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UNRELIABLE NARRATIVES AND SCEPTICISM

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UNRELIABLE NARRATIVES AND SCEPTICISM:
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FICTION?

A Master's Thesis

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WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FICTION?

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Dođramacı Bilkent University

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates whether we can learn from fiction. First, I analyse accounts of how we understand fiction and of the concepts that need to be analysed. Then I look more specifically at accounts that suggest we can learn from works of fiction. I argue that these accounts are unsatisfying and focus instead on a literary device, unreliable narration, from which I argue we can derive a better account of how we learn from fiction. I offer an analysis of a literary device called unreliable narration. Afterwards I suggest that this literary technique can provide a different way of learning from fiction. Finally, I argue that what my analysis of unreliable narration suggests is that through this device, fiction can help us learn and practice scepticism as an epistemic virtue.

Keywords: Fiction, Unreliable Narrator, Scepticism, Epistemic Virtue

ÖZET

GÜVENİLMEZ ANLATICILAR VE KUŞKUCULUK: KURGUDAN NE ÖĞRENEBİLİRİZ?

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Bu tez, kurgudan öğrenip öğrenemeyeceğimizi incelemektedir. İlk olarak, kurguyu nasıl anladığımız ve analiz edilmesi gereken kavramlara ilişkin açıklamaları analiz edeceğim. Daha sonra, kurgu eserlerden öğrenebileceğimizi öneren açıklamalara daha özel olarak bakıyorum. Bu açıklamaların tatmin edici olmadığını ve bunun yerine güvenilir anlatım adlı edebi bir tekniğe odaklanarak kurgudan nasıl öğrendiğimize dair daha iyi bir açıklama çıkarabileceğimizi iddia ediyorum. Güvenilmez anlatım adlı aygıtın analizini sunuyorum. Daha sonra, bu edebi tekniğin kurgudan farklı bir öğrenme yolu sağlayabileceğini öne sürüyorum. Son olarak, güvenilir anlatım analizimin öne sürdüğü şeyin, kurgunun, bu teknik aracılığıyla, şüpheciliği epistemik bir erdem olarak öğrenmemize ve uygulamamıza yardımcı olabileceği olduğunu iddia ediyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurgu, Güvenilmez Anlatıcı, Kuşkuculuk, Epistemik Erdem

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will focus on the question of what we can learn from fiction. In order to reach an account of learning from fiction, I will first analyse the accounts of various philosophers on our reactions to fiction to get an understanding on how we conceptualise fiction and its effects in the actual world. Then I will examine the accounts on learning from fiction to see what these accounts are formed upon and suggest what we can learn from fiction. As I think that these accounts overlook the internal mechanics of fiction and could not give an accurate sense on what we can learn from fiction due to this overlooking, I will offer an analysis of a literary technique, namely unreliable narration, to show that internal mechanics of fiction can provide a different account of learning from fiction. After I show how unreliable narration works as a literary device, I will argue that unreliable narratives can give us a medium to learn and practice scepticism as an epistemic virtue without contradicting the accounts on our conceptualisation of fiction and on learning from fiction.

Before getting into my analysis and arguments, I should start by setting the rules of the game. In my analysis and argument, I will be referring to fictional works that are presented mainly as books and films.

In the discussion of unreliable narration, I will be referring to the concept of narrator a lot. When I will be referring to the narrators, I will be referring specifically to the homodiegetic narrators which are the kind of narrators that are present in the storyline as characters if I do not indicate otherwise by suggesting different kinds of narrators.

For written literary works, I will be referring mainly to first-person narrators, if the narrator in question is a second-person narrator or a third-person narrator I will indicate its type.

For visual literary works, I will not get into a discussion on the type of the narrator and whether cinematic narrators can be treated in the same manner to the narrators of written literary works.

I will not make a distinction on the kinds of knowledge such as know that and know how explicitly, but I will be referring to know how after I implicitly evaluate the idea whether we can talk about know-that type of knowledge for the discourse of fiction.

In the discussion of scepticism, I will not take scepticism as a strong epistemic position. It will be treated as an epistemic virtue and skill. I will not give a responsibilist account for epistemic virtues which suggests that possessing or exercising virtues are praiseworthy and possessing or exercising vices are blameworthy. My account is likely to be presented under a reliabilist account that is a less restrictive position by suggesting epistemic virtues produce true beliefs consistently.¹

¹ This is partly the case. However, I still argue that you can depend on unreliability in the given discourse, which is fiction, for attaining a reliable epistemic virtue.

CHAPTER I: FICTION VS. THE ACTUAL WORLD

Fiction constitutes a big part of our lives. Since the 18th century, novels have been the primary medium for the transfer of fiction into our lives. However, nowadays, one does not even need to read a long novel to come across a fictional world. Even a short advertisement can contain fictional elements that affect our perception and allow us to catch the ‘unreality’ while still buying it. Even if one is familiar with Coca-Cola’s polar bear or Duracell’s bunny adverts and aware that there are no polar bears that enjoy drinking cola nor a pink bunny that saves someone by providing durable batteries, this awareness does not stop one from recognising them.

The problem with this effect is that it makes it harder to pinpoint and understand the disposition of fiction besides its definition since it seems that fiction does not stay where it is presented and makes its way into real life. Still, it is not easy to understand how to treat fiction when fiction does not induce outcomes that are similar to events in our life. An example can be given from the world we live in nowadays to make this clear. Fictionalisation of pandemic does not hold a similar impact as an actual pandemic outbreak. One can easily understand this distinction in the current pandemic we are going through.² Until now, one might have read several novels and watched quite a few films that take an outbreak as a theme (from killer bees to zombie apocalypses). While in real life — or as philosophers like to call it in the actual world — a pandemic shifts one’s lifestyle in a significant way, a novel or a film can only create a temporary fear, excitement, curiosity, or just something to think about with its what-if scenarios.

However, fiction still has some acquisitions to offer, even if it does not hold a similar impact as a pandemic or the fall of an apple. Fiction can be considered as a learning source regardless of its status of existence. But, before getting into possible ways of learning from fiction, which I will be discussing later on, I would like to explain why fiction creates a problem for placing it under a philosophical discourse. So, I want to look into how we react to fiction and try to conceptualise it to get a sense of both the functioning of fiction and our handling of it.

² This thesis was written during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, I think our handling of fiction lays the foundation of taking it as a possible learning source. These two might be seen as two separate discussions since our reaction to fiction, such as, showing fear to a horror film, does not strongly correlate to taking it as a source of learning. Nevertheless, our understanding of fiction and our approaches towards it shape our conception of treating it as a learning source because even if fear can be one of the reactions that can be shown to a specific genre of a specific literary medium; there are still different techniques, mediums, effects that can be analysed to test the connection between fiction and the actual world, and there no apparent reasons to prevent someone from adopting a particular focus on these techniques, mediums, and effects.

In order to lay a ground for my argument, I will first explain how fiction can create a paradox that makes its understanding and conceptualisation difficult. After pointing out several answers that can tackle this paradox, I will be pointing out how our reactions can establish a connection with learning from fiction since it seems to me that our conceptualisation of fiction also affects how we treat it as a learning source.

1.1 Conceptualisation of Fiction

Colin Radford has an interesting take on the discussion of fiction. He pointed out how it seems paradoxical to be moved by the fates of fictional characters when we know that they are fictional (1975: 70). Think about your favourite novel, film, or TV show where characters go through several events within the storyline. When these events turn out to be rather unfortunate, you might feel sorry for them. According to Radford, this kind of response creates inconsistency and incoherency when we think about the status of the existence of characters (1975: 78). On the other hand, feeling sorry for a close one going through unfortunate events would be consistent and coherent since she exists contrary to the character in your favourite film. In this sense, showing similar reactions to fictional characters as if they are real suggests a transition between fiction and the actual world even if they seem intuitively separate from each other considering one holds existence and the other does not.

Several philosophers give solutions to this paradox to show how we might tackle the existential status of fiction. I will examine their theories to get an idea of what kind of an approach can be taken to understand the relationship between fiction and the actual world and grasp how we can treat fiction when it makes its way in the actual world.

According to Kendall Walton, when we encounter fictional works, our reaction could be analysed in specific steps suggesting that we might constitute make-believe games (1990: 208). Make-believe games that Walton offers are not different from the make-believe games you might be playing when you are a little child. Walton prefers to focus on horror films to show how these make-believe games work in literary discourse. It seems to me that she chooses to focus on horror films because fear as a reaction is more apparent than other reactions and can be easier to pinpoint and analyse. One might flinch while sitting in her seat or even shriek as the film's tension increases. Walton thinks that we need to take part in a make-believe game in order to fear that tense event. It means one has to pretend as if the event in question is actual to show a corresponding reaction. In this sense, what Walton offers seems to be that we fictionally fear that event since we are imposing a fictional event on ourselves by taking part in a make-believe game.³

For instance, suppose that when you are watching a horror film, the scene becomes darker, and suspenseful music starts; as you try to figure out what is happening or what will happen or both at the same time, a giant peaceful teddy bear makes its move to the screen while holding a knife. You might show confused reactions, and according to Walton, whatever reaction you might show, you are taking part in a make-believe game where you pretend as if there is a giant peaceful teddy bear who holds a knife. You have either projected yourself as a character into the film or reconstructed the film as real through pretending. If you cannot take part in this make-believe game, you cannot show a corresponding reaction, or even if you somehow show the corresponding reaction, it would not be considered as related. It would be accidental, perhaps caused by a spider who happened to be watching the film with you.

³ I take it as we are imposing ourselves, but it does not mean that the work of fiction does not hold an effect. Intentions of the author and the use of language still have crucial roles.

Contrary to Walton, Peter Lamarque thinks that we need to be here, in the actual world, for creating this kind of response since this response is more like a psychological reaction (1981: 300). We cannot form a psychological response fictionally, even if taking part in a make-believe game means imposing a fictional situation, the correspondent reaction cannot be considered as fictional. This is to say, we do not pretend to react, we literally react. So, it does not seem reasonable for Lamarque to fictionally fear something fictional so as to be taking part in a make-believe game when the psychological response is happening in this world. This means that even if taking part in a make-believe game requires pretending, it does not lead to the suggestion that the reactions like fear are also mere pretendings. Since they depend on physiological and psychological changes within the body. Still, the stimulus that starts this effect can be fictional.

Lamarque grounds his argument on the elements of speech acts. He points out that these kinds of responses are more like the outcomes of illocutionary forces of the contents represented in the narration. Illocutionary forces are defined as the speaker's intentions represented in their utterance (Austin, 1975: 98). Or in other words, why they are telling what they are telling. For literary discourse, we can take them to be as the author's intentions and textual evidence that is provided by her. As the reader gets into an interaction with the work of fiction, the responses and reactions that she might show can be taken as the consequence of illocutionary force transmitted to the reader through a given literary medium. Therefore, any form of response cannot be fictional, while the responses are psychological outcomes of intended responses through the use of language. The reader and viewer respond in accordance with mental representations of these intended responses provided by textual evidence. In this sense, your realisation of a teddy bear who holds a knife can be part of a make-believe game, but your fear towards it cannot fall under the scope of this game.

However, not all fictional works are presented on screen. R. T. Allen gives another challenge to the issue at hand by recognising we do not always deal with teddy bears who hold knives on screens and also look similar to each of us viewers other than their change in appearance due to the size of our screen or our seating position or any

related spatial relationship.⁴ Keeping in mind that his theory applies mainly to written narratives since films do not require the same kind of imagination if they require any, he tries to show that beliefs can be necessary for forming a correspondent reaction; yet without imagination, we cannot impose the retelling of the story on ourselves and fail to react correspondingly. Therefore, he suggests that beliefs are not sufficient for forming a response; one also needs imagination (1986: 67-68). So, it means that even if you manage to take part in a make-believe game by forming beliefs, if the imagination of it fails, the link between fiction and the actual world will be broken. This also suggests a failure in transmission. The story cannot be transmitted to its reader.

A different approach comes from Gregory Currie who does not want to deal with beliefs related to existence namely first order beliefs. Instead, he tries to develop an emotion theory that does not depend on first order beliefs (1990: 190), in order to get rid of the paradox of existence. He argues that we can treat these kinds of responses as quasi-emotions (1990: 184). In this way, we can get rid of beliefs since quasi-emotions can be considered as second order beliefs that do not depend on existential beliefs. In this sense, Currie takes a different approach compared to Walton since quasi-emotions appear as an end product of a causal relationship rather than an intentional one and they cannot be categorised as fictional, they remain as genuine reactions.

So, this suggests that when you encounter a teddy bear holding a knife on screen, due to the techniques used in the film⁵, you match it to reality through people, situations, behaviours so on and so forth without pretending or accepting what is presented on screen is real. This can seem like nonsense at first stance since teddy bears who hold knives look unconnected to the actual world. However, the appearance of a knife in the hand of a teddy bear that should be inanimate in normal circumstances is still enough for provoking fear in the audience. Since there can be connections made by the viewer to being in danger in front of a possible weapon that is held by an unknown being. For this connection to happen, we do not need to pretend or accept

⁴ This is regardless of “the Problem of Perception”.

⁵ There are various techniques to provoke a specific emotion in the audience, but one can take use of music and light as more apparent examples.

or even to think about whether the teddy bear is real. In this sense, what is presented works as a trigger to initiate a perception that is possessed by the reader and viewer formerly.

These approaches try to build a bridge between fiction and reality. Our responses can be analysed under beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. However, in order to get an idea of what we can learn from fiction, we should also consider what kind of knowledge can be transmitted from fiction or attributed to fiction by readers and viewers.

Correspondent responses such as moving by the fates of characters and showing instances of fear while watching a film are not sufficient for coming up with a theory of learning from fiction.

1.2 Learning from Fiction

As a defendant of learning from fiction, Berys Gaut argues that “fictional artworks can function as sources of knowledge” (2007: 147). According to him, works of fiction can make valid claims that can end up in true beliefs. Still, there need to be justifications by the reader or viewer for this transformation to happen and end up having true beliefs. There are different ways for this justification that can transform claims presented by the fictional work into true beliefs to happen; it can be “through reasoning, experience, testimony and, especially, the use of the imagination” (2007: 147).

Gaut offers that imagination might be the one that is important for the learning process from fiction. Then, he sets up a simulation theory where he puts imagination in its centre (2007: 148). However, he takes imagination as a learning source rather than taking fiction for a learning source. I do not think that we can use it in a way that suggests learning from fiction itself since one might suggest that this kind of learning cannot be achieved if there is no imagination involved within the process.

For Gaut, simulation theory represents that when we engage with a fictional work, we run make-beliefs to understand or even interpret them. Running these make-beliefs can work as a simulation if imagination is involved in the process. This possible learning process can be taken as grounded on a combination of Walton’s

idea of make-believe games and Allen's assertion of the need for imagination. In this sense, we can learn from fiction if we take part in make-believe games by using our imagination. However, this seems like an account on how we can learn from fiction rather than what we can learn from it. We do not learn imagination from fiction, but we learn through it.

Again, as a defendant of learning from fiction, Martha C. Nussbaum takes a different approach and provides an account on what we can learn from fiction by pointing out possible moral acquisitions. According to her, we can learn from fiction since literary works can provide us several points of view to adapt and analyse (1990: 141). In this sense, some literary works can be taken similar to moral philosophies, especially the Aristotelian ones. If we manage to infer the given point of view, we can use it as a simulation that is a lot like a practice of virtue.

For this, you can think about children's books that try to give a message on how to be a good human being. As the child interacts with the story, she can infer the given virtues and project them to herself. I think without the projection part of given virtues, we cannot consider it as a successful inference that can lead to practice and possibly learning in the end.

Again, here we can consider it as a combination of Walton's and Allen's ideas. I am not sure whether Allen necessarily falls under this consideration, imagination might not be needed in all cases, but Walton's idea of make-believe games can be applied to a game that is specific for moral acquisitions.

For this learning account, possibly due to the form of children's books, it seems reasonable to interpret in relation to both Lamarque and Currie. Especially in children's books, the format and the use of language have intended outcomes such as transmitting an idea on how to act kind. In this sense, they are formed and developed to be successful in this transmission. As a result of this, psychological reactions of children might be specifically targeted for making any idea comprehensible and learnable by them through mental representations. However, this idea can be treated in the same manner using Currie's theory, there might be intended emotions to invoke in children to push them to make connections to their prior emotional

perception. Because of this, I do not know which one of these accounts can provide a stronger base.

Similarly, John Gibson also argues that we can learn from fiction even if at first, he appears to be arguing against it. According to Gibson, literary works cannot provide us with an informational discourse since the literary content, and the factual content are two separate things. Depending on the discourse, we turn away from one or another as we approach the other (Gibson, 2007: 29). In this sense, the presence of the one suggests that the other one cannot be present in that discourse in extreme circumstances. And in more moderate circumstances, one of them starts to lose its effect in the presence of the other. So, depending on which one of the contents is more present in a given discourse, we are inclined to perceive it either as literary or factual.

For instance, literary content is expected to be in fiction, while factual content is expected to be in an economics article. However, one can still encounter factual content in a fiction, let's say historical fiction, and in the same manner literary content in an economics article. For Gibson's theory to work, it seems that the use of one not only affects the expectations of which content to occur but also our conception of the other content if it is present. In this sense, literary content overwrites factual content if the given medium is a literary work.

Moreover, Gibson rejects the idea that fiction gives us "a direct vision of reality" (2007: 34). In order to have a direct vision of reality, semantic functions of language should work correctly. It means that they need to attach something external which is lacking for fiction. This refers to the idea that fiction cannot provide empirical knowledge.

Nevertheless, this seemingly opposed account to learning from fiction suggests that in fiction, we can still talk about the reimagining or reconstruction of reality. So, what we find in literature cannot go beyond what is assumed of reality and cannot work more than advancing a claim (2008: 86). However, this can be still sufficient for forming new beliefs about the world or how the world is or adding up to the

already held beliefs. Overall, fiction fails to give us substantial informational knowledge but can provide an indirect vision of reality through projections.

Noel Carroll adopts a comparative approach to this issue. Maybe one of the effective ways of convincing a philosopher on a subject might be showing how the subject bears strong similarities to philosophy. As Nussbaum also did, Carroll decided to go with this approach. But he focuses on a more particular part of philosophy, namely thought experiments, in contrast to moral philosophies.

Carroll considers thought experiments instrumental since they can test our conceptual commitments or make us aware of these commitments by running simulations (2002: 7-8). In this sense, fiction holds a remarkable resemblance to thought experiments if we take fiction as something providing us with points of view to infer. As thought experiments lead one to find herself in hypothetical scenarios to think about, fiction can provide the same with these points of views. So, it can provide us conceptual knowledge even if it cannot provide an empirical one (2002: 11) if the suggested inference can be actualised.

Again, as a very similar approach to Nussbaum's, Carroll attains virtue catalogues to the stories (2002: 14). Virtue catalogues represent virtues that are specifically planted into the story as if they are easter eggs. You can again think about child stories that try to transmit how a person should be or act like to be good. Justice as a virtue can be planted in these stories, and the instances of it can be considered under the virtue catalogues. This is going to be a bizarre analogy, but you can consider this as choosing a colour palette for painting your house. In this sense, as thought experiments remind us of an already existing cognitive map, virtue catalogues within the stories can function in the same manner by acquiring the given point of view and related virtue if there is any.

Carroll's theory can be again considered to be grounded on a combination of Walton's and Allen's ideas. The reader and viewer can take part in a make-believe game with use of imagination. Virtue catalogues can work as if the rules of the make-believe game that the reader and viewer will adapt when they run it as a simulation.

Additionally, especially for transmission to children, we can consider Currie's idea relevant. Since in the education of children, evoking intended emotions covers a major area. Doing this through providing a discourse that can be projected to the actual world seems reasonable. Although, this example can be also addressed in a relation to Lamarque's idea since the use of language in children's stories is very specific and guided. As a result, it seems to me that even if these arguments are very different in their construction, they can still be applied to the same example without creating incoherency.

There have been different approaches to contemplate whether we can learn from fiction. However, they primarily focus on whether we can obtain conceptual knowledge rather than an empirical one since fiction keeps creating problems for considering it as an empirical source of knowledge. Nussbaum, Carroll, and Gibson's theories especially suggest that we can acquire conceptual knowledge by inferring points of view and reflecting on them. Gaut's account is too dependent on the use of imagination, and it cannot be treated in a manner that it covers circumstances where there might not be imagination involved in the process. And he seems to be shifting towards how we can learn from fiction rather than what we can learn from it.

1.3 A Different Approach to Learning from Fiction

I want to approach the question at hand somewhat differently from what I just outlined. As far as I can see, there is a deficiency in handling literary discourses by analytic philosophy. The status of existence creates a big problem, and it seems to be very hard to come up with a theory suggesting that fiction serves as a reliable source of knowledge without the need for justification for presented beliefs in fictional works.

In this handling of literary discourses, any given information cannot avoid being so to say advertisements to inquire about later on. Even in the case of historical fiction, it seems as if historical facts are presented as advertisements within the story. If you want to buy them, you need to go to the store which I suspect would be history books.

So, at best, fiction could provide us with conceptual knowledge, usually relating to becoming a better person by moral acquisitions, as Nussbaum and Carroll argue. I do not have a direct problem with these approaches, and I might argue for or against them. Still, I do not find the treatment of literary discourse, especially fiction in this case, by philosophers to be adequate.

To better understand fiction, we might need to start looking at particular areas of fiction and how they work. As we see in moral philosophy, whether to be a subjectivist or an objectivist is a big topic. I think that fiction and literary discourses should not be treated differently. We might understand fiction as something constructed and does not have an existence status for its content apart from seeing them materially as a book or on-screen as a film or as the part of the problem some ideas that we do not treat. In this sense, fiction might be seen as composed of only its material and its content; however, its content includes particular points and functions that might not be apparent in its understanding. I suggest that we might need to work harder to conceptualise the parts of fiction and give more attention to literary techniques that have been used, in order to understand the bridge between fiction and the actual world and then come up with an adequate treatment of their effects on possible considerations on whether we can learn from them.

In order to understand the effects of fiction in the actual world, I would like to analyse how unreliable narration works. Before explaining how this literary technique works, I would like to give a slight sense of what unreliable narration might be and how it might connect to the problems and their solutions, as I have mentioned earlier.

Unreliable narration is a literary technique that is highly used both in novels and films. According to the technique, the story is told by a narrator who is unreliable. Let us take the unreliable narrator in its broadest definition which is a narrator that misrepresents or under-represents. You can take *Fight Club*'s Tyler Durden, *Rebecca*'s Mrs de Winter, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*'s Huck, *The Remains of the Day*'s Stevens as examples of unreliable narrators. These narrators make us question their reliability or the reliability of the story they tell in different ways.

For *Fight Club*, we can recognise the unreliability of the narrator as we go on with the film and realise that the narrator and Tyler Durden show parallels in their reactions. For *Rebecca*, the serious shift in narrator's reliability happens when the narrator moves to Manderley, and her perception starts to distort. For *Huck Finn*, we can say that the unreliability in question has a different form. As he perceives the events in a very naive way, his narration awakes a double image in the reader. On the one hand, there are Huck Finn's naive interpretations and on the other hand, the reader's perception of what is really going on. For *Stevens*, we are presented with a narrator who is in self-deception that leaves hints of discrepancies for the reader to catch.

The idea of suggesting these narrators as a source of learning from fiction might seem somewhat contradictory, since it does not seem reasonable to bring more unreliability into play when it is already hard to point out fiction as a reliable learning source. However, it seems to me that unreliable narrators can give us a ground to learn from them exactly due to their unreliability.

An interesting consequence of these narrators is that they might catch more attention than ordinary ones who tell the story without forming suspicion about their reliability. The absurd thing is that while we do not want to deal with unreliable narrators such as governments, parents, partners, friends, news, academia in the actual world; in fiction, we might be intrigued and even get hooked on. Consequently, these kinds of narrators present themselves in a way that evokes curiosity in their readers and viewers.

Moreover, even if they might not provide moral acquisitions or reliable points of view to their readers and viewers due to their unreliability, they provide a story that allows the readers and viewers to question their unreliability on a ground that they do not get affected directly. If your government is unreliable, you might suffer consequences such as high rates of inflation, poverty, and decrease in the safety of citizens. If your parents or partners are unreliable, you might suffer the consequence of developing trust issues. These are possible unwanted outcomes of the actual world yet being sceptical about the roots of these issues is not the way we usually choose. Not choosing to be a sceptic in the face of these encounters might be an intuitive

outcome. One may not choose to be a sceptic about an issue unless there is serious evidence that suggests the opposite. And even in such a case, people can be ignorant of evidence since their beliefs might be shaken in an unwanted way causing unpleasant outcomes such as overlooking evidence of a cheating partner to avoid emotional outcome of this information, or they might not be in a position to register this evidence such as losing their ability to be sure about themselves as a consequence of narcissistic abuse and gaslighting.

Stories with unreliable narrators push people into a similar construction by creating flags that make the reader question the reliability. Where real life events can have negative effects on people, these fictional constructions and narrators do not have the same consequences and threats. In this sense, these fictional constructions can provide a simulation for the readers and viewers to practice scepticism and perhaps acquire it as an epistemic virtue in a safer place.

CHAPTER II: UNRELIABLE NARRATION AS A LITERARY DEVICE

Unreliable narration is a highly used device within literature and any narrative discourse. However, one can encounter this device in daily life, from juridical courts to patient responses and in most often regular human communication, since this device results from the implementation of human behaviour into the stories rather than as an invention in itself. Wayne C. Booth coined the term as “I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts by the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not.” (1983: 158-159) and suggested that it is a rhetorical device.

Before jumping into how several scholars understand unreliable narration and how it works, it is essential to understand that it is a projection of human behaviour into literary discourse. The reason is that when we try to approach this technique as a possible learning device, it can be helpful to point out that this is not a fictional invention that was specifically invented for transmitting a fictional idea. This way, we can suggest a natural practice of an existing construction and possible virtues that this construction can provide.

Since Booth has coined the term, the whole debate on unreliable narration has been gathered under two titles. On the one hand Booth and his considerable followers Seymour Chatman (1978, 1990), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2002), James Phelan (2005, 2011), Greta Olson (2003) have adopted a rhetorical approach towards unreliable narration. Broadly, this approach suggests that unreliable narration is an outcome of the decoding process of textual evidence implemented into the text by the implied author.

On the other side, we have a reader-oriented approach, mostly defended by Ansgar Nünning (1997, 1999, 2005, 2008) and Bruno Zerweck (2001), suggesting that unreliable narration is an outcome of the interpretation process of the reader.

However, these seemingly opposed views converge into one cognitive-constructivist position later on in the debate, suggesting that unreliable narration depends on a feedback loop between authorial intention, textual phenomena, and reader response (Phelan, 2005: 59; Nünning, 2005: 104). It means that the work is composed by an author who intends to convey a story through the semantics of language, and she presents this by setting up the textual format for this specific purpose. It is also supported by the reader's interpretation of the author's intentions and uses of language while in the interaction of the given medium.

2.1 Different Senses of Unreliability

Before considering different approaches to unreliable narration and how they converge into one, it is important to talk about what we mean by unreliable narration to get a better understanding on what kind of an unreliability is in question. As Olson suggests, Booth uses the term unreliable both to mean “untrustworthy” and “fallible” (2003: 96). For the former meaning, unreliability is related to the narrator's characteristic qualities, which means that you cannot trust the narrator because of this quality. On the other hand, the latter is related to the narrator's ability to perceive and report the events accurately, which means that you cannot trust the narrator's ability of perception and representation. In this sense, untrustworthy narrators bear more parallels to the actual world in the understanding of the reader and viewer since the reader and viewer are more inclined to treat them in the same way as they treat people in the actual world. These narrators can be judged as untrustworthy, and the reader can always expect some misrepresentation in their narration. Whereas fallible narrators are expected to make unintentional and occasional misrepresentations or under-representations that leaves gaps in the story for the reader to fill. Booth recognises this distinction; however, he considers the terms as interrelated (Olson, 2003: 96) and uses them quite interchangeably in his theory.

In contrast, Dorrit Cohn thinks that we should separate these terms from one another (2000: 307). According to Cohn, an untrustworthy narrator represents an ideological kind of unreliability which is related to the quality of character, and it is presented implicitly, whereas a fallible narrator represents a factual kind which is related to

human error and presented in a way that is recognisable by the readers and viewers. She calls the former a “discordant” narrator.

Moreover, she finds it necessary to separate these terms since they do not represent narrative discourse in the same way. A discordant narrator is presented to the reader implicitly instead of being communicated explicitly. In this sense, a discordant narrator has the potential to transmit her “unreliable” character without getting recognised. For instance, *The Usual Suspects*’ narrator Roger ‘Verbal’ Klint can be considered as an untrustworthy narrator, whereas *The Remains of the Days*’ narrator Stevens as a fallible one. For the former, the narrator misrepresents the story to a point that he can mislead the other characters in the film and also the viewer until the point of anagnorisis⁶. For the latter, we are presented with a narrator who is inclined to be in denial and self-deception that tells the story with gaps and misrepresentations originated from his inclinations in an unintentional way.

For the definition of the unreliability of narrators, I am in line with Booth. It does not seem reasonable to me to separate these different definitions with a clear cut. I accept that the untrustworthiness and fallibility of a narrator carry different implications and affect the narration in their own ways. However, they do not look like distinct positions for a narrator to be in since it is not apparent that the narrator’s mistakes are only due to fallibility rather than an indication of character. Roger Klint may be an untrustworthy narrator who represents his unreliability as a character trait, but I cannot see clearly why Stevens’ fallibility should be considered out of the scope of character traits. His inclination to be in denial and self-deception can be unintentional but could be easily considered related. So, even if these two different unreliable narrators lead to a different story structure and discourse, I cannot see the clear cut between them. They can also be used as interchangeable terms for my theory as well.

2.2 Locus of Unreliability

⁶ Anagnorisis refers to the climax point of a reveal of new information that changes the flow of the story. Aristotle uses this notion for tragedy in *Poetics* XI, but I think it can be used outside of the scope of tragedy.

Returning to how this phenomenon occurs, we can say that the reader senses a discrepancy between her reconstruction of the story and the narrator's account of it (Chatman, 1978: 233). When this happens, two sets of norms get into a conflict. The whole debate of unreliable narration focuses on this conflict. This discrepancy can happen between the implied author and the narrator or between the reader and the narrator, while the communication of this happens between the implied author and the reader. Booth has considered both of these possibilities and showed through his examples that one could be more detectable in contrast to others (1978: 156). He takes the discrepancy between the implied author and the narrator to be more apparent in contrast to the one between the reader and the narrator. The reason behind this is that constructing a theory by focusing on textual evidence seems more reliable since the reader's interpretation can happen in a great variation. In this sense, solely creating a dependency on the reader's interpretation makes it harder to come up with a stable theory.

However, I do not find his account plausible even if I can understand the reasons behind his choice. For me, the discrepancy that happens between the implied author and narrator can be apparent more or less than or the same as the discrepancy that happens between the reader and the narrator depending on the medium, story structure, abilities of the reader and so on and so forth. It does not seem plausible to compare these two when there are too many variables to consider.

2.3 Types of Unreliability

If we set aside the roots of unreliable narration, the discrepancy can happen either intellectually or morally. This suggests that the reader is confused either about the interpretations or the judgments of the narrator (Nünning, 1999: 58). The confusion about interpretations of the narrator leads to intellectual discrepancies that make the reader question what the narrator is misrepresenting or under-representing. On the other hand, when the confusion arises in the judgments of the narrator, moral discrepancies are more likely to occur since judgments of the narrator give a sense of her moral dispositions.

When the reader senses an inconsistency between the narrator's interpretation of the events or how she forms her judgments towards them, the reader starts to question whether this narrator is reliable. Booth and Nünning in their early writings seem to disagree on whether this inconsistency occurs depending on the connection between the implied author and the narrator or the narrator and the reader. However, as Elke D'hoker shows that they show a similar understanding concerning the kinds of discrepancies (2008: 151) even if they do not agree on the locus of unreliability. Since Booth's intellectual and moral distinction seems to have a parallel to Nünning's interpretation and judgment distinction. In this sense, regardless of where this phenomenon occurs, we can point out how it occurs in both kinds. And it seems that a mistake in the narrator's interpretation of the events suggests intellectual discrepancies while a mistake in her judgements suggests moral discrepancies.

2.4 Who is the implied author?

To understand the accounts of unreliable narration, it seems to me that one needs to contemplate the idea of an implied author regardless of whether she will believe that there is such a thing. The reason is that since the beginning of the debate, the implied author is considered to be one of the elements of the technique since Booth constructed his theory by suggesting as such. In a way, being the one who coined the term turned Booth into a boss of a video game. And if anyone wants to level up, the way to do this is beating the boss.

It looks like when Booth is forming his theory, he wants to hold steady what the author brings into the story and how it is transferred to the reader. To be able to stabilise, there has to be a conception that can be treated apart from reality since intention itself is already a complex issue and talking about its transmission through narrative work makes it more complex. So, considering the implied author as a "second self" — which is distinct and superior to its natural counterpart⁷ (Booth, 1983: 151) — makes understanding the device much easier and more stable for a theory to construct. One can understand the implied author as "the governing consciousness of the work" without knowing the relation between her and its

⁷ Natural counterpart refers to the actual author.

tangible counterpart, consequently avoiding a significant amount of complexity (1983: 75).

Without this complexity in hand, we can treat the implied author as a reconstruction of the reader while getting into an interaction with the story and an agent behind the invention of the narrator (Chatman, 1978: 148). This means that there is an author who constructed the given story including the narration and the narrator that we as readers recognise. However, this author cannot be the actual author herself since we might have nothing to know about her. In cases, we have no knowledge of her, we still manage to assign her a role.⁸ Consequently, everyone who steps into the debate on unreliable narration holds an understanding of the implied author one way or another to analyse the impact of the actual author and decide how she makes its way to the fictional discourse of the story if she does.

Booth's understanding of the implied author leads to some ideal and impersonal version of the author herself while still holding something personal, which prevents us from confusing an implied author of one work with another's work (1983: 70-71). It looks to me that scholars who treated unreliable narration as solely a rhetorical device are inclined to avoid this individual part of the implied author to make any theory more stable. If we successfully avoid this individual part which is usually a combination of intentions and characteristics of the actual author, we do not need to talk about their effects on the story and consequently to the reader. This idea leaves us with an understanding of an implied author superior in intelligence and moral respects to real authors (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002: 89). It is hard to suggest that the implied author's nature holds some form of superiority. If we approach it by ignoring the individual part to avoid its complexity, this sense of superiority might have been caused by the approach itself rather than its real nature.

On the other side of the debate — where the interpretations of the reader are more critical since all the rhetorical devices only have a meaning after the cognitive process of the reader (Nünning, 2008: 32) — the implied author is just “an anthropomorphized phantom” (Nünning, 1999: 54). It cannot be defined, and even if

⁸ A fun way to think about this issue can be the writers who use pseudonyms.

it can be defined, we cannot avoid the complex issue of the author's intention since it still will be a product of the author's invention. It suggests that the implied author is just an idea that is reinventing the issue rather than getting rid of it. So, the issue itself does not disappear; we would end up adding another level to it.

Still, the implied author can be a needed and an inevitable outcome. The reader builds a picture of who has written the text while interacting with it through the narrator, which is the implied author (Booth, 1983: 73). While constructivists argue that the implied author contains reflections of the actual author's intentions, Chatman takes the implied author as an inevitable agency in narrative fiction. According to him, the implied author works as a source for the work itself to come alive in the reader's interaction and becomes "the locus of the work's intent" (Chatman, 1990: 74). He seems to choose to use 'intent' rather than the word 'intention' to reflect that when we look through the reader's eye to the work, we still come across some form of an author.⁹ In the reader's involvement, we see a reconstruction rather than a construction of the story since the text itself has already existed before the interaction. In this sense, even if we cannot pinpoint the author's intentions and how it affects the work, the reader cannot escape from assigning possible intentions to the author. Chatman looks like trying to show that it is an inevitable concept and can perhaps be stabilised by taking it in a bit of a traditional form. However, whether the author's intentions suggest a complex issue to the ground or the work's intent, suggesting that it is an inevitable concept, the implied author faces the same problems to be conceptualised.

Phelan recognises that the distinction between the real author and the implied author might not be necessary and can be treated as even against Occam's razor as a principle (2005: 45-46). Even so, he tries to approach the issue from a different point. According to him, the author's private intentions are different from her public intentions where we come across within the text, and the theory of rhetoric is not concerned with the private intentions of the author since the authorial agency would be looked at within the text (2011: 135). In this sense, the implied author's intention

⁹ This suggestion can be a bit of stretch, however 'intent' as a word gives more of a formal sense as if Chatman is trying to emphasise the notion of 'implied author' is legally binding to the narrative discourse and cannot be avoided.

would be carried around rather than the actual author for a rhetorical theory. However, we cannot still overcome the problem of intention and authorial agency with this vague distinction between the private and public intentions of the author. As a reaction to the text, the reader might discover that there is an independent person from the text and this person is not quite the same person who is regarded as the author by the reader (Phelan, 2011: 136); still, there is no evidence suggesting that these two identities are entirely separate. In this sense, detecting unreliability through the implied author may not be secure as it seems to be. However, there is no denying that an agent who constructed the text might not make the issue less complex. As Nünning argues, defining unreliability depending on a concept already paradoxical might not be the best way to approach the issue (1997: 86).

To eliminate the issue of intentionality, Bruno Zerweck points out that we cannot understand and analyse unreliability solely grounding it on the text and textual signals, interpretation of the reader and her selection of strategies to do this have a more significant role in any possible analysis of unreliability (2001: 155). It means that the cognitive process of the reader can be the determinant of unreliability. For instance, creating unreliability through using conflicting historical information would not be recognised by the readers who are not familiar with this specific sort of information. In this sense, these readers cannot sense the unreliability even if it is intended.

Until here, we can see that the debate looks like it formed around the question of the source of unreliability. On the one side, the unreliable narration is held as a rhetorical device offering an analysis of the authorial agency. And, to create a stable theory, the concept of the implied author becomes needed for these theories. The unreliable narration is treated as possible intellectual or moral discrepancies between the implied author and the narrator with implied author.

On the other side, cognitivists pointed out that possible intellectual or moral discrepancies between the narrator and the reader might be more critical since, without the interpretation process of the text, we cannot talk about a degree of reliability, so the cognitive process of the reader might have a more significant impact.

Still, the debate and the sides are not that separated from each other. One can assume that those who defend a rhetorical approach do not give the reader importance. Nevertheless, as we can see in Booth, the reader is an active element of the phenomenon (1983: 203). In uses of unreliable narration, it happens to be a “secret communion, collusion, and collaboration” between the author and the reader behind the narrator’s back (Booth, 1983: 304). This idea suggests that when the reader decodes the encoded elements that the implied author implements can see herself in the same party with the author. The author knows what happens, the reader senses it, but the narrator is clueless about being exposed. The “narrator’s limited knowledge, his involvement, and his problematic value scheme” are observable by the reader (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002: 103). Booth suggests that this observation is attained to the author since she invented the text and the narrator.

The relation between the implied author and the narrator can get fuzzy sometimes. To understand it better, we can look at them as two different narrative agents (Chatman, 1990: 75). When we interact with a story that consists of a narrator, we experience a double vision (Phelan, 2005: 280). One agent tells the story, and another agent happens to invent this agent to tell the story. This understanding of the implied author leaves her with two responsibilities; in one sense, she is a narrative agent of the text and represents the whole of the text and in another sense, she is behind the creation of the narrator.

As a consequence, we can say that the concept once suggested stabilising the theory unbalanced it. It is suggested that we can have a more stable ground if we approach the author’s sense in the reader’s reconstruction of the text as an “inferred author” rather than an implied one (Chatman, 1990: 77; Kindt & Müller, 2008: 104). This can emphasise that the reader also takes part in its conception and prevents the possible confusions between the implied author and the actual author. Although, whatever we might call this author, it is still complicated to understand its nature since it seems to be both a natural outcome of the fictional discourse and our interpretations as readers.

As we can see, the whole debate on unreliable narration does not seem to reach a consensus, other than the idea that it stretches out to a ground covering the author’s

intentions, the use of language, and the reader's interpretation. There are different views to stabilise the idea by defining kinds of narrators, kinds of authors, but this only shows that you have to give definitions in a way that strips them of their nature to stabilise the theory.

Not reaching a consensus does not propose a problem for my argument and even can motivate the argument on a metatheoretical level¹⁰. Moreover, having doubts about the function of this device does not spoil building an argument on it. Since I will suggest that unreliable narration can provide a ground for practice of scepticism, this unsteady structure could be taken as providing a ground for practice of scepticism in its analysis.

¹⁰ Metatheoretical level can be interpreted variously. I do not use it in a mathematical sense, but I still use it in a Carnapian sense. Consequently, it is a vague idea yet has similarities to mathematical sense.

CHAPTER III: LEARNING FROM FICTION THROUGH UNRELIABLE NARRATIVES

The technique of unreliable narration provides us an aspect for approaching the issue of learning from fiction in a novel way. As I try to show in Chapter I, learning from fiction mostly depends on inferring different points of view if the possible inference is successful. Nussbaum takes these points as moral representations. Similarly, Carroll considers them to be moral virtues represented in the story. As Gaut and Gibson emphasises, imagination could be the tool inferring these points for learning from them.

Still, inferring these points of view is harder to ground on empirical learning due to the need for justification in the actual world. In this sense, it seems to me that it is unreasonable to consider this as learning from fiction since we do not deal solely with the scope of fiction. Since, even if we are successful in our inference and willing to test it in the actual world, the source of learning scope both covers fiction and the actual world. It seems to me that this structure would be more like hearing from fiction in the cases of successful inferences. I think this is very similar to companies that try to gather information on where the possible client heard about them from. The source can be the internet, your acquaintances or even just a brochure flying in the wind. In this sense, fiction has similarities to these learning sources. Picked-up beliefs from fiction might work in a similar way to how these sources present them to a person in the actual world. As people encounter information through these sources, similarly, fiction could be considered as the source of where you encountered the information, not where you learned from.

One might object to this by pointing out that when you hear about a company, you acquire some sort of knowledge of them. This is obviously the case; however, one still cannot know whether this company exists without reaching out to them. It could easily be a scheme to rip off people. And in a case where they already knew about the company, it wouldn't fall under learning something from that specific source. One might still object by pointing out that it could be considered as a source if the given company exists. I agree, but in a similar case in consideration to fiction you do

not reach a reliable person that you are thankful for her suggestion or the brochure that managed to land in a sidewalk, you still reach to a fictional person which is not equivalent to a person considering existential status.

3.1 What to learn?

Fictional works with unreliable narrators can provide a way of learning from fiction, having no use for the actual world in its learning process in contrast to regular narrative techniques that provide a ground for the reader and viewer to pick up beliefs and run them in the actual world. The reason behind is that unreliable narration does not only offer its reader and viewer beliefs to pick up. With its complex structure, it makes its reader and viewer question the reliability of these beliefs as an addition. As a consequence of this, possible learning outcomes from fiction can shift.

As it has been mentioned before, moral standpoints can be presented to the reader and the viewer can pick them up and if they can be successful to infer, these moral standpoints can turn into moral acquisitions. Unreliable narratives give this a twist by creating inconsistencies that can evoke doubt and lead to an inquiry of the reliability of the presented beliefs. By taking part in this inquiry, without needing to test it in the actual world, the reader and viewer can learn and practice doubt as a skill. In this sense, unreliable narratives can be considered as a better learning source in contrast to the ones that require the actual world in their learning process.

As it is implied in its name, unreliable narrators may make it hard to consider them as reliable sources for learning even if we manage to tackle their problematic existential status. However, these narrators and this narrative technique may not need to be reliable to be considered as a reliable learning source. By arousing curiosity in its reader and viewer by showing what is narrated might not match the world in the given fictional world, unreliable narratives may invite their audience for a further inquiry. In this sense, the implications on their unreliability through planted flags in the story leave a door for the reader and viewer open to come in and interact with the story on a deeper level. The reader and viewer find themselves in a position that they are forced to interpret the intentions of the author and the textual evidence if they

want to grasp the story. Since they are presented in an inconsistent way, the reader and viewer start to doubt what they are able to catch from presented flags.

Moreover, as I can see from the analysis of this device, even if the structure of the narration can be presented and even grounded on different elements in the means of textual evidence and narration and even makes the reader confused in metatheoretical level with its implications for the implied author, these changes do not constitute an interruption in the learning process. Because even if the structural elements go through change, doubt and inquiry of reliability of the presented beliefs remain and even go on in the metatheoretical level.

3.2 How to learn?

Since unreliable narratives can present a structure that does not only depend on the reimagining of the story, but it does also not always require imagination. Imagination can be useful to catch more flags that suggest inaccuracies within the story, however one can still catch the textual evidence that indicate unreliability without requiring imagination. In this sense, even if imagination can be useful for learning in this discourse, it is not essential. With this, we can object to Allen, since he considers that imagination is indispensable for the learning process. And propose a new way to Gaut on how we can learn from fiction by pointing out to the cases that imagination may not be so necessary.

The involvement of the reader and viewer to the discourse of unreliable narratives with their interpretations can create simulations that they can take a part in. This involvement does not require volunteering besides from opening the cover of the book or playing the film. In this sense, it can overlook the idea of having a specific conceptualisation of fiction. Without needing a pretend or an emotion theory, we can take unreliable narratives as a learning source. However, I am not still sure whether we can say the same thing for a thought theory as Lamarque suggested, since I do not know how to place psychological reactions in this scope without being too barren. Psychological reactions seem as they can be interpreted both by considering intellectual and moral discrepancies. Although, leaving a pretend theory completely out does not look like a good approach either.

Overall, it seems to me that we can propose an account of learning from unreliable narratives without necessarily getting into the conceptualisation of fiction.

Imagination seems like a tool that increases the chances of possible interaction with the fictional work, but it can still be overlooked for inconsistent textual evidence in the case of unreliable narrators. The reader and viewer can take part in a make-believe game, but for unreliable narrators there seems to be another level within the story. Since as the reader and viewer take place in make-believe games, they are presented with inconsistency and inaccuracy that can lead to questioning of these games. This can be a result of the expanding structure of unreliable narratives that in a sense makes the distinction between fiction and the actual world fuzzier. However, I am not sure whether this structure can be treated as a threat to perceiving them as make-believe games. Psychological reactions and responses can create a correspondence to given intellectual and moral discrepancies. However, there needs to be serious work on what we mean by these psychological responses and how they match these discrepancies. Quasi-emotions seem to fall a bit far away from this discourse. However, the idea that proposes the reader and viewer make connections between what is presented, and their perception can be useful to understand moral discrepancies.

If we go about the previously suggested learning accounts from fiction, we can find useful points to construct a theory even if they cannot be taken as a whole. I think approaching fiction as if it is a simulation provides a nice basis for my argument. If unreliable narrators can put the reader and viewer in a discourse that they can practice scepticism, doubt, and suspension of disbelief that they are not willing to practice in the actual world, this can suggest a simulation. Since this attitude carries a resemblance to other subjects like even death. For instance, if you go around and ask people whether they prefer to die in that specific moment and say you will provide this for them, it is highly improbable that they will agree to it.¹¹ On the other hand, when you introduce people to virtual reality games that they can play and die infinite times, they do not show a specific unwillingness towards it if they do not have a dislike towards playing games. This suggests that people can be more willing to take

¹¹ This is of course, if they do not try to escape, call the police or try to kill you instead and answer your question. And if you are not in the presence of a person who wants to be euthanised in a country that her wish cannot be granted by the law and perceives you as an opportunity.

part in simulations for some subjects that are especially unpleasant in the actual world.

3.3 Is it distinctive?

Learning from fiction as if it is a simulation might not seem distinctive at first. We can treat history in a similar manner. If we consider historians that do not hold personal preferences¹² towards presented historical claims and evidence, we can suggest that they analyse presented possible discrepancies and come up with a coherent simulation. While doing that they can manage to acquire and practice a form of scepticism. However, this possible scenario has its restrictions. For the case of history, we see a narrower group of people that can get into this kind of interaction. Academic or professional historians constitute the bigger part of group, and for the rest of group, we can suggest people who are really interested in history and work on improving their interest. In contrast, fiction does not generate specific kind of restrictions. A person who is in interaction with fiction is sufficient. The only restriction we can talk about whether this person is able to catch discrepancies. In this sense, even if fiction has its own restrictions, it provides a more open to public ground.

Moreover, even so we want people to be lack of any form of personal biases that work on history¹³, this desire could only be a representation of what it should be in ideal conditions. So, we do not have a certain sense of this is actually the case. For this reason, a practice of scepticism in these conditions can face some challenges due to biases. On top of it, since we consider a specific group of people for this example, any problem can go unnoticed, can only be apparent to a small group. In contrast, fiction does not require any kind of specialisation in people.

In the next section, I will outline the idea of what we can learn from fiction by using the effects of the unreliable narratives on the reader and viewer.

¹² It is important to consider historians that do not hold personal preferences towards historical claims in order to prevent strong and false beliefs.

¹³ It is also applicable to many fields both in academia and industry.

CHAPTER IV: SCEPTICISM AS AN EPISTEMIC VIRTUE

Philosophical scepticism is an epistemological position that is hard to define in a couple of sentences due to its variety and volume. And since I am not going to claim that unreliable narrators turn you into hardcore sceptics in the actual world, I will start by defining what kind of scepticism I am referring to instead. I will take scepticism as an epistemic virtue as a suggestion of investigation and inquiry towards held beliefs. To me, fictional works with unreliable narrators can serve as a medium in order to become acquainted and/or practice and/or develop scepticism as an epistemic virtue.

As Ernest Sosa argues virtue can be taken in a sense that suggests everything with a function can possess virtues (1991: 271).¹⁴ This means that a novel or a film can possess virtues as much as a human being does. However, it could be useful to make a distinction here. In my case for fictional works, I am not going to argue that fictional works have epistemic virtues due to their function. Instead, I will suggest that fictional works enable the practice of epistemic virtues by providing a medium to their readers or viewers. So, I will be referring to the readers and viewers when I am talking about epistemic virtues, whether they can become acquainted or practice or develop them in such mediums. Otherwise, it will be a bit absurd considering my goal with this paper to argue that fictional works can serve as mediums for transmitting virtues or provide that medium. After iff my argument is convincing, these epistemic virtues can be attributed to the functions of the fictional constructions with unreliable narrators.

Moving on, I will be focusing on intellectual virtues since another goal of this paper is to show how fictional works can be analysed other than moral acquisitions if we take the internal mechanics of literature into consideration.

According to Sosa and John Greco, intellectual virtues can both be the result of natural cognitive abilities and acquisitions of patterns of thoughts later on (Sosa, 2007: 85; Greco, 2000: 177). Natural cognitive abilities seem vague to me. Because I

¹⁴ Sosa takes the roots of his argument from Plato's *Republic* Book I 353b-c.

cannot see the exact distinction between these supposed natural cognitive abilities and acquired patterns of thoughts. It seems to me that after acquiring different patterns of thoughts, it is not possible to differentiate them from natural cognitive abilities. And more importantly, it becomes elusive depending on the age of the person. I do neither want to deal with this loose concept nor I find it necessary for my argument as I will be suggesting the acquisition of a pattern of thought. So, I will build my argument by referring to these virtues as acquisitions of a pattern of thought rather than as an outcome of natural cognitive abilities. Still, these acquisitions of a pattern of thought can be based upon natural cognitive abilities.

The first thing to consider with unreliable narratives as a medium for transmitting epistemic virtue is their structure that invokes curiosity. Unreliable narrators leave flags as they show indications suggesting discrepancies between what they are telling and what is happening. Sometimes the narrator contradicts herself, sometimes she lies to another character, or sometimes she has gaps in her memory. These forms of indications are usually transmitted to the reader and viewer through evidence that breaks the flow of the story and gives a sense of doubt yet still in an amount that makes them go on with the suspension of disbelief until reaching a point that suspension of disbelief is no longer attainable due to the amount of these flags or a piece of new information such as a narrator who suffers from memory loss because of psychological trauma. These flags can work as checkpoints that make the reader and viewer question and wonder about what is really going on in the story.

Another way for these flags to be present in the story might not be too obvious and only become attainable after the reveal of the narrator's unreliability with strong evidence. In these cases, these flags become realised after reflecting on the story, so, we cannot say that all of the unreliable narratives have this kind of structure. Although, even if these points might fail evoking curiosity in its reader and viewer due to unrecognition, they still serve a purpose for doubt after they will have a chance to get recognised due to the reveal of an information that makes the reader and viewers go over the story and reflect on these points.

This is not the only way that unreliable narratives create such a structure. Unreliable narrators can also be present where the reader or viewer's moral framework does not

coincide with these narrators' moral frameworks.¹⁵ In the presence of moral discrepancies rather than intellectual ones, things can go a bit more differently.

For the intellectual discrepancies, the reader and viewer might be more willing to go on with the story to get a sense of what is really going on. On the other hand, since moral discrepancies within the story might be a consequence of a clash between moral frameworks of the narrator and the reader, the reader might become less willing to go on with the story. This can apply to the situations that the reader and viewer has strongly held beliefs related to moral standpoints, religion, politics or even history. In such cases, I cannot give an account suggesting that the reader and viewer are likely to go on with the story, however I can point out what can increase the chances that they will. When we encounter these clashes in the actual world, the persons involved are less willing to reflect on their belief and there might be a higher chance for them to get defensive in the presence of a person who has an opposite belief. On the other hand, for fiction, these clashes happen between the narrator and the reader and the exact point of where they occur is vague. It seems to me that these clashes happen on the bridge between fiction and the actual world, since there happens to be a moral disposition within the story that does not match the moral framework of the viewer and reader. For this reason, people can be more willing to reflect on their belief until they find out what kind of a reaction they should employ since whatever is represented within the story that creates a contrast and clashes to the moral framework of the reader and viewer does not really exist. Moreover, unreliable narrators have an interacting structure that is semi-hidden that can put the reader and viewer in a position to reflect on their beliefs without being subjected to these clashes.

To sum up, for a stronger suggestion for the practice of epistemic skill and virtue, I am offering those unreliable narratives create structures that their readers and viewers can practice scepticism. Again, the scepticism I take here refers to a combination of doubt and suspension of disbelief rather than an epistemological position in the actual world. Unreliable narratives as they show discrepancies invoke doubt in a way that the reader or viewer does not instantly come to the conclusion

¹⁵ See Nabokov's *Lolita*.

that their narrator is not in line with the story in order to make it possible for the story to unfold.

One might object to this by pointing out that even if there is a practice of doubt and suspension of disbelief for the reader and viewer, there is no apparent reason for them to go on with the story to reach some sort of a truth or clearing of a doubt, especially for situations involving moral discrepancies. There is a possibility that the reader and viewers do not find this structure as evoking curiosity. It can easily be tiring and confusing or simply might not match the taste of the reader and viewer. Here I depend specifically on the nature of epistemic virtues. There is still a chance that the reader and viewer might find the story confusing and could not find the motivation to go on with it. However, epistemic virtues do not require strong motivation for truth (Greco, 2005: 304; Sosa, 2011: 23). They do not require to be present in persons as personal qualities. In this sense, for the practice of scepticism in a fictional discourse, we do not need an already sceptical person that is willing to doubt and suspend her beliefs for reaching the truth. Any person can find that this practice is unbearable both depending and not depending on their personal qualities. However, the discourse does not specifically exclude them. In this sense, this fictional discourse makes it more accessible to practice scepticism as an epistemic virtue regardless of the reader's and viewer's qualities.

Until now, I have tried to show how possible discrepancies between what the narrator is telling and what is happening in the story transmitted to the reader and viewer through flags suggesting something is going wrong can put the reader and viewer in a position to practice doubt and suspension of disbelief. I think that this structure and function can be taken as a simulation for the practice of scepticism with the help of doubt and suspension of disbelief. If the reader and viewer can be successful in taking a part in the simulation that is provided by unreliable narration, invoked responses that arise from can be considered as a practice of scepticism.

The idea of considering scepticism as epistemic virtue can seem somewhat problematic. The amount of scepticism and the situations can vary. For an academic, scepticism can be considered as a part of the job. However, for a bank worker, it might not be the best idea to be sceptical about every order that is given to her. In

this sense, it becomes problematic to consider scepticism as epistemic virtue. Although, as a part of the nature of virtues, virtues correspond to a mean. Thus, the amount of scepticism and the situations to use this scepticism can be a part of considering it as virtue in the first place. This idea can be supported by the practical nature of epistemic virtues (Zagzebski 1996: 267). For an academic, scepticism has its practical uses, since questioning can lead to make her theories more fine-grained. On the other hand, for a bank worker, the best idea might be using this practice of scepticism outside of her workplace. This could also be applicable to the academic in times that she needs to stop questioning and start writing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I tried to show a different way of learning from fiction by using unreliable narratives. First, I analysed the theories on our reactions to fiction to get a sense of our understanding and conceptualisation of fiction. Then, I analysed the possible learning theories that have been offered. In my analysis of these theories, I realised that the treatment of fiction by analytic philosophers may not be complete since there is a serious ignorance towards internal mechanics of literary discourse. In order to adopt a different approach, I chose to analyse a literary technique called unreliable narrative. In my analysis of this technique, I came to the conclusion that there is no apparent consensus on elements of it. However, it seemed to me that they reached a consensus on this technique's way of work, by suggesting it as a feedback loop between the author's intentions, representations of these intentions with textual evidence, and the reader and viewer's interpretation. As a conclusion of this, fictional works with unreliable narrators managed to create a structure that evokes doubt in their readers and viewers. This structure of this technique helped me to suggest a different way of learning from fiction. I thought that doubt and inquiry on the reliability of the narrator and given story can help us practice a form of scepticism in our interaction with these kinds of fictional works. Finally, I argued that this practice of scepticism can be analysed in the scope of epistemic virtues and can be considered as a practice of epistemic virtues.

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