The ‘feel’ of this phrase is reminiscent of a fairy-tale or comic book genre, and somehow we get the feeling that Oscar is in the wings, listening, along with the reader to his own narrator. The sense that Oscar is listening is perhaps because Diaz himself seems to be implicated in and aligned to Oscar’s character on one level. We know Diaz is Dominican like Oscar. Oscar also has a love and knowledge of sci-fi, which is referenced so frequently and in such assured tones in the text of Oscar Wao it is believable that his narrator and author have a love and knowledge of this genre too.

The space opened around Oscar, in relation to his narrator, does not stop there. Oscar cannot be adequately described in English.\textsuperscript{107} The clearly bilingual narrator needs to use both Spanish and English to describe Oscar adequately. This splitting or bifurcation within the modes of representation that are attached to Oscar again seem to be deliberate tropes used by Diaz. They emphasise that within Oscar’s narrative (at an intranarrative level) Oscar’s character, as a fictional construct, is not, and never will be a ‘whole’, ‘bounded’ entity. It may be that what Diaz suggests by the structural and narrative-level fragmentation of Oscar’s character is similar to what he expressed in with the Firmat poem used at the beginning of Drown, (quoted in full on p. 43, footnote 85), which concludes:

\textsuperscript{104}This reference to ‘hots’ echoes the reference to “fucking every hot girl in sight” on p. 2 that was used to describe Trujillo’s relations with women, discussed earlier.
\textsuperscript{105} The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{106} This reference to ‘our hero’ could be said to tie Oscar Wao in to an 18th Century style of writing about the protagonist subtly acknowledging the presence of an implied reader. In this novel the narrator seems to distances himself from the initial narratorial position and from his main protagonist.
\textsuperscript{107} This is where the Perez and Walcott poems really hit home in relation to Diaz’s work. His characters who are colonized subjects are both empowered and oppressed by the fact that they express themselves in English. The narrator of Oscar Wao, Yunior, is possibly Diaz, there is an implication of this (though any definitive stance on this matter is difficult to hold to from what is revealed in the text) and while he writes in English, the heavy use of Spanish in the text of Oscar Wao clearly communicates a split in this narrator at the level and language and identity.
In the opening section of Oscar Wao there is a list of the things that Oscar is not. The negatives, coupled with the Spanish language in the text, doubly emphasise the space around Oscar’s character. He is neither a “home-run hitter”, nor a “fly backatero”, nor a “playboy”. Diaz does not stop at nouns. He also tells us, that other than in “one early period” Oscar “never had much luck with the females.” In only seven lines Oscar’s character is set up as definable, at least in the first instance, by the space around and outside of himself; by all the things he is not, and the things he can never be due to the political oppression that has affected his family and its place in influencing the language available to describe him. Oscar’s character is a hero. His hero status is the only definitive thing he has, yet we will soon discover that even this is an irony. His status as a hero rests against his racial background, and thus, as a hero he is split between English and Spanish. He is a hero who is from the first moment a cat, feline, mysterious; immediately, colloquially articulated and difficult to access.

The narrator is almost asking himself – How can this Oscar character be so at odds with his nationality, his family, his past? There are reasons for Oscar’s alienation. Diaz has set them up in the Walcott poem, in the prologue, and the footnotes. The narrator is profoundly aware why Oscar is like he is. He reveals it to us in the first 18 pages. Oscar is like he is because of the oppression suffered by forebears. Oscar is like he is due to his cultural and historical context. Yet the narrator helps the reader by opening some “intentional character correlatives” around Oscar. The ‘space’ between this Oscar and the oppression mentioned leaves a ‘tone’ around Oscar’s character, too. The contention here is that the use of this ‘space’ at an internarrative level also allows Oscar’s character some freedom. Because Oscar’s narrative stream or ‘character part’ is kept separate from the narrative streams of the political oppression that occupies such a large portion of the novel, he is actually more accessible as a character. He is not

---

109 The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 16.
smothered by his family’s past at the level of narrative, only at the level of structure.

Oscar’s past (his childhood) and its contrast to his present is another kind of ‘space’ present in this text. While the footnotes and the main text are separated at the level of structure (that is, there is an internarrative space between them), the story of Oscar’s past self and its contradistinction to his present self are separated at the level of narrative (that is, they are an intranarrative space). There is a tinge of sadness about Oscar, which is all the more poignant because it revolves around how his life has changed for the worse. The space between Oscar’s past and present is associated with a personal unhappiness that takes the tone of the novel away from the serious subject matter contained in the prologue and footnotes. In this way the intranarrative space between Oscar’s present self and past self, it maybe argued, creates a feeling state in the reader that is related to the sense of ‘loss of youth’, or ‘loss of confidence’ at a personal level. I suggest here that this ‘tone’ held within the space between Oscar’s past and present selves draws the reader close to Oscar’s character at an empathetic level. The reader knows, because of the Walcott poem, the prologue, and the footnotes that Oscar’s past self has been partly lost due to his ancestors’ subjection to political oppression, yet these elements do not overshadow the immediate story of Oscar as an overweight, under confident teenager. Of course we can not help but wonder if Oscar’s lost past self is, at a symbolic level, like the loss his ancestors suffered at the hands of their oppressors. There is the strong implication (that later in the novel becomes overt) that like his ancestors, Oscar’s past has been taken from him. Yet because Oscar’s story has space around it, because his ancestors suffering is kept at an arm’s length from his story, that story becomes all the more poignant as the reader is able to imaginatively construct its causes to a large degree.

**Oscar and Language II**

As English speakers and readers we are led and educated by the text of *Oscar Wao* to accept that, despite his omniscient position, the narrator is still unsure of Oscar. What the narrator reveals to the reader is that Oscar is *not* many things, including not being a “fly bachatero.” In this Anglo-Spanish phrase the reader is exposed
to another kind of intranarrative space that is related to the intranarrative space between Oscar’s past and present selves. Oscar’s past and present selves are split at a temporal level. Then, in addition to this there is the space at the level of language that is used to describe Oscar. Both Oscar and the narrator are split, bound to both languages, alienated from both languages.

When Spanish is used to describe Oscar, the English-speaking, mono-lingual reader is thrown into the liminal zone of ‘not-knowing’. For these readers the question – what is a bachatero? presents itself. The reading experience is interrupted by this space. Fly bachatero is not a phrase all readers will understand. And, at the same time, any attempts to ‘actualize’ the words are held in by its context. It is clear the phrase is something to do with Oscar not being a “playboy with a million hots on his jock”. In Spanish ‘bachatero’ is a reveller, a carouser. Yet what is a ‘fly-carouser?’ This phrase is not in the dictionary. This indeterminacy is complete. We are in the Spanish realm. Is Oscar not a Spanish fly? The phrase, as well as what Oscar is, are inaccessible (at least temporarily) to readers without Spanish, and Diaz knows this. It is part of his aim and he states it explicitly in a number of instances:

What I always felt from learning English and my language acquisition experience was that unintelligibility is an absolute bedrock component of language. I always felt intimately, I was always comfortable with it—that there was always going to be a part of language that I wouldn’t understand. You always get these fucking critics talking

---

110 While this point continues to be important, it is recognized here that this issue is perhaps more relevant in Australia than in the United States where there are nearly 40 million Spanish speakers who make up close to twenty percent of the population. In an interview with Céspedes, Diógenes and Torres-Saillant, Silvio, 2000, “Fiction is the Poor Man’s Cinema”: An Interview with Junot Díaz.” in Callaloo Volume 23, Number 3, p. 904, Diaz makes explicit reference to the use of Spanish in the novel stating: “...for me, allowing Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotation marks was very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why denormalize it? By keeping the Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the fluidity of languages, the mutability of languages. And also to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English.” This article is an excellent reference for anyone interested in the issues of language at a Post Colonial level in relation to Diaz’s work; as is Ch’ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming Weird English, 2004. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London England.: Harvard University Press; and Torres, Lourdes. 2007. “In the Contact Zone: Code-switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers”, in Melus, Vol. 32, Number 1 (Spring 2007).
about it, but I always felt it, I always knew there was part of language that I would never understand. And there was going to be a part of my speech act that someone wasn’t going to understand. There was never this myth of perfect communication.\textsuperscript{111}

We will see that for Diaz language is about spaces to a significant degree. Not least the spaces between characters, not least the spaces between elements of language at an English-Spanish level. The characters’ and the reader’s and even the narrator’s capacity to understand that language will always be filled with spaces, is demonstrated in the novel’s structure and in the novel’s grammar. The spaces within the novel at an inter and intranarrative level all contribute the feeling states the novel incites in the reader, as the reader is able to empathise with the novel on multiple levels distinctly, without having the different narrative streams or ‘character parts’ pollute each other too significantly.

\textbf{Walcott}\textsuperscript{112}

The Walcott poem at the beginning of Oscar Wao is first narrative in a multifaceted text with multiple narrative streams. There is an internarrative space between the Walcott poem and the prologue, between the Walcott poem and Chapter One. There are spaces between the Walcott poem and the main text, and the footnotes. The Walcott poem is however a separate isolated ‘character part’ or small narrative stream in that, obviously, it was not authored by Diaz.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Weird English}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{112} Hanna makes reference to the juxtaposition of different ‘character parts’ in "Reassembling the Fragments": Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz’s \textit{The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao}, pp. 499-500, comparing the Walcott extract with the \textit{Fantastic Four} stating, “The Walcott poem presents a speaker who sees himself as a representative figure of the nation, as his biography contains the elements of the nation’s entire history. Even his language is particular to this history. This epigraph’s tone is expansive, presenting an all-inclusive vision that embraces the disparate elements of Caribbean history. The pairing of these two epigraphs [Walcott and the quote from the \textit{Fantastic Four}] is indicative. Díaz’s novel here creates connections between two apparently distinct sources—one from United States pop culture and one from contemporary Caribbean literary production. This alerts the reader to the fact that the story to follow will draw on quite different sources, creating a pastiche that attempts to capture the Caribbean diasporic experience. The two epigraphs also address the question of the relationship between the individual and the collective, with the Fantastic Four quote suggesting a natural antipathy between power and lived "ordinary" experiences while the Walcott poem suggests the intimate relationship between official history and the experiences of a nation’s citizens”. p, 499-500.
What I argue here, however is that the Walcott poem relates directly at the level of ‘intentional character correlative’ to the way the reader experiences Oscar and his plight. I have already mentioned the spaces between Oscar’s past and present selves. These spaces relate to the history and political oppression suffered by Oscar’s family. These issues are heralded in the Walcott narrative, which relates the story of Shabine and his identity struggles in the face of colonialism. Shabine is relating the difference between his past and present selves. His identity and its formation he tells us is related to language and culture and colonial influenced relocation. Shabine is describing a loss, and my contention here is that that loss relates, through an internarrative space to the loss Oscar has suffered; that is, the loss of his past self.

The narrator tells us that Oscar, in “those blessed days of his youth, [He] was seven then”, was something other than what he is now. “[In] those long-ago seventies days, before Washington Heights was Washington Heights” relatives “would howl as” Oscar “and a girl approximated the hip-motism of the adults”.113 But those days are lost. Oscar is thirteen, and he is in trouble. His character as I have stated is steeped in an atavistically infused suffering. His loss of his former confident self will in fact lead to his death, and this is a tragedy at a narrative level. However, at a fictional, symbolic level, I believe Oscar’s troubled life and death within the narrative are mitigated and in fact redeemed because of the Walcott poem that precedes the novel. I contend that this poem and its significance to the narrative of Oscar Wao cannot be underestimated. In the poem Diaz, via Walcott, introduces a narratorial voice of significant confidence, lyricism, and poetical political comment. The echoes of Shabine’s voice resonate in and through the entire novel in my view and in a strange way my sense is that Shabine, presented by Diaz in this significant way is in fact like Diaz himself. Diaz who was, we are led to believe, almost certainly like Oscar, has with this novel Oscar Wao, risen from Oscar’s ashes. The strength of Diaz’s position, and I believe Oscar’s family, and via implication Diaz’s family biography to some degree is told in the closing three lines of the Walcott poem:

I have a sound colonial education,  
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,  
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.

113 The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 12.
This narratorial position is both consistent and inconsistent with Oscar. It is consistent in that it heralds Oscar’s suffering vis-à-vis his environment.\textsuperscript{114} Yet Walcott’s narrator, the character Shabine, is vastly more self-assured than Oscar. Oscar, introduced as a child, is almost a younger version of Shabine, yet one who did not make it. Shabine’s phrases and voice are strong and seasoned. Shabine sings mid-way through the poem:

\ldots out of corruption my soul take wings,  
But they had started to poison my soul  
with their big house, big car, big-time bobbohl,  
coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole,  
so I leave it for them and their carnival—  
I taking a sea-bath, I gone down the road.

In the act of placing Walcott, Diaz aligns his narrator with this level of maturity, with this level of poetical sophistication. Shabine’s voice is angry, steadfast, bold and “expansive”.\textsuperscript{115} It is a nineteen-line poem occupying a page to itself.\textsuperscript{116} Walcott’s voice stands by Diaz, an invisible (and an ultimately discarded) crutch. With Walcott Diaz gives the narrator of \textit{Oscar Wao} the authority to speak. He lets us the reader, know that this narrator, who will describe the flabby tragedy of Oscar, is also a narrator who has survived what Oscar has not.

If we were unsure the Walcott proem was about how a colonial subject growing up in a dictatorship was to find his English speaking identity destabilising; if we were unsure \textit{The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao} would be steeped in these themes, by the time we get to page 18 of the main text we are left in no doubt. This novel will be about how political oppression sculpts the characters of those under it, and it will be about that on an internarrative and intranarrative level.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} As stated, Diaz will consistently carve his pages in two with slabs of footnotes that tell the reader about the brutal history of the Dominican political system.
\textsuperscript{115} “Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz’s \textit{The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao}”, p. 500.
\textsuperscript{116} This poem at the beginning of \textit{Oscar Wao} – cannot be ignored. In it Diaz is saying – ‘Even as I present you with Oscar – a character riddled with self doubt, doomed, fat, hopelessly inept in almost every field other than that of sci-fi fantasy; even if I hint at the same time that Oscar is autobiographical, it is no longer like that. Oscar is dead. Shabine has risen from his ashes.’
\textsuperscript{117} The footnotes themselves are literally the story ‘under’ Oscar’s story, they are what his story sits on, on the page, literally, as though they were a small-font iron scaffold, or foundation. For another fascinating example of this technique, used
Santo Domingo is the land where Oscar’s relatives grew up; the land he will return to in the second half of the novel; the land where he will die a brutal death at a young age. It is the original place of the curse Diaz names “Fuku”, the place of oppression and dictatorship. But Shabine stands at a distance from the turmoil that will destroy Oscar. He is a character soaked in the same family history as Oscar’s family, yet he relates his part with the voice of one who, unlike Oscar, has survived. Shabine, says:

I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
a rusty bead sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.

He describes the ‘fall’ of his homeland to colonial, Empirical “bohbohl”. Immediately, and just like Oscar, Shabine’s identity is sutured into the environment, into the dark oppressive forces that he has witnessed and been poisoned by. He is tied, like Oscar, into what he sees and what has occurred in his homeland. The two are inseparable. Yet unlike Oscar, as stated, he has survived to tell the tale:

Christ have mercy on all sleeping things!
From that dog rotting…
to when I was a dog on these streets

The narrator Shabine is irretrievably spliced into, and bitterly implicated, while being simultaneously formed, by his experience as a colonized subject. He observes, and yet at the same time is, or was, a rotting dog, which is also unavoidably a comment on the rotten nature of his homeland under its colonizing oppressors. Sabine’s past and the past of his homeland are idealized, just as Oscar’s past is idealized. The narrator in Walcott’s poem has a capacity to criticise and articulate the problems he feels; yet only in and (paradoxically) through the very language tools of his “colonial education”.

This deeply problematic identity/character position is nothing new to post-colonial narratorial positions like Diaz’s and many preceding him. What I am differently where three separate narratives run one on top of the other on every page see Coetzee, J. M, 2007. *The Diary of a Bad Year*, Text publishing, Melbourne.
pointing to here though is that the intrinsically swinging, unstable, internally contradictory ‘characters parts’ or components (narrative streams) in Diaz’s work (which must be read against and next to this Walcott poem) provide good models for understanding the spaces an author is able to place between his characters in order to sequence affect through and beneath a novel’s narrative; sequence affect, existing there as a kind of emotional sub-plot. This is achieved in Diaz’s Oscar Wao because his characters are alienated from themselves, torn, divided from whom they actually are. Their alienation is caused by the oppressive political system under which these characters, or their ancestors live, or have lived. It is caused by larger structures that have paradoxically empowered and disempowered them at the same time. Their alienation from the other ‘characters parts’ or narrative streams is, at a structural level, the space around them. Yet I caution my reader – this is not a post-colonial analysis. What I am interested in are the spaces between characters and how an author is able to utilize them in order to write more powerful fiction. In Diaz’s work, to a large extent, these spaces are created by reference to characters whose identities are born within politically oppressive environments. The point here is not the politics but the spaces.

Internarrative Spaces II

The Walcott poem creates an interesting juxtaposition if we consider Oscar’s ‘typical teenage concerns’. Oscar’s teenage angst allows Diaz to deliver Oscar’s very serious and dramatic story in the tones reminiscent of a chatty, vibrant, goofy, coming-of-age, YA novel. The narrative and structural space between Oscar and the footnotes, between Oscar and the Walcott poem and the other ‘character parts’ mean the ‘general’ political background in the Dominican Republic, and its relationship to the ‘specific’ life of Oscar Wao are kept separate, while being clearly understood as deeply entwined. We believe Oscar’s trouble with girls. We believe the humble Watcher narrator when he says it was: “Ana

118 If we are unsure just how serious Diaz is about his political oppression we can read his comment in “Junot Diaz”, in Bomb, p. 10, where in an interview with Edwidge Danticat he recounts a poem by Carolyn Forche, “where the poet goes to dinner at the dictator’s house. After dinner, he spills a bag of human ears on the table while saying something like This is for your poetry. This dictator was trying to take away the power he knew this writer had by attempting to stun her into silence. On p. 10 of the same interview Diaz recounts how his father, who worked at the ‘cuartel’ (prison), once locked him into a cell that would have been used by Trujillo to torture people.
Obregon, a pretty, loudmouthed gordita who read Henry Miller while she should have been learning to wrestle logic problems’ who aroused Oscar’s teenage desires. We believe also that “On about their fifth class he [Oscar] noticed her reading Sexus and she noticed him noticing, and, leaning over, she showed him a passage and he got an erection like a motherfucker”.

Yet, in close proximity to the above passage we also believe our humble Watcher (the narrator) when he describes the murderous dictator of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo, in the language of Oscar’s loved science fiction, while not for an instant flinching at the seriousness of his crimes:

He was our own Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up. Famous for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS in the Dominican Republic to honor himself … 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community; one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere…

This description of the dictator Trujillo emphasises the deadly serious past Oscar’s family have been subjected to. It emphasises the past Shabine has been subjected to. And yet, the ‘character part’ or narrative stream of the Walcott poem, the footnotes, the main text, Oscar’s past, etc. paradoxically serve to keep Oscar’s present story isolated just enough it to remain totally interesting in and of itself.

Parallel Narratives and The Sequencing of Spaces I

The presentation of parallel narratives, the juxtaposition between the main text and the footnotes, the mixing of literary genres is summed up by Hanna, who states of the novel’s structure:

The result is a form that incorporates superhero comics, magical realism, and noir, among other genres, as well as conventional historical narration and the use of multiple narrative perspectives.

---

119 The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 34.
120 The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 2.
The history lessons about the Dominican Republic’s history, the close focus attention on teenage hormones and their effects, and the family conflicts are all melded together within these different literary styles, and within the different narrative streams that make up the novel. The effect is at once entertaining, unsettling, and at the same time profoundly destabilizing. How does Diaz manage this? I argue he manages it with his use of spaces between the ‘character parts’ or narratives streams.

These spaces serve the novel on a number of levels. As stated they not only keep Oscar and his teenage angst at arm’s length from the horrors associated with violent dictatorships, they are also placed in such a way that they disrupt what Iser calls “the flow of sentence thought” in the respective narratives held in the footnotes, and the main text, in the first chapter, etc. I argue here that the spaces are used by Diaz on a number of levels. I have already discussed and shown how the spaces serve to keep Oscar’s story separate from political horrors and how this makes his story easier to digest, and the story of the political horrors stand out more significantly. Now I suggest that these spaces are also used at a structural level by Diaz to create “expectation” and “anticipation”. This is a classic writing device – the switch from one narrative strand to another at key unresolved times to keep the reader hooked into the respective narratives; to play the action and drive in the narratives off against each other, so to speak. For example, the first ‘interruption’ in the main narrative is in the prologue. It comes at the point where Diaz has told us that the “curse” of “fuku” is still alive:

…it even had a hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say. Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina.\(^{122}\)

Then there is a footnote. The main narrative shies away from the specifics about Trujillo. It leaves them to the footnotes. But, the interruption comes just as we are about to discover why and how the curse of the fuku has affected people directly, in the main narrative. It is almost a climatic point in that narrative. There is a narrative drum-role, the main narrative is going deeper into a ghost story:

\(^{122}\) The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 2.
In my parents’ day the fuku was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew someone who’d been eaten by a fuku, just like everybody knew somebody who worked up in the Palacio.\textsuperscript{123}

This first section of main narrative runs for 34 lines. Then, the footnote, which is over 40 lines long, interrupts, and tells us a more specific/historical story about Trujillo. The writing in the footnotes is aggressive: “Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface)”.\textsuperscript{124} It illustrates the affect on the people, describing how Trujillo “…came to control nearly every aspect of the Dominican Republic’s political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master”.\textsuperscript{125} This story, or narrative in the footnotes is also a disturbing and engaging, counter, yet parallel, narrative.

The 40 lines of footnotes refer to Trujillo’s so called success with women which in its language and tone tie Trujillo’s story into Oscar’s.\textsuperscript{126} Trujillo is described in the footnotes as “fucking every hot girl in sight, even the wives of his subordinates, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of woman…” We want to continue to read, despite the disturbing nature of this narrative. Then, at its climatic point, as the description of the dictator’s powers reach a height, it ends; leaving us as the reader anticipating what is to come, anticipating what has been foreshadowed, by its content.

(Trujillo was Mobutu before Mobutu was Mobutu)… forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers, during the Occupation, were unable to do).\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 2.
\item[124] The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 2.
\item[125] The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 2.
\item[126] The word “hot” in reference to women is used to describe what Trujillo had, and Oscar didn’t; Oscar’s ineptitude in this area of life is emphasised, Trujillo’s ‘power’ is emphasised, yet, the coupling of Oscar and Trujillo at the level of connotation and syntactical implication is hard to ignore. It is worth noting that while the ‘moral’ fabric of Oscar Wao is firmly focused on an angry attack on injustice, the text is, at the same time, at times, both tangentially and overtly disrespectful in its narrating characterization and representations of women. It is beyond the scope of this study to engage with this, but a feminist reading of Oscar Wao may be an interesting endeavour.
\item[127] The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, p. 3.
\end{footnotes}
Another example of the footnotes ‘interrupting’ the main narrative in such a way that it increases anticipation in the reader is on page 13 of the novel. Oscar’s ‘past self,’ before he was angst-ridden and overweight, is being compared with his present self. “You should have seen him, his mother sighed in her Last Days. He was our little Porfirio Rubirosa.” At this point a footnote arrives. The story in the main text, that precedes the advent of the footnote, is reaching a small climatic point where Oscar’s primary school confidence is being articulated. Oscar’s family would push him and a girl together “and then everyone would howl as boy and girl approximated the hip-motism of the adults”. As readers we want to hear more at this point. Oscar’s prowess is building and just as he is (oddly) compared to Porfirio Rubirosa, there is a footnote. In this footnote we learn that Porfirio Rubirosa is Trujillo’s son in law, who “was the original Dominican Player, fucked all sorts of women” and who was enlisted by the dictator to assassinate Angel Morales but failed. This footnote narrative is, in turn, cut short as it was when it we hear the adumbrated story of Rubirosa’s demise in a car crash. This section ends on the line, which in its reference to events that will occur incite us to read on. The line states: “Hard to overstate the role cars play in our narrative”. This line is a point of irresolution, of a question the reader is left with. Why are cars so significant in this narrative? What else did Rubirosa get up to. But then that section of footnotes ends.

Again, the footnotes and the main text play a game of tussle for the attention of the reader, yet even more strangely, Oscar’s ‘past self’ is compared, by his own mother, to a murderous playboy dictator’s son in law. This juxtaposition of childhood dancing and terrible criminal activity serves as a ‘line’ or ‘thin bridge’ between the respective narratives and emphasises, at a narrative level, what is clear at a structural one – that these narrative strands are connected. Diaz’s novel, with its multiple ‘character parts’ manages to maintain itself as a unified multifaceted story. The spaces between the narratives and the connections these

128 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 12.
129 *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 12.
spaces provide on an overt and implied level is, in my view, one of the main reasons the novel is so successful.

**Conclusion to the Oscar Wao Chapter**

So, as well as creating anticipation and expectation, these disturbing narratives held within the footnotes are separate to Oscar, yet finely connected. There is a structural, typographical space between Oscar and Trujillo (they never ‘meet’ in the same block of text). There is space between Oscar and Porfirio Rubirosa, a space that is structural also, yet has an intranarrative crossover point when Oscar’s mother compares him to Rubirosa. There is space between Oscar and his past self at an intranarrative level. There is space between the prologue and the novel proper at an internarrative or structural level. There is space between the Walcott poem and the prologue and the novel, also at an internarrative or structural level. This space means the narratives, the texts, the ‘artistic’ components, do not directly ‘tell’ us just how much suffering Oscar’s family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues and countrymen have been subjected to by Trujillo’s regime (which is the historical backdrop for the novel and Oscar’s identity). We are, importantly, left to imagine that.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Diaz reminds us also that the characters in this novel are deeply immersed in this Dominican past: “...but we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not.”2. This use of the word ‘children,’ seemingly a throwaway part of a clichéd phrase, is important. Diaz is telling us: Oscar is a child and this is where he comes from. It could almost be said this is what The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao is about. Not about Oscar at all, but about Dominican history and its affect on those who suffered it. The narrative and the structure of the novel make this impossible to forget. And yet, the successful use of space between the characters (including the footnotes, Oscar’s past, the prologue, and the proem) make the story eminently readable and accessible; a quality it may lack if the space between Oscar and his oppression in his family’s history were pressed too closely together.
Conclusion

In this Conclusion I present my findings in two parts. Firstly I discuss the conclusions to the exegetical research. Secondly, I look at how the exegetical research has interacted with the creative project, the novel *My Father's Notebook*. These conclusions revolve around two central findings that relate to the spaces between characters in literary texts. These findings are termed ‘omission’ and ‘sequencing’ and have emerged as a direct result of the engagement with the research question – *How are spaces between literary characters created, understood, and then employed to provoke feeling states within the reader?*

**Part One – Exegetical Conclusion**

**Central Finding I – Omission**

One of the key findings of this project, as simple as it sounds, was the discovery that creating spaces in literary texts (primarily between characters in this instance) involves the ‘omission,’ or removal of written material. Iser is very specific about this, as are Sterne and Woolf as quoted by Iser above. Diaz, also quoted above on this issue, is clearly conscious of the indeterminate nature of language. When ‘omission’ is considered in relation to Iser’s discussion of spaces at an intranarrative level it maybe argued that omission provides a vital link between Iser’s “intentional sentence correlatives” and my own concept of ‘intentional character correlatives’.

If we consider omission as a space consciously created by the writer, we begin to appreciate that an awareness of spaces and where and how they are created in a text may possibly become a valuable tool that the writer is able to employ. At a basic level omission may be used by writers to consciously create ruptures in a text while constructing the text in such a way that those ruptures cause suspense or mystery, narrative drive, or dramatic effect.

Understanding that omissions and spaces at the level of the sentence could be
used as models to better understand omission and spaces at the level of ‘character parts’ or narrative streams, led to a seemingly simple but important finding in this research. That is, that ‘character parts’ may be constructed while considering some of Iser’s key concepts about sentences spaces, and that these concepts appear to hold up (at least in the first instance) at the level of character spaces. Consideration of the ‘artistic’ text and the reader’s ‘esthetic’ imagining into the spaces that are implicit in the text at the level of collaboration has been important here while considering ‘character parts’. ‘The contention is that an increased awareness of the content and the length of the ‘character parts’ or narrative streams (the artistic) may assist the writer to manipulate, at least to some degree, the ‘tone’ or the ‘feel’ of the spaces the reader is potentially able to imagine into, (esthetic)’.

The concept of omission at the level of character and the content of ‘character parts’ or narrative streams may also be considered in a more subtle and perhaps more simple way. James Wood in *How Fiction Works* discusses omission in terms of making a character’s motivations less transparent and more opaque. Woods states:

> Spatial metaphors, of depth, shallowness, roundness, flatness, are inadequate. A better division – though not perfect either – is between transparencies (relatively simple characters) and opacities (relative degree of mysteriousness). Shakespeare systematically reduced the amount of ‘causal explanation a tragic plot needed to function effectively and the amount of explicit psychological rationale a character needed to be compelling. Shakespeare found that he could immeasurably deepen the effect of his plays, that he could provoke in the audience and in himself a peculiarly passionate intensity of response, if he took out a key explanatory element, thereby occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold. The principle was not making a riddle to be solved, but the creation of a strategic opacity.\(^{131}\)

Wood’s position is clear and informative and relates to the examples I discussed in Chapter Two when I looked at the work of Auerbach and his discussion of spaces in the Elohist texts. It also relates to discussion I presented in Chapter Three when I discussed the spaces in Junot Diaz’s novel. Wood’s articulation of this concept, in fact, in part, strikes at the essence of what an understanding of the spaces in literary texts are able to achieve by conscious structuring of spaces to influence the reader at the level of affect. His comments relate to Cobley’s

---

example of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* that I used in Chapter One, which also gives consideration to the power of the reader’s imagination and the ways languages and spaces within language collaborate with the reader’s imagination in very significant ways.  

**Central Finding II – Sequencing of Spaces**

After acknowledging that ‘affect’ could be created by removing written material to create a space, the question became, as a writer, how to use this new understanding to write a more emotionally nuanced novel. The conscious awareness of spaces at the ‘character part’ or narrative stream level in literary texts, led to the hypothesis that it may be possible to plan how these spaces affected the reader.

I considered the possibility of ‘linking’ spaces either sequentially, or compositionally (compositionally being – the linking of non-sequent spaces via structural and/or narrative means). In other words, the reader could be encouraged to ‘actualize’ these larger spaces, these large ‘indeterminacies’ and in so doing set the emotional level of the literary work in motion at a broad or ‘character part’ level. The reader’s actualizing of the spaces, I thought, may become a ‘sequence,’ ‘composition’, or ‘emotional pulse’ that is underlying the basic narrative of the text itself. This underlying ‘affect’ or emotional pulse was exciting. I thought it may be possible to plan the use of spaces between characters to run across, beneath or next to the narrative itself, supplying the narrative text with an emotional undercurrent. I imagined this visually as not dissimilar to a series of ‘ponds of affect’ within a landscape of word.

---

132 It is important not to forget the writer. To keep the writer (oneself) interested, enthralled, excited and responsive to his or her own work is vital. I found as a writer I had to maintain a very positive emotional engagement with the work. In thinking about the spaces in the work and the ‘affect’ present within these spaces and within their sequencing gave me a better understanding of my work’s emotional tone at any one time.  

133 Comparing a novel’s composition to a painting’s colour composition at a ‘non-narrative’ level is an example of this, in which different parts of a painting are ‘connected via colour, rather than via line or narrative. ‘This could possibly be achieved in a novel by the conscious use of ‘tone’ being created in particular sections, and a conscious connection between sections via these ‘tonal’ repetitions’.
Part Two – Creative Project Conclusion

Central Finding I – Omission

*My Father’s Notebook* is a novel written in multiple perspectives with many spaces between the characters. The structure of the novel encouraged me as a writer to think about the spaces between the characters and how best to manage them. When it came to considering the issue of omission in relation to my own text two actions at this level had a significant impact upon the novel. Firstly, I cut the entire narrative stream or ‘character part’ of the mother character, who was originally a significant part of the novel. (The novel now opens with the two main characters, Art and Jay, coming back from their mother’s funeral). It is beyond the scope of this Conclusion to fully engage with a discussion about how the omission of the mother character relates to the above research. For that reason I focus my attention on the example of the omission of a large section from the middle of the novel which contained the father character’s back-story. This was the second large omission from the novel at the level of character. In this way the parents, while not being entirely removed from the narrative, certainly had their parts significantly reduced and thus they occupied less of the foreground within the narrative.

To illustrate the affect the omission of the father character’s back-story had I now mention the original structure of *My Father’s Notebook*. It was a seven-part structure. Parts one to three were entitled “Mainly about Jay”, “Mainly about

134 The omission of the mother’s ‘character part’ had some very significant effects on the novel as a whole. Firstly it meant that the two main character Art and Jay were known by the reader to be grieving. Thus there was an emotional undercurrent of this grieving in all their feeling states and actions. Secondarily, and in a similar way to the effect of removing the father’s ‘character part’, the removal of the mother’s ‘character part’ meant that Art and Jay had no mediating presence between them at the level of parent. (The father character was not a mediating presence between them). This meant Art and Jay’s relationship was changed to a large degree. They were both within an emotionally intoned space of grief and (challenged) fraternity. The interaction of these two emotional states is central to the novel’s aesthetic.
Art”, and “Mainly about Jay II” respectively. Part four was entitled “Mainly about Jon” (the father character). Part Five was “Mainly about Art II” and parts six and seven entitled “Mainly about Susan I”, and “Mainly about Susan II”.

Part four, in the voice of the father character, described his time in the navy, as a young man. It described (in the father character’s rough narrating voice) how he went to war. It outlined the father character’s increasingly unpleasant nature, his violence, his criminal activity and his questionable attitudes toward woman. This all occurred in a timeframe that was thirteen years before the novel’s main action began, when his children were infants.

Removing the father’s back-story (part four) had the effect of pressing the two previously separated halves of the novel (part three and part five) close against one another. Most importantly the conscious manipulation of this space at the centre of the novel left room for the reader to wonder about the father character. This is exactly what Wood articulates above. Because the father character’s emotional teleology was less defined, and because his character remained indeterminate to some degree, the motivations for his actions became less clear and therefore, in my view, the novel as a whole became more suspenseful and mysterious at the level of the father’s motivations. The effect of cutting the father’s back-story, to quote Wood again “took out a key explanatory element, thereby occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold. The principle was not making a riddle to be solved, but the creation of a strategic opacity”.

What this omission did was not only reduce the distance between the parts that were previously on either side of this section, but, at one and the same time, it opened a ‘character-part-indeterminacy’ for the reader to imagine into and in this way created more space in the novel. The omission meant that the other characters were more consistently part of the narrative, and in this way the novel became more compressed, faster paced and more definitively about the “presented world” of a teenage boy during a summer-time rite-of-passage. This

---

135 Part four of the novel comprised about 25 percent of the novel’s length. The section originally occupied almost one-hundred pages. It was the only section of the novel that went into significant back-story about the mother and the father characters.
foregrounding of the other characters also highlighted and emphasised their subjective responses to the father character, which in turn altered the emotional topography of their relationships and of the novel as a whole. The novel became a novel more about a teenager coming to terms with his father’s return after a long absence, rather than a family’s experience of this event, including the father’s experience of his own return.

The most important point is that the removal of the father character’s back-story opened a ‘character-part-indeterminacy’ for the reader to imagine into and in this way created more space in the novel. The creation of more space, by omitting a ‘character part’, meant that the other characters had more room to articulate their subjective experiences of the father character which was vitally important, when his long absence and unpleasant nature meant that he drew some significant deep feelings from the other characters. Importantly the reader was only ever allowed to see the father character as filtered through the consciousnesses of the other characters and this created a certain ‘tone’ or ‘feel’ in the text that I was able to consciously sequence by planning when and how the other characters spoke about the father character.

**Central Finding II – Sequencing of Spaces**

The above example points to one consciously manufactured space in the writing of *My Father’s Notebook*. But there was still the question of repeating the process illustrated in the above example throughout the entire novel. I discovered that the conscious sculpting of the novel’s emotional topography at the level of large character-based narrative spaces meant recognising that these spaces within the novel were all interrelated and had a direct correlation to the psychological nuances between characters and the consequent psychological impact of the characters’ relationships to the reader.  

Maintaining an awareness of the spaces

---

136 It is also worth reflecting on the vast difference between a reader’s understanding of a novel and a writer’s. These can be poles apart. The reader can never really know about these large structural changes, unless the writer’s working methods are later revealed as sometimes occurs. A fine example of this are the earlier drafts of Raymond Carver’s stories which are now available and which may be compared with the much shorter published stories which were edited by Gordon Lish. During this research I was also reminded of the classic mandate for children’s stories, ‘get the parents out of the way as soon as you can’. When the parents are removed the children become active agents in the story without the parents occupying the foreground and telling the children what to
between respective narrative streams in the novel – the relationship between Jay and his father, between Jay and Art, between Art and Susan, between Jay and Susan, for example – meant the ‘tones’ or ‘feel’ held between each set of characters could be plotted to create affect by considering when to put certain characters together within the narrative, and at the level of where the ‘character parts’ were presented in relation to each other.

What was also very interesting, while plotting the positions of ‘character parts’ in the re-writing process, was that I had a great deal of omitted material about each character. This material, while it never made its way into the novel, was of benefit to me as a writer as I understood my characters at a deeper level. As a consequence, when I wrote about the father character or Art or Jay, I not only did this more confidently, but with a better knowledge of how their characters were likely to react to certain situations.

The return of the father character was clearly central to the narrative space between Jay and Art and their grieving for their mother. I was better able to negotiate and handle the father character’s impact on them because I knew so well how they related to their mother, and I knew so well what kind of a man their father was, having written about both of these and subsequently omitted the material. The return of the rough father character meant Jay in particular, was less able to communicate his grieving to the reader as his ‘new’ relationship with his father took up the narrative foreground and transformed him at the level of action and inner thought into someone less capable of grieving.137

These ‘intoned’ spaces between the characters – the tougher space between Jay and
and his father, the freer space between Jay and Art and their departed mother, the more conflicted space between Jay and Art (caused by their father character’s return) are all spaces between the characters in the novel that I had to consider placing in an order or composition of sorts. The sequencing of these spaces is a task I am still developing an understanding of. This research and the way it is informing the re-writing of the novel remains in its rudimentary form. What I hope to achieve as I re-write the novel is a sculpting of the spaces between the ‘character parts’ at a hidden or sub-plot level; and that these spaces and the effect held within and between them elevates the novel’s emotional impact on the reader.

End of Exegesis
Bibliography


Diaz, Junot, 1996, *Drown*, Faber and Faber Limited, Kent


**Filmography**

*Pan’s Labyrinth* Guillermo del Toro