

## Reliable Narration in Postmodern Writing

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One of the areas in which postmodern writing is at its most distinctive and innovative is in its treatment of the narrator and narrative voices.<sup>1</sup> A major concern of the postmodern narrative voice is the narrator's reliability; Brian Richardson plots the development in contemporary fiction from 'unreliable narrators to incompetent ones to delusional and then completely insane storytellers.'<sup>2</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan identifies 'the main sources of unreliability [as] the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value scheme.'<sup>3</sup> These 'main sources' apply most readily to first-person narrators; indeed, Rimmon-Kenan states that 'a covert extradiegetic narrator, especially when he is also heterodiegetic, is likely to be reliable' and that 'intradiegetic narrators, especially when they are also homodiegetic, are on the whole more fallible than extradiegetic ones, because they are also characters of a fictional world.'<sup>4</sup>

I find this to be too simplified; the extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator is also a fictional construct that has been characterised by the author and the text in a certain way. No narrative voice is the same as the authorial voice, since the narrating instance and the writing instance are two different things; and whilst the narrator can be said to 'know' the characters, the author 'merely imagines them.'<sup>5</sup> If all narrators are constructs, then the only real difference between a third-person and first-person narrative is the narrator's decision to identify him or herself; no word can be ascribed a particular 'voice' without being contextualised by this identification. In Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, for example, the first paragraph starts with what would traditionally be considered third-person narrative; 'It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, p.ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fictions: Contemporary Poetics*, p.100.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, pp.213-4.

dead of the night, and the voice at the other end asking for someone he was not.<sup>6</sup> For the duration of the first paragraph, the text does not feature the word 'I,' or give any other indication that this is anything but a third-person narrative. The second paragraph, however, begins 'As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us.'<sup>7</sup> The shift to the plural, and the implication of passing time with 'detain,' highlights the fact that the supposed third-person narrated discourse is part of a story being told to 'us' by another, first-person narrator. As Genette points out, even 'in the most unobtrusive narrative, someone is speaking to me, is telling me a story, is inviting me to listen to it as he tells it.'<sup>8</sup> With this permeable and unstable distinction, third-person narration is just as susceptible to unreliability as first-person narration. Richardson terms this possibility 'subjectivised third-person narration.'<sup>9</sup> Very few third-person narratives actually consciously attempt to distance themselves from this notion of subjectivity.

In general, Genette considers the 'function of narrative' to be to 'simply tell a story, and therefore to "report" facts,'<sup>10</sup> suggesting that such a thing as a factual account of the story is possible. Although I disagree that any narrated story can be completely objective or factual, I do feel that narrators can largely reduce the level of subjectivity that they present. Peter Barry defines the reliable narrative voice as a 'mere "telling medium" which strives for neutrality and transparency,'<sup>11</sup> whilst Rimmon-Kenan writes that a reliable narrator is one whose 'rendering of the story and commentary on it' is supposed to be taken as 'an authoritative account of the fictional truth.'<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, there is little in literary criticism and narrative theory that positively identifies what makes a narrator reliable; 'authority,' 'neutrality' and 'transparency' are 'negatively defined by [the] absence' of 'signs of unreliability.'<sup>13</sup> This, I feel, is certainly not the best approach in determining a narrator's reliability, because reliability and unreliability are not binary opposites; just as there are

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Auster, 'City of Glass' in *The New York Trilogy*, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.161.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p.225.

<sup>12</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fictions: Contemporary Poetics*, p.101.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

'degrees of unreliability,'<sup>14</sup> so too are there degrees of reliability. Moreover, 'authority,' 'neutrality' and 'transparency' suggest that the narrator should also be objective, and a negatively defined reliable narrative voice can still lack objectivity. Indeed, in Barry's definition, 'strive' is a highly significant word; he does not write that reliable narrators 'are' neutral and transparent, but instead suggests that these are things which are aimed for. It is in this act of striving for objectivity that the reliability of a text exists; to be a reliable narrator means much more than simply narrating in the third-person, and appearing to be honest and truthful about what 'really' happened.

Two authors whose texts 'strive' to be as objective as possible in rather different ways are Raymond Carver and Cormac McCarthy; I will be looking in particular at *Are These Actual Miles?* and *No Country For Old Men*, and attempt to show through an analysis of these texts the different ways in which a reliable narrative voice can be positively classified, and the effects of using such a voice. Although both of these texts approach 'neutrality' differently from the other, they do share a similarity in their use of repetition and description;

He circles the kitchen and goes back to the living room. He sits. He gets up. In the bathroom he brushes his teeth very carefully. Then he uses dental floss. He washes his face and goes back to the kitchen. He looks at the clock and takes a clean glass from a set that has a hand of playing cards painted on each glass. He fills the glass with ice. He stares for a while at the glass he left in the sink.<sup>15</sup>

Roland Barthes writes "'he" is nasty: it is the nastiest word in the language: the pronoun of the non-person, it nullifies and mortifies its referent."<sup>16</sup> By persistently presenting a 'nullified' referent immediately followed by a verb, and thereby rejecting adjectives, the narrator implicitly refuses to impose any characteristics onto Leo's actions. This physical description, precise but without elaboration, suggests that the narrative voice is simply "'reporting" facts.' But this use of a mortified pronoun does not lead to a paragraph nullified of meaning; Leo, or 'he' as the character of Leo, is familiar with the house, and this intimacy contrasts with the dehumanised repetition of a 'non-person' pronoun. Leo's movement might read as an attempt to break out of a constricting situation,

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<sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Carver, 'Are These Actual Miles?' in *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, pp.587. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, quoted in Richardson, p.9.

with the text's repeated 'he' indicating suffocation or claustrophobia. Conversely, the seeming disparity between the familiar and the robotic might instead be read as a correlation; 'he' as a narrator's repetition and as a character's routine could represent a sense of the mechanic and automatic. In this reading, Leo's actions come across as unfeeling, or stripped of feeling.

The narrator's resistance to labelling actions with adjectives maintains an objective voice that does not judge what is narrated, consciously leaving that task to the reader. It is this lack of judgement that typifies the neutral narrative voice of *Are These Actual Miles?* Indeed, the little subjectivity that this passage offers is in the narration of Leo 'very carefully' brushing his teeth, and the fact that he stares at a glass 'for a while.' These are moments in which the narrator's stride towards objectivity could be said to falter; the descriptions, however, are physical and temporal in nature, and are not as problematic for objectivity as emotional or psychological descriptions might have been, such as 'Leo brushes his teeth sadly' or 'Leo stares, thinking of Toni.' Despite these small judgements, the narrator maintains his or her refusal to pass judgement on what might traditionally be considered the more important emotional matters.

Ensuring that what is reported is done so in an objective, non-judgemental manner is one way in which 'neutrality' is maintained. The idea of 'transparency' is the second element that Barry indicates is central to the reliable narrator. Rimmon-Kenan identifies a number of factors that contribute to the 'degree of perceptibility,' in which a description of setting is the most covert, whilst judgements and commentaries on a character's actions are the least covert.<sup>17</sup> Such a list alludes to what Genette defines as textual mimesis when he writes of 'a maximum of information and a minimum of informer.'<sup>18</sup> The relationship between these two ideas presents a potential problem when applying them to the objective narrative voice found in *Are These Actual Miles?* The narrative voice conforms to Rimmon-Kenan's concept of low perceptibility, featuring more passages of description than explicit judgements, a consequence of which is a noticeable lack of psychological and emotional information. Thus, it could be argued that *Are These Actual Miles?* does not present

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<sup>17</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, pp.96-100.

<sup>18</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.166.

the 'maximum of information.' However, the relationship between information and judgements is one of balance, which is something that Genette tries to address through his concept of the 'informer.' But what exactly the 'minimum informer' should be taken to mean is ambiguous; 'minimum informer' could be understood to mean that the story is told by a narrator with an unnoticeable presence and voice, or that the narrator has a negligible impact on the formulation and presentation of the story. In *Are These Actual Miles?*, the mechanical, repetitive nature of the narrative voice is certainly unique, and is as a result highly noticeable; but because of this very same noticeable voice, the narrative is 'transparent,' in that it has maintained an objectivity and neutrality in its reporting and rendering of the story, having made no significant alteration before presenting it to the reader.

These same arguments about a neutral and transparent narrative voice also apply to Cormac McCarthy's *No Country For Old Men*, which follows a similar method to *Are These Actual Miles?* in its description;

He opened the refrigerator and took out a carton of milk and opened it and smelled it and drank. He stood there holding the carton in one hand and looking out the window. He drank again and then he put the carton back in the refrigerator and shut the door.<sup>19</sup>

Again, the description in this passage is concerned with the physical over the emotional, and there is comparatively more detail and less elaboration than is even found in *Are These Actual Miles?* Furthermore, the narration of the action of opening and smelling the milk and the fact that Chigurh is holding the milk 'in one hand,' conveys the inclusion of what Roland Barthes calls 'realistic effects.'<sup>20</sup> These are details which are 'functionally useless to the story,' and which Genette defines as a '*connotator of mimesis*,' stating that 'the narrator, abdicating his function of choosing and directing the narrative, allows himself to be governed by "reality."<sup>21</sup> What is meant by 'functionally useless' is that these details serve no purpose in moving the story forwards; they are simply

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<sup>19</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, p.80. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, quoted in Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.65.

<sup>21</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.65. Emphasis in the original.

reported because they are 'there.' Interestingly, Genette uses the word 'reality,' which again suggests that narrations can be honest, realistic accounts of the fictive truth. Narrating the 'reality' of what is 'there' is an important characteristic of authority and neutrality that a reliable narrator ought to strive for; but not the only one. It is significant that the narrator does not restrict his report to what seems at that moment to be the most interesting or important elements; no cuts or additions are made that might increase any dramatic effect or alter the reader's interaction with the story. Because of this, such 'realistic effects' also increase the transparency of the externally focalised narrator, who 'abdicates' his position of power over the telling of the story. Through these 'realistic effects,' the narrator becomes more reliable.

As in *Are These Actual Miles?*, the word 'he' is repeated a number of times, but because the sentences in *No Country For Old Men* are much longer, this has less of an impact on the reader. Instead, the most noticeably repetitive word is 'and.' Unlike *Are These Actual Miles?*, which presented a series of self-contained movements in a staccato narrative, the words and actions in *No Country For Old Men* are linked to each other through the conjunction 'and,' and their presence extends beyond their immediate occurrence, lasting the length of the sentence. On the one hand, this reflects the nature of Moss's plight; upon finding a suitcase containing millions of dollars, 'his whole life was sitting there in front of him. Day after day from dawn till dark until he was dead' (p.18). One event, action and decision extends into and determines the course of the rest of his life. For both the character and the reader, everything merges into one thought; day and night, life and death. The plain, long sentences, concerned with minor details and connected by 'and,' reflect that similar links and consequences exist even in the day-to-day actions of the characters. Like the inclusion of 'realistic effects,' the attention paid to consequences and links between insignificant events reinforces the narrator's level of neutrality, by retaining objectivity in the decision of what to narrate. Interestingly, Mary Esteve calls the word 'and' the 'most neutral of conjunctions';<sup>22</sup> it does not designate any particular relationship between the clauses that come before or after it, and so

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Esteve, A "Gorgeous Neutrality": Stephen Crane's Documentary Anaesthetics in ELH Vol. 62, p.671.

the exact nature of the links or consequences are left undisclosed. The characters cannot know for certain what the future holds, and this ambiguity is shared by the reader, rendered through the choice of 'and.' At the same time, the repeated use of 'and' instead of a comma to break the sentences up, as might be expected from traditional grammar, also contributes to a sense of inevitability that matches well with the character of Chigurh. By rejecting punctuation, the narrator forces the reader to persevere onwards until the full stop, at which point they face another unbroken sentence, and another, and so on. The narrator's voice can be said to represent the two characters fairly, because the repetition of 'and' mirrors both Moss and his antagonist Chigurh simultaneously; the narrator does not privilege one over the other, and again, this lack of judgemental behaviour reinforces the narrator's reliability.

The different sentence structures, and as a result the different choices of repetition, are linked to the tense of each text. Since *No Country For Old Men* is mostly set in the past tense, or what Genette calls 'subsequent narrative,'<sup>23</sup> the narrator already knows what has happened and when it will happen, enabling him to trace connections and consequences. This might raise questions about the relative objectivity of the text; if the narrator knows what is important to narrate and what is not, he can edit and organise the story accordingly. Yet the inclusion of 'realistic effects,' and the level of detailed description of minor things throughout much of the novel, suggests that the choice of what to include is not predicated on the most dramatic events and actions. Surprisingly, though, the narrator does explicitly omit something that might have been considered quite significant in a traditional narrative; the death of Moss, one of the novel's protagonists. The death is not narrated directly by the third-person narrator, but is instead recounted to Sheriff Bell by a police officer after the event has occurred. In this way, objectivity and reliability are maintained at a highly dramatic and potentially emotional moment. The narration is not subjective, but is presented as fact; Moss's death is literally 'reported.' The novel then continues, despite one of its central characters having died; in the same way that the repetition of 'and' treats the novel's

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<sup>23</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.217.

characters equally, the decision of where to start or begin, the choice of what to narrate, does not rely on or solely reflect the character of Moss.

In fact, Moss' story does not actually start the novel. Of the three central characters, Moss is the third to be introduced. The first character introduced is Sheriff Bell, who offers a different, distinctive narrative voice. Italicised and spoken in the first-person, his narration opens each new chapter. Like the objective narrative voice that makes up the rest of the novel, Bell is positioned after the events that he narrates, most of which are memories and recollections from his past. Because what he narrates is so personal to him, his narration is subjective, and whilst his narration compromises the tone of the novel when taken as a whole, it does emphasise the objective narrative voice that follows after it. Interestingly, both narrative voices present an image of an American West in decline. But whereas Bell's narrative at least hints at the existence of a heroic ideal that has been lost, even when the main narrative offers more traditional Western elements, such as gunfights, it is difficult to locate a heroic identity; the weapons used, by Moss as well as by the various gangsters, are often illegal to own, or stolen from the dead. Moss' status as moral hero is ambiguous; over the course of the novel, he steals two million dollars' worth of drug money, and refuses to give himself up to save his wife's life. Chiguhr's role as absolute evil is also less than certain, since he has 'principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that' (p.153). By striving to give the narrative of the unheroic West a sense of authority and reliability, and by showing how the heroic West is little more than a subjective memory, the 'reality' of the modern American West, and the falseness of many of the representations of it, become apparent.

Like Bell, the narrator of *Are These Actual Miles?* describes events as they occur, abandoning a traditional 'doubly temporal sequence'<sup>24</sup> in favour of a singular one, suggesting to the reader that they are witnessing, for themselves, the events at the same time as they happen. *Are These Actual Miles?* is thus identified as a 'simultaneous narrative.'<sup>25</sup> The narrator does not know what future repercussions and consequences each action will entail, and so must set them down as individual

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<sup>24</sup> Christian Metz, quoted in Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.33.

<sup>25</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.217.

acts; 'He sits. He gets up.' This choice reflects the situation that Leo and his wife Toni have found themselves in; when considering their past, the narrator tells us that 'they buy what they want. If they can't pay, they charge. They sign up.' (p.586). Unaware of the future, Leo and Toni have spent their money on a convertible, luxury food items, big parties and fine travel, all things for the here and now, the consequences of which only become apparent when looking back. The narrator shares this inability to know the future. He is limited in the same way as the characters, and so does not occupy a privileged position with the authority to determine what to include or ignore, since anything could become significant. Genette claims that with this 'behaviourist' tense, the 'last trance of enunciating [...] now disappears in a total transparency of the narrative, which finally fades away in favour of the story.'<sup>26</sup> 'Total transparency' is perhaps too far, as there is still a voice narrating; the enunciation is still there, but because the informer is simultaneous with the information, and because the narrative voice is simultaneous with the narrated events, the story should be presented without the interference of hindsight. The sense of transparency that Genette identifies within present tense narration might be said to be the fact that rather than 'reporting' facts, the narrator records them. Theoretically, this should be done equally and objectively; no longer a 'telling' medium, the narrator instead becomes a 'showing' medium.

However, the narrative of *Are These Actual Miles?* is not fully mimetic, since it is not entirely externally focalised; at times, the narrator has access to Leo's thoughts, knowing things that would not be "there" to be shown by a recording medium. Again, the problem of transparency is raised; if transparency is taken to be covertness of presence, the moments at which the narrator describes Leo's thoughts are a high point of overtness, and therefore a low point in transparency. Conversely, when considering transparency as a narrator's impact on the story, insofar as transparency would reinforce a narrator's neutrality and objectivity, the narration is indeed as non-judgemental as the rest of the narrated events. Statements of Leo's thoughts, such as 'He turns the empty glass in his hand and considers biting off the rim' (p.587), maintains the steady, detached narrative voice that

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.219.

typifies the rest of the text. The objectivity is constant, whether it is in the form of a physical description of Leo turning the glass, or the revelation of his more private self-harming thoughts. These thoughts are available to the reader without a particular moral judgement being imposed upon them, and because they are described in the same way as the physical movements in the rest of the text, they are imbued with a sense of concreteness and factuality that lends the narration its tone of objectivity and reliability.

Also of particular interest is the narrator's approach to speech, which is direct and tagged throughout the short story. Like descriptions of thoughts, speech is tagged in such a way that it must come from an external narrator, and so the narrative voice is persistently reinstated; where the narration of speech is interesting and unique is that the very same direct tagging of speech that highlights the narrative voice also maintains a sense of transparency and neutrality. Directly tagged speech suggests that what precedes or follows is a perfectly quoted counterpart of the actual spoken words, and is not changed between being spoken and being narrated; this would conform to a concept of transparency as the negligible voice.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, nearly every instance of speech is tagged with 'he says' or 'she says,' the repetition of 'says' again portraying the detached and mechanically objective tone of the narration. By constantly using 'says,' the words, and therefore the presence of the narrator, may even slip by unnoticed, effaced from the reader's consciousness. When different phrases are used, such as 'yells' (p.587) or 'screams' (p.588), the previously established reliability of the narrator, particularly through his repetition of 'says,' means that these emotionally intense moments of speech are more readily accepted as being truthfully represented. The content of what is said also contributes to the idea of an objective narration;

"I don't think you know her," Leo says.

"That's alright," Leo says. "That's all right, I see her now."

(p.588)

The line break between these two moments of speech is jarring, as is the repetition of 'Leo says.' But the narrator remains silent; he or she does not judge what has happened, quite literally, between

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<sup>27</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.172.

the lines. As always, it is up to the reader to make this judgement for him or herself. Similarly, in the space of twenty lines of dialogue, subtle changes in what Leo says and how it is reported can be tracked;

“Where are you, honey?” he says slowly, gently.  
“Honey, which restaurant?” he says.  
“Honey?” he says. [...] “Honey?”  
“Honey,” he says.  
“Honey,” Leo says.  
“Please, honey,” Leo says.

(pp.587-8)

These subtle changes are all the elaboration that the narrator offers. In dealing with speech, then, it may seem that the narrator is withholding information from the reader, as in traditional minimalism, and asking the reader to decipher what is happening beneath and between the words; but I would argue that *Are These Actual Miles?* does more than this. The focus is less on the reader’s hunt for some allegedly true meaning hidden amongst the speech, and more on the narrator consciously stepping back and allowing the reader to look at the words as they are, without them being coloured by any subjectivity. The narrator does not simply leave out information and encourage the reader to fill in the blanks; he instead offers the information and refuses to judge it. The reader is not looking for what is missing, but instead judging what is there.

In almost direct opposition to *Are These Actual Miles?*, much of *No Country For Old Men* uses indirect untagged or selectively tagged speech, subsuming characters’ speech into the rest of the narration. As there are no longer quotation marks or words that could only originate from the narrator, like the ‘he says’ of *Are These Actual Miles?*, the narrator’s visible presence is distinctly reduced; but this does raise questions regarding the authenticity of the speech. Direct speech is certified as what was actually said, whereas indirect speech is a narration of what was said; traditionally, this could be seen to problematise the legitimacy of the narration, because if speech is a retelling of what was said, the “‘facts’” might not be ‘reported’ as Genette says they ought to be. However, considering that all of the physical movements of the characters have been noted down in

intimate detail, there is nothing to suggest that speech would not receive the same treatment. Bolstering this argument, the voices of the characters are distinctly different from the narrator's voice; for example, early in the novel, a deputy sheriff says;

Just walked in the door. Sheriff he had some sort of thing on him like one of them oxygen tanks for emphysema or whatever. Then he had a hose that run down the inside of his sleeve and went to one of them stunguns like they use at the slaughterhouse. Yessir. Well that's what it looks like. You can see it when you get in. Yessir. I got it covered. Yessir.  
(p.5)

The difference is noticeable in both the voice and the structure of the speech. There are no prolonged sentences filled with 'and' or simple physical descriptions. Indeed, whereas the narrator is precise in his description, the speech here, as with many other characters, contain uncertainties and comparisons; 'some sort of thing,' 'like they use,' 'or whatever.' Although the narrator of *No Country For Old Men* does use simile and metaphor in various places throughout the novel, they are rarely abstract, instead dealing with the physical elements of whatever is being compared; 'the box of shells contained almost exactly the firepower of a claymore mine,'(p.87), or 'the transponder [...] was about the size of a Zippo lighter' (p.108). This maintains the constant concern with the physical and the surface that runs throughout the novel. Additionally, the narrator is making assertions that can be checked and confirmed by anyone who has knowledge of or access to the objects in question; a Zippo lighter or claymore mine have dimensions and qualities that can be reliably proven and known by people other than the narrator. As such, the narration retains its objectivity and reliability by distancing itself from subjective and personal comparisons.

Three central elements of the reliable narrator become apparent when comparing what these texts do and what effect this has on them. First, a reliable narrator strives for neutrality by reducing the implicit and explicit personal judgements that he or she makes. The reliable narrator accepts that to present pre-judged concepts, actions, or words is to present a subjective opinion of the fictive truth. By offering words stripped of such preconceptions, the narrator can increase his or her neutrality, and consequently, his or her reliability. Secondly, of central importance to transparency is the narrator's presence or 'perceptibility,' which is perhaps the most complex issue

to consider. Perceptibility is best understood in relation to speech; in the same way that speech is more objective when the narrator is explicitly reinstated through direct tagging, the mechanical voice that presents and maintains objectivity in narration is an obvious, noticeable voice to the reader, but is less noticeable, and has a lesser presence, when considering any impact on the transition from story to plot. Finally, for both neutrality and transparency, the issue of consequence and significance is fundamental. The level of minor detail that is included in the descriptions and the concern with the physical and the surface suggests that these texts do not leave any actions or movements out, regardless of their seeming immediate significance, because characters and readers cannot tell what will become significant in the future. Through simply showing what is 'there,' by being guided by 'reality' like Genette says, the narrator's power over the choice of what to narrate and his or her impact on the story is lessened, resulting in more neutrality, more transparency, and more reliability.

It is impossible to ever have a fully reliable or objective transition from story to plot. Since 'even the most unobtrusive narrator' tells a story, it must be told in a certain way that precludes other ways of telling it. The act of narrating is an act of choosing what to narrate and how to narrate it; but that said, in the same way that Rimmon-Kenan believes it is possible to approach 'maximum covertness' as opposed to absolute absence,<sup>28</sup> I believe it is possible to achieve maximum reliability as opposed to complete objectivity. The choices in these texts, of what and of how to narrate, are geared towards 'neutrality and transparency,' but both texts also approach these ideals by different means. It is for this reason that I disagree that the best way to find a reliable narrator is to define it through a lack of the things that make a narrator unreliable. There are many different ways for a narrator to approach reliability, and so, the reliable narrator needs to be defined in its own right.

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<sup>28</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, p.96.

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