"My, you have a way of making me do things I don't normally do." The examination of the narrative (Un)Reliability of Joe Goldberg from *You* by Caroline Kepnes

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Abstract: Ever since Wayne C. Booth named the phenomenon of unreliability in narrative fiction, multiple attempts have been made to deepen the knowledge regarding its theoretical scope and practical implementation, resulting in two different approaches to its source and recognition. The initial association of narrative unreliability with the implied reader evoked a mixture of responses that included both approval and objections from narratologists worldwide, such as Greta Olson, Ansgar Nünning, or James Phelan, eventually leading to a significant shift that permanently regarded unreliability as multi-dimensional and dependable on diverse circumstances rooted both in the internal and the external contexts. The main objective of the essay is, therefore, to combine a set of textual and contextual narrative unreliability clues proposed by Nünning with Olson's comprehension of the fallible-untrustworthy distinction in order to examine an intriguing instance of a second-person narration provided by the relatively well-known today and obsessive storyteller Joe Goldberg, the protagonist of *You* by Caroline Kepnes. The study aims to make a practical and detailed analysis of the protagonist's narrative tendencies and peculiarities in order to enrich the dialogue regarding the matter of the complexity of the said literary concept and attempt to conclude the message that seems to be conveyed between the lines of his both reliable and unreliable discourse. By making a comparison of the narrator's utterances, acts, and verbal habits with the common understanding of both the ordinary and the questionable, I will address the implications, which might encourage the reader to deeply consider the amount of trust given to Joe's reports, additionally showcasing where his discourse should be placed on the (un)reliability spectrum.

Keywords: Literary studies, unreliable narrator, signals of unreliability, implied author, American literature

Introduction

Narrative unreliability as a literary phenomenon has been observed and analysed for over six decades, yet still seems far from being regarded as thoroughly examined, giving researchers a wide field for further investigation. Within that period, the knowledge regarding unreliability has expanded greatly, providing the reader with a wide range of responsibility in its recognition depending on the narratologist asked. Regardless of whether one perceives the concept as fully dependent on the values and norms of the implied author (Booth 1961, 158), leans toward the possibility of unreliability as a judgment-based phenomenon (Nünning 1997, 99) or does not believe in the rightfulness of restraining narrative unreliability to just one of the factors (Hansen 2007, 244), an ordinary reader with little to no narratological knowledge still faces it rather frequently and might be prone to trusting even if they should notn't. The main objective of the essay is to depict what recognising and evaluating unreliability might look like once put into practice through an examination of the credibility of Joe Goldberg, the protagonist of *You* by Caroline Kepnes, and to link his potentially uncovered unreliable tendencies to either deliberately made choices or unconscious acts of misreporting and misinterpreting his reality and surroundings, additionally suggesting a plausible reason behind his potential lack of credibility.

Theoretical framework

Since 1961, for at least two full decades, the successors of Wayne C. Booth's theory, subsequently considered the representatives of the rhetorical approach, concentrated on establishing the already introduced foundation more profoundly or amplifying the known unreliability model, which associated the phenomenon with discrepancies between the narrator's acts and utterances and the norms presented in the text by the implied author (Booth, 158). What they withdrew from was an introduction of substantial interferences that would either disprove or question the significance of the implied author in the very context. The said tendency was noticed and subsequently criticised by Ansgar Nünning (1997, 86), who argued that "most theorists and critics who have written on the unreliable narrator take the implied author both for granted and as the only standard according to which unreliability can be determined," emphasising that "everyone seems to be happy" with where it leads.

Having taken into consideration the strength and emotionality of the statement, as much as the numerous definitions of both narrative unreliability itself and other related literary terms either following or making use of Booth's approach to the phenomenon, it does appear justified to assume that relatively everyone at that time, obviously excluding Nünning himself, seemed satisfied with the implementation. One such instance proving the palpable presence of the tendency might be the definition of a "persona" provided by Gareth Griffiths. His explanation of the term not only included the rhetorical approach to unreliability but also used it as evidence for cruciality of comprehending the concept of an implied author in literary studies, arguing that "Recognizing the persona[1] is therefore central to the act of effective reading, since the persona represents the sum of all the author's conscious choices in a realized and more complete self as 'artist'" (1990, 176-177).

Regardless of the tangible yet unspoken agreement to collectively lean towards the rhetorical approach, the room for potential debate was there for over twenty-five years due to the pioneering redirection of Tamar Yacobi (1981), which shifted the main focus from the implied author to the reader. In her essay, "Fictional Reliability as a Communicative Problem," the narratologist suggested five core mechanisms available when encountering textual discrepancies and displayed the idea that discovering their roots might actually depend on the reader and their (ideally) cautious judgment of the discourse (121). That concept introduced novelty to literary studies in the form of a more practically oriented approach, subsequently called cognitivist, later followed, deepened, and upgraded by other narratologists who felt just as strongly about the need for a significant redefinition. The new current not only offered the reader a much more significant role in the process of deciphering the narrator's more or less conscious tendencies to depart from the truth, but also made it easier to achieve. As once emphasised by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983, 101) and subsequently broadened by Nünning (1997, 86), the attempts to establish the values and norms of the implied author are often inseparable from notorious difficulties. Considering that, at times, even narratologists regard unravelling the intentions of the implied author as challenging, the cognitivist approach appears much more reader-friendly.

However, the possibility of stepping aside from the, at times, rather ambiguous concept of the implied author did not automatically erase all the

1 Griffiths puts an equals sign between a "persona" and an "implied author."

difficulty in the recognition of an unreliable discourse. Nünning (95-100), addressing the issue, suggested a set of clues the reader may find helpful when encountering an instance of a questionable narrative. He introduced a clear foundational distinction of the phenomenon, primarily dividing its instances into inconsistencies detectable either on the textual or contextual levels. The former includes a wide diversity of examples, among which one may distinguish bizarre verbal tendencies of the storyteller, their abnormal behavioral patterns, stylistic and syntactic cues, such as incomplete utterances, noticeable hesitation, highly emotional language, or questionable memory. What Nünning considers the most evident among the said kind of unreliability signals, though, are the discrepancies within the very discourse and signs of misalignment between the narrator's reports and their actions.

Yet, despite the undeniably wide range of textual clues, "the question of whether the narrator is unreliable cannot be resolved on the basis of textual data alone. In addition to these intratextual signals, the reader also draws on extratextual frames of reference in the attempt to gauge the narrator's potential degree of unreliability (Nünning, 99)." The statement depicts an image of unreliability as a matter of not only textual peculiarities but also subjective judgments of the recipients based on their comprehension of the two encountered realities and the way they correlate, if at all. The reader's ability to detect contrasts between the picture of the world painted by the narrator and their general real-world knowledge or their conception of the ordinary remains inevitable to fully and reasonably evaluate the unreliability of discourse.

The number of traps set for a potential reader does not end here, though, as the complexity of narrative unreliability appears much more deeply rooted, as proven amongst other scholars by James Phelan and Mary Martin (1999), who, while examining the narration provided by Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, brought to light the multi-dimensionality of the concept. Having taken a closer look at specific utterances of the narrator, Phelan and Martin detected a certain duality depicting the part of the narration provided as reliable but unreliable, since, on the one hand, Stevens' passage was undeniably faithful to his comprehension of reality, but on the other hand "reliable as far as it goes" and not any further. As they subsequently explain, "the problem is that it doesn't go far enough" (91), which enforces upon the narrator a certain level of unreliability regardless, additionally confirming that the nature of the concept is anything but one-dimensional.

Greta Olson (2003, 100-102), fully supportive of the idea of displaying (un) reliability of a single discourse on a spectrum, argues for the initial differentiation of unreliable narrators between the fallible and the untrustworthy, separating the two with the crucial elements of their consciousness and intentionality. According to the theorist, fallibility should be associated with the narrators who "do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased" (101). On the contrary, the foundation for the untrustworthiness of a storyteller is in their "ingrained behavioral traits or some current self-interest" (102). Subsequently, Olson emphasises another potential feature of the unreliability kind, stating that "at one end of the spectrum, untrustworthy narrators contradict themselves immediately or announce outright that they are insane" (104). The equals sign implied between "untrustworthiness" and "spectrum," once again, broadens the comprehension of how deep the nature of the narrative unreliability might actually run. That matter additionally introduces a very intriguing concept of a spectrum (of untrustworthiness or fallibility) within a spectrum (of [un]reliability per se), making one wonder whether a single narrator might be perceived as both fallible and untrustworthy depending on the context, since the spectrum of unreliability on its own allows one to perceive a storyteller as reliable and unreliable altogether.

The analysis

The multidimensional nature of unreliability requires each instance of a questionably credible narrator to be considered specifically through the lenses of their own verbal habits, storytelling tendencies, and actions. The broad spectrum of possibilities indicates that not every discourse will contain the same set of signals, and each distinctive mixture might point to a different level or kind of unreliability, followed by various degrees of difficulty in its recognition, leaving the reader potentially uncertain about the narrators they regard as intriguing or unsettling. An undeniable instance of a storyteller who might be perceived as both is a young bookstore manager, Joseph Goldberg, whose report seems completely fixated on his gradually evolving relationship with a girl who once happened to enter his workplace. For Joe, her presence appears intoxicating enough to utterly consume his attention the moment she opens the door, which results in his second-person, limited discourse concentrated on her and the

potentiality of their romantic involvement. As the plot continues, the narrative goes far beyond reports influenced by an ordinary, first-sight infatuation, reaching deep levels of complexity and darkness.

The opening of the novel on its own illustrates a rather fascinating instance of a narrative, catching attention due to the utterances, seemingly so raw and unfiltered that, at times, even unquestionably obscene. The said directness allows the reader to swiftly catch a glimpse of the essence of the plot, which is additionally emphasised by the repeated at the beginnings of the first five sentences, straightforward "you" - a direct address to the narratee, clearly not referring to the reader. The first line of his discourse: "You walk into the bookstore and you keep your hand on the door to make sure it doesn't slam"[2] automatically puts the reader in a peculiar yet rather intriguing position of a silent observer, who, despite being right in the centre of the action, remains heavily uncertain about their actual role in the narrative. Depending on whether the quiet presence of the reader remains undetected or simply ignored, they might subconsciously play the part of an unnecessary intruder or a witness, following each footstep that Joe is willing to admit to taking or depict as taken. The very issue, however, appears to lack any explicit or even vague answer, which results in the unresolved puzzle regarding whether what the reader actually does is not eavesdrop on a series of private, intimate, and, at times, unquestionably charged confessions and statements made by the narrator towards his initially unnamed narratee.

As the first chapter progresses, more and more about them is being uncovered, and the initially mysterious "you" reveals itself as a girl named Guinevere Beck, the source of Joe's swiftly upcoming obsession and his soon-to-be centre of attention. The engaging combination of second-person narration with first-person narration, fuelled by Joe's subjective, limited, and occasionally clearly emotionally-driven utterances, might, on its own, convince the reader to cautiously evaluate the amount of trust he should be given, if any at all.

The questionable reliability of Joe's discourse appears even more prominent once contrasted with the cues proposed by Nünning, as the range of the already present doubts swiftly seems to broaden. The first and foundational unreliability signal noticeable on the textual level refers to the repeatedly occurring instances of internal contradictions. On the one hand, deeply engaged, capable of sacrifices,

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2 The precise page numbers cannot be provided as the online version of the book accessed does not have them displayed. The link to the version used has been added to the list of references.

and emotionally involved, Joe, under the right circumstances, looks at his "you" and thinks one of the most vulnerable sentences one could ever think of – seemingly sincere "I love you." Such a sweet and candid confession, even if never made out loud, automatically indicates a specific kind of behaviour associated with the feeling, proving its truthfulness. Interestingly enough, Joe seems to prominently counter the left-for-the-narratee love confession under various circumstances, including their first official date, not only with his actions but also on the level of discourse itself. The very second he sees her "all so dressed up" for a night out with him, his mind runs in circles around both her outfit and its potential implications. He entertains these thoughts to such an extent that the conclusion about her body as "an offering, a payment for all those hands-off phone calls, those lunches" is an inevitable formality. As much as the need for physicality should be considered understandable, especially under the influence of a deep level of attraction, such a statement goes far beyond an ordinary need for intimacy and physical closeness. Joe's judgment does not appear rooted in love but in an unhealthy fixation on Beck's physicality, palpable since their very first encounter in the bookshop.[3] The thought of "hands-off phone calls" and "those lunches" that seemingly require compensation implies the narrator, in fact, lacks any deeper emotional or intellectual connection to his so-called beloved. Although he does appear to associate his feelings with love, what he truly seems to crave is a "payment" for all he has done for her – for the support, the attention, and even the time together, since unrelated to physical intimacy. The paradoxical discrepancy between his "love" towards Beck and his further acknowledgments, although already difficult to omit, is additionally reinforced by his clear objectification of her body. The implementation of the equals sign between it and "an offering" remains inseparable from the lack of respect toward her as a human being, and is in opposition to the idea of love. The evident inconsistencies within the very discourse strongly indicate the plausibility of utterances lacking reliability.

Another textual signal of unreliability recognised by Nünning refers to a lack of coherency between the narrator's reports and actions, which, in the

3 The moment Joe observes Beck enter his bookshop for the very first time, some of his utterances already strike the reader as sexually oriented and include the following utterances: "[...] and your V-neck is beige and it's impossible to know if you're wearing a bra but I don't think you are." The intensity and the frequency of the unspoken remarks seem to increase as the story progresses, promptly reaching the point of a plausible obsession with Guinevere's physicality.

very discourse, might occasionally strike the reader as too easily noticeable. One such instance concerned Peach (allegedly), the closest friend of Guinevere, who, from the beginning of the initially one-sided relationship between the girl and the narrator, seems to neither support nor tolerate the idea of Joseph being someone significant to Beck. The narrator, fully aware of her, to say the least, non-existent sympathy, never even attempts to stop himself from admitting to his narratee the unquestionable mutuality of the unspoken hatred. Joe's lack of any positive emotions toward the woman is not directly rooted in her detectable coldness, though, but in his quiet suspicions regarding her real intentions toward Guinevere. His unspoken yet impossible to ignore accusations evoke his inner urge to understand her behaviour and its sources even more, reinforcing his willingness to devote his time to cautious and distant observation. According to the narrator, "if she saw me hanging out around her building, she'd go all nuts and start thinking that I'm a stalker." As much as such a careful judgment appears reasonable (under the very circumstances), it does introduce a lot of contrast to a different line of his report in which he admits: "[...] I have been tracking Peach for eight days now, and I have yet to experience the 'runner's high' that she talks about incessantly." Regardless of whether he aspires to protect Beck from her female friend or not, the act of observing her house, not to mention following her around, undoubtedly confers on him the label of a stalker. Although the report does not openly count him as one, his actions speak louder than his utterances, ingraining in the mind of a reader another thought about Joe's potential unreliability.

The third textual indicator of narratological unreliability mentioned by Nünning, hardly omittable in the very discourse, is much broader than the previous two, as containing a whole, unspecified spectrum of verbal habits of specific narrators, which would potentially, once again, make the reader wonder. Throughout the novel, Joe's storytelling appears rather stable in terms of a certain level of predictiveness in creating his utterances and reacting to specific situations involving either him or Beck. The set of behavioral patterns, potentially making the reader cautious about the amount of trust given to him, would include numerous traits, among which one of the most powerful seems to be very descriptive and persuasive language, plausibly aiming to shape the perspectives of everyone who shows susceptibility.

One aspect worth paying attention to about the man as a storyteller is his visible tendency to ensure the ideas he depicts are as graphic and detailed as necessary to leave a mark on those involved. Almost as if the precise and

deliberately described thoughts and views were, by definition, supposed to ingrain an extraordinarily vivid image in the mind of a recipient, possibly aiming to (re)wire their minds with new lines of code written by Joe Goldberg himself. The unshakeable confidence, so undeniably present every time he attempts to use this "trick" on anybody, emphasises that he never seems to doubt his perspective, which alone holds significant psychological power. Such a deliberate way of creating thoughts or holding conversations indicates certain manipulative tendencies written in the very discourse. One such instance, hardly possible to omit, is encountered when Joe follows Beck around the city and observes her from afar in the subway. She is tipsy, he is a stalker, and there is one more man there, undoubtedly homeless, plausibly in a state of mind not allowing him to keep his sanity. Clearly, if we were to search here for an antagonist, the narrator would be the closest to the label, as he is fully aware of what he does and he deliberately keeps going after the girl. Yet, Joe would not be willing to allow anyone to make such a conclusion. As he openly states, "And the bullshit thing is, if someone saw the three of us, well, most people would think I'm the weird one just because I followed you here. And that's the problem with the world, with women." The certainty of the statement, strengthened by highly emotional language and a deliberately placed swearword, does draw an image of a narrator who does not need to go out of his way to ensure his discourse remains effortlessly persuasive. The use of direct and descriptive language plausibly aims at ensuring that the mind of one regarding him as the "bad guy" would be strategically rewired in the "right" way. The reappearing presence of such purposeful and calculated utterances undoubtedly reinforces the idea of Joe's narrative unreliability, proving the point made by Nünning that verbal habits might be another strong indicator of an unreliable discourse.

Nevertheless, before making the ultimate conclusion proclaiming the narrator unreliable, the reader should regard the equally telling contextual incongruities between the displayed world and their real-world comprehension of the ordinary. In that case, when is the right moment to begin questioning the narrator's reliability on the contextual level? One such breaking point might occur when the reader's "common sense" sparks potential doubts regarding the plausibility of the utterances (Nünning, 100).

Analysing the actions of Joe Goldberg and his already suspicious narrative, the reader encounters at least two of the four suggested contextual signals, which might put their common sense on standby. The first refers

to the undeniable presence of the abnormal moral and ethical standards of the narrator, easily put in question once compared to the very idea behind the generally shared perception of right and wrong. One such instance frequently observed in the book is Joe's deliberate and calculated lack of honesty, present regardless of whether the circumstances enforce its necessity. Throughout the novel, the narrator notoriously lies to those around him, yet seems to remain much more candid with his narratee, automatically putting the reader in the position of a not-directly-involved but not-so-distant observer fully aware of all the acts of (in)sincerity. What might appear rather intriguing, though, is that he repeatedly chooses dishonesty in his interactions with the character-Beck but confesses the truth to his beloved "you," keeping the reader wondering about the actual correlation between the two. During one of his phone calls with Beck, she informs him about a break-in at her friend's property and the girl's subsequent fear, to which he replies with a sharp "Of course." However, the longer and more genuine part of his response is shared only with the narratee, who hears Joe continue, "I say, and you go on, but it's not as dramatic as you're making it out to be. I didn't break in, and I didn't move her chaise." Both cases illustrate a neatly crafted web of lies or deliberate omissions aiming to hide every little detail of his personality that he is, deep down, fully aware of but does not want to put on display for those around him.

Interestingly enough, Joe's duality between the cautiously crafted answers and the seemingly more unfiltered discourse might trap the reader in between doubt and reassurance. On the one hand, one might be willing to give their trust to a narrator who, despite his insincere tendencies, actively admits to his acts of dishonesty to the narratee. On the other hand, the reader might face an extremely simple yet objectively reasonable concern – why even consider putting trust in a liar? Regardless of the reader's initial leaning, there should be one more thing considered. Although the actual correspondence between the character – Beck and the narratee – Beck might not remain fully transparent, the primary "you" never stops addressing the girl. The girl, whom Joe undoubtedly and repeatedly chooses to lie to so as to achieve his aims and, somewhat, wire her perception in the way he finds the most beneficial and convenient. Even though the narrator indeed seems much more candid with his narratee, the reader should keep in mind that since "you" still refers to Beck, his utterances might be heavily impacted. Regardless of the personal viewpoint of the reader on the said case, though, one matter leaves no room for doubt – deliberately

shaping the perspectives of people around the protagonist through cautious and calculated dishonesty clearly indicates a highly abnormal sense of morality and underscores the already profound unreliability of his discourse.

The said contextual cues in Joe's narration are detectable not only through the acts of conscious deception but also through other, much more unrestrained parts of Joe's behaviour. According to Nünning, another framework indicating the very type of unreliability signals involves the narrator's bizarre tendencies and actions, easily striking the recipient as being at odds with the standards of typical human behaviour, and considering the acts of the unfiltered self of the protagonist, their abnormality seems rather difficult to deny. At the end of the novel, as the truth about Joseph starts to fully unravel, the reader uncovers something much more unsettling than a bone-deep obsession ingrained in the type of narration used[4] – an image of pure madness. Although it appears rather difficult to determine with certainty whether the narrator's insanity remains is a constant condition or the result of temporary occurrences and heightened emotional undercurrent, the reader might lean toward the idea that Joe has not actually been a madman throughout the entire discourse once they witness the moment in which his insincerity finally seems to shatter. Not only does he reveal his illogical, unquestionably mad side, but he also pushes his emotional train of thought just slightly further, allowing the reader and the narratee to witness the point of his realisation. The very moment, although not immediately processed, makes him comprehend he is not a put-together protector, but a villain that even he is unable to understand. A villain who brutally took away the only life that truly seemed to matter to him in the previous months – the life of his beloved Beck. Right after her very last breath, the narrator makes a cold-blooded remark about her soulless body, saying: "You are not better than a doll now, and you do not react as the pages in your mouth take the blood that rises from your gullet." Yet, as the seconds pass, he allows his mind to wander, gradually altering his perspective, and when he takes into his arms what once was Guinevere, it finally strikes him: "How could I have done this? I never made you pancakes. What is wrong with me?" After that very moment, it remained beyond a reasonable doubt – the real Joe Goldberg should not be relied on.

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4 The used phrasing refers to the application of the second person narration throughout the entire novel.

Having navigated the narration provided by Joseph as frequently leaning toward the label of unreliability, the reader might start to question its causes, considering whether the said lack of reliability is rooted in cautiously filtered and altered storytelling or a set of circumstances and traits simply resulting in the narrator's inability to report accurately. In other words, one may wonder about the origins of the unreliability of the discourse, attempting to link Joseph's behaviour to unworthiness, fallibility, or perhaps even a mixture of both, depending on the context. When recalling the formerly examined aspects of his narrative, the reader might realise that Joe's notorious insincerity or tendency to depict his thoughts in such detail without a shadow of a doubt draws an image of a man way too deliberate in his doings to consider his discrepancies and misjudgements as mistakes easily avoided under different circumstances.

What might seem particularly intriguing is that the reader does not observe any signs of self-doubt in his judgment, even in the most objectively irrelevant cases, such as regarding nothing beyond his tastes. As he surely remarks himself: "I know music. I am smart. I think Martyr deserves to be scouted and worshipped." Such an unshakeable statement regarding a matter of such minor significance speaks volumes about his inner urge to be comprehended and perceived in a specific light – as someone worthy, capable, and relevant. That might make one wonder how badly he desires to have the upper hand when there is something greater at play, if being knowledgeable and in the right in such minor cases is of this significance. Unfortunately, it may remain unanswered. Nonetheless, throughout the majority of the novel, his general utterances still tend to appear both certain and very carefully calculated, regardless of whether they refer to the moments in which the stakes are undeniably high or just trivial everyday issues, with exceptions in the form of highly emotionally charged circumstances. Here, the protagonist seems to let down his guard of the deliberate and calculated storytelling and to allow his emotions to guide both his actions and reports, temporarily replacing his formerly implied label of "untrustworthiness" with clear "fallibility." The noticeably emotionally driven parts of his discourse, much more unfiltered than the rest, allow the reader to temporarily perceive Joe as "reliable as far as it goes" (Phelan & Martin, 91), hence, although unwilling to misinform, still not objectively credible either.

The narrator's emotionally driven reports keep appearing throughout the novel in various forms, including the occasional, yet undeniably present, unnecessary repetitions, such as "I get it. You are busy. You got class – I get

it – and you got Peach – I get it – and you're not avoiding me – I get it – and you have pages due – I get it." The very instance might make one argue that the said repetitions should, in fact, be perceived as the narrator's purposeful attempt to convince his narratee, or possibly even himself, about the truthfulness of the illusion he aims to present, which would, once again, depict him as untrustworthy. To some extent, such an evaluation would seem more than reasonable. However, Joe's temporary but undeniable inability to present the events either the correct or the desired way heavily implies a moment of fallibility, illuminating that there is much more to Joe Goldberg than just pathological untrustworthiness. That instance on its own emphasises the complexity of his unreliable tendencies even more prominently, once again deepening the awareness about the real reason for the requirement of a scale as broad as a spectrum to display it thoroughly and accordingly.

Conclusions

The young bookstore manager demonstrates that an intriguing and layered character requires a coherently complex narrative matching the intensity of his inner world. The multidimensionality of Goldberg's nature and personality corresponds well with the broad scope of unreliability ingrained in his utterances. His narrative, both reliable and unreliable, just as much as untrustworthy and fallible, faultlessly exemplifies Phelan and Martin's statement that "narrators exist along a wide spectrum from reliability to unreliability" (96). Although his typically deliberately designed reports and responses reveal clear manipulative tendencies, they do not stop the occasional narrative fallibility, detectable every time his emotions leak through his carefully crafted pretence. The examined textual and contextual incongruities revealing Joe's leaning toward unreliability do not preclude him from allowing the narratee and the reader to witness the temporary collapse of his carefully built walls and his subsequent self-exposure. This duality clearly supports the claim that Goldberg occupies various positions on the unreliability spectrum. However, the occasional emotionally charged utterances combined with the carefully crafted manipulation and moments of unquestionable madness demonstrate additional fluid shifts detectable along a narrower spectrum of narrative fallibility and untrustworthiness.

Caroline Kepnes, the author of *You*, provided the protagonist with a rather baffling narrative, reaching far beyond cold calculations, obsession,

or momentary losses of sanity. His unreliability, aside from keeping the reader on their toes, paints a picture of an utterly broken soul who, despite the (usually) well-kept facade, lacks any solid ground upon which he could finally find his peace. Kepnes created an untrustworthy yet fallible, unreliable storyteller to illuminate the deep complexity of the human psyche, which may haunt everyone, including the mad and the calm and collected, indicating that they might be the same person if one reads between the lines just right. Joseph Goldberg exemplifies the concept ideally. He presents a flawless image of an individual calculated on the outside but shattered on the inside, desperately searching for a cure that would finally fix the broken and heal the wounds. This frantic inner urge eventually leads to a series of tragedies, which he likely perceived as the only opportunity to obtain what he has always lacked. That is, until the very last death he caused, as it irrevocably dismantled his fantasy of Guinevere Beck being his desired source of stability.

Joe's unreliability strikes the reader both on the levels of the text and the context throughout the entire novel via numerous discrepancies, misalignments, and suspicious verbal habits, just as much as odd tendencies detectable in his general demeanour or heavily questionable sense of morality. His calculated wiring, unnecessary and emotionally driven repetitions, or the never-present shadow of doubt about his own judgment perfectly complete a self-portrait of a narrator both consciously and subconsciously interfering with the reliability of his report. That being said, the reader might freely conclude that Joe Goldberg, indeed, cannot be fully trusted.

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