

“Revisiting ‘Third-Person’ Narrative Unreliability:
Wayne C. Booth and the Bases for an Inclusive Approach to Unreliable Narration”

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Sixty years have passed since Wayne C. Booth conceptualized narrative unreliability and, by doing so, laid the foundation for a spirited critical debate that shows no signs of relenting even now. Working in the context of rhetorical and communicative theory, and building on intuitive judgements made by earlier critics about delusional or heavily ironized narrators, he conceived of unreliability as that which happens when a set of factual and/or ideological discrepancies develop between the narrator’s account of the storyworld and the authorial tacit version of it as inferred by the reader. This version he expressly identified with what he called the “norms of the work,” thus giving rise to an unresolved duality no doubt derived from his hesitant view of the implied author as both an anthropomorphic and a textual construct.¹

No sooner had his felicitous conception of unreliability gained currency as a convenient critical tool than a deluge of papers more or less directly inspired by it began to accrue and diversify. Most scholars followed Booth’s theoretical lead—especially his apt coinage—but differed in how they credited him. Some explicitly held to his view of unreliable narration and discussed it at variable length as they undertook their own analyses²; others used his insights, but settled their debts less generously by means of perfunctory footnotes or just by entering his name in a reference list³; others, however, rather ungraciously, chose to remain silent.⁴ Many

¹ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 21983 [1961], p. 158; see also pp. 73–75. Henceforth to be cited parenthetically in the text as *RF*.

² See, among others, Robert L. Gale, “The Abasement of Mrs. Warren Hope,” in: *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 78.1 (1963), pp. 98–102; Ora Segal, “‘The Liar’: A Lesson in Devotion,” in: *The Review of English Studies* 16.63 (1965), pp. 272–281; Thoma E. Boyle, “Unreliable Narration in *The Great Gatsby*” in: *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, in: 23.1 (1969), pp. 21–26; Daniel J. Schneider, “The Unreliable Narrator: James’s ‘The Aspern Papers’ and the Reading of Fiction,” in: *Studies in Short Fiction* 13.1 (1978), pp. 43–49; Stanley J. Kozikowski, “Unreliable Narration in Henry James’s ‘The Two Faces’ and Edith Wharton’s ‘The Dilettante,’” in: *Arizona Quarterly* 35 (1979), pp. 357–372.

³ For instance, Gideon Shunami, “The Unreliable Narrator in *Wuthering Heights*,” in: *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 27.4 (1973), pp. 449–468; Thomas LeClair, “The Unreliability of Innocence: John Hawkes’ *Second Skin*,” in: *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 3.1 (1973), pp. 32–39; René Prieto, “Mimetic Stratagems: The Unreliable Narrator in Latin American Literature,” in: *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 19.3 (1985), pp. 61–73.

⁴ See Philip M. Weinstein, “The Exploitative and Protective Imagination: Unreliable Narration in *The Sacred Fount*,” in: *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice*, Morton W. Bloomfield (ed.), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970. pp. 189–209; Esther Fuchs, “The Unreliable Narrator in Agnon’s *Ancestral Tales*,” in: *Prooftexts* 3.3 (1983), pp. 278–284.

of these studies predictably addressed the Anglo-American tradition of prose narrative—the dramatic monologue being, of course, a notable exception⁵—whereas fewer targeted fictional works in other languages such as, for instance, Spanish, German, Russian, Portuguese, and Hebrew.⁶ Papers like Berendsen’s showed keen theoretical awareness, pitting Booth’s scheme against later attempts as a preparatory move to examine the unreliable narrator of Austen’s *Emma* (1816)⁷; others, for their part, unconcerned with amending or enriching Booth’s proposal, just employed its analytic potential. Finally, some critical works explored new angles of approach to well-established, consensually unreliable narrative texts, while others provided original readings of hitherto unnoted instances of narratorial deficiency. Among the former, two early papers by Segal and Hux respectively tackle Henry James’s “The Liar” (1888) and “The Aspern Papers” (1888), both held to be remarkable specimens of Jamesian unreliability.⁸ Segal discredits the received critical polarity between an upright and a hypocritical Lyon, and portrays him as an accomplished, discerning individual who, at the crucial hour, fails to size up Mrs. Capadose’s devotion to her husband, while Hux highlights the unnamed narrator’s incapacity to grasp the symbolic role of Jeffrey Aspern’s papers which the alert reader readily apprehends, he argues, under the guidance of the implied James. Two other standard testing grounds for unreliability, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925), are the object of Shunami’s and Boyle’s papers. Shunami upholds Nelly Dean’s and Lockwood’s unreliability—and even Isabella’s when she temporarily becomes a narrator—for they are “fraught with misunderstanding of the spirit of the protagonists and the meaning of their actions.”⁹ And Nick Carraway, for Boyle, is similarly unreliable in Booth’s terms as he “reveals more than he is aware of,” an assertion he substantiates by bringing up a number of cases where Carraway’s account subverts its own ostensible meaning.¹⁰ In the category one might call non-

⁵ See Robert Cornet, “The Structures of Unreliability in Browning’s *Men and Women*,” Diss. Pennsylvania State University, 1972; James R. Bennett, “Inconscience: Henry James and the Unreliable Speaker of the Dramatic Monolog,” in: *Ball State University Forum* 28.1 (1987), pp. 74–84.

⁶ Respectively, James W. Brown, “*El hermano asno*: When the Unreliable Narrator Meets the Unreliable Reader,” in: *Hispania* 71.4 (1988), pp. 798–805; Noel L. Thomas, “Oskar, the Unreliable Narrator in Gunter Grass’s *Die Blechtrommel*,” in: *New German Studies* 3 (1975), pp. 31–47; Norman W. Ingham, “The Case of the Unreliable Narrator: Leskov’s ‘White Eagle,’” in: *Studies in Russian Literature in Honor of Vsevolod Setchkarev*, Julian W. Connolly, et al. (ed.), Columbus: Slavica, 1986, pp. 153–165; Earl E. Fitz, “The Problem of the Unreliable Narrator in Jorge Amado’s *Tenda dos Milagres*,” in: *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 30.3 (1983), pp. 311–321; Fuchs, “Unreliable Narrator,” see note 4.

⁷ Marjet Berendsen, “Wolf Schmid and the Unreliable Narrator in Jane Austen’s *Emma*,” in: *Neophilologus* 64.4 (1980), pp. 619–636.

⁸ Segal, “Lesson in Devotion,” see note 2; Samuel Hux, “Irony in ‘The Aspern Papers’: The Unreliable Symbolist,” in: *Ball State University Forum* 10.1 (1969), pp. 60–65.

⁹ Shunami, “Unreliable Narrator,” p. 468, see note 3.

¹⁰ Boyle, “Unreliable Narration,” p. 23, see note 2.

canonical unreliable narratives, Gale and Kozikowski engage two of James's lesser-known tales, "The Abasement of the Northmores" (1900) and "The Two Faces" (1901), while Brancaccio's analysis of unreliability in Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800) finds in the "contradiction between Arthur's unconscious 'inclination' and his moralizing" the usual inconsistencies that lie at the root of this phenomenon.¹¹ Self-contradiction and self-deception also support a complex case of unreliability, compounded by an underlying Oedipal plot, in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923). Young Niel Herbert's platonic worship of a self-made virtuous image of Mrs. Forrester actually conceals, according to Nichols, his repressed sexual desire for her and evinces gross misjudgement of what will turn out to be a rather promiscuous character.¹²

This brief review of early scholarship on unreliable narration, albeit limited and unsystematic, reveals a fundamental point—that critics following in Booth's footsteps and inspired by his own analyses had no qualms about throwing together "first-person" and "third-person" fictions in their discussions of narrative unreliability, thus treating the text's vocal option as an irrelevant issue or, more precisely, as no issue at all. Indeed, "first-person" and "third-person" works appear side by side cutting across the heterogeneous categories pointed out above, and so "The Aspern Papers," *Wuthering Heights*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Arthur Mervyn* are described as unreliable narratives on a par with "The Liar," "The Abasement of the Northmores," "The Two Faces," and *A Lost Lady*, with the additional bonus that Kozikowski also studies Edith Wharton's "The Dilettante" (1903), another "third-person" tale, in the same paper and for the same reasons as "The Two Faces." This blissful state of indiscrimination, faintly suggestive of Eliot's unified sensibility, carried on for some two decades until "third-person" unreliability became a contentious issue as the formal sophistication of narrative theory took a leap forward. From the viewpoint of possible world semantics and authentication theory, for instance, "third-person" unreliable narration was no less than a logical impossibility for Ryan, an approach tacitly shared by Doležel given his notion of how differently the statements made by *Er*-form and *Ich*-form narrators get authenticated in the narrative text.¹³ Dissenting positions were soon balanced by a number of sympathetic views on unreliability in "third-person"

¹¹ Gale, "Abasement," see note 2; Kozikowski, "Unreliable Narration," see note 2; Patrick Brancaccio, "Studied Ambiguities: *Arthur Mervyn* and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator," in: *American Literature* 42.1 (1970), pp. 18–27, here p. 24.

¹² Kathleen L. Nichols, "The Celibate Male in *A Lost Lady*: The Unreliable Center of Consciousness," in: *Regionalism and the Female Imagination* 4.1 (1978), pp. 13–23.

¹³ Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 68, 112–113. Ryan's book will be cited parenthetically in the text as *PW*. Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, pp. 146–159.

narrative discourse.¹⁴ This time, however, rather than stemming from mere insensitivity to the vocal issue, such attempts arose from an informed reflection on what it means to have a “third-person” teller whose report clashes with the authorial version of the storyworld. Despite their pronounced individuality, all of them have a common denominator—that “third-person” unreliable narration entails, in one way or another, the suffusion of the narratorial performance and the resulting text with the subjectivity of character.

Consistent with the above, this paper sets out to make a case for “third-person” unreliability using a refined, updated version of Booth and his immediate followers, or, in other words, salvaging as much of their (rather coarse) system as can be reasonably reconciled with later narratological developments. To achieve this purpose, one must address what might be called the “Booth paradox,” that is, how a daunting amalgam of accurate insight, *sui generis* typologies, and occasionally misguided dicta can yield, once tidied and clarified, an inclusive view of narrative unreliability, coherent, meaningful, and fairly immune to the “person” parameter. I plan to accomplish this task in three stages. Sections 1 and 2 provide some background. One invokes two classical Genettian insights, the inadequacy of the “person” distinction and the segregation of the narrating voice from the experiencing self,¹⁵ and presents both in terms of their potential functionality for an inclusive perspective on unreliable narration; the other reviews Booth’s dismissal of the “person” issue on grounds of rhetorical effect in 1961 and his notorious recantation in the afterword to the 1983 second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (RF pp. 150–151, 412), as well as his influential identification of tellers with reflectors, that is, of those who report with those whose experience is reported. This led him to regard an observer as a narrator of sorts with indirect, though not unhappy, consequences for the purpose of this paper. Section 3 brings both strands together. It discusses Ryan’s adverse position on “third-person” unreliable narration and attempts to highlight its compatibility with an account of what I have called an *inclusive* view of that phenomenon. Section 4, finally, is of a more

¹⁴ See, for instance, Dorrit Cohn, “Discordant Narration,” in: *Style* 34.2 (2000), pp. 307–316; Gunther Martens, “Revising and Extending the Scope of the Rhetorical Approach to Unreliable Narration,” in: *Narrative Unreliability in Twentieth-Century First-Person Novel*, Elke D’hoker, et al. (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 77–105; Poul Behrendt and Per Krogh Hansen, “The Fifth Mode of Representation: Ambiguous Voices in Unreliable Third-Person Narration,” in: *Strange Voices in Narrative Fiction*, Per Krogh Hansen, et al. (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011, pp. 219–251; Frank Zipfel, “Unreliable Narration and Fictional Truth,” in: *Journal of Literary Theory* 5.1 (2011), pp. 109–130, here 124–125; Terence Patrick Murphy and Kelly S. Walsh, “Unreliable Third-Person Narration? The Case of Katherine Mansfield,” in: *Journal of Literary Semantics* 46.1 (2017), pp. 67–85; Jennike Hegdal Nilssen, “Rethinking the Unreliable Narrator: Is the Demarcation Heterodiegetic/Homodiegetic Necessary?,” in: *Emerging Vectors of Narratology*, Per Krogh Hansen, et al. (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017, pp. 25–45.

¹⁵ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 161–262; Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 64–129.

illustrative kind. It turns on three Jamesian tales in which unreliability can be argued to rule despite their dissimilar vocal options—“The Aspern Papers,” “The Liar,” and “The Beast in the Jungle” (1903)—and briefly supports my claims from a critical angle.

1. Misconceptions put right and their relevance to an inclusive view of unreliability

For almost fifty years the terms “first-person” and “third-person” narration have been used *sur rature*. Theorists, and especially critics, still adhere to them—such is the mesmerizing power of the pronouns—even if they somehow know they are inadequate. It was Gérard Genette who showed in 1972 that a “first-person” narrator was a harmless tautology, since that is the only way a speaker can be present in his or her statement, whereas a “third-person” narrator was a patent absurdity just because third-person pronouns are generally conceived to refer to *non-speakers*. Such dissymmetry is further compounded by the fact that “third-person” narrators can use first-person pronouns to refer to themselves and still retain “third-person” features like the oft-instanced narrators of Fielding’s novels. Considering that the grammatical pointers did not always reflect the teller’s ontological relation to the told, Genette replaced the traditional misnomers with a pair of neologisms that represented such relation more accurately, and called *homodiegetic* those narrators who shared the characters’ realm of existence and *heterodiegetic* those who did not.¹⁶ With this he shifted the emphasis from the misleading game of the pronouns to the underlying semantics of narrative discourse. Though Genette’s conceptual insight was readily adopted by theorists of quite different persuasions,¹⁷ his neologisms were not, and so more or less overlapping pairs such as character narration vs. noncharacter narration¹⁸ and personal narration vs. impersonal narration¹⁹ coexisted with his terms, and with the traditional ones, in the specialized literature.

The ongoing debate on unreliability has contributed to keeping the voice issue in focus as the appropriateness of the heterodiegetic frame was probed into. But much more important than this is to bear in mind that, even when purged of the “person” inanities, the vocal option of a fictional work *per se* remains a fairly marginal question unduly magnified over the history of narrative studies. If one considers that it only indicates the storyteller’s position this or that side of the

¹⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 244–245; see note 15.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Nomi Tamir, “Personal Narrative and Its Linguistic Foundation,” in: *PTL* 1 (1976), pp. 403–429, here pp. 415–417; Franz Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 48.

¹⁸ James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. xi.

¹⁹ Marie-Laure Ryan, “The Pragmatics of Personal and Impersonal Fiction,” in: *Poetics* 10 (1981), pp. 517–39.

fictional diegesis, it is surprising that it can be claimed to condition the occurrence of unreliability to the extent of making it (im)possible. It is precisely at this juncture where Genette's second classical insight comes into its own and provides points of reference to shape an inclusive view of narrative unreliability.

Also in 1972, Genette drew attention to the fact that the unobtrusive phrases "point of view" and "narrative situation" (*Erzählsituation*), typical of the Anglo-American and German traditions respectively, referred to composites of heterogeneous textual resources in need of analysis before they could be knowingly used.²⁰ His systematic decomposition of point of view and narrative situation into their constituents of voice and perception resulted in a quantum leap in narrative theory that can only be wholly appreciated by comparing pre-Genettian discussions of these issues with later ones informed by his insights. In plain terms, these two phrases denote a conflation of *who speaks* and *who sees* in a narrative text, two separate activities carried out, in principle, by two different agents. The voice component, as noted above, turns on the narrator's position *vis-à-vis* the diegesis; the perception component is much more complex and compelling. In fact, putting it down as *who sees* involves a highly reductive metaphor, for it exceeds the physical field of vision and also covers the capacity to access information and, as a consequence, I would argue, the mental ability to form cognitive representations of the world. So, put in more comprehensive terms, both point of view and narrative situation can be said to comprise two distinct components—*who speaks* and *who perceives*, or even better *whose cognitive perspective* on the storyworld is verbally reported.

Although its details are often disputed, this distinction has become a methodological standard of contemporary narrative theory, and yet its last consequences have seldom been assimilated. Following a reasonable mimetic, anthropomorphic bias, there seems to be some resistance to analyzing voice and perception as constitutionally different resources, independent of each other by default, though at times convergent, by authorial design, on a more or less personalized figure. It seems, in fact, that the default is the contrary—that there are ready-made, off-the-shelf packages that only in special circumstances get analyzed into autonomous components, a good example being homodiegetic narration as carried out by more or less individuated characters epistemically limited by realistic conventions. Actual narrative works, however, both classical and contemporary, have shown that packages of this sort may be a statistical regularity, but not a logical necessity. When the usual combination fails to occur, and so we have cases of homodiegetic "omniscience" such as *Moby-Dick* (1851), attempts are made to account for them as unwieldy rarities. Theorists like Nielsen and Heinze, for instance, react similarly—one posits an impersonal voice in order to explain the epistemic improbabilities of such works, a voice which results from "cutting the existential link between character and narrator"; the other argues that

²⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 161–62, 185–89, see note 15.

these improbabilities become tractable “once we separate humanness from the narrator,” which is just another way to express the idea of an impersonal voice.²¹ If I had to put it in Nielsen’s terms, I would suggest that, instead of a way to cope with occasional improbabilities, the impersonal voice emerging from the severance of the existential link represents the default, the factory setting, so to speak, of narrative discourse. Working in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Genette still held Marcel’s surplus of knowledge in Proust’s *Recherche* (1913-27) as an attack on “the very logic of its discourse.”²² Yet now, as an ultimate consequence of his analytic treatment of voice and perception, these epistemically enhanced homodiegetic narrators are “in the process of being conventionalized” through widespread narrative experiment and the influence of visual media, and readers no longer sense them as transgressive.²³

The essential autonomy of voice and perception equally affects heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narratives. The narrator and the internal focalizer (or reflector, observer, centre of consciousness, etc.) of heterodiegesis have their counterparts in the narrating self and the experiencing self of homodiegesis, for, in both cases, a speaker verbalizes *somebody else’s* representation of the storyworld. The only obstacle for this homology to be complete is what Nielsen calls the “existential link” between these two selves in homodiegetic narrative, an autobiographical convention prescribing that both are temporal, ideological, and psychological avatars of the same (human) being. But if this link is obliterated as a precondition, and we admit this fact as a point of departure, greater flexibility and combinatory potential can be achieved. Theorists working inductively tend to set up categories which reflect mainstream narrative works; logical, though yet unfulfilled or poorly fulfilled, possibilities are harder to accommodate. So a proper *fourth slot* for homodiegetic “omniscient” narrators preventing them from counting as weird exceptions can only be gained via the conviction that voice and perception are, in principle, irreducible phenomena.

If voice is genuinely construed as independent of perception, it is undeniable that its time-honoured position in narrative theory significantly degrades. What really matters, after all, is not whether tellers are more or less central, peripheral, or external to the diegesis, but rather how they come by the information they relay, and it should be obvious by now that one thing does not determine the other. To exist in the diegesis as a character does not entail human-like limitations (e.g. *Moby-Dick*), whereas to be absent from the diegesis does not automatically allow the exercise of “omniscience” as in, for instance, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

²¹ Henrik Skov Nielsen, “The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction,” in: *Narrative* 12.2. (2004), pp. 133–150, here p. 146; Ruediger Heinze, “Violations of Mimetic Epistemology in First-Person Narrative Fiction,” in: *Narrative* 16.3 (2008), pp. 279–297, here p. 283.

²² Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 252, see note 15.

²³ Filippo Pennacchio, “Enhanced ‘I’s: Omniscience and Third-Person Features in Contemporary First-Person Narrative Fiction,” in: *Narrative* 28.1 (2020), pp. 21–42, here p. 22, see also pp. 23–25.

Man (1916).²⁴ In fact, Joyce's penchant for revision provides good illustration of the issue in hand. It is well-known that "The Sisters," the opening story of *Dubliners* (1914), and *A Portrait* respectively evolved from an earlier story published in 1904 in the *Irish Homestead* under the same title and from a first draft called *Stephen Hero* posthumously brought out in 1944. Both revision processes parallel each other and lead to a significant reduction of the distance between character and narrator which results in the adoption by the latter of the cognitive and emotional limitations of the former, further compounded by his young age. Both versions of "The Sisters" are homodiegetic, whereas *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait* are heterodiegetic. Nonetheless, I would argue that the 1914 story and *A Portrait* provide a more similar reading experience despite their different vocal options than *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, and the same would hold for the reading experience of the 1904 story and *Stephen Hero* in contrast to *A Portrait*. If this personal impression can be extrapolated to other readers, as I think it can, it may confirm that how intelligence circulates and is accessed (or not) by narrative agents is far more important than their location this or that side of the diegetic frontier.

Indeed, as Genette observes in his *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, it is no easy endeavour to be consistent with the separation of voice and perception.²⁵ Many theorists who paid lip service to his analysis still overrated voice just because they could not be persuaded of its modest function within the narrative text and unwittingly enhanced its potential by decking it out with perception issues. One must be prepared to acknowledge that voice, when systematically decoupled from perception, makes a rather boring narrative resource and can hardly be the determinant factor in a theory of unreliability for the fictional text.

2. Insight and blindness:

Booth on the "person" issue and the assimilation of tellers and observers

The two questions to be examined below run parallel to the Genettian contributions just discussed—the "person" issue as conceived by Booth is obviously related to Genette's conception and ranking of the voice option, while Booth's assimilation of tellers and observers essentially overlaps Genette's analysis of voice and perception. In principle, the two theorists' valuation of the role of voice is quite similar, but they are poles apart in their understanding of the interface between voice and perception. The key point, of course, is to determine

²⁴ This is why Pennacchio's view that the epistemically enhanced narrating-I is "the result of a blend between first- and third-person features" ("Enhanced 'I's," p. 22, see note 23) can only hold if one accepts that there is a stable correspondence between the position of a narrator inside or outside the diegesis and his or her epistemic capacity. But this view is paradoxically disowned by Pennacchio's own critical analyses.

²⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, pp. 96–97, see note 15.

how the relations between these two areas, as conceived by both theorists, bear on an inclusive approach to narrative unreliability.

In 1961 Booth dismissed the “person” issue in unequivocal terms: “Perhaps the most overworked distinction is that of person. To say that a story is told in the first or in the third person will tell us nothing of importance [...]” (RF, p. 150).

Consistent with his rhetorical bias, Booth justifies his dismissal on the fact that the distinction of “person,” *tout court*, cannot explain the “effects” made on readers by “the particular qualities of the narrators” (RF, p. 150). Although his motives differ from Genette’s, his insight into the genuine function of narrative voice does not. Both believe that the teller’s presence in or absence from the told and the pronominal signals associated with either contribute little *per se* to the characterization of a particular text—unless, I would add, the voice option is enriched with perceptual attributes regarding, for instance, the access to and the traceability of the information passed on by tellers. What is more revealing, both Booth and Genette engage in transvocalization exercises which support their belittling of the vocal option. Booth does so in his well-known analysis of unreliability in James’s tale “The Liar” (1888), where he gives the alleged facts of the story in two columns, each representing respectively the leading character’s interpretation of events and how Booth himself construes the implied James’s intention. Even if the tale is told by an impersonal heterodiegetic narrator located beyond the diegesis, Booth makes him homodiegetic in his rewriting by giving the telling role to the protagonist, and simply explains, “Here is Lyon’s view of the events (in the story it is given in the third person) [...]” (RF, p. 347). The militant indifference to the “person” category evinced by Booth’s practice is echoed by Genette in more conscious fashion when he discusses the motives behind the authorial choice of an homodiegetic or heterodiegetic narrator for a given fiction. To show that both options are “roughly equivalent to one another from the point of view of modal [i.e. perceptual] consequences,” he reports to have “contemplated some real or imaginary exercises at *transvocalization*” and that simply by moving the narrator into or out of the characters’ fictional world, without further changes, he achieved no significant effect on the reading experience.²⁶

What is rather perplexing to me is why Booth, having thus contributed to a new understanding of the phenomenon of voice as early as 1961, chose to recant for no explicit reason in 1983. “Plain wrong. It was radically underworked” was his emphatic, unexplained self-rectification (RF, p. 412). Apart from branding his earlier comments on voice “superficial,” he only quoted Goldknopf’s book *The Life of the Novel* (1972) and two articles by Morrisette on narrative “person,” setting them “as examples of what it [the “person” distinction] can yield” without further elaboration (RF, p. 412). His new attitude obviously undermines in retrospect most of chapter 6 of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* about types of narration, astutely constructed

²⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, pp. 112, 109, see note 15.

to play down the importance of “person,” and exposes, for instance, his 1961 cavalier treatment of this issue in “The Liar.” Not to mention, of course, that his newly-acquired awareness of the importance of vocal distinctions rather hinders, or at least does not appear to support, the development of an inclusive view of unreliability.

But more perplexing than the substance of Booth’s about-turn is its temporal context, which throws into relief, if anything, his independence and capacity to go against the grain. In 1961 he expressed his impatience with the “person” issue at a time when it was the prevailing norm; in 1972 Genette followed suit as discussed in the preceding section; in 1976 Tamir, for one, reviewed Booth’s pioneering insight appreciatively;²⁷ and in 1980 Genette’s work got translated into English, achieving a wider reverberation and setting up a new standard. But the key point of this series was 1983. In this year, Genette published a sequel to his *Narrative Discourse* where he basically reasserted his principles on voice and perception and adhered to “the Boothian protest of overestimation” of the “person” issue *precisely* when Booth was disowning such protest in the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.²⁸ As a final irony, Anglo-American theorists and critics mostly knew that Genette supported Booth’s original position *five* years after the latter had recanted, since *Narrative Discourse Revisited* was not translated until 1988.

From the perspective of this paper, Booth’s change of mind was rather regrettable. It meant restoring to voice a number of properties which seem alien to it in Genette’s widely accepted analysis of what it truly implies to have a homodiegetic or a heterodiegetic narrator tell a story. Moreover, any misguided attempt to magnify the consequences of the “person” distinction may contribute to denying heterodiegetic narrators the possibility of being unreliable—i.e. of departing from the authorial version of a story as the reader infers it—by reopening the gap between both vocal options that early post-Booth critics managed to keep closed under his influence. However, to speak of voice recovering improper attributes leads one to consider how Booth understood the duality between *who speaks* and *who perceives*.

For him, a narrator is a lax concept indeed. Any figure “tell[ing] the audience what it needs to know” is a narrator, even if he or she seems “merely to act out [his or her] role” (*RF*, p. 152). Therefore, he does not restrict this figure to the narrative genre and argues that Horatio, as he tells his first encounter with King Hamlet’s spectre, is a regular narrator (*RF*, p. 151)—which he is, of course, but only within the diegesis. Booth goes far beyond this, however, and issues a baffling statement, “The most important unacknowledged narrators in modern fiction are the third-person ‘centers of consciousness’ through whom authors have filtered their narratives [...] they fill precisely the function of avowed narrators” (*RF*, p. 153). With this statement he assimilates observers to narrators, and endows

²⁷ Tamir, “Personal Narrative,” p. 403, see note 17.

²⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, p. 96, see note 15.

the former with the role of the latter simply, I presume, because the immersive effect of an all-encompassing fictional mind makes it difficult to detach the subject of the cognitive perspective from the origin of the verbal medium that reports it. Put differently, one could say that both merge in the reader's consciousness.

The Rhetoric of Fiction abounds with instances of this crossover, the terms *narrator* and *observer*, or their respective equivalents, being often used as synonyms. In his discussion of "The Liar," Booth deploys expressions concerning the protagonist such as "Lyon 'speaks'" (352), "the observer's [view of events]" (352), "Lyon's voice" (352), "[m]uch of what Lyon sees" (352), "author and narrator" (353), and "the narrator's immorality" (353). This meandering course, in which Lyon is properly called an observer, but also, much improperly, a narrator, pervades most of the book. For Booth, there are "narrators and observers, whether first or third person, [who] can relay their tales to us" (RF, p. 154), "narrators or observers who rarely if ever discuss their writing chores [...] or who seem unaware that they are writing" (RF, p. 155), and "narrators, like Barry Lyndon [...] [and] like Fleda Vetch, the reflector in James's *The Spoils of Poynton*" (RF, p. 159). Likewise, he speaks of Jamesian "stories narrated, whether in the first or third person, by a profoundly confused, basically self-deceived, or even wrongheaded or vicious reflector" (RF, p. 340), and, in what might seem the height of confusion, he calls Austen's Emma "a kind of narrator, though in third person" (RF, p. 245). Obviously, Lyon, Fleda, and Emma are typical Genettian internal focalizers without the least claim to a teller's voice, and the same might be said of the unnamed observers and reflectors Booth endows with the capacity of recounting their own stories.

To an extent, however, Booth seems to intuit he is talking figuratively as a response, I would argue, to the immersive experience provided by the relentless dissection of a fictional mind. For him, these crossovers are "disguised," "unacknowledged," "avowed" narrators (RF, pp. 152–153), or even "a kind of narrator" (RF, p. 340), and the occasional pair of quotation marks round key words shows that he does not take them in their ordinary meaning (e.g. "Lyon 'speaks'"). In view of this, one may wonder about Booth's awareness that observers are *by no means* narrators unless they engage in actual extradiegetic reporting—e.g. Barry Lyndon does, but Fleda Vetch does not by any accepted meaning of the term. In the case of "The Liar," for instance, he fluctuates between Lyon being an observer and a "narrator" of sorts. He seeks to discuss the unreliable narrator in this tale, but he somehow perceives that Lyon's ontological status is not such, and, lacking more discerning tools, thrusts on him a spurious, though much nuanced, narratorial role. In general, I do not think Booth's usage of these terms is driven by ignorance or carelessness. He pursues his argument figuratively and leaves sufficient clues for us to know. On occasion, however, he seems to lose track of his own working method, drops the qualifying devices, and mystifies the reader. But mystified readers tend to be critical, and Booth's assimilation of observers into

narrators has been looked upon with skepticism and considered an “unfortunately misguided claim.”²⁹

My own analysis is that Booth’s dismissal of the “person” distinction and even his ostensible assimilation of tellers and observers are decisive moves to show the viability of a theory of unreliable narration which releases this phenomenon from the teller’s “person” profile. With Genette’s endorsement more than a decade later, and despite his incidental, ill-advised recantation, Booth neutralized the “person” divide and discredited the idea that such a flimsy basis could support an exclusive theory of unreliability just relevant to narrators who are, or once were, characters. Moreover, Booth’s hint at the assimilability of tellers and observers means, in principle, that the latter can, and do, *narrate*—a proposition which is only literally true of homodiegetic works within the mimetic-autobiographic convention where the narrating self is the same individual as the experiencing self, only somewhat older. His general assimilation, while literally untenable, had the virtue of suggesting which conceptual framework could normalize heterodiegetic unreliability and render it as natural an option as early post-Booth critics felt it to be, but on the template of later narratological developments rather than as an intuitive endeavour. That Booth’s influence predisposed Gale, for instance, to describe Mrs. Warren Hope as “the narrator or the central intelligence”³⁰ of James’s tale “The Abasement of the Northmores,” holding both as interchangeable, is the price he had to pay for, or alternatively, the dark side of his contribution to an inclusive view of narrative unreliability.

3. Unreliability and inclusivity, or how to be a heterodiegetic unreliable narrator

The preceding sections have yielded three building blocks to make a case for unreliability in heterodiegetic narrative, or, more precisely, for an inclusive approach to unreliable narration in which “person” need not be a determining factor. First, we have the empirical observation that early critics applying Booth’s scheme were hardly disturbed by the narrator’s position inside or outside the diegesis, that is, whether he or she was a character or a more or less personalized non-character entity. Second, there is the convergent treatment of the voice issue by Genette and Booth—both belittled its role on structuralist and rhetorical grounds respectively. Third, we have their dissimilar view of the interface between voice and perception, narrators and observers, or equivalent figures. Paradoxically, Genette’s efforts to prevent voice from encroaching on perception and Booth’s insistence on assimilating observers to narrators equally result in a heightened awareness of how a teller placed outside the reported world can still clash with the authorial project and bear the brunt of irony. On the one hand,

²⁹ Behrendt and Hansen, “Fifth Mode,” p. 248, see note 14.

³⁰ Gale, “Abasement,” p. 98, see note 2.

Genette's separation exposes the stringent limits of the voice function and supports its relative irrelevance; on the other, Booth's assimilation enhances the role of observers by entrusting them with larger responsibilities within the narrative text. Either by cleansing voice from perception or by magnifying the role of the latter, the observer, reflector, focalizer, or centre of consciousness emerges as the key element of an inclusive view of unreliability to the detriment of a fairly depleted narratorial figure.

Although there has been a growing sympathy for heterodiegetic unreliable narration, not all references to this phenomenon support its existence. Among the skeptics, Ryan has probably made the strongest case against it on the basis of possible world semantics and the idea of the impersonal narrator. To put it briefly, she conceives of the semantic universe of a fictional text as formed by the text actual world (TAW) orbited by a number of textual alternative possible worlds (TAPWs). The TAW and the TAPWs respectively comprise those elements that exist absolutely in the said universe and those that *only* exist in the minds of characters – for instance, the windmills vs. the giants in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The essential problem is, of course, authentication, that is, how "this absolute existence [is] established and what authority guarantees it to the reader" (PW, p. 112). To her vision, it is the authorial intention as reconstructed by readers which ultimately validates the propositions making up the text's factual domain, since a personal narrator, endowed with a human-like psychology and thus entitled to TAPWs of his or her own, and specifically to what Ryan calls narratorial actual world (NAW), may be held at a variable distance from the implied author as discrepancies develop between the NAW and the TAW, that is, between what the narrator says and what the reader infers the implied author means. When such discrepancies occur, unreliable narration puts in an appearance. (Incidentally, being Ryan's a communicative model of the fictional text, compatibility with Booth's rhetorical conceptions is just predictable.) This picture alters radically when the narrator is impersonal. Described by Ryan as having no psychological profile of its own and posited for purely logical reasons, this entity has no TAPWs or NAW. It is just a disembodied "speech position" (PW, p. 71), a mere mouthpiece for the author's standpoint with whom it tends to merge in the reader's consciousness. If there is no distance between the impersonal narrator and the implied author as guarantor of the text's factual domain, it follows that there is no room for discrepancy and hence for unreliability.

But there is a glitch here. While one can readily infer the existence of a sizeable overlap between the traditional voice duality and Ryan's categories of personal and impersonal narration, it is hard to determine its true extent and significance as she never addresses this issue in any systematic way. She brings up the terms "first-person" and "third-person" narration very sparsely in her 1981 paper on narrative pragmatics and her influential 1991 book on possible world semantics and narrative theory, and in neither work does she mention Genette's revision of the concept and his neological designations. Moreover, when those terms appear

they are often used in side arguments, to discuss other authors (*PW*, pp. 67–68, 74), paired with (what I read as) quotation marks of protest,³¹ or for general clarification, as when she juxtaposes personal and “first-person” narration for the only time in the book (*PW*, p. 68) in what seems a cursory explicative move rather than a methodological commitment on her part. In strict terms, therefore, Ryan *never* denies the existence of unreliable heterodiegetic narrators, simply because her system does not cater for the traditional vocal distinction or for Genette’s elaboration of it. This solution, however, seems too facile and fails to predict what happens with the vast number of fictions told by narrators who are both heterodiegetic and impersonal. In my view, if Ryan’s position on unreliability has to be revised or extended, it must be done in its own terms, namely by showing if and how *impersonal* narrators can be unreliable regardless of their location relative to the diegesis, that is, without grafting Genette’s system onto hers.

The hallmark of impersonal narrators is that they lack a human-like psychology *of their own*, which means they cannot narrate from their (non-existent) viewpoint. But this fact grants them considerable versatility. They can speak for the implied author’s position and represent the text’s factual domain without personal interference; however, and this point cannot be sufficiently emphasized, they can also speak for a character and take his or her cognitive perspective on the told. “In impersonal fiction,” argues Ryan, “the narrator has no voice of its own. The answer to the question, ‘who speaks like that,’ can only be ‘the author’ or ‘one of the characters’ [...] whose point of view is being adopted”; and she adds, “when the narrative discourse does not adopt the point of view of one of the characters the author must take full responsibility for the choice of the words.”³² Besides, when she discusses the different relationships that can exist between the content of narratorial statements and the text’s factual domain, she mentions the case of the narrator “uttering sentences from the point of view of another person.”³³ And later, when enumerating Banfield’s attributions to non-communicative fictional discourse, she sympathetically states that “impersonal narrators may speak from the perspective of any character” (*PW*, p. 68). On this evidence, one can conceive of Ryan’s impersonal narrator as a kind of default telling device, an empty vessel to be filled up with psychological content, or, in her apt expression, a “‘rental consciousness’” (*PW*, p. 71) for the author and, I would suggest, also for the characters though never for itself.

If this analysis is correct, consequences are anything but trivial. On authorial design, an impersonal narrator can identify itself with the implied author’s standpoint or with a character’s, and in neither case will it have an *a priori* personality of its own. In fact, a tentative typology, as represented in table 1, can be derived from this observation. It coordinates a set of issues that have emerged

³¹ Ryan, “Pragmatics,” p. 518, see note 19.

³² Ryan, “Pragmatics,” p. 526, see note 19.

³³ Ryan, “Pragmatics,” p. 528, see note 19.

in my discussion, and especially the relationships between homodiegetic/heterodiegetic and personal/impersonal narrators in terms of (a) their presumed ontological reality and (b) how the reader's mind tends to apprehend them. A few comments may be in order to navigate and build on this typology.

1. Narrator speaks for ...	Implied author	+	+	-	-
	Character	-	-	+	+
2. Narrator's position relative to the diegesis	Ontologically, <i>is it heterodiegetic?</i>	+	-	+	-
	Phenomenologically, <i>does it appear to be heterodiegetic?</i>	+	+	-	-
3. Narrator is endowed with/deprived of a psychology of its own	Ontologically, <i>is it impersonal?</i>	+	-	+	-
	Phenomenologically, <i>does it appear to be impersonal?</i>	+	+	-	-
4. In the reader's consciousness, the narrator tends to merge with ...	Implied author	+	+	-	-
	Character	-	-	+	+
5. Narrator is exposed to unreliability		-	-	+	+

Table 1

The top row indicates whether the narrator speaks for the implied author or for a character; in short, whose worldview is verbally encoded in the text. The second row deals with the position where the narratorial speech act *actually* occurs versus where the reader *perceives* it to occur. *Moby-Dick* is a homodiegetic text whose narrator is a character in the diegesis. As is well-known, however, there are passages and even whole chapters that read *as if* the narrator had broken free from the existential subordination to the character's experience and become an autonomous heterodiegetic entity. And yet, as Stanzel argues, "the *in-persona* identity of the two" is never cast in doubt.³⁴ Just the opposite holds, for instance, in

³⁴ Franz Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972, p. 72.

such a novel as James's *The Ambassadors* (1903). In this work, rather than a true existential link being dissolved in the reader's consciousness, the semblance of one is forged therein, and so Strether, the character for whom the heterodiegetic narrator basically speaks, is often perceived, and even discussed (e.g. Booth, *RF*, pp. 150–151), as the teller of his own tale. In this context too, the relevance of the brief remarks previously made on Joyce's *A Portrait* and "The Sisters" — and their textual predecessors — is fully reasserted.

But it is the third row that forms the hub of this typology. While the options of the second row pivot on the place the narrator speaks from, what matters now is if the narrator has a humanoid psychology of its own. The key question is what happens when an impersonal narrator gravitates to the character's position and takes his or her cognitive perspective on the told. To me, it remains ontologically impersonal, because it still lacks its own psychological traits and does not develop any true existential link with the impersonated character. But to all practical effects related to the intuitive reading experience, it will have become a kind of functionally or phenomenically personal narrator. Are the narrators of *The Ambassadors*, "The Liar," or *A Portrait* personal or impersonal? They are, I would argue, ontologically impersonal because they have nothing to leak about themselves, but personal in the reader's consciousness because they merge there with Strether, Lyon, and Dedalus as generations of readers — and even critics — have noted. This is, of course, the substance of the fourth row. Impersonal narrators are unstable beings. In response to a natural craving for human embodiment, they are all the time forming putative associations in the reader's mind. If they speak for the author, they tend to become one with him or her for the reader; but the same can be said to happen when the impersonal narrator speaks for a character. This closes the circle and explains, for instance, Booth's intuitive assimilation of reflector characters to narrators and his hesitant, figurative description of Lyon as both, as well as his early successors' critical analyses of unreliability in "third-person" narratives. If in personal narration the teller's own mind is interposed between fictional facts and the reader, as Ryan contends (*PW*, pp. 70, 113), then, by analogy, the character's assumed mind can be said to occupy the same intervening position in impersonal narration.

This line of reasoning leads to the fifth row which, as a result of the other four, signals the kind of narrator that is open to be unreliable. Two conditions are necessary for unreliability to occur — first, that the narrator (N) should stick to the character's worldview (CH); second, that this worldview should deviate from the authorial version as inferred by the reader. The fifth row accounts for the first of these conditions, which could be roughly represented as $N = CH$. Narrators speaking for characters renounce the absolute world-constructing power they wield when they speak for the implied author (IA), simply because the verifiability of propositions made contingent on a character's mind is suspended in the text's factual domain. This brings about an authentication crisis in the textual semantic structure that allows discrepancies to develop between what the narrator literally

says and what the reader understands. But this is not an automatic process, since what is true in the character's mind as assumed by the narrator *need not be false* in the factual domain of the text; hence the second condition, which could be formulated as $N \neq IA$. Therefore, a plausible general expression for inclusive unreliability could be $IA \neq N = CH$.

In less cryptic parlance, there is unreliable narration when a narrator, regardless of its pronominal profile, position inside or outside the diegesis, or *a priori* endowment with a psychology of its own, absorbs a character's variably flawed cognitive perspective on the text's factual domain *without explicit correction or comment*, that is, remains more or less systematically tied to the character's worldview and fails to generate any distance by breaking up with it and coming closer to the implied author as the guarantor of fictional factuality. For this approach to become inclusive, it is essential to underline its autonomy from the narrator being or not a character in the diegesis and being or not possessed of its own personality. On the one hand, it matters little whether the narrator is an older version of a character, ontologically bound to him or her by an existential link, or a heterodiegetic entity appropriating his or her epistemic potential and worldview. In both cases, the narrator can assume the character's experience *without protest* and become unreliable if the latter is deemed deficient, or else can speak for the implied author and frame such experience in a correcting context of reliability. Both attitudes, or any combination thereof, are equally open to homodiegetic and heterodiegetic tellers. On the other hand, a similar point can be made regarding personal and impersonal narrators. A personal narrator *is* and *appears to be* the representation of a human being; an impersonal narrator is only a speech position, but if it happens to speak for a character in any systematic way, it will merge with him or her in the reader's imagination and thus become phenomenically personal with the semantic outcome suggested above. In radical internal focalization, where the narrator thoroughly adheres to the intricacies of a character's mind, who can actually tell the impersonated from the impersonator in an ordinary reading situation? Booth's emphasis on the "unreliable observer" and equivalent phrases (e.g. *RF*, pp. 340, 347, 352) is a step in the right direction, as is his *prima facie* baffling statement that "any sustained inside view, of whatever depth, temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator" (*RF*, p. 164). That an impersonated character tends to merge in the reader's consciousness with the (impersonal) narrator forms, to my vision, the phenomenological basis of an inclusive theory of unreliability.

As the impersonal narrator is an essentially chameleonic figure, it is just conceivable that it will not always speak for the same entity — whether the implied author or the character — all through a narrative text. More or less frequent and pronounced fluctuations are bound to occur. They shape the temporal dynamics of unreliability in a specific work and determine the epistemic structure and impact of the correction applied, for instance, when a narrator generates distance from a character by approaching the implied author. Absolute zero personality is hard to

maintain, the narrator being pulled in one direction or another as the narrative progresses. If it speaks for the implied author (IA = N), then there are two additional possibilities—that the character is misaligned and out of the loop (IA = N ≠ CH) and that there is a triple alignment (IA = N = CH). In one case, the character is ironized and his or her view disclaimed; in the other, the character concurs with the alliance formed by the implied author and the narrator. Of course, IA = N ≠ CH is the formula for the basic antidote to unreliability, meaning that the narrator identifies itself with the authorial stance, verbalizes the text's factual domain, and thus exposes the fallibility of the character's conceptions. If the narrator speaks for the character (N = CH), two further possibilities remain open—first, a triple alignment with an emphasis now on the affinity of the narrator and the character which the implied author does not disown; second, the typical structure of narrative unreliability (IA ≠ N = CH), where the narrator assumes the character's worldview, deficiencies and all, while the implied author tacitly questions it. These two possibilities represent the two conditions for unreliable narration as suggested above. And yet what truly matters is that the four resulting combinations—which can create the dynamics of unreliability by alternating in a given work—are not determined by the narrator's position relative to the diegesis or its ontological status as a human being.

4. Unreliable Jamesian narrators—homodiegetic and heterodiegetic

Take, for instance, a *locus classicus* of unreliable narration such as James's "The Aspern Papers." In this tale, an existential link connects the narrator and the character, which in mimetic terms simply means that they are the same individual in different stages of biographical progression. In a justly celebrated episode, when the obsessed scholar intrudes at night into old Juliana Bordereau's rooms to purloin the Aspern papers presumably in her possession,³⁵ he concocts an imaginary world in which what he actually does is grossly misjudged and spuriously rationalized. As a consequence, his nocturnal assault is his "last indiscretion" performed under "extenuating circumstances" (vol. 3, pp. 301–302); he entered her rooms with "no definite purpose, no bad intention [...] no keys, no tools and no ambition to smash her furniture" (vol. 3, p. 302); and when he reflects later on a deed which eventually cost the old woman her life he contents himself with describing it as "devilish awkward" and not "very delicate" (vol. 3, p. 304). All this forms an obvious case of unreliability (IA ≠ N = CH), where the narrator absorbs and reports without correction the character's perspective on the told despite the implied author's glaring dissent. By renouncing his temporal vantage point to approach the authorial position and place his earlier conduct in the right

³⁵ Henry James, *Complete Stories*, 5 vols., New York: Library of America, 1996-1999, here vol. 3, pp. 301–304. Further references to James's *Complete Stories* will be given parenthetically in the text by indicating volume and page.

ethical context, he becomes a kind of accessory after the fact and thrusts upon himself the judgemental deficit he displayed as a character.

Consider now another issue in the same tale differently resolved in the original 1888 text and in the 1908 revision. Early in this narrative, when the scholar is telling Mrs. Prest, his Venetian confidante, that he is ready to go to any length to obtain the Aspern papers, he includes “mak[ing] love to the niece” (vol. 3, p. 235) within his weaponry. As the story moves on, the reader is presented with a set of facts which conform very well to the scholar’s stated intention—for instance, sending her daily loads of flowers grown at his expense in the palazzo’s garden, having semi-clandestine meetings with her in the garden arbour at night, taking her out on his gondola, etc. Encouraged, perhaps, by these actions, and after her aunt’s death, Tita Bordereau makes bold to suggest that she is prepared to exchange papers for marriage. Appalled at the offer, he flees the woman and feverishly ponders, “Did she think I had made love to her, even to get the papers? I had not, I had not ... But I had not given her cause—distinctly I had not” (vol. 3, pp. 315–16). Here again we have the narrator speaking for the character against the implied James’s tacit signalling to the reader (IA ≠ N = CH). Then, after suffering the shame of rejection, Miss Tita confesses to having done “the great thing,” that is, “destroyed the papers” (vol. 3, p. 320), and the original tale closes with the scholar’s unsurmountable sense of *professional* loss at the extinction of the documents. “When I look at it [Jeffrey Aspern’s portrait] my chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable,” he laments (vol. 3, p. 320). Miss Tita does not enter the equation at any point in this final sentence. The passage of time and the flow of experience have not modified the initial formula IA ≠ N = CH, and the narrator’s view of the woman remains that of the character without the least correction informed by the implied author’s standpoint. The revised ending, however, adds a new perspective, of which James could not be oblivious as he phrased it. “When I look at it,” runs the edited sentence, “I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers.”³⁶ Formally speaking, the narrator denies any loss beyond that of the papers. But the italicized clause is an authorial ruse whereby the reader is instantly apprised of what goes on beneath the abrupt denial, namely that the narrator has swung to the implied author’s standpoint and betrays an intuition that his loss does include Tita Bordereau and perhaps his own respectability. Even if he tries to repress it, the correction (IA = N ≠ CH) is by no means lost upon the reader.

These shifting dynamics, however, are not exclusive of fictions whose narrators ontologically relate to particular characters via an existential link. Indeed, looking through the eyes of a character—and perhaps going wrong in the process—does not require any existential identity, and, conversely, a narrator existentially linked to a character need not look through the latter’s eyes, as amply evidenced by both

³⁶ Henry James, “The Aspern Papers,” in: *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, New York: Scribner’s, 1908, vol. 12, pp. 143; my emphasis.

classic and contemporary narratives. Therefore, in heterodiegetic texts where narrators speak for characters and merge with them in the reader's consciousness, the general formula for inclusive unreliability (IA ≠ N = CH) still holds. Brief references to James's tales "The Liar" and "The Beast in the Jungle" will be used to illustrate this point.

These two tales do not share the same dynamics of unreliability, that is, the same alternating pattern of unreliability (IA ≠ N = CH) and correction (IA = N ≠ CH) where one alignment (IA = N) tends to replace another (N = CH). This simple pattern typifies "The Liar," whereas a different one, closer to what seems a progression to a triple alignment (IA = N = CH), can be discerned in "The Beast in the Jungle." "The Liar" is the chronicle of the unwarranted construction of Everina Capadose's mind by Oliver Lyon, her former lover, a mind which has become opaque in transit from the notebook entry to the finished work and is hypothesized by Lyon according to his preconceptions. The man was deeply hurt when they parted in Munich, and all his efforts when they meet again are not directed, as he wrongly believes, at finding out her genuine feelings about her husband's weakness—he is a harmless fibber and a fabulist—and so her moral stature, but rather at breaking the harmony of the married couple and bringing home to Everina the mistake she made when she rejected him. Most of the time, the teller speaks for Lyon and his resentment, and, by doing so, rather reports an imaginary world at odds with what the reader infers to be the case; in other words, it becomes unreliable in the inclusive sense of the term. This process begins early in the narrative, when Sir David tells Lyon that Everina backs her husband's lies (vol. 3, p. 342), and continues right to the final sentence where Lyon's conviction that Everina has been "trained [...] too well" to lie by her husband is plainly reasserted (vol. 3, p. 371). Yet there are short passages that tell a different story. At one point, the narrator states that "Lyon was too scrupulous to ask other people what they thought of the business [Everina's apparent insensitivity to her husband's lies]—he was too afraid of exposing the woman *he once had loved*" (vol. 3, p. 344; my emphasis). In itself, without further context, this is a standard sample of unreliable narration. Not only are Lyon's scruples utterly denied by his behaviour, but the termination of his love for Everina is disowned soon afterwards by the narrator in a striking swing to the implied author's position functionally similar to that in "The Aspern Papers." "If our friend [Lyon] had not been in love with her," corrects the narrator, "he could have taken the diverting view of the Colonel's delinquencies; but as it was they turned to the tragical in his mind [...]" (vol. 3, p. 345). Although the narrator speaking for the character and assuming his flawed view of Everina's mind and of his own motives is the usual case, more reliable comments occasionally emerge. While the narrator takes the character's perspective in "Lyon had no nefarious plan, no conscious wish to practise upon her [Everina's] shame or her loyalty" (vol. 3, p. 348), both of which he obviously *had*, sentences such as "Lyon's curiosity [...] may strike the reader as fatuous; but something must be allowed to a disappointed man" (vol. 3, p. 348) or references to Lyon's prospects of

becoming a “noxious animal” along with his present vulgarity (vol. 3, p. 350) read as endorsed by the implied James and thus as basically factual. Once more, what really matters is that, regardless of the narrator’s position relative to the diegesis or its *a priori* existential status, unreliability and its correction can be described by the intentional and epistemic interplay of three autonomous, ever-present entities — the implied author, the narrator, and the character.

While Oliver Lyon, whether spoken for (IA ≠ N = CH) or corrected by the heterodiegetic narrator (IA = N ≠ CH), does never come round to the authorial perspective, the situation is quite different for John Marcher in “The Beast in the Jungle.” His conception of fictional factuality is arguably deficient for most of the story, but right at the end he has an anagnorisis, a significant revelation that enlightens him by bringing him into line with the implied author — hence the idea of the triple alignment I suggested above. The extent of Marcher’s self-absorption and his sensitivity to human feeling is the central concern of “The Beast in the Jungle” — which is differently conceived of by the implied author, as interpreted by the reader, and by Marcher himself. All through the tale, I would hold, the narrator mostly speaks for the character, and so unreliability initially prevails as John Marcher’s unsound views on the narrative’s central concern are reported without correction. “The Beast in the Jungle” is a moving study in egotism, sterility, and blindness — though the latter is just transitory and eventually dissipates when nothing can be saved from the spiritual wreck. Unbenown to himself, Marcher is a self-centred individual only concerned with discovering the nature of his uncanny expectations. His friend, May Bartram — who loves him secretly, delicately — is, to him, but a catalyst of knowledge, and her impending death just a hindrance to fathom out what is in store for him. Marcher’s urge to know overrides his decency, just as the scholar’s wish to get the Aspern papers overrode his. Both remain unaware for most of their respective narratives, and both come round too late — the Aspern scholar just faintly in the revised text twenty years later, as was argued above. Given these premises, consider the significance of narratorial statements such as the following:

[...] in whom Marcher’s *expert attention* had recognised [...] (vol. 5, p. 506; my emphasis)

[...] a *man of feeling* didn’t cause himself to be accompanied by a lady on a tiger-hunt. (vol. 5, pp. 508–509; my emphasis)

It was one of the proofs to himself, the present he made her on her birthday, that *he had not sunk into real selfishness*. (vol. 5, p. 512; my emphasis)

He had kept up, he felt, and very decently on the whole, his consciousness of the importance of not being selfish, and *it was true that he had never sinned in that direction* [...] (vol. 5, p. 516; my emphasis)

[...] for Marcher’s *special sensibility* [...] (vol. 5, p. 517; my emphasis)

He sat down on a bench in the twilight. *He hadn't been a fool* [...] (vol. 5, p. 528; my emphasis)

Flagrantly at odds with the implied author's signals and the global meaning of the tale, the italicized phrases denote Marcher's view of himself at the time of the told as uncritically assumed and reported by the heterodiegetic narrator. His severely limited potential for empathy and his incapacity to realize before May's death that his secret lot was to be loved by an exceptional woman turn him into anything but "a man of feeling," endowed with a "special sensibility," or free from "real selfishness." Not only does the narrator speak for the character in these and other similar cases, but what gets reported openly clashes with the authorial design as inferred by the reader—so again $IA \neq N = CH$. After she has died, he grieves *his* loss not *hers*, until the fleeting sight of a mourner in the cemetery, in whose face he reads true "scarred passion," makes him grasp, "with envy," the fearful emptiness of his life (vol. 5, p. 539). After this epiphanic moment, Marcher swings to the authorial perspective, and the remaining paragraphs form a poignant recognition of blindness and guilt dutifully reported by the narrator. So, once again, the dynamics of unreliability in this story do not oscillate between unreliability itself ($IA \neq N = CH$) and correction ($IA = N \neq CH$), but between unreliability and a triple concurrence of implied author, narrator, and character. In any case, however, what really counts is that the shifting distribution of information, whether factual or not, among the three essential agents of narrative unreliability remains virtually unaffected by the narrator and the character forming (or not) an *a priori* existential and psychological unit. As I have attempted to show, this is precisely the foundation for an inclusive view of narrative unreliability.

In part at least, this paper is a vindication of Wayne C. Booth's rhetorical approach to narrative unreliability, but, especially, of its potential to sustain an explicitly inclusive theory of unreliable narration. To this end, I have placed him in conversation with later narratological developments in the areas of structuralism, possible world semantics, and narrative pragmatics in an attempt to enhance his ideas, throw their generative thrust into relief, and achieve a balanced, properly contextualized view of his contribution to this field of narrative theory.

Paradoxically, as I indicated at the outset, to name some of his most controversial assumptions—e.g. his early dismissive attitude to the "person" issue and his assimilation of observers to narrators—is to name two insights that, refined by exposure to Genettian theory, are an essential aid, rather than an obstacle, to inclusive unreliability. And yet this paper has sought to move beyond a sympathetic reading of some central features of his fictional conception and has addressed the notion of inclusivity itself.

In abstract terms, it seems undeniable that narrative unreliability originates in the existence of an authentication crisis at the semantic core of a fictional text, that is, a lack of guarantee for the reader that the factual domain of the storyworld is

just as the narrator says it is. Authentication power, however, does not depend on *voice* but on *perception*, not on the location the narrator speaks from or its *a priori* status as a human being, but on *whose* worldview it reports at a certain moment. If narrative voice is given its due, as Booth and Genette did, the link between authentication power and heterodiegetic/impersonal narration dissolves; it becomes a statistical datum rather than a logical necessity. In my analysis, when a heterodiegetic narrator speaks for a character, it gives up the authentication capacity it has when it speaks for the author, and so it can become unreliable if discrepancies arise. But this is *also* the case in homodiegesis, except that the character and the narrator are existentially related—a fact which, in itself, does not condition the latter's capacity to represent the text's factual domain reliably, that is, as we infer the implied author would have it. Viewed from this angle, the narrators speaking for the Aspern scholar, Oliver Lyon, and John Marcher operate in essentially equivalent ways despite their location relative to the diegesis and the different dynamics of unreliability they become involved in. Considering the foregoing discussion, perhaps the phrase "unreliable narrator/narration" should be dropped and replaced, for instance, with "unreliable focalizer/focalization." This would be consistent with Booth's and his early followers' rather dithering usage, but, above all, with the actual pragmatic structure of the fictional text. Personally, I am not prepared to advocate this drastic replacement, but the fact that one can think of it and argue for it rationally is no doubt significant in theoretical terms.