

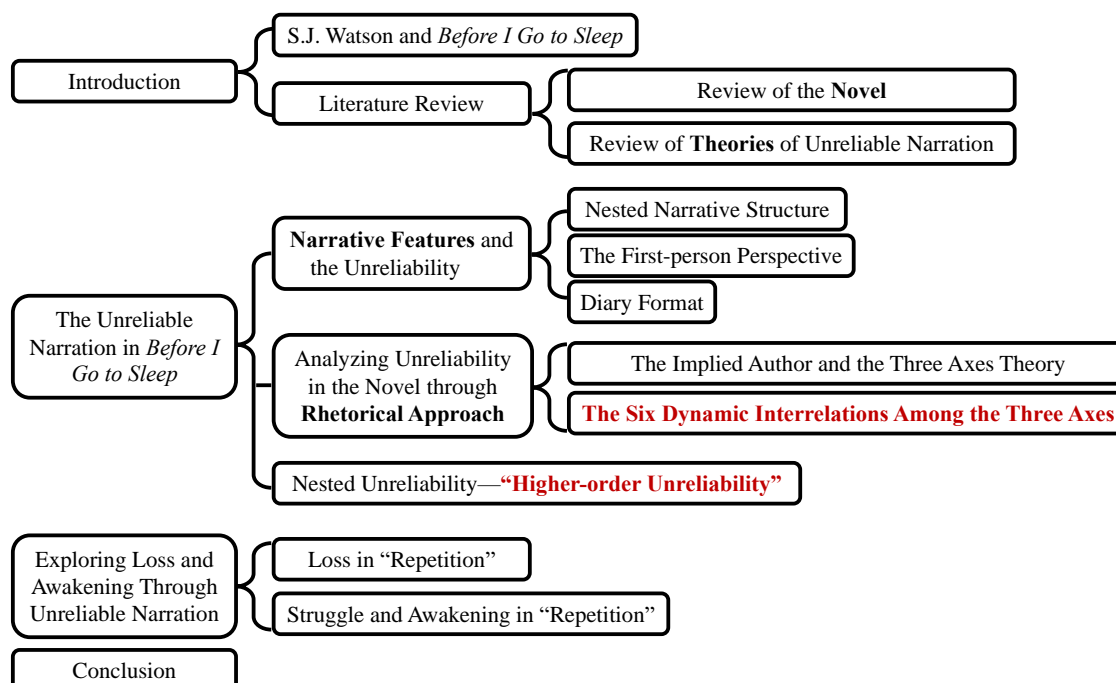
## The Unreliable Narration in S.J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*

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**Abstract:** This thesis delves into the exploration of unreliable narration within S.J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*, a contemporary psychological thriller novel. The research aims to explore the characteristics of unreliable narration and its unique role in revealing themes and enhancing the atmosphere of suspense, uncovering the intricate layers of unreliable narration that have been previously underexplored. Employing a detailed textual analysis and the rhetorical approach, the thesis identifies three primary narrative characteristics and further applies Phelan's three axes theory to analyze the manifestations of unreliability, innovatively proposing six dynamic relationships among these axes, enhancing the understanding of the narrative's complexity. By integrating "higher-order" mathematical concepts into literary analysis, the concept of "higher-order unreliability" is explored, highlighting the transitivity and multi-dimensionality of unreliability in the narrative, then showing the intertwined themes of being lost and awakening, memory and identity, as well as the metaphorical representation of modern life.

**Key words:** S.J. Watson, *Before I Go to Sleep*, unreliable narration, rhetorical research approach

### 1. Contents and structure:



Chapter 1 gives a brief introduction of S.J. Watson's career and works, as well as a brief introduction of the content of *Before I Go to Sleep*. Then, it reviews the literature of the novel and unreliable narration and points out the methodologies and significance of the thesis as well as the innovative contribution.

## Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 firstly summarizes the narrative features related to unreliable narration in the novel. Then, it uses rhetorical approach to analyze the novel in detail, including the overall analysis, and innovatively proposing six dynamic interrelations among the three axes, as well as giving corresponding text examples for analysis. Finally, according to the innate characteristics of the narrator in the novel, the concept of “higher-order unreliability” is proposed.

Chapter 3 explores how unreliable narration shows profound themes of being lost and awakening with the metaphor of “Platonic repetition” and “Nietzschean repetition.”

Chapter 4 concludes the thesis, highlighting the innovative aspects and limitations of the proposed theoretical framework as well as anticipating and suggesting future research directions of unreliable narration.

### 2. Content of the novel:

It tells the story of Christine, a woman with a rare form of amnesia that erases her long-term memories over twenty years and also makes her forget the previous day each morning. From her perspective, the story unfolds as she wakes up one morning to reacquaint herself with “Ben” who claims to be her husband, relying on her own diary and clues from those around her to reconstruct her identity and past, which she does virtually every day. Doubting the truthfulness of “Ben,” her doctor Nash, and her old friend Claire, Christine discovers clues revealing a disturbing past involving “Ben,” actually Mike, with whom she had an extramarital affair, and the cause of her amnesia being an assault from him as she attempted to end the affair, ultimately successfully rescued through the efforts of herself, her family and friends.

### 3. The six dynamic interrelations among the three axes:

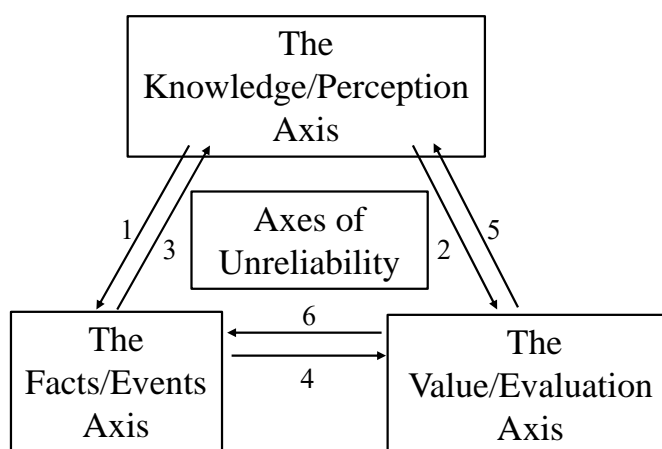
The first is the influence of the Knowledge/Perception Axis on the Facts/Events Axis.

The second is the influence of the Knowledge/Perception Axis on the Value/Evaluation Axis.

The third is the influence of the Fact/Event Axis on the Knowledge/Perception Axis.

The fourth is the influence of the Fact/Event Axis on the Value/Evaluation Axis.

The fifth is the influence of the Value/Evaluation Axis on the Knowledge/Perception Axis.



Thesis Outline

The sixth is the influence of the Value/Evaluation Axis on the Fact/Event Axis.

4. Higher-order unreliability:

Traditionally, rhetorical approach typically concentrates on the text created by the implied author, focusing mainly on the direct reliability issue of a single narrator and their narrative, while in the novel, Christine’s narrative shows a complex pathway of unreliability transmission, displaying a mathematically progressive structure of unreliability.

It stems not only from the traditional subjectivity of the narrator but also from the continuous accumulation of errors in the multiple stages of transmission and reconstruction, leading to a layer-by-layer decrease in the credibility of the narrative.

