

The Structural Function of the Unreliable Narrator in Post-Truth Era Political Thrillers

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Abstract: In this paper, the structural role of the unreliable narrator will be discussed in the framework of political thrillers of the post-truth era. After the society has going through a period where objective truth is being eroded, the unreliable narrator has come into play as an effective narrative device in literature, especially in political thrillers. This paper explores the role of unreliable narrators in complicating the representation of truth and distorting the minds of readers, which is a characteristic of modern politics and its deception and ambiguity. Using the theoretical basis of the unreliable narrator, as outlined by Wayne C. Booth and other authors, the paper analyses the narrative devices used to develop these characters, such as fragmented narration, selective revelation, and false characterization. With the emphasis on novels like *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the paper will show how the two characters represent the political manipulation in the real world, where truth is changeable and subjective. The unreliable narrator not only defies the reader in his or her capability to identify fact and fiction, but is also a commentary on the post-truth political situation. This paper will claim that the structural application of unreliable narrators in political thrillers serves as a literary technique and a mirror of more general societal concerns and ultimately challenges the morality of truth in fiction and how this applies to politics. This analysis provides the paper with insights into the role of narrative in forming the public trust and perception in the post-truth era.

Key Words: unreliable narrator, post-truth, political thrillers, narrative structure, literary analysis, truth and deception, contemporary politics

(Received: 05 December 2024; Revised: 09 January 2025; Accepted: 07 February 2025; Published: 31 March 2025)

Introduction

The unreliable-narrator principle has been a literary tradition that has evolved as a living tool to challenge the perceptions of the readers and to play with the means of truth delivery. The unreliable narrator is especially powerful in political thrillers, where the theme of power, deception, and manipulation is predominant, and leads readers through the labyrinth of half-truths and shifting realities (Jacke, 2018). This literary device is particularly important in the post-truth age, when the conventional concepts of objective truth are being doubted more and more (Ahmed, 2024). In a world that tends to put emotions, personal beliefs, and ideologies more than verifiable facts, the ambiguity and manipulation of information in the world of politics is reflected in the use of unreliable narrators in political thrillers (Jackson & Courneya, 2023).

The post-truth age, which is characterized by the spread of false information, politics, and the loss of objective truth, offers a good basis on which discover the use of unreliable narrators (Baier, 2024). Withholding, distorting, or selectively presenting information, these narrators are usually a mirror of forces that form the perception of the reality of the masses of people in the current political environment. This paper is aimed at discussing the structural purpose of unreliable narrators in post-truth political thrillers

and the way in which the characters are utilized to influence the perception of the truth in readers and bring the boundaries of fact and fiction closer (Wight, 2018).

The paper will demonstrate that unreliable narrators are not only a valid narrative device, but also a way to comment on the larger societal mechanisms of manipulating truth by the examples of such works as *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* by John le Carré. The research questions in this exploration will be: How will unreliable narrators affect the perception of truth in political thrillers? In what ways do these characters reflect the post-truth political climate?

Key Contribution

- Concentrates on unreliable narrators in political thrillers of post-truth.
- Examines the role of unreliable narrators as literary devices and commentaries on the manipulation of truth in politics.
- Discusses how these narrators make the truth difficult for the readers, which is a characteristic of the post-truth age.
- Interprets the chosen works to show how the unreliable narrators influence the plot and help the readers think about the truth and fiction.
- Grows knowledge about how narrative techniques in literature reflect social problems and provides information about the manipulation of truth in modern politics.

This paper is organized into 6 parts: Section I: Introduction presents the unreliable narrator in political thrillers and its use in the post-truth era. Section II: Literature Review discusses the literature available regarding unreliable narrators and political thrillers. Section III: Methodology describes the method of text analysis as qualitative. Section IV: Analysis looks into the application of unreliable narrators in the chosen political thrillers. Section V: Discussion discusses the implications of unreliable narration in terms of political manipulation. VI: Conclusion: summary of findings and recommendations on future research.

Literature Review

The unreliable narrator is a literary device that is used in a critical way as the credibility of the narrator is affected intentionally or unintentionally, and the reader doubts the accuracy of the narrated story (Del Gobbo, 2017). This device has developed with time and has become an outstanding characteristic of modern and postmodern literature (Hoffman & Gaber, 2023; Gurr, 2023). It enables writers to play around with the idea of reality and truth in the reader, which tends to provide some suspense, ambiguity, and layers of meaning. The unreliable narrator can play diverse roles, either a character who is deceiving the others or a main character whose vision is distorted by psychological holds or personal problems (Sorolla-Romero et al., 2021).

The unreliable narrator is especially important in the political thrillers (Zhu, 2024; Jackson & Courneya, 2023). These tales are also likely to explore the complex questions of power, manipulation, truth, and its changes. The main characters of political thrillers are usually those who conceal their real intentions, misrepresent the facts to gain some personal or political advantage, or twist facts to influence the political scene (Castrillo, 2020). The unreliable narrators of the two works further develop these themes and create an air of uncertainty, which makes the reader critically read the text and doubt the reliability of the protagonist or even the narrator (Francis, 2010).

The untruthful narration has gained even more relevance in the post-truth field, where an emotional appeal and personal conviction are considered more important than actual facts (Hoydis, 2021). In the era

of deception and cherry-picking, which may be the hallmarks of politics, unreliable narrators are the mirror image of the general social state of affairs. In political thrillers, such narrators are the embodiment of the demise of objective truth and the rise of other forms of narratives, which often make it hard to tell what is true and what is fiction (Tobin, 2022; Matiyachak, 2019). This is an embodiment of the post-truth world, in which the line between truth and fiction grows more and more challenging to walk along (Fasselt, 2018).

The unreliable narrator in the case of the post-truth political thrillers is a metaphorical aspect of the novel and a critique of the play with the truth in contemporary society. It highlights the influence of the power systems, political ideas, and personal interests in determining what is perceived to be true. This literature review will be used to develop a theoretical background of the changing role of unreliable narrators, especially in political thrillers, and will be the precursor to a more in-depth examination of their role in post-truth narrative.

Methodology

Text Selection and Rationale

This paper presents qualitative research on the role of unreliable narrators in political thrillers in the post-truth era by considering two texts: *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* by John le Carre. The works were chosen because of their high use of unreliable narrators and high involvement with political themes. *Gone Girl* is a psychological thriller, which switches unreliable viewpoints, whereas *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* uses a more traditional spy story, the unreliable narrator being a portrayal of the Cold War spy situation. Both texts can be classified as being in the post-truth paradigm, where the line between objective truth and subjective reality is deliberately obscured.

Analytical Framework

The paper analyzes the role of unreliable narrators in political thrillers and concentrates on three aspects: narrative, characterization, and theme.

- **Narrative Structure:** It is analyzed in terms of the way in which the unreliable narrator affects the plot development. This is through the interpretation of narrative techniques such as fragmented storytelling, contradiction, and selective disclosure of information, and the manner in which the aspects create an impression of suspense and complexity.
- **Character Development:** The research investigates how unreliable narrators are constructed, analyzing their psychological profiles, motivations, and how these contribute to the story. It touches upon the question of whether these narrators are deliberately deceptive or whether they are unreliable due to self-interest or the affected understanding of reality.
- **Thematic Exploration:** The paper also examines the ways in which unreliable narrators are reflections of post-truth, especially the ways in which their distortion of the truth resembles the political manipulation that occurs in political contexts. This part will seek to relate the narrative techniques in the texts to wider social concerns of false information, emotionalism, and truths subject to individuals.

Method of Analysis

Close reading is the main technique of analysis, according to which the text is examined to identify the presence of unreliable narration (disjointed storytelling, contradiction, vague details, etc.). This study will examine the ways in which these aspects are used to manipulate the perception of truth and reality by

the reader. The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and Gone Girl will provide key examples that can be used to discuss particular techniques of unreliable narration.

The sources that will be considered to give the theoretical background to the analysis are secondary sources such as literary reviews and literature on unreliable narration, political thrillers, and post-truth discourse. These sources will assist in explaining how unreliable narrators indicate the manipulation of truth in political contexts and implications in general to the way the readers see reality.

Conceptual Framework

The study will take a conceptual framework to visualize the interrelationships of unreliable narrators, political thrillers, and post-truth themes. This structure demonstrates the way in which unreliable narrators distort the reflection of truth and how their activities portray politics, which has an additional impact on the perception of the reader of reality. The conceptual figure below visually represents this relationship.

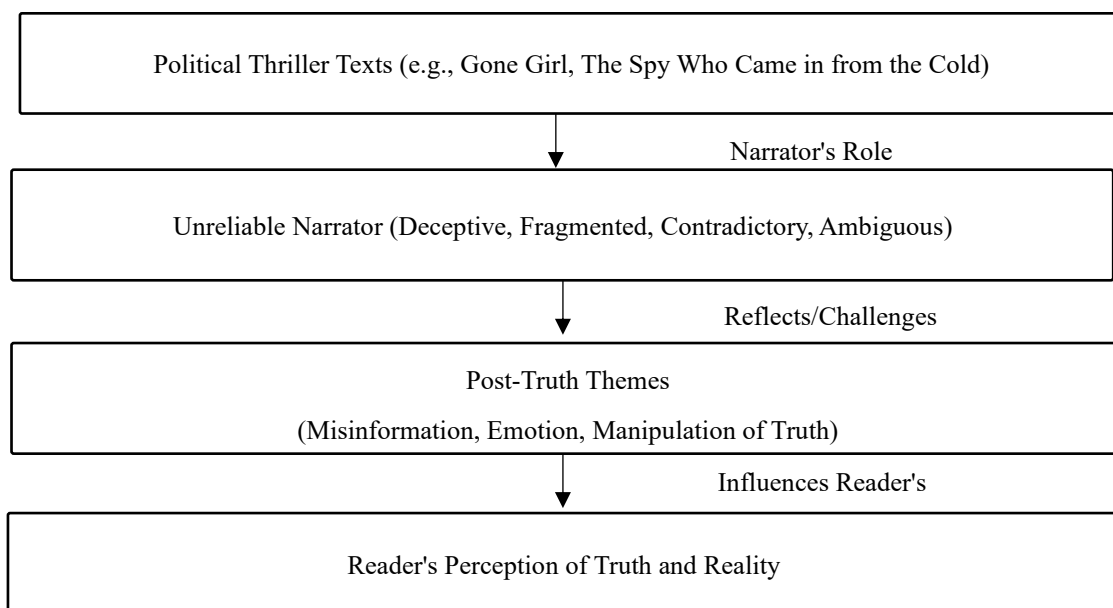


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Unreliable Narrators in Post-Truth Political Thrillers

Figure 1 shows a correlation between unreliable narrators, political thrillers, and post-truth topics. It demonstrates that the use of unreliable narrators is used in political thriller texts, like *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, to introduce fragmented, misleading, or conflicting narratives. These narrators are used to reflect on and address post-truth themes, including misinformation and emotional appeal, and the manipulation of truth. The effects of these untrustworthy narrators eventually determine how the reader can perceive the truth and reality, which underscores the difficulties in comprehending and interpreting truth in the post-truth age.

Data Presentation

The results will be elaborated in the form of textual analysis, with examples of the chosen texts. These instances will illustrate how the use of unreliable narrators affects the plot and adds to post-truth themes. The study will attempt to provide a detailed understanding of the use of unreliable characters as a political thriller and how the unreliable characters can contribute to the truth perceptions of the readers.

Analysis of Unreliable Narrators in Post-Truth Political Thrillers

In this section, discuss the use of unreliable narrators in the political thrillers that were selected, and they are *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* by John le Carré. The discussion will be on how these narrators distort the story, question the reader about the truth, and explore the political theme of deception, power, and control in the post-truth era.

Narrative Techniques and the Unreliable Narrator

Both in *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the unreliable narrator is used to build suspense and uncertainty. In *Gone Girl*, the swapping of points of view of Nick and Amy gives readers two different versions of the same events, which makes them wonder whether each of the characters is a good narrator or not. Specifically, Amy plays with not just the characters in the story but also the readers, who follow her story towards a land of confusion and misjudgment. This selective revelation of the truth makes the reader a party to the manipulation of the story, just like the tricks commonly used in the political arena in the real world, whereby facts are twisted to fit certain interests.

Likewise, in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the untrustworthy narration is connected with the Cold War espionage context, where deceit and secrets are of the essence. The protagonist, Alec Leamas, gives the deviated version of the story, which clouds his true intentions and the reader's ability to understand the relevance of loyalty, betrayal, and truth. Such distortion of the truth is representative of the gray areas of truth in political situations, especially during ideological struggle and Cold War politics.

Table 1: Characteristics of Unreliable Narrators in *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*

Aspect	<i>Gone Girl</i> (Gillian Flynn)	<i>The Spy Who Came in from the Cold</i> (John le Carré)
Narrator	Amy Dunne (First-person, alternating perspectives)	Alec Leamas (First-person, unreliable account)
Nature of Unreliability	Psychological manipulation, selective truth, deception	Moral ambiguity, disillusionment, and hidden motivations
Narrative Technique	Fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives	Uncertainty, contradictions in narrative voice
Psychological Depth	Highly manipulative, changes public perception	Disillusioned, internal conflict, betrayal
Political Context	Social media manipulation, public perception of truth	Espionage, Cold War politics, ideological conflict
Impact on Reader	Forces readers to question motives and reliability	Leads readers to doubt the protagonist's true loyalty and actions
Post-Truth Themes	Misinformation, media manipulation, and emotional appeal	Deception, loyalty, and betrayal in political ideologies
Final Outcome	Reveals Amy's strategic manipulation of truth for personal gain	Leamas's moral and ideological struggle leads to personal sacrifice

Table 1 juxtaposes some of the significant features of the unreliable narrators in both *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. It establishes the differences in narration technique, psychological subtlety, and how they are used in the articulation of post-truth ideas such as misinformation, manipulation, and ideological confrontation. The table also brings to the fore the impact of these narrators on the reader and how they make him/her question the truth and the motives of the characters.

Character Construction and the Unreliable Narrator

The untrustworthy narrators of the two novels are very psychologically complex. In *Gone Girl*, the unreliability of Amy is due to the fact that she is psychologically manipulative and has created a persona. Her personality becomes a victim of a broken marriage and a mastermind who plans her own disappearance after every turn of the story changes the perception of the reader about her personality. This mental profundity adds to the suspense of the story and increases the theme of deceit, in which truth is constantly distorted to serve self-interest.

On the contrary, Alec Leamas in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* is not as scheming, yet his lack of trustworthiness is caused by his disillusionment with the world of espionage. The reader is not able to grasp the motives of his actions as he acts on a personal vendetta based on a combination of personal vendetta and professional duties. The lack of trustworthiness in Leamas is indicative of the moral grey space and ethical fuzziness that characterizes espionage and politics, which is the symbol of the post-truth era.

Thematic Exploration of Post-Truth

The distortion of truth in the two texts concurs with the themes of post-truth politics, where the truth is usually manipulated or solely shown to perpetuate specific interests. In *Gone Girl*, Amy asserts control over the story, breaking the traditional idea of objective truth, and how individual bias and emotional manipulation make people see things as they are. Her acts reveal the weakness of truth in a society driven by the media, where the truth can be fabricated in order to gain personal and political benefits.

Likewise, in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the unreliable narrator shows the political atmosphere of the Cold War, where the tricks of deceit, misinformation, and manipulation of ideology were the usual means of both parties. The spying and treachery in the novel can also be related to the broader society of political mistrust and the untrustworthiness of truth that can be experienced in the post-truth world, where subjective truths are more likely to prevail than objective facts.

Impact on the Reader's Perception of Truth

The two novels have unreliable narrators who are not only playing the plot, but also influencing the truth as perceived by the reader. Giving readers a distorted or incomplete version of events, these narrators compel the reader to be vigilant and doubt the accuracy of the information that has been given. It reflects the problems of people living in the post-truth era where media, politics, personal biases are all involved in creating the conception of reality.

In *Gone Girl*, the reader never knows whom to believe and this ambiguity is reflected in the political world of the post-truth era, in which competing versions of reality are frequently offered. In the same way, in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* the reader is brought into a complex of lies, making him re-evaluate what the truth is in terms of espionage and ideological warfare. Such manipulation of the readers' trust is typical of how the political narrative can be manipulated to meet certain interests, and the strength of the storytelling in influencing the popular perception is evident.

Discussion

Untrustworthy narrators in post truth political thrillers can be viewed as a potent mirror of the political manipulation. These narrators in both *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* are manipulating the truth in order to influence the perception of the reader, just like political leaders do with misinformation

to influence their opinion. The manipulation of truth to serve an individual or political interest is revealed through Amy playing with facts in *Gone Girl* and Leamas having a morally dubious attitude in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.

The two novels are somehow a merging of the truth and fiction, and they represent the post-truth era, when reality is often subjected to emotions and personal religion. The fact that the narrators in these writings are unreliable compels readers to critically look at the story and doubt the credibility of the information given. This reminds of the contemporary political landscape in which most conflicting narratives are likely to be present simultaneously, and establishing the objective truth is hard to do.

The ethical features of unreliable narrators underline the dangers of perverting the truth in order to gain some personal or political benefit. The deception of Amy in *Gone Girl* raises the ethical questions whether it is agreeable that one should bend the truth, and the novel *Leamas in The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* introduces the inhumane moral aspects of being a spy. These narrators make the readers think about the outcomes of distorting the truth and the ethical prices of such behaviors.

Finally, the untrustworthy characters of these political thrillers provide a commentary on the post-truth age, when the truth is elastic and can be changed according to personal ambitions. These narrators emphasize the significance of skepticism and critical thinking in the world where information is frequently manipulated to benefit political agendas by making readers doubt the credibility of the information presented in the story.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how the unreliable narrator structural element in political thrillers in the post-truth era has been used in both *Gone Girl* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. In a thorough examination, it has been proved that unreliable narrators do not only make the narrative structure more difficult but also are a commentary on the modern political manipulation and the loss of objective truth. Distortion and withholding of information make these narrators compel the readers to be more critical in reading the story, reflecting the struggles of living in the post-truth world of conflicting narratives. The paper highlights how unreliable narrators have contributed to the reflection of the real-life politics where people have been playing with the truth in order to acquire power. Both in *Gone Girl* with psychological manipulation and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* with the disillusionment with ideas, these narrators emphasize the plasticity of truth and the moral and ethical implications of its distortion. By so doing, they attract the attention of the larger societal and political problems of misinformation, deception and subjectivity of truth in the post truth era. The present paper contributes to the understanding of unreliable narration in political thrillers and gives an idea about the use of narrative techniques as a reflection of the peculiarities of the truth in the political discussion in modern days. The unreliable narrator is not only a literary device, but a significant instrument to explore the ethical and moral nature of the manipulation of the truth. The research could be extended to other genres in the future or the authors could explore how unreliable narrators play a part in non-Western political thrillers. Also, the psychological and social impacts of unreliable narration may be explored further as the hypothesis may help to understand the effects of this device on the audience and their perception of the truth.

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