

Variations on and the Teleology of Unreliable Narration

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Abstract

Three variations in narrational unreliability are discussed along with four proposals aimed at formulating a teleology of unreliable narrator. The variations include back-loading signals of unreliability, deploying partial awareness of self-incrimination, and using a limited first person narrator. Apropos teleology, we argue that unreliable narration helps to subvert the moral and or epistemological worldview of the narrator. Secondly, unreliable narration facilitates an effective examination of the strengths and weaknesses of unbridled imagination. In addition, unreliable narration permits a reconceptualization of our understanding of truth and falsehood. Finally, unreliable narrators who overindulge in imaginary flights provide one of the best sources of narrative humor. Reinaldo Arenas, José Donoso and Jorge Luis Borges provide the raw materials for this dual effort in design and purpose.

Key words:

Unreliable narration, Default framework, Frame theory, Teleology, Unintentional self-incrimination, Interpretive strategies, Detective framework, Naturalization, Back-loading, Partial self-incrimination, Limited first person narrator, Spiritus vivicans, Unbridled imagination, Truth, Falsehood

This essay discusses variations on narrational unreliability and posits a reorientation to questions of teleology in order to expand the knowledge base of the concept and practice of unreliable narration. Trends in the development of narratology indicate that while significant progress has been made in theories of unreliable narration the same cannot be said for its teleology. Yet few will argue that literary criticism is best served if the signified is not sacrificed on the altar of the signifier. It is possible to project the effects of a sustained research in the teleology of narrational unreliability to include a more comprehensive understanding of the unreliable narrator and the finite intelligence behind a particular text, its cultural, philosophical and ideological underpinnings, among others, and the historical and literary tributaries of the text in question. In the same way that purpose and plan often go hand in hand, narrational unreliability must look for and find its teleology in clear and convincing ways. This essay attempts to do just that. By way of procedure, we first summarize current developments in narrational unreliability and then postulate a default framework of unreliable narration. This is followed by an examination of three variations on unreliable narration and concludes with four hypotheses in the teleology of narrational unreliability.

Recent developments in theories of unreliable narration have sought to move beyond the traditional understanding of the concept proposed by Wayne Booth more than three decades ago.¹ Instead of anchoring our understanding of unreliability in the values and norms of the “anthropomorphized phantom” called implied author, Ansgar Nunning has proposed a model-oriented approach that allows readers to explain unreliable narration “in the context of frame theory as a projection by the reader who tries to resolve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies by attributing them to the narrator’s ‘unreliability’.” In the context of frame theory, “the invention of unreliable narrators can be understood as an interpretative strategy or cognitive process of the sort that has come to be known as ‘naturalization’” (“Reconceptualizing...” 1999, 64). Readers bring to the reading process a conceptual or referential framework, a schemata, so to speak, that allows them to integrate narrative infelicities of all kinds- incongruities, inconsistencies, ambiguities, etc.- under the concept of the unreliable narrator. This cognitive process, along with Bruno Zerweck’s cultural and historical output, and the series of critical and theoretical approaches to the concept formulated by critics and theorists such as Monika Fludernik, W. John Harker, Manfred Jahn, Mary Patricia Martin, Tamar Yacobi, James Phelan, and Kathleen Wall, have all contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon of narrational unreliability.² However, a complementary effort in the direction of teleology awaits formulation. Such effort, when it hatches, should serve to recover the spiritus vivicans of this discursive strategy. Three short stories selected from the work of Reinaldo Arenas, José Donoso, and Jorge Luis Borges form the basis of our effort to uncover variations on narrational unreliability and formulate its teleology.

Default Framework

Readers' ability to apprehend variations on narrational unreliability depends on the existence of a default framework against which any variation can be plotted. Such framework delimits minimal conditions of unreliability. In this regard, Bruno Zerweck's model of unreliable narration that posits four minimal conditions of narrative unreliability is very helpful ("Historicizing Unreliable Narration..." 2001, 156-159). First, unreliable narrators can only occur in personalized situations of narration. In other words, an unreliable narrator must be strongly personalized in the reading process. Secondly, the unintentional self-incrimination of the personalized narrator is a necessary condition for unreliability. Thirdly, narrational unreliability is a culturally determined phenomenon. Finally, unreliable narration as a reading strategy is a historically determined phenomenon.

The first minimal condition postulates a "strongly anthropomorphized narrator-character" that possesses "human-like attributes such as knowledge, perception, and understanding." Absent that, there is no "(fictional) cognitive center to which unreliability can be attributed." Readers' construction of the unreliable narrator depends on "personality models available to them in their world knowledge base" (156). Furthermore, this condition tends to rule out narrational unreliability in extremely metafictional texts since such texts do not include signs of the narrated or the narrator.

According to the second minimal condition, narrational unreliability is made possible by a "detective framework" or signals of unreliability that dominates the reading process and "creates the illusion of the narrator's unintentional self-incrimination" (157). The unintentional self-incrimination of the personalized narrator is catapulted by ironic distancing resulting from any number of factors that may include misreporting, misreading, misevaluating, underreporting, underreading or underregarding. James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin argue that these types of unreliability are based on the axis of the narrator's faulty, factual, ethical, and epistemological evaluations, and on readers' response to these evaluations (93-96).

The third and fourth minimal conditions, which are mostly contextual or extratextual, maintain that since "the effect of unreliable narration depends on readers' interpretive strategies and culturally determined models such as personality theories or generally accepted values and norms, then one cannot exclude from the analysis of a text's unreliability the cultural [and historical] context in which the narrative text is read" (Zerweck 158).

Variations

I. Back-loading

In place of the dominance of signals of unreliability or the presence of a detective framework, back-loading occurs when evidence of unreliability is stacked up toward the end of the narrative. Reinaldo Arenas's story "Con los ojos cerrados" provides a good example of this strategy.³ Two narrative levels are discernible in the discourse: the frame text, which encompasses all events that occur while the narrator's eyes are open, and the insert text, which affects events that occur while the narrator's eyes are closed. This second set of events constitutes an idealized or romanticized version of those in the frame text. As the narrator himself admits, "[...] con los ojos cerrados uno ve muchas cosas, y hasta mejor que si los lleváramos abiertos" (Arenas 49).

Secondly, unintentional self-incrimination surfaces when the narrator invites the narratee to witness the events he is reporting on. Events at the second narrative level are fully oneiric, meaning there isn't a cake on the asphalt, no elderly women working at the candy store, nor any young heroes laboring to save a rat. The narrator confuses ontologies and by so doing arouses suspicion in the mind of the reader. His explanation of events runs counter to that of the reader whose conceptual framework allows him or her to integrate the child narrator's ontological confusion under the rubric of unreliable narrator. In a way, readers paint the narrator with the same brush of mistrust he paints his mother:

A usted sí se lo voy a decir, porque sé que si se lo cuento a usted no se me va a reír en la cara ni me va a regañar. Pero a mi mamá, no. A mamá no le diré nada, porque, de hacerlo, no dejaría de pelearme, de regañarme. Y, aunque es casi seguro que ella tendría toda la razón, no quiero oír ningún consejo ni advertencia. Porque no me gustan los consejos ni las advertencias. Por eso. Porque sé que usted no me va a decir nada, se lo digo todo. (51)

Ironically, the narratee will soon find out how misleading the narrator-character himself is and may, like the narrator's mother, laugh at or reprimand him.

Thirdly, naturalization of the text occurs only toward the end of the story; there isn't a detective framework or schemata dominating the story. In other words, the story is not populated by signals of unreliability as prescribed by

the second minimal condition. In Boothian terms, the implied author does not *regularly* speak to us over the voice of the narrator.

Lastly, the age of the homodiegetic narrator raises a relevant question.⁴ What role, if any, should the age of a narrator play in readers' effort to make sense of textual incongruities? While a definite answer lies outside the scope of this essay, one may assume that the narrator's moral and ethical compass may influence the kind of strategy readers use to naturalize a text. Typically, readers use separate naturalization strategies for a pícaro and a genuinely innocent child. For the pícaro, readers revert to the notion of unreliable narration to make sense of textual ambiguities. The genuinely innocent child invokes others strategies of naturalization to make sense of the discrepancies between story and discourse. For instance, the functional principle of naturalization that hones in on the aesthetic, thematic, and persuasive goals of the work maximizes our understanding of the role of the innocent child narrator-character.⁵ Reinaldo Arenas employs the services of a child narrator to underscore the notion that one cannot gloss over the ugly realities of the journey of life as presented in the frame text. These must be confronted and corrected in a more pragmatic way. The idealized reality of the insert text implies a rejection of the insensitivity, cruelty, violence, and poverty awash in the reality of the frame text.

Jorge Luis Borges' "Emma Zunz" offers a second illustration of back-loading. The stacking of evidence of unreliability at the end of the story involves uncertainty about and misreading of the events being reported. The narrator demonstrates a lack of grip on the details of the story:

"Referir con alguna realidad los hechos de esa tarde sería *difícil* y quizás improcedente. Un atributo de lo infernal es la irrealidad, un atributo que parece mitigar sus terrores y que los agrava tal vez. ¿Cómo hacer verosímil una acción en la que casi no creyó quien la ejecutaba, cómo recuperar ese breve caos que hoy la memoria de Emma Zunz repudia y confunde? ... Acaso en el infame Paseo de Julio se vio multiplicada en espejos, publicada por luces y desnuda por los ojos hambrientos, pero más razonable es *conjeturar* que al principio erró, inadvertida, por la indiferente recova. (64; emphasis added)

Similarly, his interpretation of the events of the story raises a red flag. For example, he validates a judgment by Emma that is clearly at variance with events in the story: "*Ha ocurrido una cosa que es increíble*," she says. "*El señor Leowenthal me hizo venir con el pretexto de la huelga. Abusó de mí...lo maté*" (68). The narrator agrees that this rendition of events is "sustancialmente cierta" and then proceeds to engage in philosophical shenanigans to shore up his approval. However, the reader is aware that the events of the story neither substantiate her views nor those of the narrator. Aaron Leowenthal did not invite Emma to her office nor did he rape her. On the contrary, Emma herself arranged to meet with Leowenthal and schemed to sacrifice her virginity as motivation to kill him. Furthermore, the narrator's subsequent effort to qualify his endorsement of Emma's version of events only serves to muddy the waters even more:

[L]a historia era increíble, en efecto, pero se impuso a todos, porque era sustancialmente cierta. Verdadero era el tono de Emma Zunz, verdadero el pudor, verdadero el odio. Verdadero también era el ultraje que había padecido; sólo eran falsas las circunstancias, la hora y uno o dos nombres propios. (68)

The game of truth and falsehood being played here raises more doubt. How do we measure the truthfulness of Emma's tone of voice? Does she really have any decency left after her self-inflicted deflowering? Is there any modesty or shyness left on her part after pulling the trigger three times on Leowenthal? If the circumstances, the hour and some names are false, then is the narrator guilty of aiding and abetting in spreading falsehood? This narrator is clearly sneaky and the fact that evidence to that effect is stacked up mostly towards the end of the narrative should not have any significant effect on how readers naturalize ambiguities and inconsistencies in the text.

II. Faint or Partial Self-Awareness

A second reordering of narrational unreliability consists of faint or partial awareness of self-incrimination. This happens when the narrator shows some awareness of his own unreliability. José Donoso's "Una señora" offer a good illustration of this narrational reordering. In addition to the abundance of signals of unreliability, it presents a narrator who shows some awareness of readers' unease with his sense of judgment.⁶

There are at least three types of signals of unreliability in "Una señora." First, verbal or mental habits such as "no recuerdo con certeza," "pero si no me equivoco," and "no recuerdo" populate the narrative. Kathleen Wall calls

these intratextual signals of unreliability (19). Secondly, there is overreporting or exaggeration. The narrator's obsession with the nondescript woman leads him to make a series of wild claims that constantly undermine his credibility, as when he stipulates that

En adelante comencé a ver a la señora bastante seguido. La encontraba en todas partes y a toda hora [...] Me sentaba en un parque y ella lo cruzaba llevando un bolsón con verduras. Me detenía a comprar cigarrillos, y estaba ella pagando los suyos. Iba al cine, y allí estaba la señora, dos butacas más allá. No me miraba, pero yo me entretenía observándola. (83)

The notion that he saw the woman everywhere and at every hour is quite improbable, not to mention his claim of having seen her at the movie theatre sitting two rows away from him even though she did not look at him. Furthermore, his early Sunday morning intuition that the woman was dying is just as baseless as his certainty that she had died in an unknown neighborhood:

Una mañana, tiempo después, desperté con la certeza de que la señora se estaba muriendo. Era domingo, y después del almuerzo salí a caminar bajo los árboles de mi barrio... Pero en alguna parte de la misma ciudad por la que yo caminaba, la señora iba a morir [...] Instantáneamente después, cesaron todos los ruidos al mismo tiempo y se abrió un pozo de silencio en la tarde apacible. Los alambres no vibraban ya. En un barrio desconocido, la señora había muerto. (85-86)

Nor is there any basis for his certainty that Mrs. Ester de Arancia whose death was announced in the newspaper was indeed the object of his intuition and the very person he met in the streetcar.

The narrative also underreports by glossing over relevant narrational detail. For instance, the narrator points to her thick eyebrows as the only distinguishing feature: "Sus cejas se juntaban más de lo corriente sobre el arco de la nariz, lo que era el rasgo más distintivo de su rostro" (82). Later additions like her thick lips and the big ring she wore do nothing but arouse the reader's suspicion: "Tenía la boca más bien gruesa. Usaba un anillo grande, bastante vulgar" (83).

The most germane variation, however, occurs in relation to the condition of unintentional self-incrimination. The narrator shows some awareness of self-incrimination by acknowledging that "[c]uando pasó bajo un farol reconocí inmediatamente su impermeable verde. *Hay miles de impermeables verdes en esta ciudad*, sin embargo no dudé de que se trataba del suyo, recordándola a pesar de haberla visto solo unos segundos en que nada de ella me impresionó" (83; emphasis added). This is an important admission because it underscores his suspicion that the reader may be questioning his judgment, or as Monika Fludernik puts it, the reader may be ready to unearth the "figure in the carpet, the secret which the implied author was trying to impart" (78). The narrator's insistence that any woman wearing a green raincoat must be the one he met in the streetcar gives him away as quixotic, neurotic or self-deluded. This evidence of self-awareness comes after a handful of inconsistencies have already been detected in the narrator's version of events and before he launches out on a dizzying flight of imagination that somehow reinstates the ironic distance between him and the implied reader.⁷

An important question arises from this variation. Does the narrator's awareness of self-incrimination, albeit short-lived, affect the way readers attempt to naturalize the inconsistencies in the story? The answer, in our view, may depend on what happens in the rest of the story. If subsequent textual evidence points to the presence of faint indicators of unreliability, then perhaps the narrative may be naturalized as minimally unreliable. Conversely, if subsequent pointers of unreliability are consistently intense, as is the case in "Una señora," then it would be proper to consider the narrator's brief self-awareness as nothing more than a moment of lucidity.⁸

III. Limited First Person Narrator

A third reordering of narrational unreliability consists of the use of a limited first person narrator. The default framework, if we recall, prescribes not just a personalized narrator but one who is strongly personalized in the reading process. Jorge Luis Borges's "Emma Zunz" provides an instructive variation in the first two minimal conditions. The narrator acts omnisciently, as can be judged from the use of verbs such as "recordó," "pensó," "no pudo no pensar," and "no creyó." The first person singular appears only once: "Yo tengo para mí que pensó una vez y que en ese momento peligró su desesperado propósito" (65) and the first person plural is also referenced once: "Emma vivía por Almagro, en la calle Liniers; nos consta que esa tarde fue al puerto" (64)⁷. However, the sense of impersonality created at the level of narration is mitigated by a series of commentaries made by the narrator, some of which are value neutral, such as those referring to Emma's impending sexual encounter with the Scandinavian sailor: "Los hechos graves están fuera del tiempo, ya que en ellos el pasado inmediato queda como

tronchado del porvenir, ya porque no parecen consecutivas las partes que los forman" (65). Others are morally tinged, as when he chides Emma for ripping up the money she receives from the Scandinavian sailor in exchange for sex: "Romper dinero es una impiedad, como tirar el pan," which he also calls "[u]n acto de arrogancia" (65). On another occasion, he characterizes Emma's version of events surrounding the murder of Loewenthal as "sustancialmente cierta" (68). Such comments do not advance the story in any meaningful way. Instead, they project the presence of a strong cognitive center that helps to diffuse the sense of impersonality readers may initially feel.

On Teleology

Teleology is used in the limited sense of end-point, purpose, goal orientation, or finality, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, and is viewed in this essay as complementary to discursivity.⁹ The narrative design, which in this case is represented by narrational unreliability, finds its complement in narrative teleology. The confluence of design and teleology creates a reassuring event, whether that event is writing, reading, speaking, etc. It is reassuring because the event refuses to be an end in itself. Rather, it becomes a means to an end, the end product of a process, a journey's destination, whether that destination is personal, interpersonal, ideological, ethical, moral, religious, philosophical, or even intellectual. This destination becomes the spiritus vivicans or the life-giving spirit of the work of art.

Four proposals are offered to guide the search for the teleology of narrational unreliability. First, unreliable narration helps to subvert the moral and or epistemological worldview of the narrator. Indeed, this is quite basic to most unreliable narration. The young narrator of "Con los ojos cerrados" represents a romantic and idealistic worldview that has flawed consequences for human relations and life in general. His immature processing of the complexities of life amounts to an innocence project that is bound to fail when it comes into contact with the brutal realities revealed at the first narrative level. Yet it is also true that the innocence project is simultaneously responsible for refocusing attention on what is wrong with society, its social, cultural, and economic deficiencies.

Secondly, unreliable narration facilitates an effective examination of the strengths and weaknesses of unbridled imagination. Narrators who demonstrate an obsession with imagination tend to be the locus of a poignant paradox. While we laugh at their imaginary prodigality, we cannot help but admire the fact that they are reliable proponents of the powers of imagination. The imaginary overindulgence of the narrator of "Una señora" casts doubts on his sanity but at the same time he deserves credit for creating a world of his own with strong emotional capital. The depth of his passion is second to none.

Thirdly, unreliable narration permits a reconceptualization of our understanding of truth and falsehood. The narrator of "Emma Zunz" foregrounds the difficulty in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. His characterization of Emma's tone of voice, her modesty, her hatred, and her humiliation as real or true is purely subjective because it lends itself to the opposite interpretation. It is uncertain how her tone of voice can be determined in the text, her modesty is questionable after shooting her victim three times, and her hatred for Loewenthal is not altogether certain, judging from the narrator's own reporting: "Ante Aarón Loewenthal, más que la urgencia de vengar a su padre, Emma sintió la de castigar el ultraje padecido por ello" (67). Equally subjective is the narrator's assertion that the circumstances, the time, and one or two proper names are false. In addition to not being told which circumstances, time, and proper names are false, there is the confusion between falsehood and fiction. Readers perceive the circumstances of the story, its time, and all the proper names to be fictitious, and not necessarily false. In the end, the narrative invites us to rethink our understanding of the concepts of truth, falsehood, the real, the fictional, and the imaginary. It calls into question the clear lines we tend to draw between these notions and suggests instead a more nuanced approach. It deconstructs the assumption that an "authoritative version of events," of oneself, of others, and of the world can be established (Wall 37).

Finally, unreliable narrators who overindulge in imaginary flights provide one of the best sources of narrative humor. The greater the distance between the narrator's perspective of events and the referential framework of the reader the greater the sense of humor the narrative may generate. Put differently, narrative humor is generated by sustained innertextual and extratextual discrepancies, where innertextual refers to discrepancies within the textbase and extratextual to the presuppositional framework readers bring to the reading process in order to reconcile incongruencies in the text under the umbrage of the unreliable narrator. The stubborn insistence of the narrator-character of "Una señora" that any woman wearing a green raincoat *must* be that of the woman he met in the streetcar reaches such feverish heights it makes the reader wonder if the narrator has not lost his marbles. He makes assumptions that cannot be defended in relation to "general world knowledge [...], explicit theories of personality or implicit models of psychological coherence and human behaviour [. . .] and individual perspective, that is the reader's or critic's knowledge, psychological disposition, and system of norms and values" (Nunning 67-68). The more outrageous those assumptions are the greater the humor. His claim that he saw the woman everywhere and at every hour cannot stand the scrutiny of our referential framework, as is his contention about the

circumstances of her death. First, he says he woke up one Sunday morning “con la certeza de que la señora se estaba muriendo.” Moments later, he confirms that “[e]n un barrio desconocido, la señora había muerto.” The next morning he reads the obituary of a Mrs. Ester de Arancibia in the newspaper. “¿Podría ser?...,” he wonders. All of which leads him to conclude, “Sí. Sin duda era ella” (86). But his certainty about the identity of Mrs. Ester de Arancibia is as baseless as his intuition regarding the fate of the woman he met in the streetcar.

Yet there is something admirable about this narrator and his sense of perseverance. He invents a character, nourishes, defines, and follows her to her grave, and perhaps beyond:

A veces me asalta la idea, en una esquina por ejemplo, que la escena presente no es más que reproducción de otra, vivida anteriormente. En esas ocasiones se me ocurre que voy a ver pasar a la señora, cejijunta y de impermeable verde. Pero me da un poco de risa, porque yo mismo vi depositar su ataúd en el nicho, en una pared con centenares de nichos iguales. (87)

The idea of reliving the experience of seeing the woman, now presumably dead, is a clear indication of his unwillingness to let go of his imaginary brainchild. This is a narrator who knows something about the value of persisting in a cause, in this case, that of creating a being and holding on to it until he is satisfied with his purpose for creating her. It is only after her burial, which he attends, that he feels “una tranquilidad especial” (87).

Conclusion

Unreliable narration comes in many permutations and its apprehension must be based on the combination of textual information and conceptual framework readers bring to the reading process. As we have seen, whether the narrator is minimally or strongly personalized may not adversely affect how readers naturalize texts that display incongruencies at various levels. Also, narratives that backload evidence of unreliability are no less subject to the process of integration or naturalization than those dominated by signals of unreliability. Apropos teleology, we have shown how unreliable narration allows us to rethink our understanding of the concepts of truth, falsehood, and objectivity on the one hand, and the real, fictional, and imaginary on the other hand. It brackets the assumption that a fixed and mandatory version of events, of oneself, of others, and of the world can be established. It leverages imagination to achieve creative fulfillment while at the same time holding up a mirror to the evils of human society. At the macro-level, the discrepancy between the narrator’s faulty adjudicating consciousness and the contrasting pre-existing conceptual framework of readers generates irony and humor and ignites criticism of all sorts: epistemological, socio-political, economic, etc.

Notes

1 "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," Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961, 158-159.[Return](#)

2 Relevant publications of these authors are listed under work cited. Of notable mention are Ansgar Nunning, Bruno Zerwick, and Monika Fludernik for their groundbreaking scholarship in narratology in general and narrational unreliability in particular.[Return](#)

3 Written in 1964 and first published in Uruguay in 1972, an eight year old narrator-protagonist explains the circumstances leading up to his hospitalization with a broken leg. On his way to school one early morning he is greeted by three unpleasant occurrences: a dead cat on the sidewalk, two elderly women begging for alms at the entrance of a candy store, and a river rat being stoned under a bridge by a bunch of mischievous kids. Out of curiosity, he decides to cross the bridge with his eyes closed. In the process, he strays onto the street and is run over by a truck. Prior to the accident, he avers, he was about to invite a group of young heroes he saw in his mind's eye to share a cake given to him by two elderly women who worked at a candy store. To forestall doubts about his version of the story, he invites the narratee to go to the bridge where he will find the cake scattered all over the asphalt:

Y no crea que lo que le he contado es mentira. No vaya a pensar que porque tengo un poco de fiebre y a cada rato me quejo del dolor en las piernas estoy diciendo mentiras, porque no es así. Y si usted quiere comprobar si fue verdad, vaya al puente que seguramente debe estar todavía, toda desparramada sobre el asfalto, la torta grande y casi colorada, hecha de chocolate y almendras, que me regalaron sonrientes las dos viejecitas de la dulcería. (51)

All quotes are taken from *El cuento y análisis*, ed. Edward H. Friedman, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall,

2003, 47-51. The three unpleasant sightings of the narrator recall the story of Siddhartha and how he became Buddha, the Enlightened One. He, too, had three unpleasant occurrences that permanently changed his worldview. At about age twenty-nine he encountered old age, disease, and death for the very first time and was so deeply moved by these experiences that he vowed to give up his palatial lifestyle to search for the ideal world. [Return](#)

4 A homodiegetic narrator is one who is present as a character in the story s/he tells and may be either extradiegetic (no involvement in the story s/he tells) or intradiegetic (involvement in the story s/he tells). Within the homodiegetic type of narrators, Genette (1980) distinguishes two varieties: “one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative (Gil Blas) and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness...” (*Narrative Discourse*, 1980, 245-248). He reserves the term autodiegetic for the first type, which fits Donoso's young narrator-protagonist. See Richard Walsh's “Who is the Narrator?” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter, 1997), pp. 495-513, for an insightful discussion of Genette's typology of characters. [Return](#)

5 “Una señora” tells the story of a narrator-protagonist's obsession with a middle-aged woman he meets in a streetcar. Similar to Benito Pérez Galdós' *La novela en el tranvía*, the narrator's encounter with the woman sparks a series of wild mental flights that end with the imaginary death of the woman in an unknown neighborhood. All direct quotes rely on *Cuentos*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1971. [Return](#)

6 In 1981 (“Fictional Reliability”) Yacobi proposed five principles of naturalization that allow readers to resolve contradictions and incongruities in a text. They are the genetic, generic, existential, functional and perspectival. According to her, the “work's aesthetic, thematic and persuasive goals [...] operate as a [...] guideline to making sense of its peculiarities” (117). She revisits the same principles in “Package Deals in Fictional Narrative: The Case of the Narrator's (Un)reliability,” *Narrative* 9 2(May 2001): 223-229. [Return](#)

7 First, the narrator's verbal or mental habits that show him to be quite unsure about the story he is telling: “no recuerdo con certeza,” “pero si no me equivoco,” and “no recuerdo el momento exacto.” Next, his confusion about the nature of the scene he was witnessing from the streetcar: “Pero cuando el tranvía hizo alto en una esquina, me invadió aquella sensación tan corriente, y sin embargo misteriosa, que cuanto veía, el momento justo y sin importancia que era, lo había vivido antes, o tal vez soñado” (81). [Return](#)

8 Textual references to “Emma Zunz” rely on *El Aleph*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992. [Return](#)

9 Teleology's long historical unfolding features thinkers as varied as Plato, Aristotle, Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Hegel, and Carl Jung. Plato makes a distinction between material and final causes, the latter corresponding to the goodness of the object in question. What is good about the object is its *telos* or purpose (*Timaeus*, 1925, 27d8-29a). Similarly, Aristotle distinguishes between necessity and final cause. His criticism of Democritus for reducing all things to necessity must be seen in light of his belief that ends are present in nature: “Democritus, however, neglecting the final cause, reduces to necessity all the operations of nature. Now they are necessary, it is true, but yet they are for a final cause and for the sake of what is best in each case. Thus nothing prevents the teeth from being formed and being shed in this way; but it is not on account of these causes but on account of the end (or final cause)” (*Generation of Animals* V.8, 1912, 789a8-b15). On his part, Francis Bacon does not deny that nature has a *telos*. However, he rejects Aristotle's use of teleological arguments to examine the natural world in favor of eliminative induction, which he perceived to be a more sophisticated scientific method. According to him, Aristotle made “his natural philosophy a mere bond servant to his logic, thereby rendering it contentious and well-nigh useless” (*Novum Organum*, Book I, Aphorism 54). In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant explores the role of teleology in the natural sciences and in nature as a whole, albeit skeptically. In addition, he relates natural teleology to religion and morality in order to discover the ultimate and final purpose of nature. While admiring Kant's idea of internal purposiveness, Hegel bemoans his skepticism and argues that living organisms definitely show *Naturzwecke* or internal purposiveness and that their structure and development can be teleologically explained. He also sees history as a whole as end-driven (*The Science of Logic*, 1961, 258-298). Finally, Carl Jung's analytic psychology fuses teleology and causality by arguing that human behavior is conditioned by his individual and racial history as well as his aims and aspirations (*On the Nature of the Psyche*, 1960, 4; also Hall & Lindzey, 1970, p.80). [Return](#)

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