Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction

Brian Richardson

Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction

Brian Richardson

Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction Brian Richardson
Brian Richardson presents a study that explores in depth one of the most significant aspects of late modernist, avant-garde, and postmodern narrative. *Unnatural Voices* analyzes in depth the creation, fragmentation, and reconstitution of experimental narrative voices that transcend familiar first- and third-person perspectives. Going beyond standard theories that are based in rhetoric or linguistics, this book focuses on what innovative authors actually do with narration. Richardson identifies the wide range of unusual narrators, acts of narration, and dramas with the identity of the speakers in late modern, avant-garde, and postmodern texts that have not previously been discussed in a sustained manner from a theoretical perspective. He draws attention to the more unusual practices of Conrad, Joyce, and Woolf as well as the work of later authors like Beckett and recent postmodernists. *Unnatural Voices* chronicles the transformation of the narrator figure and the function of narration over the course of the twentieth century and provides chapters on understudied modes such as second-person narration, "we" narration, and multiperson narration. It explores a number of distinctively postmodern strategies, such as unidentified interlocutors, erased events, the collapse of one voice into another, and the varieties of postmodern unreliability. It offers a new view of the relations between author, implied author, narrator, and audience and, more significantly, of the "unnatural" aspects of fictional narration. Finally, it offers a new model of narrative that can embrace the many non- and anti-realist practices discussed throughout the book. **Brian Richardson** is professor of English at the University of Maryland.

Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction Details

Date   : Published November 15th 2006 by Ohio State University Press
ISBN   : 9780814251577
Author : Brian Richardson
Format : Paperback 166 pages
Genre   : Language, Writing, Nonfiction, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Humanities

[Download](#) Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Conte ...pdf

[Read Online](#) Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Con ...pdf

Download and Read Free Online Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction Brian Richardson

From Reader Review Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction for online ebook

Michael Sussman says

An indispensable volume for readers and writers of experimental and postmodern fiction. Comprehensive and remarkably lucid.

Claire S says

I used to be really uncomfortable with 'weird' type books, but with my daughter whizzing through high school as fast as she is, I feel more anchored and able to take on such things. I wish I'd learned more about this sort of stuff in College! If it was even being taught then. The idea that literature is always moving forward is a 'missing link' that seems obvious now.

Steven says

One of my juicy airplane reads was Brian Richardson's Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction, which is now an essential member in my collection of books on narratology, narrativity, and the theory of narrative in general [see the bibliography at the bottom for the rest]. Two high-level takeaways from Richardson's book—challenges, really, to the extant literature on narrative theory—are: (1) current theory does not—and can not—adequately account for anti-mimetic and anti-realist narrative strategies: such modes need to be studied separately, and (2) these strategies, though a feature of postmodern literature, did not originate in the postmodern era, were in fact first attempted by modernists or earlier period writers. Both of these points are convincingly argued throughout the book.

Richardson's other contributions to narrative theory are extensive and original analyses of second person (You), first person collective (We), and multiperson narrators. Richardson also explores at length three extreme forms of "narrating agents:" (1) the interlocutor, (2) denarration, and (3) the "permeable" narrator, which includes a lively discussion of Beckett's The Unnameable. Following the presentation and analyses of these extreme forms of narration, Richardson tackles some of the schematic frameworks used in narrative theory. First he extends Stanzel's narrative circle to situate the "you," "we," and multi-person narrators, along with free indirect discourse (under the label "impossible narration"), into the schema with the traditional forms of first and third person narrators. Next he extends Chatman's revision of Booth's model for Implied Authors and Implied Readers, arguing in the process that these are still useful concepts, particularly with regard to extreme narration.

Although Unnatural Voices will mostly appeal to those interested in narrative theory, I think it is also helpful for creative writers—even those working within the realist mode—to get a dose of theory now and then, and this book is especially useful for getting a grasp on how and why the modes of narration have been extended. And if you are already writing outside the realist mode—which means you are probably into theory anyway—this book is an indispensable text. Here, though, are a couple of passages that I think are most helpful for creative writers to consider:

There is a general move away from what was thought to be "omniscient" third person narration to limited third person narration to ever more unreliable first person narrators to new explorations of "you," "we," and mixed forms. There is a similar movement from the psychological novel to more impressionistic renderings of consciousness to the dissolution of consciousness into textuality, and a corresponding move from human-like narrators to quasi-human, non-human, and anti-human speakers, as the figure of the narrator as a recognizable human being recedes into an ever greater eclipse. The basic categories of first and third person narration or homo- and heterodiegesis, themselves based on foundational linguistic oppositions articulated by Benveniste, are repeatedly problematized and violated by experimental writers. For the most part neither of the major theoretical approaches can begin to comprehend this plethora of new work for the simple reason that it rejects the type of mimetic representation that both theories presuppose. [13-14]

A whole range of narrative possibilities opens up once you leave realism behind. If you are not already predisposed to head in that direction, why should I/we? you might ask. Here's Richardson again:

A primary motive is modern novelists' continuing desire to "make it new." There is an impulse in the history of literature to take successful techniques and develop them further. . . Another reason, interestingly, has an obliquely mimetic source: it is often perceived that different aspects of human experience can be better or more appropriately depicted through new techniques. The most obvious of these is the consonance between the "we" form of narration and the representation of a close-knit group of individuals whose shared experiences lead to common ways of thinking. Multiperson narration likewise provides a more thorough picture of the multiple, distinct discourses that inform a group or a single individual consciousness; for many writers the most sensible way to produce a dialogical sensibility is to reenact it through an assemblage of disparate voices. Importantly, the breakdown of the notion of a stable self has been effective in unleashing a polyphony of discourses within an individual and a compelling image of the fragmented nature of the self, as we have seen throughout this book. [135-136]

So, realism got you in a rut? Or do you find it insufficient to portray the intellectual underpinnings of your fiction? Consider the narrative strategies Richardson elucidates. The source fiction he cites also provides a great reading list if you are interested in non-traditional literature.

Bill Sirius says

Nice selection of texts among the high literature. Horrifying theoretic categorization...

Andreas Jacobsen says

Rating: 2.5