

Wieland Schwanebeck, M.A.

**Unreliable Narration in
Literature and Film**

Wed (6)

HSZ 405

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Detailed requirements to be announced in class

Mad-men trying to win our sympathy, lovers who will not admit to their true feelings, likable everymen who turn out to be villains during a twist-ending – the list of dubious narrator-figures in film and literature is long, and the attention given to these so-called “unreliable narrators” in Literary Studies has increased considerably in recent years.

This course is aimed at students who are interested in the basics of narrative analysis in the fields of Literary Studies and Film Analysis, and who are interested in critical readings of texts from a variety of genres and traditions.

We will familiarise ourselves with the origins of unreliable narration (a concept which was coined by literary theorist Wayne Booth), learn about its characteristic features and discuss the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, including cognitive narratology and gender-oriented narratology.

Some of the main questions we want to address in the course of the seminar are: Why was the reliability of narrators frequently put in question in the 20th century? What leads us as readers to question a narrator’s value system? What literary and cinematic techniques are used? What roles do stereotypes and prejudices play? Are we as readers biased when it comes to taking the narrator’s gender into consideration? And are homodiegetic (first-person) narrators the only ones whose credibility can be put in doubt?

We will study unreliability in a variety of text-types, including short prose and excerpts from novels (by authors such as Edgar Allen Poe or Kazuo Ishiguro), as well as films, ranging from classic examples (Alfred Hitchcock) to more recent ones, such as the genre of the so-called ‘Mindfuck’ film (e.g. *Fight Club*).

You can join this course whether you have already attended the introduction to literary studies or not. A reader with selected texts will be available at the beginning of term, as will be further information on OPAL. You do not have to register beforehand – if you are interested in joining this class, just be there for the first meeting.