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MASTER IN
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UNRELIABLE NARRATOR IN *WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN*
BY LIONEL SHRIVER

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Dedication

With great honor, I hold my pen to write these words and dedicate this modest dissertation to my lovely family, dear father and mother, brother and sisters for their encouragement and help.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my lovely nieces and nephews.

Last, but not least I dedicate this work to all who have helped finish this dissertation, to my best friends who have supported me and whom I love.

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the use of unreliability in postmodern literature in particular with reference to Lionel Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* which won the orange prize in 2011 for fictional work. The first part of this dissertation represents an introduction of postmodern literature along with the emergence and the use of unreliable narrator's in postmodern work. The second part examines the use of unreliability in Lionel Shriver's novel which has been interpreted differently by readers because of the ambiguous narration by the narrator. The attempt of this dissertation is to explore the function of the unreliable narrator in Shriver's novel.

KEY WORDS: postmodern literature. Unreliable narrator. Lionel Shriver's novel.

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General introduction

The ambiguous novel is a vaguely defined genre, but at the same time it is considered as one of the most widely read and acclaimed by the readership for its themes, devices, character, and especially for the awaited outcome that makes reader remain in suspense, eager to turn the page. Ambiguous novel has to make readers enjoy from the plot half away between the complex and the obvious which makes us doubt each of the 'suspects', and most decisively, the ending has to be as tremendous as unexpected.

At the same time, we tend to pay so much importance to trying to find out the so-called *who* and the issue of *how* we are told the story. It is precisely here when the figure of narrator start to play a crucial role.

In postmodern literature, narrative entity not only tells the story under a particular perspective, but mostly postmodern authors tend to use unreliability as a narrative device to increase suspense, playing with points of view, in relation to the rest of the characters.. Therefore, there is a tendency for readers to be disposed to fully rely on narrators, to believe the story to be told, we assume that this apparently 'omniscient' voice is as uninformed as we are, and that narrators will be a kind of a 'guide' along with whom we will discover the truth.

However, how would readers react when they suddenly discover that this voice, in whom we have placed our trust, turns to be unreliable, and all that he has told us is big lie? How can readers feel when they discover that they have been deceived all along the reading of the story?

From the extensive list of novels by Lionel Shriver, I have chosen *We Need to Talk about Kevin* which was published in 2003. For materialization of this paper, Shriver has employed unreliable narrator as a main character to reveal the events of the story. The question I raised is why did Lionel Shriver use the unreliable narration in her novel *WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN?*

The attempt of this paper is to conduct an analysis of the use of unreliability in Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* a modern example of unreliable narrator paying attention to the narrative voice which is employed by the author which leads to this false sense of trust

that recreates a game between the narrator and the reader based on deception and the witty use of language.

One of many books I read, and which has helped me to choose this topic in particular is Ford Madox Ford *'The Good Soldier'*, Ford employs the device of unreliable narrator to narrate the events of the story, the narrator has been considered as being unreliable because of his bias, changes in narrative discourse, and uncertainty, which make the book ambiguous and mysterious. Throughout reading the novel, readers feel something wrong, his uncertainty.

Consequently, this dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part is a general introduction to postmodernism, dealing with the flourish of unreliability in postmodern literature. The second part is analyses the use of unreliability in Lionel Shriver's novel, dealing with the language, and narrator strategies that mislead the reader, and introduce ambiguity and suspense.

Introduction

Postmodern age witnesses new changes alter literature, authors use different devices and techniques, and “unreliable narrator” was one of these devices which has been developed mostly by post modern writers. The attempt of this chapter is to discover the new changes that occur in postmodern literature besides examining the flourish of the unreliable narrator in postmodern texts.

1-Postmodern Literature

To speak about postmodernism we have to begin first by introducing the modernist movement in literature, which was a period of new modern changes in literature. Thus, the 20th century witnessed two movements: modernism and postmodernism.

No doubt, before concept of the Postmodernism there was another so-called Modernism. It came into existence to the modern period combined with industrialization, market- oriented capitalist economies, new social classes, democracy, “reason and progress”.

In broad terms, modernism was a set of sudden and unexpected changes which occurred in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. It was such a revolt against the conservative norms and culture of Victorian and aesthetics. People reacted with the break of norms, values and the traditional culture of their society.

In literature, writers adopt a modernist point of view. New modern changes alter literature of the 20th century, and a new type of narration was introduced to their novel which really changed the entire essence of novel writing. “*The unreliable narration*” replaces the omniscient, trustworthy narrator of the preceding centuries and readers were forced to question even the most essential assumptions about how the novel should function. However, postmodernism also established different ideas and concepts in literature and even in music.

Postmodern literature is a type of literature which is noticed by relying on both stylistically

and ideologically on such literary conventions such as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators. Postmodern writers were tending to reject complete meaning in their novels,

poems and stories, and instead, they use multiple meaning, and sometimes an absolute lack of meaning. Postmodern literature also celebrated different genres, forms of writing, and storytelling and they also used new different stylistic techniques; such as magical realism, pastiche, intertextuality, and metafiction, minimalism and maximalism.

The prefix “post” point out to the new period that comes after modernism, according to Sharma and Dr Chaudhary in the book *of Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespear* (2011) where postmodernism is defined as follow:

The term postmodern literature is used to describe certain characteristic of post world war II literature (relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation questionable narrators... and reaction against enlightenment ideas implicit in modernist literature. (1)

This definition shows that postmodernism established in order to identify some features that appears in literature of the post World War II and a rejection to enlightenment’s culture and norms. However, historians agreed that the emergence of Postmodernism was during a different and complex political circumstance, after the end of the World War II especially the cold war, and the emergence of philosophies irrationality; such as surrealism, existentialism, and absurdism.

Dictionary.com (2016) defined the term Postmodernism as follow:

A number of trends or movements in the art and literature developing in the 1970s in reaction to or rejection of the dogma, principles, or practices of established modernism

especially a movement in architecture and the decorative art running counter to the practice and influence of the International style and encouraging the use of elements from historical vernacular styles and often playful illusion, decoration and complexity.

In a narrower sense, postmodernism appeared as a rejection to many literary conventions that emerged in the previous time, and imposes a new point of views. According

Tosh in *History and Historiography* (2005) “the basic percepts of postmodern thought can be summarized as the idea that all old organizing frameworks that took for granted the privileging of various centers, such as Anglo-centric, ethno-centric, and logo-centric, should not be considered as legitimate and natural frameworks” (16)

Postmodernism has appeared firstly in the field of painting, architecture and civil engineering before moving to philosophy, literature, art, technology, and the rest of the humanities and knowledge.

According to Carter in *Literary Theory* (2012) “Postmodernism theory has invaded all the disciplines; such as literature criticism, art, philosophy, ethics, education, sociology, anthropology, science and culture, economic, politics, and architecture”. (43)

It is clear that Postmodernism has moved into different fields, but it was very noticed in the field of literature.

1.1-Characteristics of Postmodern Literature

Postmodernism and Modernism are similar in some characteristics and we cannot understand Postmodernism without relating it to Modernism, thus in order to differentiate Postmodernism from Modernism some critics found that it important to distinguish between the two by discussing the characteristics of Postmodernism.

Postmodernism challenged a long in order to establish a new culture, new ideas, and new values in literature and all human disciplines. Postmodern writers believed in the view of “*there is no absolute truth and truth is relative*”, they argued that the truth is not reflected from human understanding of it. However, it is built from the brain understanding, in order to understand one’s own truth, according to them truth and falsehood are interchangeable, they see that it is impossible to reach the truth, in the sense that there is no ultimate truth, everything is relative; such a view is presented in postmodern work “*Waiting for Godot*”, which for instance, advances that there is no absolute truth and everything can change.

Postmodern literary writers also see the world as something that can never be understood or defined, for them the world is ambiguous and not clear.

Unlike Modernism, Postmodernists denied western ideas, culture, aesthetic, moral values and beliefs. Postmodern authors reject everything related to the Western culture.

Postmodernism characterized by breakdown with Western social and cultural order. Postmodernism is characterized also by doubtful and suspicious views about the deeper and profound truth of experience and life, postmodern literary writers are suspicious of being “profound”, and they argue that this idea is related to the Western value system. Postmodern writers do not prefer to look for deep and interior meaning of objects and events instead they find it better to see the exterior meaning and image rather than illustrating a conclusion or an image of events and objects. They also argued that human life and experience is something ambiguous, unstable, fragmented, and indeterminate; there is no one exact and precise reality, therefore, human life and experiences are internally conflicting and opposing. A very common idea in postmodern work used by most postmodern writers is that authors do not guide and direct readers their literary work. However, they draw such an open gate for readers to create their own association, thus readers should contribute and provide their own interpretation to the work, this idea is to involve the reader to participate and create his own analysis. Postmodernism is well known by its rejection of the modern ideas. Postmodern writers are self-conceptualize and rationalize; which mean that they reject all what is logic and objective, and the refuse to rely on scientific method. However, they prefer to rest with confidence and rely on opinions better than submitting to reality and facts. Writers sink toward what called New Age religion; they criticize what has been claim that Jesus Christ is the absolute and the only path to God, instead they argued that all religions are applicable and convincing, and they all have the importance of a complete faith. Postmodernists propose “Globalization”; they see that the boundaries between countries are obstacles of communication between people and cause wars, for this reason they asked for uniting of countries.

Postmodernism could find a new age by opposing these different ideas and different values which make it special and unique from the previous movements.

1.2-Techniques of Postmodern Literature

Postmodernism has been defined as a reaction or response against Modernism, but the relationship between Postmodernism and Modernism cannot be denied, they share some aspects which make them look same. However, Postmodernism witnessed new and different ideas and techniques especially in literature, new techniques altered postmodern writing such as irony, playfulness, and black humor, pastiche, intertextuality, and metafiction, historiographic metafiction, magical realism, and temporal distortion, maximalism, and minimalism.

Irony, and humor were not used first in postmodern writers, instead they were used before. However, postmodern writers used irony and humor as the official “hallmarks” of their writing; they often tackled historical issues such as the cold war, world war two, conspiracy theories, they depict such subjects, indirectly, ironically, and humorously, it is clear that postmodernists used irony, playfulness, and humor to treat solemn issues.

Pastiche is another postmodern technique which refers to combine or to “past” together. The word pastiche comes from Italian word “pasticcio” which means “a medley of various ingredients: hotchpotch, a farrago, jumbles”, postmodern literature texts used different styles, genres, narrative voice and devices, which have an essential role of the composition of any text. Many postmodern writers combine or “pasted” element of previous genres and styles of literature to create a new narrative voice, or to comment on the writing of the contemporaries, Thomas Pynchon, one of the most postmodern authors, used elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction, songs, pop culture, and references, obscure and fictional history.(Postmodern Characteristics 1.n.d)

Intertextuality is a different technique which recognizes the previous literary work in another literary works. It has been described by the poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966; who was the first one to coin intertextuality in her texts. Intertextuality is forming the text meaning by using other text, here authors borrow and transform a previous text or referencing another text to readers. According to the critic William Irwing (1984) “*the term has come to have almost as many meanings as users, from those faithful to Kristeva’s original vision to those who simply used it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence*” (43) Another definition of intertextuality advances that “*postmodernism embraces extreme notion of intertextuality in which the play of meaning is infinite, in which*

anything goes. The limit of interpretation set only by the boundaries of the imagination".
(*Postmodernism* 244.n.d)

The definition above shows the complexity of intertextuality which became known as everything combined and all literary text related and connected.

Metafiction is a further technique of writing in which the author familiarizes the reader with the fiction of the text they are reading, even though metafiction has appeared in Modern literature, it was used more by postmodern writers, it is a common technique used by many postmodern writers in which the author guides the reader to understand the fictionality of his/her work, and even the presence of the author "*authors sometimes use this techniques to allow for flagrant shifts in narrative impossible jumps in time, or to maintain emotional distance as a narrator*".(*Postmodern Characteristic* 1.n.d)

According to the critic Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-consciousness* (1984) defined metafiction as follow:

A term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose question about the relationship between fiction and reality.(2)

In other words, metafiction in literary text is a manufacture work; the aim of this work is to rise question about connection of fiction and reality. Authors who are famous by using of metafiction in their literary text are: *At Swim-Two Birds* by Flam O'brien, Stephen king's *Misery and Secret Window, Secret Garden*, John Irving's *The World According to Garb, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, to cite but a few.

Historiographic metafiction is another concept related to postmodern technique; it was first developed by Linda Hutcheon, her attempts is to defined historiographical metafiction as a reaction to the separation of literature and history into two separate genres, Hutcheon (1988) claimes that Postmodernism "*should be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafiction and historical in its echoes of the text and contexts of the past*". (93)

Hutcheon (1988) added "*history's referents are presumed to be real, fiction's are not*". (119)

In the sense that history and fiction cannot be divorced and at the same time they cannot be connected or joined together. The term historiographical metafiction used by Hutcheon (1988) to describe fiction that acknowledges and plays with the fact that “*representation of the past are selected to signify whatever the historian intends*” (122)

Hutcheon (1988) further states:

In many historical novels, the real figures of the past are deployed to validate or authenticate the fictional world by their presence, as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a formal and ontological sleight of hand. The metafictional self-reflexivity of postmodern novels presents any such subterfuge, and poses that ontological join as a problem: how do we know the past? (114-116)

In a broader sense, historiographical metafiction links together literature with the past in very proper and creativity manner in order to know the past in fictional world.

Paranoia is a different postmodern technique often used by postmodernists which has been defined as psychotic disorder characterized by delusion of persecution; it is the certainty and the belief of the presence of an ordering system at the back of this disorder world. Postmodernists believe that there is no order system, and according to them looking for an order is something useless and absurd “*many postmodern authors write under the assumption that modern society cannot be explained or understood. From the point of view, any apparent connection or controlling influences on the chaos of society would be very frightening, and this lends a sense of paranoia to many postmodern works*” (*Postmodern Characteristics* 2.n.d) Postmodern writers see the world as something ambiguous and not clear, and any noticeable correlation or controlling toward this confusion and disorder world make a sense of fear.

Magical realism is an important postmodern element, which is characterized by a combination of the fantastic and reality, “*Arguably the most important postmodern technique, magical realism is the introduction of fantastic or impossible elements into a narrative that is otherwise normal. Magical realist novels may include dreams taking place during normal life, the return of previously deceased characters, extremely complicated plots, wild shifts in time, and myth and fairy tales, and becoming part of narrative. Many critics argued that magical realism has its roots in the work of Jorge Louis Borges and*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, two South American writers, and some have classified it as Latin American style” (Postmodernism Characteristics 3.n.d)

The term was coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in (1925). Magical realism presents a fictional story and an extraordinary event and often characters are fabricated, postmodern writers blend reality with magic through using an extraordinary event which causes readers questioning the limits of reality.

Temporal distortion is often used by modern authors, but it became a common technique deployed by postmodern writers, it has been defined as a “*literary technique that uses a non-linear timeline; the author may jump forwards or backward in time, or there may be cultural and historical references that do not fit: Abraham Lincoln uses a telephone in Ishmael Reed’s Flight to Canada. This technique is frequently used in literature, but it has become even more common in films*” (Postmodernism Characteristics 2.n.d). Temporal distortion is often used in order to create an ironic story authors work in humorously with anachronism; they play with time, they may go beyond, repeat, or divide it into several possibilities.

Maximalism is an additional stylistic technique that is often used in postmodern literature. It is a style of writing in which the author uses disorganized the text is lacking order or “chaotic”, and is characterized by its lengthy, overextended, and highly detailed is writing. It contains too many details. However, “*maximalism is nullified by its critics for being turns disorganized, sprawling, overly long, and emotionality disconnected, maximalism exists in the tradition of long works like the Odyssey. Authors that use this technique will sometimes defend their work as being as long as it needs to be, depending on the subject material that is covered*”(Postmodernism Characteristics 2.n.d). This technique has been strongly criticized for being unsystematic, long, but writers who used this style argue the length because of the subjects they tackled.

Unlike maximalism, Minimalism is a different postmodern technique, which is “a style of writing in which the author deliberately presents characters that are unexceptional and events that are taken from everyday life. It is not an exclusively postmodern technique, as many writers, most notably Ernest Hemingway, wrote in a similar style, but some critics claim that Samuel Beckett, one of the most important postmodern author perfected minimalism. In minimalism, authors present characters and events that are definitely

ordinary and frequent, they took their stories from daily life, and it is characterized by its extreme simplicity of form.

Reader involvement or often called participation, it is often introduced throughout straight speak to the reader and direct recognition of the fictional world of the text being introduced. *“Many postmodern authors, as a response to modernism, which frequently set its authors apart from their readers, attempt to involve the reader as much as possible over the course of a novel. This can take the form of asking the reader questions, including unwritten narration that must be constructed by the reader, or allowing the reader to make decisions regarding the course of the narrative”* (Postmodernism Characteristics 3.n.d)

Unlike modern writers, postmodern literature text makes readers participate in their literary work and keeps readers close to the work they introduced and at the same time they can provide authors by their interpretation and even their analysis to the narrative process.

1.3-Major Figures of Postmodernism

Like any movement, Postmodernism has its thinkers, pioneers who strongly contributed to postmodernism by their ideas and theories among them: Michel Foucault, Jean François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard. Even though he refused to classify him as postmodernist, Michel Foucault was one of the major figures of postmodernism, in attempt to challenge the prejudice; he has contributed to postmodernism by his discussing the relation between power, knowledge and truth, he has illustrated the mechanism of the discourse of power that circulate in all community, Foucault has explained why according to him the truth is relative.

In attempt to show why he believes that the truth is relative Foucault advances:

Truth is of the world, it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints...each society has its regime of truth; that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what is true.(qtd in *Discourse*, 2004. 16)

Here Foucault wanted to show how societies and the world favored and chose their truths. According to Mills in *Discourse* (2004); Foucault is concerned with the apparatus whereby

one becomes produced as the dominant discourse and power, and who is in possession of power, are therefore central to what truth and knowledge entail at any given time. (17) Foucault has focused more on the terms: discourse, power, and strength, according to him speeches are strongly associated institutions and scientific knowledge, in the sense that knowledge is an era of what constitutes a speech includes specific rules decided upon by the community, it constitutes the real strength and power, in other words, all the strength and authority of society are expressed in the speech that power and knowledge, the ideas explained by Foucault in his book *The Discourse of Language* (1977) . Foucault argued that there is a common link between knowledge and power. He also institutes multiple and new course of study for historical research and with such ideas as “discontinuity” and “discourse” developed new field of historical conceptualization; furthermore, he shakes the very foundation upon which modern historical scholarship rests, he has greatly occupied the previous camp of historians and therefore become divisive, however, his theoretical works link together postmodern theory and practice into one.

Jean François Lyotard is one of the pioneers of postmodernism. In his famous book *Postmodern Condition* (1979), denies the truth such as Nietzsche. Lyotard, however, confirms that knowledge cannot assert that to be present truth in any total sense; it depends on the actions of language, which is always related to precise context. Here Lyotard owes beholden to Nietzsche, who asserts that enlightenment employs in individual liberation. According to Lyotard postmodernism is really about forms of representation and the ways in which we depict and come to terms with what we call reality; or even if we cannot talk about reality or truth at all. Lyotard (1984) suggests that all forms of representation rely upon narrative in order to validate themselves, and it could be said that all knowledge is primarily narrative as, no matter their medium, all artistic and cultural representation require some metanarrative to explain, validate, or justify them (7) Lyotard (1984) has been considered as one of the leading definers of postmodernism, he defines the movement as follows:

Postmodernism is really about forms of representation and the ways in which we depict and come to terms with what we call reality; or even if we can talk about reality or truth at all. (7)

Lyotard suggests that all forms of representation rely upon narrative in order to validate themselves, and it could be said that all knowledge is primarily narrative as, no matter their

medium, all artistic and cultural representation require some metanarrative to explain, validate or justify them. (ibid)

“The post” in this term intends the Greek preposition *ana*, which is a prefix, can mean “back again”, he adds: “ *the postmodern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)*, Lyotard (1986) means that Postmodernism has nothing to do with the past, or the previous rules as he called metanarrative, instead Postmodernism deals with the modern future, as he said “*simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives*” *metanarrative recommended society to be blend and homogenized, in the sense that it asked people to follow the norms and the beliefs of their society, if they did so they will recognized as good citizens.* (125) However, postmodern society changed in another way, no more homogenized society, because people notice things in different way. Lyotard in his innovative publication *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) explains Postmodernism as a social theory, his apparatus discusses the decline of metanarrative: which is defined as a group of ideas prevailing what is right and what is wrong, which leads people to live write and a good life, and people who disobey religious standards are considered as unfaithful, Lyotard asserts that this method of legitimating disappear in postmodern society, write and wrong , good and bad cannot be noticed from each other. Metanarrative¹ declined because of the sudden and different sources of information and knowledge that altered postmodern society.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard is another postmodern thinker, who has a great contribution to postmodernism. Baudrillard develops a set of concepts called: the floating truth hyperrality, interest in science fiction and take care of the virtual and unreal world, Baudrillard also develops the theory of Signe. According to Baudrillard the clear meaning does not exist; he denies the existence of clear meaning, but he refers to it by the floating signifiers or the absented meaning, therefore, he rejects the distinction between appearances and the facts behind these appearances. (Carter 14. 2012) Baudrillard also rejects the differences between the signifier and the signified, and he believes that signs do not refer to the implication of any reasonable meaning, where the real world is made up of floating concept. He argues that postmodern society is living in what he called “sign culture”, Baudrillard refers to this idea by “simulacrum” which means a copy of an image without the original one, in the sense that there are differences between reality and counterfeit. Baudrillard (1994) also denies the existence of the truth as long as it is closely

¹ Narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge.

linked to language, errors, imaginative rhetoric and the media conjecture, exaggeration metaphorical, and the term “hyperreality”: where something is real only when it moves within the media. (32)

Baudrillard argues that it is difficult to differentiate reality from imaginary; everything is unclear, vague and distorted, he sees postmodern society characterized by this feature, he thinks that society favor remaining in the imaginary world; simply because people think that they can acknowledge reality from the imaginary world.

Both Jean François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard argue that society has tended to seek together total knowledge and information as a source to find solution to all their problem, Lyotard said that in postmodern society, this idea no longer became important process, according to him because of the problem of the use of signs in society. Additionally, postmodernists often reject the idea of being any essence to phenomenon such as truth, meaning, self, or identity. (Postmodernism 159.n.d) According to him everything has changed, nothing remains as it is; norms, rules, beliefs will not remain true for everyone.

2-An Introduction to Narratology

Narratology refers to any study of narrative and narrative perspectives; it is a wide study of what narratives have in common and how they are different from others. However, narratology in literary theory is the study of narrative structure. Ball (1997) defines narratology as:

The theory of narrative, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifact that “tell a story” (3)

However, Jonathan Culler (2001) asserts that narratology includes many fields, he says: “*implicitly united in the recognition that narrative theory requires a distinction between “story” a sequence of action or event conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse and “discourse” the discursive presentation of narration of events*”. (2)

Additionally, Monika Fludernik in *An Introduction of Narratology* (2009) defines Narratology as follows:

Narrative theory- or to use the internationally accepted term narratology ...is the study of narrative as genre, its objective is to describe the constants, variables and combination typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics

of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies). (8)

From the definitions above, it is clear that narratology is the study of narrative as literary type and the study of structure narrative in any literary texts

Narratologists argue that narratology's theoretical descent harks back to Aristotle, but current is assent to have commenced with Russian formalists. The establishment of narratology was imputed in Vladimir's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* in 1928, in which models for folk tales were developed found in seven "sphere of action" and 31 "functions" of narrative, Claude Lévi-Strauss also developed what called structural anthropology in 1958, which formed a grammar of mythology. Furthermore, structural semantic, was instituted by A. J. Greimas in 1966, who suggested a collection of six structural units called "actants", and grammar *décameron* established by Tzvetan Todorov in (1969) who represented the word "narratology"

These names are considered as the foundation of narratology. However, narratology's origin goes back to structuralism's question of using a proper system that can be appropriate to any narrative subject by relating it with grammar used as starting point for parsing sentences in some form of linguistics, according to Monika Fludernik in *An Introduction to Narratology* (2009) argues:

The method of narrative theory are inspired by modern linguistic which demonstrates through a synchronic analysis of *the language system* (Saussure's langue) how language material develops meaningfully from the opposition and combination of basic element (phoneme morphemes, syntagme...ect) . in similar fashion, narrative theory tries to trace how " sentence turn into narrative" (8)

Fludernik (2009) further states:

Considering how linguistics has served as paradigm for narratology, it comes as no surprise that narratologists' models are primarily structuralist and dominated by binary opposition (story vs. discourse, narrator vs., narrate... (ibid)

However, the question that has been raised by Fludernik (2009) where should we locate narrative theory in the overall academic landscape? She argues:

Narratology has traditionally been a sub-discipline of the study of literature and also has particularly close ties to poetics, the theory of genre, and to semiotics, or semiology, of literature. Like genre theory, narrative theory deals with the distinction between lyric, drama and epic, but also focuses on typological, historical and thematic issues in relation to narrative subgenres... (9)

According to Fludernik narrative theory is enthused by modern linguistics; it has been developed from the study of Saussure's *langue* in which language elements are produced from the antagonism and arrangement of the fundamental parts in language. Furthermore, it becomes a sub-field of the study of literature which includes all the literary genres.

2.1-Types of Narration

Many years ago narratologists raised the question of how they can identify types of narratives, in which they can distinguish between the different narrative categories, Monika Fludernik in *An Introduction of Narratology* (2009) advances:

Many early works in narrative theory simply took one or two distinctions as being constitutive of narrative, but for Franz Karl Stanzel and Gerard Genette the question was rather how to reconcile the many different aspects within one coherent system, this scholars, like Chatman, Prince, Lanser and Ball...they proposed taxonomies or (typologies) consisting of categories into which individual narrative could be fitted. (88)

These narratologists were the first to approach narrative typologies by using various methods and ways.

Before identifying types of narrative voice, we have first to define what is a "narrator"? Simply, a narrator is a person or the voice of any story that tells and reveals the events of the story. The narrator is not a character within the story, while reading a story, we can recognize that the narrator is the person who is telling the story, and there are characters who are speaking, and the narrator is speaking directly to the readers, therefore, we can understand that there are two voices in the story the character's voice and the narrator's voice. The most important to know is that in non-fiction works we may see that the narrator's voice and ideas are the same of writer's voice, in other words, the narrator is a character guided by the writer,

the narrator reveals only what the author wants to say, the narrator here is a bridge between the reader and the writer. According to Kate Friedman “*the narrator*” is the one who evaluates, who is sensitively aware, who observes. He symbolizes the epistemological view familiar to us since Kant that we do not apprehend the world in itself, but rather as it has passed through the medium of an observing mind. In perception, the mind separates the factual world into subject and object”. (qtd in Crews, 1998. 14). The narrator is the responsible one in the act of narrating, s/he who familiarizes the readers with the events in the story; they can understand the story through his/her narration. However, in fiction world the narrator’s voice is not the same the author’s voice, and therefore, there are two types of narrator in fiction works: the first-person and third-person.

The first-person narrator is a type of narrator where the narrator communicates directly by using the first-person pronoun (I, we...ect), in first-person, the narrator reveals the story from his own knowledge and experiences, according to Fludernik (2009): “*The first-person narrative situation is predicated on the fact that one of the characters in the story also functions as the narrator*” (90). She adds: “...*first-person narratives increasingly concentrated on the experiencing itself, alluding only vaguely to the telling of the story. These narratives seem to be entirely located in the experiences of the protagonists*”. (ibid)

Laure Ryan in *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theory* 1993 defines “the narrator” advancing: “*In a narrative text, the narrator is the speaking “voice” which takes responsibility for the act of narration*” (85)

The word “voice” used in order to identify the style or the rhetoric of the author “voice” has been more gain emphasis in narrative theory, which was an answer of the question “who speaks?”, Genette (1972) argued that the voice is both “the generating of narrative discourse” , and the final instance of it(213-157)

The quotations above went into one idea, which is; the narrator has the same position of the author, and sometimes the narrator can function also as the main character in the story. However, in the third- person, the narrator is an outsider, s/he is not a character within the story, but s/he knows all that is happening around, and s/he is familiar with the events have been represented, but within the third-person narrator, there are two main types of third-person view points: the third-person omniscient and the third-person limited.

The third-person omniscient is when the narrator spot light on multiple characters, even though there is the main character, s/she recounts the events, knows all that is happening, presents the characters and every single detail about the story, but s/he is not a character or a participant in the story, his/her knowledge, control, his/her privilege and hereditary or right are not limited. Booth argues in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) “the most important unacknowledged narrators in modern fiction are “third-person” centers of consciousness through whom authors have filtered their narrative” (153)

Therefore, the third-person narrators are considered as the mirror as Booth called “reflector” who reflects the author’s thoughts and ideas.

Omniscient narrator also called authorial narrator who has absolute control and has total right to take the role of the author “when we refer to an authorial narrator, we mean to say that the narrator takes a role resembling that of the author of the narrative in question. S/he is reliable, in total control (holds the puppets’ strings in her/his hands, as it were) and “manages” that arrangement of time frames settings and characters themselves. (Fludernik 93, 2009)

Unlike omniscient narrator, the third-person narrator limited, also called omniscient limited, s/he a narrator whose voice is connected with the major or minor characters, whose knowledge and control are limited in the story, s/he is notable either to see or to know all what is happening in the story, the only thing s/he can do is to connect thoughts and ideas of one or some characters, s/he is not absolutely familiar with the events.

Though there are different types of narration, however, the function of the narrator remains the most important in reflecting the author’s thoughts and ideas.

3-Unreliable Narration as a Type of Narratology

3.1-Definition of Unreliable Narrator

The narrator is the person who is telling a story or events in a book, a news papers articles, in everyday life even in a cafeteria, in other words, anyone is telling something is considered as a narrator. It is well known that we as readers, while reading a book, news paper articles, or any story told by others, we believe every single word said, that this is the definite truth, we trust those narrators as what has been said by them is their feelings, their opinions, and their ideas, and what they are saying is the truth. We rely on their narration as the absolute truth. However, not all narrators are reliable, here the reader needs to distinguish

the reliable narrator from the unreliable, some narrators intentionally reveal stories, and events which are not true and they do not make straightforward and honest depiction of what really happen to them, the door is open then for interpretations, the reader is free to judge either to believe or not. What is unreliable narrator then?

Unreliable narrator is a type of first-person narrator; it is a character whose credibility has been seriously compromised. The term is first introduced in Whayn.C.Booth's (1961) *Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth defines the unreliable narrator as follows:

I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms) unreliable when he does not. (158-9)

According to Booth the reliable narrator is the person who make honest rendering to the events that happened to him or her, and unreliable when he or she does not follow the norms of the implied author. Unreliable narrator then is one who deviates from a moral principles and standards which is unpromising to change, thus his deviation and his violating without warning and suddenly take the reader into uneasy irony.

In fiction works, or even in our daily life, the unreliable narrator is the person or a character that cannot be trusted, through narrating, this narrator speaks with bias, he makes mistakes, and sometimes lies. David Lodge added in *The Art of Fiction* (1992): "*The unreliable narrators are invariably invented characters who are parts of stories the tell...*" (152)

The narrator is palpably false, that only tells what we know already, namely that a novel is a work of fiction. There must be some possibility of discriminating between truth and falsehood within the imagined world of the novel, as there is in the real world, for the story to engage our interest. The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter. (154-5). The definition by Lodge shows that the unreliable narrator is a created character whose ideas and opinions are fabricated in order to create a mystery world in the novel. He or she either intentionally distorts the real truth, or unintentionally cannot portray what really happen, and then he or she gives a false interpretation to the story.

In attempt to define unreliable narrator Herman et al in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative* (2005) theory argue: “*In unreliable narration... the teller of the a story cannot taken on his or her word*” (623) Neuman and Nunning (2011) further state: “*Those narrators whose account or interpretation of events gives the reader a cause for mistrust have been called “unreliable narrators”*”. (98)

Additionally, Jonathan Culler in *the Introduction to Literary Theory* (1997) defines unreliability as follow:

Narrators are sometimes termed *unreliable* when they provide enough information about situation and clues about their own biases to make us doubt their interpretation of events, or when we find reasons to doubt that narrator shares the same values as the author. (188)

Even though, definition vary, but they converge toward the same view which is; the narrator who creates a doubtful and suspicious atmosphere, readers cannot rely on his/her narration.

3.2- Types of Unreliable Narrator

William Riggan is one of the critics of unreliable narrator in his book; *Picaro, madmen, naiifs, and clowns* (1981). He asserts that unreliable narrators appear when they give voices to narrate their own stories. In 1981, Riggan developed in his study of unreliability different types of unreliable narrator and classified them according to their function in the story, and according to their different characteristics, authors use unreliability differently, thus, they classify as follow: naïve narrator, the ignorant narrator, the liar, the madmen or insane narrator, the picaro.

The Naïve narrator is considered as a type of unreliable narrator, which is often represented by children, who cannot be recognized as liars, but their limited experience and their innocence lead them to say thing that cannot be complete or sound logical, in which their narration mislead all the time. A child who is not developed enough readers cannot take his/her narration seriously, that is why naïve narrators are considered unreliable, such example presented in the work of: Forest Gump, Huckleberry Finn and Holden Culfield.

Unlike naïve narrator, the ignorant narrator is a different type of narrator, though some people argue that an ignorant is naïve. However, an ignorant narrator cannot be naïve like a

child, because, they called ignorant simply when they narrate they ignore some specific features which can be very important in the story they are narrating. Therefore, ignorant narrators are unreliable because they do not render the events honestly, they do not narrate the story seriously, and they often manipulate and play with the reality.

Another type of unreliable narrator is the liar; here the narrator is totally developed who intentionally misreports events, and hides the truth, his/her main purpose is to make readers believe him/her personal point of view s/he often creates an ambiguous atmosphere, such as John Dowell in *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford, who exemplifies the liar in order to cover his inappropriate and his shameful past.

The madmen or the insane is a further type of unreliability, this narrator is unreliable because he may has a mental disease or a psychological problem such as paranoia or schizophrenia, which make him/her telling things from his/her mad world, and narrates events from his/her emotion, even in our life we can meet a lot of crazies who has mental problem or they are totally diminished, those people cannot differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, and between reality and fake, simply because their mental ability cannot make them think appropriately. As result, readers cannot rely on those people's narration, especially, if they could recognize this narrator has a mental problem examples include: Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*.

The picaresque is different type of unreliable narration; where the narrator tells the story with overstatement and exaggeration s/he often magnifies things, and represent story with in an excessive manner, s/he goes beyond the bound of the truth. Examples includes Moll Flanders; *Simplicius Simplicissimus*.

According to Riggan (1981), the picaresque traced back to the picaresque novels of the late 17th century, even though, as Riggan asserts picaresque's ancestors go back to even more to Greek and Roman adventure tales and their inheritors: Pranksters disillusioned with the lofty artifice of the medieval romance, the word "picaresque" is varied. However, it describes a rascal and rogue who narrates an adventurous stories with vulgar and a representation of chaotic view of the world.

The picaresque is an "unheroic" figure often represented by a thief who belongs to the lowest society, therefore, he tries to overcome his circumstances, along his life he suffers, and thus, the picaresque narrates his adventures. (34.38)

According to Riggan (1981) the madman narrator is perhaps the best-known unreliable speaker because his/her fantastic, anxiety-ridden voice is too easy to read through his plight such a well-worn trope in narrative conventions, but the naïf may be the rarest, Riggan also asserts that the naïf's narration sometimes presents social critic unlike the picaro who has little experience which lead him/her to create an imaginary stories from his/her mind.

3.3-The Emergence of Unreliable Narrator

Many years ago, the following idea was announced by Yakobi (1981):

There can be little doubt about the importance of the problem of reliability in narrative and in literature as a whole. It arises with respect to every speaking and reflecting participant in the literary act of communication, from the interlocutors in dialogue scenes to the overall narrator to the author himself; and its resolution determines not our view of the speaker alone but also of reality evoked and the norms implied in and through his message. And the problem is (predictably) as complex and (unfortunately) as ill defined as it is important. (113)

The statement above by Yakobi raises a very important issue which is the question: "is the narrator in literary work reliable or not?" this question creates a doubt and the importance of reliability of the narrator imposes narratologists to generalize their work and judge the problem of reliability in literary works. This debate for better or worse leads to the emergence of what is called unreliability in literary text. Unreliable narration was an issue demonstrated many years ago. However, at the turn of the last century, Yacobi's statement was reflected by Bruno Zerweck in his essay *Historicizing Unreliable Narration* (2001) where he advances:

It seems hardly necessary to emphasize how important the concept of unreliable narrator has been in literary studies since it was introduced by Wayne C, Booth in 1961. (151)

The concept of unreliable narrator was used in several medieval fictional Arabic tales such as *One Thousand and One Night*, and many different fictional text. However, the term unreliable narrator was first described by Booth (1961), he discussed the concept with relation to the implied author, he argued that the narrator is reliable when he follows the author's norms, and he is unreliable when he does not. Since Wayne Booth's representation of the

concept of unreliable narrator in 1961, unreliability has become one of the most disputed issues in narratology, this concept has led to different studies to reexamine the common understanding of the concept, thus lately the concept of unreliable narration has been encouraged by some narratologists, they argued like Fludernik (2001) asserts that unreliable narration has become “*a hot issue in narratology*” (98) or as Nunning (2005) argues “*such central issue in contemporary narrative theory*” (91)

Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), explains that the unreliable narrator was first coined by Booth, he defines unreliable narrator when he discusses the types of narration, and Booth says that he called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms) and unreliable when he does not. (158), according to Booth he called unreliable when s/he deviates from the norms of the implied author. Booth further adds:

Unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author’s norms; the older “tone”, like the currently fashionable terms “irony” and “distance”, covers many effects that we should distinguish. (159)

The first sentence by Booth reinforces Booth’s standards idea of how unreliable narrators are widely and differ from the norms and values of the implied author, but the last sentence shows that Booth sees the unreliable narrator used for irony.

Booth also distinguishes between various types of unreliable narrators; he uses terms such as “*unreliable*”, “*untrustworthy*”, “*inconscience*” (unconscious) and “*fallible*” in order to create a distinction between these different types of narrator. The terms “*unreliable*” and “*untrustworthy*” imply that the narrator goes out from the norms of the text, and then the narrator cannot be considered as a trustful narrator, but the term “*unconscious*” and “*fallible*” imply that the narrator is doing mistakes and errors according to how they see the fictional world, though fallible narrator tries to be reliable but s/he fails because of s/he false report and false interpretation. However, many years later, Phelan evaluates Booth’s views about unreliable narrator and adds his orientations “*knowledge*”, “*perception*”, Phelan states that a “*character narrator is “unreliable” when he or she offer an account of some events, person, thought, thing or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account the implied author would offer*” (2005,49)

The emergence of the concept unreliable narrator was introduced and coined by the narratologist Wayne C, Booth in his studying of the Rhetoric of Fiction, and appear to be a debate discussed by most narratologists.

3.4 -Reconsidering Unreliable Narrator

Sometimes the reader is not aware of the narrator's identity, simply because some unreliable narrators are extraordinarily persuasive; they can easily convince the reader, and then make the reader believe every single word, and cannot notice what is really going on, readers may surprise, when they discover all that happen was not really the truth, and sometimes the last version of the events can shock the readers, when they come across the real story.

In many stories, many writers present the unreliable narrator as a first-person narrator to reveal a version of events of a story. In such type of narration; the first-person narrator uses the pronoun "I", the pronoun shows that the narrator is a character inside the story, in other words he has the same status as the implied author. According to narratologists, all first persons are unreliable, because they are narrating and recounting events and stories from their own experiences, life, and their points of views. First person narrators will do anything to make their own recounting look true and unique for many purposes, some narrators are more unreliable than others. They strongly misinterpret and misreport events, leading readers to make their own judgment, either to believe or not. First person narrators can be a source of intrigue; their incredibility can create such a tension for readers, who begin to question their recounting of events and the complexity of the character. However, not all readers are familiar with such type of narration. The readers while reading a story or a novel with unreliable narration are lost in their words, many questions could be raised while reading a story with untrustworthy narrators, but the problem is how can readers recognize unreliable narrator? In stories and novels with unreliable narrator, there are some tricks that familiarize readers with the identity of the narration, while reading the reader can differentiate between reality and fantasy simply because the unreliable narrator speaks with bias, makes mistakes, and even lies. In some cases readers sometimes enjoy discovering the truth, and they look for the reason of narrator's unreliability and go deeper in order to understand his motives and desires, most readers find creating such unreliability intentionally or unintentionally intriguing. Typically, some writers use unreliability to create an interesting "narrative form"; narrative form is a

term used to describe a formation or the type of a novel or a story is being narrated, and besides they choose unreliability for rhetoric² purpose, in which the story seems very interesting and in very appropriate manner, Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fictions* (1961) asserts:

...the author cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can choose only the kind of rhetoric he will employ. He cannot choose whether or not to affect his readers' evaluation by his choice of narrative manner; he can only choose whether to do it well or poorly. (149)

Unreliable narrator became a strong technique, and an important tool to have an interesting novel or a story. Additionally, some writers choose unreliability to build suspense, and create tension which make the readers along the story ask what's going on and they begin to look for the full information in order to understand the reality of the story until the end they are surprised by the truth and the real identity of the narrator, others find that unreliable narrator is wonderful, delicious element, their curiosity keeps them looking for the truth while reading the story, another effect of using unreliable narrator, writers often use unreliable narrator in order to make the reader involves and create a critical view for the story, along the story, they keep their critical mind alive, so that readers try to question what really happened, such character has ominous motives. In some stories; he or she is hiding something, the story then is ambiguous, along the novel the unreliable narrator is misleading the readers, they start to ask many questions and the main question may raise as the identity of the narrator, therefore readers are absolutely asked to distinguish between reality and fantasy and they should understand the hidden truth and understand what is between the lines. However, this unreliability makes the story fascinating and intriguing, and builds tension, the reader then is entirely oblivious and unaware of narrator's real character. Another effect of unreliable narrator is that it makes the reader sinks in the ideas and point of view of the narrator while reading the reader analytically distanced from the character. The unreliability of the narrator in any story poses a philosophical question by the reader; as what truth in story really is. Also it poses the question of where the loyalty of the story should be placed.

Yakobi (1981) in attempt to explain the use of reliability and unreliability advances:

Reliability and unreliability value judgments or description? Data or conjectures?
Gradable or ungradable contrasts? Autonomous features or products or fixed

² The art of using language for persuasion.

combinations of other features? Such, in telegraphic style, are the cruxes that the theory of fiction for the most part either neglects or inadequately treats, for reasons that will emerge in due course. (113)

Here Yakobi refers to the point that for any reason, reliability and unreliability are the “cruxes” and important elements that can be either disregarded or not used in adequate manner in fiction, and appeared when it is needed. Grete Olson (2003) argues that the use of unreliable narrator in literary works for irony he asserts:

Irony provides the formal means by which distance is created between the views, actions, and voice of unreliable narrator and those of the implied author. (94)

Booth (1961) gives a further explanation for the function of unreliable narrator he advances:

Secret communication, collusion, and collaboration. All of the great uses of unreliable narration depend for their success on far more subtle effects than merely flattering the reader or making him work. Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point; he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. (304)

Booth adds:

Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding, as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least a part for their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point... (ibid)

Booth highlights as Olson the use of unreliable narrator for the ironic purpose, and what is wonderful in using unreliability is “the secret communication, collusion, and collaboration” between the reader and the author.

To conclude, though, the device of unreliable narrator is used differently, its great use depend on its success and acceptance by the readers.

4- Unreliability in Postmodern Literature

Even though unreliability has emerged during modernism, its development and flourishing in postmodern age raised a very important question which is how did unreliability influence postmodern literature to be a key concept in postmodern work?

Postmodernism is a notoriously difficult and contested term, for its opponent signals the twentieth century's abandonment of truth and reason in favor of a world that is known only through images, signs, or copies. Postmodern writing is basically fiction of the medium. Rather than representing the external world, postmodern literature folds in upon itself in order to explore its own linguistic and literary convention. Richard Pearce (1974), for example argues that, "*postmodernist fiction manipulates the categories of narration and focalization in such a way that 'the medium asserts itself as an independent source of interest and control'*" (72) Christopher Butler's (1980) exposition of aleatory and serial strategies circles around the idea that the work of art thus organized does not refer to an external reality, but to the artificiality of the devices we use to create the illusion of external reference. (41)

Postmodernism has been defined as the literature of ontological doubt, which does not merely abstain from representing reality, but even suspends the belief in the very existence of a paramount reality. Supposedly, postmodern writers have given up on the attempt to represent reality because "reality" is experienced as amorphous and chaotic, such reality cannot provide correspondences with or referents for the ordering structure of the human mind.

Another reason behind the flourishing of unreliability in postmodern text, is that postmodernism witnessed the development of psychoanalysis, and the discovery of psychological problems such as schizophrenia, paranoia, insanity, therefore, postmodern authors depicted those who have mental disability as being narrators. In order to say not all narrators are reliable, there are some writers whom we cannot trust their narration. According to Nunning (2005) "*the use of unreliable narrator became very popular by the mid 20th century in part due to psychological realism and extra veracity given to a story by an unreliable narrator.*" (49)

It is clear that the development of unreliable narrator happened because of many reasons. Recently, postmodern literature witnessed new changes, new techniques, which show that postmodern authors wanted to establish new literary techniques and devices. Nunning in *But*

why will you say that I am Mad? (1997) also point out that “*the almost steady rise of the unreliable narrator since the end of the eighteenth century suggests that there is indeed a close connection between the development of this narrative technique and the changing notion of subjectivity*” (95) Even though, Fiction writers did not invent this device. They were simply reflecting the emerging cultural discourse whereby moral and epistemological questions were growing increasingly ambiguous. These new narrators were “modern” in the sense that they resembled a great many of us. Even though unreliability does not originate by fiction writers, it has been used more in fictional works.

Furthermore, one of the postmodern techniques is reader involvement hence; novels that employ unreliable narrator lead the reader to involve themselves in the text in order to understand the story. Postmodern author appreciate the idea of involving the reader within the work in order to give their interpretations and points of view. They often like to address directly to the reader, thus, unreliability has been strongly employed in postmodern literature

Conclusion

Literature of postmodern age symbolizes the period of new changes in literary works. Postmodern authors celebrate different genres, form of writing, and the use of unusual narrative voice. “Unreliable narrator”, is one of the postmodern devices that emerged during postmodern age. Even though unreliability emerged in modern literature, it has flourished and been used mostly by postmodern writers.

Chapter two: unreliability in *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

Introduction

By taking one of Lionel Shriver's most interesting novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* which won the orange prize for fiction in 2011, as a case study. The purpose of the present chapter is to examine the use of the unreliable narrator including the language of the narrative voice and the strategies used in narrative discourse which show the identity and the unreliability of the narrator.

1- Analyzing *We Need to Talk about Kevin's* Novel

We Need to Talk about Kevin (2003) by Lionel Shriver, won the orange prize in (2011). The novel is basically narrated by a first-person narrator; the mother Eva revealing her life story from her own perspective. Eva is a happy successful publisher of Bohemian travel guide, she loves traveling all over the world, and she loves her work and her life with her husband Franklin. However, her life changes to the worst when she knew that she is pregnant. From the beginning the reader discovers that the narrator; Eva Katchadorian is writing to her estranged husband Franklin, who is dead. The readers learn about their relationship and their life in the form of flashback, as she remember how was her life after and before her son Kevin's murder, who killed his classmates, a teacher, cafeteria worker, and his father and his sister because of her cold, judgmental, and hatred, since he was in her womb she hated and refused him, but she has decided to accept him for better or for worse. Epigraphs are like appetizers to the main great dish of a novel, they illuminate important aspects of the story, and they get us headed in the right direction "A *child needs your love most when he deserves it least*". By Emma Bombeck, this epigraph is very significant, it gives the main idea of the novel, it seems that Lionel Shriver is telling us about the content of the novel from this quotation used at the beginning of the novel; it applies to all stages of Kevin's life. Eva never seems to love Kevin, that's what makes his becoming a murder.

Baby needs unconditional love, positive affirmation warmth, this help them to become emotionally secure and developed, but Eva was selfish, judgmental, and cold mother, in the following quotation reader sees Eva declaring her bad treatment to her son:

“I expect it’s my fault” I said defiantly. “I wasn’t a very good mother, cold, judgmental, selfish...” (180)

However, the reader is left to consider whether Eva’s stories are a means to confirm her innocence to Franklin, further doubt on who to blame is seen when Eva always asks if she was a “bad mother”, it seems that Eva feels guilty of what did was because decencies as being a good mother, there is statement in the novel in which Eva asks Franklin if he can forgive her:

“... He commanded me to stop dithering about how it looked, accepting a reputation as a Bad Mother, and he clearly couldn’t have cared less about whether I really was a bad mother. (And Franklin, I was, I was terrible at it. *I wonder if you can ever forgive me*).

(75, emphasis is mine)

Reader may ask why Eva is writing to Franklin who already knew everything. Eva lives with self-recrimination; she decides to write to her estranged husband as a kind of relief or to discharge herself from her son’s massacre. Readers at the beginning may sympathize with Eva when they read of Kevin as an “evil child” however, after more emphasizing on Eva’s narration the reader is surprised by the reality that Eva is an unreliable narrator because the story is narrated from her own perspective. If had her husband Franklin been alive, his version could have been totally different.

2-Relying on the Unreliable: the Role of the Unreliable Narrator in the Novel

The narrator is the voice giving us access to the world of the story, the reader learns about rules and events of the universe from the narrator. This means that an unreliable narrator makes the world of the story unstable; readers begin to lose their hold on the reality of the text Patrick Colm Hogan in *Narrative Discourse* (2013) states that:”*narratives place narrators in a position of structural authority. Thus in all likelihood, readers begin with*

presumption of narrator reliability and lose trust in a narrator only once they have reason to do so" (155). It is the readers' habit while reading initially to take every single word by the narrator as the truth, and they do not believe the narrator if they find that the narrator is deviating from the usual norms. Rimmon Kenan in *Narrative Fiction* (2002) argues that the reader implies narratorial reliability if the writer does not lead them away from this belief (100)

In order to distinguish the reliability of the narrator from his/her unreliability we have to know first the role of narrator in the story. The narrator is either an external voice, or a part of the text, the narrator who is a part of the story is always unreliable. Per Krogh Hansen in *Reconsidering the Unreliable Narrator* (2007) defines four types of unreliability; intranarrational unreliability, internarrational unreliability, intertextual unreliability and extratextual. (241)

The intranarrational unreliability is detected when the narrator seems to hide something from the reader. The internarrational unreliability occurs when there are several narrators in a text who contradict each other, intertextual unreliability is an example of genre or character type or character type or where the reader would expect narratorial unreliability. However, extratextual unreliability is something different, this type depends on readers applying their own knowledge or values to the text and using these as basis for doubting the narrator's reliability.

When the narrator is a character in the story, all the events are the narrator's points of view and are told from his own perspective. Initially, it seems that the narrator is honestly rendering the events, but from the narrator's bias, changing and slip and when we focus more we discover that s/he is untrustworthy and then s/he is unreliable narrator, thus we know the role of the narrator within the story. In *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, the role of the narrator Eva is not one hundred percent clear for all readers, since the interpretation of the novel is divided into different points of view; this is the purpose of the unreliable narrator which is to mislead the reader, and his role depends on how S/he wants readers understand his/her narration. Eva; Kevin's mother in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003), presents Kevin as a monster, psychopath, and an evil child, she magnifies things, she is always ready to believe the worst of Kevin. However, after the school shooting committed by her son, Eva starts to recognize that what Kevin did was because of her hatred to her son. She lives with self-

recrimination, and then she begins to write letters to her dead husband to clearance and acquit herself from what her son did. Eva says:

“I expected it is my fault”, I said defiantly “I wasn’t a very good mother, cold, judgmental, selfish. Though you can’t say that I haven’t paid the price” (180)

Here, Eva; the unreliable narrator is one whose story cannot be trusted; she might lie or stretch the truth when narrating the story which makes it hard to figure out what actually was the truth.

3- Narrative Distance between the Narrator and the Implied Author

Wayn .C.Booth is credited for coining the term “unreliable narrator” the oft-cited quotation appears on his great work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: “I have called the narrator reliable when speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the author’s norms) unreliable when he does not.” (1961. 158) It is generally believed that Booth created the concept of the “implied author” as a means of getting around the actual one, it was in (1961), and the new critics were arguing strongly against authorial attention, Booth meanwhile, was about to publish a book in (1974) with rhetoric in the title. Clearly, he could not disown the author altogether; he needed another agent. His description of the term seems to support this idea “the implied author is always distinct from the ‘real man’. Whatever we take him to be who creates a superior version of him, a ‘second self’, as he creates his work” (151) we can take this oft-cited quotation to mean that Booth believes that the author, in the act of creation, is simultaneously creating a mask: attempting to better oneself through the work. James Phelan (2005) agrees with Booth, adding: “Booth definition of the implied author fits nicely with his overall denial of the ideal of the impersonality” (.39) this supported by another of Booth’s description in *the Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961):

As [the author] writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal “man in general” but an implied version of ‘himself’ that is different from the implied author we need in other men’s works...However impersonal [the author] may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe will never be neutral toward all values (70-71)

Booth's immediate problem was how to argue in favor of authorial rhetoric while steering clear of intentionality. The implied author was supposedly designed to solve this problem, and the reason for the focus on it here is that the implied author, according to rhetorical model, is the "Yardstick" by which to measure the narrator's reliability. If we do away with the implied author, we destabilize the entire model. Seymour Chatman (1978) originally described the implied author as an entity "*reconstructed by the reader from the narrative not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative* (148)

Rimmon Kenan in *Narrative Fiction* (2002) calls the implied author the "governing consciousness" of the work and the "source of [its] norms" and also "a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (87-88) The implied author is "reconstructed and 'invented'; a 'source' and a 'construct' that it appears to be both a manager of the text's construction and embodied in the work itself as clearly problem.

Mieke Ball in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* identifies Wayne C. Booth's concept of the implied author as important because it allows for a discussion of morality of the text without having to connect this to the morality of the physical author. The implied author is the product of the reader and the text, and not of any other actual physical authors or other textual information. Ball (1992) claims that the implied author was popular among critics and theorists because "*it promised to account for the ideology for the text without condemning its author and vice-versa a very attractive proposition to autonomists of the 60's.*"(42). Having initially ignored the concept altogether Gérard Genette offers a complete takedown of the implied author in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1980), the core of his argument being that the agency is simply unnecessary we have an author, a narrator or, and a reader and anything else gums up the works. Furthermore, he concurs with Ball's assessment of the concept's timeliness: "*at a time when the dissociation between the (real) author and the narrator was not very common, implied author served to mark their difference*" (139) it seems that the better solution would be to focus on the gap between the author and the narrator, our preexisting identifiable agents instead Booth uses such "misreading" as a pretext to formulate his theory about the presumed difference between the author and the ghostly surrogate that's the culprits, if only more people could recognize that the author creates a 'second self' then reader response would go so much smooth here even within the insular bubble of literary criticism, this seems like something of a leap. Indeed, Booth's *Resurrection of the Implied Author* (2005), most recent essay on the subject reads at

times like an extrapolation on an already amorphous value system: “*in every corner of our lives, whenever we speak or write, we imply a version of our character that we know is quite different from many other selves that exhibited in our flesh-and-blood world.*” (77) Of course we wear marks in our everyday lives this is axiomatic, but why would we need to “*resurrect*” the implied author? The term is still employed faithfully within the field of narratology, though it has been noticed that some theorists have relegated “implied” to parentless (as if to placate), this gets to the heart of the current debate as it see,: if one encounters the implied author at all, it’s generally within the confines of narrative theory, and every here, one can simply replace “implied author” with “author” in virtually any context. In fact, the only time one finds the implied author emphasized consistently is when (case in point) the implied author is the subject matter. Booth (1961) himself regularly drops the term, even when it would seem pertinent to his argument: our pleasure is compounded of pride in our own knowledge, ridicule of the ignorant narrator, and a sense of collusion with silent author who, also knowing the facts, has created the trap for his narrator and for those readers who will not catch the allusion.(305) “*at every point we must decide on one out of many possible reconstruction, on the basis of a set of unshakable but silent beliefs that we are expected to share with the author*” (168)

Chatman Seymour in *Story and Discourse* (1978) jumped into the dispute with his appropriately titled “*in defense of the implied author*” in which he argues that concept is necessary because it “*ensure against simplifying the reader’s relations with the text and reducing them, as some contextualist theories would, to one more instance of ordinary conversational exchange.*” (74). Chatman argues that we need the implied author because sometimes the narrator is being ironic, and well, that can be confusing. “big deal” to describe any number of situations that he, the narrator, clearly regards as trivial.

At last James Phelan, one of the implied author’s most enthusiastic defenders acknowledges toughness of the sell. In his book *Living to Tell about it* (2005), he describes the concept as a violation of “occam’s razor” and concedes Genette’s point that insisting on a distinction between the author and the implied author is multiplying entities beyond necessity (45) still; Phelan’s rhetorical nails are dug pretty deep. “*Rhetorical theory’s interest not in the author’s private intention, but rather in his or her public, textualized intention entails locating authorial agency in the implied rather than the actual author*”. (2005. 135) Squint and “public, textualized intentions” become plain old “intention”, though I don’t think Phelan would see it this way, in a sort of Hail Marry pass aimed at declaring the implied author

indispensable he cites Genette as an unlikely “[As] Genette notes the [implied author] helps explain such phenomenon as hoaxes, ghost written works, and collaborative works” (2005. 46) what Phelan neglects to mention is that Genette, having roused the issue only to play devil’s advocate, ultimately declares these instances inapplicable due to their “fraudulent” status (2005. 47) parodies are parodies, hoaxes are hoaxes, ghost-written works are a matter of marketing and collaborative works are sufficiently categorized by the multiple names attributed. Simply put, there’s nothing implied in any of these cases. Like Booth, Phelan’s relentless quest to reroute authorial agency while by passing intentionality is understandable but unconvincing. At one point, he proclaims that “*the implied author is not a product of the text but rather the agent responsible for bringing the text into existence*” (2005. 45)

Elsewhere he defends locating intentionality in the implied author by saying “*that we both come to know an author through reading his or her text and to recognize that the author has a life independent of the identity projected in the text*” (2005. 136)

Booth (1961) draws a distinction between two types of unreliable narrators: those who are morally distant from the author and those who are intellectually distant. He cites Jason Compson, the narrator featured in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, as example of the former. “Though our path Jason’s perverted moral world is clarified in many ways by what has come before essentially it is built out of secret jokes passing between ourselves and the author (306)

The “norms” exemplified by the narrator are at variance with those of the author, Seymour Chatman (1978) agrees, though he places greater emphasis on the reader’s role “*(the reader) senses a discrepancy between a reasonable reconstruction of the story and the account given by the narrator. The sets of norms conflict, and the covert set, once recognized must win.*” (233) of course, this aesthetic distance between narrators and readers had already been covered by Booth (1961): “*the narrator may be more or less distant from the reader’s own norms*” (156) he cites Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* as an extreme example.

Usually, it is well known that the author of a story the narrator at the same time, but in case of using the unreliable narrator, the author is distant from the narrator by following Booth statement “the narrator is distant from the author if he deviates from author’s norms”

4-Eva Katchadorian: the Unreliable Narrator

4.1-Language of the Unreliable Narrator

As general rule, homodiegetic³ narrators' discourse is charged with narrative strategies to cause some explicit effect in the readership, with stylistic and rhetoric devices, with direct appeals to the receiver, etc. The purposes tend to be diverse: from embellishing the narration involving the address in the story, to provide the message with multiple interpretations and connotation, misleading the reader into reaching wrong conclusion. In *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003), Lionel Shriver uses a narrator whose most powerful weapon to deceive the reader language, thus Eva Katchadourian plays in a cunningly witty way with multiple possibilities that language offers to disguise the truth.

In relation to the infinite dimensions language presents, perhaps the most successfully way to convey the mother's testimony is lies and obscurity in her speech and her utterances can be interpreted at least from two different perspectives: either she was bad mother or Kevin was psychopath.

The most attractive thing in the novel is that the author uses a narrator who is already a writer Eva the unreliable narrator is a travel guide writer and we can see in the first page that she is writing letter to her estranged husband Franklin: "*Dear Franklin, I'm ensure why one trifling incident this afternoon has moved to me to write to you*" (1, 2003) This is one of the clearest examples of Eva's ambiguity and obscurity when telling her story. She is not completely lying. In fact she cannot predict that she will be discovered. However, she uses very specific and ingeniously chosen words to express herself and at the same time to mislead the reader, such as "foreseen", "pretend" or "worried", in this way we tend to associate the idea of worried with the guilty feeling, remorse and consequently with being a bad mother, and what her son did was because of her misbehaved and hatred toward him, Eva says:

Then, while I do hope this correspondence has not degenerated into shrill self-justification, I *worry* equally that I may seem to be laying the groundwork for claiming that Kevin is all my fault. I do indulge that sometimes, too, gulping down blame with a powerful thirst. But I did say indulge. There's a self-aggrandizement

in this wallowing mea culpas, a vanity. Blame confers an awesome power.

(72, emphasis is mine)

"The point is, I don't know what exactly I'd *foreseen* would happen to me when

³ Homodiegetic is the narrator who is present as a character in the story.

Kevin was first hoisted to my breast, I hadn't *foreseen* anything exactly, I wanted what I could not imagine..." (87, emphasis is mine)

Language also lets readers recognize, and later understand several details that are almost imperceptible and that would only be plausible and coherent if someone who is actually mistaken. Another example of how language can hide great amounts of meaning of how Eva wittily uses it as a way of earning reader's trust and sympathy and at the same time to show her innocence to her husband we can see that when she advances:

Regarding my mini-lecture a more destructive self-indulgence. Our case-his case, really- was pearled around the proposition that I had been a normal maternal affections

who had taken normal precautions to ensure that she raised a normal child. Whether we were the victim of bad luck or bad genes or bad culture was a matter for shamans or biologists or anthropologists to divine, but not the court... (161)

A very first interpretation of these statements is that Eva wants show that she was a good mother, providing her son with all love condition. However, we later discover that she is not sure whether she was a good mother or not, as she adds in the following statement:

Still, like that depersonalizing rubber stamp of postnatal depression, our there but-for-the grace of God defense put me right off. I felt driven to distinguish myself from all those normal-normal mommies, if only as an exceptionally crummy one... (ibid. 2003)

As pointed out in the previous section, Eva is a very peculiar kind of narrator, since she knows more than everyone else in the novel: more than the readers, more than the rest of the characters, thus, if Eva's husband Franklin is alive may be his version of the story would be different, we can see how Franklin used to think that Kevin is behaving like any normal child, unlike Eva who saw Kevin as a monster and always waiting the worst from him:

"Mummy was happy before [widdle] Kevin came among, you know that, don't you?

And now mummy wakes up every day wishes she were in France. Mummy's life sucks now, doesn't mummy's life suck? Do you know there are some day that mummy would rather be dead? Rather than listen to you screech for one more minute there are some days that mummy would jumb off the Brooklyne Bridge".

“They understand speech long before they learn to talk” Franklin said

“Franklin, ease up, I was only kidding around” Eva said (115)

“I was only kidding” is not really what Eva was doing, how comes a travel guide writer, travels all around the world, stays home taking care of a child whom doesn’t love, and Franklin never supported Eva in any action taken against Kevin simply because he knew that Eva rejected him since he was in her womb, there is another statement in which we can see Eva’s hypocrisy:

... Moreover, since I had read-sorry, you had read-that it was important to smile at infants to try to elicit a smile in response, I smiled and smiled until my face hurt I was sure he could tell. Every time I forced myself to smile, he clearly knew I did not feel like smiling, because he never smiled back. He hadn’t seem many smiles in his lifetime but he had seen yours, enough to recognize that in comparison there was something wrong with mother’s. It curled up falsely; it evaporated with revelatory rapidity when I turned from his crib.

I know you doubt mean this, but I try very hard form a passionate attachment to my son. (93)

The main utterances that are used by the narrator all belong to the semantic field of the unreliable narrator, Eva uses very specific words in order to create a shift in the reader’s mind from reality to what the narrator is to think, the strategy is thus based on letting the reader rely on his sensation, hinted by the inappropriate semantic field.

What is more is that Eva is not only behaving as being a good mother to Kevin, but also making a role of the detector to know what leads Kevin to be a murderer, even though she knows that she is the reason behind, she is also showing her uncertainty and innocence in order to acquit herself.

It is clear that language is the most powerful device, to deceive, and mislead the reader. Readers can recognize and later understand several details that are not clear, and raise questions in their minds, the unreliable narrator plays with the wide range of words when covering meanings and giving rise to open interpretations and even for hiding the truth.

4.2- Changes and Slips in Narrative Discourse

When analyzing the narrative voice one needs to bear in mind the narrator's identity. The reader might come across diverse strategies the author uses as a clue that reveals the narrator's unreliability have to do with all those narrator's lies, slips, moments of uncertainty and indecision or moments in which the narrator changes and contradicts him/herself, and that somehow, makes the reader take a step further. The method that the narrator employs to hide these little slips from the reader is shown when Eva breaks Kevin's arm by throwing him on the wall as in the following statement:

When hoisting Kevin's body in that fluid adrenal lift, for once I'd felt graceful, because at last there was an unmediated confluence between what I felt and what I did. *It is not very nice to admit*, but domestic violence has its uses. Saw raw and unleashed; it tears away the veil of civilization that comes between us as much as it makes life possible.

A poor substitute for the sort of passion we like to extol perhaps, but real love shares more in common with hatred and rage... (242, emphasis is mine)

Another example that betrays Eva unreliability lies behind the changes in her narration as in the following passages:

... While it's true that I once search Kevin's face hungrily for resemblance to his father now I keep fighting this nutty impression that he's doing it on purpose, to make me suffer.

I don't want to see the resemblance. I don't want to spot the same mannerism, that signature downward flap of a hand when you dismissed something as insignificant". (189)

It is clear that there is a change in Eva's narrative tone, and her innocence turned to be a kind confession. Another recurrent narrative slip that can be found in Eva's speech is that of contradictions, like in the following statement:

... I had been a normal mother with normal maternal affections who had taken normal precautions to ensure that she raised a normal child" (161)

I was not a very good mother, cold, judgmental, selfish. Though you can't say I haven't paid the price" (180)

Before you condemn me utterly, I beg you to understand just how hard I'd been

trying to be a good mother. But, trying to be a good mother is maybe as distant from being a good mother maybe as distant from being a good mother as trying to have a good time is from truly having one” (214)

... I think I’m a bad mother, and you always thought so, too. (113)

It is obvious that from these examples, Eva’s contradiction is suspicious. It is an interesting aspect to comment, that Eva is perfectly aware that she might have committed a mistake when showing her hatred and rejection toward Kevin. Uncertainty is another strong strategy that diverts the reader’s attention; there are several moments in which Eva is “unsure” about her conduct toward her son, and whether she was good mother or bad, her uncertainty is clear in the following examples:

I’m no longer sure whether I rued our first child before he was even born.

(77)

I was aching to give him the very milk of human kindness, and he didn’t want it, or he did not want it from me. I should not have taken it personally, but how could I not”. (93)

“I’m not sure that I want to understand Kevin, to find well within myself so inky that from its depths what he did makes sense”. (183)

I may have misrepresented myself here of course I had misgiving. But my expectations of motherhood were high, or I wouldn’t have agreed to go through with it”. (87)

This is the role of the narrator, misleading, and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in order to keep the interpretation for reader, now the reader decides if what Kevin did is all her fault. Eva tries to decide if she was responsible for turning him into a murderer or he was all along.

Lying is another example of unreliable narrator’s strategies; there are several incidents where Eva lies, when her daughter Celia loses her eye by the liquid-plumr and she was the last one who uses the liquid and keeps it out, however she tells Franklin that Kevin who is the one kept the liquid in front of Celia, the following conversation show Eva trying to lie in order to make him responsible for the events’ leading to Celia’s eye injury:

I can’t believe you left it out.” Franklin said

I licked my lips. I had begun to tremble. “I didn’t leave it out” you dropped your head, then sighed. “Eva. Don’t make me do this. You used the liquid-

plumr on Saturday I remember because you went on about how kids' drain smelled weird or something, and then later afternoon you warned us not to run any water in that sink for the next hour because you'd put drain cleaner in it (318)

Initially it is clear that Eva was the first who use the liquid and kept it out or she kept the cabinet opens; however she denies that, in the following statement the reader will discover for what purpose she lies on Franklin:

"I put it away" I said "Back in that high cabinet with the child-lock on it, which Celia couldn't even reach with chair"

"Then how did it get out?" Franklin said

"All right", I said, steeling myself "then ask Kevin how that bottle left out"

"I knew we'd get around to this. First it's oh, what a mystery, then it's the housekeeper's fault? And, what a surprise, that Eva-who never does anything wrong herself- should finger her own son" (319)

Franklin later says:

... What's important is Kevin did everything he should have. He says when she started to scream he came running, and when he found out what it was, he ran water over her face and rinsed her eye the best he could, and *then* he called an ambulance, even before he call me on the cell... (320)

Again Eva insisting on what happen to Celia is Kevin's fault she adds:

... She knows (Celia) not to touch the stove, and she doesn't eat bleach. [Meanhde], Kevin can reach that cabinet, and Kevin can work chdd- locks in his sleep. He is not her *savior*. *He did it! Oh, Franklin, he did it'* (321, emphasis is mine)

The statements above seem to imply that to some degree she is a liar. Eva is always waiting the worst from Kevin; though she knows that he is not the responsible of Celia injury. Since his childhood, Eva exaggerates in her narration and magnifies things to give a false image of Kevin. The reader can see this through Franklin's response to Kevin, Eva was much playing the victim.

5-Author (Lionel Shriver)'s Interview about the Novel

We Need to Talk about Kevin has been interpreted into different point of view, readers were divided into two; those who sympathize with Eva and see that Kevin is an evil child, and those who blame Eva as being a bad mother, which led Kevin at the end to kill his classmates, a teacher, cafeteria worker and even kills his father and his sister Celia. The function of the unreliable narrator is to involve the reader within the story so that s/he gives his/her interpretation,

Nunning Ansgar in *Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration* (2005) argues for reader oriented approach: *“the reader interprets what the narrator says in two quite different contexts; on the one hand, the reader is exposed to what the narrator wants and means to say. On the other hand, however, the statements of the narrator take on additional meaning for the reader, a meaning the narrator is not conscious of and does not intend to convey. Without being aware of it, unreliable narrator continually gives the reader indirect information about their idiosyncrasies and state of mind. The peculiar effect of unreliable narration result from the conflict between the narrator’s report of the ‘facts’ on the level of the story and the interpretation and judgments provided by the narrator”* (258)

Booth (1961) also insists *“that the reader must be made to apply himself”* (203)

It is clear that the reader understands the story through narrator’s eyes, and all readers’ interpretation can be true, but when the author of the novel explains and familiarizes readers with the role of the narrator, they come across the truth and they may change their interpretations. Lionel Shriver, in one of her interviews in the Guardian Book, provides her readers with the explanation and familiarizes them to the unreliable narrator she used in the novel she said that the novel is about a mother unsure if she wants a baby, but there is a problem in the novel a footfall; the way Eva tells the story, she is cheating, at the beginning it seems that there is something wrong with Kevin, she seems right, but there is a logical fallacy is that she covers herself from Kevin behaving in that way.

Lionel Shriver further states that Eva makes the book more sympathetic, and the fact she is writing letters to her husband though he is dead, shows that she is writing to herself as a kind of a relief, thus the epistolary element of the novel is exaggeration, and she used letter forma which is very purposeful because why she has to write to somebody who is dead? Why she is retelling stories to Franklin as he was present, she is retelling stories that to say this is my version, and if Franklin is alive he may say different stories, and may contradict her version. Thus it helps to mislead and manipulate the reader. Additionally, Lionel Shriver

declares in the interview that she did not like to write with second-person narrator; instead she said that she prefers writing with first- person narrator in order to speak directly to readers.

Through Lionel Shriver statement, readers can understand the identity of the narrator, the events are being exaggerated, and Eva is therefore an unreliable narrator. This device is often used to intrigue, excite and shock the viewer and makes them reconsider events they may previously consider true.

Concerning the use of the unreliable narrator in the novel, Lionel Shriver said that unreliable narrator is “a delicious element” to any novel especially for a naïve reader, and using unreliable narrator makes the novel very powerful and interesting , the author employs and unreliable narrator usually, because, it has something to do with the plot.

[https://Guardian.co.uk-Guardian book club:Lionel Shriver-](https://Guardian.co.uk-Guardian-book-club:Lionel-Shriver-)

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/lionel-shriver-talks-to-robert-birnbaum/>

Conclusion

In *We Need to Talk about Kevin* nothing seems clear, the story seems very ambiguous and intriguing, thus, this is the function of the unreliable narrator, making the story mysterious and ambiguous. This part has mainly focus on the study and analysis of the employment of the unreliable narrator in literary work, it has examined the use unreliability in Lionel Shriver’s novel including the language and strategies of the narrator which make the novel so powerful and interesting, while it looking mysterious and full of suspense and ambiguity for readers.

General conclusion

This work has mainly focused on the study of the use of the unreliable narrator in literary work. This study has been applied to the ambiguous novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, written by Lionel Shriver.

In the initial section of this work mostly was about literature of postmodernism, precisely the changes that occurred in postmodern age and how writers deploy new devices and techniques, and the main focus was on how postmodern authors in particular use the unreliable narrator as a new device to narrate the events of the story, and especially how unreliability has been developed mostly in postmodern literature.

The last section of this work studied in particular the employment of unreliable narrator in Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. Shriver has employed the unreliable narrator to make the narrator's narration remain unnoticed until the end of the story, making the reader feel misled, and the novel seems extremely intriguing and not understood, the last part of this section, the focus was mainly on the language and how the author uses specific strategies in narrative discourse in order to mislead and manipulate the reader. However, throughout the changes and slips in narrative discourse readers can discover the entity and the identity of the narrator.

In an attempt to answer the question that shape my dissertation "why did Lionel Shriver use the unreliable narrator in *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, we came to understand that, Lionel Shriver has used the unreliable narrator in the novel in order to make it so powerful and to create suspense for readers. According to Lionel Shriver, novel with unreliable narrator create a very interesting, powerful, intriguing, ambiguous and mysterious novel, and rises suspense for readers. She argues that by unreliable narrator she could speak directly to reader by involving them in order to give their interpretation to the story. Additionally, she says unreliable narrator is a 'delicious element' which make the novel so interesting and different. And another is that the author employs the unreliable narrator usually, it has something to do with the plot.

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