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Shaking, Breaking, Remaking

Anxiety in Contemporary American Literature, 1990-Present

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Shaking, Breaking, Remaking: Anxiety in Contemporary American Literature, 1990-Present

Alexandra Morden Osborne

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for
award of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates anxiety in contemporary American literature from 1990-present. Through analysis of the work of Paul Auster, Siri Hustvedt, David Foster Wallace, and Junot Díaz, I develop a theory of literary anxiety that is attentive to the ways in which anxiety's presence in texts disrupts established narratives, unpicks both characters' and authors' senses of identity, and fuels contemporary constructions of temporality in which the future is uncertain or even entirely denied.

The thesis' opening chapter considers anxiety in Paul Auster's and Siri Hustvedt's illness narratives, reflecting on the position of liminality these narratives occupy between fiction and non-fiction. Chapter Two analyses short stories by David Foster Wallace and Junot Díaz in order to demonstrate the form's particular suitability for the representation of anxiety, as well as the ways in which this anxiety interacts with form. Chapter Three thinks about anxiety and masculinity in the context of the #MeToo movement and allegations of sexual harassment made against Junot Díaz in 2018. Lastly, Chapter Four investigates the links between anxiety, trauma, and temporality in Wallace's and Husvedt's writing.

With attention to the slippery, contentious, and multiple conceptualisations of anxiety, which range from apparently quotidian or 'natural' states of anxiety through to clinical diagnoses of anxiety disorders, I examine patterns in anxiety's representation in American literature, as well as in the sources of this anxiety. While remaining grounded in literary analysis, I employ a range of methodologies drawing from studies of phenomenology, accelerationism, and queer theory, among others, with a view to approaching anxiety from as many angles as possible. This allows for a fuller understanding of anxiety as a whole, as I believe such an understanding, contingent as it is on insights into the unsettling and precarious nature of our current existence under neoliberal capitalism, relies on an interdisciplinary approach.

Key words:

America, Anxiety, Body, Contemporary, Cultural, Disorder, Fiction, Form, Humanities, Identity, Literature, Medical, Mind, Narrative, Pathology, Phenomenology, Politics, Precarity, Psychology, Temporality, Time, Trauma.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:.....

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Introduction: An(other) Age of Anxiety

Though dunes still hide from the eye
The shining shore,
Already by a certain exciting kind of discomfort
I know the ocean near.

For mind and whining gull
Are saying something,
Or trying to say, about time
And the anxious heart.¹

--

We belong to our kind,
Are judged as we judge, for all gestures of time
And all species of space respond in our own
Contradictory dialect, the double talk
Of ambiguous bodies, born like us to that
Natural neighbourhood which denial itself
Like a friend confirms; they reflect our status,
Temporals pleading for eternal life with
The infinite impetus of anxious spirits,
Finite in fact yet refusing to be real.²

We live in anxious times. In his poem 'The Age of Anxiety,' written during the Second World War and published in 1947, W.H. Auden presents four characters in a New York bar, all of whom are dealing with the physical and psychological resonances of war, during which 'everybody is reduced to the anxious status of a shady character or a displaced person.'³ At several junctures in the text, Auden emphasises the enduring nature of these psychological resonances through the explicit binding of anxiety and time; it is the immediate panic and tension of war, and the subsequent unravelling of religious faith and a sense of 'having enough time' in the context of this conflict, that prompts his labelling of his time of writing as an age of anxiety. Despite Auden's use of the phrase prompting its widespread popularisation, many writers before and after him have characterized their existence as being in a collectively anxious time and temporality. In recent years, however, the term has been subject to a particularly noteworthy resurgence, with books, magazine articles and songs borrowing

¹ W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*, ed. by Alan Jacobs (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 55-56.

² Auden, p. 107.

³ Auden, p. 3.

the title: in one such piece from 2019, journalist Talia Lavin goes as far as to say that ‘America seems to be in the midst of a full-blown panic attack.’⁴ With National Institute of Mental Health figures from 2017 indicating that over 30% of U.S adults will have an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives, and American Psychiatric Association polling finding that Americans generally have become increasingly anxious since 2018, there is, at the very least, a sound statistical foundation to this claim.⁵ From the observation in David Foster Wallace’s *The Pale King* (2011) that ‘pretty much every red-blooded American in today’s (then) late-Vietnam and Watergate era felt desolate and disillusioned and unmotivated and directionless and lost,’ to the families in Paul Auster’s *Sunset Park* (2010) fleeing debtors ‘in a collapsing world of economic ruin and relentless, ever-expanding hardship,’ this anxiety has also emerged at individual and collective levels in America’s literature, especially in the last four decades.⁶

This is not in any way to suggest that anxiety does not have a long literary history, because of course, it has, in many shapes and forms. Indeed, as Marc-Antoine Crocq notes in his history of anxiety, Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* ‘shows that anxious affect is distinguished from sadness [...] mak[ing] an interesting distinction between *anxietas* that designates trait anxiety or the fact of being prone to anxiousness, and *angor* that refers to state anxiety or current anxiety.’⁷ In making this distinction between being prone to anxiousness (a clinical anxiety, perhaps), and feeling anxiety at a particular moment, Cicero speaks to anxiety’s slipperiness, and to the challenges thus inherent in its study, categorisation, and identification in literary texts. Crocq also observes that ‘between classical antiquity and modern psychiatry, there was an interval of centuries when the concept of anxiety as

⁴ Talia Lavin, ‘Age of Anxiety,’ *The New Republic* (26 February 2019), <<https://newrepublic.com/article/153153/age-anxiety>> [accessed 5 April 2020].

⁵ ‘Any Anxiety Disorder,’ *National Institute of Mental Health* (November 2017), <<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder.shtml>> [accessed 5 April 2020]; ‘Americans’ Overall Level of Anxiety about Health, Safety and Finances Remains High,’ *American Psychiatric Association* (20 May 2019) <<https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/americans-overall-level-of-anxiety-about-health-safety-and-finances-remain-high>> [accessed 5 April 2020], respectively.

⁶ David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 215; Paul Auster, *Sunset Park* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 4, respectively.

⁷ Marc-Antoine Crocq, ‘A History of Anxiety: From Hippocrates to DSM,’ *Dialogues in Critical Neuroscience*, 17, (2015), 319-325, (p. 321).

an illness seems to have disappeared from written records. Patients with anxiety did exist, but they were diagnosed with other diagnostic terms.⁸ Clinically, then, anxiety was largely treated as part of a sub-set of symptoms for other conditions such as melancholia, neurasthenia, and neuroses. It was only in 1980, upon the publication of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)-III*, that anxiety disorders were introduced as part of their own category, comprised of subsections on phobic disorders, anxiety states, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In some senses, this more overt categorisation might make it easier to identify anxiety, anxious symptoms, and anxious drives in literature, but it also constitutes a drive to pathologise affects and sensations that may resist neat clinical categories, or that simply aren't labelled or defined in this way in-text. I will return to these difficulties in defining anxiety later, but in light of this developing language around anxiety, and the increasing prevalence of anxiety diagnoses in the U.S, we may turn to one of this thesis' central questions: what is it about the nature of our existence in contemporary conditions of the Global North (particularly America) that lead to its definition as a new age of anxiety, and how is this anxiety expressed in American literature written in these conditions?

In order to answer this question, it is first important to establish what precisely anxiety is, and how this study will define it, particularly given that anxiety is often used as an umbrella term for a wide range of feelings, sensations, and disorders. Some further questions that have been central to my own definition(s) of anxiety include how to distinguish between feeling anxious and suffering from anxiety (that is to say, between anxiety as an affect and as a chronic condition); how anxiety differs from fear; whether anxiety can be anticipated or mastered; whether anxiety should be thought of as a disability; how to figure the sometimes interchangeably acute and chronic nature of anxiety; and how anxiety can be experienced simultaneously as physical and psychological, and as both individually and collectively felt. It is also important to note anxiety's role in what Raymond Williams calls 'structures of feeling': 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt [...]

⁸ Crocq, p. 321.

characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone;’ that is, ‘not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought.’⁹

In line with many other thinkers, ranging from Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein to Adam Frank and Eve Sedgwick, I consider anxiety to be an affect, which by its nature is always embodied.¹⁰ As an affect, anxiety is distinct from, but closely related to other affects, including sadness, shame, guilt, and most notably, fear. In her study of fear, Joanna Bourke summarises the difference between fear and anxiety thus: ‘the word ‘fear’ is used to refer to an immediate, objective threat, while anxiety refers to an anticipated, subjective threat.’¹¹ However, she emphasises that while such a definition may be useful for psychologists and psychoanalysts, historians must be attentive to the risks of imposing ‘distinctions on emotional states in the past’ – that is, it is not necessarily helpful or productive to make assumptions or even diagnoses of anxiety when approaching historical accounts.¹² Instead, she distinguishes fear and anxiety through social and hierarchical responses, which mean that ‘in fear states, individuals are consciously able to take measures to neutralise or flee from the dangerous object, while purposeful activity fails individuals whose subjective experience is anxiety.’¹³ Bourke also draws attention to the frequent conversion of fear to anxiety, and vice versa. She argues that this was particularly noticeable in America during the twentieth century, as fear was pathologised and thus ‘converted’ into anxiety as a result of ‘the greater cultural resonance of therapy in that country.’¹⁴ Anxiety’s status as an affect, then, is permeable – it may be converted to fear dependent on the reaction of the person to that which is inducing anxiety, and on the cultural conditions that predispose certain societies to particular ways of interpreting anxiety.

⁹ Raymond Williams, ‘Structures of Feeling’ in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, ed. by Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 20-28 (p. 23).

¹⁰ Works by these authors that discuss anxiety include, but are not limited to, Freud’s *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1925), Klein’s paper ‘Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms,’ (1946) and Frank and Sedgwick’s co-edited book, *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995).

¹¹ Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006), p. 189.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bourke, *Fear*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Bourke, *Fear*, p. 192.

Similarly, Francis O’Gorman distinguishes between ‘household, everyday, functional “worry”,’ which he argues is ‘ready and waiting, like a shadow, but [is] not a pathological condition.’¹⁵ He adds that:

“anxiety” sometimes implies a condition of mind that takes greater hold of a sufferer than worry – as if it is something flatter and squatter. “Anxiety” is a term more frequently used in relation to panic attacks, phobias, perfectionism, visible obsessions, antisocial behaviour [...] ordinary worry rarely grips so hard that nothing else can happen.¹⁶

Although I agree that anxiety generally ‘takes greater hold’ than worry, I also feel this interpretation relies too heavily on a pathologisation or medicalisation of anxiety. As well as the risk Bourke highlights of such an interpretation leading to anxiety being inappropriately ‘read in’ to the past, it also disregards experiences of anxiety that involve an eventually normalised baseline of worry and anxiety: so normalised that the sufferer will be aware of its presence, but will still be able to perform everyday tasks. For example, in David Foster Wallace’s microfictional story ‘A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life,’ three characters grapple with their anxiety about being liked, ‘anxious as [they were] to preserve good relations at all times.’¹⁷ Although the characters wear ‘the very same twist to their faces,’ which speaks to the ways in which anxiety may force people into social performances, they are still able to do things and go places: indeed, failing to do so might reveal a flaw or weak spot, rendering them vulnerable or abnormal, and ‘one never knew, after all, now did one now did one now did one.’¹⁸ This is the more chronic end of the anxiety spectrum, whereas O’Gorman is referring to what I would deem to be acute experiences of anxiety. I acknowledge that it is not helpful to use the terms worry and anxiety interchangeably, and I do not think there is the same level of permeability between worry and anxiety as there is between anxiety and fear. As such,

¹⁵ Francis O’Gorman, *Worrying: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ David Foster Wallace, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001), p. 0.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

this study assumes that one can worry without being anxious, but that it is unlikely that someone will be anxious without worrying.

Nevertheless, many definitions of anxiety are necessarily clinical, as they will be used in a medical context in order to diagnose and prescribe medications. These definitions are useful not only in enhancing our understanding of anxiety, but also in helping to provide one kind of language for the vocalisation of challenging and tumultuous feelings that may otherwise resist or defy straightforward linguistic expression. As Siri Hustvedt puts it in *What I Loved* (2003), anxiety, which is characterised as ‘that vague form of fear,’ is ‘a crude lump of feeling that relies on words for definition.’¹⁹ Here, anxiety’s slipperiness is presented as requiring words, yet it is acknowledged that it is something vague and hard to conceptualise: a ‘psychic storm,’ as Wallace says, that is not easily explained.²⁰ Adhering to the work of Freud, which I will return to later, the DSM-V (2013), which is a guide for clinicians, defines anxiety disorders as constituting ‘excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioural disturbances,’ adding that ‘*fear* is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas *anxiety* is anticipation of future threat’.²¹ It clarifies that:

obviously, these two states overlap, but they also differ, with fear more often associated with surges of autonomic arousal necessary for fight or flight, thoughts of immediate danger, and escape behaviours, and anxiety more associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and cautious or avoidant behaviours.²²

On the question of the difference between anxious feelings and an anxiety disorder, the DSM-V states that:

anxiety disorders differ from developmentally normative fear or anxiety by being excessive or persisting beyond developmentally appropriate periods. They differ from transient fear or anxiety, often stress-induced, by being persistent (e.g. typically lasting 6 months or more),

¹⁹ Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved* (London: Sceptre, 2003), p. 344.

²⁰ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 2014), p. 53.

²¹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), p. 188. Original emphasis.

²² *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*, p. 188.

although the criterion for duration is intended as a general guide with allowance for some degree of flexibility.²³

While such categorisations are helpful at a broad level, and provide a baseline or skeleton language for anxiety, the DSM-V was a controversial edition, with the NHS drawing attention to ‘bitter criticism’ of the guide that was centred around ‘an unhealthy influence of the pharmaceutical industry on the revision process,’ and ‘an increasing tendency to “medicalise” patterns of behaviour and mood that are not considered to be particularly extreme.’²⁴ Both an open letter written by members of the Society for Humanistic Psychology and articles written by Professor Allen Frances, who chaired the DSM-IV taskforce, drew attention to changes to the diagnostic criteria for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), which meant that the symptomatic duration and criteria for GAD were reduced. This blurring of the distinction between ‘normative’ or ‘transient’ fear and anxiety and anxiety disorders further complicates anxiety for both sufferers and clinicians, causing a potential diagnostic anxiety as people may feel they ‘need’ to be diagnosed because of their fulfilment of more lax criteria. Siri Hustvedt makes direct reference to this over-medicalisation in her illness narrative *The Shaking Woman or a History of my Nerves* (2010) when she observes that at the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic, ‘I found myself close to particular human beings who suffered from complex illnesses that sometimes bore little resemblance to the descriptions catalogued in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.’²⁵ That is to say, while medical language and categories do provide linguistic foundations for anxiety and its study/diagnosis, this language attempts to universalise a condition that varies wildly from person to person, and which cannot be clearly identified as a broken leg or a heart attack might be. The disconnect between DSM descriptions and lived experiences of anxiety might prompt feelings of isolation or doubt that exacerbate anxiety, which in turn emphasises the inadequacy of such broad definitions.

²³ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*, p. 188.

²⁴ ‘Controversial Mental Health Guide DSM-5,’ NHS, (15 Aug 2013), <<https://www.nhs.uk/news/mental-health/news-analysis-controversial-mental-health-guide-dsm-5/>> [accessed Apr 7, 2020].

²⁵ Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* (London: Sceptre, 2011), p. 6.

An early draft of *The Pale King* also speaks directly to the challenge of defining anxiety, describing David Wallace's father's panic at missing a train, which 'provokes some kind of strange, involuntary anxiety or urgency – I don't think there's even a specific word for it, psychologically, though it's possibly related to primal, prehistoric fears that you would somehow miss getting to eat your fair share of the tribe's kill.'²⁶ In this typescript, Wallace footnotes this quotation from his draft with '[[DW: There is such a term: *Turschluss-Panik*- see FBI notebook p.190]],' yet this note is deleted from the final novel, and is not referenced.²⁷ This quote and deleted footnote emphasise how anxiety and panic so often elude language: even though Wallace discovers a relevant term, which is a German phrase that, loosely translated, means door-shut-panic, pertaining to a sense that time is running out, it is decided that it's better to maintain that the character's feelings can't be named. Etymologically, definitions of anxiety are attentive to its physical and psychological resonances, with the classical Latin *anxietas* meaning 'worry, solicitude, extreme care, over-carefulness' as well as 'discomfort in the chest' in post-classical Latin.²⁸ The first definition of anxiety in the current *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'worry over the future or about something with an uncertain outcome; uneasy concern about a person, situation, etc.; a troubled state of mind arising from such worry or concern.'²⁹ It is worth noting that this definition is prioritised over a medicalised one: the specific entry on anxiety in the context of medicine is listed third. As I have already stated, one of the challenges inherent in trying to define anxiety is that it is both a condition and an affective state, both physical and psychological, both individual and collective, and both chronic and acute. Accounts of it must be attentive to direct experience as well as these myriad contradictions.

What is clear, then, is that the study of anxiety has spanned psychoanalytic, philosophical, and medical thought, with the definitions outlined above being influenced by the work of

²⁶ University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, MS-5155 Series IV, Container 36.3. Formatting replicates the original.

²⁷ MS-5155 Series IV, Container 36.3.

²⁸ 'anxiety, n.,' *Oxford English Dictionary*, (March 2013), <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8968?redirectedFrom=anxiety&>> [accessed 10 April 2020].

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and, most notably, Freud. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is inextricably linked to Adam and original sin, and is unique from 'fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite' as it operates as 'freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility.'³⁰ As such, his definition is particularly attentive to anxiety's formlessness, and its connection to infinite possibilities and futures which may haunt the sufferer. Heidegger echoes this sense of indefiniteness in his analysis of anxiety, stating that anxiety is not about 'a *definite* kind of Being for Dasein or a *definite* possibility for it.'³¹ Rather, 'the threat itself is indefinite,' as although 'anxiety is not only anxiety in the face of something, but, as a state-of-mind [...] is also *anxiety about* something,' this something is not an object, but the very state of 'Being-in-the-world.'³² Importantly, then, anxiety has a noteworthy philosophical function here: it is one of Dasein's ways of being-in-the-world that opens up the possibility of an authentic relationship to Being in general.

Freud revisited his definitions of anxiety on several occasions, which culminated in the publication of *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1925). In his earlier work, he describes anxiety as a transformation of accumulated tension, or a 'transformed libido.'³³ Rather than viewing anxiety as transformational, Freud amends his argument to posit that anxiety is instead reactive, and can be both an affect (a visceral, subjectively experienced emotion that catalyses certain actions and reactions) and an affective state (where precipitates of traumatic experiences that remain in the mind re-emerge when similar situations occur). It can be 'realistic anxiety' that is attached to a real, known danger, or it can be 'neurotic anxiety' which is attached to an unknown danger.³⁴ Further, if the danger is real, the subject will experience 'physical helplessness,' while if the danger is instinctual, that is, based on previous experiences that were upsetting or dangerous, the subject will

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Concept of Anxiety,' in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. by Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 138-155 (p. 139).

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 232.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sigmund Freud, 'Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 20*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), pp.77-178 (p. 79).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

suffer from ‘psychical helplessness.’³⁵ Freud deems the latter form of helplessness to be a traumatic situation, whereas anxiety about real danger is a danger-situation – ‘anxiety is therefore on the one hand an expectation of a trauma, and on the other a repetition of it in a mitigated form.’³⁶

Temporally, this also implies that anxiety has the capacity to bend or stretch the experience of time - something which is examined further in this thesis’ first and fourth chapters. The tension Freud highlights between anticipatory and reactive anxiety in turn points to the potentially chronic bind of anxiety, which may force the sufferer into a paradoxical cycle of awaiting and prematurely reacting to or repeating trauma. Similarly, the reactive quality of anxiety that Freud describes emphasises its subjectivity – its status as an affect and condition is defined by the experiences of the individual sufferer, which must be prioritised in all analyses of anxiety.

With regard to the question of whether anxiety is a disability, in the US, the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 defines a psychiatric disability as one which ‘substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of [an] individual.’³⁷ Similarly, in the UK, anxiety is deemed to be a disability under the Equality Act 2010 if it has a ‘long-term effect on your normal day-to day activity.’³⁸ The UK’s definition is temporally grounded – a person can claim certain disability benefits if their condition has lasted, or is likely to last, for 12 months or more. The US definition is somewhat less rigid, though both acts of legislation state that the person’s life must be significantly affected for their anxiety to be deemed a disability. These definitions, while helpful as guidance, pose more questions than they answer, and the wide variety of anxiety symptoms different people will experience may not satisfy these definitions while still proving disabling. For example, psychological symptoms can include ‘restlessness, a sense of dread, feeling constantly ‘on edge,’ difficulty concentrating, [and] irritability,’ while physical symptoms can include ‘dizziness, tiredness, a

³⁵ Freud, ‘Inhibitions,’ (p. 166).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ ‘EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and Psychiatric Disabilities,’ *The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, (5 March 2009), <<https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/psych.html>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

³⁸ ‘When a Mental Health Condition Becomes a Disability,’ *Gov.uk*, (5 April 2017), <<https://www.gov.uk/when-mental-health-condition-becomes-disability>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

noticeably strong, fast or irregular heartbeat, muscle aches and tension, trembling and shaking, dry mouth, excessive sweating, shortness of breath,' and many more.³⁹ While one or a combination of these symptoms may not substantially limit life activities for 12 months, they are, nonetheless, disabling in the sense that they may stop someone from leaving the house, or from being able to breathe properly, or from being able to work for short or longer periods of time. Although in terms of legislation, there are fixed temporal points at which someone will be deemed disabled, this approach is not attentive to the idiosyncrasies of anxious experience, and in reality it is not possible to choose a fixed point at which someone's anxiety should be deemed a disability. Rather, this distinction should be made on the basis of when a person self-defines as feeling unable to manage everyday tasks and the passage of day-to-day life. As Andrea Tone argues in her study of anxiety throughout American history, 'anxiety's reality is confirmed by the place it has occupied in people's lives.'⁴⁰

The question of whether anxiety can be thought of as chronic as well as acute also depends almost entirely on the experiences of the anxious person. As established in DSM definitions, a diagnosis of Generalised Anxiety Disorder requires a clinician to judge that a person's anxiety is chronic – that it will be 'more constant' than for those who have difficulty controlling their worries, and that it will 'affect their daily lives.'⁴¹ For Tone, anxiety's so-called 'expressions' include 'worry, doubt, panic, [and] fear' – affects that many people will experience without a diagnosis of anxiety.⁴² However, prioritising legal or clinical definitions in deciding whether anxiety is chronic or disabling (in a legal sense) is subjective, and not attentive to how any one person's anxiety may make them feel. Further, even if a person is not diagnosed with anxiety, they may still feel anxious on a daily basis. Many other people will have received treatment for anxiety and feel generally able to

³⁹ 'Generalised Anxiety Disorder in Adults - Symptoms,' *NHS Choices*, (1 February 2016), <<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Anxiety/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

⁴⁰ Andrea Tone, *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America's Turbulent Affair with Tranquillisers* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. xi.

⁴¹ 'Generalised Anxiety Disorders in Adults', *NHS Choices*, (1 February 2016), <<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Anxiety/Pages/Introduction.aspx>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

⁴² Tone, p. xi.

manage, but may find that anxious aspects of their personality persist throughout their lives – this, too, could be considered as a form of chronic anxiety, as it may never fully ‘go away’ or be ‘cured.’

Anxiety is neither wholly predictable nor unpredictable. In some senses, it could be deemed familiar – once a person has experienced feelings of anxiety, these feelings may well recur and become present most of the time. Once a person is aware of their tendency to feel anxious or suffer from anxiety, they may be able to anticipate that anxiety to a certain extent. They may have awareness of the symptoms most common to them, or triggers for their own anxiety. Yet it can also be vastly unpredictable and coloured by uncertainty – indeed, Dan Grupe and Jack Nitschke argue that uncertainty is ‘inextricably linked to the phenomenological experience of anxiety.’⁴³ A person may experience certain symptoms and triggers at one time, and wholly different ones at another. They may suddenly have a panic attack without an obvious or immediate ‘cause’ – this is what Freud calls neurotic anxiety. For some, the anticipation of anxiety may render it a ‘normal’ state – something that is familiar and expected, and thus, in some senses, quotidian. Further, someone may come to fear anxiety, such that it becomes reified through fear, and can become an object or state to be afraid of. This could render anxiety less indeterminate, but it also has the potential to become a feedback loop whereby a person experiences anxiety about anxiety.

It is precisely because of these wide-ranging questions, the struggle to contain anxiety in one theorization or definition, and the particular anxiousness and precarity of our current socio-political moment, that I feel it is pertinent both to apply theories of anxiety to literature, and to analyse anxiety in literature. At present, there are very few book-length studies of anxiety in literature. By examining anxiety with attention to the theories and questions I have outlined, with a particular focus on phenomenological readings of anxiety, I will provide an account of literary anxiety that is uniquely attentive to the first-person experience of anxiety, which in turn, will highlight both literature’s particular suitability for representing the interiority of anxious experiences, and what

⁴³ Dan Grupe and Jack Nitschke, ‘Uncertainty and Anticipation in Anxiety: An Integrated Neurobiological and Psychological Perspective,’ *Nat Rev Neuroscience*, 14 (2013), 488-501 (p. 490).

literature might teach us about anxiety. My study takes 1990 as a starting point as this year marked the publication of William Styron's *Darkness Visible*, a ground-breaking memoir of depression which prompted a proliferation of illness narratives and literary texts dealing with anxiety. As I have already mentioned, this is not to say that anxiety had not been present in literature before this moment, but as diagnoses of anxiety rose, information about it was made more widely available, and writers began to address the 'taboo' of mental illness by speaking more directly and thoroughly to experiences of it in their work.

With a view to conducting as thorough a study as possible, I have opted for a selection of authors who have different writing styles, backgrounds, and identities. This is motivated by a desire to think about the gendered and racialised implications of anxiety: not only do women and people of colour experience specific forms of discrimination that might fuel anxiety, their representation in the media and their wider socialisation might lead to a sense of pressure to perform certain versions of femininity or race in order to assimilate and feel part of certain communities. While Auster, Díaz, Hustvedt and Wallace are united in their representations of late modernity and their broadly postmodernist influences, each has a unique perspective on what causes anxiety, how it feels to be anxious, and how best to represent this anxiety in-text.

Chapter One considers three illness narratives that feature anxiety: Paul Auster's *Winter Journal* (2012) and *Report from the Interior* (2013), and Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves* (2011). With attention to Philip Lejeune's concept of the autobiographical pact, as well as Michael Sayeau's conceptualisation of the event in literature, I argue that anxiety's presence in illness narratives forces such texts into a position of liminality between fiction and non-fiction. This liminality is particularly noteworthy because of the expectations readers will bring to illness narratives, with Ann Jurecic noting that many view such writing as an '[act] of testimony about trauma, or at least about the dislocations and transformations caused by disease and

disorder.⁴⁴ Yet the issue here is that ‘the term testimony [...] sets a high standard,’ meaning that ‘few illness memoirs – constructed representations of the interior experience of illness – can fulfil such a standard.’⁴⁵

As a result of the pressure such expectations exert, which causes an additional anxiety (that is registered and explored textually) around how anxious experiences are represented, I argue that Auster and Hustvedt’s texts visibly bear this weight through their formal liminality, their framing of anxiety as an ‘event’ in the body and in their life stories, and their introduction of proxy bodies into their writing. In this chapter, I adopt a phenomenological methodology which is foregrounded by Dylan Trigg’s assertion that reading anxiety phenomenologically ‘helps to outline the singularity of a given experience,’ and which is substantiated by Maurice Merleau Ponty’s conceptualisations of the habitual and lived body in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).⁴⁶ In doing so, I begin to trace the impact anxiety has on bodies, language, and literary form in the texts at hand, operating as a kind of narrative rupture therein.

Chapter Two takes this analysis of anxiety’s interaction with literary form and applies it directly to the short story, which has particular resonance in the American literary tradition. Given my assertion that anxiety has the power to disrupt established narratives and alter literary form, this chapter pays close attention to the ways in which the short story’s immediacy, brevity, and sense of claustrophobia is an especially appropriate home for interiority more generally, and the representation of anxiety in particular. In this sense, I argue that the short story form also performs anxiety, reflecting and reiterating it intra- and extra-textually while adhering to Raymond Carver’s statement that the form embodies ‘a sense of mystery, of something happening just under the surface of things.’⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 10.

⁴⁵ Jurecic, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Dylan Trigg, *Topophobia: A Phenomenology of Anxiety* (London, Bloomsbury, 2017), p. xxxiii, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), respectively.

⁴⁷ Kasia Boddy, ‘A Conversation,’ in *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, ed. by Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990), pp. 197-203 (p. 198)

In order to consider this relationship between anxiety and the short story, this chapter analyses 'Ysrael' and 'No Face' from Junot Díaz's collection *Drown* (1996), and 'Incarnations of Burned Children' from David Foster Wallace's collection *Oblivion* (2004).⁴⁸ Each of these stories features children or young people, which leads me to argue that the short story is also especially able to house identities that are in flux, and that have been formed under conditions of late modernity. In turn, this, along with the physical and psychological trauma experienced by these young characters, leads me to the thesis' first in-depth consideration of the relationship between anxiety and trauma: a relationship that is explored further (in specific relation to time) in the thesis' fourth chapter. Having attended to the aforementioned questions of form, my second chapter then moves to consider recurring metaphors relating to masks and masking in anxious short stories, arguing that these masks are introduced in order to address, conceal, and represent anxious feelings.

Chapter Three addresses the relationship between anxiety and hypermasculinity in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and *This is How You Lose Her* (2012). My analysis is framed by information regarding allegations of sexual harassment made against Díaz in 2018 during the height of the #MeToo movement, which I use in order to further interrogate the misogynistic, abusive, and hypermasculine behaviour of many of Díaz's male characters. I had intended to write this chapter before these allegations came to light, with a focus on the contradictory anxieties Díaz's characters experienced around masculinity: the compulsion to perform hypermasculinity coupled with the knowledge that doing so would reinforce stereotypes about Latino (and particularly Dominican) masculinity. Once allegations against Díaz were made public, however, I felt it was my responsibility to address his actions in relation to this chapter. In solidarity with those affected by Díaz's actions, and in accordance with my own personal views regarding such actions (which I condemn in the very strongest terms), I will not conduct any future

⁴⁸ Junot Díaz, *Drown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), and David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion* (London: Abacus, 2004), respectively.

research on his work. As it was necessary to keep Díaz's work in this thesis, I opted to tackle it head on, acknowledging his actions as highly relevant to the chapter's central questions through its highlighting of the ramifications of toxically masculine behaviour for both victim and perpetrator, and the relationship between questions of race and ideas of toxic masculinity.

With this in mind, Chapter Three's argument proceeds with attention to the turn in critical masculinity studies towards interpreting masculinity as crisis, brought about in part due to liberation movements providing 'a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood.'⁴⁹ This formulation of masculinity as crisis draws attention to anxiety's centrality to the formation of masculine identities and their performance, particularly surrounding the perceived threat of femininity and/or homosexuality. I go on to argue that this crisis is all the more pressing for Díaz's characters, who are Dominican immigrants to the U.S, as they must grapple with the anxiety of a racialised dual existence alongside the anxieties inherent in hypermasculinity's performance.

Lastly, Chapter Four thinks through the complex relationship between anxiety and trauma in relation to the future, particularly a future that has been denied or cancelled in light of what Paul Saint-Amour describes as the state of 'perpetual interwar' in which we now exist.⁵⁰ Using examples from Siri Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) and *Memories of the Future* (2019), and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), I argue that the anxieties characters express about the future in these texts can be thought of as shaping a new, future-oriented form of trauma.⁵¹ Informed by relationships to traumatic pasts, this new kind of trauma has its own set of physical, psychological, and textual iterations. It operates as a pre-emptive form of haunting that occurs before the future has been completely cancelled, drawing attention to anxiety's influence on temporality and narrative time.

⁴⁹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 202.

⁵⁰ Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 311.

⁵¹ Siri Hustvedt, *The Sorrows of an American* (Sceptre: London, 2008); Siri Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future* (Sceptre: London, 2019), and Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, respectively.

Drawing on Matthew Ratcliffe's 'sense of a foreshortened future' as well as Paul Saint-Amour's notion of a 'pre-traumatic stress syndrome,' this chapter analyses both the conditions of our present time that lead characters to believe that time is running out, and the more free-floating anxieties these characters experience around traumas that are yet to come.⁵² Through close readings of characters' relationships with time and technology, and the anxieties both of these subjects provoke, I am able to analyse the precarious conditions which prompt future-anxiety through the lens of trauma. In turn, this allows for new means of interpreting the affective structures, temporalities, and forms of the texts at hand.

Each of these chapters employs different methodologies in order to address anxiety's multiplicities, as there is no one linear approach that will suffice. In adopting at different junctures perspectives from phenomenology, queer theory, and accelerationist movements, to name just a few, I aim to test different ways into anxiety which put methodologies into practice through close readings. Anxiety demands this kind of interdisciplinary approach, as it cannot be contained within one conceptualisation. In response to this anxiety around method, and the potential overwhelm this might cause, taking different lenses to anxiety itself has proved to be the most fruitful approach throughout the course of the thesis, and the one that has yielded the clearest picture of what exactly literary anxiety might be.

⁵² Matthew Ratcliffe, Mark Ruddell, and Benedict Smith, 'What is a "sense of a foreshortened future?" A phenomenological study fo trauma, trust, and time,' *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, (2014), 1-11 (p. 1); and Saint-Amour, p. 7.

Chapter One - Agency, Authorship, and the Anxiety-Event: Selfhood in Illness Narrative

I think of [*Winter Journal*] as a literary composition – similar to music – composed of autobiographical fragments. I'm really not telling the story of my life in a coherent narrative form.⁵³

During the promotion of his book *Winter Journal* (2012), Paul Auster was keen to emphasise that it was neither a work of memoir nor an autobiography – an intention reaffirmed by the absence of both these words from the synopsis on the text's back cover. Yet Auster also made it clear during interviews in this period that he did not view *Winter Journal* as a piece of fiction, reiterating the forceful declaration in his anecdotal essay 'The Red Notebook' that 'this really happened...it is a true story.'⁵⁴ As such, *Winter Journal*, which focuses on Auster's physical life, and its partner text, *Report from the Interior* (2013), which focuses on his psychological life, occupy a curious space on the borderline between fiction and non-fiction, recounting the various iterations of his anxiety, among other conditions. In my view, this liminality originates from, and is accentuated by, the representations of illness (particularly anxiety) in these texts, with the recounting of such illness therein demanding a more indeterminate form. In her consideration of illness narratives, which she views as 'defined by multiplicity,' Stella Bolaki argues that such narratives by their very nature 'challenge chronological causality and unity.'⁵⁵ As Auster himself acknowledges, his illness narratives do not adhere to a coherent narrative form, and while this is common within the genre, the fragmentation he mentions is catalysed and accentuated by anxiety.

While Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves* (2010) appears to be more explicitly non-fictional, offering a historical, psychological, and neurobiological account of shaking bodies, it, too, occupies this position of formal liminality. Early in her account, Hustvedt is

⁵³ Wayne Gooderham, 'Paul Auster interview,' *Time Out London*, <<http://www.timeout.com/london/books/paul-auster-interview>> [accessed 1 November 2016] [n.d.].

⁵⁴ Paul Auster, 'The Red Notebook,' in *Collected Prose* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp. 243-264 (p. 264).

⁵⁵ Stella Bolaki, *Illness as Many Narratives: Arts, Medicine and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 1 and p. 6 respectively.

diagnosed with ‘a version of a panic disorder’ and referred to a pharmacologist.⁵⁶ However, the doctor says her fits ‘didn’t correspond to panic disorder because [she] wasn’t worried in advance’ of public speaking (which prompts her first experience of shaking), never felt endangered when she shook, and knew she wasn’t dying.⁵⁷ Nonetheless she is prescribed Lorazepam, a benzodiazepine used to treat panic attacks and epileptic seizures. In her account of her diagnostic journey, Hustvedt is accompanied by a second version of herself and her body, (characterised as the titular shaking woman), who lends fictional and figurative qualities to the text that frustrate and complicate its ostensibly autobiographical status.

The multiplicity that Bolaki mentions, then, operates on a number of levels. It can apply to the very nature of Auster’s and Hustvedt’s texts, which employ a ‘multiplicity of styles,’ and which ‘[refuse] easy categorisation’ through their simultaneous fictional and non-fictional status.⁵⁸ Equally, this multiplicity applies to the bodies presented in both writers’ texts: *The Shaking Woman* represents two Hustvedts, the ‘familiar self’ and the shaking woman, a ‘shuddering stranger,’ while *Winter Journal* repeatedly emphasises how anxious experiences conjure new and different versions of Auster’s body.⁵⁹ Lastly, in her consideration of illness and narrative identity, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan asks ‘what happens when the present is so different from the past that subjects experience themselves as others?’⁶⁰ For Auster and for Hustvedt, this results in their texts containing past (‘well’) versions of self as well as present ones which have been altered by illness, and which find themselves grappling with ‘a future that can no longer be what the subjects imagined or used to tell themselves before the illness.’⁶¹ In Auster’s case, this illness constitutes all manner of physical symptoms as well as anxiety, whereas for Hustvedt, the exact nature of her illness remains unclear, though her imagination of the different future(s) that this opens up is fraught with anxiety.⁶² For

⁵⁶ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Bolaki, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, ‘The Story of “I”’: Illness and Narrative Identity,’ *Narrative*, 10 (2002), 9-27 (p. 10).

⁶¹ Rimmon-Kenan, p. 18.

⁶² I will examine the specifics of future-oriented anxiety in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

both writers, then, their illness narratives automatically contain multiple selves and multiple bodies, both well and unwell. Equally, both writers experience at different junctures anxiety *about* illness, as well as anxiety *as* illness.

As I have argued in my introduction, anxiety's slipperiness makes it difficult to strictly define it as an illness or a disability, but in both Auster's and Hustvedt's illness narratives, anxiety operates as a fundamental part of their experiences of ill-health, noteworthy shaping and interacting with their narratives. In *Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (1988), which is often considered to be the first major study of illness narratives, Arthur Kleinman defines such narratives as 'a story the patient tells, and significant others retell, to give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering.'⁶³ He adds that 'the plot lines, core metaphors, and rhetorical devices that structure the illness narrative are drawn from cultural and personal models for arranging experiences in meaningful ways and for effectively communicating those meanings.'⁶⁴ Kleinman's invocation of the word illness 'conjures up the innately human experience of symptoms and suffering,' and refers to 'how the sick person and the members of the family or wider social network perceive, live with, and respond to symptoms and disability.'⁶⁵ It is the 'lived experience of monitoring bodily processes' and the 'appraisal of those processes as expectable, serious, or requiring treatment.'⁶⁶ As both Auster and Hustvedt's experiences of anxiety are crucial 'distinctive events' in their stories, their suffering, and their monitoring of their own bodies, for the purpose of this chapter, I will consider anxiety as an illness within their illness narratives. This is not to say that this thesis will always consider anxiety as an illness or mental illness, nor that it operates in precisely the same way as illnesses in illness narratives as they are conceptualised in the work of critics such as Arthur Frank or Rita Charon. It does, however, share some similarities with such

⁶³ Arthur Kleinman, *Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 49.

⁶⁴ Kleinman, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Kleinman, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Kleinman, p. 4.

illnesses, while also producing other noteworthy effects in illness narratives, which this chapter will proceed to consider.

The question of the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, as well as whether it is helpful to imagine such boundaries at all, is closely bound up with what readers expect from fictional and non-fictional texts. These expectations are heightened when it comes to autobiography, because many readers may expect and/or accept that the text they're encountering is 'true'. Philippe Lejeune calls this the autobiographical pact, which assumes the reader's acceptance of the author's affirmation of identity in-text – the 'identicalness' of author, narrator, and protagonist. In turn, the author's duty in this pact is to 'demonstrate their intention to honour his/her *signature*.'⁶⁷ When it comes to texts such as Auster's and Hustvedt's, there seems to be an expectation that this pact will be adhered to particularly strictly, because, as Ann Jurecic argues, 'a subset of reviewers and readers sees illness memoirs as acts of testimony about trauma, or at least about the dislocations and transformations caused by disease and disorder.'⁶⁸ However, this presents a problem, as:

The term "testimony" [...] sets a high standard, implying that such accounts should be verifiable and authentic. Few illness memoirs – constructed representations of the interior experience of illness – can fulfil such a standard [...]. Those who write about illness, an experience that can break a life in two, face the nearly impossible task that confronts all who write about trauma: how to speak the unspeakable. If illness is beyond expression in language, translation of the experience into words misrepresents, even contaminates, the real event.⁶⁹

Here, Jurecic is suggesting that illness memoirs must exist in a liminal space between fiction and non-fiction. This is because the act of writing illness automatically changes the nature of how it is experienced, and, indeed, proves an inadequate means of representing illness in any case, as it 'contaminates' the real, non-fictional event, and replaces it with an account that can only be contemplated as fictional. As well as using their illness memoirs to describe their experiences of

⁶⁷ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 14.

⁶⁸ Jurecic, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

anxiety, then, both Auster and Hustvedt are grappling with an anxiety about how best to represent their illnesses, and how to convey the 'truth' of their experiences, or at least the truth of how those experiences felt for them. In turn, as readers, the extent to which we believe an illness memoir to be true will shape our interpretation of the text, as well as how potent, relatable, and accessible that text will be to us.

With attention to these questions of 'truthfulness', fictional liminality, and the slipperiness of illness memoir, this chapter will consider Paul Auster and Siri Hustvedt's texts with attention to three main issues. These are: whether authors of illness narratives should or do conform to an autobiographical pact given the complicated position of such narratives on the boundary between fiction and non-fiction (and the anxiety these questions cause for the author on the one hand, and the reader on the other); how and to what extent anxiety is represented as an event in Auster and Hustvedt's narratives; and whether the metaphorical invocation of multiple bodies in-text offers an opportunity for Auster and Hustvedt to reconstruct themselves given the fragmentation anxiety and illness more generally has wrought upon their stories. In order to attend to the challenges inherent in writing potentially unspeakable experiences such as anxiety, and to address the complicated translation of these experiences into language that Jurecic highlights, the chapter will adopt a phenomenological methodology informed by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Reading experiences of anxiety in this way allows for a focus on how its triggers, symptoms, and iterations differ for each individual person (and for each individual version of the self that writers present in-text), as well as for a better understanding of the interiority of anxiety. Dylan Trigg notes that reading anxiety phenomenologically 'helps to outline the singularity of a given experience,' but that such a reading also 'cannot remain content with speaking with the centrality and certainty of the first person voice.'⁷⁰ Rather, it 'must contend with multiple voices speaking through the body,' with attention both to the reaction of the subject to that which is causing anxiety

⁷⁰ Trigg, *Topophobia*, p. xxxiii and p. xxxix respectively.

(if such a cause is clear), and whether this anxiety fits into a pattern of triggers or not – that is, whether it is chronic or not.⁷¹ Answering these questions will begin to develop a picture of the many ways in which anxiety alters and disrupts the forms and narratives of texts, framing literary anxiety's particularities, while also speaking to an idea which will recur throughout the thesis, shaped by Elaine Scarry's work, which is that anxiety can be thought of as a form of psychological pain.

Fictional Liminality and the Autobiographical Pact

Before proceeding to close readings of Auster's and Hustvedt's texts, it is necessary to consider the significance of fictional boundaries in texts representing anxiety. Invoking and rejecting the autobiographical pact is a means of challenging these boundaries, which in turn can alter and frustrate the reader-author relationship. Just as the selves presented in illness memoirs are inherently multiple, anxiety, too, is experienced as and through complex pluralities. Further, Sianne Ngai argues that 'the state of unease or agitation eventually codified as "anxiety" gradually replaced melancholia as the intellectual's signature sensibility.'⁷² Although all autobiography contains fictional elements, in the sense that remembering is an inaccurate process that is shaped and framed by the unique and potentially biased perspective of the storyteller, readers will bring a particular set of expectations to autobiographical texts that rest on the assumption that what they are reading is 'true.' While these expectations may not involve literal, complete truth, particularly in texts associated with postmodernity, where autobiographical play and questioning the nature of truth is common, readers are still likely to associate certain conventions with autobiography, and an overall 'reality' surrounding the writer's life, body, and illness experience. Equally, readers may subconsciously be measuring truth according to what they expect of the form – that is, whether the work is 'true' to their expectations of what an autobiography does, even if they are aware that this

⁷¹ Trigg, *Topophobia*, p. xxxix.

⁷² Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 214.

may not always correspond to an objectively verifiable truth. However, when authors define, present, or frame a text as autobiographical while also introducing multiple versions of themselves in-text, as both Auster and Hustvedt do, Lejeune's autobiographical pact begins to break down. Given that illness disrupts the body both intra and extra-textually, who the narrator is and how they are embodied in texts becomes complex.

Describing how we define a text as fictional or non-fictional, Susan Lanser notes that we tend to make this distinction on the basis of 'the flimsy and accidental' placement of a text 'within categorical space: the "fiction" or "nonfiction" shelves in a bookstore, the blurb on a book cover, the information in the library catalog.'⁷³ To Lanser, these boundaries are inherently fluid and subjective, and indeed, they are historically determined, too, yet it cannot be denied that readers will approach and react to texts differently depending on their labelled category, which they will inherit along with the assumptions associated with any given genre. Technically, Auster's and Hustvedt's texts begin autobiographically in the sense that they lay out past experiences and conversations from their real lives, and employ what can broadly be described as realist accounts, language, and literary techniques. Both also adhere to the autobiographical pact in the sense that their narratives reiterate and conform to biographical accounts of their lives by presenting 'true' information that can be verified by the reader. Yet, for both Auster and Hustvedt, anxiety pushes their narratives clearly into the realm of metaphor and fiction, because the pain and panic it causes is almost inexpressible, manifesting as 'a vertiginous jangle' that 'shuts down' the body.⁷⁴ Anxiety as and about illness also drives both authors to write as an act of cathartic self-preservation and revision of identity, especially for Hustvedt, whose identity is repeatedly shaped and challenged by diagnoses in *The Shaking Woman*.

⁷³ Susan S. Lanser, 'The "I" of the Beholder: Equivocal Attachments and the Limits of Structuralist Narratology' in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 206-219 (p. 207).

⁷⁴ Paul Auster, *Winter Journal* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 128.

Here, the term identity is used in the sense of knowing who one is, at least at fixed points in time – identity as inherently linked to one’s past as well as a tangled web of interconnecting factors including gender, sexuality, ability/disability and race, some of which may be more or less important to a person’s sense of self. While everyone’s identity, as perceived by self and others, is constantly in flux as a result of environment and passing time, the impossibility of returning to the well self in illness makes it particularly difficult for people to figure who they are. In some senses, being well generally becomes a category of selfhood. However, provided they are prepared to adapt their own stories to accommodate the changes in selfhood illness causes, both author-narrators can move towards a fuller understanding of their altered selves, while also challenging what we may expect wellness to be. Rita Charon argues that ‘Recognising – or even being – one’s self unfolds in narrative language, includes attention to others, and takes account of the body. Narrativity is a hallmark of postmodern theorizing about autobiography, that is, that identity is both declared and created with narrative.’⁷⁵ Nevertheless, as both Hustvedt and Auster’s writing is not purely autobiographical, and given that their lived bodies are interrupted by illness, it is important to note that their identities are necessarily subject to change. As a result of both the constant revision of identity any person will undergo, as well as the forced revision of identity that comes as a result of illness, both Auster and Hustvedt must make decisions about what illness means for their selfhood. Returning to the well self may not be possible, which can lead to the idealisation of the well body as an ideal version of the self.

In phenomenological terms, there is the objective body and the lived body. The objective or biological body is viewed in the third person – it is the body of medical science. The lived body is always with us, constantly experiencing and linked to the world. When a person is healthy, the objective and lived bodies align, and, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, the lived body operates mostly habitually. However, if a person is unwell, the habitual body is disrupted, as the ‘intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility [...] goes limp in

⁷⁵ Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 73.

illness.⁷⁶ This means that the lived body is rendered unstable – it must adapt and change as a result of illness, and develop new habits to accommodate this change. Thus, writing about anxiety can simultaneously allow writers to try to preserve the lived body they had before, or discover and understand more about the new lived body through writing. The alienation from self that illness can cause is reminiscent of Lacan’s mirror stage, as the person becomes less and less acquainted with their body in illness, and must acknowledge the unattainability of bodily wholeness, as well as how the wholeness they may have experienced before was a misrecognition – a falsehood. This is not to say that the anxious body is temporally locked into before and after, though, as some aspects of the self will, of course, remain or change regardless of illness.

In the case of *Winter Journal*, the very narrative Auster has established is ruptured by illness, while for Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman* is precisely about documenting the way illness has and is rupturing her life and her means of expressing herself – it is by nature a narrative of rupture. Though Charon argues that narrativity has the power to reshape the teller, to restore a sense of agency amidst the chaos of illness, it is important to note that if the subject’s anxiety is chronic, their identity, which is housed by the lived body, may repeatedly be in flux. As a result, it can be very difficult to create or describe a ‘whole’ or complete self during illness, in spite of the potential compulsion to do so in order to speak back to one’s illness. Auster and Hustvedt must be able to change their conceptions of themselves in order to address their anxieties – their identities cannot be fixed and stable, as illness forces change upon them.

Although *The Shaking Woman* may seem more straightforwardly autobiographical than Auster’s life writing, as Petra Gelhaus notes, it is, in fact, ‘a book that is not easily categorised [...] on the one hand, it is an autobiographical report about an illness of the author, a nosography. On the other hand it is a more general deliberation about the mind-body problem and the disease-illness

⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. 135.

problem.⁷⁷ Gelhaus also acknowledges Hustvedt's 'skilful and elegant prose,' which does not give away 'private aspects of the author's person.'⁷⁸ In this sense, *The Shaking Woman's* autobiographical status is immediately called into question. By manipulating her narrative using the style and techniques employed in her fictional writing, Hustvedt can ensure she does not give away too much of herself in the text. Indeed, Hustvedt shapes the shaking woman as she would a fictional character, admitting that she has created a 'fantasy story about the shaking woman,' a story that is slowly replaced by reality as 'one by one, living persons replace my imaginary doctors.'⁷⁹ Equally, in the early stages of the text, Hustvedt makes sense of the 'uncontrollable other' that is the shaking woman and 'the strangeness of [this] duality in [her]self' through fiction, answering the self-posed question of 'who owns the self' by 'com[ing] to think of the shaking woman as an untamed other self, a Mr. Hyde to [her] Dr. Jekyll, a kind of double.'⁸⁰ While this fictionalisation serves as a coping mechanism and a means of initially understanding her episodes of shaking and her anxiety surrounding them, as Hustvedt herself acknowledges, this story eventually unravels, at least partially. Further, this process is only partially in her control: her splitting of self occurs as part of her narrativization of her shaking, but also as an inevitable and automatic result of this shaking.

Although Gelhaus argues a close connection between autobiography and nosography in her account of *The Shaking Woman*, few other critics share this view. Generally, a nosography is thought of as a systematic classification of diseases, grounded clinically and written in the third person. A nosography may form part of a patient's case report, which is typically left to clinicians. However, as Brian Hurwitz argues in his essay on form and representation in case reports, self-written case reports are favoured by some for the 'precision and richness of description,' which they can offer, 'for when the physician's 'I' becomes the object of observation and description, both the first-person

⁷⁷ Petra Gelhaus, 'In Search of a Diagnosis: Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman*,' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2016), pp.237-248 (p. 237).

⁷⁸ Gelhaus, p. 237.

⁷⁹ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 153.

⁸⁰ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 47.

presence of the patient and the importance accorded to subjective experience cannot be downplayed easily.⁸¹ Hustvedt does provide clinical levels of detail about her condition during the course of the text, such that it can be thought of as an autopathography, yet in writing in the first person, she also claims a form of agency over the description of her symptoms. In allowing herself and the shaking woman to alternate between roles as first and third person, Hustvedt is able to take a more nosographic approach to her work, which again complicates its status as straightforwardly autobiographical. Over time, as Hustvedt attempts to rationalise her shaking, appointments with professionals begin to push her narrative out of the realm of fantasy and into reality – closer to her ‘real life,’ made up of clinical information and the ramifications of potential diagnoses. However, Hustvedt implies that this switch can just as easily happen the opposite way around, noting that medical analysis is ‘a peculiar form of storytelling,’ and that such analysis would mean ‘in the end – and there is supposed to be an end - we would have a story about my pseudoseizure, and I would be cured.’⁸² It is for this reason that Hustvedt chooses to include elements of nosography in her writing, as it allows her to employ her own specialism (writing) to a field in which she is less expert, and to a narrative which is made unpredictable by illness, which does not conform to the laws of storytelling.

Given that Hustvedt never receives a satisfying diagnosis, the illness narrative she and her collaborators, the medical professionals, create does not offer the ending many may desire – namely, a cure, or failing that, some kind of explanation for her shaking. The text has the potential to build anxiety in the reader, who may echo and follow Hustvedt’s desire to know what exactly is wrong with her and whether anything can stop her from shaking. This is what Teresa Brennan calls the transmission of affect, the process of sensing and absorbing the affect(s) of another. Brennan argues that this process, which is ‘social or psychological in origin,’ ‘is responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of a room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting.’⁸³ It also, ‘if only

⁸¹ Brian Hurwitz, ‘Form and Representation in Clinical Case Reports,’ *Literature and Medicine*, 25 (2006), 216-240 (p. 223).

⁸² Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 21.

⁸³ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 1.

for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual,’ and ‘physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before.’⁸⁴ In this case, some readers, conscious of Hustvedt’s desperation to find answers, will absorb the anxiety transmitted by Hustvedt, who, in her frustration and urgency, creates an atmosphere of panic during the unsuccessful diagnostic process. Her initial reluctance to engage in a diagnostic process at all is emphasised by her having conversations with ‘some figment of her imagination,’ namely Erik Davidsen, ‘a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst’ depicted in *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) whom she describes as ‘the boy never born to the Hustvedt family.’⁸⁵ While later open to a multitude of explanations for her first experience of shaking, Hustvedt considers and dismisses the option of psychoanalysis, noting that ‘some part of [her] is afraid of an analysis’ because of a ‘vague sense that there are hidden recesses of [her] personality that [she is] reluctant to penetrate.’⁸⁶ Knowing that she ‘needed help,’ she then speaks to a ‘psychiatrist friend’ and a pharmacologist, who, as already noted, prescribes her Lorazepam.⁸⁷ There is an invitational quality to her openness about her concerns which draws the reader in from early in her diagnostic journey, and as such, the reader may feel as if they are accompanying her as friend and confidante for what is to come.

While the Lorazepam helps prevent shaking during one talk, soon she bluntly states ‘I continued to shake. I shook even with lorazepam [...] it takes great control *not* to be distracted by a violent convulsion of your own body, and I began to wonder if I could bear up.’⁸⁸ Her ‘journey, both imagined and real, had led [her] in a circle, and the cause of her fits “was still unknown.”⁸⁹ As a result, ‘everything associated with performance made [her] anxious and distressed,’ because ‘at any moment the unruly saboteur inside [her] might appear and disrupt the proceedings.’⁹⁰ Here,

⁸⁴ Brennan, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 35, p. 5, and p. 5 respectively.

⁸⁶ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 39. Original emphasis.

⁸⁹ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 32.

⁹⁰ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 39.

Hustvedt's anxiety follows her shaking, rather than being a sign of anxiety in and of itself. On the advice of another friend, Hustvedt later takes Inderal, which she has previously (unsuccessfully) used for migraine, and finds it effective in preventing shaking. Yet on the same page, this solution also fails, as an 'electric buzz' runs up and down her limbs: 'I scolded myself internally, saying repeatedly: "Own this. This is you. Own it!" Of course, the fact that I spoke to myself in the second person suggests the split that had already taken place – a grim sense that two Siris were present, not one.'⁹¹ As before, the frankness and intimacy with which Hustvedt describes her experiences here treats the reader as the subject of a direct and personal address. This passage concludes with Hustvedt saying 'While a pharmacological solution inhibited the outward problems, it didn't solve the mystery. It did not tell me what had happened.'⁹² Between her intense symptoms, her frustrated self-talk, and her defeated tone, the reader is now connected to her 'relentless anxiety about shaking.'⁹³ This affective link between reader and writer cements the autobiographical pact in the sense that the truth-claims made by Hustvedt have the potential to become bound up with a kind of personal bond, cemented by the shared experience of anxiety about diagnoses. This relationship is a problematic one in the sense that, as I have argued previously, autobiography is a form of storytelling defined by the narrating subject, who has a unique role as author, narrator, and character. However, as this chapter notes, Hustvedt does not present us with a straightforwardly autobiographical text. Rather, she deliberately draws attention to how she has fictionalised aspects of her own story, most notably 'the story of the shaking woman,' who acts as the embodiment of Hustvedt's symptoms, and who is distinct from '[the] narrating self, [the] conscious, telling self' who speaks to the reader, who 'continued on while the other shook.'⁹⁴

Hustvedt's use of the first-person in *The Shaking Woman* is a feature which further contributes to the overall indeterminacy and liminality of the text. Johanna Shapiro notes the

⁹¹ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 40.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 182, p. 53, and p. 54 respectively.

'mistakes, omissions, distortions and blatant lies' at play in autobiographical texts, stating that 'all narratives are the results of authorial decisions' which mean 'we are likely to portray ourselves as kinder, cleverer, funnier and more successful than we really are.'⁹⁵ Hustvedt is honest about the fact that her illness 'dissolve[s] the boundaries of the self,' and repeatedly expresses anxiety at this 'grim' dissolution.⁹⁶ Given that all autobiography contains an element of fiction, and as it is impossible to accurately remember exact events and conversations when recounting one's life, Hustvedt's text contains an additional fictional layer as her sense of self has been compromised and divided by illness: 'the shaking woman cuts me in two.'⁹⁷ This enigmatic character has entered her life and violated it, replacing 'wholeness and harmony' with 'disruption and division,' which is then replicated in the writing as much as it is transcended.⁹⁸

This calls to mind Merleau-Ponty's arguments about the duality of the body, namely that 'our body comprises as if it were two distinct layers, that of the habit-body and that of the body at this moment.'⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty considers this proposition through the example of a phantom limb – the habitual body performs 'manipulatory movements' that are no longer present in the actual body, and thus the habitual body provides a false guarantee to the actual body. The duality of body Hustvedt experiences places her body as the habitual one, and the body of the shaking woman as the actual or biological one. Once she has experienced her first shaking fit, her habitual body cannot function in the same way, as her actual body is constantly at risk of shaking. Over time, Hustvedt appears to assimilate the fictional character she has created into her own body in the text as a result of her thorough research into whom the shaking woman may be. Nonetheless, her illness narrative ends in ambiguous literary territory. Having spent the penultimate paragraph of the text reflecting on the construction involved in autobiography and 'the stories we spin about ourselves,' she

⁹⁵ Johanna Shapiro, 'Illness Narratives: Reliability, Authenticity and the Empathic Witness,' *Medical Humanities*, 37, (2011), 68-72 (p. 68).

⁹⁶ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 165.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 82.

gestures to the 'vast sea of unconsciousness, of what we don't know,' as well as 'the "I" of autobiography, who is no one without a "you."'100 Reflecting further on the co-dependence of author and reader in autobiography, she asks 'For whom do we narrate, after all?'101

Despite defiantly claiming 'I am the shaking woman' at the close of the text, Hustvedt precedes this with a personification of ambiguity as an 'unrecognisable figure or phantom or memory or dream that cannot be contained or held in my hands' which she 'chase[s] with words even though it won't be captured.'102 Having acknowledged that vast portions of life are impossible to record as they reside in the unconscious, her inability to gain a concrete answer about her illness and the relentless pursuit of a response to ambiguity call into question her statement that she has become the shaking woman, and has accepted her ill self. Indeed, it can be argued that at this stage, the ill self has become the real – a previously fictional character has become part of Hustvedt's illness narrative, which she then presents to us as non-fiction. Hustvedt considers how, at least in the past, this division may have been linked to hysteria, which she describes as a 'systemic divide that allows a renegade part of the self to wander off unguided.'103 Yet, despite Hustvedt's focus on hysteria at several junctures in the text, I associate her shaking and her contemplation of her duality with anxiety. Hustvedt's own categorisations demonstrate how, in psychoanalytical terms, it's often suggested that 'only male subjects are capable of experiencing genuine anxiety or dread, whereas female subjects are allotted the less traumatic and therefore less profound. [...] affects of nostalgia and envy.'104

In its telling of the story of the shaking woman, which is interwoven with Hustvedt's wider illness narrative and which also features philosophical and psychiatric musings, the text occupies both fictional and non-fictional space. *Auster's Winter Journal* and *Report from the Interior*, however, fluctuate more wildly and overtly between these fictional and non-fictional categories.

¹⁰⁰ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 198.

¹⁰¹ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 198.

¹⁰² Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 199.

¹⁰³ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ Ngai, p. 213.

Auster himself is content to label the former as ‘autobiographical fragments,’ resisting strict formal labels. In his descriptions of anxiety in *Winter Journal*, Auster repeatedly diverts from his established narrative style, moving swiftly from a mundane, journalistic voice reporting an ‘inflamed esophagus...no doubt aggravated by the heavy dose of lemon in your sandwich’ to a ‘sudden, monstrous attack that ripped through your body and threw you to the floor.’¹⁰⁵ This abrupt change is undoubtedly a result of the panic attack that ensues. Through the various panic attacks Auster suffers in *Winter Journal*, he undergoes a number of metaphorical transformations – his body is transfigured to the bestial, to an inanimate stone, and to an embodiment of death personified. Indeed, Auster deliberately creates these additional bodies in order to expel his panic as a defence mechanism and figuratively represent his psychological trauma in physical form. While this is not technically truthful, it is a truthful representation of how anxiety makes Auster feel. Though metaphor in and of itself is clearly not enough to break Lejeune’s autobiographical pact, these repeated transfigurations challenge the truth of the body in *Winter Journal*. The reader will be aware that Auster’s descriptions of panic attacks are metaphorical, but the fluctuation in tone from actual symptoms connected to organs to anthropomorphic terror is a jarring example of the liminal fictionality of Auster’s illness narrative.

During the course of *Report from the Interior*, Auster states on numerous occasions that he sometimes loses track of who he is: ‘it was as if the being who inhabited your body had turned into an impostor, or more precisely, into no one at all [...] you felt your selfhood dribble out of you.’¹⁰⁶ In these moments of feeling like ‘an uninhabited shell of flesh and bone, a nonperson,’ Auster slips into ‘a new configuration of time and space, looking at [his] own life with blank, indifferent eyes.’¹⁰⁷ The act of writing is a remedy to this feeling of selflessness, as is particularly evident through Auster’s use of the second person pronoun in *Winter Journal*, which also challenges its status as autobiography. Indeed, the text’s narration can be thought of as an act of reiteration and

¹⁰⁵ Paul Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ Auster, *Report from the Interior*, p. 45.

confirmation of Auster's selfhood, as well as a means of accepting aging. Anxiety as to who he is, and around whether he is in control of his body, culminates in the appearance of a whole new space in which to contemplate these questions, a space from which Auster can view his own body, albeit indifferently at this stage. Auster's rejection of realist representation in moments of anxiety, coupled with his creation of explorative spaces and bodies to contemplate his anxiousness, render his writing only semi-autobiographical. The liminal space between fiction and non-fiction allows much of the exploration discussed to take place, because it allows for an interpretation of the self that fuses the literal and metaphorical body.

The Disruption of Narrative and the Anxiety-Event

In his consideration of illness narratives, *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), Arthur Frank argues that 'stories have to repair the damage that illness has done to the ill person's sense of where she is in life, and where she may be going.'¹⁰⁸ In response to the narrative wreckage wrought by illness, Frank asserts that the body can communicate illness most effectively through quest narratives, which '[afford] the ill person a voice as teller of her own story' and '[speak] from the ill person's perspective [...] hold[ing] chaos at bay.'¹⁰⁹ Yet these quest narratives demand a linearity and teleology that is at odds with the nature of anxiety as presented by Auster, and dangerously frame the narrator as the hero of their story, working towards what can often be an ultimately unachievable redemption. As Angela Woods cautions, 'promoting (particular forms of) narrative as *the* mode of human self-expression, in turn promotes a specific model of the self – as an agentic, authentic, autonomous storyteller; as someone with unique insight into an essentially private and emotionally rich inner world; as someone who possesses a drive for storytelling, and whose stories

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 53.

¹⁰⁹ Frank, p. 115.

reflect and (re)affirm a sense of enduring, individual identity.¹¹⁰ Such narratives also introduce the question of ‘mastering’ illness, where the focus is on defying illness, rather than living with it.

Hustvedt’s *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves*, however, remains somewhat teleologically unsatisfied, as it leads both author and reader on an ultimately unsuccessful journey toward a concrete diagnosis to explain her convulsions. With this in mind, this chapter will now investigate how anxiety can interrupt, disrupt, or even defy narrative altogether, especially when that narrative lies on the boundary line between autobiography, memoir, and fiction. Furthermore, the impact anxiety has on narrative will be considered in connection with what Wolf Schmid defines as a narrative event – ‘a special occurrence [...] defined as a change of state.’¹¹¹ When it is anxiety that provokes this change of state, we can think of it as an anxiety-event that can catalyse both bodily and psychological change, as well as changes to the established tone and style of a text’s narrative. Interpreting anxiety as an event as well as a condition in literature allows for the establishment of certain chronologies that anxiety may otherwise resist, which in turn, may assist with thinking through the structure(s) of anxiety, slippery though that may be. Examining the changes anxiety-events cause either individually, or in combination, dependent on the subject’s experience of this event, is vital in order to understand the narratology of anxiety, and what Auster’s and Hustvedt’s work reveals about it.

This section will use Michael Sayeu’s conceptualisation of the event in literature as its foundation, but before proceeding to this analysis, it is important to consider the thinking that influenced this conceptualisation – most notably, Alan Badiou’s *Being and Event* (1988), and Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* (1969). For Badiou, ‘An event can always be localized [...] [it] is always a point in a situation, which means that it ‘concerns’ a multiple presented in the situation,

¹¹⁰ Angela Woods, ‘The Limits of Narrative: Provocations for the Medical Humanities,’ *Medical Humanities*, 37 (2011), 73-78 (p. 74).

¹¹¹ Wolf Schmid, ‘Narrativity and Eventfulness’, in *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, ed. by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 17-34 (p. 24).

whatever the word 'concern' may mean.¹¹² Further, 'the event is attached, in its very definition, to the place, to the point, in which the historicity of the situation is concentrated. Every event has a site which can be singularized in a historical situation.'¹¹³ He adds that if a situation is 'natural, compact, or neutral, the event is impossible.'¹¹⁴ In the context of Auster's and Hustvedt's work, the site of events is both the body and their narratives: events occur when their bodies are subject to anxiety or other symptoms associated with their illnesses, but also when their narratives shift in tone and in style – a shift that is usually prompted by anxiety-events. Whereas for Badiou, events are presented as inherently large-scale and unnatural, as singular within the multiple, for Deleuze, 'every event' has a 'double structure.'¹¹⁵ This double structure consists of, on the one hand, the idea that every event has 'a present moment of its actualization, the moment in which the event is embodied in a state of affairs, an individual, or person,' and that 'the future and the past of the event are evaluated only with respect to this definitive present.'¹¹⁶ On the other hand, 'there is the future and the past of the event considered in itself, sidestepping each present, being free of the limitations of a state of affairs [...] it has no other present than that of the mobile instant which represents it, always divided into past-future.'¹¹⁷ In this sense, for Deleuze, the event is always multiple, and need not necessarily be momentous - it is always part of a pattern or 'series', is 'not what occurs (an accident),' but rather is 'inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us.'¹¹⁸

Anxiety operates as an event in literature, then, because it can be localised physically and psychologically in the body and mind, and can be localised in narrative terms in-text in the words on describing it on the page. In turn, anxiety's anticipatory nature, and its relationship to traumatic pasts and futures, links it to the Deleuzian double-structure of the event, again signalling towards its evental structure. Anxiety's status as an event is also twofold in the sense that it operates as a past

¹¹² Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 178.

¹¹³ Badiou, p. 178-9.

¹¹⁴ Badiou, p. 179.

¹¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. 151.

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, p. 151.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Deleuze, p. 149.

event in Auster's and Hustvedt's illness narratives, particularly in instances of panic, as well as an event for the reader, who encounters this anxiety as an event in the present as they read. The distinction here between authorial experience and reader experience is crucial, as these experiences of anxiety-events are occurring in and through different chronologies and temporalities. As I will go on to argue, the anxiety-event is most obviously discerned in Auster's and Hustvedt's work in times of panic, and particularly during Auster's panic attacks. In using the term panic attack here, I refer to the clinical interpretation, which broadly conceived, defines such attacks as 'a sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause,' and during which the sufferer may 'think [they're] losing control, having a heart attack or even dying.'¹¹⁹

By considering moments of anxiety as events in literature, these moments come to act as transformative breaks in the form and/or tone of a text. In this sense, anxiety-events have unique potential, in that they can transform not only the structure of a text, but also the physical and psychological norms and behaviours that given characters have exhibited previously. The idea of anxiety itself being anticipated challenges anxiety's status as an event, because if it is normal to a person, it cannot be an event, a transformation. However, it can also be argued that certain moments of anxiety can never be deemed 'normal' or ordinary, because of the devastation they may cause – particularly in the case of panic attacks. Even if a state of anxiety is deemed normal by the subject, and does not generally prove disabling, the normality of this state is ruptured by panic. Freud speaks of 'anxiety-states,' which are defined by a 'specific character of unpleasure,' 'acts of discharge,' and 'perceptions of those acts.'¹²⁰ In turn, these states must have 'motor manifestation' in order to be differentiated from other unpleasurable states such as mourning.¹²¹ Although Freud defines an anxiety-state as a 'reaction to earlier danger,' its grounding in the past does not

¹¹⁹ 'Panic Attacks and Panic Disorder,' *Mayo Clinic* <<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/panic-attacks/symptoms-causes/syc-20376021>> [accessed 1 July 2020] [n.d.]

¹²⁰ Freud, 'Inhibitions,' p. 132-3.

¹²¹ Freud, "Inhibitions,' p. 133.

necessarily mean a person will be able to anticipate when they will enter an anxiety-state – rather, it means that it may be possible for a person to predict scenarios or phenomena that will prompt anxiety, though it's not necessary or guaranteed that sources of anxiety have or can be brought to consciousness. When and whether something will make them anxious is more difficult to predict.

While it is unhelpful to measure anxiety solely through events, as it does not always manifest itself in such an obvious way (that is, through corporeal, psychological, or, in the case of a text, narrative change), identifying moments when anxiety is evental provides a means of mapping the wider experience of anxiety. Further, it demonstrates the instructive potential of narrative when it comes to the behaviour of anxiety as an event. Literary anxiety is a particularly interesting case for considering anxiety as having an evental structure. In some senses, representing anxiety in literature creates a paradox, in that it inevitably inserts anxiety into the chronology of a text, which may contradict anxiety's general resistance of teleology. However, in reading anxiety as an event in literature, it is possible to establish revealing new timelines and chronologies of anxiety, which, by virtue of their transformational status, separate from the main narrative of a text, have the potential to operate against teleology. The study of literary anxiety must also address additional questions of who has the right to narrate anxiety, how to represent anxiety given it is sometimes thought of as inexpressible, and what potential this representation holds for developing wider conversations about anxiety and honing the empathetic capabilities of readers.

The decision to retrospectively structure anxiety as an event in literature may be read as an attempt to reassert a semblance of control over an experience that otherwise feels completely out of their hands. This decision also exemplifies the distinction between fear, which has an object, and anxiety, which is objectless, and thus folds back to become its own event. Although medication and therapeutic treatment for anxiety is now widely available, this cannot necessarily be considered as mastery of the condition, though it does offer the potential for people to manage and understand it

better.¹²² Indeed, the USA's privatised healthcare system means that many will be unable to afford access to treatment, and those who do must navigate an often-misleading field of medication advertising. Tone comments on advertising for Paxil, a Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI), which features the line 'empowered by Paxil,' and which directly associates taking medication with 'personal liberation and professional advancement.'¹²³ In promising a form of mastery over a condition that can be very difficult to anticipate, pharmaceutical companies are able to exploit a person's desire to manage or control their anxiety, despite this being difficult to do because of the challenge of constructing a tangible narrative for any illness story. Indeed, feeling a lack or loss of control could provoke anxiety, or be a symptom of anxiety in and of itself. For many, accepting this lack of control or ability to master illness can help the subject move forward.

Just as Lejeune argues that writing about oneself triggers an autobiographical pact, Michael Sayeau argues that starting any story 'is to enter into an implicit contract with your listener or reader that, at some point soon, something will happen and this something will be meaningful.'¹²⁴ In turn, this contract is traditionally dependent on events, which help lend temporal and narrative structure to texts. Sayeau is deeply sceptical of the narrative event in literature, describing it as a 'troubled and troublesome aspect of literary construction,' a 'literary technique [that] enact[s] cultural anxieties about the everyday.'¹²⁵ Although ensuring a narrative is driven forward by and through events can be a means of resisting and rejecting the quotidian to maintain a reader's interest, reading anxiety itself as an event in literature allows us to focus on the ways in which narrative is altered and disrupted by anxiety. Further, Sayeau's assertion that events are 'read in' to literature to quell anxiety about the everyday, or rather, to dispel any impression that a story is boring because it

¹²² Writers such as Jean Scandlyn and George Weisz have drawn connections between the language of management and the language of chronicity which are relevant here – see Jean Scandlyn, 'When AIDS became a Chronic Disease,' *West J. Med*, 172 (2000), 130-133. See also George Weisz, *Chronic Disease in the Twentieth Century: A History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

¹²³ Tone, p. 219.

¹²⁴ Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 29.

¹²⁵ Sayeau, *Against the Event*, p. 30 and p. 41 respectively.

is uneventful, does not attend to the difficulties of structuring and understanding anxiety in literature, given that its sudden appearance in many narratives is not an act of deliberate construction on the author's part, but a reflection of its unpredictability and gravity, which automatically renders it evental.

While Sayeau investigates the tension uneventfulness causes in Modernist writing, and how this has prompted an anti-evental turn in Modernist literature, contemporary autobiography in particular is under immense pressure to conform to a structure defined by narrative events, not least because it is telling the story of people's lives. In this sense, Sayeau's analysis is inadequate for the analysis of autobiography and memoir. Anxiety is not merely what Schmid calls 'a change of state,' though it is clear that climactic moments of anxiety in texts can be read as events. As such, I will argue that anxiety-events in texts are noteworthy for their resistance and defiance of established narrative structure. In autobiography and indeed in most stories, this structure is usually already evental – driven forward, chronologically or not, by events. Thus, anxiety is an event within an event, yet also distinct from the event of storytelling by virtue of its disruption of previous narrative. As Forster puts it in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), a plot is 'a narrative of events, [with] the emphasis falling on causality.'¹²⁶ For Forster, stories do not have this same emphasis, and given the centrality of causality to any nosography or even autopathography, the anxiety-event can also be distinct from mere storytelling in that it will always involve symptoms that have a clear and potentially lasting effect on the sufferer. The anxiety-event's presence remains felt and has consequences beyond the event in and of itself. The most prevalent example of an anxiety-event would be a panic attack, though experiencing associated symptoms of anxiety such as excessive sweating, exaggerated thinking, nausea and palpitations could also be anxiety-events.¹²⁷

Peter Hühn describes a narrative event as 'an unexpected, exceptional, or new turn in the sequential dimension, some surprising "point," some significant departure from the established

¹²⁶ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel - Penguin Classics Reprint* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 87.

¹²⁷ For details of symptoms, see 'Generalised Anxiety Disorder in Adults – Symptoms,' *NHS Choices* (1 February 2016) < <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Anxiety/Pages/Symptoms.aspx> [accessed 12 April 2017].

course of incidents.¹²⁸ What is unique about the anxiety-event, though, is that while an author may intend to write anxiety, the experience of anxiety itself cannot always be predicted or anticipated, given the suddenness with which it may appear and impact a person, as in a panic attack. While the author is recording and retelling anxiety, meaning the anxiety-event is in the past, it may also produce an event for the reader in the present during the reading process. The very etymology of panic, which comes from words such as ‘sudden’ and ‘urgent’ denotes its relevancy to particular kinds of events.¹²⁹ Even in chronic anxiety, when a person knows they are likely to feel anxious, particularly in certain settings or in anticipation of certain things happening, their symptoms may be more or less apparent on certain days, making it difficult to know how the subject may experience their anxiety at any given time.¹³⁰ Though an anxiety-event does certainly constitute a significant departure from the established course of incidents, the sufferer may subsequently attempt to grapple to re-establish the narrative structure they adhered to before, or experience further anxiety which renders their narrative consistently subject to change. Ato Quayson describes a similar phenomenon when disability enters a text, referring to an ‘aesthetic nervousness’ that arises at this moment. In his words, this nervousness ‘can be discerned in the suspension, collapse or general short-circuiting of the hitherto dominant protocols of representation that may have governed the text.’¹³¹ When an anxiety-event occurs in a text, it can be thought of as introducing aesthetic anxiousness to the text – not just changing patterns of representation and narration, but rupturing them completely.

¹²⁸ Peter Hühn et al, *Eventfulness in British Fiction*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 2.

¹²⁹ The Oxford English Dictionary’s record for the word panic lists its etymon as the French word *panique*, meaning sudden, wild fear. The word is also related to the Greek god Pan, who was thought to frequent caves, mountains and lonely places, and became associated with the sounds heard and fears experienced in these locations. ‘panic, adj.,’ *Oxford English Dictionary* (March 2005), <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136852?rskey=R4C0ds&result=2#eid>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

¹³⁰ For an in-depth discussion of this idea, see Kathy Charmaz, *Good Days, Bad Days: The Self in Chronic Illness and Time* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

¹³¹ Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 26.

In considering how narrative is affected by anxiety, it is first worth noting what kind of narratives are established in the texts examined within this chapter, and what purpose anxiety serves within these narratives. Attempting to force a purpose onto a narrative is in itself problematic, and Auster in particular resists this teleological drive – as Robert Lehnert writes, ‘*Winter Journal*’s grand theme [...] makes clear that the book does not strive for a complete or balanced presentation of the facts with respect to any single telos.’¹³² Additionally, whether the author intends it or not, illness disrupts teleology, while simultaneously forcing us to consider it further. Frank argues that ‘a sense of temporality’ is the central resource of a storyteller, because ‘the conventional expectation of any narrative [...] is for a past that leads into a present that sets in place a foreseeable future.’¹³³ Although this interpretation of narrative is rather too neat and structured for an illness narrative, given that illness can render the future unpredictable, and that trauma and anxiety would both interfere with this formulation, it does highlight a particularly anxiety-inducing feature of the illness story, namely that ‘its present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to.’¹³⁴ Of course, this sense of the present not aligning with the future promised by the past is itself a cause of anxiety, highlighting the additional anxiety that may be caused when anxiety’s anticipatory qualities fail.

Prior to any overt reference to anxiety in *Winter Journal*, but inevitably bound up with feelings of anxiousness, comes the announcement from the second person narrator that the text is ‘a catalogue of sensory data.’¹³⁵ Although Lehnert argues that *Winter Journal* has no single telos, it is clear from the text’s first lines that Auster fears aging and death, and that cataloguing his body, albeit through a non-chronological narrative, is an attempt to reconcile these fears. Ironically, cataloguing the body in this way also disassembles and anatomises it to some extent – though it also helps him feel more in control of a body he is losing to illness. Hustvedt, too, having described her

¹³² Robert Lehnert, ‘Autobiography, Memoir and Beyond: Fiction and Non-Fiction in Philip Roth’s *The Facts* and Paul Auster’s *Winter Journal*,’ *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 132 (2014): 757-796 (p. 783).

¹³³ Frank, p. 55.

¹³⁴ Frank, p. 55.

¹³⁵ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 1.

first shaking fit, confesses: 'intellectual curiosity about one's own illness is certainly born out of a desire for mastery. If I couldn't cure myself, perhaps I could at least begin to understand myself.'¹³⁶ Thus, for both Auster and Hustvedt, semi-autobiographical writing provides a meticulous means to document, consider, and revisit experiences, with a view to understanding their respective anxieties and ills. Both Auster and Hustvedt constantly work with two concentric selves – a mediated, fluctuating written one in-text, and the one that exists outside the text. At the same time, though, it must be acknowledged that this does also risk splitting or fracturing one's story. While on one hand, this seems unproblematic for writers as steeped in modernism as these, it does pose additional challenges in the formulation of self in texts where this formulation is already frustrated and presented as both difficult and as a source of anxiety.

It is worth noting that panic strikes quickly and violently in *Winter Journal*. This panic catalyses the shifting of narrative from conversational listing of symptoms and philosophical musing to wild, unpredictable, visceral descriptions. Previously established narrative is disrupted, as over the course of a paragraph, the second-person narrator moves from the peaceful statement that 'your heart was sound and beating normally, [...] you had learned that death was not something to be feared anymore,' to a bestial force which 'ripped through your body and threw you to the floor.'¹³⁷ Auster is left 'howl[ing] in terror, more afraid than [he] had ever been in [his] life.'¹³⁸ The possession of Auster's body in this moment renders him completely speechless, as the words 'howled' and 'howling' are repeated four times in three sentences. This calls to mind Elaine Scarry's influential argument that: 'physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.'¹³⁹ While anxiety is a psychological condition, which causes Auster psychological pain, it can also manifest itself physically, as is demonstrated by the

¹³⁶ Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 32.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.

animalistic force that throws Auster to the ground during his panic attack. His inability to express how he feels during this climactic moment of panic forces him to howl like a wolf – a metaphor that is reiterated by the word ‘ripped,’ bringing to mind images of claws and teeth. The loss of control during this episode is heightened further when Auster’s body is once again transformed: ‘death was inside you and you didn’t want to die.’¹⁴⁰ As Auster is inhabited by death personified, we can assume he is experiencing an extreme amount of physical and psychological pain, which has in turn been caused by his panic during this anxiety-event. Indeed, these panic attacks can be considered as death rehearsals, mitigated by awareness on Auster’s part that while he feels near death, he will not actually die.

Critiquing Scarry’s arguments about pain, Joanna Bourke suggests that she has ‘fallen into the trap of treating metaphoric ways of conceiving of suffering (pain bites and stabs; it dominates and subdues; it is monstrous) as descriptions of an actual entity [...] ‘Pain,’ rather than the person-in-pain, is given agency.’¹⁴¹ In her account, Scarry argues that there are only two metaphors that can adequately express physical pain – ‘the first specifies an external agent of the pain, a weapon that is pictured as producing the pain; and the second specifies bodily damage that is pictured as accompanying the pain.’¹⁴² She also argues that psychological pain is easier to express, because it has ‘referential content, is susceptible to verbal objectification, and is [...] habitually depicted in art.’¹⁴³ Yet Auster’s anxiety defies these arguments. Not only does it depict psychic pain as transformative, as altering the body and creating new forms of it, it does so while breaking with the anecdotal, at times even gossipy retelling of family events. The very fact that Auster must, in retrospect, transform his body to describe how his anxiety made him feel, only reiterates the difficulty of expressing this anxiety, and of making it referential. He cannot bear it in his own body, and must imagine it in another, connected version, which battles with his own.

¹⁴⁰ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 33.

¹⁴¹ Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 5.

¹⁴² Scarry, p. 15.

¹⁴³ Scarry, p. 11.

These transformations have facilitated a form of expression that was impossible during the panic attack itself, restoring the agency that Bourke suggests such metaphors remove. For Bourke, pain is a 'type of event,' that possesses a 'mine-ness' which causes the person to '[become] or [make] herself into a person-in-pain through the process of naming.'¹⁴⁴ The person in pain must 'identify it as a distinctive occurrence – for it to be labelled a pain-event,' and while Auster certainly identifies his panic attacks as distinctive occurrences, the nature of his anxiety-event (as pain-event) means he does not need to name this pain to become the empowered person-in-pain. Changing his narrative and his body has provided Auster with a safe space in which he can contemplate, and perhaps even escape, his anxiety – at least momentarily. There seems to be an awareness on Auster's part that though he feels near death, he will not actually die, and thus his panic attacks and the bodies they summon can be thought of as a form of memento mori. This neatly demonstrates the distinction between fear and anxiety, for if death acts as the 'ultimate fear' for most, then anxious events become a means of managing that fear. As a result of his panic attack, an anxiety-event in his own narrative, Auster's body changes. This in turn drives the narrative of the text forward, albeit in a more figurative direction than previously.

While Auster describes his first panic attack as occurring as a result of the death of his mother, he recreates a letter in *Report from the Interior* that indicates that anxiety was also present during his youth. He claims: 'I often feel that I am about to die. My body shook, I trembled, and...I cried. I couldn't understand it. As if I had fallen into the void. It is a solipsistic life. Friendless, bodyless...'.¹⁴⁵ Auster does not acknowledge this as a panic attack, and yet it bears several similarities to the panic attacks he experiences in *Winter Journal*. He feels that death is nearing, shakes, and cries out, as he has no other means of expressing his feeling. The difference is that he is unable to transfer this anxiety outwards. Floating in a bodyless void, young Auster is left to reflect ever further on what he believes during this anxiety-event is his proximity to death. He has no

¹⁴⁴ Bourke, *The Story of Pain*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Auster, *Report from the Interior*, p. 231.

reference point for his panic, no corporeal anchor to which he can link his shaking self. One of the positive elements of his bodily transfigurations in *Winter Journal*, however troubling, is that he is able to view these bodies objectively once he has written them, recalling other versions of the body which perform similar functions to Merleau-Ponty's phantom limb. In creating a new body in textual form, prompted by an anxiety-event, he can read and reread this body to learn about, and experiment with, his anxiety. In *Report from the Interior*, he is bodyless – indeed, he is locked in solipsism, unable to remove himself from his anxiety or relate his affects to those of others. As such, he remains trapped in the miserable narrative he has created for himself. Only in allowing himself to experiment and transform can Auster think through his anxiety fully.

Much as anxiety can alter the tone and style of a narrative, disrupt narrative, and catalyse the creation of new metaphorical bodies, characters, and spaces, in which to contemplate, perform, and reconcile one's illness, it can also abandon narrative altogether. In 'Against Narrativity,' Galen Strawson refutes in the strongest terms the 'widespread agreement that human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort,' (what he calls the psychological narrativity thesis).¹⁴⁶ He also resists what he calls the ethical narrativity thesis, which posits that 'experiencing or conceiving one's life as a narrative is a good thing, [...] essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood.'¹⁴⁷ Instead, he deems himself an 'Episodic,' 'one [who] does not figure oneself, considered as self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future.'¹⁴⁸ The term episodic is significant in and of itself in this context, given that in a traditional sense, an episode is what comes between parts of the main plot – something that can be assimilated into a greater narrative. Yet it is also a quasi-medical term, used to describe a period of certain symptoms, or indeed, a fleeting moment that someone does not relate to their usual behaviour – 'I had an episode.' Thus, although an episode would usually exist apart from the main narrative, it would also have significance that could be related back to or assimilated into narrative.

¹⁴⁶ Galen Strawson, 'Against Narrativity,' *Ratio*, 17 (2004), 428-452 (p. 428).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Strawson, 'Against Narrativity,' p. 430.

For Strawson, it is damaging to assume that living through narrative is the only route to leading a fulfilling life, yet if episodes are always connected to another narrative, how might we move away from narrative altogether?

There are a number of instances in *Winter Journal* where metaphor can be interpreted as a non-narrative form. For example, Auster's panic attacks operate as non-narrative moments, as they lie suspended in space, without any true sense of time other than the long wait for a potentially approaching death. They do not align with the 'story' of the rest of the text, which is a contemplation of grief and mourning, and a gradual acceptance of the reality of aging and death. Indeed, Auster specifically says that:

whenever you come to a fork in the road, your body breaks down, for your body has always known what your mind doesn't know, and however it chooses to break down, whether with mononucleosis or gastritis or panic attacks, your body has always borne the brunt of your fears and inner battles, taking the blows your mind cannot or will not stand up to.¹⁴⁹

This evidences how moments of panic occur as anxiety-events that disrupt the body even more than they do the mind, while also highlighting how the body takes on anxiety's anticipatory drive. These events, 'forks in the road' as they are, are necessarily distinct from the rest of his narrative.

Additionally, Auster repeatedly draws attention to how literature, as his vocation, is the form that brings him comfort, stating that writing 'makes [him] feel human.'¹⁵⁰ He describes phenomenological thought processes, notably, the feeling that 'the world is in my head, my body is in the world,' in order to reflect on the 'strange doubleness of being alive, the inexorable union of inner and outer.'¹⁵¹ Auster pushes back against his anxiety about his identity by writing – it allows him to unite the private and the public, and helps ground him in the world. Further, Auster seems to acknowledge to some extent that it is impossible to be wholly 'united' as a person – there will always be tensions between the internal and external, and identity will always inevitably be

¹⁴⁹ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁰ Auster, *Report from the Interior*, p. 207.

¹⁵¹ Auster, *Report from the Interior*, p. 192.

multiplicitous. During his panic attacks in *Winter Journal*, the world is reduced to the space he inhabits. Nothing exists but his panic and the prospect of death, and so these metaphorical moments of transformation to stone, metal, beast and to death itself sever any story or telos. There is no past or future, only a dramatic moment situated in a text which otherwise has certain stories to tell and tasks to fulfil. Perhaps, then, these panic moments exist outside of narrative, in an episodic space of bodily change.¹⁵²

Proxy Bodies and the Multiplicity of Anxiety

Building on these ideas, the chapter's final section will focus on how anxiety provokes Auster and Hustvedt to summon multiple new versions of their bodies within their illness narratives. In doing so, both writers complicate the idea that an illness narrative 'reflects and constitutes the self,' as by virtue both of illness itself, and the presence of multiple bodies and multiple selves, the wholeness that selfhood implies is ruptured.¹⁵³ For both Hustvedt and Auster, their selfhood is fragmented by their illnesses, which in turn, leads both authors to imagine multiple selves in-text. These multiple bodies appear to help the author-narrators think through their anxieties, while also representing them in a tangible way by offering them bodily form. This multiplicity of bodies is also attentive to the inevitable construction and reconstruction of the autobiographical self that occurs in light of illness. Although the body is always multiple and in flux, even when well, in illness, the multiplicity of the body is emphasised, such that the unwell person may imagine their previous well body as a whole, unfragmented entity. In summoning proxy bodies, certain aspects of illness that both Auster and Hustvedt find difficult to bear or represent may be exorcised to selves that are left behind in-text. This is not in any way to suggest that illness narratives are ultimately redemptive, or that the literary techniques authors employ in illness narratives serve as a form of therapy, but rather to say

¹⁵² Here I use the term episodic as Strawson does – as a person/space without a concrete sense of having a past, present and future.

¹⁵³ Charon, p. 74.

that when Auster's and Hustvedt's respective anxieties become too much to bear, they are able to think through their anxiety external to the established, lived bodies they have introduced in-text. In the close readings that follow, it is worth noting that I am not referring to Auster and Hustvedt as such, but the protagonists of their slippery memoirs, who share their names – the author-narrators who represent them in their texts.

In *Winter Journal*, Auster's anxiety prompts him to experiment and toy with narrative, and catalyses sometimes jarring tonal shifts. As I have already discussed, reading anxiety as an event defined by an aesthetic anxiousness helps figure the disorder anxiety can cause in a text. Indeed, Auster's bodily transformations are a form of narrative short-circuiting – this is evident in the narrative shifts that occur when Auster descends into panic. Reflecting on family rumours, a titbit of gossip fuels an anxious spiral - Auster remarks on how 'the family had codified its litany of complaints against [his] mother, it is the stuff of ancestral history by now, old gossip turned into solid facts.'¹⁵⁴ His recounting of his cousin's statement that his mother was 'always looking for something else, too flirtatious for her own good, a woman who lived and breathed to attract the attentions of men,' leads into long, sprawling sentences narrated in staccato – 'too much has been churned up inside you, your thoughts are sprinting off in myriad directions,' until 'swallow by swallow the liquid splashes into your empty stomach like acid.'¹⁵⁵ The assonance of this sentence drives this changing narrative forward, as the scene switches from a family feud to a claustrophobic buzzing in the head. Suddenly, Auster is 'something metallic [...], a rusty contraption that simulates human life.'¹⁵⁶ His body 'shuts down,' and 'little by little [his] limbs turn to cement...[he] is made of stone now.'¹⁵⁷ Once again, he howls, and waits for death. As he is unable to cry over his mother's death, he tells himself that 'your body broke down and did the grieving for you.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 126.

¹⁵⁵ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 127, p. 127, and p. 128 respectively.

¹⁵⁶ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁷ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 128 and p. 129 respectively.

¹⁵⁸ Auster, *Winter Journal*, p. 129.

It is clear that anxiety has short-circuited the narrative leading up to this panic attack, and has dehumanized Auster, made him feel like a metal, machine-like, perhaps even posthuman 'simulation' of himself. As affect speaks through the body, and the body has here done what the mind cannot in the moment, the body itself is momentarily prioritised. Equally, when he becomes stone, Auster expresses his emptiness in the midst of panic – he cannot move, nor can he feel. All he can do is wait for death – indeed, his panic attacks appear to be death rehearsals, all the more terrible because there is no certainty as to when they will end. Unable to express in words the grief of the loss of his mother, his body must anxiously perform these feelings instead. Auster's bodily transformations to metal and stone have allowed him to voice emotional pain that he was initially unable to process. Although these new bodies are born out of anxiety, they have an empowering quality as they give form to the potential formlessness of anxiety, allowing Auster to observe a version of himself that is the receptacle of his anxiety. As well as restoring some of the agency which Bourke says is denied in certain conceptualisations of pain, this can be thought of as a movement from Freud's neurotic anxiety to realistic anxiety, as unobservable emotions are absorbed by the bodies Auster summons. Merleau-Ponty posits: 'my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable.'¹⁵⁹ He adds that even a reflection in the mirror does not allow for observation of our own bodies, as shadows and reflections are 'given to me as a simulacrum of my tactile body since [they imitate] the body's actions instead of responding to them by a free unfolding of perspectives.'¹⁶⁰ In the space between fiction and non-fiction, however, Auster's stone and metallic bodies can be read and viewed figuratively in the world of the text. While they cannot be 'seen' per se, metaphor provides a means of visualising these bodies, and allows Auster to represent and contemplate both his anxiety and selfhood. While it could be argued that having multiple bodies might be alienating, these bodies have served a positive purpose. They may be simulacra, but they

¹⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 91.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

do far more than imitate the body's actions: they become Auster's bodies, at hand to bear the brunt of his psychological pain, so that his actual body can be free from anxiety, at least in the world of his semi-autobiography.

Where Auster creates a number of bodies to represent and bear his anxiety, Hustvedt instead embodies her illness in one figure: the shaking woman. Having described a shaking episode, Hustvedt states that 'above all, what I felt was fear.'¹⁶¹ Her failure to understand and name her condition embeds anxiety into her narrative. She becomes exhausted from 'relentless anxiety about shaking,' and this leads to the birth of the shaking woman, 'a grim sense that two Siris were present, not one.'¹⁶² This, in turn, alters the narrative of her text, as the shaking woman begins to overshadow Hustvedt's thought process about her illness, altering her journey towards a diagnosis and intensifying her desire for it, as well as for a sense of understanding – 'my only certainty is that I cannot be satisfied with looking at her through a single window. I have to see her from every angle.'¹⁶³ Hustvedt's anxiety here is not only about the actual shaking, but about living in a state of unknowing – what is the etiology of her condition, and when will she shake?

While Auster leaves his proxy bodies floating in metaphorical space, over the course of her text, Hustvedt allows the shaking woman to become a part of her: 'as she becomes familiar, she is moving out of the third person and into the first, no longer a detested double but an admittedly handicapped part of myself.'¹⁶⁴ Phenomenologically, allowing an appendage of the self, such as a walking stick or a pair of glasses, or in this case, an embodiment of one's illness, to become one with the body, is an important part of accepting our altered state. Merleau-Ponty argues that once we habitually engage with these appendages we 'make them play a part in the original structure of [our] own bod[ies]'.¹⁶⁵ Hustvedt is determined to do just this, as otherwise, she is left with nothing but

¹⁶¹ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 30.

¹⁶² Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 40.

¹⁶³ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁴ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 190.

¹⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, p. 91. It's important to acknowledge, here, that some of Merleau-Ponty's arguments are problematic from the perspective of disability studies, which critique the notion of an originary, healthy body. In this instance, I have cited Merleau-Ponty's work as Hustvedt explicitly labels the shaking woman as a

ambiguity in the face of her shaking, nothing but an ‘unrecognisable figure or phantom or memory or dream that cannot be contained or held.’¹⁶⁶ This has led some critics to deem the text’s ending a surrender. Gelhaus, however, views it as a ‘hopeful seed for a different kind of nameless understanding.’¹⁶⁷ She adds that ‘the mastery project is given up [...] Hustvedt is not happy or healed, but she accepts being one person.’¹⁶⁸ Though Hustvedt has allowed her illness to become a part of her, I do not believe this should be read as ‘giving up’ on the project of mastery and understanding. Hustvedt herself states that ‘distance from potential catastrophe [...] serve[s] a protective, adaptive purpose: alienation as armor against the real.’¹⁶⁹ Though Hustvedt will never be able to return to her previous body, she has reconciled with her newly formed habitual body, and has also learned a great deal about this body through the text.

While it has been necessary for her to keep the shaking woman at arm’s length for a period of time in order to shield her from the frightening reality of her shaking’s inexplicability, this alienation could never bring about acceptance of her illness. She may not be able to control her shaking, but in allowing the shaking woman to become her appendage, her anxiety about whether she will shake is at least partially removed. There is happiness and even an agency to this, as if she assimilates the shaking woman, she can contain her. Though this fulfills neither a quest narrative nor a restitution narrative, which Frank describes as a desire for ‘the body’s former *predictability*,’ Hustvedt contains the shaking woman both within herself, and in a semi-autobiographical state, where she has agency both as the teller of a well-researched scientific story, and an engaging piece of fiction.¹⁷⁰ As Hustvedt never feels she is going to die, she is able to maintain some corporeal predictability – something which Auster fails to do during his panic attacks, as he repeatedly states he thinks he will die, and thus fails to keep the intimation of mortality at bay. Ultimately, then,

‘handicap,’ but these examples do rely on the idea that a ‘whole,’ healthy body existed before, which disproportionately favours this kind of body and sets ableist standards.

¹⁶⁶ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 199.

¹⁶⁷ Gelhaus, ‘In Search of a Diagnosis,’ p. 247.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁰ Frank, p. 85.

where Auster treats anxiety as an intrusive and acute event, Hustvedt represents it as a chronic condition which she can, to an extent, anticipate, and which can produce time for understanding herself in light of bodily change.

By the end of *Winter Journal* and *The Shaking Woman* respectively, Auster and Hustvedt have represented, contemplated, and to an extent addressed their anxieties surrounding selfhood, wholeness of self, diagnosis, and their ability (or lack thereof) to control their illnesses and anxieties. This process has occurred through numerous bodies and narrative shifts necessitated by anxiety-events. In challenging Frank's quest narrative formulation and allowing the chaos of illness to enter their lives and bodies, they have nevertheless maintained their voices as tellers of their own stories. This is made possible by occupying the boundary line between fiction and autobiography as an experimental space, where multiple bodies can bear their physical and psychological pain. In turn, these bodies can be figuratively manipulated by Auster and Hustvedt, acting as receptacles when their own bodies cannot bear anxiety any longer. While neither writer manages to gain control or mastery over their illness, each in their own way accepts that this is impossible, employing several versions of themselves in order to reflect this impossibility while also maintain some authorial and corporeal control over their symptoms, and the struggle to express them. Paradoxically, writing semi-autobiographical texts that call into question the accuracy and 'reality' of information and experiences presented within them can draw the reader ever closer, as they are invited to collaborate in the unease and unpredictability anxiety reaps upon and within texts. Though both writers' narratives are irrevocably changed by anxiety, the disruption it causes, and the bodies that disruption creates, are fundamental in each writer's journey to finding or creating a semblance of a unified self. Throughout their work, both Auster and Hustvedt attempt to expel what cannot be accommodated in their selves and their bodies, but ultimately, the semblances of unity they achieve recognise and accept multiplicity.

'Under the Surface of Things': Short Stories and Anxious Masks

I do think there is a stronger relationship between a story and a poem than there is between a story and a novel. Economy and preciseness, meaningful detail, along with a sense of mystery, of something happening just under the surface of things.¹⁷¹

What accounts for the particular prevalence of the short story as a form in the American literary tradition? From the 1820s onwards, 'conditions of writing and publication [...] encouraged the publication of short pieces' in America, which led more writers than ever before to experiment with short fiction.¹⁷² This began to establish the short story as a worthy and respectable means of artistic expression. Indeed, the Irish writer Frank O'Connor goes as far as to say that American writers adopted and developed the form so significantly that it can be deemed a 'national art form.'¹⁷³ During this development of the form, many American writers found the short story to be especially well suited to the representation of private experiences and interiority. Bearing in mind Raymond Carver's statement that the short story is concerned with what is 'just under the surface of things,' the short story could also be thought of as an especially useful and interesting form for the representation and consideration of anxiety as a condition and experience. Might the immediacy, brevity, and potential claustrophobia of the short story reflect and reiterate anxiety intra- and extra-textually? Does the form embody and perform anxiety, provoking anxious feelings in the reader? What are the predominant features of the short story that denote its suitability for representing anxiety? What is the connection between the Americanness of the short story (or the particular predilection for the form in the USA) and American anxieties in particular? And what might the short story reveal about the complex temporalities of anxiety and trauma? This chapter will attend to these questions by examining three short stories – 'Ysrael' and 'No Face' from *Drown* (1996) by

¹⁷¹ Boddy, 'A Conversation,' p. 198.

¹⁷² Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), p. 6.

¹⁷³ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2004), p. 39.

Junot Díaz, and 'Incarnations of Burned Children' from *Oblivion* (2004) by David Foster Wallace.¹⁷⁴

Analysis will fall into two distinct but interrelated categories, with the first part of the chapter concerned with anxiety and the form of the short story, and the second with how anxiety manifests itself in these stories, particularly through the image of masks and masking. Rather than seeking to draw direct parallels between these three stories, though many similarities are certainly present (not least that the two Díaz stories consider the same character, a young boy named Ysrael, who is living with facial difference), this chapter will use the stories in question to illustrate *how* the short story form can represent and provoke anxiety, and to think through the prevalent motif of the mask and masking, which works simultaneously on literal, metaphorical, and metonymical levels in short stories featuring anxiety.

Before moving to this analysis, however, it is worth considering the history and development of the short story, and its centrality within the American literary tradition, as well as within the history of writing about anxiety. While the short story is inherently linked to cultures of oral storytelling, Kasia Boddy notes that the term short story first appeared in print in 1885, and that because at this time 'American identity was posited as an act of continuous restless invention, the American writer must continually start again.'¹⁷⁵ As such, Boddy argues that 'the short story was the perfect always-new form.'¹⁷⁶ The capacity of the short story to bear and represent this reinvention is noteworthy. As a form, by virtue of its brevity and typical open-endedness, it seems especially able to house identities in flux, be that as part of the conditions of late modernity, in which questions of identity are prevalent, or as part of the process of growing up, given that the short stories analysed within this chapter feature children and young people undergoing turbulent life changes. Writing in 1901, Brander Matthews also indicates that differing publishing practices and trends helped account for the early popularity of the American short story, as 'the short-story is of very great importance to the American magazine,' while 'in the British magazine the serial Novel is the one thing of

¹⁷⁴ Díaz, *Drown*; David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion*.

¹⁷⁵ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story since 1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

consequence.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Matthews goes as far as to say that ‘the present excellence of the American novel is due in great measure to the short-story,’ because the most noteworthy American novelists of the time began as writers of short stories.¹⁷⁸ The growing popularity of magazines and periodicals in the US also allowed for an ‘allegiance to region and locality’ that was well-suited to short form, creating space for conversations and the sharing of experiences across states that helped ‘[inform] one part of the nation about another.’¹⁷⁹ In particular, the growth of magazine culture gave space and voice to previously under-represented and minority ethnic groups, with ‘the first Yiddish periodical, *The Post*, [...] founded in 1870,’ and over 150 Afro-American magazines in circulation by 1890.¹⁸⁰

During the rise to prominence of the short story in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the form came to be characterised by a preponderance of Gothic texts, which in turn were fundamentally concerned with questions of fear and anxiety. Authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Henry James all contributed to the shaping of the short story as a site of anxiety, characterised not only by body horror, but also by psychic unease. However, this unease does not come merely from the brevity of the form, for as Matthews argues,

a true short-story is something other and something more than a mere story that is short [...] a short story has unity as a Novel cannot have it [...] [and] deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation.¹⁸¹

This unity and singularity of scene contributes to the claustrophobic feeling of the form, which also occupies a unique temporal in-between space, suspended without past or future, and speaking to the distortions of temporality that occur in anxious experiences. The anticlimax, too, comes to be emblematic of the short story, with writers including Raymond Carver, J. D. Salinger, Flannery O’

¹⁷⁷ Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1901), p. 56.

¹⁷⁸ Matthews, p. 51.

¹⁷⁹ Boddy, *American Short Story*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Matthews, p. 15-16.

Connor, Ernest Hemingway and John Cheever presenting vignettes in which the bathetic, collapsed ending is a signature. In both Carver and Cheever's work, too, action often takes place within physically, socially, and emotionally cramped domestic spaces - another common feature of the American short story in particular. The sense of constriction these spaces induce in turn reflects the sensation of being trapped within one's own body – one of many possible symptoms of a panic attack. The denial of any certain future in many short stories toys with our narrative expectations, as characters often seem on the brink of revelation, only for this to be swept away.¹⁸² Such endings contribute to the suitability of the short story for the representation of anxiety, and for embodying anxious feelings, as they echo the discomfort we feel about uncertainty, while also mimicking Freud's assertion that anxiety itself is 'a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one.'¹⁸³

Throughout this chapter, I will highlight examples of anxious and/or anxiety-inducing experiences in Díaz and Wallace's short stories. Causes of this anxiety range from youthful insecurity about fitting in, to fragile masculinity, to processes of recovery and how this recovery could be facilitated, through to witnessing, experiencing, and coping with bodily trauma. With this in mind, it is important to consider the distinction between anxiety and trauma within the short story. Many of the aforementioned anxieties relate specifically to physical and psychological trauma, as well as traumatic return, and of course, experiences can be simultaneously anxious and traumatic. Yet despite their similarities and interrelations, anxiety and trauma have separate temporalities and are related to, and provoked by, differing states of preparedness. Considering Freud's work on trauma and fright, Caruth argues that trauma is caused by 'a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time, [...] [a] lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly.'¹⁸⁴ Thus, whereas anxiety might be characterized as

¹⁸² This idea of a denied future will be discussed in detail in chapter 4 of the thesis.

¹⁸³ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 18*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 7-66 (p. 12).

¹⁸⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 61-62.

anticipating danger and preparing for it in future (sometimes, perhaps, because of past experience), trauma is a state of complete unreadiness – a gap in time that is created by a realisation of one’s unreadiness in the face of threat. Although anxiety and trauma both occupy a paradoxical position of simultaneous suddenness and chronicity, anxiety is concerned with unknown danger, while trauma is concerned with danger that has already occurred, and its aftermath. With that being said, trauma can also be marked by anxiety concerned with unknown danger, as when trauma is repressed or ostensibly unknown.¹⁸⁵ The uncertainty of anxiety creates a particular kind of temporal suspension, which the short story, by virtue of its formal predisposition towards a lack of resolution, is especially well-suited to bear.

Building on Freud’s assertion that anxiety is born out of the anticipation of unknown dangers, the absence of knowledge becomes an affective catalyst, fuelling anxious drives that could prove instructive emotionally in the sense that this anxiety may reveal to the sufferer their triggers and aspects of the nature of their anxiety. As I have already argued, uncertainty can be thought of as a driver of the short story, given that the form frequently offers little information about the future and what will come next – conditions that can prove highly anxiety-inducing. The contemporary short story works with what Eric Cazdyn refers to as the ‘new chronic [...] a logic that assumes that everything will remain the same as the present turns into the future,’ a reality that ‘is provoked by (and provokes) very real fears and vulnerabilities – an existential mode that privileges management over change and holds fast to rigid continuities.’¹⁸⁶ If, as Cazdyn argues, we now live in an age that is particularly anxious about maintaining the status quo, while simultaneously being fully aware that ‘the future cannot be put off, crisis and disaster cannot be totally managed, [and] life can never be safe,’ the short story may be thought of as a performance of the logic of the new chronic, as it relinquishes control of the future, rupturing narrative stasis and continuity by virtue of its typical inconclusiveness. Undecidability lies at the core of the short story, with scenes and questions

¹⁸⁵ The relationship between trauma and anxiety is unpacked in detail in chapter 4.

¹⁸⁶ Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 17.

presented therein likely to remain unresolved and without conclusion – this is one of the many qualities of the short story that may provoke anxiety in the reader. As a form, short fiction can be thought of as perpetual, presenting a freestanding snippet of time. In some senses the realization that everything stays the same may change the nature of this ‘same,’ and again, the short story stands as an apt form for such dilemmas, given that in the case of collapsed endings, it actively resists sameness by denying access to the future and drawing our attention to its status as a snapshot – an emblem of the incomplete. In each of the stories this chapter studies, endings work against continuity by sounding notes of uncertainty, leaving characters suspended in fictional ether, without future. Much of the anxiety in the short stories analysed in this chapter is anticipatory rather than actual – in the main, we encounter characters’ behavioural and psychological iterations of anxiety rather than its physical symptoms. Anxiously anticipating the reactions of others, (a behaviour that reaches a particular peak in adolescence, and in the short studies analysed here in particular), characters and readers alike are denied access to the future, as the short story acknowledges the impossibility of answering the question of what comes next. Of course, the open-endedness of this question, and its pronounced scale in youth, is deeply anxiety-inducing, as it denies any certainty or stability.

Imminence, Brevity, Temporality: Anxiety and the Short Form

During his consideration of microfiction (the very short story), Marc Botha notes that the 1970s and 1980s brought with them a ‘resurgent interest in short narrative forms’ both within and outside America, which was, in turn, tangled up with a ‘sustained challenge to the progressive logic of the formation of the autonomous subject.’¹⁸⁷ Although evidence for whether new media has lowered the human attention span has been much disputed in the academic community, Botha’s

¹⁸⁷ Marc Botha, ‘Microfiction,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the English Short Story*, ed. by Anne-Marie Einhaus (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.201-220 (p. 204).

question of whether ‘even the short story cannot convey the speed and immediacy of contemporary life’ highlights the shift, particularly from the 2000s onwards, towards especially brief short fiction.¹⁸⁸ The brevity of microfiction, then, is arguably reflective of the feeling of temporal acceleration caused by developments in technology, the internet, and social media platforms, all of which encourage immediacy in reporting information, and which have allegedly contributed to our diminishing ability to concentrate, as well as to a communal feeling of anxiety. Speaking of panic, which can be thought of both as an affect in and of itself, and an iteration of anxiety that is especially relevant to the imminence and claustrophobia of the short story, Franco Berardi notes:

today, panic has become a form of psychopathology: we can speak of panic when we see a conscious organism (individual or social) overwhelmed by the speed of processes in which it is involved, and where it has insufficient time to handle the information generated by those processes.¹⁸⁹

These concerns are especially evident in Wallace’s work, with its repeated consideration of the impact of technology on human culture and behaviour, as well as its formal experimentation. Both his short and longer fiction employ footnotes, varying sentence length, multiple narrative perspectives and the inclusion of potentially anxiety-inducing media and forms such as emails, lists, interviews and formal documents in-text which can complicate and potentially frustrate the flow of reading, and thus the reader’s ability to concentrate. In turn, this experimentation generally requires greater concentration to follow, though of course, our increasing reliance on technology and a profusion of screens, and the difficulties these factors pose in terms of focusing our attention on one task, may actually result in the space of the book serving as a place of solace and slowing down. This

¹⁸⁸ Botha, p. 201. Much of the reporting on the lowering human attention span has relied on a study undertaken by researchers at Microsoft in 2015, which refers to a now disputed source called Statistic Brain, which found that since 2000 (typically considered as the beginning of the mobile revolution), the average attention span has lowered from 12 seconds to 8. See: Leon Watson, ‘Humans have shorter attention spans than goldfish, thanks to smartphones,’ *The Telegraph* (15 May 2015) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/03/12/humans-have-shorter-attention-span-than-goldfish-thanks-to-smart/>> [accessed 13 Nov 2017]. Also see: Simon Maybin, ‘Busting the Attention Span Myth,’ *BBC News* (10 March 2017) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38896790>> [accessed 13 Nov 2017].

¹⁸⁹ Franco Bifo Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. by Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), p. 93.

is further complicated by the varying temporalities of anxiety and panic, which are often represented through formal changes in-text – changes that are all the more evident within the compacted space of the short story. While Berardi considers panic in the particular context of a globalized, digitized world, whereby the ‘acceleration of the infosphere’ puts the ‘human terminal of the system (the embodied mind)’ under increasing pressure, microfiction’s rise as a form responding to the speed of contemporary life cannot be explained by technology alone.¹⁹⁰ This acceleration is also inextricably linked to the precarity of contemporary work, with the proliferation of short-term, low-hour contracts and progress reports increasing pressure on workforces; this precarity coexists with wider geopolitical or even planetary uncertainty, marked by global political unrest, the threat of warfare and pandemic, and the growing environmental threat of natural disaster brought about by climate change. These conditions call for a form that can bear their imminence: in this respect, microfiction responds to, and aptly represents, the anxiety of our time, particularly in its manifestation as panic. Further, this panic need not be directly related to the aforementioned conditions – microfiction is an apt form for the representation of panic, as it is an affect that tends to unfold with visceral urgency that is especially well-suited to a literary space that shares this temporal conciseness.

In the case of ‘Incarnations of Burned Children,’ which spans three pages and nine sentences, it is clear that the breathless, urgent pace of the story’s mostly long, sprawling sentences is reflective both of the horror of the scene as it unfolds in front of the parents’ eyes, and the anxiety we as readers experience as bystanders to the trauma. Although the story does feature some loose indications of time period, in the form of the ‘radio’s lady,’ the ‘hot truck,’ and ‘the clinic’s ER,’ it is, overall, presented as a timeless scenario. It is also an instance of stopped time – a moment that is extended, and also punctuated by implications of future anger on the parents’ part – as when the narration implies the mother starts by ‘dabbing pointlessly’ at the child.¹⁹¹ This is underscored by the

¹⁹⁰ Berardi, p. 93.

¹⁹¹ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

story's title, all pluralised, implying that the scene of the story has been repeated endlessly, with the spirits of affected children ever-present as 'vapor aloft.'¹⁹² Thus, its pacing bears out Botha's view that microfiction is the most appropriate form for scenes of immediacy and acceleration. The narration of the scene is such that the reader experiences the burning of the child precisely in line with the father, who, having heard the boy scream, witnesses everything in one long sentence: 'the overturned pot on the floortile before the stove and the burner's blue jet and the floor's pool of water still steaming as its many arms extended [...].'¹⁹³ While the narrative focalisation of the piece rests with an unknown third person narrator, the reader is led to align with the father, absorbing the scene through his point of view, too. The brevity of the piece is heightened further by its locational focus within the home's kitchen, creating a twofold claustrophobia as scene and form both unfold in small spaces, producing anxiety in the reader, and representing the weight of the trauma the parents and child experience.

Equally, the story is rooted in precarious conditions, not only because of the unpredictability of the accident itself (which, interpreted alone, would not invoke a precarious context), but also because the family are hosting a tenant in their home. This implies a need for additional income that speaks of rootlessness and instability, as well as demonstrating a less traditional family structure that has to an extent breached the social hygiene of the family home. In an environment of such precarity, Ivor Southwood argues that 'the individual must exist in a state of constant readiness,' anticipating which mundane and less mundane anxieties may be realised.¹⁹⁴ With this in mind, the narration of the piece implies the family is being punished for its unreadiness, and for its inability to cope with panic and trauma, impossible though this might be to do under pressure. Even under the logic of the new chronic, which is characterised by, among many things, crisis culture and management, 'we can prepare for crisis, we can stage it, reenact it, even practice it, but when the airplane is going down we can never be sure if we will help others out the door or be pinned to our

¹⁹² Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

¹⁹³ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁴ Ivor Southwood, *Non-Stop Inertia* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2011), p. 15.

seats in uncontrollable fear.¹⁹⁵ In the mother's case, she is so hysterical 'she was almost frozen,' and turns immediately to 'invoking God,' while the father rushes to address the situation which results in misinterpretation.¹⁹⁶

The story's seventh sentence suddenly shifts the tone of the piece from a literal, visceral account to a figurative, speculative, and experimental one, as the parents realise 'where the real water'd fallen and pooled and been burning their baby boy all this time while they screamed for them to help him and they hadn't.'¹⁹⁷ Thus, the father's reflexive attempts to cool the child's head, shoulders, and chest under the tap have only meant that the child, yet unable to express its pain in words, has had to sound 'new high cries' to indicate that his parents have not yet managed to help.¹⁹⁸ Here, the invoked state of 'not yet' speaks to key facets of the story's anxious temporalities - to a sense of impending danger and uncertain futures, and also to the elongation of traumatic experience, made all the more difficult to process because there is still slim hope that the parents may yet be able to help their child. In an email to Ms. Testa, a woman who made enquiries with Wallace's literary agent Bonnie Nadell about translating 'Incarnations,' Wallace himself argues that 'the father will feel guilty that he had not checked the diaper sooner, and he will search for rationalizations: one is that, though the child was still crying, he [the father] believed the crying was from fear, not from pain.'¹⁹⁹ Here, then, the father's anticipatory logic, marred by panic, fails him, because the trauma of the scene is too great - the realization of the true threat and the true nature of his son's cries is delayed. In this meeting of panic and trauma, the father can only act on embodied reflex, rather than responding reactively to the actuality of the scene in its entirety.

Moving from the blunt eighth sentence, 'If you've never wept and want to, have a child,' the story swiftly moves to a final sentence tinged with guilt, mourning, and pathos, losing its narrative thread and imitating the childlike babble of the father's thoughts: 'Break your heart inside and

¹⁹⁵ Cazdyn, p. 69.

¹⁹⁶ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁷ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Center, MS-5155 Series II, Container 31.8.

something will a child is the twangy song the Daddy hears again as if the radio's lady was almost there with him looking down at what they've done,'²⁰⁰ Rather than offering any clarity, then, the story ends with the stark juxtaposition of the father's shame at thinking of wanting a cigarette as they remove and replace the steaming diaper that has scalded the child, and the inconclusive, open-ended, even spiritual description of the child 'learn[ing] to leave himself and watch the whole rest unfold from a point overhead.'²⁰¹ This desire serves as an especially cruel reminder of his failure to protect his child, given that he was burned, and the lighting and smoking of a cigarette must involve burning. The father's guilt is amplified by his feeling that the radio presenter is also watching him, unwanted yet present, like the twangy song which returns to a person's head unbidden. This song, in turn, metaphorically represents the child, reminding us that he will always come back to the parents' thoughts and memories as a traumatic return at unwanted and at jarring moments. Yet the twangy song is also an anxious transference, as the father's mind replaces the experience of the child being burnt with music, fearing judgement for his and his partner's response to their son's accident. While the final sentence is narrated almost like a stream of consciousness, with the child's final fate left unclear (we are unsure as to whether he is dead, or permanently disabled or disfigured), we are told that 'whatever was lost never thenceforth mattered,' and that 'its self's soul [was] so much vapor aloft, falling as rain and then rising,'²⁰² The idea of what is lost not mattering could imply that the child survived but was too young to realise, at least at this pre-verbal stage, the long-term significance of any loss of function caused by the accident. However, because as a burns victim he would likely need multiple painful surgeries, this reality would, of course, soon become apparent to him.

Given that his soul leaves the body and then enters into the water cycle, it seems more likely that he has died, yet this, too, is rendered ambiguous by the future that is temporally implied by the phrase 'never thenceforth mattered,' which indicates some kind of continuation, as well as an oddly

²⁰⁰ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

definitive negation of past trauma. This ambiguity operates in stark contrast to the previously recurring image of the tenant's new door hanging on its hinge, which reaches resolution as 'the hinge gave but by then it was too late.'²⁰³ However, the fast-paced unfolding of the burning scene means that narrative focus rests not on the story's multivalent ending, but on the immediate aftermath of the child's accident. While the reader may become anxiously involved in the child's fate, in line with the mother and father, any hope for resolution is quickly undermined. Archival material reveals that Wallace made a conscious decision to change the ending of the story so that it was far more inconclusive – in earlier notes stored on a floppy disk, the story is named 'Childhood Genital Trauma,' and ends with 'half [the child's] penis [coming] off with the diaper.'²⁰⁴ In deciding against this more visceral and conclusive ending, Wallace allows his short story to perform the temporal suspension the form can facilitate. Whereas this earlier draft has an object (the penis), linking it more closely to fear, the actual story is considerably more ambiguous, far-reaching, and inconclusive, provoking significant anxiety around temporality and all that is unresolved.

Indeed, those who desire clear resolution are almost mocked by the closing image of the sun going 'up and down like a yoyo,' which serves as a naïve image associated with childhood, embodying the oscillations in emotional states that the story has captured, and mimicking fast-paced breathing or even palpitations, as well as the passage of time in adolescence. This bathos pulls attention away from the anguish of the father, while also enhancing the claustrophobia of the piece, given that no real answers are offered to the reader. The movement of the yoyo is also reminiscent of a game which Freud observed a child playing which involved throwing an object (usually a toy) away from themselves and then pulling it back towards themselves with string. Freud labelled this game Fort-Da (Gone-Here), and conceptualizes it as a cathartic repetition of the trauma of the child's mother leaving him at any given point – 'at the outset he was in a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he

²⁰³ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

²⁰⁴ University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Center, MS-5155 Series IV, Container 37.4.

took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery.²⁰⁵ Freud also observes that this game could be a means for the child to 'revenge himself on the mother for going away from him.'²⁰⁶ The sun's movements at the story's close might also then be thought of as a kind of Fort-Da game for the burned child, an attempt to reflect the parents' failure to protect him, and a reiteration of his ability to transcend the scene and present trauma – thus reclaiming an otherwise melancholy image. Further, Fort-Da is a first loss, which relates to the father's loss in that he is back in the fort-da formative first trauma, trapped or doomed to repeat developmental stages.

Like Wallace's 'Incarnations,' Díaz's 'Ysrael,' which is formed of six short episodes that span fifteen pages, deals with a young subject. Indeed, each of the stories this chapter considers have children at their centre, and represent a particular set of anxieties surrounding the future, particularly given that, in Lee Edelman's terms, a child can be thought of as an investment in the future: 'the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value.'²⁰⁷ This focus on children and young people is significant, as this means the focus is also on questions of futurity, and the anxiety an unknown future may cause. This anxiety may well be heightened by the innocence of childhood, and our particular protectiveness over children, especially when at risk of physical and emotional harm. Considering the structure and makeup of *Drown*, Boddy notes that:

Díaz described the collection as a 'tapestry,' and the stories he has published since *Drown* have, in featuring some of its characters, added further to its texture. The absence of a 'coherent narrative' is crucial to a book that is all about living in gaps and fissures, between childhood and adulthood, between countries and between languages.²⁰⁸

With this in mind, it is clear that Díaz intended for the scenes in *Drown* to be snapshots that resist the offering of a linear, neat narrative, as this is not adequate for the representation of young, diasporic experience, which is widely varied and complex, and which, as I will argue later, has

²⁰⁵ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' p. 16.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Boddy, *The American Short Story*, p. 129.

idiosyncratic temporalities. Further, anxiety's existence within particular temporalities (that are especially relevant to young people) speaks back to Edelman's notion of the child as representing the value of the future, given that the young people in the stories analysed here face unsettling, uncertain futures, or, indeed, risk having no future at all.

Each episode of 'Ysrael' builds on Yuniór and his older brother Rafa's knowledge of a facially disfigured child called Ysrael, who lives in the countryside where the brothers spend their summers with relatives. Over the course of the story's episodes, we are made aware of Rafa's increasing fascination with Ysrael, as he asks 'Could you see under the mask?' and wonders 'how much of Ysrael's face is gone.'²⁰⁹ Although Yuniór is initially excited by Rafa's plan to find and observe Ysrael, their expedition is soon tinged with trepidation and anxiety, as the brothers begin to bicker, and Yuniór recalls his aunt's warning that if they looked at Ysrael's face, '[they] would be sad for the rest of [their] lives.'²¹⁰ By the end of the third episode, Yuniór has been portrayed as a sympathetic character, who is bullied by Rafa, called a 'pussy' and told to 'get tougher.'²¹¹ However, the fourth episode takes us back to the previous summer, where Yuniór 'pegged Ysrael with a rock,' knowing that he has 'clocked a shoulder blade.'²¹² Given that the chronology of the story is fragmented, the affective drive of the piece is also complicated. While Ysrael is clearly the affective anchor, and the character for whom the reader is likely to feel the most pity, up until the fourth episode, Yuniór is also a sympathetic character. However, any anxiety concerning Ysrael's fate soon becomes attached to both Yuniór and Rafa, both of whom become a threat to him.

It is only in episode five that the brothers actually encounter Ysrael together, and Yuniór soon falls into a friendly back-and-forth with him, asking about his kite and his interest in wrestling. This brief camaraderie is quickly and violently ended, however, as Rafa 'brought his arm around and smashed the bottle on the top of [Ysrael's] head.'²¹³ Rather than intervene to help the boy that he

²⁰⁹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 5.

²¹⁰ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 6.

²¹¹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 10.

²¹² Díaz, *Drown*, p. 11.

²¹³ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 14.

has begun to befriend, and yet, has also abused in the past, Yuniór stands by, exclaiming ‘holy fucking shit’ before helping Rafa to roll Ysraél over.²¹⁴ This episode comes to a sombre end as Rafa crouches down to Ysraél’s beaten body, and ‘using only two of his fingers, turned [his] head from side to side.’²¹⁵ Committing a final voyeuristic act, Rafa thus completes his quest to see what is beneath Ysraél’s mask, though, in turning his head from side to side to look further, there is a suggestion of shame, as if Ysraél, even in his pain and humiliation, is shaking his head at the brothers, silently condemning their violence. The structure of the brief final episode of the story further emphasizes this shame, as it transpires that Rafa and Yuniór have taken the wrong bus, and are headed in the wrong direction, back towards Ysraél’s village. In its cruelty, Rafa’s final interaction with Ysraél calls to mind Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the face-to-face encounter, which he views as the basis of the ‘ethical relation and of language.’²¹⁶ Indeed, Levinas views this interaction as so fundamental, that ‘no fear, no trembling could alter the straightforwardness of this relationship.’²¹⁷ In engaging with someone face-to-face, Levinas argues that one enters into an ethical relation with oneself, and that, through the responsibility towards the Other that this encounter necessitates for the self, ‘the Other [...] reveal[s] himself in his face.’²¹⁸ However, what does have the potential to alter and challenge the face-to-face interaction is a mask. In denying the revealing of the Other (in this case, Ysraél) in a full-face encounter, it is impossible for Yuniór and Rafa to have an ethical relationship with Ysraél. The ‘nakedness’ of the face, as Levinas puts it, reveals its poverty, and presents the Other as vulnerable – ‘the poor one, the stranger, [...] an equal.’²¹⁹ Although Ysraél’s mask in no way excuses the way he is treated by Yuniór, and Rafa in particular, it does alter the relations they share, as they are not encountering Ysraél as an equal. Rather, they are projecting fear and monstrosity onto Ysraél’s mask, and thus negating the purity of the face-to-face in Levinas’

²¹⁴ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 14.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Interiority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 203.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 81.

²¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 213.

terms. This does not divest the boys of the essential ethical responsibility that the self has for the Other, but their projections make it very difficult for them to encounter the poverty of Ysrael's face. Nonetheless, Yuniór's naivety and guilt is highlighted as he contemplates Ysrael's fate, particularly in relation to his forthcoming surgery – 'Ysrael will be OK [...] they're going to fix him.'²²⁰ 'Ysrael' ends almost like a fable, with Rafa's statement that 'they aren't going to do shit to [Ysrael]' followed by a glance from an old woman with a 'milky' eye.²²¹ In this moment, the woman embodies the narrative gaze, which symbolically notes the boys' boarding of the wrong bus, which is travelling in the wrong direction. The white of the woman's eye reflects Yuniór's waning innocence, while its blankness also serves as a bathetic reminder of the erasure of abnormal bodies, echoing the way Ysrael has been forced to mask his disfigurement.

Formally, the story ends cyclically, with a repetition of Rafa's line 'get ready to run,' reminding the reader of the temporary escape each brother can make from their respective anxieties about their treatment of, and interactions with Ysrael, and that Ysrael can make from his torment at the hands of other children. Rafa's compulsion to see Ysrael's face can itself be thought of as an anxious drive, bound up with concerns about how he himself is perceived, and about fulfilling the role of a hypermasculine Latino, driven by physical strength and thus appearance, as well as sexual virility.²²² Even without his mask, the extent of Ysrael's facial difference could result in a negation of the face-to-face – indeed, both with and without mask, Rafa cannot seem to incorporate Ysrael via the facial encounter, resulting in a severe othering with ultimately violent consequences. In this sense, the gaze cannot subordinate Ysrael. It is clear that Yuniór attempts to allay his anxiety about his own teasing of Ysrael by speaking to him, and by re-enforcing the boy's hope that his face will be 'fixed' by surgery. Unlikely though it may seem, this hope of redemption

²²⁰ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 15.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Chapter 3 of the thesis will address the topic of anxiety and Latino (hyper)masculinity in far greater detail, attending to questions of its performativity and its causes.

for Ysrael also drives the story, with the reader likely invested in this redemption, though also painfully aware of its unlikeliness.

Díaz's 'No Face' is directly linked to 'Ysrael', and offers us the boy's perspective on his disfigurement in third person narration over the course of six pages. Oddly hopeful given his ill-treatment, Ysrael imagines himself as having superpowers, with capital letters enthusiastically aligning with his child-like belief that he can speak words to engage skills: 'FLIGHT,' 'INVISIBILITY,' and 'STRENGTH.'²²³ In this sense, the story grants immense power to language, with Ysrael's words directly correlating to physical agility, and introducing a magical-realist element to his narrative. The unknown narrator of this story supports and encourages Ysrael's conception of himself, saying that 'he's unbeatable' and that 'no one can touch him.'²²⁴ Indeed, there is something excitable about the way in which Ysrael is described, which counteracts the pity and sadness with which he is described through Yuniór's eyes in 'Ysrael' (demonstrating how language has also objectified him). The excitability of narration in 'No Face' can be thought of as a means of speaking back to Ysrael's anxiety about his future, particularly as he is still haunted by the image of the pig which disfigured him, and the fear that 'nothing will change' after his now-scheduled surgery.²²⁵ His adoption of a superhero persona is clearly a coping mechanism against this anxiety that nothing will change, or that his surgery will be unsuccessful, as other attempts have been, as well as a means of combating his fear of the pig, which he can only counteract by 'tell[ing] himself to be a man.'²²⁶ Ysrael's peers repeatedly remind him of his accident, 'as though afraid that he might forget,' and this results in him dreaming of the pig, as 'blunt teeth rip a strip from under his eye and the muscle revealed is delicious, like lechosa.'²²⁷ On occasion, he is able to save some of his face in these dreams, mitigating this traumatic return, but sometimes, 'he cannot turn his head or [the pig's] mouth is like a pothole

²²³ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 117, p. 119 and p. 120 respectively.

²²⁴ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 117 and p. 119 respectively.

²²⁵ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

²²⁶ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 121.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

and nothing can escape it.²²⁸ This anxiety dream stresses Ysrael's concern that the pig will always be with him, and that the injuries it caused him will never heal – indeed, the pothole that is the pig's mouth is metaphorically all-consuming, reminding us of the voyeuristic ravenousness of Ysrael's community, which, like a pig consuming a sweet lechosa (papyrus) fruit, violently feasts on his difference.

Of the three stories this chapter considers, 'No Face' is certainly the one with the most redemptive ending, at least on first reading. Whereas 'Incarnations of Burned Children' and 'Ysrael' end inconclusively, hanging in suspense with no clear sense of what is to come, 'No Face' concludes with the act of running, which is regularly repeated throughout *Drown*: 'He runs, down towards town, never slipping or stumbling. Nobody's faster.'²²⁹ Having begun the story with members of his community calling 'No Face' after him, this appears as a quite remarkable turnaround – Ysrael is presented as forceful and determined. Yet his skill at running has developed from the repeated release of adrenaline as he has fled those who wish to harm and mock him. Equally, we are aware that the apparent optimism of this ending is a façade, masking the anxiety both Ysrael and the reader have about his future under a veneer of imagined superpower. Returning to Ysrael's invocation of the power of 'FLIGHT,' fight-or-flight responses are called to mind, with Ysrael addressing his fears by transcending them in his imagination – entering what can be thought of as a fugue state. In psychiatry, a fugue state can also be 'a flight from one's own identity, often involving travel to some unconsciously desired locality.'²³⁰ In Ysrael's case, he is metaphorically 'rising above' the cruelty of his peers, his isolation from his community, and the shame his family feel about his facial difference, leaving behind these facets of his life and identity in favour of his superheroic persona. As such, Ysrael could even be thought of as exhibiting some symptoms of a dissociative disorder as a result of the trauma he has suffered. Adopting a new, superheroic persona which

²²⁸ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 121.

²²⁹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 123.

²³⁰ 'Fugue, n.' *Oxford English Dictionary*, (June 2017), <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75270?rskey=enfWuj&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 20 April 2018].

allows Ysrael to occupy spaces he could not otherwise reach would in this case be a defense mechanism against his accident and the cruelty that has followed it.

Thus, to align with the potential optimism of the piece is to be complicit in the lie that the narration of the story weaves – that is, that Ysrael will achieve any significant change as a result of his surgery. Read in isolation, the story might give this impression, as the Doctor tells Lou, who watches over Ysrael, that ‘everything looks good’ and that ‘we’ll get him there eventually.’²³¹ Ysrael himself reacts to the spatial and medical ambiguity of the word ‘there’, noting that he ‘doesn’t know what he should think’ about this analysis, which in turn, opens up a narrative about the assumed necessity of recovery, and whether it is always positive to recover.²³² The word ‘there’ implies a space that constitutes an endpoint, a space in which Ysrael will be well, or better. However, in Ysrael’s case, it is difficult to know what recovery would constitute, particularly given that in the short story ‘Ysrael’, Yunion reports that ‘his left ear was a nub and you could see the thick veined slab of his tongue through a hole in his cheek. He had no lips [...] his eyes had gone white and the cords were out on his neck.’²³³ If we are to read this description literally, tinged though it may be by a youthful propensity to exaggerate the grotesque, the extent of Ysrael’s disfigurement is nonetheless severe, such that the prospect of a significant recovery, or indeed any kind of ‘change’, as he himself puts it, seems unlikely. Further, the language that Ysrael’s doctor and Padre Lou use to describe Ysrael’s potential recovery is ambiguous (Lou asks if the doctor has a ‘ballpark figure’ for how long it will take), and not necessarily rooted in Ysrael’s preferences, but rather in the imposition of certain trajectories of recovery that the adults in his life want for him.²³⁴ As readers, we are aware of the complexity of Ysrael’s recovery, given that he will be permanently scarred regardless of how much treatment he receives, rendering the clear ‘endpoint’ of his surgery ambiguous, as well as ethically charged – who decides when his recovery is complete? Further, none of Ysrael’s peers

²³¹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

²³² Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122. Narratives about the necessity of recovery and the social pressure to ‘resolve’ illness are addressed in the thesis’ first chapter, particularly in relation to Arthur Frank’s *The Wounded Storyteller*.

²³³ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 14.

²³⁴ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

mention the psychological impact his accident has had on him, despite the narration demonstrating that Ysrael is experiencing traumatic return through nightmares about the pig. It is his physical recovery that is being discussed by the doctor and Padre Lou, despite it being evident that recovery for Ysrael would constitute both the physical and psychological. The tapestry-like structure of *Drown* as a whole, as noted by Boddy, also speaks to the difficulties and complexities both of recovery itself and its narration, given that even full recovery will not truly restore a person to what they were before their illness or injury.

This kind of interconnectivity is apparent throughout Díaz's work. The majority of his collection *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) and his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) feature Ysrael de las Casas as narrator (as does *Drown*), and many of these stories are linked up by recurring characters and locations. As such, Díaz's body of work forms a constellation which offers snippets of characters' lives – snapshots that relate to one another. These snapshots do not necessarily unfold chronologically, which can be thought of as an acknowledgement of the challenges posed by attempting to narrate experiences of anxiety, trauma, and diaspora in a linear way. Indeed, the structure of Díaz's work implies this is, in fact, impossible, reflecting Anne Whitehead's argument that the medical humanities as a field must move away from its prioritization of 'conventional narrative modes,' which cannot bear the more 'chaotic and contingent aspects' of illness.²³⁵ If we take Díaz's work as a cycle of sorts, questions of recovery and teleology posed in his work are complicated further. The ambiguity of what recovery means for Ysrael – what it is, and how long it will take, is in and of itself a frustration of any easy sense of purpose or telos, which is reflected formally in the fragmented yet interrelated way in which Díaz presents information about different characters. Ysrael's recovery narrative, then, is rendered chronic, as there is no clear or agreed point at which it ends. Sianne Ngai notes that anxiety is 'intimately aligned with the concept of futurity, and the temporal dynamics of deferral and anticipation in general,' and this is all the

²³⁵ Anne Whitehead, 'The Medical Humanities: A Literary Perspective,' in *Medicine, Health, and the Arts*, ed. by Victoria Bates, Alan Bleakley and Sam Goodman (London: Routledge, 2014), pp.107-127 (p. 115).

more relevant in adolescence, given there is far more future to unfold.²³⁶ Equally, that future is increasingly uncertain in a globalized yet environmentally and sociopolitically precarious world.

In 'Incarnations,' 'No Face,' and 'Ysrael,' pacing, sentence length, the length of the piece in its entirety, chronology (and the rate and order in which information is revealed to the reader), narrative perspective and focalisation, tone, the layout of text on a page, and the use of bathos all contribute to the feelings of anxiety the writing evokes and represents through its form, both for characters and in the reader. In the case of building narrative tension, and bathetic endings, it can be argued that these formal qualities are particularly common in the short story, denoting its especial suitability for the representation of anxiety, given its relationship to unknown futures, and the collapse of futures in the short stories analysed. Just as Scofield argues that the short story always has an emphasis on 'narrative and event [...] the most intense and life-changing experiences,' Kasia Boddy posits that the 'formal essence of the short story is the staging of turning points.'²³⁷ There is an intimacy and intensity to the short story which provides space only for a snapshot of anxious experience, yet this snapshot can carry with it immense affective potential, given that the form is frequently used to give insights into private and internal drives, sensations and emotions. In this sense, the short story prioritises momentary sensations, thoughts, and feelings, rather than the ongoingness of a particular condition. However, this snapshot structure of the short story does, nonetheless, also carry a chronic quality because of its temporal suspension. In this sense, the short story occupies an oxymoronic space of stasis and uncertainty, where the sudden and the slow collide. A short story may take less time to read, and action may unfold more quickly because of its brevity, yet formally, its open-endedness, paired with the representation of anxiety therein, allows for both chronic and acute temporalities.

As the moments of panic captured in the child's accident in 'Incarnations,' Ysrael's assault in 'Ysrael,' and the dreams and recollections of the pig in 'No Face' demonstrate, the short story is an

²³⁶ Ngai, p. 210.

²³⁷ Scofield, p. 238; Boddy, *American Short Story*, p. 100.

especially useful form in which to explore sudden moments of anxiety, which appear as moments of narrative disconnect that are not connected to a longer telos, but rather, are suspended independently and indefinitely. The closeness a reader may feel to the action and characters of a short story also leads to a more sudden emotional investment in the text, particularly given they will have an awareness that this closeness will be fleeting. This could lead to an increasing chance of anxiety on the reader's part, should they become particularly attached to, or concerned about, a character's welfare, or indeed if they become immersed in the tension built into the form, which rarely offers resolution. The suddenness with which panic responses as a manifestation of anxiety appear in short stories speaks to the discontinuities within the new chronic. As Augé observes, there is a 'feeling among the public at large – [that is] no doubt technically inaccurate, but sociologically revealing – that in art as in architecture, everything stays the same,' – and the false promise of this sameness is highlighted by the short story's formal denial of the future.²³⁸ If the driving narrative force in short stories is episodes, events, or turning points, it can also be thought of as mimicking chronic anxiety, with anxiety consistently under the surface but also appearing in sudden, brief moments, as in the case of a panic attack.

Anxious Masks, Masking Anxiety

Having considered the formal iterations of anxiety both within the short story and on the part of the reader encountering a short story, I will now move to the consideration of a prevalent and recurring image and metaphor for anxiety and anxious experiences within the short story – the mask and masking. Both 'Ysrael' and 'No Face' contain a literal mask – the one that covers Ysrael's face, while along with 'Incarnations of Burned Children', each story also features figurative masks and instances of masking in order to address, conceal and represent anxious feelings. The word 'mask' has several

²³⁸ Marc Augé, *The Future*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), p. 56.

meanings, ranging from the obvious ‘covering for the face, and related senses’ to ‘a facial expression assumed deliberately to conceal an emotion or give a false impression.’²³⁹ In its verb form, it can also mean ‘to diminish or prevent the perception of (another stimulus, esp. one affecting the same sense).’²⁴⁰ Its etymology is linked to the French *masque* and Italian *maschera*, which in turn, has been linked to the post-classical Latin *masca* – ‘an evil spirit, spectre.’²⁴¹ As such, the process of masking is one that has long been linked to darkness and deception, as well as the covering up of emotions, or even an attempt to repress one’s feelings. Yet in drama and theatrical performance, and particularly in Expressionist theatre, the mask can be used to intensify the representation of an emotion. In the context of artistic representations of anxiety, there is perhaps no more emblematic image than Edward Munch’s ‘The Scream’, with the figure’s facial expression of exaggerated turmoil presented as mask-like. This is particularly emphasized by the placement of the figure’s hands, which are placed to the side of the face, almost as if holding a mask to it. With this in mind, it is pertinent to consider what kinds of masks, literal and figurative, are being presented in the short stories at hand, and why. How might the wearing of masks or masking allay or induce anxiety? When is masking consensual, and when it is not, why is it occurring? What anxieties are being addressed in the act of masking, be it literal, metaphorical, or metonymical? Equally, each story features disfigured child subjects, and the perspectives both of those who have experienced and witnessed trauma. Boddy argues that ‘the short story, a form constituted by and as crisis, well suits adolescence’ – might it be, then, that the youth of the characters in questions brings with it a particular desire on their parts to mask abnormality and difference, out of protectiveness, a desire to fit in, or more selfish motives?²⁴² Why does Díaz choose to focus so closely on masks and young

²³⁹ ‘Mask, n.3.’ *Oxford English Dictionary* (June 2017), <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114608?isAdvanced=false&result=3&rskey=72FF4z&>> [accessed 14 November 2017].

²⁴⁰ ‘Mask, v.4.’ *Oxford English Dictionary* (June 2017), <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114612?rskey=72FF4z&result=7&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 14 November 2017].

²⁴¹ ‘Mask, n.3.’

²⁴² Boddy, *American Short Story since 1950*, p. 102.

people?²⁴³ As I have already argued, the short story has particular affinity with panic-responses, and, with Boddy's assertion in mind, can also relate to the implicit temporality of adolescence, which, while we are young, may feel particularly slow, but which, on reflection, seems to occur very quickly – might this compacted temporality of adolescence also suggest an especial affinity with the form of the short story? In her work on adolescence and time, Pam Thurschwell notes that there is a particular trend in contemporary young adult (YA) fiction to undermine the traditional *bildungsroman* plotline when representing young people in favour of 'registering the actual condition of young western adults living under precarity and neoliberal capital.'²⁴⁴ As a result, romance plots are superseded by stories whereby 'adolescents confront the terrors of extinction rather than those of developmental time.'²⁴⁵ Given that the short story, by virtue of its length, is best suited for portraying snapshots that are often inconclusive, it lends itself to this compacted adolescent temporality, which is also driven towards uncertain, often dark futures.

Beginning with Ysrael's actual mask, in both 'Ysrael' and 'No Face,' characters exhibit a morbid fascination with what is underneath it. The narration of both stories seems to encourage this fascination, providing regular detail on Ysrael's facial expression beneath his mask, as well as titbits of hearsay and gossip about his appearance. In turn, this fascination is inevitably bound up with an anxiety about disfigurement and abnormality – a relief on the voyeur's part at their own wellness. Ysrael's mask is also presented as a means of quelling his father's anxiety about his son's abnormality – 'the father was very sensitive about anyone taunting his oldest son, which explained the mask.'²⁴⁶ While in 'Ysrael' the mask is presented as something the father has suggested to protect his child, in 'No Face,' it is implied that Ysrael wears the mask mainly for his father's sake, to

²⁴³ Oscar in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is also fascinated by superheroic masked characters, and the novel draws attention to the fact that many characters wear masks metaphorically as part of the complex relationships they have with their sense of identity. The character of the Faceless Man, who serves as a symbolic embodiment of the erasure and destruction inherent in Rafael Trujillo's dictatorial regime, may also be interpreted as masked, as his face is completely blank and devoid of feature or expression.

²⁴⁴ Pam Thurschwell, *Keep Your Back to the Future: On Adolescent Time Travel* (Work in Progress, Draft Copy, Chapter 6: Making Out in Anne Frank's House: Adolescence in the Anthropocene, 2018), p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 6.

prevent shame and embarrassment. This shame appears to be as much about the father's inability to protect his son as his son's actual disabilities, which in turn speaks to the anxieties and discomfort able-bodied people may feel when encountering a person with a disability. When the father is returning, Ysrael's mother fetches his mask and tells him to 'go [...] before your father comes out.'²⁴⁷ Thus, the family's anxiety about Ysrael turns on itself – they are anxious both about protecting the child from the people of Ocoa, and, in Ysrael and his mother's case, about ensuring that the father is not exposed to his son's true face. The fragility and indeed inadequacy of the mask to truly achieve these aims (and thus reduce the family's anxiety) is made unpleasantly evident as Ysrael places it back on his face, only to 'feel the fleas stirring in the cloth.'²⁴⁸ His proximity to these animals, as well as the fact that his facial difference was caused by a pig, reiterate the way he is repeatedly treated as non-human by his peers, while also viscerally representing his peers' fascination with his face by associating this unsettling voyeurism with bloodsucking insects.

Returning to Levinas' assertions about the face-to-face, even the title 'No Face' literalises the negation of Ysrael's face, serving as a performative act of denial that has the potential to be completely dehumanising. In conversation with Philippe Nemo, Levinas does briefly consider the act of masking, noting that 'there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance.'²⁴⁹ Here, Levinas is contemplating behavioural acts of self-masking, taking on a particular character or acting in a certain way to hide one's vulnerabilities – yet, in *Totality and Infinity*, he proposes that it is only when the self acknowledges the poverty of the Other, unhidden and naked, that we move towards productive discourse and ethical encounters. The so-called 'poverty' of the face lays us bare to the person encountering us – it acts as a reminder of our difference and our vulnerability, while also instilling a sense of responsibility in the self for the other. The significance of a physical mask, then, is all the

²⁴⁷ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 123.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 87.

more complex – Ysrael’s family are sensitive about him being seen without his mask, and yet, both wearing the mask and exposing the nakedness of his actual face result in him being subject to taunting and violence. Face-to-face encounters with and without his mask lack the ethical relationship to self and Other that Levinas cites as central to such encounters, indicating that the selves that come into contact with him do not view his actual face as a face, either. Those who meet Ysrael do not feel the sense of responsibility for him that Levinas suggests the poverty of the face should provoke in the self, and without this sense of responsibility, there is no possibility of an ethical encounter (which for Levinas, is grounded in human communication and the acknowledgement of the aforementioned responsibility). The ethical encounter is one that has the potential to teach morality, but only if the self who encounters the other is prepared to accept responsibility for them, and thus relinquish, to an extent, their freedom to act on impulses. The denial of Ysrael’s face represents an anxiety that is central to both ‘Ysrael’ and ‘No Face’ about disability – an anxiety that is so severe that members of Ysrael’s community are prepared to deny his humanity to avoid coming into meaningful contact with his facial difference.

The names of characters are particularly linked to the masking of physical and psychological pain in ‘Ysrael’ and ‘No Face,’ as the name Ysrael is a Spanish variation of the name Israel, which is biblically linked to Jacob, who was re-named Israel after wrestling with an angel (or God, in some interpretations). During this fight, the man ‘touched the hollow of [Jacob’s] thigh, and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint,’ and once their fight has ended, the man says ‘thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.’²⁵⁰ The renamed Israel is permanently disabled as a result of this encounter, and the name is generally taken to mean ‘fighter for God’ or ‘God-contended,’ as it combines Hebrew words for wrestle and God. As a result, the name is also interpreted as ‘he struggled with God.’ In turn, the ancient Greek word ἀγών (Agon) means struggle, and is the etymon of the word agony. Thus,

²⁵⁰ Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, ‘The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis,’ *The Bible: Authorized King James Version - Oxford Biblical Studies Online*, <<http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/book/obso-9780192835253/obso-9780192835253-div1-42>> [accessed 10 January 2018] [n.d.]

Ysrael's name has particular resonance, as his facial difference and the pain and anxiety it has caused him are implicit within it, almost like a prophecy of the struggles to come, masked within its etymology. Indeed, in a cruel nod to this etymology, just before Rafa smashes a bottle on Ysrael's head, Yunior tries to make conversation with him, asking if he is 'still into wrestling,' to which the boy replies, 'I'm a great wrestler. I almost went to fight in the Capital.'²⁵¹ This linguistic masking echoes Ysrael's reliance on language to ascribe powers to himself, while also offering a more positive example of a face-to-face encounter with the Other, as although the Biblical Israel is harmed and renamed by his encounter with God, it also redefines him, leading him to be blessed.

Ysrael's surgery can, in turn, be thought of as a kind of masking. His father's insistence that he always wears a mask, along with the cries of 'No Face!' from villagers and the violence Ysrael is subject to, emphasise his community's discomfort with difference.²⁵² Indeed, as well as his cloth mask, it appears that his family have attempted many other kinds of masking to conceal Ysrael, including calling on 'santeras.'²⁵³ Santeras are spiritual workers who practice Santería, a religion of Caribbean origin which centres around the worship of saints. It was Ysrael's mother who hired the santeras, who 'called on every spirit in the celestial directory for help' to heal Ysrael.²⁵⁴ As Adelaida M. Rosario and Mario De La Rosa note, 'Santería's traditions function as anchors to cultural identity and as an informal health care system that continues to prove resistant to formal biomedical health care.'²⁵⁵ Further, 'folk healing traditions inclusive of Santería function in much the same way as mental health services, serving as "informal counseling" with spirituality as an added dimension.'²⁵⁶ In calling in santeras before medical doctors, Ysrael's mother exemplifies the Ocoan community's reluctance to engage with Western biomedicine. For her, Santería is a more reliable and comforting option, though when the santeras fail the family does concede and call in American and later

²⁵¹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 13.

²⁵² Díaz, *Drown*, p. 117.

²⁵³ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

²⁵⁴ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

²⁵⁵ Adelaida M. Rosario and Mario De La Rosa, 'Santería as Informal Mental Health Support Among U.S. Latinos with Cancer,' *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 33 (2014), 4-18 (p. 9).

²⁵⁶ Rosario and De La Rosa, p. 11.

Canadian doctors to help Ysrael. While he is promised operations, their capacity to mask Ysrael's disfigurement is called into question, as his own wounds and scars are directly juxtaposed with the unmaskable injuries of other children in the ward, including 'a boy whose skull plates had not closed all the way and a girl who didn't have arms,' as well as a child who proudly states 'you can see my brain [...] All I have is this membrane thing and you can see right into it.'²⁵⁷ In particular, the boy's statement that anyone can see right into his brain seems to deny any possibility of interiority, of the ability to mask anything. It is as though his injury, and by extension, Ysrael's, strips individual agency from him – rendering any literal attempt to mask it pointless. Each of the children's wounds are obvious, and unmaskable in a literal sense, though the anxiety that Ysrael's narrative bears means that metaphorical masking is at play within 'No Face' and 'Ysrael', too.

For his own part, Ysrael opts to metaphorically mask himself, assuming the character of a superhero, and immersing himself in comic book culture as well as wrestling and strength training. This characterisation is twofold, as he trains outdoors doing pull-ups and chest exercises, while also reading comic books bought for him by the kindly Padre Lou. Ysrael clearly finds comfort in this characterisation, seeking out those similar to him, particularly those who have also been othered or isolated – in 'No Face' he chooses 'Kaliman, who takes no shit and wears a turban. If his face was covered he'd be perfect.'²⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that despite the wide variety of comic book superheroes who wear masks (and Ysrael's internal monologue indicating his preference for masked characters), the qualities that particularly draw him to a character are their ability to withstand 'shit' from others, and their status as outsiders. In developing his fitness, Ysrael is able to easily address the issue of being targeted by village bullies, as he becomes faster and stronger than them, and thus more easily able to escape. In turn, Ysrael addresses his anxiety that nothing will change by imagining himself as having superpowers – and this self-masking, or perhaps re-imagining of his own

²⁵⁷ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122.

²⁵⁸ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 119.

mask as a superheroic accessory, allows him to feel stronger in the face of his nightmares about the pig.

Both Ysrael and the child in 'Incarnations of Burned Children' are closely linked to, and indeed, masked by, the natural landscapes and organisms around them. In Ysrael's case, he is linked to nature in both violent and protective ways at different moments. When we first hear of Ysrael's accident from Yuniór's perspective in 'Ysrael,' the pig is described as having 'eaten his face off, skinned it like an orange.'²⁵⁹ This visceral simile for the way in which Ysrael's skin was apparently peeled off emphasises his vulnerability, and the ease with which masks may be removed or rendered necessary. Indeed, the jarring pairing of Ysrael's violent disfigurement with a soft, sweet fruit could, in and of itself, be thought of as a metaphorical mask, mitigating the horror of the act. Later, in 'No Face,' nature provides a mask for Ysrael, and reminds him of his need to mask himself, as he and his mother are reminded he needs to hide from his father by 'the way the land curves away to hide itself.'²⁶⁰ With this reminder from the landscape, 'he hides, blending into the weeds.'²⁶¹ This camouflage links back to the image of the orange, juxtaposing its fruitfulness and vulnerability with the barrenness of weeds and the protection they offer Ysrael. In the case of the child in 'Incarnations of Burned Children,' the boy becomes one with the environment, 'falling as rain and then rising.'²⁶² Given the immense pain and suffering the child has undergone in such a short space of time, this ambiguous link back to the natural progress of the water cycle is a considerably more gentle, though also melancholic metaphor. As rain occurs commonly, this metaphor points to the inevitable return of this trauma to the child's parents' lives – it is inescapable, and all encompassing. Indeed, bearing in mind the story's apocalyptic title, which, in its plurality, invokes an unknown number of burned children, the piece also carries an environmental anxiety, linking up natural processes to human trauma, and indeed environmental trauma caused by human activity. This

²⁵⁹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 4.

²⁶⁰ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 123.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

trauma can be thought of as becoming anxiety in its open-endedness, as the future of the family in the story, and the infinite families summoned by its title, are, by virtue of this title, presented as always at risk of tragedy. In the context of war, Saint-Amour refers to this feeling as a 'collective psychosis' or 'routinised anxiety' - an ever-present anticipation of possible catastrophe that challenges trauma studies' consistent focus on the past.²⁶³ Yet this constant sense of anxiety can apply outside of war, too, with the precarious working conditions and environmental instability implied by the story creating a persistent unease about the future that is emblematic of the shared anxieties of our present time. The universality of the story's title is heightened by the generically named 'the Daddy' and 'the Mommy,' further emphasizing that the anxieties at hand are applicable to everyone, and even suggesting allegory.²⁶⁴ These anxieties are again well-placed within the short story, as both the form itself and the environmental and political anxieties represented within it conform to Cazdyn's conditions of the new chronic, which 'extends the present into the future, burying in the process the force of the terminal.'²⁶⁵

Each of the stories this chapter considers also contains examples of narration masking the full extent of characters' traumatic and anxious experiences. In Ysrael's case, although the reader is aware his chance of recovery in any meaningful sense, at least in terms of his physical injuries, is very low, we are nonetheless encouraged into a positive outlook for his future – a narrative act that can be considered as a form of masking. When asked whether he ever takes his mask off, Ysrael responds: 'Not until I get better. I'm going to have an operation soon.'²⁶⁶ To this, Rafa says: 'They're lying to you. They probably just felt sorry.'²⁶⁷ However, in the later story 'No Face,' Ysrael meets with his Doctor, performs various exercises, knocks a boy who is bullying him away, and runs with noteworthy speed, eventually returning home to tell his younger brother Pesao that he has 'been

²⁶³ Saint-Amour, p. 6 and p. 62 respectively.

²⁶⁴ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 114.

²⁶⁵ Cazdyn, p. 7.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

fighting evil.²⁶⁸ These acts undermine Rafa's cynicism to some extent, and also plant a seed of hope that Ysrael's face could be repaired. Although Ysrael admits he's "'scared of the operations [...] and wishes he could lie under a table where no one can see' (an act of self-masking), the story closes optimistically, with Pesao being washed by his mother, and Ysrael running confidently and quickly towards town.²⁶⁹ This ending can be thought of as a form of narrative masking that attempts to appease the reader's anxiety about Ysrael's future, in the sense that it pulls attention away from Ysrael's anxieties about his surgery, and about the future (that 'nothing will change'), and instead sounds an unrealistically positive note, suggesting that Ysrael may overcome his bullies and the stigma he faces in his community, as is implied by the line 'nobody's faster.'²⁷⁰ In fact, we know that the narration of this story is focalized through Ysrael, and that his imagination is altering how scenes unfold, as when 'he says STRENGTH and the fat boy flies off him.'²⁷¹ In this sense, Ysrael's adolescence is also masking the full extent of the difficulties he is facing, from his isolation in his community and even within his own family, to the physical violence he regularly suffers at the hands of local boys. While 'No Face' ends inconclusively, and the reader may well be aware that hope for Ysrael is misplaced, we are still guided towards leaving the anxieties he has expressed behind, and instead moving forwards positively in line with the momentum of his running. Indeed, the superheroic fugue state that he adopts through language (that is, the invocation of superpowers through caps-lock words) can also be thought of as a proxy form of wellness – an adoption of a hyper-well, hyper-physical persona that speaks back to anxieties about Latino masculinity which are reflected in his family's desperate desire to heal or hide him. Although we have no sense of where Ysrael is running to, his trajectory is linear, encouraging a sense of positivity through forward motion. This stands in stark contrast to the image of the yoyo at the close of Wallace's

²⁶⁸ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 123.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 122 and p. 123 respectively.

²⁷¹ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 120.

'Incarnations', which moves up and down, unable to occupy the same space for any significant length of time, and metaphorically representing the uncertain future ahead.

Similarly, although the unnamed child in 'Incarnations of Burned Children' is not masked directly, his pain is initially presented as other, dissociated from the child's body, such that two characters emerge, with the child's face 'seeming somehow separate from the sounds that issued.'²⁷² Further, rather than linking the child's cries to the child himself, they are described as 'the screams,' presented without object as if to mask the immense pain the child is experiencing. In these unfolding moments of immense panic, the father's mind seems to empty itself – 'his man's mind empty of everything but purpose.'²⁷³ This can be thought of as a mental mask, employed to mitigate the horror of what he is witnessing, and perhaps, too, as a result of the fight-or-flight, reflexive nature of his response to his son's burning. Just as the child's screams are disconnected from the boy, the father's mind begins to block them out, as he 'ceased to hear the high screams because to hear them would freeze him and make impossible what had to be done to help his own child.'²⁷⁴ Despite the father's personal masking of the sound, the screams continue, and are briefly reconnected to the child, coming 'regular as breath.'²⁷⁵ Yet instantaneously, the screams are described as being separate from the child again, lasting 'so long they'd become already a thing in the kitchen, something else to quickly move around.'²⁷⁶ The objectification of these screams again masks the pain of the child, instead conferring it into a 'thing' that the father must avoid to help his son – indeed, through the father's gaze, 'the toddler still made little fists and screamed except maybe now merely on reflex from fear,' – lines that seem to deny the pain the child is in.²⁷⁷ To further this denial, the father comes face to face with his son only to hear 'a high pure shining sound that could stop his heart.'²⁷⁸ Although this sound is clearly panic inducing, the fact it is not identified

²⁷² Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 114.

²⁷³ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 114-115.

²⁷⁴ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 115.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

as a scream again indicates the father is masking the trauma he is witnessing from himself, unable to process the full reality of the scene. Oxymoronically, at this juncture the child's pain is unmasked, and made startlingly evident to the father, as the boy comes to embody the flame that has scalded him, 'his bitty lips and gums now tinged with the light of a low flame the Daddy thought, screaming as if almost still under the tilted pot in pain.'²⁷⁹ It is only at this point of unmasking in the father's thought process that he realises that in fact, he and his partner have been attending to the wrong wound, and that it is beneath the child's diaper that most of the boiling water has gathered, fusing the fabric to his skin. Indeed, the child's cries themselves serve a masking function, pointing to his inability to express his pain in language, particularly given his young age. This reflects the etymology of the word infant, which derives from the Latin *infāns* and French *enfant*, both of which translate as without speaking, or without language. The masking of the child's pain thus occurs not out of any choice on his part, but rather because the only means he has of indicating his pain (through crying out) has proved inadequate, as it has not resulted in his parents being able to pinpoint the main bodily location of his pain.

The story concludes with two contrasting examples of masking, fluctuating from the trivial to the transcendental. Recalling regretfully the scene of his son's burning, the father feels immense guilt at 'how badly he wanted a cigarette' as he wrapped the child in gauze and handtowels.²⁸⁰ In thinking of smoking rather than his son in these desperate final attempts at rescue, the father masks the reality that 'it was too late, [...] it wouldn't stop, and they couldn't make it.'²⁸¹ The inefficiency of the parents' anxiety-ridden responses to their son's accident lead their son's assumed death, or at least life-changing injuries, which in turn, brings the story to its final narrative mask, as 'the child's body expanded and walked about and lived its life untenanted.'²⁸² As what appears to be the child's soul ascends as 'so much vapor aloft,' his pain is drawn away from his body, which is left to wander

²⁷⁹ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 115.

²⁸⁰ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

eternally.²⁸³ The story's narration thus ends on a jarring note, simultaneously horrific and peaceful, with the trauma of the scene apparently evaporating away, yet clearly ever-present for the child's parents. However, it must also be acknowledged that this ending is highly ambiguous – the reader is not offered any real certainty as to the child's fate, and the word 'untenanted' seems to point not to overt bodily trauma such as wounds and scars, but rather to a more existential trauma. The apparent emptiness of the child's physical body, its lack of a tenant, indicates a separation of body and self, such that the child is no longer coinciding with himself. In dividing the child's physical and psychological presences, Wallace speaks to the challenges of presenting a unified self, especially following physical trauma. This, too, speaks to the act of masking oneself, of presenting many versions of oneself that are suited to certain scenarios, and that can mask certain pains and anxieties.

Through formal techniques such as varying sentence length, the brevity of the stories themselves, narrative pacing, a variety of narrative perspectives, and the employment of collapsed or bathetic endings, the short stories this chapter has considered demonstrate the variety of ways in which the form is especially well-suited for the representation of anxiety, and is inherently anxious, in line with the form's historic intertwinement with questions of anxiety and fear in the American tradition. These questions are revisited and reformulated in our contemporary anxious age in the stories at hand, cementing the short story as an anxious form. The general feeling of claustrophobia the techniques I have mentioned perform, tied with the sense of a denied or uncertain future that collapsed endings provoke, further emphasise the short story's capacity both to be anxiety-inducing, and to mimic contemporary anxieties and symptoms of anxiety. Indeed, the open-endedness of 'Ysrael,' 'No Face,' and 'Incarnations of Burned Children' speaks directly to the "slow cancellation of the future" that Mark Fisher analyses.²⁸⁴ He argues that

²⁸³ Wallace, *Oblivion*, p. 116.

²⁸⁴ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. 8.

The 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion. It doesn't feel like the future [...] there's an increasing sense that culture has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present. Or it could be that, in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more.²⁸⁵

With this in mind, the lack of certainty that each of the stories offers about the future for its characters echoes the difficulty artistic culture faces in articulating the present (while also begging the question as to whether such articulation has ever truly been possible). Anxiety's relationship with the short story is consolidated not only by its formal predisposition towards denied futures, but also by recurring themes, imagery, character types, and metaphors – particularly, in the case of the stories analysed within this chapter, the mask and the child. For Díaz, the mask operates both at a highly literal level and a metaphorical one, with Ysrael's mask negating the possibility of ethical interactions with Rafa and Yuniór, while also masking all the anxieties his facial difference provokes in its failure to adhere to a hypermasculine Latino identity. In Wallace's work, masking works at a far more linguistic level, with long, panicked sentences, the child's cries, and the metaphorical suggestion that the child ascends as vapor all masking, or at least delaying, the full interpretation of the trauma that has occurred, given the anxiety both the unfolding of the accident and its consequences provoke. In focusing on young subjects, both Díaz's and Wallace's work encompasses the many anxieties adolescence entails – about fitting in, about the ability to express oneself, and one's pain, and about the ultimate shortness of this period, which again, is aptly represented in the short story form.

While much of the analysis within this chapter has thought through traumatic events that also cause anxiety, the particular relevancy of the short story to and for anxiety is how its brevity relates to, and heightens, its anticipatory, panic-driven qualities. The shortness of 'Incarnations of Burned Children,' for example, exaggerates the anxious tension the unfolding of the traumatic burning scene causes, and reflects and reiterates the panic of said scene. Equally, the excitable, childlike, fast-paced nature of the narration of 'No Face' reflects Ysrael's desperate anxiety about

²⁸⁵ Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 8-9.

acceptance in his community and the prospect of recovery, which is promised yet highly ambiguous, not least because he ends the story as he begins – on the run, a typical anxious image. With all of this in mind, as well as being an archetypally anxious form, the short story has much to tell us about anxiety, speaking to its ability to induce claustrophobia, to highlight precarity and to feed upon it, to induce temporal acceleration and deceleration, and to invoke and emphasise uncertainty about the future. In the cases of the young people in the short stories this chapter has considered, the form has also articulated anxieties that have particular potency in youth – of being stuck in time, of being faced with an uncertain future, or even of having no future at all. Through the short story form, then, we also bear witness to how anxiety operates textually: it settles in tropes (as with masks and masking), it gives voice to all manner of internal sensations and drives, and it interferes with the structures of texts so that the temporalities of given anxieties are reflected therein. In turn, these features accentuate the unsettling question of what lies ahead, with anxiety feeding upon this question until bathos reigns.

'The Proper Path of Dominican Male-Itude': Anxiety and Hypermasculinity in Junot Díaz

In May 2018, during a Q&A session at Sydney Writers' Festival, Junot Díaz was confronted by author Zinzi Clemmons, who asked whether his recently published *New Yorker* article, 'The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma,' had been written to pre-empt allegations of sexual misconduct against him.²⁸⁶ She said he had harmed her in the past, and later described her experience in more detail on Twitter, saying he had 'forcibly kiss[ed]' her.²⁸⁷ This led several other women to come forward with accounts of mistreatment by Díaz, including Carmen Maria Machado, who said that he had lost his temper after she questioned his male protagonists' problematic relationships with women in 2012 during the *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) book tour.²⁸⁸ This allegation is particularly pertinent in the context of the #MeToo movement, which has challenged and shaken prominent male figures in the literary scene and beyond for their misogynistic behaviour. Díaz's writing is rife with such hypermasculine displays, ranging in scope from repeated infidelities, to physical and sexual abuse, to the control and coercion of women. While many of Díaz's characters are self-conscious about the ways in which this behaviour feeds into stereotypes about Latino, and specifically Dominican masculinity, their actions also frequently and problematically reiterate these stereotypes, with recurring narrator Yunior des Las Casas going as far as to state that he 'inherited' his status as a '[sucio] of the worst kind' from his violent father and brother.²⁸⁹ In this refusal of responsibility for

²⁸⁶ For reporting on this incident, see: Kristine Phillips, 'Pulitzer Prize-Winning Author Junot Díaz Accused of Sexual Misconduct, Misogynistic Behaviour,' *Washington Post* (6 May 2018), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2018/05/05/pulitzer-prize-winning-author-junot-diaz-accused-of-sexual-misconduct-misogynistic-behavior/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.0e3849bb975c> [accessed 10 Aug 10 2018]. See also: Junot Díaz, 'The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma,' *New Yorker* (16 April 2018) <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-silence-the-legacy-of-childhood-trauma>> [accessed Aug 10, 2018].

²⁸⁷ Zinzi Clemmons (@zinziclemmons, 4 May 2018, 12:05am) <<https://twitter.com/zinziclemmons>> [accessed Aug 10, 2018]. The tweet in question has now been deleted.

²⁸⁸ See Carmen Maria Machado (@carmenmmachado, 4 May 2018, 1:22am), <<https://twitter.com/carmenmmachado/status/992318598398992384?s=21>> [accessed Oct 10, 2018].

²⁸⁹ Junot Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 161. Sucio translates directly as dirty or filthy, but in slang, can mean someone sexually immoral or 'tainted'. In framing his behaviour as an inevitability of Dominican culture and upbringing, Yunior implies that toxic masculinity is a kind of cultural inheritance for him – a meme, in Richard Dawkins' terms: 'a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation [...] when you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the

his poor treatment of women, which he puts down to genetics, Yuniors comes to epitomise a number of important questions rising from the current debate about toxic masculinity. What does it mean to be masculine now, particularly for Dominican men in America? Are all men implicated in the #MeToo movement? Is there anything positive about masculinity, and can men be redeemed after enacting toxically masculine behaviour? How and why is hypermasculinity performed by Díaz's characters? What is the relationship between masculinity and anxiety? And what does it mean to be a 'good' man? These questions remain live, and the issues they raise require close and sustained scrutiny. With attention to these questions, as well as the extra-textual anxiety arising from reading and working on fiction by a writer tangled in allegations of sexual misconduct, this chapter will focus on Díaz's hypermasculine characters and their anxieties in order to think through what anxiety about masculinity (specifically Dominican masculinity) can reveal about anxiety more generally.

Rather than specifically interpreting allegations against Díaz (which are, nonetheless, inextricably linked to patterns of aggressive male behaviour that are increasingly being exposed for their misogyny and for the harm they cause women, and which are prevalent in Díaz's writing), the analysis in this chapter will focus on his writing, its reception, and broader sociopolitical contexts. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these contexts, aside from the #MeToo movement, is the turn in critical masculinity studies towards interpreting masculinity itself as crisis, which, as I will argue, inextricably connects masculinity to anxiety. As Bruce Traister puts it: 'the history of American men as men now not only proceeds as a historiography of masculine crisis but collectively writes itself as an actual history of American masculinity *as* crisis.'²⁹⁰ In Michael Kimmel's view, this crisis became particularly apparent from the 1970s onwards, during which time 'feminism, black liberation, and gay liberation provided a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood.'²⁹¹ Framing masculinity as crisis draws attention to the centrality of anxious drives in

meme's propagation.' (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene 30th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 192).

²⁹⁰ Bruce Traister, 'Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,' *American Quarterly*, 52 (2000), 274-304 (p. 287).

²⁹¹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 202.

forming the masculine subject and masculine experience, while also highlighting the instability of what R.W. Connell calls hegemonic masculinity: ‘the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.’²⁹²

At this juncture it is worth establishing some of the particularities of American and Dominican masculinity to provide context for the analysis that follows, which centres on Dominican-American immigrants. In both American and Dominican constructions of masculinity in the literary and theoretical texts within this chapter, there are outdated expectations that a man will be the main provider for his family, and that he will be physically strong yet emotionally unavailable, taking pains to conceal feelings or hints of femininity. Successful heterosexual relationships are also central to both conceptualisations of masculinity, though as Maja Horn notes in her study of gender politics in Dominican literature, gender roles in the US are predicated on the assumption that ‘monogamous relations and marriage are [...] ideal arrangements,’ whereas Díaz’s Yunió is presented as an ‘ideal model of Dominican masculinity’ because he is ‘incessantly cheating and chasing other women.’²⁹³ This is not in any way to say that American masculinity does not also involve infidelity, but in American masculinity, this may be hidden or revealed only to those who would find it impressive, while for Dominican men, infidelity is a badge of honour, and a more open and expected part of masculine construction. However, this formulation embeds an ‘us and them’ rhetoric that problematically deems Dominican masculinity as more harmful:

mainstream American readers are easily compelled to receive this “New World” doom as being at a far remove from North American reality, an exotic and opaque “Other” world vastly different from their own, rather than one with long-standing close relations with the United States and that was shaped by U.S. imperial, economic, and cultural politics.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 77.

²⁹³ Maja Horn, *Masculinity After Trujillo: The Politics of Gender in Dominican Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), p. 133, p. 130, and p. 133 respectively.

²⁹⁴ Horn, p. 129.

Although Díaz himself describes how he grew up in ‘a very segregated masculine world’ in which men were ‘struggling with a mask that they have to be tough and constantly aggressive,’ Horn notes that he ‘does not consider U.S. masculinity any less problematic or noxious than the Dominican forms of masculinity that he addresses in his writings.’²⁹⁵ However, in response to the additional pressure of conforming to both American and Dominican versions of masculinity, Horn argues that ‘the Dominican diaspora has contributed to amplifying existing gender repertoires in the Dominican Republic.’²⁹⁶ As well as responding to the emasculation prompted by colonisation, which I will discuss later in the chapter, Díaz’s characters, as immigrants in the US, are thus pushed to even more noteworthy hypermasculine performances enacted to assert power and dominance. This poses a challenge in assimilating, as well as the danger of being conceived of as a violent other, yet is also necessary to it, as Díaz’s characters must work much harder than white American peers to prove their worth and their masculinity. When using examples of American masculinity in this chapter, then, I assume that these conceptualisations generally apply to Dominican masculinity, too, but to a greater and more complicated, racialised extent. This is not to say that these masculinities are directly interchangeable, because of course, they are not, but as Dominican-Americans, Díaz’s characters are in the challenging position of having to fulfil two sets of expectations of masculinity.

Concepts such as Connell’s have now been challenged repeatedly, and while the hegemonic power and presence of masculinity undeniably remains, in light of mounting pressure that has culminated in the #MeToo movement, aspects of this particular, dominant kind of masculinity have been reinterpreted as and through narratives of toxicity. For Terry Kupers, ‘toxic masculinity is the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence.’²⁹⁷ Mel Chen notes that toxicity has permeated

²⁹⁵ Nicholas Wroe, ‘Junot Díaz: A Life in Books,’ *The Guardian*, (31 August 2012) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/31/life-in-books-junot-diaz>> [accessed 1 June 2020]; Horn, p. 131.

²⁹⁶ Horn, p. 124.

²⁹⁷ Terry J. Kupers, ‘Toxic Masculinity as Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison’ *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61 (2005), 713-724 (p. 714).

‘environmental, social, and political discourses [...] leaking out of nominal and literal bounds while retaining their affective ties to vulnerability and repulsion,’ yet also remaining driven by ‘domestic panic’ about toxins, a fear which ‘[recycles] languages of terror.’²⁹⁸ Both Kupers’ and Chen’s formulations link up toxicity and anxiety, positing that toxicity is inherently anxious as it emphasizes our vulnerabilities, thus prompting exaggerated displays of strength and violence. The Good Men Project, established as a platform to think through what it means to be a ‘good man’ in the twenty-first century, also reflects on the damage toxic masculinity does to men: ‘it derives from a rejection of the perceived opposite, femininity, that is so pervasive as to become unhealthy for both men and those around them.’²⁹⁹ These definitions speak to a twofold crisis of masculinity, with the dominant position of men in society coming under siege for its toxicity, and the anxiety this may cause, as well as the pressure on men to perform a certain version of masculinity to be successful and not be perceived as weak. In turn, the desire or need to engage in such harmful gender performances is born from anxiety, while the performance itself may also cause anxiety if the subject is conscious of its toxicity.

As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, ‘as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences.’³⁰⁰ Yet, in the main, the always-performative nature of gender is hidden, particularly given that there is no conceivable ‘original’ masculinity upon which masculine performance is based:

Gender is [...] a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and its naturalness.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Mel Y. Chen, ‘Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections,’ *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, nos. 2-3 (2011): 265-286 (p. 266, p. 268 and p. 268 respectively).

²⁹⁹ Michael Carley, ‘What Is Toxic Masculinity?’, *The Good Men Project*, (5 April 2018) <<https://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/what-is-toxic-masculinity-dg/>> [accessed 11 Oct 2018]

³⁰⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 178.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

However, in the case of many of Díaz's male protagonists, this performance is not hidden, because it is hypermasculine. It is visibly performed, inherited and copied from male peers - albeit without any real source, as its performed nature means it has always been a fiction. So exaggerated are the masculinities at play in his work, so violent and misogynistic, that their status as performance is explicit, such that they cannot appear natural. Indeed, Yunior's brother Rafa alludes to his behavior being for show, when he purposely interrupts his mother's prayer group to highlight the fact he has succeeded in bringing a woman home despite the fact he has cancer, later explaining: 'can't let them think I'm slipping.'³⁰² For Yunior and many of Díaz's other male characters, anxiety about being perceived as masculine means performances such as this are thought of as a necessity – a defense mechanism against accusations of femininity or homosexuality. They must be seen to act, to perform masculinity, as they cannot be taken to be 'real' men without doing so. Sianne Ngai discusses how anxiety 'has a history of being gendered in Western culture,' with Freud's castration complex 'barring female subjects from anxiety' while it 'plays a privileged role in the process of gendered ego formation for male subjects.'³⁰³ Indeed, 'the privileging of anxiety as a key for interpreting the human condition is accompanied by its being secured as the distinctive – if not exclusive – emotional province of male intellectuals.'³⁰⁴ However, all of this problematizes masculine performance, as it reveals vulnerabilities and anxieties, with masculinity defined as much by what threatens it, about what it is not, as by what it may be. As I have already mentioned, these hypermasculine performances are complicated further by Díaz's characters' status as Dominican-American immigrants, meaning that they occupy a challenging position of duality. In his autotheoretical text, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon describes the duality experienced by a black person thus:

³⁰² Díaz, *This is How You Lose Her*, p. 95.

³⁰³ Ngai, p. 213.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question.³⁰⁵

Although the use of the word Negro means this example is not culturally specific to Dominican men, it does highlight the necessity of performative behaviour for people of colour living in white communities. The performance of hypermasculinity by Díaz's male characters is multi-dimensional, anxiously grappling with a racialised dual existence that is both actual through migration to the US (which occupied the Dominican Republic from 1916-1924), and existential in the broader sense of splitting oneself to survive amidst black and white people.³⁰⁶

In turn, this exemplifies one of four scenarios in which Julia Kristeva believes hysterical time is manifested – the double personality, whereby a person is 'two people at the same time,' experiencing 'simultaneous dissociation.'³⁰⁷ Kristeva uses this example to describe a woman named Oriane, who lost her brother in an accident, and presented anxious symptoms including breathlessness and 'silent gasping' thereafter.³⁰⁸ She also had a 'selective memory disorder' which led to her struggling to remember her brother's death, breaking her out of the 'linearity of conscious time' as a kind of defense mechanism.³⁰⁹ While for Oriane, it is a specific emotional trauma that prompts her existence as two people at the same time (that is, existence within hysterical time), for Díaz's characters, it is the broader pressure of fulfilling the masculine expectations associated with American and Dominican masculinity, while also grappling with the legacy of a brutal dictator and life as an immigrant to a country that has oppressed the Dominican Republic. With all of this in mind, Yunió des Las Casas (*Drown* (1996), *This Is How You Lose Her*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

³⁰⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 8.

³⁰⁶ *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is particularly attentive to the history of the Dominican Republic's colonisation, describing Santo Domingo as 'the Ground Zero of the New World' following Columbus' initial arrival on the island in 1492: Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 1.

³⁰⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness*, trans. by Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 131.

³⁰⁸ Kristeva, p. 131.

³⁰⁹ Kristeva, p. 131 and p. 132 respectively.

(2009)) and Oscar de León (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*) both participate in hypermasculine performances which reflect a wide range of anxieties about gender, identities, and whether or to what extent they should fulfill stereotypes of Dominican masculinity.

In the opening story of *This Is How You Lose Her*, entitled 'The Sun, the Moon, the Stars,' Yunior reflects on his relationship with a woman called Magda, contemplating her discovery of his infidelities while also attempting to defend his moral character. Yunior refutes claims made by his ex-girlfriend Magda's friends that he cheated 'because [he] was Dominican, because all [...] Dominican men are dogs and can't be trusted,' arguing that 'from [his] perspective it wasn't genetics; there were reasons. Causalities.'³¹⁰ Here, he tries to justify his behavior, framing it as a cumulation of circumstances unassociated with his heritage. Yet in a later story, 'Miss Lora,' he admits to himself: 'you had hoped the [sucio] gene had missed you, skipped a generation, but clearly you were kidding yourself. The blood always shows.'³¹¹ In describing a 'sucio gene,' Yunior suggests that his sexual promiscuity is a fundamental part of his and his male relatives' essence, in Aristotelean terms – their virility, their violence, and their poor treatment of women are framed as inevitabilities here.³¹² However, Yunior battles constantly with his identity in this regard, sometimes accepting his behaviour as an inevitability of his Dominican background and upbringing, as above, and at other times denying his background altogether. Reflecting on a meeting with a woman from Trinidad who uses a 'phony-as-hell English accent,' he notes that such performances demonstrated 'the way we all were back then. None of us wanted to be niggers. Not for nothing.'³¹³ DuBois reflects on this kind of identity struggle and its consequences in an American context in his concept of double-consciousness:

³¹⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 19.

³¹¹ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 161.

³¹² The idea of essence in Aristotle is translated from his term "to ti ên einai," meaning "the what it was to be;" see: Marc S. Cohen, 'Aristotle's Metaphysics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (15 June 2016) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>> [accessed 18 Jan 2019]

³¹³ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 39.

a world which yields [a black person] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world [...] one ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.³¹⁴

As with Fanon's writing, it is important not to assume the blackness reflected on here is relevant to, or representative of, all black people, though while Negro is often used derogatively to describe African-American people, Yunior uses this word to describe himself: 'For some Negroes [being rejected] wouldn't mean shit. But you ain't that kind of Negro.'³¹⁵ This demonstrates how Latino masculinities are mapped onto other racialized identities in North America, with such identities inappropriately conflated to such an extent that Yunior absorbs such homogenizing discourses, while also wishing to escape them and his specific identity as a Dominican.

His struggle with whether or not he possesses the 'sucio gene' speaks to a complex and paradoxical anxiety arising in Díaz's writing: a seemingly self-perpetuating anxiety about masculinity and what it is to be a Dominican man that prompts his double-consciousness. Despite eventually finding 'a wife [he] adores and who adores [him], a negrita from Salcedo' whom he says he 'does not deserve,' and with whom he discusses having children, Yunior's concluding statement in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* that he is 'a new man, you see, a new man, a new man,' is partially undermined as he says 'I don't run after girls any more. Not much, anyway.'³¹⁶ Even having seemingly stepped away from hypermasculine performance, desperately repeating that he is a good man, Yunior still feels anxiously compelled to state he still chases women. This anxiety can be thought of as self-perpetuating in that Díaz's writing tends not to resolve the anxieties his characters experience; rather, anxiety is compounded, becoming not only anxiety about masculinity, but anxiety about anxiety itself. Such anxieties are equally prevalent throughout *Oscar Wao*, which also features Yunior as a narrator, but focuses on the titular Oscar, who is described as 'very un-

³¹⁴ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. by Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.

³¹⁵ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 177.

³¹⁶ Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 326.

Dominican' based on his inability to sleep with women.³¹⁷ This shift in narrative focus can be thought of as a means of deflecting from Yunior's anxious masculinity: Oscar shares this anxiety to an extent, but is altogether more complicated as a character given that he seems to simultaneously desire and reject the kind of Dominican masculinity Yunior practices. That being said, Oscar's struggles with anxiety and depression are directly linked to his failure to fulfil stereotypes about Dominican men having 'Atomic Level G;' while observing his 'cursing swaggering cousins, [...] he had started to suspect that in their Latin hypermaleness there might be an answer.'³¹⁸ Yet despite his best efforts, and his affirmations of 'soy dominicano. Dominicano soy,' his peers refuse to believe he is Dominican.³¹⁹

Both *This Is How You Lose Her* and *Oscar Wao* are texts haunted by spectres of absent, abusive fathers, as well as the hyperbolically masculine and totalitarian Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. The absent father can be thought of as an anxious emblem, embodying, too the son's failures to successfully perform Dominican masculinity. After an unexpected appearance from his father, Yunior remarks that 'a father is a hard thing to compass,' pointing to the difficulty in placing him both geographically and emotionally.³²⁰ The linguistic link that is established between a sense of rootlessness and fatherhood cements the relationship between paternal absence and a broader lack of connection to a Dominican identity, particularly as this absence continued even when Yunior's family were reunited in America. While these spectral figures are portrayed as deeply flawed and unpleasant, 'free with [their] smacks,' and abusive towards almost everyone they encounter, Yunior also grapples with the possibility (or perhaps even inevitability) of becoming them, at times openly mirroring their behaviour.³²¹ This speaks to the double-bind of anxiety surrounding masculinity in Díaz's work – the anxiety characters feel about fulfilling or performing the stereotype of a hypermasculine Dominican man, but also the anxiety provoked by successfully (or unsuccessfully)

³¹⁷ Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 11. Original emphasis.

³¹⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 24 and p. 30 respectively. 'G' is a slang term for gangster.

³¹⁹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 49.

³²⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 125.

³²¹ Díaz, *This is How You Lose Her*, p. 130.

doing so. This anxiety is demonstrated physically through trembling, sweating, and accelerated thought processes, to name but a few symptoms, but is also borne out at a formal level as much of Díaz's writing is connected across different texts by a selection of narrators, and in the case of *Oscar Wao*, is split and interrupted by footnotes that fluctuate in tone between the conversational, the jovial, and the academic.

More often than not, Díaz's male characters are aware of the problematic nature of stereotypical Latino masculinity, and the inherently contradictory desire they feel to perform it – driven, as I have noted, by an anxiety about fitting in, and being perceived as a 'real man.' Yet this awareness and anxiety does not necessarily guard against misogyny, despite the explicit performativity of their hypermasculinity, Díaz's characters end up reiterating stereotypes of Dominican men. Horn reflects on the way in which Western readers and critics have responded to Díaz's work, noting that their enthusiastic reception is partially built on how 'Dominican masculinity is used to bolster implicitly a presumably less problematic American masculinity.'³²² Male readers may contemplate their own performances of masculinity, problematically defining them as less damaging than the Dominican masculinity presented in the text. In turn, this assumption that Dominican masculinity is more problematic and damaging grants no attention to the complex and multifaceted nature of racialised gender performance, nor how a person may over-compensate for their position as other. While Yunior stands apart from the tacit collective agreement to perform gender in the manner that Butler posits, drawing attention to his anxious reluctance to fulfill stereotypes about Dominican men, Oscar is desperate to 'prove' his Dominican identity to Latino men who are part of the collective agreement. One of many reasons that both Oscar and Yunior end up assimilating hypermasculine stereotypes through performances of them is as a result of the reception and perception of Dominican men as inferior to, or 'worse' than American men – indeed, even Yunior's own father reinforces this stereotypes, cursing Yunior for urinating on the street as he

³²² Maja Horn, p. 138.

had always done in Santo Domingo: ‘Decent people live around here and that’s how we’re going to live. You’re Americans now.’³²³

Anxiety surrounding masculinity and its performance in Díaz’s work can be divided into a number of sub-categories with physical and psychological iterations, each of which this chapter will consider in turn. This anxiety manifests itself through language and through the form of Díaz’s writing, which makes numerous chronological jumps, testament to the challenges inherent in recounting and representing anxious narratives: *Oscar Wao* spans many generations and jumps between time periods, and the short stories in *This Is How You Lose Her* are also out-of-order, while also providing considerable additional detail about Yunior’s life that is not revealed by his narration in *Oscar Wao*. These categories include anxiety about fathers (or the absence of fathers); anxiety about ‘proving’ heterosexuality and refuting claims of homosexuality (despite the phallocentrism of Latino masculinity as portrayed in Díaz’s work, which centres on sexual virility); anxiety about displaying strength, particularly physical strength; and anxiety about appearing too emotional or expressive (which can also be thought of as a fear of the feminine and a racialized trope). This final anxiety also extends to the discussion of mental health, with Oscar’s family, for example, feeling a great deal of shame and misunderstanding over his attempted suicide and his emotional state in *Oscar Wao*. Prior to his attempt, which follows an unrequited romantic interest in a fellow college student, Lola tells Oscar ‘you need to let it go,’ later explaining to Yunior that he ‘gets like this sometimes.’³²⁴ Similarly, when Oscar’s mother visits him in hospital, he starts to cry, prompting her to say ‘you’ll be doing a lot more than crying when I get through with you.’³²⁵ Of course, this shame and anxiety about confessing experiences of mental illness can lead not only to the repression of such experiences, but also to further mental health problems – another contradictory facet of Latino masculinity. As Ilán Stavans remarks in his essay ‘The Latin Phallus’:

³²³ Díaz, *This is How You Lose Her*, p. 122.

³²⁴ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 187.

³²⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 191.

for a culture as steeped in sexuality as our own, it is strange that the substance of our masculine identity remains a forbidden topic [...] we are terrified of exposing the labyrinthine paths of our unexplained desire of engaging in what the Mexican essayist and poet Octavio Paz once called “the shameful art of *abrirse*” – opening up and losing control, admitting our insecurities, allowing ourselves to be exposed, unprotected, unsafe.³²⁶

In refusing to open up or admit vulnerabilities, characters in Díaz’s work end up caught in cycles that reiterate and reinforce themselves, rejecting the behaviour of fathers and forefathers in principle, yet enacting it in practice. Indeed, in *Oscar Wao* erasure and the denial of feeling (and in fact any history at all) is personified in a male figure – that of the Faceless Man. In his introduction to *Muy Macho*, Ray González notes that for the Latino men willing to confront and write their masculinity, ‘the fear and anxiety of confessing too many personal things [changes] to relief and enlightenment.’³²⁷ Yet for the vast majority of Díaz’s male characters, this anxiety about showing and feeling anxiety, about opening up, means performances of hypermasculine behaviour persist. Although González argues that ‘the caricatures of the rebellious street punk and the Latin lover, who beds as many women as he can, no longer fit the mold’ when it comes to portrayals of Latino men, Díaz’s work deliberately and repeatedly employs these caricatures precisely to question why such a mould exists, and whether it can truly be broken out of completely – questions that can also be applied extra-textually in relation to contemporary debates about being a ‘good’ man.³²⁸

The Shadow of the Father

While in most instances, the anxiety Díaz’s characters feel about masculinity is not expressed in literal terms, and rather, can be inferred from behaviour, conversation, and narration, when it comes to fathers, this anxiety is clear. Although David Cowart observes that diasporic writing such as

³²⁶ Ilán Stavans, ‘The Latin Phallus,’ in *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront their Manhood*, ed. by Ray González (New York: Random House, 1996), pp. 143-164 (p. 148).

³²⁷ Ray González, ‘Introduction,’ in *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront their Manhood*, ed. by Ray González (New York: Random House, 1996), pp.xiii-xx (p. xix)

³²⁸ González, ‘Introduction,’ p. xii.

Díaz's is governed by a 'thematics of absence' whereby 'the one condition (fatherlessness) compounds the other (displacement),' this absence is never total, as fathers in Díaz's work have a habit of casting long, inescapable shadows.³²⁹ As such, Yunior's father's physical absence proves relieving, as it removes a source of violence: 'we rarely talked about our father. Me, I was just happy not to be getting my ass kicked in anymore.'³³⁰ Although he describes his father's 'Last Great Absence,' capitalised to indicate the fundamental place these absences occupy in his life's narrative, his father continues to be mentioned throughout the text, present through the anxiety he causes, while appearing in person only in the short story 'Invierno' (Winter).³³¹ The story's title speaks to the nature of his father's cold and fleeting presence: narrating as a young child, Yunior explains he 'didn't know' his father, commenting that 'his narrow face [was] still unfamiliar' because of their five-year separation, during which time his father worked in the US while Yunior, Rafa, and their mother remained in Santo Domingo.³³² Indeed, it is in the state of complete unknowing that Yunior is most comfortable with his father, imagining him as being 'seven feet tall with enough money to buy our entire barrio.'³³³ This image is quickly shattered by the reality of the father's 'average height' and harsh discipline, encapsulated in his obsession with neatly-tied shoelaces – a task with which Yunior struggles.³³⁴ His performance anxiety in this setting is obvious:

Rafa showed me how, and I said, Fine, and had no problems in front of him, but when Papi was breathing down my neck, his hand on a belt, I couldn't perform; I looked at my father like my laces were live wires he wanted me to touch together.³³⁵

³²⁹ David Cowart, *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 194.

³³⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 36.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 122 and p. 123 respectively.

³³³ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 125.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 126.

As well as exemplifying Yuniór's father's aggression and violence, this extract highlights the transference of masculine anxiety from father to son, with the neat tying of shoelaces signifying suitability for work and ability to generate income for the family. The phrase 'I couldn't perform' also speaks to a prevalent masculine anxiety surrounding sexual performance. Kimmel goes as far as to argue that the stereotypical 'male sex role' led men to view sex as work – a 'dangerous encounter' operating as the 'ultimate test of masculinity;' an opportunity to prove oneself and achieve sexual pleasure, but also a precarious task that risks exposing a man's failure to be masculine.³³⁶

In failing to 'perform' successfully for his father, masculinity itself is constituted as a kind of performance anxiety, with a convincing performance contingent on fulfilling hypermasculine stereotypes – turning stereotypes into spectacles that are conspicuous in their visibility. This conspicuousness is heightened as such spectacles border on simulacra – yet simulacra that have no real source material, given that a single definition or version of masculinity that inspires all others does not exist. There is an inherent narcissism at play here, as the father seems to want his children to be well presented in order to demonstrate his own ability to work hard and care for his family (although at this point, the father is refusing to let his children out of the house, meaning this is only an internal performance, a kind of competition between male family members). This masculine 'preparation,' as it were, for his sons to enter the outside world, comes as a result of the way in which a father is measured by his sons, and the extent to which he can replicate a certain masculinity through both nature and nurture. Edelman points to the necessity of replication for heterosexuality, or at least heteronormativity, to replicate itself for survival in his description of the 'heterosexual alibi of reproductive necessity.'³³⁷ He argues that heterosexuality is 'impregnated' 'with the future of signification' because it has conferred upon it the 'cultural burden of signifying

³³⁶ Kimmel, p. 204. Kimmel's use of the term 'male sex role' refers to four rules of manhood, defined by the psychologist Robert Brannon, which are that 'one can never do anything that even remotely hints of the feminine,' 'masculinity is measured by power, wealth, [and] success,' that men are 'emotionally reliable by being emotionally inexpressive,' and to always 'exude an aura of manly daring and aggression.' (Kimmel, p. 203-204).

³³⁷ Edelman, p. 13.

futurity.³³⁸ Framing heterosexuality in this way confers a particular power to it, as through this framing, it is a necessity – the future of humanity depends upon it, and heterosexual reproduction must, by this logic, continue to guarantee survival. Threatened by his father’s hypermasculine display, which is predicated on this logic, Yuniór cannot satisfy the stereotypical image of a strong, dependable Latino male migrant (an image he has conjured, and previously imagined his father to uphold) – he is too overwhelmed by the figurative prospect of being shocked by his laces. In this overlaying of the mundane with the hazardous, Yuniór captures his father’s fickleness and unpredictability (themselves symptoms of anxiety), while also confirming the state of panic he enters in his presence.

The extent of this panic is later confirmed when Rafa, who is usually very cruel to Yuniór, watches his brother dress himself, leading to the only explicit expression of anxiety by a character in all of Díaz’s work: ‘[Rafa’s] mouth was tight. *I started to feel anxious*. What’s your problem?’ I said.’³³⁹ Ironically, it is masculine care that provokes Yuniór here, or at least allows him to consciously feel an anxiety that is more dispersed and repressed at other times, as he is so unused to being cared for. In making a direct admission of anxiety, he confirms how central father figures are to anxiety about masculinity, as well as masculine attention, which might compromise performances of hypermasculinity. Indeed, the act of being looked at, and of looking, are charged with anxiety here: both boys feel uneasy, and Yuniór’s irritation at being watched frames Rafa’s looking as a ‘problem’ that is provoked by the male gaze, speaking to an undercurrent of fear about being accused of homosexuality: earlier in the story, Yuniór glances at his father, only to be told ‘Don’t eye me,’ and later ‘don’t you look at me.’³⁴⁰ Rafa proceeds to tie Yuniór’s laces for him, responding to his own anxiety about how his father will respond to Yuniór’s appearance, especially given that his hair is a ‘Caribbean grandparent’s dream,’ while Yuniór’s ‘had enough of the African to condemn [him] to

³³⁸ Edelman, p. 13.

³³⁹ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 127. Emphasis my own.

³⁴⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 123 and p. 126 respectively.

endless combings.³⁴¹ While Rafa's hair satisfies his Dominican family's beauty standards, Yunior's is seen to reveal mixed heritage that must be repressed and tamed through brushing and cutting, placing him beneath his brother who is seen as 'wholly' Dominican, with greater capacity to satisfy ideals of Dominican masculinity. Both brothers, then, are anxious about their failure to meet their father's standards, though this anxiety ultimately results in both men mirroring his behaviour, which is turn an expression of the father's own anxieties.

Nancy Chodorow argues that responses to parental judgement and violence are inherently gendered, with 'the girl or women [trying] to rid herself of the mother in her mind; [and] the boy or man [trying] to rid himself of the father out there,' engaging in 'external violence against an object experienced as being without.'³⁴² Yet this logic only points to the contradictory nature of masculine anxiety surrounding fathers – in trying to shake their father's violent and emotionally abusive treatment, Yunior and Rafa end up enacting the same external violence by directing the anxiety they experienced elsewhere, mistreating women and each other, and bringing themselves closer to that which they hoped to escape or deny. Indeed, in failing to shake their father's violence and influence more generally, Yunior and Rafa adhere to the Oedipal 'first hatred and first murderous wish against [their] father.'³⁴³ Freud argues that to succeed in avoiding becoming psychoneurotic, we must '[forget] our jealousy of our fathers,' but in their youthful state, the brothers are unable to do so, or something has got stuck, simultaneously despising and becoming their father in Freudian ambivalence – 'the symmetrical development of contradictory pairs of partial drives.'³⁴⁴ This ambivalence, too, is inherently anxious, as the co-existence of fear, disdain, anger, but also a desire to please the father later leads Yunior and Rafa to act both as he asks and as he does, knowingly and unknowingly – Rafa 'obeyed [his father] with a scrupulousness he had never shown anybody,' while

³⁴¹ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 126.

³⁴² Nancy J. Chodorow, 'The Enemy Outside: Thoughts on the Psychodynamics of Extreme Violence with Special Attention to Men and Masculinity,' in *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. by Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp.234-260 (p. 255).

³⁴³ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 280.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, and: Sigmund Freud, *The Wolfman and Other Cases*, ed. Adam Phillips (London: Penguin Classics, 2002) p. 224.

Yunior 'wanted [his] father to like [him] too' but 'wasn't in an obedient mood.'³⁴⁵ While Rafa's anxious ambivalence makes him pliant, Yunior is still very young and his anxieties do not prevent him from stepping out of line and disobeying his father. Despite this, he, too, later mimics his father, though he grapples with whether this is an inevitability and outside of his control, or because of causalities (the anxiety his father caused, and the complex network of feelings his behavior prompted).

Oscar, on the other hand, never gets to know his father at all. The only information provided about him throughout the novel is that he met Oscar's mother Belicia on her plane from Santo Domingo to the US, and that 'after two years together he [left] her, her third and final heartbreak, and she would never love again.'³⁴⁶ In a text governed by curses, folklore, and omens, most notably the 'Fukú Americanus [...] the Curse and the Doom of the New World,' there is particular resonance to this meeting occurring in transit.³⁴⁷ The plane acts as a symbol of imminent male departure, particularly given that the vast majority of fathers in Díaz's work migrate to the US for work, initially (and often permanently) leaving their families behind. Contemplating the origins of paternal absence as a societal problem, Susan Faludi remarks that it is 'in the wake of World War II [that] the vanishing father [...] displaced the authoritarian father as the central male "problem."³⁴⁸ Indeed, this speaks to another masculine contradiction, as during the Second World War and its aftermath, 'a new generation of men [were] raised with both the heightened expectations of a father-knows-best culture that promised too much and the anguish of having fathers physically and psychologically lost.'³⁴⁹ In turn, this is complicated by 'fears of feminization' which 'only partially cloaked a simmering homophobic fear' rising in the 1950s and 60s.³⁵⁰ As more women entered the workplace, particularly white-collar workplaces, the role of man as breadwinner was challenged and partially

³⁴⁵ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 136.

³⁴⁶ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 164.

³⁴⁷ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 1.

³⁴⁸ Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 375.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Kimmel, p. 201.

devalued. This perceived threat to a space that was previously predominantly masculine coincided with a more general feeling of lack of purpose at work, an 'empty anxiety that sprung directly from the blind pursuit of a marketplace masculinity.'³⁵¹ In the specific context of Dominican-Americans, the developments Faludi outlines come after the US' first occupation of the Dominican Republic, while Kimmel's observations precede its 1965 intervention in Santo Domingo. For Dominicans, then, their cultural contexts had already been massively disturbed, with indigenous populations emasculated by colonisation and inevitably contributing to a built-in Latino hypermasculinity, partially constructed to compensate for a significantly more violent disruption of masculinity than that described by Kimmel.

Although Díaz's writing comes decades later, these same anxieties and contradictions remain, particularly given that even when fathers are absent, like Oscar's, male perspectives and macho behaviour are still valued and revered above all else, with behaviour to the contrary derogatively labelled as feminine and/or indicative of homosexuality.³⁵² While Beli is strict and overbearing with her daughter Lola, she takes a softer approach with Oscar, allowing Tío Rudolfo to guide him instead. Rudolfo is a deeply problematic father figure, addicted to drugs and in trouble with the law, with his 'four kids by three different women' securing his status as 'the family's resident méteselo expert.'³⁵³ Under his so-called 'tutelage,' offered while he is living with Beli, Lola, and Oscar, he advises that Oscar's failure to '[pull] in the bitches with both hands' like a 'normal' Dominican man can be rectified by 'grabbing] a muchacha, y méteselo,' which will apparently 'take care of *everything*.'³⁵⁴ Here, Díaz is representing an offensive, caricatured version of Dominican masculinity, toying with stereotypes about Latino men being sexually aggressive. Rudolfo argues plainly that rape will solve Oscar's problems – a recommendation so hyperbolic it cannot be taken at

³⁵¹ Kimmel, p. 192. This anxiety about a lack of purpose at work, and feminisation more generally, is especially relevant to war veterans, who might have felt 'domesticated' on returning home from a highly male-dominated (and masculine) environment.

³⁵² These anxieties will be addressed in greater depth later in the chapter.

³⁵³ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 24. Méteselo typically means 'stick it' or 'force it' – in this case, sexually.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

face value. It is difficult to ascertain whether Oscar is completely unwilling to participate in such violent and misogynistic behaviour, as he does not explicitly condemn it, demonstrating, as Rafa and Yuniór do, a Freudian ambivalence in his handling of hypermasculinity. However, in his defiance (conscious or not) of the exaggerated Latino male persona embodied by those around him, he is able to break the masculine mould through his interest in video games and anime, his inability to participate in violent or sexual displays, and his general bookishness.

This mould-breaking comes at a high price, however – Horn argues that Oscar’s death comes directly as ‘a result of his overstepping the scripts of hegemonic masculinity in the Dominican Republic.’³⁵⁵ More than this, though, his enactment of a persona that stands as such a direct antithesis to expected Latino masculinity also causes him to feel both anxious and depressed – physically and psychologically painful emotional states that are expressed in language and through the text’s fragmented, non-chronological narrative - a symbol of the emotional and historical weight the text is bearing, and the difficulty Yuniór experiences in piecing the aftermath of dictatorship and Oscar’s life and death together. Although he is proud of being a ‘smart bookish boy of colour in a contemporary US ghetto,’ Yuniór remarks that this is equivalent to having ‘bat wings or a pair of tentacles growing out of your chest,’ echoing the superheroic characterisation of outcasts in Díaz’s *Drown*.³⁵⁶ Oscar’s intelligence only deepens his othering by his peers, and while he ‘wanted to blame the books, the sci-fi, [...] he couldn’t – he loved them too much.’³⁵⁷ His failure to denounce his interests and be more Dominican, which is bound up with his inability to get a girlfriend or have sex with a woman, appears to be the main source of his anxiety, as well as causing him to be increasingly depressed. Regurgitating the paternal ‘advice’ issued by Rudolfo, he tells Yuniór that ‘[he] has heard from a reliable source that no Dominican male has ever died a virgin,’ asking in all seriousness if this is true, and saying he is ‘worried’ by this notion.³⁵⁸ Of course, this logic is unsurprising given that the

³⁵⁵ Horn, p. 128.

³⁵⁶ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 22.

³⁵⁷ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 50.

³⁵⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 174.

only real paternal guidance he has received has been that sex will solve his problems, as when Rudolfo responds to Oscar's 'triple-zero batting average with the ladies' by suggesting being with a woman will 'take care of *everything*.'³⁵⁹ Thus, while Oscar is free of direct anxiety about fathers, as his played no meaningful part in his life, he is nonetheless subject to the same pressure to be macho, exerted instead by his male tutor or mentor Rudolfo, albeit without violence, as in the case of Yuniór and Rafa's father.

Further, while Oscar's father is not present, both Oscar and Yuniór also feel the dominating, spectral presence of past Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo. Haunting much of Díaz's work both implicitly and explicitly, he acts as a patriarchal father figure that is ever-present through menacing violence, serving as the pinnacle of hypermasculine performance, and provoking intense anxiety in life and death, particularly given his influence on Oscar's family over the years. His control over 'nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life' was, according to Yuniór, cemented through 'a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror,' pointing to the centrality of anxiety and hypermasculinity to his rule through the production of anxiety in his subjects.³⁶⁰ Although Yuniór observes that Oscar had 'no kind of father to show him the masculine ropes,' using this a partial explanation for his lack of 'all aggressive and martial tendencies' and 'zero combat rating,' Trujillo is described as 'running the country like it was a marine boot camp,' and 'insisting on absolute veneration from his pueblo.'³⁶¹ Indeed, Yuniór remarks that Trujillo used 'Dios y Trujillo' as his national slogan, deliberately shaping himself as a God-like, omnipotent, and paternal figure whose domination was so total that he built 'one of the largest militaries in the hemisphere [...]; fucking every hot girl in sight.'³⁶² These performatively exaggerated displays of masculinity are facilitated through provoking anxiety in Dominicans, abusing what Yuniór describes as the superstitious nature of the older generation to such an extent that 'it

³⁵⁹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 24.

³⁶⁰ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 2.

³⁶¹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 15, p. 15, p. 15, p. 3, and p. 2 respectively. Pueblo means people.

³⁶² Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 3 and p. 2 respectively.

was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful.³⁶³ Serving as a ‘curse or doom of some kind,’ and referred to in full as *fukú Americanus* (teasing at ‘fuck you Americans’, which itself has connotations of rape), the concept of fukú epitomizes the anxiety Dominican people felt about his dictatorial rule, while also acting as a convenient means for Trujillo to exploit people’s anxieties further, encouraging the logic that bad thoughts about him, whether voiced or not, would result in being cursed.³⁶⁴

Despite Yunior’s sense that Oscar has no aggressive tendencies, it is clear that he does learn some stereotypical Dominican masculine ropes from Trujillo, as a curious symmetry is implied between Oscar and Trujillo’s son Ramfis, ‘who during his childhood amused himself by blowing the heads off chickens with a .44 revolver.’³⁶⁵ Hurt by having listened to Ana, with whom he is infatuated, talk about her boyfriend Manny’s poor treatment of her, Oscar proceeds to stand outside his apartment with Rudolfo’s ‘antique Virginia Dragoon,’ a ‘First Nation-extermimating Colt .44.’³⁶⁶ In using revolvers of the same caliber, Ramfis and Oscar are linked in their violence. Holding revolvers, themselves phallic power symbols, both act in accordance with Trujillo’s hypermasculine influence, though to very different degrees as Trujillo is Ramfis’ actual father. Oscar’s handling of a gun that is associated with the slaughter of indigenous peoples echoes not only Trujillo’s dictatorial violence, but the trauma, anger, and anxiety of the erasure of minority voices – Rudolfo’s possession of such a weapon may also represent a desire for violent revenge against those who colonized the Dominican Republic. In representing even Oscar, who otherwise acts as an exception to stereotypes about Dominican men as violent cheaters, Díaz also reflects on the compulsion Maja Horn highlights to always paint one’s own actions, one’s own masculinity, as less harmful and problematic than another’s, particularly the Dominican Republic’s. As she observes, ‘the emasculating experience of US occupation’ led to an even closer link between ‘patriotism and masculinity [...]in the Dominican

³⁶³ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 1.

³⁶⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 99.

³⁶⁶ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 46.

national imaginary,' which was cemented in 'the Trujillato's political discourse of hyperbolic virile masculinity as part of a new nationalist project;' a project that has subsequently been used as a means of justifying stereotypes about the aggressive masculinity of Dominicans, and which applies in many discourses of emergent nationhood and patriotism, from postcolonial Africa to post-Cold War Eastern Europe.³⁶⁷

The performativity of this hypermasculinity is clear in the way it dominates the Dominican Republic's social and political discourses. Trujillo is described as the 'Dictatingest Dictator who ever Dictated,' acting 'like he owned everything and everyone,' and his far-reaching patriarchal, paternal, and sexual influence is emphasized by Yunió's description of the Dominican Republic as a 'Chivato Nation [Trujillo] helped spawn.'³⁶⁸ Yet despite symbolically fathering a nation of informants who grew up and lived in a constant state of anxiety about being informed on (as exemplified by the repeated metaphorical description of Trujillo as the all-seeing Eye of Sauron from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, an act that is mirrored at a micro-level when Yunió's father watches him tie his shoelaces), or being made subject to the Trujillato's physical and sexual violence, 'like every Dark Lord worth his Shadow he had the devotion of his people.'³⁶⁹ Upon his death, Beli hears 'a grade of grief unlike any she'd encountered before [...] being uncoiled, a cacophony of wails that seemed to have torn free from the cracked soul of humanity itself.'³⁷⁰ Although Freud observes that 'the emotional attitude towards rulers includes [...] a powerful unconscious element of hostility' that is directly linked to the father complex (emotions towards the father, including oedipal drives, and the fear of castration), for many, this hostility appears to be overruled by a complex form of communal love for Trujillo – a love that itself could also be performative, anxiously enacted to feign grief, avoid speculation of dissidence, and offset a potential *fukú* curse.³⁷¹ This love is also present towards the

³⁶⁷ Horn, p. 27, p. 28 and p. 28 respectively.

³⁶⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 80, p. 225, and p. 225 respectively. Chivato means informer.

³⁶⁹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 225.

³⁷⁰ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 154.

³⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 13*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.1-164 (p. 51).

father, though as with the love people demonstrate towards Trujillo, it is ambiguous, and rooted in fear. Yet as Kimmel notes, this fear of the father as a 'bigger, stronger, more sexually powerful' figure 'forces the young boy to renounce his identification with mother and seek to identify with the being who is the actual source of his fear, his father.'³⁷² As a result, 'the boy becomes gendered (masculine) and heterosexual at the same time.'³⁷³ There is undoubtedly admiration at play here, yet the admiration comes from a place of anxiety in the face of the father's power. The soundscape that follows Trujillo's death is almost Hellish, emerging from a damaged soul that has been governed by a dark and oppressive power. Fathering an exaggerated masculinity among his people, Trujillo's status as a paternal figure is, of course, fraught, but his influence in this sense is undeniable.

Homosexuality and the Threat of the Feminine

Despite Trujillo's overwhelmingly heteronormative and homophobic behavior, he encouraged men and women alike to worship him, which in Díaz's writing, leads Beli's father Abelard to 'cover [Trujillo] in the warm effusion of his adoration,' which in turn prompts Yunió to add 'if you think the Trujillato was not homoerotic, then, to quote the Priest, *you got another thing coming*.'³⁷⁴ However, encouraging such behavior can be thought of as another means of reiterating his own particularly masculine form of control, as it allows him to accuse others of homosexuality, contributing to an already intense anxiety about homosexuality among Díaz's male characters and a wider sense of homosexuality as a threat to the nation. Rudolfo represents this anxiety bluntly when, upon Oscar's departure for university, he hands him a box of condoms, saying: 'use them all, he said, and then added: on girls.'³⁷⁵ By enforcing heterosexuality in this way, Rudolfo highlights a broader American

³⁷² Michael Kimmel, 'Maculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,' in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), pp.119-141 (p. 126).

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 215.

³⁷⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 49.

anxiety about emasculation and feminisation, which gained particular prominence during the 1940s following the publication of Philip Wylie's controversial non-fictional text, *Generation of Vipers* (1942). Anxiety about these topics is, of course, entangled with anxiety about homosexuality and feminisation, with Wylie's text denigrating the perceived emasculation of men at the hands of mothers, who, through an apparent combination of coddling and controlling behaviour, cause 'the good-looking men and boys [to be] rounded up and beaten or sucked into pliability.'³⁷⁶

Contemplating the figure of 'mom,' Wylie observes she is 'a great little guy' who is able to 'keep her captive son or sons in a state of automatic adoration of herself,' leading Wylie to ultimately ask: 'But where [is] man's freedom?'³⁷⁷ Of course, Wylie's concern here about the feminine absorbing the masculine (with 'mom' becoming a 'guy') is in itself a part of his anxiety about men being robbed of their strength and freedom, allegedly because of their submission at the hands of the mother. His anxiety about the feminine is thus also a form of homophobia, and a homophobia that operates misogynistically. In the context of Díaz's writing, the maternal influence Wylie fears is intensified by the absence of meaningful father figures. Similarly, Trujillo's tactical manipulation of homoeroticism (in which homosexuality is framed as a threat to heteromascularity and its performance, while male adoration of him as a leader is also strongly encouraged) poses the threat of emasculation, as well as the risk of death at the Trujillato's hands. In this sense, if masculine homoeroticism is directed at, or enacted by Trujillo, it is deemed acceptable, as his control extends to a control of the erotic, but this also means he is able to pick and choose what is and is not 'acceptable,' and can weaponize homosexuality. When Abelard is arrested by the Secret Police, the guards inform the other prisoners that he is 'a homosexual and a Communist' in order to turn them against him, which results in him being harassed and having 'most of his clothes' stripped from his body.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012), p. 206.

³⁷⁷ Wylie, p. 201, p. 208, and p. 217 respectively.

³⁷⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 239.

In response to anxieties about the emasculation of men (and connected anxieties about homosexuality and feminisation,) we begin to witness what Susan Jeffords refers to as ‘the remasculinization of American culture,’ occurring in celebration of the ‘mythos of masculine bonding,’ and framing ‘the survival of masculinity itself [...] as depending on the exclusion of women and the feminine.’³⁷⁹ Jeffords reflects on how the experiences of Vietnam veterans were exploited in order to frame them as oppressed,

insert[ing] this characterization into an already formulated cultural attitude towards the victimized that had been established in relation to civil rights and women’s movements, to the point that hiring quotas and organizations like NOW were seen as depriving men of their “rights.” The final step in this process was to transfer the accumulated negative features of the feminine to the government itself, the primary vehicle for legislated and enforced changes in civil rights [...] all men could declare their suffering at the hands of a government biased towards and operating under the aegis of the feminine.³⁸⁰

The logic Jeffords criticises takes anxieties such as Wylie’s and uses them as justification for the need for binaristic gender categories, using the perceived downtrodden status of veterans to argue that women’s liberation has ‘gone too far.’ This feeling of emasculation that led to remasculinization during and after the Vietnam war echoes the emasculation that Horn highlights as a result of repeated American occupation in the Dominican Republic – in both cases, the result is a reiteration of the need for traditionally masculine values and behaviours from men, and by men. Yet as Jeffords observes, in America, it is ‘primarily the white male’ that is used as an emblem of emasculation: ‘although remasculinization works primarily to the benefit of white males [...] all men would, to some extent, benefit from this process. But in spite of the ideology of collectivity, remasculinization is not a project of equivalence;’ that is to say, the benefits remasculinization may bring to men (a reiteration of male dominance and power) apply to a lesser degree to black and mixed-race people, as well as to immigrants.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 168.

³⁸⁰ Jeffords, p. 169.

³⁸¹ Jeffords, p. 168 and p. 204 respectively.

It is interesting to note, however, that this remasculinization relies heavily on male bonding, as an exclusion of all things feminine (including women) could in and of itself be used as part of an accusation of homosexuality – a lack of interest in women that could cause suspicion. These various threads further complicate the performance of masculinity for figures like Oscar and Yunior, who must grapple with masculine expectations from two countries, one of which prioritises the masculinity of white people, and the other of which reactively exaggerates its collective masculinity and the masculinity of individual men in order to challenge its past domination at American hands. These performances must not only account for their particular racial identities, but also for a number of contradictory messages about masculine performance – engaging with as many women as possible sexually, but also rejecting the feminine, befriending other men, but not too much, emphasising one’s vulnerability in order to (re)gain status and power, but also being careful not to appear weak as a result. These opposing behavioural requirements in masculine performance speak to the need to develop a double consciousness, or indeed to operate in hysterical time, as the performer is required to be many things, indeed, many people, at once, and in Kristeva’s terms, existing in this time provokes dissociation.

When Yunior criticises Oscar for putting a sign saying ‘*Speak, friend, and enter,*’ on his dorm room door, saying ‘De León, you gotta be kidding, Elvish?’, Oscar corrects him, saying it’s Sindarin, only for Yunior’s friend Melvin to say ‘Actually [...] it’s *gay-hay-hay*.’³⁸² As on other occasions, the only guidance Rudolfo feels able to give Oscar is to have sex, with his earlier clarification that this should be with women emphasising both how Dominican masculinity tends to be structured in relation to a disavowal of same-sex desire, and his specific anxiety that Oscar’s failure to conform to ideals of Dominican masculinity is caused by homosexuality. Indeed, in this sense, the imagined threat of homosexuality is central to the construction and performance of heteromascularity, with homophobia operating as ‘a mechanism for regulating the behavior of the many by the specific

³⁸² Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 172. Original emphasis. Sindarin is a language invented by J.R.R. Tolkien for his Middle Earth stories.

oppression of the few,' and also as 'a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood.'³⁸³ Given that homosexuality is the only explanation Rudolfo can think of, it is clear that failure to adhere to macho stereotypes is rare – indeed, Ray González notes that drinking, stealing, and learning about sex are 'timeless rites of initiation' for Latino men, who must 'come to terms with the consequences of growing up in a society that produces a high rate of substance and sexual abuse.'³⁸⁴ He adds that men with such backgrounds '[influence] the way Latino males behave, treat women, and deteriorate their own culture,' while also acknowledging that 'some of these negative aspects of life were forced upon Latino men by mainstream society and social policies that influenced the environment in which many of these young men grew up.'³⁸⁵

Oscar has not even skimmed the surface of such initiations, investing himself instead in fantasy novels, comics, tabletop games, and anime films. These interests, too, lead to accusations of homosexuality, with Yuniór calling Oscar's university residence 'Demarest Homo Hall' because of its demographic of 'weirdos and losers and freaks.'³⁸⁶ This again demonstrates Oscar's Latino peers' clear discomfort with his position outside established parameters of Dominican masculinity. Living in this way can be thought of as provoking an anxiety about exposing the hyperbolically performative nature of their own masculinity, which relies on displays of physical strength and sexual virility, as well as language that belittles women and anyone else who fails to join in with the performance - as Butler argues, those who do not participate in established performances of gender are punished and excluded. Yuniór is frank about the fact he 'would have hidden from a Caliban like [Oscar]' if not for the fact that he was desperate for somewhere to live, and that rooming with Oscar would bring him closer to Oscar's sister Lola, adding that he'd 'never in [his] life met a Dominican like [Oscar].'³⁸⁷ Oscar's exclusion is so severe that he describes himself as 'cursed,' an assertion that is catalyzed by

³⁸³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 88, and Kimmel, p. 131.

³⁸⁴ González, 'Introduction,' p. xviii.

³⁸⁵ Gonzalez, 'Introduction,' p. xviii.

³⁸⁶ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 170.

³⁸⁷ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 170 and p. 171 respectively.

his peers' denial of his heritage: when he is asked 'you ever eat toto?' and answers no, his friend Harold insists 'tú no eres nada de dominicano.'³⁸⁸ Oscar's inability to have sexual contact with a woman leads to his friends refusing his heritage, as the performance of Dominican masculinity must involve heterosexual sexual virility. It is interesting to note the use of the term 'dominicano' in this context, which is gendered male – that is to say, there is nothing that is *male* and Dominican in Oscar, in Harold's view. Oscar's friends regularly infer he is gay, and in saying he is completely unmasculine, the novel's homophobia is presented as a variant of misogyny, as an anxiety about the female within the male, or about men acting outside of the unwritten codes of acceptable masculine behaviour. More broadly, this anxiety is about the blurring or complete collapse of gender binaries, and of heterosexual desire, as well as the threat presented by this. In denying the presence of anything feminine apart from in brief sexual encounters, or abusive relationships, Díaz's male characters demonstrate their anxiety about being perceived as feminine, and indeed about women having any agency or autonomy. There are very few women with agency in Díaz's work, and even those who do possess some independence and intelligence, such as Nilda in *This Is How You Lose Her* and Lola and Beli in *Oscar Wao* are characterized by and through infidelities and sexual violence at the hands of men. Intra- and extra-textually, this demonstrates a difficulty in acknowledging the feminine without the influence of the masculine, while also highlighting the anxiety about the feminine and feminization that is at the heart of Díaz's writing and the masculine performances in which his characters participate.

When the anxiety prompted by accusations or insinuations of femininity or homosexuality prove too much, those who are able may incorporate props into their masculine performance. Such props, however, require a level of privilege not afforded to Dominican migrants to the US. Brenda Boudreau thinks about how 'consumer capitalism courts [...] men relentlessly, convincing them that their very masculinity is threatened without an expensive, flashy car, designer clothes, perfect hair

³⁸⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 171 and p. 180 respectively. Toto is slang for 'pussy' (vagina), Harold's statement is 'you are not one bit Dominican.'

and skin, and a lavishly furnished apartment.³⁸⁹ Given that these items are only available to those who can afford them, Díaz's characters, typically poor Dominican migrants into the US, cannot participate in such displays of masculinity, explaining the perceived need, instead, to perform masculinity through physical and sexual violence, as they lack the agency to participate in other aspects of American masculinity. In any case, both objects and behaviours form part of the performance of masculinity, and as Boudreau notes, 'if masculinity is a display [...] it is also vulnerable to being revealed as false.'³⁹⁰ For Boudreau, the ultimate challenge to this performance comes when the 'ability to perform sexually is questioned,' yet for Oscar, almost every aspect of his character leads to accusations of homosexuality, from his appearance and interests through to his creative writing and manner of speaking. Indeed, Oscar's very name in the title of the novel, *Oscar Wao*, comes from a joke Yuniors makes at his expense, announcing to him and his friends that 'he looked like that fat homo Oscar Wilde.'³⁹¹ This results in the nickname Oscar Wao (based on a Spanish pronunciation of Wilde) sticking to such an extent that Oscar begins to answer to it, accepting the offensive homosexual labels his peers use to tease him despite his own certainty that he is both 'truly' a Dominican and heterosexual. Here, too, homosexuality and the feminine are linked, as it is Oscar's interest in writing fiction (and thus in expressing himself) that leads to this nickname: indeed, there is a strong precedent for anxiety about writing and the feminine/homosexuality, with authors such as Ernest Hemingway and Charles Bukowski expressing real paranoia about the association between writing, emotional vulnerability, and femininity.³⁹²

Although the terms 'fag,' 'homo' and 'pato' (queer) are used regularly as insults in Díaz's work, he only features one actual homosexual relationship, which occurs in his short story 'Drown.'

³⁸⁹ Brenda Boudreau, 'Sexually Suspect: Masculine Anxiety in the Films of Neil LaBute,' in *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st Century Man in Popular Culture*, ed. by Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 37-57 (p. 38).

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 180.

³⁹² A noteworthy example of this is Bukowski's poem 'The Bluebird,' in which the narrator describes the bluebird in their heart that wishes to escape and reveal itself, but which is covered up by whisky and cigarette smoke, for fear of this emotional vulnerability 'screw[ing] up the works' and 'blow[ing] my book sales in Europe.' Charles Bukowski, *The Last Night of the Earth Poems* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1992), p. 120.

Here, an unnamed narrator is non-consensually masturbated by his friend Beto, prompting him to shout ‘what the fuck are you doing?’ ejaculate, start to shake, and then flee.³⁹³ The narrator does later appear to have consensual sex with Beto, but in retrospect, describes him as a ‘pato’ (which is phonetically connected to Beto’s name) and has a sexual encounter with a woman that mirrors his first encounter with Beto. He also begins to spend time with men who drive past what he refers to as the ‘fag bar,’ calling over those who go there to ‘point [a] plastic pistol at them, just to see if they’ll run or shit their pants.’³⁹⁴ The aggression of this homophobia serves to reiterate the level of anxiety many Dominican men feel about being labeled gay, as well as to emphasise the childlike and theatrical manifestation of homophobic violence in Díaz’s writing and the idea that oppression is necessarily feminising. While in the main, the LGBTQ community is pushed to the peripheries of Díaz’s narratives because of the aggressively and exaggeratedly heterosexual performances that are expected of Dominican men, and because of the anxiety and shame homosexuality appears to provoke, following Trujillo’s death in *Oscar Wao*, a footnote reveals that the stretch of land where he dies ‘was the haunt of what El Jefe worried about the most: los maricones.’³⁹⁵ Although this is not revealed in the main body of the novel’s text, reiterating the exclusion of LGBTQ people within the Dominican Republic under Trujillo, their choice to occupy his place of death constitutes a small but significant act of resistance against the kind of hypermasculinity he practiced and encouraged in others.

It is Oscar’s inability to have romantic or sexual relationships with women, and thus prove his heterosexuality and his Dominican-ness, that highlights his desperation to participate in Dominican masculine performance. His failures in this regard exacerbate his depression and anxiety to such an extent that he attempts suicide, telling Yunior that he is desperate to change his life, but that ‘nothing [he’s] tried has been ameliorative.’³⁹⁶ However, in practice, his motivation wanes – he

³⁹³ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 104.

³⁹⁴ Díaz, *Drown*, p. 103.

³⁹⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 155.

³⁹⁶ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 175.

is understandably unwilling to give up on his interest in books, which provide great comfort to him, and he only manages a few days of physical exercise. What does remain, however, is his motivation to be with a woman – but motivation alone cannot help him to be deemed masculine in the eyes of his peers, as this stereotype hinges on actual sexual contact. The contradictory nature of this masculinity is highlighted in James Baldwin’s essay ‘Freaks and the Ideal of Manhood’ (1985), which describes the ‘American ideal of masculinity’ as something which has created

cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden – as an unpatriotic act – that the American boy should evolve into the complexity of manhood.³⁹⁷

The difficulties highlighted here apply to an even greater degree when it comes to the experience of immigrants, who are already split or caught between two identities without the additional complication of expectations to present as hypermasculine. If these binaristic expectations apply to those born in the US, there is no room for manoeuvre in the performance of Dominican masculinity, particularly when attempting to prove oneself in new environments among people who are more financially stable (and thus able to ‘prove’ their masculinity through consumer objects) – the man must adhere to the performance completely, or else he is the complete opposite of masculine, in stereotypical terms – effeminate, weak, a ‘freak’ like Oscar.³⁹⁸ As ever, the pressure to conform to expectations of masculinity is heightened yet also problematised for Dominican immigrants, framed as the ‘bad guys’ in comparison to American men, and yet also unable to conform to the ideal that Baldwin highlights by virtue of existing between some of the categories outlined.

Despite enduring endless slurs from other men, it is a disparaging comment from a woman that catalyses Oscar’s ‘killer depression at the end of sophomore year,’ as he attempts suicide by drinking ‘two bottles of 151 because some girl dissed him - almost fucking killing himself and his sick

³⁹⁷ James Baldwin, ‘Freaks and the Ideal of Manhood,’ in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. by Toni Morrison (New York: Penguin Random House, 1998), pp. 814-829 (p. 815).

³⁹⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 29.

mother in the process.³⁹⁹ Later, having caught Jenni Muñoz, a female friend who Oscar has feelings for, with another man, Oscar toasts ‘to my virginity!’, drinks three bottles of Cisco, and ‘[throws] himself down into the darkness’ off a bridge near New Brunswick train station.⁴⁰⁰ In both suicide attempts, Oscar feels his masculinity has been threatened by female rejection. This reiterates his uncle Rudolfo’s expectation that he may not be able to sleep with women, as well as the toxicity of these expectations and sarcastic comments about homosexuality, given the mental anguish they have caused Oscar, pointing to the anxiety that men also cause Oscar, as he doesn’t want his male peers to view him as a sexual failure. Despite all this, even after rushing to his side at the hospital and asking ‘What the fuck were you thinking, O?’, Yuniór still returns almost immediately to Oscar’s virginity: ‘you don’t want to be dead. Take it from me. No-pussy is bad. But dead is like no-pussy times ten.’⁴⁰¹ Although this is supposed to provide comfort, ultimately, it only reinforces the notion that Oscar has, at this point, failed as a Dominican man, adding to his anxieties about this subject.

Though Oscar does want to be identified as Dominican, and to be able to sleep with women, his general refusal (and inability) to actually participate in stereotypically masculine behaviour can be thought of as a form of disidentification, a term coined by José Esteban Muñoz to describe an act of resistance that parodies toxic representations of minorities, re-appropriating phobic objects in order to undermine stereotypes. Muñoz considers disidentification in the context of queer performance, citing as an opening example a performance by gay women which ‘luxuriates in the seemingly homophobic image of the truck-driving closeted diesel dykes,’ acting out the stereotype in a ‘campy [and] over-the-top’ scene that reconfigures the stereotype ‘as sexy and glamorous, and not as the pathetic and abject spectacle that it appears to be in the eyes of heteronormative culture.’⁴⁰² The purpose of such disidentification resonates with Oscar’s position outside of Dominican masculine stereotypes: ‘disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the

³⁹⁹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 169. 151 is a now-discontinued, highly alcoholic rum that was produced by Bacardi.

⁴⁰⁰ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 189 and p. 190 respectively.

⁴⁰¹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 193.

⁴⁰² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 3.

minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.⁴⁰³ To an extent, Oscar's status as an overweight, proudly 'nerdy,' and usually unaggressive man can be thought of as an act of performative defiance against the hegemonic model of Dominican masculinity. His inability to fight other men, charm and sleep with women, and generally be stereotypically macho, can actually be thought of as a way of speaking back to a performance which reinforces outdated and binaristic conceptions of gender, encourages the abuse of women, and also pushes men further towards identity crisis, given the potential consequences of failing to perform masculinity. Muñoz notes that disidentification can be 'a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously,' and in Oscar's case, this is especially true – almost as soon as he is actually successful in sleeping with a woman, Ybón, he is murdered by the capitán, 'one of those very bad men that not even postmodernism can explain away.'⁴⁰⁴ Thus, Oscar's success in finally becoming a 'real' Dominican, in embarking upon 'the proper path of Dominican male-itude,' places him in more danger than the act of resisting them, resulting in his death at the hands of a man Yúnior is at pains to emphasise is morally 'worse' than him, in a way that cannot be justified by any form of scholarship.⁴⁰⁵

Violently Macho: Shows of Strength

Anxiety about proving strength (especially physical strength) and asserting dominance is a far more complex aspect of masculine anxiety, and the performance of masculinity. Although violent behaviour is part of the unpleasant tapestry that is stereotypical Dominican/Latino masculinity, which many of Díaz's male characters feel anxious about embodying, to frame this violence as a result or symptom of anxiety is, of course, problematic, as it could be thought of as an attempt to

⁴⁰³ Muñoz, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 294.

⁴⁰⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 283.

understand this violence. Equally, in enacting this violence, men fall into what Maggie McKinley describes as the trap of ‘paradoxically [reinforcing] the oppressions [they] seek to overturn,’ – oppressions that, for Díaz’s male characters, come from their own fathers, the legacy of Trujillo’s dictatorial regime, and white men in the US, who position themselves as superior and less damagingly masculine than Dominican men.⁴⁰⁶ Although masculinity can never be a ‘solid, immovable construction [...] [because] from moment to moment, forces redictate, replace, and reimagine its constructing,’ in the context of Dominican masculinity, its performance relies heavily on displays of strength through violence, as when Yunior and Rafa’s father forces them to ‘kneel down on the cutting side of a coconut grater’ when they misbehave to assert his dominance, when Rafa starts beating people during his chemotherapy, and when a boy organizes against Trujillo and has ‘an eye gouged out with electric shocks,’ to name but a few examples.⁴⁰⁷ Of course, this anxious desire to perform violently relates to the disavowal of the feminine as part of Dominican identity construction – a desire that is amplified when it comes to black masculinity, because ‘as black men, [...] characters immediately experience an existential and gendered crisis [...], their masculinity is questioned as a consequence of their race and ethnicities.’⁴⁰⁸

As I have already argued, although the process of remasculinization, of performing masculinity in order to fit in and reiterate one’s own power, can benefit a wide range of men, these benefits still operate on a spectrum in which a black person (or any person of colour) must work harder to prove his masculinity, despite this performance itself helping to shape racist stereotypes about black violence – another crisis of masculinity that is shaped by longstanding stereotypes that black people are predisposed to violence and sexually charged crime. As Fanon argues: ‘the Negro

⁴⁰⁶ Maggie McKinley, *Masculinity and the Paradox of Violence in American Fiction, 1950-75* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 67.

⁴⁰⁷ Marc E. Shaw and Elwood Watson, ‘From Seinfeld to Obama: Millennial Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture,’ in *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st Century Man in Popular Culture*, ed. by Marc E. Shaw and Ellwood Watson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 1-5 (p. 1); Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 130, and Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 129.

⁴⁰⁸ McKinley, p. 115.

symbolizes biological danger [...] whoever says rape says Negro.⁴⁰⁹ Despite having ‘lost eighty pounds to chemo,’ a week after leaving hospital, Yunior’s brother Rafa ‘cracked this illegal Peruvian kid in the face with a hammer and two hours later threw down at the Pathmark because he thought some fool was talking shit about him, popped said fool in the piehole with a weak overhand right before a bunch of us could break it up.’⁴¹⁰ As well as emulating the behaviour of his violent father, here, Rafa is accounting for his own physical weakness as a result of his cancer, overcompensating by performing a highly violent and visible kind of masculinity that is centered around male-on-male violence and that is rich in pathos. This kind of violence acts as a very literal denial of homosexuality, even of the homosocial, in Sedgwick’s terms – Yunior is enacting the ‘obligatory heterosexuality’ that is ‘built into male dominated kinship systems.’⁴¹¹ Indeed, Sedgwick remarks that patriarchal structures ‘group together all the bonds that link males to males, and by which males enhance the status of males,’ yet it is ‘impossible to imagine a form of the patriarchy that is not homophobic.’⁴¹² Men can enhance each other’s status through homosocial bonds, though operating through the exaggeratedly patriarchal lens of Dominican masculinity, such bonds are especially hard to navigate because of the risk of being viewed as homosexual. As such, Rafa rejects such bonds outright, enforcing his own ‘obligatory heterosexuality’ in the most overt manner possible, enhancing his own masculine status while also establishing his particular dominance as a Dominican man through his attack on a Peruvian child.

Abelard, Beli, and Oscar are each victims of extreme violence of the Trujillato and/or the Dominican police, with the physical beatings they suffer each speaking to anxieties about masculinity that arise throughout the novel. Abelard denies Trujillo access to his beautiful daughter, and also writes a book about the extent of his power – provoking Trujillo’s anxiety about being toppled, as well as challenging the all-encompassing nature of his virility. This results in him being

⁴⁰⁹ Fanon, p. 127.

⁴¹⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 93.

⁴¹¹ Sedgwick, p. 3.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

connected to an 'electrical contraption' known as 'the pulpo,' being 'beaten [...] mercilessly with leather truncheons' leaving 'one of his testicles [...] permanently shriveled,' and ultimately, in him being driven mad by pain and becoming 'a vegetable.'⁴¹³ The use of a leather truncheon by male guards adds a homoerotic and sexual dimension to Abelard's abuse, while the centrality of his sexual organs to his abuse demonstrates the centrality of sexual organs to Dominican male conceptions of self – it is the threat to Abelard's virility that tips him over the edge. Abelard is stripped of his intellect, his sexuality, and his own body – denying him any ability to engage in masculine performance and linking him to Peter Abelard, who was castrated following his relationship with Héloïse d'Argenteuil.

Beli, having had a relationship with Trujillo's sister's husband, is made to endure violence so severe that Yuniór 'report[s] instead on the damage inflicted: her clavicle, chicken-boned; her right humerus, a triple fracture; [...] five ribs, broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung, collapsed; front teeth, blown out. About 167 points of damage in total.'⁴¹⁴ In threatening the Trujillo family's reputation, Beli pays the ultimate price, as she loses the child she is expecting. This constitutes a substantial denial of the feminine, a clear and categorical act of masculine violence at the hand of Trujillo's henchmen which reiterates the dictator's complete dominance. Oscar faces two bouts of extreme violence as a result of his relationship with Ybón, whose abusive ex-partner seeks revenge – first, 'the beating to end all beatings' leaving him with a 'broken nose, shattered zygomatic arch, crushed seventh cranial nerve, three of his teeth snapped off at the gum, concussion,' and later, his murder at the hands of the ex-partner's hired assassins.⁴¹⁵ As Maja Horn argues of Oscar's murder, 'the military policeman's murderous violence is not simply a case of individual pathology. Rather, as the narrative clearly suggests, it responds to the social logic that taking a woman from another man profoundly challenges his masculinity and its prerogatives.'⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 240, p. 240, p. 241, p. 241, and p. 251 respectively.

⁴¹⁴ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 147.

⁴¹⁵ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 298 and p. 301 respectively.

⁴¹⁶ Horn, p. 128.

Each of these acts of torture occurs in the Dominican Republic rather than in the US, reiterating the especially physical and corporeal nature of the construction and performance of the country's masculinity. In Oscar's case, his successful interaction with this masculine performance, as a man who does not fit into the mould of who should act out this performance (an attractive, powerful, ever-sexually virile Dominican), cannot be allowed to continue. Having failed to be stereotypically masculine, he is not the intended performer, and his actions are deemed all the more insulting because of this. As he shares his first kiss with Ybón, 'there were lights all around them and he thought I'm going to transcend,' yet he suddenly realizes that 'the two plainclothes who had pulled them over [...] were beaming flashlights into the car.'⁴¹⁷ Thus, Oscar's transcendence from his apparently un-Dominican chasteness is almost immediately halted, with the lights not representing joy but the danger of being seen, as with an 'expression of sheer murder' Ybón's ex-partner the capitán ends Oscar's moment of fitting the Dominican masculine stereotype.⁴¹⁸

Saying Too Much: Exposing Hypermasculine Performance

One of many reasons that Oscar is ultimately denied the opportunity to continue his engagement with Dominican hypermasculinity (having remarked to Yuniór in a letter sent before his death that 'he couldn't believe he'd had to wait for [sex] so goddamn long,' adding, 'so this is what everybody's always talking about!'), is that he is too emotionally open and expressive.⁴¹⁹ Whereas Yuniór represses his anxiety about his father and his expectations of him, saying 'I didn't have the words,' and Rafa 'wouldn't say a word' in his dying days, Oscar is blunt about his inability to cope, and about his struggles with anxiety and depression as a result of his virginity and his social isolation, solidified by his peers' refusal to acknowledge him as a 'real' Dominican.⁴²⁰ Following his suicide attempt, he

⁴¹⁷ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 294.

⁴¹⁸ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 294.

⁴¹⁹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 334-335.

⁴²⁰ Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*, p. 128 and p. 150 respectively.

cries in the hospital, and when his sister asks 'are you OK?' he 'shook his head: No.'⁴²¹ Although the haunting figure of the Faceless Man, an apparent embodiment of the fukú curse, appears at moments of extreme violence in *Oscar Wao* to symbolically represent the erasure of those who do not conform to Trujillo's regime (and in Oscar's case, to stereotypical notions of Dominican masculinity and its performance), he can also be thought of as representing the silence that must accompany a full performance of Dominican hypermasculinity. The failure or willful refusal to express one's feelings is often itself a form of violence, provoking further anxiety while attempting to allay the fear of the feminine.

However, as much as the Faceless man, who Mahler argues is, in fact, the ghost of Trujillo, wishes to leave the Dominican Republic and the people within it with nothing but a 'página en blanco,' Oscar's final letter does eventually reach Yunior, allowing him to write the Cabral family's story, which operates in book form as 'a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell.'⁴²² This action of the 'hero-writer's taking up of the pen,' is, in Mahler's view, 'a counter-gesture in which the placement of ink on the page reveals that which the tyrannical power seeks to suppress.'⁴²³ While she is speaking here of violent omissions occurring as a result of Colonial dominance, this argument can also be applied to emotional openness. While Yunior has usually failed in expressing or addressing his emotions, which is part of the hypermasculine, strong, and unaffected male persona Trujillo encouraged Dominican men to perform in his image, receiving Oscar's final letter and writing their intertwining stories allows him to understand his own emotions without fear of being perceived as feminine. While framing Yunior, and writers in general, as 'heroic' offers rather too much credit to a figure who has repeatedly engaged in misogynistic, homophobic, and generally bullying behaviours (albeit as part of a hypermasculine performance), Oscar's disidentification and Yunior's eventual attempt at penance through writing each demonstrate means of employing one's

⁴²¹ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 192.

⁴²² See Anne Garland Mahler, 'The Writer as Superhero: Fighting the Colonial Curse in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*,' *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 19 (2010), 119-140; Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 90 and p. 7 respectively.

⁴²³ Mahler, p. 131.

dual-existence, one's existence in hysterical time, as a means of untangling oneself from expected masculine gender performances, and the anxieties that drive and arise from such performances. Indeed, in this sense, writing can be thought of as a disidentificatory practice that speaks back to Colonial dominance and narrow, stereotypical models of masculinity, for as Munõz argues, 'disidentification is about cultural, material, and psychic survival' while also being a 'response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation.'⁴²⁴

Despite having resigned as Chairman of the Pulitzer Prize board following the allegations made against him, in November 2018, following an independent review of these allegations, Junot Díaz was re-appointed to his old role.⁴²⁵ He also maintained roles at the Boston Review and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Contemplating America's 'tender spot for men who admit their flaws,' Lili Loofbourow identifies Díaz as having participated in acts of male self-pardon that have become increasingly common in light of the #MeToo movement.⁴²⁶ Not only does she view his piece on his childhood sexual abuse as self-pardon, she also sees the sympathetic portrayal of characters such as Yunior as acts of pardoning, too, drawing attention to his 'I'm not a bad guy...' speech at the beginning of *This Is How You Lose Her* as an example of Díaz's lenience or excuse-making regarding misogynistic or generally abusive male behaviour. In turn, this can be linked to Yunior's writing in *This is How You Lose Her* and *Oscar Wao*, as he uses the act of writing to frame and justify his so-called reinvention: 'These days I write a lot [...] Learned that from Oscar. I'm a new man, you see, a new man, a new man.'⁴²⁷ Loofbourow adds that 'the regular speculation about if and when the men of #MeToo will make their comebacks arises from a culture *steeped* in the belief

⁴²⁴ Munõz, p. 161.

⁴²⁵ Julie Jacobs, 'Junot Díaz Remains on Pulitzer Board After Review of Misconduct Allegations,' *New York Times* (16 November 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/16/us/junot-diaz-pulitzer-board.html>> [accessed 1 Dec 2018]).

⁴²⁶ Lili Loofbourow, 'Junot Díaz and the Problem of the Male Self-Pardon,' *Slate Magazine* (24 June 2018) <<https://slate.com/culture/2018/06/junot-diaz-allegations-and-the-male-self-pardon.html>> [accessed 20 Nov 2018].

⁴²⁷ Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, p. 326.

that men should basically be able to self-pardon,' a 'ritual that tends to exclude the injured party.'⁴²⁸ In turn, this reiterates Jeffords' argument that men claim to have 'paid the price for women's equality, both in their careers and in their self-definition.'⁴²⁹ Of course, this logic is used as justification for the need for remasculinization, as well as an explanation for hypermasculine behaviour, and both *Oscar Wao* and *This Is How You Lose Her* are texts that are overly sympathetic and forgiving towards their male characters. While both texts do critique the hypermasculinity that is expected of their characters, very little attention is given in the text to the social and political conditions that led to performances of masculinity being considered necessary. Equally, although the texts highlight anxieties about fathers, homosexuality, the feminine, displays of strength, and emotive language, as well as about the performance of masculinity itself, it is only Oscar who actually subverts and toys with the expectation of such a performance, despite the obvious damage it causes to those who engage in it (as demonstrated by Yunior, Rafa, and his father, among many others). The actual manifestation of these anxieties and their longer-lasting repercussions are also largely ignored, with the engagement in certain hypermasculine behaviours serving as the most obvious indicator of anxiety surrounding masculinity. Indeed, although conceptions of gender are generally less binary than ever, the crisis in and of masculinity is also being exploited to justify and pardon sexual harassment and abuse, amidst accusations that our interpretation of misogynistic male behaviour in the past and present is overly 'politically correct', and making it difficult for men to know what to do, and how to be. While such behaviour continues to be pardoned by the general public and political figures alike, the crisis in masculinity will only continue, as we move no closer to meaningful answers to the question of what, precisely, positive masculinity may look like, and when, if ever, it is appropriate to forgive the hypermasculine.

⁴²⁸ Loofbourow, 'Male Self-Pardon.'

⁴²⁹ Jeffords, p. 119.

Chemically Troubled Times': Traumatic Futures, Anxious Futures

With the Cold War receding and “post-9/11” on the rise as a periodization of the present, does it make sense to speak of a perpetual interwar in referring to our own moment? To be sure, the prospect of a worldwide war that would both mobilize and target whole populations seems more remote than it once did. Other doomsday scenarios occupy us more urgently. Yet despite our not having plunged into global conflict since the Second World War, few populations have enjoyed an uncomplicated peacetime in recent years [...] U.S. armed forces are deployed at present in over 150 countries, most of them in Middle Eastern combat zones associated with the “war on terror.”⁴³⁰

In *Studies on Hysteria*, Breuer and Freud expand contemporary definitions of trauma to include what they describe as ‘psychical traumas [-] any experience which calls up distressing affects – such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain.’⁴³¹ The word trauma has particular physical resonance in Breuer and Freud’s work, and as such, in this formulation, anxiety is an experience that can be simultaneously physically and psychically traumatic. Their definition also speaks to the complex and disruptive ways in which anxiety may at one point be felt physically, and at another point, psychologically – a kind of traumatic switch that may be especially challenging to bear. Later, Freud posits that ‘the individual will make an important advance in his capacity for self-preservation if he can foresee and expect a traumatic situation,’ adding that ‘anxiety is the original reaction to helplessness in the trauma and is reproduced later on in the danger-situation as a signal for help.’⁴³² Whereas the former definition describes anxiety as one of various affects that could lead to, or constitute, psychic trauma, the latter proposition suggests that anxiety is both preparation for, and reaction to, trauma. Yet this preparation is still strongly linked to lived experience; the ‘signal’ of anxiety announces that ‘The present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I have had before. Therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as though it had already come, while there is yet time to turn it aside.’⁴³³ However, in the context of the current state of ‘perpetual

⁴³⁰ Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 311-12.

⁴³¹ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, ‘On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 2, Studies on Hysteria (1893-1895)*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 6.

⁴³² Sigmund Freud, ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,’ p. 166 and p. 166-67 respectively.

⁴³³ Freud, ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,’ p. 166.

interwar' in the US and elsewhere described by Saint-Amour, a state punctuated by anxieties about a multitude of doomsday scenarios, anxiety's anticipatory qualities, its purported ability to allow for the avoidance or prevention of further trauma in the future, does not and cannot apply. By virtue of the futurity of these scenarios, the ability to remember or imagine what they might be like is at least partially negated, and this negation is furthered by our uncertainty about whether there is, indeed, 'time to turn [these scenarios] aside,' particularly as action at an individual level could never do so. Equally, existence in a state of continuous crisis disrupts any sense of futurity. Whether these crisis scenarios involve armed and/or nuclear conflict, impending environmental catastrophe, terrorism, pandemic, the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, or a more personal yet general sense of hopelessness about the future, particularly under neoliberal capitalism, anxiety surrounding such uncertain future traumas defies Freudian formulations, which typically link trauma to memory and the past. While Freud argues that anxiety is produced through experiences that resonate with past traumas, the anxieties this chapter will consider can be thought of as shaping a new, future-oriented form of trauma with its own set of physical, psychological, and textual iterations that are, nonetheless, informed by a relationship to traumatic pasts, whether experienced directly or not.

As such, this chapter will position anxiety about the future as this unique form of future-oriented trauma, which operates as a pre-emptive form of haunting, occurring before the future has been completely denied or cancelled while still demonstrating the many dangers that could lead to such an eventuality. Instead of being traumatised by an event that has already happened, this kind of trauma centres around events and experiences that are yet to come, psychically painful anxieties that feel, at times, overwhelmingly real. Literature provides a particularly interesting and prescient frame through which to contemplate these ideas, because it allows for the precise linguistic and affective tracing of these trauma-inflected anxieties as they unfold. This trauma also draws particular attention to anxiety's influence on temporality and narrative time – to the speeding up and slowing down this anxiety prompts for characters' sense of time, and the way in which anxiety ruptures established narratives and chronologies, as discussed in Chapter 1. In order to think through the

features of this anxious future-trauma further, this chapter will focus on two main texts: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Siri Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American* (2008), with references too to Hustvedt's autobiographically-inspired novel *Memories of the Future* (2019).

Rather than attempting to draw direct correlations between these very different texts (one of which occurs prior to 9/11, the other of which addresses this event directly on several occasions), this chapter will fall into two distinct sections which consider both texts' relationships to temporality and to technology, and the anxieties about the future that these subjects provoke. These sections will interpret anxieties about the passage of time and the future with attention to Matthew Ratcliffe et al's 'sense of a foreshortened future' (that is, 'a sense that the future is bereft of positive, meaningful life events [...] a sense that one's meaningful life is in the past') as well as Saint-Amour's concept of a 'pre-traumatic stress syndrome whose symptoms [arise] in response to a potentially oncoming rather than an already realized catastrophe.'⁴³⁴ In the former, the sense of a foreshortened future arises following traumatic events, broadly conceived by Ratcliffe et al as 'occurrences that would cause almost anyone great distress,' which as a result destroy a 'previously intact (or largely intact) sense of trust,' especially in the future.⁴³⁵ In the latter, the pre-traumatic stress syndrome is 'the experience of an apparently inescapable future' through a 'mass-traumatic anticipation of violence' that is shaped by violence that has occurred in the past and present.⁴³⁶ What differs, then, between these concepts and the anxiety and trauma at hand in this chapter is both the idea that future-anxiety can occur without the subject having knowingly or directly experienced a traumatic event in the past or present, and that it can arise intensely at an individual level as well as on a mass scale. Many of the characters this chapter considers are not traumatised in overt ways by specific events; rather, they exist in unstable and precarious conditions that traumatise incrementally, meaning that the future becomes an increasing source of anxiety. It is

⁴³⁴ Matthew Ratcliffe, Mark Ruddell, and Benedict Smith, 'What is a "sense of a foreshortened future?" A phenomenological study of trauma, trust, and time,' *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, article 1026 (2014), 1-11, p. 1 and p. 2 respectively, and Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, p. 7-8.

⁴³⁵ Ratcliffe et al, p. 2.

⁴³⁶ Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 20.

important to emphasise, however, that this future-anxiety must have a referent of some kind – it may not have a specific object, but it does not arise from nowhere, either – it always exceeds its object, and the reasons why and how this exceeding occurs must be unpacked in order to understand the anxiety fully. It may arise because of one’s own experience of trauma, but it may also arise out of knowledge of another’s trauma – knowledge that has been gained from historical accounts, personal testimony, contemporary news coverage, or even social media. The experience of future-anxiety is also contingent on a particular set of political, sociological, and cultural factors that provoke the sense that the future can only be negative, arising first at an individual level as a kind of pre-traumatic stress in the anticipation of a mass-scale disaster. Despite featuring significantly different plots and themes, both *Sorrows of an American* and *Infinite Jest* demonstrate the way in which such anxieties alter and disrupt speeds of mental processing in light of the pressure a sense of a shortened, denied, or cancelled future exerts. In turn, this specific kind of anxiety, arising as it does as trauma that is oriented towards the future, offers new means of interpreting the temporalities, narratives, forms, and affective structures of the literary texts at hand.

The aforementioned iterations of future-trauma can only be read through the lens of the widening gap between ‘the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor, between highly educated and illiterate,’ and as Marc Augé argues, ‘fear of falling down on the excluded side is today very widespread, [feeding] anxiety over the immediate future.’⁴³⁷ Franco Berardi goes as far as to say that ‘the future is over,’ that the ‘slow cancellation of the future got underway in the 1970s and 1980s,’ and that this ‘collapse of the future is rooted in the acceleration of psychic and cognitive rhythm.’⁴³⁸ This speeding up of the mind, and the pace of life more generally, is itself inevitably linked to the increasing influence and prevalence of technology and 24 hour media cycles. Mark Fisher notes that young people he taught in the classroom had an ‘inability to synthesize time into any coherent

⁴³⁷ Marc Augé, p. 52. It is also interesting to note here that there is a sense of anxiety, within a neoliberal capitalist system, about social mobility going in all directions, rather than just upwards – that one might end up in freefall, in direct opposition to neoliberal preoccupations with growth, particularly economic growth.

⁴³⁸ Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, p. 18, p. 18 and p. 23 respectively.

narrative,' a symptom not of demotivation but being a 'generation born into that ahistorical, anti-mnemonic blip culture – a generation, that is to say, for whom time has always come ready-cut into digital micro-slices.'⁴³⁹ This is a phenomenon he describes as 'a pathology of late capitalism – a consequence of being wired into the entertainment-control circuits of hypermediated consumer culture.'⁴⁴⁰ William Davies suggests that 'as we become more attuned to 'real time' events and media,' our 'speed of reaction often takes precedence over slower and more cautious assessments,' adding that 'the threat lurking in this is that otherwise peaceful situations can come to feel dangerous, until eventually they really are.'⁴⁴¹ That is to say, as more and more causes to be anxious about the future arise, the way in which the future is thought of and imagined, if there is to be a future at all, is vastly accelerated by the technology vast swathes of the global North rely upon to receive, send, and share information. This acceleration then risks making all future scenarios seem anxious, which, as Davies notes, can make otherwise peaceful situations actually threatening. Our ability to concentrate, and, indeed, to think for ourselves is challenged; evidence suggests that positive feedback on social media (or 'rewarding social stimuli') causes the activation of 'the same dopaminergic reward pathways' as drug use, with this neurological response being exploited by companies to 'keep us using their products for as long as possible.'⁴⁴²

Existing anxieties about the future are thus heightened by the speed with which it's possible to receive news of new threats, as well as the speed of our own thoughts, with a racing mind itself constituting an anxious symptom.⁴⁴³ Yet despite all of this information about potential dangers and threats, anxiety about the future is as much about unknowing as knowing. Anxiety may turn the

⁴³⁹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2009), p. 24 and p. 25 respectively.

⁴⁴⁰ Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 25.

⁴⁴¹ William Davies, *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), Preface p. xi.

⁴⁴² Trevor Haynes, 'Dopamine, Smartphones and You: A Battle for your Time,' *Harvard University Science in the News*, (1 May 2018), <<http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time/>> [accessed 1 Nov 2019].

⁴⁴³ 'Anxiety Symptoms: What Does Anxiety Feel Like?' *Mind*, (Sept 2017) <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/anxiety-symptoms/#.XNRE_OhKiUk> [accessed 20 April 2019].

peaceful situations Davies highlights, situations that are known to us, into something threatening and unknown. Anxieties about different catastrophic scenarios usually lack the specificity that would be required to act to stop them, and where that specificity is available, individuals are unlikely to have the political power to enact the change that is necessary, particularly without the support of elected officials or major corporations. Equally, it is often difficult to predict when and how these catastrophes would unfold. Anxiety about the future may also be more formless and free-flowing: a general sense of dread about what comes next, or whether there is a next to come.

It is this oxymoronic relationship between knowing and unknowing in anxiety about the future that binds it to theories of trauma. Although trauma is usually associated with memory, history, and the past, Cathy Caruth also notes that ‘trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on.’⁴⁴⁴ Here, trauma is directly characterised as embodying the unknown, at least at first – it is any given event’s physical and psychological resonances that are most significant, rather than the event itself. This is particularly evident in Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, translations of which include “‘deferred action”, “*après-coup*”, “afterwardsness”, “retroactive temporality”, [and] “belatedness”.”⁴⁴⁵

Describing an example of this concept, which, as its various translations exemplify, has particular temporal significance, Freud notes that:

the patient under analysis, at an age of over twenty-five years, was putting the impressions and impulses of his fourth year into words which he would never have found at that time [...] at the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he is unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four; and only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4. Original emphasis.

⁴⁴⁵ Gregory Bistoien, Stijn Vanheule, and Stef Craps, “*Nachträglichkeit: A Freudian Perspective on Delayed Traumatic Reactions*,” *Theory and Psychology*, 24 (2014), 668-687, p. 672.

⁴⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘An Infantile Neurosis,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 17*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 45.

For Freud, the patient here demonstrates how trauma is often not processed as the trauma-inducing event occurs, but rather, arises unexpectedly and surprisingly at some unknown point in the future. Yet one cannot predict when this might be, because the point at which this trauma is recognised as such is unpredictable, which once again partially negates Freud's argument that anxiety might allow for the anticipation of traumas that have not yet occurred. References to the future in Freud and Caruth's work, as well as the work of many other significant trauma theorists, are scarce, highlighting the need for further analysis of the tangled relationship between anxiety, trauma, and the future.⁴⁴⁷ Contemplating Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, she does remark that 'the traumatic structure of monotheism at the heart of this question [*What does it mean to be chosen?*] signifies a history of Jewish survival that is both an endless crisis and the endless possibility of a new future,' defining genocidal trauma through a constant bind between the potential for repeated pasts, or different futures.⁴⁴⁸ This idea is echoed in contemporary terms in Janet Roitman's work, in which she observes that 'crisis is posited as an epistemological impasse' that 'found[s] the possibility for other historical trajectories or even for a (new) future': while crisis might well be traumatic, potentially locking societies into the state of perpetual interwar Saint-Amour discusses, it also offers the possibility of breaking out of established temporalities, opening up the possibility of a different future.⁴⁴⁹ Once again, however, how this possibility is actually unlocked is not addressed.

In the preface to *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Caruth contemplates the link between trauma and the future further, noting that after 'a profound political disruption in the United States' and 'the opening decade of a new, already deeply troubled, century' the 'language of life must be

⁴⁴⁷ In their consideration of the history of trauma, Shoshana Ringel and Jerrold R. Brandell argue that Jean Martin Charcot's work with traumatized women in the Salpetriere is the first meaningful investigation of the relationship between trauma and mental illness, citing Pierre Janet and Freud's thinking as a continuation of this work (Shoshana Ringel and Jerrold R. Brandell, ed. *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice and Research* (California: Sage Publications, 2012). Trauma theory itself rose to prominence during the 1990s through the work of Caruth, Ruth Leys, Shoshana Felman, and academics such as Michelle Balaev, Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, Robert Eaglestone and Roger Luckhurst have written extensively on trauma in a literary context.

⁴⁴⁸ Caruth, p. 68.

⁴⁴⁹ Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 4.

reread, and understood anew, through the losses, and disappearances, of an era in which the very possibility of the future is fundamentally in doubt.⁴⁵⁰ Although Caruth goes on to write that ‘this would also be the challenge for the theory of trauma [...] as it passes on its own languages of death and survival into the new, and changing, dangers of the twenty-first century,’ this question remains largely unresolved in her work, and in trauma theory generally.⁴⁵¹ Whereas Caruth does not link this doubt about the future to a specific trauma or kind of trauma, but rather to a more general sense of loss and political unrest, Roger Luckhurst, having also remarked that ‘trauma studies [...] has not been much concerned with the future,’ adds that ‘*unprocessed* trauma might be figured as that which puts pressure on the very possibility of a future.’ However, he, too, makes this point speculatively, remarking that the field of trauma studies itself is ‘beginning to reflect on its future directions.’⁴⁵² That is to say, while he suggests that it is unprocessed trauma, in particular, that leads to a sense that the future may not arrive, his focus remains on the direction of the field of trauma studies itself, rather than the specific relationship between anxieties about the future and trauma which this chapter will proceed to consider.

The Future’s Anxious Temporalities

Siri Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American* is a text rife with traumatic themes and experiences. Its cast of characters bear complicated psychological burdens, many of which are interrelated through familial bonds and shared lives. The text’s narrator, Erik Davidsen, frequently experiences ‘sudden rushes of anxiety,’ characterised as ‘a speeding internal engine that wouldn’t turn off,’ while his sister, Inga, suffers from migraines, episodes of trembling, and ‘neurological crashes.’⁴⁵³ In turn,

⁴⁵⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), Preface p. xi, p. xi, and p. xi-xii respectively.

⁴⁵¹ Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes*, Preface p. xii.

⁴⁵² Roger Luckhurst, ‘Future Shock: Science Fiction and the Trauma Paradigm,’ in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* ed. by Gert Buelens, Samuel Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp.157-168 (p. 159). Emphasis my own.

⁴⁵³ Siri Hustvedt, *The Sorrows of an American* (Sceptre: London, 2008), p. 210, p. 215, and p. 55 respectively.

Erik's niece, Sonia, is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder induced by having closely witnessed 9/11, as well as having lost her father, leading her to yearn for her past life – to 'face those ghosts again' and 'change now to then.'⁴⁵⁴ Although each of these characters do have trauma in their pasts that contributes to their anxious states, they also share anxieties about traumatic futures and what will come next in 'a world in which buildings fell down and wars were fought for no reason.'⁴⁵⁵ In Erik's case, his anxiety spans through past, present, and future. His narration of the text is broken up by dreams, ghostly visitations, and autobiographical accounts written by his father, Lars, which are themselves 'taken directly from [Hustvedt's] father's [memoir] with only a few editorial and name changes.'⁴⁵⁶ This immediately introduces layers of chronology to the text, as although its narrative generally proceeds in a linear fashion, it does also jump between past and present, and is itself a retelling from Erik's perspective as he recalls the 'year of secrets [...] a time not of what was there, but of what wasn't,' a line that encapsulates Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* through its focus on trauma that is not yet recognised.⁴⁵⁷ The anxiety Erik feels about this state of unknowing, as well as his anxiety about the reliability of his narrative (which he repeatedly anticipates with observations that 'every memoir is full of holes,' that 'history is made by amnesia,' and that 'there is no clear border between remembering and imagining,') point to a wider sense of trauma about how he will be received and remembered in future, as well as about aging into a world where he may be alone. Similarly, *Memories of the Future* sees the semi-autobiographical narrator S.H. recalling a 'dream or night terror or hallucination' experienced at age five in which her 'house is falling' first as a twenty-four year old, and then again at sixty-two.⁴⁵⁸ Although at twenty-four, S.H. 'imagines she is writing her future,' at sixty-two, she remarks 'it is frightening here in the present, in February 2017. The house is falling down.'⁴⁵⁹ S.H. initially believes that writing will secure her future,

⁴⁵⁴ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 126.

⁴⁵⁵ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 230.

⁴⁵⁶ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American – Acknowledgements*, p. 306.

⁴⁵⁷ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁸ Siri Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future* (Sceptre: London, 2019), p. 98.

⁴⁵⁹ Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future*, p. 98 and p. 99 respectively.

and will offer her a way of making time progress naturally and fluidly, as when ‘in old movies [...] a wind rises out of nowhere and blows each month off a calendar that hangs on the wall.’⁴⁶⁰ Although both Erik and S.H. write in the hope of addressing their trauma and reclaiming a sense of control over their lives, S.H. finds that in the present, she is simply reliving the trauma of the past: the house is still falling down, despite all her writing, and the future her twenty-four year old self imagined has not come. Given their past experiences of loss, death, and violence, Erik and his family are all experiencing Saint-Amour’s pre-traumatic stress syndrome at an individual level, an ‘anxious and even wounding sense of futurity’ that prompts a ‘sense of time stretched out of its usual modes.’⁴⁶¹ This stretching out (and sometimes, condensing) of time is overtly referenced at several anxious moments in the text, particularly when Erik’s tenant Miranda’s daughter Eggy is admitted to hospital, prompting Erik to observe that he is ‘on the inert side of medicine, where neither heroism nor failure is possible, where time expands and ordinary numbers on a clock can’t register it.’⁴⁶²

While *Infinite Jest* (1996) does not explore such overt trauma, it does, nonetheless, feature a wide range of characters bearing all manner of difficult pasts. These pasts are not always clearly articulated in-text, echoing concepts in trauma theory around trauma not necessarily emerging at an obvious point in time, while also highlighting the unspeakability of this trauma and the difficulty of situating it in a neat, chronological narrative. Here, anxiety about the future takes precedence at the micro- and macro- level, with characters and the narrative structure of the novel itself bearing the temporal weight of this anxiety. The most obvious indication of this is the way in which time is divided and sponsored in the novel, categorised as the ‘CHRONOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION OF NORTH AMERICAN NATIONS’ REVENUE-ENHANCING SUBSIDIZED TIME™, BY YEAR,’ including ‘Year of the Whopper,’ ‘Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken,’ and ‘Year of Dairy Products from the American Heartland.’⁴⁶³ Of course, this is predominantly capitalistic in its drive, but it also speaks to a need to

⁴⁶⁰ Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future*, p. 98-99.

⁴⁶¹ Saint-Amour, p. 13.

⁴⁶² Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 300.

⁴⁶³ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 223.

'name' time, to attempt to master and control it, to try and write and define what comes next. In his work *Lived Time* (1970), Eugène Minkowski reflects on this desire to give meaning to time, arguing that 'our life is essentially oriented towards the future,' and that 'through its activity the living being carries itself forward, tends towards the future, creates it in front of itself.'⁴⁶⁴ However, in the case of, for example, a state of depression that prompts what Minkowski refers to as 'obsessive phenomena, such as the tendency to count, to check, to ruminate,' the 'flow of time is only slowed down,' because such phenomena 'express the impossibility of advancing.'⁴⁶⁵ Minkowski adds that these phenomena 'can give rise to the idea of a progression – a mechanical progression, that is – of time.'⁴⁶⁶ The ironic bind that anxiety causes in this formulation is that as an activity, anxious rumination about the future will deny not only the specific future(s) this anxiety relates to, but the future in general, as it consumes time that could be spent on activity that generates a meaningful sense of forward motion.⁴⁶⁷ Instead, anxious rumination provides an illusion of having control over time and the future, when in fact it is giving a false sense of presence to time, and is trapping the subject by filling time with that very time's denial. As such, the obsessive need to count years through superficial products highlights the unproductive and indeed ironic nature of anxious rumination, as spending time categorising years in this way spends time that could be used to address the potential causes of future-trauma and move forward from them.

A general sense of unease about the future is heightened by the novel's reference to the 'chemically troubled times' in which its characters are living; while there is no specific large-scale disaster referenced as having happened, the potential imminence of such an event floats throughout the novel, buoyed by the incompetent political leadership of figures such as Rush Limbaugh and Johnny Gentle, as well as the state the US is in environmentally: 'the years around the millennium

⁴⁶⁴ Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*, trans. by Nancy Metzel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 298 and p. 83 respectively.

⁴⁶⁵ Minkowski, p. 298.

⁴⁶⁶ Minkowski, p. 299.

⁴⁶⁷ This idea is explored in much greater detail in a forthcoming paper by Laura Salisbury and Lisa Baraitser, entitled 'Depressing Time: Waiting, Melancholia, and the Psychoanalytic Practice of Care.' (London: Routledge, 2021).

being a terrible time U.S. time for waste, then, ozone-wise and landfill-wise and shoddily-disposed-of-dioxins wise.⁴⁶⁸ This unease is described as being experienced on a mass scale, with President Gentle promising to ‘hose down our chemically troubled streets and to sleep darn little until he’d fashioned a way to rid the American psychosphere of the unpleasant debris of a throw-away past.’⁴⁶⁹ The idea of a ‘throw-away past’ here operates at two levels: it both describes a past in which people were wasteful and unconcerned about the environment, living without paying attention to it, but it also implies that for Gentle, the past is something that can be discarded, ironically leading him to adopt the same throw-away attitude of his predecessors.⁴⁷⁰ Gentle’s party is named the ‘Clean U.S. Party,’ and his thinking on the subject of the U.S.’ waste is so overt that his first political platform is ‘Let’s Shoot Our Wastes Into Space.’⁴⁷¹ Although this refers specifically to waste from the ‘new landfills and toxic repositories the People demanded in every area but their own,’ Gentle’s logic also seems to apply to the ‘unpleasant debris’ that lingers psychologically for the American people.⁴⁷² Without offering any specific solutions to the anxiety and depression these people are experiencing, he promises ‘an end to atomized Americans’ fractious blaming of one another for our terrible internal troubles,’ troubles for which ‘the actual term employed is *downer-type*.’⁴⁷³ In his unsympathetic and unproductive approach to the nation’s mental health, Gentle implies that mental unrest, or ‘psychological waste,’ can be easily discarded, too – that trauma experienced on a mass scale can be rinsed away by severing the country’s relationship with its past. The notion of psychological waste also implies that, in Gentle’s view, the minds of American people are doing unnecessary work, raising questions of production and productivity that imply a precarity which he would rather avoid and dispel in order to ensure the US’s image, as well as landscape, is clean. It is noteworthy, too, that his initial platform describes ‘Wastes’ in the plural, indicating that physical

⁴⁶⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 151 and p. 1029 respectively.

⁴⁶⁹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 382.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 383 and p. 382 respectively.

⁴⁷³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 383 and p. 1029 respectively.

and psychological waste can be dispelled from the planet itself, and that these problems can be solved through this ultimate act of disposing of the past.⁴⁷⁴ Yet, as the ‘toxic effluvia choking our highways and littering our byways and grungeing up our sunsets and cruddying those harbors’ remain unaddressed, Gentle’s request that people ‘sit back and enjoy the show’ offers very little hope for the future – indeed, it feeds future-anxiety, contributing to the many ‘psychic storms’ present in the novel.⁴⁷⁵

Such anxieties are made considerably more specific at an individual level, as when Hal Incandenza tells Kent Blott his concerns about pursuing a career in professional tennis:

I look at these guys that’ve been here six, seven years, eight years, still suffering, hurt, beat up, so tired, just like I feel tired and suffer, I feel this what, dread, this dread, I see seven or eight years of unhappiness every day and day after day of tiredness and stress and suffering stretching ahead, and for what, for a chance at a like a pro career that I’m starting to get this dreary feeling a career in the Show means even *more* suffering.⁴⁷⁶

The repetitious nature of Hal’s expression, as well as the life he imagines for himself, emphasises the slowness of this particular anxiety – the future stretches hopelessly out in front of him and seems to mean only further suffering. In this case, Ratcliffe’s sense of a foreshortened future is apt, for it represents ‘a change in how time is experienced’ whereby ‘one confronts a world that is incompatible with the possibility of an open and progressive life story.’⁴⁷⁷ Many students at the Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.) are described as ‘manag[ing] their internal weathers chemically,’ highlighting the second meaning of the novel’s chemically troubled times.⁴⁷⁸ While an unknown narrator comments that many E.T.A. students ‘are involved with recreational substances,’ adding ‘Like who isn’t, at some life-stage, in the U.S.A. and Interdependent regions, in these troubled

⁴⁷⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 382.

⁴⁷⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 383 and p. 53 respectively.

⁴⁷⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 109. Original emphasis.

⁴⁷⁷ Ratcliffe et al, p. 8. While Ratcliffe’s notion of an ‘open and progressive life story’ here applies to the personal, real-life traumatic experience, rather than a traumatic experience narrated in a novel, it is worth acknowledging the normative quality of such a life story, which would not necessarily apply to contemporary novels that are experimental or avant-garde in style and narration.

⁴⁷⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 53.

times,' for the students, these substances have specific temporal significance.⁴⁷⁹ For a 'traditionally smaller and harder-core set' of its students, there is a development of reliance 'on personal chemistry to manage E.T.A.'s special demands.'⁴⁸⁰

These demands are of course physical and psychological, with the dread Hal associates with the Show (the students' phrase for a career in professional tennis) prompting those who regularly take drugs to fall into a 'circular routine' of stimulation and tranquilisation:

Dexedrine or low-volt methedrine before matches and benzodiazapenes to come back down after matches with Mudslides or Blue Flames at some understanding Comm. Ave. nightspot or beers or bongs in some discreet Academy corner at night to short-circuit the up-and-down cycle, mushrooms or X or something from the Mild Designer class – or maybe occasionally a little Black Star, whenever there's a match-and-demand-free weekend, to basically short out the whole motherboard and blow out all the circuits and slowly recover and be almost neurologically reborn and start the gradual cycle all over again.⁴⁸¹

Narrated in a sparsely punctuated and breathless voice, this passage mirrors the fluctuating temporalities of anxious drives (from the acute pace of panic in matches to the more drawn-out, chronic pace of weekend binges and recovery), while also highlighting the students' desire to escape certain temporalities and enter others at different points in their weekly routines – something these students find themselves incapable of doing without the assistance of drugs. Although the majority of those engaged in this routine rely on amphetamines pre-match, a footnote reveals that Michael Pemulis 'rarely ingests any 'drines before a match, reserving them for recreation – some people are wired to find heart-pounding eye-wobbling 'drine stimulation recreational.'⁴⁸² As such, it is not as straightforward as to say that students want a quickened pace for matches, and a slowed pace for outside of matches. Indeed, the pinnacle of this cycle is to escape time (and anxiety) altogether, to 'blow out all the circuits' and be 'neurologically reborn,' before eventually re-encountering both and

⁴⁷⁹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 53.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 983.

beginning the cycle again.⁴⁸³ This complete denial of past and future, if temporary, calls to mind Gentle's tactic of sending all waste(s) to space, escaping trauma and future-anxiety in a hallucinogenic haze. Again, this calls to mind Minkowski's notion of rumination giving a false sense of forward movement to time, and to his idea that 'what is lacking in [a] manic patient is *unfolding in time*.'⁴⁸⁴ That is to say, there is a sense that the future has become inaccessible. Minkowski argues that 'a person in a state of manic excitement lives only in the now, and this is a now which limits his contact with the environment; he has no present anymore.'⁴⁸⁵ In the ETA students' drug-fuelled attempts to escape time (attempts that are driven by anxiety about the present and future), they in fact trap themselves in time, denying themselves the ability to engage with their current surroundings while also locking themselves into perpetual loops of overdose and recovery that deny them the ability to move forward normally in time, or create a potentially comforting sense of teleology for themselves. Despite their neurological rebirth, given that the cycle recurs, it is clear that neither past nor future can be denied, particularly when both revolve around preparing for a Show that many students are unsure they wish to be in.

Sonia's experience and recollections of 9/11 demonstrate how trauma is always simultaneously concerned with the past and future in affective terms. Having been 'just blocks from the burning towers,' she sees the scene unfold from her schoolroom window, but despite this, and her father's death, Erik observes that she didn't cry, instead 'retreat[ing] into compulsive orderliness,' 'clean[ing] and straighten[ing] and stud[y]ing far into the night.'⁴⁸⁶ Erik's analysis is that she is at 'an age of inner and outer revolutions,' making 'structures built to fend off the ugly truths of chaos, death, and decay.'⁴⁸⁷ This recalls Jennifer Yusin's argument that 'as a wound that results from a piercing to the body and psyche, trauma derives from the inseparable embrace between our

⁴⁸³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 53.

⁴⁸⁴ Minkowski, p. 294.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 4 and p. 18 respectively.

⁴⁸⁷ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 18.

inside and outside worlds,' linking Erik's interpretation of Sonia's experience of adolescence with traumatic experience.⁴⁸⁸ While it may be that Sonia uses tidying as a form of distraction from her past trauma, structuring her space in the way that she does can also be thought of as an anxiety about the future – she is ensuring that she is prepared for whatever may come next, from her 'perfectly folded sweaters organized by colour' to 'her radiant report cards,' ensuring that the world and the future is as open as possible for her.⁴⁸⁹ However, this does not prove to be enough, and she instead turns to poetic expression to make sense of what has happened to her. Initially, her poetry reveals her desire to return to the past, as discussed previously, and the only words she is able to write about 9/11 are 'a big empty spot with only the date,' referencing Ground Zero and pointing to the spatial and temporal absence left in the wake of the attack. In his essay reflecting on 9/11 soon after the event, Don DeLillo remarked that 'the future has yielded, for now, to medieval experience, to the old slow furies of cut throat religion [...] we have fallen back in space and time.'⁴⁹⁰ This sense of being frozen in time, of being outside of modernity's sense of a progressive future, is echoed in Sonia's poetry, which is overt about her traumatic return – 'a twin ablaze inside of me / the burn recast in memory.'⁴⁹¹ While previously, Sonia was readying herself through organization, here, it is as though she is psychologically unable to move on, as she has embodied that which she saw and is now replaying it within her body and mind. In reincarnating one of the twin towers as a twin child burning inside her, Sonia also summons and kills a future that could have been, instead turning this possibility for new life into a vivid reminder of life lost. The extent of the violence she witnessed has made it impossible for her to imagine the future, with poetry, too, proving unsuccessful in helping her process her trauma.

⁴⁸⁸ Jennifer Yusin, *The Future Life of Trauma: Partitions, Borders, Repetitions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 18.

⁴⁹⁰ Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future,' *The Guardian*, (22 Dec 2001), <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>> [accessed 26 April 2019].

⁴⁹¹ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 189.

As well as a falling back through space and time, Sonia's writing also locks her trauma into memory, casting it eternally into the present and binding it to herself, as she signs the poem with her name underneath: 'Sonia Blaustein.'⁴⁹² In an attempt to dispel this memory, and perhaps to set a clean slate for the future, Sonia proceeds to post the poem under Erik's door, so that it is no longer stored in the order of her bedroom. In stark contrast, Erik 'folded the paper carefully and put it inside [his] journal,' continuing the preservation of Sonia's traumatic memories. At this point in the novel, Sonia is unable to imagine a future in which she is free of the flames that haunt her, and thus attempts to break this traumatic cycle by physically parting with her own recalled narrative. In *Memories of the Future*, writing is framed as redemptive even in the most awful of futures: as S.H. ponders, over many years, what might have happened if she killed the son of one of her friends and was imprisoned for the crime, she says that 'when she was optimistic, she wrote many books during her life sentence, but when she was pessimistic, she dwindled away in her cell to next to nothing, a wan and wasted being, drained of the future altogether.'⁴⁹³ Although S.H. never does commit this crime, it is interesting to note that her anxiety around the future this might have prompted is contingent on her writing: unlike for Sonia, here, writing is redemptive, and to be without it means that the future is snatched from S.H., despite writing not actually offering the control over the future that she hopes it will in her youth.

Sonia's anxiety about the future eventually becomes overwhelming, as on the second anniversary of 9/11 she 'put her hands on either side of her face and shouted, "I don't want this world! I don't want it!,"' and proceeds to sob uncontrollably.⁴⁹⁴ Erik's narration denies us Sonia's own voice at this point, but his analysis is that this episode 'opened an internal crack in Sonia,' helping her to realise that although her 'memories wouldn't leave her,' she 'knew she could survive the power of her own emotion.'⁴⁹⁵ Here, her denial of the future leads to a moment of breakdown, a

⁴⁹² Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 189.

⁴⁹³ Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future*, p. 272.

⁴⁹⁴ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 229.

⁴⁹⁵ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 230.

coalescence of her trauma from the past, and relating to the future, leading her to cry for the first time since both her father's death and the attack on the twin towers. Although her anxiety, her future-trauma, has not disappeared, there is a slowing here of her narrative, a sense of acceptance of memory, as well as what comes next, through the word 'survive'. Whereas after the attack, she was operating at an urgent pace that relied on order and creative output (reflecting DeLillo's view that after 9/11, 'time [was] scarcer,' and that there was a 'sense of compression, [of] plans made hurriedly, [of] time [being] forced and distorted'), she reaches a point where she is no longer perpetually anxious about a world in which buildings fall down.⁴⁹⁶

This may fall into the category of what Žižek calls renormalization, whereby

An event first experienced as real but impossible (the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable it may be, is effectively dismissed as impossible) becomes real and no longer impossible (once the catastrophe occurs, it is "renormalized," perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always already having been possible. The gap which makes these paradoxes possible is that between knowledge and belief: we *know* the (ecological) catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not believe it will really happen.⁴⁹⁷

Although this argument is applied here to ecological crises, the same logic can be applied to many other traumatic futures – entering a state of protective denial, dispelling anxieties about potential crises in order to slow down thought processes and allowing ourselves to enter states of disbelief that will precede further future-traumas. This also relates to coping mechanisms for what Alvin Toffler described in 1970 as 'future shock': 'the distress, both physical and psychological, that arises from an overload of the human organism's physical adaptive systems and its decision-making processes [...] the human response to overstimulation.' Although Toffler's concept does not relate directly to trauma, but rather, as above, to overstimulation, like Žižek, he notes that 'one widespread response to high-speed change is outright denial.'⁴⁹⁸ The 'Denier,' in Toffler's formulation, 'flatly refuses to take in

⁴⁹⁶ DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future.'

⁴⁹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 328. Original emphasis.

⁴⁹⁸ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 359.

new information. Like the disaster victim whose face registers total disbelief, the Denier, too, cannot accept the evidence of his senses. Thus he concludes that things really are the same, and that all evidences of change are merely superficial.⁴⁹⁹ In his film *HyperNormalisation*, Adam Curtis extends these ideas to argue that as people living in the neoliberal global north, we have begun to live not just in a state of disbelief, but in a fantasy world, albeit one whose falsity is known to those within it:

over the past 40 years, politicians, financiers, and technological utopians, rather than face up to the real complexities of the world, retreated. Instead, they constructed a simpler version of the world in order to hang on to power. And as this fake world grew, all of us went along with it, because the simplicity is reassuring.⁵⁰⁰

Of course, this is a broad and perhaps over-simplified interpretation, but it is useful in summarising the motivation behind existing in a suspended state of denial in the face of future-anxiety. In turn, this idea of the simplicity of a fake world chimes with Mark Fisher's notion of a pathology of late capitalism – in this case, a pathological state of mass complicity in ambivalence that pushes the question and concept of the future out of view, leaving it to be addressed at another time or by someone else. As Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek argue, while the catastrophes that politicians should be addressing are 'ever-accelerating,' politics itself 'is beset with an inability to generate the new ideas and modes of organisation necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations [...] in this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been cancelled.'⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Toffler, p. 359.

⁵⁰⁰ *HyperNormalisation*, dir. by Adam Curtis (BBC, 2016).

⁵⁰¹ Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics," in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), pp. 347-362 (p. 349).

Technology and Future-Trauma

Having unpacked the anxious relationships characters in *The Sorrows of an American* and *Infinite Jest* have with time, as well as the ways in which the novels' narratives are affected by future traumas, this chapter will now consider the specific influence of technology upon anxiety and its manifestation as a form of future-trauma. I am using the term 'technology' here to indicate both machinery and equipment in an industrial sense, and media technology such as the television, computers, and mobile phones. All of these technologies have contributed to the speeding up of our lives, our culture, and our sense of time more generally. Thinking about the relationship between time and geographic space, Virilio suggests that 'with the supersonic vector (airplane, rocket, airwaves), penetration and destruction become one,' adding that 'the instantaneousness of action at a distance corresponds to the defeat of the unprepared adversary, but also, and especially, to the defeat of the world as a field, as distance, as matter'.⁵⁰² He later remarks that "'without the violence of speed, that of weapons would not be so fearsome,' pointing to the damage that anxious temporalities can cause through their creation of (sometimes false or misinterpreted) potential catastrophes.⁵⁰³ Similarly, Mark Fisher remarks that 'the internet and mobile telecommunications have altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition [...] there is no present to grasp and articulate any more.'⁵⁰⁴ This acceleration, then, is not only a symptom of anxiety but a cause of it, prompting an urgent sense of threat or danger that could strike anywhere at any time. In Fisher's terms, this acceleration is so immense in all aspects of our lives that the present, much like the future, is negated, leaving us 'desperately short of time, energy, and attention' and 'demand[ing] quick fixes.'⁵⁰⁵ Indeed, he laments that the potential of technology has not been harnessed to challenge systems of neoliberal capitalism: 'what haunts is the spectre of a world in which all the

⁵⁰² Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 149-50

⁵⁰³ Virilio, p. 153.

⁵⁰⁴ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 9.

⁵⁰⁵ Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 15.

marvels of communicative technology could be combined with a sense of solidarity much stronger than anything social democracy could muster.⁵⁰⁶

While technology, then, could have been framed as a gateway into a more socially just or responsible future, it has, instead, intensified existing anxieties about the future being denied us altogether, allowing this message to be disseminated at increasing speed and to an ever-increasing audience. Srnicek and Williams note that ‘capitalism has begun to constrain the productive forces of technology, or at least, direct them towards needlessly narrow ends,’ such that ‘rather than a world of space travel, future shock, and revolutionary technological potential, we exist in a time where the only thing that develops is marginally better consumer gadgetry.’⁵⁰⁷ This means that ‘the true transformative potentials of much of our technological and scientific research remain[s] unexploited.’⁵⁰⁸ Benjamin Noys argues that in this sense, the media ‘exploit[s] the sensational and attack[s] us with shock tactics [...] [using] the speed of modern media technologies to overcome our capacities for response and [leave] us reeling.’⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, he goes as far as to argue that technology not only leaves us reeling, but suppresses and entraps us: ‘the relief that technology was supposed to bring from labour merely leaves less labor doing more work. No longer, as in Marx’s day, are we all chained to factory machines, but now some of us carry our chains around with us, in the form of laptops and phones.’⁵¹⁰ As such, technologies have then reformulated capitalism, rather than evened out its inequalities or rendered capitalism itself obsolete altogether.

Fisher’s concerns about the failings of communicative technology are particularly evident in *Infinite Jest*’s video-telephoning (or videophony) technology, which, ‘having enjoyed an interval of huge consumer popularity,’ lost many of its users: ‘within like 16 months or 5 sales quarters, the tumescent demand for ‘videophony’ suddenly collapsed like a kicked tent.’⁵¹¹ This constitutes a self-

⁵⁰⁶ Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 26.

⁵⁰⁷ Srnicek and Williams, p. 355.

⁵⁰⁸ Srnicek and Williams, p. 356.

⁵⁰⁹ Benjamin Noys, *The Culture of Death* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 107.

⁵¹⁰ Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), p. 11.

⁵¹¹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 144 and p. 145 respectively.

inflicted denial of futurity in the sense that consumers made an active choice not to continue using the technology, though in line with Fisher's comments, it also highlights how the capacity for solidarity and community-building is swiftly undermined – in this case, because of '(1) emotional stress, (2) physical vanity, (3) a certain queer kind of self-obliterating logic in the micro-economics of consumer high tech' Users of videophony realised 'they had to compose the same sort of earnest, slightly overintense listener's expression they had to compose for in-person exchanges,' resulting in 'videophonic stress.' Such thought processes demonstrate an anticipatory social anxiety that is exacerbated by the performative nature of this communication: 'the videophonic stress was even worse if you were at all vain. I.e. if you are worried at all about how you looked. As in to other people. Which all joking aside who doesn't.'⁵¹² So intense is the anxiety that people felt seeing the 'shiny pallid indefiniteness' of their faces, deemed to make them appear 'evasive, furtive, untrustworthy, *unlikeable*,' that it becomes a syndrome in itself: '*Video-Physiognomic Disorder*.'⁵¹³ That a face appears indefinite in itself speaks to fears about transience and ceasing to be, and the fact that a platform for face-to-face communication ends up generating a syndrome that relates to one's own appearance, reiterates a process of individuation which makes people ever more vulnerable to the threats of the future – ever more conscious of themselves, and ever more anxious, to the detriment of their ability to function effectively in everyday life. Here, a technological fantasy that promised a more intimate level of connectivity with others has in fact resulted in anxiety-induced introversion.

Bifo expresses particular concern about the influence of technology on communication, arguing that 'millions of phones are calling each other,' but that in fact this ends up postponing meaningful contact. This then means that 'there is no longer time to get close to each other; there is no more time for caresses, for the pleasure and slowness of whispered words [...] desire turns into anxiety, and time contracts.'⁵¹⁴ Wallace's writing emphasises the falseness and emptiness in modern

⁵¹² Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 147.

⁵¹³ Ibid. Original emphasis.

⁵¹⁴ Berardi, p. 95-96.

communication further through the introduction of ‘High Definition Masking,’ first through the use of photographic imaging, screening a ‘wildly attractive high-def broadcastable composite of a face wearing an earnest, slightly overintense expression of complete attention’ to the receiver of the call, and later through encouraging users to get casts of their own enhanced facial images which, when not in use, ‘simply hung on a small hook on the side of a TP’s phone-console, admittedly looking maybe a bit surreal and discomfiting when detached and hanging there empty and wrinkled.’⁵¹⁵ Despite users’ awareness of the falsity of this form of communication, usage persists, though people ‘began preferring and then outright demanding videophone masks that were really quite a lot better-looking than they themselves were in person.’⁵¹⁶ In turn, this led to further social anxiety:

enormous psychosocial stress began to result, large numbers of phone-users suddenly reluctant to leave home and interface personally with people who, they feared, were now habituated to seeing their far-better looking masked selves on the phone and would on seeing them in person suffer (so went the callers’ phobia) [...] illusion-shattering aesthetic disappointment.⁵¹⁷

It is clear from this extract how technology has altered the fabric of human communication in the novel’s world, with an in-person meeting deemed a form of ‘interfacing,’ albeit a terrible one which poses the risk of one’s real face being exposed and found lacking. The futurity of this technology thus becomes its own undoing, breeding new anxieties as it develops, even in its ultimate shift into obsolescence, as ‘a return to good old telephoning’ occurred ‘not only dictated by common consumer sense but actually after a while [a] culturally approved [...] kind of chic integrity,’ with the telephone becoming ‘a status-symbol of anti-vanity, such that only callers utterly lacking in self-awareness continued to use videophony.’⁵¹⁸ Once again, a denial of that which the future has brought is deemed necessary to offset the anxieties that it has prompted – there is a safety in technology that is more familiar, though after the traumas prompted by videophony, this safety still

⁵¹⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 147, p. 148 and p. 148 respectively.

⁵¹⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 148,

⁵¹⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 149.

⁵¹⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 150, p. 150 and p. 151 respectively.

comes with caveats in the sense that choosing the telephone is itself an anticipatory act performed to portray a sense of integrity and sincerity. In speaking on the phone, characters hope that they are interpreted as above the vanity of videophony, and as especially invested in the conversation they are having, rather than how they appear when that conversation is taking place, although, of course, this hope is still almost completely driven by an anxiety about how one's actions will be perceived by others.

Hustvedt's work does not deal anywhere near as closely with developing technologies, but its engagement with existing technology, most notably photography, also speaks volumes about future-anxiety. Just as in *Infinite Jest*, the telephone comes to offer a newfound sense of safety and security, Susan Sontag argues that in the late 1970s, photography 'is not practiced by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power.'⁵¹⁹ As an example, she notes that the camera becomes a symbol of, and tool for, successful family life, such that 'not to take pictures of one's children [...] is a sign of parental indifference,' and that 'through photographs, each family constructs a portrait chronicle of itself – a portable set of images that bears witness to its connectedness.'⁵²⁰ This speaks to the anticipatory anxiety that much technology provokes – an anxiety that one may miss out if one does not participate in a certain practice, and in this case, that failing to decisively chronicle family life might indicate a personal and emotional failing, or lack of care. She also draws specific parallels between photography and trauma, noting that 'people robbed of their past seem to make the most fervent picture takers, at home and abroad. Everyone who lives in an industrialized society is obliged gradually to give up the past, but in certain countries, such as the United States and Japan, the break with the past has been particularly traumatic,' because of the extent of large-scale conflict in which these countries have been involved.⁵²¹ In this sense, for Sontag, photography provides a means of clarifying and validating the present, so that once that present becomes past, it cannot be lost – it 'proves' one's life is interesting, 'becom[ing] one of the

⁵¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 8.

⁵²⁰ Sontag, p. 8.

⁵²¹ Sontag, p. 10.

principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation.⁵²² Although these arguments apply to an extent to Jeffrey Lane's photography exhibit 'Jeff's Lives: Multiple Fictions, or an Excursion into DID,' his use of photography seems far more preoccupied with using images to manipulate the future, and to address his anxieties about that future.⁵²³

Jeffrey's photo exhibit does document his past, which has been a traumatic one (both his parents died in a car accident, which he represents in the exhibit with a screen 'replay[ing] a typical crash from some Hollywood movie,') but its most provocative images are in the 'Stalker' and 'Father' series, which feature photographs he has taken and doctored. On viewing these photographs, Erik observes 'not [himself] but a blank where [he] should have been, a white cut-out that walked with Miranda and Eglantine toward the park.'⁵²⁴ He also notes an 'unsettling image of Miranda without eyes,' along with a photo of himself captioned '*Head Doctor Goes Insane*.'⁵²⁵ On closer viewing, Erik notices that this photograph has been doctored, too: 'I noticed that the picture appeared to have been taken outside rather than from the stairs above the second-floor hallway [...] Lane had altered the setting [...] the photograph made it appear as if I had been raving half naked in the street, wielding a hammer. Beside it was an image of Lane with a large bruise on his forehead.' In reality, Jeffrey had taken this photograph of Erik when intruding in his home, and Erik had been wielding the hammer in self-defence, having heard someone enter. While this is certainly an attempt to reclaim the past, Jeffrey's doctored photo is also an act of power, as Sontag puts it – an attempt to change a future he fears. In advance of the exhibition, Miranda, who is Jeffrey's on-off romantic partner, warns Erik that one of Jeffrey's photographs is likely to offend him, later adding that 'Jeff's been so jealous' of their friendship, and of Erik's clear attraction to Miranda.⁵²⁶ In order to address his anxiety about losing Miranda, and by extension, their daughter, Eggy, Jeffrey enacts a simultaneous romanticisation of the past, and exertion of control over the potential future narrative

⁵²² Sontag, p. 10.

⁵²³ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 260.

⁵²⁴ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 262.

⁵²⁵ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 262.

⁵²⁶ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 275.

of a relationship between Miranda and Erik – an anxiety that is exacerbated by Erik’s closeness to Eggy. Reflecting on ‘dead relatives and friends preserved in the family album,’ Sontag remarks that the presence of those lost in photographs ‘exorcises some of the anxiety and remorse prompted by their disappearance [...] supply[ing] our pocket relation to the past.’⁵²⁷

In Jeffrey’s case, his ‘*Lover*’ series documents the stark reality and intensity of their relationship: ‘Miranda crying, an angry Miranda waving her first at the camera, Miranda dancing in some nightclub, Miranda on a swing,’ – what Erik views as ‘the documentation of a real love affair,’ ‘intimate pictures of a Miranda [he] didn’t know.’⁵²⁸ Given their relative estrangement, this can be thought of as Jeffrey’s exorcism of anxiety about Miranda’s absence from his life, as the series serves as proof of their intimacy, reinforced by photographs of the physical and emotional signature Miranda left behind: ‘at the bottom of the rectangle were twenty or thirty pictures of the empty bed [...] the sheets were configured differently. After she left him, the man would wake up in the morning and photograph the empty bed.’⁵²⁹ This is a curious attempt at relieving his anxiety, however, as photographing and exhibiting these scenes both emphasises Jeffrey’s affection for Miranda, while also serving as a visual record of what he has lost. In removing Miranda’s eyes from another photograph in the exhibit, Jeffrey removes a portion of her agency, preventing her from seeing anything again, meaning that visually, she can rely only on memory, and what she has seen in a past that they shared. While Miranda is, in the space of the gallery, trapped in the past, Erik is erased from the past and present, quite literally cut out of images in an act of defensive severance. Jeffrey’s jealousy surrounding Erik and the alleged emotional threat he poses is encapsulated in ‘*Head Doctor Goes Insane*,’ which is a deliberate attempt to deny Erik a future with Miranda, and indeed, a continuing career as a psychiatrist.

In this sense, Erik’s future is threatened, as the doctored image presents him as violent and crazed, and the image is seen by one of his most vulnerable patients. The accompanying image of a

⁵²⁷ Sontag, p. 16.

⁵²⁸ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 261, p. 261-2, p. 262 and p. 262 respectively.

⁵²⁹ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 262.

bruised Lane, along with ‘a photo of George Bush, the Twin Towers, a hospital corridor, and war images from Iraq’ reinforces Jeffrey’s narrative about Erik, while also presenting him as a foolish yet destructive force engaged in unnecessary conflict – that is, a threat to Jeffrey and Miranda’s future.⁵³⁰ This combination of images also reiterates Jeffrey’s desire to erase Erik from this future, and from his life generally. Fully aware of the potential consequences of the exhibit, Erik finds himself ‘suddenly nauseated’ and ‘stagger[ing] out into the bright light of Twenty-fifth Street, where [he] squatted on the sidewalk for a moment with [his] head lowered to prevent the oncoming faint.’⁵³¹ Having overcome the overwhelming physical symptoms of his anxiety in this moment, Erik attaches this anxiety to the future, contemplating a lawsuit against Jeffrey while also imagining ‘other patients and colleagues standing in front of the photograph and laughing.’⁵³² Although Erik’s lawyer is eventually able to have ‘a black square put over the face of *Head Doctor Goes Insane*,’ on the grounds that Jeffrey had doctored the photograph ‘to create the illusion it had been taken in a public rather than a private space,’ for Erik, ‘the photograph lived on,’ projecting itself into his future, and to his anxious mind at this point in the text, altering and narrowing it, as Jeffrey had intended.⁵³³

The challenge that all the scenarios and experiences of future-anxiety considered thus far present is the relationship between anxiety, trauma, and direct experience. However, it is very difficult to determine what actually constitutes direct experience when contemplating future-anxiety, particularly as psychoanalysis bases its whole system on the impossibility of distinguishing external reality from the workings of internal reality.⁵³⁴ In his consideration of trauma in

⁵³⁰ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 263.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Hustvedt, *Sorrows of an American*, p. 264.

⁵³⁴ Freud describes this process as reality-testing, saying that ‘our whole relation to the external world, to reality,’ depends on our ability to ‘[distinguish] perceptions from ideas,’ though in the analytic scene, it is not clear how one would tell the difference between reality and fantasy cathected with affect. (Sigmund Freud, ‘A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 14*, ed. by James Strachey (London, The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 217-236, (p. 230).

contemporary American novels, Alan Gibbs reflects on the potentially “problematic distinction’ between absence and loss’ in conceptions of trauma, noting that the texts he considers are united by ‘the infringement or incursion of large-scale historical events [...] into the personal.’⁵³⁵ He adds that this ‘potentially violent irruption of the global-political into the personal-familial [...] echoes the anxieties of post-9/11 America.’⁵³⁶ This binary between absence and loss, and, by extension, absence and presence, as presence must precede loss, while generally unhelpful in the theorization of trauma, does speak to a bind arising in Saint-Amour, Fisher, Davies, and Ratcliffe et al’s work: namely, the question of whether one needs to have directly experienced trauma in order to feel the sense of a foreshortened or cancelled future that leads to future-anxiety. Lyndsey Stonebridge posits that in Freudian terms, ‘anxiety is a ‘protection’ against trauma; it is a way of staying in relation to history without being consumed by it,’ adding that ‘while anxiety might work as a prophylactic against trauma, as a sort of psychic defence against history, it is not an emotion that has much truck with a concept of history perceived in terms of linear time.’⁵³⁷ However, for Stonebridge, at least from a psychoanalytic point of view, anxiety is always looking backwards and forwards simultaneously – future-anxiety, or “dreading forward,” as she puts it, ‘also mean[s] recycling versions of the past.’⁵³⁸ In turn, this raises questions about the point at which this anxiety is most present: whether the future-anxiety is in fact greater in the period of in-between when an individual, community, or population is aware that the possibility of a future is slipping away, but is also aware that there is a chance of redeeming it. In this state of in-between, which also operates as a locational in-between, the most common response to future-anxiety seems to be that of expulsion.

⁵³⁵ Alan Gibbs, *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 207.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 4.

⁵³⁸ Stonebridge, p. 6.

Having directly experienced a wide range of traumas, from 9/11, to parental loss, to relationship breakdown, characters in *Sorrows of an American* have strikingly tangible reasons to feel anxious about the future. While this does apply to characters in *Infinite Jest*, too, many other characters have not experienced traumas that are specific to them, but rather, have felt the traumatic pressure exerted by anxiety-inducing technologies and ecological crises that anxiously call into question the nature of the future that may (or may not) follow. Yet in both cases, following Žižek's logic of renormalization, characters enter self-perpetuating anxious cycles with fluctuating temporalities, cycles of realization of trauma, followed by anxiety, followed by denial, followed by further anxiety, a kind of acceptance, and then a return, once again, to anxiety and denial. For Sonia, this operates at the micro-level of disposing of her poetry at Erik's house, while for President Gentle, it operates at the most maximal level of blasting toxic waste that threatens his country's future into space. Both examples operate as physical denials of trauma, but also psychological denials of anxiety about futures that can only be terrible. Such cycles call to mind Eric Cazdyn's argument that existence in a state of permanent crisis brings us into the new chronic: 'a certain mode of time – one that resists viewing the future as anything other than an extension of the present.'⁵³⁹ In this mode of time, one never actually reaches the point at which the terrible future that beckons occurs, and in this denial of direct immanence, one is trapped in stasis. This, in turn, speaks to how anxiety operates as something 'stuck' – a failure to adequately orientate oneself to the future, because, in Minkowski's terms, rumination has occupied time that could be spent on this orientation through the false promise of forward-movement.

This sense that anxious symptoms causes the processing of trauma, and indeed of the future, to become stuck, speaks to the need for a different orientation towards both past and future, and fiction operates as a particularly suitable space for the representation both of traumatic returns, and, through anxious forms, the possibility of other futures, both within the imaginative frame of

⁵³⁹ Eric Cazdyn, p. 14.

the novels in question, and in their readers, too. Hustvedt speaks to this duality of past and future in literary space directly in *Memories of the Future*, as its narrator S.H. reflects that

Every book is a withdrawal from immediacy into reflection. Every book contains a perverse wish to foul up time, to cheat its inevitable pull. Blah, blah, blah and hum-da-di-hum. What am I looking for? Where am I going? Am I vainly searching for the moment when the future that is now the past beckoned me with its vast, empty face, and I cowered or tripped or ran in the wrong direction? Do my memories, painful and joyous, provide tenuous proof of my existence? Do the revolutions of memory, that circling from year eight to year twenty to year fifty-one, provide an illusion of more time? Are they a way of tricking myself into believing that mortality can be put off, and then put off again?⁵⁴⁰

If activity is what moves us as living beings towards the future, then writing, as Hustvedt notes, is an additional push towards exerting control over time, as well as to reflect on when certain futures were cancelled or taken away from us. For S.H., traumatic return and reflection is painful, but it also provides the illusory comfort of having more time, of being able to defer – though this deferral acts to repeat cycles of memory that end up holding the future at bay. As Freud posits, anxiety is a symptom that emerges from trauma in the past, but it is also, as Stonebridge notes, always a symptom that relates to the future, and an attempt to imagine another kind of future in which there is ‘yet time to turn it aside.’⁵⁴¹ However, as I have argued, future-oriented anxiety is contradictory and sticky in that both imagines other futures, and frustrates one’s ability to turn these futures aside. For Stonebridge, ‘the writing of anxiety [...] can be read as describing a kind of historiography of trauma; a writing which treats history not so much as enigmatic or unrepresentable,’ but ‘as a form of imaginative provocation.’⁵⁴² Further, ‘the writing of anxiety has its own kind of awkward and compromised historical agency; it at least allows us to dream on, as Bowen said, to ‘complete’ ourselves ‘in *some way*.’⁵⁴³ With this in mind, perhaps it is not that one needs to have experienced a major traumatic event in the past in order to be traumatised in the present and feel traumatised about the future. Rather, literature provides a space in which past, present, and future coexist –

⁵⁴⁰ Hustvedt, *Memories of the Future*, p. 128-129.

⁵⁴¹ Freud, ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,’ p. 166.

⁵⁴² Stonebridge, p. 5.

⁵⁴³ Stonebridge, p. 9. Original emphasis.

anxiety is always concerned with the future, and this future is, in the texts examined here, felt as inherently traumatic, whether one has experienced trauma or not. Trauma-oriented futures operate as a form of anxiety in literary texts precisely because, for both characters and readers, these texts provide room for the imagination of other futures, futures that have not yet been denied – we are permitted the space to dream on and to use traumatic pasts to create at least a capacity for a less traumatic future.

Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Literary Anxiety

The thing is I get scared it won't come. I'm back to thinking IJ was a fluke. I feel nothing lapidary inside. 'Until there is commitment, there is only ineffectiveness, delay – Goethe. How to make a commitment – to writing, to a somewhat healthy relationship, to myself. How to schedule things so that a certain portion of each day is devoted to writing. [...] I'm now scared. I'm now starting to want to run. I don't know what to do. Go to FedEx and movie. Fun after tennis. Play tennis well. Sit and relax. This seems formless and poor. Not hardly nothing in sight anyplace. The fear and frustration and self-doubt.⁵⁴⁴

Throughout this thesis I have analysed anxiety's presence in a range of contemporary American texts in order to suggest its interaction with, and effect on literature in general. In using the term literary anxiety, then, I refer not to an anxiety of writing literature (although, as Wallace's journal entry above attests, this anxiety may well be prevalent for writers), but rather, to the relationship between anxiety and literature, to the specific qualities of anxiety in literature, and to its transformative impact upon literature. Through the use of the term literary anxiety, I also acknowledge, as I have during the course of my analysis, that literature is a particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression and representation of anxiety, especially through its establishment of spaces and time to consider it. Literature provides new ways of thinking about and understanding anxiety. As such, in drawing conclusions here, I hope, by extension, to lay down some foundations for a theory of literary anxiety.

In developing this theory, it has been important to attend to a variety of fictional and non-fictional texts by Auster, Hustvedt, Díaz, and Wallace, all of which address a variety of anxious experiences from 1990-present. In each of these writers' work, anxiety is always situated, even when it feels free-floating. Just as Yasmin Gunaratnam argues that 'pain needs a body' and 'relies upon flesh to receive it and to register it,' anxiety must find its mind and/or body in a particular subject.⁵⁴⁵ This subject will shape the nature of the anxieties it bears, as well as how that anxiety

⁵⁴⁴ University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, MS-5155 Series II, Container 31.14.

⁵⁴⁵ Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Death and the Migrant: Bodies, Borders and Care* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 133.

manifests itself, while also serving as a site in which the ‘constituency and temporality of pain’ can be ‘approached as a complex, moving heterogeneity that [includes] the social, psychological, and the spiritual.’⁵⁴⁶ As the thesis’ first chapter argues, anxiety blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction and between imagination and fantasy, contributing to the sense of ‘formlessness’ that Wallace feels when writing of his own anxieties.⁵⁴⁷ Just as anxiety itself might attach or adapt to a variety of forms, there is also, then, the anxiety of finding a form. Panic in particular may prompt a radical change or indeed complete rupture of established tone and narrative(s): the feelings of entrapment, of ‘want[ing] to run,’ and of ‘nothing [being] in sight anyplace’ speak to the challenges inherent in bearing anxiety in a single body, particularly a previously healthy or ‘well’ body that once offered false promises of wholeness encapsulated within a linear story and trajectory.⁵⁴⁸ With attention to Arthur Frank’s idea that ‘the [ill] body sets in motion the need for new stories when its disease disrupts the old stories [...] so that the changed body can become once again familiar in these stories,’ I have argued that the anxious body defies such familiarity: indeed, it becomes troublingly alien.⁵⁴⁹ As such, the strict narrative categories that Frank outlines in *The Wounded Storyteller* cannot and will not apply – the psychological pain wrought by anxiety provokes a necessary multiplicity of body and narrative. The struggle to create a tangible story for the ill body that may restore a sense of unity or at least a semblance of control to and over the ill body is central to Siri Hustvedt’s and Paul Auster’s illness narratives, yet for both writers, anxiety wreaks havoc on these stories, prompting metaphorical transformations of the bodies they inhabit and imagine themselves as inhabiting.

In his consideration of disabled bodies, Ato Quayson remarks that ‘corporeal difference is part of a structure of power, and its meanings are governed by the unmarked regularities of the normate [...] there are various elements of this complex relationship that do not disclose themselves

⁵⁴⁶ Gunaratnam, p. 140. Here, Gunaratnam is thinking through Cicely Saunders’ concept of total pain and the issues inherent in separating out physical and mental pain in medicine.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Wallace, *Container* 31.14.

⁵⁴⁹ Frank, p. 2.

as elements of power as such, but rather as forms of anxiety, dissonance, and disorder.⁵⁵⁰ Working through these anxieties may be a route to finding a 'body', whether corporally or within a corpus of literary work. Quayson adds that 'the impairment is often taken to be the physical manifestation of the exact opposite of order,' and that 'the recognition of this radical contingency produces features of a primal scene of extreme anxiety whose roots lie in barely acknowledged vertiginous fears of loss of control over the body itself.'⁵⁵¹ While anxiety may not qualify as a disability, it may prove disabling. As Quayson notes, existing with corporeal difference and/or an impairment prompts further anxiety and emphasises feelings of powerlessness and disorder. Anxieties around a loss of control over the body are present in experiences of disability and illness more generally, contributing to the aesthetic nervousness that 'can be discerned in the suspension, collapse, or general short-circuiting of the hitherto dominant protocols of representation that may have governed the text.'⁵⁵² I have argued that this short-circuiting of representative protocols also occurs when anxiety is introduced in-text, particularly when this anxiety manifests itself as panic or a panic attack. I frame this narrative collapse in light of anxiety as an event in the illness narratives I have analysed: an event which typically constitutes the introduction of metaphorical proxy bodies that highlight the fluid and subjective nature of fictional boundaries, as well as the pitfalls inherent in Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact in the context of illness narratives.

Not only do these anxiety-events subvert reader's expectations of receiving 'truthful,' broadly realist accounts in illness narratives, they also disrupt understandings of the literary event as a whole. Michael Sayeau argues that 'to start a story is to enter into an implicit contract with your listener or reader that, at some point soon, something will happen and this something will be meaningful, whether banally or profoundly, simply or complexly,' and that 'works of literature are predicated on eventfulness, whatever the specific dynamics of the form in question.'⁵⁵³ Although it

⁵⁵⁰ Quayson, p. 17.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 26.

⁵⁵³ Sayeau, p. 29.

cannot be denied that the anxiety-events I explore in Chapter 1 are meaningful and constitute a significant 'something' within the texts' narratives, they do not offer the kind of narrative resolution or certainty associated with evental structures. Of course, anxiety does not offer this either: it may dissipate, but it is rarely resolved within its own anxious structures. In both Hustvedt's and Auster's narratives, where few answers and no cures are established, anxiety-events defy previously established tone and style, prompting a shift in form that establishes new timelines and chronologies of anxiety. Through a series of phenomenological close readings, then, I begin to unpack anxiety's ability to catalyse bodily and psychological change and to create new bodies and spaces in which Hustvedt and Auster can bear and contemplate their anxieties outside of the confines of their original bodies. The aim is to find a body in which narrative time can bear the anxiety as something that can be thought about rather than enacted. This analysis allows for the thesis' first contemplation of the narratology of anxiety, which forms one strand of the theory of literary anxiety this thesis seeks to outline.

Of course, this narratology of anxiety is inherently bound up with questions of form, which is why the thesis' second chapter moves to consider the short story's particular suitability for the representation of anxiety. Whereas the thesis' first chapter thinks about anxiety's influence on form, in Chapter 2 I have specifically chosen the short story form, which plays a significant part in the American literary tradition, to demonstrate how certain literary forms may influence how anxiety is represented. I then move to consider the recurring images of masks and masking that Díaz and Wallace conjure in their short stories in order to address racialised anxieties arising in these works. Through these two analytical threads, I have argued that the sense of claustrophobia that is induced by the short story form and by the motif of masking contributes to the overall uncertainty prompted by the bathos and/or narrative collapse that features and occurs so often in this form. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's idea that trauma is prompted by a 'lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly,' and Freud's assertion that anxiety is 'a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it,' I note that the uncertainty of the short story and the anxiety such uncertainty

and unpreparedness causes produces further anxiety, meaning an already anxious form's anxiety is reiterated in its content, too.⁵⁵⁴ In turn, this means the short story may operate as a performance of Eric Cazdyn's new chronic, enacting the logic that everything will remain the same with its tendency towards inconclusiveness. Just as Auster and Hustvedt's illness narratives implicate the reader in the anxieties therein, Díaz's and Wallace's short stories are fraught, claustrophobic, and generally unresolved, leaving characters and readers in a futureless limbo which is all the more unsettling due to the featured characters' young ages.

I have also used Chapter 2 to reflect on the varied temporalities of anxiety, ranging from the polar ends of the chronic and the acute (which, in the case of anxiety, often manifests itself as a panic attack). I continue this analysis in the thesis' final chapter, which politicises these temporalities in the context of a technologically advanced Global North that operates largely under and within systems of neoliberal capitalism. Within Chapter 2, I conclude that microfiction and the short story, by virtue of their brevity, enact a temporal acceleration that reiterates the temporality of panic as well as the quickening pace of our existence facilitated by technology and the increasing socio-political pressure to perform well and produce more in our working lives. Just as Wallace, in his diary extract, is at pains to feel productive and creatively 'effective' following the success of *Infinite Jest* (demonstrated by the visible speeding up and clipping of his thought processes in the extract), the stories I consider in Chapter 2 feature characters who are anxious about fulfilling certain roles and who exist in anxious worlds. The younger characters in these stories may also enhance the anxiety readers experience when encountering them, as the denial of a young future and the destruction of youthful innocence is especially painful and uncomfortable to witness. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that a reader may also feel a sense of satisfaction in 'working through' such anxieties.

Having thought through the significance of masking in the short story in relation to Emmanuel Levinas' theory of the face-to-face and its connection to anxious and traumatic

⁵⁵⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 62; Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' p. 12.

experiences, as well as how this relates more broadly to ideas of a lost or cancelled future and, in Mark Fisher's terms, the 'crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion' the 21st century encapsulates, I return to the chapter's central assertion that the short story is especially useful for the representation of panic and anxiety.⁵⁵⁵ Although Fisher's formulation here is more grounded in depression than anxiety, both conditions are linked to a sense that time cannot be used. In depression, we can observe an excess of time that is slow, sluggish, and that won't pass, while in anxiety, it is a rush of time that feels overwhelming, and which emphasises the finitude of the future. As well as laying foundations for later chapters' consideration of the relationship between anxiety, technology, temporality, and trauma, I have established further threads in the theory of literary anxiety. These pertain to the ways in which literary form interacts with anxiety and vice versa, the ways in which anxiety may be experienced by a reader when encountering anxiety, anxiety's complex temporalities, and the relationship between trauma and anxiety.

In the thesis' third chapter, I have investigated the relationship between anxiety, hypermasculinity, and the performance of masculinity in Díaz's work, with attention to the #MeToo movement and allegations of sexual assault made against Díaz in 2018. Developments in critical masculinity studies have led to the formulation of 'an actual history of American masculinity as crisis,' explicitly linking experiences of masculinity with experiences of anxiety.⁵⁵⁶ Díaz's male characters perform an exaggerated and often violent version of Dominican masculinity, which, unlike in Butler's conceptualisation of gender as 'a construction that regularly conceals its genesis,' is clearly inherited from peers and family members.⁵⁵⁷ Characters such as Yuniór highlight how it is a necessity to demonstrate adherence to this kind of performance in order to keep up appearances and appease any anxiety about being perceived as weak, effeminate, or homosexual. These anxieties are paired with a racialised dual existence, which prompts Díaz's characters to fulfil both American and Dominican stereotypes of masculinity in order to attempt to assimilate while also satisfying

⁵⁵⁵ Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 8

⁵⁵⁶ Traister, 'Academic Viagra,' p. 287.

⁵⁵⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 178.

Dominican peers. For Yuniór, Oscar, and other male characters in Díaz's work, anxiety about masculinity is closely bound up with anxieties about diasporic experience, racial identity, and ethnicity, and becomes, in turn, an anxiety about being anxious, which would betray these characters' hypermasculine performances.

From absent fathers, to existence under Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship, to 'proving' heterosexuality and refuting claims of homosexuality at all costs, to demonstrating physical strength, to avoiding appearing emotional or expressive, Díaz's male characters have a wide range of anxieties that are related to the continuation of hypermasculine performances, and the avoidance of any source of shame. While Díaz's writing is attentive to the problematic nature of stereotypes of Dominican (and more broadly, Latino) men, his work also employs and reinforces such stereotypes in order to suggest that it may be impossible to entirely depart from such models of masculinity. Anxiety is very rarely named or labelled specifically as such in Díaz's work, yet it is ever-present in characters' behaviours and language, and is neatly encapsulated in the Freudian resonances of characters' challenging relationships with their abusive, hypermasculine fathers. I have argued that characters' failure to perform Dominican hypermasculinity operates as an act of disidentification – a 'survival [strategy] the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship,' in José Esteban Muñoz's words.⁵⁵⁸ Indeed, his eventual conformity to Dominican hypermasculinity through sleeping with a woman who was previously sexually involved with a gangster results in his murder. Several members of Oscar's family also succumb to such violence, which is, of course another form of hypermasculine performance: and one that sometimes has homoerotic elements in order to further 'humiliate' the victim into a position of weakness and effeminacy. Torture methods used by the Trujillato, apart from violent beatings, include the use of leather truncheons and a focus on genitalia as a site of torture. While

⁵⁵⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, p. 3.

Yunior's writing is eventually presented as partially redemptive of his previously hypermasculine behaviour, it does not address the anxieties that prompted it in the first place, nor does it interrogate the meaning or ramifications of such behaviour. Nonetheless, in analysing Díaz's male protagonists, and particularly in considering Oscar's partially unintentional acts of resistance against hypermasculine performance, I have begun to unpack how gender and race will influence both what one is anxious about, and how that anxiety finds and settles in its mind and body, in Gunaratnam's terms.

Finally, I have attended to the relationship between trauma and anxiety, particularly in the context of work by Paul Saint-Amour, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Eric Cazard, and Mark Fisher on the notion of a suspended, denied, or cancelled future. In thinking through this relationship, I have concluded that anxiety (particularly around technology and temporality) operates as a form of future-oriented trauma, that unlike depression, is overwhelming because time is moving us too quickly towards this future. Anxiety here constitutes a mourning for lives we will not lead because of the wide range of threats our world now faces. A literary approach has allowed me to pay particular attention to the language of these trauma-inflected anxieties, which in turn, provides a clearer picture of the affective resonances of these anxieties. A character or writer may be acutely aware of the risks that will result in the future being cancelled, and yet is very unlikely to have the means to prevent these risks from being actualised. As such, a close focus on language also reveals how anxiety interacts with temporality and narrative time, speeding up and slowing down a character's experiences as they face 'an apparently inescapable future' in an act of 'mass-traumatic anticipation of violence.'⁵⁵⁹ In the case of future-anxiety, this anticipation can operate at an individual as well as collective level, and does not necessarily rely on overt experiences of trauma and catastrophe: indeed, the anxiety surrounding a denied future may even be heightened by the uncertainty around

⁵⁵⁹ Paul K. Saint-Amour, p. 311-12.

how it will be denied, and an inability, through lack of direct experience, to meaningfully anticipate what the trauma that is to come will be like or how it will feel to experience it.

Hustvedt's characters in *Sorrows of an American* and *Memories of the Future* overtly reference their trauma and its resonances, and these resonances often manifest themselves as anxiety about the future. On the other hand, central characters in *Infinite Jest* generally do not acknowledge themselves as having experienced trauma, despite many of them having had very difficult pasts. They do, however, share a sense of anxiety and dread about the future, bearing the temporal weight of this anxiety, which is itself highlighted by the non-chronological, scrambled nature of the entire text. Here, characters are existing in 'chemically troubled times,' meaning they are acutely aware of the unstable nature of their existence, particularly under the leadership of incompetent political figures who have ruined the country's environment.⁵⁶⁰ At an individual level, Hal Incandenza's descriptions of his time at the Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA) are often narrated with an urgent, scarcely punctuated voice that speaks to the anxieties he experiences around sporting performance and his future. Equally, Hustvedt's Sonia, having witnessed 9/11, fails to acknowledge or imagine the future, which eventually leads her to an anxious breakdown during which she denies the world she lives in. However, in acknowledging the relationship between her trauma and her anxiety about the future, she is able to slow the pace of her own narrative, at least temporarily.

I have also considered the specific influence that technology has on anxious temporalities, with technologies constantly accelerating the pace of life and causing further anxiety through this acceleration. In turn, this acceleration has contributed to the feeling that the future has been cancelled, and has also, according to Benjamin Noys, contributed to a placating and neutralising sense of overwhelm, exploiting 'the speed of modern media technologies to overcome our

⁵⁶⁰ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 151.

capacities for response and [leave] us reeling.⁵⁶¹ From *Infinite Jest*'s videophony to *Sorrows of an American*'s photo editing, technologies in both novels are utilised so that characters feel a sense of control over their own lives – yet in both cases this proves insufficient in dispelling future-anxiety altogether, or in actually changing or tackling the traumatic futures that may be coming. Yet, by virtue of these future-anxieties being represented in a literary sphere, there is always the opportunity for another interpretation, and there is always space to imagine a different future that is divorced from traumatic pasts and the traumatic futures these pasts threaten. In this sense, literary form may offer the capacity for another kind of time.

With all of this in mind, we can outline a theory of literary anxiety that attends to anxiety's place in literature, as well as the ways it interacts with and disrupts literature. Anxiety may, by producing its own aesthetic anxiousness, rupture established narratives and call in to question the suitability of particular forms and particular bodies to bear it. Literary anxiety, then, shines a light on how form responds to anxiety, and how anxiety responds to form. It may induce a kind of transmission of affect, to borrow from Teresa Brennan, whereby anxiety on the page is felt by the reader holding the book, or it may, through the breakdown of certain narratives and formal shifts, make the reader feel anxious because of its ability to speed up or slow down a text's pace. In a psychoanalytic sense, then, the page or text itself may 'contain' anxiety. Literary anxiety also speaks to the relationship between trauma and anxiety, particularly when this trauma manifests itself as anxiety about the future that is linked to traumatic pasts. It allows, too, for a more nuanced consideration of gendered and racialised experiences of anxiety, which are shaped by different sources and symptoms of anxiety too. Literature provides an apt space to consider anxiety's relationships to technology, to time, and, as I have stated, to unsettling, uncertain, or denied futures in contexts of global unrest. Perhaps most crucially, literary anxiety unfolds in an imaginative sphere:

⁵⁶¹ Benjamin Noys, *The Culture of Death*, p. 107. It is worth noting here that this is a critique of accelerationist discourses that might exult in technology and an idea of sweeping away: it is a more standard attachment to Left melancholia.

it lets us see how an affect and a condition that can be experienced in all manner of ways, both physically and psychologically, appears and operates outside of the confines of clinical definitions. We are thus able to discern all manner of additional details about anxiety's effect on language and literary technique, on form, on narrative – on the very fabric of a text and the characters that inhabit it – about its structures of feeling, which '[define] forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process'.⁵⁶² This is, of course, a mutual relationship, so in turn, our understanding of anxiety is affected by these features. This insight speaks to anxiety's multiplicities and its power to alter not only the person it affects, but the structures that exist around them, too. In a world that seems to become ever more uncertain, and in times that seem to unfold at an ever-accelerating pace, yet simultaneously, in Lisa Baraitser's formulation, are experienced as 'stuck, perpetually present and unable to change,' these insights into the anxiety these circumstances prompt are all the more important.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶² Williams, p. 24.

⁵⁶³ Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 8.

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