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RAMIFICATIONS

**Interpretation:
Its Status as Object or Method of Study in Cognitive
and Unnatural Narratology**

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Abstract Narratology and literary studies have always had ambivalent attitudes toward interpretation. This article proposes that the recent divide between the research programs of cognitive and unnatural narratology is a new expression of a profound methodological schism. Reviewing the status of interpretation in cognitive and unnatural approaches to narrative, we contend that scholars in the cognitive camp have tended to treat interpretation as an object of study (i.e., investigating the interpretive process), while those in the unnatural field typically treat it as a method of study (i.e., practicing interpretation in the study of narratives). Relatedly, whereas cognitive narratology assumes continuity between the interpretive processes operative in narrative understanding and the rest of life, the unnatural approach emphasizes discontinuity between fiction (reading) and the everyday. To show how these different conceptual underpinnings feed into contrasting academic practices, we supplement this theoretical overview with a double case study of Hans Christian Andersen’s short story “The Shadow” (“Skyggen”). Taking advantage of our diverse disciplinary backgrounds, we offer one “interpretation” from a cognitive perspective and one from an unnatural

1 narratological perspective, followed by metaresponses to each other's responses. By
 2 setting up a theoretical and methodological dialogue, we highlight the nature of the
 3 differences between the two approaches while also looking for possible sites of overlap
 4 and cooperation.

5 **Keywords** cognitive narratology, fictionality, Hans Christian Andersen, interpreta-
 6 tion, unnatural narratology

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 9 Interpretation is arguably something of an elephant in the room for narra-
 10 tology and literary studies. Although interpretation clearly plays a central
 11 role in the humanities, its status in the study of narrative raises slippery
 12 methodological questions. Narratology in particular has proposed various
 13 strategies for confronting (or dodging) the many ways of conceiving of the
 14 nature, functions, and determinants of interpretation. The major contrasts
 15 between unnatural and cognitive approaches to narrative are arguably root-
 16 ed in ongoing disagreements about interpretation.

17 This special issue exists because, instead of seeking to overcome their
 18 differences, scholars working within these two strands of narratology have
 19 been more prone to cultivate their opposition. This is understandable when
 20 you compare their conceptual underpinnings. Whereas cognitive forms of
 21 narratology are unified by the basic assumption that there is continuity
 22 between sensemaking processes directed at narrative and cognitive processes
 23 operative in the rest of life, unnatural approaches stress the discontinuities
 24 between the two for particular kinds of fictional narrative.

25 Part of the disagreement is merely a matter of emphasis. Unnatural nar-
 26 ratologists often criticize cognitive narratology for its “mimetic bias”—for
 27 being overly restricted to conventional mimetic texts (Richardson 2011). But
 28 this call for a wider range of texts is closely linked to deeper worries about
 29 interpretation: cognitive approaches are also held to be overly oriented
 30 toward naturalizing interpretive stances (Nielsen 2013: 373). Unnatural nar-
 31 ratologists have stressed that the interpretation of narrative need not be a
 32 disambiguating process, as cognitive narratology allegedly implies, and have
 33 preferred to emphasize the notion that, in Maria Mäkelä's words, the reader
 34 need not be treated “as a mere sense-making machine but as someone who
 35 might just as well opt for the improbable and the indeterminate” (2013: 145).
 36 Cognitive narratologists have disputed the validity of these objections, often
 37 refuting the need for a specifically unnatural narratology (e.g., Fludernik
 38 2012), and claiming that the phenomena unnatural narratologists seek to
 39 describe are perfectly amenable to cognitive-narratological models.

40 We aim to show how interpretation runs through many of these issues as
 41 an (implicit or explicit) bone of contention. More specifically, we present

1 and examine the thesis that different conceptions of the status of interpreta-
 2 tion in narratology underlie some of the key conceptual differences between
 3 unnatural and cognitive narratology. The role of interpretation in the humani-
 4 ties at large can be understood as falling into two methodological traditions:
 5 treating interpretation either as a method of study or as an object of study.
 6 Narratology, we argue, currently occupies a somewhat volatile position
 7 between the two—not least because the choice between them involves
 8 some key questions about the goals and nature of the discipline.

9 In order to illuminate the often implicit stances of cognitive and unnatural
 10 narratology, we first offer a contextualizing discussion of the place of inter-
 11 pretation in narratology, literary studies, and the humanities more broadly.
 12 This is followed by an overview of how scholars in cognitive and unnatural
 13 narratology have sought to deal with the complexities of interpretation in
 14 their analyses. Finally, a case study of Hans Christian Andersen’s short story
 15 “The Shadow” (“Skyggen”) crystallizes the theoretical observations and illus-
 16 trates the potential for reconciliation, and its limits.

17 18 **1. Interpretation: A Brief Contextualization**

19 One key distinction must be made when talking about interpretation within
 20 the context of academic inquiry. On the one hand, interpretation is often
 21 deployed as a method of study (what can interpretation tell us?). That is, it can
 22 be used to acquire insights about texts or artifacts, often through academically
 23 established frameworks that guide the interpreter in his or her reading.
 24 On the other hand, the interpretive process itself can also be taken as the
 25 object of study (what is interpretation?). That is, one can aim for a descriptive
 26 or explanatory grasp on the complex processes by which people make mean-
 27 ings out of texts, artifacts, or events.
 28

29 Historically, the humanities have been the site of interpretation as a meth-
 30 od of study par excellence. Many areas of the humanities—including major
 31 currents in literary studies—have made it their business to develop and apply
 32 refined frameworks for interpretation, focusing on what these can teach us
 33 about texts, artifacts, rituals, or other cultural practices. This idea of the
 34 humanities as a fundamentally interpretive practice has been formative in
 35 the evolution of most humanities disciplines, including the practices and
 36 institutions of literary studies as we know them today.

37 The second approach—treating the process of interpretation as an object
 38 of study—has by comparison been decidedly less dominant and influential
 39 but has certainly not been ignored. The initial establishment of hermeneutics
 40 as a primary method of study for the humanities, for instance, drew on
 41 philosophical hermeneutics in its keen interest in what constitutes interpre-

1 tation as an epistemological or even ontological a priori (see Mueller-Vollmer
2 1985). Meanwhile, the study of how meaning is established became central to
3 research programs as diverse as frame analysis in sociology (Goffman 1974)
4 and thick description in symbolic anthropology (Geertz 1973).

5 Narratology seems always to have been ambivalent toward both ways of
6 approaching interpretation. In its structuralist origins, the discipline marked
7 a deliberate move away from the philological and hermeneutic methods
8 of literary studies, intending to offer a more objective approach based on
9 the identification and analysis of structural and universal features of narra-
10 tive discourse. Nonetheless, as has often been discussed, subsequent “post-
11 classical” (Alber and Fludernik 2010) generations of narratologists have been
12 notoriously noncompliant with these aims. In recent years, a number of
13 literary theorists have called for more attention to the status of interpretation
14 in narratological description, discussing its centrality, inevitability, and limits
15 (e.g., Nordlund 2002; Jackson 2003; Pettersson 2009; Easterlin 2012: 20–27;
16 Korthals Altes 2014: 36, 91–100; Caracciolo 2016a). Among the manifold
17 variations of postclassical narratology, some (e.g., postcolonial narratology)
18 have incorporated interpretive methods from cultural studies into narrato-
19 logical frameworks to make narratology a tool for gaining understanding of
20 cultural phenomena. Other research programs, meanwhile, have foregrounded
21 the descriptive or explanatory study of the interpretive process itself,
22 focusing on how texts shape and constrain interpretive engagement—a per-
23 spective first brought to the fore by approaches like reader-response criticism.
24 Moreover, under the influence of psychology and other cognitive sciences,
25 the idea that narrative itself constitutes an important mode of interpreting
26 and organizing the world has gradually gained momentum too (e.g., Bruner
27 1987; Knight 1994; Turner 1996; Herman 2003), reinforcing the insepara-
28 bility of narrative and interpretation.

29 For narratology, questions about the place of interpretation relate to the
30 question of what exactly the field’s purpose is. Should the discipline form an
31 interpretive method (or set of methods) to aid the (critical) understanding and
32 explication of cultural expressions? Or should it focus on the metaquestions,
33 addressing how the interpretation of narrative texts generally functions and
34 how this affords certain (aesthetic, cognitive, or cultural) effects? Or should its
35 task remain on the descriptive and historical side, emphasizing the charac-
36 teristics of texts over context or readers? Or is it the narratologist’s job to
37 untangle the complexity of narrativity as a general-purpose tool of the human
38 mind or a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon? The following outline of the
39 status and function of interpretation in cognitive and unnatural narratology
40 shows that the two seem to have settled on different answers.

1.1 *First- and Second-Generation Cognitive Approaches to Interpretation*

The original (now “first”) generation of cognitive approaches to narratology tended to cope with the complexities of interpretation by taking a clear stance, avoiding the subjectivity of the humanities’ interpretive methods altogether and favoring descriptive and explanatory studies of the more universal processes and mechanisms underlying acts of interpretation. As such, the approach focused on obtaining relatively universal and generalizable knowledge about textual processing rather than on generating or investigating singular, perspectival, or contextually embedded interpretive engagements with specific texts. These original cognitive approaches to narrative interpretation gave rise to some highly influential theories, models, and descriptions of “local” cognitive processes assumed to underlie or constitute narrative understanding. These included work on the script-, frame-, or schema-driven nature of narrative understanding (e.g., Fludernik 1996; Herman 1997; Jahn 1997; Stockwell 2002), notions such as conceptual blending in relation to literary meaning making (e.g., Turner 1996), and empirical investigations of the discourse-processing aspects of reading, with an emphasis on the mental representation of textual structures (e.g., Bortolussi and Dixon 2003).

The exclusion of interpretive methods (or, some would say, the pretense thereof) has frequently been a source of criticism directed at cognitive narratology. Scholars have argued that the universal methodologies of the natural sciences are fundamentally unsuited to the objects of literary studies (e.g., Jackson 2003), have expressed concerns about the limitations of the approach relative to aesthetic complexity (e.g., Ryan 2010: 472–73), have objected that narratologists have sometimes uncritically seized on outdated or questionable cognitive concepts (e.g., Semino 1997: 149, 2001: 353), or have claimed that many cognitive models might not offer much more than novel ways of talking about old, familiar hermeneutic concepts (Allington 2005: 2–3; Korthals Altes 2014: 48–50).

The second generation of cognitive narratology (Kukkonen and Caracciolo 2014) has in part been propelled by such criticism within narratology and literary studies but mostly takes its inspiration from developments within the field of cognitive sciences, specifically the emergence of E-approaches to cognition (e.g., embodied, embedded, enactive, extended, ecological, emergent). One of the interesting reorientations of the second-generation approach to cognition lies in its reaffirmation of the centrality of interpretive concepts in cognition, reconnecting the cognitive sciences to insights from hermeneutics and phenomenological philosophy, and foregrounding some of their long-overlooked affinities (Gallagher 2004). Interpretation is treated not just as an epistemological matter or a set of functional mind tools but

1 as an ontological precondition of any sentient subject, which, by definition,
 2 always finds itself presituated in (and “toward”) a world that is filled with
 3 possibilities for interaction. In the enactivist view, interpretation is essentially
 4 the dynamic and emergent result of the constant feedback loops between a
 5 subject’s experiences and the affordances of the world in which the subject is
 6 embedded—a process in which meaning is a precondition for interpretation
 7 as much as a product of it (Smythe 1991).

8 In the study of narrative, second-generation approaches focus predomi-
 9 nantly on the processual study of interpretation, articulating the embodied,
 10 enactive, and embedded aspects of narrative meaning making rather than
 11 focusing largely on abstract, propositional, and representational information
 12 processing in linear input–output structures, as first-generation approaches
 13 tended to do. According to Marco Caracciolo, who has developed the most
 14 extensive second-generation approach to narrative interpretation (2012,
 15 2014a, 2014b, 2016a), narratologists can benefit from studying “the struc-
 16 tures of interpretation through the lens of science. If we do this, a number of
 17 constraints *on* (or affordances *for*) interpretation will emerge, making clear
 18 that interpretation may be ‘unimaginably complex,’ but that there is still
 19 method in this complexity” (2014b: 399). Caracciolo’s model characterizes
 20 narrative interpretation as a reciprocally modifying interaction between a
 21 narrative text and the reader’s “experiential background” of previous inter-
 22 actions and experiences (2014a: 5). The model relies on previous generations
 23 of cognitive theory, such as frame theory and conceptual blending, but uses
 24 these to tease out the diverse phenomenological resources on which the
 25 interpreter can draw, ranging from highly personal values and competences
 26 to elementary bodily resonances. Interpretive methods (the academic study
 27 of texts) form a natural extension of these fundamental interpretive processes
 28 (ibid.).

29 Beyond modeling the general processes of interpretation, second-
 30 generation cognitive analyses have mostly focused on matters of emotion,
 31 embodiment, and enaction as key factors in our engagement with literary
 32 works and their meaningfulness. Some have used cognitive theory to ask how
 33 narrative style and form correspond to, or diverge from, aspects of the
 34 embodied mind and so shape real readers’ interpretations (e.g., identifying
 35 examples of “cognitive realism” in literary Modernism [Troscianko 2014] or
 36 Realism [Troscianko 2012]). Others have focused on particular experiential
 37 dimensions of the reading experience (e.g., Kuzmičová [2014] on mental
 38 imagery) or have sought dialogue with earlier narratological models of the
 39 reader; Karin Kukkonen (2014), for instance, complements Wolfgang Iser’s
 40 (1972) propositional account of the reader’s engagement with the temporal
 41 dynamics of plot using an embodied-cognitive approach based on Bayesian

1 probabilistic models. Meanwhile, Marco Bernini (2014) has explored how the
2 reader's interpretive activity is shaped by inferences about authorial inten-
3 tion that the extended-cognition paradigm allows us to understand as emerg-
4 ing in writing as well as being retrospectively recoverable when reading.

5 Second-generation views on literary interpretation are also being explored
6 empirically. For example, Raymond Gibbs (2017) conducts an exploratory
7 analysis of readers' interpretations of a passage from Nicholson Baker's *The*
8 *Anthologist* to show how both recreational and professional interpretations of
9 narrative result from a set of embodied dynamics in which personal, histori-
10 cal, and cultural constraints interact, highlighting both commonalities and
11 individual differences in interpretive results. Richard Gerrig and Micah
12 Mumper (2017) treat readers as participants in narrative worlds and report
13 on experiments that assess how participatory responses are affected by such
14 factors as similarity judgments and degrees of transportation, which in turn
15 are determined by the full range of prior life experiences. By their very
16 nature, empirical studies tend to work with more specific hypotheses than
17 theoretical approaches, and research like this helps to test and refine the
18 many predictions that can be derived from a second-generation take on
19 interpretation.

20 These examples all clearly make interpretation the object of academic
21 inquiry. In its disciplinary grounding, second-generation cognitive narratol-
22 ogy, like its predecessor, favors explanatory perspectives on interpretation
23 over the practice of interpreting. Cognitive narratologists generally appear
24 less concerned with extracting meanings from a text than with asking how this
25 extraction takes place.

26 But to claim that cognitive narratology is therefore more concerned with
27 human minds than with texts would be misguided, for two reasons. First,
28 for most cognitive narratologists, studying the processes of interpretation (or
29 of the human mind in general) serves equally to generate understanding of
30 artworks and their cultural functions; some also argue that artworks in
31 turn give us insights into the human mind. After all, the second-generation
32 approach views minds and texts as manifestations of the same extended
33 system of interactive cognition and sees interpretation as one of the key
34 channels within that system. Second, more often than not, even when big
35 theoretical questions are being tackled, literary scholars also use cognitive
36 theory to help shed light on specific literary works. But rather than adopting
37 a hermeneutic program that seeks primarily to establish the meaning of a text
38 or detect expressions of broader cultural patterns, most scholars using
39 second-generation methods focus on the spaces of intersection between lit-
40 erature's structures or contents and the cognitive realities of readers. As an
41 example we might take Kay Young's (2011) interpretations of the work of

1 Austen, Eliot, and Hardy, which explore how these works “perform” aspects
 2 of the embodied mind and how the close reading of literature may reciprocally
 3 affect readers’ own minds. Such an approach deliberately blends interpretive
 4 methods with explanatory models of interpretation (and the workings
 5 of the embodied mind more generally) to achieve an enriched understanding
 6 not only of particular literary works but possibly also of readers and their
 7 understanding of themselves and others.

8 In sum, cognitive narratology generally studies the process of interpretation
 9 via its relationship with textual features. It does allow for the generation
 10 of interpretive end products, but, as Caracciolo has argued, when providing
 11 “readings informed by cognitive science,” cognitive theory should be “used
 12 heuristically, and with full awareness of its epistemological limitations” (2016a:
 13 188; see also Nordlund 2002: 314). After all, taking theories developed in line
 14 with the criteria of the natural sciences and applying them as part of an
 15 interpretive method in the humanities can easily lead back to thorny issues
 16 as to what type of knowledge is being pursued: do we want to do interpretation
 17 better in general, interpret specific texts better, understand better how
 18 interpretation works, or all three—or something else altogether? For Caracciolo,
 19 practicing interpretation guided by cognitive theory could ideally
 20 “illuminate a background of metacognitive questions while pointing to the
 21 incompleteness of current scientific knowledge about the mind” (2016a: 188),
 22 encouraging interpretive practice and the cognitive sciences to “work in
 23 tandem, calling attention to each other’s blind spots” (ibid.). Such truly
 24 two-way scientific dialogues are being furthered by work that brings together
 25 those whose background is in cognitive science with those trained in literary
 26 studies or linguistics to address questions at all points of the narrative-mind
 27 spectrum (e.g., Young and Saver 2001; Burke and Troscianko 2013, 2017).
 28 However, in such interdisciplinary endeavors, the dominant interest often
 29 remains on the side of the explanatory perspective—something true of cognitive
 30 narratology more broadly.

31 32 **1.2 Interpretation and Unnatural Narratology**

33 Like cognitive narratology, unnatural narratology is not a fully integrated
 34 field of study. It is best described as a collective research program, represented
 35 in the work of literary theorists such as Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, Maria Mäkelä,
 36 Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Brian Richardson. It has always been heterogeneous
 37 in both its sources and its methods, and it remains a workshop for varying,
 38 and to some extent competing, theories.

39 In part, however, unnatural narratology arose as a reaction against certain
 40 tendencies in narrative theory in general, and cognitive narratology in particular.
 41 Unnatural narratologists recognize and theorize the ways in which

1 fictional narratives and our interactions with them can be discontinuous from
 2 “real-life” sensemaking—an idea usually rejected by cognitive narratology.
 3 Unnatural narratologists point out these discontinuities from the everyday
 4 both in narrative texts—observing how a substantial number of fictional
 5 narratives transgress or obstruct everyday mimetic parameters—and in
 6 the interpretive responses that these evoke, contesting Monika Fludernik’s
 7 assertion that “when readers read narrative texts, they project real-life
 8 parameters into the reading process and, if at all possible, treat the text as
 9 a real-life instance of narrating” (2001: 623). Unnatural narratologists collec-
 10 tively turned against the putative centrality and necessity of this naturaliza-
 11 tion as a strategy for reading and interpretation. As Alber and colleagues
 12 summarize it: “Common to all the approaches within unnatural narratology
 13 is (1) a fascination with highly implausible, impossible, unreal, otherworldly,
 14 outrageous, extreme, outlandish, and insistently fictional narratives and their
 15 structure; (2) the urge to interpret them by addressing the question of what
 16 they might potentially mean; and (3) an interest in examining the relationship
 17 between these specific narratives and all other narratives” (2012: 380).

18 Here too, issues of interpretation come into play in many of the differences
 19 between practitioners of unnatural narratology. These begin with the core
 20 question of defining what exactly makes a narrative “unnatural.” Alber, for
 21 instance, argues that we should restrict “the term to narratives which repre-
 22 sent storyworlds that contain physically, logically, or humanly impossible
 23 scenarios or events” (2013: 69), thus making the unnatural about the relation
 24 between textual content and extratextual logic. But others have focused more
 25 on stories’ effects or reception in their conceptualization of the unnatural.
 26 Nielsen relates the unnatural to the interpretive strategies that a story
 27 requires, arguing that a narrative is unnatural when it cues a recipient “to
 28 employ interpretational strategies that are different from those she employs
 29 in non-fictionalized, conversational storytelling situations” (Alber et al. 2012:
 30 373). Iversen likewise takes the interpretive process to be integral to the unnat-
 31 ural, arguing that unnatural narratives are those which “present the reader
 32 with clashes between the rules governing a storyworld and scenarios or events
 33 producing or taking place inside this storyworld—clashes that defy easy
 34 explanations” (ibid.).

35 Countless classics in literary history involve invented unnatural characters,
 36 events and worlds. Consider the metamorphosis in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,
 37 Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies*, or Franz
 38 Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.” Readers may be asked to imagine what it
 39 is like to be an animal, as in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Life and Opinions of the*
 40 *Tomcat Murr*, a nose in *The Nose* by Nikolai Gogol, a ghost as in Horace
 41 Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, or dead as in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás*

1 *Cubas* by Machado de Assis. Fictional narratives can give access to heaven and
 2 hell, to alternative futures, to a world where time is moving backward, or to
 3 never-ending metaleptic loops. Some of these works can be categorized as
 4 fantasy, science fiction, fairy tales, Gothic novels, metafiction, postmodern
 5 fiction, or children's fiction and to some extent can be "normalized" by
 6 means of generic conventions, but they all ask the readers to imagine some-
 7 thing they cannot experience in real life and therefore call for other forms of
 8 interpretation and analysis.

9 As Richardson has noted (2016: 386), most unnatural narratologists consider
 10 cognitive theory to have been applied to narrative in an unnecessarily
 11 restrictive way. For instance, when David Herman constructs a model of
 12 literary character that restricts itself to treating characters as if they were
 13 people "or prototypical members of the category of 'persons'" (Herman et al.
 14 2012: 240), he "neglects or denies those characters that defy standard con-
 15 cepts of personhood, such as schematic or dehumanized figures, contradic-
 16 tory or conflated entities, impossible beings, parodic types, and characters
 17 who know they are fictional" (Richardson 2016: 400). Perhaps in part
 18 because of their "mimetic bias," most cognitive theories of narrative do not
 19 make any principled difference between fictional and nonfictional narratives.
 20 Iversen has proposed a pragmatic, rhetorical approach that addresses not
 21 only the functions of unnatural devices in fictional narratives but also "the
 22 many cases where such devices appear locally in otherwise traditional types
 23 of narratives, or appear outside of generic fiction, be it in poetry, in every-
 24 day communication, or in rhetorical discourse, such as advertisements"
 25 (2016: 456).

26 Another critique of cognitive narratology is that cognitive interpretive
 27 concepts such as mental scripts and frames have been used similarly to
 28 the concepts of structuralist narratology—as a way to help interpretations
 29 seem intersubjective and universally valid instead of personal and context-
 30 dependent. In the first generation of cognitive literary studies, cognitive nar-
 31 ratologists such as Richard Gerrig and Giovanna Egidi studied predictive
 32 inferences as a way to determine how readers in general were likely to under-
 33 stand a literary text, and aspired to give "an exhaustive account of all the
 34 processes that function at each moment while a reader experience a nar-
 35 rative" (2003: 35). Whereas such approaches sought to show regularity in
 36 readings or determine prototypical interpretive strategies, unnatural narra-
 37 tologists have argued that many unnatural narratives are best served by the
 38 acknowledgment and preservation of their interpretive ambiguity and mul-
 39 tiplicity (e.g., Richardson 2011: 33; Iversen 2013: 93). As Iversen has argued, a
 40 "major limitation inherent in a full-blown cognitive approach to narrative,
 41 with an insistence on fully renaturalizing or recognizing the haunting and

1 wondrous otherworldly visions of minds, events, and scenarios that some
 2 narratives manage to capture, is that it runs the risk of reducing the affective
 3 power and resonance of such narratives” (2013: 96).

4 In this context, unnatural narratologists such as Nielsen (2013) have called
 5 for “unnaturalizing reading strategies” to resist the application of real-world
 6 models and limitations in interpretation, and “leave open the possibility that
 7 unnatural narratives contain or produce effects and emotions that are not
 8 easily (if at all) explainable or resolvable with reference to everyday phenom-
 9 ena or the rules of the presented storyworld” (Alber et al. 2012: 377). Unnat-
 10 ural narratologists study the differences between interpretation of fictional
 11 narratives or unnatural devices and qualities, on the one hand, and interpre-
 12 tation of nonfictional narratives without unnatural devices, on the other, the
 13 two offering different opportunities and prompts for interpretive engagement
 14 (see Kukkonen and Nielsen’s article in this special issue).

15 What are the effects of these unnatural elements or devices? In fictional
 16 narratives real-world assumptions do not always apply (e.g., the restrictions
 17 of a single experiential perspective may be lifted). This has significant con-
 18 sequences for the interpretation of these narratives because an interpreter
 19 may “avoid assumptions which would hold true for nonfictional accounts”
 20 (Nielsen 2016: 473). Iversen has shown that this idea of distinctive interpretive
 21 engagement also draws on Viktor Shklovsky’s notion of defamiliarization
 22 (see Anderson and Iversen’s article in this special issue). Iversen rereads
 23 Shklovsky, drawing on rhetorical and pragmatic approaches to look at func-
 24 tion more than form and describing how defamiliarization and unnatural
 25 elements can be used as rhetorical devices. Unnatural narratology shares
 26 Shklovsky’s idea that the use of “strange-making” formal techniques of
 27 presentation and representation can “impede, obstruct, and in other ways
 28 de-automatize perception” in ways that reintensify it (Iversen 2016: 458). For
 29 Iversen the unnatural can be seen as a subset of the devices of defamiliariza-
 30 tion, as a “permanent defamiliarization, a permanently upsetting sense-
 31 making” and a source of “perpetual unrecognizability.” These features are
 32 not just a “cognitive burden to overcome” but “mov[e] and motivate[e]
 33 people while retaining their untranslatable quality” (ibid.: 460–61).

34 35 **2. A Case Study: Interpretations and Metainterpretations of “The Shadow”**

36
37 The conceptual differences between unnatural and cognitive narratology,
 38 which were ever present as we wrote this article, are just the latest incarnation
 39 of an older chasm in narratology. The divisive question is whether narratol-
 40 ogy is a conceptual tool that aids us in the interpretation and appreciation of
 41 specific texts or a theoretical framework that conceptualizes and explains the

1 general makeup of texts and our interactions with them. Although neither
2 cognitive nor unnatural narratology is fully committed to either stance, they
3 do emphasize different angles. The standoff appears to boil down to the
4 question of whether one seeks to capture the qualities and interpretive riches
5 of specific narratives, as unnatural narratologists generally seek to do, or
6 wants to describe and understand the literary experience and the processes
7 underlying it, as cognitive narratologists generally aim to.

8 To illustrate how these differences play out in the analysis of specific
9 narratives, we take Hans Christian Andersen's 1846 story "The Shadow"
10 ("Skyggen") as a textual example. We provide first an unnatural and then a
11 cognitive take on the text as an object of interpretation, followed by reflections
12 on each other's interpretations to show how each field might respond to
13 the other's take on the text. Although we are three individuals who work in
14 areas broadly related to unnatural (Kraglund) and cognitive (Troschianko and
15 Willemssen) narratology, respectively, we make no claims to the representativeness
16 of our readings or metareadings; something both fields can perhaps
17 agree on is that no reading is an unconstrained, context-free act, and no single
18 reader can stand in for any other. Nonetheless, we hope this commentary plus
19 metacommentary format will help bring into focus what the theoretical divergences
20 outlined in the previous sections mean for the analysis of narratives
21 and perhaps also for the status of narratology.

22 The choice of story was encumbered by the heterogeneity of definitions of
23 the unnatural. "The Shadow" counts as unnatural only for some unnatural
24 narratologists, such as Alber (due to its events being physically, logically, or
25 humanly impossible) or Nielsen (because it arguably requires interpretive
26 strategies different from real-life, conversational storytelling; see Alber et al.
27 2012: 373). For others, like Richardson or Iversen, the familiar generic
28 context of the fairytale would probably counter or entirely negate the unnaturalness
29 (Richardson 2016: 386, 389). We take an intermediary example
30 rather than a highly experimental text that might meet all commentators'
31 criteria, in the hope that it will help highlight some of the definitional questions
32 raised by the concept of the unnatural, along with other features of the
33 cognitive/unnatural divide as they manifest in matters of interpretation.

34 "The Shadow" is a story about a young man, a Romantic, scholarly character,
35 visiting a foreign country. A house across from where the young scholar
36 lives fascinates him. No one has ever been seen in the house, but in the
37 evenings the door is open. The house is dark inside, but from its interior
38 the young scholar hears the sound of music. One night he wakes up and
39 fancies that a marvelous radiance is emanating from the balcony across the
40 street, and he sees a lovely maiden. Later he discovers his shadow cast on the
41 mysterious house, and he wishes that his shadow could go inside. The next

1 morning, he finds that his shadow has disappeared. It comes back many years
 2 later, in an almost human form, and tells him that he saw Poetry herself in the
 3 house across the street that day. The shadow tells the scholar that after visiting
 4 the house, he lived under the skirts of a “cake-woman” and only ventured out
 5 in the evenings and nights. He says he has been peeping into places where
 6 no one else could peer and has seen what nobody knows but everyone would
 7 like to know, and he has used this knowledge to become rich. The shadow
 8 now persuades the scholar to come on a journey as his servant. Later the
 9 scholar agrees to act as shadow, so that the shadow can be taken for a real
 10 man. In the end, the scholar attempts to reveal the real relationship between
 11 the two of them, but no one believes him and the shadow has the man
 12 executed for his attempt to tell the truth.

13 **2.1 An Unnatural Interpretation**

14 Andersen’s story has been read and analyzed from a variety of critical meth-
 15 odologies: its sociopolitical, biographical, psychoanalytical, and historical
 16 complexities have all been addressed. From an unnatural perspective, the
 17 first key observation is that the story does cue the reader to use interpretive
 18 strategies that are different from those employed in reading nonfictional
 19 narratives without unnatural devices; after all, the story presents to the read-
 20 er a man who can lose his shadow, as well as a shadow that can talk and be
 21 perceived as a real man by those around him. If we follow Nielsen’s definition
 22 of the unnatural, the question for the unnatural narratologist is then, how can
 23 I interpret these deviations from and transgressions of real-world bound-
 24 aries?
 25

26 At the beginning of the story the reader encounters a conventional realist
 27 storyworld. Every time something strange happens, the narrator naturalizes
 28 it. The scholar just “*fancied* that a marvelous radiance came from the balcony
 29 across the street” and it only seems “*as if* a radiance” came from a maiden
 30 and the flowers were “*like* flames”; the narration even states that it is “quite
 31 possible that he *only imagined* this” (Andersen 1949 [1847]: 1–2, all italics
 32 added). Several times similes like these are used to indicate that subjective
 33 experience shapes the reality of the storyworld. The young man tells his
 34 shadow to make himself useful and step inside only “as a joke.” But these
 35 naturalizations end when the shadow actually leaves the scholar and enters
 36 the house. This shift opens up a gap in the text. In a humorous metacommentary
 37 on the story, via intertextual reference to the Adelbert von Chamisso’s
 38 *Peter Sclemihis wundersame Geschichte* (1813), the narrator points toward its fic-
 39 tionality: “What annoyed him most was not so much the loss of his shadow,
 40 but the knowledge that there was already a story about a man without a
 41 shadow. All the people at home knew that story. If he went back and told

1 them his story they would say he was just imitating the old one” (Andersen
 2 1949 [1847]: 2). This passage demonstrates a self-reflective awareness of
 3 literary history, a sense of the text as existing among other texts. An unnatural
 4 reading can be helpful in examining this self-consciousness of the text and
 5 in helping the reader to recognize the ways in which the story thematizes its
 6 own interpretations and its own fictionality while denaturalizing the reading
 7 process. Andersen overtly breaks the rules of physical possibility and does not
 8 allow this deviation from a more natural storytelling situation to go unnoticed
 9 by his readers, instead accentuating the artificiality of the telling.

10 “The Shadow” has been described as a story about how human beings can
 11 embody different identities and how one’s life can be viewed as a struggle
 12 between them, possibly even a struggle to the death. It has been interpreted as
 13 a philosophical parable about the relationship between “one’s identity as
 14 defined by knowledge of and commitment to absolute ideals of Truth, Good-
 15 ness, and Beauty and one’s identity as it exists without inspiration from these
 16 ideals” (White 1994: 637). Different approaches to identifying the “real”
 17 subject of the tale have been suggested, but for an unnatural approach,
 18 this story or fairytale does not have just one sense; what is of interest is the
 19 flexibility of interpretations of the text. “The Shadow” has an openness that
 20 can inspire multiple readings, and it can be appreciated from very different
 21 angles, depending on the interpreter’s interests.

22 “The Shadow” can be said to thematize the very subject of this article,
 23 interpretation. The story frequently poses direct interpretive questions about
 24 the loss of the shadow (“What *does* it all mean?” [1949 {1847}: 3]), or about
 25 the mysterious house (“But who lived there? What entrance did they use?”
 26 [ibid.: 2]) that seem to function as invitations to the reader. Several other
 27 scenes in the story concern interpretation in that they delineate the circular
 28 nature of interpretation and the problem of experiencing something when
 29 one has already decided what to find and how to interpret it. The scholar is
 30 curious to know what the shadow saw in the house across the street. When the
 31 shadow tells him that he saw Poetry herself, his description of Poetry is not
 32 very convincing; he just repeats the same phrase over and over again: “I saw
 33 everything, and I know everything” (ibid.: 4). As it turns out, the shadow has
 34 not really been in the innermost rooms but has stayed in the dark anteroom.
 35 The only one who gives an interpretation of Poetry is the scholar, but he has
 36 already decided what there is to find, and being a scholar who aspires to write
 37 about the true, the good, and the beautiful, he has some very romantic ideas
 38 about Poetry: “Was it like a green forest? Was it like a holy temple?” and “Did
 39 fair children play there and tell their dreams?” (ibid.: 4). The shadow has
 40 actually gained his knowledge about the world from peering into places no
 41 one else can peer into; he knows significantly more than he could if he were

1 a real person, has seen a wicked world, and now cashes in on others' misfor-
2 tunes. He has no illusions, no utopian thoughts or ideals, nor is he heroic. The
3 pure-hearted scholar, on the other hand, is pursued by sorrow and trouble
4 and looks more and more like a shadow himself: "What he had to say about
5 the good, the true, and the beautiful, appealed to most people about as much
6 as roses appeal to a cow" (ibid.: 5). At moments like this, the story is humorous
7 in its tone, displaying an element of social satire. It evokes a battle between
8 irony and naivety and reveals Andersen as an early modernist (Mylus 2006).

9 On their later journey, the scholar and the shadow meet a princess who has
10 the malady of seeing things too clearly, but she misinterprets the shadow. She
11 thinks the shadow's problem is that he does not cast a shadow, but she never
12 considers the more unnatural possibility that he actually could be a shadow
13 himself. She is seduced by the shadow's pranks, and when examining the
14 shadow, she does not notice that the shadow is letting the scholar answer all
15 the difficult questions. Her misconception of the relationship between the
16 man and the shadow causes a series of mistakes, and in the end she casts the
17 noble-souled scholar aside to marry the fraud. The princess has made up her
18 mind about the relationship between the two men, and this is shown to be
19 based on presupposition rather than the product of interpretation. It is pri-
20 marily how the shadow is dressed, and his considerable fortune, that makes
21 people interpret him as human. Reality seems to be dominated by appear-
22 ances. In this sense, the story can be read as a story about blindness, seduc-
23 tiveness, and the threatening quality of truth telling, and it uses unnatural
24 elements to illuminate social problems in a new way.

25 In sum, an unnatural narratological approach shows "The Shadow" to be
26 an insistent fictional narrative in which multiple phenomena do not corre-
27 spond to any real-world scenarios. The story's fictionality is paramount.
28 Something that is impossible in real life (such as losing one's shadow or
29 being a sentient shadow) is accepted as true in this fictional story, and we
30 do not have to impose real-world necessities on it. Nor do readers need to
31 compare the unnatural happenings with real-life situations. The story asks us
32 to imagine something—what it is like to lose one's shadow—that cannot be
33 fully comprehended or experienced. We have to acknowledge the funda-
34 mental ambiguity in "The Shadow," and the sheer number of readings that
35 this may afford. The unnatural approach prefers interpretations that fore-
36 ground the differences between invented and reported worlds—interpre-
37 tations that are not restricted by referentiality but are interested in the
38 capacity of this story's magic and its metanarrative strategies to change read-
39 ers' views about real life.

2.2 *A Cognitive (Meta)Interpretation*

1 The humanizing of an inanimate (indeed, an immaterial) entity, the extended
2 direct speech of the dialogues between man and shadow, the matter-of-fact
3 manner in which the shadow's disappearance is evoked—all these features
4 would appear to challenge an approach that in principle draws no distinctions
5 between this narrative and the narratives of gossip or football commentary. But for the cognitive narratologist, these features are perfectly amenable
6 to analysis from a cognitive perspective. The tendency to anthropomorphize
7 nonhuman natural forms is commonplace: we treat our cars as though they
8 have personalities, see faces in the clouds, and readily attribute defiance,
9 timidity, and elation to a big triangle, a small triangle, and a circle shown
10 moving around in a short and primitive animated film (Heider and Simmel
11 1944).
12

13
14 The shadow cast by a human body is consistently perceptually available
15 and, by definition, closely resembles the human form and replicates its move-
16 ment patterns. We have all played games with shadows, whether making
17 puppets dance behind a screen, making shadow rabbits or birds with our
18 hands by candlelight, or watching our full-body shadows stretch to giant's
19 height on an evening lawn. Shadows' possibilities fascinate us and sometimes
20 draw us into the realm of fantasy. How far we go in that direction depends
21 on many factors—the progression from childhood to adulthood being an
22 obvious one. One empirically grounded theory of anthropomorphism has
23 identified key factors increasing our tendency to anthropomorphize: the
24 accessibility and applicability of anthropocentric knowledge about humans,
25 the current level of need to interact effectively with one's environment (via
26 hypotheses to help make sense of complex or otherwise unpredictable stimuli),
27 and the lack of a social connection with other humans (Epley et al. 2007).
28 In the case of the shadow of a young man alone in a bewildering foreign land,
29 with a tantalizing mystery on his doorstep, all three influences are likely to be
30 in play.

31 Focusing on the anthropomorphic element makes the story's central unnat-
32 uralness entirely natural: a manifestation of a general cognitive tendency,
33 here expanded on in narrative form. A cognitive interpretation might go on
34 to acknowledge that the anthropomorphism here is not a static given, and
35 that its epistemic status in the fictional world is never made explicit. The early
36 descriptions, focalized largely through the scholar, evoke his disorientation in
37 the unfamiliar climate, his physical dwindling in the daytime and revival in
38 the evenings when he can stretch out on the balcony—and the shadow's
39 characteristics are a natural counterpart to his own (contracting and stretch-
40 ing, as he does). But as the narrative progresses, and the shadow holds con-
41 versations and wears clothes, the balance of evidence tips from the uncanny

1 (that which can just about be realistically explained) toward what, in Tzvetan
2 Todorov's (1975) schema, can be thought of as the marvelous: clearly super-
3 natural in the fictional world, yet still fundamentally natural in the sense of
4 being generated by the author's mind and generating particular responses in
5 the reader's.

6 Here it is already becoming clear that the cognitive interpretation tends
7 toward a metainterpretation. Any given statement about what the text means
8 (*the text instantiates the multifaceted nature of humans' anthropomorphic tendencies*) tends
9 to give way to statements about what the text does (*the text's instantiation of the*
10 *nature of humans' anthropomorphic tendencies takes a changing set of forms that may incline*
11 *readers towards interpreting those tendencies as more or less supernatural*). That is,
12 interpretation as method constantly slides into interpretation as object. It
13 is hard—perhaps impossible, perhaps meaningless—to adopt a cognitive
14 approach without linking what is given in the text with the cognitive contexts
15 of its creation and/or reception, because the basic premise of the cognitive
16 approach is that texts and minds operate in constant interaction with one
17 another. Texts are created by the cognitive activity of authors and made
18 meaningful by that of readers. So as soon as you make a statement about
19 textual features, you find yourself making a statement about cognitive fea-
20 tures too: any feature has effects (including the effect of connoting meaning)
21 only by being cognitively engaged with.

22 Once cognitive narratology acknowledges that what it does is analyze—
23 not just exemplify—interpretive tendencies, many options open up. One
24 might follow the example of Kukkonen's (2017) exploration of how fictional
25 texts can highlight the ambiguous boundaries between the interpretive possi-
26 bilities of the uncanny and the marvelous, and how this highlighting can
27 help expose, through defamiliarization, the continuous updating and read-
28 justment of probabilities by which our minds makes sense of the world (an
29 idea very close to Shklovsky's deautomatization, promoted above as an unnat-
30 ural perspective). One could talk about how the distinct phases of this pro-
31 cess may induce shifting and sometimes unsettled interpretive-emotional
32 responses in readers. One might also begin to pinpoint the roles of embodi-
33 ment and enaction as mediators between the textually created characters
34 and actual readers; a cognitive approach could investigate how the kines-
35 thetic and sensorimotor qualities of the imagination, as well as its capacity for
36 indeterminacy (Troscianko 2014), are activated and exploited by textual
37 evocations of movement and other bodily experiences that link man and
38 shadow, and how this in turn generates further interpretive probabilities
39 hovering between the uncanny and the marvelous. Such an approach can
40 ask to what extent the type of ontological violation in question (here, a
41 shadow coming alive) is also counterintuitive (intuition may not resist this

1 particular anthropomorphization very long or strongly, because the genre
 2 makes it quite easily assimilable) and how the relations between ontology and
 3 intuition in turn shape the new interpretive stories readers tell about Ander-
 4 sen's (Zunshine 2008).

5 It is eminently possible to flesh out these possible responses. A reader might
 6 interpret the initial morning disappearance of the shadow and the scholar's
 7 evening attempts to entice it back as an occurrence poised ambiguously
 8 between the scholar's delusion and a literally supernatural happening. As
 9 the scholar makes himself little and then big in the evening lamplight, this
 10 reader might remember the games she played with her shadows as a child; she
 11 might in one direction (the psychological reading) draw an interpretive con-
 12 trast between the scholar's bodily disconnectedness and her own more har-
 13 moniously embodied existence in childhood, and she might take that further
 14 into inferences about the ageing process or intellectuals' tendency to separate
 15 the life of the mind from that of the body. These reflections might be balanced
 16 out by the supernatural route of trying to imagine herself without a shadow,
 17 imagining what else would need to change for that to be the case, elaborating
 18 on other stories she's read where it is the case, and find those imaginings in
 19 tension with the ones about her childhood games.

20 As literary scholars, we might want to close down the difference between
 21 that possible reader and ourselves, and simply *be* "the reader" for a while. But
 22 making interpretations of the kind she does (reading the scholar as commen-
 23 tary on the disembodiment of scholarship, say) is not a cognitive narratologi-
 24 cal activity—it's just called reading. The study of narrative in a cognitive
 25 framework takes a step back and asks how any such interpretation comes
 26 about within the mind-text system. This question might well involve empiri-
 27 cal investigation beyond an individual scholar's analysis of the text. Read-
 28 ers' individual vacillations around these interpretive possibilities are likely to
 29 depend on prior reading experiences, on cognitive and personality traits, on
 30 personal associations that affect empathy with the scholar, and so on. Empiri-
 31 cal investigation is the only way of establishing to what extent an individual
 32 critic's connection of a specific textual cause and its interpretive effect is borne
 33 out more generally: was it really that metaphor which prompted my cynical
 34 reading, or was the fact that I slept badly last night more important? Cogni-
 35 tive narratology is thus likely to be invested in empirical investigation to the
 36 extent that it is invested in the attempt to understand interpretations better,
 37 rather than merely to perform them.

38 39 **2.3 The Unnatural Interpretation from a Cognitive Standpoint**

40 To a cognitive narratologist, the unnatural interpretation we began with
 41 may well read like a cognitive interpretation pretending not to be one. The

1 essence of the objection to adopting cognitive principles of analysis seems to
 2 be that “fictionality is paramount” in the story. But there is no incompatibility
 3 between cognition and fiction, even flamboyantly self-aware fiction. Ander-
 4 sen’s mind created a text which bears a certain relationship to everyday
 5 reality and to other texts that were created before it, and readers’ minds
 6 engage with this cognitive creation via all the means humans use all the time
 7 to negotiate phenomena with every possible configuration of plausibility,
 8 trustworthiness, (self-)referentiality, and so on. The same goes for the inter-
 9 textual qualities of “The Shadow”: there is nothing in the least unusual in
 10 making reference to other versions of a story one is telling, whether those
 11 other versions are published works of literature or variants on the rumor one
 12 is helping spread about some celebrity persona’s plastic surgery. Likewise for
 13 metareferentiality: being a story about interpretation means being a story
 14 about how minds work, something humans have needed to be interested in
 15 for their whole evolutionary history.

16 Similarly, when it comes to the invitation to imagine something physically
 17 impossible—a shadow detaching itself from the caster of the shadow—there
 18 is no need for recourse to anything non- or anticognitive. Trying to imagine
 19 logical, conceptual, or physical impossibilities (a three-sided square, a chemi-
 20 cal composition of water other than H₂O, a human with no shadow) is inter-
 21 esting but in no sense unnatural. A cognitive perspective is the only one that
 22 can give us purchase on the details of what happens when we try: on the
 23 distinctions, for instance, between imagining (perhaps in a sensory mode),
 24 conceiving, or entertaining thoughts of something. Literary narratives can
 25 push the boundaries of our experience, but so can philosophical thought
 26 experiments, mathematical theorems, historical artifacts, face-to-face conver-
 27 sations, and countless other subtypes of human ingenuity: there are myriad
 28 differences in inflection, but there is no magic boundary between “literature”
 29 and the rest. So whether it refers to unnatural narratologists or readers of
 30 texts, the statement that “we do not have to impose real-world necessities
 31 [on this fictional narrative or] compare the unnatural happenings with real-
 32 life situations” is meaningless. The text is part of the real world, whether or
 33 not it is acknowledged as such within the process or outcome of interpretation
 34 or in the analysis of that interpretation. Of course, our awareness of fiction-
 35 ality is likely to affect our responses to a textual feature (you will respond
 36 differently to Andersen’s protagonist losing his shadow and to your friend’s
 37 e-mail telling you he has lost his), but the reasons and mechanisms for these
 38 differences are real-life cognitive facts too.

39 Once the set of interpretations offered in the unnatural reading are rein-
 40 terpreted as cognitive despite appearances, we can turn to the more inter-
 41 esting question of what attitudes toward interpretation itself are manifested

1 in this reading. A shift takes place between the opening observation that the
 2 story cues “the reader” to use interpretive strategies that differ from nonfiction,
 3 and the subsequent question: “how can I interpret these deviations from
 4 and transgressions of real-world boundaries?” The first takes interpretation
 5 as its object; the second initiates an example of interpretation as method. The
 6 latter dominates the rest of the unnatural reading, presenting a variety of
 7 options for interpreting particular aspects of the story. Statements like “what
 8 is of interest is the flexibility of interpretations of the text,” or “the unnatural
 9 approach prefers interpretations that . . .” make it clear that the unnatural
 10 approach toward interpretation involves normative standards: certain interpretive
 11 attitudes are deemed more interesting or appropriate than others. From a cognitive
 12 standpoint, expressing interpretive preferences is a phenomenon to be investigated,
 13 not to be actively replicated in academic discourse. And the very preferences expressed
 14 here are ideally suited to cognitive investigation. A focus on texts that “can be
 15 appreciated from very different angles, depending on the interpreter’s interests”
 16 is precisely a call to explore psychological variability as it affects interpretive
 17 response. Here the potential becomes clear for a cognitive-narratological approach
 18 to help shed light on the effects of some forms of (ambiguous) unnatural
 19 fiction. The distinct effects of such texts could be studied in terms of the
 20 cognitive discord between what is textually presented and the knowledge,
 21 models, and sensations of everyday embodied actions, thoughts, feelings, or
 22 contexts that readers are likely to rely on in their sensemaking attempts.
 23

24 Nothing can be said about a text without making—explicit or implicit—
 25 statements about the process of coming to that conclusion. Arguably, making
 26 the interpretive process explicit and trying to understand it better are what
 27 distinguish the academic study of narrative from the everyday pleasures of
 28 reading and reflecting on one’s own reading, as well as from the hermeneutic
 29 practices of traditional literary criticism.
 30

31 **2.4 The Cognitive (Meta)Interpretation from an Unnatural Standpoint**

32 While acknowledging the relevance of cognitive narratology’s work to the
 33 larger project of narrative theory, this section seeks to sharpen the sense of the
 34 distinction between the two perspectives. Unnatural narratology is only one
 35 of many worthwhile perspectives, and there are limitations built into any
 36 theory; pursuing certain kinds of knowledge inevitably means not pursuing
 37 other kinds. For the cognitive narratologist the unnatural interpretation may
 38 read like a cognitive perspective trying not to be one, but although the two
 39 approaches share common interests, they also conflict.

40 Interesting and persuasive as explanations about the cognitive logic under-
 41 lying readers’ interpretations may be, the goal of performing a reading is also

1 always to interpret a specific text. We have to test our theories against their
2 ability to respond to the interpretive challenges in “The Shadow”; in this
3 case, an overly strong focus on the story’s “relationship to everyday reality”
4 quickly becomes reductive. Most unnatural narratologists would object to the
5 tendency to use a literary text as a case study or illustrative example of more
6 general questions about human psychology and textual processing. In the
7 cognitive interpretation, the theory seems to precede narrative; close reading
8 is sacrificed and the primary object of study is not the literary text but the
9 workings of the human mind—a position that downplays many of the story’s
10 dynamics on aesthetic, affective and ethical levels.

11 One can also question the tendency to take the actual as the horizon of
12 expectations by reading Andersen’s story as related to real-life experiences.
13 The cognitive approach tells us that the tendency to anthropomorphize
14 nonhuman forms like shadows is a commonplace human tendency. Although
15 the scholar indeed anthropomorphizes his nonhuman shadow in the begin-
16 ning of the story, the story becomes fascinating when the shadow is not just
17 something that is treated as humanlike but turns into a kind of man. In the
18 cognitive approach this change in the story is relatively neglected and dis-
19 ambiguated in the pursuit of the “natural,” that is, treating the story’s central
20 unnaturalness as an entirely natural manifestation of a general cognitive
21 tendency expanded in narrative form. In many ways the cognitive reading
22 could almost do without Andersen’s story; in tending toward a metainterpre-
23 tation, cognitive approaches seem proud to avoid interpretation, being
24 invested in attempts to understand interpretation better rather than merely
25 performing interpretations. But if we are going to interpret Andersen’s story,
26 an interpretation always precedes the metainterpretation; otherwise, the
27 metainterpretation has no foundation or becomes too dependent on personal
28 associations. It is like the scholar who can’t see poetry because he has already
29 decided what to find without visiting the house, or the shadow who tells the
30 scholar that he saw everything and knows everything but has only been to the
31 anteroom.

32 An unnatural narratologist will not buy the idea that we are all (whether we
33 know it or not) cognitive narratologists. We can, of course, agree that there is
34 no incompatibility between fiction and cognition—that fictional texts are
35 part of the real world. There is no need for recourse to anti- or noncognitive
36 stances. But in the process of interpreting a fictionalized narrative it is impor-
37 tant not to impose real-world necessities on fictional stories. It would have
38 been a very different story if Andersen had limited himself to what is possible
39 in real life. As readers, we are asked to use our imagination in significantly
40 different ways than we would have if the scholar had just dreamt that the
41 shadow was real.

3. Conclusion

Although the three of us have been unable to reconcile cognitive and unnatural narratology here, we hope that the above confrontations have helped spell out more clearly the different statuses the two approaches accord interpretation. To us, the theoretical as well as the case-study work involved in writing this article made clear that the methodological divergences between cognitive and unnatural approaches are rooted in what are essentially conflicting views on the tasks of narratology as academic discipline—views to which interpretation is central.

It is not that the two approaches lack common ground. Researchers in both fields are likely to agree that interpretation is perspectival and contextually determined; that text, reader, and world should be understood as recursively connected; that “mimetic” texts have attracted too much attention; and that the first generation of cognitive approaches focused too much on universalizing knowledge about the mechanisms of textual processing. Moreover, there is obviously much potential for collaborative exchange, for example, in detailed exploration of the specific interpretive processes activated by distinctly unnatural narratives (which is already happening, from both the unnatural and cognitive directions; e.g., Alber 2016; Caracciolo 2016b; Kiss and Willemsen 2017).

But despite these commonalities, the differences run deep. For those who work within unnatural narratology (or at least the one writing here), it is important to appreciate texts’ fictionality, to recognize and theorize the ways in which fictional narratives and our interactions with them can be discontinuous from “real-life” sensemaking, and to emphasize that it is not always fruitful to stress similarity to “real-world” experiences. For cognitive narratologists (or at least the ones writing here), claims that any text or interpretive process is not part of real life are incoherent, and the disciplinary division built upon them therefore ill-founded. To them, factors like fictionality and mimesis make differences only in degree, not in kind, and the point of the academic study of texts is not merely to make statements about textual meaning but to acknowledge and then explore the factors which have brought about that meaning making.

The cognitive conclusion, then, is that no convergence between approaches is necessary (or possible) because the cognitive already encompasses the unnatural—a position that, of course, the unnatural field continues to contest. We are thus left at an impasse in which pragmatic collaboration is eminently possible but also obscures the fact that the fundamental questions about interpretation raised here still need tackling. We hope that our dialogue here allows you to draw from our disagreements your own conclusions

1 about narratology and its relation to interpretation, and to reflect on the
 2 underlying open question about how the two fields do or should relate.

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