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by Neil LaBute“

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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

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1. Introduction

Neil LaBute is a contemporary American playwright, screenwriter, director and short-story writer. His works are controversial, disturbing and polarizing, and have earned him titles such as misogynist and misanthrope. Part of this effect stems from the fact that LaBute has a predilection for scrutinizing the dark side of human nature in particularly banal and seemingly innocuous everyday situations. In *Reasons to be Pretty*, for example, a young man's remark about his girlfriend's face being 'regular' launches a "profanity-laced rant" (Jordan) by the girlfriend, which is only the tip of the iceberg of the events to come. In another play, *Wrecks*, a man delineates his love for his late wife and leaves the audience questioning if love can really transgress every boundary. Rarely does LaBute give answers to the moral questions he poses in his plays; prevalently, the reader and the audience are left tumbling in a gloomy state between disgust and horror in the wake of a shocking revelation. At times, LaBute even eludes responsibility for his plays as in the preface to *This Is How It Goes*:

I'm not sure where this one came from. This is one of those plays that just sort of dropped out onto the page and I figure it's best not to ask too many questions; it's here now, so we'll just have to live with it. (*This Is How It Goes*, vii)

At the core of this thesis lies the implicit question which tools LaBute employs in his dramatic works to achieve such surprising, shocking and frequently disgruntling effects. What works in favor of the LaBute-ian twist? What leads to and supports the unsettling revelation common in the plays of Neil LaBute? The assumption is that LaBute transgresses the boundaries of prototypical drama by mingling mimetic traditions of drama and diegetic traditions of epic. He draws on a repository of literary devices that not only includes elements of drama but also elements of prose. It is the latter type that is of central interest in this thesis. In relation

to drama, these elements of prose are termed narrative elements. It is presupposed that LaBute moves beyond naturalistic conventions of drama by utilizing narrative elements and, thus, challenges the reader's and audience's expectations to achieve his desired, discomforting twists.

As will be discussed in more detail in the theoretical part of this thesis, the assumption described above is founded upon the peculiar relationship of narrative and drama. Drama is typically seen as being distinct from prose in terms of narrativity. While prose - and to a certain extent also poetry - is defined as a narrative genre, the narrative capability of drama has been marginalized in academic circles and drama has generally been branded as a non-narrative genre. Drama has been relegated to the realm of mimesis and, thus, story-telling in drama has been limited to the mode of showing rather than telling. It is an aim of this thesis to examine this dichotomous relationship of narrative and drama through a theoretical consideration and an analytical investigation of selected plays by Neil LaBute. The works that will be analyzed function hereby as representatives of all of LaBute's dramatic works. The chosen plays include *This Is How It Goes*, *autobahn: a short-play cycle*, *Wrecks and other plays*, *Reasons to be Pretty*.

2. Narrative and Drama

2.1. What is Narrative?

In her article “Toward a Definition of Narrative”, Marie-Laure Ryan writes that few words have undergone such a vast extension as the term ‘narrative’. Today almost anything has become a narrative as the following example perfectly illustrates: “the political strategist James Carville attributes the loss of John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election to the lack of a convincing narrative” (Ryan, “Toward a Definition of Narrative” 22). It is clear that Carville has not used or even intended to refer to the literary meaning of the term ‘narrative’ but has utilized it more or less as a synonym of the word ‘story’. The narratologist Gerald Prince has classified such applications of ‘narrative’ as a hedging device which allows the user to circumnavigate the usage of other words that position the speaker in a certain category:

“One says ‘narrative’ instead of ‘explanation’ or ‘argumentation’ (because it is more tentative); one prefers ‘narrative’ to ‘theory,’ ‘hypothesis,’ or ‘evidence’ (because it is less scientific); one speaks of a ‘narrative’ rather than ‘ideology’ (because it is less judgmental); one substitutes ‘narrative’ for ‘message’ (because it is more indeterminate).” (qtd in Ryan, *Definition* 22).

Despite such exploitation of the term, the extended usage is not unwarranted since scientists have begun to recognize that narrative technique is a cognitive-organizational tool of human beings to make sense of the world. Renowned narratologists, such as Monika Fludernik, have acknowledged the special function of ‘narrative’. She claims that “[w]e are all narrators in our daily lives” (Fludernik, *Introduction* 1). Whenever we tell somebody about our latest holiday or any other incident, we narrate. In everyday life narrative is, to some extent, a cognitive tool – Fludernik calls it “a fundamental epistemological structure” (Fludernik, *Introduction* 2) - that helps us reduce the endless complexity of events, bring them into causality and thus create order. A

practical example: “[...] if a sequence of panels in a graphic novel first shows two characters walking along a sidewalk and then shows them seated in a restaurant, the reader will assume, all other things being equal, that the characters’ being in the restaurant is a result of their having walked to it.” (Herman 8). The acknowledgment of the all-pervasiveness of narrative raises the need of narratologists to define their area of investigation more precisely. What is a narrative in a narratological sense? What kind of narrative is worth to be scrutinized in this scholarly field? Fludernik proposes to phrase the question differently: “[...] what is **not** some kind of narrative, or rather, how should narrative be defined in order to distinguish it from non-narrative discourse?” (Fludernik, *Introduction 2*)

An answer to this last question can be found in the distinction of narrative and other text types. Traditionally four types of elementary texts are distinguished: Argumentation, Description, Exposition, Narrative (Chatman 6). What sets Narrative apart from other types is “[...] its “chrono-logic,” its doubly temporal logic” (Chatman 9) as well as its causality. Seymour Chatman explains that Narrative has not only an external temporal level, which functions on the narratological level of discourse, *récit* or *syuzhet*, but also an internal echelon that can be assigned to what narratologists have termed story, *histoire* or *fabula* (Chatman 9).

The necessity of a temporal movement of narrative is not the only defining characteristic. As explained by Fludernik, the term ‘narrative’ is a derivate of the Latin verb *narrare*, thus, directly related to the speech act of narrating. Hence, the narrative is tightly linked with the figure of the narrator, which consequently is viewed as a distinguishing trait of an archetypical narrative. What the narrator narrates is of course also of crucial importance. Influential in this respect is the tripartite distinction of the French narratologist Gérard Genette of the word *récit* (=narrative). He identified “*narration* (the narrative act of the narrator), *discours* or *récit* proper (narrative as text or utterance) and *histoire* (the story the narrator

tells in his/her narrative)” (Fludernik, *Introduction* 2). If these different qualities can be isolated from a narrative act, i.e. a particular story, then it is possible to reproduce the core story in a different form. This is what also Russian Formalists have claimed and have represented by the terms *fabula*, which denotes the essence of the story, and *syuzhet* which denotes the particular realization of the story and is not restricted to a particular medium (Fludernik, *Introduction* 3-4).

As becomes apparent, there are many features which are considered indispensable for the concept of ‘narrative’ and which are crucial concerning the definition of the term. However, this has led to a plethora of different definitions of narrative proposed by various scholars whereby most have in common that dramatic works are excluded from the definition. This exclusion has a long tradition in narratology. Despite the peripheral acknowledgment of the fuzzy boundary of narrative, i.e. dramatic works may also be narrative in some way, fiction has established itself as the turn-table of narratological analyses, frames, theories and approaches. One of the reasons for this phenomenon has German roots. It was Goethe who set up a three-fold model of narrative genres – similar to Greek models – that consist of drama, lyric and epic. Goethe has not excluded text types from his model. He said that there are genres with an underlying story as in drama, but the only real narrative genre supposedly is the epic due to the presence of a narrator figure. Therefore it is not overly surprising to continuously find definitions or related writings that reflect this latter fact:

By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. A drama is a story without a story-teller; in it characters act out directly what Aristotle called an “imitation” of such actions as we find in life. A lyric, like a drama, is a direct presentation, in which a single actor, the poet or his surrogate, sings, or muses, or speaks for us to hear or overhear. Add a second speaker, as Robert Frost does in “The Death of the Hired Man,” and move toward drama. Let the speaker begin to tell of an event, as Frost does in “The Vanishing Red,” and we move toward narrative. For

writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required. (Scholes and Kellogg 4)

In recent times narratologists have attempted to find a broader definition of narrative which includes a wide array of genres such as drama, film, fiction, music, paintings and so on. Marie-Laure Ryan is the advocate of the establishment of a transmedial narratology and a strong critic of the restrictive “language-based, or rather, speech-act approach to narrative.” (Ryan, *Transmedial Narratology* 2). She argues that this speech-act based definition of narrative (i.e. story plus narrator) precludes potential narrative texts or media that do not exhibit an overt narrator. Moreover, the narration of a narrator is strictly bound to the re-telling of a story that has happened in the past and as a result this classical notion bars any form of narrative that occurs in the present such as drama. She proposes a new, broader definition of narrative:

1. Narrative involves the construction of the mental image of a world populated with individuated agents (characters) and objects (spatial dimension).
2. This world must undergo not fully predictable changes of state that are caused by non-habitual physical events: either accidents (happenings) or deliberate actions by intelligent agents (temporal dimension).
3. In addition to being linked to physical states by causal relations, the physical events must be associated with mental states and events (goals, plans, emotions). This network of connections gives events coherence, motivation, closure, and intelligibility and turns them into a plot (logical, mental and formal dimension). (Ryan, *Transmedial Narratology* 4)

Her transmedial definition emphasizes four features: *action*, *temporality*, *causality*, *world-construction*. It allows taking account of both narratives that are founded on past events and immediate narratives that happen in the present.

2.2. Narrativity

Prior to defining and delineating particular narrative elements in drama there is still the need of describing what makes a narrative a narrative. This is a question to which many answers have been given, but a clear consensus has yet to be found. The most straight-forward solution is the presence of characters, actions and events that can be causally linked. Particularly helpful is the notion of *eventfulness* as proposed by Peter Hühn. With this concept he centralizes the *event*, the “change of state, [as] one of the constitutive features of narrativity” (Hühn 2). Eventfulness and event assist in grasping what makes a narrative a narrative and “[...] help define narrativity in terms of the sequentiality inherent to the narrated story [...] and thereby [imply] the presence of temporality time” (Hühn 4). However, “[...] the representation of a series of events and the eventfulness of the story are by no means the only typical elements [...] which can be classified as ‘narrative’” (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 332).

Scholars refer to many other concepts that are related to each other but are not entirely the same. These include *emplotment* (Ricoeur), *eventfulness* (Hühn), *experientiality* (Fludernik), *narratibility* (Prince), *sequentiality* (Sternberg), and *tellability* (Labov). In the course of this section, some of these concepts will be discussed briefly in order to help define what establishes narrativity. According to Seymour Chatman

“[n]arrativity designates the quality of being narrative, the set of properties characterising narratives and distinguishing them from non-narratives. [...] It also designates the set of optional features that make narratives more prototypically narrative-like, more immediately identified, processed, and interpreted as narratives” (qtd. in Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 333).

Even though this definition seems to be comprehensive, it unfortunately lacks further descriptions of what these properties and features might be and “merely shifts the problem from narrativity to the term narrative”

(Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 333). What the definition does, however, is that it includes the notion of fuzziness – which stems from the prototype theory of linguistics. For H. Porter Abbott this is not necessarily a negative point because there is an advantage in this term that lies in “[...] its grammatical status as a reference to a property or properties rather than to a thing or class” (Abbott 310). “As what one might call an “adjectival” noun, narrativity suggests connotatively a felt quality, something that may not be entirely definable or may be subject to gradations. Ryan’s distinction between “being a narrative” and “possessing narrativity” (Ryan, *Transmedial Narratology* 6) highlights the difference: where a narrative is a “semiotic object,” narrativity consists in “being able to inspire a narrative”. [...] In short, if narrative itself is a “fuzzy concept”, narrativity is a term more closely attuned to its fuzziness” (Abbott 310).

But what exactly does it mean that a text possesses narrativity? A glance at the history of this concept sheds some light on the dark matter because it reveals that structuralist approaches, which still prevalently besiege the fortress of narratology, cannot satisfyingly account for narrativity. Franz K. Stanzel, for instance, pleads *mediacy* as a necessary parameter for narrativity, for which he identifies two realizations – the teller and the reflector mode, respectively. The teller mode features an instance of a narrator who transmits the story to the reader or the audience; the reflector mode enables the reader to experience the story or the events through the eyes of a character and thus enhances the illusion of immediacy. Despite such distinctions, narrativity as defined through mediacy is too restrictive as both modes entail the presence of a narrator figure and thus exclude drama from the narrative genre (Alber and Fludernik 174).

Mediacy or mediation, however, has not always been as restricted as in F.K. Stanzel’s perspective. The earliest accounts of mediation stem from Greek heritage and incorporated two particular forms of mediation. In Plato’s *Republic* we find on the one side “the indirect representational

character of *diegesis*” and on the other “the direct presentational character of *mimesis*” (Abbott 311). Diegesis is in other words the form of mediation that is narrated through the words of the poet and more closely associated with epic, while mimesis is occupied with the act of showing the story and akin to drama. Not long after Plato’s dichotomy, Aristotle proposed the idea of ‘*muthos*’ in his *Poetics* which is “[...] the totality of related events as reconstructed by the reader [...] and, more or less strictly, projected on a chronological line – i.e., the relation between events is primarily represented in terms of time sequence – with more or less equal weight given to each event in the sequence” (Downing 165). The discussion of *muthos* has never been without controversy since Aristotle has apparently not made himself overly clear. Put in more simple terms, *muthos* denotes “the configuration of incidence in the story” (Greimas & Ricoeur 1989: 551 qtd. in Abbott 311) and is labeled as the predecessor of Ricoeur’s concept ‘*emplotment*’. *Emplotment* thus shares similarities with *muthos* in the way that it, too, involves and entangles the notions of plot and time, which for Ricoeur makes it “a key manifestation of narrativity” (Abbott 313).

It is obvious that narrativity is a notion that is immanent in narrative but not easily graspable nor definable. The approximations given above make clear what we are dealing with, but there is still a part of the notion missing. The term ‘*emplotment*’, for example, concentrates solely on a definition of narrativity as a quality inherent in a narrative text. What has already been vaguely noted in the discussion of Stanzel’s *mediacy* is that narrativity is contingent upon the actual receiver of the text and this notion is central to Monika Fludernik’s concept of *human experientiality*.

“Narrativity is a function of narrative texts and centres on experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature” (Fludernik, *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* 26).

In Fludernik’s model, narrativity is not located within the plot or character’s involvement in it, but it is a consequence of the very existence of anthropomorphic actants. Due to their human-like mien they are able

to “perform acts of physical movement, speech acts, and thought acts, and their acting necessarily revolves around their consciousness, their mental centre of self-awareness, intellection, perception and emotionality” (Fludernik, *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* 26).

This merges well with theories proposed by other scholars such as Abbott and Scholes, who both argue that narrativity is basically a constructivist activity carried out on behalf of the reader or the audience. “Fiction is presented to us in the form of a narration (a narrative text) that guides us as our own narrativity seeks to complete the process that will achieve a story” (Abbott 318). So, narrativity should not be seen as a property of a text but a skill that is present in the perceiver of the story. Only through such an approach is it possible to explain the narrativity of postmodern texts such as for example the plotless movie from 1929 *un chien andalou* by Salvador Dali.

“Scholes argued that this exercise of our gift of narrativity is essential even in those postmodern and experimental novels and films that seek to disrupt it, since without this cognitive and semiotic equipment the effects of their disruption would go unexperienced” (Abbott 319)

This psychological equipment is crucial in the understanding of Fludernik’s model of *experientiality*. She nests narrativity in “the representation of experientiality” (Fludernik, *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* 28) which therefore makes her form of narrativity a cognitive notion that has influenced many narratologists and has achieved a high degree of impact particularly in models such as that of transmedial narratology. The definition of narrativity that seems the most suitable and accessible for this paper does not incorporate this psychological component, but emphasizes the dichotomy of diegesis and mimesis. In their article, Nünning and Sommer propose such a distinction between diegetic and mimetic narrativity:

Mimetic narrativity could be defined as the representation of a temporal and/or causal sequence of events, with the degree of

narrativity hinging upon the degree of eventfulness. Diegetic narrativity, on the other hand, refers to verbal, as opposed to visual or performative, transmission of narrative content, to the representation of a speech act of telling a story by an agent called a narrator. Whereas diegetic narrativity presupposes the presence of a speaker, a proposition, a communicative situation, and an addressee or a recipient role, mimetic narrativity does not. (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 338)

2.3. On the problematic Nature of Narrative and Drama

The neglect of drama and the concomitant emphasis of prose in narratology seem peculiarly odd and surprising. Story and plot – undoubtedly crucial aspects of a narrative – are inherently present in a dramatic work. It seems unnatural to claim that a dramatic work is not narrative merely for the lack of a narrator figure commensurable to epic texts. Despite this fact, it is possible to distinguish diegetic narrative elements in dramatic texts even if there is no discernible narrator.

How did it happen that narrative and drama arrived in this tension-laden state, this narratological cul-de-sac so-to-speak? After all, “[...] some of the key concepts of narratology derive from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, whose prime example for the elucidation of plot was the Athenian stage” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 355), and in this work Aristotle “[...] devotes more space to drama than to epic” (Richardson, *Drama and Narrative* 142). Fludernik points out that the problematic nature of narrative and drama is due to modern narratology focusing on the novel and thus “[...] narratology inevitably ended up highlighting the function of the narrator as a basic element of the narrative text” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 355). Oddly, the dichotomous juxtaposition of narrative and drama even remained in place despite the advancements in other mimetic genres: “[...] while cinema was quickly brought into the fold of narrative theory, most notably in Seymour Chatman’s *Story and*

Discourse, drama has lagged behind, leaving a number of important theoretical contributions in the wings, as it were” (Richardson, *Drama and Narrative* 142). Brian Richardson delineates and compares the similarities of novels and plays such as characters, time, plot, etc. with the aim of bridging the gap between narrative theory and drama.

In his work “Coming to Terms”, Chatman takes up the topic of the alleged opposition between narrative and drama and retraces hints of that opposition to Genette and his seminal work “Narrative Discourse”. This is not to insinuate that it was Genette’s intention of creating a yawning chasm between narrative and drama, but it seems as though some of Genette’s formulations might have contributed to that situation. Genette discusses the distinction between mimesis and diegesis and has allocated mimesis to drama and diegesis to narrative. Nevertheless, Chatman explains that Genette has carefully employed his threefold terminology of *récit* and was well aware of the narrative quality of mimesis. Genette has used the term *narratif* to denote the two narrative modes as delineated by Aristotle and Plato, and *récit* to the “truly insurmountable opposition between dramatic representation and narrative” (Chatman 110). However, this implies that he has not, strictly speaking, excluded dramatic representation as a sort of narrative. What the two terms denote is on the one side the aspect of ‘story’ and on the other side the aspect of ‘discourse’ (i.e. *récit*). In other words, what epic and drama share is the component of story with a temporal sequence of events, and what they do not share is the form of presentation whereby the one is enacted on stage and the other is retold by a narrator. Furthermore, Chatman argues that

[...] it is not even clear that the *discursive* difference between plays and novels is all that profound. A short story or novel becomes more or less purely “mimetic” when it consists of nothing but the quoted dialogue of the characters. Then it is an “unmixed” case, and only the nontheatrical circumstance of its publication distinguishes it from a drama (Chatman 110-111)

He continues to explain that the difference between showing (mimesis) and telling (diegesis) is merely a matter of the former type using iconic and the latter using non-iconic signs of presentation. A novel typically uses non-iconic language to present the events, the setting and the characters of a story whereas a play employs a stage, a set, actors and action to present a story. "To say that a play or movie or cartoon is "shown" is to say that its narration is conveyed by a set of signifiers [...] which are "motivated" or "analogous": that is, they resemble their signifieds in some culturally recognizable way" (Chatman 112).

It has become clear in the discussion of narrative in this paper that a demarcation between drama and narrative cannot hold. As delineated in section 2.1. there are recent attempts in the realm of narratology to broaden the reach of the term 'narrative' to include neglected narrative texts that do not feature a perceptible narrator figure. However, even though this paper most likely purports the view that drama as a genre has been completely ignored in narrative theory and that its incorporation is a very recent innovation, quite the opposite is true. Various scholars have hinted at the narrativity of drama (and other media) parenthetically such as Roland Barthes in his 1966 essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives": "[N]arrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation" (qtd. in Herman 7). Moreover, the narrativity of drama has come under closer scrutiny in "The Theory and Analysis of Drama", the seminal book by Manfred Pfister published in 1988. This book has unquestionably propelled the study of drama forwards even though Pfister has not merged the dramatic with the narrative – as a transmedial narratology tries to do – but rather has kept the terms separate to compare dramatic texts with narrative texts. Nevertheless, he exposes elements that dramatic and narrative texts share - "Story as the basis of dramatic and narrative texts" (Pfister 196) - and reveals intersections between the two texts, which will be discussed in the next section 'narrative elements'.

3. Narrative Elements

3.1. Narrative Elements in Drama

“[...] the complete lack of mediation between the internal and external communication systems and the absence of a mediating narrative function represent an idealized norm from which dramatic texts have frequently deviated over the centuries.” (Pfister 69)

The preceding sections show that drama is not restricted to mimetic forms of storytelling only, but rather combines both mimesis and diegesis. Nünning and Sommer even state that diegetic elements are a fact that people were well aware of, but which “have either been labelled as ‘un-dramatic’ exceptions to the (mimetic) rule or else closely linked to specific rhetorical functions [...]” (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 341). Such functions included for instance the verbal presentation of events that were otherwise impossible to be visually demonstrated on stage for various reasons. Moreover, Nünning and Sommer point out that there exist many English plays that expose a “high degree of diegetic narrativity” (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 341) such as Shakespeare’s “*Othello*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *Henry V*, and *Pericles*” (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 341). Within the following lines a detailed overview of diegetic elements that can possibly appear in dramatic texts will be given.

The first elements to be mentioned are “elements of plays that display a mediational function, such as prologues and epilogues or, if one looks at the dramatic text, stage directions [...]” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 367). Prologues and epilogues were a common feature of ancient drama especially in Roman comedies in which it was usual to employ an introductory passage that provided “a lengthy summary of the ensuing play [...] a “prolepsis” or flash-forward of events to come” (Richardson, *Point of View* 196). Such features were also utilized in medieval and Renaissance plays including the morality play *Everyman*, for example.

More relevant in respect to this paper are stage directions that move beyond mere descriptions of stage layout and design, but involve a mode of diegetic storytelling that is conventionally reserved for prose writing. This technique of epic communication, as Pfister has called it, is “superordinate to the figure-perspectives” (Pfister 72) and uses references to time, “commentative elements which often cannot be completely transposed into the stage-enactment” (Pfister 72), characterizations of “the behaviour of characters in evaluative terms” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 372) and also “metanarrative remarks” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 372). Prime examples of such narrative stage directions can be found in the works of George Bernhard Shaw whose stage directions “[...] are notorious for their excessive length and unstageable detail” (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 371-372).

Another narrative element is the presence of a narratorial figure or instance, which is actually quite common especially in “non-Western drama” (Richardson, *Point of View* 196). So-called generative narrators who can set, frame and interpret scenes are to be found in the works of Brecht (“The Caucasian Chalk Circle”) or Wilder (“Our Town”) for example (see Richardson, *Point of View* 196-197). In particular the stage manager of Wilder’s play has been subject of scholarly scrutiny. Fludernik has identified that the stage manager

[...] operates much like an authorial narrator. He takes on certain functions of the Greek chorus such as plot summary, but also keeps up a running commentary on the action, including direct address to the audience with a metadramatic inflection (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 367-368).

Generative narrators as in *Travesties* by Tom Stoppard can not only comment on the action but also take part in the actual play. These narrators are called homodiegetic narrators (Fludernik, *Narrative and Drama* 368). Particularly Richardson, through his analysis of point and view and focalization in drama, has drawn attention to the problematic nature of reliability of such homodiegetic narrators. Henry Carr of Stoppard’s play *Travesties*, for example, recounts events of his past from

his memory. The stage directions highlight the fact that Carr is reciting events exclusively from his memory which is sometimes considering his age “too reliable,” as Richardson points out: “there is no way he could have remembered Joyce’s words “Deshill holles eamus” with such fidelity” (Richardson, *Point of View* 206).

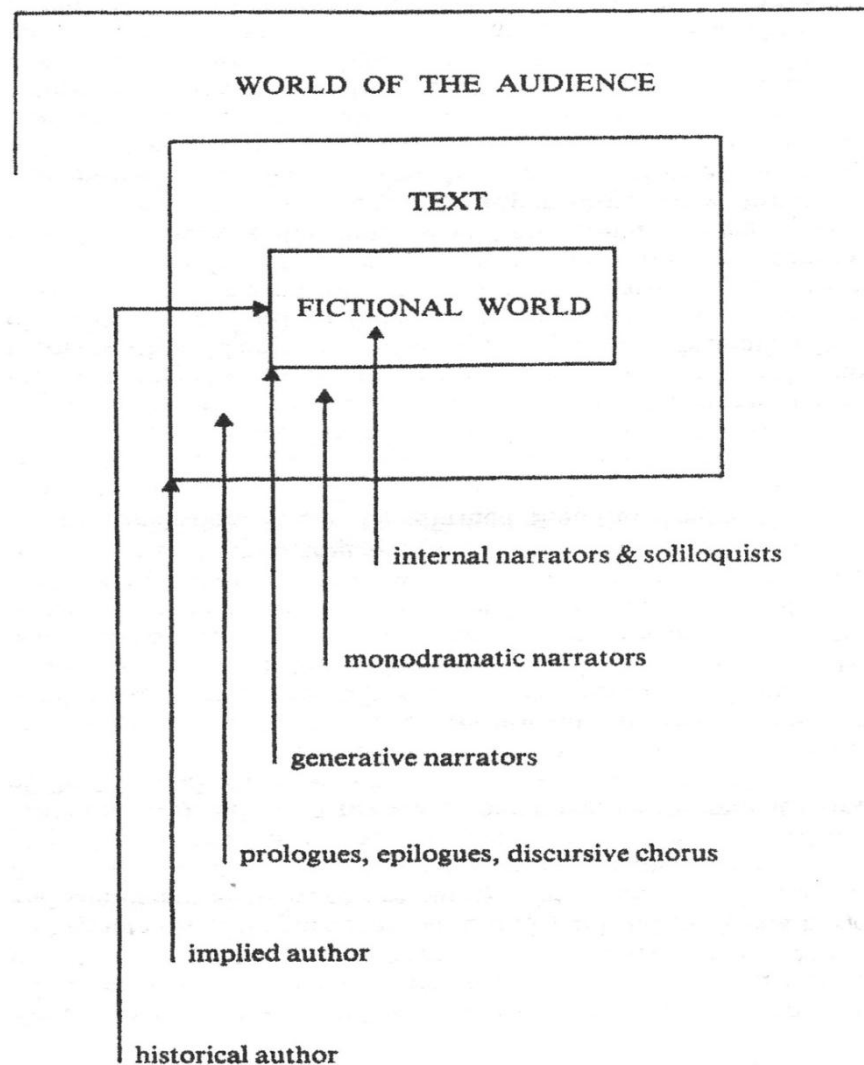


Figure 1: Narrators in analytical framework
(Richardson, *Point of View* 210)

As various forms of narrators constitute a large portion of narrative, diegetic elements, Richardson has made an effort to collect, summarize and classify the different types within an analytical framework (Figure 1; Richardson, *Point of View* 210). Not all types are equally important in this thesis, the most relevant being the generative and the monodramatic narrator. The kinds of narrators have been allocated to their relative

position on three planes of a dramatic text namely the world of the audience, the level of the text and the level of fiction. The generative narrator, thus, has been positioned by Richardson on the edge of the fictional world and the level of the text due to the fact that such a narrator inhabits the world of the characters and simultaneously through his “diegetic discourse engenders the ensuing mimetic action” (Richardson, *Point of View* 197). No less interesting is the “speech of *monodramatic narrators* [which] constitutes all or most of the play they inhabit (Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*, Beckett’s *A Piece of Monologue*). The world of the play is largely coextensive with the narration of the character” (Richardson, *Point of View* 209), hence the location lies on the textual level which incorporates the fictional world.

Lastly, unreliable narration shall be explored as it is a frequent narrative element especially in contemporary drama such as *Krapp’s Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett or *Landscape* by Harold Pinter (see Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 343). Narratorial unreliability is, however, often a concern in plays that feature only one speaker which can be called monodrama. These employ a technique traditionally associated with poetry namely the dramatic monologue. Although the monologue was a prevalent mode in Greek theatre (see Richardson, *Point of View* 204), “the monologue was suppressed in the name of a mimetically-oriented aesthetics of drama that attempted to seal off the stage’s “fourth wall” and to curtail the interaction between actors and audience” (Richardson, *Point of View* 201) during the period of naturalism. Nevertheless, diegetic narrative strategies such as the dramatic monologue were reintroduced in contemporary drama (see Richardson, *Point of View* 203) and merged with mimetic forms of storytelling. In order to summarize the narrative elements mentioned above, an enumeration of diegetic narrative elements is provided by Nünning and Sommer:

transgressions of the boundaries between diegetic levels by characters or narrators, direct audience address by a narrator character, prologue, epilogue, asides, soliloquies, and parabasis (i.e. a song performed by the classical Chorus in the Old comedy,

addressing members of the audience), choric speeches, and messenger reports in Greek drama as well as modern narrator figures such as the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938), verbal summaries of offstage action, the play within the play, *mise en abyme*, narratives embedded within dramatic action, all kinds of metanarrative comment, stage directions, choric figures and narrating characters (Nünning and Sommer, *Narrativity* 340-341)

3.2. Unreliable Narration

3.2.1. Definition

The existence of such a phenomenon as the unreliable narrator is without doubt a standard concept in literature theory. Yet, it is a narratological notion that is not without its immanent problems that lie at the foundation of this term – its definition. The unreliable narrator is a narratological concept that has been taken for granted since its introduction in Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961, but which accuracy or precision is not very high. A major problem which has long been a scholarly concern is the fact that definitions of unreliable narration rely on the definition of another literary category, the author. This means that the unreliability of a narrator can only be identified via the recognition of what the actual (or implied) author has intended to say. How can the reader reliably know what the author wanted to say if the story is told through a narrator?

Such imprecisions of definition are quite common with this term. According to Nünning the most problematic feature is exactly the aforementioned fact that most definitions relate the unreliable narrator to the implied author of a text:

The central problem of previous research concerning the phenomenon of the *unreliable narrator* lies in the fact that the available definitions invoke merely one criterion by which the

lacking credibility of the narrator can be measured: the terminologically unclear and theoretically controversial concept of the *implied author* [...] (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 13) [own translation]¹

Nevertheless, quite clear criteria for the categorization of an unreliable narrator with the help of the implied author as a benchmark have been developed. The first of five traits of an unreliable narrator is that such a figure is usually an I-narrator and the protagonist of the story. The second is that it is usually marked by a high degree of overttness. Thirdly, the act of narration is traversed by subjective comments, interpretations and reader addresses of the narrator. The fourth trait is that such narrators often appear neurotic or even lunatic in their speech, which commonly focus on one particular topic – themselves. Lastly, there is a notable discrepancy between what the unreliable narrator tells the implied reader and what the reader implicitly perceives to be the truth. The bottom line is that the narration of such a narrator typically has one basic effect, i.e. the unintentional self-revelation of these figures (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 6).

Regardless of how precise and helpful implied author-based definitions might be, according to Nünning they are restricted and produce more complexities than they eradicate. For that reason Nünning proposes to find a definition that has a different center, away from vague concepts such as the implied author. Thus, his aim is to find a reliable definition which is intersubjectively comprehensible. He argues that the starting point for such reconceptualization lies in the fact that the unreliable narrator is not just a text-immanent phenomenon but is also contingent upon an extra-textual reality, i.e. the recipient and his/her individual network of norms and values. Consequently, unreliable narration is a phenomenon – Nünning couples it with the literary concept of dramatic irony – that is distinguished by the reader with the help of textual cues.

¹ Das zentrale Problem der bisherigen Forschung zum Phänomen des *unreliable narrator* besteht darin, daß die vorliegenden Definitionen nur einen einzigen Maßstab anführen, anhand dessen sich die mangelnde Glaubwürdigkeit eines Erzählers ablesen läßt: das terminologisch unklare und theoretisch umstrittene Konzept des *implied author* [...] (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 13)

In the case of an *unreliable narrator* the dramatic irony results from a discrepancy between the moral concepts and the intentions of the narrator and the norms and the state of knowledge of the real (not an implicit) reader. Once the reader has uncovered the insufficient reliability of the narrator due to certain textual signals, the statements of the narrator obtain on the basis of this superior awareness an additional meaning that is beyond the narrator's awareness and intention (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 17) [my translation]².

A disadvantage (or advantage, depending on perspective) is that the degree of unreliability can greatly fluctuate among individuals due to the fact that every reader has his or her own idiosyncratic value-system. Therefore, where one reader might be massively disturbed by the unreliable narrator, another reader might not even notice anything unusual depending on how well the worldview of the narrator matches the reader's perspective of reality (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 25).

Greta Olson points out that the two models of the unreliable narrator as proposed by Booth and Nünning, respectively, are actually founded on the same grounds and have quite a lot in common as she effectively shows in the following diagram (Figure 2).

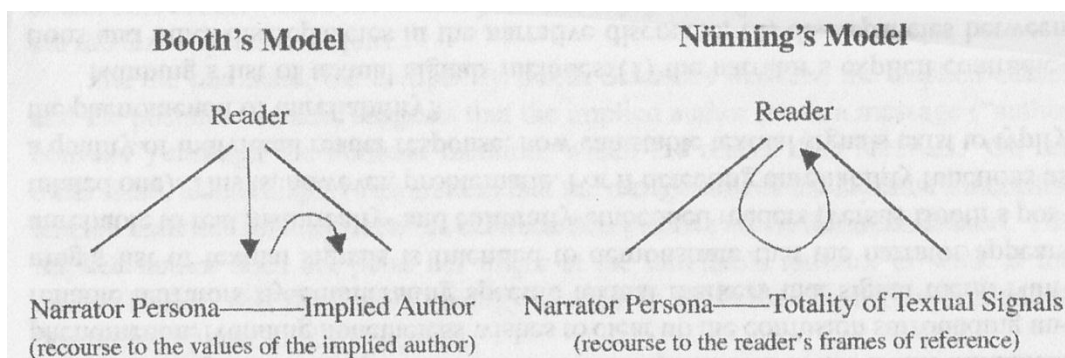


Figure 2: Booth's and Nünning's Model
(Olson 99)

² Im Falle eines *unreliable narrator* resultiert dramatische Ironie aus einer Diskrepanz zwischen den Wertvorstellungen und Absichten des Erzählers und den Normen und dem Wissenstand des realen (nicht eines impliziten) Lesers. Hat der Leser die mangelnde Zuverlässigkeit des Erzählers anhand bestimmter textueller Signale einmal durchschaut, dann erhalten aufgrund dieses Informationsvorsprungs die Aussagen des Erzählers eine diesem nicht bewußte und von ihm nicht beabsichtigte Zusatzbedeutung. (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 17)

“In both models”, Olson explains, “three points of view coexist: that of (1) a personified narrator; (2) the implied author or the fictional world created by the totality of textual signals; and (3) the reader [...]” (Olson 99). The only major difference between the two models is which referential norms are taken to evaluate the norms of the narrator. In Booth’s model the norms are a fixed and stable set that belong to the implied author and are therefore text-immanent. In contrast, Nünning outsources these norms and ascribes them to the reader, which, however, are not stable and inclined to variation. His model is built on the foundations of the theories of naturalization, which purport that “readers relate what they read to ordinary human actions, motivations, and behavioral scripts” (Olson 98).

3.2.2. Functions and Effects of Unreliable Narration

Some of the functions and effects that unreliable narration can exert have been already touched upon in the previous section because a clear distinction between individual passages is not always possible. Nevertheless, it seems profitable to filter and collect the crucial functions and effects of this narratological concept to have them ready, lucid and clear. As has already been mentioned, the term unreliable narrator stems originally from Booth, and he was also the first to understand “narrator unreliability to be a function of irony.” (Olson 94). In other words, Booth relates the concept of narratorial unreliability to dramatic irony, which denotes a state in which the audience has information that some characters in a story – in this case the narrator – are unaware of. Seymour Chatman has also integrated this function into his understanding, which he depicted in the following figure (Figure 3).

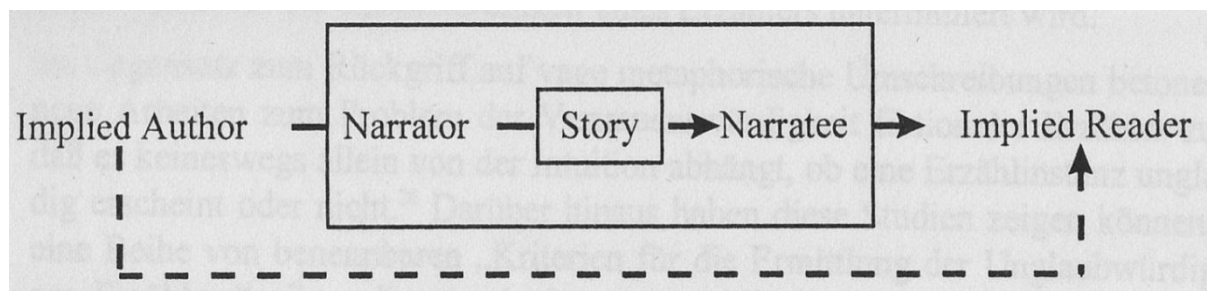


Figure 3: Chatman's secret ironic message
(Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 14)

Chatman is an advocate of the implied-author-hypothesis, so-to-speak, and claims that the implied author communicates “the secret ironic message about the narrator’s unreliability” (Chatman 1990, 151 qtd. in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 14) to the implied reader. As has been mentioned above, as soon as the reader has identified the secret ironic message, the words of the narrator will have an additional meaning for the reader and lead to the involuntary self-revelation of the narrator (Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 6).

The main function of narratorial unreliability within a literary text, however, is that it can direct the readers’ gaze. In the moment when the reader has noticed and identified an unreliable narrator, the focus is instantly shifted from the story towards the idiosyncrasies of this persona. The action and events of the story become secondary. What attract the most attention are the personality and the behavior of the unreliable narrator, as well as the deviations and anomalies from normal social norms (Allrath 68; Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 19). For the reader, the identification of narratorial unreliability can be, according to Tamar Yacobi, part of “mechanisms of integration” (Yacobi 119): “Whenever he [the reader] comes up against referential difficulties, incongruities or (self-) contradictions of these kinds, whether external or internal, the reader has at his disposal a wide variety of reconciling and integrating measures” (Yacobi 113-114). Unreliability is in Yacobi’s terms a perspectival attitude of the reader towards the text and hence can be defined “[...] as an inference that explains and eliminates tensions, incongruities,

contradictions and other infelicities the work may show by attributing them to a source of transmission" (Yacobi 119). Nünning agrees with Yacobi and states that this integrative mechanism is a technique of the reader to 'naturalize' textual inconsistencies and solve these in the most plausible way. The textual discrepancies are produced by disagreements between the textual world and external frames of reference particularly belonging to the first group (see section 4.1.3.) including moral and ethical standards. From this standpoint, Nünning argues, narratorial unreliability is not necessarily or solely a feature of the text but rather needs to be perceived as an interpretative effort on behalf of the reader. A similar conclusion is provided by Fludernik who asserts that unreliable narration should be seen

as the result of interpretative work brought to bear on the juxtaposition between the wording of the text and the (by implication incompatible) cultural or textual norms of the text as *constructed by the reader* or implied as values shared by the reader and the realistic textual world (qtd. in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 32).

3.2.3. Different Forms of Unreliable Narrators

Not all unreliable narrators are alike and may be categorized the same way. Many distinct phenomena have been collected under the banner of 'unreliable narration', but comparatively little scholarly attention has been granted to the differentiation of the different forms subsumed under the same header (cf. Nünning 6). The first attempts of a typology of narratorial unreliability stems from the original source, Wayne Booth, who introduced four terms to distinguish different degrees of reliability: "unreliable", "untrustworthy", "inconscience" and "fallible" (Olson 96). Unfortunately the terms chosen by Booth are rather vague and not clearly demarcated from each other, but nevertheless they effectively demonstrate his vision of various kinds of narrators.

I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not.

If [the narrator] is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed.

It is most often a matter of what James calls *inconscience*; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him.

Sometimes it is almost impossible to infer whether or to what degree a narrator is fallible (Booth *Rhetoric of Fiction* 158-160, qtd in Olson 96).

According to Olson, the four degrees delineated by Booth can be classified in two broader categories namely whether the unreliability stems from a deviance from the text's (i.e. in Booth's case the implied author's) inherent norms or whether the narrator misconceives him- or herself or the fictional world. "The first terms ['unreliable' and 'untrustworthy'] concern the narrator's qualities as a person and the second her ability to perceive and report accurately" (Olson 96).

A different approach to the classification of different types of unreliable narrators comes from Chatman, who hinges his typology not on norms or values inherent in the text but on the narrator's character. Using this approach, Chatman has produced a heterogeneous list of various famous narrators who all exhibit unreliability but do so for diverse reasons:

The narrator's unreliability may stem from cupidity (Jason Compson), cretinism (Benjy), gullibility (Dowling [sic! John Dowell], the narrator of *The Good Soldier*), psychological and moral obtuseness (Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle"), perplexity and lack of information (Marlow in *Lord Jim*), innocence (Huck Finn), or a whole host of other causes, including some 'baffling mixtures' (Chatman 1978 qtd in Nünning 7).

In his study *Living to Tell About It* James Phelan has provided a relatively recent attempt of producing a taxonomy of unreliable narrators. His model of unreliability stands on the pillars of Booth but extends beyond "the axes of events and of values: a character narrator is "unreliable"

when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account the implied author would offer” (Phelan 49). Furthermore, he also addresses the issue of implementation of different vague terms by Booth, and instead suggests to use only one term in order to avoid semantic overlaps: “Consequently, I prefer to label all deviations with the single term “unreliable” and then differentiate among kinds of unreliability rather than creating separate terms for different deviations” (Phelan 50).

Commencing from the acknowledgement that narrators “perform three main roles – reporting, interpreting, and evaluating” (Phelan 50), Phelan allocates distinct manifestations of narratorial unreliability on three axes:

unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of characters, facts, and events; unreliable reading (or interpreting) occurs along the axis of knowledge and perception; and unreliable regarding (or evaluating) occurs along the axis of ethics and evaluation. (Phelan 50)

Besides the characteristics of the narrator, Phelan also adds the role of the audience to his classification, which can perform two actions when encountering unreliability in a narrator. The audience can either “reject those words [of the narrator] and, if possible, reconstruct a more satisfactory account” (Phelan 50) or it can “accept what the narrator says but then supplement the account” (Phelan 51). In combination with the three roles of the narrator, Phelan thus constructs a typology of “six kinds of unreliability: misreporting, misreading, misevaluating – or [...] misregarding – and underreporting, underreading, and underregarding” (Phelan 51). He exemplifies these six kinds with the help of the narrator, the butler Stevens, of the novel *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. However, he points out several times that all six kinds are able to appear in the course of the narration of one unreliable narrator and that it is also possible that some types are present in combination with one or more other types of unreliability. Phelan explains, for example, that “[m]isreporting involves unreliability at least on the axis characters, facts,

and events. I say “at least” here because misreporting is typically a consequence of the narrator’s lack of knowledge or mistaken values, and, consequently, it almost always occurs with misreading or misevaluating” (Phelan 51). Concerning the difference between the two broader categories, the “contrast between the ‘mis-‘ category and the ‘under-‘ category is basically a contrast between being wrong and being insufficient” (Shen 7).

3.2.4. Signs and Signals of Unreliable Narration

Reliably identifying an unreliable narrator is one of the aims that narratologists have sought to solve via defining the term and extracting signs and clues that indicate the unreliability of a narrator. The strategies vary depending on the scholar and his or her model of unreliability. Therefore, Chatman solves the problem of identifying an unreliable narrator by proposing “reading out [...]’ between the lines” (Allrath 59) in order to distill the secret ironic message of the implied author from the text. Not only is this approach problematic because it is built on the shaky pillars of the implied author, but in addition it does not provide any hints for the reader which clues between the lines qualify as indicators. Narratologist Rimmon-Kenan is here a little more precise although she, too, relies on the implied author:

“[...] when the facts contradict the narrator’s views [...]; when the outcome of the action proves the narrator wrong [...]; when the views of other characters consistently clash with the narrator’s [...]; and when the narrator’s language contains internal contradictions, double edged images, and the like.” (qtd. in Allrath 60)

Here, the reader has four rudimentary indicators that can prove a narrator to be unreliable. Nevertheless, the tradition of founding the unreliable narrator on the precarious implied author seems outdated in the light that there have been attempts in the narratological field to dissociate the unreliable narrator from the implied author. Pioneer work has been undertaken by Ansgar Nünning, who has proposed an extensive list of

textual signs and signals that help to identify unreliable narration which has been translated into English by Olson:

(1) the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse; (2) discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions; (3) divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' descriptions of her; (4) contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself; (5) contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the story and discourse; (6) other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals; (7) multiperspectival arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events; (8) an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; (9) an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy; (10) syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; (11) explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability; (12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations; (13) a confessed or situation-related prejudice; (14) paratextual signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces (Olson 97-98; see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28).

Nünning distinguishes two categories of signs in his cognitive theory of unreliable narration. On the one hand, textual signals and, on the other, non-textual signals that have an external frame of reference. The list above is composed of fourteen different textual signals which, according to Nünning, may indicate unreliable narration without reference to phenomena outside of the text. These thematic and formal criteria of a work allow for judgments of the narrator's credibility and reliability. External frames of reference, on the other side, chiefly include clues of unreliable narration resulting from anomalies between the norms and values of the fictional world presented in the work and the norms and values that the recipient carries to the text. Nünning explains that such external frames of reference should be included in the discussion of unreliability; however, one should not operate solely on the basis of a generally approved societal model of reality. Rather, several such frames,

which Nünning has taken from models of frame theory, can be distinguished and categorized under two main groups. The first group encompasses those extra textual frames that are prevalent in a society. The hypothesis underlying frames that belong to the first group is that the world of the text is principally considered to be congruent with that of the real world. Consequently, any deviations from the prevailing norms and value system of the societal frame of reference that occur due to a narrator's statements, utterances or commentaries will result in a loss of credibility of the narrator (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 29). In order to systematize the analysis of unreliability according to such frames of reference, Nünning identified five possible marks where deviations can occur:

- general knowledge of the world;
 - the respective historical model of reality as part of a culture;
 - explicit or implicit theories of personality as well as socially approved notions of psychological normalcy and coherence;
 - moral and ethical standards which holistically constitute the prevalent norms and value system of a society in their entirety;
 - the individual norms and value system and perspective of a recipient
- (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30) [my translation]

The second group of extra textual frames of reference relates to a reader's specific knowledge of literary conventions and a reader's experience with literary texts. Similarly as for the first group, Nünning composed a list of five frames of reference that in combination comprise the literary competence of a recipient:

- general literary conventions;
 - conventions associated with certain genres;
 - intertextuality, i.e. references to specific pretexts;
 - stereotypical models of literary characters;
 - the norms and value system of the respective text inferred and constructed by the reader;
- (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30) [my translation]

However, both textual signals as well as external frames of reference can only aid in the process of pinpointing unreliable narration but do not

suffice to qualify the level of unreliability of a narrator (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-29).

3.3. Monodrama and Dramatic Monologue

A narrative element that is frequently used in drama and particularly in the plays of Neil LaBute is monodramatic speech. Neil LaBute's plays not only expose longer passages that digress from a dialogic pattern of communication, but often feature only one speaker. A second person may be present but would function merely as an auditor. Such plays can be called monodramas, but there are other forms of integrating the dramatic monologue. Before going into detail about the different ways that LaBute has incorporated and utilized dramatic monologues, this literary term shall first be defined.

3.3.1. The Dramatic Monologue

In the Victorian period a new form of poetic monologue began to emerge, which stood separate from usual forms of poetry – the dramatic monologue. However, this term “was not in widespread use until late in the nineteenth century” (Byron 2) and it was definitely “not in use during the period when the great Victorian dramatic monologues were being written” (Culler 366) by Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson or Matthew Arnold. Furthermore, a clear definition of the term ‘dramatic monologue’ was not easily found. This is mainly due to the fact that literary scholars struggle with the exact demarcation of monological versus dialogical speech. Pfister delineates this problem concisely stating that “[t]he only thing that the various standard definitions of monologue actually have in common is the fact that they define it as the opposite of dialogue [...]” (Pfister 126). Nonetheless, there exist two criteria that delimit the three terms ‘monologue’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘soliloquy’. The first criterion is situational and is concerned with the speaker’s level of solitude. The second criterion refers to structural aspects, namely “the

length and degree of autonomy of a particular speech" (Pfister 127).
Hence,

... [a] monologue is distinguished from one side of a dialogue by its length and relative completeness, and from the soliloquy ... by the fact that it is addressed to someone ... A soliloquy is spoken by one person that is alone or acts as though he were alone. It is a kind of talking to oneself, not intended to affect others (Pfister 127).

The definition of the term 'dramatic monologue' gained momentum in the 20th century when Ina Beth Sessions published her article "The Dramatic Monologue" in 1947, which proposed several types of dramatic monologues. Basically, a dramatic monologue features a single person speaking about certain events of his or her life, clearly addressing one or more persons with the speech (see Culler 366). The latter point sets this type of monologue apart from other forms, such as the soliloquy, and justifies the adjective 'dramatic' in the terminology although A. Dwight Culler points out that 'dramatic' also had another meaning for Browning and Tennyson: "[It] is related to their sensitivity about their private lives and their insistence that they are not speaking in their own persona" (Culler 366) as people often tended to directly relate the poem's story to the poet's life. As mentioned above, Sessions identified several types of dramatic monologue: one perfect form and several "'sub-classifications', including the Imperfect, the Formal and the Approximate dramatic monologue" (Byron 10). According to Sessions, the Perfect dramatic monologue exhibits all seven, possible characteristics namely "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present" (qtd. in Byron 8). The paradigmatic example that she lists for the Perfect dramatic monologue is "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning.

Other definitions deviate from this position and state that although "many of Browning's most famous monologues [...] meet these criteria, many others fail to satisfy them all simultaneously" (Howe 3). In particular, in comparison with works by other authors such as Tennyson or T.S. Eliot, it

becomes apparent that not all criteria found in the prototypical dramatic monologues by Browning are prevalent in other works and, thus, not all are essential for the constitution of the dramatic monologue as such. According to Howe there is only one criterion which can be found in a wide range of works: “[the] identification of the speaker as someone other than the poet, whether a mythical figure like Ulysses and Tithonus, a historical one like Marvail, or a fictional speaker such as Prufrock or the soldier of “Locksley Hall” (Howe 3). In consequence, other attempts of definitions have been launched, for instance, by Robert Langbaum, who avoided rigid structuralist lists of characteristics and instead focused on the “way [sic] of meaning,” (Howe 3-4) which he sees as predicated upon the reader’s sympathy with the poem’s speaker and his experience” (Howe 3-4). This, however, as Howe points out, cannot solely function as a defining trait of the dramatic monologue since “a tendency to sympathize with a first-person speaker is characteristic of any genre” (Howe 4).

In the realm of the lyric, the dramatic monologue is contrasted to the lyric poem. Specifically the speaker, the ‘I’ of the dramatic monologue, differs from the lyrical ‘I’ as it always represents someone else, someone different to the poet who is more or less clearly identified as being someone specific. Furthermore, the speech of a dramatic monologue can be accurately ascribed to a particular persona. In contrast, “[...] the ‘I’ of [...] a lyric does not necessarily, or not absolutely, represent the poet himself, it also does not represent anyone else, either” (Howe 6). With that the speaker found in a dramatic monologue acquires a certain distance both from the poet as well as from the reader and the otherness of the speaker becomes material, so-to-speak (see Howe 7). The fact that the poem’s words, as in “My Last Duchess”, can be clearly attributed to a speaker makes a “linguistic anomaly” (Howe 9) possible that can be taken as a key characteristic of the dramatic monologue:

[...] if we know the Duke of Ferrara is speaking, then we accept that the words of the poem are his; ... although this may not be completely true. For as we listen to the Duke telling us his story as

he sees it, we cannot remain unaware of the poet's presence in the poem, shaping a somewhat different version of the story (Howe 8).

Similar observations have been made by Loy D. Martin in his book on Browning's dramatic monologues. He speaks of two different voices – that of the duke and that of his creator (i.e. the poet) – who “interpret life differently” (Martin 109). Howe calls this effect the “double voice of the dramatic monologue” (Howe 8) and this effect provides the central ground for analysis of such poems. It is related to what has been discussed in section 4 of this paper namely unreliable narration.

What characterizes the dramatic monologue in addition is “its characteristic narrative element” (Howe 10), which stands in contrast to the ideal, apostrophic quality of lyrical poetry. This quality positions the dramatic monologue closer to the novel as both genres share the development of events and the unfolding of a story. “Like the protagonists of a novel, Browning's personae have a past, and as in a novel we attend to the gradual unfolding of their story [...], or of a particularly significant incident in their lives” (Howe 10). This implies that aspects of time, space and setting often play a significant role in dramatic monologues and that the style of language or verse differs greatly from that of regular poetry. So, for example, in “My Last Duchess”, Howe explains, “[a]lthough the Duke of Ferrara speaks in rhymed couplets, the syntactic line rarely corresponds to the verse line, so that the “poetic” level of language is played down and the impression conveyed is almost one of natural speech” (Howe 11). Consolidating this impression of natural speech is the direction of the Duke's speech. It is not directed to himself or addressed in apostrophe but is discernibly directed to an auditor, which grants this genre a mimetic element akin to drama. The dramatic monologue can thus be often seen – although as Howe acknowledges there exist examples that do not exhibit this feature – as one half of a dialogue. This fact is also recognized and reinforced by Martin, who asserts that “[a]ll dramatic monologues at least fantasize a listener, and

this is chiefly what differentiates them from lyrics or extracted soliloquies” (Martin 133).

3.3.2. Monodrama

It is not fully clear in what relation the term ‘monodrama’ stands to ‘dramatic monologue’. Is it a synonym or rather a separate form of art? A. Dwight Culler seeks to differentiate the two terms in his article “Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue” and commences with the acknowledgment that ‘monodrama’ is a term that is not “particularly well known to students of English literature” (Culler 369). He states that it was in fairly regular use during the nineteenth century designating poems which are nowadays categorized under the banner of the dramatic monologue, however the best known example is Tennyson’s “Maud” which in its sub-title is called “A Monodrama” (see Culler 369). In his article, Culler sets out to define this term ‘monodrama’ in order to not only learn more about the literary history of the nineteenth century, but also about the nature of the dramatic monologue.

Culler states that the invention of the monodrama can be traced back and associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his 1762 work entitled “Pygmalion”, which combines both musical and dramatic elements. “Pygmalion” is a dramatic piece that focuses on the exposition of various states of passion which was expressed through only one actor whose speech alternates with episodes of music. The idea of Rousseau was that music and language should rather be juxtaposed than merged. “In this way, the actor would not have to sacrifice a natural style of acting in order to accommodate himself to the music, neither would music be hindered in its flights by the conceptual and phonetic properties of language” (Culler 370). In consequence, the monodrama became a popular art form during the second half of the 18th century inspired by the model of “Pygmalion” which spread across Europe. It was taken up by Goethe and supposedly even by Mozart, according to Culler, however, “the best and most famous

of the German monodramas" (Culler 371) was "Ariadne auf Naxos", which was written by Johann Christian Brandes and Georg Benda, who supplied the musical accompaniment. This work was actually a "Duo Drama" by Benda as it "actually consists of two successive monologues, the first by Theseus before the sleeping Ariadne, lamenting that he must leave her; the second and longer by Ariadne, when she awakens and finds her lover gone" (Culler 371). In general, the style of the monodrama was only a brief episode in literary history which lasted according to Culler not longer than a quarter of a century and was over around 1814. Nonetheless, it influenced other works on the continent and so in many plays a certain monodramatic technique can be found which is apparent through a combination of music and declamation. It should be pointed out as well that apparently the term 'monodrama' gave way and was replaced in favor of the word 'melodrama' "which is, of course, literally, "musical drama" (Culler 372).

At the end of the 18th century, around 1790, the monodrama was introduced to England through German literature by "William Taylor of Norwich, his friend Dr. Frank Sayers, and Robert Southey" (Culler 375) who had an interest in displaying German literature in England where it was hardly known. Taylor and Sayers have written, according to the model of the German monodrama, "Pandora" and "Oswald". "*Pandora*, then, was apparently the first monodrama to be written in English, and *Oswald* the first to be published" (Culler 376). The genre was extended by the writer Matthew Gregory Lewis, whose works seem to have served as an inspiration for Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Maud", which Tennyson called a monodrama. However, "Maud" significantly differs from the genre 'monodrama'. Culler explains that "[i]t is obvious that it is not a direct imitation of them for it is far longer and more complex, it has a larger narrative element, and, of course, it is not set to music" (Culler 379). Nevertheless this work of Tennyson exhibits a distinguishing feature of the monodrama:

[...] the sequence of the passions in *Maud* follows a common monodramatic formula. Beginning in morbidity and bitterness, it rises through the alternating moods of dark suspicion and growing love to the exaltation and even exhilaration of the garden scene. It then plunges down through the remembered violence of the duel into the madness of Part II and reemerges with the hero calm but shattered in Part III (Culler 379).

Briefly speaking, “Maud” displays the same emphasis of varying levels of mood and passion that Rousseau’s “Pygmalion” was already known for.

In the next step, Culler intends to disclose and unveil the impact of monodrama on the dramatic monologue. The monodrama, as has been discussed above, is not only an attempt to express the states of human emotion and the “motions of the soul” (Culler 381) but moreover is an endeavor “[...] to gain access to this inner world of psychic motion and [...] to represent it externally” (Culler 381). Culler compares “Maud” with Tennyson’s dramatic monologue “Locksley Hall”, as the two share similarities in, for example, theme and form. “The poem does not have the metrical variety of *Maud*, and it is retrospective rather than being enacted in a continuous present. But the range and variety of mood, as arising out of this inner conflict, are nearly as great” (Culler 380). One of the essential differences between the monodrama and the dramatic monologue is, however, the emphasis and individuation of the single speaker. Whereas in the monodrama the speaker is typically not concretely characterized, the dramatic monologue stresses this aspect particularly. “The passions explored in the monodrama are universal and abstract; those in the dramatic monologue are so connected with the particular acts and circumstances of an individual, with his deeds and situation, that we can hardly avoid partly sympathizing with and partly judging him” (Culler 382).

In conclusion, Culler tries to highlight the difference of the two genres with a few thoughts on the prototypical, representative poem of the dramatic monologue – Browning’s “My Last Duchess”.

[I]f Browning had written “My Last Duchess” as a monodrama, it would have been spoken not by the Duke but by the Duchess, presumably in the moments just before her death in the prison in which she had been incarcerated. She would have begun with a low moan at her wretched state, would have remembered how her husband had grown increasingly tyrannical, would have thought fondly of the day when a youth of the court brought her a bough of cherries from the orchard, would have wept at the blow or reprimand he received, would have recalled with pleasure the day she sat for her portrait and how Fra Pandolph in his courtesy called up a spot of joy upon her cheeks – but there is no need to proceed to the end. The point of the poem would have been the varied passions of the lady as modulated by music and her varied language. But for this Browning substitutes a painting in which the Duke has fixed her in a single moment. The Duke stops time, puts an end to motion, and fixes her in the stasis of a work of art. In so doing he fixes himself, in a posture of cold pride and aesthetic detachment, and he also fixes the envoy. His eye is fixed upon the spot of joy and his ear upon the cold intonation of pride, and he must make his choice between them. (Culler 383)

3.4. Framing and Frame Stories

The framing of stories is a crucial notion in literary theory which has already to a certain extent been implied in the discussions above. Numerous famous works exist on the literary landscape that employ and use framings in various ways. A particularly prominent example of frame stories is, for example, *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, which features multiple narratives embedded in the larger structure of a pilgrimage.

According to Werner Wolf “‘frames’ of frame stories designate concrete parts of a text” and they are “integral parts of the respective verbal representations which are located on a logically higher (diegetic) level” (Wolf 180). The literary term ‘frame’ stands in a metaphorical relationship to the frame of a picture, both of which have the common traits of a frame that provide an outside border and one on the inside. However, whereas literary frames are a part of the whole, picture frames seldom “partake in pictorial representation of the framed picture” (Wolf 180). Nevertheless, in

both cases the frame serves the crucial function of bordering and thus influencing the recipient's perception of the framed artifact. Wolf defines the framing of narrative stories as follows:

“[...] – at least with reference to prototypical cases such as Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (written c. 1380) or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) - as distinct parts (and therefore ‘overt framings’) of fictitious (written) verbal stories, namely intradiegetic (fragments of) narratives that embed, by means of one or several secondary narrator(s) or narrator-character(s), one or more hypodiegetic text(s). These embedded texts are usually also narratives and constitute the centre or dominant part of the frame story as a whole, while the framing only forms its border” (Wolf 181).

Wolf adds that there exist exceptions to the rule and that not every framing forms merely the border while the embedded narrative is the main focus. Furthermore, while it is typically the intradiegetic portions of the main text that are part of the framing and the framed, Wolf acknowledges that it is possible that also extradiegetic constituents such as narratorial comments can share affinities with framings (Wolf 6–7). Nevertheless, the aforementioned definition can be attributed to the majority of frame stories. Per definition such a frame story “contains at least one *mise en abyme* of storytelling” (Wolf 181). In literary terms a *mise en abyme* is a reproduction of the story on a smaller scale within the story. ‘*Mise en abyme*’ is French for ‘to put into abyss’ or ‘to put into infinity’. It is a term that stems originally from heraldry where it denoted the placing of a coat of arms within a larger coat of arms. This could, in theory, be repeated *ad infinitum* (Cohn and Gleich 108). Analogous, this effect can be found in literature whenever an instance of storytelling is reproduced within another instance of storytelling – which can be repeated infinitely. Unlike to heraldry or paintings (e.g. a picture containing a smaller version of itself that contains a smaller version itself etc.) the infinite repeat is only theoretically possible, but in reality impossible and can merely be suggested (Cohn and Gleich 109).

Wolf identifies four criteria for categorizing various forms of frame stories:

- a) the nature of the difference between framing and framed [...],
- b) the number of embedded (and hence framing) levels [...],
- c) the number of parallel embedded texts and of narrator-characters responsible for these texts [...]
- d) the occurrence and position of the framing parts [...] (Wolf 185)

In detail the first criterion (a) alludes to the fact that, as already mentioned beforehand, a frame story must at least feature one *mise en abyme*, which in turn means that “[f]rame stories must possess at least two hierarchically (‘vertically’) different levels” (Wolf 185), which can be either narratological or ontological. The narratological criterion “refers to the distinction between diegetic and hypodiegetic [...] levels” (Wolf 185–186) and the ontological “refers to the difference between [represented] reality and fiction [as in dream narratives] (sic Wolf 186). The second criterion (b) denotes the fact that there can either be only a single level of embedded narratives or “**multiple** embeddings with **recursive** framings” (Wolf 186). The case of multiple vertically embedded stories can lead to the production of a ‘Chinese-box structure’ “where recursive embeddings could in theory go on for ever (producing endless *mises en abyme*) but are, of course, in reality limited” (Wolf 186). Criterion (c) can be subdivided into ‘one-story framings’ and ‘plural-stories framings’. An example of a frame story that exhibits a multitude of horizontally embedded stories presented even by a multitude of narrators is *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer. Lastly, criterion (d) denotes the possibility that the framing of a story can either be complete or partial. The former case thus exhibits “initial and terminal” framing parts as in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The latter case can yet again be partitioned into missing terminal frame or missing opening frame. Particularly the last instance can have a “startling, disorientating or metatextual effect” as “[...] it is only **after** the embedded text has come to an end that the reader notices that what he or she may have taken for fictional ‘reality’ or diegetic story is actually an embedded, hypodiegetic text” (Wolf 188).

Concomitant with the large number of different forms of frame stories, just as many distinctive functions can be identified. Enumerated below are the functions of frame stories that Wolf has dealt with. Each of these functions may appear on its own or in combination with other functions:

- (1) “supplementing a basic deficiency” (Wolf 188)
- (2) “to enhance suspense” (Wolf 191)
- (3) “to implicitly authenticate the embedded stories” (Wolf 191)
- (4) “to create aesthetic coherence” (Wolf 197)
- (5) “the possibility of defamiliarizing the usual type of framing structures” (Wolf 200)

According to Wolf, “written narratives lack [...] a communicative situation” (Wolf 188) that is known from the era of oral storytelling. In this way framing functions as a surrogate for the communicative context that oral storytelling naturally featured. In its highest manifestation, this compensation can create narratorial illusionism which “[...] is particularly frequent in simulations of oral storytelling. Such narratorial illusion permits the recipient to imagine him- or herself being present in a storytelling (or storyreading) situation” (Wolf 189). Such an aesthetic illusion influences the reader’s perception of the story and can thus contribute to the arc of suspense. “This is done by following the strategy of announcement and delay: the framing announces something terrible or enigmatic [...], while it denies its explanation and postpones it to an often much later stage in the embedded story” (Wolf 191).

The authentication of embedded stories is an important function that is typically realized through the pretension that the embedded frame tale relies on true incidents. Customarily in the introduction the reader is confronted with, for example, a manuscript which has been supposedly discovered. Such a technique not only serves the purpose to validate the embedded story or to raise the interest and the involvement of the readers, but also “establishes a bridge between the everyday experience of the readers and the fantastic hypodiegetic stories” (Wolf 192). This

function is in some respect related to the creation of aesthetic coherence, which a framing can display holistically. One way to achieve this effect “[...] is to use the level of *histoire* of the framing in order to create a plausible situation which enable the embedding of multiple parallel stories” (Wolf 197) as in *The Arabian Nights* or *The Canterbury Tales*. Another way to produce aesthetic closure via framing lies on the thematic level which, in turn, is related to *mise en abyme*. The same underlying themes can be inserted both in the framing as well as in the main embedded narrative. This happens for instance in the novel by Mary Shelley:

[...] in *Frankenstein* remarkable thematic and normative parallels emerge between the author of the framing letters, Captain Walton, with his ruthless curiosity and urge to detect the northern passage at all costs, and Frankenstein, the teller of an embedded tale that testifies to a no less ruthless will to detect something regardless of (moral) costs. (Wolf 198)

Finally, the last function is the defamiliarization of “the usual type of framing structures” (Wolf 200). This function is associated with what is in literary theory known as ‘*metalepsis*’, which makes impossibilities possible such as transgressions between boundaries. In this case the transgressions “take place between framing border and framed text” (Wolf 200). As an example Wolf lists *Die Unendliche Geschichte* by Michael Ende “where the principal character of the framing, a little boy reading a fairy tale book, is suddenly able to enter the world of this fairy tale not only metaphorically [...] but in person” (Wolf 200–201).

4. Analysis of the Plays

4.1. Narrative Elements in LaBute

Before moving to the analyses of selected plays by Neil LaBute, a few explanatory words on the structure of this thesis shall be provided. In the upcoming sections the selected plays will be investigated in sequence. In favor of coherence and readability, the plays were ordered according to publication date and, in the case of *autobahn* and *Wrecks*, chronological sequence within the play collection. Nevertheless, an overview of narrative elements pursuant to appearances in the selected plays shall not be omitted wherefore the following table has been produced.

Dramatic Monologue Monodrama	<i>autobahn. a short-play cycle:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funny • all apologies • long division • autobahn <i>Wrecks and other plays:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrecks • Union Square • Love at Twenty • Stand-Up • Falling in Like Reasons to be Pretty
Unreliable Narration	This Is How It Goes Wrecks Union Square Stand-Up
Framing Play-within-the- Play Mise en Abyme	This Is How It Goes Stand-Up

Elements with a mediational function: stage directions that defy mere descriptions	This Is How It Goes
Direct Audience Address	This Is How It Goes Wrecks Love at Twenty (Stand-Up) Falling in Like Reasons to be Pretty

Table 4: Plays by LaBute according to narrative elements

4.2. This Is How It Goes (2005)

This Is How It Goes features three characters: Man, Woman (later it is disclosed that she is called Belinda) and Cody Phipps. In the course of the play it is revealed that Cody and Belinda are an unhappily married, interracial couple. She is depressed about the way the marriage has turned out, for which she has fought for in the past. Cody is a successful, athletic entrepreneur who is used to winning and used to getting what he wants. The Man returns to the town where he grew up after having lost or given up (this remains elusive in the play) his job as a lawyer. He accidentally meets – or so it is told – a girl with whom he went to high school more than a decade ago and whom he was enamored with.

The first narrator

There are a couple of aspects that make this play very remarkable and distinct in comparison to ‘standard’ dramatic works. LaBute himself has

provided a concise summary of these in the preface: “[...] the shifting sands of a narrator’s voice, the repetition of scenes from different perspectives, [and] a set of stage directions that has more asides than a Borsht Belt comedian” (*This is how it goes*, ix). In a way, LaBute prepares the reader for what he will encounter in the subsequent play and he also gives away the narrator’s unreliability when he writes “I myself am as unreliable as my own narrator [...]” (ix). This is, of course, the most interesting feature: the unreliable narrator simply named ‘Man’. The Man serves a double function in this play. On the one side he is part of the story and on the other side he is the narrator of the events. In Genettian terms the Man is a homodiegetic narrator, i.e. a narrator who is part of the story. A narrator in a dramatic play is something that can be classified as a narrative element as theoretically the drama’s mimetic nature does not permit the inclusion of a diegetic narrator, which is usually associated with and restricted to prose.

At the beginning of the play the Man is alone, casually commencing to tell a story that he experienced. He is directly addressing the reader/audience and hence constantly breaking the fourth wall. In the course of his narration, the Man accidentally omits facts which he eventually mentions later as on page 4 when he interrupts the first encounter with the Woman and says, “Just one other thing... I know her already. From before. Like, before *now*. From school. Okay, good. I just wanted you to know” (4). This complements the informal impression of the narration, which resembles common face-to-face conversations in real life. In addition, it seems as though that the Man is intentionally withholding information at the beginning: “What you need to know for now, I mean *right* at this moment, is that there was a girl.” (3) Further puzzling utterances that signify the Man’s conscious, yet indeterminate control of the story follow immediately:

MAN. Huh. I think I’m gonna go talk to her, because... well, girls are nice. Basically. And that would be enough, but I need to, talk with her, I mean. To get this started. Or keep it going... or whatever. You know what I’m saying! Sort of. And which is

okay. because / only sort of know, too, at this point. (Beat.)
Geez, I think I might end up being an unreliable narrator... (3)

The first decisive indicator for the narrator's doubtful credibility is that the Man himself uses the term 'unreliable narrator', instantly changing the reader's perspective. He uses the term deliberately. This is what Nünning has classified as indicator number "(12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations" (Olson 97-98; see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28). Moreover, the Man contradicts himself, thereby his intentions of talking to the Woman are put into question. First he wants the reader to believe that this is a casual encounter, but then, in a slip of the tongue discloses that he *needs* to talk to her to get this started or to keep it going. Moreover, he accidentally reveals the immoral deal with Cody. Later in the play another faux-pas happens to this narrator:

MAN. Now, I'm not going to be in this next bit, I mean, I will in *spirit* or whatever, because I'll be talked about, things like that, but, I won't actually be there. [...] Now, like I said, I wasn't there, so I didn't see it [...] (32)

With these words the Man is implying that he knows parts of the story that he cannot possibly know, because he was not physically there when the upcoming scene occurred. So, in other words, the narrator claims omniscience that is normally strictly reserved to heterodiegetic narrators, who are not part of the story. However, what follows is a brutal scene in which Belinda and Cody engage in a quarrel that provides enough ground for Cody to beat up his wife unseen for the audience behind the couch. The incident ends with an abrupt interruption of the narrator, who immediately amends the scene by admitting that "maybe it wasn't *exactly* like that" (37) and promptly provides an alternative version which allegedly Belinda described to him, whose version he does not fully believe and approve of. In this alternative scene, Cody appears as the loving husband, caressing his wife and her injury creating a comfortable atmosphere, which, however, quickly dissipates and the married couple

engages in a quarrel over Cody's work. She suspects him of having committed adultery, because his work schedule has extended in recent times. To the reader and the audience it becomes clear that Cody and Belinda have problems with their marriage and neither of them is satisfied with the way it has developed over the years. At the end of this scene, the Man takes over his narrating function again and repeats that he does not know every detail of the story, but is only sure that "those two have got something going on" (45).

Undoubtedly the double version of one incident is perplexing especially because there is only one channel of information available (i.e. the narrator), but the scene that "[...] *definitely* puts a wrinkle in things" (64) starts on page 65 and features Cody and the Man meeting up at a nature reserve and finalizing their dubious deal.

MAN. Cody, please. Be honest here. You asked me to take your wife – have her in *trade* –

CODY. You wanted to! We got to talking ... I mean, we were going on about that Jackie Robinson card and, and then *you* brought up Belinda.

MAN. Cody, I was *there*, remember? Right there next to you and you asked me flat out.

CODY. Yeah, but I knew you liked her ... back in school, I'm saying. I came over to you and ...

MAN. No, *I* came up to you ... saw you and made the connection, and like, *three* beers later ... you dish up this proposition. A *whopper* of a proposition...

CODY. I'd just been thinking and you did always like her.

MAN. So, you were just being nice, then? Gonna let me have her as a *gift*?

CODY. No, no, we made a *deal* and now I'm hearing a whole different...

MAN. You gave me your wife. *Asked* me to take her. Now, either you're Henry Youngman or there's something fishy going on!...(Beat.) I'm only saying this to help remind you – do not forget the truth here. The truth is always of some importance. (Smiles.) Just a little tip for you there, buddy ...

Cody stares at him, not sure how he knows all this. Suddenly, the Man seems a lot smarter than he's come off during the rest of the proceedings. (67)

After this scene the story that the narrator has been telling shifts in meaning. In retrospect, the Man's behavior in his preceding narration is more than questionable. He introduced the scene with the words "Can't believe I forgot to mention this!" (64), but this is not the sort of information one accidentally forgets to mention. Furthermore, the behavior of the two characters appears to be different in comparison to the preceding part of the play. Cody seems to be weaker, while the Man has become stronger. This is reflected twice in the play. The first time in the secondary text on page 67 and the second time the Man himself becomes self-conscious about a scene he just narrated: "Also, I think maybe I came off a little too, I dunno, *something*, in that last bit. Not like myself. (*Laughs.*)" (75). His laugh at the end of this sentence is almost like a confession or a proof that he has meddled with the truth. The end of the story is slightly different to the rest of the play. The Man's narration of events has arrived in the present. In the last scene, in which all three characters appear simultaneously, the Man is *more* part and has less control over the course of the events than indicated before, especially through his last monologue on page 80-82. Cody starts to leave this last encounter between his ex-wife and the Man but not without asking "... But if I ever wanna trade back, you'll let me right? Hmm?" (79). This comes as a surprise remark – something that Belinda was not intended to hear – and the Man is in a dilemma as he tells the reader.

The Man glances back at her, then turns pleadingly to us for advice.

MAN. I'm serious, gimme some help here. I always imagined a day like this, one where she stumbles onto an airline ticket or a scribbled note on a napkin and asks me about it ... and I believe that I'd do the righteous thing. Tell her the truth. But the thing of it is, the truth is just so damn ... elusive, isn't it? (80)

The Man is no longer the homodiegetic narrator, but rather a ‘regular’ character who must act in the moment. He is taken by surprise by Cody’s remark and Belinda’s question and, as mentioned before, has no control over the situation. The fact that he is referring to the future [“I always imagined a day like this” (80); “I can’t wait ... to be with her. Finally.” (82)] indicates that he is not recounting events from his past (or making them up on the go) but rather that he and the action are located in the present. Concurrently, the Man can no longer uphold his constructed self of “The Sensitive Guy” (75) or other versions as he no longer is the active narrator of this story and so his covert racist tendencies begin to surface: “See, Cody Phipps was born a nigger. Still is, to this day. And I do know the difference, believe me, between regular black people and what Cody is. [...] it’s just a word, right? ‘Nigger’. A word like any other. Only has power if you let it...” (81-82). This last speech resembles an aside to the audience rather than words by a narrator. The story ends with the events in favor of the Man, who is finally together with Belinda and of Cody, who got rid of his wife without losing his face. An end typical of LaBute, who seldom grants victory to general morality but shifts poetic justice to the reader and the audience in his plays as Jay Oney points out.

She is unaware that her new husband is a racist who bartered for her love with her African American husband, Cody, who wanted to divorce her without having to pay financial damages. The Man gave Cody a valuable Jackie Robinson baseball card to sweeten the deal, and Cody made it possible for the Man to take the Woman off his hands. Both Cody and the Man have avoided poetic justice for their own profit at the Woman’s expense. (Oney 45)

The second narrator

This is How It Goes is a play that is intended to be read rather than performed – at least not without the loss of an interesting layer of diegetic narrativity. The stage directions, which are part of the secondary text and compromises, according to Pfister, “the title of the play, the inscriptions, dedications and prefaces, the dramatis personae, announcements of act and scene, stage-directions, whether applicable to scenery or action, and

the identification of the speaker of a particular speech” (Pfister 14), are inhabited by another narrating instance which cannot be easily categorized, labeled nor spatially positioned. These stage directions go beyond a mere description of stage and character layout. They even go beyond evaluative comments. The stage directions of *This is How It Goes* are home to a narrating presence which refers to itself [*“I think he’s going to say something”* (3)], refers to its ontological relation to the reader [*“We need it”* (3); *“The Man steps away for a minute. Toward us.”* (6)] and its spatial location [*“The Man smiles and moves back into his original light. Looks out at us [...]”* (22)]. It would be appropriate, as Christopher Bigsby rightly remarks, that the character list could be extended from three to four characters in order to acknowledge the fully-fledged entity that the stage directions present (cf. Bigsby 178). This narrating instance, in addition, fulfills a few purposes which complement the reading experience of this play as, for example, the creation of suspense: *“The Man does a fair impression of it [Flying Cody Phipps] and they laugh again – but they better be careful. Cody’s coming. At the last moment, they both notice”* (55). Most importantly the narrator of the stage directions highlights and lays bare the synthetic nature of the Man’s narration and the play as such as is apparent in the following excerpts:

She moves off toward the kitchen. Well, backstage, actually, but we’ll pretend there’s a kitchen. (20)

Lights need to pop up now on another playing area – turns out we’re going to need a few. This one should be some kind of nice sitting-room area. Just a few pieces to suggest it. We’ll fake the rest. (32)

Suddenly, the Woman walks back into the room – how did she get out there? Well, it should seem pretty magical but it’ll need to be a theatrical trick. A trap door or something. Anyhow, she walks back in [...] (37)

[...]Then she starts to cry. Not a lot – that’s hard on an actor, and we’ve got a ways to go – but a little. Just enough. (45)

In what way does the narrator of the stage directions fit in the play and what function does this narrator fulfill? The stage directions-narrator shares some similarities with the first narrator, the Man, as both

characters exert influence over the play at hand: the Man by summoning scenes and characters and the other by controlling stage props and lighting – “*Let’s give him a little light.*” (3) – and also partially the characters including the first narrator – “*They laugh – what the hell, let’s have another hug.*” (5). Furthermore, each of the narrators displays a certain degree of insecurity of what will actually happen on stage, though the difference between the two is that the first narrator can actively form the content of what he will be telling the audience, while the second narrator exhibits rather the role of a commentative observer:

The First Narrator

MAN. ... Okay, This is how it goes. I mean, went. This is the way it all played out. Or, is going to ... right now. (3)

The Second Narrator

A Man walks on stage. Let’s give him a little light. There that’s better. Now what? Wait – I think he’s going to say something. Yes, he is. Good. (3)

The Woman doesn’t react and the Man snaps his fingers, jumping back to his light spot. What’s up? Let’s find out. (4)

The second narrator can also be paralleled to the real author of the work, LaBute, of course, as the stage directions mirror in a certain respect “[...] the process of writing, [...] and] the spontaneous inventions of the imagination [...]” (Bigsby 185) and echo the feeling the author had while writing this particular play, which LaBute describes briefly in the preface: “Not that I knew where I was headed, mind you, not at all, but that’s rarely stopped me before. No, I simply threw two characters together – as I often enjoy doing – at a Sears in an outlet mall (I had a long history with that department store chain in my youth) and waited to see what happened” (vii). Consequently, the second narrator is an allusion to the process of creating a play during the performance of a play, and hence can be viewed as a layer of meta-theatricality.

Both narrators share another similarity outside of the text on the structural level. The play can be defined as a frame story as the Man, the first

narrator functions as the framing of an embedded tale – or perhaps even *tales* as he provides the reader with multiple strands of the truth – in which he himself takes part of. The second narrator hidden in the comments of the stage directions, too, forms a frame for the story encompassing the narrative of the first narrator who is telling an audience of the embedded tale.

There is a series of Chinese boxes as the stage directions comment on a character who himself, at times standing outside the action, comments on other characters who themselves present shifting versions of the truth (Bigsby 179).

The purpose of such a structure and of the utilization of multiple levels of mise en abyme is to remind the reader of the highly factitious nature of the Man's tale which is not, as it initially appears, "the story of one-time high school acquaintances who meet a dozen years later" (Bigsby 179) but a "half-remembered version of one side a' things" (80). Perhaps it is not even a remembered version of the truth as the first few words of the Man – "This is how it goes. I mean, went. [...] Or, is going to..." (3) - cast doubt on temporal realization of the events. In other words, it is unclear when the events happened or if they will happen at all. What the protagonist and the play as such effectively demonstrate in the end is "[...] just how subjective truth can be" (vii).

This is, the audience comes to realise, in fact not necessarily *how it goes*, not only because stories have the capacity to move in unlikely directions but because the real is not to be captured with total assurance. It depends who is telling the story. (Bigsby 178)

4.3. autobahn. a short play cycle (2005)

The collection of short plays *autobahn* is one of the best examples to demonstrate the power of diegetic narrative elements in a supposedly non-narrative medium like drama. In the introduction, Neil LaBute briefly delineates the reasons, the motives and the pleasures of theatrical

restriction, voluntarily relinquishing lavish stage settings in favor of more simplistic methods of presentation, and the reasons why he continues to enjoy the work in the theater.

Films are nothing but colorful, noisy lies that bring us undeniable pleasure upon their viewing. That's fine, but why the hang-up with wonderfully false moments like outdoor sets built on giant stages or action scenes that are executed in front of a screen? And if we do occasionally accept them, why do we limit our enjoyment of such things to space operas or science fiction extravaganzas? Why can't actors have a picnic or mow their lawns in obviously false settings and not start a ripple of guffaws in the audience? (LaBute, *The Pleasures of Limitation*, xii)

LaBute explains that, unlike films, the theater allows realization of topics akin to everyday experience that would not be possible in contemporary cinema anymore. The topics and, in particular, the setting of all the seven plays that constitute this short play cycle would not fit into the movies as the demand and the expectation of the cinematic audience is completely different.

All seven plays of *autobahn* consist of only one scene, are set in a car and feature only two characters. In addition, every character is nameless carrying just minimalistic references such as 'MAN', 'GUY' and 'WOMAN' to distinguish the roles of the speakers which makes the short plays appear more universal. The reader's and audience's attention is drawn and bundled on the conversation and relationship between the two characters in each play. No change of scenery ever occurs. The rest of the world is blanked out. Nevertheless, worlds unfold in the minds of the reader and the audience that open up more questions than are answered. In the following sections only four of the seven plays will be analyzed in more detail. These four plays have in common that, even though they feature two characters, only one character speaks. These plays are *funny*, *all apologies*, *long division* and *autobahn*.

4.3.1. funny

funny features a Young and an Older Woman, the former holding a monologue while the latter refrains from speaking and limits her actions to a few glances at the Young Woman and to driving. The two are, in fact, as is quickly revealed, mother and daughter to each other. From the daughter's words alone the reader learns that she has just been picked up by her mother from a correctional facility called Twin Oaks. It is never fully disclosed why she has been at Twin Oaks but it is implied in her monologue, which reveals a lot about the family situation, in the title of the play and even in the silence of her mother: "She has, it seems, been funny in the sense of damaged. Her 'serene' smile is not a sign that she is at peace. Indeed her spill of language, her free-associating, implies the reverse" (Biggsby 149). The title 'funny' also relates to her noticing that the scenery along the highway appears funny, "not funny-ha-ha, but the other kind of funny" (*funny*, 7) as well as her father visiting the grandparents who as she concludes are "not very nice people" but "crabby, old, mean people who don't give a shit about anybody" (7).

Through this monodramatic narration, which has the only purpose of challenging the mother to turn around the car and take her daughter straight back to the facility, the reader gains insight into the troubled family history that shows that the daughter is not the only person who is 'funny'. "It was an interesting place, a lot different than the last one" (8), she notes, which uncovers that Twin Oaks has not been her first visit to this sort of institution. Obviously the Young Woman is not overly religious as she points out that the facility was "maybe a little heavy on the 'higher power' stuff, perhaps a bit too much of that nonsense" (8). She then remembers having seen an "old black-and-white move" (8), which she found funny as the café appearing in that film carried the same name as her institution. "The film is clearly *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [...], which gains a certain irony when we learn of the mother's fears" (Biggsby 150). The stay at Twin Oaks, as gradually trickles through the monologue, has not had the corrective effect on the Young Woman as

anticipated by the mother. Utterances full of hedges as for instance “I think *maybe* it *could be* really easy to fit back in at home, in a way” (10, emphasis added) prove that she has not changed.

‘I think’, ‘maybe’, ‘in a way’ hardly suggest someone confident about her future. She implies that she could get her old job back, ‘or that sort of deal’. ‘I could do that,’ she says, ‘Absolutely’, uncertainty and assurance running into one another (Bigsby 149).

The Young Woman has already been through at least one other facility, knows the procedure and, above all, knows how to use it against her mother: “... No, I think the only way to prove to you guys that your money was well spent is to be honest, like they said.” (10) The facility has tried to teach her to be an honest citizen, but she takes it literally and works it against her mother to tell her all those things that she does not want to hear as for example “... and after, we shared a smoke before bed. A *marijuana* smoke. I know that’s probably hard for you to hear and everything, but I’m supposed to be more honest now” (9).

The mother, it transpires, is just as ‘funny’ as her daughter but in her own way. Through her silence she proves her daughter right of being a person who is not willing to speak about or confront problems. But here within the confined space of the car the mother does not have an opportunity to “run into the next room or slam the door” (11) in her daughter’s face or to throw herself “down on the bed and start crying” (11). The mother is a fragile and neurotic woman the reader learns from the daughter:

YOUNG WOMAN. You who calls Dad at work, pulls him out of a staff meeting when the pool guys don’t show up. Or ... when that one post office dude, the delivery man, was trying to break in? ‘Member that one? He made the mistake of opening the *screen door* and you had the police over in, like, ten seconds! (12)

The car is the perfect place for the Young Woman to confront her mother as there is no place to hide for her. Her intention of being ‘truthful’ may be read at the same time as a plea to her mother to be honest too who,

instead of taking care of her daughter in the way a mother is supposed to do, withdraws herself and has her child removed from the home (cf. Bigsby 151). Although the mother does not speak her “presence is critical” and provides “an ironic commentary on the action” (Bigsby 151). “One expresses her desperation with a flood of words; the other with an abandonment of language” (Bigsby 151). Even though there is hardly any dramatic action – as mentioned before the setting does not change at all – a lot is happening in this short play.

This, indeed, is one of the play’s strengths as it creates a portrait of a world we never see, a woman who never speaks and a life we infer only from the sometimes oblique words of a woman who does nothing more than sit in a car (Bigsby 150).

4.3.2. all apologies

A MAN and a WOMAN sit in a parked car. Traffic zooms past. (all apologies, 35)

Why are these two people parked on the side of the road? Where did they come from? Where were they heading and why are they not continuing to drive there? The fact is that the setting of this short play, which consists merely of a silent woman and a monologue full of indecent language by the Man, exactly mirrors the status quo of the relationship between the man and the woman. It is revealed that the Woman has stopped the car probably on the way home from Albertson’s, because the Man has publicly called her a ‘cunt’ in that particular supermarket. It is a major linguistic insult, but not in the view of the Man who, stumbling from one verbal offence to the next, is unwilling or rather unable to apologize for his wrong-doing, and will not even acknowledge the semantic weight of this derogatory term:

MAN. I-was-wrong. Is that what you want to hear? Is it? ‘Kay. It was bad of me to call you a “cunt,” whether we were in the Albertson’s or not. It’s not a nice word, carries a lot of meaning with it – not that I assigned any to it, but that’s

neither here nor there. It's some monk's fault, really, that's what it is. (38)

"It is, he seems to assume, no more than a problem of language as he endeavours to defend himself without causing further offence, despite a tendency towards obscenity" (Bigsby 154). From the beginning onwards, all his attempts lead to the instant revelation of his insensitive character and of his real feelings about the topic. He has, it turns out, not understood anything at all despite his initial claim.

MAN. Look, I know what I did was shitty – sorry about that, I'll try and watch the language here because I realize that it bothers you, started this whole business, really – but I do, though. Understand, I mean.

He obviously has not realized that crude language upsets his wife or else would not use such a jargon to apologize for his insult. Nevertheless, he continues to lament about the wear of language – "Teenagers's ruined that word, mostly, but it's still what I think of when considering us. We are 'awesome'" (35) – and the consequent insufficiency it has to express what we think and feel. The problem with language, he elaborates, is that the lexical appearance is too inaccurate to fully represent the complex meaning it is denoting like the example "love" that he provides: "And who says "love" was the correct idea to go with or that it had all the right shit – sorry, "crap" – to mean what that feeling is?" (36). In his opinion, clearly, the more apt word to express the relationship the Woman and he have is not 'love' but 'awesome'. Unfortunate is only that he has used that word just a few minutes earlier to describe the difference between 'shit' and 'crap' whereby 'shit' is "completely strong and awesome" (36).

As he continues to reject any responsibilities for his language ["And now I could lose all I've worked for, my home, children, even you – the lady in my life – all because of some fucking friar back in *Sherwood Forest!*" (37)] he even states that he is "'indignant' at being required to apologise but ready to do so if it means they can resume where they left off"

(Bigsby 154). However, the relationship is as immobile as the parked car in which the couple is sitting.

There is, effectively, nowhere for them to go. The traffic streams past. He is what he denies. They sit, together and apart, a marriage in which there is no communication, only his voice, dominating, justifying, pleading (Bigsby 154).

Here again, LaBute presents his readers with a play that can only marginally be classified as a dramatic piece. A dialogue, whose incorporation would be mandatory in an ideal work of drama, exists merely through the presence and the silence of the second character, the Woman. In regard of communication, the play more or less completely lacks a level of mimesis as the entire action and contents of the play are represented through non-iconic signs (cf. Chatman 112). In other words, the plot is realized exclusively through diegesis which takes the form of a dramatic monologue.

4.3.3. long division

long division is, next to *funny*, the only play in *autobahn* that does not feature a male and a female character but two male characters who are friends with each other. The play starts without an exposition and positions the reader and the audience in the middle of a running conversation as the initial three periods suggest. Despite the three words “Go down Division” (*long division* 65) the Other Man remains silent and the Man at the wheel does most of the talking. Apparently, as becomes clear from the Man’s monologue, the Other Man has asked his friend for advice about a particular, ambivalent topic and the Man is speaking in favor of it for two reasons. On the one side because “[i]t doesn’t hurt anybody, and it’s right [...]” (61) and on the other because he is sure that it will become “unfinished business” (61) and will erode the Other Man should he not do it. In fact, the Man is so sure about the rightness of it that the Other Man should ‘take heed’ of his words. Due to the Man’s strong conviction the reader assumes that it must be very important

“stuff” (61) which the Other Man is supposed to retrieve from his ex-girlfriend or wife (the exact relation is never fully revealed). All the more the reader is then surprised to discover that the object of desire is a Nintendo 64 game console. For the Man the recovery of the gaming system is a matter of “gravity” (61), “truth” (65), right and plain principle.

MAN. She left you. Correct? All the circumstances in the world don't mean anything – she *left*. So ... you do it, you go get back what is yours and you're gonna sleep a lot better tonight. (63)

In the same breath the Man adds that the “kids, I mean, you can't deal with that now” (63), thus he subordinates their importance and claims that there is no point in fighting over custody as this is a matter for the authorities while the Nintendo is a matter of immediate concern. At the end of the play the Other Man follows the advice of the Man and announces “Go down Division” (65) which is an ambiguous utterance that denotes on the one hand that the Man should take the division to the ex-wife's house, and on the other hand it refers to the division of the relationship between the Other Man and the ex-girlfriend/wife.

The monologue of this play is interesting as it comes from a man who is in a certain way untrustworthy. The Other Man, seeking unbiased advice on a topic of property, is confronted with a friend who, under the mantle of justice and righteousness, pursues his own egoistic motives. There is for one thing the misevaluation - to put it in the terms of Phelan – of the ranking of priorities concerning the children of the now defunct relationship and the gaming console. The reader cannot dismiss wondering whether the Man not really is “dying to play a little Mortal Kombat or whatever” (65). The other cue to suspicion is the intensity with which the man is arguing for the recovery of the Nintendo and with which force the Man is pleading for his “impartiality in this matter” (65) as a reliable source of advice. His main point of argumentation is a short diegetic narrative episode in this play namely the recounting of a recent cinema visit. During the presentation of the film, the Man narrates, there

was a technical failure resulting in the audience missing one or two minutes of the film. Afterwards, an older woman and a man had demanded their money back, which was against the Man's values because they sat "*through* the whole damn feature" (64).

[... H]e accuses them of failing to get things in proportion, a complaint he puts down to the man being gay. Yet the loss of the Nintendo (as opposed to the children) is 'about principle and fair play and that type of consideration,' (65) the bathetic last words undermining the elevated tone of the first (Bigsby 158).

Failing to make out the inconsistencies in the Man's alleged and "absolute down-the-middleness" in the matter, the Other Man is persuaded to reclaim his Nintendo. The Man turns down division "[...] *and smiles as he does it*" (66) which goes unnoticed by the Other Man who is staring out the window. Exclaiming words of exuberant joy and anticipation – "Oh my. Oh my, my, my, oh my. Yes, yes, yes!" (66) – the Man incidentally quotes "from *Hamlet*, who accused himself of substituting words for action" (Bigsby 158): "[...] the readiness is all" (66). "What is at stake is plainly not the games console, still less the needs or otherwise of the Other Man, oddly unconcerned for his children. What is at stake is the Man's desire for action." (Bigsby 158)

4.3.4. autobahn

In the title play of the short play cycle, the reader encounters the LaButeian twist at its best. The play, although it yet again features two characters, consists merely of the monologue of the female character and a few brief stage directions. The monologue diegetically characterizes the Man and the Woman, exposes their troubled relationship and recounts the issues with the foster child whereby the disturbing incidents that led to the abandonment of the foster child are ordered in a climactic way. Although this is a dramatic work, the crucial parts are told and not shown. In this way the central role of the Man in the events is disclosed even

though he never does more than glance, nod and briefly touch the hand of the Woman.

The first words of the Woman are proleptic. They foreshadow the truth of the events “which she lays down like the playing cards in a losing hand” (Bigsby 161). “We just keep doing lousy things, I guess” (*autobahn* 85) the Woman remarks, revealing that on the one side the Man and her – who are very likely married as that would be a requirement for gaining eligibility for adoption – did lousy things and will continue doing the same lousy things in the future as is suggested in the narrative. The lousy things that have been done are multifaceted and can be divided according to the four main agencies of the play: (1) the things done by the couple in accord; (2) the things done by the foster child; (3) the things done by the Man; and (4) the things done by the Woman. Point (1) refers to the failure as foster parents, the forsaking of the adoptive child, the return of the child to the institution, and the justification of this act which is primarily constituted through point (2). The foster child, which is suggested to have already been a teenager at the time of adoption, “[...] has grown up to commit crimes, taking their car and joyriding, stealing their money, verbally abusing them, [and] carrying a gun to school” (Bigsby 161). These events, as transpires, have led the Man and the Woman ultimately to the decision of dissolving the adoption and returning the child to the care facility. However, the tension rises due to the exposition of point (3), i.e. the revelation of the allegations of the child against the Man, which becomes all the more important because of the Man’s absence of speech:

His silence throughout becomes ever more ominous as we learn that, perhaps as an act of revenge, the boy had accused him of sexually abusing him. His denial is not voiced, not here, in the car, in the immediate privacy of their relationship. The alternative interpretation hangs in the air, not least because he seems to avoid eye contact with her (Bigsby 162).

The accusation of child molestation is never resolved, merely hinted at by the utterances of the Woman. Through her attempt of masking the whole incident she involuntarily unveils that she knows that there is a kernel of truth in the accusation of her companion. Nevertheless, she never makes an attempt to draw the bridge and to close the connection between points (2) and (3), the things that the foster child and the things that the Man has done. Lastly there is (4) - the sum of things that the Woman has done or not done.

The Woman is the only source of information and for this reason the reader acquires the most knowledge about her character. Two times in the play the Woman refers to her past as an amateur actress:

WOMAN. I took Drama back in school, did I ever mention that? Oh yes. I was quite the little actress ... had the lead in several productions and even sang a bit. Not much of a dancer – I've always thought that was a difficult art, don't you? Dancing – but I was known to carry a tune and could shed a tear on cue. (85)

She makes apparent that this part of her history is important to her and it emerges that acting and pretending continues to be an imperative of her behavior. Thus, she pretends that it is not just them who do lousy things, but "the whole country is living with this now" (85); she pretends that her marriage is intact – "it is "we", right?" (86); "[...] it has in no way chipped away at our, you know – and I'm aware that you think I overdo the word "love", I know that, but – I'm just very happy that it hasn't" (91-92); and as an actor with some experience, she knows when it is her cue to "shed a tear" when necessary: "Charges dropped, or the kid will say it didn't really happen or that kind of deal. So, no worries. And you know that I believe you, right? You have my complete and utter support ... I mean, why would you ever lay a finger on the boy?" (89)

Her social integrity is tantamount to her. The first reason the Woman calls attention to is not the wrongdoing of the adoptive child but her fear of

losing face in the community: “When people start to look at you in the store – and I don’t care if it’s just Target or not - then it’s time to do something. To step up and do what it takes to feel right and safe and like a good citizen. Don’t you think? Well, I do.” (87). She discloses essential aspects of her personality and her priorities, which have nothing to do with the well-being of the child. In addition, a slip of the tongue underlines this fact as she states that she is “a working adult” who doesn’t have time to be “someone’s mom” (87-88). Her need to assert to the community the intactness of her image and her marriage reverberates in her utterances: “Don’t you sense that we should do it again and let everyone know that this boy was a blip on the radar, a kind of, some sort of bad apple in the barrel, and we are not the problem.” (90). Her plans of repeating the adoption with a different child, “[m]aybe a girl this time [... a]nd younger, maybe” (88), while the Man only nods in confirmation of the fact that this is what they need to do, evoke a shudder in the reader and the audience. If it cannot be proven to the reader or the audience that the Man has not molested this child in the past, then a fortiori, the reader cannot assume that the Man can be trusted on this fact in the future with the next foster child. The Woman cannot prevent such acts, which are implicitly stated in the monologue, from happening, having arranged herself, it appears, with this part of the male human nature which has perhaps also happened to her in the past: “I have a photo of it someplace, a snapshot that my uncle took of me ... he was always taking pictures of me. My mother’s brother” (90). In a nutshell, the vile act of the male character(s) of *autobahn* is left unpunished. Yet again as is symptomatic for LaBute’s works, there is a shift of poetic justice:

[...] LaBute is writing plays where, if a character is not punished for a misdeed, the audience is clearly signaled to despise that character. What LaBute is doing is shifting the burden of poetic justice from the writer to the society that recognizes his familiar people, who get along pretty well, even succeed in our world. His plays almost shout, ‘Why is there no law against this?’ But the answer is not spelled out or performed for us (Oney 45).

At the end of the monologue, the Woman philosophizes on the German autobahn that it represents perhaps “the way it should be ... all of us speeding by one another, too quick to stop, too fast to care ... just racing along, off on our little journeys and no sense of how dangerous or careless we’re being” (92). She echoes the core of the problem, that is not only inherent to this play but all plays in the short-play cycle *autobahn*. She did not see or does not care to see the signs her adoptive child was emitting, because she is too busy caring about herself and her image in the community.

What is apparent from these plays, and their ruling metaphor, is that though we travel together there is always a gap of understanding, a misalignment of needs, usually, though not invariably, between the genders. Nor is that a divide that can be bridged by language since that itself is evidence of the divide (Bigsby 162).

4.4. Wrecks and other plays (2007)

4.4.1. Wrecks

Edward Carr is the protagonist of *Wrecks*. He is the narrator as well as a regular character in the play, which means that he is a homodiegetic narrator. Moreover, he is the only person physically appearing in the play, despite the fact that he is addressing an unknown person with his talk. In contrast to the Man of *This Is How It Goes*, Edward Carr cannot easily be categorized as an unreliable narrator, nevertheless with the aid of Nünning’s indicators traces of narrator unreliability will be made apparent.

A first clue of Edward Carr’s insufficient level of reliability relates to point nine of Nünning’s list “an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader’s sympathy” (Olson 97-98; see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28). There are several utterances that show that the protagonist is not simply talking to himself, but breaking the fourth wall by apparently appealing to the audience:

EDWARD. Just trying to be honest here, get some of my feelings across, and there's not a thing wrong with that. Is there? (*Wrecks* 6)

EDWARD. Oh no, I sounded like ... Heidi, probably. You know, that little girl from the fairy tale? Up in the Alps and whatnot, with the grandfather and all... (8)

EDWARD. ... you okay? I won't smoke if you're – I don't know what you're supposed to do [...] (11)

EDWARD. Got a few other things I *need* to say, if you don't mind. Actually, even if you do, 'cause I'm not really asking your permission here [...] (17-18)

It remains unclear throughout the play to whom Edward is addressing his speech, but clearly, as the examples prove, his speech has a specific addressee. Nevertheless, the use of 'you' in Edward's monologue creates the impression as if the protagonist is talking to the audience or the reader.

Similar to *This Is How It Goes*, world-altering information is revealed at the end – the fact that Mary Jo is not only Edward's wife but also his mother – which changes the perspective of how the protagonist is perceived. It is obvious that his moral standpoint does not commensurate with standard social norms. In other words, the internal frame of reference clashes with an external frame of reference (Nünning 29-30). The collision of the narrator's and the recipient's system of moral standards is the basic source of mistrust and the reason that the reader finds the narrator Edward Carr not only highly dubious but also repulsive. However, this effect is chiefly conveyed in the last third of the play. In the first two thirds, Edward actually works hard on creating a certain picture of him and the relationship he and Mary Jo had. During the first two thirds Edward displays a moral attitude that the reader can identify with and most importantly with whom the reader can sympathize. Edward is a man who has nothing to lose. He is a widower ["[...] who's gonna say something to a widower, right?" (11)], he has been diagnosed with cancer

and has only eight more months to live (cf. *Wrecks* 18). In addition, he knows very well the difference between the conventional right and wrong, and, moreover, knows how to exploit shared social mores and values in order to gain sympathy:

EDWARD. Well, “Jo-Jo” sometimes, when I was being cute, or up in the bedroom – you don’t need to know too much more about that, thank you very much! I think I come from a different, you know, *generation* than most *people* do on that particular subject, so, no. You can’t open the paper today without reading about how so-and-so is doing it with what’s-her-name, or how much they love doing such and such. *And* made themselves a videotape, which is available off the computer there, for just \$19.95! Good God, what’ve we become? Huh? Buncha savages, just sitting around the campfire and trying to keep one another entertained! (7)

EDWARD. [...] but never once did I lie in bed with a woman in that way – the biblical way is what I’m referring to here, for the slower ones in the group – until Mary Jo and I slept together on the first night of our marriage. Course it was different then, a complete and utterly different age than we have here now, and I’d consider it a golden one, too. I really would. Filled with some chivalry and proper thoughts and holding the door open for a lady, which gets you nothing but a strange look and maybe even the *finger* these days [...] (26)

EDWARD. But in my day [...] if you wanted something, you had to work for it. And that’s what Jo-Jo and I did. We both worked on our relationship every day of our lives, thick and thin, richer and poorer and, well, obviously, the health stuff, too ... we never gave up on each other. Not one time. (*Beat.*) Doesn’t mean I didn’t sleep on the couch a few nights, but shit ... I didn’t move out because of it! People today are so ... you know. Everybody’s all ready to take offense. Pack it in. Give it up. I don’t understand this world anymore, I truly do not. [...] When I had a goal, I stuck with it – stuck in there for *years* until I’d reach it! [...] And that’s what I did with my Mary Jo. I finally got her and I held on to her right up until the last minute of her life ... in my arms and me staring down into her sweet, sweet face. That’s what I did, thank you very much. I did indeed. (25)

The last excerpt is an evident example of how well Edward understands social morals and values: love is hard work and not everyone is willing to retreat and give a relationship the extra bit of effort it needs to sustain.

But Edward successfully verbalizes and creates this picture of him in the minds of the reader and the audience in which he is indeed a man who knows what is right, who knows what is good, who is willing to fight for it and who possesses the necessary endurance to pursue it until the end. Edward succeeds at creating this romantic, chivalrous picture of him, but in the last third of the play he discloses the truth about his relationship to Mary Jo. Edward is fixated upon his image in society. He utters defensive statements even though nobody is questioning him, such as after the excerpt from page 25 presented above:

He starts to move away but suddenly turns in a tight circle, looking back around at us.

EDWARD. ... and you know why? Any idea how come I was obsessed with Mary Jo in this way? Huh? Because she was *worth* loving, that's why. Yeah. And you can't say that about everybody you run into on the street, not any longer... But she was. She was like a woman haunted, looking for something out there on the horizon – you could see it in her eyes – and when she found a thing like love, real, true love like we offered each other ... well, she would cling to it like wreckage from an airplane gone missing out over the ocean. When we met, middle of this fancy-dress party, she saw that in me. She did. That I was worth holding on to. And for me, hell, listen – I spent my whole life looking for her. (25-26)

As it is so often the case, the unreliable narrator involuntarily exposes himself and his real nature through discrepancies in his own statements. Through his narration Edward describes himself as a man of honor who fights for love and stands by his partner, but at the same time discloses that he is a man who has no qualms about attaining his goals. In order to acquire a part of information to find Mary Josephine, Edward Carr even became engaged with a girl, pretending to love her, only to immediately break off the engagement and annul the eighteen month relationship after he obtained possession of the valued piece of information. Furthermore, he similarly embraces the family while he announces that “[...] families can be ... [the] most unloving creatures that the good Lord ever collected together in one place” (23). But, he adds, that “[...] it's not my girls, no, they'd never ... it's her sons. From the first marriage. *Them*” (23). Such

passages suggest that there must have been various dissonances in the marriage between Edward and Mary Jo, and one of them is the children. “There is, in other words, a rift in the marriage, a fault line between the children. He confesses to ‘leaving a lot out here’ but adds that ‘you’ll just have to believe me on this.’ It is ‘private’. Such silences invite filling.” (Bigsby 223) Moreover, such utterances – “I know I’m leaving a lot out here but you’ll just have to believe me on this” (23) – remind the reader that Edward is the sole source and controller of information.

Much of *Wrecks* is reminiscent of the dramatic monologue, in particular Robert Browning’s *My Last Duchess* as already Bigsby has observed:

Robert Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’ is, effectively, a dramatic monologue, a poem addressed to an invisible person in which he seems to praise his former wife, now dead but captured in a painting. Little by little, praise turns to something else and we begin to suspect a secret he is tempted to reveal. [...] [*Wrecks*] is reminiscent not only of his [i.e. LaBute’s] earlier plays but also of Browning’s poisoned encomiums as love turns out to be the source of more than consolation and transcendence (Bigsby 220).

The parallels to Browning are obvious. *Wrecks* is a dramatic monologue as there is only one speaker who clearly speaks to an unnamed addressee. Similar to *My Last Duchess* the addressee is invisible although in Browning there are hints to the identity of the addressee whereas in *Wrecks* the person addressed remains unknown. Both dramatic monologues are about the relationship of a man to a woman, who, in both cases, has passed away already and cannot speak for herself any longer. Finally, both works have in common that the protagonists involuntarily reveal more about them and the truth than they had intended to do. Nevertheless, there are of course differences between the two. This is on the one side Edward Carr’s odd dual position in the room with the casket and the adjoining room, and on the other side the unknown addressee. Edward makes several remarks which suggest that he is at the same time holding his monologue in the room with the

casket and making conversation in the adjacent room among the relatives and friends of the late Mary Josephine.

EDWARD. God, listen to me in there! I sound like a complete ass, don't I? [...] (6)

Hears the sound of the group again. Listens.

EDWARD. I must be doing something right in there! Listen to 'em all, crying and everything. Big laugh now and again. (7)

The man sits on a small bench, bowing his head for a moment. Snaps up when he hears more noise – shakes his head very disapprovingly as he begins to speak.

EDWARD. [...] 'cause listen to me there, I've got that sound going, I definitely do ... a catch in my voice ... listen ... (*Waits.*) Hear it? Right there as I'm talking to her niece. Just... now. [...] (9)

Realistically speaking, Edward's dual existence is impossible and complicates the categorization of his mode of speech. What is the purpose of his talk? Why does he reveal all these facts? Edward explains that he will have to present an eulogy on the following day, but it seems that today he is presenting another eulogy - dedicated to himself, filled with all the information that will be omitted in the praise to his late wife. Edward suggests that the eulogy to her is as much fabricated as his tone and words while he is speaking in the adjacent room: "It's expected, what can I tell you? And I do feel it, I *absolutely* do, but it's still manufactured. You know? *After* the fact. Not like on the day, right as I lost her." (9) Bigsby, too, highlights the questionable nature of Edward's monologue:

Who does he address, since there is no one present but the body of the woman to whom he was married? To whom does he confess, since what follows has something of the air of a confessional, but himself? On the other hand, confession hardly seems his natural mode. Even justification implies something altogether too defensive. There is, it seems, a pride in his account (Bigsby 220–221).

Bigsby has a certain theory what the purpose of Edward's monologue is and it has nothing to do with love without boundaries. Edward Carr has

had a life-long plan which is inextricably linked with the life of Mary Josephine. Edward has his own truth, which differs from the one that he reveals at the end of the play. He is an actor who involuntarily demasks the artificiality of his play. "He had been taught by her, he explains, to 'be open. Vulnerable', in touch with his emotions and 'all that other crap', the last a throwaway line which serves to neutralise the essence of his claim." (Bigsby 222) Edward is his own admirer of his performance, being able to make people cry and laugh in the room next door ["I must be doing something right in there!" (7)] (cf. Bigsby 222). Mary Josephine, his mother, has been Edward's obsession because he was abandoned by her and grew up as an orphan. He had the plan that they could be happy together if not as mother and son then as wife and husband, but his love is corrupted. He always knew who she was and how much she suffered from her past.

EDWARD. She was like a woman haunted, looking for something out there on the horizon- you could see it in her eyes [...] (26)

EDWARD. Fact of the deal is, the heart of this particular matter – I always knew she had a secret. My Mary Jo. I did. Knew that's what was going on deep down in those golden eyes of hers, way, way back inside ... that she was carrying something else around. I knew it because – well, maybe you're all a bunch smarter than I take you for – *I* was her secret. Me. (*Beat.*) (32)

Edward deliberately withheld the truth, the one piece of information "which might once have set her free only to reveal it when it had become contaminated, revenge clothing itself in the garments of human concern" (Bigsby 224). Edward knew that Mary Josephine was raped and "[g]ot pregnant by a visiting uncle" (31) and was forced by her mother to give away the child. Still he retained the truth and instead determined to lead an incestuous marriage "carrying on the family tradition" (Bigsby 224). "While insisting that he has dedicated himself to making her happy, he has withheld a truth which might have been the source of true happiness to her had he not wished to corrupt that truth, to turn it into a dagger pointing at her heart" (Bigsby 225). It is not certain, however, whether

Edward indeed disclosed to his dying wife his true identity, but the probability that the four whispered words were 'I am your son' is strong. What remains in the end is that

[i]n *Wrecks*, the speaker deceives himself no less than others. He writes his life in such a way as to emerge its hero. Speaking of the woman he insists he loves, he discloses how little he loves her. Celebrating truth, he has dedicated himself to a lie. (Bigsby 227)

The play is aptly named *Wrecks* and the title possesses a multitude of meanings. First of all, 'Wrecks' relates, of course, to the successful business that Edward and Mary Josephine led, which is called 'Rent-A-Wreck'. In the second place, the two main characters in the play Edward and Mary Jo – who exists merely through Edward's narration – are both colloquially speaking wrecks. The one a product of an incestuous family disgrace grew up as an orphan in several foster homes. The other one, abused by a relative as a teenager had to give away her son, her first child, under the pressure of a cold-hearted mother. Furthermore, 'Wrecks' also denotes the state of health of both characters – one dead from the after effects of secondary smoking and the other diagnosed with cancer and a short life expectancy due to smoking. Lastly, as Bigsby points out, "[t]he title is also a homophone for *Rex*, which summons up memories of *Oedipus Rex*, in which a son and a mother became lovers, evidence of a tragic fate, except that *Wrecks* can offer nothing but an ironic parallel in that fate has had no hand in this mating which is calculated, knowing" (Bigsby 225).

4.4.2. Union Square

Union Square is a short, one-act play which is included in the play collection *Wrecks and other plays*. It features a Man in his thirties who comes to New York City to visit his ex-wife, but has difficulties finding the way. He speaks to an unnamed person. From clues in the Man's speech the reader learns that he has apparently approached a homeless person

in the park at Union Square. Although the Man begins to inquire very politely if he might ask him something, he immediately exceeds the boundaries of such an encounter and commences a monologue. The eight-page play ends with a dubious joke uttered by the Man. He claims that he came to New York City to kill his wife, but quickly withdraws his statement and tells the homeless person that he was only joking. But it remains unclear in the end whether there is a gun or not in his brown paper bag.

Through the majority of the play there is little reason for the reader to assume that the nameless Man is an unreliable narrator. However, although there are no multiperspectival versions of a scene and no contradictions of the narrator's statements (as there is no one else to contradict him), the reader is confronted with a monodramatic narrator who (a) exhibits a high level of emotional involvement and (b) possesses a twisted set of social standards that does not concord with the set that most people carry to the text. The high level of emotional involvement is only faintly noticeable on the syntactical level. There exist a few exclamation marks but that alone does not suffice to verify the tenth indicator of unreliability: "syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc" (Olson 97-98; see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28). Nevertheless, the elevated degree of emotional involvement is present and may be determined by the protagonist's elongated speech which provides a completely strange and unknown person "context" (*Union Square* 60). As already mentioned, the addressee is most likely a random homeless person, as the reader can guess from the few clues that the Man provides. This fact amplifies the dubious image of the Man and the clues supply ample ground to question his moral rectitude. The way the Man is talking with this homeless person (whom he does not even know) indicates a manifest, twisted set of social standards: First of all, he provides the homeless with information which might be regarded as inappropriate: "[...] It's not, like, a regular mall or anything – you have to drive over to Coeur d'Alene for that – but it's one of those outlet jobbies,

you know, with the big Ralph Lauren stores and Tommy Hilfiger and that sort of stuff. Bargain shopping, you know what I'm saying. [...]" (59). Second, he addresses the homeless person in a very inappropriate fashion thrice:

MAN. [...] And then I saw you sitting there, just hunched up on your blanket, and I figured, what the hell, he's not going anywhere fast, so I'll ask him. That's what brought me over here, anyway. No offense. [...] (59)

MAN. [...] That doesn't really matter to you, though, I suppose, not to anybody who sleeps on a piece of *cardboard*, probably, but I just thought I'd give you a little background on us. Some, whatchamacallit.... context? [...] (60)

MAN. [...] (*He stops for a moment, glancing at a paper bag he's carrying.*) I see you got your eyes on my Burger King bag there, probably haven't heard a word I've said, right? Well, hate to break it to you, pal, but there's nothing in it, I mean, fries or anything like that. Half a Whaler or whatnot. Uh-uh. (*Whispers.*) Actually, I got a gun in here.... [...] (62)

In relation to what Nünning defined as external frame of reference, the Man violates the moral norms and social standards included in the reader's external frame of reference. The reference to the cardboard that serves as a makeshift bed is derogatory and disrespectful, and the use of the clichéd image of the 'hungry homeless' in order to draw attention to his paper bag is cruel and mean notably because the addressee has not even taken notice of it judging from the secondary text.

What remains in the end for the reader is not a prototypical instance of an unreliable narrator. There is abundant reason to doubt this narrator's righteousness and moral integrity, but this has not as much impact on the story as in *This Is How It Goes*. Rather, the reader is confronted with a mad narrator with a depraved sense of social behavior and a tasteless, black humor whose anger over his ex-wife is verbalized in form of a monologue. Unresolved in the end is the content of the paper bag. The reader is confronted with a dilemma akin to Schrödinger's cat: As long as

the paper bag covers the content, both versions of his visit – the intent of killing his wife and the casual drop-by during his vacation - are true.

4.4.3. Love at Twenty

Love at Twenty is a short one-act play included in the play collection *Wrecks* about a nineteen year old female college student who talks about her relationship to a married college professor. At the beginning the Young Woman counts to twenty and reminisces about the game 'hide-and-seek' that she used to play when she was a child. She explains that the number 'twenty' has become extraordinarily central in her life in a multitude of ways. She will turn twenty on the twentieth of December, has a boyfriend who is twenty years older and who only twenty minutes ago mis-addressed a text message to the Young Woman which was originally intended to be exclusively read by his wife. The Young Woman uses this as the final straw and gives her boyfriend an ultimatum which he cannot escape. Although the play centers on the theme of the husband who has a love affair, who now has to face the consequences, the focus is set on two other topics. The one is the personality of the Young Woman and the other is the machiavellian question that is similar to the one found in the title play *Wrecks*, namely: does love justify whatever means are used?

What are the peculiarities that make the analysis of this play within this paper worthwhile? *Love at Twenty* is yet again a brief play that lacks any form of dialogue but is merely constituted by a dramatic monologue. The Young Woman's speech is not a soliloquy as she clearly addresses her thoughts and plans to an undefined recipient. The stage directions at the beginning and end, too, indicate that her speech has a specific direction: "*Lights up on a YOUNG WOMAN standing onstage, looking down at us*" (69); "*Suddenly her phone rings. She looks out at us one last time.*" (73). The personal address serves the function of involving the reader more closely in the events of the play, but whether the character of the Young Woman is indeed addressing somebody on the diegetic level is

questionable as her rhetoric is structured in such a way as to require no response. The second reason that makes an analysis of this play interesting is that although the protagonist is arguing to have enacted the plan in the name of the love she holds for this man, a second alternate truth transpires that states the opposite – a feature that is characteristic of the dramatic monologue in general.

The most interesting aspect of this play is indeed the personality of this young college student who declares to have loved being “it” in a game of hide-and-seek as a child. She implicitly characterizes herself, being unlike other girls who “get scared or stupid shit like that” (69) ascribing this trait to the fact that she enjoys “being the center of attention. A *lot*.” (69). While elaborating on the importance of the number ‘twenty’ she recounts that she has always been “screwed on gifts” (70) for Christmas because her birthday is so close to that holiday making it clear that she felt that her parents have subordinated her birthday to Christmas eve. Consequently, in one way her parents have subordinated her in comparison to her sister, whose birthday was celebrated as a closed and singular event. Analogous, the Young Woman is being subordinated by her boyfriend: “Well, I guess he’s not actually that, technically, because he’s got a wife and all that – no kids, though – and that’s a bit of a bummer but he’s getting divorced, he *totally* is” (70, emphasis added) - her last utterance clearly undermining her confidence in the man’s willingness to separate from his wife. At first sight, the Young Woman might appear naïve – “we’ve been a couple for almost a year now, school year, anyway, and he’s promised me that we’re always gonna be together. Forever.” (70) – but to the reader it slowly percolates through that the goal of her plan has been vengeance from the start:

YOUNG WOMAN. Sometimes you’ve really just got to get in there and get your hands dirty when you believe in something so intensely, and this is one of those times ... Dex and I are gonna be so happy, so *stupendously fucking* happy [emphasis added] when all this stuff of his gets straightened out. I really believe that. Or not. Or he will scurry home like some total pussy and fix things for a minute and then I’ll know

he's not the man I want or need him to be and at the tender age of twenty I'm gonna realize that it's a long road ahead to happiness. But, hey, at least I'll know, right? At least I'll head off into the sunset with my eyes wide open and understand a bit more about the way this world works ... and that's something, isn't it? (72)

Her obscene language unveils the unspoken truth that for her it isn't important that Dexter will, in the end, choose her to live happily ever after. At a certain echelon her actions are purely revengeful and it is only a question of power, because in this ultimatum game she is 'it'. She has the power to disclose her identity to the wife, or not, and to severely damage her boyfriend's marriage, or not.

4.4.4. Stand-Up

Another play taken from the collection *Wrecks and other plays* is *Stand-Up*. The title and references in the play suggest that it is set in a New York comedy venue, where there is momentarily open mike night. A rather modest Man occupies the stage, introduces himself as Merrit Wilson and tries to fill his ten minutes on stage with his material, as he calls it. His appearance is improvised and unsure. From the beginning on, he produces an uncomfortable atmosphere – the sort that makes the reader feel embarrassed for him. He re-starts his performance, introduces himself multiple times and talks about being the “in-house funny guy [and the] equivalent of the class clown or whatever” (*Stand-Up*, 92) at his work place, but the few jokes he makes are at best tasteless (e.g. “My grandmother died at Auschwitz and all I got was this lousy T-shirt” (92)). The tension of the situation is slightly relieved when he slowly starts to be open with the audience/reader, verbalizes what the audience has already been thinking and thus gains sympathy:

MAN. [...] I'll be honest with you – my jokes suck. They just, like, absolutely reek. They're not even jokes, really, I mean, not actually, they just, you know ... I can observe things. In the moment. React. Throw a little irony out there and get a smile

out of my coworkers. That's what I do. Not this. I'm wasting your time [...] (93-94)

He explains that the nature of his humor relies more upon observing things and throwing “a little irony out there” (93). Little by little, the protagonist reveals the purpose of his appearance on a stand-up comedy stage, which has nothing to do with telling jokes. He is using the opportunity for a coming-out. The Man tries to stand up for himself and be honest and frank about himself. He explains that there are probably a few of his co-workers in the venue, whom he wants to finally tell the truth that he is a proud homosexual and weary of hiding his real identity in public. The audience applauds his sincerity and candor, but the Man unexpectedly changes his attitude, he suddenly “has a much stronger stage presence” (95) and his verbal behavior becomes vulgar all of a sudden. He proclaims that this was his show – “It's a joke, some new material I'm working on.” (95). His name is not Merrit Wilson, but Danny Patrick, and he performs as a comedian at two other comedy clubs in New York.

The issue of narratorial unreliability is ambivalent in this play. On the one hand the reader knows from the very beginning that the Man is obviously performing a show: the title is reminiscent of the genre ‘Stand-Up comedy’; the secondary text reveals that the setting is “[a]n empty stage” (90), which is reinforced by the addition that the “MAN walks out into a spotlight, stands next to a microphone.” (91). Structurally, *Stand-Up* can be described as being a play-within-a-play. At first, the reader witnesses a shy man whose clumsy, inelegant performance can merely elicit a feeling of shame from the audience, but who is able to win the sympathy by being proud of who he is. Afterwards the reader must learn that the Man is not who he claims to be, that the whole coming-out was a swindle and that ‘Merrit Wilson’ is only “a joke, some new material” that Danny Patrick has been working on.

The fact that causes this impersonation, the transformation from Merrit Wilson to Danny Patrick to be so daunting is the extreme contrast and the huge gap that lies between Merrit and Danny. The difference between the two, even though they are expressed through one person, is actually large enough to justify two characters being mentioned in the character list of the play. The reader has gained a lot of information about Merrit Wilson, which is complete and coherent enough to form a consistent person and a plausible life from the information. However, then comes Danny Patrick, the creator of 'Merrit Wilson' and the person to be made responsible for his creation, displaying characteristics that are the exact opposite of his creation. The juxtaposition of a proud homosexual coming-out and lewd, vile homosexual jokes unified and expressed by one person leads to the disintegration of Danny Patrick's moral integrity. The nature of this performance exposes the comedian's value system, which is incommensurable with the external frame of reference and thus yields unsympathetic emotions toward him, instead of well-earned applause.

In this short dramatic piece Neil LaBute plays with the readers' and audiences' expectations of what a stand-up comedian will present. He deliberately references Andy Kaufman, a comedian who is legendary for his unpredictable performances which experimented with the limits of what the audience will tolerate on stage (Jensen). Similarly, this play tests and exceeds the limits of what is appropriate and what not.

4.4.5. Falling in Like

The shortest play of the *Wrecks* play collection bears the title *Falling in Like*. This does not only resemble *Love at Twenty* in regard to its shortness, but, to a greater degree, the two plays share the same theme – a man who is obviously having an affair, betraying one woman and deceiving another. The reader does not learn much about the man, even less so about the second woman. The only source of information is the

affair of the man, a character simply named 'Woman'. This play, too, consist entirely of a dramatic monologue of the Woman whose sole purpose is to exonerate her presence in a venue, her waiting and her love – or better: her liking for a particular man. 'Love' is a word that she, yet, refuses to use to define the relationship to the man she is waiting for, but it soon becomes clear that 'love' would actually be an inappropriate term to describe this particular affiliation between male and female. At the beginning of the play the Woman engages in a one-sided act of communication with an unnamed addressee, justifying her purpose of occupying a table in a venue. She explains that she is meeting someone and that this is their "rendezvous" (*Falling in Like*, 119) accidentally misusing the French word. "It's our anniversary" (120) she announces but not without immediate reservations that it is "not, like, an official one, of course" (120) even though they have been together for one year already. While she states how fine and mature the relationship is, she checks her watch a couple of times until she finally explains that it is unfortunately one of her boyfriend's characteristics of being "tardy" (121), that he even once came so late that he only saw the ending credits of a movie. At the end of the play she gives herself and him another three minutes before she leaves, but she remains sure that he will appear shortly.

The relationship that the Woman is trying to convey differs significantly from the relationship that is actually communicated via the small but distinct signs in her language.

WOMAN. Little over a year ago and we're still ... well, it's been very nice, that's all. It is a lovely ... *thing* that we have here, and I'm happy. I'm quite happy with it, which you can probably tell. I adore it! (*Beat.*) And we don't try to label it or classify it as something it's not, we're taking it very slow ... like *molasses*, if you must know ... (120)

The utterances that the Woman exclaims at times disclose the frustration that resides in her but which she does not acknowledge at this point of time. To her it is important that she has found a man who likes her and

who also accepts her son. On that premise alone she is willing to block out otherwise obvious signs of distrust: the regular events of lateness [“once or twice he just didn’t show up [a]t all” (121)]; or the whispering on the phone. Then there is also the fact that was used as the title for the play. She explains that they “are in like” (122), a phrase that was coined by her boyfriend to reflect the maturity of their relationship, that they are “not two kids running around the yard out back, chasing each other at recess” (122). For the Woman it is, she pretends, the natural order of things: “[...] if it’s meant to be, then you fall ... fall toward each other in a steady and true way. First in like. Then in ... well, you know” (122). As mentioned before, ‘love’ does not cross her lips for the reason that she – at least unconsciously – does not believe in the applicability of this concept to this relationship either. Neither is ‘confidence’ in her boyfriend a suitable word to describe her feelings toward this man. Although she constantly repeats at the end that she knows that he will, indeed, still come, it is the exactly this continuous reiteration of this fact that unmasks her true, undeniable sentiments toward him.

In *Falling in Like*, LaBute showcases his talent of taking ordinary everyday situations and distorting them into something completely different. In this particular case, the twist is not as extreme as it is for instance in the title play *Wrecks*, but instead it is all the more recognizable and identifiable because the topic is so mundane.

4.5. Reasons to be Pretty (2008)

Reasons to be Pretty is a play that is concerned with the human obsession with beauty and perfection. It consists of two acts which each are made up of six scenes. There are four characters that appear in the play who each exhibit a different form of vanity or peculiarity related to the theme ‘beauty’. The main protagonist is Greg whose passing remark about his girlfriend’s, Steph’s appearance being ‘regular’ not only puts their relationship out of equilibrium, but also causes a chain-reaction of

events involving his best friend Kent and his girlfriend Carly. Despite Greg's efforts to persuade his girlfriend that his utterance was only meant as "a point of contrast" (*Reasons to be Pretty*, 16) to the new girl at his workplace and as a compliment, and that he "wouldn't trade her for a million bucks" (16), Steph breaks up with Greg. At a later point in time, they meet again in the food court of a mall, Greg in the hope of reconciliation but Steph with the anticipation of revenge, reading publicly aloud a list of all the things she finds ugly about him. At his work at a warehouse, his best friend Kent shows that he is a bad consoler to the needs of his friend, being completely obsessed with the looks of the new girl, Crystal. He reveals to Greg that he has been seeing Crystal for a few weeks already and makes him a reluctant confidant of his affair. At a restaurant, Greg accidentally meets Steph again who is out on a date with another man – an upper-middle class man who drives a convertible with personalized number plates. On the day of the big match of the softball team, that both Greg and Kent are on, a fight between the two friends arises over the fact that Greg does not want to cover up Kent's affair and lie to Carly any longer. The dramatic action of the play ends in the last scene at the workplace, in which Greg suggests to Carly, who is three months pregnant, to take the day off and surprise Kent – knowing that she will discover Kent in flagranti with his affair. Shortly after Carly leaves, Steph appears in the warehouse informing Greg that she is engaged and will marry.

Reasons to be Pretty is structurally a relatively conventional play in comparison to other plays included in this thesis and it can be positioned clearly on the mimetic side of the mimesis-diegesis continuum, but, still, it contains a few diegetic narrative elements that make a brief analysis interesting. Primarily of interest are the four monologues that interrupt the dramatic action of the play at regular intervals and make up scenes 3, 6, 9, and 12. The question to ask is to what purpose these four monologues have been implemented by LaBute in this play. They clearly do not serve the progress of dramatic action nor do they fulfill a necessary function in the line of the plot – on the contrary, the monologues could be omitted in

respect to the story. Nevertheless, they grant the playwright a space in which he can further shape the characters' personalities. Each character has the opportunity to say a few words about him- or herself, ponder about his or her situation in the present and past. It belongs to what Pfister calls "self-commentary" (Pfister 185) which is a particular technique of characterization, namely explicit figural characterization. However, the self-commentary provides the reader with several cues to further details about a character's personality especially through his or her verbal behavior and the particular things that he or she says. This form of figural characterization has been termed by Pfister "implicit" (cf. Pfister 184).

The first monologue is held by Steph, who explains why she felt hurt by what Greg said. Her words have a justifying quality in relation to the action that is about to follow in Act I Scene 4 in which she publicly exposes Greg's ugly features and his loneliness. Her speech resembles a dramatic monologue rather than a soliloquy due to the fact that her speech is directed at an addressee indicated by "He hurt me, he really did, you know?" (32) at the beginning of the monologue, and "[...] I'm gonna protect that. I am. Yeah. (*Beat.*) I mean, wouldn't you?" (35) at the end. Despite these clues, there is no evidence to the identity of the addressee. In addition there are hardly any stage directions from which to deduce the way that LaBute has intended this scene to be performed in a production, save for the four words "*A moment with STEPH*" (32). However, this phrase suggests that the monologue is at least directed towards the audience and, moreover, that the monological scenes are not moments *for* Steph/Kent/Carly/Greg which the audience/reader is allowed to witness, but the audience/reader is granted a moment *with* each of the characters. In her speech, Steph points out that there is an unbalance between male and female concerning the value of beauty. She reveals that it is important to her that a man finds her attractive, but it does not necessarily need to be analogous vice versa. She echoes Greg's remark about her face being 'regular' by saying "[h]e's got a good face, really, not knockout but very OK" (32) and highlights that it seems strange to her

that men and women cannot be compared in the same manner. She claims that even when she noticed that Greg “is a handsome man” (33) his looks were never the decisive factor that made her like him. However, the fact that she “[...] *thinks about this for a moment, mulling over what she’s just said* [and then] *nods her head*” (33) undermines her claim. This brief display of insecurity hints at the actual truth, namely that it is the opposite of what she has been trying to communicate.

Kent is the speaker of the second monologue, which has a distinct chauvinist attitude particularly effected through the preceding scene in which Kent revealed that he is having an affair with his co-worker and cheats on Carly. He explains that having an attractive wife also comes with “disadvantages” (63). The beauty of Carly makes him to some extent paranoid because he cannot trust her not to cheat on him: “I’m not saying she cheats on me, I’m not – but with a face like that it’s hard to believe it’s not always up in her head” (63-64). Although his anxiety about other men being after his girlfriend is comprehensible, he attenuates the sympathy the reader might have for him by having an affair. The aversion that he has against Carly’s job highlights this fact as he is not concerned about her safety at all, but rather is only inconvenienced by it: “I don’t mind it so much, I guess, but she’s always in the halls or down on the floor, strutting around, and I hate having to watch myself so much, who I’m talking to or whatever... pain in the ass” (65). He makes it clear throughout the play that he is the sort of man who prioritizes beauty above every other value. Crystal, the new girl is for him nothing more than a conglomerate of beautiful features on which he can feast, however, temporarily as she is “[t]wenty-three, so, you know, only starting to fade a bit” (60). The same is true for his pregnant girlfriend:

KENT. Carly’s getting kinda tubby but it’s sort of cute, too. Never seen her with an ass like that before ...

GREG. Huh.

KENT. I’ll put with it, though. For now.

GREG. Right.

KENT. Long as she hits the gym, like, *day* after she delivers, we're all fine ...

GREG. That's nice.

KENT. Hey, she says it louder than me ... Carly knows that's all she's got going so she's gonna take care of it. Her looks. (*Beat.*) Dude, beautiful women are like athletes: couple good years and then the knees go. (97)

Carly evinces the reverse of the medal: beauty not as a blessing but a curse. In her monologue, she describes that her looks have not only brought about fortunate things but quite often generate negative effects such as men regularly following her through supermarkets, to her car or worse. "Not just out to my car but all the way home ... slowly going along behind me to see where I live. Or work. Or through the mall, from store to store, by people." (93). She explicates that she wishes her unborn daughter to be "no more than pretty" (95) and "not some beauty queen that people can't stop staring at" (95). Carly makes it clear that she is grateful for being privileged by her good looks but that she concurrently feels vindicated by beauty.

CARLY. And for what? Because I'm great or smart or have this, this wonderful and witty way about me? No. How could anybody know that from chasing me around *Safeway*? The answer is – they couldn't. Nothing to do with me, that's what the truth of it is. It's about this (*Points.*) My face. (93-94)

The last monological speaker is Greg and his speech exhibits some features that demonstrate that these four moments with the play's characters are indeed monologues and not soliloquies.

GREG. So... but work is good, that's all fine and Carly had her baby, little girl, which is ... I dunno, did she tell you that already? Maybe. (128)

GREG. they've already reset the date *twice*, but you didn't hear it from me, OK? (128)

GREG. Listen, I'm gonna meet some friends so I need to get going [...]. (129)

Greg is clearly addressing an undefined, unknown recipient whom he asks questions to, whom he also feels obliged to apologize for having to leave. These indicators reveal that the unknown addressee has a notable presence, immediacy and spatiality, which is shared with the speaker. Greg conveys the lesson learned in this short episode of his life that makes up this play to this addressee. He remarks that beauty is an illusion. It is an elusive concept that defies definition and demarcation:

GREG. It's this mirage ... some nonexistent thing, really, that we see on people's faces or in what we imagine their bodies to be and it has so little, I mean, absolutely almost no *real* value with anything important or tangible in our lives, and yet we can't stop from chasing it... (125-126)

Greg's speech functions as a conclusion which highlights the moral of the play (i.e. beauty is in the eye of the beholder), but still it has a slight monodramatic quality. Similar to a narrator of a dramatic monologue, Greg conveys a second, true meaning in his speech. He wishes all the best for Steph, but in reality he secretly wishes her back.

GREG. Steph's got her wedding coming up, like, in December – they've already reset the date *twice*, but you didn't hear it from me, OK? – I really do hope for the best where she's concerned, though ... because I'm, you know, she's great, she is, and I'll always ... whatever. Anyhow, it'll be in December. Yep.

What is the purpose of the four monologues? Are they indispensable for this play? They are no contribution to the plot as mentioned above. Furthermore, the monologues disrupt the continuity and the mimetic quality and thus highlight the staged nature of the play. Their primary function, however, is to grant the reader an additional insight into the personality of the characters and, by doing so, they highlight a different angle of the play's main theme each time. Thus, the monologues fulfill a thematic function. Moreover, the monologues bring the mirror function of *Reasons to be Pretty* to the fore. This is particularly obvious in Greg's speech. His monologue refers to a specific work of art; a painting by

Velázquez entitled 'The Toilet of Venus' which depicts the roman goddess Venus viewing herself in a mirror. The reflection of Venus is blurred, the image is not clear to the observer. Greg explains that "the reason is because we all have a different perception of what real beauty is" (127). The image serves as an analogy for the play as a whole. In the preface LaBute first mentions the artifact 'mirror' as an everyday object that has become an essential item in contemporary homes. It is thus this artifact that should be made apparent in this play. *Reasons to be Pretty* is a mirror to the reader/audience. It is an ordinary story based upon four ordinary characters working in the blue-collar sector. The implication is that this story might happen to anyone. Furthermore, the stage directions at the beginning and end also indicate this mirror-function of *Reasons to be Pretty*. Instead of 'Silence. Darkness.', LaBute deviates from his usual phrase and wrote in the secondary text "*Lights burst on / Lights snap off.*" (7; 129) reminding the reader of the light around a vanity mirror. Typically in a play, the lights on the stage go on as soon as the play begins – first there is darkness, then there is light – but in the case of *Reasons to be Pretty* LaBute obviously highlighted that the reader/audience might not necessarily be watching a play, but actually watching their own reflection in a mirror.

[...] all these characters stare in their own mirrors and wonder if they too are good and pretty and smart and liked. Or at least good and pretty and smart and liked enough. Am I just pretty enough? Enough to get by and not be laughed at, and to meet someone and be happy? All because we can't be sure, having never really seen ourselves. Those damn mirrors are of absolutely no use to us, in the end. They tell us exactly what we wish to hear – everything, in fact, but the truth (*Reasons to be Pretty*, x)

5. Conclusion

The consideration of theoretical aspects of narrativity and its relation to drama has shown that a definition of the term 'narrative' is not easily to be found. A problem of extension has arisen due to popular (over-) usage of the term, which goes beyond the traditional notion of narrative. Nevertheless, scholars such as Ryan and Fludernik have shown that 'narrative' is a crucial notion not only in respect to academic attention of literature. 'Narrative' has been shown to be an important cognitive action and, thus, to a certain extent, it bridges the hiatus in the narratological consideration of narrative in drama. There exists a unilateral emphasis of narratological research of epic works, in particular novels, which has led to the negligence of the importance of diegesis in allegedly non-narrative genres such as drama. This neglect has developed despite the fact that ancient Greek masters, specifically Aristotle, have to a great part deduced fundamental narratological concepts from drama and the theater. Modern narratology, however, has chiefly concerned itself with the investigation of novels. The upshot of this one-sided focus was the incurrance of the ostensible dichotomy between narrative and drama. This dichotomy has remained stable even though other mimetic forms, most notably the cinema, have been incorporated into the mesh of narrative theory. Various researchers such as Richardson, Nünning, Sommer, or Chatman have argued for an inclusion of drama into narratological examinations and have demonstrated that certain diegetic narrative elements can be found in dramatic works. Such narrative elements may include prologues, epilogues, stage directions, monologues, or the presence of a narrator figure, and are present in a plethora of dramatic works spanning authors such as Shakespeare, Shaw or Beckett.

Throughout the thesis a particular focus has been put on unreliable narration and extended monodramatic speech as these elements are the most interesting in relation to the discussion of the works by LaBute. Of

course, these are not the only narrative elements that LaBute has employed in the selected plays as can be seen in Table 4 on page 43. This table has been produced to provide an overview of the narrative elements present in the selected plays. Most salient of all the elements present in these works are the stage directions of *This Is How It Goes*, which go beyond traditional conceptions of the function and purpose of secondary texts. These stage directions exceed a mere description of the setting or the appearance of characters, but instead partly assume a mediational function, which, however, at no point of the play replace the narrator 'Man', and partly represent the mind of the playwright in the moment of the creation of a play. In detail, this means that on the one side, the stage directions supplement and support the Man's narration, and on the other, they add a layer of meta-theatricality to the play, which reflect upon the play in the making while it is in progress. This meta-theatrical quality is expressed, inter alia, through the disclosure and emphasis of the factitious nature of the stage. For instance, the incorporeal voice of the stage directions draws the reader's attention to the makeshift state of the sitting-room area which is only suggested through a few pieces and encourages the reader to pretend that it is real and "fake the rest" (*This Is How It Goes*, 32).

The most frequent narrative element in the selected plays is the use of monodramatic speech. In principal, all the shorter plays – *funny*, *all apologies*, *long division*, *autobahn*, *Wrecks*, *Union Square*, *Love at Twenty*, *Stand-Up*, *Falling in Like* – feature only one speaking character. In some cases, there is a second person on stage, but in others there is even only one character present. These plays not only challenge traditional, established conceptions of drama, but also draw increased attention to the one character. There is no dialogue, no communicative exchange save for the character and the reader/audience, no action, and no change of scenery. The only source of information is the one character narrating, which is generally not to be trusted in one way or another.

In how far do the diegetic narrative elements discussed in the selected plays undergird the LaBute-ian twist and pave the way for the shocking, surprising, and disgruntling effects that Neil LaBute's plays are notorious for? To begin with, these narrative elements show that LaBute indeed moves beyond the boundaries of mimetic theater and uses a repository of literary devices that infringes the limits of drama imposed by traditional narratology. The theoretical survey of this thesis has described the divide between narrative and drama and has also delineated that leading narratologists have commenced to advocate the dissolution of the divide and to further the integration of drama into the field of narratology. The analysis of the plays has excavated that LaBute ostensibly ignores this divide, breaks with traditional conventions of drama and employs elements of narrativity that, narratologically, are associated with prose.

LaBute uses diegetic narrative elements for specific purposes as they grant the playwright special possibilities. First of all, the elements allow for the disclosure of information which cannot be shown onstage or which the playwright does not want to show onstage. Second, the narrative devices emphasize non-mimetic aspects of the play. This realization is crucial in respect to LaBute's works as his plays heavily focus on language and are to some extent even psychological. As can be seen from the analysis of the selected plays in this thesis, LaBute's plays are often so-to-speak 'eventless': there is only one character in one setting who narrates something about his or her life. This is particularly true for the play collections *autobahn* and *Wrecks*. The narrative elements active in these plays all guide the reader's/audience's gaze to the central character and his or her personality. The result is that language is in focus and not the events or the actions. Through narrative elements the reader/audience is encouraged to contemplate the character's usage of language, the content of his or her utterances and especially the manner and the mode of usage. This effect particularly pertains to the elements 'monodramatic speech' and 'unreliable narration'. Other narrative elements may have different purposes or effects such as the stage directions with a mediational slant in *This Is How It Goes* have been

apparently employed to include a layer of meta-theatricality, as has been mentioned above.

As concerns the LaBute-ian volta, the investigation in this thesis has unearthed that without the diegetic narrative elements the twist would be inconceivable in the analyzed plays. As the thematic pivot of LaBute's dramatic works is in general language, diegetic narrative elements are crucial in every respect.

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8. Abstract

This thesis aims to make a contribution to the better understanding of the techniques and the use of narrative elements in selected plays of Neil LaBute, a critically-acclaimed, contemporary American playwright, whose dramatic works are notorious for their polarizing effects. His plays, however, do not only challenge the audience, but also the boundaries of traditional conceptions of drama. Therefore, a main focus of this thesis is the investigation of the peculiar relationship of narrative theory and drama. An overview is provided of basic narratological concepts such as 'narrative' and 'narrativity', on the one hand, and of the origins of the perceived incommensurability of narrative and drama, on the other. The investigation has shown that a distinction between narrative theory and drama has evolved in the wake of the emergence of the novel and its subsequent unilateral consideration of narratologists. As a consequence, drama has been labeled as non-narrative and has been more closely associated with mimesis than diegesis. Nevertheless, various scholars have brought this dichotomous position into question and have discerned a multitude of diegetic narrative elements in numerous dramatic works.

The use of narrative elements by Neil LaBute has been examined via an analysis of selected plays which include *This Is How It Goes* (2005), *autobahn: a short play cycle* (2005), *Wrecks and other plays* (2007), and *Reasons to be Pretty* (2008). The analysis has shown that a plethora of narrative elements are employed in these plays. These are monodramatic speech, the presence of a narrator figure, unreliable narration, frames and framing devices, and stage directions which go beyond a mere description. Preeminently featured in the selected plays are the narrative elements monodramatic speech and unreliable narration. Thus it can be said that many of LaBute's plays defy a traditional notion of drama and exhibit multifarious parallels to other literary forms, in particular the dramatic monologue.

9. Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit widmet sich der Untersuchung der Verwendung von narrativen Elementen in ausgewählten Stücken von Neil LaBute. LaBute ist ein von Kritikern gefeierter, zeitgenössischer amerikanischer Dramatiker, dessen Werke für ihr polarisierendes Potential berüchtigt sind. Seine Theaterstücke fordern jedoch nicht nur das Publikum heraus, sondern auch die Grenzen etablierter Auffassungen von Drama. Aus diesem Grund ist ein Hauptaugenmerk dieser Arbeit die Betrachtung der eigentümlichen Beziehung zwischen narrativer Theorie und Drama. Ein Überblick grundlegender narratologischer Konzepte wie etwa ‚narrative‘ und ‚narrativity‘ und der Ursprünge der vermeintlichen Unvereinbarkeit von Narrativ und Drama bildet die theoretische Basis dieser Arbeit. Die Untersuchung hat gezeigt, dass sich eine Abgrenzung zwischen narrativer Theorie und Drama aufgrund des Aufkommens des Romans und dessen Privilegierung gegenüber anderen literarischen Formen in der Narratologie entwickelt hat. Als Folge wurde Drama als nicht-narrativ eingestuft und noch näher mit Mimesis als mit Diegesis verknüpft. Nichtsdestotrotz haben verschiedene Narratologen diese dichotome Position in Frage gestellt und eine Vielzahl an unterschiedlichen diegetisch narrativen Elementen in zahlreichen dramatischen Werken feststellen können.

Der Einsatz von narrativen Elementen in den Werken von Neil LaBute wurde mittels einer Analyse ausgewählter Stücke untersucht. Zu den untersuchten Stücken gehören: *This Is How It Goes* (2005), *autobahn: a short play cycle* (2005), *Wrecks and other plays* (2007), und *Reasons to be Pretty* (2008). Die Analyse hat ergeben, dass seine Vielzahl an verschiedenen narrative Elementen in diesen Stücken zum Einsatz gekommen sind nämlich monodramatische Reden, das Vorhandensein einer Erzählerfigur, unglaubliche Erzählung, Elemente der Rahmenerzählung und Bühnenanweisungen, die sich nicht auf reine Deskription beschränken sondern vermittelnde Elemente aufweisen.

Vorranging in diesen LaButeschen Stücken vertreten sind monodramatische Reden und unzuverlässige Erzähler. Es zeigte sich, dass viele dramatische Werke von LaBute einer traditionellen und etablierten Vorstellung von Drama trotzen und Parallelen zu anderen literarischen Formen schlagen, vor allem zu der aus der Lyrik bekannten Form dem dramatischen Monolog.

10. Curriculum Vitae

Angaben zur Person

Name	Michael Foith
Staatsangehörigkeit	Österreich, USA
Geburtsdatum	08.07.1986
Geburtsort	Wien
Familienstand	ledig
E-Mail Adresse	mfoith@gmail.com

Schul- und Berufsbildung

1996 – 2004	Bundesgymnasium Keimgasse Mödling
2004 – 2005	Präsenzdienst Martinek-Kaserne Baden, NÖ
2005 – 2011	Bakkalaureatsstudium Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, Universität Wien
2006 – 2013	Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Wien
seit 2011	Masterstudium Science-Technology-Society, Universität Wien

Persönliche Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen

Muttersprache	Deutsch
Sonstige Sprachen	English (muttersprachliches Niveau) Französisch (Grundkenntnisse)
Führerschein	B-Führerschein