



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

XIAO Yao

English

College of International Studies

Shenzhen University

April 26, 2024

CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology & Structure
- Innovation Points
- Conclusion

Motivation

- **Interest**
 - Suspense, psychological thriller novels.
- **Innate characteristics of the narrator**
 - Unreliable narration—**special**.

Background

- **The novel**
 - British writer S.J. Watson.
 - In 2011.
 - Christine; **amnesia**; the first-person perspective.

Significance

- **The rhetorical approach**
 - A developing theory.
 - Enrich the academic discourse.
- **Intersects with many fields**
 - A new perspective.

Research Question

- How to study the unreliable narration in *Before I Go to Sleep* using rhetorical approach?

Literature Review

- **The novel**

- Debut; contemporary.
- Mainly focusing on its themes and linguistics.

- **The theories**

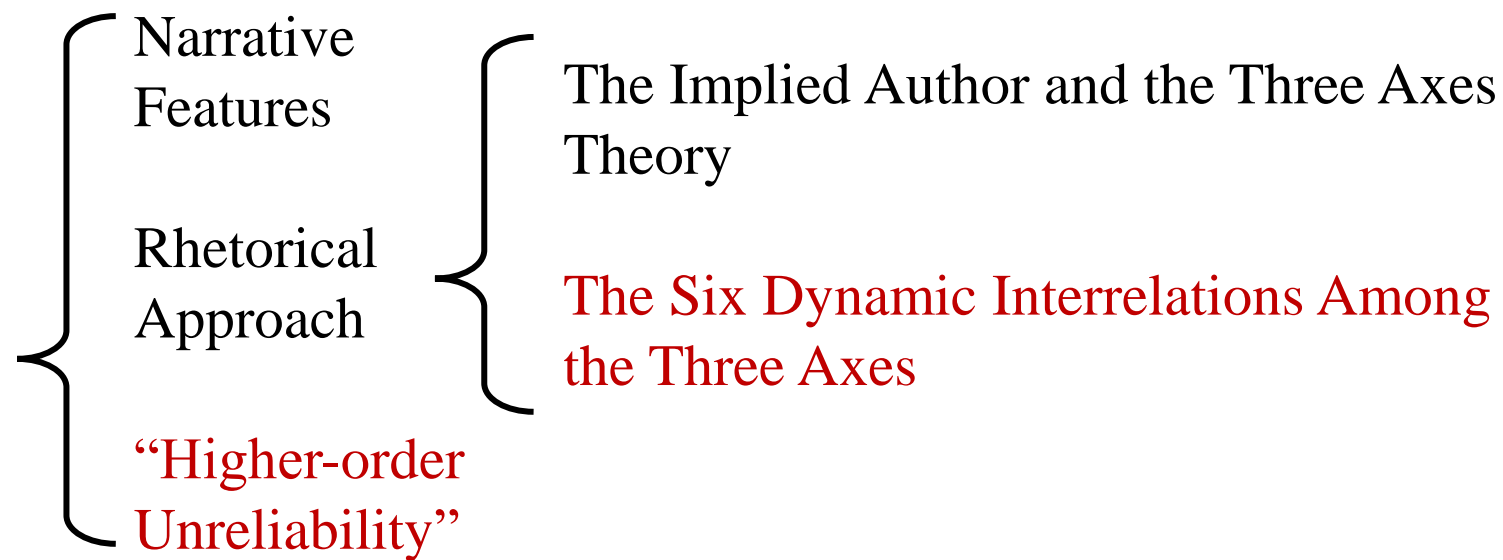
- Definition: Unreliable narrator (Booth 1961: 158-159) .
- Development: **Rhetorical approach** & cognitive (constructive) approach.
 - James Phelan: “**axes of unreliability**” (Phelan & Martin 1999: 95; Phelan 2005: 51) .
 - **facts/events axis, value/evaluation axis and knowledge/perception axis**
 - Shen Dan: potential causal relationships.

Methodology

- Textual analysis
- Rhetorical approach

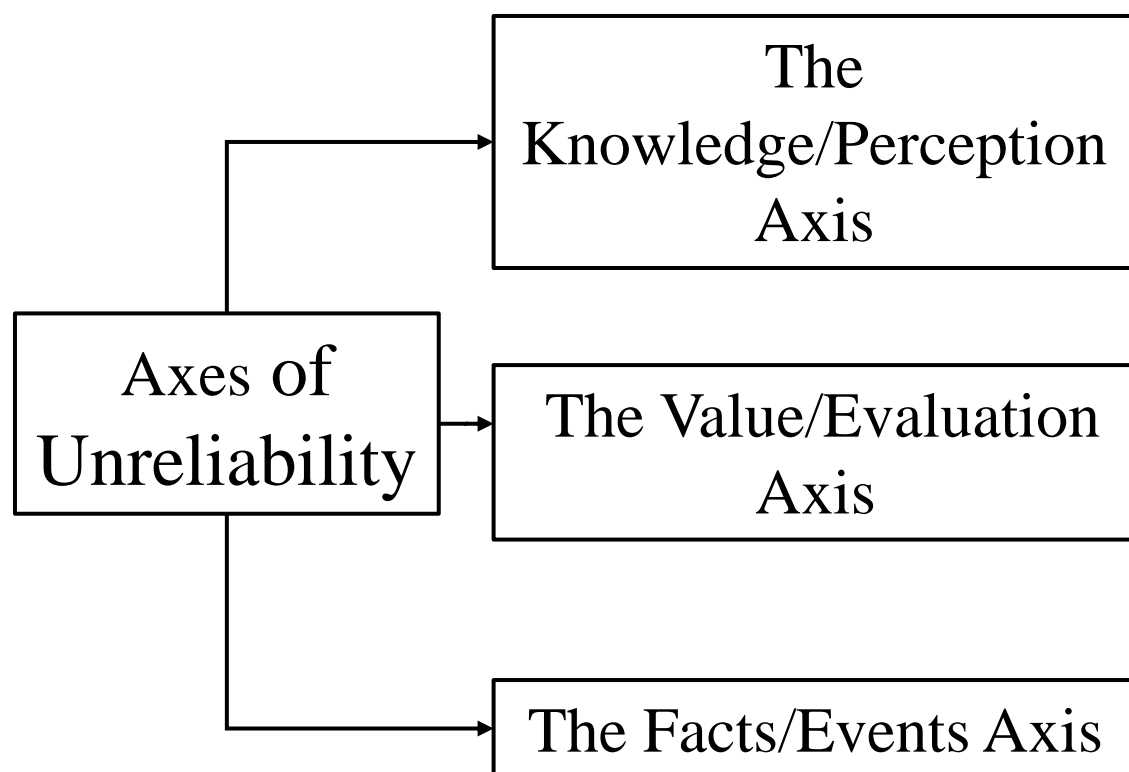
Structure

- Introduction
- **Unreliable Narration**
- Theme
- Conclusion

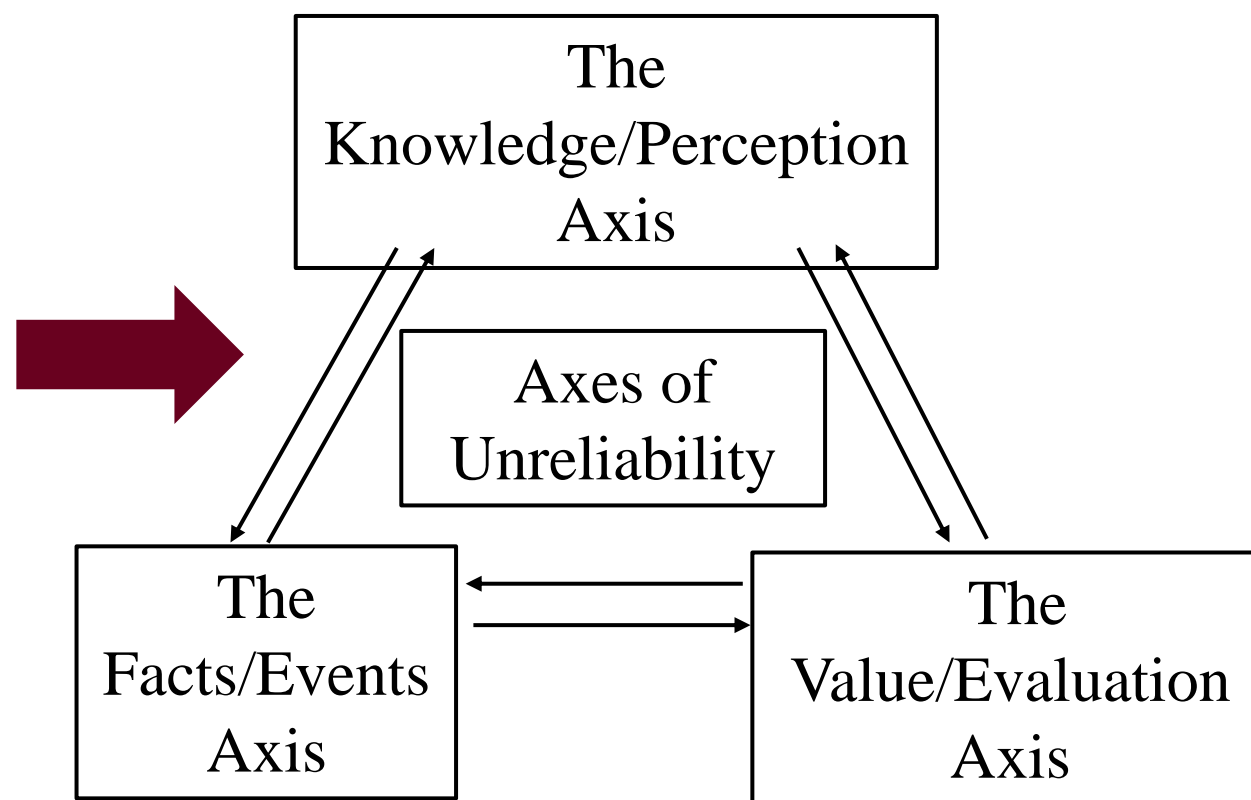


- **The Six Dynamic Interrelations**

Phelan: **parallel**



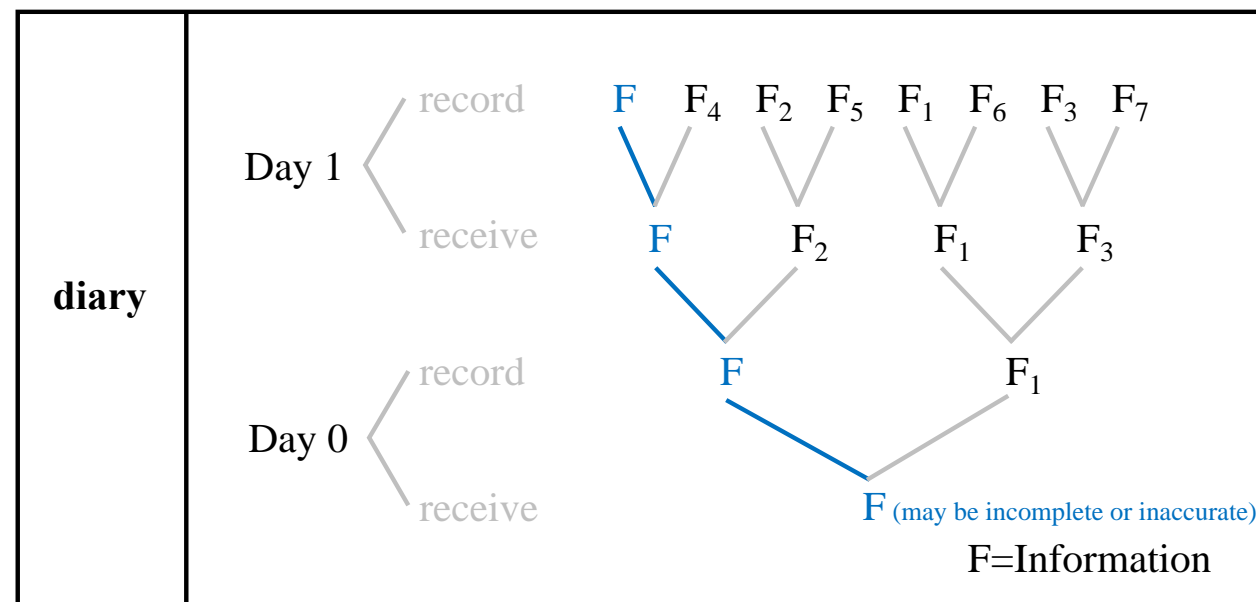
The thesis: **dynamic**



• Higher-order Unreliability

- Mathematical or logical.
- Dimensions and layers of unreliability transmission.
- The narrator also acts as a reader

Figure 2 “Higher-order Unreliability”—Transitivity of Unreliability



- **Conclusion**

- Analyzing the unreliable narration in the novel.
- The Six Dynamic Interrelations and higher-order unreliability.
- Developing the rhetorical approach.



• References

Booth, Wayne Clayson. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Phelan, James. *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Phelan, James, and Mary Patricia Martin. “The Lessons of ‘Waymouth’: Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics and The Remains of the Day.” *Narratologies*, edited by David Herman. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999.91-96.

申丹，何为“不可靠叙述”？《外国文学评论》，2006年第4期。



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

Thanks for your attention.

XIAO Yao

English

College of International Studies

Shenzhen University

April 26, 2024