

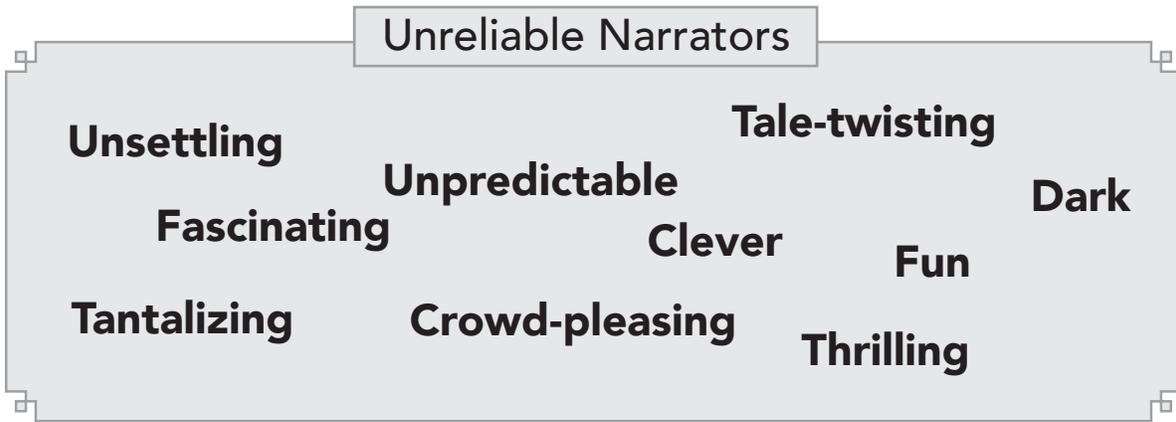
Reading our World:

How Unreliable Narrators Reflect the Storyteller in Us All



by

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..... **DEFINITIONS**

Narrator:

(Noun) one who gives an account or tells a story.

(Often a participating character or unseen entity. In fiction, rarely the author.)

Unreliable narrator:

(Noun) a narrator whose credibility is compromised.

..... **TRUST**

Readers naturally extend trust and suspend disbelief, and in return for that trust, readers expect the narrator's honesty. When a reader finds that a narrator is being untruthful, even in so far as her or she knows it, the reader questions everything about the story, adding complexity to the tale.

..... **DETECTION**

Writing unreliable narrators is one of the trickiest literary tropes, but, for readers, these narrators are some of the easiest to spot -- if you know the signs.

Unreliable narrators creates their own version of events because they, like us, can see and understand their experiences only from their own viewpoint. The truth is relative. Unreliable narrators sees events through their own prism and only when they're ready to face them.

..... **CONVENTIONS**

- Usually are first-person narratives with a definite motive or a compromised understanding of events.
- Occasionally are third-person narratives limited to the viewpoint of a single character.
- Often cross several types.

..... **TYPES**

The Madman

The story is relayed through the eyes of insanity or mental illness.
The narrator may fathom his own insanity through the tale or may already be cognizant and hoping to convince the reader - and himself - of his sanity.

The Pathological Liar

The story is littered with lies, omissions, or misleading and carefully crafted shifts.
The narrator is trying to hide something from others - and perhaps herself - while justifying her actions.

The Embellisher

The story is told with great exaggeration.
The narrator seeks the reader's admiration - and his own escapism - through an amazing tale.

The Braggart

The story is told as to take credit.
The narrator seeks recognition for her martyrdom toward the greater good.

The Sympathy-Seeker

The story is told highlighting all woes as personal blows.
The narrator seeks the reader's sympathy for consequences that may well have been of her own making.

The Self-Preservationist

The story is told through memories and flashbacks.
The narrator comes to grasp his disturbing past through flashes of memory - false, tainted, or true as they may be.

The Jokester

The story is told flippantly.
The narrator seeks reader amusement through clever humor. He is not deeply worried about his tale nor its protagonists.

The Naif

The story is told through miscues due to immaturity or limited understanding.
The narrator misses key elements of every situation, misjudging events through her lack of experience or social graces. She is charming in her honesty but naïve to the world's ways.

..... **SEVEN TIPS TO WRITING AN UNRELIABLE NARRATOR**

- Provide your narrator with conflicting desires that your reader can recognize.
- Shift your narrator's motives to leave the reader wondering which will prevail.
- Make your narrator more clever than she appears - and have other characters fall for it.
- Have a secondary character reveal that he's the victim of your narrator's lie.
- Have a secondary character reveal a truth that your narrator's kept under wraps.
- Have your narrator behave erratically and seemingly outside of her goals.
- Have your unreliable narrator be his own victim as his own slowly dawning acceptance brings a hard truth to light.
- Make your character a liar (like there *really* being eight writing tips here, not seven 😊) - or a liar by omission.



An unreliable narrator is not just a device, but also the skilled portrayal of a realistically flawed human being.

Thanks for coming!



Silvia Acevedo is the author of the *God Awful* Series of Books, the tale of a not-so-likable Cupid who loses his place in Olympus and fights his way back - and into our hearts.

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