



Entangled Fictions: A Quantum Approach to Narrative and Identity in Selected Literary Novels

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Abstract

Traditional literary approaches often treat characters as arrested instantiations whose identities are slowly revealed over the course of a plot with causal implications. While the assumption of a kind of stability in fiction has been significantly challenged by modern and postmodern fiction, all of the tools that are wielded to explain this instability remain largely within linguistic or philosophical frameworks. In this article, I present an alternative reading of literary characters by developing a quantum narratological framework. Quantum mechanics presents that we might see fictional characters as existing in multiple identities as states all at once, rather than having single state of identity.

From this vantage point, characters are fields of narrative potential that only seem bounded within a specific moment in the narrative or reading. The reader's interaction with the text is parallel to the quantum observer whose measurement forces a spectrum of possibilities into a temporary and contingent state. Through close readings of novels that refuse linear models of identity formation, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Waves*, and *Never Let Me Go* have never been discussed together in this way. The study explores how narrative structures enable such multiplicity. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship can be reframed through the logic of the entangled: two individuals so fundamentally interwoven that it becomes impossible to disentangle a meaningfully separate identity. Woolf's fluid narrative voices in *The Waves* tend towards a superpositional model of subjectivity, while Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* emphasizes the function of observation and interpretation within character identity.

Through a distinctive synthesis of insights from physics, narratology and reader-response theory the article contends that quantum narratology constitutes a fruitful interdisciplinary framework for addressing the instability, relationality and openness of character in modern and contemporary fiction.

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1. Introduction

The classical literary theory presents the characters as coherent psychological agents. These agents are governed by stable motivations and bounded by an ontological frame. If we examine literature starting from Aristotle's *Poetics* and finishing with realism, we will find that literary characters are presented traditionally as figures of development and resolution. But such assumptions are rejected by the appearance of modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary narrative experimentation. These experimentations have shifted from focusing on society in general to the fragmented identities in multi-voiced structures.

They are not necessarily in the same line and order. In this article, I present a new way of understanding the quantum narratology through reimagining the characters not based on their essence and their stable entity but on a dynamic and indeterminate, coping instable characteristics of the quantum mechanics.

Quantum physics, such as Superposition, entanglement and the observer effect, represents a substantial break from classical Newtonian models of reality. It challenges fixed ideas of identity and causality. As Niels Bohr famously said, "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth". (Bohr, 1949, p. 201) ^[5] In this sense, reality in literature is not fixed but depends on perspective and situation. When quantum ideas are applied to narrative theory, they offer useful ways of understanding the complexity and ambiguity of literary character.

In *The Waves* novel, which is one of Virginia Woolf's masterworks, she presents six characters who frequently merge and overlap, making it difficult for them to exist as separate individuals. The idea of superposition (a particle vibrates across all its states at the same time and it collapses into one when we observe it) could come to be useful for understanding characters who do not follow any line. As Bernard, writes, "we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (Woolf, 2000, p. 11) ^[17]. Here, identity is not restricted, it is spread out like a quantum field of possibilities waiting for a story or a reader to give it a clear form.

In *Wuthering Heights* novel, Heathcliff and Catherine are so intertwined that it is impossible to have one character without the other in a single-story line. This leads us to the concept of Entanglement. It is the phenomenon where two particles remain connected regardless of distance between them, is an alternative perspective on the strong relationships of the characters. For example, when Catherine says, "I am Heathcliff", the line between subject and object has lost. (Brontë, 1998, p. 82) ^[6] The emotional and symbolic nature of both the characters as a single entity corresponds to the quantum body. So, we can refer this to where individual particles are parts of a single state system rather than separate units.

Also, the observer effect (the idea that observing something changes its status) closely equals the reader-response theory. It seems that identity is not something fixed or self-centered, it emerges through relationships and interpretations. So, we can decide that a character is not singular or totally formed on its own, it is co-created in the encounter between the reader and the text.

Wolfgang Iser points out that "the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process". (Iser, 1978, p. 92) ^[12] In these cases, meaning is not fixed in the words themselves, but is formed through the reader's imagination. This can be compared to the way a quantum state changes when it is observed. So, reading is an active process that the reader helps to shape the text and also turns multiple possible meanings into one temporary meaning.

As a result of what is mentioned above, I explore how the theory of quantum narratology can offer a wide scope for understanding literary characters. So, by close reading of *The Waves*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *Wuthering Heights* novels, I examine how fictional identity can be understood based on probability rather than essentiality and present the character not as a stable figure that is limited by the text, but is

presented as a shifting field of possibilities, one that only takes form through the act of observation and interpretation.

2. A Primer on Quantum Mechanics for Literary Readers

Quantum mechanics has redefined matter, causality and reality itself. While this world is far removed from the usual approach of literary criticism, its central principles clearly show that metaphor and structure can help us to understand fiction. As Karen Barad writes, as part of her ongoing project to challenge the basics of classical epistemology, ontology, and ethics. I see this as showing how quantum physics makes us rethink the usual ways, we understand these fields. (Barad, 2007) So, it is important to challenge the classical literary character. In this part, I will introduce three important principles which are superposition, entanglement and the observer, use these as the basis for what I call a quantum narratological approach.

- **Superposition:** Being in More Than One State at Once
In classical physics, at all times an object is in exactly one clear state. In quantum mechanics, things work differently. Particles can exist in more than one state at once. A simple way to understand this paradox is through Schrödinger's famous experiment. If we put a cat inside a sealed box with a quantum trigger, it can be considered both alive and dead until someone opens the box and observes it. The paradox lies not in the cat itself, but rather between the states of the cat before we observe it. This idea changes our understanding of the literary characters. A superpositional character can exist with conflicting desires, identities or paths at once until the action of the reader or the story itself demands a resolution. Susan Strehle argues in *Fiction in the Quantum Universe* (1992), that postmodern and "actualist" fiction often moves away from traditional stories. Instead, it embraces plurality, contradiction, and simultaneity that reflect the influence of quantum ideas about reality specially the concept of superposition.
- **Entanglement:** How Identities Stay Connected Across Distance
In quantum entanglement, two particles become connected in such a way that the state of one immediately affects the other, no matter how far they are. Albert Einstein famously has presented it as "spooky action at a distance." In literature, we can see the same effect in characters who are closely connected that their emotion or symbolic roles cannot be separated.

In this network of connected of identities, entangled characters can be far apart from each other or even exist in the same moment of the story. Just like quantum particles, one character cannot completely be understood without the other. This idea of rational identity contrast with the modernist perspective of independency and it points toward more flexible and independent model of selfhood.

- **The Observer Effect:** How Observation Shapes What We See
In quantum mechanics, the observer effect means that measuring a system forces a superposition to collapse into a single state. This suggest that reality is not completely objective since it is shaped by the act of observation. As Werner Heisenberg has argued, "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning." (Heisenberg 1958 p. 58) ^[11]

In terms of literature, I see the idea as closely connected with reader-response theory. Wolfgang Iser's concept of the "implied reader" suggest that meaning only comes alive when someone reads the text. As Iser explains, "Effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process." (Iser, 1978, p.92) ^[12] In quantum narratology, a character can have many possible identities at the same time. Its only when the reader interprets them, even shortly, that one identity comes to be visible.

I see these quantum ideas (superposition, entanglement and the observer) as a guide for understanding the character in a different way. Instead of being fixed, characters are unstable possibilities, defined by their relationships, the narrative, and the reader's role in shaping them.

A. Superposition: Characters' Identity Before we Observe Them in *The Waves*

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) is a perfect example for exploring quantum superposition in development of the character. Instead of following a traditional plot or tracing the character's growth, the novel uses a flexible polyphonic structure. Six voices (Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis) take turns sharing internal monologues combining the individual with the collective. The characters are constantly in the process of becoming (they are not fixed, but exist in the field of possibilities). Like quantum particles, they can exist in several, sometimes conflicting, narrative states until readers engage with and "measure" them.

3. Breaking Down the Boundaries of the Self

The voices in *The Waves* novel are not fixed in stable psychological identities. They overlap and reflect each other, blurring the boundaries of self. As Bernard states, "We melt into each other with phrases". Virginia Woolf describes this beautifully: "We make an unsubstantial territory". (Woolf, 2000, p. 13) This sense of flexibility and blurred identity shows literary superposition at work. Characters, sharing a textual space, shift between being individual and being part of a collective patterns. The idea of being "edged with mist" is similar to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, which shows that it is impossible to know both where a particle is exactly and how it is moving at the same time. In the same way, Woolf's characters resist being pinned down, they cannot be captured in a single, fixed reading.

Julie Vandivere points out that *The Waves* "represents the self not as a unitary subject but as a field of forces," with characters taking the role not as complete psychological whole but as "currents of perception and memory". (Vandivere 1997, 34) ^[16] This idea fits well with the quantum concept that particles or selves are better described by probabilities, existing as clouds of possible states until someone observes and fixes the states of the other.

4. Multiple Identities in One Person

Virginia Woolf gives her characters multiple layers of subjectivity even within a single monologue. Rhoda caught in intense anxiety and deep alienation, expresses a desire to dissolve and disappear: "I am not here. I am not there. I am in the long grass. I am in a boat. I am out in the garden with the curtains blowing". (Woolf, 2000, p. 93) ^[17] Her sense of self moves freely through space and time, untethered from the story. She exists as field of possible selves (a poetic reflection of quantum coherence, where particles can occupy multiple

places at once.

Gillian Beer notes in Virginia Woolf: *The Common Ground* (1996) ^[4], that Woolf fiction often avoids the usual unities of time and character development, instead presenting "a multitude of experiences as they overlap". This approach challenges traditional narrative realism. In *The Waves*, reality feels quantum: flexibility, indeterminate, and shape by the reader's observation.

5. The Destruction of the Self Through Observation

In *The Waves*, characters often exist in a superpositional state. Whenever the story, or the characters' emotions, focuses on them, it acts like a "measurement" that temporarily collapsing their multiple possibilities into a more defines states. The death of Percival, though we never see him, serves as this kind of intervention. It triggers changes in all the characters' sense of self, bringing them into order based on the emotional need. Louis, who had felt out of place and longed for social recognition at the start of the novel, briefly finds meaning in the experience of loss. After Percival's death, Bernard reflects on his memory, seeing him as a symbolic presence living within their shared consciousness (Woolf, 2000, p. 129)

Percival's symbolic role can be understood as similar to a measurement in a quantum system; an external event that brings internal uncertainty into a more defined form. As Karen Barad explains, "the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the phenomenon of observation". (Barad, 2007 p. 333) In the same way, Woolf's characters do not begin as fully formed identities. Instead, they take shape through their emotional and interpretive interactions with others (whether with each other, the narrator, or the reader).

In *The Waves* novel, Woolf does not follow the usual rules of storytelling. Instead, she creates a world that works more like quantum possibilities than psychological realism. Her characters are not fixed, they exist in multiple states at once, emotionally, in time and across the space. They only settle into a form shortly, when the reader pays attention or when the story focuses on them. This shows something important about modern literature, the self is not something ready-made. It grows, shifts, and becomes through our engagement with it.

A. Entangled Selves: The Nonlocal Identity in *Wuthering Heights*

If quantum superposition can serve as a metaphor for the simultaneous existence of a plurality of states of the character, then quantum entanglement describes a model of relational identity. Entanglement distinguishes those identities that find the deepest, most primary, invariable connection – unrecoverable and permanent – even beyond time, space, life, and death. The most acute case of this phenomenon in the literary realm is presented by Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights*.

6. Identity Beyond Separation

The relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff is impossible to describe sequentially and causally, and they continue to out of the reach of the narrator's descriptive gaze. They suggest metaphysical entanglement when the identity of each of the participants in such an interaction cannot be revealed exclusively, without reference to the other. Their bond, the most profound, consuming, and indefinite – a passionate and unresolving death-sentence – resembles a

quantum state of two coupled particles whose properties are correlated without changing, regardless of the distance between them. Catherine and Heathcliff are not two discrete entities that have gradually complemented each other – they are entangled selves. From the very beginning, Catherine and Heathcliff are not seen as reciprocally complementary, but ontologically inseparable. The famous “I am Heathcliff” is not an expression of love or psychological intimacy. In Heisenbergian terms, she and Heathcliff are in an entangled state: the properties of one of them are approximate without describing the second. Such an identity in the relationship increases complexity, and the plot becomes more entangled state. After Catherine’s death, her figure continues to determine Heathcliff’s reality, spatially and temporally-local. “I cannot live without my life! I cannot die without my soul.” Here Catherine is not Heathcliff as a lost object of love. She is a person essential to his nature. Karen Barad: “entanglements are not intertwinings of separate entities but rather, the constitution of relata”. Catherine and Heathcliff are not separate integrated ones – they become themselves precisely out of the interaction with each other, as a part in this entanglement.

7. Haunting Beyond Space and Time

Catherine does not disappear from narrative space upon her death. And instead, she haunts the landscape, the house and — most important of all — Heathcliff’s mind. In quantum physics, nonlocality designates the tendency for entangled particles to instantaneously influence each other’s states over long distances. Brontë also conveys a narrative equivalent through Heathcliff’s mysterious, obsessive bond to Catherine’s ghostly figure. He confesses to Nelly:

I think, I know that ghosts have walked on earth. Be with me straight always, do you take the shape, make me crazy! but you must not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! (Brontë, 1998, p. 243) ^[6]

We can learn from what is quoted above that Catherine’s identity is not limited to her physical death. She still has an effect on Heathcliff and this works as a force that goes beyond the limits of the body, space, and time that we know. It shows that her presence still active even after her death. So, Heathcliff and Catherine’s relation is not only emotional but it is tied to their existence in a deep way. It reflects what Karen Barad argues “space, time and matter do not exist separately... they are material phenomena that emerge through entangled intra-actions” (Barad, 2007, p. 180) ^[2].

8. Entangled Time in Narrative Structure

Wuthering Heights novel does not start and finish in the same line. It changes from one narrator to a different one and from moment to another, and then, it returns again and again to the same event. We can see that the past and the present are tangled together. In the center of this tangle, we find the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff. It is considered as an emotional connection which knots the whole story and keeps it circling around.

To clarify what had happened at *Wuthering Heights* in the past, Nelly and Lockwood take turns to narrate the story like a kind of measurement. The novel, therefore, can be read as a kind of entangled system, where identity is rational and inseparable. Catherine and Heathcliff are not independent beings; each of them depends on the other for their very existence.

Their love is not a love in the usual sense. It is a deeper kind of connection that shapes who they are, and it does not end with death. Instead, it continues in different forms, leaving behind a lasting and un resolved sense of meaning that cannot be closed or fully explained.

9. Never Let Me Go: How Observation Shapes Identity and Limits Possibility

The observer effect in quantum physics suggest that measuring a system forces it into many possible states. Observation, then, does not only reveal reality it helps to shape it. Kazuo Ishiguro in his novel *Never Let Me Go*, presents the same idea. The clones in his novel are created for organ donation. They live in a limited space of awareness and they rarely question their situation until it is too late. Their lives are shaped and restricted by how others see and classify them, even by the readers. In this way, the novel shows how perception can determine what identities and futures are possible.

9.1. Being Viewed as a Tool of Control

In Hailsham school, the clones live under constant but unclear observation. Their drawings and behavior are quietly watched and assessed. Miss Emily later explains that the children were encouraged to make art because it was a meant to comfort them and show who they were. It also proves that they had souls (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 255) ^[14]. In other words, they were not treated as fully independent people, but as subjects of study, and their humanity depended on being recognized by the others.

Heisenberg’s idea suggests that “We cannot look directly at nature ... what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (Heisenberg, 1958, p. 58) ^[11]. So, following the same idea, the clones do not have a clear or fixed humanity. Their humanity is shaped by the ways others see and interpret them. Their drawings, are not just creativity, but a kind of evaluation that helps to determine their status and possibilities.

9.2. Kathy as Observer and Narrator

Kathy, as a narrator in this novel, is both participant and observer in the story. This makes the idea of observation become complex. Kathy looks back on the story events through memory. She maintains both of the participant and observer, and changes them at the same time. So, as a narrator of the story, she keeps interpreting what happened. Phrases that give us feeling of uncertainty (such as ‘I am not sure’ and ‘maybe’) are used so much in her narration. It gives a sense of instability and hesitation, much like the idea of certainty in quantum physics

Kathy does not retell everything as it happened. Instead, she takes specific stances from her memory and shapes them into words. This makes her way of telling the story becomes more ordered than the real experience. Dominic Head argues that her narration depends on selection and omission, so the full truth of the events is always out of reach (Head, 2009, p. 86) ^[10].

So, as seen through quantum lens, Kathy’s memories behave like wave functions which are flexible and multiple. It is only when she tells them that they settle into a clearer form, though never a complete one. Her way of narration become a way of shaping her and the others identities especially Tommy and Ruth.

9.3. The Reader as Ethical Observer

The novel's ethical power comes from the way it places the reader in the position of being the last witness in the story. Ishiguro doesn't give the reader complete information about the clone system until late in the story, leaving us to face our own complicity for not having asked the right questions. When Madame recoils in horror from Kathy and Tommy — "It's you two.. You poor creatures" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 256)^[14] — that effect is not simply narrative but meta-narrative. It reflects back onto the reader, who might similarly have failed to fully see the protagonists' subjectivity.

As Lisa Zunshine contends in *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006)^[18], the novel emphasizes how limited is a reader's theory of mind by demonstrating that readers have to work through what characters might be thinking or feeling — but in doing so it also pushes readers to confront the challenge of bestowing inner lives, particularly onto characters who are socially marginalized or marked as "other.". So, the novel literalizes the observer effect: our awareness — or lack of it — actively molds what's meaningful and possible for the narrative's subjects.

In *Never Let Me Go*, observation is active. It structures possibility. The clones are made visible in particular, instrumentalized ways — evaluated, documented, judged — but not seen as fully human. Ishiguro's novel, then, dramatizes a tragic kind of quantum collapse: possible selves that never quite coalesce because the very act of observation has preempted them.

10. A Historical and Theoretical Survey of Quantum Paradigm Shift

The effects of quantum narratology aren't limited to specific pieces of writing; they invite a rethinking of the literary theory itself. Traditional literary criticism, often based on structuralism or historicism that treats texts as stable objects, that can yield fixed meanings through appropriate methods. Quantum narratology also destabilizes this principle of textual fixity, but rather than asserting the static thingness of a text as a basis for movability, instead argues that texts are fields of potential energy, in which meanings only arise through relational, contextual embodied acts of reading.

10.1. Replacing Fixed Structure with Indeterminacy

Much as classical physics assumed a deterministic universe, much of classical narratology assumes a coherent, mappable narrative structure, beginning, middle, end. The novels in this study do not follow the same line and structure or even giving clear endings. Through quantum narratology, the stories can be understood as something that appears and changes depending on the context. In this sense, Brathes' concept of the "writerly text" (Brathes, 1974) is relevant since it sees meaning as something produced in reading rather than fixed in advance, the text becomes active when we read it.

10.1. Rethinking Subjectivity and the Self

Ideas like 'quantum entanglement' and 'the observer effect' help us to rethink of the fixed, independent self. This challenge was developed in poststructuralist thought specially in the works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. They showed that identity is formed through social and discursive processes. The quantum theory extends this by emphasizing material relation as well. The self is not independent of its surroundings. It is shaped through continuous interactions with the others and the environment

in what Karen Barad calls "intra-action" (Barad, 2007, p. 136)^[2].

Here, the identities in *Wuthering Heights* and *Never Let Me Go* novels are not just psychological forms. They point to a way of understanding existence itself as flexible, and not fixed in advance. This makes it possible to read these texts through feminist, post-humanist, and other emotional approaches without considering their strict or stable definitions.

10.2. Reading as Quantum Measurement

One of the most important ideas in this approach is it changes the role of the reader. Interpretation is traditionally considered as a way of finding the meaning inside any text. In quantum narratology, it becomes more active that it helps to produce the meaning. Each reading becomes an "event" as Derrida suggests, where one meaning is formed temporarily, but never permanently fixed or closed.

This idea builds on 'reader-response' theory but it makes it more complicated. The reader is not outside the text but part of it just like the observer is part of a quantum system. Meaning does not exist independently in the text, it is it is formed through the relationship between the reader and the text. Barad explains that "phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components" (Barad, 2007, p. 333)^[2].

11. Moral Commitments in a Wild World

Quantum narratology also raises an ethical point about reading. If meaning is formed through interactions, then interpretation carries the responsibility. Just as observing something can effect it in physics, engaging with a story can change how it is understood and remembered. This means that we have to be aware of the story whenever we read it since there can be multiple meaning and that each of us can interpret the story from different perspective.

This view fits well with several theories like the postcolonial and ecocritical theories. They focus on the secondary and the hidden voices and reject one fixed interpretation. Quantum narratology does not take their place. It adds to them and helps to describe the meanings that they are still developing and not fully finished.

12. Conclusion

In this article, I have presented the ideas from the quantum physics such as superposition, entanglement, and the observer effect. They can help us to understand the character, time, and reality in the modern and contemporary novels in new ways. These ideas are not just metaphors, they offer a way of thinking that correspond with modern literature and how it questions the fixed ideas about identity, time, and truth.

The Waves novel of Virginia Woolf presents characters whose their identities shift between different possibilities and they become clear for a moment through narration or reading. While in *Wuthering Heights* novel of Emily Bronte, she creates a world where identities are deeply connected through the relationships in a way that even death can not separate them. In *Never Let Me Go* novel of Kazuo Ishiguro he shows how being observed shapes the lives of the characters as their futures are guided and limited by how others look at and define them.

So, this perspective does not turn literature into science. It rather sees literature as something like the mechanisms of

quantum. It is just like a space where uncertainty and ambiguity are not weaknesses. They are necessary conditions for meaning. So, both literary theory and the quantum concepts question the fixed truth. It suggests that meaning is flexible and contextual, and it is formed through its engagement between the story and its reader.

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