

My Narratology

An Interview with Brian Richardson

DIEGESIS: What is your all-time favorite narratological study?

Richardson: I admire and have been impressed by a number of narratologists, particularly those who have attempted large-scale systems, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Franz Stanzel, and Gérard Genette. I think the work of Viktor Shklovsky is especially seminal and would greatly reward additional study and investigation. I continue to find much of his work both challenging and intellectually exciting. In my recent work, I find myself going back to Wayne Booth, Dorrit Cohn, and Lubomír Doležel.

DIEGESIS: Which narrative would you like to take with you on a lonely island?

Richardson: If I may take a book, the choice is easy: the complete works of Shakespeare. One would almost relish being on a desert island as an opportunity to read and reread these plays. If I could only take a single narrative, I think it would be Joyce's *Ulysses*, the many narratological riches of this work are still quite underappreciated. Borges' *Collected Fictions* would also ease the solitude.

DIEGESIS: Why narratology?

Richardson: Narratology gets to the roots of all narrative, and as such is essential and, in fact, invaluable. Every day in every classroom in the world where literature is taught, basic concepts of narratology are employed: narrator, character, plot, ending, and so forth. Without some narratological training, many of these teachers cannot explain exactly what these terms signify. Thus, some minimal narrative theory is inescapable whenever narrative is discussed at a serious level. If one does not examine one's concepts, one is doomed to simply repeat unexamined the conceptualizations of others.

DIEGESIS: Which recent narratological trends are of particular interest to you?

Richardson: The most interesting for me right now is unnatural narratology, which is incorporating vast new areas of world narrative into a theoretical framework, and rethinking that framework to include these strange, new texts. I am continually surprised at how exciting new work in this area is, and how widely it can be extended. Another interesting field is feminist narratology,

which similarly brings a new perspective to traditional questions and continues to develop in new ways. Postcolonial narratology, a field just being born, also promises to be rewarding as it explores how Western, indigenous, and oppositional poetics are refigured and hybridized.

DIEGESIS: What is the future of narratology?

Richardson: Speculating on the future of literary studies in the USA, I am guessing that the swerve away from deconstruction, poststructuralism, and cultural studies will continue. The resulting vacuum should be filled by the study of literature as literature, rather than as history, psychology, or sociology. These developments would lead presumably to greater interest in the text itself, in narratology, and in aesthetics. I am encouraged by the spread of narrative theory in Victorian studies and the renewed interest in experimental narratives.

DIEGESIS: What other question would you like to answer?

Richardson: What areas are still in need of narratological investigation? – Many important areas remain largely unexplored. Recent avant-garde, postmodern, and experimental digital narratives that seem to defy conventional theoretical frameworks need to be more thoroughly investigated and theorized more effectively. More work in feminist, minority, postcolonial, and gay narratives is also needed. A fuller approach to Medieval and Renaissance texts would be very helpful. Also promising is the challenge offered by classical Asian narratives, such as Japanese Noh drama or the Chinese novel. Such analyses would greatly enrich the corpus of works analyzed and thereby extend existing theoretical accounts.

Brian Richardson is Professor of English Literature at the University of Maryland. His books include, among others, *Unlikely Stories: Causality and the Nature of Modern Narrative* (1997), *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Plot, Time, Closure, and Frames* (2002, editor), *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Postmodern Fiction* (2006), *Narrative Beginnings* (2008, editor), *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts & Critical Debates* (2012, co-author), and *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative* (2013, co-editor).

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