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A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative

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Unnatural Minds

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THE GOAL of this essay is twofold. First, in taking certain types of subversive, arresting, strange, and odd minds that one encounters in narratives as my primary target, I aim to propose a definition of such narrative phenomena as *unnatural minds* and illustrate how they might be constructed and interpreted in a concrete narrative. Second, in order to situate this definition in the current postnarratological landscape, I want to discuss some of the promising and problematic aspects of the tools developed by cognitive narratology for dealing with presentations of consciousness in narrative. Seen as a whole, the essay thus attempts to highlight a specific type of unnatural textual phenomena and to negotiate the usefulness and validity of several of the key concepts in the previous decade's massive influx of works dealing with minds in narratives. In order to try to steer clear of what might be considered either/or reactions to the solutions and tools offered by cognitive narratology, the approach attempts to navigate between these offerings, suggesting ways to learn from them without subscribing to all their underlying assumptions.

The essay is divided into four parts. Before presenting my definition of the unnatural mind I will in what remains of this introduction present the position this essay aims to take in the field of unnatural narratology. For the reason stated above I will do so with special regard to the ways in which approaches within unnatural narratology have related to work done in cognitive narratol-

ogy. The second part of the essay contains my definition. In the third part I will explore some of the possible implications of recent work that questions the validity of the so-called Theory of Mind thesis. Turning, in the fourth part, to unnatural minds, I have chosen not to present a catalogue or typology but rather to put my arguments to the test by analyzing a case of an unnatural mind in the guise of the metamorphosed mind in modern narrative fiction, as exemplified by the *Pig Tales* of Marie Darrieussecq. In the fifth and final part I draw some conclusions and outline some perspectives for further work.

One way of outlining the field of unnatural narratology is to say that what unites the researchers who consider themselves part of this paradigm is, first, an interest in narratives that “defy, flaunt, mock, play, and experiment with some (or all) of [the anthropomorphic] core assumptions about narrative” (Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson 114) and, second, a skepticism toward theories of narrative that rely solely on mimetic models for understanding how narratives function. Inside this shared frame, however, several rather substantial differences reside, the source of some of those being the acceptance or rejection of the tools, concepts, and basic assumptions developed by cognitive narratology. I would like to briefly highlight two of these differences, one related to the choice of methodology, one related to questions of interpretation.

The question of methodology is the question of how to work with unnatural narratives. Jan Alber has argued in favor of using tools developed by cognitive narratology in that he advocates using “the cognitive-narratological work to clarify how some literary texts not only rely on but also aggressively challenge the mind’s fundamental sense-making capabilities” (80). In contrast to this position Brian Richardson and Henrik Skov Nielsen have, with different means and goals, argued in favor of the development of post- or post-post-structuralist concepts. 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” (139), while Nielsen in his essay “The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction” (2004) extends Genettean vocabulary beyond the scope and framework of linguistically based structuralist narratology.

The question of interpretation, then, is the question not of how to work with these narratives but of what sense to make of them. Again the cognitive approach is represented by Alber, who aims at making “strange narratives more readable” (82). According to such an interpretive strategy, the job of both the layman and the professional reader is to renaturalize or translate the odd and strange matters of the unnatural narratives into statements about the way humans experience and make sense of the world, by applying what Alber

calls allegorical, script-blending, or frame-enriching techniques of interpretation. In contrast, what one might call nonnaturalizing 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. According to Nielsen, when a reader faces unnatural narratives, she “will not be able to optimize relevance and understanding by applying the same rules of interpretation as normally applied to everyday, conversational narratives and real-world reports” (“Fictional Voices?” 79). Along the same lines, in the context of a discussion of unreadable minds, Porter Abbott claims that unreadable minds “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” (448).

I am now able to more precisely designate the position suggested in this essay: I agree with most of Alber’s points on the level of methodology, while I agree with Abbott and Nielsen when they disagree with Alber on the level of interpretation. Like Alber, I find it useful to engage with cognitive narratology’s importation of knowledge about how actual minds function, knowledge developed by fields such as philosophy of mind, cognitive linguistics, and cognitive psychology. However, in contrast to Alber’s unreserved embrace of cognitive narratology, I approach the field with a good deal of skepticism, a skepticism which is to some degree shared by research in the very fields cognitive narratology attempts to learn from. I will treat this issue in more detail shortly. On an interpretational level, I object to Alber’s insistence on the relevance of always aiming for renaturalizations or translations. Narrative fiction, and perhaps narrative as such, is capable of both constructing and probing unnaturalness in ways that not only evoke paradoxical and/or sublime feelings, insights, and horrors but at the same time question these very feelings and insights, which produces what Abbott refers to as states of “anxiety and wonder” (448). As I see it, one major limitation inherent in a full-blown cognitive approach to narrative, with an insistence on fully renaturalizing or recognizing the haunting and wondrous otherworldly visions of minds, events, and scenarios that some narratives manage to capture, is that it runs the risk of reducing the affective power and resonance of such narratives.

1. Definition

Say I read a story about a man who wakes and finds himself transformed into a giant bug but still in possession of a human mind—and then have the end of

the story tell me it all took place in a dream. Or say I read a story about a brilliant but gentle and fragile scientist turning into a giant green thing who beats up supervillains when he gets really angry. Or say I read a story about a man situated in a possible world that looks very much like my own who wakes up as a giant bug with a human mind and stays like that while trying, to the best of his newfound physical abilities, to act in accordance with what is expected of him as the human he no longer is, at least not in his physical appearance.

These three examples are alike in that they all present the reader with combinations of physical and mental attributes that are impossible in my world, but they differ because they prompt rather different readings. As I see it, the mind in the first case is naturalized by the fact that the transformation takes place in a dream, in the sense that it doesn't really happen. A slightly different logic can be applied to case two. Here, the transformed mind is unnatural in the sense that it is impossible in a real-world scenario, but the mind may be conventionalized with the help of my knowledge of the genre in which it appears: in certain action-hero comic books, fragile but brilliant scientists are known to transform into raging beasts. In the third case, however, I am unable to naturalize or conventionalize the consciousness resulting from the physically impossible metamorphosis.¹ This monstrous irregularity cannot be exterminated in the name of sense-making with the aid of text-external cues such as knowledge of how actual minds typically work ("this happens all the time to central-European salespeople"), knowledge of genre or literary conventions ("this type of text is easily resolved with recourse to an allegorical reading"), or text-internal cues.

The third human/bug, who might go by the name Gregor Samsa, is an example of what I propose to call the unnatural mind, which I define as follows: an unnatural mind is a presented consciousness that in its functions or realizations violates the rules governing the possible world it is part of in a way that resists naturalization or conventionalization. Compared with Alber's definition of the unnatural narrative as containing logically or physically impossible elements or scenarios,² this definition operates with the looser "violates"

1. This division draws upon a matrix suggested by Henrik Skov Nielsen, who "distinguishes between four categories by combining the natural/unnatural dichotomy with the conventional/unconventional dichotomy" ("Unnatural Narratology" 85).

2. The definition of the 'unnatural' as an impossible scenario has been suggested by Jan Alber: "The term *unnatural* denotes physically impossible scenarios and events, that is, impossible by the known laws governing the physical world, as well as logically impossible ones, that is, impossible by accepted principles of logic" (80). The arguments put forth in this essay share a fundamental premise behind Alber's definition of unnatural narratives, in that I view them as narratives that exhibit physically or logically impossible scenarios or events—although, as I will argue, they are heavily influenced by notions of genre and convention. The main advantage of this definition is that it radically limits the number of unnatural narratives, which heightens the

rather than the strong “impossible” while linking the determination of something as unnatural to notions of convention and genre: the unnatural is unnatural compared with the naturalness set forth by the specific narrative, not compared with some sort of global naturalness, whatever that might be.

Unnatural minds come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, often but not exclusively in the context of experimental fiction. My goal here is not to suggest a taxonomy but rather to focus on one example of an unnatural mind in the form of the metamorphosed mind. Before detailing my approach to the poetics and pragmatics of such minds, it is necessary to dwell on the notion of mind and the understanding of the minds of others and oneself: what does it mean to naturalize or conventionalize a mind? I have two reasons for elaborating on this question. First, it is crucial to a discussion of the role that cognitive narratology can or should play in dealing with unnatural narratives. Second, researchers from different positions inside the field of philosophy of mind have recently presented a string of convincing arguments against the very basic assumptions underlining the core ideas of mindreading. Since these ideas also form the core of major aspects of the methodological development done by cognitive narratology during the last decade, addressing these challenges is of vital importance for anyone wishing to use or criticize the concepts and tools brought forth by cognitive narratology.

2. Mindreading

In this part of the essay I will first provide a brief look at the current state of cognitive narratology’s import of the notion of mindreading before examining some of the key points of the critique of mindreading outside the field of narratology. Finally, I will discuss some of the implications that can be drawn from this critique, especially as this relates to unnatural minds in narratives.

Alan Palmer argues that “novel reading is mind-reading” (“Attribution” 83). This sentence contains perhaps the shortest formulation of the basic premise behind cognitive narratology’s effort to bring insights from philosophy of mind, developmental psychology, and cognitive linguistics to bear on the theories of how and why narratives work. When we read narrative fiction, we read minds; we perform mindreading, so the basic argument goes. The notion of *mindreading* (also known as *mentalizing*) has been a cornerstone of most of the work on what is known as commonsense psychology or folk

explanatory power and precision of the definition as compared with a definition of all fiction as unnatural.

psychology. Folk psychology, in the words of Hutto, is typically understood as “our everyday practice of making sense of intentional actions (i.e. our own and those of others) in terms of reasons, where this implies having a capacity for the competent invocation of propositional attitude talk” (“Folk Psychology” 10). Baron-Cohen’s *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, one of the classic contributions to the concept of mindreading, puts it as follows: “We mindread all the time, effortlessly, automatically, and mostly unconsciously . . . In the words of Sperber, ‘attribution of mental states is to humans as echolocation is to the bat. It is our natural way of understanding the social environment” (3–4).

Without the ability to read the minds of others by ascribing beliefs and desires to them, Baron-Cohen claims, we would be unable to understand the doings and intentions of other people—we would suffer from mindblindness, which is Baron-Cohen’s way of describing the psychological and social reality of the psychopathological condition of autism. We are able to perform these attributions because we have a theory of the mind of the other; this is what is known as the Theory of Mind (ToM) explanation of our fairly formidable though not always perfect social cognition skills.

Two different models of how this attribution actually happens have fought for primacy. The so-called Theory Theory (TT) claims that we draw our inferences about the beliefs and desires of others with recourse to our own folk psychological theory, while the so-called Simulation Theory (ST) claims that “simulation is the primitive, root form of interpersonal mentalization” (Goldman 8). In other words, rather than theorizing about what the other is thinking, we put ourselves in the position of the other, trying to understand the beliefs and desires of the other by simulating their state of mind.

Palmer’s statement—“novel reading is mind-reading”—might appear to be a truism (as in: “well of course we read minds when we read fiction”). In fact it is anything but a truism. The consequences of subscribing to Palmer’s statement and the approach it epitomizes are substantial. By positioning mindreading as ToM-informed, cognitive narratology envisions it as both the purpose and essence of reading narrative fiction. Palmer’s approach thus asserts claims about what it means to read as well as claims about what narrative theory should be able to account for.

The most important of the first set of claims is what we might call the Similarity Thesis³ regarding the distinction between our understanding of the

3. This claim is put forth most strongly by David Herman, who suggests using the term “Exceptionality Thesis” to describe the opposite claim that “fictional minds are different in kind from their experiences of the minds they encounter outside the domain of narrative fiction” (“Introduction” 17).

attribution of mental processes to fictive minds and attributions of mental processes to actual minds. For David Herman, “a unified picture of mind representations of all sorts, fictional and other” (“Introduction” 12) is the desirable and reachable goal made possible by drawing upon ToM when working with narrative fiction. The second set of claims has to do with theoretical and methodological ramifications, and there are several important new insights to be gained here. Central among these is the intention to demonstrate and to try to remedy the fact that classical narratology has always treated minds, especially understood as social phenomena, as tangential to character, to narrator, or to focalization, if treated at all: “there is a hole in literary theory between the analysis of consciousness, characterization and focalization. Oddly, as I hope to have shown, a good deal of fictional discourse is situated precisely within this analytical gap” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 186).

Taking Cohn’s *Transparent Minds* as his point of departure, Palmer shows the limitations of Cohn’s concepts: they deal only with the linguistically based mind, and they deal with the mind as an inner phenomenon. In contrast to this, Palmer and others have convincingly argued that our understanding of fictional minds is based on much more data than Cohn’s vocabulary can account for. Therefore, Palmer and other theorists import and refine tools to deal with this data, including concepts such as the social mind, attribution, intermental minds, metarepresentation, sociocognitive complexity, embedded narratives, and continued consciousness.

Furthermore, the ToM approaches are capable of simultaneously dealing with aspects of narratives that are normally kept apart because the mechanics structuring mindreading are operative on the level of narration (the narrator reads the mind of his characters), on the level of thematics (the characters read each other’s minds), and on the level of reception (the reader reads the minds of the characters).

I will now turn my attention to the recent critique of the suppositions underlining the primacy given to the model of ToM in explanations of folk psychology. This critique, which has been put forth by various researchers in the fields of philosophy of mind and developmental psychology, has become substantiated in a series of essays, books, and special issues of journals during the last couple of years by researchers such as Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Hutto.⁴

4. Several of the key contributions to this critique are represented in the anthologies *Folk Psychology Re-Assessed* (2007), edited by Hutto and Ratcliffe, and *Against Theory of Mind* (2009), edited by Leudar and Costall, as well as in the 2008 special issue of *Philosophical Explorations* titled “Rethinking Folk-Psychology: Alternatives to Theories of Mind,” edited by Slors and Macdonald.

In “Inference or Interaction: Social Cognition without Precursors” (2008), Gallagher summarizes what he sees as the pertinent challenges to ToM suppositions in the three points. First, there is the rejection of what Gallagher calls “the mentalizing supposition, that is, the Cartesian idea that other minds are hidden away and inaccessible” (164). In contrast to ToM approaches, which treat the beliefs and desires of others as something locked away inside the heads of others, Gallagher argues that “in many cases knowing the other person’s intentions, emotions, and dispositions is simply a matter of perceiving their embodied behaviour in the situation” (164).

Second, Gallagher rejects what he calls “the spectatorial supposition” (164): “Our normal everyday stance toward the other person is not third-person, detached observation; it is second-person interaction” (164). Hutto argues along similar lines for the idea that “understanding others in normal contexts of interaction is not a spectator sport” (*Folk Psychological Narratives* 12). ToM, whether TT or ST, is based on what Gallagher and Hutto find to be a faulty assumption, that we make sense of other people in a detached, observational third-person context. What actually happens when we comprehend the actions of others as intentional and meaningful is something rather different: this typically takes place in the form of an interactive, involved second-person context.

From this rejection follows Gallagher’s third rejection, the rejection of “the supposition of universality”:

Mentalizing or mindreading are, at best, specialized abilities that are relatively rarely employed, and they depend on more embodied and situated ways of perceiving and understanding others, which are more primary and pervasive. (164)

If we do undertake the massive amount of work needed in order to actually ascribe desires and beliefs to others from a purely spectatorial stance, it happens only rarely, argue Gallagher and Hutto. According to Hutto, this is because “we simply do not need to make such ascriptions in most everyday, second-person contexts” (*Folk Psychological Narratives* 6).⁵

5. While Gallagher and Hutto, and others with them, agree in their critique of basing folk psychological understanding on a ToM module, they offer fairly different alternatives to the TT and ST approaches. Gallagher (“Inference”) highlights interaction as what enables our understanding of others. Hutto has put forth the fairly radical and potentially very consequential narrative practice hypothesis (NPH), claiming that we gain the ability to understand beliefs and desires of others through developmental (thus culturally situated) series of interactions with caregivers, interactions that center on discussing or practicing explanations of intentions and motivations as they appear in narratives (see *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16: 6–8 (2009),

I will now move into the third and final part of this tour through the landscape of mindreading theory by turning my attention to what conclusions cognitive narratology—and narratology in general—can or must draw from these convincing refutations of ToM as folk psychology’s universal means of understanding actual minds. As we have seen, the idea that we read actual minds is fundamental to different approaches inside cognitive narratology, whether the goal is to argue in favor of a unified approach to the representation and reception of consciousness in fiction and nonfiction (Herman) or to develop new tools for a more fine-grained analysis of narrative fiction (Palmer). These approaches are now facing critiques that challenge them to come up with either new or refined arguments in favor of ToM or new ways of anchoring their cognitive approach.

An interesting but not unproblematic take on this challenge is to be found in the introduction to *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (2011), an anthology edited by Herman. As mentioned, Herman argues in favor of a “unified picture of mind representations” (what I have suggested calling the Similarity Thesis), and he underscores not the fundamental incompatibility between the two approaches in folk psychology but rather the way in which both can be said to refute what Herman calls the Exceptionality Thesis, which is the idea that minds in fiction operate according to rules different from those governing actual minds.

According to Herman, from one direction, the insights of ToM can be used to refute the notion that fictional minds must be understood differently from actual minds:

[. . .] dichotomous treatments of fictional and actual minds can be questioned via research suggesting that readers’ knowledge of fictional minds is mediated by the same kinds of reasoning protocols [. . .] that mediate encounters with everyday minds. (“Introduction” 20)

From another direction, still according to Herman, “The Exceptionality Thesis” can *also* be refuted by using insights from theorists who *reject* ToM: “people do in fact experience others’ minds, encountering the I-originary of others in everyday settings as well as fictional narratives” (“Introduction”

especially the essay “Storied Minds: Narrative Scaffolding for Folk Psychology,” by Herman, for possible applications, consequences, and problems in Hutto’s ideas). Slors and Macdonald put the difference between Gallagher’s and Hutto’s approaches this way: “While Gallagher’s criticism of ToM is that in a sense it does too much—we can understand most of our social interaction in more basic and epistemologically direct ways—the claim of Hutto’s NPH can be interpreted as saying that when it comes to FP [folk psychology] or providing reasons for actions, ToMs do too little” (Slors and Macdonald 157).

20). This is a case of having one's cake and eating it too: seeing ToM and anti-ToM approaches as having "ultimately the same" ("Introduction" 21) force is possible only if one neglects the fact that they are mutually exclusive in their native domain.⁶

While ToM once seemed to guarantee that the understanding of actual and fictional minds followed the same rule, the rule of mindreading, the opposite situation now seems more plausible: in real life we rarely read minds, whereas in fiction we have no choice but to do so. In my view, the rejection of ToM as a universal means of making sense of actual minds carries different implications for different aspects of the practice of cognitive narratology. Since the ToM module is essential to a unified theory of consciousness representation, this aspect—along with the idea that understanding the minds of actual people and reading the paper minds of fiction amount to the same activity—is put into serious doubt. However, for methodological approaches that use the ToM module as one among many different modules imported from folk psychology or cognitive linguistics, the loss of ToM as the fundamental principle of sense-making in real life may be less crucial.

In the methodological aspects of both Palmer's and Herman's work, many of the key concepts rely on other aspects of folk psychology, and this is the main grounds for my own adaptations of cognitive narratology's work on minds in narratives; the arguments that minds are more to narratives and that there is more to minds in narratives than is dealt with in classical narratology still stand as valid. It is perfectly possible to agree with the rejection of real-life mind understanding as a spectator sport put forth by Gallagher, Hutto, and others while at the same time agreeing with Palmer that literary theory has paid too little attention to the role of consciousnesses in narrative.

Also, the cognitive-narratological idea that both writers and readers of fictive narratives initially draw upon their folk psychological knowledge of the workings of real minds when dealing with fictional minds appears convincing to me. These processes of meaning production normally happen effortlessly; but narratives that stray from or disrupt or subvert the norms or rules of our folk psychological competences pose an interesting methodological challenge. To my mind this is one of the sites in the current narratological landscape

6. A second problem lies in the way Herman presents the recent break with ToM. What Hamburger says about minds in fiction differs substantially from what philosophers such as Hutto, Dan Zahavi, and Gallagher say about actual minds in action. As Herman also notes, their critique of the ToM approach hinges on the idea that social cognition and interaction are guided not by observational, distanced reasoning (i.e., a theory) but rather by bodily, second-person involvement. Such involvement is clearly not present when we read, whether we are reading fiction or nonfiction, so when dealing with written minds, do we make sense of them as we make sense of (or engage with) actual minds?

at which methodological reflection and development are called for.⁷ What, then, happens when these non-ToM aspects of cognitive narratology are set in motion with what I call unnatural minds?

3. The Metamorphosed Mind

As described earlier, unnatural minds occur in a wide range of narratives and they come in rather different shapes and sizes. One such shape is what Abbott convincingly suggests calling “unreadable minds.” In a move similar to the one I am arguing for, Abbott places “a focus on fictional minds that cannot be read” (448), and he moves forward through readings of “characters that disallow the default reading of opaque stereotypes through lack of sufficient narrative action to release them from their unreadability” (448). These stereotypes are reading patterns capable of naturalizing the seemingly unreadable, and Abbott lists three: the insane (the strange mind read as a mad mind), the catalyst (the strange mind read as portraying another character), and the symbol (the strange mind read as a metaphor or allegory). The crucial aspect of Abbott’s approach is that he insists on the existence of narrative minds that resist being naturalized by these three conventional reading patterns. Melville’s *Bartleby* is one such mind who, according to Abbott, should not be turned readable but rather invites us to experience the unreadable as such (448).

In the following I will focus on another type of unnatural mind that I will call the impossible mind. The impossible mind is a mind that is biologically or logically impossible, such as a mindreading mind, a deceased mind, a radically metaleptic mind, or a mind running without the hardware that the human mind as we know it is nested in. Impossible minds are often conventionalized—the double consciousness of Bruce Banner / Hulk is conventionalized using knowledge of genre. I will focus on a type of impossible mind that is both unnatural and unconventionalizable: the mind of the metamorphosed human. In my discussion of this type of mind I will draw upon concepts from cognitive narratology, more specifically on the notions of attributions and the distinction between intermental and intramental minds as developed by Palmer.

7. This approach—taking the tools for describing our means of making sense of real people developed by cognitive studies to deal with the strange scenarios, the odd consciousnesses, and the logically impossible worlds presented to us by unnatural narratives, revising or supplementing these tools when needed—is what I aim to do in my section of Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson and in “In Flaming Flames’: Crises of Experientiality in Non-Fictional Narratives.” The concepts in question are Palmer’s notion of continued consciousness and Fludernik’s notion of experientiality.

Metamorphoses are fairly common in almost every existing oral and/or written storytelling tradition: from Ovid to myths to fairy tales to fantasy and science fiction. In the majority of these traditions, the metamorphoses are part of the rules set up by the possible world of the narrative. From frog to prince or from young beautiful lady to horse: these are metamorphoses that obey the rules of the narrative in which they appear. They might appear impossible according to the conventions of our world, but inside the world of their narrative they are expected. They are typically conventionalized using genre.

The kind of metamorphosis I would like to focus on, the human–animal transformation as described in the literary fiction of the last one hundred years, behaves differently. One canonized narrative is Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.” Another example would be William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*. A more recent example that has gathered a lot of attention is the *Pig Tales* of Marie Darrieussecq from 1996. In this context I will focus primarily on the unnaturalness of the metamorphosed mind in *Pig Tales*, but several of characteristics of this mind are found in Kafka’s and Burroughs’s work as well.

Pig Tales is set in a parallel universe around the year 2000. In this universe several major destructive events have taken place—among those apparently a giant war which has laid waste to most of the animal life on the planet—and the world is now a dystopian nightmare, ruled by a decadent, corrupt, and misogynous small group of completely ruthless men. Women are either giving birth or employed as prostitutes. Our knowledge of the world is filtered through the character narrator, a woman who is also a pig. The narrative structure resembles that of a memoir: the story told by the woman/pig is the story of how the woman metamorphosed from a young girl into a sow. The setting, as well as the protagonist’s reaction to it, is captured in this passage in the beginning of the novel:

So I was looking for work. I had interviews. And got nowhere. Until I filled out a *job application form* (words are coming back to me) for a big perfume and cosmetics chain. The director of the form sat me on his lap and pawed my right breast, obviously finding it marvelously elastic [. . .] The director had me get down on my knees in front of him, and while I was hard at work, I daydreamed about these beauty preparations, about how good I was going to smell, about the glowing complexion I’d have. (2–3)

“The Metamorphosis” and *Pig Tales* share several basic premises: a young protagonist’s mind lives on after a metamorphosis from human form to animal form has taken place. While the transformations are primarily physical (human body to bug and pig, respectively), in both cases the desires and

beliefs of the new bodies slowly start to intermingle with those remembered by the human brains. Gregor and the young woman both experience new urges, stemming from the needs and wants of their new bodies. To the woman in *Pig Tales* this includes things such as excessive eating of her own vomit and rolling in the mud. This intermingling of experiences from two radically different—and in a real-life scenario radically incompatible—types of embodiment is what justifies calling these minds impossible.

We might compare this kind of mind with one described by Abbott. In the case of what Abbott calls the unreadable mind we are dealing with no mind where there should have been one. In the case of these modern human-animal-metamorphosis minds we are dealing with the opposite: a human mind where there should have been none; a mind with the memory of the desires and beliefs of its former body as well as with new urges and experiences, brought forth by the new body. These two works also share the fact that the violations against the world they appear in are not easily resolvable with recourse to conventions such as genre or allegorical readings. The many discussions of how to read Kafka's story are well known, and the reception of *Pig Tales*, while still young, is characterized by similarly fundamental disagreements on the level of interpretation.⁸

There are also some important differences between the two texts, and while they are vital to a full reading of *Pig Tales*, as well as to a reading of its relationship to "The Metamorphosis," my aim here is more limited. What I would like to do is to focus on aspects of the way in which this unnatural mind is constructed by the narrative. I will do so by drawing upon Palmer's idea of the social mind. According to Palmer, traditional narratology deals with fictional consciousness as solely an inner phenomenon, employing what Palmer calls an internalist perspective on the mind which stresses those aspects that are hidden, solitary, mysterious, and detached: "As a result, the *social* nature of fictional thought has been neglected" (*Social Minds* 39). In contrast to this internalist view, Palmer argues in favor of an externalist view that sees the mind as something social as well as something private, a view that stresses the outer, active, public, social, behavioral, evident, embodied, and engaged aspects of the mind. Palmer introduces two concepts into narratology in order to better deal with the social mind: attributions and intermental minds. "*Attribution theory* is the study of how attributions of states of mind are made"

8. In her reading of the novel Katharine Swarbrick sums up the reception as follows: "the reception of *Truismes* was marked by anxiety: critics and the public faced with narratives devices which had all the familiarity of *Candide* and Kafka, of Orwell and *Arabian Nights*, described the effect provoked by Darrieusecq's production in terms of nauseous uncertainty" (58).

(“Attributions” 293). In narrative fiction such attributions take place on several levels: on the level of the narrator, on the level of the characters, and on the level of the reader. Intermental minds or intermental thought “is joint, group, shared or collective thought, as opposed to intramental, or individual or private thought [. . .] It is also known as *socially distributed, situated or extended cognition*, and also as *intersubjectivity*” (“Attributions” 293).

In *Pig Tales*, the initial shocks delivered by the novel originate from the very elaborate descriptions of the actual physical transformation, of the becoming-a-pig. But the real horrors of the novel are to be found in the way the novel deals with the attribution of desires and beliefs; more specifically, with the protagonist’s attribution of desires and beliefs to herself and the surrounding world’s attribution of desires and beliefs to her. As she gains weight and changes color, her work as a prostitute changes as well. From what appears to be fairly standard, if deeply impersonal sessions the services she provides start to take on more and more extreme shapes, as does her body. The combination of the physical transformation and the degrading actions becomes too much even for her to handle:

It wasn’t a life any more. I could never be *in tune* with my body, yet the constant refrain of *Gilda Mag* and *My Beauty, My Health*, magazines I received at the boutique, was that if you didn’t achieve this harmony with yourself, you risked getting cancer, an *anarchic growth of cells*. (35)

This passage mirrors the kind of intrusions her physical body is subjected to in her work as a prostitute on a semantic and mental level. To put it bluntly, while her clients and her boss have been inserting strange objects into her body, the language and logic of commercials have been inserted into her mind. And these semantic objects are not just supplements to the wordings of her soliloquies—they form the basic building blocks for the reconstruction and explanation of her own desires, beliefs, and emotions.

As the story continues so does the protagonist’s transformation. Her boyfriend leaves her behind in the large amusement park Aqualand. The park closes with her trapped inside and she suddenly finds herself naked, in the middle of a large closed party for Edgar, the evil politician on the rise. After being submitted to severe abuse—they unleash dogs on her—she is about to be shot, when one of Edgar’s assistants intervenes and brings her to Edgar. They decide to use her as the main model in his election campaign under the slogan “For a healthier world!” She then spends the entire night being photographed.

The photographer sent me off with a wad of bills in my hand. I thought that was fair. The one thing I regretted was not having seen the end of the party at Aqualand, when I'd never in my whole life been invited to such a high-class affair. (56)

On the one hand, this passage displays the classical situation of a character's access to the content of her own mind: she has experienced something, has reacted to it, and is now reflecting on these experiences and reactions. The trouble for the reader, on the other hand, comes from the fact that her evaluation of the experience radically differs from what most would consider normal. As readers of her story we witness a series of massive violations of human dignity. But when she rereads these events in her mind, her thoughts are full of other peoples' words, other peoples' perspectives, other peoples' demands and wishes. As is the case with Kafka's Samsa, in the rendering of the metamorphosed mind in a tortured body we would expect hidden, detached introspection on the wrongs being done to her, but what we read is for the most part detached not from the perpetrators in the outer world but from the core of her inner world, a core that has been eradicated by the doxa of a society gone wrong.

I will now take up some examples of how the novel deals with the minds of others. I will restrict my focus to the attribution aspect of the social mind. The protagonist is in principle capable of attributing mental states to others, even though she often refrains from doing so. But what is striking about the novel's presentation of the social aspect of what constitutes a mind is that the story contains almost no passages in which others attribute desires or beliefs to the protagonist. What we are able to reconstruct from the narrator's tales of her interaction with others can be boiled down to the following: they either use her or are horrified by her bizarre looks. In the *Perfume Plus* she is treated solely as a commodity. The only customer who attributes a minimal amount of inner life to her is a mad preacher who calls her a sinner. I have previously mentioned some of the ways in which the politician Edgar puts her to use: as a model and as a spectacular freak. The horrified responses come from all sides: when she visits a doctor the doctor "exclaimed indignantly" (45). When she meets a woman with a child we hear that "the sight of me seemed to frighten the woman" (71). And when a policeman shortly after pursues her, he yells, "It's monstrous! [. . .] His hand shook as he drew his weapon—which is what saved me" (73).

After a long time in a prison cell, she becomes the center of attention at a huge New Year's Eve party at Edgar's place. She is brought in and received like a freak, and after she has eaten someone's vomit they begin throwing food

at her and make her perform tricks for it. This episode is followed by a rare example of someone reacting to her as if she had actual desires and beliefs:

Everyone was having lots of fun. I was getting dizzy from the champagne they were pouring into me and I started feeling sentimental, shedding tears of gratitude for all the food I was getting. One lady with a stunning dress of lazuré from Gilda flung her arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks, sobbing and babbling incoherently. I would have liked to understand what she was saying, while we were both rolling around on the floor. She seemed quite fond of me. It had been a long time since anyone had shown me such affection, and I was moved to fresh tears. “Look at that!” the lady stammered. “She’s crying!” (93)

The passage may be read as both a demonstration and a parody of what Palmer refers to as the attribution of mental states on the basis of external signs. In this scene the external signs are tears, and they are produced by the protagonist and the lady in the stunning dress, respectively. The autodiegetic narration prevents the reader from insight into the intentions of the lady, but based on her tears and motions it is safe to assume that the lady reads the tears of the protagonist as tears of misery and sadness. But this rare example of someone actually attributing an inner life to the protagonist is undermined by the grotesque irony of the situation; the woman concludes from the tears that there is in fact a human being behind the mass of red flesh, but even so she totally misjudges her: the tears of the protagonist, so we are told by the narrator, are in fact tears of joy and gratitude, not of sorrow or pain.

Pig Tales holds one major exception to its otherwise complete lack of intermental units: at the end of the narrative, the protagonist enjoys a short and stormy love affair with a werewolf, the only other person in this world also capable of shifting from human to animal form. He is later hunted down and shot.

4. Conclusion

I have selected the modern human–animal metamorphosis narrative as an example of the possibilities as well as the limitations of drawing upon cognitive narratology because this form of narrative dislocates the distinction between the mind as an intramental phenomenon and the mind as a social phenomenon in an instructive way, especially with regard to the distinction between internal and external minds. Where we would expect to find inner

thoughts, feelings, and motivation in these narratives, we instead encounter public language, common expressions, doxa, and vice versa: where we would expect to find a readable face, a set of decodable gestures and movements, we encounter fearful reactions to what are perceived as bizarre physical appearances. The uncanny effect of these narratives stems from precisely this double estrangement: the inside of the consciousness has been invaded by the truisms of the outside public sphere, while the outside appearance and hence the social interface with other minds have been disfigured beyond the human form.

On a theoretical and methodological level, the goal of this essay has been twofold: on the one hand, I have suggested ways of drawing upon insights and concepts from cognitive narratology in dealing with unnatural narratives. Classical narratological approaches to representations of consciousness, such as the one offered by Cohn in *Transparent Minds*, excel at dealing with the minds of narratives at an intramental level, as a set of linguistically based inner phenomena. As I hope to have indicated, and this is where I agree with several of the proposals made by Palmer's recent work, cognitive research on the enactive, social, and intermental aspects of the mind enables, when brought into narrative analysis, a more thorough and precise reading of the workings of the impossible and unnatural minds of the likes of Samsa and the woman-pig, even if these narratives affirm the conventions of the intramental by deliberately dissolving them.

On the other hand, I have stressed what I take to be some of the shortcomings of basing a unified theory of consciousness representation on ToM, a theory that now appears less convincing than the available alternatives.

As I see it, the tools of cognitive narratology offer invaluable help in explaining what happens on the level of structure and reception. Nonetheless (and this is where I disagree with Alber and agree with Abbott), cognitive concepts will not save us from the unknown, will not undo the haunting feelings some narratives produce. These narratives could be out to teach us something, but because of the current intellectual and emotional setup of humans this something continues to elude us. And while the new contributions to the theory of narrative offered by cognitive narratology can help shed light on what makes these narratives unnatural, their unnaturalness remains resistant to being fully translated, normalized, or recognized. That's why they read us while we read them.

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