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AN ANATOMY OF AESTHETIC AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

by

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2014
AN ANATOMY OF AESTHETIC AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

In this essay, I will examine the use of distance as an overt authorial strategy in three very different works of fiction: Cloud Atlas, A Possible Life and Lolita. Distance can sometimes be seen as a matter of perception or reader response that is outside the author’s direct control but, as critics such as Wayne Booth, Dorrit Cohn and Wolfgang Iser have established, the textual construction of fiction demonstrates that the author has an enormous array of choices and variations when it comes to establishing distance through control of point of view and other devices. Much of what we think of as an author’s unique “voice” or aesthetic presence emerges from the control and manipulation of distance and the perception of distance. This remains true even though there are difficulties in defining and evaluating distance both in general and in the context of an individual text.

The literary concepts of distance and point of view can be illustrated with the following quotations from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Tender is the Night:

“He seemed kind and charming – his voice promised that he would take care of her, and that a little later he would open up whole new worlds for her, unroll an endless succession of magnificent possibilities. He managed the introduction so that her name wasn’t mentioned and then let her know easily that everyone knew who she was but was respecting the completeness of her private life – a

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1 David Mitchell Cloud Atlas Hodder and Stoughton 2004
2 Sebastian Faulks A Possible Life Vintage 2013
3 Vladimir Nabokov Lolita Penguin 1995
4 F. Scott Fitzgerald Tender is the Night Penguin Modern Classics 2000
courtesy that Rosemary had not met with save from professional people since her success.”

“After that he didn’t ask for the children to be sent to America and didn’t answer when Nicole wrote asking him if he needed money. In the last letter she had from him he told her that he was practising in Geneva, N.Y., and she got the impression that he had settled down with someone to keep house for him. She looked up Geneva in an atlas and found it was in the heart of the Finger Lakes section and considered a pleasant place. Perhaps, so she liked to think, his career was biding its time, again like Grant’s in Galena; his latest note was post-marked from Hornell, N.Y., which was some distance from Geneva and a very small town; in any case he is almost certainly in that section of the country, in one town or another.”

Both quotations are written in the third person and describe the novel’s protagonist Dick Diver. The first section appears near the beginning of the novel and is presented from the point of view of the young, impressionable starlet Rosemary Hoyt. Seen through Rosemary’s eyes, Dick is full of charm and potential. Like Rosemary, the narrator is fascinated with Dick and the effect is to create interest in Dick and draw Rosemary, the narrator and the reader, closer. The second quotation is the very last paragraph of the novel and is presented from Nicole’s (Dick’s ex-wife) perspective. Both the Nicole and the narrator are, at best, only mildly interested in Dick’s whereabouts and life. They are doing no more than going through the motions of showing interest in the fallen hero – tying off an inconsequential loose end in their

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5 *Tender is the Night* p. 25
6 *Tender is the Night* p. 338
own lives. The effect is almost precisely the opposite of the earlier quotation – if Nicole and the narrator have lost interest in Dick, the effect is to expand the distance between Dick and the reader. In this case the change in the distance between the reader and the character is particularly significant – both observations come from the same narrator and are about the same character and therefore show that distance can vary considerably within a single text even where there is no radical shift in the point of view. As these quotations demonstrate, the presentation and reception of a literary text provides the writer with opportunities to manipulate and explore (and the reader to experience) varying degrees of distance between the principal agents involved. It is trite to say that the writer and the reader are distinct entities (to paraphrase Roland Barthes the “writerly” and the “readerly”7) and the number of literary agents is not limited to the writer and the reader. The principal literary agents are:

The actual reader

The implied reader

The narrator

The implied author

The actual author

The distinctions between these agents can be summarised as follows:

7 Roland Bathes S/Z p. 4
**The actual reader:** the real person reading the text;

**The implied reader:** “a term used by Wolfgang Iser and some other theorists of reader-response criticism to denote the hypothetical figure of the reader to whom a given work is designed to address itself” and who can be distinguished from both the real or actual reader and the narratee;

**The narrator:** the person or imagined voice who tells (or is assumed to be) presenting or telling the story and who can be distinguished from both the actual author and the implied author;

**The implied author:** “the source of a work’s design and meaning which is inferred by readers from the text, and imagined as a personality standing behind the work” and who can be distinguished from the real or actual author and the narrator.

**The actual author:** the real person writing the text.

For completeness, other literary agents have been identified, including the narratee (“the imagined person whom the narrator is assumed to addressing in a given narrative” and “a notional figure within the ‘space’ of the text itself” and who can be distinguished from both the implied reader and the actual reader). Further, Iser discusses the “real reader” and the “hypothetical reader” and notes that the latter is frequently subdivided into the “ideal reader” and the “contemporary reader”.

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8 Chris Baldick *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 2008 p.166
9 Wolfgang Iser *The Implied Reader* Johns Hopkins 1978 p.xii
10 *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 2008 p.220
11 *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 2008 p.166
12 Wayne Booth *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 2 ed p. 71-76
13 *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 2008 p.219
14 *The Implied Reader* p.26
“Generally, two categories emerge, in accordance with whether the critic is concerned with the history of responses or the potential effect of the literary text. In the first instance, we have the ‘real’ reader, known to us by his documented reactions; in the second, we have the ‘hypothetical’ reader, upon whom all possible actualizations of the text may be projected. The latter category is frequently subdivided into the so-called ideal reader and the contemporary reader.”

It is also important to acknowledge that, while the various agents may be very different they do not necessarily have to be. As an example, the distinction between narrator and character can become indistinct.

Emotional or aesthetic distance between the literary agents is important to the reading experience – understanding, empathy, sympathy, endorsement and their opposites are at least in part affected by distance and, hence, distance will affect how readers interpret and experience a text. At the risk of generalising about both readers and texts, ultimately the act of reading is as much an emotive experience as a cerebral one. For present purposes, the cerebral experience can be considered the objective or analytical response to a text and the emotive experience can be the reader’s subjective response to the text. The concept of distance is inextricably linked to these two elements of the reader’s experience – the greater the distance (or perceived distance) between the reader and the narrator/characters the more objective and analytical the experience of at least the implied reader (and likely many actual readers as well). Reducing the distance between the narrator/characters and the reader will potentially expose the reader to a more subjective or emotive experience.

15 *The Act of Reading* p. 27
Principal texts and critical sources

In this essay I intend to explore the ways in which distance can be manipulated and its relationship with point of view primarily through three novels that demonstrate differing approaches to the relationships between the various literary agents, including the transparency or concealment of authorial presence David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Sebastian Faulkes’ *A Possible Life* (2013) and Vladimir Nabakov’s *Lolita* (1955).

From a formalist perspective each of the novels can be viewed through the prism their inherent forms (grammar, syntax, tropes etc.) without taking consideration cultural, social or other outside influences. But while the primary relevance to this essay is found in the formal differences between the novels, the immense thematic differences between them are also relevant in that the formal aspects of each novel functionally assist in the presentation of each author’s thematic ideas. To borrow terminology from economics, we might say that *Cloud Atlas* is focused on political and social macro themes measured across times, places and societies that are far removed from each other and *A Possible Life* is focused on the micro theme of the potential inherent in individual lives. *Lolita* is a substantially different novel both structurally (a single continuous narrative\(^\text{16}\)) and thematically (a focus on character) with a much lighter degree of discernable authorial presence or intrusion. *Lolita* also differs from *Cloud Atlas* and *A Possible Life* in the way it utilises distance and point of view – not only does Nabokov utilise a single point of view (first person) and make the narrator the lone focal character (Humbert Humbert) from beginning to end, but

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\(^{16}\) Excluding the fictional forward by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.
the reduction of distance between the narrator/central character and the reader is
undertaken for the purpose of attempting to make the reader sympathetic towards a
character who, by his nature, is one that readers should find reprehensible. In contrast,
*Cloud Atlas* and *A Possible Life* both utilise multiple points of view (first person, third
person etc.) and, even when first person narration is used, the reader is never drawn as
close to the narrators/characters concerned as they are to Humbert Humbert.

For this essay, the principal critical sources are Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of
Fiction*, Dorret Cohn’s *Transparent Minds* 17, Wolfgang Iser’s *The Act of Reading*
18 and *The Implied Reader* and David Jauss’s *On Writing Fiction* 19. These critical
sources provide both a theoretical and a practical framework for understanding the
literary agents and the problem of distance.

**Terminology and techniques**

Of the ways in which an author can manipulate the distance, this thesis will focus on:

(i) point of view;

(ii) authorial absence, presence or intrusion;

(iii) the role of the narrator; and

(iv) the expansion and contraction of time.

Of course, none of these techniques exist in isolation. In particular, the role of
the reader and the context in which a novel is presented are also relevant
considerations.

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17 Cohn Dorrit *Transparent Minds* Princeton University Press 1978
18 Iser, Wolfgang *The Act of Reading* Johns Hopkins 1980
19 Jauss, David *On Writing Fiction* Writers Digest Books 2011
This essay takes as a basic assumption that a novel is controlled by the author’s conscious (and possibly unconscious but still evident) stylistic and structural choices and that all novelists, to a greater or lesser degree, concern themselves with how the implied reader understands and experiences the text. This assumption is both warranted and important because, as Iser observed, the novel is “the genre in which reader involvement coincides with meaning production.” In effect, an author who wishes a text to carry a particular meaning must take into consideration the intended effect of his/her on the reader during the act of creation. It follows that while it can be asserted that “true artists write only for themselves,” as Wayne Booth observes:

“Though some characters and events may speak by themselves their artistic message to the reader, and thus carry in a weak form their own rhetoric, none will do so with proper clarity and force until the author brings all his powers to bear on the problem of making the reader see what they really are.”

**Distance and point of view**

While they are distinct concepts, distance and point of view are at least somewhat related and often discussed together. Distance (also called aesthetic distance) refers to the degree of emotional involvement in a literary text and the extent to which a reader...

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20 For present purposes, the extent to which a text reflects the influence and views of editors and others who review pre-publication drafts of the text is assumed to be subsumed within the concept of “author”

21 *The Implied Reader* p. xi


23 *The Rhetoric of Fiction* p. 116
can be drawn into a work and identify with the relevant characters. Because distance is a product of the act of one person (the author writing the text) and the further act of a second person (the reader receiving and responding to the text) and because the actual author and the actual writer are real human beings (not theoretical literary agents), any attempt to analyse distance has to allow for the subjective intentions of the former and the subjective reception and response of the latter. Accordingly, any analysis of distance (either generically or text-specific) needs to allow for subjective as well as objective considerations – it is for good reason that ‘distance’ is often referred to as ‘emotional distance’. The human element also requires avoidance (or at least awareness) of the intentional fallacy – an assumption that an author’s stated intention in writing a text is the appropriate basis for interpreting that text.

Accordingly, while the primary focus of this essay is on how discourse is controlled and manipulated within the text, consideration of extrinsic matters such as the author’s intentions are treated with some caution.

With that rather large caveat, it can be said that the extent to which distance between an author and the characters is expanded or contracted has at least the potential to affect the extent to which the reader can impose his or her own interpretations and understandings on the story.

Although point of view is not the primary focus of this critical thesis, it is worth noting that it has at least three aspects which should be considered together:

(i) the narrator’s person (usually first or third person);

(ii) the narrative techniques (such as omniscient, limited or dramatic); and

24 The Implied Reader p. 104
26 On Writing Fiction Writers Digest Books chapter II
(iii) the “locus of perception (the character whose perspective is presented, whether or not that character is narrating)”\textsuperscript{27} (for example whether a first person narrator is presenting another character’s story) or “focalisation”\textsuperscript{28} (the extent to which the perceptions presented are or are not those of the narrator).

Point of view relates to, or overlaps, distance because point of view affects the way in which distance is manipulated, the techniques available to the author to manipulate distance and how issues such as authorial presence can be concealed or exposed.

\textit{The problem of omniscience}

At best a writer can only pretend not to have omniscient insight into characters he has created – a fictional character is no more and no less than the product of the author’s imagination. It follows that, consciously or unconsciously, the distances between the literary agents only exist as they are because the writer allows or dictates them. In this context, a character/narrator who is presented in a manner that gives the reader unrestricted insight into his mind is still no more than what Cohn describes as the “mimesis of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{29} No matter how omniscient the written word, and no matter what literary techniques are engaged in the presentation, no literary character can amount to anything more than a semblance of a real person. It follows that while the writer has the ability to narrow (in some cases considerably) the distance between

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{On Writing Fiction} p. 25
\item \textit{Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms} 2008 p. 131
\item \textit{Transparent Minds} page 7 Cohn cites Kate Hamburger \textit{The Logic of Literature} as pinpointing “the representation (mimesis) of consciousness as the subject that distinguishes narrative fiction from non-fictional narrative”
\end{itemize}
the narrator and the character (when they are not the same person), it is unlikely that
the distinction can ever be completely eradicated or the distance reduced to zero. No
matter how creative the author, if nothing else the printed rectangular pages that
convey a text from the imagination of the writer to the imagination of the reader
provides a permanent and insurmountable barrier. Reduction of the emotional or
aesthetic distance between the literary agents to zero is impossible. As William H.
Gass observes:

“The so-called life one finds in novels, the worst and the best of them, is
nothing like actual life at all, and cannot be; it is not more real, or thrilling, or
authentic; it is not truer, more complex, or pure, and its people have less
spontaneity, are less intricate, less free, less full.”

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The visible and the hidden – authorial absence, presence and intrusion

One of the more interesting dynamics of literature is the extent to which the reader is
able to discern the presence of either the implied or the actual author in the text (as
distinct from the fictional narrator) whether by directly addressing the reader, issuing
judgements, structural design, the use of non-text elements or other means. Further,
the distinction between recognisable authorial presence and more overt authorial
intrusion in the text can be significant. In Cloud Atlas the authorial presence is heavily
in evidence. In A Possible Life it is clearly evident but plays a lesser role. In Lolita it
is, in some respects, extremely light and, in others, frequently evident.

30 William H. Gass The Concept of Character in Fiction, On Being Short
31 For example: the use of grainy monochrome photographs in W.G. Sebald’s
works such as The Emigrants Vintage 2002 and The Rings of Saturn Vintage 2002
A discussion of discernable authorial presence contains an implicit presumption that the author consciously chooses the extent to which he wishes to project a noticeable presence (actual or implied) to the reader. In the realm of published fiction, this assumption is as unwarranted as the mirror assumption that every actual reader will always be aware of or influenced by authorial distance. However, for present purposes authorial presence in the works cited is assumed to have been consciously inserted. As Wayne Booth has observed:

"The author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability."\(^{32}\)

This is no more than an acknowledgement that the entirety of the text is the creation of the author. In some respects Booth’s observation can be viewed as a corollary to Dorrit Cohn’s observation that fiction can be no more than the “mimeses of consciousness”\(^{33}\).

It therefore follows that the notion of authorial silence is misconceived. The author is always present and the relevant issues are (i) the extent to which the author’s presence is readily discernable or intrusive as a distinct literary agent and (ii) the extent to which distinctions can be drawn between the real author and his/her creations – the implied author, the narrator and the character(s).

Cloud Atlas – a commentary on societal dysfunction


\(^{33}\) Transparent Minds p. 8
Structural and technical approaches

From a structural perspective, Cloud Atlas comprises six interrelated stories. Five of the six stories are split into halves and the stories are presented in a sequence which follows narrative time, presenting the first half of each of “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” (set in 1850 in the South Pacific), followed by the first series of “Letters From Zedelghem” (1931 - Belgium), “Half Lives - The First Louisa Rey Mystery” (1975 - California), “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish” (present day - Britain) and “An Orison of Sonmi 451” (unspecified dystopian future - Korea) followed by the entirety of “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” (post-apocalyptic future – Hawaii) before returning to the remaining parts of each of the first five stories presented in reverse order (finishing with the second half of “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”).

Mitchell uses different technical approaches to present each of the six stories. “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” is presented in the form of a journal written by a fictional Adam Ewing as he journeys across the Pacific Ocean. “Letters from Zedelghem” is, as the title suggests, a series of letters written by Robert Frobisher from a small village in Belgium. “Half Lives - The First Louisa Rey Mystery” is presented as a novel written in the third person. “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish” is written in the first person contemporaneous with the events being narrated. “An Orison of Sonmi 451” is an interview transcript. “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” reverts to the first person, but the narrative is historical as an old man recalls events from his youth.

Visually, the first half of Cloud Atlas can be summarised as follows:
The second halves of the first five stories are then presented (using the same techniques) but in reverse order, ending with the conclusion to “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. The effect is something akin to a Russian doll or Chinese puzzle box.

**Distance and the reader**

The use of different technical approaches in each of the six stories provides Mitchell with diverse means of manipulating the emotional distance between the literary agents. As an example, the distance that the unemotional narrator of “An Orison of Sonmi 451” places between her tragic and horrifying autobiography and the reader enables dispassion to replace what could so easily have been (and objectively should have been) horror, shock and outrage. If the narrator is able to tell her story so
objectively, what should the reader feel? One possible answer is that readers are freed
to impose their own emotions on the story; in particular, sympathy for Sonmi 451
herself is allowed to uncomfortably co-exist with repugnance for the dystopian
society she inhabits. The micro (personal) does not overwhelm the macro (political).
This can be contrasted with the other stories. “Letters from Zedelghem” is almost
entirely a story about personal motivations – the political is barely discernable
background – and consequently the distance between the narrator’s character and the
reader is considerably reduced. In “Half Lives - The First Louisa Rey Mystery” this is
reversed with the characters being reduced to devices through which political and
social commentary is presented and, consequently, the distance between the narrator
and the reader is comparatively significant.

The approach in “An Orison of Sonmi 451” can also be contrasted with the
studied diffidence of Stevens in Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day 34– what appears
to be an exercise in purging emotional displays from Stevens with the intention of
imposing a massive emotional distance between the reader and Stevens, soon has the
opposite effect. The intricate and intimate details of Stevens’ inner world have a very
powerful effect and draw the reader very close to Stevens.

Cloud Atlas repeatedly demonstrates the distinction between the fictional
reader, the implied reader and the actual reader. Cohn notes that diarists write and
monologists speak only for themselves35. With respect, this is a questionable
proposition – many diarists write with an audience in mind. Humbert Humbert’s
narration of his relationship with Lolita being a fictional example and the journals
kept by seafarers in the eighteen and nineteen hundreds being non-fictional examples.

34 Kazuo Ishiguro The Remains of the Day Faber Library 1999
35 Transparent Minds p. 208
Adam Ewing’s journal is ostensibly written either for himself or other fictional readers although it is unlikely that the fictional diarist (Ewing) could have more done more than speculate as to who, if anyone, would be reading his (presumably edited) words a eighty one years later (Frobisher). Much the same could be said of Frobisher who presumably never dreamed that his letters resembling diary entries would be read by anyone other than Sixsmith to whom they were addressed. None of diarising or monologuing characters of Cloud Atlas suffers from the delusions of other narrators writing with an audience in mind (such as Humbert Humbert or the self-serving egoist Claudius in I, Claudius).

If, as Iser notes, the search for meaning is considerably influenced by historical norms\(^{36}\), the reader’s understanding of a text must be influenced by both the reader’s personal awareness of external facts (history) and readings of other fictional texts.

Authorial presence and intrusion

Authorial presence is evident through all six of the linked stories that comprise Cloud Atlas. Examples of authorial presence are nether difficult to identify nor infrequent. Perhaps the most obvious is the way in which the stories are presented – with all but one of the stories presented in two parts with one or more of the other stories (or a half story) being placed between the pieces. In this sense, Cloud Atlas is a novel that confronts the reader with a structural authorial intrusion that initially makes no organic, logical or intuitive sense, at least on a first reading. Along with the challenge of piecing together the connections between the seemingly disparate stories,

\(^{36}\) The Act of Reading p. 3
we are faced with the challenge of “reading” the logic of Mitchell’s structural intentions – which intentions can, of course, be explained in many different ways.

“The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”, which bookmarks the beginning and the end of Cloud Atlas, is particularly notable in this respect. Frobisher finds half of Adam Ewing’s journal in the library at Zedelghem37. While incomplete manuscripts can have their appeal if they are of historical significance (The Epic of Gilgamesh38 has enduring fascination notwithstanding its fragmentary nature) or of personal relevance (such as a family history), no reason is advanced for Frobisher’s interest in “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. Absent such factors, when half of a book is lost the usual reaction would be to consign the remaining half to the rubbish bin. It is even less likely that, when faced with a large choice of reading matter that presumably existed in the Ayrs household, Frobisher would elect to start reading a book of which he had only a part. To embark on such a reading without an articulated motivation would expose him to the experience of the narrators and characters encountered in If On a Winter’s Night A Traveller39 (to say nothing of the experience of the actual reader). Given that no explanation is provided for either the survival and retention of half of the journal or Frobisher’s motivation in reading half a book, it is highly likely that the imposed division of the journal and Frobisher’s reading of it represents the intervention or interference of the author in the story. The fact that the rest of the book is later discovered being used to prop up a bed40, serves to confirm the low value placed on the book – of all the many books and other objects in a very large house which could have propped up the bed, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” was the one selected for utilitarian destruction. At its most simple, the

37 Cloud Atlas p. 64
38 The Epic of Gilgamesh Penguin Classics 2003
40 Cloud Atlas p. 478
physical split of a fictional book within a work of fiction is a transparent authorial intrusion in the narration.

Other examples are plentiful – the title of “An Orison of Sonmi 451” (possibly) acknowledges *Fahrenheit 451* another dystopian novel populated with an unthinking general populace. Once again, it is difficult to describe this as anything other than the author intruding on his narrator’s story.

*Narratorial absence, presence and intrusion*

In *Cloud Atlas* (and *A Possible Life*) narratorial presence varies in each story with consequent variations in the distance imposed or reduced between the characters and the reader. At the extremes, *Cloud Atlas*’ Somni 451 has her story presented in the form of a visually recorded interview (an ‘orison’) and (largely) through the use of “neutrally reportorial language”\(^{41}\). This affects the reader in a number of ways, all of which should have the theoretical effect of excluding possible techniques for reducing the distance between her and the reader.

The first point is that although the “orison” in which the interview is recorded is not available to readers - they are faced with what is essentially a typed transcript.

“Let’s begin. Usually I start by asking interviewees to recall their very earliest memories. You look uncertain.

I have no earliest memories, Archivist. Every day of my life in Papa Song’s was as uniform as the fries we vended.”\(^{42}\)

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\(^{41}\) *Transparent Minds* p. 100
\(^{42}\) *Cloud Atlas* p. 187
Almost all the extraneous descriptive markers that provide context and vividness beyond the spoken word (voice, tone, facial expression, physical description etc.) are denied to the reader. The only material deviation from this practice occurs when the Archivist is hearing about the fabricants’ fate – a deviation that highlights the horror that the Archivist (and the reader) should be experiencing. The second is that the reader will likely query whether the interview has been edited. The absence of frequent broken sentences, pause utterances and other features of real speech that appear in real literal transcripts of interviews (such as witness statements) is striking – the orison/interview reads like a journalistic interview that has been professionally edited for both readability and content. The reader can be in no doubt that the narrator (presumably the interviewer) has been selectively at work. Further, given that the interviewer is a representative of the oppressive regime that rules this dystopian future and that what is presented to the reader is an uncompromising condemnation of that regime, the reader could conclude that the narratorial intrusion is likely limited to enhancing readability. This leaves the reader with the unemotive words of the condemned Somni 451 herself and awareness that, even though most of the words are those of Somni 451, she is not the narrator.

Like Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, Somni 451 is presented as a remote character who experiences limited emotions and who shows even less on a journey towards self awareness but who still elicits strong emotional involvement from the reader. In part, this is because of historical awareness (the treatment and exploitation of humans viewed as inferior has been a lamentable feature of our history as a species) and, in part, because of the repressive world in which Somni 451 relates her story is presented in a one-dimensional manner – it has no redeeming features.
whatsoever. There is no “good” to dilute the “bad” and provide a basis for the reader to compromise his or her reactions to Somni 451’s testimony.

“The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” provides another interesting example of the manipulation of distance. The reader of Cloud Atlas is many times removed from Adam Ewing, beginning with the journal being (by definition) a recording of events rather than a dramatic presentation of them. In addition, it is written by Ewing after the events rather than in real time as the events occur, and is filtered through Ewing’s mind rather than being presented omnisciently or even objectively, it has been edited by Ewing’s son (who may not be immune to the temptation to project his father in the most favourable light possible) and has the entirety of the other five stories inserted in the middle of it (thus providing the reader with comparative reading material as well as the rather curious and unexplained fascination of Frobisher with the journal). This layering of textual material and use of “false documents” is a not uncommon technique that (among other purposes) facilitates the management of distance. Other examples include Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein and Elizabeth Kostova’s The Historian.

Another means for authors to manipulate the distance between the narrator/character and the reader is to adopt a stylistic approach that provides the reader with elements of structural and stylistic familiarity. Cloud Atlas uses this approach; the tone and presentation of each of the five stories is consistent with the time periods in which each of the stories takes place. The use a journal by Ewing is consistent with the practices of many well-educated individuals who were confined to

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43 Mary Shelly Frankenstein Penguin Classics 1992
44 Elizabeth Kostova The Historian Time Warner Books 2006
sailings ships for long periods of time\textsuperscript{45} - what Cohn describes as the classical model of the distanced memorialist\textsuperscript{46}. The bantering lingual style of Frobisher’s letters will be familiar to readers of Bertie Wooster’s follies\textsuperscript{47}. “Half Lives - The First Louisa Del Rey Mystery” is written in the narrative and dramatic style of popular fiction from the mid-late twentieth century. For the future tense stories, “An Orison of Sonmi 451” and “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”), the first is narrated through the device of a highly detailed interview transcript and the second in a futuristically degraded English. The worlds described and language used will resonate with readers of many other dystopian or speculative fiction novels such as \textit{Neuromancer},\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The Not Yet}\textsuperscript{49} or \textit{THX 1138}\textsuperscript{50}. While this aspect may not fully reflect Iser’s “filter of history”\textsuperscript{51}, for at least the implied reader and many actual readers it enables each story to be viewed through the filter of \textit{expected} history or \textit{recognisable} futurism. This stylistic and structural familiarity serves to reduce the distance between the narrators/characters and the reader.

The question of to whom a narrator is speaking may also play a role in establishing the desired amount of distance between a reader and the narrator/character(s). Consider Somni 451 who explicitly states that she is speaking for the benefit of, and with the intention of prompting to action, people who will see her testimony:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} The journals kept by Charles Darwin and Captain James Cook being two famous examples
\item \textsuperscript{46} \textit{Transparent Minds} p. 155
\item \textsuperscript{47} P.G. Wodehouse \textit{Jeeves and Wooster} series
\item \textsuperscript{48} William Gibson \textit{Neuromancer} Ace Books 1984
\item \textsuperscript{49} Moira Crane \textit{The Not Yet} Kindle Edition
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ben Nova \textit{THX 1138} Warner Books 1978
\item \textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Implied Reader} Ch 4
\end{itemize}
“Every schoolchild of Nea So Copros knows my twelve blasphemies now.

… My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold.”

The self-centred narrator of his existential crisis in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” is very far removed from Somni 451’s intended audience. This provides the reader of _Cloud Atlas_ with another reminder of just how far the world of Nea So Copros is from the early twenty-first century inhabited by Mitchell’s readers. As an aside, this example also serves as a literary illustration of the gulf that can exist between the implied or intended reader and the actual reader. Somni 451 was speaking for people of her world, not the post-apocalyptic survivors of Sloosha’s world.

_Distance and the passage of time_

In a novel the time experienced by the characters and narrator(s) moves differently from the time experienced by the reader. And for good reason; Alfred Hitchcock described a great story as “life with the dull parts taken out.” Cohn terms this contracting of a timespan or expanding of an instant “temporal elasticity”. When a narrator manipulates time the reader loses something of the sense of proximity to the events contained in the text. However, the reader’s mind may be prevented from wandering when faced with excruciating and lengthy detail about the less interesting parts of the story (or the bits which aren’t part of the story at all). Would “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” be more interesting if it more accurately

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52 _Cloud Atlas_ p. 364  
53 _Transparent Minds_ p. 168  
54 James Scott Bell, _Revision and Self Editing_ Writers Digest 2008 p. 15  
55 _Transparent Minds_ p. 38
reflected the realities of a lengthy journey at sea? A recording of endless days and
nights with very little to do except read, watch the waves and count the stars might be
a more realistic depiction of Ewing’s journey but it would be considerably less
interesting. Keeping the reader’s attention focused on what is important offsets the
loss of proximity to Ewing’s complete experience.

Cohn notes that “blanks convey both the passage of time as well as interruption
of thought”56. To a greater or lesser extent the practice of using blanks in a text is
used in most, if not all, novels (e.g. the paragraph, chapter break or other space
break). Cloud Atlas takes this disruption of time and thought further by breaking the
novel into six discreet stories. Each transition from one story to the next requires the
replacement of one narrator with another and, for the reader, a mental re-orientation.
Furthermore, five of the six stories are split into halves with other stories interposed
between each half. The resulting disruption of the passage of time and attended re-
engagement of the reader has the effect of increasing distance – in effect the reader is
being required to repeatedly step back from the novel and provided with an
opportunity to contemplate what has been experienced up to each such point.

A Possible Life - chance and free will

Like Cloud Atlas, the five lightly connected stories which comprise A Possible Life
are each presented from a different perspective; first person, close and distant third
person57 etc. and these techniques allow for varying degrees of objectivity and
subjectivity (or degrees of compassion and dispassion) without necessarily creating a

56 Transparent Minds p. 220
57 For an explanation of the differences between close and distant third person
point of view, see Nancy Kress Characters, Emotion & Viewpoints Writers Digest
Books 2005 pp. 185-191
disconnect from emotional sympathy. In “Part I - A Different Man”, the distant third person narration of Geoffrey Talbot’s unfulfilled life allows room for sympathy but does not permit the horrors of his wartime experience to overshadow questions about the life he might had lead in different circumstances. “Part II – The Second Sister” is a stark, factual and unemotive first person narration. Set in Victorian London, this story follows the life of Billy Webb who, after his impoverished parents send him to the Union House, rises to a state of middle class prosperity essentially through a combination of hard work, making the right choices and (on occasion) good fortune. “Part III – Everything can be Explained” reverts to third person narration to present the life of scientist Elena Duranti who, for all her scientific brilliance, lives a life that she is, continually and ultimately, unsatisfied with. In “Part IV – A Door Into Heaven” the third person narrative is used, but in a fact-driven manner which never examines Jeanne’s feelings only considers her internal thoughts in a superficial manner and thus maintains a greater distance between the illiterate French peasant who is the subject of the narration and the reader. The final story, “Part V – You Next Time” provides much more exposure to the emotions and internal world of music producer Freddy as the first person narrator than “Part II – The Second Sister”.

Speaking broadly, we might say that A Possible Life is about the impact on choices on our lives and the role of random chance. As Freddy laments:

"I was almost sixty years old, but I didn't understand anything. It all in the end seemed to have been a matter of the purest chance."\(^{58}\)

\(^{58}\) A Possible Life p. 293
Beyond the commonality of comprising multiple lives with a low degree of interconnectedness, *A Possible Life* varies significantly from *Cloud Atlas* in a number of respects including the extent to which the authorial presence can be readily discerned.

In *A Possible Life*, the presence of the author is evident but is less intrusive than in *Cloud Atlas*. From a comparative perspective, there are similarities between the two texts – both are comprised of several short stories that include connecting elements that serve to link the stories. In some respects, *A Possible Life* is closer to a more conventional compilation of short stories with a less intrusive authorial presence both structurally and textually. In contrast, the authorial presence in *Cloud Atlas* is more evident in the text itself and in the distinctive structure (splitting of five of the six stories and the pendulum like historical sequencing of their presentation). The textual distinctions can be illustrated by considering the linkages between the stories - linkages that appear so blatantly in *Cloud Atlas* are muted to the point where they can either be taken by the reader as a reminder that to some extent all humans are presented with life altering moments and decisions (which provide us all with a degree of commonality in our lives) or glossed over allowing the reader to focus on the development of individual characters. As mentioned, these structural and formal differences affect the reader’s experience and thus function to support the thematic differences between the two novels.

We can understand that the village in France where Giselle betrays Geoffrey Talbot to the Nazis is likely the same village where Jeanne spends her life a century

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59 The interconnectedness is sufficiently weak that some critics have suggested that *A Possible Life* is better considered as a collection of short stories:
http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/a-possible-life-by-sebastian-faulks-8165766.html
earlier but the linkage is so subtle as to be almost unnoticeable. In contrast, when faith is being discussed in “A Door Into Heaven”, the following exchange occurs:

“Marcel smiled. ‘One day there may be someone who understands every bit of how our minds work, not just like a philosopher but like a scientist.’

‘What on earth would be the point of that? said Jeanne. ‘It wouldn’t alter anything.’”

This exchange serves both as a commentary on the previous story “Everything Can Be Explained” and a prelude to the final story “You Next Time”. In the former, Elena Duranti discovers the “defining quality of human consciousness”. In the latter, as singer Anya King performs her last concert, Freddy understands that there is no next time. In effect, Faulks is telling us that all the understanding of a futuristic science cannot overcome the fact that our lives are largely defined by human action – our own choices as well as those of others. In this respect the illiterate peasant of a French village in the early eighteen hundreds has as valid an understanding of what it is to be human as the brilliant neuroscientist of the future.

Another area where authorial intrusion occurs is sequencing. The five stories of A Possible Life are presented in an order that, although not definitively recognisable until the final pages, is not random. Part I asks a question (what would Geoffrey Talbot’s damaged non-life amounted to if he had not been betrayed and sent to a concentration camp), Part II shows human potential (Billy Webb’s life is reminiscent

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60 A Possible Life p. 189
61 A Possible Life p. 152
of an Horatio Alger\textsuperscript{62} story), Part III provides an explanation (Elena Duranti’s life is devoted to providing a scientific understanding of the human condition), Part IV casts doubt on the value of that explanation (the illiterate Jeanne asserts the supremacy of faith over knowledge and science) and Part V questions the value of the scientific explanation of consciousness (Freddy recognises the inability to change the decisions he made while younger). Faulks presents these ideas largely through narration, in particular the dialogue and thoughts of his characters. The reader has been taken back to the question raised at the beginning. It is no accident that the heavily ironic final story (“You Next Time”) is the one story whose final pages are set in the same time period as Faulks is writing – the conclusion is presented in a setting with which contemporary readers will have greatest familiarity with consequential reduction of distance.

It remains to consider the effect of Faulks’ presentation of each story through a different narrator and from a distinct point of view and consequential variation in distance on the literary agents identified by Iser\textsuperscript{63} and Booth\textsuperscript{64}. One effect is that Faulk’s approach facilitates the reader’s awareness of the thematic issues. The reader observes the impoverished, ignorant and illiterate Jeanne’s life from the considerable distance provided by a remote, almost dispassionate, third person narrator. It is also one of the shorter stories in the novel. The sympathy, frustration and other reactions that the reader experiences are consequently rendered less emotional and more analytical than they might have been if the narrator had brought the reader closer to Jeanne’s life or even maintained the distance but simply provided the reader with a greater opportunity to examine that life. In contrast, the use of first


\textsuperscript{63} The Implied Reader

\textsuperscript{64} The Rhetoric of Fiction

\textsuperscript{65} Part IV – A Door Into Heaven p. p. 170
person narration and point of view combines with a much more vivid and lengthy text to bring the reader much closer to Freddy. However, the positioning of Freddy’s narrative as the final story means that the reader will have already experienced the four stories which preceded it. For at least some readers, this structural positioning will mean that the reduction in distance through textual means will be offset, to some extent, by an analytical awareness of the thematic issues that Faulks is presenting.

**Lolita – intrinsic and extrinsic presence and intrusion**

*Lolita* provides an interesting, almost compelling, study of a flawed character and narrator. The entirety of *Lolita* is written from the perspective of Humbert Humbert. He serves as both the principal character and the narrator and, as narrator, denies readers any opportunity to get close to Dolores/Lolita or any of the other characters. The reader is forced to see the world of *Lolita* through the eyes of a paedophile and the effect is to draw readers emotionally closer to a character whom we should regard with unqualified contempt. However heroic the efforts of Nabokov (or Humbert Humbert himself) to draw readers of *Lolita* closer to Humbert Humbert, the basic facts of his actions are (or should be) enough to allow readers to maintain a sufficiently contemptible distance from the pedophile. In spite of this Nabokov succeeds in reducing that distance significantly. In part this can be attributed simply to the reader being provided only with Humbert Humbert’s perspective (it is his manuscript that is presented). At no point is the reader given the means to view Dolores/Lolita as anything other than a flat cypher. There is little within the text itself

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66 Part V – You Next Time p. 200
to divert the reader’s attention away from Humbert Humbert. As an example, when Humbert sees Lolita after a month apart, he describes her as follows:

“She was thinner and taller, and for a second it seemed to me her face was less pretty than the mental imprint I had cherished for more than a month: her cheeks looked hollowed and too much lentigo camouflaged her rosy rustic features; and that first impression (a very narrow human interval between two tiger heartbeats) carried the clear implication that all widower Humbert had to do, wanted to do, or would do, was to give this wandering through sun-colored little orphan aux yeux battus (and even those plumbaceous umbrae under her eyes bore freckles) a sound education, a healthy and happy girlhood, a clean home, nice girl friends of her age among whom (if fates deigned to repay me) I might find, perhaps, a pretty little Magdlein for Herr Doktor Humbert alone.”67

All Lolita’s physical characteristics are subordinated either to Humbert’s memories or his desires. Whatever exists of Lolita herself in this description is of a secondary nature. Humbert’s descriptions of Lolita often take this approach. Another example:

“Sitting on a high stool, a band of sunlight crossing her bare brown forearm, Lolita was served an elaborate ice-cream concoction topped with synthetic syrup. It was erected and brought her by a pimply brute of a boy in a greasy

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67 *Lolita* p. 111
bow-tie who eyed my fragile child in her thin cotton frock with carnal deliberation.”\textsuperscript{68}

The omniscience of which both Nabokov and Humbert Humbert are possessed is consciously underutilised by Nabokov and intentionally distorted by Humbert Humbert with the resulting unwilling reduction of emotional distance between reader and pedophile. Nabokov’s approach in Lolita can be contrasted with Zoe Heller’s approach to distance in \textit{Notes On A Scandal},\textsuperscript{69} which deals with another inappropriate sexual relationship. In \textit{Notes On A Scandal}, considerable distance is maintained between Connolly (an under age schoolboy who has a sexual relationship with his teacher) and the reader. From this perspective, Heller’s approach to distance is similar to Nabokov’s. There is no attempt to paint Connolly in a sympathetic light – if anything, the opposite is done with Connolly being very superficially portrayed as a type of surly unattractive teenager. However, a meaningful distance is maintained between Sheba (the schoolteacher who has a sexual relationship with Connolly who is one of her pupils) though the interposition of a narrator (Barbara) who imposes her own interpretations and judgements on the events she is recollecting. The reader of \textit{Notes On A Scandal} is kept at some distance from Sheba. Instead, considerable attention is drawn to the narrator by making the narrator the least distant character from the reader.

\textit{Intrinsic and extrinsic elements of authorial presence}

\textsuperscript{68} Lolita p. 115
\textsuperscript{69} Heller, Zoe \textit{Notes on a Scandal} Penguin 2004
Lolita serves as an example of an authorial presence that is (arguably) very distant from the narrator when the text is looked at in complete isolation but more easily discerned when factors outside the text are taken into consideration and an “extrinsic approach to interpretation”\textsuperscript{70} is adopted. As discussed above, Booth has observed that the notion of authorial silence is unsupportable and, by Nabokov’s own admission, Lolita is an exercise in linguistic and artistic creativity rather than a didactic text\textsuperscript{71}.

If the reader ignores or is unaware of a number of external factors, there are very few instances where the presence of either the implied or the actual author can be readily discerned from the text itself. While authorial presence in Lolita is often a matter of inference rather than objective observation on the part of the reader, the number of examples is striking. To use a few examples:

- The characters Ms Lester and Ms Fabian (italics added) – the conjunction of the italicised portions of the characters’ names as ‘lesbian’\textsuperscript{72}
- Mr Quilty – the name of Humbert’s rival is only one similar sounding consonant away from “guilty”, a reflection on Humbert’s attitude to Quilty
- Lake Climax – where contraceptives are retrieved for reuse\textsuperscript{73}
- The “indefatigable” Charlie Holmes – Lolita’s first sexual partner whose name is pronounced “homes” and thus is a statement that Charlie has “reached home base” in teenage dating slang\textsuperscript{74}

These frequent playful manipulations of the English language occur in a novel about a socially unacceptable sexual relationship\textsuperscript{75}. Likewise, various critics have

\textsuperscript{70} The Act of Reading p. 15
\textsuperscript{71} Vladimir Nabokov, On a Book Entitled Lolita, Lolita p. 314, 316
\textsuperscript{72} Craig Raine Afterward to Lolita 1994, Lolita p. 331
\textsuperscript{73} Lolita p. 137
\textsuperscript{74} Lolita p. 137
suggested that *Lolita* parallels *Ulysses* in various aspects\(^76\). It requires a huge and unrealistic leap of faith for a reader to accept that they are anything other than conscious authorial intrusion. Given the current status of literary theory, the existence of authorial presence can be taken as a given and attention focused on the consequential issues of what role an author plays in a text and how the author manages the norms of distance between author, narrator, character and reader.

One technique to manage the distance between narrator and reader is to call into question the reliability of Humbert Humbert as the narrator. Although Craig Raine asserts that Humbert Humbert is not an unreliable narrator\(^77\), Humbert Humbert’s reliability cannot be assumed for the simple reason that the narrator is confessing to paedophilia and has considerable reason to lie to his audience even if, like Claudius\(^78\), he is writing for an audience whom he intends only to see his manuscript after his own death (and that of Dolores/Lolita). However, it is difficult to either see how the playful manner of diverting the judgemental reader which is evident so frequently in the text could serve Humbert Humbert or to accept such playfulness as being consistent with the seriousness of the rest of his account of his relationship with Dolores/Lolita. Even awareness that Humbert Humbert is a professor of literature is insufficient to attribute the jokes to the narrator. Humbert Humbert may be the dominant voice in the narrative, but it would appear that Nabokov was unable to resist

\(^{75}\) It goes without saying that there have been significant improvements to the mainstream social acceptability of same sex relationships since *Lolita* was first published in 1955
\(^{76}\) Eotvos Lorand Tudomanyegyetem *As McFate Would Have It: The Author's Joycean Cameo in Lolita* 2009
http://www.thefreelibrary.com/As+McFate+Would+Have+It%3A+The+Author's+Joycean+Cameo+in+Lolita.-a0225938541
\(^{77}\) Craig Raine *Afterward to Lolita* 1994, *Lolita* p.322
\(^{78}\) *I, Claudius* Penguin Classics 2006 p. 11
at a subtle and more substantial level of presence than is apparent on a first reading. Nabokov may not be intrusive, but he is far from silent.

Nabokov’s approach can be contrasted with the unconcealed authorial presence and intrusion in novels such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* that commences with the famous opening sentence:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

At this stage the reader of *Pride and Prejudice* has yet to encounter any character whatsoever. Even when the first characters appear, there is nothing that would allow the reader room to attribute the observation to anyone other than either the third person narrator or the author. Critics have generally attributed the remark to the author and the only question left is whether the opinion expressed is that of the actual author (i.e. of Jane Austen herself) or the implied author (i.e. the authorial presence that Jane Austen wishes to present to the reader). Given what is commonly known of Jane Austen’s life and the society in which she lived, either construction could be legitimately advanced (as could the possibility that the views of the actual and implied authors are, in this case, the same).

If the reader is aware of and takes into consideration matters external to the text, the authorial presence in *Lolita* is even heavier than it appears from a reading done in

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79 *Pride and Prejudice* Headline Review 2006 p. 3
isolation. As example, *The Gift*\(^{81}\) includes what is very close to an outline of *Lolita*. There is also Nabokov’s own statements about *Lolita*, not least that it is not a moral\(^{82}\) and that it is a record of his love affair with the English language\(^{83}\). Readers aware of these matters will likely conclude that the playfulness of the language is that of Nabokov rather than Humbert Humbert (who is a professor of literature\(^{84}\)). Given that not all readers will have the same awareness of such extrinsic matters, it must follow that different readers will have different reading experiences on this ground alone. The range of reactions to the publication of Lolita (and Nabokov’s efforts to have it published) provide ample testimony to this. In Nabokov’s own words:

> “There are gentle souls who would pronounce Lolita meaningless because it does not teach them anything. I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction, and, despite John Ray’s assertion, Lolita has no moral in tow. For me, a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.”\(^{85}\)

*Why does authorial presence happen at all?*

Authorial presence is sometimes also termed authorial intrusion\(^{86}\), the implication being that the visible presence of an author in his or her own work needs to be justified in order to be accepted as anything other than a disruption of the

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\(^{82}\) Vladimir Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita, Lolita* p. 314
\(^{83}\) Vladimir Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita, Lolita* p. 316
\(^{84}\) *Lolita* p. 15
\(^{85}\) Vladimir Nabokov *On a Book Entitled Lolita, Lolita* p. 314
\(^{86}\) *The Rhetoric of Fiction* p. 42
narrator’s functionality and a distraction to the reader. There are many reasons why an author would intrude on a narration – providing information, expressing an opinion which is different from those of the characters and narrator, remedying the narrator’s deficiencies, providing guidance to the reader etc. As a general observation, given the flexibility that the novel form provides, it should be possible to achieve all of these objectives without authorial intrusion.

The one-dimensional presentation of “The Orison of Somni 451” is similar to the technique used by Nabokov in Lolita to draw the reader closer to the objectionable Humbert Humbert. In The Orison of Somni 451 the reader sees only a world of bad things (apart from Somni 451 herself). In Lolita the reader sees Humbert Humbert as the only fully developed character. All the other characters appearing in Lolita are either flat types or considerably less developed than the protagonist. The reader may know what Lolita does – her actions and words – but, unlike Humbert Humbert, the reader is never provided with her internal thoughts. The comparative lack of insight into secondary characters can (and in Lolita does) prevents readers’ attention from being diverted from the central character. Even where a secondary character is developed to a reasonable extent, such characters will likely be rendered more distant from the reader by reason of the comparatively greater development (and page space) devoted to the primary character. In Cloud Atlas the reader is manipulated away from the other inhabitants of Somni 451’s society and in Lolita the boundaries may not be as decisive but the reader is still denied access to any character other than the narrator. Even degrees of separation in characters have an effect on distance and the reading experience.

Cloud Atlas and A Possible Life both use varying approaches to the narration of each story with corresponding variation in the distances between each narrator and the
reader. In contrast, *Lolita* presents the reader with a single story, a single narrator and a single dominant character. As both a narrator and a character Humbert Humbert is someone with whom neither the implied nor the actual reader should have any sympathy. Accordingly, the efforts of Humbert Humbert as narrator to draw the reader closer to him (presumably for the purposes of eliciting sympathy) take place in the face of at least expected if not actual hostility from his intended audience. Although not as blatantly ironic as Claudius in *I, Claudius*, Humbert Humbert does not shrink from appealing directly to the reader:

“Frigid gentlewomen of the jury! I had thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Dolores Haze; but by six she was wide awake, and by six fifteen we were technically lovers. I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me.”

While the question of whether the irony is attributable to Humbert Humbert or to Nabokov is open to debate, this rhetorical plea is so richly ironic because the only jury to which it is addressed is that of the opinion of unknown people who are not intended to have access to Humbert Humbert’s manuscript until both himself and Dolores/Lolita are dead.

In *Lolita* the compression and expansion of time is handled in a more conventional manner than in Cloud Atlas. The single story experiences moments when Humbert Humbert omits or truncates lengthy periods of time into short paragraphs (or single sentences) and others where his narrating of events takes considerably longer than the events themselves.

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87 *Lolita* p. 132
Applications, implications and conclusions – why distance is important

From the writer’s perspective, imposing, narrowing, removing or otherwise manipulating the distance between the various agents over which he or she has control, provides the writer with the means of influencing the manner in which the implied and actual reader will experience the novel (or at least the potential means for the reader’s experience to be influenced). In contrast, or perhaps in compliment, a reader with the awareness of the existence of the various agents and the potential relationships between them will have the ability to gain a deeper appreciation of the novel. In addition, because the ‘reader’ agent cannot be viewed as a single homogenous entity the differences between a theoretical and a real reader (and, further between individual real readers) will affect each reader’s interpretation and experience of a text.

Cohn states that there is a trade off between depth and directness\textsuperscript{88}. In the context of an analysis of the role of distance between the various literary agents, the trade off can often be between objectivity and emotional engagement. As a reader is brought closer to a character and the emotional distance that separates them shrinks, the reader becomes further removed from a distant vantage point that allows objective consideration. However, and the qualification is a significant one, and involves obvious trade offs.

As a further observation on the implications of distance and the consequences of proximity, emotional proximity (or its absence) does not have to equate to emotional

\textsuperscript{88} Transparent Minds p. 98
empathy (or its absence). The distance between Somni 451 and the reader in Cloud Atlas is significant (see above). In spite of which one feels all the horror of Somni 451’s existence in a dystopic world. In contrast, Humbert Humbert is a Machiavellian master in the art of drawing readers very close to him – in spite of the repugnance that the implied reader should feel towards Humbert Humbert, the rejection of his appeals to our understanding is harder than it should be. As Wayne Booth observes, “One of the major delights of this delightful, profound book is that of watching Humbert almost make a case for himself”89 (emphasis in original).

In remains to consider why distance is important for both the creation and understanding of literary fiction. From the perspective of reading, understanding and responding to a text, the degree of actual or perceived distance between the implied and actual reader will have a significant effect on the reader’s potential and actual experience. As an example, the balance between objective and analytical responses and subjective and emotive responses is heavily influenced by the degree of distance imposed between the relevant literary agents. A writer who is aware of these dynamics thus has the ability to convey meaning and influence the reader’s experience by manipulating the aesthetic or emotional distance between the various literary agents through the use of point of view and other techniques.

89 The Rhetoric of Fiction p. 391
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