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Reliably Unreliable: An Analysis of the Child Narrators in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Room* (2010)

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the figure of the child narrator in fiction regarding the concept of narratorial unreliability and argue that child narrators present conflicting characteristics of both reliable and unreliable narrators, due to their ability to accurately report events but inability to accurately interpret them, attributable to their innocence and limited knowledge of the world. In order to support this hypothesis, this paper includes an overview of the study of the concept of unreliability—from Wayne Booth and Ansgar Nünning to Greta Olsen and James Phelan—followed by an analysis of the child narrators in the novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Room* by Emma Donoghue, taking into account their differences in narrative structure and focalization. This paper further argues that the (un)reliability that these narrators illustrate can cause bonding effects in the reader, instead of estranging effects, according to James Phelan's theories about bonding unreliability.

Key words: unreliability, child narrator, bonding effects, Emma Donoghue, Harper Lee

RESUM

Aquest treball pretén analitzar la figura del narrador infantil en ficció en relació al concepte de la "no fiabilitat" i argumentar que els narradors infantils presenten característiques tant de narradors fiables com de narradors no fiables, degut a que relaten els successos amb precisió però no són capaços d'interpretar-los amb la mateixa precisió. Aquest fet es pot atribuir a la seva innocència i coneixement limitat. Per a donar suport a aquesta hipòtesi, aquest treball inclou un resum de l'estudi que s'ha fet del concepte de la "no fiabilitat"—des de Wayne Booth i Ansgar Nünning a Greta Olsen i James Phelan—tot seguit d'una anàlisi dels narradors infantils en les novel·les *To Kill a Mockingbird* de Harper Lee i *Room* d'Emma Donoghue, tenint en compte les diferències d'estructura i focalització que presenten aquestes obres. A més a més, aquest treball també argumenta que la "no fiabilitat" que caracteritzen aquests narradors pot causar efectes de familiarització en el lector/a, enlloc d'efectes de defamiliarització, segons les teories de James Phelan.

Paraules clau: "no fiabilitat", narrador infantil, efectes de familiarització, Emma Donoghue, Harper Lee

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1. INTRODUCTION

The idea for this paper came to me as I was reading *Atonement* (2001) by Ian McEwan earlier this year for the first time. Despite having read about many young characters in fiction before, it was Briony Tallis that made me realize how much of an impact a child's perspective can have on a story and on themselves as characters. The fact that Briony's misinterpretation of a crucial event fuels the whole novel and the way the other characters are going to live their lives underscores the conflicting world view of a child against an adult world she cannot fully comprehend at the time. In this way, this novel made me think about the possibilities of exploring the figure of the child in fiction intended for adults, not in Children's Literature or Young Adult fiction. What arises with children characters in adult fiction is a sharp contrast between these singular characters' points of view and the intended adult audience's. Thus, following this thought, I became interested in the figure of the child not only as a character but as a narrator, taking on the full telling of the story. Preferably, I wanted to look at narrations written solely in the first person, which are expected to generally give more insight into the thought processes of these children and, therefore, it is more difficult for the reader to escape the character's perspective.

Some of the Bildungsromane of the 19th century, such as *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens or *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, which depicted a character's intellectual and emotional maturity from childhood into adulthood, were written in retrospective and in the first person, as the adult character/narrator looked back on his or her life. They are some of the earlier examples in which one can see how a child perceives the storyworld in a different way than adults. What readers can find in retrospective narration is the adult character remembering their thoughts and feelings as a child. Thus, in the first chapters of *Jane Eyre* for example, readers can distinguish between internal focalization[1] and external focalization[2]: "What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days! I feared to return to the nursery; I feared to go forward to the parlour; ten minutes I stood in agitated hesitation: the vehement ringing of the breakfast-room bell decided me; I *must* enter" (Brontë 31). This is similar to the case of *The Goldfinch* (2013) by Donna Tartt, a contemporary version of the classic narrative structure of the Bildungsroman. Tartt also

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[1] In which the child's view is portrayed.
[2] In which the adult character's perspective comes into the narrative voice.

gives voice to the character's worried thoughts as a child: "Almost every day in elementary school I heard things on the Channel 7 news that worried me. What if some bum in a dirty fatigue jacket pushed my mother onto the tracks while she was waiting for the 6 train? Or muscled her into a dark doorway and stabbed her for her pocketbook?" (61) These narrations in retrospective are similar examples to one of the novels I have chosen to analyze for this project, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee, which remains beloved classic. However, the difference is that I have chosen this novel because it only focuses on the character's childhood, and the protagonist, Scout, who is aged 6 when the events start taking place, does not go on to tell about her life after childhood. This is a shared characteristic with the other novel I have chosen, *Room* (2010) by Emma Donoghue, in which, Jack, the narrator[3], is aged 5 at the beginning of the novel. In this way, I believe that their infantile point of view can be examined more accurately in contrast with the perspective of an adult reader.

I have selected these two novels together despite their temporal differences and those regarding plot. In this way, I believe my paper exemplifies how the child narrator is a figure that can be used and has been used in literature in a universal and atemporal manner. It might not be a typical narrator for adult fiction but it can be found on countless instances in literatures in English, not necessarily written in the first person. Some examples, apart from those previously mentioned include: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) by James Joyce, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) by Betty Smith, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) by Carson McCullers, *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) by Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison, or the more recent *The Night Rainbow* (2013) by Claire King and *My Name is Leon* (2016) by Kit de Waal.

The novels I have chosen also share thematic content in the sense that these child narrators are characters placed in difficult situations for children to fully understand. On the one hand, Scout lives in a segregated, racist society as the daughter of a lawyer who is defending a black man against a white woman accusing him of rape. Jack, on the other hand, was born and raised in captivity, after his mother was kidnapped and raped by a man he calls Old Nick. Unable to effect change in these complicated circumstances, these children are limited to positions of observing and interpreting what they see. Because of this, this paper aims to analyze the figure of the child narrator regarding their degree of

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[3] Who does not tell his story in retrospective, but simultaneously as the events occur, unlike Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

narratorial unreliability. Due to their ability to accurately *report* events but inability to accurately *interpret* them, I argue that these narrators illustrate the conflict that arises when trying to define them as either reliable or unreliable, as they present characteristics of both. Using Greta Olsen's and James Phelan's revisions of Wayne Booth's initial definition of unreliability, I propose that the child narrator is a "fallible" narrator (Olsen 93) which can be positioned at the blurred limits between the reliable and unreliable narrator (Phelan), thus being considered unreliable in their reliability. I hope that my readings of the novels prove to illustrate this. Furthermore, I wish to argue that the figure of the child narrator is a narrator able to raise empathy in readers despite this degree of unreliability, as it is due to unconscious external circumstances. The fact that the adult reader must fill in the informational gaps (Olsen) that the innocent child narrator leaves open allows for positive reader-response to occur, based on the underlying bonding effects between reader and character narrator. This extension of my initial hypothesis is supported by James Phelan's theories on bonding unreliability.

The first section of this paper is a theoretical chapter encompassing an overview of the study that the concept of unreliability has undergone in the field of narratology these last decades. After defining the figure of the child narrator according to my hypothesis, a brief explanation of the possibility for bonding effects in reader-response stemming from narratorial unreliability according to James Phelan follows. In the next section I offer my reading and analysis of the two novels that this paper focuses on, explaining the differences they present in narrative structure and levels of focalization beforehand, hoping that they prove to illustrate the theory and hypothesis presented in the previous section.

2. THE (UN)RELIABLE NARRATOR

2.1. Wayne Booth's Initial Rhetorical Definition

Wayne Booth coined the term "unreliability" in 1961 in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and his definition has been since then considered "the leading model for unreliable narration" (Olsen 93) despite having been continuously criticized, revised, and updated by many contemporary narratologists[4]. It is therefore fundamental that I look at Booth's initial definition of unreliability in order to move on to newer revisions of the term on which I will be basing this paper.

In the sixth chapter of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth talks about the relations of distance between narrators, authors, readers, and other characters in stories. He then emphasizes that the "most important of these kinds of distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" (158). In Booth's view, if the narrator "is discovered to be untrustworthy," then the whole effect of the work on readers changes (158). Booth's stance on the reliable or unreliable narrator is stated on page 158: "For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not. … Unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart form their author's norms." Booth's model of unreliability is communicative and rhetorical, as it illustrates a "secret" communicative process regarding the implied author and the "postulated reader" in which "the implied author sends a message through the fictional medium, which the reader then receives" (Olsen 95). Olsen summarizes Booth's model very accurately as "a tripartite structure that consists of (1) a reader who recognizes a dichotomy between (2) the personalized narrator's perceptions and expressions and (3) those of the implied author" (93). Hansen additionally states that although Booth "proposes a purely structural definition of what an unreliable narrator is (a matter of difference in norms), [he] is very certain of the distribution of right and wrong between the two parts" (229).

Booth did not further explore it, but throughout his work, one can find mentions of terms such as "unreliable," "fallible," or "inconscious" being used as interchangeable

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[4] However, Hansen notes that newer studies are "narrator-character studies," as discourse narratologists have generally ignored the concept, due to the fact that "a narrator's unreliability accentuates the character of the narrator" (230).

terms. Therefore, to a certain extent, "Booth's mention of degrees of potential fallibility shows that he conceives of reliability and unreliability as well as fallibility and infallibility as being interrelated rather than diametrically opposed" (Olsen 96), and later narratological analyses have expanded on that. One should consider the following observation by Hansen on Booth's model:

> "What Booth shows here, but only barely reflects upon, is that the reader's determination of a narrator's unreliability is, to a large extent, based on a comparison of the narrator-character's behavioral patterns with his or her own understanding of behavior, and the same applies to historical facts and culturally determined beliefs. Expressed in more general terms, we can say that when the fictional story world of the text is comparable to and obeying the same (or at least some of the same) rules as the factual world, the reader relies on this frame of reference as being presupposed by the text." (234)

Hence, one can see how Booth's dichotomized definition of unreliability focuses, as Shen explains, "on the narrator's misreporting and ethical misevaluation" (par. 3). The problem with Booth's model of unreliability arises with focusing mainly on these two axes: the axis of facts and the axis of values or ethics. My hypothesis on the conflict that is illustrated by the figure of child narrator does not focus on the axis of values or ethics because what arises is simply a distance between what the child sees and reports through their filter, and what the child interprets perceptively, not necessarily ethically. In this way, Phelan and Martin's revision of Booth's rhetorical model of unreliability[5] has proven to be key for this paper, they classify unreliability by focusing on these two axes plus the axis of knowledge and perception, which Booth did not give much attention to (Shen par. 3).

2.2. Ansgar Nünning's Cognitivist Approach and Greta Olsen's Revision of it

Before explaining Phelan and Martin's key revision and expansion of unreliability in detail, I want to mention Greta Olsen's work, who proposes another broader model of unreliability which I have found useful to support my hypothesis on child narrators. Olsen took a step further in revising Booth's rhetorical definition of unreliability, which paid

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[5] See Phelan, James & Mary Patricia Martin (1999). "The Lessons of 'Weymouth': Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*." D. Herman (ed). *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 88–109.

closer attention to the axis of values, as I previously mentioned. According to Olsen, those narrators that are considered to be unreliable need to be further defined and classified, and readers can identify them as either "fallible" or "untrustworthy" (93), in relation to their level of awareness.

In defining her theory, Olsen bases her definition as stemming from Ansgar Nünning's well-known cognitive model of unreliability[6] which proposes a model of unreliability "that rests on the reader's values" (Olsen 93). Nünning disputed Booth's model and the formulaic definitions that were thus attributed to unreliability and which developed into "a tendency to treat reliability and unreliability as binary opposites, and a lack of attention to how unreliability functions" (Olsen 96). Nünning's stance is therefore also very relevant to my paper as I wish to argue that the child narrator cannot be strictly defined as either unreliable or reliable, and that the child narrator is one of these cases that brings readers to question Booth's initial polarized definition of narratological unreliability. Moreover, it is additionally relevant because Nünning's model is based on how the reader/critic can identify narratorial unreliability. I wish to look at the child narrator from a *generic* adult reader's point of view[7], the implied reader for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Room*, as it has been my personal experience as a reader, taking our age and maturity difference into account. I am arguing from this slightly limited theoretical viewpoint because a lengthier empirical study which would hypothetically consider the "different interpretations" that readers could provide for the texts, deriving from "different conceptual frameworks or cultural contexts" (Shen par. 23), is beyond the scope of this work.

In 1999[8], Nünning, taking a cognitivist approach, stated that unreliable narrators could not be defined "as a structural nor as a semantic aspect of the textbase alone, but only by taking into account the conceptual frameworks that readers bring for the text" (qtd. in Hansen 228). So, according to Nünning (qtd. in Hansen) "A narrator may be perfectly reliable compared to one critic's notion of normal morality but quite unreliable

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[6] Similar to other recent models such as those by Monika Fludernik (1999, 2001) and Tamar Yacobi (1981, 2001, 2005).

[7] As Shen explains, "many cognitivist narratologists … are concerned with generic readers" who share an equal "narrative competence" (Prince [1987] in Shen par.17).

[8] See Nünning, Ansgar. "Unreliable, Compared to What? Towards a Cognitive Theory of Unreliable Narration: Prolegomena and Hypotheses." *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*, edited by W. Grünzweig and A. Solbach, Tübingen: Narr, 1999, pp. 53–73.

in comparison to those that other people hold" (236). Hansen, who also revises Booth's and Nünning's models to propose his own, summarizes it very simply: if a reader agrees with the narrator/author's values or viewpoints on a specific topic, they will not be regarded as unreliable; however, if the reader's worldviews and beliefs differ with those of the narrator, the narrator will be considered unreliable (227). This is the main reason why so many contemporary narratologists after Booth, such as Nünning, have revised and reconsidered reliability to be a "reader-dependent issue" (Hansen 227).

However, as a proposal for future studies, Hansen acknowledges that the concept of unreliability is "among the most slippery" (228) in narratological studies and points out that despite Nünning's important revision of Booth, "the rather exclusive orientation towards the reader's responsibility does seem to overlook the fact that the phenomenon of unreliable narration is much more diverse … which is why further distinctions and conceptualizations are needed" (228). Hansen further expands his critique stating that despite the light that cognitive models are shedding on "the reader's active role," which "has so far been widely neglected," he believes that "to give the reader the full responsibility is to go to the opposite extreme" (240).

Hansen's classification of unreliable narrators is based on a mix between textual elements and the knowledge readers bring into a text in view of his statement that "narrational unreliability can but does not always depend on an intentional act by a higher level authorial agency" (240). His classification, which he titles "A taxonomy for unreliable narration" (241) defines four categories: intranarrational unreliability, internarrational unreliability, intertextual unreliability, and extratextual unreliability. I am mentioning his model as it is a contemporary revision of both Booth and Nünning but I will not further explain nor explore this classification, as I haven't used it as a base for my definition of the child narrator nor do I think that the child narrator can be positioned precisely according to Hansen's classification. Additionally, Shen finds that this fourth type of unreliability, extratextual unreliability, which bases its existence on the knowledge that readers bring into the text, is not in coherence with the other three types because "readers with different reading strategies, conceptual frames, or in different contexts may interpret the same intranarrational or internarrational phenomena quite differently" (par. 10).

Coming back to Olsen, she finds some discrepancies within Nünning's model and proposes a new way of differentiating between unreliable narrators: either as "fallible" or

as "untrustworthy." Olsen points out that Nünning's reader-based model presents a paradoxical issue. Despite defending unreliability as detected by what readers bring into their reading of a text,

> "Nünning nonetheless wishes to clear up the confusion surrounding unreliable narrators by enumerating specific textual markers that signal them. … This is, however, problematic. For if detecting unreliability functions as a quality of individual reader response, how can stable textual signals exist to typify the phenomenon of unreliability?" (97)

Hence, she states that in his model, Nünning "ignores the structural similarities between his and Booth's models" (93), which led others like Shen to read his position on unreliability as a "shifting position" (sec. 3.2.2) between rhetorical and cognitivist approaches.

So, Olsen draws attention to how readers can and will "predict whether the narrator is likely to always misreport or is prevented by circumstances from telling the tale straight" (105). She states that in order to theorize on unreliability, one must take into account the "limitations of homodiegetic" (101) and, I add, autodiegetic narrators. Their limitations are defined by the fact that "these narrators cannot have metatextual, omniscient knowledge" (101). Thus, these intratextual conditions themselves suggest the need for a revision of what the term "unreliable" entails in Booth's initial definition of it. Olsen proposes that by contrast, narrators may not be able to "reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased" (101). This distinction is, by extension, the basis for her classification of unreliable narrators as either fallible or untrustworthy. If a narrator is inclined to consciously withhold information or misreport events, considered then by Olsen to be explicitly "untrustworthy," reader's responses to them will be very different than to those narrators who are "prevented by circumstances" (105) to report accurately. These latter narrators are those that Olsen defines as fallible. They might "make individual mistakes or leave open informational gaps" (104) that readers can and generally will fill in. She lists the character of Huckleberry Finn as one of her examples, whose perception is flawed because he is a child with "limited education or experience" (101), not someone who is intellectually or ethically deficient (102). This mention of this specific child narrator serves to further support my hypothesis on Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Jack in *Room*, who are unreliable in an unconscious manner due to the fact that they are young

children with limited knowledge of the situations they find themselves in, and can be considered, therefore, fallible narrators by Olsen's definition. On the other hand, Olsen states that "untrustworthy narrators strike … [readers] as being dispositionally unreliable" (102). Olsen additionally considers that fallible and untrustworthy narrators can always be situated on a gradient (similar to Phelan's model), and be highly fallible or untrustworthy or the other way around. In the case of consciously unreliable narrators, she argues that "at one end of the spectrum, untrustworthy narrators contradict themselves immediately or announce outright that they are insane. At the other end, readers are required to do more "detective" work to determine whether a narrator is trustworthy or not" (104). Therefore, as I mentioned before, reader-response will differ depending on the self-consciousness of the unreliable narrator. Olsen explains that "untrustworthy narrators meet with [reader's] skepticism about their characters, whereas fallible narrators are more likely to be excused for their failures to deliver on the informational goods" (104). Therefore, Olsen considers the term "untrustworthy" as one that "concern[s] the narrator's qualities as a person" and regards "fallible" as a term that considers "[the narrator's] ability to perceive and report accurately" (96), depending on external circumstances.

Olsen goes on to conclude that keeping this distinction in mind, a "reader can then assume a strategy by which she can make different types of unreliable narration comprehensible and render fallible and untrustworthy narrators reliable in their unreliability" (105). This is one of the key statements that supports definition of the child narrator. As I previously mentioned, the child narrator illustrates a conflict between reliability and unreliability, but by taking Olsen's definition of "fallible" narrators into account, one can see how the figure of the child narrator can be reliable in their unreliability, as it is a condition caused by unconscious circumstances. In the case of Scout and Jack, these external circumstances include innocence and lack of experience which go hand in hand with their very young age. However, because Booth himself uses, "untrustworthy," "fallible," and "unreliable" interchangeably, Shen suggests that Olsen could have used more specific terminology such as "circumstantially unreliable" instead of "fallible" and "dispositionally unreliable" instead of "untrustworthy" (par. 13). Thus, taking both Olsen's definition and Shen's suggestion into account, I find that the terms "circumstantially unreliable" and "fallible" are adequate to be used to refer to the concept

of the child narrator, as I define them as narrators who are unconscious of their justifiable fallibility up against an adult reader.

2.3. James Phelan's Extension of Booth's Rhetorical Model

While Olsen took a step in Nünning's direction to consider the position and view of the reader regarding the issue of unreliability, Phelan and Martin had also proposed their own model in 1999, extending Booth's rhetorical model, to define up to six subtypes of (un)reliability, which have proved to be key in my definition of the child narrator regarding their degree of unreliability. As I unfortunately lack access to Phelan and Martin's complete work[9], I will be referring to Phelan (2007) and Phelan (2017) in this paper, where he revisits both his amplification of the subtypes of unreliability[10] and their ability to cause either estranging or bonding effects with readers.

Phelan joins Olsen in critiquing the polarized definition that Booth gave to unreliability: "Reliable and unreliable narration are neither binary opposites nor single phenomena but rather broad terms and concepts that each cover a wide range of author-narrator-audience relationships in narrative" (Phelan, "Reliable" 94). This led Phelan and Martin to develop a revised rhetorical model which defines 6 subtypes of narratorial reliability and unreliability. Phelan states that:

> "reliable and unreliable narration are neither binary opposites nor single phenomena but rather broad terms and concepts that each cover a wide range of author-narrator-audience relationships in narrative. Furthermore, it makes sense to combine their two ranges into a single larger spectrum that runs from unreliable reporting on one end to mask narration on the other." ("Reliable" 94)

This spectrum he mentions is the gradient of reliability containing six main subtypes (three main subtypes of reliability and three main subtypes of unreliability) that I will be using to support my hypothesis on the child narrator. Since the figure of the child narrator illustrates the blurred lines between reliable and unreliable narration, I will use Phelan's classifications of both reliable and unreliable narration to situate the fallible child narrator as fluctuating in the limits of both types of narration. Phelan notes that "the main functions of narrators are to report, to interpret, and to evaluate, and that skillful implied authors

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[9] (n 5)

[10] See also Phelan, James (2005). *Living to Tell about It*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

can communicate to their audiences whether their purposes and those of their narrators converge, diverge, or do some of each" ("Reliable" 95). Child narrators do report events honestly, or at least partially, but might be limited in their interpretation and evaluation of said events. Phelan also bases his classification on the author's use of what he calls the "filter," which introduces a "distortion of the implied author's take on things" and conditions "the distance between implied author and narrator" ("Reliable" 96). In my readings of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Room*, this filter is clearly used through the child's eyes.

On the reliable side of this spectrum, Phelan includes *restricted narration*, *convergent narration*, and *mask narration*, from less to more reliable. In restricted narration, Phelan argues that "the narrator's function" is "reliable reporting" and that the implied author "convey(s) interpretations that the character narrator remains unaware of" ("Reliable" 96). Further along the gradient, Phelan pinpoints convergent narration, which aligns "author, narrator, character, and audience" ("Reliable" 97), in all three functions (reporting, interpreting, and evaluating) even though the "narrating-filter of the character function is thick" ("Reliable" 96). Finally, on the furthest end of the reliable side of the spectrum, Phelan locates mask narration, in which "the character narrator's reporting function recedes and the interpreting and evaluating functions move to the foreground" ("Reliable" 97), therefore, aligning author and narrator.

On the unreliable side of this spectrum, Phelan includes *misinterpreting*, *misevaluating*, and *misreporting*, from less to more unreliable[11]. As one can see, these three types of unreliability correspond to the three axes that have been previously mentioned: the axis of perception, the axis of ethics, and the axis of facts. First of all, Phelan states that he views "divergence between author and narrator about what happened to be more fundamental than divergences in interpretations or evaluations of what happened" ("Reliable" 98), thus positioning misreporting to the far left of the spectrum. Second, Phelan considers misevaluating and more unreliable than misinterpreting because he views "ethical deficiencies as more significant than interpretive ones" ("Reliable" 99). For example, as I will later argue, in *Room*, Jack reports fully but misinterprets. The narrator is at the limits between reliable and unreliable narration

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[11] Note that in *Living to Tell About It*, Phelan defined six subtypes of unreliability which would then be added to the three subtypes of reliability; however, in revisiting the model, Phelan groups them together in three subtypes to be situated along this spectrum of distance between implied author and narrator: more distance equals more unreliability. (n 10)

because of cognitive differences regarding thought processes with the adult authorial audience.

In Fig. 1, one can see where I position the figure of the child narrator on Phelan's spectrum ("the arrow indicating the direction of increasing reliability" ["Reliable" 99]) both as *misinterpreting* (on the unreliable side of the spectrum) and *restricted narration* (on the reliable side of the spectrum), as I argue that the child narrator is both a reliable type of unreliable narrator and, at the same time, an unreliable type of reliable narrator.
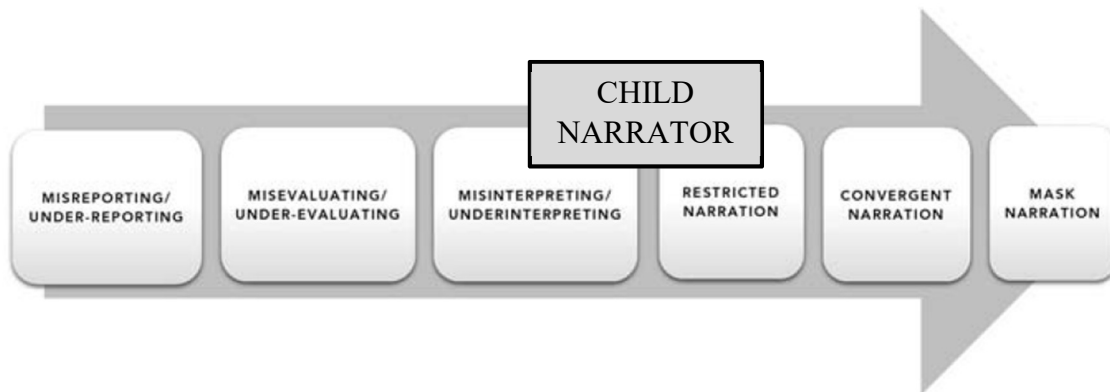

Fig 1. Adapted from Phelan, "Reliable" 99

Now that I have placed the child narrator on Phelan's broad spectrum of unreliability, I wish to argue that the unreliable, to a degree, figure of the child narrator will not have estranging effects on the reader regarding the narrator and implied author, but the contrary. These narrators report objectively but misinterpret events due to their innocence and lack of experience. Therefore, the bonding effects they cause will translate to some degree into empathy in readers. Despite not being perhaps at the level of *mask narration*, they can certainly cause bonding effects with readers. Many studies on unreliability after Booth coined the term in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* have presupposed that its effects are estranging (Phelan, "Reliable" 94) but Scout and Jack's unreliability, which functions along the axis of facts and that of knowledge and perception, has bonding effects on the generic adult reader, closing the distance between them, the authorial audience, and the narrator. Phelan explains this phenomenon thus: "in bonding unreliability, the discrepancies between the narrator's reports, interpretations, or evaluations and the inferences of the authorial audience have the paradoxical result of reducing the interpretive, affective, or ethical distance between the narrator and the authorial audience" ("Estranging" 225). Additionally, Phelan suggests that "any one of

the six types [of the spectrum] can function as estranging unreliability or as bonding unreliability" ("Estranging" 226). Moreover, he acknowledges the need to "look at actual narrative practice" as it has proven that "authors have also found ways to use unreliable narration to decrease distance of one or more kinds" ("Reliable, 94).

In the article, "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*," Phelan describes six subtypes of bonding unreliability. As my stance on child narrators only concerns one of these six subtypes, I will list the six subtypes but only explain in more detail the relevant one for my work: (1) "literally unreliable but metaphorically reliable"; (2) "playful comparison between implied author and narrator"; (3) "naïve defamiliarization"; (4) "sincere but misguided self-deprecation"; (5) "partial progress towards the norm"; (6) "bonding through optimistic comparison".

The type that I consider illustrates to a certain degree the bonding that takes place between the audience or readership and the figure of the child narrator is that of "naïve defamiliarization" (Phelan, "Estranging" 229). Phelan, like Olsen, uses the character-narrator Huckleberry Finn as an example to illustrate how a child fails to interpret certain events accurately due to their naïveté ("Estranging" 229). This type of bonding unreliability therefore works along the axis of perceptual knowledge and that of facts. So, while a child's perspective might defamiliarize certain events for the generic adult reader, their age and lack of knowledge allows for the "perceptual distance" (Phelan, "Estranging" 229) between them and the authorial audience to be reduced. An "informational gap" is created (Olsen 104) and the adult reader can fill it in with their broader perceptual knowledge of the world.

In this overview of the study of narratorial unreliability I have explained in detail Phelan's and Olsen's theories on which I base my initial hypothesis on the figure of the child narrator. I therefore further argue that the child narrator, which is both reliable and unreliable at the same time, mainly regarding the axis of facts and the axis of perception, can have bonding effects, according to Phelan's theory about bonding unreliability. I hope my readings of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Room* serve to illustrate my hypothesis on these child narrators seeing where I've located them on Phelan's spectrum of (un)reliability, and also to show why they can also be defined as fallible narrators due to the fact that they fully report events accurately in their view but misinterpret them due to unconscious external circumstances.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CHILD NARRATORS IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* AND *ROOM*

3.1 Differences in Narrative Focalization

Although these two novels share certain characteristics regarding the narrators' characteristics, as I explain in the introduction to this paper, they differ to an extent in textual circumstances regarding point of view and focalization. On the one hand, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is written from the point of view of an adult woman, Jean Louise Finch (nicknamed "Scout" in childhood), who is looking back on her childhood, revisiting events that took place in the past and, therefore, channeling the perspective and thoughts she had when she was a child. Similar to the ways in which the Bildungsromane of the 19th century were written, tracing the intellectual and emotional maturity of young characters into adulthood, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel in which, as is also the case of *Room*, our narrator as a child "cannot help but function as a set of lenses through which the audience perceives the story world" (Phelan "Why" 57), as I'll argue in this section. On the other hand, *Room* is written from the point of view of a 5-year-old child and the events seem to take place simultaneously as they are being narrated. The "telling of events" does not "occur after their occurrence" (Phelan "Reliable" 90), which corresponds to the common default structure in many narratives. There is no complex structure of focalization in this case, as it isn't a case of a narrative told in retrospective, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Before analyzing each of the narrators in detail I want to note the approach to focalization that I have used for this paper. I will be using the terms *point of view*, *perspective*, and *focalization* interchangeably, since Genette himself replaced the term *perspective* with the synonym *focalization*[12] but I will distance myself from his classification of the different types of focalization, which has been critiqued, revised, and reformulated since then, and will use Edmiston's revision of it in the context of first person narrative[13] (Niederhoff, par. 22, par. 24), relevant to this paper. Genette proposes a triple model including: zero or non-focalization, which, as Niederhoff explains, redefines the concept of omniscience (par. 22); internal focalization, which includes the perspective of one character; and external focalization, which further restricts this

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[12] See Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Basil Blackwell, 1980.
[13] See Edmiston, William F. *Hindsight and Insight: Focalization in Four Eighteenth-Century French Novels*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991.

previous perspective. In first-person narrative, besides zero-focalization which is not relevant to this paper, Edmiston highlights the possibility of Genettean internal focalization, in which the "experiencing I" functions as the point-of-view character for the text. However, Edmiston states that external focalization as Genette had defined it is not an option anymore in first-person narration but he does reformulate the term, using it to define the option of "telling the story from the point of view of the narrating I" (Niederhoff par. 24).

Another theory which further exemplifies the complexity of the perspectives used in these novels stems from a recent tendency in narratological studies to emphasize the "diversity of the phenomenon" of perspective and to acknowledge "different facets or parameters" in order to define and further classify the concept (Niederhoff par. 26). Schmid[14] acknowledges the need to distinguish several parameters[15] in order to show how they might not be "necessarily in line with each other" (Niederhoff, par. 26). He offers a convenient example regarding language, in which a narrative "may report events as they are perceived by a character, while … using language that is very remote from that of the character," illustrating dissociated parameters. On the contrary, an author might, as Joyce does in the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "render a child's perceptions in a child's language," which illustrates aligned parameters (Niederhoff, par. 26). Schmid refers to the use of dissociated parameters as "distributive perspective" and to the use of aligned parameters as "compact perspective." Thus, one can see how Emma Donoghue uses compact perspective in *Room*, seeing that Jack's perceptions are expressed through a very immature use of language, as I will illustrate in this section. On the other hand, as *To Kill a Mockingbird* is written in retrospective that makes use of both internal and external focalization, it seems that Scout's perceptions are expressed through the adult Jean Louise's language in distributive perspective. However, Scout is experiencing a life in society, surrounded by adults who communicate differently than the common child. Therefore, as much as I would like to go as far to say that the language the audience reads the story through does not correspond to Scout's language in childhood, I cannot be sure, as her circumstances are drastically different from those of Jack's. Therefore, their use of language should consequently be different as well.

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[14] See Schmid, Wolf. *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008.
[15] As Niederhoff explains, he discerns five specific parameters: space, ideology, time, language, and perception.

3.2 Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird *(1960)*

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the audience can difference between a present and former self (Phelan "Why" 61) of the homodiegetic narrator, which work as the *narrating-I* and *experiencing-I* in the novel, through this use of external and internal focalization that Edmiston refers to. Phelan states that this use of the narrator as a focalizer, internal and external in this case, "allows us to account more satisfactorily for the complex dynamics of narration, enabling us to recognize the role that narrators play in influencing audience's vision of the story world" ("Why" 63). In this novel, the narrating-I, which I place on the reliable side of Phelan's spectrum, is Jean Louise Finch who is looking back on the childhood she had in Maycomb, a fictional Southern town, surrounded by her family: Atticus Finch, her father, and Jem, her older brother. The experiencing-I, who I consider to be between the reliable and unreliable limits of Phelan's spectrum, is the child narrator of the story, Scout Finch, whose perceptions are used by Lee to tell the story events to the audience of readers "when enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them" (Lee 3). Scout fully reports but fails to accurately interpret certain events by herself. Therefore, as Shackelford explains, the novel is "focused on the older Scout's perceptions of her growing-up years" (108).

There are many instances in the novel in which the author draws attention to this distinction, and readers can distinguish between these two Is. For example, when the narrator reminisces about the time spent with Charles Barker Harris, nicknamed Dill, the siblings' summer neighbor who is close in age to Scout. The narrator expresses how "summer was the swiftness with which Dill would reach up and kiss me when Jem was not looking, the longings we sometimes felt each other feel. With him, life was routine; without him, life was unbearable. I stayed miserable for two days" (154). In this short passage readers can both identify the adult voice remembering past feelings which seem clearly exaggerated because they are expressed through the child's point of view at that time. When the author writes "without him, life was unbearable" and talks about "the longings we sometimes felt," the readers can identify the use of internal focalization, in which the narrative voice is that of Scout as a young girl, and distinguish it from the adult narrative voice who is remembering these past episodes. In the following passage one can see another example of Scout's exaggerated thoughts and, therefore, misinterpretations of certain events:

"His curtness stung me. The comb was midway in its journey, and I banged it down. For no reason I felt myself beginning to cry, but I could never stop. This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts. My father never spoke so. Aunt Alexandra had put him up to this, somehow. Through my tears I saw Jem standing in a similar pool of isolation, his head cocked to one side." (178)

The wording of "this was not my father", "my father never thought these thoughts", and "my father never spoke so", illustrates Scout's feelings as a child, and the experiencing-I reports what she felt at the time. However, these are not reliable interpretations. Scout's image of the idealized Atticus in her innocent eyes is broken during moments such as the one illustrated in the passage above. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Atticus "never spoke so" or "never thought these thoughts." Another example in which this distinction between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I is made clear regards Scout's relationship to the character of Calpurnia, the Finch's black housekeeper and motherly figure to Jem and Scout. After seeing her interact with others at Church, the narrator remembers how the fact "that Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages" (167). These are adult realizations. The moment in which these thoughts "dawn" on her marks the shift from internal focalization, in which the child is unaware, to external focalization, in which Jean Louise acknowledges that this thought had escaped her in childhood. Because the story is told through Scout's perceptions of past events, while she was growing up as a child, the narration is inescapably "focused on the world of Maycomb which she must inevitably enter as she matures" (Shackelford 108).

Scout's relationship to other female characters in the novel further provides readers with other instances in which they can identify the distinction between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I. Atticus' sister, Aunt Alexandra, who comes to stay with the family for an undetermined period of time, aiming to somehow impose "femininity" on the young girl ("We decided that it would be best for you to have some feminine influence. It won't be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys—" [Lee 170]), is a complete mystery to Scout. She recalls that "Aunt Alexandra fitted into the world of Maycomb like a hand into a glove, but never into the world of Jem and me. I so often wondered how she could be Atticus's and Uncle Jack's sister that I revived half-remembered tales of changelings and mandrake roots that Jem

had spun long ago" (175). Again, readers can see how the narrative voice expresses thoughts that she had as a child, when she was confused by the behavior of adults. Scout observes and wonders at Aunt Alexandra and at the world of women in general, as she expresses towards the end of the novel, when Aunt Alexandra hosts a gettogether with some of the women who live in the neighborhood.

> "Aunt Alexandra got up from the table and swiftly passed more refreshments, neatly engaging Mrs. Merriweather and Mrs. Gates in brisk conversation. When she had them well on the road with Mrs. Perkins, Aunt Alexandra stepped back. She gave Miss Maudie a look of pure gratitude, and I wondered at the world of women. Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra had never been especially close, and here was Aunty silently thanking her for something. For what, I knew not. I was content to learn that Aunt Alexandra could be pierced sufficiently to feel gratitude for help given. There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water." (313)

Lee writes Scout remembering how she observed these women and thought "I must soon enter this world" (313), which again is the use of internal focalization, in contrast to the narrating-I who is remembering these past events. Furthermore, this is a passage which serves to clearly illustrate Lee's use of distributive perspective, in which Scout's past thoughts are not expressed through her language but through the language of adult Scout in the future. Despite Scout being very eloquent for a 7-year-old and influenced by the language of adults spoken around her, this passage clearly distances itself from the simpler language that is commonly used by children.

What further allows me to define Scout as a fallible narrator is the fact that, although she is accurately reporting the events that happen to her and those she witnesses, she fails to understand many of them, due to the lack of information she has as a very young girl. The fact that her father, the lawyer, must legally defend Tom Robinson, a black man who has been accused of rape by a white young woman, Mayella Ewell, is a lot for such a young character to comprehend—especially considering the time period and the "racist, segregated society which uses superficial and materialistic views to judge outsiders" (Shackelford 101) that this story takes place in. As Sundquist precisely notes, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel of childhood, but one saturated in narrative consciousness of deeper regional and national time" (80). Luckily for Scout, and consequently for readers, she is growing up in a community surrounded by many adult

figures who pass on information. So, the text's audience can gain access to information about the story from other characters apart from Scout, who is placed in an uncertain position of ignorance, trying to make sense of everything around her, like us readers are. This alignment between the unreliably reliable child narrator and reader is what allows the narrative to produce bonding effects between them, instead of defamiliarizing effects. In order to illustrate this constant seeking of information on both parts, one can read the countless passages of dialogue included in the text in which Scout is either listening to adults who are passing on information or constantly asking adults questions in order to make sense of everything that she is experiencing, mainly regarding her father's case. The Maycomb case that is so brutal and outrageous that it is unspeakable of, thus rendering Scout, who is not in the adult male world, unfamiliar with the situation—a position she can only escape by asking questions. For example, in the following passage, where Scout expresses her confusion at why the town people will not hire Helen, Tom Robinson's wife and an innocent woman, after her husband is put in jail.

> "'Cal, I know Tom Robinson's in jail an' he's done somethin' awful, but why won't folks hire Helen?' I asked.
>
> Calpurnia, in her navy voile dress and tub of a hat, walked between Jem and me. 'It's because of what folks say Tom's done,' she said. 'Folks aren't anxious to— to have anything to do with any of his family.'
>
> 'Just what did he do, Cal?'" (165)

Inquiring about Helen is the starting point for Scout to move on to what is truly on her mind, that nobody has explained to her: what did Tom Robinson do?

> "'They c'n go loose and rape up the countryside for all of 'em who run this county care,' was one obscure observation we met head on from a skinny gentleman when he passed us. Which reminded me that I had a question to ask Atticus.
>
> 'What's rape?' I asked him that night. (180)

In this way, readers gain the information about Tom Robinson and the case simultaneously as Scout does and are now placed in a position of awareness. For Scout, however, what seems to be confusing is not *what* happened but why so much of the town's population is turning against her father for helping fellow citizen Robinson. When Atticus tells his daughter that he was appointed to defend this man and that, as an American lawyer who believes in the justice system, morally *must* defend him, Scout has a tough

time processing this, as the experiencing-I expresses in the following passage, oblivious to the town's racist reality:

> "This was news, news that put a different light on things: Atticus had to, whether he wanted to or not. I thought it odd that he hadn't said anything to us about it—we could have used it many times in defending him and ourselves. He had to, that's why he was doing it, equaled fewer fights and less fussing. But did that explain the town's attitude? The court appointed Atticus to defend him. Atticus aimed to defend him. That's what they didn't like about it. It was confusing." (218)

Moving on, although this is a story of childhood, Scout's older brother Jem is coming of age in the novel. Scout has always perceived him and her as a pack, in their own world, different from the adult world of Maycomb, which they do not fully comprehend. However, Jem can be read as a character who is situated on the brink of adulthood. In a moment which is a turning point in the novel, Scout perceives that he does not belong to her world anymore. This moment comes when they find Dill, their summer neighbor, in their house one night because he has run away from his own home. Dill pleads them not to say anything to Atticus nor any adult, for fear of being punished. In that moment, "Dill's eyes flickered at Jem, and Jem looked at the floor. Then he rose and broke the remaining code of our childhood. He went out of the room and down the hall. "Atticus," his voice was distant, "can you come here a minute, sir?" (Lee 188)

As an adult character now (in Scout's eyes), Jem has access to information that Scout as a narrator does not have, and that is only passed on through adults, and he will therefore, engage in dialogue with adults from then on, excluding Scout. One of the longest scenes in the novel, spanning various chapters, is the trial. It is one of the clearest moments in which one can see how the novel aims at providing readers with the story through the children's perspective. Shackelford states that this courtroom scene exemplifies how the novel aims at giving the audience a story filtered through the eyes of the child narrator, as the text stresses the "children's perceptions of the events which unravel before them" (108). It is there in the courtroom where Scout further realizes that Jem is closer to those adults around them than to herself anymore, as it had always been. At one given point during the trial, Scout witnesses how "Dill leaned across me and asked Jem what Atticus was doing. Jem said Atticus was showing the jury that Tom had nothing to hide" (255). At this moment, Scout, together with the readers, is further made aware of two things. First, that Dill turns to Jem in order to obtain information about what is going

on, as Scout had previously turned to adults in other to gather information. This therefore symbolizes Dill's acceptance of Jem as an adult character who now is a possessor of information. Secondly, Scout is sitting between Dill and Jem, and Dill has to "lean across" her in order to talk to Jem. Scout therefore sees how Dill dismisses her even though they are closer in age than him and Jem. This moment suggests that Dill will soon also take Jem's steps into maturity, and therefore become aware of the reality of the events that have taken place in Maycomb, and will continue to take place in the future. Furthermore, Jem himself explicitly dismisses Scout, by acknowledging the distance that now exists between them and their ability to interpret and comprehend events. Still in the courtroom, Jem states that "she doesn't know what we're talkin' about," said Jem. "Scout, this is too old for you, ain't it?" (279)

Entering the world of adults in Maycomb not only comes with information for Jem but also awareness of the dark, underlying ideological discourses that fuel Maycomb. Going back to the topic of Scout's confusion at the town's disapproval of Atticus, Jem tells Scout that he is "scared" and, thus, readers can see how Jem perceives that what Atticus is preaching is not aligned with the moral values that prevail in the town. Jem is made aware of the manipulative politics of racism, which Scout, as a child, blindly accepts as the reality of her world.

> "Sort of. [Aunt Alexandra] won't let him alone about Tom Robinson. She almost said Atticus was disgracin' the family. Scout… I'm scared."
> "Scared'a what?
> "Scared about Atticus. Somebody might hurt him." Jem preferred to remain mysterious; all he would say to my questions was go on and leave him alone. (197)

In this passage, Jem "remains mysterious" to the experiencing-I, Scout as the child narrator, but not to the narrating-I, who is aware, like readers, of why Jem was scared those many years ago. Moreover, there are other instances in this second half of the novel, when Dill finally realizes what Jem was "scared" about. In the following passage readers can see how his awareness of the racist treatment during the cross-examination of the defendant in the courtroom clashes with Scout's unawareness of this abuse of power dynamics.

> "Well, Mr. Finch didn't act that way to Mayella and old man Ewell when he cross-examined them. The way that man called him 'boy' all the time an' sneered at hm, an' looked around at the jury every time he answered—"

"Well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro."

"I don't care one speck. It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that—it just makes me sick." (266)

Right before this passage, Scout tells readers that "for some reason, Dill had starting crying and couldn't stop; quietly at first, then his sobs were heard by several people in the balcony" (265). She then goes on to incorrectly interpret his sorrow, not even considering for a second that what has been going on in the courtroom might have affected him in any way, because it does not affect her, an unaware child. "Dill had seemed to be all right that day, nothing wrong with him, but I guessed he hadn't fully recovered from running away" (Lee 265). This attempt to explain Dill's feelings further illustrates how readers are reading the story through Scout's subjective filter, marking the experiencing-I as an unconsciously unreliable narrator because she misinterprets this situation, due to a lack of knowledge. It makes Dill "sick, plain sick" (Lee 266) to witness how the prosecutor addresses Tom Robinson during the trial as he becomes aware, like Jem, of the discourse of racism that operates in the courtroom. Scout, who in this passage can be read as unreliable along the axis of values, because she has unconsciously internalized the racist discourse that functions around her in the community of Maycomb, has not yet reached this point that Dill and Jem are at, a point where they have inevitably developed the ability to think critically about the circumstances that are unraveling before them.

Finally, this leads me to mention in detail the racist discourses of Othering that function in the novel and in Maycomb county. After the trial, Scout learns about Hitler's regime in school. As the innocent experiencing-I, Scout fails to understand why her teacher advocates for being accepting of everybody while criticizing Hitler at the same time. This is linked to the discourses of racism in the town because she overhears her teacher, Miss Gates, having a conversation outside the courthouse referring to the black citizens of Maycomb. Scouts hears her say that "it's time somebody taught 'em a lesson, they were getting' way above themselves, an' the next thing they think they can do is marry us" (331). When she goes to Jem, the new adult to whom she can ask adult-intended questions, Scout is startled to find that Jem refuses to speak about the events of the trial. The narrator explains how "Jem was suddenly furious. He leaped off the bed, grabbed me by the collar and shook me. 'I never wanta hear about that courthouse again, ever, ever, you hear me? You hear me? Don't you ever say one word to me about it again, you hear? Now go on!" (331) Jem is clearly tortured by the awareness, new to him, that black people

in Maycomb are being Othered by the prevailing discourses of racism for no other reason. Scout learns at the end of the novel, that Boo Radley, the enigmatic figure whose absence haunts the children throughout the whole story, is not the "malevolent phantom" (Lee 10) that Scout describes at the beginning of the novel but just another unfortunate Other, who "the provincial Maycomb community…has marginalized" (Shackelford 107). Scout herself can also be read as an Other, because she is a female child trying to find her way in the male adult world of her father, Atticus. After learning about the politics of Othering that take place in her town, Shackelford argues that Scout "recognizes the empowerment of being *the other* as she consents to remain an outsider unable to accept society's unwillingness to seek and know before it judges" (113).

At the end of the novel, Scout acknowledges that "Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them" (324). Just as Scout needs to observe her surroundings in order to understand them, Lee's use of the first-person narrator forces readers to walk around in Scout's shoes, accompanying her on her journey of discovery of all that she unconsciously fails to comprehend as a child narrator.

3.3 Jack in Room *(2010)*

Jack can be seen as more fallible than Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a child narrator because he is truly isolated from a society that answers all of Scout's questions. Thus, he truly has no choice other than interpreting his experience on his own. He believes to possess the truth of the world surrounding him and believes that his perspective is in line with his mother's. Unlike Scout, he lacks access to the outside world: to school, to Church, to any type of dialogical exchange with other adults or children, to adult conversations, etc. He only has access to external input from television, which his mother, out of sensibility, told him is completely made up, in order to protect him. He also gets input from fictional story books, including Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She could be seen as paralleling Jack himself. His Wonderland is doubled as Room itself, where he lives, because it is not the real world, and the Outside (as Jack calls it) that he encounters when he and his mother escape and leave the room they were held captive in. To him, the Outside *is* an unknown and, therefore, unsettling world, much like Carroll's Wonderland is to Alice. Therefore, Jack is unreliable along the axes of facts

and of perception, as his knowledge of the world is limited. What he tells readers without withholding any information is what he believes to be true.

In *Room*, Jack is a 5-year-old narrator who functions as both the experiencing-I and the narrating-I at the same time, by telling the story simultaneously as the events are unfolding in his world. In contrast to the competent adult reader, Jack's voice might result in being defamiliarizing, but his voice gives readers a lot of information about his thought processes and the cognitive stage he is at. Right from the very first page, readers see how Donoghue conveys Jack's voice by using very simple childish grammar (e.g. "I forgetted to have some [7]", "sometimes she says I'm too young for her to explain a thing [11]", "I'm the most loudest ever because my lungs are stretching from being five [50]") and other details such as non-standardly capitalizing the nouns which refer to the objects in his surroundings (Caracciolo, "Defamiliarization" 186) such as Bed, Lamp, Rocker, Shelf, and Wardrobe. Jack even gives them a gender, therefore seeming to process them as persons, or at least as uniquely personified objects, not "its": "Ma leans out of Bed to switch on Lamp, he makes everything light up *whoosh*" (Donoghue 3). After learning about Jack and Ma's daily routine, locked in Room, as Jack calls it, and the "games" they play such as "Scream" or "Keypad" (which are actually attempts at escaping, together with Ma's lamp signals at night), readers "immediately realize that there is something wrong with Jack's belief system—and they come to the conclusion" (Caracciolo "Defamiliarization" 199) that Jack was born and brought up in captivity, in a small room, after his mother was kidnapped and sexually abused, crucial details which Jack remains unaware of. These are the only surroundings he knows, and thus he treats all objects as unique and genders them like people, because he believes the only people in the world are him, his mother (whom he refers to as Ma), and Old Nick (his mother's abuser). For example, later on, in the outside world he tells his mother that they "really have to go back to Room" because, he says, "I need Toilet" (200), as if the toilet he'd been using all his life was the only one.

The dynamics at work involving this initial defamiliarization and reader-response in *Room* can be illustrated by the empirical study that David S. Miall and Don Kuiken present in their article "Shifting Perspectives: Readers' Feelings and Literary Response." Their data concluded that reader-response in engaging with literary narratives could be described using a model comprising three phases (299), because the "reader's perspective is repeatedly disrupted and reshaped…in response to stylistic devices" (Miall and Kuiken

301). In the first stage, there is an encounter with a defamiliarizing aspect of the text which arouses feeling to some extent in the reader. In this case, readers are faced with both Jack's unusual narrative voice and the unusual surroundings he is describing to readers. Since Ma hides the truth from Jack in order to protect him, not knowing if they will ever escape, she does not provide readers with information, as do the adults in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In a second stage, these feelings that arise in the first stage direct the reader to search for context in order to diminish the defamiliarizing effect of the text. Therefore, as readers progress into the novel, readers can fill the "informational gap" (Olsen 104) that is created in the beginning, due to the difference "between the ways in which these child narrators engage with the world and the sense-making processes of adult readers" (Caracciolo, "Defamiliarization" 184), who can infer information about the story despite Jack's narrative voice. Finally, in the third stage of this model, the second stage produces a shift in the reader's general understanding of the story, because what was initially defamiliarizing has now been contextualized. However, one can see how there "is a double ingoing defamiliarization at work here" (Caracciolo, "Defamiliarization" 200): in both Jack and Ma's situation, and in Jack's responses to it, because from his perspective, "his living situation seems perfectly sensible" (Caracciolo "Defamiliarization" 199). Hence, after seeing through Jack's narrative perspective and acknowledging the tough and vulnerable situation he is in as a child, Caracciolo further argues that bonding effects with Jack can take place, as "readers will have little difficulty in understanding these characters' psychological states, and therefore in empathizing with them" ("Defamiliarization 184) and that, to an extent, "this radical departure from what the audience finds normal or natural raises the bar for reader's narrative empathy" (Caracciolo "Defamiliarization" 199). Using Phelan's terminology, I would argue that readers' empathetic bonding with Jack takes place as a result of "naïve defamiliarization," since Jack's worldview is very limited due to his age and spatial/social circumstances. Miall and Kuiken sustain that this phasic sequence "is likely to recur several times during response to a literary text," but I only want to argue that it accurately illustrates how this reader-response sequence works in *Room* at large while the reader is trying to infer more information about the story due to Jack's unconscious unreliability.

Furthermore, Jack misinterprets many things in his surroundings, not only the "games" he plays with Ma and how everything on TV is fiction, despite some things being real: "Cats and rocks are only TV", "Mountains are too big to be real", "Bunnies are TV

but carrots are real" (22). In Jack's language, "to be TV" means to be unreal or to be fiction. These conclusions he reaches spread to people too, not only objects and animals: "Women aren't real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half?…but he's not human like us. He only happens in the night, like bats" (22). In the case of Old Nick, Jack had to use fiction to name his mother's abuser, because he "didn't even know the name for him till I saw a cartoon about a guy that comes in the night called Old Nick. I call the real one that because he comes in the night" (14). Therefore, he transposes fictional names only reality in order to make sense of them because of their resemblance. Hence, it is impossible for Jack to distinguish between fact and fiction. This is further illustrated when he explains to the audience that his mother tells him stories after dinner such as "*Hansel and Gretel* and *How the Berlin Wall Fell Down* and *Rumpelstiltskin*" (88). In the same way that Jack uses TV and asks Ma questions, readers use Jack's perspective in order to make sense of what is going on inside Room. Jack does not comprehend why Old Nick comes at night, which is the reason why Ma put Jack to sleep inside Wardrobe. Jack describes the episode on page 46: "When Old Nick creaks Bed, I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do." The adult reader, unlike Jack, understands that Old Nick rapes Jack's mother almost every night. Every time that Jack reveals something about their routine, the reader can piece together the puzzle. In this way, "the audience makes up for the character's cognitive limitations while at the same time adopting his perceptual and epistemic perspective" (Caracciolo, "Two" 72). The reader can understand certain things that Jack does not: for example, Ma taking her birth control pills, which Jack describes as a "silver pack that has twenty-eight little spaceships" (10); or weather phenomena, like rain, which simply means, to him, that "Skylight's all blurry" (46) since he has never seen or felt rain outside. He doesn't understand why Ma cannot ask Old Nick for a dog "turned to real" (because dogs are TV) and, he explains, they "could call it Lucky" (48). Jack however is unconsciously misinterpreting due to his circumstances, but he believes that the things he is telling readers are truths, he is not willfully trying to hold any information back. Ironically, Jack tells readers that "when I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I'm five I know everything" (126).

At one point in the novel, Ma and Jack are able to escape from Room. Before planning the escape, now that Jack might be old enough to understand, Ma tries to tell Jack the story of her kidnapping, using comparisons to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a reference point so Jack can try to slowly understand the story. "You know how Alice wasn't always in Wonderland?" (102), Ma says. Jack knows that Ma comes from Heaven, like himself, but Ma tells him that she "came down and I was a kid like you, I lived with my mother and father" (103). Jack replies that *she* is the mother. Of course, Jack's logic is valid. How can there be another mother if there are not other children in the world like him? He also does not understand how Ma's older brother's name could be Paul if Paul is the Saint. In Jack's world, there is only one of every single concept he knows. Thus, every signifier corresponds to only one signified. Nothing is repeated, everything is limited by the four walls of Room. Jack ends up believing Ma's story but he has trouble comprehending that everything he thought was only TV is actually the reality of Outside: "Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yoyos, I have to remember they're real, they're actually happening in Outside all together. It makes my head tired" (88). However, Jack wonders about the fact that he and Ma are not in Outside and what that means for them: "we're the only ones not there. Are we still real?" (88) This brings up the question of identity in the novel. Jack questions they are real if they are missing from the Outside world, and later, in a similar way, when he escapes, he finds himself wondering: "I'm not in Room. Am I still me?" (172) Being in Room is the only characteristic that had defined Jack as a child from his perspective, so getting used to being away from Room proves to be a very challenging process of adaptation for him. This turning point in the novel draws a line of symmetry according to Caracciolo: "just as readers had encountered great difficulty in entering the character's world through narrative empathy, Jack's entry into what is, for the audience, the world of everyday life is a slow, painful process" ("Defamiliarization" 200). It is now the adult reader who possesses the information about the outside world that Jack will struggle to comprehend, as readers struggled in the first parts of the book to comprehend Jack's world and perspective. The Outside is as defamiliarizing for Jack as his narrative voice was for readers in the beginning. However, Caracciolo argues the following:

"understanding [Jack's] acute distress at the outside world requires further imaginative work, since the gap between their own perspective and the character's widens even more: after learning to see a dysphoric place from Jack's strange point of view, they

have to reimagine their own, everyday reality from the perspective of a child who longs
for captivity." ("Two" 74)

The reader is not required to further attempt to comprehend the world through Jack's
eyes, as in the first part of the novel, because the reader is already accustomed to the
world Jack is discovering. Therefore, the audience must attempt to comprehend Jack's
reactions to a world strangely unfamiliar to him, but familiar to the audience. Jack's
longing for his ironically "safe" place, his old home, Room, is expressed in many
instances in the novel, such as on page 201: "Sleep not in Room makes me feel sick." The
audience now know what Jack does not and this shift from defamiliarization has positive
effects. Thus, readers can further bond with Jack and the difficult situation he is living in,
accompanying him on the journey of "discovering the world through his eyes"
(Caracciolo, "Two" 72).

In this second part of the novel there is adult dialogue in the text, but Jack
continues to make narratorial comments outside these dialogues and the audience thus
continues to be provided with Jack's fallible interpretations which are now contrasted
with the information that readers hear from adults. This constant comment on adult
conversations stems from the fact that adults are the only referent he has in order to
decipher what is going on in the world, like Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As he is not
reliable enough on his own, the audience can turn to the adults in the story in order to
gain more information, which was not the case in the first part of the novel, when Jack
and Ma were isolated in Room. These extra-dialogic comments, which, in turn, enter into
dialogue with the audience, can be seen in passages such as the following:

"'Have you given further thought to new identities?'

Ma shakes her head. 'I can't imagine…I'm me and Jack's Jack, right? How
could I start calling him Michael or Zane or something?'

Why she'd call me Michael or Zane?

'Well, what about a new surname at least,' says Dr. Clay, 'so he attracts less
attention when he starts school?'

'When I start school?'

'Not till you're ready,' says Ma, 'don't worry.'

I don't think I'll ever be ready." (383)

In the outside world, Jack is not used to seeing his mother interact with anybody but
himself, or do activities on her own without Jack, as she did such a long time ago, before

being kidnapped. Jack expresses this concern: "I ask if we can go back asleep again and Ma says sure, but she's going to read the paper. I don't know why she wants to read the paper instead of being asleep with me" (231).

Jack's voice in first person, conflicting emotions, and constant curiosity to decipher his surroundings makes readers feel like we are accompanying him on journey. The novel's unique perspective also seems to "cushion" the effect that such a dark tale of abuse might have on readers, making the reading process lighter. Caracciolo adds that "the innocence of Jack's point of view works as an emotionally distancing device: it invites readers to relativize the extreme situation the characters find themselves in, considering the advantages of Jack's perspective" ("Two" 73). At the end of the novel Jack confidently says goodbye to Room, his old home which he now sees through a new perspective. The audience thus witnesses how Jack gains reliability after he has been discovering the outside world. The audience follows Jack and Ma as they "step in through Door and it's all wrong. Smaller than Room and emptier and it smells weird" (399). In a way, Jack is no longer misreporting because he sees the truth that Ma and the audience knew all along. This shift in point of view allows Jack to understand that the time has come to say goodbye to Room with courage and jump into the rabbit hole for once and for all, to discover the Wonderland that readers know he had been missing.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I have argued that the child narrators in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Room* illustrate the conflict that arises in the blurred barrier between reliability and unreliability. The narrator can be considered to be at the limits between reliable and unreliable narration due to cognitive differences regarding thought processes with the adult authorial audience. In the theoretical section of this paper, I have argued that I locate the child narrator on James Phelan's gradient between reliable and unreliably narration. On the one hand, on the reliable side, one finds "restricted narration." In this case the author implies meaning that the narrator doesn't communicate to the reader but the reader receives that information regardless or receives the signal to fill in the "informational gap" (Olsen 104) that the narrator leaves open. On other hand, on the unreliable side, I have the child narrator next to "misinterpreting," which Phelan considers to be the least unreliable of unreliable actions, in contrast to misevaluating and misreporting. Therefore, one can see how their fallibility can be seen to function along the axis of facts and the axis of knowledge and perception. This is illustrated by the fact that their fallibility due to their young age and limited knowledge of the world, and, in Jack's case, cognitive deficiencies brings them to accurately report events but to interpret them incorrectly, as the intended adult reader can identify. By Olsen's definition, I consider them to be fallible, not untrustworthy, because they are circumstantially unreliable, which renders them reliable in their unreliability. Being placed in difficult situations makes it impossible for them to accurately interpret their surroundings. Scout, on the one hand, is too young to think critically about the societal dynamics that surround her in Maycomb, while Jack, on the other hand, has been too isolated from society to understand his situation as a captive living in terrible conditions. The child narrator proves to be a convenient example in order to show how necessary further revisions of Booth's initial rhetorical, polarized, and ethically-based definition of unreliability[16] are in order to cover a wider range of literary works.

Moreover, I have argued that, according to Phelan's definition of "naïve defamiliarization," these narrators succeed in allowing bonding effects to arise between the audience and themselves. When the adult reader understands the cognitive and emotional difficulties that these children are affected by, positive reader-response occurs which can further allow for empathetic relations to ensue. Although a child's perspective

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[16] Like those by Olsen and Phelan that I have used as a basis for this paper.

might defamiliarize the story for the generic adult reader, it is because of this defamiliarization that an adult reader can identify the flaws in Scout's and Jack's perceptions due to their naiveté. Therefore, their lack of knowledge allows for the "perceptual distance" (Phelan, "Estranging" 229) between them and the intended reader to be reduced. However, a hypothetical lengthier study based on an empirical method would be necessary in order to examine more closely how this reader-response with child narrators in adult fiction takes place.

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