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A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative

Jan Alber, Henrik Skov Nielsen, Brian Richardson

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Introduction

JAN ALBER
STEFAN IVERSEN
HENRIK SKOV NIELSEN
AND BRIAN RICHARDSON

IN RECENT YEARS, unnatural narratology has developed into the most exciting new paradigm in narrative theory and the most important new approach since the advent of cognitive narratology. A wide range of scholars have become increasingly interested in the analysis of unnatural texts, that is, texts that feature strikingly impossible or antimimetic elements.¹ Such works have been consistently neglected or marginalized in existing narratological frameworks.

Generally speaking, unnatural narrative theorists oppose what one might call “mimetic reductionism,” that is, the claim that the basic aspects of narrative can be explained primarily or exclusively by models based on realist parameters. This has been the default position for most narrative theory since Aristotle and has recently been given new prominence by many cognitive-

1. See the publications by the following authors: Alber; Heinze; Iversen; Mäkelä; Nielsen; Richardson; Tammi. See also the joint essay by Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson as well as the debates with Monika Fludernik and Tobias Klauk/Tilmann Köppe in *Narrative and Storyworlds*; the joint essay by Alber/Bell; the entry to the *Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* by Alber, Nielsen, and Richardson; and the collections edited by Alber/Heinze and Hansen/Iversen/Nielsen/Reitan. In November 2008, Jan Alber and Rüdiger Heinze organized a conference called “Unnatural Narrative” at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Study (FRIAS) in Germany, and unnatural narratology also features regularly at the Narrative conference which is organized by the International Society for the Study of Narrative.

oriented theorists.² Scholars working within the tradition of unnatural narrative argue instead that narratives are particularly compelling when they depict situations and events that move beyond, extend, challenge, or defy our knowledge of the world. According to Jan Alber, narratives “do not only mimetically reproduce the world as we know it. Many narratives confront us with bizarre storyworlds which are governed by principles that have very little to do with the real world around us” (“Impossible” 79).

Many innovative practices and projected storyworlds differ radically from those of the actual world. The narrator may be an animal, a mythical entity, an inanimate object, a machine, a corpse, a sperm, an omniscient first-person narrator, or a collection of disparate voices that refuse to coalesce into a single narrating presence. A fictional narrative may have the structure, purpose, and development of a traditional realist narrative, or it may resist or refuse many of these features of tellability, and seem instead (from a conventional or “natural” perspective) relatively plotless, pointless, arbitrary, unconnected, or contradictory.

Similarly, fictional characters often resemble human beings, but we should never lose sight of the fact that they are not people but verbal constructs acting in a fictional world. A character (such as Cora in Clarence Major’s *Reflex and Bone Structure*) can die several times; a human dies only once. One character may merge into another, or may try to escape from the author that created him. Also, fictional storyworlds are often fundamentally different from the world we inhabit. Many invented domains differ radically from actual places, as is evident by merely glimpsing into the worlds of Aristophanes, Jonathan Swift, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, Italo Calvino, Angela Carter, Mark Z. Danielewski, and the more anomalous spaces in Shakespeare’s plays. Fictional narratives can easily and radically deconstruct our real-world notions of time and space.³ As Lubomír Doležel affirms, fictional entities “are ontologically different from actual persons, events, places. . . . It is quite evident that fictional persons cannot meet, interact, or communicate with real people” (*Heterocosmica* 16; see also Richardson “Nabokov’s Experiments”).

Unnatural narratology seeks to challenge general conceptions of narrative by accentuating two points: (1) the ways in which innovative and impossible narratives challenge mimetic understandings of narrative, and (2) the consequences that the existence of such narratives may have for the general

2. One important work that does include several antimimetic examples is Herman and Vervaeck’s *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*.

3. See Richardson “Beyond Story and Discourse,” as well as the essays by Rüdiger Heinze and Jan Alber in this volume.

conception of what a narrative is and what it can do. Unnatural narrative theory regularly analyzes and theorizes the aspects of fictional narratives that transcend the boundaries of conventional realism. Unnatural narrative practices may be flagrant and widespread, as in much postmodern fiction, or the practices may be more restrained, intermittent, or submerged, as when, at the beginning of the otherwise mimetic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the fictional character Huck complains about the verisimilitude of his representation in Mark Twain's earlier novel, *Tom Sawyer*.

Many theorists of the unnatural are particularly interested in texts that present extremely implausible, impossible, or logically contradictory scenarios or events. Unnatural narratologists affirm the distinctive nature of fiction, gravitate toward unusual and experimental works, and seek to comprehend theoretically the strategies of narrative construction that are unique to fiction. But even though many theorists are particularly interested in non- and antimimetic kinds of narrative such as postmodern texts, they also draw attention to the many unnatural and unrealistic features that can be found in literary realism.⁴ These include *paralepsis*, or a character narrator's knowledge of events he or she cannot have learned, and what James Phelan refers to as "redundant telling," that is, a narrator's apparently unmotivated report of information to a narratee that the narratee already possesses. They are also interested in probing conventional strategies of realistic narratives that nevertheless are impossible or wildly unlikely in everyday experience: phenomena such as omniscience, a streamlined plot, and literary dialogue. Furthermore—as has been claimed by Stefan Iversen in the context of Holocaust narratives ("In Flaming Flames")—unnatural and impossible elements may also occasionally be found in nonfictional narrative. In short, unnatural narrative analysis seeks to draw attention both to the unnatural in defiantly antimimetic texts as well as to the largely invisible unnatural elements cached within ostensibly mimetic works.

The term "unnatural" was originally derived from its antithesis to what William Labov called conversational natural narratives. Brian Richardson used it in the title of his book *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* as an allusion to Monika Fludernik's *Towards a "Natural" Narratology*. By doing so he indicated that his work was intended to both complement and move beyond the framework that Fludernik had developed and applied. Unnatural narrative theorists like the looseness of the term as well since it provides a kind of umbrella word that all can comfortably utilize, even as each individual occupies a slightly different space and offers adjacent yet overlapping definitions (see, for example, Alber, "Impossible" 80).

4. See, for example, the essays by Maria Mäkelä and James Phelan in this collection.

Unfortunately, the word “unnatural” carries a large amount of cultural baggage that has nothing to do with these narratological investigations, which are “unnatural” only in the socio-linguistic sense just indicated. Unnatural narratology has no position on the nature/culture debate and does not designate any social practices or behavior as natural or unnatural. This term will inevitably cause a certain amount of confusion among the uninformed, but since the name is now fairly well established all are prepared to live with its natural (and unnatural) consequences.

Narrative theory has always had a pronounced mimetic bias. Fictional works are largely treated as if they were primarily lifelike reproductions of human beings and human actions and could be analyzed according to real-world notions of consistency, probability, individual and group psychology, and correspondence with accepted beliefs about the world. This kind of analysis is for the most part perfectly appropriate for substantially mimetic genres such as Menandrine comedy and parts of the realist tradition in the novel, as well as mimetic aspects of works such as Homeric epics, Euripidean drama, and Shakespeare’s more realistic plays. An insistently mimetic narrative theory, however, is largely useless when faced with the rich tradition of works by non- or antimimetic authors that stretch from Aristophanes and Apuleius through Rabelais and Shakespeare to the innovative fiction of romanticism, late modernism, and postmodernism.

The unnatural approach is usually an inductive one—beginning with the full range of the literature that exists and then going on to construct theories around it. This is different from approaches such as structuralism that start with a linguistic or rhetorical model and then proceed deductively, often ignoring the many innovative texts that elude the model. We, however, take seriously unusual and experimental texts. Many unnatural works are designed to flout realist models and conventions; they cannot by definition be circumscribed by theories that limit themselves to the forms they are designed to transgress. We feel that a theory of narrative that cannot do justice to non- and antimimetic practices is as impoverished as a theory of art that cannot account for nonrepresentational painting.

In the twentieth century, the tradition of antimimetic narrative theory begins with the insights of the Russian formalists and their analyses of anti-realist texts and techniques (see Shklovsky, for instance). Mikhail Bakhtin (“Forms”) is another important theoretician, especially in his work on Rabelais and nonrealist chronotopes of the novel. Theorists and practitioners of experimental French fiction between 1950 and 1980 are also very instructive: these include Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Jean Ricardou. We would also like to mention the important work of Brian McHale and Werner

Wolf, who both deal with the specific techniques that are used in postmodern and anti-illusionist narrative texts, as anticipations of unnatural narratology.⁵ Since 2000 there has been an explosion of new work in the field by a large number of scholars, many of them represented in this volume, who are keen to theorize the unnatural and who are skeptical about unified theories and universal narratological categories that try to comprehend all narratives whether fictional or nonfictional, written or performed, literary or nonliterary.

The distinctiveness of unnatural narratology, then, is in the object, aims, and approach rather than any specific theoretical framework. Indeed, there is no inherent reason why rhetorical or cognitive theorists could not extend their work to include the rhetoric or cognitive function of non- and antimimetic narrative. In fact, the essays by James Phelan and Jan Alber in this volume show how this fusion might be achieved. At the same time, sustained analyses of antimimetic texts often reveal the limitations of existing narratological accounts: to comprehend the kinds of texts discussed by Heinze and Richardson, for example, one needs to modify and extend existing conceptions of the *fabula*.

This brings us to an outline of some of the most important points of disagreement within the field. These differences concern (a) the definition of the term “unnatural,” (b) the choice of methodology and tools, and (c) the question of interpretation. In other words, the differences within unnatural narratology concern the questions of *what* and *how*: what is an unnatural narrative, and how can we approach and/or make sense of it? These divergences affect which texts get included as unnatural, how they are conceptualized, and how their reception is understood.

For Brian Richardson the fundamental criterion of unnatural narratives is their violation of the mimetic conventions that govern conversational natural narratives, nonfictional texts, and realistic works that attempt to mimic the conventions of nonfictional narratives. Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter” is an entirely unnatural text as a result of its depictions of contradictory events. The temporality of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is unnatural since it has a dual chronology: four days pass for those in Athens while, at the same time, two days pass in the enchanted forest (see Richardson “Time”). Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* is a narrative that travesties “the mimesis of actual speech situations” (*Unnatural* 5): the narrator of this novel is a semihuman figure who keeps merging with the contradictory narrative he is telling. Richardson goes on to argue that “if a narrative is, as commonly averred, someone relating a set of events to someone else, then this entire way of looking at nar-

5. See also the studies by Heise, Orr, Sherzer, and Traill.

rative has to be reconsidered in the light of the numerous ways innovative authors problematize each term of his formula, especially the first one” (5).

Jan Alber, on the other hand, restricts the use of the term “unnatural” to physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios and events. That is to say, the represented scenarios or events have to be impossible by the known laws governing the physical world; accepted principles of logic (such as the principle of noncontradiction); or standard human limitations of knowledge and ability (see also Alber, “Impossible” 80).⁶ The speaking breast in Philip Roth’s *The Breast*, for instance, is physically impossible because in the real world, breasts do not speak, that is, produce lexemes. Meanwhile, the coexistence of mutually exclusive storylines, as in Robert Coover’s short story “The Babysitter,” is logically impossible: in the projected storyworld, the contradictory sentences “Mr. Tucker went home to have sex with the babysitter” and “Mr. Tucker did not go home to have sex with the babysitter” are true at the same time, and this feature of the text violates the principle of noncontradiction. Finally, Saleem Sinai, the telepathic first-person narrator in Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children*, transcends standard human limitations of knowledge and ability because he functions like a radio receiver and can literally hear the thoughts of other characters, which is also impossible in the real world. Moreover, Alber discriminates between unnatural elements that have already been conventionalized, that is, turned into cognitive frames, during the course of literary history (such as the speaking animal in beast fables, the talking objects in eighteenth-century circulation novels, the omniscient narrator in much realist fiction, and time travel in science fiction) and unnatural segments that have not yet been conventionalized and still strike us as being odd, strange, or defamiliarizing (Alber “Diachronic”).⁷

For Henrik Skov Nielsen, unnaturalness can appear on the representational level as well as on the level of the act of narration. For him, unnatural narratives are a subset of fictional narratives that may have temporalities, storyworlds, mind representations, or acts of narration that would have to be construed as physically, logically, mnemonically, or psychologically impossible or implausible in real-world storytelling situations.

In his essay in this volume, Stefan Iversen ties the notion of the unnatural to narratives that present the reader with clashes between the rules governing the storyworld in the narrative and events producing or taking place inside

6. The unnatural in Alber’s sense may concern the level of the story but also discrepancies between the level of the story and the level of the narrative discourse. An example of the latter would be the child narrator in John Hawkes’s *Virginie: Her Two Lives* who speaks like an unusually eloquent adult.

7. In most cases, Richardson would refer to these two types as, respectively, nonmimetic and antimimetic.

this storyworld, in other words, clashes that defy naturalization. While many of these events become conventionalized over time, some remain resistant to familiarization, such as the unnatural transformation in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," which confronts the reader with an unresolvable fusion of a bug and a human mind, situated in an otherwise conventionally realist storyworld. Iversen's model allows for explaining the fact that some narratives change status along the natural–unnatural axis over time as new methods of conventionalization are developed and become widespread.

A fifth definition sees any kind of fictional and/or artificial representation of human life as unnatural in the capacity of its character as a representation that is tied to one or more specific types of media. In Maria Mäkelä's terms, "we don't have to resort to avant-garde literature to notice that the unnaturalness—or the peculiarly *literary* type of cognitive challenge—is always already there in textual representations of consciousness" ("Cycles" 133). To Mäkelä, the unnatural does not only emerge from broken conventions or impossible scenarios; it must also be recognized as a fundamental feature of *any* fictional representation of human life. A very broad notion of the unnatural results from this approach, in that in effect any type of art is, as Mäkelä puts it, always already not natural, in the sense of being artificial.

The question of methodology (b) and the process of interpretation (c), then, concern the question of how to make sense of unnatural narratives. Richardson has argued in favor of the development of concepts and models that are sensitive to the fluidity and dichotomy-resistant nature of unnatural narratives. Thus, the simple opposition between story and discourse is often dismantled or problematized by experimental works, as the essays by Brian Richardson and Rüdiger Heinze here make clear. According to Richardson, "we will be most effective as narrative theorists if we reject models that, based on categories derived from linguistics or natural narrative, insist on firm distinctions, binary oppositions, fixed hierarchies, or impermeable categories" (*Unnatural* 139).

Jan Alber instead argues that "ideas from cognitive narratology help illuminate the considerable, sometimes unsettling interpretive difficulties posed by unnatural elements" and advocates using "cognitive-narratological work to clarify how some literary texts not only rely on but also aggressively challenge the mind's fundamental sense-making capabilities" ("Impossible" 80). Alber argues that since we are always bound by our cognitive architecture, unnatural narratives can only be approached on the basis of cognitive frames and scripts.⁸ He therefore proposes a number of reading strategies designed

8. Frames are static, while scripts are dynamic cognitive parameters: "frames basically deal with situations such as seeing a room or making a promise while scripts cover standard

to help readers explain or make sense of the unnatural.⁹ According to his approach, the reader's job is to demonstrate how the unnatural urges us to create new cognitive frames that transcend our real-world knowledge (such as the unborn narrator, the speaking corpse, the reversed causality, or the shapeshifting room), and, in a second step, to address the question of what the unnatural says about us and our being in the world. Alber's second step closely correlates with what Stein Haugom Olsen calls the "'human interest' question" (67), that is, the argument that fiction focuses on "mortal life: how to understand it and how to live it" (Nagel ix).

By contrast, what one might call unnaturalizing readings leave open the possibility that unnatural narratives contain or produce effects and emotions that are not easily (if at all) explainable or resolvable with reference to everyday phenomena or with reference to the rules of the presented storyworld.¹⁰ In his contribution to this volume, Stefan Iversen elaborates on ideas presented by H. Porter Abbott, who—when discussing what he calls "unreadable minds"—claims that they "work best when we allow ourselves to rest in that peculiar combination of anxiety and wonder that is aroused when an unreadable mind is accepted as unreadable. In this regard, my stance is at odds with efforts to make sense of the unreadable, as, for example, Jan Alber's effort" ("Unreadable" 448).¹¹

Similarly, Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that when readers face unnatural narratives, they have two options: they can either try to naturalize or they can apply unnaturalizing reading strategies. Unnaturalizing reading strategies, for him, resist the application of real-world limitations to all narratives and refrain from limiting interpretations to what is possible in literal communicative acts and representational models. Accordingly, for Nielsen, unnatural narratology investigates the interpretational consequences of the employment of unnatural techniques, scenarios, and strategies insofar as they are *different* from the interpretation of natural narratives. For example, he argues that readers will be led astray if they judge first-person narration unreliable only on the basis that information is revealed that the protagonist could not realis-

action sequences such as playing a game of football, going to a birthday party, or eating in a restaurant" (Jahn, "Cognitive" 69).

9. See also the essays by Jan Alber and Werner Wolf in this collection.

10. This point is also made by Henrik Skov Nielsen and Maria Mäkelä in this volume.

11. Abbott is here rephrasing what the Romantic poet John Keats calls "*Negative Capability*": the state of remaining in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact or reason" (Forman, *Letters* 72). Along the same lines, Jan Alber proposes "the Zen way of reading," which might be adopted by an attentive reader who repudiates cognitive-rational explanations, and simultaneously accepts the strangeness of unnatural scenarios and the feelings of discomfort, fear, or worry that they evoke in her or him ("Impossible" 83).

tically possess. Likewise, he argues, if we begin to ask in second-person narratives who is telling this story to the “you” that seems completely unaffected by and even ignorant of the uttered words, we will miss the point of most literary second-person narratives that explore the possibility of designating while not addressing a specific person through the “you”—a possibility that is different from oral, natural storytelling situations in which the “you” simply refers to the audience being addressed (or is used in the sense of “one”).

Even though their individual formulations and specific interests may vary, it should be underscored that these approaches within the new paradigm of unnatural narratology are all drawn to the same basic features and qualities of narrative fiction: the impossible, the unreal, the preternatural, the outrageous, the extreme, the parodic, and the insistently fictional.

Let us turn to the individual contributions. Brian Richardson’s essay examines the nature and narrative status of a number of unnatural stories and progressions. He begins with texts that test the very concept of narrative: extreme works by Beckett and Robbe-Grillet that play with or aspire to the status of a minimal narrative and David Shields’s unusual collection of actual bumper stickers that he has assembled into a text called “Life Story.” Richardson goes on to explore unnatural narratives’ innovative practices and challenges to traditional conceptions of story (*fabula*) and text (*syuzhet*), investigating works that refuse to provide fixed or retrievable stories, a stable presentation of the text, or both. His analysis of Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* discloses the way readers are invited to construct three different possible stories by using any of three different reading sequences. He goes on to discuss works that refuse to offer fixed beginnings or single endings. Richardson then discusses challenges to the identity of a single narrative in the case of texts that produce variant sequences and multiple plot trajectories (*Lola rennt*). In the course of this investigation, he argues for the extension and reformulation of conventional narratological concepts, calls for the inclusion of the important analytical category of multilinearity, and makes the case for still other essential analytical tools for postmodern narrative progressions.

Moving along a parallel path, Rüdiger Heinze discusses the many paradoxes of unnatural temporality in fictional narratives. After a compelling discussion of time as understood by physicists and time as constructed by novelists, he identifies two major types of unnatural temporality: one located in the story, the other in the work’s discourse. The former can be found in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, which depicts an unnatural temporal scenario at the story level that is quite unobtrusive at the level of discourse. In the latter camp, he points to antichronological and fragmentary texts that present perfectly realist events in an unnatural manner. And there are also texts that

do both. He explains how readers come to naturalize and narrativize these unusual texts, and goes on to discuss works that cannot be broken down into the *fabula/syuzhet* model, something that can be done with every natural narrative. Heinze discusses the role of medium and genre in the construction and perception of unnatural temporalities, and points out some surprising paradoxes that ensue from these modes.

In his contribution, Jan Alber seeks to further our understanding of narrative spaces by determining the potential functions of representations of physically or logically impossible space. In a first step, he shows that narratives may denaturalize our real-world knowledge of spatial organization in a wide variety of different ways. For instance, narrative texts may present us with shapeshifting locations; burning lakes; insubstantial castles; impossible planets; visions of the infinite universe; unnatural geographies; two-, one-, and nondimensional worlds; literal manifestations of internal processes; houses that are bigger on the inside than they are on the outside; and so forth. In a second step, he addresses the potential purpose or point of these simulations of impossible space. For Alber, unnatural spaces fulfill determinable functions and exist for particular reasons. He thus proposes seven reading strategies that concern the cognitive reconstruction of spatial impossibilities on the one hand, and their subsequent interpretation on the other. Furthermore, his navigational tools constitute options to help readers cope with the unnatural in general and impossible spaces in particular.

Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that it is sometimes necessary, often profitable, and nearly always possible to apply unnaturalizing reading strategies when faced with unnatural narratives. He contends that Genette's separation of voice and mood (who speaks? vs. who perceives?) and Genette's understanding of focalization as a restriction of access to point of view are more radical proposals than previous narratologists have recognized—and that they are in line with unnatural narratology insofar as they allow for the development of unnaturalizing reading strategies. Furthermore, Nielsen argues that Genette's separation of mood and voice and the possible combinations that follow from it are connected to the no-narrator thesis. These combinations of narration and focalization are attributable not to a fact-reporting narrator but rather to a world-creating author. The consequences of this assumption are tested in a range of examples, and, finally, he offers a simple rhetorical model in which the real author (rather than the narrator) is the main agent of the telling.

Stefan Iversen takes unnatural minds as his topic, and examines the nature of subversive, impossible, and metamorphosed minds in narrative fiction. He provides a definition of unnatural minds and goes on to evaluate approaches

to theories of mind that have recently been set forth in cognitive studies and philosophy, showing the inherent limitations of most of these accounts when confronting antimimetic narratives. To demonstrate his argument, he applies it to Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*, the story of a woman who is miraculously transformed into a pig.

Werner Wolf addresses the important question of whether metalepsis, an inherently unnatural phenomenon, and aesthetic illusionism are necessarily incompatible. He shows that there are indeed cases in which the unnaturalness of metalepsis appears to be compatible with immersion and aesthetic illusion, and hence there is not a *necessary* incompatibility in all cases. On the other hand, it is worth noting that metalepsis generally has a strong anti-illusionist effect as a common function. However, Wolf shows that this is a generalization which must be relativized—at least with regard to the cases he discusses in his essay.

Maria Mäkelä's essay attempts to recover the unnatural essence of the conventional in narrative fiction. She argues that classical realist novels are often far from being natural. Focusing in turn on the topics of perception, psychological verisimilitude, anti-immersion, and discursive agency, she shows how the works of classical realists such as Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Dickens are permeated by dislocated or unnatural perceptions, conflicted or arbitrary motivation, and the frequent impossibility to derive cognitive agency from novelistic representation. In the end, this essay calls for nothing less than a reevaluation of the project of realism.

Meanwhile James Phelan studies character narrators in mimetic fiction but zeroes in on some salient violations of mimetic conventions. His essay provides a rhetorical account of these unnatural acts of narration, focusing on “implausibly knowledgeable” narration in *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Great Gatsby*, and on the “impossible” phenomenon of simultaneous first-person present-tense narration. Phelan also introduces an unnatural narrative technique that has hitherto gone unnoticed and coins it “crossover narration.” In “crossover narration,” an author transfers the effects arising from the narration of one set of events to the narration of a second independent set of events. Phelan proposes some rules of thumb about the reading of mimetic character narration that explain why most readers do not notice these violations of the mimetic code and why they are so rhetorically effective.

Alice Bell's analysis may be placed at the intersection of unnatural and transmedial narratology. More specifically, Bell analyzes two examples of unnatural narrative in Stuart Moulthrop's 1991 hypertext fiction *Victory Garden*. Her first analysis shows how the multilinear structure of a hypertext

creates contradictions in the narrative. In her second analysis, Bell demonstrates that the fragmented structure of the text allows the unnatural status of a scene to change depending on the reading route through which it is accessed. She ends her discussion by arguing that any narratological analysis must be alert to the media-specific features present within these unique texts.

The protagonist of Borges's story "The Secret Miracle" chooses to write his drama in verse because, as he puts it, verse "does not allow the spectators to forget unreality, which is the condition of art" (159). In the same spirit, Brian McHale investigates the unnaturalness or artificiality of narrative poetry. More specifically, he analyses William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* as well as Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune* to show that artificial segmentation functionalizes and semanticizes nonsemantic patterns, such as rhyme, that are irrelevant and even inaudible in unsegmented prose. Furthermore, artificial segmentation occasionally coincides with narrative segmentation, enhancing and amplifying it. Sometimes, instead, it cuts across segmentation, setting up counter-rhythms, syncopating and counterpointing narrative shifts. In any case, by introducing a series of minuscule gaps and interruptions, artificial segmentation jars us out of our automatic (or "natural") attitude toward such a narrative. For McHale, artificial segmentation counters the template of natural narrative with a competing unnatural one.

It will be readily apparent that the essays in this volume are not simply dutiful reapplications of the same general formula. Instead, the contributors develop the poetics even as they are expounding it. The editors are interested in assembling a dialogue of overlapping perspectives and watching them enrich, modify, and extend each other's insights. We are happy to leave the differences in a productive tension, a normal enough situation at the birth of a new theoretical approach. Furthermore, we feel that diversity has proven productive for the field of narrative theory as a whole, and it would be surprising if this were not also the case with regard to the thriving subdiscipline of unnatural narratology.

In addition, we hope this volume will achieve several other goals. We believe it will help us refigure literary history by connecting postmodern experiments with earlier unnatural work in Aristophanes, epics, romances, Rabelais, German romanticism, Gothic fiction, metadrama, science fiction, theater of the absurd, *écriture féminine*, and many avant-garde experiments. We expect these essays to help provide a rethinking of literary realism, and to suggest important new perspectives on narrative poetry, nonfictional narratives, and hyperfiction.¹² Above all, we hope to fill an important gap in exist-

12. See, for example, the essays by Brian McHale and Alice Bell.

ing narrative theory by including the wide range of texts it has historically ignored, and by producing expanded theoretical models that are able to incorporate these recalcitrant texts. Furthermore, we wish to identify, comprehend, and theorize the numerous unnatural elements within seemingly realistic or largely mimetic works and thereby provide a more comprehensive account of narrative fiction in general.

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