

The Unreliable Narrator's Role in Postmodern Fiction: Probing True Storytelling in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the role of the unreliable narrator in postmodern literature, concentrating on novels of *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov and *City of Glass* (1987) by Paul Auster. It discusses how the two novels use narrative ambiguity and narrative deception in understanding of truth, and reality in a postmodern literature. The research is situated in narrative theory and postmodern frameworks in order to discuss the protagonists' Humbert Humbert's and Daniel Quinn's manipulation of language, distortion of events, as well as blur the limits between reality and fiction. The present study maintains, using close textual analysis, that these novels expose instability in storytelling as a means of forcing the readers to participate actively in the construction of meaning. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that unreliable narration becomes a means to prompt questioning absolute truths, further reinforcing the genre's skepticism toward subjective reality and grand narratives.

Key Words: *Lolita*, Unreliable Narrator, Narrative Deception, *City of Glass*

Objective Reality.

دور الراوي غير الموثوق في الروايات الخيالية لفترة ما بعد الحداثة : البحث عن الحقيقة في روايته "لوليتا"، للكاتب فلاديمير نابوكوف و "مدينة الزجاج"، للروائي بول أستر

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مُستخلص البحث:

يتناول بالدراسة هذا البحث الدور الذي يقوم به الراوي غير الموثوق في أقواله في روايات أدب ما بعد الحداثة، مع التركيز على روايتي : *لوليتا* (1955) لفلاديمير نابوكوف الكاتب الأميركي (ذا الأصول الروسية) و *مدينة الزجاج* (1987) للكاتب الأميركي بول أستر. حيث يتناول بالمناقشة كيف وضفت الروايتين المذكورتين اعلاه إستخدام الغموض السردي والخداع في سرد الأحداث للوصول الى فهم الحقيقة و واقعها الأحداث في الأعمال الأدبية وخصوصا الروايات لفترة ما بعد الحداثة. يستخدم البحث في نظرية السرد وأطر ما بعد الحداثة من أجل مناقشة تلاعب بطلي الرواية همبرت همبرت ودانيال كوين باللغة (لغة الكلام)، وتشويه الأحداث، وتغييرها حسب أهوائهم مما يفضي الى طمس الحدود بين الواقع والخيال. تؤكد الدراسة الحالية، باستخدام التحليل النصي الدقيق، أن هذه الروايات تكشف عدم الاستقرار في السرد كوسيلة

لإجبار القراء على المشاركة بنشاط في بناء المعنى في بناء المعنى. في الختام، توضح هذه الدراسة أن السرد غير الموثوق به يصبح لاحقاً وسيلة فاعله لِحَث القاريء عدم تقبل كل ما يتم سرده عليه بل دفع القاريء الى عدم الثقة في الحقائق المطلقة، مما يعزز شكوك هذا النوع تجاه الواقع الغيرالموضوعي والسرديات الكبرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لوليتا، الراوي غير الموثوق، الخداع السردى، مدينة الزجاج ، الواقع الموضوعي.

INTRODUCTION

Postmodern fiction substantially rejects established norms within the disciplinary arena of literature by moving very prominently into the modernity of the mid-twentieth century and refraining from grand narratives while advancing vagueness, plurality, and reflexivity. Postmodernism becomes, for Jean-François Lyotard (1984), "incredulity toward metanarratives" (p. xxiv), and hence, dismantling the traditional structures of authority, the universal truths are also halved. Thus, in postmodern literature, there is a skepticism concerning language, an unstable meaning, and a deconstruction of linear storytelling (Hutcheon, 2003, p. 202), by which this skepticism becomes apparent in postmodern literature. Postmodern texts tend to put fiction and reality on an evenly constituted level with the intention of opening up readers' eyes to the fact that the development of knowledge and truth is actually a construction, so the postmodern literary texts call the audience to know the construction of truth and the nature of knowledge.

Among the many defining characteristics of a postmodern narration, an unreliable narrator emerges as a critical narrative device summarizing the postmodern ethos. According to Wayne C. Booth (1983), the unreliable narrator is, one whose version of events is either unintentional flawed or intentionally deceptive, thereby forcing the audience to question their credibility and authority (p. 158). Which means that; when a narrator expresses perceptions and values that blindingly deviate from those of the implied writer he is considered unreliable (Olson, 2003, p. 93).

This concept has since transformed into a device for examining subjectivity and the manipulation of narrative, with most of postmodern literary works having this tool at their disposal. Ansgar Nünning (1997) believes that unreliable narration is more than a technique of storytelling; it is a way to mirror the human nature fragmentation or even ambiguous features of human experience, thus taking it at the center of postmodernism aesthetics (p. 85).

Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) represent the fact that unreliable narrators induce disintegration of those notions of morality, truth and authority in narration. In *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert [which means all thumbs, He imagines himself as European scholar and idealist, but he's just an inelegant thumb], for instance, employs rhetorical manipulation as justification of his actions and compels readers to face their complicity against his account, while Auster's main character Daniel Quinn exhibits in his fragmented narration the postmodern collapse of identity and reality. This kind of narrator destabilizes the truth perception of the reader along with serving as meta-commentary on the artifice of the narration. *Lolita* [the novelist's twelfth novel] stands among the most controversial and critically acclaimed 20th century novels. Analysing critically *Lolita*'s depiction of postmodern American culture and how it interrogates authenticity and reliability in the novel, is to gain a deep understanding of its complexity as well as its continuing significance in contemporary literary discourse. The Russian- American poet and novelist Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov born in St. Petersburg in an aristocratic family. His life was marked by displacement and exile (Boyd, 1991). In 1919, he and his family flee Russia because of The Bolshevik Revolution which leading to an emigration period in Europe.

As for the American-Jewish translator, essayist Paul Auster, he is also novelist and memoirist, he was born in 1947 in New Jersey. He is from a middle-class family. Auster's uncle was a translator, when he decided to leave for Europe, he left his books for Auster to read, he does so which stimulated his interested in literature and writing. In 1974, he has published essays, poems, novels, and translations. Then he released four volumes of poetry, Squeeze Play was his first novel in 1982. After gaining a reputation, he published his other novels (Odacıoğlu, Lo1, & Çoban 2017, p. 479).The purpose of this paper is to explore how the postmodern fiction has been using unreliable narrators to interrogate the notion of truth as well as the nature of narrative itself.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Postmodern fiction contests traditional concepts of truth and storytelling, usually employing the notion of an unreliable narrator to pull down the narrative authority and prompt readerly exploration out of curiousness as to the very existence of reality and the nature of it. Nevertheless, the mechanism by which this unreliable storyteller functions to examine and truth, reinforced by in-depth readerly identification, remains widely unexplored in specific postmodern literary works. In other words, in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, the sulking Humbert Humbert, the

narrator cleverly manipulates the speech- language and the principals of morality, while in *City of Glass* the author Paul Auster employs a fragmented storyteller to merge fiction with reality so as to make blurry in the boundaries between them to obliterate the truth.

The two novels provide examples where undermining trust is one aspect of how unreliable narration functions and disharmonizes narrative interpretation. This research paper aims to address the critical gap that reinforces understanding of how unreliable narrators within the postmodern fiction works reflect the greater issues of truth, ethics, and the construction of storytelling. The study shall address how, in the context of these two canonical novels, these post-modern works employ unreliable narrative pursuit of truth-telling to challenge the traditional frameworks of storytelling. Unreliable narrators in postmodern fiction do not merely highlight the subjective nature of truth but also criticize the art of storytelling, as portrayed in Nabokov's *Lolita* by Nabokov and *City of Glass* by Auster.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Booth dedicatedly defined the concept of unreliable narration in his ever-famous work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983). Booth, who would direct the use of an unreliable narrator for effecting some intentional or unintentional impairment of these narratorial credibility, which causes to encourage the reader to question the credibility of his account, provides this definition about the unreliable narrator is the one “whose perceptions or interpretations of the events are different from the norms implied by the author, creating a gap between the narrator’s account and the truth” (Booth, 1983, p. 158). The narrator, here, employs his rhetoric skills (to influence the readers’ beliefs and ideas) in practicing successful and persuasive oration to manipulate readers by his “silver tongued” (Meessen ,2015, para.1). The difference or lack of synchronization, here, obligates the reader to play an active role in rationally evaluating statements by the narrator in order to achieve a true understanding of the narrative.

Unreliable narrators are categorized into several types: a morally unreliable narrator who manipulates readers knowingly and a cognitively unreliable narrator who falls prey to misunderstanding or deficiencies of memory. Error and limitation are key in forming this slope. Here, the narrator intervenes and complicates the interaction existing between the author and the reader. The act of reading itself derives considerable investment from a convicted fixation on “authorial audience” as explained by Booth to detect the contradictions in the narrators’ interpretations and distinguishes the truth that intended by the writer (Ibid, p. 159).

In postmodern literature, the concept of an unreliable narrator aligns the tendency of this form of literature in deconstructing traditional narrative authority and, instead, interrogating the limitations of the narrative and truth. Here, an unreliable narrator is often used to tackle issues that arise from exploring the ontological and epistemological uncertainties. These explorations emphasize the truth that all narratives are constructed due to subjectivity. Booth's theory gives this first foundational ground by which unreliable narrators are understood, providing the much-needed critical framework for understanding the way strong and weak narrators, like Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* or Quinn in *City of Glass*, unseat and foreground the artificial nature of storytelling.

Previous studies about some key critical perspectives

Narrative complexities as well as postmodern characteristics of the two novels, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* have been the concentrate of scholarly attention, many studies emphasize the use of unreliable narrators as well as metafictional elements.

Most scholars agree that Humbert Humbert, as a narrator, is very unreliable; for many of them, studying how his language manipulation employed to change the moral and the truth of the narrative. Boyd points out the use of some literary devices, like rhetorical irony and wordplay which are employed by Nabokov to make an extremely persuasive, yet deceptive, narrator who makes readers question their involvement in his narrative. Boyd argues that Humbert's unreliability represents a critique owing to the tendency of audiences to rationalize or romanticize immoral behavior thereby positing an ethical responsibility on the reader (Boyd, 1991, p. 79). A similar view is taken by Phelan (2005) in *Lolita*, he states that Humbert's unreliable narration remains one of the central characteristics of postmodern literature that, moreover, denies traditional moral binaries and the coherence of any narrative in order to embrace the epistemological uncertainties of this form of literature (p. 170).

City of Glass, Paul Auster's novel, is considered a high quintessential postmodern text, receiving much scholarly attention regarding its fragmented structure and metafiction as narrative techniques. Shiloh (2002) observes how *City of Glass* deconstructs authorship and identity through its protagonist Quinn's unreliability in a narrative structure that parallels the ontological confusion of postmodern fiction works (p. 46). Shiloh argues that Quinn's manipulating and unreliability are indicative that mirror coherent selfhood disintegration and the fragmentation of narrative authority, placing the reader as an indispensable

participant in reconstructing the story. Moreover, McHale (2003) approaches *City of Glass* as a “metafictional detective story” thereby highlighting the storytelling artificiality and, addressing unreliable narrators, attempting to blur the limitations between reality and fiction (43).

Lolita and *City of Glass*, these two novels have been critically studied for the **postmodern characteristics** of them, in particular, through their engagement with intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and uncertainty. Hutcheon (2003) recognizes *Lolita* as a historiographic metafiction example, as this novel problematizes the storytelling act by showing its artifice and its own limitations (p.53). *City of Glass*, also, subverts the detective genre conventions by using the unreliable narrative and fragmented identity so as to defy the notion of truth.

So, the critical analysis of the two novels *Lolita* and *City of Glass* show that their **narrative complexity** as well as **postmodern characteristics** bring forth their contribution towards the challenge of true conventional notions of storytelling and truth. These novels employ unreliable narrators as devices and philosophical tools to discover the identity's instability and the reality. These critical studies offer a theoretical insight into the critique of how Humbert Humbert and Quinn's unreliability contribute to the wider postmodern critique concerning morality, narrative authority, and truth.

However, within the postmodern literary discourse, there is a **gap** occurs in both iconic unreliable narrators' comparative analysis. Although the two texts use unreliable narration so as to discover epistemological instability and deconstruct authority [of narratives], but very few studies have underlined and critically analyzed the operation of how the narrators' function, through confronting postmodern themes like the truth's constructedness, identity's fluidity and storytelling's ethics. With reference to the established self-reflexive and historiographic characteristics of postmodern fiction, Phelan (2005) and Hutcheon (2003) make good arguments in regards to the absolute necessity for these although most paramount characters which interact across diverse works **remains underexplored** to be a matter of scholarly debate.

Moreover, most of the existing research has considered these novels, *Lolita* and *City of Glass*, just like a different case studies without thinking of how a comparative analysis could cause to deepen the readers' understanding of the thematic resonances and narrative mechanisms that the unreliable narrator commands over the postmodern narrative. The concept of “incredulity towards metanarratives” of Lyotard's (1986), and theories of metafiction in Hutcheon's

(2003) also, both introduce deep critical analyses of the unreliable narrators so that they, in turn, constitute a tool to destabilize narrative authority; however, its application to such broad examples in comparison is restricted.

To assess this gap, the present study seeks to tackle it by comparing the protagonists of two novels, Humbert Humbert and Quin as example of unreliable narrators and critically analyze the way that their narrative strategies mirror and contribute to the postmodernism key tenets. This study is very essential to illuminate the different and shared ways that both narrators involve with the discourse of postmodern literature, to enhance the readers' understanding of how unreliable narration eventually serves as a broader critique of morality, truth, as well as storytelling in postmodern fiction.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The current study contributes to the ongoing corpus of postmodern fiction scholarship by introducing a comparative study of unreliable narrators in *Lolita* Vladimir Nabokov's novel and *City of Glass* novel by Paul Auster, displaying how these narrators serve to destabilize traditional storytelling and instead challenge readers, forcing them to interrogate about morality, truth, and most importantly, identity. Through a critical analysis of the narrative strategies used by Humbert Humbert and Quinn, this study advances the readers' understanding of how the re-description of unreliable narration mirrors a postmodern skepticism towards grand narratives and also reflect the epistemological uncertainty. Moreover, the present study contributes in enriching the discussion about the storytelling ethics of storytelling, and discovering the role of unreliable narrators in involving the audience in critical dialogue around complicity and the narrative authority boundaries. This research paper, also, will attempt to address a critical gap in the comparative studies of postmodern literary works through offering new perception concerning the diverse ways the unreliable narration acts in postmodern critique.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study's conceptual framework is set in postmodern literary theory and the unreliability as a narrative concept, as proposed by Wayne Booth in his 1961 *Rhetoric of Fiction*. It connectively engages Lyotard's (1984) notion of "incredulity toward metanarratives," emphasizing the postmodern rejection about the universal truths, in addition to theory of historiographic metafiction by Linda Hutcheon (2003), which emphasizes the constructedness and self-reflexivity of the storytelling. These frameworks then place the unreliable narrator as a crucial

mechanism which is employed to deconstruct the conventional narrative authority and at the same time urge the readers to be an active participant in meaning making.

In novels like *Lolita* and *City of Glass*, both protagonists, Humbert Humbert and Quinn are introduced as unreliable narrators, their subjectivity and their fragmented accounts cause to destabilize the reader's trust and are crucial for addressing themes central to postmodernism as the fluidity of identity, the instability of truth, as well as the artificiality of storytelling. The framework here, positions the present study into the wider discourse context of postmodern literature, highlights the unreliable narrators' role in reforming truth and fiction's boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has employed a descriptive qualitative method in order to analyze some texts from the two selected novels, the textual analysis is used to some appropriate excerpts and passages reflecting a **narrative theory approach** in the light of **postmodern analytical framework**. Nevertheless, data are collected from primary and secondary sources, both are used. As for the primary sources' data, it is the novels' pdf versions, *Lolita* (1955) downloaded from google books, and *City of Glass* (1985), downloaded from Perlego.com. The secondary sources contain some scholarly papers, relevant magazines articles, books based on narrative discourse, and whatnot.

Furthermore, some key passages from the two novels are chosen for close reading, concentrating on moments where the unreliable narration in postmodern context blur and change the meaning stability and the truth. Quotations are selected to be analysed for the same purpose to convict a masterfully unreliable storyteller whose ego still pulses with the inevitability that the narrator skilfully manipulates time along with his readers sympathies' as he works against the time to tie up the threads of the narrative and to prove that unreliable narration complexity extends far beyond more than simple deception. Moreover, the purposive excerpt texts are employed to locate examples of pertinent themes in the specified novels. The researcher has implemented the following steps for undertaking the data collection: First of all, the researcher read the two chosen novels for a thorough apprehension of the story; second, a re-reading of the work made it possible to collect diligently all relevant data in forms of phrases and quotations and ideas relating directly to the study topic; and finally, the data were classified to identify topics relevant to the study.

THE PROTAGONISTS' DECONSTRUCT TRADITIONAL ACCOUNT

1. Humbert's role in *Lolita*

Lolita novel tells Humbert's enthralling and disturbing story, he is a middle-aged hebephile literature academic but he sexually obsessed with Dolores Haze the girl of twelve-year-old, "Lolita" as he nicknames her, he then becomes her stepfather and laying this position to manipulate a vastly distressing romance with her to fulfil his illegitimate desires. After her mother's dies in an accident, he kidnaps the child to go on a long trip. Because Lolita (Dolores) dependence on him, Humbert uses that to abuse her sexually and emotionally. She plans to escape with the support of Clare Quilty [one of the peers' support circle]. Humbert claims he loves her, he expresses guilt feelings for (as he claims); "having stolen her childhood (Nabokov,1955, p.221)." Dolores then realises that Quilty is also perverse, so she rejects him and marries, Richard Schiller, a supportive man. Pregnant and needy, she later asks Humbert for financial help, but he begs her to return again to him, then she refuses, he wants to know the man who helped Dolores's escape. He, at that time, goes to kill Quilty in his house. While expecting trial, Humbert writes the account as a memoir. Later, he dies of a heart attack, Dr. John Ray, his psychiatrist, adds a preface to the document that is published (Ratna, 2020,p. 22).

Lolita is regarded as one of the most controversial achievements in the literature of twentieth century (Liu, 2024, p.36). The novel's challenging subject matter and Nabokov's virtuosity in his prose style have made it an intense critical debate subject since its publication. Much of the discussion focussed on the novel's literary merit and its moral implications. Then, the critical attention shifted towards his linguistic brilliance and innovations (Nabokov,2011, p. xlvii).

Lolita's Narrator, Humbert Humbert, represents extreme indubitable **unreliability** as narrator by his manipulative language as well as self-justifying and reality's distorting. According to Wayne C. Booth (1983), unreliable narrators tell misleading, deceitful accounts, thus compelling readers to critically evaluate the differences between narration and reality (p. 158).

From the beginning, Humbert's narrative is troubled with contradictions, justifications, and self-aware manipulation moments that call into interrogating the reliability of his account. He, for instance, starts his narrative with a straight appeal to the readers, he says; "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at

three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta'' (Nabokov, 1955, p. 9). Humbert strategically complicates the immorality of his acts, posing himself either as a tragic lover rather than a predator by using poetic prose, rhetorical flourishes, and appeals to sympathy (Booth, 1983, p. 158). Humbert's self-justificatory remarks such as his description to Lolita, that she is rather a seductress than a victim, is an attempt to manipulate the reader and himself into redefining the abuse as romantic desire (Nabokov, 1955, p. 133).

Furthermore, he (Humbert) narrates reality out of reality, he distorts it by omitting significant aspects, he often addressing the readers' perception in an attempt to overcome it. Such rhetorical manipulation, as Phelan says (2005), would put readers in an inevitably paradoxical situation; complicit in Humbert's tale and aware of the deception therein (p. 123). Through all these very techniques, Nabokov skilfully constructs a narrator completely in line with the postmodern epistemological uncertainty theme to challenge the truth stability in the retelling of stories.

As for **truth subjectivity** and Humbert's **unreliability** in *Lolita*, they both act as a postmodern narrative device, whereby the morality of his account and **the instability of the truth** must be questioned by the reader. His purposefully contrived language manipulation, self-justifications, as well as rhetorical appeals, all make parallel with what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1984) would term "incredulity toward metanarratives", destabilizing Humbert's attack on any one, singular, objective truth (p. xxiv). While presenting his coercive actions as poetic love, Humbert creates a challenge for the reader's ethical interpretation responsibility, revealing the tension between both persuasion of narrative and ethical judgment into the reader's own conscience (Nabokov, 1955, p. 133).

For Linda Hutcheon (1988), postmodern fictions foreground narrative instability and self-reflexivity as a way of foregrounding the constructive nature of the storytelling act (p. 12). In *Lolita*, Humbert's confessional style as well as his endeavours to narrate directly to the reader create an awareness of the text as an artificial construct, thus rendering his version of reality untrustworthy and the morally ambiguous. Such a postmodern narrative device not only interrogates the authority of the narratives being told but also places the reader in a questionable position regarding the interpretation of his story.

In concert with Foucault's (1977) concept regarding the truth shaping through power structures and discourse rather than any objective criteria. Nabokov embeds

the deception within the narrative itself and critiques the way readers rely on conventional structures of storytelling to urge the readers to question the moral implications of narrative authority (p.27). Thus, Humbert's voice, while artful and persuasive, becomes a reminder that in the realm of pragmatic experience, the truth is often comes from rhetorical manipulation not from the inherent truth.

2. Quinn 's role in *City of Glass*

Identity crisis and confusion between the boundaries of fiction and reality construct a background of Daniel Quinn's **account unreliability** in Auster's *City of Glass*. With the shifting identities from detective Paul Auster and his alias William Wilson, Quinn endures ever more a self-fragmentation, leading to an increasingly unreliable perspective and narration that force readers to question their faith in him as a narrator. The judgments on fragmented identities are by themselves a postmodern concern; Quinn's endless role-playing serves to undermine his grip on reality so badly that it becomes utterly unclear whether the man before us is Quinn himself or another one of his many complicated disguises. All this questioning of truth leads the narrative to urge readers not only to consider the questionable nature of Quinn's narrative but also to think about truth in that story (The Maze of Identity, 2018, para4).

City of Glass is the story that follows Quinn, an isolated detective novel's writer who receives an ambiguous phone call meant only for a private investigator called Paul Auster. Fascinated, Quinn adopts Auster's identity and takes on Peter Stillman's case, a troubled man who is afraid of his father, a linguist interested in exploring a "pure" language, will hurt him. While Quinn investigates, he slopes into a tangle of shifting identities, and uncertainty by losing reality. The novel explores many themes, among them the blurred lines between reality and fiction, eventually leaving the readers with an unsettling and open-ended conclusion (Bhargav, 2014, p. 296)

Daniel Quinn's unreliable narration, in *City of Glass*, expresses **postmodern concerns** about the identity's instability and the no limitations between reality and fiction. Quinn adopts personal identities such as detective Paul Auster and Max Work, the latter being his own invention. This way, his sense of self becomes fragmented, representing postmodern theme on decentered identity. Quinn's multiplicity of roles within the same narrative undermines the distinctions between character and author, fiction and reality, thus challenges the reader's perception about the literary work as a coherent narrative. As stated in an analysis on PhD

essay(n.d.); “Quinn creates his own character Max Work, a private eye narrator, Max becomes very real and moves away from merely being a fictitious character, subsequently causing Quinn himself to take on some of the characteristics of Max, thinking and behaving in a similar manner to him”.

This strategy of narration is corresponding with what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1984) concept of “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. xxiv), as it deconstructs the accepted traditional forms of storytelling and foregrounds the subjective nature of feeling reality. Auster dips his readers within Quinn’s disoriented experience and, in so doing, hints at ways in which the significance of narrative itself is interrogated, thus drawing attention to the uncertainty and fluidity of postmodern identity.

The character of Quinn is employed by the writer in *City of Glass* to collapse the distinctions between narrator, author, and character for showing storytelling’s artifice. Quinn is a detective novelist writing under the name of William Wilson (his pseudonym); by chance, a phone call misdirected to a detective named Paul Auster plunges him into a real mystery. Concerning himself as Auster, Quinn’s fetch journey through an adventure of metafiction in which the identity and the making of a narrative become the subjects of reflection for both identity and narrative. Indeed, this multiply layered quilting of identities, Quinn as Wilson, Auster, and himself, deconstruct conventional narrative boundaries and emphasizes its constructed nature as well as challenging reader to question the narrative authority’s reliability. (Baumgartner, n.d., para 4).

In a simple **comparison** between the two novels to analyze **the similarities**, it is clear that the two male narrators in *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov and *City of Glass* by Paul Auster are classified as a sort of postmodern narrator who destabilizes truth as well as narrative authority. In *Lolita*, for instance, Humbert Humbert’s unreliable narration provokes the reader’s belief systems with respect to the account, thus contributing to challenge a conventional structure of the narrative (Wasmuth, 2009, p.15). In *City of Glass*, also, Daniel Quinn’s presumption of multiple identities which blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, calling into actively separates deception from truth and differentiate the differences. Here, the complexity of narrative puts readers into active engagement in the process of interpretation, mirroring postmodern literature’s confirms which emphasis on both ambiguity as well as the truth subjective nature (Worthington, 2006, p. 187).

But, these two novels **differ** in that the unreliability of Humbert Humbert as a narrator, in *Lolita*, is deliberate-moral as well as psychological manipulation, he offers self-serving narrative into trying to justify his wicked acts from every point of view that any reader would sympathize. The eloquent prose of Humbert and his rationalizations have managed to obscure the terrible reality of his abuse, thus making him an ideal example of the unreliable narrator that personal agenda forms his mind (Castellani, 2016, p.10).

On the contrary, in *City of Glass*, the existential and metafictional crises turn Daniel Quinn into an unreliable narrator. The more Quinn takes on multiple faces, such as that of Paul Auster, a detective, the more fragmented his identity becomes. This inevitably leads to a narrative that challenges the limits of reality and fiction in terms of deep self-exploration and the storytelling nature (Lyčková, 2009, p. 33).

Consequently, while Humbert is unreliable because of self-justification and intentional deception, Quinn becomes unreliable through an identity crisis and the collapsing boundaries between author, narrator, as well as character.

EXPLORING THE OBJECTIVE TRUTH

Lolita (1955) and *City of Glass* (1985) explore the objective truth instability through their unreliable narrators. Distrust of grand narratives is an important feature of post-modern literature: the narratives which claim universal truth. Humbert, Nabokov's protagonist and Daniel Quinn Auster's protagonist represent this skepticism, which in turn suppresses any claim of objective reality by their fragmented and self-contradictory narratives.

In *Lolita*, Humbert's cleverly crafted a very highly self-justifying, manipulative narrative ultimately to cast his spell on the readers for persuading them of his own version of reality. His persuasive poetic language is filled with contradiction and exposes the lies, he claims, "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (Nabokov, 1955, p. 9), as if he admits that his narrative might be untrue, or even may be deceitful, which cause that the readers can't judge whether this narrative version is self- serving fiction or it is the real truth, taking into account that once a narrator is considered unreliable, his unreliability , then, will be constant throughout the whole work(Booth, 1983, p.158).

This unreliability creates a conflict and suspicious in sincerity, which causes to conclude that the narrator is either unable to tell the truth as it is or even withholding the story's true version (Chatman, 1980, p. 149). There are many

sources of unreliability, among them; limited knowledge of the narrator, his doubtful morals as well as his (or her) personal involvement. When narrator presents his story's personal involvement, he portrays characters or events in a subjective way, perhaps for interior hidden motive, or plan to fulfil. The reader can quickly extrapolate that Humbert is a troubled character. He could be convicted for a wide variety of crimes, starting from the abduction of children to murders in cold blood. and his sanity and to ascertain whether Humbert might plead insanity as a defence and protection for his crimes. His contradicting comments about his skilful ability to retell memories offer textual evidence supports his unreliability as a narrator, for example, when he realises that there are some persons pursued them both he and Lolita, on their trip in the States. Humbert describes himself like "a murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory" (Nabokov, 1955, p.217). Moreover, in his last reflections and thoughts about his work, he elaborates on the elusive quality of the narrative by saying that he feels his "slippery self eluding him, gliding into deeper and darker waters" (Ibid, 308). This indirectness can be read as the narrator consciously deciding to prevaricate in presenting the evidence of the story. It suggests a hesitance to reveal the more truthful version of himself that exists in the darker and deeper waters. Therefore, Humbert might be considered unreliable because he thinks that though his incomplete memory but his duty is to retell events accurately. Challenging the very idea of the narrator's authority means that *Lolita* participates in the postmodern canons of skepticism, which can illustrate that the truth is (constructed) created, not absolute (Wasmuth, 2009, p.7).

In the same way, *City of Glass* negates the objective reality notion by portraying Daniel Quinn into existential uncertainty. He, who is a writer adopting the identity of the detective Paul Auster, loses sense of self as well as narrative control. At a certain point he declares that "Reality was no longer real; everything had begun to float" (Auster, 1985, p. 98), which illustrates postmodern suspicion of stable meaning because the fragmented narrative created by Quinn reflects his psychological dissolution. Whether truth can be accessed or is just another ornament of fiction is what *City of Glass* raises for more understanding. Whereas narratological categories influence the readers' anticipations and understanding during reading.

When these conventions, however, are subjected to critique, the interpretation starts to become more theoretical, compelling the reader to think about the author's motivations for experimenting with categories, such as that of narration. In *City of*

Glass, there seems to be a heterodiegetic, omniscient narrator, and this narrator seems to be mostly, though not wholly, unproblematic. By the end, however, it turns out that this narrator is (also) homodiegetic. Auster's breaking down of the rules of traditional narration by having a narrator who is both hetero- and homodiegetic not only leaves the readers guessing in interpreting the text but also makes them realize how much they rely on the narrator for meaning. Auster's experimentation with the category of narration in this novel is instrumental to the text's insistence on a reviewed understanding of truth (Wiese, 2017, p. 304).

The novel employs Quinn's distorted perceptions and shifting identity to challenge the narrative truth's reliability. Quinn's supposition of multiple identities is among the earliest signs of his unreliability, his acceptance to the case that meant for investigator Paul Auster, efficiently erasing his personal identity: "In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it was chance or fate, whether it was a dream or a nightmare, Quinn did not know." (Auster, 1985, p. 3). Here, there is no lines or even there is blurred boundaries between fiction and reality, these lines introduce Quinn's detachment. *City of Glass's* metafictional structure supports this instability. Auster introduces himself as a character, further disturbing traditional reality notions. Quinn himself admits his conflict with discerning truth; he states "Nothing was real except chance." (Auster, 1985, p.3), his statement proposes that reality is unstable, making truth unknowable and subjective. His search for truth eventually causes to his downfall, indicating that when truth filtered through unreliable narrators, it becomes elusive and fragmented.

The two novels thus represent how the postmodernism questions the narrative reliability. In constructing narrator who manipulates, or loses control over the stories, Nabokov and Auster have challenged the objective truth idea. It is through self-serving justifications of Humbert and Quinn's fragile, unraveling identity that, in fact, the novels uncover a truth that-contrary to all popular belief-is, rather, a fluid and subjective construct and not an absolute reality, and probably never will be.

Because both novels have narrators who do not represent the information well, thereby engaging the readers in an active interpretive course. They aim at regarding the reality of the narrative and in this making the readers active participants in meaning construction. Such attempts go hand in hand with postmodern literary

refusal for fixed interpretations since it places the reader at the forefront of active and not passive consumption of text.

In *Lolita*, there emerges a moral dilemma for the readers that Humbert presents before them in manipulative prose; for they face the justifications he gives, while recognizing at once the deception contained therein. His direct addresses to the audience, he says; “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury” (Nabokov, 1955, p. 9), are a sign of his attempt to have possession over interpretation, presenting the whole narrates under the cover of a protection defense not as a confession. Yet all his contradictions which require weighing his words rather than accepting them right away. The readers become evidence examiners because unreliable narrator compel them to turn into such rather than being mere spectators which is the role Nabokov assigns unashamedly to the readers.

City of Glass, also, subverts the traditional expectations of a reader by displacing any clear concept of narrative authority. As Quinn, gradually dissolves the borders between his text and reality, the reader becomes equally disoriented. At one particular juncture in the text, the novel states that, “Each time he took a step forward, the world changed before his eyes” (Auster, 1985, p. 124), hence underlining the meaning instability. The very conditions of the novel’s metafictional structure that the protagonist, author and narrator stance is all ask the reader to assume an active role in creating coherence from a fragmented and unreliable text. Thus, the act of reading becomes an interpretive challenge; Auster further obscures the possibility of a single truth, emulating Nabokov.

The novels, consequently, engage readers by disrupting narrative reliability, making the readers participants in the meaning creation. Such texts force readers to fill in gaps and question inconsistencies; as Wolfgang Iser argues in *The Act of Reading* (1979), texts resisting closure compel readers to enter into this meaning-making activity (p.107).

CONCLUSION

Lolita and *City of Glass*, they employ unreliable narrators to destabilise traditional storytelling notions and truth concept. In Humbert’s manipulative self-presentation as well as Daniel Quinn’s disintegrating reality sense, both novels compel readers to question the narrative authority. Unreliable narrators show that storytelling is a complex reflection of objective truth, but subjective construct shaped by manipulation. By doing so, Nabokov and Auster call reader to actively engage with the narrative, inviting them to restructure meaning from unreliable,

fragmented accounts and, rethink the how readers understand truth in literary works.

The unreliable narration in these novels emphasises a postmodern fiction key feature: for its engagement with multiplicity and ambiguity. By offering narratives that resist singular, clear truths, both writers, Nabokov and Auster adopt postmodernism's encounter to objective reality, confirming that meaning is constantly shifting, it never fixed. This narrative technique motivates reader to identify the truth fluidity, to question authority and to challenge the storytelling complexities. Eventually, in postmodern literature, unreliable narrators serve as a good powerful tool for discovering the subjective, fragmented human experience nature, emphasising the broader scepticism of genre toward absolute truth idea and grand narratives.

SUGGESTIONS

For a future direction of research, it would be an exploration of unreliable narrators in other new postmodern texts that could greatly enrich the view of this narrative technique and its consequences. Examination of the transformations in techniques and themes alongside intersections with essential issues like power, identity, and truth could throw insight into how unreliable narration changes in contemporary literature. Here, the possibility for scholars could include tracing postmodern uses of unreliable narration by contemporary writers and possibly how such unreliable narration reflects cultural shifts today or the effect of digital storytelling on such shifts. This line of inquiry could provide more insights into how narrative instability remains relevant in literature today and how it continues to question traditional power and truth claims.

Researchers may examine the unreliable narrator psychology, through investigating the cognitive and psychological dimensions of the narration to analyse how readers' interpretation and perception are affected by deception and ambiguity. The selected novels, for future research could extend to cover and may be examined alongside some contemporary literary texts, such as Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing*, to evaluate how unreliable narration puts readers in confrontation with fractured, raw viewpoint of trauma and identity in a stream-of-consciousness literary text. Also, the American author Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* an experimental novel implies unreliable narration of multiple layers, challenging the concept of objective reality and textual authority, to unreliable narration across various literary works. These comparisons would

illuminate the role of unreliability in gaining the truth. This multidisciplinary method helps researchers to study the wider consequences of probing true storytelling within the postcolonial framework.

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