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Vejleder: Henrik Lassen		Institut: SDU	

Titel, dansk: Den utroværdige side af fortællekunsten: Den upålidelige fortæller i "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street", <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> og <i>The Great Gatsby</i> .	
Titel, engelsk: The untrustworthy nature of narration: The unreliable narrator in "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street", <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , and <i>The Great Gatsby</i> .	
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Notes

As this thesis was written during the extensive worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, some difficulties have occurred to me in form of obtaining given literary works which were not fully available online, as the libraries were closed in an extended period. This includes the works *Mark Twain and the Brazen Serpent: How Biblical Burlesque and Religious Satire Unify Huckleberry Finn* by Doug Aldridge, *The Cambridge Introduction to Mark Twain* by Peter Messent, and *Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856* by William B. Dillingham, where it was only possible for me to get (very) abridged versions of the books online, therefore the specific page numbers in Works Cited. Furthermore, it was impossible to get hold of other literary works.

Introduction

When reading a story, it is essential how it is told and conveyed to the reader. The types of narration are huge, and one can tell a story in endless varieties of approaches. Mostly, the reader just listens and involves him- or herself in the story: He or she concentrates on the storyline and the characters involved, excited about what is going to happen in the next chapter. At this stage, the reader does not think about the narrator and his way of narration as the narrator does not attract substantial attention and generally says things that make sense. The reader has no reason to doubt him, thus turning the focus away from the way the story is told rather than what is told and instead concentrating on the plot of the story. However, in some instances, the reader cannot avoid noticing the narrator and his narration of the story. Aspects in the narration do not add up: A tale can strike the reader as incomplete and insufficient, which leads them to experience issues in trusting the narrator. This is called an unreliable narrator, who on different grounds does not tell the (whole) truth, whether he or she is aware of it or not.

There are many ways to be an unreliable narrator and many ways to spot an unreliable narrator, which will be my main topic. In my thesis, I will focus on the unreliable narrator in three works, namely the short story “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street” (1853) by Herman Melville, the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain, and the novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald. I will look at what an unreliable narrator does to the perception of the reader, and in what ways the narrators of the stories, namely the lawyer, Huck, and Nick Carraway, are untrustworthy. Furthermore, I want to look at the authors of the stories and consider in what ways they play a part in the text.

To begin this paper, I would like to introduce the different types of narration as presented by the American literary critic Wayne C. Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). The book is one

of Booth's most recognized books in which he argues that it is impossible to talk about a text without talking about an author, as the text would not exist without the author who wrote it. Furthermore, in this book, Booth introduces the terms "implied author" and "unreliable narrator" which will be a main point of focus that I shall consider in detail. Later, I will define the unreliable narrator and how to spot unreliability with the use of Booth's view and an elaboration of this view by American scholars James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin. After my analysis about unreliability in the three works, I will end my thesis with a conclusion and a closing discussion where I compare the three works, look at how their unreliable narrators are created differently or similarly, and discuss what the authors might seek to achieve by using the unreliable narrator as the mode of narration.

Defining an unreliable narrator

Before explaining what an unreliable narrator does to a story, I will begin my thesis by defining the different types of narration according to Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Some of the types closely resemble – and furthermore contain the same features as – the unreliable narrator.

Types of narration

A story can be told in dozens of different ways from different points of view. In many cases, it is not enough to define a narrator as one thing or the other since the same narrator can change how he narrates in the course of the story. Thus, just to call a narrator “first-person” and “omniscient” is in most cases vague and lacks precision.

According to Booth, the most overworked criterion for determining a narrator type is that of **person** (Booth 150). Discussing whether it is a first- or third-person narrator will not tell the reader anything of importance about the narrator. Descriptions and explanations of how the particular qualities of the narrator relate to specific effects are crucial in determining what kind of narrator is present in the story. Furthermore, according to Booth, the following types of narrators fall in categories of both first- and third-person narration (Booth 151).

An important aspect of narration is whether “the narrator is dramatized in his own right and on whether his beliefs and characteristics are shared by the author” (Booth 151). In this sense, all stories contain an **implied author**. However, it is not in every story that the implied author is clearly visible and that the reader notices him. The implied author is a construct or an impression of the actual author produced by the reader on the basis of the story, who stands behind the scenes and tells the story (Larsen 64-65). Any situation in the story can be attributed to the design of the implied author since everything can be read as having meaning. The implied author is not the ‘real’ author, so the implied

author can have different opinions and intentions than the ‘real’ author. In this way, the implied author represents a manipulation of the reader as the author crafts the persona of the implied author by his textual choices in the story. Thus, the author and the implied author are distinct from each other, but it *is* possible that the viewpoints of the two voices collide, although it is not very common.

When a narrator is **undramatized**, the narrator speaks in the third person and works as the anonymous voice which mediates the events in the story to the reader. Here, the narrator is not a part of the story and usually he or she only observes and comments upon given aspects in the story. When a narrator is **dramatized**, the narrator speaks in the first person and mediates the events of the story to the reader as a conscious identity. Usually, the narrator is a character of the story, however, it is not always the case. Furthermore, many dramatized narrators are not clearly labelled as narrators at all: Many works contain disguised narrators who tell the audience what it needs to know while at the same time being a part of the story. Two subcategories of dramatized narrators are **observers** and **narrator-agents**: Observers do not produce much action in the story, do rarely if ever discuss the activity of writing, and seem unaware that they are writing, thinking, and talking to readers in a literary work. Narrator-agents produce a perceptible effect on the course of the events, and they are aware of themselves as writers. These narrator-agents can also be called **self-conscious narrators** (Booth 155). However, it is not often that the distinction between observers and narrator-agents is explicitly made about point of view.

Another important aspect of narration are the **variations of distance** by which is meant the degree and kind of distance that separates narrators and third-person reflectors from the author, the reader, and the other characters of the story (Booth 155). When you read, an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters, and the reader always takes place. The narrator can be more or less distant from the implied author, whether in terms of a moral, intellectual, physical or temporal distance. At the same time, the narrator can also be more or less distant from the characters in the story,

and furthermore, he can be more or less distant from the reader's own norms. It is not only the narrator that can be distant from both characters and readers; it also applies to the implied author who can be more or less distant from the reader and from the other characters. With distance from the reader, the distance between the main norms of the implied author and the norms of the postulated reader must be eliminated, which is what happens with a successful reading of a book. An unsuccessful reading occurs when the implied author wants the reader to judge according to unacceptable norms which the reader cannot share. The implied author's distance from other characters can happen in many circumstances. Jane Austen, for example, "presents a broad range of moral judgment (from the almost complete approval of Jane Fairfax in *Emma* to the contempt for Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*), of wisdom (from Knightly to Miss Bates or Mrs. Bennet), of taste, of tact, of sensibility" (Booth 158).

Minor types of narration, which Booth also includes, are scene and summary, commentary, variations in support or correction, privilege, and inside views. With **scene and summary**, the narrator – whether in the first or the third person – can tell the story as scene, as summary, or as a mix of both which is most common (Booth 154). Scene and summary can also, in a modern context, be called showing and telling: With showing, the narrator uses description and action to help the reader experience the story, and with telling, the narrator simply tells the reader what is happening. However, it all depends in what way the narrator expounds the story: He or she can either report the dialogue alone or support it with "stage directions" and different descriptions of the setting. **Commentary** is connected to scene and summary, thus expanding the previous narration type, but critics disagree on the extent and kind of commentary allowed in addition to a direct relation of events in the story. The comments can be related to the main plot of the story, or they can be related to any aspect of human experience which the narrator finds important to tell in the given moment. With **variations in support or correction**, a narrator – whether he is reliable or not – can be supported or corrected, or unsupported or uncorrected by other narrators, which can make it easier for the reader to see whether or to

what degree the narrator is fallible (Booth 160). However, support or correction differ significantly depending on the given situation in the story; for example, whether the support or correction is supplied to help the narrator-agent stick to the right direction or change his own views, or whether it is provided to help the reader correct or strengthen his own views as against the narrator's. With **privilege**, the narrator (any kind of narrator) is able to know what could not be learned by purely natural means. This is also called omniscience or an omniscient narrator. However, typically, it is not everything that the omniscient narrator knows, but the writer is allowed to imagine and make up everything the narrator 'knows' (Booth 160). Finally, narrators who give **inside views** are different in the way in which they contribute. Authors who use stream of consciousness narration, which attempts to portray the numerous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of the narrator, mostly try to go deep psychologically, while some authors remain superficial or shallow regarding moral questions. Thus, the person with an inside view turns into a narrator in the story, and in this way, inside views are subject to different kinds of variations in terms of the types of narration described in this section. More importantly, by following different narrators' inside views, we may discover different degrees of unreliability, and the more we learn about our narrators' inside views, the more unreliability will we accept in the end without loss of sympathy (Booth 164).

Unreliability and the unreliable narrator

As stated by the American literary scholar James Phelan, unreliable narration is a mode of indirect communication, like character narration (Phelan 9). The indirect communication is passed on via the implied author who communicates with his or her audience by means of the narrator in the story who addresses another audience. Thus, one story actually consists of two speakers where one is explicit and one implicit, two audiences, and it may have at least two purposes. Its function is not merely to convey what the relation is between the implied author and the narrator, although this can be worked

out in the context of the specific story. On one end of the spectrum, the relation can consist of what Phelan calls **mask narration**, where the implied author uses the narrator in the story as a spokesperson for ideas to increase the appeal and persuasiveness of the ideas expressed. Thus, the implied author and the narrator have the same lines of thought. On the other end of the spectrum, the narration can be unreliable when the narrator does not follow the same lines of thought as the implied author. This kind of narration has to be unreliable along more than one of the three axes of communication, which I will address later in the section about Phelan and Martin's view on the unreliable narrator.

There are many ways of spotting unreliability in a story. One way is to focus on a narrator's use of hedges, omissions, silences, irony, sarcasm etc., and to pay attention to descriptions of unlikely or exaggerated events or phenomena within the diegetic universe of the story. Furthermore, if there is more than one narrator, the presence of opposing or conflicting accounts of an event between the two narrators can create unreliability.

In the following, I will account for the unreliable narrator in more detail with the use of Wayne C. Booth's work. Additionally, I will also elucidate James Phelan's and Mary Patricia Martin's position, which consists of an elaboration of Booth's understanding of unreliability.

Booth on the unreliable narrator

As mentioned in the introduction, Booth coined the term **unreliable narrator** in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Here, Booth argues that narrators who articulate values and perceptions that differ from those of the implied author are the unreliable narrators. When reading a story with an unreliable narrator, one reads until textual markers force one to revise one's interpretation of the context, which leads to the conclusion that the words of the narrator are incomplete, incoherent, or contradictory. Furthermore, Booth understands unreliability to be a function of irony, which remains

the leading model for unreliable narration today (Olson 93). With the use of irony, a distance is created between the actions, voice, and views of the unreliable narrator versus the implied author, and a sort of secret communion, as Booth calls it, between the ‘postulated reader’ and the implied author takes place:

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. 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 the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of 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. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker’s back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting. (Booth 304)

When reading a story, the implied author thus counts on the fact that the reader understands the unspoken message beyond the literal one, and the reader has to read against the grain of the text to intercept the irony and understand the unreliability of the narrator. In this way, the reader and the implied author start to share values and views, which are not the same as those presented by the unreliable narrator, and the implied author thus invites the reader into the fellowship of those who grasp the irony, detecting the unreliability, and enjoying the insider joke within the story. Hence, the implied author sends a message through the story which the reader then receives. However, the implied author does not point fingers at the unreliable narrator or give any sign to the reader, because detecting unreliability is an important and sophisticated skill which is necessary to require to gain the full reading experience of this type of story with an unreliable narrator (Olson 95).

In the book, Booth also argues that once a narrator has revealed himself or herself to be unreliable, the narrator will be considered unreliable throughout the rest of the story. It will not occur that the narrator suddenly becomes infallible or begins to have other opinions and values than the ones that have already been introduced in the story. Thus, unreliable narrators are consistently unreliable. Booth defines different types of unreliable narrators using the words “unreliable”, “untrustworthy”, “inconscience”, and “fallible” to describe the different kinds of unreliable narrators (Booth 158-160): When a narrator is reliable, he speaks for or acts in ways that are consistent with the norms of the story (of course, that is, the norms of the implied author), and he is unreliable when he does not do so. As mentioned above, the total development and impact of the story will be transformed if the reader discovers the narrator to be untrustworthy. Inconscience is about the narrator’s unconscious and takes place when the narrator is simply mistaken or believes him- or herself to have certain qualities with which the author disagrees. Finally, Booth states that in most cases, it is almost impossible to conclude whether a narrator is fallible or not and if so, to what degree.

To sum up, Booth divides unreliability into two different types: One type occurs when the narrator is unreliable and untrustworthy, when he or she varies from the norms of the implied author (and in a way of the reader as well) and the story, and the reader cannot trust the narrator. Here, it is about the narrator’s abilities, features, and characteristics as a person. The second type concerns the narrator’s inconscience and fallibility, where the narrator makes mistakes about his fictional world or even about how he perceives himself. Here, the focus is on the narrator’s ability to distinguish, identify, and describe himself and his world accurately to the reader. Booth sees these two types of unreliability as not directly opposed but also as being interrelated in investigating the unreliable narrator (Olson 96).

Phelan and Martin on the unreliable narrator

Since Booth's publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961 and with it the introduction of the concept of the unreliable narrator, literary scholars have drawn on his work. Some agree with him, some disagree², and some have made further amplifications of his model of unreliability. Two American literary scholars, James Phelan (whom I have introduced briefly above) and Mary Patricia Martin, have worked with further amplifying Booth's model of unreliability, which describes six types of unreliability. They argue that narrators cannot be sharply divided into either reliable or unreliable, because narrators can become more or less reliable during the story and can furthermore be unreliable in more than one way. Therefore, we as readers have to recognize that "narrators exist along a wide spectrum from reliability to unreliability" (Phelan and Martin 96).

In their study, Phelan and Martin introduce three axes of unreliability: The axes of facts/events, ethics/evaluation, and knowledge/perception (Phelan and Martin 94). Furthermore, they state that it is possible for the narrator to deviate from the implied author's views in the role of either a reporter, an evaluator, or as a reader or interpreter. Here, unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of facts/events, unreliable evaluation along the axis of ethics/evaluation, and unreliable reading or inter-

² I am aware of the fact that some literary scholars disagree with Booth's line of thought about unreliability, for example the German scholars Tom Kindt and Ansgar Nünning, where the latter is the most well-known 'adversary' of Booth's ideas. Nünning argues that Booth's understanding of unreliable narration "gives a false impression of how unreliability is attributed to narrators during reception" (Kindt 130), and that Booth's model has resulted in "narrator reliability being regarded as a text-immanent issue that rests solely on the distance between the implied author and the narrator" (Olson 96). In Nünning's view, the concept of the implied author becomes an archive for queries regarding the relationship between the reader and the author, however, the concept does not provide suitable answers to any of the queries. Furthermore, according to Nünning, unreliable narration simply becomes a reader's strategy of making sense of a text. But according to German professor Greta Olson, the two models by Booth and Nünning are in fact highly similar. All things considered, the discussion of Booth and Nünning's different views is not a subject which I will explore further in this thesis.

More information about Nünning's view can for example be found in Nünning, Ansgar. "Unreliable, Compared to What? Towards a Cognitive Theory of 'Unreliable Narration': Prolegomena and Hypothesis," 1999; Kindt, Tom. "Werfel, Weiss and Co. Unreliable Narration in Austrian Literature of the Interwar Period," 2008; and Nünning, Ansgar. "Reconceptualizing the Theory, History and Generic Scope of Unreliable Narration: Towards a Synthesis of Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches," 2008.

pretation along the axis of knowledge/perception. To further distinguish the different kinds of unreliability, the reader performs two different actions when he or she realises that the narrator cannot be trusted. The first action is that the reader rejects the words of the narrator and, if this is an option, attempts to rebuild a more suitable account, and the second action is that the reader accepts the words of the narrator but adds his or her own interpretation to the account. Thus, the following six types of unreliability are based on the axes of the narrator's flawed factual, ethical, and perceptual evaluations, and on the reader's response to these evaluations.

The six kinds of unreliability are **misreporting**, **misreading**, **misevaluating** (also called **misregarding**, which will be the word I use), **underreporting**, **underreading**, and **underregarding** (Phelan and Martin 95-96). With misreporting, the narrator does not tell the truth, and thus, misreporting belongs on the axis of facts/events³. However, misreporting is typically a consequence of the narrator's lack of knowledge or mistaken values which means that misreporting almost always occurs in combination with the two next kinds of unreliability: misreading and misregarding. With misreading, the narrator misunderstands the truth, and misreading therefore belongs to the axis of knowledge/perception. With misregarding, the narrator fails to accurately assess the truth, and this type of reading therefore belongs to the axis of ethics/evaluation. Additionally, both misreading and misregarding can occur alone, by themselves, or in combination with other kinds of unreliability, as is also the case with misreporting. With underreporting, the narrator tells part of the truth and thus less than he or she knows. Underreporting belongs to the axis of facts/events. However, it is not always the case that underreporting constitutes unreliability. With underreading, the narrator interprets only parts of the truth, a situation which can occur if the narrator lacks knowledge or perception of a given event or

³ However, the six kinds of unreliability may occur on all of the axes of facts/events, ethics/evaluation, and knowledge/perception. It depends on the given situation and the fact that the different kinds of unreliability are often consequences of another kind of unreliability, which is also the case with misreporting. In this section, I am just listing and describing the most typical axis of each kind of unreliability.

character. Furthermore, it belongs to the axis of knowledge/perception. Finally, with underregarding, the narrator misses the significance of the truth or of an event. This means that he or she moves along the right track but simply does not go far enough to cover the full event or the whole truth. In addition, underregarding belongs to the axis of ethics/evaluation. The first three types of unreliability – misreporting, misreading, and misregarding – are “grouped together on the basis of how the reader responds to them, namely by replacing the narrator’s story with a less contradictory account of fictional events, and the [next] three [underreporting, underreading, and underregarding] on the reader’s need to amplify on the narrator’s incomplete tale” (Olson 100).

The unreliable narrator in three works

In the following, I will look at the narrator in three different works – namely the lawyer in “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street”, Huck in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* – and analyse in what ways the narrators function as unreliable and untrustworthy. I will look at how they manage to handle the task of narrating the story, and to what degree they are unreliable; is it on purpose, or does something else make them unreliable? Furthermore, I will pay attention to the authors of the works and how they play a role in their respective story.

Unreliability in “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street”

“Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street” is a short story by the American writer Herman Melville, first published anonymously in 1853 in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* and later reprinted with small modifications in Melville’s own short story collection *The Piazza Tales* from 1856. The story is told by a nameless lawyer, who manages a law firm on Wall Street in New York. Of his employees, he has two scriveners, Turkey and Nippers, and an

errand boy named Ginger Nut, however, in the beginning of the story, he chooses to hire another scrivener, namely the titular character, Bartleby. In the first few days, Bartleby writes accurately and quickly, but one day, when the lawyer wants Bartleby to help examine a document, he replies “I would prefer not to”. He continues to use this sentence as a standard reply, and he starts to do it more often. In the end, Bartleby is doing no work at all, and the lawyer is surprised and puzzled about what he should do about Bartleby.

“Bartleby, The Scrivener” is narrated in the first person with the nameless lawyer as the narrator of the story, and in this way, we as readers hear the story from his point of view. Not much is known about him – not even his name – however, he describes himself as an elderly man, probably about 60 years old, as well as hardworking, reasonable, and sympathetic. He considers himself good at dealing with people, however, in meeting Bartleby, he is put to the test. It would appear as if the lawyer is neither lovable nor cruel but a regular man who lives by the conviction that “the easiest way of life is the best” (Melville 1). He tells that he was made master in chancery, a rather good position within law and court, however, his position was abrogated within a few short years. Despite this, it seems like the lawyer is still successful at his job and that he has a good reputation because of his position and his dependability. However, it does not appear that the lawyer works too hard in the beginning, and the lawyer and his members of staff are doing their jobs in routine until Bartleby is hired.

As mentioned, not much is known about the lawyer, besides him being a lawyer: He does not tell the reader his name, where he lives, his interests etc., and in general he appears mysterious as we know so little about him. We can interpret his person and personality on the basis of his actions and motivations in the story: He does not mention any friends or family, and he seems rather lonely, however, not too lonely as he interacts with people at his job. Furthermore, his life appears to only concern his job and his regular, daily routine as it is the only thing he talks about in the story, which is why I call him a workaholic. The lawyer says that he seldom loses his temper (Melville 1) which

seems true given the circumstances regarding Bartleby's behaviour, and in the story he is generally kind and friendly towards all he meets. He has some ordinary flaws such as a bit of arrogance and passive aggression, the latter he gladly shares with the reader in connection with Bartleby's surprising and inappropriate demeanour. He likes to call attention to his relationship with the late, famous German American businessman John Jacob Astor, which is already evident in the beginning of the story, thus seeking to impress the reader with his acquaintances. The lawyer's biggest flaw is the fact that he is conflict-averse, which is apparent in the way he deals with his employees, especially the titular character, Bartleby. It is evident that the lawyer does not understand Bartleby's behaviour, even though he actually *should* be able to understand some of it, which is a subject I will return to along with other elements that make the lawyer an unreliable narrator.

The author Herman Melville

Herman Melville was born in New York City, New York in 1819, and it was not destined that Melville should become a world-famous writer: In the beginning, he did not even have the goal and desire to become a writer (Gray 208). When Melville was only twelve years old, his father died, and he had to leave school to support the family where he worked respectively as a bank clerk, a teacher, and a farm labourer. When Melville was nineteen years old, he sailed on a merchant ship to Liverpool as a cabin boy, and this exhausting but fascinating trip was the experience and voyage that started his interest in sailing on the seas. In the summer of 1842, he jumped ship at the Marquesas Islands and lived there for a month, and after that, he sailed to Tahiti, where he worked as a field labourer. Continuing his journey, he sailed from Tahiti to Honolulu, where he was recruited as an ordinary seaman on the man-of-war *United States* and where he served for just over a year, namely until October 1844. Hereafter, he returned to land, where he started to write. Melville has based many of his stories on his adventures

at sea, for example the novels, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847), *Mardi: And a Voyage Thither* (1849), *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849), and his most famous novel, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). Like Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, who states that the whaleship was the only Yale and Harvard he ever had, so it was with Herman Melville: He gathered all of his knowledge and adventures on sea (Gray 208). Even in Melville's early work, one can identify traits that would become some of his later trademarks as a writer, namely his mediation between antitheses, especially the one of the land and the sea (Gray 208).

Even though Herman Melville's works are recognised today, his stories were not widely appreciated at the time of his death: Even his best-known book *Moby-Dick* was not a success when it was first published. He had a pressing feeling of a need to produce stories that would, as he put it, pay "the bill of the baker" (Gray 213). This was his explanation of why he wrote his seventh novel, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852), because he was sure that this book would be much more popular than his previous books. However, the book turned out to be a critical and commercial disaster, and his next book *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1855) was unsuccessful as well. Although his novels were not favourably reviewed, his short story collection *The Piazza Tales* (1856), in which "Bartleby, The Scrivener" is included, received largely positive criticism. However, it attracted little attention and did not sell well enough to get Melville out of his financial straits. In order to support himself and his family, Melville turned to poetry, where his collections became privately financed for publication. These poems were not regarded as successful, which is still the view today. Likewise, when Herman Melville died in 1891 in his hometown, aged 72 years old, it went largely overlooked by a wider public, and it was not until the 1920s that his work began to be valued and respected. Today, however, his standing as a major American writer is indeed confirmed (Gray 214).

In 1853, Herman Melville decided to become a writer of magazine stories, at least for a time, according to himself, because of the fact that he was not appointed United States consul to the Sandwich

Islands, about which he was very disappointed (Dillingham 1). Until 1856, thus over a time period of four years, he wrote sixteen short stories which he published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*⁴. The short stories followed his novels *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* that were not successful, and while writing his short stories, he hoped to get the time and peace to withdraw from the public eye and its criticism. However, the short stories attracted massive attention and gave him a huge audience because of the popularity of *Harper's* and *Putnam's* magazines. Thus, he witnessed a dramatic change in his situation as an author: After the novel *Pierre*, Melville might have wondered whether he would ever write another work of fiction again, and then suddenly he was a regular writer in two highly successful magazines. Ironically, the great success of the short stories did not profit Melville's image, as the magazines did not include the names of the authors and contributors as a rule, and therefore the readers could not know that the stories were written by Melville.

Herman Melville had an issue with offending his readers in his previous works, which is for example seen in *Typee* and *Omoo* where he attacked missionaries, an approach which was not acceptable to the magazines. The two magazines would only publish stories that were in good taste, and they did not make any exceptions. If the magazines found his stories inappropriate, Melville would find himself without a publisher. This only happened once, however, when *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* rejected the short story "The Two Temples"⁴. Thus, Melville could not only camouflage his intended messages and hide his attacks on different aspects of the world, but he had to create a smooth surface in his works. He had to create a façade and *seem* likeable, humorous, and harmless. This was a big task for Melville, who now had to "conceal his profundity in an illusion of vapidity" (Dillingham 4).

⁴ Melville published seven short stories in each magazine, thus making it fourteen of them to be published in these two magazines. Here follows a description of the last two short stories: Melville's short story "The Piazza" from 1856 was the only story specifically written for the collection *The Piazza Tales* and was thus never printed in any of the magazines beforehand. Furthermore, his short story "The Two Temples" was originally rejected by *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* because of the possibility of the story offending religious sensibilities of the public (Dillingham 3), but it was later published posthumously along with one of Melville's lost short stories "Daniel Orme" in 1924 in *Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces*.

For example, this illusion was created by the lack of action or adventure in his stories. In most of the short stories, the narrator tells about a single incident which is then the whole plot of the story, for example a husband describing an argument with his wife, or a traveller telling about his visits to a men's club in London. In all of Melville's short stories except for two, the storyteller is a first-person narrator, and the narrators are generally older men who are looking back at a specific episode that happened years ago. Melville's preferred narrator was an older man recollecting a particular episode, an odd character, or something extraordinary he had once seen in his life:

[The narrators] are as a rule mild, domestic types, husbands and fathers or bachelors who have settled down to a staid way of life. They offer no offense, pose no threat. They are witty, humane, educated, congenial, a bit boring. Beneath these external similarities, however, are great differences. Some of them are rebellious deep divers, others shallow and hypocritical weaklings, but such differences become evident only after careful scrutiny. (Dillingham 5)

In the two short stories that do not make use of the first-person narrator, "The Bell-Tower" (1855) and "Benito Cereno" (1855), there is more violence and more action present. But it is concealed to such a degree that the stories were acceptable to the publishers. In most of the stories, the reader feels a sense of imaginative impotence and incompetence on the part of one or more characters in the stories that deceives the reader in the same way as Melville deceives them with the problem-free façade of his works: For example, "The Bell-Tower" seems too preachy and derived, both "Benito Cereno" and "The Enchantadas, or Enchanted Isles" (1854) appear very uneven and unfinished, and some readers find the scrivener in "Bartleby, The Scrivener" to be intolerable and boring (Dillingham 5-6). Undeniably, when reading Herman Melville's short stories, the reader gets a sense of having read a peculiar genre not like any traditional short story format, which may have the effect of leaving the reader more confused when he is finished reading than when they started.

The American scholar Richard Harter Fogle has commented on the situation of Herman Melville's short stories, where he warns the reader against overrating the stories and points out Melville's lack of skill and different forms of weaknesses in these shorter forms of fiction. Furthermore, Fogle concludes that "[t]o respect these tales at their full value, one must have respected Melville to begin with" (Dillingham 7). However, even though it might be true that most of the short stories do not have a high place in the Melville canon, it cannot have come as a surprise that Melville wrote the stories on his own terms and that the mysteries of the stories might be revealed later, thus a central factor for the reader would have to be the ability to be patient. His short stories were not like ordinary short stories, and neither were his novels like other usual novels. Melville liked to experiment with his stories, and he found the ordinary and accepted ways of writing insufficient and unsatisfactory. He wrote his short stories in the way he did for two main reasons, namely secrecy and creative experimentation. In this way, he could both make himself and the publishers happy with his stories consisting of camouflaged meanings and concealment as a characteristic part of his writing style, and stories where no one was offended. Writing went hand in hand as the bigger the secrecy, the bigger the experimentation, and because of the camouflage, the stories would appear inoffensive and incompetent while in reality, they were sophisticated, original works (Dillingham 7-8). The originality is evident because of Melville's unfamiliar fictional forms, however, it was not the structure that was the most important aspect for him, but the characters. He was absorbed in the delineation of the characters, and if one should briefly describe his short stories, they are a gallery of people and their characterisation. Through the characterisation, Melville deployed his two main writing reasons for secrecy and creative experimentation very well, thus making every main character unique and strange in his or her own way with a suitable amount of mystique and creativity applied.

As stated, typically, the short stories of Herman Melville portray human thoughts and actions, and the focus of the stories is very much on characterisation. The characterisation is highly traditional

where the narrator tells about himself, his age, what he likes and dislikes, and what his occupation is. The reader gets an impression of what kind of character the narrator is through his description of his own movements, feelings, and attitudes towards other people, which helps us get an overview of his strengths, weaknesses, and intelligence as a human being. Mostly, readers would accept and be content with the obvious characterisation and delineation, thus perceiving the narrator as he seems and not thinking further about his traits: It is easy to put the characterisation of the narrator in the background and focus on what one would assume to be Melville's primary interest, namely to look at other, broader topics such as historical, social, political, and economic issues within the stories. However, this is not the case as the narrator and his characterisation is the most important aspects of Melville's short stories, and the other issues are secondary to the development of the characters in the stories. For example, the major issue in "Bartleby, The Scrivener" is a social issue that has a negative effect on the general morale in the office, thus creating an economic issue as well, but the characterisations of both the lawyer and Bartleby are just as important as these issues, if not more crucial. Actually, Melville's focus point is on exposing character awareness and thus subordinating all other issues, because as the first-person narrator is the one who is covering the story, it is through his eyes and his perception that the story is constructed and created. Thus, he is the most important element as he is the one who creates the actual story with its style, its structure, and its descriptions. However, even though the narrator is the one who moulds the story, it is not enough for the reader to just listen to the statements and words being said by him. For example seen in "Bartleby, The Scrivener", the lawyer is a deceiver about the description of himself, and he is even making himself believe his own statements, thus deceiving himself as well. As a result, we as readers are unable to fully trust him and accept his characterisation of himself without a doubt. We have to carefully examine his behaviour throughout the story to see if his characterisation matches up with how he really behaves in strained situations, and we have to look at the patterns that occur when he speaks about specific topics or uses

particular words, namely his worry about age and death, his references to eating and to money, and his overspending of the term “strange” when confronted with describable events, mostly about Bartleby’s behaviour. When the reader figures out these patterns, it is possible to see who the lawyer really is, both as a character and as a narrator: He is unreliable, but it is highly possible that he does not even know it himself (Dillingham 12).

“Bartleby, The Scrivener” was Herman Melville’s first magazine piece which was published in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* in 1853, and these short stories for the magazines were often shaped by current events in the society. This is also the case with “Bartleby, The Scrivener”, where the dead letter office was a part of the everyday life, both for Melville and the rest of the population. In the end of the story, it turns out that Bartleby has worked in the dead letter office, an important aspect and possible explanation for Bartleby’s odd behaviour to which I will return in my analysis of the lawyer as an unreliable narrator. Already in 1841, a journalist noted that the workplace had become a “great curiosity”, and when Melville wrote his story, it had grown to be “one of the leading tourist attractions in the capital” (John 637). When Zachary Taylor was elected president in 1849, the dead letter office was visited by approximately one hundred people a day, and generally, people were very willing to see how such an office worked (John 637). Regarding trade, sale, and commerce, the dead letter office was like Paradise for the people, and it functioned as a safety net for merchants where the office helped them getting their business started in a continental extent. In this way, it makes perfectly sense that Melville chose to have the dead letter office serve as a surprise ending of his story, as it functioned as one of the leading financial institution of the country at the time of writing. Furthermore, Melville himself had also interest in the unjust dismissal of public officeholders because of multiple incidents; for example the fact that Melville’s own uncle Thomas Melvill had been dismissed without further notice in 1829 as an inspector of the port of Boston, and that Melville himself was close to getting a similar job in an administration like Bartleby’s, thus making it a possibility that

Melville could have shared the same fate as his titular character (John 639). Generally, there are speculations about whether *Bartleby* may represent Herman Melville's dissatisfaction and frustration with his own situation as a writer, because at one point in 1851, Melville got tired of writing like *Bartleby* does. When working on *Moby Dick*, Melville writes to the American writer and good friend Nathaniel Hawthorne:

In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my "Whale" while it is driving through the press. *That* is the only way I can finish it now -- I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose, -- that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me ... My dear Sir, a presentiment is on me, -- I shall at last be worn out and perish ... What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot.
(Marx)

Melville felt like it was a necessity for him to keep writing, of which he was not fond, and maybe this lack of desire to write was what inspired Melville to create the character of *Bartleby*, a man that carries an unmistakably similar problem like the one Melville described to Hawthorne. In the beginning of "Bartleby, The Scrivener", *Bartleby* writes fast and flawlessly, but later, *Bartleby* stubbornly refuses to do the writing demanded of him, which happens to Melville as well. Furthermore, like *Bartleby* shifts attention in his work ethic, Melville goes through a shift as well in terms of changes of interest between writing *Typee* and *Moby Dick*, and one can describe both *Bartleby* and Melville as writers who "[forsake] conventional modes because of an irresistible preoccupation with the most baffling philosophical questions" (Marx). When reading "Bartleby, The Scrivener", it is not obvious that the story is trying to state the desirability of the change, however, it is an extensive possibility that Herman Melville took such extraordinary pains to mask the meaning of the story as it reveals so much of his own situation if the reader is capable of reading the story from Melville's perspective.

The nameless lawyer as an unreliable narrator

As stated earlier, not much is known about the narrator beside the fact that he is a diligent lawyer who cares greatly about his job. However, he is prevented from doing his work properly because of personal problems with Bartleby. The lawyer is a calm and mild man, who however wishes that he sometimes would become more aggressive when people are being too unreasonable with him. From what we as readers learn, he spends most of his time in his cosy office, to which he refers as his retreat, where he performs monotonous and straightforward work regarding rich men's bonds and mortgages. He never addresses a jury or strives for public applause, and he indicates that he is very discreet and trustworthy with the phrase of him as an "eminently *safe* man" (Melville 1), meaning that he takes no chances. The lawyer feels torn when Bartleby is hired and he after some time refuses to do any work: On the one side, the lawyer has an ordinary life consisting of his stable job with the uncomplicated everyday life, and on the other side, he becomes involved in the puzzling and mysterious stranger living in a weird world of his own, but who nevertheless is compelling and fascinating. However, he procrastinates the problem with Bartleby further when he postpones the confrontation several times throughout the story: "I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure" (Melville 9). In the beginning of the story, before Bartleby appears, the lawyer wants to give the reader some background information about the people and the place before telling the actual story about Bartleby: "Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employées*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented" (Melville 1). However, it is a rather ironic statement as it is debatable who the 'chief character' is. Even though it is a story about Bartleby, making him the titular character, the lawyer is the one about whom we hear the most: In the quotation, he also uses the word 'my' about every issue, namely *myself*, *my* employees, *my* business, and *my* chambers. The lawyer is actually

focusing on his own narration rather than Bartleby's story, and he describes his own character in sentimental values (Post-Lauria 200), thus making himself the 'chief character' without himself being aware of it. The use of 'my' is an example of the fact that his choice of words carries two meanings almost every time: One he intends, and another he does not intend (Dillingham 22). In fact, the lawyer utters more than he realises.

In the beginning of the story, the lawyer comments that he is "a rather elderly man" (Melville 1), and he cares about his own age as well as other's. This is one of the first signs of possible unreliability, as it is highly imaginable – without being age discriminatory – that aged persons forget or confuse situations. Furthermore, the lawyer does also state that the story is one he recalls, making it even harder to get all details entirely correct because it was not something that happened recently. Even before Bartleby turns up in the story and accepts his demise, age and death are nervously and timidly on the lawyer's mind most of the time, and when introducing his clerks, he goes through each clerk's estimated age. He is worried about his age because of a deep fear of approaching death, however, the lawyer shares it with the oldest scrivener, Turkey, with whom he discusses the concern with advancing age on which they both agree. Turkey is appealing to his fellow feeling regarding the fear of becoming old, which makes him calmer; for example, Turkey states that "I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age – even if it blot the page – is honorable. With submission, sir, we *both* are getting old" (Melville 3). However, the lawyer's meeting with Bartleby results in him experiencing death, namely in the discovery of Bartleby's death in the prison in the end of the story – and even worse, he is the one who declares him dead! Even though the lawyer is not comfortable with the thought of aging and death, he has actually already envisaged Bartleby dead before his actual death, namely when discovering that Bartleby lives in the office:

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasant sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings – chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain – led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet. (Melville 13-14)

It is evident that the lawyer feels sorry for Bartleby and the situation that he has entered. They are both human beings in the same kind of world, and seeing Bartleby ending up alone without money or a home makes the lawyer feel sympathy for him. However, it feels like his death does not come as a shock for the lawyer, as it is not a normal way of dying and the fact that the lawyer has already previously coped with Bartleby's decease through his imagination. Bartleby was a young man with sincere problems when dying, thus being in a completely other situation than a man coming closer to death because of old age, which is the aspect of which the lawyer is afraid. Furthermore, the lawyer watched from the sidelines while Bartleby went through a change from being industrious and hard-working to denying doing anything and eventually die in the light of his reserved behaviour; thus, it seems like the lawyer had predicted the decline of Bartleby in advance, which could be the reason why he was not particularly shocked about his death taken into account that the thought of being in line for death scares him. Bartleby is a troubled soul, whom the lawyer is unable to help, which I will return to.

It is evident that the nameless lawyer has a major issue with averting conflict, especially regarding Bartleby's behaviour but also regarding the other employees. For example, we as readers learn that he has employed the two scribes Turkey and Nippers, who together are doing the job for one person:

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause – indigestion – the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and *vice versa*. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances. (Melville 5)

In the morning, Turkey is a meticulous, effective worker who gets his work done properly, but after lunchtime, he starts drinking which makes him lose his temper, and he gets in a troublesome mood for the rest of the day. Furthermore, he changes wildly and rapidly from being cheerful to violent after lunchtime, and in this way, you never know quite where you have him apart from the mornings. With Nippers, it is the same as with Turkey, however, with him, it is after lunchtime that *he* gets his work done. Nippers is not a morning person, and he spends his mornings anxiously and irritably anguishing himself and others while being full of dissatisfaction towards everything. Even though both of them are unbearable at their respective times of the day, the lawyer does not bother to replace them with someone who actually works the whole day, thus avoiding a confrontation. Furthermore, he rationalises the matter quite foolishly with the sentence "This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances", which is a sign of the fact that the lawyer is unaware of his own shortcomings in confronting people and doing something about a current problem. His weakness of not being able to confront problems directly is the root of his problems with Bartleby, as he is unable to get rid of Bartleby and ironically finds it more convenient to move his whole law firm to another building to make sure of Bartleby's departure and thus escaping further conflict with him.

Aside from communication and confrontation-related problems, the lawyer features estimable qualities as well. One of them is sympathy, as he continues to be kind and understanding towards the odd Bartleby throughout the story. Additionally, he feels a sense of personal responsibility towards Bartleby: Despite Bartleby's behaviour, the lawyer feels somewhat responsible for the scrivener, and he wants to make sure that Bartleby is doing alright, which is the reason why he keeps watching Bartleby even when the scrivener stops working and is jailed. Thus, the lawyer becomes a narrator and character with whom the reader can identify because of his sense of human commiseration, and the reader pities him because he is unable to save Bartleby despite his persistence.

One of the reasons why we as readers find Bartleby mysterious is because of the insufficient information about him given by the lawyer. If we knew about Bartleby's life prior to his employment in the law office from the beginning of the story, it would possibly help us understand his behaviour: Namely, his odd behaviour can be inferred because of his previous dismissal from the dead letter office (John 631). In the beginning, the lawyer states that he has no information about Bartleby, and all that he knows about Bartleby is solely discovered via his eyesight. However, when finished reading "Bartleby, The Scrivener", we doubt the lawyer's sincerity, and sometimes, it seems like he is being obscure on purpose and trying to mislead the reader regarding Bartleby's life. Thus, a certain inability or refusal to understand Bartleby may be in evidence regarding the lawyer, which I will look upon now.

In the end of the story, the lawyer elucidates that before working at his office, Bartleby worked as a clerk in the dead letter bureau of the general post office in Washington, D.C., and here, he was suddenly removed following "a change in the administration" (Melville 29). However, it is only a rumour that the lawyer has heard, but he finds it highly expressive and plausible, and thinks about the rumour's imaginable moral significance for Bartleby's behaviour and conclusive fate:

When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? [...] On errands of life, these letters speed to death. Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! (Melville 29)

However, most twentieth-century readers have disregarded this concluding and final detail as an externally imposed knowledge connected with Melville's literary design, and critics have furthermore stated that it would be a mistake to interpret "anything like the significance" to a rumour in the way that the lawyer does it: "But nobody seems to take seriously the Dead Letter Office as an explanation for what went wrong with Bartleby; most critics tell us that the rumor is a boomerang, and it flies right back to the Lawyer, showing us what is wrong with him" (John 632). Yet, this closure functions as a surprise ending that modifies readers' expectations of the story but also as a useful insight into Bartleby's social status, as a clerkship in the dead letter office was almost always reserved for elderly ministers with economic problems or for young merchants with good connections but comprised of limited or any means at all. Thus, the dead letter office functioned as a 'dumping ground' for the nineteenth-century man with the abilities and hopes for stock broking but never got the chance at the job, which may indicate that Bartleby was in great need of money. Furthermore, Bartleby's acquisition of calligraphy is indeed a great sign of him having some kind of a solid education before joining the office, which the lawyer must have known before hiring him, thus further indicating that the lawyer indeed knows more about Bartleby's background from the start even though he claims the opposite (John 634). By storing the explanation of Bartleby's behaviour for the ending rather than the beginning of the story, the lawyer gets the sympathy instead of Bartleby, who would have got it if the explanation was revealed right at the beginning. This demonstrates that the lawyer's way of narrating is a way of putting the focus on himself, thus being unwilling to consider the possibility of removing himself to some extent and make more room for the titular character (Post-Lauria 202).

Because of the knowledge about Bartleby's past, we are able to realise why Bartleby is behaving oddly at the lawyer's office. At his former job as a government clerk, Bartleby had almost certainly earned a salary of at least \$1,000 a year, which was a very considerable sum considering the fact that it was extremely rare for even the most ambitious and hardworking law office copyist to make yet half this sum. Aware of this fact, Bartleby works extremely hard to copy documents when he first arrives at the office in an understandable but useless attempt to match the income he had formerly enjoyed as a government employee, hoping that if he works hard, he will gain some of his 'lost' salary in the form of a material reward (John 634). He even tries to save money by eating minimal food and sleeping in the office when everybody has gone home. However, it is quite a naïve and simple-minded act as he can never be able to earn as much as he did at his former job with his current work position, of which his low sum of savings in his desk is a sign (Melville 14). Later in the story, Bartleby realises that his efforts are futile, as he will not be getting paid extra in performing routine tasks and customary chores, thus never reaching his old salary. Now, he starts to be obstinate and unwilling to undertake any kind of job which he expresses with the phrase "I would prefer not to", and it only gets worse with time, where he begins to state it more often until he does not work at all. This phrase also has a connection to Bartleby's former job, as the response "I would prefer not to" has a sound of a contemptuous, self-pitying tone to it: Bartleby is well aware of the fact that his former job was higher ranked than his current job and that he has fallen on hard times. Furthermore, the word *prefer* is greatly connected with the culture of a public office: "*Preferment* referred to holding public office and *preferring charges* to drafting a formal indictment against a public officer who failed to uphold his trust" (John 634). Thus, despite Bartleby's odd behaviour, it is widely possible to understand him if we as readers are familiar with his former job (an information that the lawyer should have stated from the beginning), and it starts to make more sense that Bartleby refuses to leave the office after

his dismissal as well, as he is determined not to be removed again like he was at his former job and has nowhere else to go than the office.

It is actually possible to draw a parallel between Bartleby's sacking from the dead letter office and the lawyer's own loss of a valuable position as justice of the chancery court in the state of New York, making it even harder to believe that the lawyer does not understand the motive behind Bartleby's actions. In the beginning, as mentioned, the lawyer talks about his position as a master of chancery, and he considers the loss of his government office as a major and frustrating blow:

I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a – premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. (Melville 1-2)

Here, he declares his discontent with being dismissed way too soon from the government office that he had looked forward to in all these years. He actually reacts in approximately the same way as Bartleby; both are frustrated and annoyed by their departure of their previous jobs. Thus, it creates a certain unreliability in the lawyer's narration and description of Bartleby that he fails to combine and connect his own personal outrage with a lost office with that of Bartleby's similar situation with a lost clerkship as well and that he is unable to understand Bartleby's behaviours and emotions even though he has experienced some of them himself. It is strange and peculiar why the lawyer is unable to draw attention to the feature of Bartleby's past in explaining Bartleby's behaviour, as it plays a huge part in understanding Bartleby's motives.

An explanation of his failing in understanding Bartleby can be found in the lawyer's constrained social vision. He is too busy working and wanting Bartleby to work, thus not looking at Bartleby in a social manner but only in a working manner: "I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his

own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure” (Melville 7). It appears as if the lawyer wants to help Bartleby – and later on, he tries to help Bartleby to some extent – but every time he begins to puzzle about Bartleby’s personality, he stops himself with the excuse of work. The lawyer is always fixed on his work, so absorbed in it that he is unable to look at Bartleby in a social way. His limited social vision is also shown when the lawyer wonders about what he should do with Bartleby’s refusal to leave the office:

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next morning it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

“I’ll take odds he doesn’t,” said a voice as I passed.

“Doesn’t go? – done!” said I, “put up your money.”

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. (Melville 19)

Here, it is evident that the lawyer is so engaged and distracted with the concern of getting rid of Bartleby, an issue he has to solve in order to continue working properly without worrying about Bartleby’s conduct, that he entirely forgets the fact that it is election day. He simply assumes rather ironically that the people at the corner are referring to the moral drama in the lawyer’s office – a private matter that they could never know anything about – and not about the actual public election.

However, the lawyer is able to figure out the misunderstanding himself, but his failure to reflect on the wider implications of Bartleby's dismissal is perfectly in character, as he is too obsessed with his job and work-related personal problems to see Bartleby's problems despite all opportunities to do so.

One can argue that because Bartleby rebels against his downsizing in money and place of employment, he has to pay the greatest and dreadful price of them all, namely death, only because of the fact that – according to the American scholar William B. Dillingham – he was being “stronger, greater, and more honest than an ordinary man” (Dillingham 49). A further observation is that Bartleby actually ‘dies’ two times during the story, the first being figuratively when he achieves the will to say “I would prefer not to” to the society and to the world, and he stops being an ordinary man who is guided by fear but now starts doing what he wants, namely nothing, although it means that he no longer feels what ordinary people experience, like happiness, fear, hope, sympathy, humility, and being human in general. When Bartleby first ‘dies’, he transforms into a person who does not care for others and anything else other than his own determination to demonstrate against the system in his own kind of extreme way, which in the end leads to his actual death. With his death, Bartleby gains what Herman Melville called “apotheosis” in *Moby-Dick*, which is the “state of the highest degree of independence obtainable by mortal man, noble in itself but always accompanied by the loss of ordinary feelings” (Dillingham 49), thus being treated like a god. However, no rebirth takes place, but Bartleby feels so victimised that he uses his massive willpower to strike back at what he believes to be the source of his problems. His strength of will is not supernatural, but it is a mysterious phenomenon, which the lawyer also points out when describing Bartleby for the first time: “While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man” (Melville 1). Thus, it is no wonder that readers

have a hard time understanding and identifying with Bartleby if this apotheosis really was the status he indirectly wanted to achieve⁵.

“Bartleby, The Scrivener” is thus a story about two men, where one does not want to communicate with the world, and the other one does not want to communicate with himself (Dillingham 53). Like a dead letter from the dead letter office, Bartleby has no place to go in the world: He has erased his past and tries to reach his future in a way to which the world is not used. The lawyer is troubled about the rumour of Bartleby’s time at the dead letter office, once more worrying about death and the fact that “dead letter” sounds like “dead men”. It appears as if the lawyer feels commiseration, understanding, and pity towards Bartleby in the end, but it is born out of fear and self-pity and includes a wrong observation: The lawyer just concludes that we all die. It is this linking with Bartleby and ordinary humanity in which he fails to see “with what force and finality Bartleby rejected and transcended humanity” (Dillingham 54) and the fact that Bartleby has never been an ordinary man. Thus, Melville manages to translate the complaining and lament of Bartleby into the voice of an uncomprehending narrator who is completely unaware of the wider dimensions of Bartleby’s state and thoughts.

Unreliability in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a novel by the American writer Mark Twain, published in 1884. The book is considered his greatest work, and leading writers and literary critics have also proclaimed it to be “the great American novel” (Elliott vii). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a story about the white boy Huck, short for Huckleberry Finn, about “thirteen or fourteen or along there” (Twain 90)

⁵ However, this is only one take on Bartleby’s behaviour by Dillingham. Bartleby’s identity and the cause of his actions are much debated among critics: For example, both Newton Arvin in *Herman Melville* (1950) and Richard Chase in *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (1949) argue that Bartleby is suffering from schizophrenia, and other critics like Leo Marx read Bartleby as the artist in society or as Melville himself. In the light of this debate on Bartleby’s behaviour, it could be argued that there are no limits as to in how many ways Bartleby can be interpreted.

of age, who fakes his own death to escape his drunken father and travels down the Mississippi River from the fictional St. Petersburg, Missouri to Cairo, Illinois together with the runaway slave, Jim. According to Twain himself at the title page containing an indication of place and time before the story begins, the time is “Forty to Fifty Years Ago” which means forty to fifty years ago from the year of 1884 where the novel was written. Thus, the story takes place some time before the American Civil War.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is narrated in the first person with Huck as the main character and the narrator of the story, thus having a dramatized narrator. Furthermore, Huck functions as a narrator-agent who has the central role on the course of the events. We as readers are told the story from Huck’s perspective and through his eyes, and we experience both external events, which Huck witnesses, and his own internal feelings and thoughts. The reader feels related to Huck’s actions, thus creating alignment between the reader and the main character of the story, even though Huck can be dishonest and lying a lot. This is for example seen when Huck dresses himself up as a girl and lies about who he is to learn information about his father from a woman. However, she quickly discovers that Huck is not a girl as he cannot remember his made-up girl’s name and does things in ways that only boys will do them: For example, Huck threads a needle with the thread still and fetching the needle up to it, while a girl holds the needle still and pokes the thread at it, and furthermore, Huck claps his legs and knees when trying to catch something, while a girl throws her legs and knees apart (Twain 57). Even though it is wrong to be deceitful and dishonest, we as readers feel sympathy and go along with his actions as we understand the motives behind them and why Huck must lie to prevent getting recognized. In a way, many of Huck’s dishonest actions are not very different from the ones of the Duke and the King – who are two otherwise unnamed con artists that defraud people⁶ – as all

⁶ Huck and Jim are also among the people who the Duke and the King try to defraud, namely as they introduce themselves as respectively the long-lost Duke of Bridgewater and the long-dead Louis XVII of France in an attempt to gain respect and services from Huck and Jim (Twain 112-114). They never call themselves by any other names as they are

three of them tell stories to manipulate people. However, we as readers do not hear the story from the perspective of the Duke and the King, which means that we cannot enter their feelings and values. Maybe they have a good reason to do what they do as well as Huck? Because we do not know what their motives are, we must assume that they are egotistical and rapacious as their actions suggest, which is not the case of Huck, to whom we relate because of his understandable motives and high will of freeing Jim.

Huck is mostly an unreliable narrator, as he misreads some of the situations because of his young age. Additionally, Huck's "child persona serves well as the voice of an unreliable, naïve narrator, for in such an approach the narrator innocently exposes societal inconsistencies and contradictions" (Kaufmann 68). The misunderstandings create irony and a contrast between Huck's good nature and the cold and sanctimonious grown-ups. This kind of irony refers to situations where the reader knows more than the narrator in the story, which is the case with Huck and the reader in *Huckleberry Finn*. I will look further into this important aspect, when I have looked upon Mark Twain.

The author (and implied author) Mark Twain/Samuel Clemens

The author of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain, was born in the hamlet of Florida, Missouri, in 1835. However, the name of Mark Twain was not his real name, but a pen name, 'persona', nom de plume, and kind of fictional character which he invented in the early 1860s to represent himself in public and as the author behind his books. Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens, and he was more specifically raised in Hannibal, Missouri, which later provided the setting for the

trying to trick Huck and Jim, however, on the posters of their Shakespearean revival, they introduce themselves as David Garrick and Edmund Kean (Twain 126). This is another fraud as they now pretend to be respectively an English actor and playwright who was famous for his productions of Shakespeare's plays, and the successor to Garrick who was noted for playing Richard III. Furthermore, they call themselves "the younger" and "the elder" as additions, thus being called "David Garrick the younger" and "Edmund Kean the elder", however, no such persons have ever existed (Rasmussen 331).

fictional city St. Petersburg where his novels *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* take place. Furthermore, some of Twain's childhood friends, who was African Americans, had a powerful influence on him and his future writing, as he in these years learned about their speech and culture which he utilised in writing his novels. At the same time, he was directly influenced by the presence of slavery as his father both traded slaves and enforced public whippings of slaves. These experiences resulted in Twain depicting the distorting effect of slavery and undermining standard racial stereotypes in his works, as he was a passionate opponent of slavery and what it entailed (Messent 2-3). This is also seen in his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where he introduces the runaway slave Jim and his wish to be free and find his family.

Twain started using the name Mark Twain when he worked as a professional Mississippi steamboat pilot, where it meant "to take note that the river is now 'two fathoms deep'" in terminology of piloting (Elliott ix). Thus, the name provided a double message for him; for the river pilot Mark Twain, it meant that the water was deep enough for safe passages of steamboats, and for the writer Mark Twain, it referred to stories which contained at least two registrations of authorial voices. Hence, we as readers have to keep in mind that even though we may hear only one voice in the stories, we have to look further for at least two voices and not restrain our interpretations to only one level of meaning.

In the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the narrator is Huck Finn, however, this voice is the evident and obvious one of the story, but not the only one. Mark Twain is the author – and at the same time the nom de plume for Samuel Clemens – and the one who takes the credit for the books, thus distancing Clemens from the public. Following Booth's line of thought, we can distinguish between two point of views, namely the one of Huck and the one of the implied author. As readers, we sometimes witness the fact that the implied author lurks behind the scene, for example seen in chapter 17 when Huck gets invited to stay at the home of the Grangerfords, an aristocratic Kentuckian family

who is involved in an age-old blood feud with another local family, the Shepherdsons. At the Grangerfords, Huck admires the house and its humorously tacky finery, not knowing what a real distinguished house looks like. He also appreciates the sentimental artwork and poems by the deceased daughter, Emmeline, regarding people who died, however, the works are created in an unintentionally funny way. While admiring the house and its content, Huck stumbles upon some books on a table, among them the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, both religious works. However, Huck does not know of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a Christian allegory written by the English Puritan preacher John Bunyan in 1678. The allegory describes the journey of the human or everyman character towards the eternal blessedness, however, Huck reads the allegory literally: "One was 'Pilgrim's Progress,' about a man that left his family it didn't say why" (Twain 93). Here, Huck completely misses the point, but it is possible that Twain invites the reader to compare Huck with the everyman character of the novel of which Huck obviously is unaware (Aldridge 36). Furthermore, on the same occasion, it is clear that Twain pokes fun of the American tastes and arrogance of romantic literature through Huck's ignorance, as the Grangerfords and their home are rather absurd and not the palace which the naïve narrator Huck describes for us.

As seen in chapter 17, the reader can witness signs of the implied author connected with events where the naïve narrator is unaware or unknown of the given situation. In continuation of this, Booth comments on the case of the implied author in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* where he states that "the narrator claims to be naturally wicked while the author silently praises his virtues behind his back" (Booth 159). However, is it really Mark Twain that is the implied author of the novel? Because Mark Twain is in fact just a persona or character, it is conceivable that the 'real' Samuel Clemens plays a role in constructing the story. According to the American scholar and recent biographer of Mark Twain, Andrew Hoffman, there is an underlying tension present in the novel between Clemens and Twain:

Sam[uel] Clemens hides behind the scenes in *Huck Finn* pulling the narrative strings, and he does not mind weakening Mark Twain's authority in the process. Tom [Sawyer]'s incursion at the end of the book, which challenges the moral foundation carefully set by Mark Twain, represents [Clemens'] disguised effort to secure recognition for himself as both the author of *Huck Finn* and the inventor of its titular author. (Aldridge 24)

In this way, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is actually consisting of three tellers, namely a real author (Twain), an implied author (Clemens), and a narrator (Huck). This should not be understood as if Twain is a real person and not a persona, but in the regard that Clemens invented the persona of Mark Twain to be the one behind his speeches and his books, thus Twain being the 'real' author. In the early days when Clemens had just invented the character of Twain, Clemens was actually more popular as a speaker than he was as a writer, and when he performed, he performed as the character Mark Twain. The real identity was not a secret, and the general public knew who he really was. Clemens discovered that the reason why the public attended his lectures and bought his books was because of the fictional Mark Twain who became alive at the lectures and as the writer in the books. Because of Clemens' literary experiments at the lectures and on the printed pages, the fictitious Twain's personality and views were implied, and he took his alter ego to a new level that had not been seen before, nor have been seen since (Aldridge 37).

In this way, according to Hoffman and American scholar Doug Aldridge, Mark Twain is a product of fiction, and his feelings and understandings are an important theme of the works. However, Twain is not the maker nor the source of the works; that is Samuel Clemens. Therefore, even though it is obvious and reasonable to call Mark Twain the implied author of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it is actually Clemens who is the true implied author of the work (Aldridge 38). In a way, both Clemens and Twain function as an implied author, which can be put in this way: Clemens is the implied author by Mark Twain and Huck in collaboration, while Mark Twain only is the implied author by Huck's

narration, which can be seen in the first paragraph of chapter 1, where Huck introduces the novel: “You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth” (Twain 3). You could say that the character of Mark Twain is masquerading as the implied author in the text, and he is at the same time the only author of whom Huck knows. Thus, Twain functions as an obvious implied author – for both the reader and Huck himself – but Clemens is also behind the implied author as well, hiding.

I am aware of the fact that not everyone divides the persons of Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain as I have done based on the thoughts of Doug Aldridge. Aldridge presents merely the two identities to be very different from one another, however, I am not sure whether they are as contrasting as he makes them. In the public domain, there are no signs that the pseudonym and character of Mark Twain conflicts with the birth name and legal identity of Samuel Clemens, and that Clemens’ views are far from Twain’s line of thought. We cannot know exactly how Twain viewed himself, however, even if he tried to distance Clemens from the spotlight and share stances through Twain which were not his real opinions as Clemens, it would be somewhat of a detour as the thoughts of the implied author are not equivalent to the thoughts of the author as mentioned earlier. I do not think that the reader has to distinguish and analyse the two ‘persons’ as seriously as Aldridge does, as much of Twain’s works are based on irony. Additionally, before the novel begins, Twain writes a ‘notice’ which says that “[p]ersons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot” (Twain 2), indicating that the reader should not read too much into the story, which is another example of Twain’s sense of humour. Regardless of whether Twain himself believed that he distanced himself from Clemens or not, and whether Clemens indeed hides behind the scenes and functions as a hidden implied author or not, I will no longer through my thesis distinguish further between Samuel Clemens and Mark

Twain in an attempt not to confuse the reader more than necessary. Henceforth, I will refer to him as Mark Twain.

Mentioning irony, this literary technique is one in which Mark Twain makes a great use of in his works and especially in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As mentioned earlier, irony is one of the techniques and approaches to spot unreliability in a story, and irony creates a distance between the views and behaviours of the unreliable narrator versus the implied author. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an outstanding book as it is the only novel where Twain committed the full story to the voice of a boy, and the reader only witnesses what Huck truthfully tries to describe regarding what he sees and thinks. It is highly possible that the reader misses out on some aspects of the narrative, and that Huck's limitations of common knowledge create "foreshortening in the narrative" (Aldridge 33), but that is solely the part of Huck being a child trying to manage with the confusing world of adults without any guidelines apart from the company of the slave Jim, who seems more stupid in the beginning than he really is due to the fact that he is very superstitious. However, throughout the novel, the reader learns that Jim possesses knowledge of the natural world through his superstition, and even though he has alternative methods of showing intelligence, Jim shows parental tenderness, compassion, and friendliness toward Huck. One could argue that Jim is the only adult that provides a good, respectable, and decent example for Huck to follow, and in this way, Jim acts as a surrogate father for him and tries to help him through the awaiting troubles.

Even though the reader may think that Huck possesses a great deal of humour because of his witty and ironic remarks from time to time, this is not the case as Huck himself does not know that he is funny to the reader. Here, it is Mark Twain as the implied author who becomes responsible for the humour and thus leads the reader to sense the irony and the ignorance of Huck. Actually, Huck does not possess much humour, and it is merely the implied author's doing that the reader finds Huck's remarks ironic and funny. Huck does not intend to make the reader laugh, as he is just describing and

informing the reader on what is happening in the best way of an innocent and naïve child: Huck is an impassive observer as he does not interfere and judge. Because of the fact that he does not know better in given situations about specific circumstances, his observations are yet full of irony as the reader and the implied author know better: The reader “marvels at his innocence, ignorance, and naiveté” (Aldridge 34), and it is clear that the contrast between the two levels of perception, namely the ones of Twain and Huck, constructs an almost unbroken irony. As mentioned earlier with Twain’s ‘notice’, this attention or note is a part of Twain’s ironic humour, as the motive, the moral, and the plot *are* indeed identifiable in Huck’s narrative, and not entirely impossible to find as Twain indicates, but only if the reader’s satire and wit are on the same level with that of ‘The Author’, and thus with that of Mark Twain. On that note, it is evident and obvious that irony is a keynote of the narrative.

Through the irony, the book distances the implied author Mark Twain and the narrator Huck from each other. This is for example seen in the very beginning, which I have already touched upon, where Huck introduces the book and mentions that the novel is made by Mr. Mark Twain, the “Mr.” indicating that Huck respects Twain for his status and profession. This is a clear example and statement of the fact that we as readers must keep these two persons separate, as Huck simply introduces Twain as a co-narrator in the background, while he himself is the one narrating the story. However, even though the novel indicates that Huck is the one who wrote the story and furthermore leaves signs of it – for example the aforementioned beginning and the very ending “and so there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more” (Twain 262) – this is not the case. Even though the whole story is narrated by a boy, seen through his eyes, and thus indicating that he himself wrote down the story, we as readers do never believe that Huck in fact is a real character who wrote a memoir about his journey and experiences along the road with Jim. If he were to have written the book, we would ask ourselves: “[H]ow could such an ill-educated boy possibly have an authorial role,

and just when might the novel have been composed and written by him?” (Messent 74). Furthermore, Huck does rarely discuss his alleged writing chores (Booth 155). It is confirmed in the book’s ‘notice’ and ‘explanatory’ before the beginning of the novel that ‘The Author’ is the creator of Huck’s words, although denied by Huck. However, seemingly, this segregation and distance of the author from the text is what Mark Twain intended to achieve by putting the complete story into Huck’s own words. In his manuscript, it is shown that Twain thought about putting ‘Reported by Mark Twain’ on the title page, however, he scrapped the idea as it would take away too much of Huck’s credibility as a narrator if Twain took that much responsibility as the author (Aldridge 34). Even though he tries to distance himself as much as possible from Huck’s narrative, the ironic humour is still a part of the story thanks to Twain, as he adds decreasing harshness of the realities of Huck’s narrative to lighten the mood.

In Mark Twain’s final years, he was an acknowledged and famous author, both nationally and internationally: At home in the United States of America, he was the ‘cracker-barrel’ philosopher and the cherished satirist, and abroad in the world, he was “the representative American Westerner who mocked convention, laughed at himself, and good-naturedly violated the rules of propriety” (Elliott xxxvi). He enjoyed the recognition and liked to draw attention to himself, for example by walking by churches on Sundays in his famous white suit and thus be easily seen by many people. In this period of his life, Twain was more likely to speak in his own voice in his writing: He expressed his thoughts in a non-fiction mode, thus not using an implied author or a persona, and he avoided to apply his comic persona which made him well-known. One of the aspects where Twain used his voice as well as presence was during protests, for example against the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902 and against the larger combination of Christian missionary activity and western Imperialism (Messent 8). There are various conflicting accounts of Twain’s last years, where one of the most influential accounts has been made by American scholar Hamlin Hill, who portrayed Train as an “unpredictably bad-tempered old man, vindictive, sometimes worse-the-wear for drink and with a faltering memory”

in *Mark Twain: God's Fool* (1973) (Messent 9). However, other scholars have called this view a severe perception and try to depict a man and an artist who could still enjoy life and write remarkably, and they tried to state the fact that Twain cannot be restrained to a single dimension. In his last decade, he kept on writing, even though much of it was never published at the time he lived. He died in 1910 of heart trouble, that had plagued him in his final year, in Redding, Connecticut.

Huck as an unreliable narrator

As mentioned earlier, Huck functions as an unreliable narrator because of him misreading the situations due to his young age. The aspect of misreading creates irony and thereby situations where the reader knows more than the narrator himself, therefore knowing more than Huck does. Twain very often employs this aspect of irony and thus Huck as unreliable in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The misreading begins on the first page of the book, where Huck winds up the preceding book of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) about him and his friend, Tom Sawyer, who is also a part of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. When telling about his time at the Widow Douglas' home, Huck tells that “[w]hen you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them” (Twain 3). Here, Huck fails to understand the fact that the Widow Douglas is simply praying before eating her dinner. In general, Mark Twain is very satirical about religion and Christianity in the novel, and the narrative divides Christianity into two different kinds of experience: The first way is dismal regular, tiresome decent, and deadly boring, while the second way is free and satisfying. The first experience is the way Huck lived his life at Widow Douglas' home, while the second experience is the way Huck lived at his former place as well as after his stay at Widow Douglas'. In the beginning when he lives in the widow's house, Huck rejects the civilised way by which Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson live, along with their threats about “the bad place” and

promises about “the good place” if he behaves properly. Although he starts to accept and to like this lifestyle, the school, and his evident good results and improvement, he does not miss religion and the prayers when his father kidnaps him and puts him locked up in a cabin in the woods. It is clear that Huck never understood the aspects of Christianity as he misunderstands the gestures several times, even though he tries to make Widow Douglas and Miss Watson happy. Another example is the fact that Huck does not understand the concept of prayers, and what you can pray about and not:

[Miss Watson] told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By-and-by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way. [...] I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was 'spiritual gifts'. This was too many for me. [...] I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it – except for the other people – so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go. (Twain 12)

Widow Douglas explains to Huck what the proper object of prayer consists of, namely to help other people and never to think about oneself, however, as Huck is just a boy, he cannot see the benefits in it. At this age, children think about what is good for *them* and what *they* gain from a specific situation. Huck thinks that praying is an activity that makes you get whatever you desire, but when he figures out that you have to do something for other people and even not get any physical desired object in return, he cannot understand the concept of praying as it can never be in his favour. Huck does not understand much of the widow's worldview nor of her values, and his ignorance towards Christianity does not make it easier for him in trying to understand her belief:

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers; and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by-and-by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him; because I don't take no stock in dead people. (Twain 4)

In general, chapter 3 is about how and in what you can believe. In the opening paragraphs, Huck tests and refuses the key principles associated with the nominal religion of the society, as stated above, however, in the end of the chapter – when Huck and Tom Sawyer's gang are supposed to kill a whole parcel of Spanish merchants and rich Arabs and scoop their things, which in reality are just a Sunday-school picnic and thus just another one of Tom's lies and pretendings – Tom introduces another theory in which you “rub an old tin lamp or an iron ring, and then the genies come tearing in, with the thunder and lightning a-ripping around and the smoke a-rolling, and everything they're told to do they up and do it” (Twain 14). Huck has some questions about it and is suspicious, but as well as he gave praying a chance, he decides to give this theory a chance too: However, after giving it a go, nothing happened, the same way as nothing happened to Huck while praying. This shows a great parallel between the concept of Christian prayer and (unworking) magic formula put up against each other, and the event makes Huck both ignorant and gullible as he cannot see the difference between Christian faith and supernatural powers. Because the chapter deals with both praying and magic, it equates praying with rubbing an old tin lamp and an iron ring in an attempt to summon a genie, which indeed is another sign of Mark Twain's humour.

Another example of Huck's unreliability happens when Huck goes to the circus after leaving the lynch mob who wanted to kill the wealthy shop owner Colonel Sherburn. However, Huck is unfamiliar with circuses, and thus, he is very fascinated by the atmosphere and the dressed-up entertainers. Furthermore, he is not familiar with the ways a circus entertains people, for example when the clown exclaims witty comebacks out of nowhere:

[A]ll the time that clown carried on so it most killed the people. The ring-master couldn't ever say a word to him but he was back at him quick as a wink with the funniest things a body ever said; and how he ever *could* think of so many of them, and so sudden and so pat, was what I couldn't noway understand. Why, I couldn't a thought of them in a year. (Twain 135)

Clearly, Huck is not aware that it is all planned in connection with the entertainment. Additionally, he is not aware that the (supposedly) drunk man in the audience and the ringmaster both are a part of the act; the drunk man only plays a drunkard and is actually a performer, and the ringmaster is perfectly aware of the clown's witty comebacks and the fact that the drunk man is a part of his own circus crew, because it is all a part of the plan and the entertainment. Nonetheless, Huck cannot figure this out, and while the crowd is excited and amused, Huck is afraid because of the drunk man's danger, and he does not find the act funny like the crowd.

However, it is not odd why Huck cannot tell the difference between reality and charade. Just before attending the circus, as briefly mentioned, Huck has witnessed the shooting of a rowdy drunk man called Boggs, gunned down by Colonel Sherburn. The lynch mob wants to kill Sherburn and goes to his house, where Sherburn awaits the people with a rifle pointed at them. Here, Sherburn delivers a profound speech about human nature where he criticises the cowardice and despicable behaviour of the average citizen, which is an impressive and accurate speech about the disgraceful behaviour of the people we meet in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The context is strange though, as Sherburn says all the right things, but at the same time, he has just shot a defenceless drunkard which makes him no better than the men he has just unfavourable described. Thus, he contradicts himself by saying one thing, yet has done the opposite minutes before his speech. When Huck goes to the circus, the former incident with the speech only complicates the matter. He cannot distinguish between reality and the act that the performers of the circus are in, and he is not able to see through the enthralling

experience that the circus tries to create, therefore misinterpreting the situation. Huck sees the drunk man in the audience and assumes that he really *is* a drunkard, but gets marvelled when it is clear that he is one of the performers. Huck is innocent and uncorrupted; he believes in what he sees, and when he has just seen a man getting shot, it is obvious why Huck believes that the drunken man in the circus is in danger as well. The circus depicts how little difference there is between the spectacular, the entertainment, and the blatant deceit happening in both the circus and in the episode of the speech. In a world like the one in the novel, Twain shows how it is impossible to distinguish between the reality and the charade.

Huck does also show his ignorance when visiting the Grangerfords after him and Jim lose each other while being rammed by a steamboat⁷. I have already talked slightly about Huck's experience at their house in an earlier section as an example on how you can see the implied author function in the novel. As mentioned, Huck admires the house, and as he has never truly had a home besides the rather spartan house of Widow Douglas, he finds the Grangerford house to look like a palace and adores it too much. Although his delight is sincere, this is another example of Huck's naivety and why he is unreliable, as he does not describe the house the way it really is – but again, he does not know any better. We do also witness the fact that Huck is unfamiliar with *The Pilgrim's Progress* and completely misses the point of the events in the Christian allegory.

Linked together with his time at the Grangerfords, we as readers realise that Huck sometimes happens to be an unknown and unskilled judge of character. This is also connected with his age and his

⁷ This is another example of Mark Twain's humour as well, where he lulls the reader into believing in a comfortable outcome, only to introduce the reader to a surprising and startling twist of events (Elliott xix). The development of Huck and Jim's journey has so far (before chapter 17) been consisting of many ups and downs, and now, when Jim and Huck are finally back together on their raft, the reader can finally begin to see hope ahead for them. However, this light of hope is suddenly and unexpectedly shattered when the steamboat crashes through the raft and thereby sinking the hope for a future of Huck, Jim, and the humanity of the story.

ignorance about the society in general and the fact that it can be difficult and complicated to distinguish between the illusions and realities of human experience. When Huck first meets the Grangerford family, they are very charming, generous, graceful, and hospitable. Even better, the family has a boy at the same age as Huck – funnily enough called Buck – with whom Huck quickly becomes friends. The family consists of warmth and humour, and Huck adores their scenic and quaint house and furniture, as well as their façade of gentility, propriety, and aristocracy. Huck feels fairly at home for a time with the Grangerfords. However, as time passes within a few paragraphs, both Huck and the reader come to realise that the pleasing of the Grangerford family may be a façade, for example seen when Buck in an evil agenda shoots at a young man from another family, Harney Shepherdson. Buck tells Huck about the two families’ age-old blood feud involving mutual killing and mutilating: They cannot stand each other. However, on Sundays, they can attend the same church well enough together, and the reader and Huck start to accept the clan war, as people around them and within the families still seem to be able to live normal, fairly undisturbed lives. It turns out that it is another façade though, which is seen in the church with a rather laconic description from Huck of the events: “It was pretty ornery preaching – all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness” (Twain 101). The incident at the church is another example of Twain’s humour as it is fairly ironic to have a cease-fire in effect while going to church, but still bringing weapons to keep between the knees and against the walls. It exposes the sham and bogus that Christianity represents in a society full of destructive and internecine violence, fighting, and killing, and shows how Southern people think of honour and proper, distinguished behaviour as only disguises of a cruel and horrific savagery (Messent 81). It does not make it any better that Huck unwittingly helps Sophie Grangerford and Harney Shepherdson escape together in the best Romeo and Juliet style, and all hell breaks loose once more between the two families. The mood of Southern charm is now transformed into a night of horror, and helplessly

and frightened, Huck watches Buck being killed by three of the Shepherdson men. Huck realises that it has been a mistake to come to the Grangerford house as he describes the disastrous day:

I don't want to talk much about the next day. I reckon I'll cut it pretty short. [...] I ain't agoing to tell *all* that happened – it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them – lots of times I dream about them. (Twain 104-106)

Now, Huck is completely disappointed about the Grangerford family, and his credulous illusion about them is shattered. The previously felt admiration for the inner dignity and resolve is now gone, and even though he cannot force himself into judging the family as murderers because they were too kind to him, he can never get back his sense of adoration for them with the events of Buck, a boy like himself, being mutilated and killed in the name of family honour. An afraid and anxious Huck flees the place and finds Jim, who has rebuilt and repaired the raft, and it has been a traumatic experience that has left a deep mark on Huck.

Now, one would assume that Huck would be more careful when meeting new people and would look out for their real attentions and hidden selves. Nevertheless, in chapter 19, when the two swindlers the Duke and the King invade and start to command the raft, Huck does not do anything about it. In the beginning, he is naïve and believes in the tales of the two liars, but later on, he realises that they are not the men they pretend to be:

It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble. If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family; and it wan't no use to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him. If I never

learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way. (Twain 115)

Here, we as readers witness something important about Huck as a person: He does not try to find a way to get the Duke and the King off the raft and escape from them, but he passively accepts the loss of his freedom and property. Furthermore, he compares them to his father, Pap, who beat him and kidnapped him, as a way of saying that there is absolutely nothing that can be done about the situation. This is a sign of the fact that Huck dreads male authority figures, and when being confronted by one who confidently proclaims power and control over him, he does what he used to do in similar situations with Pap: He manages through passive acceptance and silently watching for a change to escape (Elliott xxii). It is fair to say that Huck is “at the mercy of anyone whose words claim power over him” (Messent 80) until he finds a way to escape them. The passive acceptance is also seen towards the end of the novel, where Huck without any resistance accepts most of Tom Sawyer’s plans, systems, and their casual malice toward Jim. This form of passive acceptance by Huck is also a kind of unreliability, namely a *bonding unreliability* which diminishes the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience⁸ (Phelan 9). Throughout the novel, Mark Twain has employed bonding unreliability, which is for example seen through Huck’s naïve defamiliarizations of Tom Sawyer’s detailed but complicated plans, and in this instance, Twain employs the bonding unreliability in relation to Huck as a misreader. He misreads his own values; what is alright to be done to oneself by others (how should the Duke and the King treat Huck?), and what is alright to be done to others by oneself

⁸ Furthermore, James Phelan states that “[i]n bonding unreliability, the discrepancies between the narrator’s reports, interpretations, or evaluations have the paradoxical result of reducing the interpretive, affective, or ethical distance between the narrator and the authorial audience. In other words, although the authorial audience recognizes the narrator’s unreliability, that unreliability includes some communication that the implied author – and thus the authorial audience – endorses” (Phelan 11). At the same time, he identifies six subtypes of bonding unreliability which are “literally unreliable but metaphorically reliable”; “playful comparison between implied author and narrator”; “naïve defamiliarization”; “sincere but misguided self-deprecation”; “partial progress towards the norm”; and “bonding through optimistic comparison”. However, in this thesis, I will not dig deeper into these subtypes and bonding unreliability in general besides what I am already describing in this section. See more about bonding unreliability and the six subtypes in Phelan 2008.

(how should Huck (and Tom) treat Jim?). The fact that Huck misunderstands what he can and cannot do entails frustration and anger for some readers, first towards the Duke and the King, and later towards Tom Sawyer.

Unreliability in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is a novel by the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, published in 1925, and the book is considered to be Fitzgerald's finest work (Gray 436). The story is told by Nick Carraway, who is a bond salesman, a newly arrived resident of a rented house in West Egg, and the next-door neighbour to the young and mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is enormously obsessed with Daisy Buchanan, a young and beautiful debutante whom he met as a young military officer during World War I, and the two of them were involved in a romantic relationship together. Furthermore, she is also Nick's second cousin once removed. Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan, a millionaire and former American football star, and they live in the town East Egg, the opposite-lying town from West Egg. Both towns are comprised of rich people, where East Egg accommodates the people who have mainly received their wealth through inheritance, namely the Buchanans, whereas West Egg houses the people who have recently gained their wealth like Gatsby, who however has achieved it by participating in organized crime. The two fictional towns⁹ are located on the prosperous island, Long Island in New York, and the story takes place in the summer of 1922, where we follow the characters' lives from the suburbs to New York City, and how Gatsby tries to win Daisy back.

The Great Gatsby is narrated in the first person with Nick Carraway as the narrator of the story and thus from his point of view. Fitzgerald abolished the third-person narrator with the omniscient viewpoint that he had used in his two previous novels, *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and*

⁹ West Egg and East Egg are modelled after the two villages of Long Island, Kings Point and Sands Point, respectively.

Damned (1922), and he introduced a fictional narrator, Nick, who is – according to Booth – only slightly involved in the actual events but who is greatly affected by it (Gray 436). Whether Nick is “only slightly involved” or not is a subject I will return to. It is easy to say, however, that Nick functions as an adjunct to *Gatsby* and the Buchanans, thus following them around when they go somewhere specific.

Nick Carraway is only describing his own opinions and the actions where he himself is present, and if he indicates other people’s thoughts, it is because they have told him. Mostly, he remains an observer of the events around him, and he disappears into the background when something important is about to happen, for example the meetings between Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy, where Nick narrates what is going on and what is being said there. Sometimes, he empathises too much in his narration of the lives of others and forgets his own life; for example, he fails to remember his own 30th birthday until later the same day (Fitzgerald 136). In several passages, Nick’s voice disappears entirely, and even though he is not an omniscient narrator, he narrates opinions and feelings of other characters as if he was inside their minds. This is for instance seen when Gatsby tells Nick about his past with Daisy:

His heart beat faster as Daisy’s white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (Fitzgerald 112)

Here, it is actually Gatsby’s point of view we witness, but as Nick narrates directly what Gatsby has told him, it does not violate the first-person narration: The passage is merely a recollection.

It can be difficult for the reader to figure out how much one can rely on the first-person narrator's comments, views, and opinions; thus, whether the narrator is reliable or not. A general assumption is that the narrator is almost always in some way unreliable, as the story is told from only one person's perspective and the fact that the narrator always has some kind of biases and prejudices that he brings into the events which may affect and distort the story and the truth. Furthermore, some narrators even lie to the reader purposely. It can be tough to determine Nick Carraway's role as a narrator, as he is not a typically unreliable narrator. As I will analyse more in depth later, F. Scott Fitzgerald does not give any indications or signals to show that Nick is lying or that his version of a given event is not consistent with anyone else's; seemingly, Nick tries to tell the truth as well as possible. In the very beginning, Nick states that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" (Fitzgerald 1) and thus getting people to trust him easier, however, this statement can be interpreted differently. Without a doubt, he is saying this to encourage the reader to see him as a reliable narrator, however, it is unusual for a first-person narrator to establish their credibility quite so openly, and thus, the statement can create a degree of scepticism. This also applies to Nick's later statement where he says that "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (Fitzgerald 60), where this description of himself makes the reader wonder how much Nick really can be trusted. In this way, *The Great Gatsby* is making Nick a somewhat complicated narrator, not clearly indicating whether he is a reliable or unreliable narrator, which is an issue to which I will return. A general assumption of the book is the fact that it is a primary straightforward criticism of the American Dream, which crumbles before Gatsby's eyes with Nick witnessing it all (Cartwright 218).

The author F. Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1896, however primarily raised in New York, where *The Great Gatsby* takes place. Like *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's novels depict

abundance, riches, and flamboyance of the Jazz Age, a period in the 1920s where dance styles and jazz music gained national popularity in the United States, which was also referred to as The Roaring Twenties. For his generation, Fitzgerald maintained the great American romance of the self, and he also managed to convey several of the differences of the modern age through his personality and style of writing. During his lifetime, Fitzgerald attained popularity, success, and wealth, however, it was not until after his death that he received critical recognition and acclaim. Today, Fitzgerald is considered one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century (Gray 440).

Once, F. Scott Fitzgerald stated that “[s]ometimes, I don’t know whether I’m real or whether I’m a character in one of my own novels” (Gray 435), which is an interesting observation as he bears an abnormal and extraordinary similarity to some of his protagonists, for example from books like *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *Tender is the Night* (1934), *The Last Tycoon* (1941), as well as *The Great Gatsby*. These books have the same content of and commitment to flamboyant riches, individual ideals and opinions, and the dream of power, love, possibilities, and wealth, which is a classical dream for the individual American. Fitzgerald perceived himself as a cynical idealist, who like his fellow Americans could navigate through the dreams and the realities that fascinated him, as well as register both the necessity and the impossibility of idealism, like Gatsby reaching out for the green light in the distance where Daisy is: He wants it badly and stretches out to reach it, but he can never quite reach it.

Fitzgerald’s intention and purpose in writing *The Great Gatsby*, according to himself, was to “make something *new* – something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned” (Gray 436). The new aspect consisted of the narration, where the first-person narrator Nick Carraway told the story from his point of view entirely. In using Nick as a narrator, it was made possible for Fitzgerald to keep a balance between the two sides of his character for the first time in his career: The one side with the romantic, who believed in love and possibility, and the other side with the realist,

who did not believe in coincidences and thought of life as rough and short. Because of this type of narration, it was possible to create drama and tension between these two sides of Nick's character, to hold the two opposed ideas in the mind simultaneously, but still remain the capability and qualification for Nick to function as a character. In this way, because of the use of Nick as a narrator, the book is a product of not just a sophisticated sensibility and act of sympathy, but also of a great intelligence consisting of a reinvention of the self.

However, what F. Scott Fitzgerald did *not* intend was to make Nick Carraway an unreliable narrator (Murtaugh 33). Today, many modern critics contemplate Nick as an unreliable narrator, which is a view that entered into literary criticism in the 1960s, but letters from Fitzgerald to his editor, Max Perkins, did not indicate any signs of Fitzgerald thinking of Nick as unreliable and untrustworthy. Actually, Perkins believed Nick to give a convincing and extensive insight into the story and its characters, as he in one of his letters to Fitzgerald wrote:

You adopted exactly the right method of telling it, that of employing a narrator who is more of a spectator than an actor: this puts the reader upon a point of observation on a higher level than that on which the characters stand and at a distance that gives perspective. (Murtaugh 33)

Furthermore, at the time of the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, the criticism regarding the book did not concern any matter of Nick's reliability or the lack of it. As a matter of fact, although he only comments superficially on the story, Wayne C. Booth does also look at Nick as reliable: Even though Booth defines unreliability as a narrator at a distance in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he does not juxtapose distance and unreliability in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, but instead link distance to a heightened objective description of the story. Additionally, both Perkins and Booth believed Nick to be reliable and trustworthy as he shares the same intentions with Fitzgerald as well as the norms Fitzgerald introduces in the novel.

As mentioned, the view on Nick Carraway as a narrator changed in the 1960s, where Nick began to be regarded as an unreliable narrator. One of the most significant and critical works was made by the American scholar Thomas E. Boyle in 1969, where he directly discards Booth's opinion of Nick as a trustworthy narrator. Boyle agrees with Booth regarding his concept of distance, namely the distance between the narrator's perception and the reader's perception, however, Boyle does not agree with Booth's statement that "Nick provides thoroughly reliable guidance" (Booth 176). Even though it is a new view on Nick Carraway, Boyle remarks on the unoriginality of his study as two independently studies already have discussed some of the matter in 1966, namely "Against "The Great Gatsby"" by Gary J. Scrimgeour and the thirteenth chapter of *Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction* by Charles Child Walcutt, where "Scrimgeour sees the narrator's unreliability as a mark of Fitzgerald's confusion, [and] Walcutt sees it as part of the novel's mystery" (Boyle 22). Overall, according to the studies (and to Boyle as well), Nick is a superficial, confused, sanctimonious, and unethical narrator, thus far from Booth's description of him, and critics are no longer being carried away by Nick's narration as they were in the 1960s, but instead debating his untrustworthiness and its effect in order to get a clear understanding of the novel.

This is the view I will follow in my thesis, namely of Nick Carraway's narration as unreliable, as the common view on Nick today is the fact that he *is* an unreliable narrator, as mentioned earlier. In a later paragraph, I will look at Nick's unreliability as being an essential aspect of the story by elucidating ways in which the norms of the novel are being displayed, and in what ways they contrast with the explanations Nick offers. It is an easy solution to accept the explanation for overlooking the norms as an attempt of objectivity, however, under the guise of objectivity and humbleness lurk a haughty pride of Nick, for example seen when he rather snobbishly describes his advantages as "“fundamental decencies” which are “parcelled out unequally at birth”" (Boyle 22).

It is an interesting aspect and dilemma that Nick Carraway can be viewed as an unreliable narrator even though F. Scott Fitzgerald never intended him to be, and that the opinion of Nick as untrustworthy is the popular assumption today. Today, modern critics have potted about the idea of the unstable narration – even though intended to be stable – having something to do with the role of the author, thus having to do with Fitzgerald himself. Somewhat of a conclusion has been that Nick indeed does not speak for the ‘norms’ of the book, which results in him failing to fit his own actions, although it is commonly accepted that Fitzgerald did not intentionally write Nick Carraway to be an unreliable narrator.

However, maybe it is not as weird as to why Nick Carraway is interpreted in two different ways. According to the German scholar Bruno Zerweck, the effect of the readers’ historical and cultural context plays a big role in the modern view of Nick as unreliable and untrustworthy and thereby how they understand him as a narrator. Additionally, the human psychology and behaviour is very important, and this is the aspect that makes the reader believe the first-person narrator, Nick, to be unreliable (Murtaugh 35). The psychology mainly used is the one by Sigmund Freud called Freudian psychology, which is a theory about how a human’s psyche and mind functions. Freud discovered that people were frustrated about the fact that they sometimes acted in ways they could not even understand themselves. They did things that they could neither defend nor explain, for example be very aggressive towards others without any reason why. On this note, Freud argued that all humans have an unconscious life of thoughts, which is the reason why people behave the way they do, sometimes without themselves knowing why. By accepting the Freudian psychology, we are aware of the fact that unconscious motives cause “those around us to project themselves onto others” (Murtaugh 35), thus leading to a general unreliability of narrators. In short, the reader’s own mind and line of thoughts are important in order to decide whether one finds Nick Carraway unreliable or not; if one finds Nick reliable, it is what Fitzgerald would have wanted, but if one finds him unreliable, it is fully

accepted as well due to the social situation the reader finds himself or herself in. For further expansion, Zerweck explains that:

The reader's interpretation of unreliability depends upon the *social norms constructed at the time* in which the story is read rather than the social norms in which the narration is set. [...] [I]nstead of whether the narrator follows the accepted values or norms within the setting of the novel, it is more important that the narrator follows *the norms of the time in which the reader is set*. (Murtaugh 35, my italics)

In this way, even though the unreliability was not intended consciously by neither the narrator nor the author, it is still undeniable to the modern reader who today knows new aspects that was not known at the time of the publication of the book. When the book was published in the 1920s and further forty years forward, the general view and mindset was of Nick as reliable: This was the view that was taught, and unknowingly, this was the opinion people had of the narrator without questioning it. Today, because of new viewpoints and researches, the context in which almost all people are taught is the one in which Nick is seen as unreliable without further notice of Fitzgerald's intention of the narrator. It is furthermore possible that a growth of scepticism in modern times has influenced the reality of the reader as well: If the reader becomes insecure regarding whether Nick as a narrator is capable of interpreting reality or not, the reader can no longer accept the first-person narrator as objective, and so, the reader automatically tends to view the narrator as unreliable. Thus, because of the placement of the modern reader's norms upon *The Great Gatsby* and Nick Carraway as a narrator, namely the fact that the reader has a growing scepticism in whether Nick can account for reality or not, the reader's view on him being unreliable is almost unavoidable (Murtaugh 36).

Even though *The Great Gatsby* was a major success, F. Scott Fitzgerald's popularity did not last. Because of his declining acclaim, he started to face financial difficulties, and he started to suffer from

alcoholism as well. He began to write and revise screenplays in Hollywood, however, he only completed one, *Three Comrades* (1938), and was later dismissed because of his drinking (Gray 439). Even though Fitzgerald's fourth novel, *Tender is the Night* (1934), was well received by reviewers, it did not sell well when first published, and for a while, he stopped writing. With the help from the columnist Sheila Graham, Fitzgerald started writing again, and he was in the process of writing a fifth book, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), when he died suddenly of a heart attack, caused by his long struggle with alcoholism. The book was published posthumously and completed by the American writer and friend Edmund Wilson a year after Fitzgerald's death. At the time of his death, his reputation had hit a new low, where he was overall "dismissed as a writer of the 'lost decade' of the 1920s (to use Fitzgerald's own phrase), who had become irrelevant with its passing" (Gray 440). However, today, we realise that Fitzgerald was a prodigious poet and writer, who had a firm grip on reality, which he combined with the aspect of romance. He died in Hollywood, California in 1940, only 44 years old.

Nick Carraway as an unreliable narrator

As mentioned earlier, Nick Carraway is the first-person narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, and he functions as one of the main characters as the whole story is told from his point of view: We as readers do only know the things that Nick wants to share with us. In the beginning of the book, we are told that Nick is looking back on events that have already taken place, for example when he comments on Gatsby's outcome: "No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (Fitzgerald 2). Here, it is obvious from the very opening that the goal of Gatsby ended in disaster, and the reader can now read the book to find out what the disaster is referring to. However, even though Nick is the narrator, the protagonist of the story is not the same person as the narrator in this case. Here, the protagonist is Nick's mysterious next-door

millionaire neighbour Jay Gatsby, whom Nick accompanies around and thereby experiences his task of getting Daisy back. In a sense, Nick resembles Gatsby in many ways. For example, they are both trying to prove themselves in the East, where they hope to realise their dreams of wealth, measureless power, and free movement to wherever they want to go. That was a dream about which many young people fantasised in the 1920s, including Fitzgerald himself. Even before they learn each other's names, Nick and Gatsby have established a bond between them because of war experience as well. Furthermore, Nick and Gatsby are both having a love affair with appealing women which although ends in disappointment, frustration, and disillusion: Nick is interested in the glamorous professional golfer Jordan Baker, and, as the main theme of the novel, Gatsby is in love with Daisy Buchanan, who is a character partly modelled on Fitzgerald's own wife, Zelda Sayre (Gray 436). The fact that Nick and Gatsby are to some extent experiencing the same kind of love creates a bond of sympathy between them, and in a sense, it is a story about a love affair between the two men: In the beginning, Nick notes how he began to sympathise with, like, and admire Gatsby, which could indicate that Nick, besides being in love with Jordan Baker, is in love with Gatsby too. As seen in the novel, Nick fancies both men and women¹⁰, however, it is far from surely that it is a sexually love that drags Nick towards Gatsby, but more of an attachment where he will do anything for Gatsby and thus help him win Daisy back. This devotedness to Gatsby, however, obscures Nick's judgement and view on the other characters, to which I will return in a later paragraph.

As Nick Carraway speaks in first person, he functions as a dramatized narrator and narrator-agent. However, the role of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* is still debatable. Wayne C. Booth comments on Nick's role as consisting of only "minor involvement" (Booth 154) and, as stated earlier, of

¹⁰ It is obvious that Nick fancies women as we hear about Nick's admiration of both Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker. However, in chapter 2, where he accompanies Tom Buchanan to a flat in town to meet his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, Nick ends up in bed with Mr. McKee from the apartment below. Nick does not comment further on the event though (Fitzgerald 38).

“thoroughly reliable guidance”. As well as with Booth’s comment about Nick as utter reliable, Thomas E. Boyle does once again not agree with Booth, in this case on the matter of Nick being only slightly involved, in which I agree with Boyle. In the book, Nick’s acts – or the lack thereof – have a major consequence on the outcome of the novel and the characters. The best example is seen when Daisy in Gatsby’s car runs over Tom Buchanan’s mistress, Myrtle Wilson, because Myrtle thought it was Tom who drove the car, thus wanting him to stop and take her with him, away from her shrinking, passive, and boring husband. Although Nick is not involved in the love affair between Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, when figuring out about their affair already in chapter 1, he states that “[t]o a certain temperament the situation might have seemed intriguing – my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police” (Fitzgerald 16-17), thus wanting to say something to Daisy. However, Nick chooses to remain passive and restrict his concerns to only critical observations. Thus, Nick continues to visit Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby and enjoy their altruism, even though it would have been most wise to confront Daisy about it. Because of the fact that nobody, neither Nick nor Jordan Baker, tells Daisy about the affair, a confrontation never arises between her and Tom Buchanan, leading Daisy mistakenly to run over Myrtle without knowing why she ran out on the road. Here, the second part of Nick’s silence becomes effective: Nick chooses to hide the fact that Daisy drove the car, and not Gatsby. With the assistance of Tom Buchanan – who does not know that Daisy drove Gatsby’s car, thus insinuating that Gatsby is one that killed Myrtle – Myrtle’s husband George Wilson finds Gatsby, kills him, and subsequently commits suicide. Here, Nick *should* actually have called the police, but instead, he conceals Daisy’s crime of manslaughter. Thus, it can be argued that Nick’s silence has resulted in three deaths: Myrtle Wilson’s death, because if Nick would have spoken up about the affair, they would never have gotten that far to leave for town and driven past George Wilson’s garage, thus killing Myrtle; Gatsby’s death, because if Nick would have told the police the truth about Daisy driving the car, no one would have got hurt; and George Wilson’s suicide caused by anxiety

and anger of Myrtle's death. Nick has been participating crucially in the events just by bringing Gatsby and Daisy together, thus causing a downward spiral of frightful incidents where he is responsible for some of them as well. Indeed, Nick's careless treatment of the events and his acquaintances makes him, with Jordan Baker's words, "a bad driver" morally – where Daisy turned out to be the same both morally and literally (Walcott 289). In this way, the silence became an important determinant on the events of the novel, which is doubtfully equivalent to 'minor involvement' (Boyle 22).

From the beginning, we as readers learn that Nick is not exactly intelligent. He states that "Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men", and adds that he himself is "slow-thinking and full of interior rules" (Fitzgerald 59). In the same conversation with Jordan and on the same page, she claims that "I hate careless people. That's why I like you", however, Nick turns out to be a careless person, both because of the crucial secrets that he does not tell anyone about and of his lost and negligent interest of Jordan towards the end of the story. Furthermore, as stated earlier, Nick has a minor problem with honesty, even though he himself believes that he is a rather honest person. Even though he is fairly honest compared to the other characters of the story, Nick fails to hide his judgments of others and finds himself involved in the mess created by those around him. He lies to himself, and thus the reader as well, for example about his relationship with a girl back home. Nick's obvious dishonesty is spoken about when he is challenged by Jordan Baker, who says "I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person" (Fitzgerald 180) in the last chapter, after he had just lied in the trial after Gatsby's death and praised Catherine, the younger sister of Myrtle Wilson, for lying to a judge. Nick is not a compulsive liar, however, he often makes up excuses to justify his behaviour. One of his justifications is Gatsby: He becomes Nick's 'romantic hero' through the story, and via Nick's memoir, he is described as almost divine, sometimes to an inconvenient and exaggerated extent (O'Rourke 58).

Thus, an aspect of Nick Carraway being unreliable is his fondness for Gatsby, which impacts his view, interpretation, and understanding of the events in the story. He thinks of Gatsby as a symbol of hope, which he articulates in the very beginning of the book: “If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (Fitzgerald 2). This is Nick’s first description of Gatsby – even though he has not met him yet – and still, Nick describes him as a person emitting an aura of success. However, what Nick is unable to see is the fact that Gatsby only *projects* an image of success, as he wants to impress Daisy and to win her love back. Furthermore, Nick’s affection of Gatsby is quite noticeable as Nick at the same time expresses his clear distaste for the other characters, and when he describes the romantic triangle between Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom Buchanan, we as readers are apt to look at Gatsby as a sensitive, emotional genius and to take his side in the romantic conflict. Even when the reader is introduced to the less appealing sides of Gatsby – namely the fact that he is involved in adultery, that he has earned his money through shady business, and that he may be involved in organized crime – Nick vindicates Gatsby’s acts with explanations of the romantic lengths to which he is willing to go to be reunited with Daisy. Nick feels antipathy and hatred towards Tom, and to a lesser extent Daisy as well, because he is not fond of people who cause adversity and misfortune for Gatsby. Gatsby himself is Nick’s romantic dream, and because Nick wants Gatsby to be spectacular and different from the rest of the world, Gatsby *becomes* different from the rest of the world (Scrimgeour 80). It is clear that Nick’s perspective is biased as his personal feelings for the different characters taint his account of the events in the story, and occasionally, it makes the readers question his representation of Gatsby as a character.

With Nick Carraway’s description of Gatsby, it feels like the character of Gatsby remains ‘static’ throughout the course of the summer’s events, however, this is alone Nick’s perception of him that

does. This is palpable when the reader learns about the symbolic, different portrayals of Gatsby's mansion. In the very beginning of the book, when Nick introduces us to his home on West Egg, he describes his neighbour's house as well: "The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard – it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thick beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden" (Fitzgerald 5), which is in stark contrast to Nick's own house: While Nick's home is an 'eyesore', Gatsby's house is like a palace or a castle taken from a fairy tale. Some days before Gatsby's meeting with Daisy Buchanan at Nick's house, at two o'clock in the night, Nick discovers the whole mansion fully lit up, "blazing with light, which felt unreal on the shrubbery and made thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires" (Fitzgerald 82), and he finds Gatsby outside, uncomprehending and absent of the big light show, stating that he has just "been glancing into some of the rooms" (Fitzgerald 82). More likely, though, it is possible that he admired his gigantic, expensive mansion and wondered whether Daisy would like it or not. However, after his reunion with Daisy, Gatsby's house starts to be described in a new, unfavourable way: The 'enchantment' of the perfect castle begins to dissolve, and the mansion loses its luxurious and imposing quality. After waiting for Daisy until four o'clock in the morning, Gatsby does a mental inventory together in his house with Nick, and they talk about the last days' events while searching for cigarettes in Gatsby's house:

His house had never seemed so enormous to me as it did that night when we hunted through the great rooms for cigarettes. We pushed aside curtains that were like pavilions, and felt over innumerable feet of dark wall for electric light switches – once I tumbled with a sort of splash upon the keys of a ghostly piano. There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere, and the rooms were musty, as though they hadn't been aired for many days. (Fitzgerald 148)

Here, it is a completely new description of Gatsby's home, where everything is heavy, grey, and depressing. Now, the house is instead reflecting on Gatsby's actual state: Heartbroken, careless of his

surroundings, secretive, and criminal. When Gatsby is done telling Nick the true story of his past which includes how he and Daisy fell in love with each other, Nick notes: “It was dawn now on Long Island and we went about opening the rest of the windows downstairs, filling the house with grey-turning, gold-turning light. The shadow of a tree fell abruptly across the dew and ghostly birds began to sing among the blue leaves. There was a slow, pleasant movement in the air, scarcely a wind, promising a cold, lovely day” (Fitzgerald 153). Now, the secrets of Gatsby have finally been told, which eases Gatsby, and he can begin to look forward. To some extent, he has realised Daisy’s conflict in leaving her husband, and he has started to dismiss any last straws of hope of getting Daisy back. He begins to take charge of his life again and wants to do things that he has postponed, for example diving in his swimming pool. However, the irony of the last quote is obvious: Even though Gatsby starts to make changes to become happy again, it never becomes a ‘lovely day’ as George Wilson finds his way to Gatsby’s mansion and kills him. As seen, the house of Gatsby has many different descriptions throughout the novel, which is an example of Nick’s unreliability and quickly changing opinions. We as readers witness a sign of Nick’s blindness and unlimited glorification of Gatsby in the description of the house in the beginning, which shatters towards the end as Gatsby faces difficulties in convincing Daisy to leave Tom Buchanan for him. The house therefore reflects Gatsby’s state of mind (O’Rourke 59).

Another element of unreliability is the classic aspect of alcohol leading to confusion, distortion, and misorientation. When being drunk, it is quite a challenge for anybody to catch the right words and accurate meaning of a conversation or a situation, which also applies Nick Carraway, who is exceedingly susceptible to alcohol in *The Great Gatsby*. This is seen on the afternoon of Myrtle Wilson’s party, where Tom Buchanan introduces him to Myrtle: “I sat down discreetly in the living-room and read a chapter of *Simon Called Peter* – either it was terrible stuff or the whisky distorted things, because it didn’t make any sense to me” (Fitzgerald 29); before that, on the same page, he admits that

“I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon; so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it”, thus admitting his sensitiveness and drunkenness, however still trying to go through with his observation and narration. Thus, the reader is already aware of the fact that Nick’s account cannot be trusted as he is very inexperienced when it comes to being exposed to alcohol. Weeks later at Gatsby’s party, the alcohol hits again as Nick states that “I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound” (Fitzgerald 47), which makes his perception and narration once more contorted. In this way, it makes it even more difficult for the reader to believe Nick’s observations and opinions when he is being intoxicated (O’Rourke 58).

During Nick Carraway’s narrative in *The Great Gatsby*, he tells the reader what to think of his actions, however, most times, he is doing something else than he is saying. Should the reader then believe his words or his actions? An example of this is seen when Jordan is confronting Nick about his character; about him not being “an honest, straightforward person”, as mentioned earlier. Even though Nick likes to state the opposite, he is neither honest nor high-principled. Hypocritically, Nick lives by the same kind of carelessness that he has criticised the Buchanans and the rest of the world for having. He says that he has an ability to not judge people, however, that is his primary doing. He fails to see the undisguised dishonesty of his position, he does not feel any worries in playing a silent and ‘impartial’ sort of God or pander, and in addition, he actually helps the others to maintain activities which he later asserts to consider unworthy. Throughout the story, Nick sticks to one specific aspect, namely to say nothing and merely observe, not interfering with any events no matter which secrets he has to keep. Even when Gatsby is dead, Nick does not tell the truth about who drove the car: He brushes it aside with the statement “all this part of it seemed remote and unessential” (Fitzgerald 166), without any explanation of his attitude. Evidently, he prefers to bury the truth rather than making a big fuss about it, thus keeping appearance, and his contribution to justice consists only of

going loyally to Gatsby's funeral consisting of very few attendants. When Meyer Wolfsheim, a Jewish friend, mentor, and gambler who together with Gatsby is involved in criminal activities, advises Nick to "learn to show [...] friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead" (Fitzgerald 174), Nick is doing the opposite: He is being a better friend to Gatsby in death than in life, as he is trying so hard to get people to come to Gatsby's funeral. In this way, his 'interest' of Gatsby's funeral only functions as his way of apologising for the disaster and manslaughter he has witnessed passively (Cartwright 229). Nick's behaviours are strange for a man who in the very beginning of the book has declared that his "tolerance [...] has a limit", and that he wants "no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart" (Fitzgerald 2).

Another example of Nick Carraway doing the opposite of what he said takes place in the end of the story, where he meets Tom Buchanan for the last time. Nick is mad at Tom because he and Daisy ran away from it all, and he is convinced as well that Tom was the source of Gatsby's death. He tries to avoid him but is unable to, and he says that he will never forgive him nor like him, as both him and Daisy are careless people who destroy things and creatures for then afterwards just to escape back into their money and let other people clean up their mess. However, right after his moral judgement, Nick changes direction:

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewellery store to buy a pearl necklace – or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons – rid of my provincial squeamishness forever. (Fitzgerald 182)

Here, out of the sudden, Nick changes his viewpoint of Tom Buchanan: Nick has just stated that he views Tom's behaviour as that of a villain, but now, he looks at it as the behaviour of a child. Even though he might shake hands with him only to avoid embarrassment, the act does not seem honest either to Tom or to Nick. In this way, it seems like Nick's quick forgiving is not a sign of consistency,

but merely of convenience in the moment, even though it may go against Nick's own 'principles' (Scrimgeour 81-82).

The first sections of the last chapter of *The Great Gatsby* deal with Gatsby's funeral, where it is Fitzgerald's intention to show the reader the irony of Gatsby throwing parties with numerous of people attending, however, at his funeral, his irrelevance is revealed as nobody attends. Even though it is Gatsby's funeral, it is interesting to see how it turns out to be not so much about Gatsby as it is about Nick Carraway. Here, as mentioned, Nick is being a better friend to Gatsby in death than in real life; he starts to feel responsibility and a sense of guilt of what has happened, and he begins to identify Gatsby with his own progress in life, namely the fact that he has not got anybody to look after him either: "I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone. [...] I wanted to get somebody for him. I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him. [...] I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all" (Fitzgerald 166-167). On behalf of Gatsby, Nick gets angry and loses faith in people like Daisy Buchanan and Meyer Wolfsheim who should have cared for Gatsby till the very end, and he starts to take up both partial residence in Gatsby's house as well as moral residence for Gatsby, thus becoming sort of a protector of Gatsby's memory and soul. However, he does not succeed in preserving Gatsby's memory, not even for himself: "I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment, but he was already too far away, and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower" (Fitzgerald 177). In this way, even though how much Nick tries to avoid it, he loses Gatsby not only in reality, but in his remembrances as well (Cartwright 228).

Somehow, besides the dishonesty and lack of morality, the reader cannot help but feel somewhat sorry for Nick Carraway. The novel does not have a happy ending and thus defeats our expectations, because Nick loses his beloved Jay Gatsby, fails in love, and leaves West Egg in favour of the safe and pleasing Middle West of his past, where he begins his account of his 'riotous excursion'. With

this ending, it is possible to state two interpretations of the novel, depending on the reader's identification with or distance from the narrator's point of view, thus whether one views Nick Carraway as a reliable narrator or not. If we as readers look at Nick as a trustworthy and informed narrator, we believe the fact that Gatsby turned out all right in the end: The dream is good, but the circumstances and the major actors involved made the dream corrupt: "[I]t is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams" (Fitzgerald 2). Furthermore, we accept Nick's romanticised perception of Gatsby and the fact that "Gatsby is great because his dream – however naïve, gaudy, and unobtainable – is one of the grand illusions of man" (Boyle 26). However, if we look at Nick as an untrustworthy and uninformed narrator, the dream is no longer good: Nick's knowledge of both Gatsby's corruption and 'incurruptible' dream is a paradox, which is only resolved because of the reader's awareness of Nick's lies. We are aware of his non-existing moral responsibility, for example seen when he shakes Tom Buchanan's hand and attends Gatsby's funeral rather self-righteously. According to Boyle, "[o]n the level of plot [Nick] knows more than he tells, but on the level of the novel's rhetoric he tells more than he knows" (Boyle 26), which makes it even more difficult for the reader to lurk Nick. Thus, according to this interpretation, it is not what happened to the dream that is corrupt, but the dream itself that can never be realised.

Conclusion and closing discussion

In this paper, I have looked at the works, “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street”, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Great Gatsby* in order to analyse the concept of the unreliable narrator. First, I introduced different types of narration and the features of the unreliable narrator according to Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Here, he coins the term unreliable narrator and argues that an unreliable narrator is a narrator that expresses different values and perceptions from those of the implied author. Different textual markers force the reader to revise his interpretation of the context, which leads to the realisation that the words of the narrator are incomplete, and irony plays a great part in relation to unreliability as well. Furthermore, a narrator can also be unreliable without being aware of it, for example by mistaking his fictional world or his perception of himself. In addition, James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin describe six types of unreliability which elaborate on Booth’s term.

Each of the three stories includes an unreliable narrator, but they are different types of unreliable narrators. With Huck in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, there is no doubt about the unreliability as he is a child who misreads and misunderstands the truth: He is unreliable on multiple occasions where he outright says something nonsensical or misinterprets the situation. However, this is not because he wants to lie to the reader, but because he does not know any better. In this story it is possible for the reader to just read the sentences in the text and have some general knowledge about the society, culture, and literature of the time to know that Huck’s narrative is generally untrustworthy. Regarding “Bartleby, The Scrivener” and *The Great Gatsby*, it is obvious that the reader must analyse and interpret the lawyer’s and Nick Carraway’s narration in more depth, as it is indicated between the lines that they are untrustworthy. The storylines are much alike, as the two narrators are both attracted to and repelled by the worldviews and philosophies to which they are exposed: The lawyer is exposed to Bartleby’s constant phrase “I would prefer not to”, and Nick to Gatsby’s impossible desire and

wish to repeat the past and win Daisy back. The narrators seem much alike as well. They can be described as friendly enough, sensible, but perhaps a bit slow-witted at times. Furthermore, the same distance between the lawyer/Bartleby and Nick/Gatsby is present, where both the lawyer and Nick are unsure of what is going through the minds of Bartleby and Gatsby, but they are trying to help as much as they themselves find sufficient. However, it is debatable how much they actually want to help, as their superficial and morally irresponsible concern for order and their willingness to help ironically prevent them from properly doing so. For both of the narrators, the easiest way is the best, which for one thing consists in staying out of as many conflicts and confrontations as possible. Where Bartleby and Gatsby are unwilling to compromise no matter the cost, the lawyer and Nick Carraway find facile and hasty compromises to be a way of life, and they therefore tend to consider the titular characters attractive enigmas because they do what the narrators themselves are unable to do. Both are unreliable narrators as they become distracted by the titular characters: The lawyer is blinded by odd behaviour that contradicts the rational mind, whereas Nick Carraway is distracted by an inclination to sentimentality.

Even though none of it can be entirely proven, it seems like the authors of the stories have played a significant part in forming and creating their narrators and their fictional surroundings. Regarding “Bartleby, The Scrivener”, Herman Melville included the dead letter office, which was a part of people’s – and his own – everyday life, and he himself was close to getting a job identical to Bartleby’s. Some critics have speculated that Bartleby may represent Melville’s displeasure with his own situation as a writer, because he got tired of writing when working on *Moby Dick*. Regarding *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain both had African American friends and a father who traded slaves, which influenced his writing and may have played a part in his depiction of the destructive effect of slavery and, consequently, in Twain’s undermining of standard racial stereotypes. In this novel, the reader gets a constant sense that the implied author lurks behind Huck’s words, and it is this implied

author that controls the hidden messages and irony of the novel. This is especially clear in situations when the naïve Huck is unaware of what is really going on around him: Huck himself does not seem to be aware that he is funny to the reader, he simply does not know any better, which makes it the implied author's, namely Mark Twain's, responsibility to manage the humour of Huck. However, it has been a matter of great debate whether Twain is the implied author or if in fact the 'real' Samuel Clemens plays a role in constructing the story, but even though the persona Mark Twain is a nom de plume, there is no specific proof that the pseudonymous 'Mark Twain' should somehow represent a creative entity that conflicts with the birth name and legal identity of Samuel Clemens. Regarding *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels depicted the Jazz Age of the 1920s, which was the era in which he wrote his major novels, and *The Great Gatsby* is set in New York where Fitzgerald spent the early parts of his life as well. Fitzgerald stated that he felt like one of the characters in his novels, and he bore an extraordinary resemblance to many of them as well: A lot of his characters shared the dream of power, love, possibilities, and wealth, the classic American dream to which Fitzgerald himself also subscribed. Even though Fitzgerald resembled his characters, he never intended Nick to be an unreliable narrator, an ironic truth which makes it possible to interpret Nick's narrative in two ways. However, the general assumption today is that he functions as an unreliable narrator.

As this thesis makes clear, there are many ways in which to be an unreliable narrator. In the three works by Melville, Twain, and Fitzgerald, the narrators exhibit different motivations and reasons for narrating in the way they do, and at certain points, the signs of unreliability and unreliable behaviour are similar to each other. It is no mystery that the narratives of Melville's lawyer and Nick Carraway resemble each other, as F. Scott Fitzgerald may have gained inspiration indirectly from Herman Melville, namely because of the probability that Fitzgerald was influenced by the Polish-British author Joseph Conrad and Conrad, again, by Melville (Boyle 23). In reading the stories, it is obvious that

the reader cannot avoid becoming conscious of the narrators and their way of narrating the stories, and this adds an extra element to the story by inserting a complicated, peculiar, unreliable narrator.

The three stories are great examples of the use of the unreliable narrator in different circumstances and with different functions. If the reader wants to achieve optimal knowledge and comprehension of a literary work, it is important to examine the circumstances of the narrator, including whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable. This thesis has elucidated the fact that the relation between the narration of the story and the worldview and opinions of the author is interesting and important to study if the reader wants a sufficient and comprehensive result from the reading. Furthermore, it appears that the authors frequently make use of unreliable narration in the works – either intentionally or unintentionally – through the narrator’s exclusions, additions, ignorance, or ironic remarks in the texts. Additionally, the historical dimension can come into play when exposing an unreliable narrator; this is applicable for Nick Carraway whom Fitzgerald never considered an unreliable narrator, although many readers and critics have since judged him to be so.

My studies and assessments have supported Phelan and Martin’s thesis that the reader must acknowledge the fact that narrators exist in many different variations from reliable to unreliable. Strictly speaking, the question is really whether the absolute and perfect reliable narrator exists at all, or whether in fact all narrators are to some extent unreliable.

Abstract

In this master's thesis, I study and analyse the three literary works "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street" (1853), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by American writers Herman Melville, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Mark Twain respectively, with the focus being on the unreliability of the narrator. The stories are still highly discussed today, both regarding the plot and action in the story itself, but also regarding how the stories are being told and presented to the reader. Furthermore, I look at the authors of the stories and consider in what ways they play a part in the text.

Before looking at the short story and the two novels, I state the typical types of narration according to Wayne C. Booth, where the aspect of the implied author is especially important for the forthcoming analysis. Then I explicate the unreliable narrator and the signs of unreliability, as well as presenting the views on the unreliable narrator of Booth and an elaboration to this view by James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin. Booth coined the term 'unreliable narrator', and he argues that narrators who articulate values and perceptions that differ from those of the implied author are the unreliable narrators. Furthermore, he looks at irony to be of important use regarding unreliability. Phelan and Martin describe six types of unreliability on how to approach the way in which a narrator is being unreliable, and they introduce three axes of unreliability as well, namely the axes of facts/events, ethics/evaluation, and knowledge/perception.

Following the definition of the unreliable narrator, I elucidate in what ways the stories contain unreliability, and in what different and similar ways the narrators are narrating the stories and being unreliable while doing so. In "Bartleby, The Scrivener", the nameless lawyer is narrating the story about his employee Bartleby, who suddenly does not want to work anymore, and his standard answer to every request is "I would prefer not to". The lawyer is uncomprehending to Bartleby's behaviour,

however still fascinated by him, but the lawyer is conflict-averse and has too much work to do to examine it in depth. The lawyer is telling the story years after the incident happened, but he does not tell about Bartleby's dismissal from the dead letter office until the very end of the story, even though it explains greatly why Bartleby reacts in the odd way he does, thus hiding essential information. It is even possible to draw a parallel between Bartleby's sacking from the dead letter office and the lawyer's own loss of a valuable position as justice of the chancery court, which makes it even more strange that the lawyer is unable to understand the motive behind Bartleby's actions. A general conjecture is that Bartleby may represent Melville's displeasure with his own situation as a writer, as he got tired of writing when working on his famous novel *Moby Dick*.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the young boy Huck is telling about his journey with the runaway slave, Jim, where Huck fakes his own death to escape his drunken father. Because of his young age, Huck misreads and misunderstands many of the situations, which creates a sense of irony and humour to the story, even though Huck does not try to be funny. The hidden messages and irony are due to the implied author Mark Twain, who lurks behind the scene of Huck's narrative.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway is narrating the story about his rich neighbour and friend Jay Gatsby, who chases the American dream and tries to win his former lover Daisy Buchanan back. As with "Bartleby, The Scrivener", Nick is telling the story years after the events happened, which is one of many similarities with Melville's short story. Nick is dazzled by Gatsby, and it is obvious that his fondness of Gatsby influences his view on the other characters and incidents. Nick has multiple incidents where he narrates while being drunk, and mostly, he is saying one thing but doing another, for example the fact that he has an ability to not judge people, which is exactly his primary doing throughout the novel. Fitzgerald bore an extraordinary resemblance with his character, as he chased the classical American dream as well, however, Fitzgerald never intended Nick to be an unreliable narrator, but it happened because of the effect of the historical and cultural context on the reader of today.

The untrustworthy nature of narration

Thesis, English Studies

Astrid Frimann Kristensen

Thus, a narrator can be unreliable in many ways, as long as the narrator varies from the norms of the implied author or makes unintended mistakes about his or her fictional world. Furthermore, in using an unreliable narrator to tell the story, it adds an extra element of thinking for the reader when examining the story.

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