

A Different Picture of Unnatural Narratology: A Review of Macro Caracciolo's *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction*

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Abstract Since the advent of the new millennium, unnatural narratology has raised a upsurge in Western academia, which reaps widespread attention and arouses enormous controversies. In *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters*, Macro Caracciolo attempts to bypass the typology contest between "natural" narratology and "unnatural" narratology by putting forward the concept of "strange." Caracciolo adopts the cognitive perspective of reader-response to explore unusual narratives in contemporary literary works, which offers a different picture of unnatural narratology and deserves scholarly attention.

Key words unnatural narratology; strange; reader response; recognition

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Introduction

Since the new millennium, unnatural narratology has fully flourished to be one branch of postclassical narratology, keeping abreast with feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology, and cognitive narratology. It must be pointed out that "unnatural narratology is not a unitary theory school, but an integration of multiple perspectives and methods." While attracting widespread attention, it incurs a large number of controversies due to its innate "diversity" and "hybridity" (Shang, "Unnatural Narratology" 96). Unlike most unnatural narratologists who are

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confined to the typology contest of natural narratology and unnatural narratology, Macro Caracciolo bypasses it by adopting an innovative approach toward the construction of unnatural narratology. In *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (hereafter referred to as *Strange Narrators*), he examines the phenomenon of strange narrator from the cognitive perspective of reader-response. This unique perspective results from Caracciolo's longtime of academical accumulation. His works mainly focus on the phenomenon of narrative, literary cognition, structure of experience in literary works and other media, as well as reader's engagement with character, especially strange and unusual character such as narrating animal, serial killers, cyborgs, etc. In *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo draws on the merits of diverse narrative theories, including natural narratology, unnatural narratology, cognitive narratology and so on, to scrutinize unnatural narrative from the perspective of reader's cognition, which displays a different picture of unnatural narratology.

Narrative Unnaturalness and Enactivist Experientiality

Since the 20th century, the Western literary world has ushered in the radical cultural movement of postmodernism. A large number of unprecedentedly extreme writings and anomalous narratives come into being, with striking plots and narrative skills of novelty, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, etc. However, continuously dominant is natural narratology led by Monika Fludernik, which claims that narrative is an imitation of realistic events, "a retelling of a story in certain way, or a representation of events" (Shang, "Unnatural Narratology" 96). It is a pity that natural narratology ignores the phenomenon of unnatural narrative in contemporary fiction. In this situation, a group of narratologists headed by Brian Richardson take the lead in exploiting the field of unnatural narrative. They call for the construction of unnatural narrative poetics by examining unnatural, anti-anthropocentric and antimimetic narratives, so as to make "a radical extension of and addition to that performed by Monika Fludernik in her *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996), where she follows out the paradigm of conversational natural narratives to its limits." (Richardson 392). In contrast with "mimetic" of natural narrative, Richardson sets "antimimetic" as the primary attribute of unnaturalness to describe the "events, people, scenes and frameworks" that violate the realistic conventions (389). Jan Alber uses "impossibility" as a yardstick for examining unnaturalness, as opposed to "possibility" of naturalness (Alber 436, 439). Stefan Iversen specifies unnaturalness as an irreconcilable conflict between story world and narrating principles (Shang, "Unnatural Narrative" 98).

Different from the aforementioned unnatural narratologists, Caracciolo, in *Strange Narrators*, tries to study unnatural narrative of strange narrators, particularly those in contemporary novels, from the cognitive perspective of reader-response, combined with corpus-based empirical analysis. He explains that the selection of contemporary works as samples of analysis indeed has a realistic factor - contemporary works are more likely to have a large number of book reviews on the Internet for corpus study, but the deeper reason is that the characters in the post-war fiction “are likely to appear particularly strange or unusual to readers” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xv). Among these characters, Caracciolo pays particular attention to character narrator who possesses dual identities, one as a narrator at the discourse level and the other as a character at the story world.

The strong rise of unnatural narratology does not declare the decline or demise of natural narratology. Instead, natural narratology still plays an important role in interpreting unnaturalness of narrative works. As one of the leading figures of unnatural narratology, Jan Alber, advocates cognition-oriented naturalizing reading strategies. As Shang Biwu comments, “although in terms of the research object, Albert seems to deviate from natural narratology initiated by his academic tutor Fludernik and instead engages in the study of unnatural narrative, yet regarding research method, he draws close to Fludernik, trying to naturalize the unnaturalness of narrative to make them ‘readable’ through cognitive approach” (“What is Narrative ‘Impossibility’” 136). Likewise, Caracciolo absorbs a helpful concept — “experientiality” — from Fludernik’s natural narratology and hereby innovatively adopts the perspective of reader’s cognitive experience to study the unconventional narratives in contemporary fiction. It is worth noting that the cognitive perspective emphasized by Caracciolo is actually far distinct from the cognitive approach adopted by Albert. Albert’s cognition refers to a cluster of real-world knowledge stored in general readers’ cognitive frames and scripts, while Caracciolo’s cognition highlights “experientiality,” meaning the cognitive responses made by the specific reader during the course of his reading experience. The former is static, but the latter is dynamic. Caracciolo points out a metaphoric image of spider web in the opening pages of *Strange Narrators* as an argumentative support for his calling for the angle of reader’s reading experience. In his saying, “just like a spiderweb, narrative fiction is carefully arranged in a pattern that is meant to ensnare prey (or readers) through its exquisite workmanship” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xiv). Narrative fiction begins with the author but do not end with the author. Reader’s reading engagement and interpretive response made during the engagement play an important role in the construction of narrative. Therefore, Caracciolo invests numerous words in analyz-

ing reader's reading experience in the book.

Caracciolo's emphasis on the reading experience is not groundless but based on the concept of "experientiality" that Fludernik introduces in constructing natural narratology. She first proposes the concept in *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), arguing that narrative is "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" (12). In her view, the essence of narrative is "the communication of anthropocentric experience," which involves "drawing on fixed patterns of behaviour as well as conveying thoughts and feelings, and depicting perceptions and reflections." On the contrary, the genre of academic history is not a narrative, because it refers to factual materials only to make an argument, "not depict human experience (The emphasis here is on academic: much historical writing is quite novelistic in structure and tone.)" (Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* 59), and lacks "the dynamics of experientiality" (Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* 28). It can be seen that in the natural narrative theory of Fludernik, the dynamic process of representing human experience is the key to the constitution of a narrative. She also poetically compares life to a journey made of narration: "Throughout our lives, things frequently happen without prior warning and bring about radical changes in the course of events, for example the first unexpected meeting with one's future partner. In reconstructing our own lives as stories, we like to emphasize how particular occurrences have brought about and influenced subsequent events" (*An Introduction to Narratology* 1). In one word, "experientiality" emphasizes two characteristics of narrative: anthropocentrism and dynamic process.

Despite of his premiere presence in European academia, Caracciolo has made a fruitful study of Fludernik's narratological theory since his post-doctoral period, attaching great importance to the issue of experientiality and experience. He has published several papers and two monographs devoted to the experientiality and experience of narrative¹. However, it is worth mentioning that although Caracciolo's experientiality derives from Fludernik's, he has integrated his own insight into its specific referential scale. The "representation" and "communication" functions of narrative make experientiality somewhat ambiguous in its reference. Does it refer to

1 Regarding the experientiality and experience of narrative, Mark Caracillo has published the following monographs and journals: *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, *A Passion for Specificity: Confronting Inner Experience in Literature and Science*, "Notes for a(nother) Theory of Experientiality," "On the Experientiality of Stories: A Follow-up on David Herman's 'Narrative Theory and the International Stance'," "Beyond Other Minds: Fictional Characters, Mental Simulation, and 'Unnatural' Experiences," "Playing Home: Video Game Experiences Between Narrative and Ludic Interests," "Those Insane Dream Sequences: From Distorted Experience to Experientiality in Literature and Video Games."

narrative's intrinsic experientiality made by imitating real-world human experience, or reader's psychological experience when interacting with texts during reading? The former focuses on character's anthropomorphic experience conceptualized by Fludernik, while the latter turns to David Herman's cognitive narratology, which focuses on reader's reading experience. Combining the views of the predecessors, Caracciolo takes both text and reader into consideration, to critically apply Fludernik's experientiality from the perspective of reader-response. In *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* (2014), Caracciolo proposes the concept of enactivist experientiality. Caracciolo believes that experience is not limited to in-text context. "Instead, we should think of experientiality as a kind of network that involves, minimally, the recipient of a narrative, his or her experiential background, and the expressive strategies adopted by the author. At the root of experientiality is, then, the tension between the textual design and the recipient's experiential background" (Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative* 49). In this case, narrative is the product of the mutual interaction between its author and its reader. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that Caracciolo advocates a steadfast turn to reader-response in *Strange Narrators*, using cognitive reception theory to engage in unnatural narrative, with an attempt to provide a complementary research tool for previous text-oriented analysis method. Cognitive reception theory never negates the value of textual cues, but adopts a brand new perspective — reader's view — to analyze the clues of text and treats reader as an interpreter who actively performs a dialogue with text. This kind of dialogue is physically embodied in the idea exchange between the two minds of the text, the character's and the reader's brains. In *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo applied his enactivist experientiality to study reader's experience, that is, how reader's mind engages with the spiritual world of character during his reading process, and the psychological and cognitive reactions generated by the engagement.

Besides the aforementioned enactivist update of experientiality, in *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo extends "experientiality" from Fludernik's natural narratology to unnatural narratology in order to use it to analyze the unconventional narratives in contemporary fiction. From the perspective of reader's experientiality, naturalness and unnaturalness are no longer a set of irreconcilable oppositions but overlap and intersect to some degree. This is why Caracciolo chooses a broader concept "strange" rather than "unnatural" to work on unnatural narratology (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 2). Arguably, we can say that, heavily inspired by Fludernik's experientiality, *Strange Narrators* is such an innovative monograph that adopts the cognitive perspective of reader-response made during reading experience to explore

the unnatural phenomenon of contemporary novels.

Reader-response and Cognitive Interpretation

In response to the frequently appearing unconventional narratives in contemporary novels, Caracciolo in *Strange Narrators*, interprets this “strange” phenomenon from the reader’s perspective — including reader-response and cognitive interpretation. He believes that narrator’s strangeness comes not from the narrator itself, nor from the isolated text, but from the “experiential and interpretative negotiation” between the specific reader and the particular text (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 1). The introduction of reader’s perspective into the study of unnatural narrative has both a realistic basis and a theoretical support. On the surface, strangeness is a personal feeling of reader. A thousand readers seem to have a thousand different strange experiences, and its diversity makes this issue difficult to predict or study. However, in realistic reading process, “readers within a certain interpretive community — or within neighboring communities — tend to share a large number of cultural assumptions and templates for defining ‘normality’” (1). Likewise, the identification of strangeness is based on common cultural values. Therefore, reader along with his cultural background is key issue of studying strange phenomenon of literary works. For another, Caracciolo quotes a theoretical support from Phelan’s theory of character. Phelan divides characters into three categories: “mimetic,” “synthetic” and “thematic” characters (Phelan 2-3). The concept of mimetic character, as the name suggests, refers to the characters created as the copy of real people, understood as the embodiment of human entity, while synthetic character goes to the other extreme — completely neglecting the factors of reality and mimetics, it is seen as a product of pure textual mechanism, with emphasis on its textuality and fictionality. The concept of thematic characters challenges the polarized opposition between the former two types of characters. It is considered to have thematic functions, used to represent a certain thought, or a group/class as an embodiment of meanings of reality. Caracciolo thinks that both mimetic and synthetic characters have drawbacks. He points out that because readers’ reading context and life attitudes are quite different, to what extent readers perceive characters to be imitated and fictional are totally different, which causes readers to oscillate between these two extremes. Based on Phelan’s “thematic” view, however, Caracciolo understands character to be “usually play[ing] into readers’ meaning constructions...and they become entangled in broader interpretations” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 5) . In *Strange Narrators*, the narrators are uniformly character narrators. According to the thematic view of character, we can see that, due to their additional identity

of being a character, the images of such narrators are formed in reader's meaning construction. Therefore, it is theoretical convincing for Caracciolo to argue that reader's perspective is the key to analyzing the strangeness of character narrators in the book.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of introducing reader's perspective, Caracciolo also values the dynamic process of reading. He believes that strangeness is not a consequential ramification, but what is being generated during the course of reading experience. Therefore, he introduces a large number of narratological and psychological concepts to examine reading experience from perspective of reader-response, including readers' engagement, character-centered illusion, defamiliarization, empathy/empathetic perspective taking, cognitive dissonance, folk psychology, and imaginative resistance. I will combine these concepts to illustrate how strange reading experience goes on.

In Caracciolo's view, there are three stages involved in the interaction between reader and text: character-centered illusion, cognitive dissonance and interpretation. In the first stage, character-centered illusion comes from what Werner Wolf calls "aesthetic illusion," which means that the novel brings reader an effect of fiction: "feeling of being recentered in a possible world as if it were (a slice of) life" (qtd. in Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 8). Reader feels that he engages in or enters the spiritual world of character. This illusion has its authenticity established based on the realistic "folk psychology." According to folk psychology, in a specific social and cultural community, people have a "set of cognitive capacities which include — but are not exhausted by — the capacities to predict and explain [other people's] behavior" (18). Under this precondition, reader can cognitively engage with character. However, reader's engagement is not only limited in "predict[ing] and explain[ing] behavior" as an outsider, but, more thoroughly, will deepen to empathize with character. Regarding empathy, two are three blind spots to be clarified: First, empathy is a kind of prosocial behavior, but it is not equal to selflessness, which means that reader empathizes with character without being assimilated by character and instead still maintains his own subjectivity. Second, empathy is different from sympathy. Compassion is an emotion, while empathy is an "imaginative, simulative mechanism" (39). Reader imagines that he is the character and imitate the character to "act." Reader's character-centered illusion is reflected by the two points of empathy, that is, reader engages with character without losing himself. It is caused by the mutual interaction between text clues and the reader's "predispositions, interests, and perceived similarity to the character" (40). In other words, reader's character-centered illusion is actually an empathic encounter of the reader in the real world with the

character at story world.

However, when some contradiction or conflict happens during the encounter, reader will enter the second stage — generating cognitive dissonance, which can be emotionally expressed as strangeness. It should be pointed out that cognitive dissonance and strangeness are an perception of dynamic “oscillation.” In the process of reader’s engagement with character, reader’s and character’s worldviews may conflict with each other. If the reader closes the book right now, giving up continuing to read or refusing to empathize with the character, the sense of dissonance or imbalance will disappear. But, if the reader along with the conflicts continues to engage with the character, he will enter the gray zone of defamiliarization, oscillating between “imaginative resistance” to the character and “tentatively ‘trying it on’.” (48) The so-called “imaginative resistance” refers to “the impediments we seem to encounter when we are asked to imagine moral judgments sharply divergent from those we ordinarily make” (45). Caracciolo thinks that although imaginative resistance intensifies the difficulty of empathy, it does not completely prohibit empathy. Since fictional world provides a safer zone for reader and character to interact than the real world, reader might overcome imaginative resistance and painstakingly empathize with the characters. To be more specific, reader condemns the immoral behaviors of character on the one hand, but on the other hand, experientially and imaginatively engages in character’s mind and acts. The reader himself becomes a hub replete with tension, cognitively perceiving dissonance between the internal fiction and external reality, and thus emotionally feeling unfamiliar and strange. This intense state is described by Amy Coplan’s “self-other differentiation” concept to be an in-between situation, that is, “when we empathize with a fictional being (or a person, for that matter) we don’t imaginatively become him or her. Rather, we learn to see the story world through the narrow gap between being ourselves and being another.” (46).

Reader will not linger in the stage of cognitive dissonance forever. They may enter the third stage — interpretation. By adopting proper interpretive strategies to explain the abnormal behaviors of character and hereby rationalize them, reader reduces his strange feeling and regains cognitive balance. Caracciolo summarizes four types of generative interpretation: existential readings, metacognitive readings, categorizing readings, and reflective readings. These four strategies respectively refer to the four ways that the reader deals with the abnormal behavior or thoughts of character, such as induce them into the totality of human existence, understand them as sample of studying mental process of human totality, incorporate them into a category of realistic individuals, analogize them with reader’s realistic experiences

for him to reflect on. Reflective interpretation means that reader moves from one-way involvement to two-way interaction, that is, the reader not only examines the text, but also has to face the scrutiny of the text in turn. Thus, as the third stage of interpretation progresses, the reader's self-correction deepens and cognitive frames get expanded. As a result, the initial strange feelings are conventionalized as the normal.

Reader Cognitive Perspective: Values and Limits

Strange Narrators has a broad scale of theoretical basis by drawing on concepts and research methods from different critical theories and interdisciplinary science. For example, in the field of literary criticism, Caracciolo borrows from Russian formalism the “defamiliarization” concept, reader-oriented theory, reader response, and learns from cognitive narratology and unnatural narratology. As for interdisciplinarity, Caracciolo employs the empirical research of natural science, the corpus study of linguistics, and cognitive analysis of psychology. In this sense, the book transcends the barriers both within the discipline of narratology and those between narratology and other disciplines, displaying its compatibility and interdisciplinary merit. Besides, it is enlightening for the prospective academic research, especially on unnatural narratology and cognitive narratology, forging a bond of mutual complementation between the two branches of postclassical narratology.

Reader cognitive perspective adopted by Caracciolo makes a major breakthrough in the study of unnatural narratives — it helps define unnaturalness. Since Brian Richardson initiated unnatural narratology, the definition of unnaturalness has been a thorny issue. In 2016, the fourth issue of *Style*, published a special issue on the construction of unnatural narratology. Concerning the definition of unnatural narrative, Richardson points out, “each theorist of unnatural narratives tends to define the field slightly differently” (Richardson 389). As a pioneer of unnatural narratology, Richardson believes that “the unnatural consists of events, characters, settings, or acts of narration that are antimimetic” (389). Thus, antimimetic becomes a core attribute of the unnatural. Whereas, a new contradiction emerges in the discussion of the definition of antimimetic: how come a supernatural novel such as a fairy tale, does not bring forth the unexpected effect of unnaturalness. Faced with this interrogation, Richardson explains with “conventionalized,” which is conspicuously a cognitive concept. Caracciolo's three-step decoding of reader's strange reading experience helps to demonstrate why and how conventionalization is formed: from the initial character-centered illusion, to cognitive dissonance and to

the adoption of interpretative strategies, readers' cognitive frames get expanded so that initial strangeness is perceived to be understandable, during which the original unnaturalness gets conventionalized during the course of reading process. As Albert says, "Some of them have already been conventionalized, that is, transformed into cognitive frames we are now familiar with (such as that of the speaking animal in the beast fable or time travel in science fiction), while others are currently being conventionalized (such as the impossibilities in postmodernist narratives)" (Alber 435). Therefore, the definition of unnaturalness is dynamic and should incorporate the reader cognitive perspective to help procedurally verify itself. The unnaturalness is constantly diluted as the reader's cognitive interpretation proceeds. It is even reasonable to say that, upon being discussed, unnaturalness begins its destined of being conventionalized. Perhaps it is in this sense that Albert declares, "Richardson's approach of merely enjoying the unnatural for the sake of the unnatural does not take us very far" (440). Therefore, it is greatly significant to introduce reader-response perspective into unnatural narratology, because it can help explain what unnaturalness means to readers and will inspire us how to literarily treat unnaturalness.

Furthermore, the reader-response emphasized by Caracciolo is equally instructive for the development of cognitive narratology. Caracciolo and cognitive narratologists led by David Herman, both get inspired by cognitive psychology to take narrative as the object of cognitive interpretation, thus paying attention to the cognitive process of reading. However, they have different understandings of reader. A type of reader can be named as "genre reader," that is, a group of reader sticks to a particular literature genre. They are categorized by the criteria of literature genre, so they "enjoy the same genre convention and the same genre's cognitive assumptions, expectations, models, scripts, frames and schemata" (Shen Dan, Wang Liya 223). Cognitive narratology focuses on such readers, "exploring the commonality among the readers' perception of the narrative structure of a certain genre and examining the prescriptive narrative context and the conventionalized reader" (224). We can see that cognitive narratology theoretically accepts readers but practically puts readers aside when analyzing the cognitive process in a specific case, because genre readers' cognitions are conventionalized, common and mutual psychology. Such psychology is unconsciously taken by cognitive narratologists as a precondition for all cognitive analyses, and thus is certainly unnecessary to be mentioned. In this way, cognitive narratology seems to go far away from its original aim, and the "invisibility" of individual readers causes cognitive narratology shifts its research object to in-text characters. For example, when Herman analyzes the short story "The Dead" in *Dubliners*, he mainly examines the character's cognitive states

in the story world, while the readers become passive recipient functioning to test the effect of narrative. He believes that we “must take into account the cognitive and emotional states and processes of the characters as they act and interact in the story world; these states and processes must be construed as integral to the core events or “gist” of the narrative” (Herman 247). Compared with Herman, Caracciolo seems to go further in the cognitive study of narrative. He not only pays attention to the cognition of character, but also keenly notices how reader recognizes the cognition of the character, making cognitive analysis further complete. In other words, reader-response highlights two aspects of cognitive analysis, the cognition in the text (especially those of character), and additionally reader’s cognitive process when getting engaged with the text (especially with cognition of character). Such readers do not belong to any genre but come from the social and historical context of reality. They are no longer readers of a specific genre, but individual readers with flesh and blood. Thus, Caracciolo takes into account reader’s background — middlebrow — when selecting the online review database for the case study in *Strange Narrators*.

Of course, *Strange Narrators* has some problems and shortcomings both in theoretical construction and case study. First of all, the core concept of the book “strange” lacks a clear definition. In fact, “strange” derives from “defamiliarization” first invented by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, meaning “*ostranenie*: making strange.” The concept is used to refer to an rhetorical device in poetry, that is, “to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Selden et al. 32). However, Caracciolo does not give a clear definition of “strange” in *Strange Narrators*. Who is the owner of this “strange”? The title of the book, “Strange Narrator” seems to imply that strangeness comes from narrative discourse, but the strange emotions mentioned in the author’s demonstration is a kind of feeling made by reader. Caracciolo fails to clarify the two concepts — defamiliarization of text and the strange feelings of reader — but rather mixes them to generally refer to a strange reading experience where characters go against “readers’ expectations” and “folk psychology” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xv). It leads to the problem of referential ambiguity when decoding a specific reading process. To solve this problem, I suggest that the first step should be to distinguish the strange effect of text and the strange feeling of reader in their referential scales, and then the next step is to illustrate the totality of their both belonging to reading experience. Furthermore, Caracciolo shows that “strange emotions” refers not to its “experiential traits,” but to the attributes of “psychological structure that underlies them. This structure is, at the same time, situational, phenomenological,

and cognitive” (xvi). This assertion creates a conceptual confusion, so the relationship between strangeness as experiential trait and strangeness at the psychological level needs a further clarification. Are the two exclusively opposite or intersective with each other during reading process? How can readers avoid the experience of emotions and merely involve psychology or cognition at the scientific level? In addition, there is a certain gap between this book’s practical demonstration and ideal plan. The introduction part claims that a major feature of this book is to use the empirical method of the online commentary database to study reader’s reaction, but this research approach has not been implemented consistently. Except for the first two chapters involving detailed online reviews, the following case study in the other chapters rarely mention online corpus. Another problem of the book is the confusing mixture of the two distinctive concepts of character and narrator. The first-person narrator discussed in *Strange Narrators* are all character narrators, who intrinsically have dual identities, being a character at story world and being a narrator at discourse level. One of distinctive traits of narrator from character is that narrator has “telling” function to make a narrating act (Shang, “What is Narrative ‘Impossibility’” 136). Thus, the study of strange narrators must be firmly anchored in the strangeness caused by his narrating act. Unfortunately, Caracciolo unconsciously mixes the study with the strangeness generated by his another self of being a character in story world.

Conclusion

Caracciolo’s exploration of the strange narrators in contemporary novels from the cognitive perspective of reader-response, opens up a brand new research route of the study of unnatural narrative, which displays a different picture of unnatural narratology. Richardson points out that “the goal of any narrative theory should be a theory of all culturally important or resonant narratives, not a single subset...It would be bad enough if unnatural narratives only existed in a few countries over a couple of decades; But new forms of unnatural figures, techniques, and worlds keep appearing...it is essential that we are able to theorize these narratives...We cannot expect fifty- or sixty-year-old models to be able to effectively handle a new world of narrative literature without some significant reconceptualization” (Richardson 403). Caracciolo’s *Strange Narrators* echoes Richardson’s calling for “new form” and constant “reconceptualization” of unnatural narrative. He innovatively adopts the concept of “strangeness” to revisit unnaturalness, successfully avoiding the thankless typology contest of natural narratology and unnatural narratology, and fruitfully outlining the dynamic strangeness of unnatural narrative from the

perspective of reader's reading. In terms of his prospective study, I list the following points to be further probed: first, to make an explicit definition of "strangeness," including its subjects (whose strangeness?), modes (including but not limited to emotional strangeness and cognitive strangeness), and functions (for rhetorical effects, ethical interpretation and so on); second, considering reader's engagement in narrative includes involvements with narrator at discourse level and that with character story level, it is necessary to distinguish these two levels in case study; third, the generating of strangeness consists of three stages, whose relationship with one another need to be examined. Do they proceed in turns or in an overlapping manner, once for all or circularly? By answering these questions, we can help to define the border between the natural and the unnatural in a dynamic way, and meanwhile offer a more scientific theoretical tool for analyzing unnatural narrative.

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