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非自然叙事学及当代叙事诗学：布莱恩·理查森教授访谈录

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摘　要：本访谈主要涉及叙事理论，尤其是非自然叙事及非自然叙事学研究的现状与未来。在阐述了非自然叙事学这一概念之后，本访谈进而梳理了非自然叙事学与其他叙事研究之间的相互关系；接着，访谈对经典叙事学与后经典叙事学之间颇具问题的区分加以说明。最后，访谈谈到了当代叙事理论的局限性和不足，并对未来的叙事学研究提出了建议。

关键词：叙事诗学　非自然叙事学　后经典叙事学

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Abstract: This interview centers around the current state of and the possible future directions for the research on narrative and narrative theory in general, and unnatural narrative and unnatural narratology in particular. A definition of the term “unnatural narrative” is followed by a discussion of its relationship with unnatural narratology and other strands of narrative inquiry. The interview has also commented on the problematic distinction between classical narratology and postclassical narratology, before the constraints of contemporary narrative theory are talked about and some possible future directions for this rapid developed discipline are outlined.

Key words: narrative poetics　unnatural narratology　postclassical narratology

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Brian Richardson is a professor of English at University of Maryland and the president of International Society for the Study of Narrative. He is a leading scholar in the fields of narrative theory, poetics of drama and twentieth century literature, and his most recent book is *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (co-authored with David Herman, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowits and Robyn Warhol, 2012).

Shang Biwu (hereafter as Shang): A decade ago, when guest-editing a special issue of *Style* devoted to the "Concepts of Narrative", you made a prediction that "narrative theory is reaching a higher level of sophistication and comprehensiveness and that it is very likely to become increasingly central to literary studies" (Richardson 174) Could you comment on this prediction from today's vantage point? Or, what do you think of the development of narratology in the first decade of the new millennium?

Brian Richardson (hereafter as Richardson): In literary and historical studies, narrative is increasingly perceived to be central. The study and application of narrative theory have also continued to grow and expand in a large number of other fields, including anthropology, philosophy, art, medicine, psychology, religion, and psychiatry. The role of narrative just continues to proliferate.

Shang: The mode of unnatural narratology has been gaining unprecedented popularity. Could you please briefly explain what is unnatural narrative, and what is unnatural narratology?

Richardson: Unnatural narratives are those that violate the conventions of conversational natural narratives, nonfictional narratives, and the realistic fiction that attempts to mimic the conventions of nonfiction. It is useful to think of three kinds of representation in fiction: the mimetic or realistic, as in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the nonmimetic or non realistic, as in a fairy tale, and the antimimetic or unnatural narrative that not merely eludes the conventions of realism but mocks them, as we see in many postmodern narratives.

Shang: In the special issue of *Foreign Literature Studies* on "Postclassical Narratology: Western Approaches" (2010), you entitled your essay "An Introduction to Postmodern Narrative Theory". For me, what you write in that paper can be best labeled as unnatural narratology. Could you elaborate on the differences between unnatural narratology and postmodern narrative theory?

Richardson: Postmodern narrative is an important and especially prominent subset or type of unnatural narrative. To use Brian McHale's useful formulation, postmodern works problematize the ontology of the text itself or the ontology of the world which it projects; in this, they are in my terms unnatural. Unnatural narrative is a larger category and includes Aristophanic comedy, Rabelaisian narratives, novels in the tradition of *Tristram Shandy*, theater of the absurd, and other types of antimimetic texts. The concept of the unnatural helps us to see connections between postmodern and earlier antimimetic forms.

Shang: When did you delve into the studies of unnatural narratives? And what makes you interested in this particular genre?

Richardson: In the 1970's I developed a great interest in experimental fiction, especially the work of Samuel Beckett, the *nouveau roman*, magical realism, and the avant-garde U. S. authors like John Hawkes, who once noted that he "began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, setting, character and theme." I found these narratives to be original, exciting, and creative, and as I read these works and was amazed by their play with or movement away from traditional uses of plot, narration, and characterization. I naturally looked to works of narrative theory to help me understand these innovations. Unfortunately, narrative theory then tended to ignore such narratives.

Shang: The big question that puzzles a lot of teachers and students might be why unnatural narratives matter. Could you say something about the theoretical or practical implications of unnatural narratology? Or, to put it in another way, what contributions can unnatural narratology make to literary studies?

Richardson: The main issue here is that traditional narrative theory has largely or entirely neglected an entire range of narratives that are important at many points of literary history. The inclusion of unnatural narratives is essential if narrative theory is to produce have a thorough, comprehensive account, rather than a partial, incomplete account. Why should we have a narrative theory that is helpless to discuss the most interesting aspects of postmodern fiction, the dominant literature of our time? In addition, un-

natural narratives thus provide an interrogation of the basic elements of narrative, a critique of overused narrative conventions, a challenge to official public narratives, an original vehicle for the self – representation of the oppressed, an exceptional way to express extraordinary events, and a different, challenging kind of aesthetic experience.

Shang: In an essay "Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models", you and other unnatural narratologists claim that "the study of unnatural narrative has developed into one of the most exciting new paradigms in narrative theory" (113). Despite its rapid development in recent years, unnatural narratology is a still project in progress. Could you outline some directions for future research in this field?

Richardson: One of the first objectives is to analyze unnatural narratives in earlier time periods. Jan Alber is currently doing work along these lines, tracing unnatural narratives in English from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. In my new book, I am focusing on unnatural narratives in the work of Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Other new areas are the intersection of unnatural narrative theory and feminist narratives, postcolonial narratives, and minority narratives. Studies of digital narratives and of the more unusual works of popular culture will also be helped by the methods and poetics of unnatural narrative theory.

Shang: It's generally agreed that unnatural narratology is one of the most salient strands of postclassical narratology. Unlike its classical counterpart, postclassical narratology is not a holistic and unified discipline but a "critical passepartout"—a hybridization of feminist narratology, cognitive narratology, rhetorical narratology, transmedial narratology, etc., and this has been aptly demonstrated in David Herman's 1999 volume *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* or most recently in Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik's edited collection *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analysis* (2010). What are the interrelations between unnatural narratology and other sub – branches of postclassical narratology?

Richardson: I would say that unnatural narratology is the most radically postclassical narratology, since the texts it deals with and the conclusions it reaches are the one that diverges the most from classical narratology. It is also true that the other approaches mentioned in the question—feminist, cognitive, rhetorical, and transmedial narratology—can be effectively combined with unnatural narratology.

Shang: You serve in The International Society for the Study of Narrative as its present president. How contemporary narrative theory is focalized from that position? In other words, from your perspective, what are the major trends and features of contemporary narrative theory?

Richardson: In addition to unnatural narratology, some of the most interesting new developments are postcolonial narrative theory (see Frederick Aldama, ed, *Analyzing World Fiction: New Horizon in Narrative Theory*), applied cultural narratology (Ansgar Nuenning), and digital/electronic narratology (Marie – Laure Ryan, Alice Bell). Feminist narratology continues to produce new and exciting work and cognitive narratology remains impressive. Monika Fludernik and others are doing important work in historical narratology. Comparative narratology, in which Asian narrative and narratological traditions are discussed, is still in its early stages in the West but promises to be a wonderful subject for future research.

Shang: Speaking of comparative narratology, Fludernik and Greta Olson claim that it is a potential critique of "the dominance of Anglophone narratology" and that "narratology as a discipline has now reached the stage of critical self – analysis" (7). Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman calls for a transnational turn in narrative theory in her most recent paper. How do you understand comparative narratology? What should we compare? And why?

Richardson: Narratology is the theory of narrative, so it draws on and theoretically examines narratives. By definition, I believe, narratology is intended to cover all narratives just as linguistics is supposed to cover all languages, not just modern or European

languages. In practice, however, mostly narrative theory has restricted itself to examples from the modern European and American fiction. Among the huge gaps in coverage are medieval narrative, classical Asian narratives, postmodern narrative, drama, and certain popular narrative traditions. For this reason, much narratology has not fulfilled its mission and has unfortunately and unnecessarily restricted itself. An engagement with the classical Asian tradition, such as Japanese Noh or joruri drama, will necessarily produce a more complex and thorough formulation of basic concepts like the narrator and, I believe, characterization.

Shang: What can unnatural narratology learn from comparative narratology? Does unnatural narratology also need a transnational turn?

Richardson: I have no doubt that a wide variety of unnatural narratives exist in many cultures. It is my hope that future research will identify these and help integrate them into a larger theoretical matrix. An obvious starting place would be the metaleptic shifts between the nonillusionistic prologue and the drama proper in classical Sanskrit dramas, such as Rakshasa's Ring. Comic kabuki plays would also benefit from an unnatural analysis.

Shang: When David Herman coined the new term "postclassical narratology" in his 1997 article "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology," you had reservations with his project in two senses. One is about "the unidirectionality of his account of the changing and cumulative movement of literary history," and the other is about his "attempt to produce a description of narrative practice that includes all narratives, whether fictional or nonfictional, classical or postmodern, hackneyed or hermetic" (Richardson and Herman). About a decade later, your position seems to receive its echo from Meir Sternberg, who has radically argued that the difference between classical narratology and postclassical narratology is "nonexistent." In his eyes, the term postclassical narratology "was invented in order to give an impression that the history of narratology started with classicism and then moved toward something that is the development of classicism. This tale is simply false." Could you elaborate a bit on Herman's term "postclasscial narratolgy" and Sternberg's critique from today's vantage point?

Richardson: The distinction between "classical" and "postclassical" kinds of narratology is a fluid and debatable one. Some recent approaches, like feminist or unnatural narrative theory, diverge considerably from earlier conceptions, and certainly deserve the epithet "postclassical." I would be sympathetic with anyone who felt that some "postclassical" approaches are not that new, that the cognitive approach, for example, is not radically different from but rather an extension of a classical structuralist position with additions from psychology – driven narrative theory and analysis. See the introduction to *Postclassical Narratologies*, edited by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, for a current discussion of this very issue. Interestingly, they include Sternberg as one whose work is postclassical. Of course, one may construct many different narratives of the history of narratology. A theorist like Northrop Frye might suggest that Herman offers the narrative trajectory of comedy: a newer, better, teleological narrative leaves behind older, less effective positions as it moves toward greater knowledge. Sternberg understandably contests the distinction that leads to this kind of narrative; if he didn't, his best option would be a narrative in the form of a tragedy that suggests that the great systematic narrative syntheses of the classical period are now being lost as narratology becomes increasingly fragmented, speculative, and dispersed. By contrast, an unnatural account might claim, along with feminist narratology, to be the only true postclassical theory, or it might offer a circular narrative that begins with the genius of the Russian Formalists, followed by a long period decline as the antimimetic aspects foregrounded by the Formalists were ignored and forgotten by nearly all mimetic – based theories, with only the partial exception of Meir Sternberg and the Tel Aviv School of Poetics, until the unnatural narratologists recovered, restored, and developed this important tradition. The conclusion, perhaps, is that one can always construct

a variety of narratives about the same basic events, and one should therefore be wary of every narrative that comes with an explicit or implicit moral, including those offered by narratologists themselves.

Shang: It may be said desoite its rapid development that narratology is still a theory in progress. What are those constraints that limit its development as a discipline? Or to put it differently, what challenges are there in the future development of narratology?

Richardson: Historically, narrative theory has been created to explain basic features of specific types of narratives. I would say that a key limitation of narratology is the limited type of basic texts that have been chosen to model narrative theory. In our case, there are two governing models: natural and conversational narratives (Propp), and one grounded largely on realist and modernist fiction (Shklovsky, Stanzel, Genette). If one had started with medieval, postmodern, or classical Chinese narratives, then contemporary narratology would look quite different. The challenge is always to go beyond the limits of one's basic model.

Shang: Could you possibly outline a few directions for contemporary narratologists to free narratology from those constraints?

Richardson: I feel the most important thing for narratologists today is to extend the range of textual examples discussed and to modify established theories as necessary. In particular, we need to see a greater variety of nonrealistic narratives, such as medieval, avant - garde, classical Asian, and postmodern, brought into our discussions.

Shang: More and more universities are now offering narrative theory courses to MA students, Ph. D. students and even undergraduates. In such an age that "feels like a good time to be a narratologist" (Palmer 108), how to teach narrative theory may become one scholarly concern. This appears to be evident in the book *Teaching Narrative Theory* edited by David Herman, Brian McHale and James Phelan (2011). For the beginners or those who are interested in narrative theory, an important issue is how to learn narrative theory. Could you offer a few suggestions about how to study narrative theory to those who are interested in this rapidly developed discipline?

Richardson: The best way to start is to begin with one of the more recent introductory guidebooks, such as H. Porter Abbott's *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* or Suzanne Keen's *Narrative Form*. Also useful is *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, in which four different perspectives on narrative theory (rhetorical, feminist, cognitive, and unnatural) are set forth by eminent theorists (James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz, Robyn Warhol, David Herman, and myself) writing in an accessible manner.

Shang: Thank you very much for the interview, Professor Richardson.

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