Deceit, delusions and dishonesty

Unreliable narration in the novels *Notes on a Scandal* and *Gone Girl*

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- 3.2.6 “Amy and Nick’s idiosyncrasies”
- 3.2.8 “Preliminary conclusion – unreliability in *Gone Girl*

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Résumé

In our thesis, we set out to investigate how narrational unreliability can be located in texts, and how this unreliability is detected and decoded by readers. As part of this investigation, we provide an overview of the changing face of unreliable narration as well as the key concept related to unreliable narration, the implied author. We present the two main approaches to dealing with unreliability, the rhetorical and the cognitive approach, and what different analytical tools and methods they offer for our investigation. The rhetorical approach emphasises the influence of the implied author and textually encoded signal, while the cognitive approach focuses on the different kinds of knowledge and experience the reader brings to a text and how these affect the reader's interpretation of textual incongruities. Having accounted for the definitions and positions of theorists Wayne C. Booth, Seymour Chatman, James Phelan and Ansgar Nünning on unreliability as well as the implied author, we look more closely at the synthesis of the cognitive and rhetorical approaches proposed by Nünning and how it is beneficial to our dual focus on locating and decoding textual unreliability. Having settled on this synthesised approach, we present additional analytical tools that we will employ for our analysis of our case material, the novels *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) by Zoë Heller and *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn. These tools are the fourteen textual signals of unreliability proposed by Nünning, the six different types of unreliability established by Phelan in cooperation with Mary Patricia Martin, and Gérard Genette's concepts of focalisation and time.

In our analysis, we identify many textual indicators of narrational unreliability and specify the type of unreliability and work using the aforementioned tools, many of which are recurrent in both novels, including contradictions, lies of omission, verbal tics and idiosyncrasies, overt and covert attempts at directing the reader's sympathy, and strong personal bias and subjectivity influencing the narrative. The unreliability frequently appears in the form of underreporting or underreading, where the narrator withholds information or attributes insufficient importance to events in ways that raise the reader's suspicion, as well as in the form of misreporting, misregarding or misreading, where the narrator provides outright false or morally shaky accounts and evaluations of events and characters. There are also a number of features of unreliability unique to the two novels. *Gone Girl* features multiperspectivity, which results in internarrational unreliability and manipulations of the story's timeline. In *Notes on a Scandal*, we see instances where the focalisation of the story is transgressed, which negatively impacts the narrator's reliability, as well as strong indicators of the narrator's delusional state of mind. In both texts, we detect the influence of the implied author, who, as a

text's creative agent, composes the structure of the texts in ways that expose the flaws of the narrator and result in numerous instances of irony. In *Gone Girl*, this influence also relates to the overall function of unreliability in the novel, which is to purposefully direct the reader's suspicion towards first one, then the other narrator. This plot-related function of unreliability may be related to the novel's genre, which is that of a crime and mystery novel.

While the analysis itself works well from a practical point of view, there are nonetheless a number of issues associated with combining the rhetorical and cognitive approaches. Chief among these are their fundamentally different outlooks on where unreliability stems from in the reading of texts. The relative ease with which the two approaches have been able to coexist and cooperate in our investigation is largely due to the greater emphasis placed on the rhetorical side of Nünning's synthesis, at the expense of the cognitive approach. Trying to put more emphasis on the cognitive approach in order to render the synthesis more balanced appears to us, after having tried this, to come with the risk of lessening the certainty of the results produced by the rhetorical approach. This is because greater prominence of the cognitive approach would seem to come with greater levels of speculation as well. That being said, we also realise that there are times when the rhetorical approach comes up short because of the lack of clearly identifiable textual signals indicating a particular reading. In such instances, the cognitive approach would be able to offer answers where the rhetorical could not, but these answers would, because of the nature of the cognitive approach, be speculative and based on intuition rather than identifiable, textually encoded signals.

Rounding off our investigation, we are able to conclude that the effect of unreliable narration is based partly on a variety of different identifiable textual signals encoded by an implied author, partly on the decoding process of a reader. Because of his or her literary, cultural, moral and contemporary knowledge – which the implied author had in mind when designing the signals – the reader is able to interpret the textual incongruity as having a deeper meaning. Following this realisation, the incongruity is then construed as a signal, and this signal is finally decoded as an indicator of unreliability not just through the context, but also through the reader relating it to his or her aforementioned knowledge.

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1.0 Introduction

Since the nineteen-sixties, a number of literary works both old and recent have been described by critics and narratologists as having unreliable narrators. One character that has been categorised as such is the dutiful butler Stevens from Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). What makes the reader question Stevens' reliability is not just the uncertain way in which Stevens accounts for his past, but also how it becomes increasingly obvious that he has been harbouring repressed feelings for his former co-worker, Ms Kenton. On top of this, his obsession with how a butler must be dignified at all times is revealed to be little more than an attempt to hide from the guilt he feels due to his own wilful ignorance of his master's associations with Nazi Germany (Ishiguro 1989). Although Stevens might be considered unreliable, he is still fairly sympathetic, even pitiful, because he is lying to himself more than to the reader. His greatest flaws are his own dignity and self-deceit.

Not all unreliable narrators have such relatively sympathetic reasons for misrepresenting reality, however. Some might have a deteriorating grip on sanity, such as the unstable Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991). Bateman's unreliability becomes more and more pronounced as the story becomes progressively more implausible, incoherent and grotesque. Others may be deliberately and consciously distorting the narrative to suit their own agenda, like Vladimir Nabokov's depraved paedophile character, Humbert Humbert, in *Lolita* (1955).

In addition to being mentally ill, malicious, self-deluding or otherwise flawed, such narrators might also be more or less overt about their unreliability. Some, like the aforementioned Stevens, frequently remind the reader that their memory of events is imperfect and encourage the reader to be mindful of this. Others say nothing of such nature, and it is left to the reader to play detective and pick up breadcrumbs of inconsistencies and contradictions that might eventually lead to a revelation that casts the story in a new light.

As should be apparent from the above, the general term "unreliable" can cover a wide variety of different types of narrators, many of whom may express their unreliability in very different ways. That said, their designation as being unreliable does not mean that everything they say is a lie and cannot be taken at face value – a narrator may be unreliable on some points but reliable on others (Phelan & Martin 1999, 96). However, it does mean that a significant part of reading a story with an unreliable narrator involves trying to separate fact from

falsehood, and to otherwise try and assess on what points the narrator is liable to be unreliable. Unreliability can thus be seen as a label that is applied to a narrator because part of his or her narrative is somehow suspect rather than an indicator that nothing the character says can be believed. Perhaps as a result of a recognition of this complexity, efforts have also been made to refine the terms of unreliability and unreliable narrator into subtypes (Phelan & Martin 1999, Olson 2003), which makes a good deal of sense when considering that narrators like Stevens and Bateman, for instance, hardly have anything in common other than being classified in the same broad category as being "unreliable".

What unreliable narrators do have in common, regardless of their type, is that they function as both protagonist and first-person narrator at the same time – a homodiegetic narrator (Genette 1972, 244-245) – and thus, unlike a story with a third-person omniscient narrator, the homodiegetic narrator can potentially make the whole story suspect because everything is filtered through his or her perspective. Being protagonists in their own stories, they frequently have a personal investment in trying to win the sympathy and understanding of the reader (and narratee if one such exists in the story). The restrictions imposed on the reader by an unreliable narrator mean that the reader frequently has to "read between the lines", as the old saying goes, in order to unveil the true nature of the homodiegetic narrator.

This is part of what we find interesting about works featuring unreliable narrators. In a sense, stories with an unreliable narrator have two narratives to tell; the one presented to us by the narrator, and the one we as readers have to decipher by peeling back the layers of lies and self-delusion in an attempt to figure out what is really going on (Nünning 2005, 102). Of particular interest are the various factors that together result in a narrator being deemed unreliable, as well as what the relationship between these factors is. Is it the features of the text itself that is most important to the notion of a narrator's unreliability, or is it how the reader interprets the text? These are some of the processes we wish to investigate in more detail in this thesis.

1.1 Problem area

The unreliable narrator has been a widely discussed term ever since Wayne C. Booth presented his theoretical definition of the term in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).[1] Consensus regarding the terminological clarity of the term, not least concerning how unreliability is actually detected, seems to have been difficult to achieve. Generally speaking, there are two main groups that have different views on and understandings of unreliability: the rhetorical and the cognitive approach. Put bluntly, unreliability is encoded in and signalled through the text itself in the rhetorical approach, while in the cognitive approach, it arises as a result of the reader's interpretation of the text (Nünning 2008, 32, Shen 2011). As such, the rhetorical and the cognitive approach focus on the role of the text's creator and that of the reader respectively, while downplaying or even disregarding the role of the other. Because of their opposing understandings of where unreliability stems from, it can be difficult to decide which approach to settle on if one has the opinion that both textual features and reading process are important when investigating unreliability. By adopting one of the two established approaches, one would have to neglect the importance of either the reader's role in assessing a narrator's unreliability, or the notion that texts have encoded signals which suggest unreliability. Some theorists, such as cognitivist Ansgar Nünning, recognise this problem and have tried to combine the two under the assumption that they can, under the right circumstances, be complementary to each other rather than contradictory (Nünning 2005). We share this notion, and we believe that combining the cognitive and the rhetorical approach will yield a more nuanced understanding of how unreliability is located, analysed and explained – even if attempting to combine the two opposing approaches might come with its own set of problems. Having settled on this approach, the question then becomes about how to account for the various factors that influence the reading of a text, such as textual features and the reader's own knowledge (ibid.), as well as how to combine two disparate lines of thinking for the purpose of a practical analysis. These are some of the questions that lie at the foundation of our thesis, and to investigate them in more detail, we have formulated the following problem statement and research questions inspired by Nünning's own theoretical considerations regarding his proposed synthesis:

[1] For the exact definition, see section 2.2.1 "Wayne C. Booth"

1.2 Problem statement

Based on Nünnings proposed synthesis of rhetorical and cognitive approaches to unreliable narration, how is unreliability located in the novels *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) and *Gone Girl* (2012), and how is this unreliability decoded by readers?

- What textual signals suggest unreliability in a narrator to the reader?
- How are these signals integrated into the text in order to suggest this unreliability?
- How does the reader's own world-view and understandings influence the reading and recognition of unreliability?
- With our theory and the results of our analysis in mind, is it possible to combine the cognitive and the rhetorical approaches for practical analysis, and to what extent can they be balanced equally in a synthesis?

1.3 Theoretical approach

In this thesis we work within the field of narratology, which covers a wide variety of different concepts, theories and traditions. Narratology has roots in both formalism and structuralism, both of which are rather wide fields as well (Meister 2011). However, for the sake of simplicity, and due to the emphasis in recent theory on the following two approaches, we have chosen to focus mainly on rhetorical and cognitive narratology, since these two are essential for the synthesised approach outlined earlier. While we have already chosen this particular approach, we believe it would be prudent to account for the complexity of the topic of narrational unreliability in order to understand the progression in definitions of the term that has led some theorists to reconceptualise unreliability. It is also necessary to account for some of the points of contention between the rhetorical and the cognitive approaches, not least the problematic concept of the implied author[2], since it is one of the main issues that seems to stand between a synthesis of the two approaches. Thus, in order to better understand the evolution of the concept of unreliable narration as well as to understand the sometimes nebulous concept itself, we will present a lengthy and detailed theoretical section featuring theorists and key terms from both

[2] The concept of the implied author will be explained in detail in section 2.2.

the cognitive and the rhetorical approach. We believe that it is necessary to offer this kind of overview and discussion of unreliability in order to position ourselves in the field of narratology. As previously stated, we hypothesise that the synthesis of the two approaches will yield more nuanced results compared to using only one or the other on its own. As such, we want to try to compile and combine some of the tools presented by theorists within the field of narratology that can be used for such an analysis. We want to look at both textually encoded signals of unreliability and the underlying cognitive processes that result in the reader interpreting these signals as suggesting unreliability in order to better understand the various factors that contribute to the effect of unreliable narration. In doing this, we also aim to illustrate the possible application of the synthesised approach, which may hopefully contribute to a more thorough way of carrying out analyses of unreliable narrators. To perform this investigation, we have chosen to analyse two literary works featuring unreliable first-person narrators. These are *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) by Zoë Heller and *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn.

1.4 Chosen works for analysis

We have chosen our case material not because we wish to analyse *if* they have unreliable narrators – this was known to us beforehand – but because we wish to analyse the various different factors that influence how a narrator is read as being unreliable. The novels we chose, *Notes on a Scandal* and *Gone Girl*, were selected because they have different narrational styles: the former has a fixed singular first-person narrator, and the latter has dual first-person narrators with variable multiperspectivity on the story. We believed the difference in narrational style might play a role in the unreliability displayed. Another reason for our choice of these two novels is due to them being of different genres; *Notes on a Scandal* can be categorised as a psychological drama, whereas *Gone Girl* is more akin to a mystery or crime novel. We speculate that this difference in genre might influence the way in which unreliability manifests in the two novels. We should stress that we do not seek to conclude anything about unreliability in genres in general or to establish archetypes of unreliable narrators, nor to be able to make representative statements about them. Our aim is to identify the various textual features and reader-related factors that result in a narrator being deemed unreliable, and we believe that the differences in the chosen novels will allow us to investigate this in more diverse narrative scenarios.

2. Theory

In the following sections, we will present the theories and concepts relevant to our investigation of unreliability. The first section contains a brief overview of the two main approaches to investigating unreliability: the rhetorical and the cognitive approach. The next section presents the evolving concepts of the unreliable narrator and the implied author, which will also demonstrate the debate and discussion there has been – and continues to be – between proponents of the two different approaches regarding the function of the concepts. Near the end of the section, we will also clarify our position in the debate surrounding unreliable narration and how we intend to approach our investigation. The final section contains a number of additional terms and methods for analysing unreliability, which we will make use of in our analysis section.

2.1 Rhetorical and cognitive approach to unreliable narration

When investigating unreliable narration, there are mainly two different approaches used to identify this: the rhetorical and the cognitive approach. The former is the more widespread of the two, and many of its proponents subscribe to Booth's definition of unreliability. In this approach, the concept of the implied author as well as the implied reader – the kind of reader whom the text is intended to be read by – feature as key terms. Central for the rhetorical approach is to show how an implied reader – or rather, a reader who tries to enter that position – decodes the gap between implied author and narrator (Shen 2011); unreliability is something that is encoded in the text by the implied author, and it is then up to the implied reader to decode this in order to achieve a successful reading of the text. (ibid.).

In contrast to the emphasis placed on the implied author by proponents of the rhetorical approach, those favouring the cognitive approach place much greater emphasis on how readers resolve textual incongruity as unreliability, with some calling for the abandonment of the concept of the implied author altogether (Nünning 2005, 89-90). To put it bluntly, a cognitivist might argue that postulating an implied author limits the reader's role to simply attempting to conform to the guidelines provided by the implied author. This is problematic because it carries the implication that there is only one true way to read a text, and that it is the reader's task to interpret the text in the way the author intended. In cognitive narratology, the implied author,

if at all present, is changed from being an entity constructed by the sender to being a reading strategy constructed by the receiver, as the reader's *idea* of the author used to help explain textual oddities and ambiguities (Nünning 2008, 34-35). With the importance of the implied author thus much reduced, cognitive theorists shift the method of detecting unreliability to the reader by making unreliability an interpretive reading strategy used by the reader to resolve textual ambiguities and contradictions (ibid., 32). This interpretive strategy is called *naturalisation*[3] by some cognitivists. It is a cognitive process through which the unfamiliar is made familiar to the reader – or 'natural', hence the name – by linking textual inconsistencies to frames of experience, to what the reader already knows about human actions, motivations and behaviour. Thus, when the reader is faced with a puzzling contradiction in a text, he/she is able to make sense of it because of previous experiences (Al-Mansoob 2011, 803).

It should be noted that while proponents of the cognitive approach may differentiate themselves from the rhetorical approach on how to identify unreliability in a text, the former still tend to use the same methods as the latter when it comes to practical analysis (Shen 2011). For instance, in her article "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" (2003), Greta Olson points out that Nünning fell into this very trap in an article from 1998. While arguing that unreliability is not a text-immanent phenomenon and is instead something attributed by the reader during text reception, Nünning nonetheless presents a list of fourteen stable textual markers that signal unreliability to the reader (presented in detail in section 2.3.1). The issue here is how such stable textual signals of unreliability (a feature of the rhetorical approach) can exist if unreliability is supposed to be a result of reader response (a feature of the cognitive approach) (Olson 2003, 97).

2.2 The unreliable narrator and the implied author

In this section, we will present an overview of the concepts of the unreliable narrator and the implied author, two important – and, in the latter case, highly controversial – terms used when analysing unreliability in texts. The overview is presented in a semi-historical manner, meaning that we start with the origin of the concepts, followed by redefinitions and criticism of and

[3] This term is related to the context of frame theory. Frame theory is an attempt to explain how humans perceive the world with the aid of frames of reference and schemata (Nünning 2008, 46).

challenges to the concepts made by other theorists. The overview is concluded by a clarification of our own stance towards the concepts and how they will be utilised in our analysis.

2.2.1 Wayne C. Booth

Since we are working with the unreliable narrator, we find it sensible to begin with the theorist who gave the first theoretical definition of the term: Wayne C. Booth. Although his definition has been questioned since then, many theorists still cite Booth as a sort of basic foundation for discussing unreliable narration. Booth's theoretical terms also form the basis for the conceptualisation of later terms, and in order to understand the later theories that build on Booth's theory, it is necessary to understand his key terms.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, Booth gave his definition of the term 'the unreliable narrator' in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). The exact definition is as follows: "[...] I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not." (Booth 1961, 158-159). What is worth noting here is that simply lying is not what makes a narrator unreliable; instead, unreliability is measured by how closely the narrator shares the norms of the text/the implied author – Booth conflates the terms of text and implied author – in words or actions. But what exactly is the implied author, this standard against which unreliability is to be judged? As far as a clear, concrete definition goes, Booth is unfortunately rather vague. According to Booth, the implied author is an artificial version of the real author, one created for the specific work. The norms and values of this "second self" should not be seen as being identical with those of the real author, and different versions of implied authors may be created for different works (ibid., 71). The implied author is present even in novels without a dramatised narrator, and Booth describes it as "[...] an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails." (ibid., 151). He lists a variety of terms that are aspects of – but not synonymous with – the implied author: theme, meaning, symbolic significance, theology, ontology, tone, style and technique (ibid., 73-74), although Booth dismisses each of these terms as being insufficient to truly cover what the implied author is. The fact that Booth attempts to use the above terms to approach a definition of the implied author suggests that it is a textual phenomenon, the structure of the whole work. However, he goes on to imbue the implied author with a sort of agency, stating: "The "implied author" chooses, consciously or

unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices." (ibid., 75). It may seem paradoxical that the implied author can be the structure of the text yet also be the one who chooses how that text is structured, which is also something that critics of the concept have argued. Another point of criticism raised by some theorists such as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Ansgar Nünning is that it is difficult to discern what exactly the norms and values of the implied author are, which makes the implied author an unsuitable tool with which to measure a narrator's unreliability (Nünning 2008, 34). However, proponents of the implied author, such as the narratologist Seymour Chatman, have attempted to refine the concept further in order to argue its indispensability in narrative theory and textual analysis.

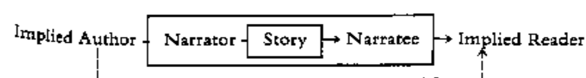
2.2.2 Seymour Chatman

According to Chatman, the main benefit of positing an implied author is that it offers "[...] a way of naming and analyzing the textual intent[4] of narrative fictions under a single term but without recourse to biographism. This is particularly important for texts that state one thing and imply another." (Chatman 1990, 75). Texts that state one thing and imply another can also be a way of describing unreliability in texts. Like Booth, Chatman views the implied author as an indispensable term for identifying unreliability: He states that if a narrator's account of the story is unacceptable to the reader, then there must be someone or something else that is the source of the "true" story (ibid., 90). As far as identifying unreliability goes, Chatman is in agreement with Booth that unreliability results from a discrepancy between the narrator's norms and values and those of the implied author (though where Booth speaks of norms and values, Chatman prefers to qualify them as codes and conventions (ibid., 83)). However, where Chatman differs from Booth is in his definition of the implied author.

In his book *Coming to Terms - The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (1990), Chatman attempts to give a more concrete definition of the implied author. He states: "The implied author is the agency within the narrative fiction itself which guides any reading of it. Every fiction contains such an agency. It is the source – on each reading – of the work's invention. It is also the locus of the work's *intent*." (ibid., 74). This, together with another

[4] By "intent", Chatman follows the definition made by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, stating that it refers to a work's whole or overall meaning, including its connotations, implications and unspoken messages (Chatman 1990, 74).

passage in the book where Chatman equates the implied author with the whole text (ibid., 81), suggests that the implied author is a wholly text-immanent phenomenon. The implied author is "a record of invention" – an imprint of sorts – left behind by the real author when he/she created that text, which the reader reconstructs during the course of the reading and which is used to account for the structure and composition of the text (ibid., 83). However, although Chatman refers to the implied author as a record of invention, he also classifies it as an inventor, the one who empowers the narrator (who by comparison is invented) to "speak" (ibid., 85). It should be noted that the use of the word "record" does not mean that one can deduce from the text what the real author had in mind while writing that text. When Chatman states that the implied author could be simplified as just "text intent", he stresses that intent is supposed to be understood not as what was in the author's head during the creative process, but rather what is in the physical text the reader has in his hands (ibid., 86). In connection to this, Chatman puts greater emphasis on the reader's role in connection to the concept compared to Booth, stating that it may be better to speak of the inferred author rather than the implied author. This is because of the interpretational role of the reader in the reception of texts, and to emphasise the variance in what a text means to different readers (ibid., 77). In a similar vein, Chatman also makes reference of the concept of the implied reader. Like its authorial equivalent – the implied author – the implied reader is a hypothetical version of its real counterpart. The implied reader makes a notable appearance in a communication model denoting unreliability, where it functions as the receiver in an implicit communication between it and the implied author behind the narrator's back, so to speak (see the figure below).



The communication taking place in the box between the narrator and narratee represents the story as it is represented at face value in a given text, while the one between the implied author and the implied reader, indicated by the broken line, represents the "secret, ironic message about the narrator's unreliability", the one that undermines the story put forward by the narrator and allows the reader to correctly identify him as unreliable (ibid., 151).

Although Chatman has often been cited for his defence of the implied author, he has also received criticism for what can be perceived as contradictions and paradoxes in his theory. One of these critics is cognitive narratologist Ansgar Nünning.

2.2.3 Ansgar Nünning

In his article "Deconstructing and Reconceptualizing the Implied Author: The Implied Author – Still a Subject of Debate" (1997), Ansgar Nünning, a proponent of the cognitive approach, disputes Chatman's defence of the implied author on several points. One of his main points of critique is that the implied author as defined by Chatman is inherently contradictory. Nünning claims that when Chatman refers to the implied author as being both inventor and the patterns in the text – thus both anthropomorphising and depersonifying the implied author – he creates a paradox, because how can the implied author be both inventing subject (by being the creator – or inventor – of the text) and invented object (the patterns in the text) (Nünning 1997, 97)? Another point of criticism by Nünning is that, while Chatman insists upon "theoretical clarity and consistency" in the concept of the implied author, Nünning believes that Chatman does little to actually make the concept any clearer or more well-defined, and instead simply dresses it in a "semiotic sounding garb" when he suggests substituting codes and conventions for norms and values (ibid., 98). It is worth noting that Chatman does not explicate what his alternative to norms and values actually covers, and Nünning stresses that the alternative is no easier to define or arrive at than the original (ibid., 98). Nünning also criticises Chatman for making the concept of the implied author too encompassing when it can cover not only the text itself and its codes and conventions, but also be an instruction on how to read the text, the inventor of the text itself, the text in its "inventional aspect", text design, text intent, etc. (ibid., 98). Nünning states: "The sheer number of such nebulous features, of course, lends the concept a certain colourfulness, but it can not disguise the fact that it is impossible here to speak of making something precise or of the establishment of a descriptively adequate terminology." (ibid., 98). He criticises the concept for being essentially everything and nothing at the same time; it covers too many different terms – some of which seem incompatible – to adequately describe any one of them.

There is also an issue, according to Nünning, in the role of the implied author and implied reader in the communication model put forward by Chatman. The model illustrated earlier places the implied author and reader "outside" the narrator-narratee communication, with the former two having a separate level of communication around the latter two. The main problem here is this: If the implied author is comparable to the text in its entirety, and if the implied reader is essentially the mirror image of the former, then either the "sender" and "receiver" are identical – because if the implied author (a) is the text (b) and the implied reader (c) is also the

text (b), then (a) and (c) are the same – *or* there is simply no place left in the text for the implied reader to fill (ibid., 101-102). In connection to this, Nünning points out that some of the terms that the implied author is supposedly synonymous with, such as text intent, are incapable of filling the role of a sender in a communications model – because how can a text be its own sender? – which again emphasises the paradoxical nature of the concept (ibid., 101-102).

Furthermore, Nünning also takes issue with the way that the implied author is often portrayed as a purely textual phenomenon when many of its definitions suggest that it is heavily dependent on and constructed by the reader (ibid., 103). Citing Chatman's statement that "[...] we might better speak of the 'inferred' than the 'implied' author" (Chatman 1990, 77), Nünning views this as Chatman implicitly admitting that the implied author is something that is worked out by the real reader as part of the interpretation of the text (Nünning 1997, 104). Nünning uses Rimmon-Kenan's interpretation of Chatman's words regarding the implied author to further illustrate how the latter concedes the reader's importance; Rimmon-Kenan states that, since the implied author – as she interprets Chatman – is voiceless and silent, then it must be seen as "a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (ibid., 104). If the implied author is largely, or exclusively, a reader construct, then this stands in contradiction to the idea that it is a textual phenomenon imbued in the text by the author and *re*constructed by the reader.

Because of the various contradictions and the insufficient terminological clarity of the concept, Nünning suggests eliminating the implied author altogether and replacing it with a concept that better fulfils the textual role that the implied author was supposed to do. Nünning calls this new concept *the structural whole*, which is conceived of exactly as the name suggests, by taking the sum of all the various levels and components of a text (ibid., 111). The key difference between this concept and the implied author as the whole text – as suggested by Chatman – is that the structural whole is explicitly and exclusively a reader construct. Although there are various features, such as character conversation, chapter division, and other matters related to the composition and decision-making of the text, that must ultimately be attributed to the real author, it is still the reader who combines all the various parts of the text into a greater whole in the reception process (ibid., 112). Although Nünning believes that this reconceptualisation resolves some of the problems and contradictions inherent in the implied author, it does leave the question of how unreliability is to be located, since in the classic definition, it is in the discrepancy between the implied author and the narrator that unreliability is revealed.

This is something that Nünning addresses in an essay from 1999 titled "Unreliable, compared to what? Towards a Cognitive Theory of *Unreliable Narration*: Prolegomena and Hypotheses", in which he suggests a number of ways to account for unreliability without having to rely on the implied author. Nünning believes that unreliability can be explained in terms of *dramatic irony*. Dramatic irony results from "[...] the discrepancy between the intentions and value system of the narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader" (Nünning 1999, 58). In other words, if the norms of the narrator and the reader clash, or if the reader knows more than the narrator knows or more than the narrator assumes that the reader knows at a given stage, there is an instance of dramatic irony. The reader interprets the narrator's words on two different level. First is what the narrator wants the reader to know and the way he/she wants the reader to view certain events. The second level is the meaning the reader extracts from the narrator's utterances that the narrator does not intend to convey; statements made by the narrator continually exposes his or her state of mind and world view, which not only allows the reader to create a more rounded image of the narrator, but also allows the reader to deduce what "really happened" in the narrative (ibid.). He sums up this argument by stating: "Unreliable narrators are those whose perspective is in contradiction to the value and norm system of the whole text or to that of the reader, and unreliable narration can be seen as the result of discrepant awareness or dramatic irony" (ibid., 59). Thus Nünning's argument is that unreliability may arise if there is a discrepancy between the norms and values of the complete text or the reader and those presented by the narrator, but it is not necessary to postulate the existence of the implied author in order to be able to talk about the value system of the text itself.

As seen above, dramatic irony can be indicated in the text by textual signals. Nünning goes on to describe a number of identifiable clues of unreliability that may be found in texts. These range from explicit contradictions in the narrator's statements to grammatical feature and indicators of subjectivity that suggest bias on the narrator's part (ibid., 64-65). Nünning has also compiled a comprehensive list of fourteen textual signals of unreliability in an earlier article on unreliability. This list will be elaborated on in more detail in section 2.3.1. However, while Nünning acknowledges that there are certain textual signals of unreliability, he also asserts that textual signals alone cannot properly account for unreliability. The reader is essential for interpreting the textual signals and actually aligning them as a function of unreliability. He cites Monika Fludernik, who, on the subject of irony, states that it is only the reader who can align the various textual contradictions and inconsistencies and determine that it is, in fact, irony at work (ibid., 66).

The focus in the cognitive approach on the reader as the deciding factor in determining unreliability raises the question of how exactly the interpretive process that results in something being deemed unreliable works. Nünning explains this in terms of naturalisation, which, as mentioned earlier, is an interpretive strategy that can be used to resolve textual ambiguities. Nünning cites fellow narratologist Kathleen Wall, who states: "Part of the way in which we arrive at suspicions that the narrator is unreliable, then, is through the process of naturalizing the text, using what we know about human psychology and history to evaluate the probable accuracy of, or motives for, a narrator's assertions" (Nünning 1999, 67). However, since Wall asserts that this process is so ingrained in our reading strategy that it is largely unnoticeable, Nünning suggests clarifying these unacknowledged frames of reference. To do this, he distinguishes between two types of schemata: those based on knowledge about the real world and society, and those based on knowledge gained from previous literary reading experience.

The first type, *extraliterary knowledge*[5], draws upon the reader's referential frameworks of, among other things, cultural codes, models of psychology and human behaviour, knowledge of the contemporary social, moral or linguistic norms relevant for the text and the reader's own system of norms and values (Nünning 1999, 67-68). The second type, *literary knowledge*, has to do with reader's experience with general literary conventions, genres, intertextual references, stereotypical characters and the structure of the text being read (ibid., 68). When readers encounter textual inconsistencies, they draw on one of these two frames of reference in order to naturalise the text, that is to say, to make sense of it (ibid, 68). In other words, viewing a narrator as being unreliable is an interpretive strategy used by the reader in order to resolve incompatibilities in the text (ibid., 69).

In conclusion, it should be noted that while Nünning harshly criticises the concept of the implied author and even suggests eliminating it altogether, he later adjusts his stance towards it to the point where he uses it as a term himself, albeit in a different way than Booth or Chatman did. This new stance comes as a result of a reconceptualisation of the implied author suggested by narrative theorist James Phelan.

[5] Since Nünning does not name these two frameworks, we have borrowed the terms "extraliterary" and "literary" from Phelan's survey of Nünning's theory in Phelan's book *Living to Tell about It* (2005).

2.2.4 James Phelan

In his book *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (2005), Phelan redefines the concept of the implied author in such a way that it is moved outside the text itself and more closely tied with the real author (Phelan 2005, 47). He describes the implied author as "[...] a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text" (ibid., 45). As Phelan points out, his definition can account for two kinds of implied author: the word "streamlined" suggests that the implied author is a partial, though not necessarily entirely accurate, representation of the real author, while "version" suggests that the implied author is something constructed by the author (ibid., 45). Phelan argues that his implied author also stands apart from previous definitions of the concept. Unlike Booth, whose implied author is occasionally conflated with the text, and Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan and Nünning[6], who make the implied author a strictly textual phenomenon, Phelan's implied author is a text-external feature, the agent responsible for bringing the text into existence (ibid., 45). Phelan admits that, for practical purposes, distinguishing between the flesh-and-blood author and the implied author can make a communication model more complex than is strictly necessary. However, from a theoretical point of view, he still wants to keep the two separate, because he believes keeping the distinction offers a number of advantages in terms of clarity and comprehensibility (ibid., 45-46). Like Booth, Phelan argues that authors create versions of themselves as they write that are only partial representations of their real selves. Indeed, the values, beliefs or attitudes espoused by the implied author in one text may be radically different from those of the real author or those of implied authors in other texts made by the same author. Another argument presented by Phelan is that the concept also helps explain phenomena such as ghost-written narratives, where the actual author attempts to pass for a different person altogether, or collaborative works, where the various authors of the text can be synthesised into a single implied author. While the above points regarding the implied author may make it seem as if Phelan assumes an intentionalist position – that is to say, believing that interpretations of a text can be supported by what the author intended with the text – this is disproven when he states in a later essay,

[6] Despite Nünning's vehement criticism of Chatman that we have outlined above, Phelan somewhat amusingly equates Nünning's reconceptualisation of the implied author as the structural whole with the definition offered by Chatman.

"The Implied Author, Deficient Narration, and Nonfiction Narrative: Or, What's Off-Kilter in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*?" (2011), that:

> I want to locate the intentionality in the agency of the implied rather than the flesh-and-blood author [...] Rhetorical theory's interest not in the author's private intentions but rather in his or her public, textualized intentions entails locating authorial agency in the implied rather than the actual author. (Phelan 2011, 135).

Based on the above, it can be said that when Phelan speaks of authorial intent and agency, he refers to the notions that the reader creates from reading the text and which he/she ascribes to the implied author rather than what might hypothetically have been the thoughts and intentions of the flesh-and-blood author. However, he emphasises that the implied author is not merely a product of the text nor simply the reader's inferences; the implied author is an active agent, and the way in which the reader becomes *aware* of the implied author (through the text) is not to be equated with the implied author herself. Referencing Dan Shen's terms, Phelan states that the implied author encodes the text, the reader decodes it, and through the decoding, the reader comes to know the implied author (ibid., 136). It is through this feedback loop between authorial agency, textual phenomenon and reader response that meaning arises (Phelan 2005, 47).

As mentioned earlier, Nünning adjusts his previously sceptical stance towards the implied author because of Phelan's reconceptualisation, in part due to some of the above points, but also due to criticism by Phelan of Nünning's own radical redefinition of the implied author. Phelan's main criticism concerns Nünning's replacement of the implied author with the structural whole and how he locates the agency for determining that structural whole solely in the reader, since there are, according to Phelan, a great number of constraints imposed on the reader's agency by the designer – that is to say, the implied author – of a text. Phelan argues that Nünning is already aware, on some level, of these constraints because of his identification of certain textual signals of unreliability; signals that, logically, someone must have deliberately planted in the text for the reader to pick up on. Likewise, Phelan states that the idea of naturalisation of texts rests upon the assumption that a text was designed by an agent who expects his audience to make certain inferences from problems in the text. The structural whole of a text has also been designed, consciously or intuitively, by that agent, the implied author, and there are clues left behind in the text about that design (ibid., 48). In addition, while Phelan approves of Nünning's arguments for supplementing narratological analysis with

cognitive tools and terms, specifically the frameworks and conceptual schemata that readers use when interpreting texts, he states that it is also necessary to keep in mind that authors also use their own frameworks and schemata when they design the structural whole of a text. However, since it is still the premise that it is only possible to infer the implied author's agency from a text and not that of the flesh-and-blood author, the conceptual schemata for the structural whole that the reader reconstructs during a reading will be those of the implied author (ibid., 49). Because of its role as agent and chief architect of the organisation and structuring of the text, Phelan considers the implied author to be the source of unreliability.

2.2.5 Nünning revisited

Despite his attempts at debunking the concept of the implied author in his earlier articles, Nünning's opinion of the validity of the implied author changed following Phelan's reconceptualisation. In his articles "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches" (2005) and "Reconceptualizing the Theory, History and Generic Scope of Unreliable Narration: Towards a Synthesis of Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches" (2008), Nünning attempts, as the titles suggest, to combine the best methods and insights from both approaches into what he believes will be a more thorough and rounded analytical approach to unreliable narration. As will become apparent, Nünning's earlier theories were already tinged by rhetorical methods, but in this new article, he explicates the benefits of employing some of the rhetorical cornerstones, including the implied author, in narratological analyses. This softening in attitude comes in no small part thanks to Phelan's theory and his criticism of Nünning's earlier work. Nünning appears to have taken Phelan's notion about the logical necessity of assuming a creative agent behind all textual signals of unreliability to heart, stating: "The interpretive move to read textual inconsistencies as a signal of unreliability after all does not make much hermeneutic sense if it does not proceed from the assumption that someone designed the inconsistency as a signal of unreliability" (Nünning 2008, 49-50). He also states that Phelan argues convincingly for both his view on the necessity in unreliable narration for the rhetorical model of narrative communication, and also for the assumption that authors fashion their texts in particular ways to communicate meanings, beliefs, values and norms to the reader (ibid., 50). Another clear indicator that Nünning moves closer to the rhetorical approach is his support for the idea put forward by Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin as well as Greta Olson that the various models of unreliable narration all consist

of a tripartite structure. This structure consists of 1) *a reader*, who recognises a dichotomy between 2) *the narrator's* viewpoints and statements and 3) those of the *implied author* (or the textual signals) (ibid., 50). While it might seem odd that Nünning, a cognitive narratologist, would accept the implied author as a basic part of unreliable narration after his vehement attack on its usefulness as a concept, let alone an analytical tool, it should be stressed again that it is Phelan's reconceptualisation of the term that Nünning accepts, not the versions posited by Booth or Chatman. Phelan's implied author, which is outside the text as a creative agent that is practically interchangeable with the actual author, is functionally similar in role to the agent that Nünning, in his essay from 1997 about the implied author, acknowledged as being the ultimate creator of his theoretical structural whole of a text (see section 2.2.3). It may be because of this similarity in role between the two that Nünning was more receptive to this version of the implied author and why he willingly included it as part of his attempted synthesised approach.

2.2.6 Synthesising rhetorical and cognitive approaches

So what exactly is this synthesised approach to unreliability that Nünning suggests, and how does it differ from a strictly cognitive or rhetorical approach? A good point of departure may be the aforementioned tripartite structure. In a rhetorical analysis of a text using this model, a reader would attempt to enter the position of the implied reader by correctly reading the various textual signals and inconsistencies between narrator and implied author and interpreting them as indicators of narrational unreliability. However, it would not explain *how* the reader would know to correctly interpret these signals as clues to unreliability and not, for instance, as simple authorial incompetence (Nünning 2005, 94). Nünning believes that the cognitive approach can supplement this model by explaining the reader's interpretational abilities in terms of frameworks and conceptual schemata; their real-world knowledge and norms and values together with their knowledge of literary conventions would affect their reading of a text. Additionally, the synthesised version of the tripartite structure has another feature that sets it apart from the rhetorical version: In addition to a dichotomy between implied author and narrator, there can, in our understanding of Nünning's synthesised approach, be a dichotomy between narrator and reader – though this dichotomy would still be orchestrated by the implied author – which is demonstrated in Nünning's case analysis of Ian McEwan's short story, "Dead As They Come" (1978) (Nünning 2008, 52-54). At the same time, the design of the text, the

various signals that the (implied) author has furnished the text with, would typically place constraints on the multitude of possible interpretations a reader might make (ibid., 56). Nünning sums up his proposed synthesised approach as follows:

> In the end it is both the structure and norms established by the respective work itself and designed by an authorial agency, and the reader's knowledge, psychological disposition, and system of norms and values that provide the ultimate guidelines for deciding whether a narrator is judged to be reliable or not. (ibid., 65)

It thus attempts to combine the best of both worlds; the rhetorical approach's detailed descriptions and methods of locating textual unreliability, and the cognitive approach's explanation for how readers understand and interpret textual inconsistencies and oddities as unreliability. However, Nünning himself says that his proposed synthesis does not provide definite answers on all points, and in fact raises some questions of its own, such as whether the presuppositions and goals of the two approaches are truly compatible. Instead it is meant as a way to rethink and spark further debate on issue of explaining the complex mechanisms that underlie instinctive reader assessments about a narrator's reliability (ibid., 65).

While Nünning's proposed synthesis has merit and he makes a good case for the benefit, perhaps even necessity, of combining the rhetorical and cognitive approaches, the synthesis is not above criticism. As mentioned above, Nünning attempts to employ his synthesised approach in practice by analysing the short story "Dead As They Come", for which he asks working questions such as "What textual and contextual signals suggest to the reader that the narrator's reliability may be suspect?" (Nünning 2005, 100). Dan Shen criticises Nünning on the grounds that the working questions are only rhetorical in nature. In order to make it an actual synthesised approach, Shen argues that Nünning would also need to ask questions like "When faced with the same textual features, what different interpretations might readers come up with? What different conceptual frameworks or cultural contexts underlie the divergent readings?" (Shen 2011); that is to say, questions that involve cognitive concepts such as the aforementioned frameworks and conceptual schemata.

2.2.7 Our approach to unreliability

Regardless of how the ongoing debate about unreliability pans out, the idea presented by Nünning of combining the two established approaches and letting them complement each other in an analysis is one we believe to be both sensible and useful for practical analysis. Both the rhetorical and the cognitive approach have methods and tools that can provide valuable insight into how unreliability is located and decoded. Since our point of departure for locating and analysing unreliability will be textual signals we believe have been encoded by an implied author for readers to decode, the rhetorical aspect of the synthesised approach influences the structure of our analysis more than the cognitive approach, in the sense that the textual signals we locate form the basis for further analysis. In order to try and alleviate the potential issue of the rhetorical approach being too prominent, we will attempt to address the additional questions posed by Dan Shen in order to better cover the cognitive aspect of the synthesis as well. Thus, while the main contribution of the cognitive approach will be to explain how and why readers can interpret the textual peculiarities we uncover as signals of unreliability, we will also attempt to offer divergent readings of the texts where applicable. That being said, since the conceptual schemata used by readers to make interpretations cannot be directly located in the text like the unreliability signals can, our statements regarding these schemata will be more hypothetical in nature and based on our assumptions about the text's intended readers.

Considering the immense debate regarding the implied author, we believe that we ought to make our stance on the concept, and on the role of the actual author, clear, and to consider what role we see it as fulfilling in an analysis of narrational unreliability. Generally, we are in agreement with Phelan in that we see the implied author as a text-external creative agent. We also support the distinction between implied and real author on the basis that any ascriptions we make regarding authorial agency must be attributed to our *idea* of the author rather than the actual one. Likewise, when we in the analysis state that readers in general are likely to interpret something in the text a certain way, we would argue that it is because the implied author has had certain foreknowledge about the frameworks and conceptual schemata of a significant part of his or her potential readers when designing the text.

Furthermore, since unreliability may arise as a result of a narrator expressing deviating norms and values, it will be worthwhile to clarify whose norms and values we believe the narrator's can deviate from. Based on our understanding of Nünning's synthesis, we would argue that the narrator may be at odds with both the reader and the text itself – and by extension,

at odds with the creator of the text, the implied author. Discrepancies between the narrator and the reader may come as a result of the reader's sense of normalcy, and by extent his/her frames of reference, and discrepancies between the narrator and the text may manifest as instances of irony[7] – indicating a gap between the narrator and the implied author – which in itself is a signal of unreliability. Because of the implied author's aforementioned role as creative agent of the text, we would argue that if the text expresses certain norms and values which are at odds with the narrator's, the text's norms can be seen as being identical to those of the implied author.

2.3 Identifying textual unreliability

In the following sections, we will introduce two methods of locating and categorising unreliability in a text. The first is what we have called Nünning's fourteen signals of unreliability. Nünning's signals were originally presented in his article "*Unreliable Narration* zur Einführung: Grundzüge einer kognitiv-narratologischen Theorie und Analyse unglaubwürdigen Erzählens" from 1998, and they were in part adapted from the work of Dagmar Busch and Gaby Allrath (Nünning 1998, 27). Greta Olson presents the signals in her article "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" (2003), which we will use below. The second method is Phelan and Martin's six types of unreliability, first presented in their co-written article "The Lessons of "Weymouth": Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*" (1999) and later reprinted in Phelan's book *Living to Tell about It – a Rhetorics and Ethics of Character Narration* (2005). Next is a presentation of Gérard Genette's definitions of perspective and time, two concepts that are relevant to the analyses of our case material. In addition to our case material being of a particular type – both homodiegetic first-person novels, the second also multiperspectival – we would argue that the two concepts are important to discuss in connection to unreliability; both the point of view and the temporal aspects of the novels, such as their chronology, can affect the reading and interpretation of the narrator and the events of the story.

[7] While we will also make use of dramatic irony at times, we are hesitant to use it as often as Nünning's definition of the term would allow, since Nünning appears to use the term in a broader sense than other definition of this specific brand of irony suggest. A more narrow view on dramatic irony has it refer specifically to instances where the implied author shares with the reader additional knowledge about the present or future in the narrative that characters in the story are ignorant of (Abrams & Harpham 2005, 186).

2.3.1 Nünning's fourteen signals of unreliability

This section is an introduction to the fourteen textual signals for locating unreliability established by Nünning in 1998 and compiled by Olson in 2003. Note that both Nünning and Olson simply list what the signals are without offering much in the way of examples, and as such, the elaboration for each quoted signal is of our own making and thus a reflection of how we understand the various signals. Additionally, we will use Monika Fludernik's comprehensive study of subjectivity and expressivity in her work *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (1993) to provide elaboration on the eighth and the tenth signal. Although her work concerns the use of indirect and free indirect speech, Nünning has expressed approval for the study as a useful supplement to the study of unreliable first-person narrators because of "the close link between subjectivity on the one hand and the effect called unreliability on the other" (Nünning 2008, 44), and we thus believe Fludernik's research can be favourably adapted for our own study.

Nünning's first signal of unreliability is "the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse" (Olson 2003, 97). An example of this might be if the narrator claims that she has always been very fond of someone, and then later states that she has always despised the same person. The second signal is "discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions" (ibid.), such as the narrator declaring that she is not a nosy person, but then promptly digging through someone else's private belongings out of mild curiosity when given the opportunity. The third signal, "divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' descriptions of her" (ibid.), may be the narrator claiming to possess certain positive characteristics, and then having other characters calling her out for lacking those same characteristics. The fourth signal, "contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself" (ibid., 98), might be when the narrator attributes certain faults and flaws to those around her, and in so doing, reveals herself to be possessing her own set of, perhaps personally unacknowledged, flaws and shortcomings. The fifth signal is explained as "contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the storyanddiscourse [sic]" (ibid.). This signal has to do with instances where the narrator explains and interprets actions or events, whether those involving herself or others, so that it fits her idiosyncratic world-view.

The sixth signal, “other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals” (ibid.), can be understood, in our opinion, as meaning either that another character directly contradicts the narrator’s statements, such as during a dialogue between the two, or that a character unwittingly corrects a statement made by the narrator to the narratee. For verbal remarks, an example of the latter might be if the narrator has built up the idea that she holds an important position at some company, and another character casually mentions that the narrator is unemployed. For body signals, an example could be if the narrator claims to be respected, but other characters act in a manner towards her which suggests contempt or mockery. The seventh signal refers to “multiperspectival arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events” (ibid.). Multiperspectivity is a narrative term commonly used to describe a story where the point of view shifts between several different characters – and as such, the story can be said to have several different narrators rather than just one (Hartner 2012). Unreliability would thus arise if two or more viewpoints present the same event in ways that contradict each other. This type of unreliability can be referred to as *internarrational unreliability* (Hansen 2008, 332). Naturally, it would only be relevant to look for this signal in stories that actually have shifting viewpoints.

Signal number eight is explained as “an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity” (Olson 2003, 98). It has to do with, in part, instances where the narrator refers to herself in some capacity but also involves certain grammatical categories that suggest that the narrative is coloured by the narrator’s perceptions. These could for instance be addressee-oriented adverbials, e.g. “honestly”, epistemic lexemes such as “maybe” and “probably” and speaker-related sentence modifiers such as “in my opinion” (Fludernik 1993, 234, 240 and 263).[8] The ninth signal, “an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy” (Olson 2003, 98), is about how the narrator attempts to create a link between herself and the reader and make the reader – or perhaps more accurately, the narratee – feel included in the story through the use of direct addresses such as “you”, which might also have the effect, or at least the intention, of making the narrator more relatable. Likewise, attempts at directing sympathy towards the narrator would also be a way of persuading the reader to the narrator’s

[8] It should be noted that the presence of subjectivity in a homodiegetic first-person narrative does not automatically constitute unreliability; almost everything in such a narrative is more or less by definition subjective, because it is filtered through a character in the story. Whether or not the subjectivity signals unreliability depends on the context in which it appears, for instance if the narrator is evaluating the actions of another character whom the narrator is biased against.

line of thinking. It could be with the aid of direct addresses – e.g. “You would have done the same in my place” – but it can also be the relating of events where the narrator portrays herself as a victim and thus deserving of pity. The tenth signal, “syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.” (ibid.), bears some similarities to the eight signal in that it also has to do with certain words and expressions that indicate the narrator’s subjectivity. However, instances of this signal more clearly show how the narrator’s discourse is influenced by certain emotions. In addition to the examples in the quote, this category includes emphasis by means of italics, interjections such as “for God’s sake” and evaluative adjectives like “poor”, “damned” or “lousy” (Fludernik 1993, 232, 239, 263). The eleventh signal, which involves “explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability” (Olson 2003, 98), seems to overlap somewhat with the twelfth signal, and it is rather unclear how a signal of this variety would manifest in a text. A possible understanding of it might be that it denotes instances in which the narrator makes it known to the reader that she is aware that her presented narrative may seem incredulous, but she nevertheless maintains that she is reliable. By contrast, the twelfth signal, “an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations” (ibid.), is more clear-cut. It denotes any instance in which a narrator admits she is fallible and that some elements of the story might thus be of questionable veracity. A “confessed or situation-related prejudice” (ibid.) is the thirteenth signal, and it may involve the narrator admitting that her account of events might be coloured, whether because of certain emotions affecting her at a given time, or because of ingrained bias against something or someone. To give an example of the fourteenth and final signal, “paratextual signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces” (ibid.), the title of Brett Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* would likely make the reader wary of the evaluations, interpretations and justifications made by a narrator of the story. Even if the narrator might be truthful, at least in his own world-view, for most people the word “psycho” would likely carry the connotations of a person who does not possess the same set of norms and values as the average person.

The fourteen signals described above provide useful guidelines for identifying various types of unreliability. However, while the categorisation of signals might seem rather stringent, we see the signals as being heuristic and more akin to guidelines rather than being rigid, separate classes. We believe the signals lend themselves to this kind of understanding from the onset, as illustrated by the overlaps between some of the signals. The reason we would still keep the categorisation of signals is because we believe it is important to differentiate *how* the unreliability is signalled, as it affects the kind of unreliability we would attribute the narrator.

In addition to our findings from the use of the signals, we will make use of Phelan and Martin's six types of unreliability, which will allow us to further specify what kind of unreliability is at work in the text.

2.3.2 Six types of unreliability

In their article "The Lessons of "Weymouth" " (1999), narratologists James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin devised a rhetorical theory for identifying different kinds of unreliability. Their intention was to create a method which can be used to sharpen the reader's perception of unreliable narration and to move away from the assumption that reliability and unreliability are a binary pair; that is to say, it is possible for a narrator to be reliable on some points and unreliable on others (Phelan & Martin 1999, 96).

Phelan and Martin expand on Booth's notions of fallibility and untrustworthiness and establish the three roles that a narrator fulfils in a story: he reports on, evaluates and interprets characters, events and situations. They establish three metaphorical axes that help distinguish these roles: the *axis of facts/events*, the *axis of knowledge/perception*, and *the axis of ethics/evaluation*. Unreliability may occur along these three axes, manifesting as *unreliable reporting* for the first, *unreliable reading* for the second and *unreliable evaluating* for the third. Once the reader identifies unreliability along one or more of these axes, he does one of two things: either he rejects the narrator's words and attempt to reconstruct a new account that more satisfyingly explains what is happening in the text, or he accepts the narrator's words but, recognising that they fall short of giving a proper account, he supplements the narrator's account in order to make better sense of it. As such, the three types of unreliability – unreliable reading, unreliable evaluating and unreliable reporting – can be further divided into six: *misreading*, *underreading*, *misregarding* (or misevaluating), *underregarding* (or underevaluating), *misreporting* and *underreporting*. The prefix of each type indicates which of the two aforementioned approaches the reader takes to the type of unreliability encountered: mis- indicates the reader's assumption that the narrator's account is wrong, and under- indicates the reader's assumption that the narrator's account is insufficient. These different types of unreliability occur when unreliability is detected on at least one of the three axes. As will be explained below, some of the types of unreliability on one axis may come as a consequence of unreliability on other axes (ibid., 94-95).

The first type of unreliability, misreading, has to do with faults in what the narrator knows about or the way he perceives a given character or situation. Underreading indicates that a narrator's lack of knowledge or perceptive awareness results in an insufficient reading of a given event, character or situation. As subsets of unreliable reading, these two types occur when there is unreliability on at least the axis of knowledge/perception (Phelan & Martin 1999, 95).

Misregarding denotes a narrator's mistaken value system – in the eyes of the reader and/or the implied author – or attempts at justifying actions or events. An example of this would be Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, who misregards his sexual abuse of a little girl by classifying her by his made-up term "nymphet" – a prepubescent temptress of sorts (Phelan 2005, 108). Underregarding is when a narrator's ethical judgment may be on the right track, but is still not sufficient to allow for sound moral evaluation of situations or other characters. These subsets of unreliable evaluating occur when there is unreliability on at least the axis of ethics/evaluation (Phelan & Martin 1999, 95).

Misreporting, which involves unreliability at least on the axis of facts/events, often occurs as a result of misreading or misregarding characters or situations, and has to do with the narrator giving a faulty account of events; for instance, if a narrator shows unreliability in his knowledge about a character or in his evaluation of that character's behaviour, it also impairs his ability to reliably report on events or facts regarding that character. Finally, underreporting, which likewise involves unreliability on at least on the axis of facts/knowledge, occurs when the narrator says less than what she knows about a given situation or character, including herself – although this particular type may not always indicate unreliability, depending on whether the narrator expects the reader to be able to infer meaning from what is being said (Phelan & Martin 1999, 95-96).

It should be noted that a narrator may express more than one type of unreliability during the course of a story, and that different types can occur at the same time. It also bears stating that the lines between different types of unreliability, especially occurring on the same axis, are sometimes blurry and may overlap (Phelan & Martin 1999. 96).

As stated above, Phelan and Martin operate with two different strategies that the reader might employ when encountering unreliability, resulting in the six types of unreliability listed above depending on whether the narrator's account is viewed as wrong or insufficient. However, they also recognise a third option that the reader might take, namely to subtract from a narrator's inflated account. That is to say, if a narrator provides too much information to the detriment of the reliability of the account, it may be necessary for the reader to trim the account

down to the essential. However, they choose not to include it as its own category, since they argue that it is functionally similar to the reconstruction required by the first option; unlike the second option, where the reader adds to a lacking account which nonetheless has a stable core, it would be entirely up to the reader to decide what should go and what should stay in the case of subtraction (Phelan & Martin 1999, 94-95).

However, we would argue that there is analytical benefit to establishing another type of unreliability on the axis of facts/events – *overreporting* – for when the reader is faced by an overstating narrator. We believe that inflating the volume of details in a situation may serve as a decoy on behalf of the narrator that obfuscates another, more important matter. The unreliability would then manifest itself as the narrator's attempt, consciously or subconsciously, to hide something by diverting the focus onto something else. The reason why we choose to only include an extra type of unreliability on one of the three axes is because the two other types that would have been created as a result – overreading and overregarding – would be very similar to misreading and misregarding. In an overreading of a situation, only part of what is conveyed would be accurate, and the rest would be a misconception similar to a misreading. Since it would be unclear what is and is not accurate, it would be necessary to dismiss it all and start over, just like a misreading. The same applies to an overregarding of a character's actions and the ethical evaluation of these. However, when it comes to overreporting and misreporting, we believe there is a difference. In an overreporting, it is not the factuality of what is being reported that is in question – and thus it is dissimilar to a misreporting, where what is being said is in some capacity false. Rather, it becomes a question of the relevance of what is being reported; why the narrator would choose to flood the reader with an abundance of superfluous information – and what events or facts the narrator is trying to hide or downplay by doing so. We stress that this last type of unreliability is of our own devising and is thus not tested empirically like the types presented by Phelan and Martin. However, we have found textual data during the course of our analysis that we believe supports our argument for the relevance of this seventh type of unreliability. This, together with the other six types of unreliability, will be elaborated on in the analysis section of this thesis.

2.3.3 Gérard Genette: focalisation and time

In addition to the concepts outlined in the previous sections, we find it necessary to employ other terms from narratology, specifically *focalisation* and *time*, in order to properly explain

how our chosen novels for analysis, *Notes on a Scandal* and *Gone Girl*, are told. These will be clarified in this section. The concepts originate with structuralist Gérard Genette, but we have chosen to supplement Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1972) with Nils Soelberg's theoretical overview of the concepts in *Narratologi som analyseredskab* (1991), since Soelberg's presentation provides additional examples of analytical usage for Genette's theoretical terms.

2.3.3.1 Focalisation

Genette considers all narrators to initially be omniscient, and through the use of what he calls focalisation, they may deliberately limit the amount of knowledge and information they have access to and can perceive, depending on what serves the narrative best. Focalisation thus denotes a way in which some things are placed in focus while other things are sidelined. It can be seen as a filter of sorts that restricts what type of information may pass through to the narrator, and thus to the reader. Genette uses focalisation as an alternative to point of view, since he sees the former as simply asking: "Who sees?", whereas the latter encompasses this together with other matters such as the narrator's values and opinions, what the narrator decides to tell about and how, and he considers this conflation of categories impractical (Soelberg 1991, 6, 43, Genette 1972, 186). While there are three main categories of focalisation – *zero focalisation*, *internal focalisation*, *external focalisation* – our focus will be on internal focalisation and its subcategories – *fixed*, *variable* and *multiple focalisation* – because of their relevance to homodiegetic narration. Internal focalisation is when the narrative is presented through the eyes of a single character, and as such, the information and details available to the reader are limited to what this character has access to. The character may become identical with the narrator through the use of the personal pronoun "I", and internal focalisation thus covers what is traditionally called a first-person narrator, but an internal focalisation is still possible even without the personal pronoun; what matters is that the flow of information is restricted to a single character (Soelberg 1991, 43). The subcategories of internal focalisation denote shifts in the ways the focalisation is used: fixed internal focalisation stays with the same character throughout the narrative; variable internal focalisation shifts to new characters during the course of the ongoing narrative; and multiple internal focalisation shifts between several characters' perspective on the same event in the narrative (Genette 1972, 189-190).

Within the context of internal focalisation, Genette calls a narrator who is identical with the character through which the story is focalised a *homodiegetic narrator*, and a narrator who is

separate from the story a *heterodiegetic narrator* (Genette 1972, 244-245). In narratives where there is a distance between the events being told and the time of narration, a certain ambiguity may arise if the homodiegetic narrator (purposefully) fluctuates between knowledge she had "back then" and the insights she has in the present. While it is largely unproblematic as long as the narrator clearly indicates when the shift in insight happens ("Back then I didn't know that this would happen…"), the ambiguity arises when the shift is unmarked, and it may become unclear exactly which self the narrator is using while reporting events (Soelberg 1991, 44). Another instance where the features of the homodiegetic narrator as opposed to the heterodiegetic narrator become relevant – particularly in relation to our study of unreliability – is when the narrator reports on events that she simply cannot know about, a transgression of the boundaries set by the internal focalisation. Since a narrator with internal focalisation has given up her omniscience, information that she would not have access to must instead be seen as pure imagination. Soelberg states that readers would attribute transgressions like these to either mistakes by the author or to some "other meaning", and we would argue that this meaning could be to signal unreliability (ibid., 44-45).

2.3.3.2 Time

Gérard Genette distinguishes between two categories of time: *story time* and *narrative time* (Genette 1972, 33). According to Soelberg's explication of the concept, story time can be defined as the total length of the story being told in a text, measured in "standard" time (hours, days, months) while narrative time can be defined as the time it takes the narrator to tell the story measured in a more abstract "pseudo-time" consisting of words and pages in the text (Soelberg 1991, 69). While story time is generally fixed and unchangeable – because it has already occurred – narrative time is open to manipulation and tweaking by the narrator. The narrator can influence the relationship between story and narrative time by playing with three aspects of the story: the *order*, *duration* and *frequency* of events (ibid., 55). In our case, it is mainly the order and duration of events that will be of analytical relevance, which is why we choose to explain only these terms in more detail.

Order, the first of the subsets of narrative time that we have chosen to focus on, can be described as the chronology of events in the narrative. Very few novels are strictly chronological, and in many cases, the narrator is able to move freely and without problems along the story's timeline, so long as it is indicated where on the timeline the narrator is

(Soelberg 1991, 55). There are three key terms related to order: the *main narrative*[9], *analepsis* (or flashback) and *prolepsis* (flash-forward). The main narrative is the narrative typically introduced by the first event in the text, unless stated otherwise by the narrator, and the other two terms are always used in relation to this term. The second term, analepsis, is when the narrator tells of something that happened prior to where he or she is in the main narrative, while the third, prolepsis, is when the narrator relates something that takes place later relative to the current position in the main narrative (ibid., 56). Prolepses are common in first-person narratives, where the narrator's discourse is influenced by the narrated events (because those events – and everything that might have followed – have, in turn, influenced the narrator). A narrative in which the narrator, while telling the story of her younger, more naive self, states: "If I'd only known back then…" (ibid., 57) is an example of prolepsis. It is important to note that prolepses occur because the narrator decides that it is necessary to bring up something now that doesn't occur until later in the timeline, and likewise, analepses occur because the narrator has neglected mentioning something earlier on and has now deemed it relevant to bring it up in relation to the main narrative (ibid., 56). This can be important in relation to identifying narrational unreliability, because such decisions regarding when to divulge information reveals something about the narrator's priorities and values.

Duration, the second subset of narrative time, denotes how much time in terms of words and pages is dedicated to the recording of events and the passing of story time. Several days, months or even years may pass by in just a few lines or words, while an event lasting only a few minutes may take several pages. While there is no set standard for what constitutes as long and short duration, it is the marked shifts during narration that are noteworthy. A long duration automatically increases the volume of information and detail given to the reader, while a short duration compresses and minimises the flow (Soelberg 1991, 61-63). In that sense, it is possible to deduce what the narrator considers important and worthwhile to dwell on and what is glossed over as barely worth mentioning, which makes it relevant to the study of unreliability: if an event that seems largely irrelevant to the reader receives an extraordinary amount of attention while another, more important event (in the reader's eyes) is demoted to a mere offhand comment by the narrator, it may indicate something about the narrator's ability or desire to provide relevant information.

[9] This term does not appear in Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, but Nils Soelberg uses it under the term "det primære tidsplan" – *le récit premier* in French (Soelberg 1991, 56) – and the English translation of this is borrowed from the online book of reference *the living handbook of narratology* under the section "Time" (Scheffel, Weixler and Werner, 2013).

Another key temporal concept is the "time of the narrating" (Genette 1972, 215), which can be described as the point in time at which the narrator tells the story compared to when the narrated story takes place. Typically, the story is told *after* the events in the story took place, though this is not always the case (Soelberg 1991, 30). It is possible to distinguish four different types of narrating: *subsequent*, *prior*, *interpolated* and *simultaneous* (Genette 1972, 217). As mentioned above, the time of narrating is most often subsequent to the narrated story, but it may also be placed prior to what is being told about in a sort of prophetic narrative; that is to say, the narrator makes a prediction about the future without actually knowing what will come to pass. It is important not to confuse prior narrating time with prolepsis/flash-forward. In the case of the former, the events described (hypothetically) take place after the time of narrating, while in the case of the latter, the time of narrating is placed *after* all the other events of the story, including those in the prolepsis. The interpolated time of narrating is placed in between various parts of the narrative, as is the case with a diary narrative, where the events of the day are described after they take place without foreknowledge of what comes next. The final type, simultaneous narrating time, occurs at the same present time as events take place, though this is a less common type in narrative fiction. The narrator narrates events *as they occur* before her eyes (Soelberg 1991, 30-31). Soelberg states that the time of narrating is of particular interest in the first-person novel where the gradually closing gap between the narrated story and the time of narrating might be played with. It is also of interest when the time of narrating appears to be of one type but is later revealed to be quite another (ibid., 31). With regards to the interpolated time of narrating – which we will be operating with in the analysis of *Gone Girl* – Soelberg points out that diary narratives are written with emphasis on what the narrator found interesting and relevant at the time the events took place. When this becomes of analytical relevance is when the narrator, employing what seems on the surface to be a diary narrative, makes note of seemingly trivial and irrelevant details that later turn out to be of vital importance to the plot. In such a case, it might suggest that what is apparently an interpolated time of narrating was instead subsequent to the events, and deliberately staged to appear as if it was the former (ibid., 33).

Having presented the above theory of the synthesised cognitive and rhetorical approach, the concepts of the unreliable narrator and the implied author as well as the analytical tools relevant for our investigation – Nünning's fourteen signals, Phelan and Martin's six types of unreliability, and Genette's concepts of focalisation and time – we will move on to our analysis section, where these will be employed in practice.

3.0 Analysis

In the following analysis of *Notes on a Scandal* and *Gone Girl*, we will investigate the various textual signals of unreliability found in the novels and the kinds of unreliability at work in the texts. We will also look into how the reader's conceptual schemata influence the interpretation of signals, and how these schemata might at times produce divergent readings. Our aim is not to analyse and comment on every single instance of unreliability found in the texts, but rather to provide examples that illustrate different kinds of unreliability, or examples of unreliability which serve a particular function in the overall reading and interpretation process. During the course of our work of analysing the novels, we learned that the novels differed on more than just narrational style; the function of unreliability differed between the two texts as well, potentially related to the difference in genre, and we felt that this discovery was of sufficient importance that we decided to make it the organising principle for the analysis of *Gone Girl*. Thus, while there will be a certain overlap regarding the signals and types of unreliability in the analysis of the two texts – for instance, both analyses have a section concerning lies of omission – the function of the unreliability differs, which is why we choose to include analytical points that may be similar on a surface level. The differing functions will be explored in more detail in the relevant sections. Additionally, since we will first be demonstrating how unreliability can manifest through signals and exploring the different types of unreliability in the analysis of *Notes on a Scandal*, we will not include quite as many examples of these from *Gone Girl*, and as such, the latter analysis will be a bit shorter. As a final note, while there is an analysis section for each novel devoted specifically to the implied author, that is not to say that the implied author is only present in the instances mentioned in those sections, since the implied author is, after all, the creator of the textual signals. Rather, the examples provided denote places where we believe the implied author takes a particularly prominent role concerning the manifestation of unreliability in the texts.

3.1 Analysis of unreliability in *Notes on a Scandal*

"This is not a story about me." (Heller 2003, 4). These are among the first words that Barbara Covett, the narrator in *Notes on a Scandal*, tells the reader when describing the events of an affair between her friend and fellow teacher, Sheba Hart, and a schoolboy, Steven Connolly.

As it becomes apparent during the course of the narrative, it is in fact very much a story about Barbara and her involvement in the scandal, and the above statement represents one of many instances where Barbara's dishonesty, delusions and idiosyncrasies make her narrative unreliable.

The novel is written with internal focalisation through Barbara, who presents the narratee with her own account, a manuscript she has decided to write in order to set the record straight about what exactly went on during the affair. The narratee of the novel is the in-universe reader of Barbara's account, an interpretation supported by the familiarity with the scandal that Barbara assumes in her readers: "Her name will probably be familiar to most of you by now" (Heller 2003, 4), she casually remarks in reference to Sheba's identity in the novel's foreword. The majority of the novel is written in retrospect, occasionally intersected by sections and short chapters taking place in the novel's present. As such, most of the story is told in the form of analepses, with the main narrative making up only a small portion of the novel's length. The time of the narrating for the analepses is, unsurprisingly, subsequent to the events, whereas for the main narrative, it is interpolated, the chapters there occurring in the manner of something akin to diary entries. Significantly, this means that Barbara has had much more time to process and reevaluate the events of the analepses – at least those events experienced by Barbara herself; those told to her by Sheba are sometimes more recent news for her. By comparison, there is a much shorter gap between the events and Barbara's time of narrating in the main narrative. The net result of the time gap between the analepses and Barbara's time of narrating is that she is potentially able to present the events of the analepses – and by extension, herself – in such a way that she is portrayed in a favourable light. As will be demonstrated in the analysis, however, she has limited success with this.

3.1.1 Barbara's contradictions

One of the ways in which Barbara's unreliability is signalled is through the various explicit contradictions that occur during the course of her narrative (see Nünning's first signal, section 2.3.1). A number of these contradictions will be illustrated below.

As mentioned in the introduction of our analysis, Barbara makes a point of stating:

> This is not a story about me. But, since the task of telling it has fallen into my hands, and since I play a minor role in the events I am going to describe, it is only right that I should offer a brief account of myself and my relationship to the protagonist. (Heller 2003, 4)

Several parts of this statement are noteworthy. First is Barbara saying that the story is not about her. As the reader discovers early on in the narrative, this is blatantly false. The statement can be seen as a case of misreporting because it runs contrary to the facts of the story, which again speaks of a misreading by Barbara in relation to how much space she takes up in the narrative (see section 2.3.2); large sections of chapters are devoted to Barbara's own life and how events in the story affect her personally. While some of this self-exposure is deliberate, a significant part of it is involuntary and comes about as a result of her idiosyncrasies, delusions or biases, often in such a way that the statements and assessments she makes ironically reveal more about herself than her subject. This makes her remark about the story's focus even more ironic than she realises – assuming she is even aware of how contrary to fact the statement is. Second is Barbara's statement that she should offer a *brief* account of herself and her relationship with Sheba, the story's "protagonist". This initially seems to refer just to the explication provided in the foreword of the novel, but in reality, the entire story is one long account of Barbara's life during her time with Sheba, occasionally even further back. For one who claims to play only a "minor role" in the events, Barbara takes up an inordinate amount of space of the story, illustrating either her own self-delusion, or that she is deeply disingenuous in her assertions. As becomes apparent later in the narrative, she is partly responsible for the scandal going public (Heller 2003, 193), which makes her statement about playing a minor role contradictory. As such, Barbara may be pre-emptively trying to downplay her own crucial role in the events while at the same time denying her own responsibility for Sheba's downfall. Viewed in this light, there is a form of irony at work in how Barbara designates Sheba as the protagonist. Based on the reader's literary knowledge about traditional narrative structure containing a protagonist-antagonist dynamic, they might then quite naturally ask who the antagonist is. Because Barbara – or perhaps more accurately, the implied author – directs the reader's awareness to this binary opposition and then later reveals her role in Sheba's misery, she inadvertently makes it so that the reader could easily classify her as the antagonist. On a less speculative level, it is also ironic that Barbara calls Sheba the protagonist, since the reader does not have to delve too deeply into the narrative before realising that it is her, not Sheba, who should be classified as such. This is indeed a story about Barbara.

Another strong example of Barbara's self-contradiction occurs on the very first page of the novel where she states: "We don't have secrets, Sheba and I" (Heller 2003, 1). This statement clashes with another utterance only seven pages later, where she says: "(Sheba doesn't yet know about this project [the manuscript] of mine. I fear that it would only agitate her at the moment, so I've decided to keep it a secret until I am a little further along.)" (ibid., 8). This is a clear contradiction of her first utterance since Barbara outright states that she is, in fact, keeping secrets from Sheba. Additionally, since the intention behind these two statements appears to be about showing the reader how close and good a friend Barbara is to Sheba, but the actual outcome of the contradiction between the two statements is that she reveals herself to be a hypocrite, the second statement can arguably be seen as an instance of dramatic irony. The information the reader extracts from those two statements is decidedly different than what Barbara intends to convey through them. Tellingly, the latter statement occurs as a parenthetical aside, which highlights how little importance she attributes this, to the reader, quite important bit of information. This can be seen as an instance of misregarding (see section 2.3.2). In addition to the irrelevance with which she seems to treat what is tantamount to a direct lie to the reader, the remark also undermines the reader's confidence in Barbara possessing a sound ethical value system when she first claims that she and Sheba are open and truthful with one another, but then admits that she keeps secrets from Sheba if she deems it to be in Sheba's best interest. Barbara's claim that they have no secrets becomes particularly egregious when it is revealed that she is the one who caused Sheba's affair to be exposed, and that she has been hiding that fact from Sheba for about six months. Once the reader obtains this knowledge, Barbara's statement that she plays "only a minor role" in the events described in her narrative (Heller 2003, 4) also becomes darkly humorous and retrospectively ironic. The statement also retroactively becomes a case of either underreporting or misreporting, depending on whether the reader, now equipped with a much clearer picture of the events and the characters involved in the story, regards Barbara's statement as an attempt to mislead the reader by saying less than she actually knows about her own involvement in order to retain sympathy and hide her own culpability, or whether she genuinely and naively believes, because of her flawed value system, that since she did not *personally* go to the authorities and only strongly *suggested* the existence of the affair to someone else, she is not directly responsible. Thus, depending on which of these divergent readings the reader leans towards, a different type of unreliability may be detected.

Another case of Barbara contradicting herself is during a lunch between her, Sheba and Sue where Sheba calls Barbara out for making a scathing remark about the absent Sue. Barbara then admits to the reader that she is unused to being confronted that way. She states: "In my

other friendships over the years, I have tended to dominate. I've never made any conscious bid for power; it has always come about quite naturally that I should be the one to lead." (Heller 2003, 141). However, she claims that she sees Sheba's ability to stand up for herself and speak plainly as a boon to their relationship: "How much healthier to have a friend who isn't afraid to take you on, to tell you what's what! [...] I always knew that her forthrightness was an asset to our relationship – something that could only strengthen our bond." (ibid., 142). Based on this, it would seem that Barbara desires a friendship of equality with Sheba rather than one where Barbara is in charge. It becomes apparent in the main narrative, though, that Barbara attempts to take increasing control of Sheba during her vulnerable state once the affair is exposed to the public. She lets Sheba stay with her in her apartment for a week, but after Sheba's brother allows Sheba to stay in his house for a while, Barbara decides to follow and move in with her as well (ibid., 6). She appoints herself as Sheba's caretaker and spokeswoman, and she treats Sheba in a patronising, almost infantile manner, managing both food and budget, and giving Sheba cheap carton wine to pacify her when she wants a drink, the same way a mother might pacify an unruly child with a treat (ibid., 9). At the end of the novel, after Sheba has discovered the truth about Barbara's involvement and seemingly broken down completely, Barbara describes how she "made" Sheba take a nap after lunch and how she "let" Sheba go for a walk, and concludes by saying, apparently pleased, that Sheba knows at this stage not to go too far without Barbara (ibid., 244). This clearly illustrates the degree of control and dominance that Barbara exerts over her "friend" at this stage. This state of affairs is apparently quite satisfactory for Barbara; upon learning that they have to move out of Sheba's brother's house, she muses that the time spent there has been "terribly sad, of course. But terribly intense too and even wonderful in its way." (ibid., 239). Considering that they are both jobless, soon to be homeless, the house is besieged by journalists, there is still the impending trial for the affair, and Sheba is slipping deep into apathy, it is evident that Barbara is extremely selfish in her evaluation of their situation. From this, it is clear that while Barbara may say that she likes a friend that can stand up to her, her behaviour points to the opposite. She has consciously taken the dominating position she claims to have never sought.

Finally, Barbara states in the beginning of the narrative that she has been trying to defend Sheba's character against the media and counter some of the hostile press coverage, and that she has decided to write her own account as a means to do this (Heller 2003, 7). Unlike the slanderous, sensationalist press, Barbara claims that she will reveal the "true nature" of Sheba's personality (ibid.,7), and that she wants to show the public who Sheba "really is" (ibid., 8). However, by the end of the narrative, when Sheba has discovered Barbara's manuscript, the

veracity of the account is severely undermined by Sheba's denouncement of the information in it, accusing Barbara of lying and making things up (ibid., 236). As a response to these accusations, Barbara simply states: "Well, that's what a writer does, Sheba." (ibid., 236). In doing so, she more or less flatly admits that parts of her supposedly truthful, accurate and reliable account are completely fictitious and the product of Barbara's own speculation and fantasy – exactly the things she accused the media of in the novel's beginning. As such, Barbara's casual remark about writers constitutes a signal of unreliability to the reader when seen in light of Barbara's earlier comments about her narrative's accuracy.

As the above examples show, part of Barbara's unreliability stems from her inability to keep her narrative straight. Her contradictions serve as warning signs from the implied author to the reader that care must be taken when navigating the story.

3.1.2 Lying by omission

Barbara has a fondness for furnishing her account with seemingly trivial details about herself and others, but she also has a tendency to omit crucial details about events that might cast a shadow over her character.

Throughout the story, we learn that Barbara has had a friendship in the past with another teacher, Jennifer Dodd, who was her previous closest friend at the school, and that the friendship ended abruptly and without warning, according to Barbara: "Beyond some mysterious reference to my being 'too intense', she refused to furnish *any* explanation for her decision." (Heller 2003, 35). Barbara's lack of recognition for Jennifer's characterisation of her – calling it 'mysterious', suggesting she does not understand why she might be described in such a way – constitutes a signal of unreliability, because there is a discrepancy between Barbara's view of herself and how another character sees her (see Nünning's third signal, section 2.3.1). The reader's suspicion of Barbara's unreliability, piqued by the signal, is strengthened because of the statement's vagueness; like Jennifer to Barbara, Barbara doesn't offer the reader any more details on the matter. The suspicion deepens when Barbara adds that Jennifer reportedly clammed up upon being pressed for explanations, and eventually threatened with legal injunction before ceasing contact altogether (Heller 2003, 35). The last bit of information in particular strengthens the suspicion that Barbara is telling less than she knows and is thus underreporting (see section 2.3.2). Most readers will know, because of their extraliterary knowledge and exposure to news media, that legal injunctions are not normally

involved in the termination of relationships unless one part is behaving unreasonably – or, like in Barbara's case, in a manner that is "too intense". Put together, all these factors may suggest to the reader that Barbara's behaviour has been what amounts to stalking. A possible interpretation of all this is that Barbara genuinely does not understand Jennifer's accusations against her rather than it being a case of Barbara withholding information. This would mean that her unreliability stems from a case of misreading her own behaviour. However, a more likely interpretation is that Barbara is guilty of underreporting, a hypothesis that can be supported by a later passage where Barbara is comparing her newfound friendship with Sheba to what she had with Jennifer: "She [Jennifer] never uttered a critically word against me until the very end. (And then, of course, criticism was the *only* thing that came out of her mouth.)" (Heller 2003, 141-142). This seems to contradict Barbara's earlier statement about Jennifer's stony silence concerning her problems with Barbara's behaviour. If Jennifer had nothing to say except criticism – note that a rather important piece of information once again occurs as a parenthetical aside – then she must have said *something* that Barbara would understand as actual criticism and not just made "mysterious references". This understanding of Barbara as an underreporting narrator can be further reinforced by Barbara's statements regarding her conduct for contacting friends: "I had learned by now a little something about how these things are played. I knew it was important not to overstep the mark, not to appear too clingy [...]" (ibid., 143). Her observations about the necessity of not coming on too strong seem to be born of experience ("I know *by now…*"), which would suggest that she has previously been – or appeared to have been – too clingy, and that she *knows* that she has previously overstepped some boundaries. If the reader interprets Barbara's words to suggest this kind of awareness, it would support the notion that Barbara has some understanding of what Jennifer meant when she called her "too intense", and it thus reinforces the reader's suspicion that Barbara is underreporting.

In relation to the "incident" with Jennifer Dodd, Barbara also recounts an episode some time after their falling out where she saw Jennifer with her fiancé on a train. After a brief staring contest between Barbara and Jennifer's boyfriend, the latter turns around and kisses Jennifer, supposedly as an assertion of "proprietorial rights", which upsets Barbara to such a degree that she flees the train and sits on a bench weeping for half an hour (Heller 2003, 35-36). Barbara cites the entire episode regarding her relationship with Jennifer as an explanation for how deeply she is affected by erstwhile friends turning against her, but she underreports on why seeing the kiss specifically made her break down in tears. This is a case where an instance of underreporting is not necessarily indicative of unreliability. The reader may infer that Barbara's

grief is because of her seeing what she regards as a display of ownership, which she construes as a definitive signal that her friendship with Jennifer is over. In this case, the underreporting is mostly just an instance of Barbara assuming the reader can connect her remarks about being upset over losing a close friend with her crying. Alternatively, in a divergent reading, her breakdown might instead be because of heartbreak caused by unreciprocated love.[10] In this second reading, Barbara withholds the real reason for her reaction, which is that Barbara was interested in Jennifer as more than just a friend, and seeing the undeniable proof that she is romantically involved with another is what upsets Barbara so much. This example is sufficiently ambiguous that the unreliability depends entirely on the reader adopting the latter reading rather than the former.

Another instance where Barbara leaves out information that has to do with her past is during a conversation in the staffroom about private schools. She states that she does not mind private schools, unlike her colleagues, and that she has, in fact, worked at one: "My first job in teaching was at a fee-paying school in Dumfries and, had it not been for certain personal difficulties that I experienced with staff members at that institution, I might well be teaching there still." (Heller 2003, 39). However, Barbara offers no elaboration on what those "personal difficulties" entailed, nor whether she left at her own volition or was fired. Coupled with Barbara's frequently scathing remarks about her colleagues at St George's and the rough end to her friendship with Jennifer Dodd, the reader may begin to wonder if Barbara is even capable of sustaining "normal" relationships. Her statement suggests that she had issues with several – or all – of the other teachers at her former school, much like how she seems to despise, and is despised by, the other teachers at St George's (ibid., 20, 57-58). However, unlike her current colleagues, whom she goes to great length to deride as her intellectual inferiors (ibid., 16, 64), she is surprisingly tight-lipped about the "difficulties" she experienced at the school in Dumfries. This underreporting suggests that Barbara is somehow ashamed of, or at least unwilling to disclose, the details of what went on at the other school, but the underreporting only makes the reader more suspicious of Barbara's character. Even if the omission is a result of Barbara considering the details irrelevant, it still catches the reader's attention. While the details would indeed be irrelevant if this story was, as Barbara claims in the beginning of the novel, not about her, there are many other places in the novel where Barbara doles out

[10] There are a number of other places in the text that could be read in a similar manner regarding Barbara's possible repressed sexuality (Heller 2003, 6, 26, 123, 140-141, 144, 175, 204). However, while there are numerous *potential* places where such a reading could be offered, all are ambiguous enough that nothing can be said in this regard with any degree of certainty.

significant amounts of details about herself, both relevant and irrelevant. This makes her underreporting on this particular issue stand out all the more for her unwillingness to share details surrounding her departure from her previous workplace. It is likely that her underreporting is a result of her awareness that the details would have contributed to an unflattering image of herself in the eyes of the reader.

3.1.3 Transgression of focalisation

As mentioned in the introduction to the analysis, the perspective is internally focalised through Barbara, meaning that the reader is restricted to the observations she makes and has the events of the narrative filtered through her. This places restrictions on the type and amount of information that Barbara is able to present the reader with, although Barbara attempts to pre-empt the issues related to pushing these restrictions: "In many cases, the events I describe here were witnessed by me personally. Elsewhere, I rely on detailed accounts provided by Sheba herself." (Heller 2003, 8). By saying this, Barbara allows herself the option of describing events that she would otherwise not be able to describe without violating the boundaries set by the internal focalisation. In a sense, in the sections that supposedly reflect these "detailed accounts" that Sheba has provided, where the reader is presented with events that were not witnessed by Barbara herself, Barbara applies an internal focalisation of her own on Sheba. She presents the reader with the thoughts and feelings Sheba had during those events in a style reminiscent of free indirect speech: "She [Sheba] couldn't expect herself to be oblivious of what the kids looked like and smelled like. [...] Some of them were vile looking and some of them were attractive. What kind of saint wouldn't notice the difference?" (ibid., 50). However, the reliability of these passages that are based wholly on Sheba's accounts is severely undermined near the end of the novel when Sheba comes across Barbara's secret manuscript and becomes predictably outraged by the contents. When Barbara states that there is nothing in the manuscript that Sheba has not told her, Sheba declares: "You're mad! How did I never see it before? You're mad! You really believe this stuff is the truth. You write about things you never saw, people you don't know." (ibid., 236). Because of how confidently Barbara has used Sheba's account of events, this statement becomes a powerful signal of Barbara's unreliability (see Nünning's sixth signal, section 2.3.1): When the source of Barbara's information about the particulars of the affair denounces what she has written, it casts a shadow of doubt over a large part of Barbara's narrative. All the events she did not personally witness now become

suspect because her one justification for transgressing the focalisation – namely that she has Sheba's account of them – has been called into question.

3.1.4 Barbara's justifications

At several points throughout the narrative, Barbara tries to provide the reader with explanations and justifications for her questionable conduct. However, to the reader, they may often come across as flimsy at best and damning at worst, putting her motives and dubious value system into focus.

In the beginning of the novel, Barbara explains why she chose to move in with Sheba after the scandal broke, stating that Sheba was "so pitifully alone", and that only a heartless person would have abandoned her in her time of need (Heller 2003, 6). In doing so, Barbara portrays herself as a loyal, altruistic friend. However, during the course of the narrative, Barbara frequently comments on her own loneliness and how dreadful it is to be alone (ibid., 93, 186-187), and she seems to regard anyone else who interacts with Sheba as a competitor who vies with Barbara to be Sheba's one true friend (ibid., 140-141). All of these things signal unreliability to the reader about whether Barbara doggedly following Sheba wherever she goes is motivated out of loyalty or of Barbara's own crushing loneliness and need for companionship. The latter case is seemingly confirmed near the end of the novel when Barbara, while wondering how Sheba will manage on her own if she cannot go with Barbara, states: "I'm not sure I can bear it if I have to go back to being on my own again." (ibid., 240). Here Barbara's explicitly states her true concern, which also exposes the unreliability in her earlier explanation; without Sheba, Barbara will be as lonely as before. Her unreliability thus stems from her underreporting; she provides only part of her motivation in her initial explanation, and the other half is only admitted later on in the narrative.

A different kind of justification is seen when Sheba and Barbara visit Barbara's sister Marjorie during Easter, after the affair has gone public. While Sheba and Marjorie are attending church, Barbara takes the opportunity to do a little "spring-cleaning" of Sheba's handbag when she comes across it while tidying up. She claims to have had no intentions of rifling through Sheba's belongings, but gave in after she saw how messy it was (Heller 2003, 168). While this alone would most likely be considered a violation of privacy to most readers because of their extraliterary knowledge about the importance of respecting other people's privacy, Barbara takes it a step further when she finds an envelope at the bottom of the bag and opens it to find

a bundle of photos inside: "Naturally, I hesitated to look at them [the photos]. I take no pleasure in violating Sheba's privacy. But as Sheba's unofficial guardian, I have certain obligations that I cannot shirk." (ibid., 168). Two things are particularly noteworthy about this passage. First is the use of the sentence-modifier "naturally", which is a syntactic expression denoting a high degree of subjectivity (see Nünning's eight signal, section 2.3.1). According to Fludernik, sentence-modifiers like these are often used to present an argument (Fludernik 1993, 237), and in this case, it is used by Barbara to present her justification for going through Sheba's belongings. However, the fact that she apparently has to assure the reader that she *naturally* hesitated mostly just serves to highlight that it is not considered acceptable behaviour to violate the privacy of others – and that Barbara knows this. The second noteworthy aspect of the quote is how Barbara uses her status as Sheba's "unofficial guardian" as justification for her breach of Sheba's privacy. By stating that she is an *unofficial* guardian, she also implicitly admits that it is a position that no government institution has assigned her, and coupled with statements she has made earlier about her voluntary role as Sheba's caretaker, it is very likely a role she has bestowed upon herself. As such, the extent of the "obligations" that Barbara uses as justification for her behaviour are essentially unlimited; they can include whatever Barbara wants them to include. Her value system thus seems to dictate that she is allowed to ransack other people's private belongings in the name of "caretaking", which places her justification firmly on the misregarding side of the axis of ethics/evaluation. Her reasoning, which appears to be nothing but a thinly-veiled desire for snooping, makes the ethical side of her argument flimsy and misguided at best, and outright disingenuous at worst.

Another, more severe case of this is when Barbara reaches the part of her narrative concerning her betrayal of Sheba. Barbara begins by stating: "If I seem to take particular care in describing how I came to act as I did, it is not because I hope to exculpate myself, but rather because I wish to be as rigorously and unsparingly truthful as possible." (Heller 2003, 171). She is true to her word inasmuch as she takes great care in providing details about the events leading up to her leaking Sheba's secret to Bangs, but she does appear to makes some very conscious attempt at exculpating herself. To begin with, Barbara states that the month of December was difficult for both Sheba and her; difficult for Sheba because Steven's interest in her was waning and because of strained relationships with her family, and difficult for Barbara because her cat was dying (ibid., 171-173). Barbara considers their problems to be of equal magnitude and defends her misregarding:

> I dare say it will seem inappropriate to some people for me to assume a parity between my troubles and Sheba's. They will be hard pressed to believe that an ailing pet could cause a person as much heartache as a wayward lover. Sheba certainly didn't understand this. In fact, it was her failure to respect my grief – to respond with anything like the proper sympathy – that lay at the root of our brief but catastrophic rift. (ibid., 173-174)

While Barbara acknowledges that not everyone will consider a dying pet as devastating as she does, the delivery of her statement suggests that she considers anyone who does not share her viewpoint to be the ones who gravely misregard the situation by dismissing her concerns, rather than her being the one who misregarded her pet troubles by elevating them to the same level as Sheba's problems. This is the accusation she levels at Sheba, and in doing so, she contradicts her previous statement about her not trying to excuse her actions; this is exactly what she does when she claims that it was Sheba's "failure" to understand Barbara's hardship that caused the "rift" between them – in other words, it was Sheba's fault that Barbara revealed the affair to Bangs. As such, the justification Barbara tries to put forward ends up reeking of vindictiveness more than anything. It is not moral scruples about knowingly letting Sheba continue to have an affair with a minor that prompts Barbara to leak the story to Bangs, but rather what seems to be petty vengeance. By trying to shift the blame Sheba, Barbara almost attempts to portray herself as the victim rather than the culprit, the one the reader should be sympathetic towards because of the misregarding of those around her.

Barbara certainly appears to be very aware that she may be in danger of losing the narratee's sympathy. Before presenting the account of her betrayal, she states her awareness that some readers may judge her harshly for her actions (Heller 2003, 171), and immediately following her account of what she told Bangs, she takes great care in reminding her readers of the other pertinent issue during this time; which is to say, her ailing cat: "After I had left Bangs' flat I stood in the street, trying to collect myself. I wanted to go home – bury myself under my blankets, block out the fact of what I had just done. But then I remembered Portia. Poor Portia! I went to get my car and drove to the vet's dangerously fast." (ibid., 193). This is followed by a description of exceedingly long duration about how Portia has to be euthanized and how Barbara tries to cope with her final hours together with her cherished pet. The long and detailed descriptions of Barbara's pain of having to say goodbye to her cat comes as a rather jarring shift in focus compared to the pivotal event that preceded it. The story is, after all, still ostensibly about Sheba and not Barbara, and although Barbara stated she would be detailed in explaining how she came to act as she did in order to be "truthful" (ibid., 171), the scene with

her cat at the vet's takes place *after* she told Bangs, and as such, there should be no need to provide so much information that is only relevant to Barbara personally, not to the overall narrative that she claims to be telling. Yet Barbara has deemed it necessary to include that section, and the only plausible explanation appears to be that it is an attempt to garner sympathy from her readers, to soften the harshness with which Barbara acknowledges the reader might judge her. This, we would argue, is a case of overreporting (see section 2.3.2); Barbara tries to flood her readers with what is to them, strictly speaking, irrelevant information in order to move focus away from the much more glaring issue, which is her own culpability in Sheba's downfall; something she has up to the conversation with Bangs kept secret from the reader – both the in-universe and the flesh-and-blood version – and continuously hides from her friend until Sheba finds out for herself. The purpose of the overreporting is thus twofold: it is an attempt to shift focus away from the ethical breach of Barbara's betrayal; and it is an attempt to ensure that the narratee looks at her more leniently once the betrayal does move back into focus. While it could be argued that it might instead be a case of misregarding – that Barbara simply considers her cat important enough that it should be mentioned regardless of its relevance to the story – the fact that Barbara made it clear earlier that she knows her readers might not share her value system regarding pets would seem to make the interpretation about Barbara overreporting more likely; Barbara knows that the narratee has been made aware by now how much her cat means to her, and she believes she can thus get away with putting her own misery into focus, because her readers will understand the personal hardship Barbara is going through and thus be inclined to judge her less harshly. That the actual reader may not share this sentiment is, of course, not clear to her.

What most of Barbara's justifications seem to have in common is that they are conscious attempts to direct the sympathy of the narratee, and by extension that of the real reader. Such attempts constitute a signal of unreliability (see Nünning's ninth signal, section 2.3.1), because they typically occur when the narrator knows that not only are her actions questionable, but the underlying motivations are not entirely pure either. Thus her "sympathy" justifications – which are themselves often born of a misregarding of values – become a source of unreliability that counteracts her efforts to explain and – regardless of the remorse she claims to feel – excuse her actions.

3.1.5 Barbara's delusions

In some cases, Barbara's arrogant behaviour becomes almost delusional and out of touch with reality. This is reflected by a severe misreading or misregarding of situations, in which Barbara's perceptions or evaluations may become difficult for the reader to accept.

Barbara's delusions are particularly prevalent during her descriptions of her and Sheba's time together while they are holed up in Sheba's brother's house, awaiting the trial pre-hearings. At one point, when Sheba has begun to seclude herself in her room with a sack of modelling clay, Barbara contemplates the possible reason for Sheba's insular behaviour. She makes reference to remarks made by Sheba regarding married life, how a couple's interest in each other waxes and wanes rhythmically, and that the happiest couples are those in which one partner balances out the other's diminished interest by being all the more attentive and vice versa. Barbara speculates that this might apply to them as well now, and concludes: "If Sheba is being moody and difficult at the moment, perhaps that's just because it's her turn to be. Perhaps the shifts will change soon and it will be *my* time for some attention." (Heller 2003, 132-133). This illustrates a profound lack of understanding of Sheba's situation and is where Barbara's unreliability becomes especially noticeable as an instance of both misreading and misregarding. In addition to losing her job, her family, her reputation and her lover, Sheba's weekly visits with her son, which have been one of her few remaining highlights after her downfall, are being severely limited. Shortly before Barbara makes her speculations about Sheba's reclusive behaviour, Richard informed Sheba that she will only allow her to see her son under supervision, and that the supervisor he has assigned her is not only his student but is implied to be his mistress as well (ibid., 128-131). Based on their extraliterary knowledge of human psychology, most readers would likely say that any one of the above circumstances are sufficient grounds for being "moody", to say the least. However, not only does Barbara trivialise Sheba's situation by severely misregarding the impact of those circumstances on a person's behaviour, she also misreads Sheba's dark mood by relocating it to being a couple-related phenomena between her and Sheba. In so doing, she places herself into focus, and reduces Sheba's woes to a phase that she simply has to get over with Barbara's help – if only so that it might be Barbara's time to be the centre of attention. All of this signals to the reader how out of touch with reality Barbara is, how critically lacking her ability to evaluate situations is, and how her egocentrism clouds her empathy, resulting in a value system that is thoroughly

distanced from most readers. Unsurprisingly, this severely hampers her ability to reliably report on many things that requires ethical evaluations or judgments.

Another instance where Barbara's delusions affect her evaluation of a situation is in the novel's last chapter, after Sheba found Barbara's manuscript and raged at her. Barbara begins by blithely stating: "The crisis is over. Sheba and I have reconciled." (Heller 2003, 241). Immediately, these two sentences give the reader insight into Barbara's skewed priorities. The "crisis" refers not to Sheba's impending trial or their homeless situation, but rather to Sheba's falling out with Barbara. Once again, this illustrates the level of misregarding that Barbara displays towards the situation; her egocentrism makes her value system incompatible with that of many readers. Likewise, by the end of the chapter, the text signals a discrepancy to the reader between events and Barbara's interpretation of these, since Barbara's idea of a reconciliation appear to be rather different than the typical meaning of the word, or her interpretation of Sheba's reaction to what transpires is rather lacking (see Nünning's fifth signal, section 2.3.1). After Barbara has smashed Sheba's sculpture and cut up the photographs of Sheba and Connolly, thus effectively removing the last physical traces of the affair, Sheba breaks down completely. She despairs over her future, and Barbara keeps a tight hold of her until Barbara "[...] felt her droop, as if in surrender." (Heller 2003, 244). Sheba becomes listlessly pliant, which seems to be what Barbara takes as proof of their reconciliation. To Barbara, apathy appears to equate mending fences, or it is at least satisfying substitute for it. The reader, however, will most likely have a different interpretation and see Sheba's reaction as a sign of resignation and crippling depression. Thus Barbara's unreliability stems from a misreading of Sheba's lack of hostility and resistance as an extended olive branch, a sign that she is willing to move on.

3.1.6 Verbal idiosyncrasies

Throughout her narrative, Barbara displays a number of "verbal tics"; idiosyncrasies that often signal subjectivity – and by extension, a form of bias. These rhetorical idiosyncrasies thus come to convey unreliability through their repeated use and their function in Barbara's discourse.

At the beginning of the novel, Barbara makes the following observation:

> For most people, honesty is such an unusual departure from their standard *modus operandi* – such an aberration in their workaday mendacity – that they feel obliged to alert you when a

> moment of sincerity is coming on. 'To be completely honest,' they say, or 'To tell you the truth,' or 'Can I be straight?' (Heller 2003, 2-3).

Statements such as these as well as addressee-oriented adverbials like "honestly", "truthfully", etc. are similar in the meaning they convey. They all denote a high degree of subjectivity in the sense that the presented statement is the speaker's unfettered opinion – or at least, the addresser wants the addressee to accept it as such. To put it differently, these markers suggest that everything else said outside those sentences that are covered by the indicator of honesty are potentially lies or insincere statements – at least according to Barbara. What is noteworthy and ironic, however, is that despite her apparent derision of people who use phrases like the above, Barbara herself makes frequent use of these addressee-oriented adverbials. For instance, when Barbara is about to admit her betrayal of Sheba to the reader, she says: "[...] if I am to be entirely truthful, I must confess some very reprehensible behaviour on my own." (ibid., 171)[11]. Because Barbara previously made a point of stating how adverbials like these indicate a general level of dishonesty in the speaker, she undermines her own credibility when she makes use of them herself, at least by her own logic. Her earlier statement becomes doubly ironic because, had she not brought it up, it may very well be that her use of the adverbials might have passed the reader by unnoticed, or at least they would have been attributed less significance. We believe we see the implied author's presence quite clearly here because of the irony of what is being said; by ensuring that Barbara makes her statement regarding truth adverbials near the very beginning of the novel, the reader becomes mindful of their use right away, and is thus more likely to pay attention to their usage throughout the narrative. Viewed in this way, the implied author has thus set Barbara up to point out her own unreliability by making her fall into the same traps she derides others for stepping into.

As part of her narrative, Barbara makes frequent use of italics to place emphasis on certain words. While this in itself is not particularly remarkable, there is one word that is italicised more often than others: *me*. Once again, this would not be that strange were it not for the regularity with which it is used. By italicising these pronouns, Barbara emphasises her own importance in the narrative, which might not be so surprising for a story told in the first person, except for that problematic, contradictory claim she makes near the beginning that the story is not about her (Heller 2003, 4). Their usage also denotes the high degree of subjectivity in the

[11] Other examples of addressee-oriented adverbials or other indicators of truthfulness that Barbara uses are "frankly" (ibid., 6), "I must confess" (ibid., 26), "I might as well admit" (ibid., 83), "the truth is" (ibid., 102) and "any honest assessment" (ibid., 84).

contexts in which they appear. When Sheba tells Barbara about the affair after having kept it a secret for months, Barbara bitterly notes: "We had spoken of the deceit that she had been practising on Richard, on her children, on the school, even. But nothing had been said by either of us about her deceit of *me*." (ibid., 163). During the summer holidays, Barbara notes: "Although Sheba didn't find time for *me* that summer, I know now that she managed to put in several calls to Connolly." (ibid., 144). Barbara's indignation can be seen rather clearly in these two statements, and she most likely intends the narratee to empathise with her and share this indignation. From what the actual reader knows about her relationship with Sheba at the various stages, however, it is just as likely, if not more so, that the reader will find Barbara's outrage disproportionate to the level of intimacy she and Sheba share, which may be far lower than what Barbara evidently considers it to be. In that case, the reader would consider Barbara to be misregarding of the appropriateness of her indignation because she has misread the depth of her relationship with Sheba, which again lowers the trust the reader places in her assessments and evaluations.

Finally, although perhaps not an idiosyncrasy in the strict meaning of the term, Barbara's audience addresses through the use of the pronoun "you" is sufficiently characteristic of her that we choose to include it in this section. Although she also uses "you" in the generic sense, it is the addressee-oriented "you" that is of interest here: "So you see, I know all about biding my time." (Heller 2003, 144) As mentioned in the introduction to this analysis, Barbara's narratee is the in-universe reader of her manuscript, the people who will presumably read it once it is finished and published. Her explicit addresses and references to an audience constitute a signal of unreliability (see Nünning's ninth signal, 2.3.1), and the unreliability signalled relates to the fact that Barbara knowing that she is writing for an audience almost invariably means that she filters her account and is presumably more guarded about which details about herself that she reveals, and the repeated references to the narratee reminds the actual reader of this awareness on Barbara's part (Heller 2003, 4, 46, 180).

3.1.7 Barbara's bias and lack of objectivity

As might be expected of a story told with internal focalisation, Barbara displays a high degree of bias in her observations and evaluations that makes her account very subjective. While a lack of objectivity may not be surprising, it becomes problematic when Barbara herself makes claims about her account being factual and accurate.

In the foreword of the novel, Barbara states that the factual errors and the sanctimonious slant of the news media were some of her reasons for writing her own account of the novel's events. She believes that she is the best suited candidate to write about what went on, both because she believes she knows Sheba better than anyone else, and also because she has either personally witnessed the events described, or she has access to Sheba's account of them (Heller 2003, 4-8). She does admit that the version of the story she presents is not infallible, but this admission of unreliability seems to be more directed at the parts of the narrative that are based off Sheba's descriptions, since, as Barbara notes, Sheba has a tendency to romanticise the affair, and she fails to acknowledge the wrongness of her actions (ibid., 8). The implication of this is most likely intended to be that Barbara, unlike Sheba, is able to provide a more sober and nuanced account. However, this implicit self-characterisation (see Nünning's fourth signal, 2.3.1) ends up becoming a signal of Barbara's own unreliability once the reader moves further into the narrative. When Barbara in the beginning of the novel states that she disputes Sheba's reading of events in places where she feels Sheba is being too biased, she forgets to make reservations about her own bias, because she does not appear to account for how her own bias might influence *her* reading of events. The unreliability here stems from Barbara underreading the impact of her own bias.

Throughout Barbara's report of Sheba and Connolly's relationship, she does indeed dispute Sheba's reading of the affair – but she does much more than simply question the meaning and significance of gestures and conversations. She frequently provides scathing remarks about Connolly's physical appearance and the ridiculousness of his relationship with Sheba. After presenting what must have been Sheba's account of her first kiss with Connolly, Barbara steps into the narrative and undermines the situation by trying to point out the silliness of the situation to the reader (Heller 2003, 71): "It must have been a pretty comic sight – the little suitor reaching on tippy-toe for his middle-aged mistress, the bike smashing to the ground. But the farcical element of their first embrace seems never to have occurred to Sheba." (ibid., 71) Sheba has told Barbara many details about the scene, but "[...] never about how immensely *silly* the whole thing must have looked." (ibid., 71). The repeated use of the modal auxiliary "must" is noteworthy. It indicates a conjecture with a high degree of subjectivity on Barbara's part, an indicator of how certain Barbara is – without actually knowing for certain – that the events took place in the way she describes it. The epistemic weight behind the modal auxiliary is thus most likely intended to convince the reader that this is the case as well, if for no other reason than to de-romanticise the situation – perhaps to "dispute" Sheba's reading, as Barbara said she would – and to bring the reader's viewpoint closer to that of Barbara. However, Barbara's

reading, which should ideally just bring Sheba's rosy account down to a more realistic level, goes further and paints the events in a decidedly negative light, in which Barbara makes a mockery of the affair by describing Connolly as "the little suitor", how he has to go on his tippy-toes to be able to reach his "middle-aged mistress". Barbara's personal dislike for Connolly is also evident in her physical descriptions of him. While Sheba and a number of female newspaper columnists describe Connolly as being quite attractive, Barbara makes a point of stressing how thoroughly unattractive she finds him, stating that he has "lank hair the colour of pee", a severely squished nose, heavy-hooded eyes so down-turned that they look like those of a tragedy mask, as well as dirty skin (ibid., 26). Notably, Sheba focuses on some of the same features of Connolly's appearance in a later passage – his eyes, his nose, his skin, the last of which she remarks is "golden and impeccable" (ibid., 68). Since Barbara bases much of her information regarding both the affair and Connolly himself on Sheba's descriptions, it may seem as if Barbara has simply taken the same features that Sheba has gushed over and painted them in a negative light instead, indicating quite strongly to the reader that Barbara is most likely just as unable to offer an objective evaluation of the affair as Sheba is. Another telling sign that Barbara despises Connolly is when she smashes Sheba's sculpture, which resembles the two lovers, and the apparent glee that Barbara takes in destroying the parts of the sculpture resembling Connolly (ibid., 243). Thus, when Barbara states that Sheba's account is "not always entirely reliable" because of how she tends to romanticise the affair (ibid., 8), the reader comes to see the irony in how Barbara does not acknowledge how her bias makes her own reading of the events unreliable.

Apart from Connolly, the two other characters whom Barbara seems to hold in lowest esteem are Sue Hodge and Richard, Sheba's husband. Barbara gives the reader very unflattering descriptions of them and questions why Sheba puts up with them. Early in the novel, Barbara expresses outrage upon first learning of the friendship between Sue and Sheba, calling Sue a "ridiculous creature" (Heller 2003, 33) and launching into a series of personal attacks against her character (ibid., 33-34, 41). Her upset seems to stem from the fact that Sheba chose someone other than Barbara as a friend – regardless of the fact that at the time, Barbara had been sitting back passively doing nothing for the first few weeks while Sue had been making active efforts at getting to know Sheba. By comparison, Richard is criticised by Barbara for lording his intellect over others, for being condescending towards everyone else, and for being petulant if his opinions are challenged or if he is not the centre of attention (ibid., 104-105, 124-125). The reader may note that these accusations could constitute instances of dramatic irony and may come to signal an unwitting self-exposure of Barbara's own hypocrisy

(see Nünning's fourth signal, section 2.3.1); since the reader has learned throughout the story that Barbara displays contempt towards almost everyone else (ibid., 15), loves using flowery language to elevate her intellectual superiority (e.g. "Pantagruelian bulk", ibid., 89) and enjoys not-so-subtly displaying how well-read and educated she is (e.g. "[...] a north London version of Turgenev's Matthew Ilich", ibid., 104), the traits Barbara pins on Richard are to a great extent equally applicable to herself.

The criticism levelled against these two characters gives an indication of where the bias stems from: Barbara considers no one except herself suitable for Sheba, and she is jealous of the fact that Sheba not only devotes time to them, but that she seems to like them as well. Her bias distorts her reporting on anyone remotely associated with Sheba, which renders her account just as unreliable as Sheba's; if not more so, because where Sheba's fallibility in her reporting on her affair is stated early on by Barbara, she does not disclose her own biases to the reader and thus tries to manipulate the reader by attempting to pass off her account as the most accurate version of the story, when in reality it is riddled with many of the same faults she has accused others of making in their accounts.

3.1.8 The implied author at work

Although we would argue that the influence of the implied author saturates every level of the narrative, there are places in the novel where we see this influence as being noteworthy enough that it warrants its own analysis section. Since we consider the implied author to be practically synonymous with the real author, the instances listed below are examples where we as readers believe that we see most clearly the suggestion of the creative agent behind the text.[12]

In the foreword to the novel, Barbara introduces herself by her full name: Barbara Covett (Heller 2003, 4). At first, the name may not seem particularly conspicuous, but as the reader progresses through the narrative, it becomes clear that Barbara's surname represents one of her defining character traits – if not *the* defining trait: Barbara covets Sheba, as she has coveted other people in the past. Her name thus takes on an ironic quality in hindsight, a quality that further undermines Barbara's credibility and rationalisations for her interest in Sheba, and

[12] To reiterate, this is why we still prefer to speak of the implied as opposed to the real author; whenever we conclude that the creative agent of the text has positioned certain signals in a particular way, we attribute this deliberateness to our idea of the author – the implied author. We cannot say for certain – nor is it perhaps particularly relevant – whether the real author had the same plans in mind when the text was created.

which strengthens the suspicions that the narrative has fostered in the reader during the course of the reading. Because of how ironically appropriate the name is in hindsight, we would argue that this strongly suggests that the implied author ensured that the name was introduced fairly innocuously early on so that when the reader may start to feel that Barbara is a little *too* envious, a little *too* interested in Sheba, the name takes on a new meaning as an actual characteristic of Barbara – and more importantly, a characteristic that Barbara does not wish to acknowledge. As such, the name can be seen as a way in which the implied author signals Barbara's unreliability to the reader: the narrator of the story has a strong personal stake in the story she tells – or rather, in one of its characters – and the implied author is making sure the reader is able to recognise the narrator's agenda.

Another instance where we believe the presence of the text's creative agent makes itself felt is at the beginning of the seventeenth chapter, where the first paragraph of text is crossed out. The previous chapter ended with Sheba confronting Barbara about the manuscript and calling her out on her duplicity. It ends with Barbara leaving the house for a while and Sheba locking herself in her room with the manuscript (Heller 2003, 235-238). The crossed-out paragraph was presumably written by Barbara in a moment of anger no more than forty-eight hours after the confrontation (this is the time that Barbara in the subsequent paragraph states has passed):

> ~~Damn her. Damn her. Lady Muck. Skinny bloody cow. She always made the big point of downplaying her advantages, behaving as if we were just two middle-aged ladies confronting life from equal positions. Oh Barbara don't put yourself down like that! And the moment I take her at her word, presume on our equality, rather than waiting for her to magnanimously assure me of it, she is beside herself. Outraged. Ha! Her, who can't boil a bloody egg without me. Ungrateful bitch.~~ (ibid., 238)

The style is noticeably distinct from the rest of the novel, containing a number of sentence fragments, a comparatively high volume of profanity and lacking the meticulous grammar exhibited by Barbara in the rest of her prose; notice, for instance, the distinct lack of commas in "Oh Barbara don't put yourself down like that". That the paragraph is crossed out is indicative of Barbara having written it in a moment of anger and later regretted it; it is quite clearly not intended to be available to the narratee. However, the implied author has ensured that it remains in the novel for the actual reader regardless of Barbara's intentions. The paragraph reveals a side of Barbara that has been hidden, or at least mitigated, in the rest of the narrative, and it illustrates how Barbara's account is highly filtered.

A place where the ironic distance between Barbara and the implied author seems to manifest is when Barbara comments on the details of Sheba's first confession about Connolly, in which she only admits to him having an interest in her. Barbara remarks, with the benefit of hindsight, that Sheba omits a great deal of information about the affair while she at the same time reports on small details like exact time or gestures with inordinate accuracy. Barbara notes that: "For all its omissions, it was a long narrative, which she told with many fastidious digressions." (Heller 2003, 110). The irony arises when the reader takes into account how apt that description is of Barbara's own narrative as well. Barbara omits a great deal of information as well, at least initially, and she also tells the story with a lot of her own "fastidious digressions", some of which are largely irrelevant to the story of Sheba, such as anecdotes about Barbara's childhood (ibid., 143-144), Barbara's animosity towards the headmaster and the clashes with him over a report she has not, according to him, written satisfactorily (ibid., 55-61), and her holiday habits with her sister (ibid., 65-66). Furthermore, her comment on Sheba trying to present her confession accurately mirrors Barbara's attempt to present her own account as being accurate: "To make sure that I maintain maximum accuracy in this narrative, I have started putting together a timeline of Sheba's year at St. George's." (ibid., 24). Similar to Sheba, however, while her factual particulars may be reliable (ibid., 6), Barbara's reading of people and situations is frequently unreliable (see section 3.1.5 "Barbara's delusions" and section 3.1.7 "Barbara's bias and lack of objectivity"). By ensuring that the text is furnished with signals such as these which allow the reader to detect that Sheba's heavily modified account has the same characteristics as Barbara's overall narrative, the implied author paves the way for readers to ask themselves: If Sheba's account is fallible, what does that say about the reliability of Barbara's?

3.1.9 Preliminary conclusion - unreliability in *Notes on a Scandal*

In the above analysis, we have demonstrated various ways in which Barbara's unreliability manifests in the text. A substantial number of textually encoded signals – such as contradictions, idiosyncrasies and grammatical features – indicate that Barbara, at various points throughout the novel, is misreporting (see section 3.1.1, "Barbara's contradictions"), underreporting (see section 3.1.2, "Lying by omission"), overreporting (see section 3.1.4, "Barbara's justification"), underreading (see section 3.1.7 "Barbara's bias and lack of objectivity"), misreading and misregarding (see section 3.1.5, "Barbara's delusions" and 3.1.6

"Verbal idiosyncrasies"). What allows the reader to decode these signals to indicate the various types of unreliability is the process of naturalisation that draws upon the reader's conceptual schemata, some of which we have accounted for in the analysis. As has also been noted, occasionally the signals encoded in the text are ambiguous to a degree that allows for divergent readings (see section 3.1.1 "Barbara's contradictions" and section 3.1.2 "Lying by omission"), the choice of which are again reliant the reader's conceptual schemata. Finally, there are instances where the implied author appears to expose and distance herself from Barbara, further highlighting the narrator's unreliability (see section 3.1.8 "The implied author at work").

3.2 Analysis of unreliability in *Gone Girl*

Gone Girl revolves around the disappearance of Amy Dunne, the wife of Nick Dunne, and the weeks that follow. The story shifts from being a seemingly cut-and-dry "whodunit" mystery about Nick's suspicious behaviour and his possible role in his wife's disappearance to being about the sociopathic mind-set of Amy once it is revealed that she orchestrated her own disappearance in order to get back at her cheating husband (Flynn 2012). Both characters serve as narrators in the story, providing the reader with their own idiosyncratic views on their relationship through variable internal focalisation, which will be explored in more detail below. For the first half of the novel, the focalisation shifts every other chapter between Nick's experiences following Amy's disappearance in the present and Amy's fake diary entries about their past. Some of the past events are also referenced by Nick, thus creating multiple internal focalisation for these events (see section 2.3.3). In the second half of the novel, the diary entries are replaced by the real Amy's account of present events, and the focalisation continually shifts between Nick and Amy until the novel's conclusion. The novel's unreliability stems not only from their frequently discrepant descriptions of their relationship and each other, but also from the involuntary self-exposure of their own traits, flaws and value systems. Both Nick and Amy deceive the reader to some extent while also trying to win their sympathy. However, unlike in *Notes on a Scandal*, it is less clear who the reader should sympathise with. The whole novel is built around the idea of he-said she-said; both narrators lie to and manipulate the reader, and due to the novel's multiperspectivity, the reader's verdict on who is more reliable – or at least less unreliable – fluctuates throughout. At the same time, both also occasionally present their cases in a way that is not unreasonable – if the reader believes them and can relate, that is.

3.2.1 Focalisation

As mentioned above, the story of *Gone Girl* is multiperspectival; it is internally focalised through Nick and Amy, with the focalisation shifting every other chapter. For the first half of the novel, the reader is presented with Nick's experiences following Amy's disappearance in the present and Amy's diary entries about their past. This variation in focalisation results in frequent instances of internarrational unreliability, because their accounts of events and portrayal of each other are often discrepant. An example of this is seen when Nick mentions their first anniversary gifts to each other. Amy's gift to Nick was "a set of posh stationery" (Flynn 2012, 23), which he says he disliked. Amy presents a rosy image of how she imagines their anniversary will unfold, mentioning the "monogrammed stationery [Nick]'s been wanting from Crane & Co." (ibid., 46). What is noteworthy here is that either Nick is underreporting about why Amy chose to give him the stationery, or Amy is misreporting when she says Nick had been wanting the stationery, possibly because of her having misread Nick's enthusiasm for it. The variable internal focalisation creates an element of uncertainty about both accounts, because there is no factual, objective authority to act as an arbiter on whose version is more reliable.

Another example is when Amy, on their third anniversary, writes in her diary that she is coming dangerously close to violating her promise to herself that she would not make Nick jump through hoops to prove his love to her. The reason for her distress is that Nick has bailed on her in order to get drunk with some of his laid-off former co-workers, and now all of Amy's hard work of arranging their annual treasure hunt has gone to waste (Flynn 2012, 72-73). However, if Nick's account is to be believed, she broke this promise on their first anniversary when she became surly and unresponsive because of Nick's failure to correctly play out her treasure-hunting game (ibid., 22-23). If the reader believes Nick's account of their first anniversary, Amy is misreporting in the above example when she implies that she has not previously made Nick go through elaborate work to prove his love to her. If the reader instead believes Amy, then Nick is misreporting Amy's reactions in the wake of his failed attempts at solving the clues of the treasure hunt. In both cases, the misreporting would stem from one or the other misreading the scope of Amy's reaction to Nick's failure to complete the first treasure hunt. Their conflicting representations of Amy's need for validation may also be rooted in their differing interpretations of what the treasure hunts signify. To Amy, her treasure hunts consist of "[...] little love messages, reminders of our past year together [...]" (ibid., 73), while for

Nick, they are somewhat less romantic: “These treasure hunts had always amounted to a single question: Who is Amy? (What is my wife thinking? What was important to her this past year? What moments made her happiest? Amy, Amy, Amy, let’s think about Amy.)” (ibid., 82). It is discrepancies like these – different versions of similar events – that signal unreliability to the reader (see Nünning’s seventh signal, section 2.3.1); Nick and Amy clearly read the same events quite differently, but at this stage in the novel, it is one’s word against the other’s. What the above examples have in common is that they offer potential divergent readings, which are signalled in the text once the reader has read both narrators’ accounts of events. Depending on who the reader finds more believable, the other narrator will come across as dishonest, or at least as giving a mistaken account of events – unless the reader sees both as being too biased to provide a sober, reliable account.

However, the effect of the internarrational unreliability changes once it is revealed that Amy is alive and well. It becomes clear that the story has essentially had three narrators: Nick, “Diary Amy”, who has been narrating Amy’s diary chapters for the first half of the novel, and “Actual Amy”, who created Diary Amy in order to create a sympathetic picture of herself and present Nick as becoming self-centred and cold over time (Flynn 2012, 248, 263). Actual Amy narrates the Amy chapters for the latter half, and in doing so, she becomes the new source of internal focalisation for these chapters. Many of the instances of internarrational unreliability from the first half of the novel, such as the ones listed in the previous paragraph, arise as a result of the implied author giving the reader access to both Amy’s diary as well as Nick’s narration so that the reader can see the discrepancies within them. Neither Amy nor Nick knows that the reader[13] is being presented with both sides of the story, only that their own accounts are being read by the reader. Some cases of the internarrational unreliability that the reader can detect come about as a by-product of Actual Amy’s attempts to frame Nick in the eyes of the police. An example of this is the issue of Amy’s faked pregnancy. Diary Amy states that, during their stressful time in Missouri, she suggests to Nick, as an attempt to save their failing relationship, that they have a baby. Nick angrily responds: “ ‘Just… No, Amy. Not right now. I can’t take one more bit of stress. I can’t handle one more thing to worry about. I am cracking under the pressure. I will snap.’ ” (ibid., 213). She also states that she was once eagerly looking forward to having children with Nick, but that she now fears for her life when she realises she is pregnant (ibid., 231-232). By contrast, Nick, after learning of the pregnancy during Amy’s vigil (ibid., 219),

[13] For an elaboration on the distinction between narratee and reader in Gone Girl, see section 3.2.3 “Reader addresses”.

states that Amy was the one who did not want kids; Nick did want them, and they had even been looking into fertility treatments until Amy changed her mind (ibid., 224), but his underreporting on other matters and his apparent misregarding of Amy's disappearance (see section 3.2.4 "Nick's lies of omission") will most likely make Nick seem like the less reliable narrator in this case. However, once the real Amy reveals herself and her motives to the reader, the unreliability the reader has pinned on Nick as a result of the discrepancies between the two accounts in the novel's first half shifts to Actual Amy instead. Since she outright tells the reader that she manipulated them to make Nick seem worse than he is, the reader may well ask whether Amy has been or is being manipulative on other subjects; after all, she has already shown herself very adept at lying convincingly.

3.2.2 Time

The novel's main narrative begins on the day of Amy's disappearance and is, for about two-thirds of the novel, internally focalised through Nick. Nick's chapters, starting with chapter one, advance the main narrative, while the chapters based on Amy's diary entries interrupt the main narrative and instead function as analepses to it. The first chapters internally focalised through Actual Amy are also analepses, but from page 313 and forward, Amy's timeline catches up with Nick's and both their chapters then move forward on the main narrative. In all three cases – Nick, Diary Amy and Actual Amy – the time of the narrating is interpolated, narrating the experienced events of what has come before without knowing what follows the next day; though in the case of Amy's diary chapters, this is only an illusion. Once Amy reveals that she fabricated the diary in order to frame Nick (Flynn 2012, 248, 263), the reader comes to realise that the time of narrating of all the chapters featuring Diary Amy is not interpolated but instead subsequent. While not all of the details in the diary chapters may be fake (ibid., 262), Diary Amy is fictional and the narrative has been deliberately constructed in such a way that it incriminates Nick and sets him up for murder charges. As in section 3.2.1 "Focalisation" above, this revelation is a severe blow to Amy's reliability; the image the reader has created of her based on the diary entries turns out to be entirely fictional and must be rebuilt from scratch from her new chapters.

3.2.3 Reader addresses

As opposed to *Notes on a Scandal*, there appears to be no distinction between an in-universe narratee and the reader in *Gone Girl*. As such, while there are a number of direct addresses to an explicit narratee, these are more meta-textual in the sense that they express an awareness on the narrator's behalf that the narratee has access to information that no other character in the story world would. For instance, Amy talks about her diary entries as if the reader has already read the entries, even though the diary has yet to be discovered by any characters in the narrative (Flynn 2012, 247, 248, 266). The narratee is not intruding, however; the narrators choose to share their stories with the reader, which is reflected in their discourse. As such, Amy referring to her diary in such a knowing way can be seen as a result of her having chosen to share those entries with the reader. It may be more accurate to say that the implied author has made the narrators of *Gone Girl* choose to share their stories, but for argument's sake, we assume that it is the narrators' own choice. This reader awareness expressed by Amy as well as Nick becomes of analytical relevance when they begin to overtly and covertly direct the reader's sympathy towards themselves. Amy, for instance, prefaces her lengthy diatribe about her parents, Nick and gender roles in general by saying: "I can tell you more about how I did everything, but I'd like you to know me first. [...] What kind of woman would do such a thing? Let me tell you a story, a *true* story, so you can begin to understand." (ibid., 248-249). Amy implicitly states that what follows is an explanation and a defence of her actions. Regardless of whether the reader buys some, all or none of her arguments, Amy's efforts to sway the reader to her point of view constitutes a signal of unreliability because of the conscious attempt at directing sympathy (see Nünning's ninth signal, 2.3.1); Amy knows that the reader may not trust or sympathise with her at the moment, particularly after having fed them what she admits to be a stream of lies in the form of her fabricated diary entries, and so she tries to regain some of that sympathy the reader may have felt for the victimised Diary Amy by explaining how she came to act as she did.

Nick also makes efforts to direct the reader's sympathy towards himself, albeit in a rather different, somewhat self-deprecating manner, with the possible intention of making himself seem more honest by opening up to the reader about his mistakes: "I have a mistress. Now is the part where I have to tell you I have a mistress and you stop liking me. If you liked me to begin with. I have a pretty, young, very young mistress, and her name is Andie. I know. It's bad." (Flynn 2012, 161). Although he has been acting suspiciously in the eyes of the reader

before (see section 3.2.4, "Nick's lies of omission"), he reaches out to the reader by acknowledging that he has likely lost any sympathy the reader had for him before, while at the same time implicitly asking for a chance to explain himself and regain that lost faith in him. The light-hearted self-deprecation, and perhaps even an example of irony on a meta-level, becomes particularly apparent when he states: "I was the embodiment of every writer's worst fear: a cliché. Now let me string still more clichés together for your amusement: [...]" (Flynn 2012, 164). However, similar to Amy, Nick is attempting to manipulate the reader into being sympathetic towards him, and as such, it constitutes the same signal of unreliability as with Amy: Nick has an agenda, and he is playing the reader as part of that agenda.

3.2.4 Nick's lies of omission

"I'm a big fan of the lie of omission." (Flynn 2012, 150). This is what Nick tells the reader after offering a number of additional details that he initially left out about a conversation he and Amy had. His statement certainly appears to be true, considering how frequently he underreports during the course of his narrative.

An example of Nick's underreporting takes place during a conversation with officers Boney and Gilpin. After the police officers ask Nick a number of questions about him and Amy, he confides in the reader that: "It was my fifth lie to police. I was just starting." (Flynn 2012, 42). Even though he admits that his last statement was a lie, he does not specify to the reader which of the other parts of the conversation contained the lies and which parts were true, leaving the reader to guess how much of what was just read should be dismissed. The number of lies later goes up to eleven. At this point, Nick reveals to the reader the truth behind some, though not all, of the lies he fed the police (ibid., 51-54). Even during these moments of truthfulness towards the reader, however, he is still underreporting in his explanations (ibid., 53). Perhaps paradoxically, Nick's partial honesty about his dishonesty functions as a clear signal of unreliability, because while he admits his own lack of reliability towards others, he still does not give the reader the full picture (see Nünning's twelfth signal, 2.3.1). It is his lack of elaboration regarding the specifics of his dishonesty that points to his unreliability as being of the underreporting variety.

Another example of Nick's underreporting has to do with his disposable cell phone. This example is also an instance of delayed decoding, which is important to the implied author's attempts to make the reader suspicious towards Nick as part of the overall plot structure of the

novel. On four separate occasions, Nick mentions that either he is making a call on his disposable, or someone is trying to call him (Flynn 2012, 85, 89, 117, 146). However, he never mentions who he is calling or who is calling him, nor for what reason. He tries to keep the calls a secret not only to those around him – "I turned the phone off, scanned the room to make sure the Elliots [Amy's parents] hadn't seen me do it" (ibid., 117) – but to the reader as well: "My phone rang, the disposable, and I flicked a glance at the display, then shut it off. I needed to get rid of the thing, but I couldn't yet." (ibid., 89). What signals unreliability in these four cases is that while Nick accounts for the events, he offers no explanation or elaboration on the nature of the calls (see Nünning's fifth signal, 2.3.1). His underreporting leaves the reader with many questions: Who is on the other end of the phone? Why does Nick need to get rid of the phone? And why can he not get rid of it *yet*? This underreporting continues to be a source of unreliability until the identity of the caller is revealed to be Nick's mistress (Flynn 2012, 161).

A prominent example of underreporting which turns into an instance of delayed decoding occurs near the beginning of the novel when Nick moves downstairs to have breakfast with Amy: "Bile and dread inched up my throat. I thought to myself: *Okay, go.*" (Flynn 2012, 8). The story then jumps forward several hours to when Nick arrives at the bar he co-owns with his twin sister, and shortly after his arrival, around 12 noon, he receives a call from his neighbour telling Nick that the door to his house is wide open. Nick rushes home and finds that Amy is gone (ibid., 8, 19-27). Nick's whereabouts in the time period in between telling himself "*Okay, go*" and arriving at the bar remain unknown to the reader, however. Initially, he tells the police that he was at the beach, but he also suggests to the reader that this might not have been the case. He admits that it had been Amy's idea for him to go to the beach, to figure out what he wanted. He then tells the reader rather ominously and without elaboration: "Unfortunately for Amy, I had already decided." (ibid., 53). In each of these instances, Nick underreports to the reader: he does not explain why he tells himself to go; he does not explain where he was during the time gap in the narration; he does not tell the reader what it was he had already decided regarding Amy. It is not until much later in the narrative, after both Andie and Actual Amy have been revealed, that the reader obtains the whole picture: During breakfast, Nick had been trying to muster the courage to ask Amy for a divorce, because he had decided he wanted Andie over Amy, and the "*Okay, go*" was him trying to steel himself for the confrontation. It is also revealed that during the time gap, Nick, after having lost the nerve to ask for the divorce, visits Andie, and afterwards spends the remaining time in an empty garage, reading magazines (ibid., 271, 303-304). Since the truth behind what he tries to keep hidden is eventually revealed regardless of his deceptions, Nick's underreporting does him no

favours. The only thing it achieves is to make the reader more inclined to believe Diary Amy's account of events over Nick's in the first half of the novel.

To compare these lies of omission with those found in *Notes on a Scandal*, it is possible to distinguish two different functions for them. Possibly related to the novel being more of a psychological study of a deranged, sometimes enigmatic character, the truth behind Barbara's lies of omission is never fully revealed, and the omissions instead linger as seeds of doubt about her character. They are not particularly important for the overall plot development, which is in contrast to those found in *Gone Girl*. Not only are most of these eventually revealed – which may be due to the novel's relation with the crime genre, where questions raised by clues in the text usually come with the expectation of eventual answers – but their function is also specifically geared towards making Nick appear more suspicious and his behaviour more sinister than is actually the case. Until Actual Amy reveals herself, the reader can easily be misled to believe that Nick is either somehow involved in the disappearance, or he has otherwise behaved badly towards Amy. As such, the underreporting and delayed decoding found in *Gone Girl* play an important role in the advancement of the plot.

3.2.5 Amy's justifications

Upon revealing herself to the reader, Actual Amy spends a fair bit of time trying to justify the necessity of her plan to frame Nick that appears to be intended to ultimately result in his execution on charges of murder (Flynn 2012, 277). When Amy explains her reasons for framing Nick, she expresses an awareness that her actions are likely to be seen as going too far in the eyes of the reader: "It's rather extreme, framing your husband for your murder. I want you to know I know that." (ibid., 263). However, she seems completely unrepentant about her actions, deriding those who would condemn her: "All the tut-tutters out there will say: *She should have just left, bundled up what remained of her dignity. Take the high road! Two wrongs don't make a right!* All those things that spineless women say, confusing their weakness with morality." (ibid., 263). This reveals an important feature of Amy's character: rather than swallowing her pride and slinking off with a wrong against her left uncorrected, Amy believes in exacting retribution on those who wrong her – often disproportionate retribution (ibid., 309-312, 324-326). Amy's resentment towards Nick is twofold: First, she finds it unreasonable that Nick disliked her real self once she started to slough off the "Cool Girl" facade she knew Nick would originally go for (ibid., 253), explored in more detail in section 3.2.7 "The implied

author at work". Secondly, she hates him for cheating on her with a younger woman who, in Amy's eyes, puts on the same facade she once did (ibid., 267). She refuses to let Nick get away with either offense, and this is why she concocted her elaborate plan to frame him. Whether or not Amy's sense of justice towards Nick is construed as a sign of unreliability towards her reasoning depends to an extent on whether or not readers find themselves in accord with her value system. If the reader agrees with, is sympathetic towards or can otherwise relate to Amy's grievances, the reader will be less likely to view her ethical sense as being flawed. If the reader instead finds Amy's value system to be out of touch with their own, the reader will encode the above example as a signal of unreliability manifesting as a severe case of misregarding by Amy of what the reader considers sensible ethics.

Another point on which the reader might question Amy's justifications concerns the sometimes wild accusations and outright lies she tells about those who cross her. Amy uses the same excuse in these instances so often that it could almost be classified as a verbal idiosyncrasy. Whenever she has to justify to the reader that she has been exaggerating someone else's actions or behaviour, she states that they "might as well" have done or been like she claims. For instance, it is revealed that Desi, her long-time stalker with a crush on her, did not actually try to commit suicide upon them breaking up, which is what Amy told Nick – and which Nick told the reader, who then got the same impression (Flynn 2012, 189). Amy confesses, almost proudly, that she made up the story about the suicide: "I'd always liked the lie about Desi trying to kill himself over me. He had truly been devastated by our breakup, and he'd been really annoying, creepy, hanging around campus, hoping I'd take him back. So he might as well have attempted suicide." (ibid., 365). Other examples include her derision of Andie (ibid., 267) and a lie she told Desi about his own mother (ibid., 402). In each case, the excuse serves as a signal of unreliability, because Amy implicitly concedes that she is lying and making things up so that it suits her narrative (see Nünning's twelfth signal, section 2.3.1). Moreover, she does not seem to consider her habit of lying to be problematic. If anything, she justifies her actions by claiming that in each case, the reality of what she is lying about is so egregious that her lie might as well have been the case. As such, her unreliability lies in her misregarding of the importance of being truthful. If she has such an easy relationship with honesty, it may make readers wonder about Amy's truthfulness towards them.

While there are certain overlaps between Barbara's and Actual Amy's justifications – both are about the narrator's questionable value system and how it affects the reader's sympathy towards her – those found in *Gone Girl* do serve another purpose as well. They function as a counterweight to the various signals of unreliability that have been pinned on Nick throughout

the first half of the novel and help illustrate that Amy is just as flawed and no more reliable than Nick is. This ties into a greater narrative structure, wherein the implied author appears to emphasise how much the entire novel is a long game of he-said she-said. This analytical point will be elaborated on in more detail in section 3.2.7 “The implied author at work”.

3.2.6 Amy and Nick’s idiosyncrasies

At several points in her narrative, Amy displays idiosyncratic behaviour that impacts her reliability. Nick is not exempt from this behaviour either; both narrators have their own peculiar habits that influence their narrative.

Nick has a strange tendency to draw on TV and movie references and to refer to stereotypes and clichés from these, especially in difficult situations when he is under scrutiny from others. Examples of this behaviour are seen when he is being questioned by the police about his wife’s disappearance, and instead of being upset and distraught, he is *acting*: “I wasn’t sure what to say now. I raked my memory for the lines: What does the husband say at this point in the movie? Depends on whether he’s guilty or innocent.” (Flynn 2012, 53). Rather than reacting naturally to the situation, Nick muses over the appropriate response in order to ensure he does not incriminate himself; something that is likely to come across as suspicious to the reader. After all, would a man who really is innocent even need to consider what Nick is considering in that situation? Another example is when Nick is being asked by the police if he wants a lawyer, and Nick tells the reader: “But I knew from my TV shows, my movies, that only guilty guys lawyered up. Real, grieving, worried, innocent husbands did not.” (ibid., 196). Once again, Nick seems to be putting too much thought into how his actions will be interpreted by others, what kind of image he will present by acting in a certain way. It may seem that the reason Nick constantly looks to clichés for guidance is because he does not believe his actual, natural reactions would do him any favours. The reader, drawing upon their extraliterary knowledge of human behaviour, would likely know that most people in Nick’s situation would be, as Nick himself says, grieving or worried, or perhaps angry or otherwise upset. What they would not be is indifferent, reacting with the kind of calculation about responses that Nick is. He appears to be misregarding the disappearance of his wife, and he tries to excuse his lack of emotional behaviour by telling the reader that he has made a lifelong effort to avoid becoming his angry father, the result of which is an inability to express negative emotion at all (ibid., 54). However, coupled with the variable focalisation where Amy’s diary entries provide the reader

with additional, unflattering information about him, Nick's peculiar behaviour and responses during a stressful situation is most likely intended by the implied author, as part of the novel's plot structure, to make his narrative come across as unreliable; he does not behave the way the reader might expect an innocent husband to behave, as if he is hiding something not only from other characters in the novel, but from the reader as well.

One of Amy's key characteristics that perhaps influences her narrative the most is her obsession with winning, with being the very best at everything; with essentially being Amazing Amy. This obsession saturates every aspect of her life, including her view on relationships: "I thought we would be the most perfect union: the happiest couple around. Not that love is a competition. But I don't understand the point of being together if you're not the happiest." (Flynn 2012, 253). In addition to contradicting herself by first claiming that love is not a competition, then immediately stating that the only point of being together is to be the happiest, Amy's words illustrate not just her single-minded drive to be the best, but also, despite her claim, how she views everything in the world: as a competition. While being ambitious may in itself not be that remarkable or foreign to readers, it is the extent to which Amy takes this obsession that makes her narrative unreliable: being the happiest couple does not mean actually *being* the happiest, but merely that they present a facade, an illusion that convinces everyone else that they are the happiest (ibid., 445, 453). The possibility for actual happiness in their relationship is compromised by the fact that Amy's competitive nature also demands that she be completely in charge in the actual relationship as well, with Nick completely under her thumb (ibid., 440, 459). Her unreliability stems from how her value system deviates from that of many readers, whose conceptual schemata of what constitutes "normal" behaviour would most likely be at odds with Amy's. She misregards the importance of winning, striving for always being the best at the expense of all else, which may be difficult for readers to relate to; Amy's focus on winning is so powerful that it precludes basic social values such as empathy. Even if some of her drive can be understood, the fact that she is perfectly willing to fake her own happiness – and to make Nick fake his own as well – if it means others believe it to be true speaks volumes about the extent of her misregarding, and it is part of what makes her narrative so unreliable.

3.2.7 The implied author at work

The implied author's influence is more clearly visible in the structure of *Gone Girl* than what is seen in *Notes on a Scandal*. While the implied author's influence is of course present everywhere throughout *Gone Girl*, it is particularly evident in the way in which chapters and events are organised to keep the reader in the dark about Amy for the first half of the novel. Up until the revelation of Nick's affair about a third into the novel, the structure also means that the reader is likely to suspect Nick's verbal tics and evasive behaviour as being a hint that he is somehow involved in Amy's disappearance. Once the affair is revealed, some of Nick's unreliability is explained, but while it does explain his evasiveness, the fact that he has been withholding information from the reader up until that point remains a blemish on his reliability. Even after the revelation, however, the implied author seems to continue to pile doubts upon Nick's trustworthiness in the eyes of the reader because of the shifts in focalisation between Nick and Diary Amy. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this is the build-up leading to the reveal of Amy's (fake) pregnancy, which begins with the Diary Amy chapter in which Amy suggests having children to save their failing marriage, a suggestion that Nick dismisses (Flynn 2012, 212-213). This is followed by Nick's chapter in which Amy's "best friend" – in reality just an unwitting pawn in Amy's elaborate scheme – publicly accuses Nick of being involved in Amy's disappearance and reveals that Amy was pregnant (ibid., 218-219). The next chapter has Diary Amy tell the reader that Nick has become violently abusive (ibid., 220-222), followed by a chapter wherein Nick is told by the police that they have confirmed Amy's pregnancy, and the chapter ends with Nick having an image of Amy in his head: "[...] I saw my wife on the floor of our kitchen, her hands around her belly and her head bashed in." (ibid., 228). Ironically, the next chapter (and the last chapter with Diary Amy) begins with Amy stating: "I have never felt more alive in my life." (ibid., 229). She reveals that she is indeed pregnant, but that she also fears for her life, that Nick might be planning to kill her (ibid., 231). What the implied author seems to be doing is building on and compounding the suspicions roused by the two contrasting narratives (see Nünning's seventh signal, 2.3.1) and the unreliability stemming from contradictions in Nick's own account to lead the reader to believe Nick might indeed have murdered his wife. Additionally, the chapter ends and beginnings, such as the example above with Nick seeing Amy dead and Amy stating she has never felt more alive, often create such ironic, unsettling contrasts that we believe can only come about as a result of the implied author ensuring that Amy's diary entries interweave with Nick's storyline to create this unreliability.

The implied author can arguably be seen distancing herself from the narrators at points in the story, and in doing so, putting the unreliability of the narrator in question on display. An example of this is during Actual Amy's speech about Cool Girl and her bitterness over Nick failing to see Amy for who she really was. She states that she adopts new personalities as needed, something she has been doing her whole life, and that when she met Nick, she had put on the latest fashionable persona, Cool Girl, because she knew it was the type of girl someone like Nick wanted (Flynn 2012, 250). However, Amy comes to hate Nick for not realising that the woman Amy was pretending to be was fake – even though she kept up the act for around two years – and that when she did reveal her "true" self – which she claims she did not discover until she got together with Nick – it turned out that Nick preferred Amy's Cool Girl persona to her real self: "Can you imagine, finally showing your true self to your spouse, your soul mate, and having him *not* like you? So that's how the hating first began." (ibid., 254). The problem with her reasoning is that it is not Actual Amy that Nick fell in love with; he fell for Cool Amy, the personality Amy had adopted for the express purpose of making Nick fall in love with her, but she expects him to like her previously unknown self more than her other self. Because of how ironic and unreasonable Amy's argument is, it seems unlikely that the implied author endorses her justification. Rather, there seems to be a form of ironic distancing by the implied author from Amy in how Amy exhibits her value system and presents her argument as if the reader would surely agree with her about how unjustly Nick has treated her. Readers may distance themselves from Amy for the same reason; that is to say, Amy's value system is so far apart from the reader's so that the reader cannot accept Amy's reasoning. However, Nick is not exempt from this kind of ironic distancing. Near the end of the novel, it seems as if the implied author puts Nick's peculiar reasoning for staying with Amy on display. Upon being told by Amy that he would never be able to settle for anyone but her, Nick concedes her point, musing that he would hold all other women up to Amy's insane standards: "*You've never murdered for me. You've never framed me. You wouldn't even know how to begin to do what Amy did. You could never possibly care that much.*" (ibid., 444). What is remarkable here is that Nick equates what seems to be the almost psychopathic aspects of Amy's character – her cold-hearted murder, her obsessively meticulous planning – with caring. This is perhaps as telling about Nick's own mind-set as it is about Amy's, because while it highlights how much Amy deviates from the average, everyday kind of woman that Nick compares her to, it also highlights how distant Nick would be from such a person. As such, it may seem as if the implied author is reminding the reader that no matter how much he may try to be relatable, Nick is in his own way just as flawed as Amy.

The ironic distance created by the implied author to both narrators as well as the plot structure that swings the reader's suspicion back and forth between them ultimately makes it difficult to assess whether the implied author's own sympathy lies with one or the other, or if the implied author even picks a side., It may be that it is open for the reader to decide who to side with. Nick may come across as the lesser of two evils, for instance near the end of the novel where Amy reveals her real pregnancy and Nick opts to stay with her for the sake of the child, but this does not change the fact that he has previously been shown to be a liar, a cheater and a closet misogynist. It is also worth bearing in mind that this is being told in a chapter narrated by Nick, and thus the presentation of the pregnancy revelation and his rationale for staying is on his terms. Nick's twin sister presents a less selfless interpretation of his actions, that he is just looking for an excuse to stay with Amy (Flynn 2012, 460). It is possible to see Margo's statement as the implied author suggesting that Nick and Amy are both so flawed that they belong together as a highly volatile and messed-up couple. Alternatively, the ambivalence towards the narrators seen throughout the narrative could be summed up as the implied author washing her hands of both of them and leaving it up to the reader to make up their own mind.

3.2.8 Preliminary conclusion – Unreliability in *Gone Girl*

As demonstrated in the above analysis sections, *Gone Girl* shares some of the same features of unreliability with *Notes on a Scandal*. These features can be located in the text in many of the same ways as in *Notes on a Scandal*, such as through textual contradictions and idiosyncratic behaviour from the narrators (see section 3.2.1 "Focalisation" and section 3.2.6 "Nick and Amy's idiosyncrasies). Different types of unreliability such as underreporting (see section 3.2.4 "Nick's lies of omission"), misreporting (see section 3.2.1 "Focalisation") and misregarding (see section 3.2.5 "Amy's justifications") can also be seen in both novels. However, *Gone Girl* also differs from *Notes on a Scandal* on some points. The most notable distinction from the unreliability seen in *Notes on a Scandal* is in the multiperspectivity of *Gone Girl*, which manifests as variable internal focalisation (see section 3.2.1 "Focalisation"). The time aspect in the first half of *Gone Girl* is also significant, in that what initially seems to be interpolated time of narrating is revealed in the second half to be subsequent, fundamentally changing how that entire part of the narrative is understood (see section 3.2.2 "Time"). The reader also appears to be more directly involved in *Gone Girl*, as many of the reader addresses seem to break the fourth wall, illustrating awareness by the narrators that they are being evaluated (see section

3.2.3 “Reader addresses”). Likewise, the various character-specific unreliability signals – justifications, idiosyncrasies and lies of omission – appear to be designed in such a way as to keep the reader guessing about the plot through delayed decoding and wondering about the integrity and reliability of the two narrators, an interpretation that can be supported by the various ways in which the implied author seems to make herself present (see section 3.2.7 “The implied author at work”). The difference in the function of unreliability that we have noted during the course of the analysis of *Gone Girl* may be, if not a result of, then related to the novel being of the mystery/crime genre, since the uncertainty and doubt prompted by the narrational unreliability is what keeps the reader guessing for the majority of the novel.

4.0 Discussion

In the following section, we will debate some of the issues relating to the synthesised approach. These include the fundamental issues in trying to combine the cognitive and rhetorical approaches, the arguable imbalance between the two approaches in the synthesised approach, and finally whether having a perfect balance between the two is required for the synthesised approach to be worthy of its name.

One of the most pertinent questions related to the synthesised approach is whether it is actually possible to combine the two opposing lines of thought that are the cognitive and rhetorical approaches. In general, synthesising the cognitive and the rhetorical approach can potentially be problematic because of their inherently opposing premises and aims. Among other things, cognitivists seek to explain why readers choose particular interpretations for texts that are challenging to read; the goal is to nuance the process underlying a particular interpretation. With the rhetorical approach, one of the main objectives is to deduce what a text signals to the reader, to explain how it signals its message, and to chart where in the text these signals are located. They look for an answer to the question posed by the text. Perhaps the greatest problem, however, is that cognitivist would essentially consider narrational unreliability to be a reading strategy to understand a text, whereas in the rhetorical approach, the unreliability is encoded in the text regardless of reader input. It is difficult, for instance, to speak of textually encoded signals denoting a specific interpretation while at the same time attributing the reader all agency in interpreting texts. So in terms of their ultimate objective, it does seem as if there are some compatibility issues between the two approaches. Nevertheless, as we have demonstrated throughout our analysis, on a more practical level, it does seem as if it is possible to combine the two approaches, at least to some extent. The methods used in the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and as such, depending on what the goal of using them is, combining them can achieve viable results. In our case, the relatively smooth fusion is most likely due to our greater reliance on the rhetorical approach to form a baseline for the analysis. So while this first question can be initially answered with a tentative “yes” with the caveat that one needs to take a pragmatic stance towards the synthesis, the next question then becomes whether it actually is possible to give both approaches equal emphasis in a synthesis. And if the answer to this question is “no”, is it then still possible to speak of having created an actual synthesised approach? As said, our analytical approach to accounting for unreliability has been more rhetorical than cognitive from the onset, with the latter approach being more

supplementary because we first looked for textually encoded signals to decode, with the reader's interpretation as well as the process behind this interpretation being seen in relation to these textual signals found through a rhetorical approach. We attempted to address this issue by incorporating Dan Shen's criticism of Nünning's synthesis and the proposed questions[14] to redress what Shen perceived as an imbalance of the two approaches into our analysis. But does asking these questions accomplish their stated objective; that is, to make the synthesis more cognitive? It is certainly possible to offer divergent readings, as we have demonstrated at several points in our analysis (see section 3.1.1, "Barbara's contradictions", section 3.1. "Lying by omission", section 3.2.1 "Focalisation" and section 3.2.7 "The implied author at work"), but it is debatable whether these instances actually give the cognitive approach more prominence. First is the problem that, when we operate with Phelan's implied author, we have to consider textual ambiguities such as branching readings and interpretations as having been deliberately constructed by the text's creative agent, who has had her own implied reader in mind when writing these passages. Divergent readings might thus be seen as different options that the implied author *allows* the reader to choose between, rather than the reader arriving at different interpretations of their own accord. As such, the possibility for the divergent readings is as attributable to the implied author as it is to the reader's interpretational agency. To describe the processes behind how a reader arrives at the divergent readings would still be part of the cognitive approach, similar to what we have done when describing all the non-divergent instances of unreliability, but simply offering divergent readings would not in itself make the approach more cognitive. As we have shown in our analysis, looking for divergent readings can certainly be worthwhile, since it can provide examples where the type of unreliability differs depending on the reading, as well as highlighting scenarios where the unreliability is wholly reliant on a particular reading (see section 3.1.1 "Barbara's contradictions" and section 3.1.2 "Barbara's lying by omission"), but it is less helpful in terms of making our analysis more cognitive. We must then ask whether the second of Shen's questions – about what different conceptual schemata might underlie the divergent readings – can contribute to more cognitive presence in the synthesis. Since the process behind describing these is largely similar to the process of describing non-divergent interpretations, it would definitely provide *more of the same* cognitive elements already accounted for, but from our understanding, it would not give

[14] "When faced with the same textual features, what different interpretations might readers come up with? What different conceptual frameworks or cultural contexts underlie the divergent readings?" (Shen 2011)

the cognitive approach more prominence; it would still be used to describe how readers deal with a textually identified signal.

Where the cognitive approach would come into its own is when we are confronted with textual incongruities that lack any tangible signals denoting particular readings. There are places where, although we can locate unreliability and identify how it manifests, we cannot explain *why* it is presented in this manner. The clearest example of this is in *Notes on a Scandal*, when Sheba confronts Barbara with the existence of the manuscript and its many falsities. While we can see what the unreliability stems from – Sheba's accusations against Barbara contradicting the latter's statements earlier in the novel about the veracity of her account (see section 3.1.1 "Barbara's contradictions") – it is unclear why this passage is in the novel. It seems to violate the text's internal logic; the text is supposed to resemble a manuscript that Barbara is writing, and whenever Barbara previously has included passages that expose her unreliability, it has always been involuntary and come about as a side-effect of her trying to make a different point, or otherwise trying to justify herself. The confrontation, however, outright incriminates Barbara in the eyes of the reader without any apparent redeeming features for Barbara's case. On the contrary, she does not try to excuse herself from the accusation of using her imagination for large parts of the manuscript, neither to Sheba nor to the reader. At the same time, the section does not lend itself to being explained as a case of the implied author giving the reader additional insight beyond what Barbara would want. Unlike the beginning of the next chapter, which contains the crossed-out paragraph that was more clearly written and subsequently regretted by Barbara, but left in the text by the meddling of the implied author (see section 3.1.8 "The implied author at work"), the confrontation does not contain any such signals of the implied author's interference. Instead, Barbara herself makes reference to the confrontation in the next chapter by mentioning how Sheba uttered hateful words to her, which precludes the interpretation that the reader was not supposed to have access to the incriminating information in the previous chapter. As such, it seems as if the structure of the text itself is unreliable. The problem is that the presence of the confrontation goes against what we know of Barbara's character; there is no logical reason for her to include the passage the way it has been, because it does not help her case in any way, but since the subversive influence of the implied author is not a viable alternative explanation, it must be treated as part of the narrative Barbara has chosen to tell. As such, because of the lack of clear signals suggesting a particular reading, the only way to resolve it is through the reader's own interpretive frames of reference. In this case, it does not seem possible to understand the section using a rhetorical reading, and it must instead be solved through a cognitive approach. However, this comes with its own set

of problems, at least in relation to our investigation: because there are no concrete signals suggesting a particular reading, it is also difficult to arrive at any concrete answers in relation to this textual issue. In the end, the different interpretations we could offer here would only amount to speculation and guesswork rather than anything grounded in textual evidence, such as it is. As such, while analysing instances such as these might give the cognitive approach the additional weight it arguably warrants in a synthesis, it would not produce the kind of meaningful results that we seek.

But to what extent does an imbalance between the two approaches affect the viability of the synthesis? If the intention is to let the two approaches have equal prominence, then it is clear that what we have been working with is less of a synthesis and more of a rhetorical approach with supporting cognitive elements. However, it would be difficult for us to define exactly how one would go about striking a more equal balance. As we argued above, asking Shen's questions would go some way to make the approach more nuanced, if also more speculative, but we do not believe that a greater emphasis on guesswork strengthens the synthesised approach – although this stance may stem from our stated objective for this thesis, which relies on locating, whenever possible, concrete textual results, whereas the cognitive approach in general may be more focused on the multiplicity of reader interpretation than on definite answers. For the same reason, the arguable imbalance between the two approaches is less of a problem for us in terms of considering this a viable approach for investigating unreliability. Taking what we believe have been the strongest features from both approaches and combining them, as Nünning has suggested, has allowed us to not only uncover a wide variety of textual signals of unreliability through the use of rhetorical analytical tools, but also to explain the reader's decoding process that results in these signals being construed as indicators of unreliability.

5.0 Conclusion

With our thesis, we set out to investigate how the synthesised approach works in terms of locating textual signals of unreliability and subsequently decoding these signals. Our aim was to look at the interplay between textual data, reader agency and the influence of the implied author, using the novels *Notes on a Scandal* and *Gone Girl* as case material. We looked in detail at the different theories that deal with unreliable narration, not only to better comprehend the evolving understandings of the concept, but also in order to position ourselves on the subject. The tools provided by Phelan and Martin as well as Nünning for a textual analysis allowed us to locate a wide variety of different textual signals in our case material, and also to specify more precisely the type of unreliability at work. We have found many of the signals proposed by Nünning and the types of unreliability suggested by Phelan and Martin in the texts, occurring in the form of contradictions, often accompanied by misreporting (see sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.1), lies of omission, frequently in the form of underreporting (see sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.4), justifications (see sections 3.1.4 and 3.2.5) and idiosyncrasies (see sections 3.1.6 and 3.2.6), both of which feature instances of misregarding, delusions that display misreadings (see section 3.1.5), and biased behaviour (see section 3.1.7) that showcases the narrator's underreading of her own subjectivity. In addition to these analytical tools designed specifically for working with unreliability, we have also made use of more general narratological concepts, specifically Gérard Genette's concepts of focalisation and time. The concept of focalisation was used to investigate the multiperspectival narrational style of *Gone Girl*, which produced the effect called internarrational unreliability (see section 3.2.1). It also allowed us to identify instances where the narrator of *Notes on a Scandal* transgresses the rules set for a homodiegetic narrator (see section 3.1.3). The concept of time, specifically the time of narrating, allowed us to identify the unreliability stemming from the manipulated narrative in *Gone Girl* (see section 3.2.2). One of our more important findings was how the unreliability in *Gone Girl* seems to play an important part of the text's overall structure and plot, which might indicate that genre is another feature of a text that could be considered when investigating unreliability.

The concept of the implied author constituted a significant part of our theory section because of its prominent yet contested position within unreliable narration. We settled, by and large, with James Phelan's redefinition of the concept, which makes the implied author a text-external creative agent, and which makes the concept a useful analytical tool in relation to explaining how the textual features we located were encoded in the text. Although we believe the implied

author has influenced every level of the text, we did not list every place in the text where the implied author's presence can be seen, such as through ironic distancing to the narrator. Rather, we listed some of the places where this influence was most prominent and accounted for how this influence manifested in the text in terms of producing unreliability (see sections 3.1.8 and 3.2.7).

Providing the missing link between locating textual incongruities and identifying them as unreliability, the tools of the cognitive approach, such as frameworks, conceptual schema and the concept of naturalisation, allowed us to describe the decoding process that underlies the reading of textual unreliability. Explaining this decoding process, or naturalisation, of textual incongruities involved having recourse to the reader's literary or extraliterary knowledge, whether explicitly mentioned or not (see for instance sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.2.6).

The use of the synthesised approach to locate and decode textual signals of unreliability has been largely successful and without many of the clashes that might arise when combining opposing lines of thinking. However, the relative ease of this melding may stem from the fact that the synthesised approach we have used is inherently skewed towards the rhetorical side of a cognitive-rhetorical synthesis. Because of our overall objective of identifying and understanding textual unreliability, the imbalance has not been a major issue for us. It may be that, for practical analytical purposes, letting one approach be dominant – in our case, the rhetorical approach – is necessary for avoiding some of the problems inherent in combining opposing theories. That being said, as we have mentioned in our discussion, the dominant approach may not be able to resolve all incongruities the reader encounters. In at least one instance, the rhetorical approach comes up short, but the solutions offered by the cognitive approach would still not be able to provide the concrete answers that we seek.

To sum up, in both of the texts we have analysed, unreliability is signalled through many of the same textual incongruities, which have been designed and encoded in the text by the implied author. These signals were created with the foreknowledge that the reader, equipped with conceptual schemata and frames of reference, would be able to decode the signals using these cognitive tools. Both texts also have their own unique features that sets them apart, however. In addition to the multiperspectivity of *Gone Girl*, which allows the implied author to make use of internarrational unreliability, the unreliability of *Gone Girl* is strongly tied with the novel's overall plot structure, while in *Notes on a Scandal*, by virtue of being more of a psychological character study, the unreliability does not function as part of a game of he-said she-said, but is part of the gradual exposure of a deeply troubled person.

With this thesis, we believe we have provided a detailed, though not exhaustive, account of the different factors that influence the reading of narrational unreliability. While the synthesised approach we have used in our analysis may not be the final answer to the question of how to investigate unreliability, it has gone some way towards furthering our understanding of the complexity of the concept of unreliability in fiction.

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