Etching "Inconscience": Unreliability as a Function in Narrative Situations

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Summary

The article takes as its point of departure Henry James's notion of "inconscience" or, as Booth was later to call it, unreliability, as a function of the mediator in narrative situations. It explores the literary etiology of the concept and illuminates by praxis the parameters within which such narrators are placed, offering in the conclusion a typology of "inconscient" narrators which may form the basis of subsequent narratological exegesis.

Opsomming

Die artikel neem as vertrekpunt Henry James se nosie van "inconscience", of, soos Booth dit later sou noem, onbetroubaarheid, as 'n funksie van die bemiddelaar in narratiewe situasies. Dit verken die literêre etiologie van die konsep en ondersoek prakties die parameters waarbinne sulke vertellers geplaas word. In die gevolgtrekking word 'n moontlike tipologie van "inconscient" vertellers aan die hand gedoen, waarop toekomstige narratologiese eksegese gebaseer sou kon word.

1 Introduction

In this article an attempt will be made to outline some of the parameters within which a narrative strategy which I call "immanent narration" (De Reuck 1987) takes place. I have argued elsewhere (1986; 1987; 1989) that this type of narrative situation augments the models advanced by Stanzel (1955; 1978; 1984) and is especially important for interpretation where texts with unreliable mediators are in question. A concept such as unreliability has been a part of narrative form as long as tales have been told, but for the sake of clarity, it seems necessary to establish in what light I presently regard the concept; and to what specific ends I shall put it. A brief history of the term's evolution in criticism is therefore warranted and the reiteration of my position as critic within an augmented structuralist framework is also necessary if the moves I make are to be accurately construed.

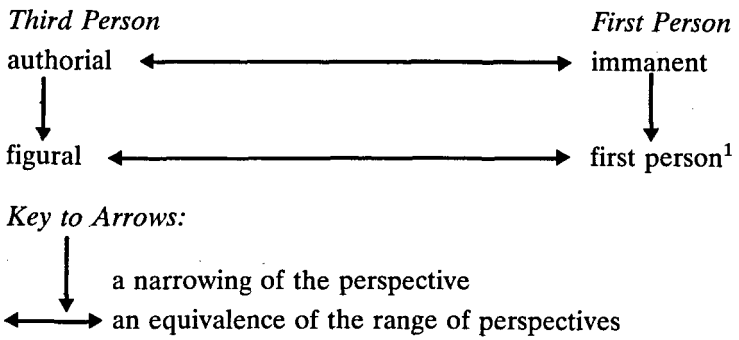
As part of their ideological commitment (where the nature of critical activity is concerned) both F.R. Leavis and the New Critics elevated texts that evinced the cardinal literary virtue of irony to the ranks of the "Great Tradition". My interest in irony (though I acknowledge that my critical practice is informed with its own theoretical bias: be it construed as essentialist, materialist or structuralist) stems from a concern to establish what the narrative mechanism in fact is in certain narrative situations which have thus far been treated – broadly and somewhat "loosely" – as aspects of a kind of first-person narrative; involving such disparate elements of the spectrum of narrative transmission as what Booth (1961) calls the unreliable narrator, and Rimmon-Kenan (1983) refers to as the implied author. Recent critics such as Chatman (1978), Rimmon-Kenan, Stanzel (1984), Iser (1978)

and Fokkema (1984), for example, have all implicitly recognised the limitations of objective (text-based) descriptions of the narrative process and their approaches reveal the fecundity of an augmented approach; one that incorporates both the domain of the author and that of the reader/receiver in a comprehensive semiotic analysis of the relationships involved in the narrative act. However, too heavy a reliance on the autonomy of reception (and its multiplicity of receivers) or, conversely, upon the autonomy of authorial intention, can lead to the distortion of the necessarily careful (objective) focus of narratological investigation.

Something that requires – certainly – activation by a reader/receiver but which is (after the creative act) intentionally text-based, is present in narratives; and when they are of the kind that form the objects of my investigation, their particular mechanism requires very close analysis if critics are not to slide into the somewhat murky realm of cultural or social "relativity" in attempting to explain a product's "meaning".

If the basic narrative situations are, as I believe (contra Stanzel), merely two:
1. first person
2. third person

with figural narration the result of a narrowing of the focus of authorial narration, and immanent narration a broadening of the focus of first person narration so that a satisfying symmetry is discernible in the relationships of the types of narrative focalisation generally possible:



then my theoretical enterprise can be extended and no doubt expanded to encompass those instances of third person narrative which exhibit unreliability of their particular kind. This undertaking is, however, not a part of the present enterprise, though it may prove a profitable area to explore in the light of the model being developed here. By "unreliable first-person (homodiegetic) narration", here however, is meant the anthropomorphised persona, qualified by the adjective unreliable, which functions as the mediatory presence, and which filters the presented world before transmitting it to the receiver. Unlike third person (omniscient/heterodiegetic) narration, where the functions of the narrator are less anthropomorphically delineated, and the mediator occupies either the presented world *or* the presentational process,

the unreliable homodiegetic narrator, functions in the ontological realms of both process and world (Ruthrof 1981).

The unreliable narrators of homodiegetically transmitted fiction can be arranged, initially, according to their degree of what Henry James called "inconscience" along a continuum (although, as I argue at the end of this article, the inconscient narrator is only a sub-class of unreliable narration), providing the critic with a sense of the accretion of complexity possible in the use of the technique. At one end of the continuum could be placed a manifestly unreliable narrator such as that of Malachi Whitaker in "X" (whom we discover is insane): at the other, could be placed the self-deceived narrators of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* or *The Ambassadors*. Conscient but deceiving narrators will conclude the continuum of unreliability.[2]

2 Unreliability: A Survey of the Concept's Literary Etiology

In focussing now on the concept of unreliability and charting its evolution as a critical term (a manoeuvre necessary to the location of my position in the debate) perhaps the best definitional point of departure is Wayne C. Booth's – he has devoted a sizable component of his seminal work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), to the notion of unreliability – and from his mapping of the terrain I shall move on to more contemporary discussions of the notion, including those of Stanzel (*Theory of Narrative* [1979] 1984) and Rimmon-Kenan (*Contemporary Poetics* 1984). The theoretical refinement of this particular mode of narration, given the level at which I am operating, however, moves beyond the broader demarcation of the territory that these narratologists have attempted and goes some way towards resolving a problem that Stanzel recognises, but for reasons of economy, no doubt, subsequently does not engage with (1984: 151); that is, against what framework – Stanzel talks of the norms of the implied author – such a notion as "unreliability" is to be measured. More recent developments in cultural theory would resist a placing of "meaning" solely within the domain of the implied author and point instead to social semiotics as the context from which "meanings" are produced and construed. (Birch 1989 and Hodge & Kress 1988). Such critics, however, beg the important ontological question as to how the norms are encoded in the text and fail to identify with any accuracy the presence of an immanent voice in an immanent narrative situation when confronted by the highly wrought, ironic texts valorised by the New Critics. Reader response theory, critically attuned as it is to the finer gradations of reception and grounded in epistemology, seems more suited to the task of analysing the *processes* involved in mediations of an unreliable kind.

Booth's focus in his section of the *Rhetoric of Fiction* which deals with unreliability is upon the short stories of Henry James who, perhaps, pre-eminently among writers in the realist mode, sought to project in his fiction, a world whose parameters were often clouded by the doubtful observations of a narrator who could, in the final analysis, not be trusted to tell the truth. As Booth makes clear, this is a deliberate technical manoeuvre on James's part, reflecting "a desire for 'gradations and superpositions of effect' that will

produce 'a certain fullness of truth'" (1961: 339), but which will be grounded in the "troubled vision" of an unreliable narrator that has a reflector quality (Stanzel's term).[3] Booth then demarcates further, while commenting critically on James's failure to grapple theoretically with "one large segment of his own work" (1961: 340), narrative territory that involves "stories narrated, whether in the first or third person, by a profoundly confused, basically self-deceived, or even wrong-headed or vicious reflector" (p. 340). It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive assessment of the basis for such a choice on the part of James, in particular (possibly, his stated intention to create worlds within a realist framework would be a point of departure for such an enterprise): however, that he worked in this mode, and was aware, as Booth puts it, of the "dramatic role of *inconscience* itself" (though he never articulated it with any fullness) is born testimony to by several works in the James canon, notably *The Aspern Papers*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Ambassadors*, *What Maisie Knew* and the short story which Booth, himself, undertakes to analyse, "The Liar". James was palpably aware of the potential effect of this line of approach to the narrative situation: in the entries he makes in his Notebook for a tale entitled "The Next Time", James comments:

> ... say it's a woman [set up in contrast to the main protagonist]. *She* succeeds – and she *thinks* she's fine! Mightn't *she* be the narrator, with a fine grotesque *inconscience*? So that the whole thing becomes a masterpeice of close and finished irony?
>
> (Quoted in Booth 1961: 342–3)

James's "inconscient" narrator, here, is what Booth and others have termed, subsequently, *unreliable*: and one of the goals of my undertaking is to establish more fully what is to be understood by the "dramatic" or revelatory role played by the deployment of an unreliable narrator in a narrative act that normally assumes the submission of the reader/receiver vis-à-vis the mediator as regards the events narrated in the text. To do this requires a more inclusive notion of unreliability than that exemplified in such works as those of James listed above.

In applying his teller-character/reflector-character distinction to the unreliable narrative situation and producing an argument for reliability as a criterion useful only if limited to teller-characters, Stanzel minimises the role of the reader/receiver (Chatman's narratee) in those narratives (like Benjy's in *The Sound and the Fury*) where the conventional tyranny of the narrator is deliberately undermined. Reception, albeit relatively unstable critical terrain at present, must be accorded status of paramount importance to the narrative act in such narratives and is determined exactly by the level of "inconscience" of the mediator. Contrary to Stanzel's stated position (1984: 152), the question of unreliability in narratives of the above kind becomes a central, indeed pivotal, one for "meaningful interpretation" (Stanzel 1984: 152). Booth perceived (and elaborated incisively upon) the "double focus" prevalent in some of James's tales (notably *The Turn of the Screw* and "The Liar":

Booth 1961: 347–354; 364–371), but in attributing the effect to "an incomplete fusion of original subject with the new subject that develops once a flawed narrator has been created to reflect the original" (1961: 346), he begs the critical question, which is: What precisely is the encoded technique that is being employed in such narrative situations?

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's discussion of unreliability as a narrative device (1983: 100–103) takes careful cognisance of the positions of both Booth and Seymour Chatman. However, her criteria for unreliability (a narrator's "limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme", p. 100) are by no means inclusive and she, like Booth before her, concedes finally that "even a passage [from Ambrose Bierce's "Oil of Dog"] with so many markers of unreliability is problematic" (1983: 102).

Susan Sniader Lanser, on the other hand, regards the granting of what she terms "mimetic authority" to the narrator, as quintessential to the narrative act:

> Whenever possible ... some degree of mimetic authority is granted to the narrating voice even if it is granted sceptically; readers conventionally try to "make sense" of (infer felicity in) the most frustrating instances of narrative incompetence.
>
> (Lanser 1981: 170)

Like Rimmon-Kenan, Lanser resists a direct encounter with the pressure on the text of post-modernist techniques which deprive the reader of the narrator's mimetic authority[4] which would validate the orientation of the reader/receiver vis-à-vis the mediator. And it is precisely because the reader's reception of "incompletely fused" narratives presents problems that the underlying technique requires exposition and explication. With Lanser, I agree that the primary impulse in the engagement of a mind with a literary (or other) work of art is towards coherence; towards the establishment of "a relation between minds" (1981: 174) that presupposes order, and it is to the nature of the underlying order, the narrative and textual markers (what I term "indices") which provide a structure for coherence, that the theory must now address itself. If, as Christopher Butler argues (1984: 2), interpretation has its base "in a number of principles that underlie all communicative exchanges", then there are serious implications for a less than rigorous examination of the fundamental or informing structures upon which the discourse in question is predicated. Such formulations of the nature of this particular narrative process as that it is a product of the "norms" of the real author, or that it is a construct reified by the reader on the basis of a discrepancy between the values (of the implied author) projected in the text and those of the receiver of the narrative transmission, slide over such complex narratological concepts as the position and nature of the hypostatised reader or the narratee and the "real" receiver (to restrict the problem for the moment solely to the area of reception). Implicit in approaches of the kind that diminish the complexity of the matrix of relationships in the narrative act, and impossibly problematic for criticism generally, is a kind of cultural and societal relativism which would

seriously undermine a work's intersubjectively available meaning. As William Ray argues in his introduction:

> Literary studies *qua* discipline might best be defined both as an accumulated system of rules and codes within which every instance of interpretation . . . must occur, and as an ongoing collective act, each utterance of which is necessarily different and in a sense in opposition to all others. No two readings can be said to be exactly the same, just as no critic can claim to have seized absolutely the author's meaning.
>
> (Ray 1984: 2)

It is somewhere within this almost irresolvable tension – between the "instance and the system" (Ray 1984: 2) of meaning – that the locus of analysis is to be found. Thus the minutiae of textual relationships, finely graded along the continuum that comprises the act of narrative transmission, require our observation and understanding. In this regard, Whitaker's short story, "X", occupying as it does, a space at one end of the continuum that comprises unreliable homodiegetic narratives, is especially fecund for the corroboration by example of the theoretical position being deployed here.

3 "X": An Example of Unreliable Homodiegetic Narration

Malachi Whitaker, "the Bradford Chekhov", as she was hailed in the thirties, contrived narratives very much in the realist mode, dealing with the apparently trivial, but fundamentally significant, events (usually in the domestic situation) affecting working class families in England just prior to the Depression. She contributed to the *Adelphi* among other periodicals and journals, and describes, somewhat whimsically, in an essay entitled *Beginnings*, included in the Paladin collection, her meeting with John Middleton Murray who subsequently, during the thirties, published her stories to consistently positive reviews. Culled from her four volumes of short stories, a selection has been recently collected by Joan Hart, from which "X" has been selected because of its paradigmatic representation of a narrative mode which can be called "immanent".

The homodiegetic narrator of the story situates her discourse "presently" in the past: that is, she casts her narrative back from the temporal vantage point of the present:

> I have never seen my harp since. I have an idea that my sister cut the strings with a linoleum knife some time before she died. I know now that I could have had it repaired, but I did not think of that at the time. I have not yet found *x*. The world seems to have closed in, and there are not many places left in which I can look for it.
>
> (Hart 1984: 114)

The shift in the tense of the verbs that occurs in this, the final paragraph of the narrative is from the past to the present. The entire utterance, therefore, is informed by the flash-back technique, coercing the reader/receiver of the narrative along a temporal continuum that leads from the narrator's recol-

lected past to the constraints of her experienced present. The opening sentence of the narrative, "I slept in the same room as my sister until she died" (p. 110), successfully foregrounds both the climax of the tale – and in this respect the teller of the story reveals a sophisticated control of structure and the build-up of tension – and introduces the motif of "inconscient" proximity which is to lead to murder. Moreover, a linguistic assessment of the surface structures of her discourse reveals the dominance of simple sentence construction, and immature lexical choice. (It is largely monosyllabic.)

Within a very short span, then, the analyst is alerted to a number of potential discrepancies that must bear upon reception of this text. There is, for example, a clear disjunction to be found in, on the one hand, the subtlety of the narrative act of transmission – foregrounding, tension, the introduction of motifs – and the linguistic simplicity of the discourse on the other. As the receiver orientates her/himself to each successive utterance, the semantic implicatures demand interpretations that can, by no narratological sleight of hand, be traced to a source in the homodiegetic discourse. As the first-order epistemological ground of the apparent discourse is eroded, a second-order epistemological discourse (which is dominant because it amplifies the meaning of the narrative as it corrects it) becomes discernible: the immanent narrative situation appears to be functioning.

Several translational indices which reinforce such a conclusion are scattered throughout the various levels of this story; and Whitaker presents the narratologist with all three of Ingarden's (1973) ontological realms lying outside the overt discourse of the homodiegetic narrator. The receiver is left in no doubt that this is a narrative of an exceedingly limited consciousness (the narrator, imagining herself to be a flying black pig, rips out her sister's throat at the climax of the story) and by implication, the entire narrative is projected from a spatial domain concretised in the last paragraphs as – we infer – an institution of some kind: in short, the narrator is mad. We are not, however, permitted access to this conclusion via the first person discourse: her discourse contains the indices to the second-order epistemic system which she is unable to perceive. We reach the conclusion that she is insane only in the light of several markers which she, herself, cannot comprehend.

Incomprehension is fundamental to the narrator's perceptions about herself (a pattern of observations which throws light upon the degree to which she can be defined as "reliable"). At first glance, the statement that ". . . my heart began to move all about my body . . . into my calf. I thought, How shall I get home with my heart in my leg?" (p. 110) is disturbing, but the hypostatised reader, not yet in a position to jettison (or qualify) the statements being made by the homodiegetic narrator; and orientated by an apparently realistic discourse and context ("I slept in the same room as my sister until she died", being the deceptively banal opening sentence of this narrative), finds him/herself suspending judgement until further accretions have annealed reception of the narrator's discourse, enforcing a modification upon it. That this narrator's sensory integrative functions are aberrant is corroborated by her own avowals:

> I did not like the throaty sound of the water . . .
>
> (Hart 1984: 110)

her oddly variant aural response (for one thing) reinforced by the further statement:

> . . . I would sometimes run my hands over the strings [of her harp], from the bass where they said *qubble bub bub qubble* up to the highest notes which just went *pee ting*.
>
> (p. 110)

Olfactory functions, too, play a role in alerting the reader to this narrator's deviance:

> The smell of hen-food used to make my heart move about my body. Once, I know, it nearly got out of the tip of my left ear.
>
> (p. 111)

(Even when she herself questions the validity or accuracy of such an observation: "How can that happen when the heart is so large and the ear so small?" she continues.)

(p. 111)

Extending and enhancing the pattern of sensory integrative dysfunction, touch can be seen to function as a pointer to the narrator's unusual sensitivity: she describes her face as having ". . . no cheekbones at all", and continues:

> I have looked in the mirror, and felt for them, and not found them, and thought "When I am a skeleton, I shall be quite unlike all the other skeletons". But I have only patted my cheeks lightly, very lightly. Perhaps they are underneath.
>
> (p. 111)

Her claim that she "wanted to do so many things" (p. 111) and the juxtaposition of her desire to learn algebra (hence the variable "X" of the title, the symbolism of which will be explored further below) with an equivalent desire to "fly without wings, just by moving [her] elbows backwards and forwards, and dropping from a cliff or a high window" (p. 111), sounds the first clear alarm that the signals which project the states of affairs in this narrative, are not entirely trustworthy. Undermining the matter-of-fact tone of the narrator's utterance, and projecting in the process a second-order epistemic system which enforces for the receiver a stereoscopic perspective on the presented world, is her unreliability. Ironically, her sister's first utterance, embedded in the context of the narrator's homodiegetic discourse, carries a weight of insight into the psychopathology of this mediator which we, as receivers of this narrative transmission, will only be able to corroborate entirely once the climax has been reached. In describing how her sister had interrupted (by "roughly" grabbing her hair) her singing to her harp, the mediator recalls the direct speech as "Shut up! Do you want everybody to think you are mad?" (p. 111). Shifting perceptions now become an integral feature of the mediator's discourse, and accurate reception of the events

becomes a challenge for the reader, even as its achievement is undermined. The narrator comments, for example, that contrary to her sister's perception that she is mad, she herself had ". . . begun to think [her] sister was mad" (p. 111).

Translational indices in this narrative are confined largely to the semantic stratum of "X" and then, when the exemplifications begin to become apparent, to the strata of portrayed objectivities and states of affairs (Ingarden 1973). There may be a suggestion of a prephonetic pointer in the title of the story – "X" gestalting a mathematical variable as it simultaneously suggests a blank at a metaphoric level – but this is not a particularly fruitful line of investigation in this narrative. However, the second-order epistemic system becomes clear to the reader/receiver, as a result of the exemplification process engendered in the other strata that Ingarden defines. If we recall Nelson Goodman's assertion that

> . . . exemplification involves reference by what possesses to the property possessed, and thus that exemplification though obviously different from denotation (or description or representation) is no less a species of reference.
>
> (Goodman 1978: 32)

then the symbolic reference that is fundamental to the process of exemplification can be seen to be occurring in the process that enforces on the reader/receiver a re-alignment of his/her orientation: that is, when the narrator's unreliability has been established (up to page 111 by dint of the accretions of perverse sensory descriptions and incipiently deviant avowals of the kind outlined above) and the presented world of the first person mediator finds its epistemic position being superceded by another "world".

It is, naturally, possible to arrange the indices and the projected (second-order) "worlds" in a number of suggestive patterns, but allowing for translational signals of a linguistic and/or lexical kind to remain – for the present – unexplicated,[5] the world (in Goodman's sense) that is projected as an alternative one to that which the ostensible narrator presents, and which derives from the framing context of the immanent narrative situation, can be determined by arranging the utterance of the homodiegetic narrator (whose semantic units, alone, are responsible for the text's meaning potentialities) against the implicatures which have as their fundamental source the immanent voice. To suggest merely three such possibilities for patterned grouping, exemplification could be examined as it affects:

1. the relation between the sisters
2. the narrative's climax
3. the narrator's perceptions about herself.

Correction of the first person narrator's utterance or observation (Column A) is provided by the exemplificatory process of the immanent voice (Column B) in the following comparative analysis:

(i) The Relation Between the Sisters

A *First Person Narrator*	B *Immanent Narrator*
"I am sure my sister did not like me." (p. 110)	True. But reasons for her dislike are to be found in the narrator's insensitivity which borders on lunacy.
"If there was anything to organise, . . . anyone's feelings to be trampled on, she would volunteer for the job." (p. 111)	She has friends and is popular, so the "trampl[ing] is reserved for her sister, the narrator.
"She would pull things together that had almost fallen to pieces" (p. 111)	She was constructive and/or socially sensitive and aware.
"In some ways she was like a horse." (p. 112)	The sister is athletic, blonde, the "norm". She has physical strength (plays tennis and rows) but the animal qualities of a horse are the dubious projection of the narrator.
"My sister began following me around in a way I did not like." (p. 112)	Her sister becomes increasingly perturbed by her aberrant behaviour. The singing to the harp, particularly, reveals the fear of public exposure of the derangement of the narrator. (This could be self-serving, but might also be construed as a protective measure: she continues to sleep with and watch over the narrator.)
". . . I would sing a great deal to my harp. I know I sang very loudly, but I did not think it mattered." (p. 111)	The noise, tuneless and incessant, by the narrator's own admission, must be regarded as a severe strain on the nerves of the older sister.
"This was strange to me, as I had begun to think my sister was mad." (p. 111)	A lack of personal insight on the part of this narrator precludes her recognition of the signals that denote aberrant behaviour.
"[My sister] would sleep though the light went off and on a hundred times, and though I turned back the sheet to see if she had turned into a horse as many more.' (p. 113)	Sleep, for her sister is severly hampered. They share a bed, and she manifestly wants to inhibit the narrator's destructive potential. But she is subjected to her darker sibling's obsessive, repetitive behaviour night after night.

(ii) The Narrative's Climax

A *The First Person Narrator*	B *The Immanent Narrator*
"I looked up and saw a sort of pig flying about. It was a thin black pig, and it kept smiling at me, and it had teeth just like mine." (p. 113)	The narrator distances herself from her action by objectifying her behaviour, and making it that of an imaginary flying pig.
"All at once [the pig] swooped down to my sister's neck and began to bite and make horrible growling noises."	The narrator herself is, in fact, the "pig" that bites into the neck of her sleeping sister and kills her.
". . . [I] ran about trying to catch the flying pig in [the drawer]." (p. 113)	There is nothing flying about the room: the pig is a psychotic figment of the narrator's imagination.

(iii) The Narrator's Perceptions about Herself

A *The First Person Narrator*	B *The Immanent Narrator*
". . . it seemed to me that my heart began to move all about my body. Sometimes it even got into my calf. I thought, How shall I get home with my heart in my leg?" (p. 110)	The bizarre physical and anatomical distortions experienced subjectively by the narrator (and given the "realist" overlay of the *presented* world) suggest, early in the narrative, that the judgements of the narrator are suspect.
"I did not like the throaty sound of the water nor the dank smell of it . . ." (p. 110)	Utterances of this kind must be read as surface signals of the narrator's sensory integrative dysfunction, that is, of her psychotic behaviour.
and	
"Now, I have no cheekbones at all." (p. 111)	
"When I am a skeleton, I shall be quite unlike all the other skeletons." (p. 111)	At a superficial level the narrator reveals a number of physical deficiencies which, however, mask the nature of her mental deficiencies.
"I wanted to lean algebra, and, like many other people, I wanted to fly without wings." (p. 111)	The cognitive slippage evinced by this type of sequence reveals her disconnection from the "world" projected by her narrative.

In keeping with the essentially "constructionist" methodology utilised in this mode of analysis, the patternings and juxtapositionings suggested above demonstrate that the exemplifications are (as must be the case) entirely missed by the ostensible homodiegetic narrator: the aspects of the world that they indicate, derived from Ingarden's "states of affairs" (stratum 3) and "portrayed objectivities" (stratum 4), remain outside the cognitive sphere of the homodiegetic narrator. But they are nevertheless exemplified via the attention drawn to them by the fact of the homodiegetic narrator's blindness to so obvious a set of properties of situations which she herself has described. These and similar indices establish the existence of the covert discourse of the immanent narrator.

The translational indices in this short story (notably the exemplifications) constrain the implications and/or inferences within a relatively narrow band of potential meanings; and I would suggest that a recognition of this delimitation is of paramount significance for interpretation, and would subvent the kind of dilemma expressed by Booth (1961: 353–354) who feels that interpretations of narratives of this kind must, inevitably, reveal large areas of indeterminacy as regards meaning. The immanent voice in "X" in fact coerces the receiver of the narrative transmission into concretising the lacunae very specifically: the entire utterance of the homodiegetic narrator requiring recasting in the light of the second-order epistemological perceptions that her unreliability is a function of her madness.

4 A Typology of Unreliable Homodiegetic Narrators

A *Inconscient*:

(i) Insane. (The narrator in "X"; Benjy, in *The Sound and the Fury)*
(ii) Childish. (Huckleberry Finn)
(iii) Self-deceived: straddling categories. (The narrators of "Haircut", *The Aspern Papers* or *The Good Soldier*)

B *Conscient*:

(iv) Deceiving. (The Duke in "My Last Duchess": although he exhibits marked elements of self-deception as well.)
(v) Manipulative. (Lucy Snowe in *Villette*)

To conclude the discussion of unreliability, a typology (even one as schematic as the one above) indicates the range of degrees of unreliability available to writers who wish to deploy the immanent narrative situation. The typology includes the fascinating case of the mediator as self-deceived, a category of unreliable narration which I am exploring in an analysis of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*. Self-deceived narrators are inconscient in virtue of their being deceived, conscient in virtue of their active participation in the deception to which they fall willing victim.

In an attempt to further elaborate the subtleties of unreliable homodiegetic narration the Jamesian category of "inconscience" as an aspect of the narrative mode is a useful point of departure. It refers, as has been shown, to the narrator's knowledge of his/her own inner states, while the concept of unreliability refers to the epistemological barriers that stand between the reader-receiver and the narrator. One of those barriers is often the inconscience of the narrator him/herself. The fully conscient, deceiving narrator can on these grounds be regarded by the reader/receiver as unreliable.

Some measure of "intrinsic" criticism is essential when the goal of interpretative activity is the discovery of the means or processes by which meanings are made. Contra Birch (1989) I would therefore argue for the enrichment made possible when critical engagement entails a detailed construction of the processes whereby meanings are encoded. As receivers of a text as complex as Whitaker's "X" we are bound, certainly, by our social context (our "gaze" is defined by the positions we start from) but nevertheless, we are capable of more accurately refining our interpretative abstractions if we acknowledge the structures *intrinsic* to the text which offer themselves for our interpretation.

Notes

1. Authorial and figural narrators on the one hand, and immanent and first person narrators on the other, correspond to Genette's external and internal focalisers in the graphic depiction of the relationships between the types of narrative situation. Like immanent and first person narration, authorial and figural exhibit ontological similarities, with figural being, in effect, merely a conventional narrowing via the imposition of limiting strictures upon the range of authorial "omniscience".
2. In answer to the question: Why is the corrective in these narratives not a feature or function of an implied authorial stance (Iser, Rimmon-Kenan, Yacobi) against which or from which receivers of the text re-orientate themselves vis-à-vis the narrated events, I must reply that the answer lies in the logic underpinning narrative transmission itself; its mediatory generic point of departure which implies a "speaker", either literally (a teller-character) or metaphorically (showing or exemplifying).
3. Booth's source, here, is footnoted as "Preface to 'The Pupil'" in *The Art of the Novel* ed. R.P. Blackmur (New York, 1947), pp. 153, 154; and is to be found in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 1961: 339.
4. Coover's "The Babysitter" (*Pricksongs and Descants* 1969), for example, deprives the reader of a satisfying construction of the presentational process, not to mention the presented world; drawing into both the process and presented world, the elements of incoherence that distinguish the plot of this narrative. Each paragraph suggests another vantage point – for the receiver – from which to view the presented world.
5. Although I have not attempted an extended analysis of a novel such as *Huckleberry Finn*, such elements of the second-order discourse of the homodiegetic narrator as linguistic choice and idiolect are readily perceived to function as important features of the exemplification process in texts of this kind.

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