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### Narration Through the Lens of Disinformation: The Impact of Unreliable Narrators

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# Unreliable Narrators and Misleading Information: Characters and Readers as Targets of Literary Disinformation

By: Riya Nobi

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## BACKGROUND:

Narratology, or the study of narrators, is a subsection of literary analysis that focuses on how storytelling affects the flow of information from characters to readers. Theories regarding narration and narrator-reader relationships will be applied to Alexander Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, a short story that follows a German officer, Hermann, in his quest to uncover the tale of a Countess's winning cards.



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Types of unreliable narrators	Behavior	Problems Presented	Literary Examples
Braggart	Exaggerates his role in key incidents to take credit of accomplishments	May lead to misreporting of motives and attitudes	Miles Gloriosus, or the Braggart soldier, a stock feature in Roman Comedies
Madman	May be schizophrenic or paranoid	Affects ability to recount facts or events (schizophrenic) or motivations and attitudes (paranoid)	Narrator in "The Tell-tale Heart"
Clown	Stupid, unmotivated, hypocritical	May underreport or misreport facts	Polonius in Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i>
Naif or child	May be juvenile or have insufficient worldly experience	May misjudge motivations or attitudes	Holden Caulfield in <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>
Liar	Deliberate misrepresents self, often to cover up bad intent	May offer an incomplete narrative, altering events which might implicate himself	Humbert Humbert, in <i>Lotlita</i>

via Mary Manjikian

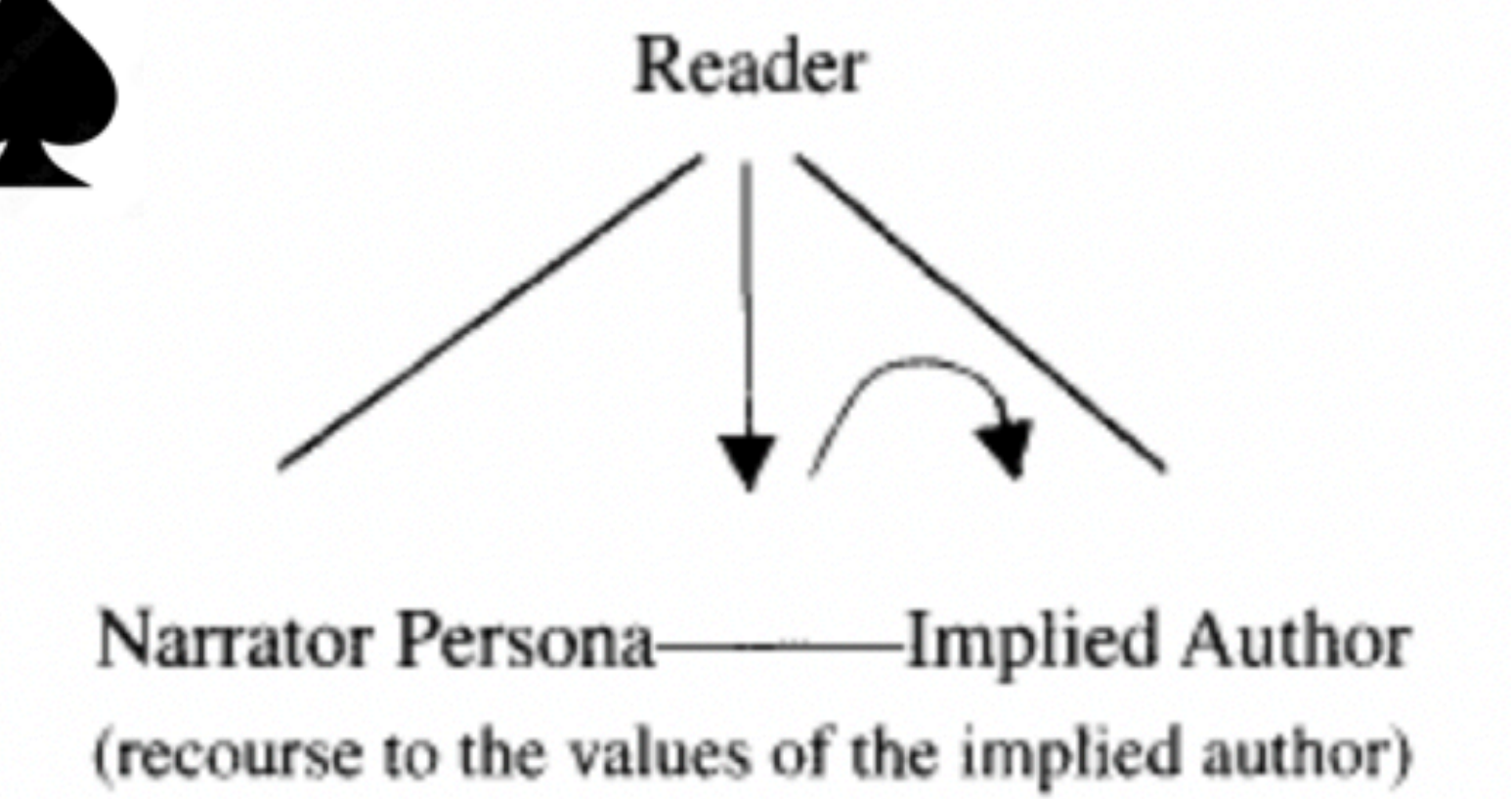
**The intentionally false information disseminated by an unreliable narrator in a literary text affects both characters and readers in some of the same ways that disinformation campaigns affect target communities**



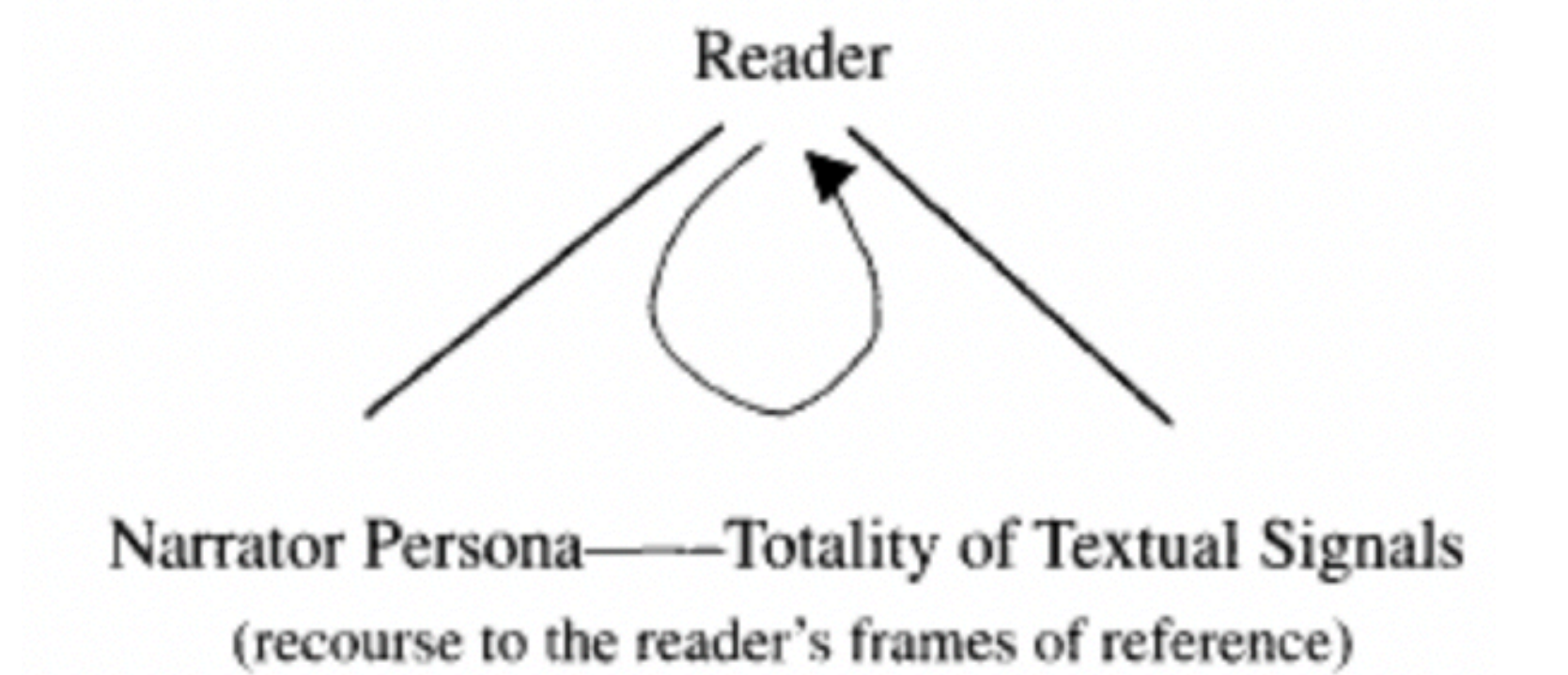
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## Booth's Model



## Nünning's Model



(Olson 2003, 95)



## METHODS:

1. Discuss existing theories on narration: distinguish between faulty and unreliable narrators based on Great Oslen's model; dive into the variety of unreliable narrators based on Mary Manjikian's model.
2. A look into *The Queen of Spades*: the events, characters, and determining who the narrator is.
3. Apply the theories of narration to the story: which type of unreliable is the narrator? Why? How does it the way the readers interpret the events?
4. Bringing it back to the disinformation field: how can literary works serve as a model for understanding misleading information?

Fallible narrators → mistakes are situationally motivated  
 Untrustworthy narrators → mistakes are caused by "ingrained behavioral traits or self-interests"  
 ↓  
 Fallible narrators are more likely to be excused for informational gaps whereas untrustworthy narrators meet the reader's skepticism of their character.  
 ↓  
 Readers decide which category a narrator falls into via textual signals (Olson 2003, 100)