

Working Title: Transformations of Unreliable Narration from Postmodernism to Contemporary Literary Fiction and the Erosion of Truth, Values and Common Frames of Reference

PhD Candidate: Lucia Toman

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Ansgar Nünning

My research project seeks to examine the phenomenon of unreliable narration, both in theory and in concrete literary examples, with focus on the transformation it has undergone since the alleged end of literary postmodernism.

Since the marked proliferation of unreliable narrator in literary postmodernism (increase not only in number and popularity, but also in relevance—in terms of symbolizing, even epitomizing the current literary and cultural period), the narratorial device has undergone a significant change as a result of the deconstructive power of postmodernism. Equally, the grand narratives, cultural and cognitive structures, in other words, the frames of reference commonly used to detect unreliability have eroded.

Concept such as ‘truth’, ‘reliability’ and ontological certainty have been transformed. Since we have shunned the possibility of narrative reliability, can we still talk about unreliable narration after this binarism (the axis with reliability on one end and unreliability on the other end) has ceased to exist? Can a particular narrative still deviate from a narrative ‘truth’? If there is no ‘truth’, there can be no lies, no misleading narration etc.

This project seeks to analyze, contextualize and historicize recent versions of unreliable narration in an attempt at understanding what has become of unreliable narration as we knew it in postmodernist fiction, how it functions and what has changed.