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"Reading between the lines": Detecting (Un)reliable Narrators

In how far can Nick in *The Great Gatsby* be considered an (un)reliable narrator?

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1. Introduction

I have been an aivid reader for nearly my entire life, and for as long as I have been reading I have experienced unreliable literary narratives: I followed Huck Finn and his adventures that my dad read to me when I was five years old; I had to accompany Marlow for my first ever literary studies exam; and I encountered the unnamed narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* last summer. In every case, the unreliability of the narrators not only fascinated me, but also illuminated a flawed, yet very human, perception. Misperceived, flawed human narratives like these have been an almost warlike subject of academic research for a long time. Since Booth's introduction and definition of the term 'unreliable narrator', academics have been disputing indicators and analysed strategies for, and causes of unreliable narration. While some earlier theorists called for a strict either-or distinction between reliable and unreliable, recent analysis shows that the diversity of today's world cannot accommodate such a restrictive distinction and must acknowledge ambivalent cases.

Thus, my paper aims to show that evaluating and detecting a narrator's (un)reliability has to include a variety of indicators and seldomly results in an either-or assignment. In my thesis, I chose to focus on the narrator in *The Great Gatsby* which presents an exemplary ambivalent case of narratorial unreliability. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* in 1925. It is narrated by thirty year-old Nick Carraway in the first-person perspective. The novel is set in spring and summer of 1922; yet, Nick tells the story in retrospect two years later, in 1924. Since Nick only presents his past experiences and thoughts during the narrative, he is a narrating-I and his role in the novel is secondary. Nick is no protagonist but an I-as-witness narrator and observes and comments on the events and characters in the story.

Every time I have read *The Great Gatsby*; I could not get my head around Nick. My reading experience was always ambivalent: I liked, disliked, trusted, and doubted him. At one point, I was purely annoyed. The mixed feelings Nick has for Gatsby during the story are the same I had for Nick. So, my decisive research question became: In how far can Nick in *The Great Gatsby* be considered an (un)reliable narrator? I will argue that Nick cannot be labelled as solely reliable or unreliable. It is instead a spectrum where elements of unreliability and reliability exist. The perception of Nick's (un)reliability changes depending on the situation, the readers' value scheme, and the historical standpoint. Although a multiplicity of textual and extratextual indicators point towards unreliability, there are also several hints of reliability.

These hints might not be as multiple as the indicators for unreliability, yet they are enough to demolish the idea of a completely unreliable narrator.

To support my hypothesis, I will explore various theories concerning unreliable narrators. To introduce several terms used in explanations of narratorial unreliability, I will explore Seymor Chatman's notion of the six instances of narrative-communication. Then the focus will be on the theories of Wayne Booth, who coined the term 'unreliable narrator', and Chatman, who refined Booth's concept. A thorough depiction of Ansgar Nünning's reader-oriented and practical approach with his assortment of indicators for unreliable narration is going to conclude the theoretical chapters. Greta Olson's and Per Krogh Hansen's ideas are introduced as academic critiques of Nünning here. In the following, I will apply Nünning's textual and extra-textual indicators for unreliability to *The Great Gatsby*. The focal point will be on Nünning's concept since it is the most detailed and applicable for narratorial analysis where the relevance of the historical standpoint is considered as well. Then, my research is going to focus on indicators for narratorial reliability in *The Great Gatsby*. The closing point will be the changing academic and popular reception of Nick as a narrator over the years, which will show that analysing and evaluating a narrator depends on the historical standpoint of the reader.

Several secondary sources helped me foster my research. For the theoretical part, Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Rhetoric of Irony*, Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, as well as Nünning's "'But why will you say that I am mad?' On the Theory, History, and Signals of Unreliable Narration in British Fiction" were essential works to understand different takes on unreliable narration. Nünning's and Birgit Neumann's *An Introduction to the Study of Narrative Fiction* provided additional theoretical frameworks and textual indicators that Nünning's article did not touch upon. To elaborate on the academic critique of Nünning, Hansen's "Reconsidering the unreliable narrator" and Olson's "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" presented interesting approaches: both critique Nünning for impreciseness and hence introduce new theoretical categories of narratorial analysis.

The academic articles by Matthew J. Bolton, Elizabeth Preston, Susan Resneck Parr, Thomas A. Hanzo, and Suzanne Del Gizzo enhanced my textual analysis. Bolton's takes on narratorial ellipsis warned me of literary over-reading and introduced different causes and motivations for Nick's lacking reliability, namely memory lapses and ellipsis due to alcohol consumption, confusion, or secrecy. Hanzo and Resneck Parr's research offered various interpretations of Nick's ambivalence toward Gatsby, ranging from reservedness to crush-like

idolisation and psychological compensation. Both Resneck Parr and Preston conducted close-readings of Nick's ethical and moral violations that led to a lacking credibility. Del Gizzo introduced me to the ambivalent role of Nick as a character and narrator that causes confusion in the narrative. For the differing receptions of *The Great Gatsby* and Nick as a narrator, I employed the review page by *bookmarks.reviews* featuring *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times,* and *The Chicago Tribune*'s reviews of 1926. For the modern-day reception, the articles of *The Observer*, the BBC, and *The Paris Review* were insightful. Academic receptions of Nick as a narrator ranged from Booth and Peter Lisca to David O'Rourke and Preston. While Booth focused on Nick's reliable nature as a narrating-I, Lisca presented Nick's unreliability as a fixed entity of a first-person narrative. O'Rourke indirectly argued for a mixture of unreliability and reliability in *The Great Gatsby*; and Preston, on the other hand, concentrated on Nick's attitude towards racism, gender, and class, arguing that all these extratextual factors are not sufficient reasons to speak of unreliability.

To recap the basics of narratology and focalisation, Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* and Walker Gibson's article "Authors, Speaker, Readers, and Mock Readers" were helpful. John A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* and Nünning and Nünning's *An Introduction to the Study of English and American Literature* provided me with basic literary definitions.

2. The Six Instances of Narrative-Communication

There are six essential instances necessary to understand narrative-communication: the real author, the implied author, the narrator, the narratee, the implied reader, and the real reader (Chatman 148). The implied author is not the narrator, but a principle that invented the narrator and everything in the narrative. The implied author is someone who arranges the fundamental elements of the story. She[1] designs the story (ibid.). Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. She has no way of direct communication and only establishes the norms of the narrative. So, the real author can present every norm she likes through the implied author (ibid. 149). Chatman explicitly states that the reader cannot mix up the implied author, which is a structural principle, with the real author, who is a historical figure we like or

[1] This paper uses the generic feminine for all instances of narrative-communication.

dislike morally, politically, or personally (ibid.). While designing the story, the implied author gives us the voice the story is told through, namely, the narrator. The narrator may or may not agree with the implied author (ibid. 150). The narrator then tells the story to an audience, the narratee. The narratee is the addressee of the narrator (ibid. 149f).

While holding the book in her hands, the real reader enters the fictional contract — she becomes the implied reader (ibid. 150). The real reader takes on the "mask" (Gibson 266) of the implied, or mock, reader to "experience the language" (ibid.). Implied readers differ from book to book. The implied reader must quickly share the assumed and required attitudes or experiences the narrator designs for her narattee (Gibson 267). If the real reader recognises a violent gap between herself as the real person and herself as the implied reader, she puts the book away. The gap between the real reader's personal value scheme and the one of the implied reader becomes too considerable (ibid. 266). The real reader finds the implied reader intolerable (ibid. 269). So, the implied reader can but does not have to ally with a narratee (Chatman 150). The real reader's decision of value and tolerance is always linked to and influenced by the societal values of the reader's real world (Gibson 269).

Chatman illustrated the narrative-communication between the six instances in a diagram (151). Narrative-communication is a one-way street. The arrows only go in one direction — from left to right, from the real author all the way to the real reader in a flow-chart-like fashion. This draws back to Chatman's definition of a narrative as "communications […] envisioned as the movements of arrows from left to right, from author to audience" (31). Either direct or indirect communication takes place between all six entities as indicated by the different kind of arrows. Direct communication happens between the implied author and the narrator, the narrator and the narrattee, and the narrattee and the implied reader, as indicated by the solid lines along the central axis of the diagram. The communication between real author and implied author, and implied reader and real reader is only indirect as exemplified by the broken lines (ibid.). While the real reader and real author are existing real-life entities, the implied author and implied reader are only theoretical constructs that the real-life author and reader employ. The implied author and the implied reader are immanent parts of the fictional narrative. The box drawn around them in the diagram illustrates that (ibid.). The box signals the essential parts of a narrative. Narrator and narrattee are in parentheses since they are optional to a narrative. They can be fully characterised or be absent or unmarked (ibid.) The real reader and the real author are parts of the real, non-fictional world outside the narrative.

Hence, in the diagram, they are located outside the box. The communication between the real author and the implied author or between the implied reader and the real reader is only indirect since the respective parties are not on the same communicational and structural level.

3. The Notion of Reliable and Unreliable Narrators

This chapter thematises different theories for the concept of the unreliable narrator. Subchapter One focuses on Booth's coining definition and the way Chatman elaborated on this. Subchapter Two considers Nünning's reader-oriented approach. Here, the focal points are Nünning's definition, his textual and extratextual indicators of unreliability, as well as the critique of Nünning's concept.

3.1 Booth and Chatman

Booth coined the term 'unreliable narrator' in his 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (158f). Booth states that instances of lying and incidental or difficult irony are no reasons for calling a narrator unreliable (ibid. 159). Unreliability is a matter of "inconscience" (ibid.). The narrator somehow believes to have qualities that the author denies her. The narrator herself is mistaken (ibid.). To what extent unreliable narrators differ from the implied author's norms varies from narrator to narrator. Some narrators are far removed from the author and reader. Others are closer to embodying the author's ideals and moral values as well as taste (ibid.). In the end, unreliable narrators pose stronger demands on the reader's powers of inference than reliable narrators do (ibid.).

Hence, Booth's notion of the unreliable narrator strongly relies on the reader. The reader has to detect the norms of the work as set by the implied author, analyse the behaviour and speech acts of the narrator, and then check concordance of the two. The problem is not that the reader needs to be attentively analytical but instead that such a procedure makes detecting unreliable narrators a highly subjective undertaking. Booth does not answer questions such as what the "norms of the work" constitute, how the reader can detect them, and if they might be subject to historical change. Booth's definition, furthermore, does not acknowledge that every reader's perception of ethical misevaluations differs. What one

reader might find a violation of the implied author's norm, another might not. Yet, the biggest problem is the missing definition of "norms of the work" on which every narrator's evaluation would rely and which Booth does not define in further detail. Every assessment of a narrator's unreliability would lack a clear, definitional basis.

In his 1978 book *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Film and Fiction*, Chatman builds on Booth's definition, stating that "[w]hat makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author's; that is, the rest of the narrative – 'the norm of the work' – conflicts with the narrator's presentation" (149). The unreliable narrator's presentation of facts and events does not align with parts of the narrative. Norms of the work are then "the rest of narrative", referring to the parts of the narrative that are not compromised by the narrator's rendition of events or commentary. It seems complicated to extract what the narrator's parts of the narrative are and what not. The idea of norms of the work remains blurry. Chatman goes on and explains that due to the narrator's divergence from the norms of the work, the reader becomes suspicious of the narrator's sincerity and competence, to tell the truth (ibid.). The reader reads out between the lines that the events could not have happened in that way and as a consequence holds the narrator suspect (ibid. 233). The virtual conflict between unreliable narrator and implied author always needs to exist for unreliability to emerge (ibid.).

Later on, Chatman refers to his narrative-communication diagram from the beginning and changes it to accommodate for the by-path of unreliable narration (ibid.). He states that if the narrator is reliable, the narrative act solely takes place on the main central axis, as seen in the original diagram of narrative-communication. If the narrator is unreliable, two messages must be shown in the modified second diagram (ibid.). The upper broken line from implied author to implied reader illustrates message one. Message two follows along the main central axis from real author, implied author, narrator, narrattee, and implied reader to the real reader. Message one is credible but implied. The implied author has created a secret communication with the implied reader, as illustrated by the broken line. The implied author has communicated to the implied reader that the narrative is unreliable (ibid. 234f). The second message is overt, unreliable, and not credible. No secret communication between implied author and implied reader occurs (ibid.). Chatman indicates that by strictly following the main central axis of communication. No line or communication between implied author and implied reader exists (ibid. 233). Nonetheless, some of the lines on the main central axis, from the implied

author to the narrator and from the narrator to the implied reader, are broken and suggest that a discrepancy still exists. The communication is inferential (ibid. 234). It is up to the reader to discover the nature of the discrepancy.

Chatman furthermore declares that unreliable narration is an "ironic form" (233) since it possesses all of Booth's four features of stable irony: intended, covert, fixed, and finite (Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony* 5ff). Unreliable narration is intended since it was created by the silent author as trap for the narrator and for readers not able to catch the allusion (Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction* 305). It is also covert because the implied reader has to read between the lines to detect the secret message of the implied author (Chatman 304). When the reader sees the discrepancy between the story's covert and logical reconstruction and the overt narrator's account, she cannot unsee it. Once detected, the covert set of norms, the implied author's norms, has to win (ibid. 233). The narrator's unreliability remains stable throughout the narrative, only sometimes it may fluctuate. Unreliable narration becomes fixed and finite as a rhetorical device (ibid. 234).

To conclude, Chatman gives the power to the reader. The reader must determine the norms of the work, recognize the stable irony of unreliable narration, and distinguish between the narrator's commentary and other credible parts of the narrative. But what happens if the reader does not detect the stable irony, namely the secret message from the implied author to the implied reader? Is it an entertaining and purposed effect of stable irony, or does it not just make unreliable narration a theory prone to subjectivity? Theoretical frameworks, such as unreliable narratives, are supposed to be universal. However, if only some readers are able to detect an unreliable narrator, does it not make the concept itself protean? Neither Chatman nor Booth introduce or create features that make narratorial unreliability a universally applicable and theoretically grounded framework. They do the contrary.

3.2. Nünning

3.2.1 Nünning's Reader-Oriented Approach

Nünning addresses the issues of Booth's and Chatman's definitions of unreliable narrators in his article "'But why will you say that I am mad?'". Here, according to Nünning, Booth's frequently used definition of an unreliable narrator is not clear and ill-defined (85). The term "norms of the work" and the notion of the implied author are no reliable basis for determining

a narrator's unreliability (ibid.). The concept of the implied author itself is imprecise. It is a term that was solely invented to explain unreliability (ibid. 86). Defining the norms of this implied author is impossible (ibid. 87). For Nünning, the question "Unreliable, compared to what?" remains (86). Another problem with the definition of unreliable narrators is the question of whether the narrator's shortcomings are epistemological or moral (ibid. 88). Unreliability can either be caused by the narrator's misrepresentation of events and facts, or by the narrator's questionable judgements and interpretations (ibid. 89). The usage of the term "unreliable narrators" for Nünning is highly metaphorical and fails to distinguish between those two options (ibid. 88). The distinction between what is said and how it is said in terms of unreliability is missing.

Therefore, Nünning suggests the distinction between 'unreliable' and 'untrustworthy' narrators (89). Unreliable narrators are narrators "whose rendering of the story the reader has reason to suspect" (ibid.). On the other hand, untrustworthy narrators, are narrators "whose commentary does not accord with conventional notion of sound judgement" (ibid.). Hence, the concept of unreliable narrators concerns the epistemological aspects of the narrative, namely what is said. Is what was said the truth? Are the events and facts, as presented by the narrator, accurate (ibid.)? The concept of untrustworthy narrators, on the other hand, thematises how something is said. Are the narrator's judgements and interpretations sound? Do they align with common-sense (ibid.)? With this distinction, the analysis of the narrator's unreliability can distinguish between the two causes: misrepresenting narrative facts and dubious narratorial judgements (ibid.). Nünning also points out that Chatman's idea of reading between the lines is not helpful in determining a narrator's unreliability (90). Such a metaphor does not account for textual and contextual clues of narratorial unreliability (ibid.). Additionally, Nünning dismisses the idea of secret communication between implied author and implied reader since critics offer no tutorial for how such a message might be received and understood behind the narrator's back (ibid.).

Nünning introduces the concept of dramatic irony to explain unreliability (87). Unreliable narration can be explained with dramatic irony since it involves a contrast between the narrator's view of the fictional world and the reader's sense of a divergent state of this fictional world (ibid.). The reader interprets the narrator's utterances and the text's statements in two different contexts. First, the reader sees what is said, i.e., what the narrator states and wants (ibid.). Second, the reader is uncovering how the narrator said these utterances. Here,

the narrator's statements get an additional meaning for the reader; a meaning the narrator does not intend to convey or conveys unconsciously. So, subconsciously the narrator gives the reader information on her mental state and idiosyncrasies (ibid.). As an effect, the reader's attention is redirected from the story to the speaker. The reader decides whether the statements of the narrator are facts about the fictional world or only clues for her distorted mental state (ibid. 88). The dramatic irony in unreliable narration "results from the discrepancy between the intentions and value system of the narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader" (ibid. 87). Unreliability is not about discovering the norms of the work or the implied author anymore, but about the norms of the reader. The reader and the reader's norms either align or not with the narrator and deem her unreliable.

To sum up, the reader suspects unreliable narration when there is a) "an internal lack of harmony between the statements of the narrator" (ibid.) or b) there are "contradictions between the narrator's perspective and the reader's own concept of normality" (ibid.). Thus, in the former case, the narrator contradicts himself in his statements and the reader recognises it. In the latter case, the reader's common sense suggests that something is wrong with the narrator's perception of events. Nünning's concept relies on what the reader suspects or sees during the narrative, i.e., what the reader can grasp from the narrative. The reader can account for all discrepancies if the text is read as a concept of dramatic irony and the unreliable narrator is viewed as "an integrative hermeneutic device" (ibid.). The unreliable narrator becomes an interpretative and rhetorical device of the text.

In addition to dramatic irony, Nünning suggests putting the phenomenon of unreliability into the context of frame theory (88). Unreliability then becomes a projection of the reader who tries to resolve textual ambiguities and inconsistencies and attributes them to the narrator's unreliability (ibid.). With frame theory, the reader's projection of unreliable narrators becomes an interpretative strategy known as "naturalisation" (ibid.). Modes of naturalisation are means by which the reader accounts for world models in the texts. Many empirical frames of references and literary models belong to these standard modes of naturalisation (ibid.). Naturalisation is a way of the literary world-making process. The readers try to understand the text and to negotiate between the world model of the text and their own empirical world model (ibid.). It is a comparison between the fictional world and the readers' own reality and an attempt to comprehend both. If there is no discrepancy between narrative and reader's worldview, no questioning of a narrator's reliability arises (Neumann and Nünning 100).

With these two contexts, dramatic irony and frame theory, narrative unreliability is located in the interaction between text and reader (Nünning, "'But why will you say that I am mad?'" 99). Unreliability, according to Nünning, is a reader-oriented approach (ibid.). He clearly states, "Conceived in this way, the identification of an unreliable narrator is not only informed by textual data, as Chatman and other proponents of the implied author maintain but also by the norms and conceptual models existing in the mind of the reader" (ibid. 102). Unreliable narration is not a purely structural or semantic narrative aspect but a concept that includes the contextual frameworks of the reader (ibid.).

3.2.2 Nünning's Textual and Extratextual Signs

Nünning introduces several textual and extratextual signals as frames of reference for unreliable narration. While textual signals serve to detect unreliability and resolve textual ambiguities, extratextual signals draw on moral value schemes of the reader to determine unreliability (Neumann and Nünning 99f). Nünning points out that norm and value schemes are subject to historical change. Unreliability needs to be considered in a broader historical and cultural context (ibid. 100).

Textual signals can be divided into internal inconsistencies and verbal idiosyncrasies of the narrator. Internal inconsistencies of the narrator might be explicit contradictions within the narrator's comments, discrepancies between the statements of the narrator and the narrator's actions (ibid. 98f), and a discrepancy between the narrator's account of events (ibid.). In the latter case, the story is at odds with the discourse. The narrator's representation of events does not match with the narrator's the explanations and interpretations of them (Nünning, "'But why will you say that I am mad?'" 96). The narrator's commentary does not align with the evidence presented in the scene through narrative modes such as description, scenic representation, or report (ibid.). Contradictions between the self-characterisation of the narrator and the characterisation of the narrator by other characters are another possible internal inconsistency of the narrator (Neumann and Nünning 99).

Verbal idiosyncrasies can be sub-divided into stylistic peculiarities and their violation of linguistic norms, multiperspectival accounts of the same event, addressing the narrator's unreliability, and paratextual clues (Nünning, "'But why will you say that I am mad?'" 96ff). For Nünning, the stylistic peculiarities must be further differentiated to specify the linguistic expressions of subjectivity (97). One instance is pragmatic indications such as speaker-

oriented and reader-oriented expressions (ibid.). The pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ are frequently used. The narrator deliberately tries to justify herself or to manipulate the reader’s response (Neumann and Nünning 99). The narrator might also insist on her own credibility or lack thereof. She utters respective statements and comments to convince the readers of her credibility (ibid.). On the other hand, syntactic indications consist of incomplete sentences, exclamations, interjections, hesitations, and unmotivated repetitions on behalf of the narrator (Nünning, “‘But why will you say that I am mad?’” 97). Lexical indicators of unreliability are the repeated occurrence of subjective comments and the use of evaluative modifiers, expressive intensifiers, or adjectives that express the narrator’s attitude (ibid.). All three stylistic peculiarities point to the narrator’s high emotional involvement and her problematic value scheme (ibid.).

Multiperspectival, or contrasting, accounts of the same event as an indicator provide the reader with additional information. She can make her own assumptions of the characters, narrator, and chain of events (ibid.). Addressing the narrator’s unreliability might be done directly or indirectly (ibid. 98). Indirectly means that the texts allude to the narrator’s faulty memory, memory lapses, or limited knowledge (ibid.). For direct addresses to unreliability, word choice and phrases give away the cognitive limitations of the narrator. Many unreliable narrators repeatedly admit they cannot remember what happened (ibid.). Paratextual indications, such as prefaces, forewords, dedications, afterwords, epigraphs, or chapter titles, might provide additional clues for unreliability (ibid.).

Extratextual signs, i.e., extratextual frames of references against which the credibility of the narrator is judged, are deviations from common sense or general world-knowledge, violation of standards of a given culture, or the violation of generally agreed-upon moral and ethical standards (ibid. 100). The reader’s frame of reference, such as the reader’s general world knowledge, historical world view and standpoint, and moral values as well the socially accepted ideas of psychological normality in the reader’s world determine the reader’s judgement of the narrator’s reliability or unreliability. Also, the literary competence of the reader influences her perception of the fictional narrative (ibid. 100f). Nünning refers to the knowledge of literary frames of reference such as genre and literary conventions, stereotypes of literary figures, and the kind of world presented in a text. Nevertheless, Nünning states that no universally accepted standard for “common sense” or “normal moral standards” exists. Our

world today is a highly pluralistic one. It is difficult to determine normality in terms of moral and psychological behaviour (ibid. 101).

3.2.3 Critique of Nünning

Hansen agrees with Nünning that the notion of an implied author or even the modification of the concept of the implied author is not outcome-oriented when defining unreliable narrators (232). Hansen considers Booth's definition too narrow as well (ibid.). Yet, Hansen notes that Nünning's approach with its focus on the reader's responsibility overlooks the diversity of unreliable narration. For Hansen, Nünning's understanding of fiction as the reader's particular understanding of the fictional world does not acknowledge that fiction can be the room for possibilities as well. Fiction can be a place where an alternative world is being tested and opened for the reader. Whether the reader finds this world appealing or not should not have anything to do with unreliability (ibid. 238). However, Nünning never says that fiction has to be related to reality or that the reader has to agree with the fictional world. In fact, Nünning's concept of extratextual frames of reference incorporates literary and genre conventions and the norm- and value system of the text. A reader of a sci-fi or dystopian novel has to be aware that the fictional world is different from her reality and that other societal norms and values are in place (Nünning 101). Nünning's judgement of reliability is not arbitrary. It means analysing the intertextual frameworks, considering the literary and genre conventions of the text and the norms and values of the real world. Only when there is no balance and a discrepancy between these three criteria, can the reader speak of unreliability. Hansen furthermore criticises that Nünning points to extratextual signs of reference but never to textual levels of unreliability (239). Nonetheless, Nünning mentions and explains in a variety of his works what textual signs might point towards unreliability. The whole focus of Nünning's research of unreliability is on combining extratextual and textual frameworks.

Hansen then declares that Nünning's concept of the historical standpoint in judging unreliability is only right to a certain extent. It is true that many narrators who were once deemed reliable are now considered unreliable because the norms and value systems of the readers changed over the centuries (240). Hansen states that saying that earlier readings and readers were mistaken is the same as rejecting "postcolonial studies, feminist studies, deconstructionist readings, etc." (ibid. 240). This comparison seems jarring since Nünning does not mention that earlier readings of narrators were wrong but rather that our conception of

narrators changes due to different historical standpoints (101). Changes in narrator reception are far away from rejecting feminist or postcolonial research. In fact, re-evaluating the narrator's unreliability from a new and modern historical standpoint is in line with feminist and postcolonial research.

According to Hansen a further differentiation of unreliable narrators is necessary. He introduces four forms of unreliable narration: 'intranarrational', 'internarrational', 'intertextual', and 'extratextual' unreliability (241). While intranarrational unreliability is concerned with verbal tics of the narrator, internarrational unreliability focuses on multiple perspectives of the same event. Intertextual unreliability is based on certain types of narrator-characters that with their existence and paratextual mentioning direct the reader's attention towards the narrator's unreliability. Extratextual unreliability refers to the reader's own value system and divergences from it (ibid. 242). Hansen basically gives different and complicated names to Nünning's categories. All aspects that Hansen introduces and deems necessary to cover "further distinctions and conceptualizations" (228) were already included in Nünning's reader-oriented approach.

The actual problem with Nünning's textual frameworks are the blurred lines between the individual textual indicators and their vague definition, something that Hansen does not pick up on. In his article "'But why will you say that I am mad?'" Nünning introduces categories into which textual indicators can be sorted. Yet, in other works he presents the same and additional indicators without sorting them into the respective categories. The assignment and analysis of text features gets subjective and interpretative. The textual categories are overlapping. Nünning covers almost all linguistic fields but misses out on semantics, ignoring the interplay between meaning and structure. He refers to lexical indicators as evaluative words, not whole comments or characterisations. Syntactic indicators are about syntactic gaps, hesitations, and exclamations in sentences, hence the smaller textual units. Are subjective commentary, like biased characterisations and comments, then lexical or syntactic indicators? Should there be another semantic category altogether? Nünning's idea of the faulty memory of a narrator is vague as well. Would narratorial ellipsis count as syntactic indicators since they are a gaps in the narrative? Or are ellipses direct or indirect addresses to the narrator's unreliability because they present memory lapses? Here, two issues remain. When does an ellipses count as a memory lapse and when not? What makes an address to unreliability direct or indirect? Categorising factors of unreliability strictly according to Nünning's categories causes

confusion. Hansen's four new categories are an equally blurry endeavour since he uses the same indicators as Nünning and does not define them in accurate detail. In fact, Nünning's approach is due to the detailed sub-categorisation of verbal idiosyncrasies and stylistic peculiarities, which Hansen simply summarises as "intranarrational unreliability" (242), more applicable to texts.

Olson, in contrast, criticises that all recent models of unreliability point out that narrators cannot be neatly divided into reliable or unreliable (100). She thus presents two categories of unreliable narrators to ease a narrator's evaluation and make a clearer distinction between reliable and unreliable possible, namely 'untrustworthy' (104) and 'fallible' (ibid.) narrators. Untrustworthy and fallible narrators loosely relate to Nünning's distinction between untrustworthy and unreliable narrators. Untrustworthy narrators cannot be trusted on basis of their personality. The inconsistencies in the narrator's accounts are caused by their behaviour or current self-interest. The reader suspects their accounts of the events and assumes a different narrator could and would behave more reliably (ibid. 102). Untrustworthy narrators contradict themselves or state their insanity outright (ibid. 104). In contrast, fallible narrators do not reliably present events because their perceptions are impaired. Their judgements and perceptions are mistaken or their information is biased and incomplete (ibid. 101). Hence, readers are more likely to excuse this sort of narrators for their failings (ibid. 105). With fallible narrators, external factors come to play. It is not the narrator's fault that she is presenting unreliable information to the reader. Fallible narrators leave gaps or make individual mistakes that the reader can and needs to fill in (ibid. 104.). Unfortunately, Olson does not present textual or extratextual indicators for a proper analysis and categorisation of narrators into fallible and untrustworthy. Her distinction of unreliable narrators is more concerned with the causes of unreliability than actually detecting unreliability, as Nünning's concept does.

Olson furthermore claims that Nünning's textual indicators contradict Nünning's idea of individual reader response (97). She, as well as Hansen, fails to consider that Nünning speaks of a combination of textual and extratextual signs. His theory combines fixed stable textual signs and individual reader response (105). Moreover, Olson's neat distinction between two types of unreliable narrators is also problematic, although she admits that there might be a movement from fallible to untrustworthy during the narrative (104). The two categories of untrustworthy and fallible evoke the danger that the evaluation of a narrator's

unreliability is a purely black or white matter and that there is no room for discrepancies outside that schema. This fails to account for the multiplicity of our world today.

4. Textual Indicators for Unreliability in *The Great Gatsby*

Chapter Four explores the different textual indicators for unreliable narrators in *The Great Gatsby* according to Nünning. Subchapter One deals with the internal inconsistencies of Nick as a narrator. Subchapter Two focuses on the verbal idiosyncrasies. Here, the analysis covers two indicative linguistic levels: pragmatics and lexis. Nick's insistences on his own reliability form the pragmatic aspect and Nick's recurring subjective commentary the lexical. Subchapter Three analyses Nick's memory lapses, ellipsis, and speculative utterances as ways of addressing his narratorial unreliability. The boundaries between Nünning's intertextual linguistic categories are blurry. Narratorial ellipsis as well as subjective commentary could also be considered as syntactic signs depending on the analytical perspective but I chose to incorporate the potentially, yet marginal, syntactic signs into the two other categories.

4.1 Internal Inconsistencies of the Narrator

There are three significant narratorial inconsistencies in *The Great Gatsby* that are indicators for unreliability*:* contradictions within Nick's commentary and between Nick's comments and actions, both visible in his changing opinion about Gatsby, as well as a discrepancy between Nick's self-characterisation and his characterisation by other characters. During the novel, Nick feels utmost confusion for the character of Gatsby. He alternates between romanticization and hatred, doubts and trust. Nick's initial depiction of Gatsby in Chapter One is:

> Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction — Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the "creative temperament."— it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. (Fitzgerald 8)

The first characterisation of Gatsby is crush-like. Although Gatsby represents everything for which Nick has an “unaffected scorn” (ibid.), Nick speaks of him with admiration. Nick and many other people find Gatsby magnificent because Gatsby projects an image of success with his gestures and doings, regardless of whether there is actual substance behind that. Gatsby’s persona prompts projections like these because he is receptive to the desires of others. He has a fine feeling for all the good things life has to offer. People see Gatsby’s wealth, his extravagant parties, and his radiance. For them, Gatsby is the embodiment of the American dream. His “extraordinary gift for hope” (ibid.) is a sense of something that could be — a sense of a glorious future. Nonetheless, with his statement, Nick is romanticizing Gatsby. Everything Gatsby represents for Nick is more than any human possibly could. The question is if people project these images on Gatsby or if only Nick views Gatsby this way. Gatsby seems to embody everything Nick yearns for in his life.

Nick’s crush-like portrayal of Gatsby intensifies when Nick describes Gatsby during the first party. Nick depicts Gatsby’s smile as “one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life” (ibid. 49). The smile “seemed to face – the whole eternal world for an instant” (ibid.). The metaphor of Gatsby’s smile facing the entire world is a hyperbole. Gatsby’s smile becomes more than a human smile can embody. It represents reassurance and everything the world has to offer. Nick’s sighting of reassurance in Gatsby’s smile says more about Nick’s needs than Gatsby’s actual smile. Mentioning coming across that sort of smile only four or five times in life makes Gatsby special. He becomes one of the few moments in life where you can witness such a smile. Furthermore, Nick states that he “could see nothing sinister” in Gatsby (ibid. 51). No doubt about Gatsby exists. Gatsby is flawless. Hanzo resonates, “*The Great Gatsby* is not a melodrama about Jay Gatsby, but a definition of the senses in which Nick understands the word ‘great’” (190). Nick thinks Gatsby can look “great” by presenting him as great, i.e., infallible. Gatsby is idolised as the perfect character. He sounds too good to be true.

The first instance of doubts about Gatsby’s character occurs to Nick during the drive with Gatsby in Chapter Four. Nick suspects Gatsby’s perfect image. He says, “I wondered if there wasn't something a little sinister about him, after all” (Fitzgerald 64). Nick does not believe Gatsby’s back story. He suspects that “he [Gatsby] was pulling my leg. […] The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ‘character’ leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Bologne.”

(ibid.). Gatsby's stories about making money, attending Harvard, and being in the army sound dubious to Nick. He thinks of Gatsby as a liar who tells absurd stories. When Gatsby talks about his time in the army, Nick starts believing him again. The way Gatsby presents facts about his past, with his smile and attitude, results in Nick acknowledging, "My incredulity was submerged in fascination now. […] Then it was all true" (ibid. 65). Nick is impressed by Gatsby and his doubts change to admiration. Nick believes anything Gatsby says again.

Shortly afterward, Nick's comments change from admiration to annoyance. From now on Nick's comments on and critique of characters and events do not accord with his actions anymore. When Gatsby wants to meet Daisy with Nick's help and communicates that through Jordan Baker, Nick declares, "I don't like mysteries […] and I don't understand why you won't come out frankly and tell me what you want. Why has it all got to come through Miss Baker?" (ibid. 70). Nick would prefer if Gatsby was honest and told him the truth. Nick is shocked about being asked to support adultery. He is annoyed by the modesty of Gatsby's demand and by how meticulously Gatsby planned all this – buying a mansion next to Nick and Daisy, inviting Nick to his parties, and asking Nick to set up a meeting with Daisy (ibid. 76). However, Nick ends up helping Gatsby and does set up the meeting with Daisy at his place.

At some point later in the narrative Nick was "believing everything and nothing about him [Gatsby]" (ibid. 97). Also, at the same time in the narrative, Nick stops being associated with Gatsby since Gatsby is absorbed in the love affair with Daisy (ibid. 98). Nick does not meet Gatsby anymore and spends his time with Jordan Baker instead. The distance and confusion do not stop Nick from protecting Gatsby. When Tom calls all newly rich "big bootleggers" (ibid. 104), Nick cuts in saying "[n]ot Gatsby" (bid.). Nick is loyal at all costs. He will not say anything against Gatsby or Gatsby's illegal business. In his actions, he ignores the critique and doubts he has about Gatsby.

Towards the end of the novel, Nick has "one of those renewals of complete faith" (ibid. 123) in Gatsby. A few pages later, he dislikes Gatsby again. After the car accident that killed Myrtle and that Gatsby tries to cover up, Nick remarks, "I disliked him so much by this time that I didn't find it necessary to tell him he was wrong" (ibid. 136). Nick's dislike, although justified, sounds like hatred. Nick's loyalty has reached its limits. Even though Nick detests Gatsby's actions, he only utters inner accusations against Gatsby but does not stand up to him. Nick does not go to the police. His comments once more contradict his actions. Even the last time he sees Gatsby, Nick pays him a compliment – the only one he ever gave Gatsby (ibid.

146). Nick follows that with an explanation of why he never complimented Gatsby: he disapproved of Gatsby from beginning to end (ibid.). One of Nick's last statements about Gatsby starkly contrasts his initial characterisation of the novel's protagonist. Nick was not even close to despising Gatsby at the beginning or in between, neither in his commentary nor in his actions. Resneck Parr calls this one of the major contradictions of the novel: "Nick devotes himself to finding a way to reconcile his admiration for Gatsby with his awareness that Gatsby 'represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn'" (674). Nick is confused about Gatsby and does not know how to make sense of Gatsby's character. Nick alternates between doubts for and complete faith in Gatsby. In his struggle, he cannot find an objective middle-ground and leaves the reader with either a crush-like romantisation or utmost scorn for the novel's protagonist. The confusion Nick feels about Gatsby is the same confusion the reader feels about Nick's statements and actions. Nick alternates from admiration, to confusion and doubts, and then to hate.

The discrepancies in Nick's commentary and actions are contrary to Nick's self-characterisation as a credible and honest narrator. During the narrative, Nick praises himself for possessing the cardinal virtue of honesty. He is "one of the few honest people" (Fitzgerald 59) he has ever known. Preston considers such an honesty claim problematic, noting that "[w]hen a self-conscious homodiegetic narrator asserts his own honesty, an implied reader responds by questioning the narrator's honesty" (158). The reader doubts Nick's open claim because saying something does not make it true. Moreover, Jordan Baker contradicts Nick's perception of himself as an honest man. After Nick had broken up with her, Jordan tells him that she thought he were "rather an honest, straightforward person" (Fitzgerald 168) and that his honesty was his "secret pride" (ibid.). However, Nick's actions let her come to the conclusion that she made a "wrong guess" (ibid.): Nick is not as honest as he pretends to be. He shows how proud he is of his honesty but fails to act according to it. Nick's self-characterisation contradicts the characterisation of him by another character. Nick's response of "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honour" (ibid.) does not deny Jordan's claim, but does not state that he is honest either. Nick's integrity as a narrator gets dubious. Resneck Parr defines this as the "irony and perhaps tragedy of Nick's narrative" (677). Nick tries to justify his self-deceptions and interprets them as signs of maturity, responsibility, and integrity (ibid.). He ignores that his illusions are, in fact, "empty" (ibid.). He cannot acknowledge the truth about himself nor about other characters like Gatsby. Nick does not think about his world, the world of East and

West Egg, reflectively. Everyone's perception is subjective, but Nick's perception of his world reach new levels of obliviousness and bias. The reader cannot help questioning Nick's reliability and steadiness as a narrator and his ability to present credible facts about characters.

4.2 Verbal Idiosyncrasies of the Narrator

4.2.1 Pragmatic Indications: Insistence on the Narrator's Credibility and Addresses to the Reader

Nick's stressing of his credibility and the frequent use of 'I' and 'you' as speaker- and reader-oriented addresses are attempts to justify himself and manipulate the reader's response. Nick tries to convince the reader of his reliability, yet, he achieves the opposite: he becomes unreliable. In Chapter One, especially on the first page, Nick establishes himself as a credible narrator. The opening sentence, "In my younger and more vulnerable years" (Fitzgerald 7), presents him as a narrating-I. He recounts his experiences and feelings of the summer of 1922 in retrospect. Nick indirectly states that the two years gap made him wiser, and now he can critically reflect on his life then. Nick moreover quotes a piece of advice his father gave him and that he has been following ever since: "Whenever you feel like criticising anyone […] just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages you've had" (ibid.). What is intended to convince the reader that Nick always keeps an open mind and checks his privilege, can be read as a critique of Nick. His father reminded him not criticise people because it was one of Nick's habits. Nick's self-praise as a non-judgemental person turns to an indirect confession that he might not be as objective as he claims to be. Nick indirectly declares his lack of credibility. He goes on saying:

> In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. […] Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth. (ibid.)

Nick portrays himself as an instance of moral justice. The reserving of judgements makes him the ideal confidante. People are drawn to him because they feel they can trust him. However,

Nick must admit that reserving judgement is a quality only some possess. He cannot feel contempt for judgmental people since every person is different. Wealth as well as kindness and decency are assigned arbitrarily. The idea that so many people confide in Nick and that he does not judge them makes him objectively an ideal narrator. He has access to valuable information and can present facts neutrally. Nonetheless, an extensive self-praise like that arouses suspicion in the reader, asking why the narrator frequently insists on his own credibility and will not let his actions speak. Nick makes himself sound special by mentioning that he is one of the few people who strive to reserve their judgement. He becomes a show-off rather than a credible narrator.

To emphasise his credibility further, Nick uses speaker- and reader-oriented addresses. In Chapter Three, Nick stops mid-way in the narrative and notes:

> Reading over what I have written so far, I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me. On the contrary, they were merely casual events in a crowded summer, and, until much later, they absorbed me infinitely less than my personal affairs. (ibid. 56)

By interrupting the narrative flow with a self-reflective speaker-oriented and an indirect reader-oriented address, Nick attempts to be authentic. He acknowledges the possible impression of a one-sided narratorial focus and tries to reverse it. Nick proclaims that the three party nights were not his sole centre of attention. He goes on summarising events that were happening during the summer weeks of 1922 as well (ibid. 57f). So Nick picks up a possible reader accusation and forcingly proves the opposite to make his narrative seem round and credible. He insists on his versatile representation of events.

Later, Nick directly addresses the reader. He lists all the people who have attended Gatsby's parties and states that "they will give you a better impression than my generalities of those who accepted Gatsby's hospitality" (ibid. 60). He tries to manipulate the readers by directly addressing them. In admitting that his summaries of the events, guests, and parties might not provide a sufficient impression, he acknowledges his limits as a narrator. Nick's confession makes him seem honest and vulnerable. Since his generalities are not enough, he introduces additional material in form of an excessive list. The readers should feel they are presented with evidence that Nick solely organised for them to even out his narratorial limits. Yet, Nick's attempt to be credible is a mental manipulation of the reader. He only presents material to support his claims, not to contradict them. It is also questionable whether a claim

like the type of guests at a party needs to be proven. Nick's extra material is unnecessarily forced on the reader to prove Nick's integrity as a narrator.

4.2.2 Lexical Indicators: Repeated Occurrence of Subjective Comments

In his narrative, Nick uses an assortment of subjective comments. He describes the lifestyle of the wealthy elite in Long Island, namely Tom and Daisy, and everything they stand for in a negative and biased way. While criticising capitalism and classism is valid, Nick's critique of the established, wealthy elite soon turns into hate. He covers Daisy, and especially Tom, with negative commentary from the get-go and applies an arbitrary judgement scheme. The wealthy elite is critiqued and the newly rich, that is Gatsby, is idolised. Nick's evaluative statements point towards his high emotional involvement and problematic value scheme which is counterproductive to Nick's goal of being a reliable and non-judgemental narrator.

Nick describes Daisy and Tom as "unrestfully" (Fitzgerald 11) people who "played polo and were rich together" (ibid.). He introduces the Buchanans as purposeless and escapist people who can do everything because they have the money. When Daisy and Tom show interest in Nick's private life and his rumoured engagement, Nick admits that he was touched by their interest (ibid.). He mentions that such an interest made them seem "less remotely rich" (ibid.), which is a dubious analogy since he explicitly stated in Chapter One that empathy and kindness are assigned arbitrarily and regardless of wealth. Saying that the Buchanan's interest made them seem less wealthy, he denies rich people having a sense of empathy. Nick then adds that "nevertheless, I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away" (ibid. 24). "Disgusted" is an opinionated word. In this context it becomes derogative of Tom and Daisy and the world they represent. Nick cannot hide his frustration with them. At the end of *The Great Gatsby,* he resonates, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (ibid. 170). Nick's critique of Tom and Daisy aims at the right point. However, the tone of his statement is full of grudges because of how Tom and Daisy were involved with Gatsby and how things ended for Gatsby. Tom and Daisy are indeed rich people who can escape from messy circumstances whenever they please. Money can repair everything for them. Nick applies an arbitrary line of moral judgement. Gatsby equally used money to impress and convince Daisy.

He did not care about other people and forgot about Nick after winning Daisy over. Still, only Tom and Daisy are covered with negative commentary. Gatsby himself is idolised.

Furthermore, Nick's characterisation of Tom is purely dismissive. He does not say anything positive about Tom's character. Nick introduces Tom as a strong man with "a cruel body" (ibid. 12f) and "[t]wo shining arrogant eyes" (ibid.). For Nick, Tom always seems to say, "[M]y opinion on these matters is final […] just because I'm stronger and more of a man than you" (ibid.). Nick's description says more about his anxieties and lacking self-confidence than Tom's actual appearance. Nick sounds jealous of Tom's physique and confident, sometimes aggressive, character. During the confrontation between Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy in the Plaza in New York, Nick comments that Tom's "transition from libertine to prig was complete" (ibid. 124). Nick openly states that he thought of Tom as a "prig" (ibid.) from the get-go. Nick's reliability as a narrator is fading in depicting a completely negative and subjective image of a person. His hatred gives way to a biased character depiction that the reader cannot trust.

As a narrator, Nick is not supposed to justify or tolerate a character's actions. Nonetheless, his romanticised version of Gatsby nor his fully-fledged hatred for Tom are accurate characterisations. Even without Nick's subjective comments, the reader would conclude about Tom and Daisy that they are vain and arrogant and their actions questionable. Yet, Nick designs Gatsby as the angel and Tom as the villain to spice up the narrative and support his reasoning. Nick's analysis and commentary manipulate the reader's response. If Nick trusted the readers to make their own decisions, he would have to face the truth — Gatsby's questionable character and a possibly positive side to Tom's persona. In forcing a particular picture and commentary of characters on the reader, Nick turns from a neutral observer into a judgemental and unreliable witness. The reader is left questioning how much Nick's comments are actually non-biased and credible.

4.3 Addressing the Narrator's Unreliability: Memory Lapses, Ellipses, and Speculation

Nick directly and indirectly addresses his unreliability as a narrator: through references to memory loss, speculative word choice, and the use of narratorial ellipses. The first instance of memory loss occurs during the confrontation of Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy at the Plaza. Nick states that he cannot recount how they ended up there. He says, "The prolonged and

tumultuous argument that ended by herding us into that room eludes me" (Fitzgerald 120). The heat confuses Nick and he cannot recall the whole conversation (ibid. 118). That day is also Nick's thirtieth birthday which he realises afterward (ibid. 129). If Nick is so irritated by the heat and forgets something as vital as his birthday, it is dubious how much of the conversation Nick can truthfully recount.

Later, when Nick describes the days after Gatsby's death, he confesses that his memories are clouded and converge. He notes, "After two years I remember the rest of that day, and that night and the next day, only as an endless drill of police and photographers and newspaper men in and out of Gatsby's front door" (ibid. 155). His climactic enumeration of police, photographers, newspaper men show that events and people melt together. They become an unnerving "drill" (ibid.) for Nick. Thus, Nick debunks his initial statement that his nature as a narrating-I makes him a reflecting, credible source for the reader. He cannot present a valid account of the end of the narrative. The events are blurry for him and the reader. The reader cannot trust Nick's narrative.

Besides, Nick admits his memory loss due to alcohol consumption. At every single one of Gatsby's parties, Nick ends up drunk. He gives a repetitive listing of hallucinatory drunken episodes: "I was on my way to get roaring drunk" (ibid. 44), "I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound" (p.48), "Almost the last thing I remember was standing with Daisy and watching the moving-picture director" (ibid. 103). Nick's depictions of his surroundings make him sound as if he is in a hallucinogenic state. The cocktails are floating (ibid. 42), and the music is yellow (ibid.). The comparison of music with the colour yellow is a synaesthesia — the association of one sense in terms of the other (Cuddon 702f). Colours and music merge. Yellow is an extremely bright colour, and the connection with music suggests irritating, shrill sounds. Nick's sensual receptors are clouded. He is confused and cannot make sense of his surroundings. During his drunken episodes, Nick is not a reliable narrator. The alcohol dims his senses and makes him unaware of his surroundings.

In addition to directly confessing memory loss, Nick indirectly communicates his unreliability through speculative word choice. He uses a lot of mental state verbs like "I think that" (Fitzgerald 93), "I suppose" (ibid. 95), and "I think that he would have acknowledged anything now" (ibid. 141). The verbs express Nick's uncertainty. Nick presents speculations, not facts. Whole phrases such as "I've heard" (ibid. 14), "There must have been moments" (ibid. 92),

and "I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come" (ibid. 153) furthermore point towards speculations. Nick was never present when Gatsby and Daisy or Tom and Daisy were together. He has to speculate. His word choice makes his limits as a first-person narrator evident. Nick addresses his powerlessness and lacking credibility as a narrator.

Nick's narratorial ellipses point towards unreliability as well. Ellipses are "the omission of time and intervening occurrences between narrated events" (Nünning and Nünning, *Introduction to the Study of English and American Literature* 187). In Chapter Two, one of Nick's most elaborate narratorial ellipsis takes place with Tom and Myrtle in New York. Nick introduces the events as follows:

> I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon; so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it, although until after eight o'clock the apartment was full of cheerful sun […] so I sat down discreetly in the living-room and read a chapter of Simon Called Peter – either it was terrible stuff or the whisky distorted things, because it didn't make any sense to me. (Fitzgerald 32)

Nick's ellipsis is caused by excessive alcohol consumption. Nick admits that he cannot exactly remember the chain of events and his recounting of events gets a hallucinatory turn. Nick repeatedly wants to leave the apartment, but every time, he gets "entangled in some wild, strident argument" (ibid. 37) that keeps him tied to his chair "as if with ropes" (ibid.). Soon a sense of alienation confuses Nick. He notes, "Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I saw him too, looking up and wondering" (ibid.). Nick feels he is "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (ibid.). Nick refers to his simultaneous role as a narrator and character of the story. He is an I-as-witness narrator who is emotionally involved in the story but has to give a credible account. Nick expresses his confusion. The confusion marks the narrative style for the rest of *The Great Gatsby*. Del Gizzo calls that Nick's experience of being "inside and outside" the novel's events (74).

Nick's confusion influences his narrative style during this episode. His elliptic, narratorial sequences mimic his drunkenness. He loses track of time. He states, "It was nine o'clock – almost immediately afterward I looked at my watch and found it was ten" (Fitzgerald 38). Nick is not aware of what happened in the one hour. For him, the time goes by in a second. He cannot make sense of the people who come and go. Nick says that "[p]eople disappeared,

reappeared, made plans to go somewhere, and then lost each other, searched for each other, found each other a few feet away" (ibid. 38f). Everyone seems to be as lost and confused as Nick. Nick's utterance is a repetitive climax. The sense of time, people, and orientation gets climactically lost and is found again. Nick writes in the past tense, but his writing style sounds like a stream of consciousness. He is part of the action and tries to document everything. But he has no idea of what is going on. The point of utmost confusion comes when Tom breaks Myrtle's nose. Amidst the chaos, Nick leaves together with Mr. McKee. They enter the elevator and have a conversation. Suddenly, Nick remarks, "... I was standing beside his [Mr. McKee's] bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hand" (ibid. 39). The three dots signal the ellipsis formally and point to a locational and temporal jump in the narrative. It is unclear how Nick ended up there. The ellipsis could imply memory loss due to alcohol consumption or hide a sexual encounter with Mr. McKee. Bolton points out that Nick self-censoring his homosexuality would be a case of "overreading" (197) because Nick could self-censor himself more than purely for sexual encounters. Nick would then not even admit that he was in Mr. McKee's bedroom. For Bolton, it is a classic case of a lost sense of time and place caused by drunkenness (198). Nick does not exert excessive control over his narrative; he instead loses it (ibid.). Nick ends the episode and chapter with another ellipsis. He says, "Then I was lying half asleep in the cold lower level of the Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning *Tribune*, and waiting for the four o'clock train" (Fitzgerald 40). "Then" points towards Nick's disjointed memories due to alcohol consumption. He ends up at the train station not knowing how he got there. None of Nick's memories and impressions of the party and people there are trustworthy.

In addition, minor forms of ellipses occur in Nick's narrative with the omission of information and the summarising of essential dialogues. Nick reveals the information he wishes to. In Chapter One, he briefly addresses his upbringing, his decision to move to New York, and his family. He is very selective about what he chooses to share. Such a selection process means that Nick does not give all facts but he instead evaluates and chooses what he wants to tell. When other characters ask Nick about his private life, he remains vague. When Daisy asks him about his engagement to a girl in the West, Nick gets distant. He comments, "Of course I knew what they were referring to, but I wasn't vaguely engaged […] I had no intention of being rumoured into marriage" (ibid. 24). Nick is afraid of rumours and thus gives little insight in his private life. Moreover, Nick withholds information in dialogues. He uses em-dashes to omit

phrases, as in his conversation with Jordan over the phone: "'It's impossible this afternoon. Various –' We talked like that for a while, and then abruptly we weren't talking any longer." (Fitzgerald 148). Nick hides the details of their conversation. Considering this is their break-up call and important to the plot and narrator's persona, Nick stays vague. The reader gets nearly no insight in Jordan's and Nick's romance, a decisive sub-plot of the novel.

Nick uses a lot of summarises as well. He summarises his first ever conversation with Gatsby. Gatsby is the name-giver and protagonist of the novel and *The Great Gatsby* is a story about Gatsby's life. Still, Nick dryly recaps: "We talked for a moment about some wet, grey little villages in France. Evidently, he lived in this vicinity, for he told me that he had just bought a hydroplane, and was going to try it out in the morning" (ibid. 48). Instead of 'showing' the conversation, i.e., unmediated presenting (Chatman 32), Nick uses the technique of 'telling'. He recounts the event in his own words (ibid.). If he showed word by word what they were talking about, Nick would have to reveal something about himself and his time in the army. However, he is leaving questions about himself and about Gatsby for the reader: Which village in France are they talking about? In which year were they stationed there?

Later, Nick shortly summarises his experiences without Gatsby during the summer of 1922 in not even a whole page (Fitzgerald 56f). He chooses what he wants to convey about his summer. Furthermore, Gatsby's death in Chapter Nine is not witnessed by Nick or extensively narrated. Nick retells the event by putting together witness reports and newspaper articles. Nick narrates what he finds out from his surroundings and thus makes his limits as a first-person narrator obvious. Nick must follow a very long chain of fact gathering and his recounting of the story becomes suspicious. Bolton presumes, "Nick's narrative selectiveness derives not only from his desire to tell Gatsby's story but also from his wariness of telling his own" (193). But to critically evaluate Nick as a reliable or unreliable narrator, the reader needs details about him. The narratorial gaps leave too many question marks. Cutting off mid-sentence and hiding information makes Nick an unreliable narrator.

5. Extratextual Signs for Unreliability: The Violation of Moral and Ethical Standards in *The Great Gatsby* [2]

Nick's misogynistic, racist, and antisemitic, as well as hypocritical comments, leave the reader to question his moral integrity and make his problematic value scheme obvious. Nick's representation of characters and events becomes biased and unreliable. His set of norms and worldview starkly contrast the modern reader's. As Nünning has pointed out, these extratextual frames of reference are subject to historical change and hugely dependent on the reader's worldview. What counts as racism, antisemitism, and misogyny and is against the reader's norms of today was considered normal or at least not as a sign of narratorial unreliability in the 1920s or later decades. Perceptions of violated moral or ethical standards differ from reader to reader as well.

During the narrative, Nick employs racist and antisemitic appearance-based stereotypes. On his drive with Gatsby, Nick refers to the passengers of another car as "a white chauffeur, two bucks and a girl" (Fitzgerald 67). The racialised concept of the "black brute" or "black buck" alludes to a physically powerful black man who is stereotyped as animalistic, terrifying, and barbaric and accused of insulting and assaulting white women ("Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of African Americans", n.p.). Jews are characterised as "flat-nosed" (Fitzgerald 68) people with "large head[s]" (ibid.) and "black and hostile" (ibid. 161) or "tiny eyes" (ibid. 68).

Nick's commentary about women is misogynistic in every aspect. He introduces every woman in the story by describing her physique in detail, completely reducing her to her appearance. His descriptions range from "She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage" (ibid. 16) to "She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously as some women can" (ibid. 28). Another woman is characterised as "massive and lethargic" (ibid. 102). His comments are sexualised, associating women's bodies with "flesh" (ibid. 28) and focusing on their "small-breasted" (ibid. 16) carriage. Preston refers to that as the "patriarchal view of the entire narrative" (156). Women are portrayed as the "golden girls" (ibid.) who nurture male romantic fantasies (Fetterley quoted in Preston). Nick's

[2] These signs could also be considered lexical indicators since they cover subjective commentary. But since the critical and socio-historical evaluation of this subjective commentary is the main focus, this extra chapter thematises them as extratextual signs.

romanticised ideal of women is especially obvious when he describes how he walked up Fifth Avenue:

> I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. (Fitzgerald 57)

Nick engages in stalker-like fantasies of women. In his head, he randomly picks out a woman from the crowd, enters her life without her or anyone else disapproving, and follows her to her apartment. The notion of "hidden streets" (ibid.) sounds like dark back alleys where non-consensual encounters happen. Women, for Nick, are objects to be chased and possessed. They are not able to voice dissent.

Nick utters hostile and intelligence-declining statements about women. Young virgins are "ignorant" (ibid. 95) and "the others" (ibid.), i.e., the other women, are "hysterical about things" (ibid.). Although Nick only quotes thoughts he alleged Gatsby to have; it says more about him and the value scheme he assigns to other men. Nick also states that "[d]ishonesty in a woman is a thing you can never blame deeply" (ibid. 58-59). The present tense in the statement shows that Nick's narrating-I still holds this belief. He puts female dishonesty in contrast to his male honesty, which he considers a virtue (Preston 157). Nick neither disagrees with Tom's misogynistic comments, although otherwise, he does not hesitate to utter inner remarks of dissent. He is a silent bystander when Tom abuses Myrtle or Daisy presents a bruise Tom gave her (ibid. 39, ibid. 17).

In his characterisation of Daisy, Nick's misogyny gets personal. He portrays Daisy as a naïve, stupid young woman who only thinks about money. She cannot make sense of a lifestyle different from her own, namely the party life of the newly rich in West Egg. Nick attests that Daisy "saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (ibid. 103). He directly expresses that Daisy cannot even comprehend simplistic concepts. Her voice is "full of money" (ibid. 115). In using a metaphor and not a simile – Daisy's voice is not like money, but it is money – Nick enforces the idea of Daisy as a material girl. She becomes someone for whom life is all about a wealthy lifestyle. Nick is disgusted by that idea and notes, "She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby – nothing" (ibid. 142). The climatical mentioning of Daisy's rich house, rich and full life contrasts with the emptiness she

leaves for Gatsby. Daisy deprives Gatsby of all he has. She becomes the little princess who gets everything. Nick concludes, “Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year” (ibid. 143). Daisy’s life is naïvely artificial. She knows nothing about real world and hides behind the illusions and snobbery of the wealthy elite in Long Island. Here, Nick’s initial critique of Daisy turns into hatred. Although Nick’s critique of Daisy is appropriate, his personal sympathies prevent a reasonable character depiction. In his total loyalty to Gatsby, Nick feels sorry for him and holds a grudge against Daisy. He cannot present her in a non-biased way. The boundary between reasoned critique and utmost dislike gets blurry. Nick’s aversion for Daisy reaches a whole new dimension. It is not about a critique of classism, the arrogant lifestyle of the wealthy elite, or capitalism anymore. Personal motives drive Nick’s critique. Again, Nick’s characterisation of one of the main characters in *The Great Gatsby* is subjective, making him the opposite of a credible and reliable narrator.

What is more, Nick’s narrative is covered in hypocrisy. He frequently expresses contempt for Daisy, Tom, and Jordan; but still spends time with them. He accepts their hospitality and makes peace with Tom’s and Daisy’s extramarital affairs. Nick encourages Gatsby’s love affair with Daisy. He sets up the meeting between them and does not tell Tom about it. Nick furthermore accepts and does not comment on Gatsby’s illegal business endeavours. Yet, when Gatsby tells him that Meyer Wolfshiem fixed the World’s Series, Nick is shocked that Meyer Wolfshiem is not in prison (ibid. 71). Nick applies an arbitrary line of moral judgement, letting the reader question Nick’s own norm and value scheme.

In addition to his hypocrisy, Nick spies on Tom and Daisy. He watches them sitting together in the kitchen. Then he walks back to Gatsby and lies: he does not tell Gatsby that Daisy and Tom were plotting together (ibid. 138). Nick also lies about Myrtle’s death. He does not disagree when Tom tells Myrtle’s husband he has not seen the accident car all afternoon and does not name the driver and owner (ibid. 134). When Gatsby tells Nick that Daisy was driving and killed Myrtle, Nick does not talk to Daisy about it, nor does he go to the police. Resneck Parr assesses, “By so simplifying the moral complexities of this situation, Nick avoids having to take responsibility for his own actions […] he does not need to worry about the morality of his failure to tell the police or to testify at the inquest that Daisy had been driving“ (671). Nick can point to the carelessness of the Buchanans, make them responsible, and ignore his moral responsibilities. Nick’s self-denial and ignorance are more comfortable than facing the truth.

By blaming Tom and Daisy, Nick can stay on his moral high ground and act as a credible narrator or the moral instance of the novel. His self-denial and hypocrisy achieve the opposite: Nick becomes unreliable.

6. Hints of Reliability

Although Nick's narrative includes a plethora of indicators for unreliability, there are signs for reliability as well: detailed descriptions and observations, instances of moral integrity, Nick's nature as a reflective narrating-I, and episodes focalised through other characters. Indicators like these give Nick an air of credibility and trustworthiness. Nick's reports of the novel's settings and parties are thorough. The depiction of Daisy's and Tom's mansion takes nearly a whole page. He meticulously observes the parties in Gatsby's house. Nick describes Gatsby's servants, guests, orchestra, and party routine in a stalker-like fashion. He states, "I watched his guests" (Fitzgerald 41) and then: "Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived" (ibid.), "At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas" (ibid.), "By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived" (ibid.). Nick's deictic statements chronologically depict what is happening in Gatsby's house. To the reader, it looks like a tremendously detailed and truthful rendition. Nick looks like a credible narrator.

Furthermore, there are instances where Nick shows signs of moral integrity. When Jordan tells Nick about Tom and Myrtle's affair, Nick is shocked. He proclaims that his own instinct was to call the police immediately (ibid. 21). Nick also has a good feeling for people and their lies. He acknowledges to the reader if he feels people are insincere. When Daisy says she is ecstatic and happy, Nick contradicts in his commentary: "I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said" (ibid. 22). As Catherine mentions that Daisy keeps Tom and Myrtle apart because she is Catholic and against divorce, Nick notes, "Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie" (ibid. 36). Nick likewise does not take the money Gatsby offers him for arranging the meeting with Daisy. He cuts Gatsby off at the very suggestion (ibid. 80). For Nick, it is not about money. He did a service for a friend. So, Nick's moral compass does tell him what is right and wrong. His integrity makes him look trustworthy.

Nick's very nature as a narrating-I who narrates the story in retrospect two years after the events, enhances his trustworthiness. He is matured and could reflect on events, or as Booth recognises, "the older Nick provides thoroughly reliable guidance" (*Rhetoric of*

Fiction 176). The younger Nick would not have been reliable. The older and more mature Nick, who had evaluated the events, can now be a reliable and credible narrator. Instead of the experiencing-I, the narrating-I provides thorough guidance.

Sometimes, Nick changes the level of focalisation. Hence, the perception perspective of events changes (Genette 189f). From time to time, Nick's narrative is perceived through the eyes and consciousness of other characters. The 'I' of Nick's narrating-I gives room for another character's perception. One instance of focalisation occurs as Jordan tells Nick about the early beginnings of Gatsby's and Daisy's love story. The passage starts with "One October day in nineteen seventeen (said Jordan Baker […] — I was walking" (Fitzgerald 72). The beginning sounds like a fairy-tale opener, which adds to the storytelling effect. The reported speech of Nick introduces Jordan as the narrating-I. The em-dash cuts between reported speech and Jordan's internally focalised narrative. The 'I' of Nick changes to the 'I' of Jordan. Jordan is now the I-as-witness narrator. Focalising the narrative through Jordan makes the story more credible than sole hearsay in reported speech. The first-person narrative of Jordan reduces the emotional distance to the reader and the story becomes relatable. By avoiding the limits of a first-person narrator, Nick suddenly becomes a trustworthy and reliable narrative voice.

Another episode of focalisation occurs when Nick lends his voice to Gatsby. The passage starts with Nick's perception of Gatsby's feelings: "[B]ut if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was" (ibid. 106). Three dots mark the switch to Gatsby's narrative: "… One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street" (ibid.). Nick's voice completely vanishes. There are solely Gatsby's feelings and thoughts as in "Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder […] His heart beat faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own" (ibid. 106f). Gatsby's inner thoughts are presented by using the third person pronoun 'he'. The syntax is still the one of Nick, but it is adjusted to bring life into a story about Gatsby's past (Bolton 167). The point of view does not change. Nick remains the narrator of the conversation before and the narrator of the embedded narrative. Gatsby remains the character and does not become the narrator. Only the focalisation, the perception, changes. By presenting the narrative through Gatsby's eyes, the difference between the 'I' of the narrator and the 'he' of the character, namely between Nick and Gatsby, is diminished (ibid. 199). The story becomes more immediate and gives Nick credibility. So, while Jordan's

focalisation was about emotional credibility, Gatsby's focalisation establishes narratorial omniscience and factual credibility. Nick looks like a trustworthy and credible narrator.

7. Critical Reception of Nick as a Narrator

The reviews of *The Great Gatsby* after its publication in 1925 did not focus as much on Nick as a narrator as on criticising the kitsch and romanticism of the novel itself. According to the critics, the book could not compete with Fitzgerald's other works, such as *This Side of Paradise*. Mencken calls *The Great Gatsby* a "glorified anecdote" (n.p.) that is "obviously unimportant" (ibid.). In *The New York Times*, Clark critiques the vagueness of the narrative. Gatsby's "fortune, business, even his connection with underworld figures, remain vague generalizations" (n.p.). Clark indirectly refers to Nick's weakness as a narrator but does not elaborate on it further. Ford, in contrast, states in *The Los Angeles Times* that the vagueness of facts and characters is one of the novel's strengths (n.p.). For her, "The story is powerful as much for what is suggested as for what is told. It leaves the reader in a mood of chastened wonder, in which fact after fact, implication after implication is pondered over, weighed and measured" (n.p.). The narratorial gaps, ellipsis, and memory lapses that Nick presents to the readers make *The Great Gatsby* a "revelation of life"(ibid.). Nick's flaws as a narrator encourage the readers to figure out parts of the storyline themselves. And once the reader has figured out the missing bits, the story becomes powerful.

The disagreement over whether the vagueness of the narrative is essential to the novel or a weakness of the narrator is also apparent in the academic reviews of *The Great Gatsby*. In 1961, Booth called the older Nick a reliable narrator and summarises the story as "Nick's experience of Gatsby or as Gatsby's life seen by Nick" (346). Six years later, Lisca, on the other hand, presents unreliability as a fixed entity belonging to a first-person narrator. For him, the novel is "entirely the product of Nick Carraway" (23). And since Nick is the readers' only source, no distinction between "things as they are and things as Nick sees them" (ibid.) is possible. Lisca notes that there are degrees of objectivity existent. Yet, the readers can be surer of the existence of Gatsby's mansion than of any conversation in the book (ibid.). Lisca shares Booth's notion of Nick as a reflective narrator. Although Nick was drunk at the parties, he is not drunk when he writes the story two years later (ibid. 25). Lisca ignores the implications of a drunken experience, namely memory loss and erroneous perception of events.

Nick's "biased role as a narrator" (26) supposedly functions like a Trojan horse (ibid.). In Nick telling the story, Fitzgerald can smuggle in descriptions and judgements of the society of the Jazz Age. Here, Lisca employs the idea of the author as a decisive entity for interpretation. The author hides his views in the text. Understanding the text means understanding the author. So, Lisca does not refer to a secret message between the implied author and implied reader as Chatman does, but to a message from the real-life author to the real-life reader transmitted by the narrator. He indirectly argues for a connection of authorial intent and unreliability.

O'Rourke, in 1982, attempted a middle position. He admits Nick's unreliability, but also states that his unreliability is not as bad or existent as it could be. For O'Rourke, it would be foolish to consider a "not very intelligent" (57), "slow-thinking, sentimental, and occasionally dishonest" (ibid. 58) narrator like Nick to be reliable. Considering "these obstacles, the reliability of Nick's narration is quite surprising. His 'slow-thinking' is channeled into caution, his dishonesty is rare and ultimately acknowledged" (ibid. 58). The reader cannot expect an entirely reliable narrator. However, Nick's reliability is surprisingly existent (ibid.). O'Rourke ignores that many unreliable narrators directly admit their unreliability or dishonesty and that Nick's dishonesty is not rare but frequent. In his attempt to argue for a narrative with a spectrum of reliable and unreliable indicators, O'Rourke contradicts himself. He tries to stick to an either-or, an unreliable or not, although he recognizes that a range of both options exists.

In 1997, Preston solely focused on the attitude of Nick towards '-isms', namely racism, antisemitism, classism, as measures for his reliability. Her sole focus is on Booth's notion of a value system not on textual indicators. Considering the formal features of the novel, Nick is a "[s]howpiece for Booth's Reliable Narrator Model" (ibid. 147). He presents facts with authority and acts in accordance with the implied author's norms. Fitzgerald utters his critique of the American Dream through Nick (ibid.). Preston judges reliability by asking whether Fitzgerald shared Nick's norms and beliefs. In looking for compliance between real-life author, implied author, narrator, and norms of the work, she applies a very Boothian sense of narratorial analysis. Preston focuses on the idea of norms of the work, which are given to the implied author by the real-life author. But how can the reader know what Fitzgerald intended or not? Preston's argument goes towards authorial intent, something that Lisca attempted thirty years earlier.

For Preston, "neither the contradictory rhetoric nor the offensiveness of the racist undertones provides sufficient grounds for finding Nick unreliable" (151); and "there just isn't

enough evidence to find Nick unreliable. The sexism here, like the anti-anti-Semitism and Africanism […] originates with the implied author" (158). The temptation to judge Nick unreliable resonates from the modern view on those '-isms', namely a distance between the norms of the real reader today and the norms of the narrator and real author as presented in *The Great Gatsby* (ibid. 151). A reader-response is rooted in historical situatedness. An academic reader is conditioned to look for signs of antisemitism, racism, and classism. Readers did not notice these issues when *The Great Gatsby* was published because it was not against the moral values then (ibid. 154). If readers would judge Nick unreliable for antisemitism, Africanism, or sexism, they would have to judge Fitzgerald unreliable because he shared these norms. And there cannot be an unreliable implied author or unreliable real-life author (ibid. 158). Preston loses focus on what a violation of ethical norms implies. Surely, whenever evaluating moral and ethical norms, the historical standpoint must be considered. However, violating a moral value scheme says something about the narrator, namely Nick's biased worldview and subjective presentation of events and characters. Noting that all these issues originate with the implied author and have nothing to do with the narrator over-simplifies the matter. With her argument that the '-isms' stem from the implied author, Preston ignores that, according to Booth, checking for unreliability means checking if the narrator, i.e., Nick, shares the norms of the implied author. And he does – as his actions and thoughts show. Mentioning then that in case of a violation of moral norms, the author is unreliable too, merges the real-life author with the implied author — something Chatman warned of. Furthermore, Preston states that features indicating unreliability, such as double voicing, omissions, and contradictions, are absent (147f). She ignores Nick's frequent narratorial ellipsis and his memory lapses.

Preston's struggles in her line of argumentation exemplify the need for a combination of textual and extratextual indicators. A sole analysis of extratextual indicators in the sense of norms of the work is insufficient and causes a potentially subjective analysis. Nonetheless, the fact that '-isms' are subjects to historical change is no reason to not critically evaluate them and hold them against the narrator. Textual interpretations change over time, and hence the reliability of a narrator can change over time. It is only essential to support these extratextual indicators with textual proofs for a well-rounded analysis.

Nünning, on the other hand, does not make a statement about Nick's reliability. In his 2013 anthology *Unreliable Narration: Studien zur Theorie und Praxis unglaubwürdigen*

Erzählens in der englischsprachigen Erzählliteratur, the bibliography of primary texts with an unreliable narrator simply mentions *The Great Gatsby* (288) without further explanation.

Modern-day reviews admit Nick's personal involvement and agree that Nick's flawed narrative makes *The Great Gatsby* a classic. For Wesley Morris, the novel is a "hypnotic mystery" (n.p.). It is unclear which characters, events, and episodes are true. After every read the reader comes to new conclusions (ibid.). In the end, no reread manages to make sense of the whole narrative (ibid.). Hephzibah Anderson's review for the BBC comes to the same conclusion about *The Great Gatsby*: "Pick it up at 27, and you'll find a different novel to the one you read as a teenager. Revisit it again at 45, and it'll feel like another book altogether" (n.p.). In both reviews, there is the sense that the historical standpoint forms the interpretation of the novel and of Nick as a narrator. Regardless of the years between the reading experiences, the reader will never come to a satisfactory conclusion about Nick's narrative. The only sure thing is that Nick's voice and his flawed storyline presentation belong to *The Great Gatsby*. Or as Jay McInerey puts it, *"Gatsby* without Nick's voice, without his presiding consciousness, is like Bob Dylan's lyrics without music" (ibid.).

8. Conclusion

In the end, Nick cannot be labelled strictly reliable or unreliable since his narrative provides indicators for both aspects. There are numerically more indicators for unreliability existent in the text than for reliability. However, the sheer existence of reliable narratorial elements demolishes a strict labelling of Nick as an unreliable narrator.

On a textual basis, Nick's internal inconsistencies, verbal idiosyncrasies, and addressing his own unreliability point to an unreliable narrative**.** Internal inconsistencies are contradictions in Nick's commentary, between Nick's comments and his actions, and between his self-characterisation and the characterisation of him by other characters. All three are visible in Nick's changing opinion about Gatsby. Nick cannot decide whether to trust or distrust, idolise, critique, or like or dislike the novel's protagonist. Nick's verbal idiosyncrasies are apparent pragmatically and lexically. On the pragmatic level, Nick constantly insists on his reliability and credibility. He employs 'I' and 'you' as speaker- and reader-oriented addresses to justify himself, manipulate the reader's response, and establish himself as a credible and reliable narrator. He presents himself as an instance of moral justice and acknowledges his limits as a first-

person narrator to appear honest and authentic. Yet, such an honesty claim causes the opposite response in the readers: they question Nick's integrity as a narrator. On the lexical level, Nick's subjective commentary make his high emotional involvement and problematic value scheme obvious. He applies an arbitrary line of judgement: while Gatsby is idolised, Daisy and especially Tom, as representatives of the wealthy Long Island elite, are covered with negative and biased commentary from the get-go.

Nick addresses his own unreliability in various ways: by acknowledging his memory loss and lapses, employing narratorial ellipses, and using speculative wording. Most of Nick's memory loss is caused by excessive alcohol consumption. Some minor memory lapses occur due to the summer heat or the shock after Gatsby's death. Alcohol consumption also causes Nick's narratorial ellipses where his sense of time, place, and people is lost. Some ellipses appear because of Nick's narratorial selectiveness — he chooses what he wants to reveal. Nick omits giving information about himself, cuts dialogues, and summarises essential information. He frequently uses the narrative technique of 'telling' instead of 'showing'. Furthermore, Nick's speculative word choice alludes to hearsay and limited information.

The evaluation of Nick as unreliable or not is dependent on the reader's historical standpoint, which is evident when analysing the extratextual indicators and the changing reception of Nick as a narrator. Today's views on class, gender, and race, from which the extratextual evaluation of narratorial unreliability stems, are in stark contrast to those nearly a hundred years ago. So, today, on an extratextual basis, Nick's antisemitic, misogynistic, and hypocritical comments prove his unreliability. Nick employs racist and antisemitic appearance-based stereotypes. His depiction of women is misogynistic, enforcing a patriarchal focus on the entire narrative. In Nick's characterisation of Daisy, his misogyny gets personal. She is the naïve material girl against who Nick holds a grudge because she left Gatsby. Nick's whole narrative is a hypocritical undertaking — he spies, lies, and has an arbitrary line of judgement. Although he frequently critiques Jordan, Tom, and Daisy, he still spends time with them. He accepts Gatsby's legal business but critiques the criminal activities of Meyer Wolfshiem. All these factors cause the reader to doubt Nick's depiction of the story's characters and events. The chain of events remains blurry, and there are nearly no insights into decisive subplots or Nick's thoughts, feelings, and past — all essential elements to evaluate his credibility. Nick turns from a neutral observer to a judgemental and unreliable witness whose portrayal of the story the reader cannot trust. He becomes unreliable.

However, Nick's detailed descriptions of the novel's settings and parties give him the air of a credible narrator. There are instances where Nick has moral integrity: he does not take money from Gatsby and acknowledges the lies or contradictions of other characters to the reader. His status as a narrating-I furthermore provides the possibility to reflect on the events two years ago. By changing the level of focalisation and giving the perspective of perception to Jordan or Gatsby, the story appears immediate and factually correct. Nick looks credible and trustworthy to the reader.

The spectrum of unreliable and reliable indicators, the difficulty of attributing a strict label, and the influence of the historical standpoint are reflected in the academic and popular reviews of *The Great Gatsby*. The initial reviews in 1925 did not focus on Nick as a narrator but rather critiqued Fitzgerald's work for lacking behind his earlier novels. Some critics stated that Nick's gaps and inconsistencies are essential to the narrative. Academically, Booth argued for narratorial reliability on the basis of Nick's narrating-I status. Lisca presented unreliability as a fixed factor of Nick's first-person narrative where yet also objective descriptions exist. In presenting Nick as a biased narrator, Fitzgerald was able to smuggle in his critique of the Jazz Age. Hence, Lisca indirectly argued for connecting authorial intent and unreliability. O'Rourke, on the other hand, attempted a middle position. The reader cannot expect Nick to be a reliable and trustworthy narrator, nevertheless the degree of reliable elements in the narrative is quite surprising. Preston looked at the Boothian idea of norms of the work, namely Nick's attitude towards '-isms', concluding that these are insufficient to call Nick unreliable. She has a similar idea of authorial intent like Lisca but fails to consider textual elements in addition to a moral and ethical evaluation of Nick. Here, the necessity of combining textual and extratextual elements becomes obvious. Nünning, in contrast, mentions Nick as an unreliable narrator in the bibliography of his *Unreliable Narration* anthology without further explanation. Recent reviews agree that *The Great Gatsby* is great because of what is left unsaid, and that the historical standpoint influences our reading experiences and how we view Nick as a narrator.

Concluding, it is apparent that neither Booth's theoretical construct of 'norms of the work', nor Chatman's more detailed elaboration of it with his narrative-communication model, as well as Nünning's textual and extratextual indicators, provide sufficient grounds for evaluating narratorial unreliability. The first two theories remain too abstract. The power lies in the reader, making the attribution of indicators of unreliability subjective and not as universal as theoretical frameworks are supposed to be. Nünning's theory is detailed and applicable, but

his many textual categories overlap and make a precise classification of indicators difficult and interpretative. A semantic category is completely missing. Olson and Hansen's critique slightly points in that direction. At the same time, their new categories remain vague and are equally misleading. Olson's two-way distinction between untrustworthy and fallible runs into danger of an even stricter either-or distinction. Hansen's four categories copy Nünning's framework and do not give ground-breaking new explanations. Again, both downplay the importance of the historical standpoint and the necessity of combining textual and extratextual factors.

Ultimately, a framework for determining unreliable narrators has to consider textual and extratextual indicators, as well as the historical standpoint, and refrain from advertising a rigorous either-or distinction. In today's world, enforcing labels, namely a strict distinction between reliable and unreliable, is difficult if not impossible. In literary analyses, there has to be a space for narratorial developments from reliable to unreliable and vice versa, and for ambivalent cases of a narrator's (un)reliability. Interpreting unreliability must mean interpretating reliability. To prove one theoretical framework, searching for possible refutations is necessary. Narratives are never purely objective or subjective. Allowing for an in-between acknowledges the flaws and strengths of the narrator and our world today.

For future research, a comparison of ambivalent cases regarding unreliable narrators or re-evaluating narrators deemed unreliable or reliable would be interesting. Comparing texts from different literary epochs or genres regarding unreliability and putting that in a broader historical and social context might be eye-opening as well.

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