Embedded Madness: Mad Narrators and Possible Worlds
Abstract

Madness has long been a popular theme for literature, featuring as a trope of horror, mystery, tragedy and comedy genres in varying degrees of amplitude. The topic has provided a significant access point for analysing historical, socio-political and cultural issues as it addresses controversial themes of alienation and criminality as well as philosophical theories of perception and consciousness. As a result, studies on the representation of madness in literature have been dominated by historical approaches that focus directly on social, political, philosophical and psychoanalytical interpretive models. Comparatively little has been done to analyse madness in literature from a narratological perspective. It is for this reason that I will conduct a narratological study on the impact of madness on narrative and fictional world structures. I am specifically interested in the way in which madness can be embedded across multiple levels of the narrative and the effect that this has on readers’ imaginative and interpretive processes. Close readings of Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (1996) Bret Easton-Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991) and John Banville’s *The Book of Evidence* (1989) will uncover some of the techniques that are used to embed madness into the textual and imaginative structures of a narrative, and will demonstrate how this works to deceive and challenge the reader. I will demonstrate the need for an expansion of terms within the narratological model that can cope specifically with the theme of madness.

**Key words:** Mad Narrators; Narratology; Postclassical Narratology; Possible Worlds Theory; Fictional Worlds
Introduction

Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t.

- Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Tracing the Western conceptualisation of madness through history offers a spectacular insight into the evolution of cultural ideologies, practices and interests.\(^1\) It is a topic that historians of medicine, philosophy, criminology, religion, art and anthropology have long found fascinating, as it shapes the way that governing principles of culture and society have been formed, if only by delineating the borders. By focussing on the medical history of madness as an example, it is possible to see how the conceptualisation has evolved from a religious issue to a pathological one: from demonic possession that required exorcism, to an imbalance of humours that needed leeching, to psychological repression or trauma that responds to psychiatry, to bio-chemical imbalances that respond to medication. This overly condensed “evolution” ignores (not least) the gendered and political issues as well as the changing definitions and scope of treatments for madness, but the fact that it is problematic to contain only goes to show how dense and culturally significant the topic is. The concept of madness, therefore, is highly contingent. What persists through time, is that madness is considered to be a deviation from the norm which explains why academics, artists and audiences have consistently shared a fascination in the topic. I mention “audiences” with more than dramatic theatre or cinema in mind: seventeenth and eighteenth-century Londoners, for example, would visit the infamous Bedlam insane asylum (Bethlem hospital), coined “the theatre of madness” to watch and observe the patients as a tourist activity.\(^2\) Whilst the cultural intrigue in general may be picked up at an ethical level, I wish to highlight a simpler idea that links to my interests in interpretation: interest in madness is fuelled by a basic, human curiosity in a phenomenon that “resists all understanding” (Foucault, 75). Trying to understand madness, therefore, has a cultural and commercial value that can be traced throughout history, which explains, in part, why it has been explored in such depth in

\(^1\) See Alan Thiher *Revels in Madness* (1999), Michel Foucault *History of Madness* (1961).

\(^2\) See Amanda Ruggeri’s article for the BBC “How Bedlam Became a Palace For Lunatics” (2016).
literature, theatre and art. Aiming to capture and express the experience of madness is considered by some as paradoxical, as the tools available to communicate madness are designed as tools of Reason, which is not a property considered to be attributable to madness. Lars Bernaerts notes that “madness is typified by its inaccessibility to outsiders. The gap between madness and normality, reality, truth is conventionally depicted as unbridgeable” (375). This creates a “problem of representing the unrepresentable” (Wiesenthal, 12) which speaks to Foucault’s contention that it is “impossible for [madness] to speak of itself” (115). Despite (or in spite of) the burden of paradox, artists continue to explore the phenomenological contours of madness, just as audiences and academics continue to try to understand it. As such, there is method to be found in madness. A brief glimpse at the history of madness in literature will introduce some of the key ideas that will be explored in this paper, and will frame the angle of this study.

Madness has plagued the minds of some of the most intriguing and iconic characters of literary history. Shakespeare’s famous mad characters: Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth of the eponymous plays are some of the earliest examples from English Literature. His characters descend, true to tragic form, from noble heights to deplorable lows of violence, murder and derangement. Allen Thiher notes in Revels in Madness that Shakespeare’s dramas were the first to combine the essential motifs of literary madness - the descent into madness with a crucial element of uncertainty. This is achieved in Shakespeare’s plays by blurring the ontological boundaries between the supernatural and natural worlds as the entropic plots unfold. The sense of ambiguity that is introduced forces the audience to consider whether the characters are really visited by ghosts and witches, or whether they are hallucinating. Thiher notes that “[t]his dubiety demands that madness be interpreted: hermeneutics is a necessity in a sense that the Western world had not seen before” (80), because the audience must make decisions about the conditions of the fictional world and the plot using their own knowledge and belief systems. The descent into madness is later used as a discernible motif of nineteenth century horror: “The Tell-tale Heart” (Poe, 1843), Crime and Punishment (Dostoevsky, 1866), Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Stevenson, 1886), The Horla (Maupassant, 1887), The Picture of Dorian Gray (Wilde, 1890) and The Turn of the Screw (James, 1898) each present magnificent examples of characters that transition from emotional and psychological stability to instability. Interestingly, Felman notes that The Turn of the Screw was not considered a story
about madness until Edmund Wilson published a psychoanalytical reading in 1934, suggesting that it is not a ghost story but a story about the governess’ madness (144). Felman says that many people rejected Wilson’s interpretation as it ignored the battle against evil that was inherent to the story (145) causing a divide between the “psychoanalytical” critical camp and the “metaphysical” camp (145), which highlights the significance of hermeneutics as described above. By hermeneutic interpretation, I intend to refer to the dynamics of reading whereby the audience or reader draws on their own knowledge, experience and beliefs from the actual world in order to understand a story and make judgements of a narrative and its fictional world. As a result, interpretations and understandings can differ between individuals, depending on their perspective, which is informed by their own knowledge, or schemata. This is critical to bear in mind, as narratives that deal with madness will often challenge schema, putting pressure on what we think we know, in order to capture or express the madness of a character. As the example of The Turn of The Screw shows, some readers draw on their psychoanalytical schema and consider the governess to be mad, and others draw on schema of superstition, concluding that evil, supernatural forces are at work.

For literary theory, these examples mentioned have been rich sources for historically motivated research that aims to discover the contextual significance of such representations of madness. For Shakespeare’s plays, appreciations for medical history, superstition and social structures unveil a wealth of interpretive possibilities, not just for the protagonists, but for Ophelia, Lady Macbeth and the Bedlam beggar (Edgar) too. Similar contextual sensitivities are productive for interpreting nineteenth-century horror with added consideration needed for the arrival of psychoanalysis and the evolving, public conceptualisation of criminality and madness since “the increasing use of insanity, for the first time in history, as a legal defence, [...] thrust the problem of madness, and particularly, the problem of defining madness, into the forefront of the public agenda as perhaps never before” (Wiesenthal, 14).

Stylistic evolutions and literary movements must also be taken into account: the

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3 See Allen Thiher Revels in Madness (1999) or Will Tosh’s article “Shakespeare and Madness” (2016).
4 For examples of the political/cultural discourse see Russel D. Covey’s study on cultural iconography in “Criminal Madness: Cultural Iconography and Insanity” (2009), and Cynthia Erb’s exploration of schizophilia in “Psycho, Foucault and the Postwar Context of Madness” (2006).
fictional world of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) for example, can be read as an early Modernist experiment that explores levels of consciousness and subverts literary convention by playfully challenging logic, reason and lexical semantics. “Madness” for literature, therefore, is not simply a character-related concern: *Alice in Wonderland* depicts a mad, dream world where logic, sense and order are notably absent. The vertiginous plot, nonsense language, and impossible taxonomy concocts a bizarrely vivid, yet disturbingly coherent imaginary world of madness. The experiment presents a shift in familiar perspective and disrupts conventions of literary form, so it is as much structural madness as it is a story about the mad characters of Alice’s mad dream world. Despite the modernist and postmodernist evolutions in the representation of madness seeming to invite and prompt formal attention, very few structuralist or narratological studies have been conducted on the theme of madness. It is for this reason, among others, that I intend to conduct a narratological study. Felman’s afterthoughts from *Writing and Madness* offer a useful ways for thinking about how we talk about madness in literature, which helps to frame my interest in a more formal, narratological approach.

Felman notes of contemporary literary studies on madness that it is essential to distinguish between “texts about madness or the very madness of the text” (251). *Texts about madness* refer to the subject matter, the content of the story, whereas the *very madness of the text* refers to the structure of the discourse. For Felman, the *very madness of the text* connotes the “madness of rhetoric” where normative linguistic systems are corrupt and “meaning misfires” (252), as can be shown in the word games of *Alice in Wonderland*:

> “Take some more tea,” the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.
> “I’ve had nothing yet,” Alice replied in an offended tone, “so I can’t take more.”
> “You mean you can’t take less,” said the Hatter: “it’s very easy to take more than nothing.” (53).

Although Felman does not make it explicit, the *very madness of the text* may also allude to the overall narrative composition: the chronology and internal logic of the storyworld, as would be an appropriate consideration for Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) and *Metamorphosis* (1915). The dissonant semantic and semiotic systems that are presented in Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) could also be characterized in terms of the *very madness of the text*. Furthermore, I would suggest
that *texts about madness* need to distinguish between texts that are about the madness of characters, and texts that are about the madness of a fictional world. For example, Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) is a story about mad characters, whereas Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (1939) is a story about a mad fictional world. Expanding on Felman’s distinctions is a useful exercise that helps to frame what is meant by madness in literature, but in order to really examine the architecture of madness in narratives to any depth requires a much more comprehensive typography.

The central aim of this study is to explore the impact of a narrator’s madness on narrative and fictional world structures, and the effect that this has on readers’ imaginative and interpretive processes. I am specifically interested in the way in which madness can be embedded into the narrative “directly affect[ing] the textual reality and the outcome of the plot” and altering the way that readers are able to interpret and understand the story (Bernaerts, 378). In order to achieve this, I will focus on novels with mad, autodiegetic narrators as they offer a direct view of the impact that madness has on both the narration and the fictional world. I will draw on narrative theory and possible world theory as the critical framework as they provide the essential terminology needed for describing the complex mechanisms at work. Bernaerts, Herman and Vervaeck question whether “narrative theory [is] sophisticated enough to account for the representation of madness, or [whether] the narratological toolkit simply lacking in this respect” (284). Whilst the classical model does provide the fundamental terminology needed to describe specific aspects of narrative structure, it does seem to falter at certain points when it comes to dealing with narratives that have mad narrators. Focalization and narrative voice have been specific targets for postclassical narratologists aiming to highlight the inadequacy of the classical model, and push for expanded and revised terms. In order to appreciate the significance of this critical evolution and its emerging terminology, it is pertinent to explore the foundational terms and their limitations in regards to the topic of madness.

Rimmon-Kenan’s semantic typology in *Narrative Fiction* (1983) identifies time, characterization, focalization, narrative levels, voices and speech representation, as well as events and characters as key components of storytelling. These are employed within fictional narratives to varying effects, and can be useful focal points for conducting an analysis. The chapters on focalization and narrative voices,
however, are somewhat inadequate when it comes to attempting to untangle the complicated, often polyphonic narration of mad characters. Rimmon-Kenan defines focalization as “the angle of vision through which the story is filtered in the text, [...that] is verbally formulated by the narrator” (43), which is instinctively associated with a singular perspective as the angle of vision can only be tied to one character at any given time. Focalisation can shift between characters throughout the narrative, of course, but when dealing with mad narrators the problem arises when trying to account for multiple voices that may be contained within the one character as a result of delusions or a multiple personality disorder, for example. This problematizes the efficiency of “focalization” as a classical narratological term, as it cannot accurately account for the duality in vision and narrative voice that can sometimes be detected. Rimmon-Kenan refines the concept of focalization with “the perceptual facet” (78) “the psychological facet” (80) and “the ideological facet” (82). The perceptual facet determines the “sensory range” of a focalizer in terms of space and time; the psychological facet is comprised of “the cognitive component” (80) which determines the scope of knowledge the focalizer has access to and “the emotive component” (81) which accounts for emotional inflections on the narration. The facets are further separated into “internal” and “external” positions of the narrator-focalizers which determines how much is possible for them to recount, and whether they are offering an objective or subjective perspective. Not only do these definitions put mad narrators at risk of being proclaimed unreliable, they do not account for a duality in vision and voice that can be detected—sometimes simultaneously—throughout the narrative. Describing the narrator’s experience of the world in terms of focalization and narrative voice alone, therefore, is limiting.

The problem with using unreliability to describe the narration of a mad character can be summarised by Ansgar Nünning’s pivotal, title question: “Unreliable compared to what?”. Postclassical narratologists have focussed on this question, aiming to determine whether the unreliability refers to a deviation from the norms of the text, or a contradiction in the expectations of the (implied) reader or the ethical systems of the (implied) author. The problem presented is one of defining what constitutes the norms of the text, and whether the reader or author (implied or actual) are relevant judgement criteria for a text. Nünning proposes that it is “more adequate to conceptualize unreliable narration in the context of frame theory as a projection by the reader who tries to resolve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies by attributing
them to a narrator’s ‘unreliability’. He says that “unreliable narrators” can be understood as “an interpretive strategy or cognitive process of the sort that has come to be known as ‘naturalization’” (54). In the context of mad narration, this is a far more favourable model, as the moral distance between a mad character’s narration, and norms of any extending comparative body such as the author or reader can be expansive. Furthermore, focussing on moral judgements when it comes to mad narrators risks perpetuating the historical impulse to denounce, discredit and disregard the word of the mad as meaningless. If the narrator is a serial-killing psychopath, for instance, does this invalidate their narrative? Does this make their narration implausible or useless? If a mad narrator experiences an alternate relation to reality, for example, does this automatically make them unreliable? A hallucination may well be narrated faithfully and sincerely, but it is not to be taken as a sequence of events that occur within the textual, actual world; it may be true but it is not necessarily real. Lars Bernaerts says that the delusional “subject may be unreliable, but not insincere” (380), validating potential deviations and irregularities of a mad character’s narration: the narrator’s world-view may be incompatible or inconsistent with the other characters of that fictional world, but it does not mean that they are impossible or untrue of the fictional world. Inconsistencies are commonly found in texts narrated by mad characters, and so recognising these as symptoms of an unreliable narrator in terms of Nünning’s proposed frame theory, launches an interpretive line of enquiry rather than burning the interpretive bridge. This is far more useful in the context of madness than James Phelan’s classical categories of unreliability: “misreporting; misreading; misevaluating/ misregarding; underreporting; underreading; underregarding” (51), which prefix all of the perceptive and communicative faculties of a narrator with “under” or “mis”, discrediting their worth. If I am to explore the impact of a characters’ madness on their narration, then I will set aside unreliable narration and seek out other terms within the postclassical narratological field, only drawing on the concept as an interpretive strategy in Nünning’s terms, when absolutely necessary.

The significance of including possible worlds theory in this narratological approach to madness celebrates the idea that “[b]oth madness and literature enable us to believe in and be moved by what in a sense does not exist, by fictions, imaginations, hallucinations, inner voices” (Thiher, 2). Whilst this study is primarily focused on “normal,” or “natural” fictional worlds, with “minimal departure” (Ryan,
1991, 558) from the actual world, a strong grasp on possible world and fictional world theory is still needed in order to conduct a clear analysis. This is because I intend to explore the impact of the narrator’s madness on the narrative composition and fictional world structure specifically, to determine how “the character’s alternative world,” or their perspective of the world, “directly affects the textual reality and the outcome of the plot” (Bernaerts, 378). Marie-Laure Ryan’s semantic typography (1991) is extremely useful for dissecting fictional worlds and arranging them into their composite parts. In order to encourage clarity, she proposes the terms “actual world” (AW) which “is simply the world we inhabit,” and “textual actual world” (TAW) which is the world described by the text. This distinction removes the problem of becoming inadvertently entangled in debates on reality, mimesis, authorial intention and philosophies of language in an effort to be precise about which “world” is being referred to. Ryan notes that “[t]his characterization misses, however, the sense in which the opposition actual/non-actual is itself internalized within the semantic domain.” This problem of distinguishing between actual and non-actual or fictional and non-fictional within the TAW is solved by the term “alternative possible worlds” (APW), which are “constructs of the mind, produced by such activities as dreaming, fantasizing, and forming beliefs or projections” (Ryan, 553-554). Whilst it sounds simple enough to have an actual world model (AW) and an imaginary, cognitive model (APW), it is not always possible to detect where the TAW ends and the APW begins, especially when it comes to dealing with texts that have mad narrators. As will be shown, APW will be an essential term for distinguishing and delimiting the hallucinations of delirious characters when trying to imaginatively reconstruct the ontological composition of the fictional world. Ryan notes that “the semantic domain of the narrative text contains a number of subworlds, created by the mental activity of characters. The semantic domain of the text is thus a collection of concatenated or embedded possible worlds” (573) which the narrator may or may not recognise and engage with. During an exploration of the arrangement of these fictional worlds, it will be necessary to draw on further postclassical narrative theory such as “narrative delirium” (Bernaerts), “narrative stutter” (Hoffman) and “intermental thought” (Palmer) to illustrate the impact that a narrator’s madness can have on the imaginative structures of the fictional world. Further clarification is perhaps needed with regards to what is meant by “fictional world” and “possible world.” “Fictional world” will be used frequently to denote the realm in which the
TAW and the APWs exist together, which is governed by “modal systems” of “alethic” “deontic” “axiological” and “epistemic” constraints (Doležel, 114). Alethic constraints are characterised by what is possible, impossible and necessary (115); deontic constraints denote the norms and what can be considered ethically permissible (120); the axiological “codex” determines the value structure, acknowledging that “what is a value for one person might be a disvalue for another one” (123-124); and the epistemic constraints are “modal system[s] of knowledge, ignorance and belief” (126). “Possible worlds” by comparison, are tethered to a “world at the center of the textual system” and so are only considered possible in relation to something else (Ryan, 566). APW, therefore, will only be used in relation to the TAW to denote hallucinations and internal reality systems of the fictional world.

A brief analysis of Charlotte Perkins-Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) will help to put some of these concepts to work, highlighting the weaknesses of the classical narratological model for studies on mad narration, clearing the way for a justification of the necessity of postclassical concepts. The first person, autodiegetic, epistolary form of narration prompts the use of focalization and narrative voice to conduct a narratological reading. Rimmon-Kenan’s definition of focalization describes “the angle of vision through which the story is filtered in the text” and the way that it is “verbally formulated by the narrator” (43). As mentioned, this is problematic as it limits the angle of vision and verbal formation to one character or narrative agent, but how does focalization or narrative voice account for a multiple personality disorder? As the narrative progresses in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, it becomes possible to detect two ways of seeing from the narrator’s (Jane’s) perspective. The bifurcation is signalled early on in the text. Whilst the narrator’s Romantic inclinations make allowances for her intrigue in “ghostliness” and her judgement of the run-down, isolated and gated garden in the beginning as “[t]he most beautiful place!” (11), Jane’s personality seems to divide when she contemplates the wallpaper. Her tone notably slides from a detached position of curiosity: “One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” that is “dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study” to violent repulsion: “The colour is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow” with “a sickly sulphur tint” (13) and a “recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down” (16). This duality matches the internal battle Jane faces as she tries to curb her temptation to “give way
to fancy” (15) and dwell on her illness and her obsession with the wallpaper: “But I must not think about that” only to immediately submit to it: “This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!” (16). The second narrative voice gradually begins to take form, becoming more distinct as Jane writes: “I really am getting fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper” which is instantly responded with: “Perhaps because of the wall-paper” (17), offering verbal clues as to the narrator’s bifurcated state of mind. Much like Jane’s belief that the woman she sees in the wallpaper “seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out” (23), it is possible to detect a second character, shaking the pattern of the text, infiltrating and intercepting the sentences, as if trying to get out: “To jump out of the window would be an admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try” is characteristic of “the creeper” in the wallpaper, quickly met by Jane’s waning voice of reason: “Besides I wouldn’t do it. Of course not” (34).

Recent developments in narrative theory that have explored so-called “unnatural narratology”, “cognitive narratology” and intermedial approaches, are beginning to solve these issues. Marina Grishakova’s concept of “virtual voice”, for example, is a “structural-ontological category” (93) of narrative voice that expands on concepts for both possible world theory and classical narratology. “Virtual voice” accommodates the dynamic, hybrid nature of discursive spaces that are created in modernist and postmodernist fiction, which blur the ontological distinctions between fictional worlds (TAW and APW) and the narrating agents (91). She notes that for postmodern and modern fiction, the “fictional discourse becomes imbued with voices - manifestations or traces of subjective speech, thought, and perception that are not always attributable to characters or narrators” (96), which calls for the need for more accurate narratological terminology to account for the polyphony of narrative voices. “Virtual voices” account for six categories of narrative voice: Mediated or Embedded voice, Hypothetical voice, Generalized or Impersonal voice, Fictive or Projected voices, Metaleptic voice and Alternative voices (93-95). Grishakova describes “alternative voices” as belonging “to the same subject but retaining their separate quality or even ascribed to separate fictive agents, for example, a subject’s social or psychological roles and projections, voices of schizophrenic characters [...] or characters with split personality disorder” (95-96) which more accurately accounts for the duality of voice that is perceptible in the narration of The Yellow Wallpaper. Furthermore, “alternative voices” accounts for the specific pathological explanatory
framework that is needed to explain Jane’s bifurcated narration. By comparison, Rimmon-Kenan’s “psychological facet” (80) of focalization accounts only for “the cognitive component” and the “emotive component” (80-81) which determines the narrator’s cognitive ability in the former definition, and their emotional state in the latter. These classical definitions cannot account for the hefty themes of madness and mental illness that are more complicated than cognitive ability and emotional stability, which demonstrates the significance of postclassical narratological revisions and expansions. This one example sets the stage for an exploration of other postclassical terms that have emerged such as “narrative delirium” (Bernaerts) and “narrative stutter” (Hoffman) which will be shown to be vital for a narratological study of stories with mad character-narrators.

Close readings of Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (1996), Bret Easton-Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991) and John Banville’s *The Book of Evidence* (1989) will illustrate the significance of emerging postclassical narratological concepts for conducting a structural analysis of texts about madness and the madness of the text. The intention is to move beyond reflexive readings of unreliability, instead aiming to unravel the ways in which madness can be embedded into the semantic and semiotic structures of the narrative. These novels have been chosen for their autodiegetic, mad narrators as they offer a direct link to the impact that madness has on both narration and fictional world building. As well-known novels, the hope is also that this study may add a new perspective and draw out some of the formal techniques for writing about madness.\(^5\) *The Yellow Wallpaper* will continue to be used as a comparative text and where possible, I will try to bring in other examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts being used. The first section will explore Bernaerts’ concept of “narrative delirium” in *Fight Club* in more detail, expanding on the ways that it can be embedded into the structure of the narrative. I will draw on Doležel’s “intensional” and “extensional” modalities to distinguish between semantic devices that operate at the level of the text, and ones that operate within the imaginary realm of the storyworld. The second section will demonstrate the limits of narrative delirium using *American Psycho*, and will show instead how possible world theory can be invoked to explore systems of reality within a fictional world, and how these reflect the

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\(^5\) Although the film adaptation of *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000) and *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) may also be taken into consideration for a narratological analysis, they are not to be included here for the purpose of simplicity.
narrator’s madness. *The Book of Evidence* will be taken last as the most complicated example that embeds the narrator’s madness at multiple levels of the narrative. The choices that are made regarding narrative structure foreground the issue of uncertainty, which challenges conventional reading practices and interpretations of the novel. Without the means to conduct a thorough, methodical study of readers’ responses, I will necessarily draw on my own reactions, interpretations and transformations, but as the main motivation of this thesis is to explore the formal aspects of narrative structure, this should not interfere too drastically with my findings. The postclassical narratological framework for this paper will focus on traditional methods of structural analysis with the view to work towards conclusions on “what these narratives achieve in communication, which ideological or identity-related messages they convey, what ‘cultural work’ […] they perform, and what possible effects they may engender in the real world” (Alber and Fludernik, 22). I believe that stories that present madness as an embedded quality of the narrative structure can provoke radical transformations in reading practices, actual world perspectives and understandings of madness. I will try to address the ethical implications of these effects towards the conclusion, but since the predominant attitude of this research is to discover how the seemingly inexpressible is expressed and how the incomprehensible is made comprehensible through the craft of writing, the ethics are not an aspect that can be explored in sufficient depth. This would require much more research and an expert knowledge of the way that functional and dysfunctional minds process fiction. Instead, I will lean into the proverbial headwinds and embrace the problematic aspects of madness as I explore the ways in which a narrator’s madness can be perceptible as an embedded property of the narrative.
Lars Bernaerts coins the term “narrative delirium” to describe the impact that a character’s symptoms of madness—specifically hallucinations—can have when they “are woven into the imaginary fabric of the narrative” (377), causing the madness to “colonize the fictional world” (373). He poses it as a narrative strategy that embeds the character’s delusions into the discourse, allowing the narration to continue as if the elements of the delirium are real. This has the effect of blurring the ontological boundary between the textual actual world (TAW) and the cognitive alternative possible world (APW) of hallucinations; the delusions are either so discreetly, or so completely embedded that it is not always possible to detect where the TAW ends and the APW of the narrative delirium begins. Bernaerts notes that madness “deserves an attuned narratological approach that does justice to the distinction between delirium and embedded dreams, fantasies, lies, errors and magic elements” (384). In order to distinguish delirium from these other APWs, Bernaerts outlines “five defining features” that constitute narrative delirium: “an alternative relation to reality, an alternative coherence, a strong belief, a psychological motivation, and a pathological background” (376). The alternative relation to reality consolidates the position of the delirium as an APW; once the delirium has been identified, it can be regarded as world distinct from the TAW. The alternative coherence refers to the logical construction of the delirium; Bernaerts notes that “[r]arely if ever is the world of the delirium a chaotic, disordered world” as he suggests that it is “often presented as a way of coping with the chaos of reality” (379). The strong belief is an essential property as the experiencing subject must believe in the truth and the reality of the delusion for it to take effect for the reader. The psychological motivation means that elements of the narrative delirium’s world construction must be “understood as a representation of the subject’s consciousness and unconscious” (380) as opposed to magical elements or actual properties of the TAW for example. Finally, the pathological background of the experiencing subject must be alluded to in the text so
that “pathological frames and scripts” (382), or pathological schema, can be drawn on by the reader as explanatory frameworks for the hallucinations.

In order to make use of Bernaerts’ narratological concept, it is necessary to condense his ideas into a working model. Bernaerts proposes that in addition to these five defining features, it is possible to trace the effects and workings of narrative delirium to the way it is embedded on three levels “meaning, structure and effect” (377). Combined with the defining features, these levels provide a model for analysing “the semiotic structure of the narrative delirium as a substantial component of the interaction between text and reader” (376). “Meaning” refers to the content; the subject matter; the topic of madness that allows readers to call upon their psychoanalytical and psychopathological schema to rationalise the hallucinations as symptoms of mental illness. With the knowledge that a character is mad, the reader is able to interpret inconsistent or dissonant aspects of the narration as manifestations of the character’s sick mind. The “effect” determines the function of narrative delirium as it is the aspect that directly elicits interpretation, posing such questions as: Why is narrative delirium used in the story? What rhetorical function does it have? Does it comment on ideological, epistemological or ontological conditions of the fictional world? As Bernaerts does not make it explicit, I would suggest that “structure” must further distinguish between “intensional” and “extensional” semantics (Doležel, 135).

The intensional semantics constitute the textual composition, the verbal organisation of the narrative; the extensional semantics delineate the reference, or fictional world that is imaginatively reconstructed as a response to textual (intensional) cues. Bernaerts’ analysis of Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* is largely concerned with how narrative delirium impacts the extensional dimension (the fictional world), and how the reader’s imaginative reconstruction of the fictional world is hindered, or impaired by the effects of the delirium. Although he says that “textual clues, such as improbabilities concerning facts, events, and characters will mark the ramification [of narrative delirium] within the textual universe” (377), Bernaerts does not go into much detail about the impact that narrative delirium has on the textual, intensional dimension of the narrative structure. He highlights themes and motifs as embedded markers of madness, and notes that the “narrative progression runs parallel to the progression of the delirium” (383) by way of intensity and duration, but this does not necessarily address the explicit verbal clues that are scattered throughout the text. If time is taken to reread the novel, it is possible to detect embedded, explicit verbal
clues that are assembled and positioned in such a way that they can be read to have multiple meanings. It is almost impossible for anyone encountering the narrative for the first time with no knowledge of the plot to detect the polysemous clues. I am interested in how this is made possible without completely corrupting the coherence of the narrative, and will approach the question by focusing on the intensional semantics and considering theories of reading practices. First, I will explore Bernaerts’ concept of narrative delirium in more depth by comparing Fight Club with The Yellow Wallpaper to demonstrate the significance of identifying the locus of the delirium within the intensional and extensional dimensions of the narrative structure.

Chuck Palahniuk’s Fight Club is a prime example of narrative delirium, as “the delirium of the protagonist assumes vast proportions” (Bernaerts, 373), enabling a clear appreciation for the way that narrative delirium works, and the impact it can have on understandings of the story. The nameless narrator retrospectively tells the story of how he and Tyler Durden form an underground, bare-knuckle boxing club that evolves into an anarchistic, terrorist organisation that operates on a massive scale across the country. It is revealed towards the end that Tyler Durden is a figment of the narrator’s imagination; a manifestation of his multiple personality disorder that is triggered by his insomnia. The story is told as if all events take part in the TAW: Tyler Durden and the nameless narrator are presented as complete, distinct characters that have separate lives within the fictional world, and it is only towards the end of the story, after Tyler disappears (130), that the reader has any concrete reason to suspect that he is not real. Bernaerts notes that “[g]radually, the reader notices the cracks in the architecture of the fictional world” (375-376) until at last, the narrator is revealed to have multiple personality disorder, causing the entire storyworld to self-destruct: “We’ve lost cabin pressure” “We’re all going to die” (Fight Club, 160). Following this revelation, the reader is forced to pick up the pieces, revise their understanding of the narrative and reimagine the storyworld. It is only by rereading the novel that it is possible to detect the embedded clues and appreciate the intricacy and complexity of a narrative structure that is able to conceal and support such a major ontological transformation.

“Storyworld” is a useful term here, as it acknowledges both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the fictional world in which the events take place, which “ensures narrativity” (Ryan, 2019, 63). David Herman emphasises the significance of storyworld over story, as he says that in trying to “make sense of a narrative,
interpreters attempt to reconstruct not just what happened [...] but also the surrounding context of environment embedding existents, their attributes, and the actions and events in which they are more or less centrally involved” (13-14). TAW by comparison, is more static and descriptive; it describes the physical landscape of the fictional world and its alethic constraints, so there is no obligation for events to occur or even for characters to exist. By these definitions, when the narrator of *Fight Club* is revealed to have imagined Tyler, the storyworld falls apart; the reader must retrace their steps through the narrative and piece it back together with only one character performing the action. The spatial dimension that is imagined of the fictional world (the TAW), however, is not destroyed by the revelation; the physical, logical, natural conditions of the TAW remain intact with just one of the main characters performing within it rather than two. This is a significant result of the psychological motivation and the pathological background that Bernaerts determines as defining features of narrative delirium; in recognising elements of the narrative as psycho-pathological manifestations, the reader must (re)imagine them as part of an APW, rather than as aspects of the TAW, dismantling and redesigning the storyworld in the process. Tyler is no longer considered to be part of the TAW, and must be reconceptualized in his new role as a hallucination. By contrast, the storyworld of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is not disrupted by the impact of narrative delirium. The “creepers” that Jane describes, for example, are so inconsistent with the TAW, as the reader would reconstruct it, that they are never believed to be part of the “inventory” of the fictional world (Ryan, 1991, 558). Instead, they are immediately imagined to be part of Jane’s delirium, populating the peripheral APW.

The different effects that narrative delirium can have on the stability storyworld can be explained by the way it is embedded into the narrative structure. This is where Doležel’s intensional (text) and extensional (reference, story) semantics become useful. For *Fight Club*, the narrative delirium is embedded most prominently as part of the intensional semantics of the narrative structure because the reader is deceived by the textual cues, forcing them to imaginatively reconstruct an APW of delirium as the TAW. It is not possible to account for narrative delirium as part of the extensional, storyworld in *Fight Club* until the narrator reveals that Tyler is a hallucination. By comparison, the narrative delirium of *The Yellow Wallpaper* can be seen to be embedded as part of the extensional structure, as it is clear to the reader that Jane is hallucinating, but not clear to Jane, so they are immediately imagined to
be aspects of the storyworld: The reader understands that Jane’s mental health is unstable, so the hallucinations are imagined as pathological manifestations within the storyworld as APWs, as opposed to existents of the TAW.

In an analysis of the parallel progression of narrative delirium and the narrative, Bernaerts notes that it is useful to determine the “intensity, duration and range” of the delirium presented at the structural level of the narrative (383). I would be inclined to draw on Rimmon-Kenan’s facets of text-time and add “frequency” (57) as a further factor for consideration. “Intensity” refers to moments of “increased suspense” (384), when the narrative delirium demands interpretive attention by becoming intensified. Bernaerts uses “intensifying” to define “intensity,” so it is a little unclear what he means completely, but his statement that it demands “more interpretive attention” (384) suggests that the delirium can be foregrounded or backgrounded throughout the narrative. For example, there is low intensity when Jane mentions “the creepers” in passing, compared to the higher intensity when Jane tries to free the creeper from behind the pattern of the wallpaper. The “range” determines the scope of impact; the delirium may be restricted to a character’s perception, or it may extend across intensional and extensional “narrative elements (characters, events, plot, time, space, narratorial comments)” (384). The implications that duration and frequency have on the impact of narrative delirium are that they can determine how discreetly or overtly the delirium is embedded into the narrative. Focusing on the duration and frequency of the hallucinations can also provide information as to the state of mind of the narrator. For example, Jane’s obsessive thoughts about her mental health and the wallpaper are gradually mentioned more frequently and in increasingly longer passages, the more her mental stability deteriorates. Her hallucinations and obsessive thoughts monopolize the narrative and textual space, forcing the reader to concentrate on her rapid unravelling, without ever suspecting that she will suddenly be transformed into the woman of the wallpaper that she is trying to free. The duration of the delirium in Fight Club, by comparison, is far more expansive as it extends across the majority of the narrative.

Marco Caracciolo notes in Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction that “[j]ust like a spiderweb, narrative fiction is carefully arranged in a pattern that is meant to ensnare prey (or readers) through its exquisite workmanship” (2016, xiv) which perfectly describes the construction and impact of narrative delirium. Much like Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper, Fight Club weaves clues of its plot twist into the
narrative from the beginning, signalling towards the APW of the delirium. The narrator mentions his insomnia early in the story: “Three weeks and I hadn’t slept. Three weeks without sleep, and everything becomes an out-of-body experience” (19). This simultaneously signals towards his pathological background and his existential status which experiences a sense of detachment from reality, but also an awareness of it: “This is how it is with insomnia. Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can’t touch anything and nothing can touch you” (21). This detachment is further worked through the narrative via textual clues, or intensional semantics: the narrator is never quoted in dialogue; his narrative position repeatedly slides into second person narration: “You wake up [...] you wake up [...] you wake up” (25) and his character is constantly deferring to Tyler: “At the hospital, Tyler tells them I fell down. Sometimes, Tyler speaks for me” (52). These embedded semantic clues are initially read as characterisations of the narrator and as symptoms of his insomnia, which seems to warp and flatten his responses to the world around him. As a result, the narrator is seen to be neurotic and morose, prone to entertaining his morbid curiosity in terminal illness, and fantasising about death: “Life insurance pays off triple if you die on a business trip. I prayed for wind shear effect. I prayed for pelicans sucked into the turbines and loose bolts and ice on the wings [...] I prayed for a crash” (26). He has resigned to conformity in his “tiny life” and his “shit little job” (147) and been defeated by it. The narrator’s personality is drastically contrasted by Tyler’s anarchistic, self-empowered and self-liberated character, and so it seems natural for the narrator to defer to Tyler, who he admires, in order to practice the self-empowerment he seeks for himself: “Tyler’s words [were] coming out of my mouth. I used to be such a nice person” (98). Furthermore, this admiration for Tyler disguises the moments that should be read as clues that Tyler is not real: “I know this because Tyler knows this” (26) and “These are Tyler’s words coming out of my mouth. I am Tyler’s mouth. I am Tyler’s hands” (155) reads as a metaphorical rather than literal. Building the clues into characterisation plays on Caracciolo’s concept of the “character-centered illusion” (8) which recognises the desire that readers have to imagine fully formed, plausible and conceivable characters. Character-centered illusion seems an apt term for this particular novel as it is precisely the illusion of distinct characters that deceives the reader. Readers are able experience the “strong belief” aspect of narrative delirium, by way of this character-centred illusion, as they are so preoccupied by a desire to imagine the characters as independent agents, that
they are unable to perceive the alternate ontological possibility. In being trapped by
the process of converting intensional formations into extensional ones (transforming
textual cues into imaginary entities) the reader is unwittingly drawn under the spell of
narrative delirium themselves. It is only when the spell breaks, when the delirium is
exposed, that the reader can go back through the text and recognise the clues.

In addition to the pathological and character-centered disguises that mask the
embedded clues, polysemous semantics are exploited to full effect. The narrator
wonders “if Tyler and Marla are the same person” offering a satirical justification that
matches his character: “Still, you never see me and Zsa Zsa Gabor together, and this
doesn’t mean we’re the same person. Tyler just doesn’t come out when Marla’s
around” (65). The reader is content that this is an ironic aspect of the narrative, and
later assimilates it when the narrator explains that his parents behaved in a similar
way: “My parents did this magic trick for five years” (71), encouraging the idea that
this observation speaks to the narrator’s history and character. The reader only fully
comprehends the impact of this observation when they realise that it can be
interpreted more literally: Tyler and Marla are never seen in a room together because
the narrator is Tyler. This technique is used to express the alternative relation to
reality, the alternative coherence and the strong belief that the narrator-character has
in his delusions. It is significant that the reader interprets these instances a certain way
so that they can fully appreciate the strong belief aspect of narrative delirium. If the
reader is deceived by the delusions, they can empathise with the narrator-character’s
madness. Marco Caracciolo states that “empathy is best understood as an imaginative,
simulative mechanism” (39), which allows the reader to achieve a profound shift in
perspective. In being vulnerable to narrative delirium’s intensional functions, rather
than simply being a witness to its extensional meaning, the reader can contemplate
their own epistemological and ontological status. Bernaerts determines that the
narrative delirium of Fight Club has an ideological function because it “is the locus of
resistance to an overprotecting and superficial consumer society” which makes the
“subversive potential of the imagination operational” (377), suggesting that the
protagonist’s delusions are a reaction to his environment. By focussing on the
intensional function of narrative delirium, however, it is possible to appreciate first
hand how “the delirium clears the way for epistemological and ontological doubt”
(384) for the reader. This not only transforms the reader’s cognitive and interpretive
skills (Caracciolo, 35), it may also show how an evolution in the paradigm of madness in literary theory may be initiated.⁶

How is it possible then, that the author can count on the reader being susceptible to narrative delirium? I have already mentioned the embedding of polysemous clues and characterisation, but reading techniques also contribute to the success of narrative delirium: Bernaerts notes that the “sort of coherence displayed in the delirium prompts the reader, for his part, to use a certain kind of integration mechanism” (379). Jonathan Culler’s concept of “naturalization” (131) is one kind of integration method that is particularly helpful. Bart Vervaeck and Luc Herman note that Culler’s theory of “naturalization” is “a strategy that turns the peculiar and the unknown into the known” (515) which has been further explored by Monika Fludernik to appreciate how “readers turn alienating texts into something they can understand” (Vervaeck and Herman, 514). Culler writes that “‘Naturalization’ emphasizes the fact that the strange or deviant is brought within a discursive order and thus made to seem natural” (137) whereas Fludernik reworks the term as “narrativization” which “characterizes a process of interpretation by means of which texts come to be perceived as narratives” (1996, 313). It may be useful to maintain the distinction between the two as I have emphasised the importance of clarity, so for Fight Club, and American Psycho in the next section, “naturalization” is the more appropriate term as the narrative chronology is fairly straightforward, and so reconstructing the narrative is not necessarily the main challenge for interpretation. By contrast, The Book of Evidence may require the use of “narrativization” as the narrative order is fractured and fragmented.

“Naturalization” for Fight Club then, is the way in which the reader assimilates inconsistencies into the storyworld and uses them as signs of conspiratorial comradeship or explanations of pathological symptoms. For example, the narrator asks around for Tyler after he goes missing, and experiences strange responses: “No, sir. Not hardly, sir. Nobody they know’s ever met Tyler Durden. Friends of friends met Tyler Durden, and they founded this chapter of fight club, sir. Then they wink at me” (135). The reader is led to believe that they should interpret the wink as suggesting that the characters are following a secret rule of fight club.

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⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, the paradigm shift that I am seeking from a narratological perspective is with regards to the reflexive diagnosis of a mad narrator as an unreliable narrator as it is currently defined.
the narrator is not aware of and that these people have, in fact, met Tyler. That it is left unexplained by the narrator, however, leaves a sense of uncertainty, especially as he returns rapidly to his insomniac state: “it’s not clear if reality slipped into my dream or if my dream is slopping over into reality” (137) until “I smell gasoline on my hands. Tyler goes ‘Hit the road. [...]’ I’m still asleep. Here, I’m not sure if Tyler is my dream. Or if I am Tyler’s dream” (138). Having spent the entire narrative believing that Tyler is a separate, TAW character, these signals are easily naturalized as symptomatic of the narrator’s insomnia. The narrator has already stated that he feels a detachment from reality when he is severely sleep-deprived, so these fragmented, ontologically blurry moments can be rationalized within this explanatory frame. In addition to his insomnia, the narrator’s characterisation may contribute to this process of naturalization. He can be described as being acutely sardonic: “I am Joe’s Complete Lack of Surprise” (138) which momentarily abandons the literal function of the discourse and activates the rhetoric of irony. As such, inconsistencies in the narrative may be naturalized as hyperbole and irony, as components of the narrator’s character.

Rimmon-Kenan’s “dynamics of reading” (120) and Doležel’s “authoritative narrative” (148), offer further explanations as to how narrative delirium is so effective at deceiving the reader, even though clues are offered throughout the narrative. Drawing on Menakhem Perry, Rimmon-Kenan describes the heuristic process of reading whereby the reader “does not wait until the end to understand the text” as they “start integrating data from the very beginning” (122) which complements the concept of naturalization. Doležel explores the way in which readers make judgments on the truth of the fictional worlds, based on the authority of the narrator. He uses the windmill passage in Don Quixote to demonstrate how readers rationalize inconsistencies:

The passage forces upon us the question: What exists in the fictional world of Don Quixote - windmills or giants? Our answer is the same as that of any ordinary reader of the novel: windmills. Clearly, the decision is not based on truth-valuation, because there are neither windmills nor giants in the world until the text tells us about them. The decision is based on the character of the constructing texture: the windmills are introduced in the narrator’s discourse, the giants in that of a fictional person. (Heterocosmica, 148).
Doležel’s authoritative narrative, therefore, draws on the normative practice of deferring to the authoritative voice for answers, which, in the case of fictional narratives, is the narrator. This may well be contestable by engaging in debates about authors, implied authors and even unreliable narration, but such debates cannot be accessed without going through the narrator and the narration first. Due to this narrative authority, the reader does not instinctively conduct a reading with the intent to be suspicious of the narrator, until they are given reason to be. This trust in the narrator contributes to Rimmon-Kenan’s “dynamics of reading” enabling the reader to be misguided by narrative delirium.

Marie-Laure Ryan suggests two further reading strategies that are significant to note when considering the function and impact of narrative delirium. One is concerned with reading fictional and possible worlds: “recentering” (1991, 556), and the other is concerned with handling narrative inconsistencies: when narratives “open logical holes in the fabric of storyworlds” readers “process these texts according to what I call a ‘Swiss cheese strategy’” (2019, 66). “Recentering” is the imaginative process that readers undergo to achieve immersion in the fictional worlds of a narrative. The reader must imaginatively reconstruct a TAW from the text which determines the realms of possibility for that fictional world. As such, this determines temporal and spatial conditions, which delimits the borders of any APWs that may be referenced. Recentering may occur at multiple stages throughout the narrative as the reader accumulates more information. For example, the reader can be seen to recenter twice whilst reading *Fight Club*: first as “a precondition of the immersive process” (Ryan and Bell, 18), whereby the reader activates their imagination to reconstruct the fictional world, and secondly as they begin to understand the extent of the narrator’s madness; the reader recenters initially, but unwittingly, to an APW and then to the TAW as the hallucinations begin to be revealed. Perhaps a more advanced example of multiple recentering may be found in Philip K. Dick’s *Time Out of Joint* (1959). The reader recenters to, or becomes immersed in, a suburban American town set in 1959 where Ragle Gumm professionally competes in a daily newspaper competition (that he always wins) solving a puzzle: “Where-will-the-little-Green-Man-Be-Next?” (25). Life for Ragle seems to be fairly mundane and prosaic, but as the narrative progresses, he stumbles upon bizarre inconsistencies: he finds a magazine featuring Marilyn Monroe, but she is unrecognisable to him and his wife. His neighbour, Bill Black, knows that she is a hollywood actress (68), and becomes
agitated when he is quizzed about her which breeds suspicion. Ragle also experiences moments when objects seem to dissolve into thin air, being replaced simply by their labels:

Not again!
It’s happening to me again.
The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules. He saw the molecules, colorless, without qualities, that made it up. Then he saw through, into the space beyond it, he saw the hill behind, the trees and sky. He saw the soft-drink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, the cash register [...].
In its place was a slip of paper. He reached out his hand and took hold of the slip of paper. On it was printing, block letters.
SOFT-DRINK STAND. (40-41)

The reader recenters, beginning to suspect that Ragle is going mad and so activates a heightened awareness for pathological clues. This is quickly revised, however, as it is revealed that he has a collection of these slips of paper, and that perhaps the inconsistency is located within the TAW rather than within Ragle’s mind. Ragle contemplates the relation between language and reality: “Word doesn’t represent reality. Word is reality” (45), prompting a metafictional framework of interpretation that supports the idea that the TAW is the locus of the inconsistency. Following his instinct that he is caught up in a conspiracy, Ragle leaves town, only to discover that the rest of the world is living almost “forty years in the future” (134): the reader recenters again. It emerges that Ragle’s hometown has been constructed as a kind of simulation, and that actually, the earth is caught in a war with lunar colonists or “lunatics” (184). The competition Ragle has been winning daily, has been a task set by the “One Happy World Government” (190) for him to predict the target of the enemy’s missiles: the reader recenters once more. Whilst this novel is not a particularly clean example of narrative delirium because Ragle’s madness is indeterminable (or irrelevant), it demonstrates how the gradual release of information is integrated by the reader and influences the imaginative organisation of the fictional worlds through the process of recentering. Awareness of this reading practice enables the author to carefully control the structural formation of narrative delirium and, to a certain degree, the reader’s reaction.

The “Swiss cheese [reading] strategy” that Ryan proposes is activated when readers encounter logical inconsistencies in the narrative: she says that readers “close
their eyes on the holes and process the rest of the text according to normal inference processes” (2019, 66). It would be interesting to pursue a more focussed study on this theory using more experimental texts that present glaring inconsistencies that need to be ignored in order to make progress through the narrative. This theory seems to be similar to Culler and Fludernik’s concepts of “naturalization”, but I would suggest that her “Swiss cheese strategy” focuses more on the praxis of reading rather than the interpretive process that naturalization refers to. In essence, the inconsistency is ignored or set aside to be dealt with once the entire narrative has been absorbed. Naturalization, however, aims to focus on the inconsistency in order to normalise and assimilate it, bringing it “within modes of order which culture makes available” (Culler, 137).

Assimilating narrative oddities contributes to the process of encouraging profound perspective shifts and evolving readers’ schemata. After reading *Fight Club*, not only is the reader able to marvel at how brazenly they were conned by the narrator, they may be able to appreciate, to a degree, what it means to experience hallucinations and delusions. Bernaerts notes that as “the narrative offers access to madness, it might—sometimes misleadingly—enable readers to appropriate a radical, individual experience” (375), which leans towards a similar conclusion. Whilst I am cautious not to insinuate that narrative delirium enables readers to experience madness, it does make the hallucinatory aspect of madness more vivid and conceivable. Bernaerts goes on to note that this “raises important questions regarding the force of rhetoric and the ethical consequences of the procedure” (375), which are not necessarily possible to settle here, especially as the next section is concerned with the representation of a psychopathic murderer’s perspective. Instead, I will tread cautiously as I continue my analysis and return to this idea in the concluding section.

“Narrative delirium” has been an essential narratological tool for analysing the way that a character’s hallucinations can impact the structure of the narrative. By focussing on the ontological arrangement of the fictional worlds in *Fight Club*, Bernaerts has shown how the boundaries between reality and hallucinations can become blurred, which has the effect of embedding madness into the imaginative structures of the narrative. I have expanded on Bernaerts’ concept using Doležel’s intensional and extensional modalities to mark a sharper distinction between the texture of the narrative and the extended references to demonstrate how sophisticated the embedding technique can be. This has enabled me to draw out
particularities of the intensional semantics, such as polysemous clues, which has demonstrated that the narrator’s madness can be evidenced as an embedded property of the texture of the narrative, as well as of the fictional world. Furthermore, I have expanded towards theories of integration mechanisms and characterisation to demonstrate how narrative delirium as a device takes effect, and how intricate the craft of writing from a mad narrator’s perspective can be.

**American Psycho** - Intermentality, Intertextuality, Trans-universality

Abandon all hope ye who enter here

- Ellis, *American Psycho*
- Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

*American Psycho* exhibits all five of Bernaerts’ defining features of narrative delirium: “an alternative relation to reality, an alternative coherence, a strong belief, a psychological motivation, and a pathological background” (376), so it is of course possible to conduct a reading using this theoretical concept, but as I will demonstrate, doing so may forestall the opportunity to expand interpretations of the novel. This is because narrative delirium creates a specific ontological model of “real” and “imaginary” within the storyworld, forcing the reader to imaginatively reconstruct a binary model of TAW and APW from the textual cues. This task risks being too reductive as the judgements that are necessary to make of the narrative to decide what can be ascribed to the TAW and to the APW of delirium, do not acknowledge connections that can be made between other fictional world-building systems. A more flexible, postclassical narratological framework using the possible world concept of “reality systems” (Ryan, 1991, 557) and Alan Palmer’s cognitive theoretical approach will demonstrate that there is more to be discovered about the way that madness is embedded in the structure of the narrative of *American Psycho*. For this section then, I propose “intermentality” (Palmer), “intertextuality” (Doležel) and “trans-universality” (Ryan) as more useful terms for exploring the complexity of the narrative structure that is influenced by the narrator’s psychopathy. Baudrillard’s “hyperreal” and Philip K. Dick’s “fake fakes” will also prove useful for describing the reality systems of *American Psycho* and demonstrating their multi-layered quality. In order to appreciate
how much more these proposed concepts are able contribute to an understanding of American Psycho, I will first consider how narrative delirium can be used. Marco Caracciolo recognises the significance of narrative delirium in American Psycho, but does not expand on its interpretive potential. I will entertain a few interpretations of my own before making the case for these other narratological terms.

In Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction, Marco Caracciolo considers the reaction that readers have to the madness of the narrators in American Psycho and Fight Club by focussing on online reviews. He notes the problematic aspects of conducting research in this way, as the forums he uses are on bookseller websites, and so contributors will often censor their reviews to avoid spoiling the plot for other readers. Despite this, he is able to detect that many readers recognise that American Psycho and Fight Club “are characterized by a hesitation between reality and hallucination: readers interrogate the ontological boundaries internal to the fictional world; they are encouraged to attend to such boundaries, questioning them or retrospectively contemplating their ambiguity” (2016, 81). As a result, some readers have determined that Patrick Bateman has been hallucinating throughout the entire narrative, and that his murders and confessions are symptoms of his delusions:

...are Bateman’s crimes real or imaginary? Many reviewers mull over this question, and the fact that the question cannot be answered satisfactorily on the basis of textual cues only calls for more hypothesizing— and more interpretation— on the part of readers. Thus the novel’s epistemological instability through mind-baffling unreliability feeds into the interpretive openness of the novel itself. (Caracciolo, 113)

This is a problematic reading, however, as if Bateman is taken to be hallucinating his murders and confessions throughout the entire story, then what can be accepted as actual and true of the narrative? Furthermore, how is it possible to begin to distinguish between the TAW and APW? It seems rather naive to assume that all violent, immoral and inconsistent moments of the narrative are simply alternate possible worlds of fantasy and hallucination, especially as the other characters of the TAW perform morally questionable acts as well. For instance, Bateman and his friends are regularly seen to be harassing homeless people, which raises the question as to why he would feel the need to fantasise about maiming and murdering them as separate episodes? It is true that Bateman suffers episodes of delirium and loses control, but these moments are explicitly signalled in the narrative: “it has been a bad week” (368)
and “I think I was hallucinating while watching it. I don’t know. I can’t be sure” (62) and his behaviour is notably different: he runs up and down Broadway “screaming like a banshee” (160), and confesses: “I’ve started drinking my own urine. I laugh spontaneously at nothing. Sometimes I sleep under my futon” (368). As such, it is conceivable that Bateman could be persistently delusional, but not necessarily logical. This logic, however, is challenged by the fact that there are no apparent consequences to his crimes and his confessions are either missed, ignored or misinterpreted: he says to the bartender at Tunnel: “‘You are a fucking ugly bitch I want to stab to death and play around with your blood,’ but I’m smiling,” (57), and to Evelyn: “‘Well,’ I say, ‘you couldn’t have come over anyway.’ [...] ‘Because your neighbour’s head was in my freezer.’ I yawn, stretching” (114), to which neither character responds. Then with Daisy, he says:

“I’m into, oh, murders and executions mostly. It depends.” I shrug.
“Do you like it?” she asks, unfazed.
“Um...It depends. Why?” I take a bite of sorbet.
“Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don’t really like it,” she says. (197).

The question at this point, is to consider what the significance is of ascribing narrative delirium to this novel. What interpretive possibilities are there as a result of recognising a dual ontology? A socio-psychological interpretation using narrative delirium, could postulate that Bateman’s life is so superficial and abstracted from “natural” reality that he has to fantasise about destroying the world around him and carnally reconnecting to life and nature through death, violence and cannibalism. Perhaps his existential crisis, triggered by the anonymity and superficiality of metropolitan life makes him dream of lashing out so that someone might notice him: “if I were to disappear into that crack [...] the odds are good that no one would notice I was gone” (217). These interpretations, however, risk ignoring the pathological element that is signalled in the title, or worse, they risk concluding that psychopathy is just a result of environmental causes. It is perhaps more appropriate to take a mimetic, cognitive approach to argue that narrative delirium captures the way in which a psychopath’s mind works, but I would maintain that a dual ontology of “reality” and “delirium” simplifies the fictional world structure of this narrative so dramatically that the more subtle aspects of the TAW and Bateman’s ontology become invisible. Instead, it is essential to consider systems of reality; social and professional networks.
and their associated behaviours; internal and external modes of existence; as well as public and private performances. It is for this reason that “intermentality” “intertextuality” and “trans-universality” are more useful terms. In order to access the significance of these terms, it is first necessary to consider the structure of the fictional world described by the narrative.

The TAW of American Psycho can be considered as “minimally departed” (Ryan) from the AW, as the properties, inventories, natural laws and taxonomy, are compatible. Doležel’s “deontic” and “axiological” modalities of fictional worlds (114) are useful focal points for making judgements of the cultural conditions of the TAW, which are foregrounded in American Psycho. The story is set in the late 1980s in New York, and is narrated by a Wall Street “yuppie”, Patrick Bateman, who also happens to be a serial killer and a psychopath. References to AW people, AW cultural history and AW events create a strange impression of overlapping which may be seen to enhance the mimetic aspects of the narrative, or as a technique for steering contextual readings towards ideological or socio-political commentary of AW culture and society. Since we are taking a narratological, possible worlds approach to the novel, a focus on the axiological conditions (value systems) of the TAW provides access to the hyperreal aspects of the storyworld. Daniel Cojocaru observes that in trying to fit in with his social circle, Bateman “becomes an expert in adapting to the Baudrillardian hyperreality world of pure signification” (187). In striving to construct a credible image or persona, Bateman must imitate those around him and conduct specific, public performances in order to conform, such as dressing a certain way or being seen at certain restaurants. Paradoxically, these performances amount to his depersonalisation as he becomes indistinguishable from many of the other characters of the TAW: “this couple looks like they’ve just strolled out of a Ralph Lauren ad, [...] Jean and I do too (and so does the rest of the whole goddam restaurant)” (250-251). Cojocaru goes on to demonstrate how these performances infiltrate Bateman’s narration, which is of particular interest to this study as I aim to discover ways in which madness is embedded into the narrative structure. Cojocaru says that Bateman’s identity performances are “mirrored in the narrative itself, which is largely a collage of restaurant and music album-reviews, remarks about what has been on The Patty Winters Show [...] and] exasperating descriptions of in-vogue brand products” (187) which ultimately have no functional meaning for the plot. The text becomes loaded, then, with superficial and empty signals, which is emblematic of Bateman’s
identity construction and the value systems of his social circle. The duration and frequency of these instances, as embedded properties of the intensional dimension of the narrative structure, prompts the need for further interpretation. The expansive descriptions of pop-music artists and their careers, or technical specifications and beauty products, has the effect of isolating the reader from the storyworld. As the narrator, Bateman is transferring his performances as a character onto the text; just as Bateman can hide behind superficial performances in the TAW, he can hide behind narrative content that is irrelevant or superficial to the progression of the plot. The reader is momentarily trapped in a dimension between the storyworld and the actual world, trying to process and narrativize these descriptions as part of the fictional world and potentially failing. Cojocaru may note the parallels that can be drawn between the narrative presentation and the narrator’s identity performances, but what he does not make explicit is that these narrative choices are made in direct communication with the narrator’s madness. It is necessary for Bateman to imitate the behaviour of the people around him because he must hide his psychopathy.

It is significant that Bateman’s identity performances conform to the practices of his social circle as these contribute to the “intermental” property of the socio-cultural conditions of the fiction world. Alan Palmer’s cognitive narratological approach describes “intermental” thought as “joint, group, shared or collective thought as opposed to intramental, individual or private thought” (293). This term describes the hidden connections between characters that ultimately shows how they share a common perspective of the world, forging an “intermental unit” (294). This explains how it is normal practice for Bateman and his friends to indulge their arrogant, competitive natures, engage in crude banter and savagely taunt homeless people for sport. The men have formed an intermental unit in which jokes and bragging are the normal mode of speaking, so when Bateman confesses: “‘I want to … pulverize a woman’s face with a large, heavy brick’” it is shrugged off as insincere, “‘Besides that,’ Hamlin moans impatiently” (301) and “‘You know, guys, it’s not beyond my capacity to drive a lead pipe repeatedly into a girl’s vagina’” is received as innuendo: “‘We all know about your lead pipe, Bateman’” (312). Any attempts to resist the intermental conventions result in rejection: when Preston tells a racist joke, Van Patten and Price laugh at the punch line, whereas Bateman protests: “‘It’s not funny,’ I say. ‘It’s racist’” to which Preston responds: “‘Bateman, you are some kind of morose bastard.’ [...] “You should stop reading all those Ted Bundy
biographies’” (37). The stability of the intermental unit can be disturbed by a simple deviation in perspective, which fractures the group, causing discordance and on occasion, narrative opportunity, as Palmer successfully demonstrates in his reading of Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love* (1997). Intermental and intramental, therefore, are essential terms for describing this ontological arrangement of this fictional world, as opposed to simply public and private, as it more accurately captures the cognitive and communal aspects of social existence.

*American Psycho*, makes use of this cognitive narrative device to demonstrate how vast the void can be between intramental and intermental thought when madness is introduced. None of the other characters appear to share Bateman’s sadistic, homicidal tendencies, and so this is reserved for his private thoughts and private life. Much of the narrative interest and drive, therefore, flourishes within this chasm. Bateman can attend parties, performing his role as “the boy next door” (17) around Evelyn, he can be a convincing member of his fraternal friendship group, and is able to go about his day maintaining “a credible public persona” (285), all the while stifling his “need to engage in homicidal behaviour on a massive scale” (325). The autodiegetic narration allows a privileged view of both Bateman’s public and private life, presenting an opportunity to follow both intermental and intramental narrative threads, fuelling suspense and intrigue. When intermental and intramental thoughts clash and overlap, tension, comedy and irony is introduced to the narrative. For example, the tension is highly charged with dramatic irony when Bateman asks Daisy to leave his apartment:

> “I think you should go home,” I say. She opens her eyes, scratches her neck. “I think I might...hurt you,” I tell her. “I don't think I can control myself.” She looks over at me and shrugs. “Okay. Sure.” Then she starts to get dressed. “I don't want to get too involved anyway,” she says. “I think something bad is going to happen,” I tell her. She pulls her panties on, then checks her hair in the Nabolweb mirror and nods. “I understand.” (204)

Daisy presumably has no idea that Bateman is a violent murderer, despite his confession that he beat up a girl earlier that day, and so she is seemingly naturalizing Bateman’s words in terms of romantic frames and scripts of emotional pain, not literal, physical pain. This joint access to the truth and misunderstanding acts as a
narrative engine that drives progression, fuels interest and encourages readers to anticipate outcomes of the plot.

Intermentality is also useful for explaining how dependent Bateman’s identity is upon those who are perceiving him, and as a result, how kaleidoscopic his identity construction is: to Evelyn he is “the boy next door”; to his friends he is the style guru, able to offer advice on fashion etiquette off the cuff, but also “morose” as he always talks about serial killers, protests against their racist jokes and on occasion, criticizes their culinary tastes; his assistant, Jean, considers him “funny” and “spontaneous” (251), strangers think he is “a model” (158), and his acquaintances intermittently mistake him for Morrison, Paul Owen, Conrad, Marcus Halberstam and Davis. At certain moments, Bateman is shown to be embarrassingly socially awkward: when he meets Tom Cruise (67) he commits a faux pas and stumbles to recover, then when trying to engage with a younger crowd in a nightclub he says: “I’m fresh. The freshest, y’know...like uh, def...the deffest” (191), which is met with derision. Using the principle of intermental thought, it is possible to see how Bateman must adapt to his surroundings according to the perception of others in order to succeed in disguising his madness, demonstrating how reactive and depersonalized his identity is. In essence, it could be argued that Bateman acts as a mirror that reflects the other characters’ judgements of him, which is motivated by their own agendas. For example, it seems plausible that when Tom Cruise—or any Hollywood celebrity—meets fans near their home, they would consider them to be awkward, starstruck imbeciles, much like younger crowds might consider a yuppie “suit” in a nightclub to be outdated and irrelevant. Bateman merely imitates and assumes these judgements as “costumes” for his personality that enable him to survive the encounter. This mimicry contributes to the fractured and unstable impression the reader has of Bateman’s character, but more importantly, it demonstrates how deception and manipulation are fundamental tools for his continued participation in (TAW) society: Bateman must disguise his mad intramental thoughts from the other characters of the TAW if he is to continue to be accepted. It may even be suggested that the reason Bateman has to imitate behaviours and reflect impressions is that his psychopathy makes it necessary.

The epistemological vertigo that is felt in trying to pinpoint a consistent viewpoint or moral code for the fictional world of American Psycho can be seen as mimetic of the actual world where societies are comprised of a multitude of
perspectives. Perhaps more interestingly, it shows how easily judgements can be deceived by exploiting an awareness of this. Further still, it emphasises the danger of basing judgements on a singular perspective. For the novel, the multitude of perspectives contributes towards the “connectedness” (Hayot, 153) of the fictional world, expanding the reader’s immediate vision that is tied to Patrick’s narrative, out across the wider city. Combined with intertextual and trans-universal components, this fuels hermeneutic reading practices and directs attention towards the narrative’s historical context, which creates an interpretive openness for the novel. References to news media and fashion magazines present an image of a vast and dense fictional world that has political, sociological, legal, environmental, medical and cultural issues. It is made starkly apparent that Bateman is just one madman in a sea of madness since “some maniac is going around the city poisoning one-liter bottles of Evian water, seventeen dead already” (368), and when Price reads the newspaper:

[…] let’s see here … strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Media boss wiped out, Nazis […], baseball players with AIDS, more Mafia shit, gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, faggots dropping like flies in the streets […] (4).

Ironically, by collecting all of these atrocities together, they become neutralized rather than more horrific; much like the lengthy descriptions Bateman makes of his designer products, music and clothes, they can become incidental furnishings of the TAW. The concept of trans-universal links however, allows the narratologist to interpret these moments as contextual indicators that comment on culture and society of America in the late 1980s.

Trans-universal links “determine the degree of resemblance between the textual system and our own system of reality” (Ryan, 1991, 558), and contribute to the way in which a hermeneutic reading is conducted. For example, it is reasonable to assume that mentions of Les Miserables refer to the actual world’s hit Broadway show, that a walkman is a portable device for playing music and that Donald Trump is a prominent business figure and celebrity. These assumptions are consistent between the TAW and the AW’s contextual background of the late 1980s, and allow for further inferences to be made. The Patty Winters Show, for example, is not an AW television programme, nor is The Dorsia an AW, New York restaurant, but they are plausible, conceivable components of the
fictional world that do not disrupt the narrative or imaginary reconstruction of the conditions of the TAW. It would be inconsistent if Bateman used an iPod or if Donald Trump was the President in this fictional world, which would transform the story into something closer to science fiction, much like it does for *Time Out of Joint* when Ragle Gumm and his wife do not recognise the picture of Marilyn Monroe. The significance of trans-universal links and their impact on hermeneutic readings become most apparent when Bateman references historical serial killers—especially Ted Bundy, as Bateman very closely resembles his profile—and their mentioning triggers an acceptance of the plausibility of the fictional character. As such, it becomes impossible not to bring knowledge of the AW serial killers to the story, and make judgements of Bateman’s narrative in this light. Just the mere mention of the name, stimulates a number of AW connections which cannot be separated from the narrative as it progresses, potentially reducing the amount of work the narration has to do to encourage the reader to understand this perspective.

Multi-medial intertextuality works in a similar way for the narrative. Mentions of Talking Heads, the band, may spark a connection to their famous track “Psycho Killer” (1977); use of the words “helter-skelter” (337) may prompt the reader to recall the Tate massacre carried out by the Manson family in 1969 where the perpetrators wrote the phrase in blood on the walls; during a meltdown, Bateman references Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960): “‘Phoenix. Janet Leigh was from Phoenix …’ I stall, then continue. ‘She got stabbed in the shower. Disappointing scene.’ I pause. ‘Blood looked fake.’” (104) These intertextual cultural references are by no means foregrounded, or integral, but rather scattered throughout the narrative as implicit “semantic traces of hidden intertexts” (Doležel, 201). Collecting these intertextual gems is a satisfying task that builds an impression of significance, history and cultural importance: “the text’s meaning can be grasped without identifying the intertext but is enriched, often quite substantially, by its discovery” (Doležel, 201). It is difficult to know how implicit these references really are to other readers, as although they are embedded as fleeting thoughts or passing comments, their extraction from the text makes them glaringly obvious. It is more useful to consider what these intertextual references do to enrich the text’s meaning, aside from drawing attention to other actual and fictional psychopathic murderers. The significance may be as simple as the idea that the references flesh out the fictional world, enabling it to “gain a semiotic existence independent of the constructing texture”, thereby becoming an object of “the
active, evolving, and recycling cultural memory” (Doležel, 202). In essence, the intertextual references stimulate the reader’s interest in the subject of the novel, prompting them to make connections to the actual world, perhaps as a ploy to reify the novel’s own cultural significance, making it possible to introduce the novel into this recycling cultural memory. It is also possible to interpret the intertextuality as a motif of the uncanny whereby actual world and fictional world histories are being overlapped, creating a bizarre, surreal aesthetic.

Having explored the systems of reality and Palmer’s cognitive model, perhaps a final observation deserves to be made about the fake aspects of the fictional world. A prominent moment in American Psycho may be approached through Philip K. Dick’s concept of “fake fakes” in “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later” (264). Dick contemplates the consequences of replacing the fake animals on display at Disneyland’s rides and attractions with real ones: “Imagine the horror the Disneyland officials would feel when they discovered the cruel hoax. Real birds! And perhaps someday even real hippos and lions. Consternation. [...] They would have to close down” (264). This idea is captured in the novel at the point where Patrick arrives at a halloween costume party dressed as a mass murderer with a painted sign on his back, written in blood saying ‘Yep, that’s me.’ His “suit was also covered with blood, some of it fake, most of it real. In one fist [he] clenched a hank of Victoria Bell’s hair, and pinned next to [his] boutonniere (a small white rose) was a finger bone [he’d] boiled the flesh off of” (317). This act demonstrates the extent of his madness, but also how unprepared and unaware the other members of the TAW are for his psychopathy. Without any reason to suspect that Bateman is a murderer, the characters of the fictional world have no motivation to think that his costume is made of real body parts and real blood, and that the sign he pins to his chest is a confession. Because of the deontic and axiological properties of the fictional world, Bateman is able to hide in plain sight. This incongruity is a device that maintains the reader’s interest, but also contributes to the overall aesthetic of the fictional world that is layered across multiple planes of reality and truth.

This section has aimed to forge a bridge between cognitive narratology and possible world theory to push for a more accurate analysis of the structure of American Psycho, which is heavily influenced by the motives, perspective and psychopathology of its narrator. By focusing on reality systems as possible world constructions and intermental, socio-cultural performances, it has been shown that
“public” and “private” are not completely adequate terms to distinguish between certain performances and behaviours. Furthermore, the concept of “reality systems” has enabled intertextual and trans-universal references to be analysed in more expansive terms that do not force mimetic interpretations. This is significant considering the aims of unnatural narratologists who are making advances in the field for mad narrators: unnatural narratologists “stress that characters’ minds are not always naturalistic and that taking a mimetic stance toward these minds (and texts) does not do justice to the authors’ sophisticated literary craft work” (Caracciolo, 7). By adopting a more flexible narratological approach, rather than continuing with narrative delirium as an analytical template, I have demonstrated that additional interpretations can be reached regarding the characterisation and the fictional world construction, that do justice to the author’s skill.

**The Book of Evidence - Narrative Psychopathy**

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Don’t make me laugh.

-Banville, *The Book of Evidence*

Having explored three ways in which madness impacts the narration and the fictional world construction, this final section is dedicated to bringing some of the different theoretical strands together in order to try and explain the effects of Freddie Montgomery’s madness in *The Book of Evidence*. To contextualise the position of Freddie’s narration in this thesis requires a brief, synoptic recap: The narrative drive of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is founded on the principle that the narrator is unaware that she is descending into madness, allowing the reader to closely follow her gradual mental breakdown to its horrifying, haunting end. The narrator of *Fight Club* knows that he is mad, but masks the extent of his delusional state of mind by embedding his hallucinations into the structure of the narrative (narrative delirium) and disguising them from the reader until the denouement of the novel. Patrick Bateman of *American Psycho* is an overt, mad narrator, candidly narrating his experience of psychopathy, making it available to the reader, but hiding it from the other characters of the
fictional world. Whether *American Psycho* is interpreted in terms of transparent narration or narrative delirium, there is no question that the narrator considers himself mad, and so does the reader. Freddie Montgomery’s glaringly unreliable narration, however, makes him a little more difficult to characterise. His narrative is presented as a letter of confession to the court, written from his cell where he has been sentenced to life imprisonment for killing a maid. The epigraph marks the tone of the novel, which rapidly vacillates between arrogance and indignation, causing uncertainty as to how Freddie should be judged. He is never perceived to be innocent of his crime, but there is certainly a judgement to be made as to whether or not he is mad.

Freddie makes several references to madness, stating that he has “always felt - what is the word - bifurcate, that’s it” (95), naming his alter ego “Bunter” (29) who he claims was the dominating personality at the time of the crime: “he was let slip once, was Bunter, just once, and look what happened” (29). This alludes to a multiple personality disorder which can, debatably, be seen to absolve the subject of any conscious participation and responsibility for the action. The overt, self-conscious narration of his alter ego, however, has an adverse effect, projecting a sense of insincerity and raising suspicion as to whether Freddie is really mad. To call upon Rimmon-Kenan’s “illusion of mimesis” (109), there is a difference between showing and telling in narration. She uses the examples “John was angry with his wife” and “John looked at his wife, his eyebrow pursed, his lips contracted, his fists clenched. Then he got up, banged the door and left the house” (109) to illustrate the distinction.

The narrator of *The Book of Evidence* is extremely self-aware and willing to profess his madness early in the narrative, saying “the watcher from inside has stepped forth and taken over while the puzzled outsider cowers within” (17). This raises alarm bells as to his motive. It has already been made clear that he is addressing the court after being convicted of a heinous crime, and just one page prior to this comment, he pleads: “I am merely asking, with all respect, whether it is feasible to hold on to the principle of moral culpability once the notion of free will has been abandoned” (16). *Fight Club, The Yellow Wallpaper* and *American Psycho* all show their narrator’s madness via the diegesis, only contemplating their mental health explicitly under tactical guises of doubt, whereas Freddie announces it so flippantly that it reads as an excuse, or an imitation of something a mad man might say. Already then, it is possible to conceive that Freddie can be regarded as either mad and suffering from a personality disorder
that caused him to commit murder, or that he is not mad, and he is feigning this in his confession to claim insanity, rationalise his crime and incite some form of empathy in the jury and the reader. The problematic aspect is that he repeatedly professes that he “wish[es] to claim full responsibility for [his] actions” (16) and not make excuses, but in light of his request to the jury to reserve judgements on moral culpability, these may well be regarded as insincere.

This insanity claim is evocative of Jon Ronson’s journalistic report on “The Man Who Faked Madness” in The Psychopath Test. During his quest to gain a deeper understanding of psychopaths and madness in general, Ronson was encouraged to meet an inmate of Broadmoor, which is a high-security psychiatric hospital in England that incarceraes the dangerous and criminally insane. Ronson met Tony, a man convicted of grievous bodily harm, who claimed to have faked insanity in the hope he would receive a shorter sentence in a county hospital. The plan backfired and Tony ended up being sent to Broadmoor, where his protests were regarded as further evidence of his insanity. His later performances of obedient and civil behaviour (as attempts to demonstrate his mental stability) were reported as proof that his detention was “preventing deterioration of his condition” (45). Tony is seemingly caught in an impossible situation, which is initially posed as evidence for the anti-psychiatry viewpoint of the Scientologists who encouraged Ronson to meet Tony in the first place. To try and balance the debate, Ronson met with the hospital’s psychiatrists, and it emerged that Tony was diagnosed as a psychopath, who is characteristically “deceitful and manipulative” (59) as well as presenting signs of “Superficial Charm. Proneness to Boredom. Lack of Empathy. Lack of Remorse. Grandiose Sense of Self-Worth” (64). These listed characteristics are all taken from Robert Hare’s “Psychopathy Checklist” (PCL) of twenty defining traits, which was designed as a diagnostic tool in 1980 and has since been revised as the PCL-R which is used today. It was decided by Tony’s psychiatrists that lying about being mad is “exactly the kind of deceitful and manipulative act you’d expect of a psychopath. Tony faking his brain going wrong was a sign that his brain had gone wrong” (Ronson, 59). This anecdote helps to frame both the problem of, and the attraction to Freddie’s narration: He declares his own madness, which can be taken at face value as it corroborates his actions, or it can be rejected and replaced with a more severe judgement on his character. Having read about Ronson’s encounter, the PCL-R, and in response to the instinctive suspicion of Freddie’s bare declarations of madness, it is
hard not to read *The Book of Evidence* as the narrative of a psychopath. This may seem an obvious conclusion to reach, considering that Freddie openly and callously states that “I killed her because I could kill her” (215), and folk-psychology automatically diagnoses cold-hearted killers as psychopaths. Accounting for the depth of Freddie’s psychopathy in the narration, however, using concepts of text time in conjunction with the narratological tools already deployed will demonstrate how intricately constructed the narration is around his psychopathy; how only a narratological approach can truly verify the interpretation that Freddie is a psychopath.

The structure of Freddie’s narration can best be described using a combination of Genette’s anachronies: “analepsis” and “prolepsis” as found in Rimmon-Kenan’s chapter on “Text Time” (43-58), and Catherine Hoffman’s concept of “narrative stutter” which “is what alternately drives and hinders the narrative” (358). Rimmon-Kenan states that “time in narrative fiction can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text” (44), but that these are not always compatible. Genette’s anachronies refer to instances where there are discrepancies between the chronology of the text and the chronology of the story: an analepsis is “the narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told” whereas a prolepsis is “a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned” (46). In other words, an analepsis is a digression from the present narrative instance to the past events of a story, and a prolepsis skips to future events before we are given an opportunity to understand the causes and reasons for that event.

Narrative stutter is necessary for a study on mad narrators, as it specifically recognises the impact that a narrator’s madness can have on the chronology of a narrative. Hoffman says that what is at stake with narrative stutter, is “not the effect of the character's madness on events in the story but the impact of the narrator's mental state on the telling of that story and on the reception of the narrative” (Hoffman, 357-358). Narrative stutter, then, is concerned with how fractured thoughts patterns are imitated by the text, embedding madness into the texture of the narrative, and how this impacts the process of narrativization (Fludernik). Hoffman delineates her concept using Dermot Healy’s *Sudden Times* (1999), whose narrator has suffered a series of emotional traumas, which causes him to experience mental dysfunction and symptoms of aphasia. The narrative is constructed to imitate his mental confusion and
communicative battles which authenticates the narrator’s voice, and encourages empathy within the reader. For *The Book of Evidence*, narrative stutter works in a completely different way.

The stuttered effect that is created by the fractured narrative chronology is emblematic of Freddie’s psychopathic personality as it reflects his inflated sense of superiority and his audacious abuse of narratorial power. It is possible to demonstrate how fractured the narrative chronology is by examining a short extract, labelling the jumps in time:

What is happening to me? Is this what they mean by rehabilitation? [present] Perhaps I shall leave here a reformed character after all [cognitive prolepsis]. Poor Charlie did not recognise me at first, and was distinctly uneasy, I could see, at being addressed in this place, in this familiar fashion, by a person who seemed to him a stranger [first analepsis]. [...] He used to come down to Coolgrange when my father was alive and hang about the house looking furtive and apologetic [second analepsis]. They had been young together, he and my parents, in their cups they would reminisce about hunt balls before the war, and dashing up to Dublin for the Show, and all the rest of it [third analepsis].” (34-35).

This passage moves swiftly back to the story-time period at the second analepsis, cuts to present time, and then begins another analeptic story-line: “What was I saying? Charlie. He took me to the races one day” (35). Labelling “cognitive prolepsis” is necessary in this instance, as the temporal condition of this sentence is mentally forged, rather than being intended to refer to an actual, future event. The anachronies make the process of narrativization extremely complex for the reader, echoing the idea that madness is a phenomenon that may well resist understanding, but does not completely evade it. Jan Alber notes that “[r]egardless of the specific interpretive path we choose to follow, logical impossibilities do not paralyze our interpretive faculties” (170), serving as an encouraging reminder that there is method and meaning to be found in this narrative madness.

The temporal framework is further complicated by Freddie’s self-conscious narration. Freddie’s commentary from the extradiegetic level alternates between direct addresses to the reader/jury and private, intramental thoughts. His direct addresses are either in the form of an appeal or an attack, depriving the reader of the luxury of a stable aesthetic illusion, and any sense of immersion. He harrasses the
reader with accusations: “I know that whatever I say will be smirked at knowingly by the amateur psychologists packing the court” (41), and:

I was at a turning point, you will tell me, just there the future forked for me, and I took the wrong path without noticing - that's what you'll tell me, isn't it, you, who must have meaning in everything, who lust after meaning, your palms sticky and your faces on fire! (24).

Coupled with the fragmented narrative arrangement, Freddie’s heckling from the extradiegetic level acts as a distraction technique that delays decisive judgement and resists empathetic reading practices. The reader’s interpretive tools and schemata are deactivated because they are denied the illusion of privacy that conventionally accompanies reading practices, engendering a form of self-conscious reading. This sense of privacy usually allows readers to make judgements of the narrative and the characters without any tangible consequences, but by casting accusations at the reader, Freddie is making threats of consequence. Perhaps because of the character-centred illusion (Caracciolo) that motivates readers to want to recognise something familiar, or plausible in the fictional characters, and because of the principle of narratorial authority (Doležel), the reader is willing to momentarily set aside their analytical frames to avoid his accusations and to entertain his perspective. His glibness and blithe self-deprecation, however, undermines his authority and either turns him into a comic figure that cannot be taken seriously, or scorns the reader’s sympathies, aggravating their mistrust: “Yes, m’lud, you see before you a middling man inside whom there is a fattie trying not to come out” (29) and “Ah, these poor, simple lives, so many, across which I have dragged my trail of slime” (93). In addition to his accusations, Freddie makes appeals to the judge and jury that can be interpreted as attempts to forge intermental connections through flattery, and to seek out empathy: “I’m sure you have noticed this, your honour, over the years” (2), “Believe me your lordship, I do not enjoy relating these things any more than the court enjoys hearing them” (54) and “I insist, your honour, gentle handymen of the jury, I insist it was an innocent desire [...] to possess this marvellous toy” (97).

Freddie’s comments to himself, framed as private, intramental thoughts such as “Calm, Frederick, Calm” (145), and “Dark deeds, dark deeds. Enough” (219), project a peculiar impression of false interiority within the context of his self-awareness as the narrator. By narrating his thoughts to himself, he intends for the reader to see them, which activates a rhetorical function: these are not moments where the reader
Brason 41

has a discreet, privileged view of his interior life; he is making his intramental thought process explicit. Furthermore, his attempts at self-censorship, framed as comments to himself, come across as conceited, instead inadvertently exposing his pathological impulse to lie: “We were - well, yes, we were heroes. I thought all of this ridiculous of course. No, wait, I am under oath here, I must tell the truth. I enjoyed it” (11) and “He said to me - Stop this, stop it. I was not there. I have not been present at anyone’s death. He died alone” (51).

These seemingly harmless interjections from the narrator contribute to the unreliability of his testimony, but in far more complicated ways than Phelan’s categories account for. Of the six kinds of unreliability: “misreporting; misreading; misevaluating/misregarding; underreporting; underreading; underregarding” (Phelan, 51), Freddie regularly misreports and underreports. His comment: “Speaking of jaunts: I went to my mother’s funeral today” (99), could be classed as an act of underreporting as an understatement, albeit loaded with irony, and the moments he needs to censor could be judged as clues of misreporting. Freddie’s unreliability is not as straightforward as underreporting and misreporting though, he is being ironic and sarcastic, deliberately playing tricks on the reader to rattle their sense of certainty. When Freddie recounts time spent at Wally’s bar after the murder, he writes: “The flash of blue when he added the ice, what am I thinking of? Blue eyes. Yes, of course. I did say dead maidens didn’t I? Dear me” (32), which reads as superficial, as rhetorical aporia. He is deliberately feigning ignorance to play the tortured, haunted soul, which is mirrored by his intertextual reference to the infamous Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment: “I felt like the gloomy hero in a Russian novel” (90-91). Freddie’s commentary, therefore, offers insight into a complicated character, who is attempting to control his narrative and manage how it is perceived. It takes a lot of effort to step back and regard the narrative as a whole in order to make a clear judgement of his character, as the reader is constantly called upon by the narrator from the extradiegetic level. The narrative arrangement exerts a unique level of control over the reader that forces perpetual adjustment and resists assimilation, which is emblematic of the manipulative, controlling aspects of Freddie’s psychopathic personality disorder.

The use of intertextual references draws a narratological parallel between The Book of Evidence and American Psycho. It also resonates with the anecdote about Tony from Jon Ronson’s The Psychopath Test, whereby Tony claims that he cited
extracts from horror movie scripts and serial killers’ biographies to convince his assessors that he was mad: “Plagiarizing a well-known movie was a gamble, he said, but it paid off. Lots more psychiatrists began visiting his cell. He broadened his repertoire to include bits from *Hellraiser, A Clockwork Orange* and the David Cronenberg movie *Crash*” (42). The intertextual references in Patrick Bateman’s narrative were shown to reify the novel into the cultural discourse of madness, as well as creating a surrealist aesthetic by overlapping fictional world and actual world histories. For Freddie Montgomery, however, with the shadow of doubt looming over his claims to madness, his intertextual references read as superficial gestures that extract themes from other cultural texts in an attempt to simulate madness, just as Tony was shown to have done. Freddie makes a direct reference to “Ma Jarrett” (39), the mother of a psychopathic murderer from the movie *White Heat* (Walsh, 1949) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886): “I would put on my hat and my new clothes - my new mask! - and stepforth gingerly, a quavering Dr. Jekyll, inside whom that other, terrible creature chafed and struggled, lusting for experience” (172). His more implicit intertextual references after the murder call upon imagery from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*: “We [...] sat down at the table under the stuffed owl’s virulent, glassy stare” (153), and also *Macbeth* (Shakespeare):

...none of it affected me as did this drop of brownish gum. I plunged my fists under the tap again, whining in dismay, and scrubbed and scrubbed but I could not get rid of it. The blood went, but something remained, all that long day I could feel it there, clinging in the fork of tender flesh between my fingers, a moist, warm, secret stain. (*The Book of Evidence*, 126)

The parallel is evident when considering the extract from Macbeth’s soliloquy:

What hands are here! Ha! They pluck out mine eyes!  
Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red. (2.2, 59-63)

And then later, Lady Macbeth’s deranged ramblings: “Here’s the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh…” (5.1, 42-43). The interpretation that these intertextual references are superficial gestures undoubtedly stems from my own skepticism of Freddie’s sincerity, and so in an effort
to conduct a balanced analysis, other potential rhetorical functions must be considered. The immediately apparent alternative is that these are not intertextual references at all, and that I have tried to interpret something that need not be interpreted, but this does not account for the explicit references and would leave little more to be said on the matter. Another alternative is that Freddie is genuinely trying to explain his experience, and must draw on other cultural models in order to express himself and encourage understanding. This rhetorical aim exposes the symptomatic problem of depicting madness that has broadly been recognised as paradoxical problem of “representing the unrepresentable” (Wiesenthal, 12). By revising and recycling existing representations of madness, Freddie is able to communicate his experience in ways that his readers may understand. This is a risky move however, especially considering that these references all come from the horror genre and bear negative connotations, which leans towards the conclusion that he wants to be perceived in this light. After all, Freddie’s opening lines describe himself as a monster, “the girl-eater, svelte and dangerous, padding to and fro in my cage, my terrible green glance flickering past the bars, give them something to dream about, tucked up cosy in their beds at night” (3), playing up to the idea that he is likely to be perceived a certain way.

Although these intertextual references, acts of denarration (Richardson, xi) and anachronies demonstrate how Freddie’s psychopathy impacts the narration, it is worth emphasising that these aspects are embedded as symptoms of Freddie’s psychopathy, within a dense imaginative narrative structure. Freddie’s narrative does not foreground these aspects, instead they are camouflaged by the multitude of sub-narratives about drinking, party-crashing, affairs, family life, travelling, murder and prison. He is regularly distracted by philosophical contemplations about his epistemological and ontological status, his dreams, coincidences, and other people’s perception of him, all the while insisting that “I do not believe such moments mean anything - or any other moments for that matter” (24). He has a restless, parasitic lifestyle and revels in his ability to read and manipulate people: “I have always derived satisfaction from the little wickedness of human beings. To treat a fool and a liar as if I esteemed him the soul of probity, to string him along in his poses and his fibs, that is a peculiar pleasure” (13). The Book of Evidence pushes the limits of unreliable narration through a series of double bluffs, testing the reader’s ability to land on solid ground with regards to judgements of his character. Diagnosing Freddie
as a psychopath does not solve the unreliable narration in the slightest, instead it drags uncertainty into every possible proposition, scenario and reference, making fools of those who claim to have Freddie pegged. My own analysis proves the point: Freddie is not as mad as he says, he is more mad; he is a clueless drifter, an inadvertent criminal, but also a manipulative mastermind; he is aiming to exert control over the reader and elude characterisation by confusing them, which exposes his character; by telling the truth about lying, he is showing that he is a liar; expressions of transparency are attempts to conceal. Freddie is the ultimate unreliable narrator, by some level of choice, and he deserves far more narratological attention than he has received here so far. Freddie performs his psychopathy by embedding his symptoms and personality traits into the narration, allowing (or forcing) the reader to encounter the manipulative tricks of a psychopath—what I would call narrative psychopathy. This is intended to be taken as a more extreme and complex version of unreliable narration, that specifically accounts for the defining features of the personality disorder that is detectable within the character-narrator.\(^7\)

**Conclusion**

In “Schizophrenic Narrative” Lee R. Edwards argues for the significance of attending to madness and writing from a structural, narratological perspective. In his concluding remarks, he says that:

> What L. P. Hartley once said of the past might well be said of madness: it is another country; they do things differently there. Confronting insanity, we can cast no trail of breadcrumbs that will take us through unscarred, unscathed. The self that declares its own disintegration may, if listened to, reveal a lot about the shadows that haunt us all. (30).

This offers a poetic summary to the aims of this paper, as I have attempted to listen closely to narrators that declare (or narrate) their own disintegration, and determine

\(^7\) See Robert Hare’s PCL-R in *Without Conscience*
what impact this has on our imaginative and interpretive processes, as well as our real world perspectives.

Edwards’ primary concern is to conceptualize “schizophrenia as narrative” rather than “schizophrenia in narrative” (original emphasis, 25) to demonstrate that schizophrenia is an illness that is inextricably linked to language and narratives. He says that the dislocation and disintegration of subjectivity for schizophrenics manifests through their abstract communications, and demonstrates this by examining the writing of various twentieth-century mental patients. Edwards notes that despite the seemingly verbal and logical “deviance” of the patients’ texts, they are somehow formally “accessible” and “enticing” (27), which complements the motivation for my literary study on the impact of madness on narration. I have argued that the madness of a narrator can be embedded across multiple levels of the narrative structure: in the imaginary, extensional structures of the fictional world, and within the intensional semantics of the textual composition. The interest in the embedded aspect was initially motivated by two angles: firstly to discover how a reader can be deceived into imagining the storyworld a particular way, only to have it subverted towards the end of the story, and secondly to explore how in these cases, a narrative can withstand the pressure of multiplicitous meanings whilst remaining coherent, even during re-readings. I chose to expand on this core idea to see if there were other ways that madness can be embedded into a narrative.

Narrative delirium has been shown to be significant, as it not only puts Marie-Laure Ryan’s TAW and APW models to work, it makes a direct, distinct connection between the architecture of the fictional world and character-narrator’s madness. Narrative delirium has offered an introduction to the way in which madness can be conceptualised from a formal perspective, and how it is a vital accompaniment to the more popular psychoanalytical, philosophical, historical and socio-political studies on madness in literature. That the impact of the narrator’s madness is entrenched so deeply into the narrative speaks to a rhetorical function, be it ontological, epistemological or ideological, which emphasises the ways in which a structural analysis can be used as an interpretive approach to the broader, cultural work of a literary text. By expanding on the distinction between delirium embedded at a textual level (via polysemous clues for example), and delirium embedded at the imaginative level (as a component of the storyworld), I have been able to develop a framework for studying “embeddedness” using other narratological concepts. Alan Palmer’s
distinctions between “intermental” and “intramental” thoughts are vital for recognising the cognitive dimension of characters and their interpersonal networks. The cognitive approach matures the fictional worlds model by expanding it beyond what is possible, true and compatible within the fictional world or in relation to the actual world, and allows for a narratological study of characters’ behaviours, reactions and agendas on a mental level to be conducted. Cognitive narratology acknowledges the character-centred illusion that readers experience, and provides the means to conduct a more thorough, character-focused analysis of the fictional world. This has been vital for examining the relations between the mad narrators specifically, and the other “sane” characters of the fictional world. Hoffman’s “narrative stutter” was shown to be more than just an expansion of anachrony, as it is a specific effect engendered by the narrator’s mental dysfunction. When encountering fragmented text time, the reader is able to more vividly appreciate the struggles in communication that a narrator can experience. By contrast, narrative stutter may also be used to convey the manipulative characteristics of a self-conscious narrator, as it was shown to have done with Freddie Montgomery.

In being able to distinguish between embedded devices at the textual and extensional levels, and by gaining access to the cognitive dimension of the fictional world, it has been possible to determine specific effects and functions of madness across multiple levels of the narrative structure. This narratological and possible worlds approach that has remained flexible between classical and postclassical models has been crucial for expanding the interpretive scope to accommodate the varied demands and challenges of the chosen narratives. I have suggested that when readers encounter these challenges, it is possible that transformations in reading practices and actual world perspectives may occur. The appeal of these challenging narratives is something of an “intensive workout for [the] Theory of Mind” (Zunshine, 164) which builds an analytical, interpretive strength that is useful across multi-medial narratives and transferrable towards the real world. It would be interesting to conduct further research to determine what the defining features of my proposed term “narrative psychopathy” would include and whether a stable enough model could be outlined for use in other texts. I anticipate this to be more complicated that simply merging Robert Hare’s PCL-R with Lars Bernaerts’ five defining features, but having assembled some of the foundations in this study on mad narrators and embedded madness, there seems to be clear opportunity for expanded research.
Works Cited


