Plurality and Complementarity of Postclassical Narratologies

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Abstract:

The aims of this essay are three-fold. First, it observes that postclassical narratology is not a holistic and unified discipline but a "critical passepartout"—a hybridization of feminist narratology, cognitive narratology, rhetorical narratology, cultural-historical narratology, etc. Second, it argues that there exists a complementary relationship among the different strands of postclassical narratology. To illustrate this point, cognitive narratology and rhetorical narratology are chosen for a case study. Third, it attempts to offer some suggestions for the future development of postclassical narratologies.

Key Words: Postclassical narratologies, Plurality, Exclusiveness, Complementarity.

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1. TOWARDS POSTCLASSICAL NARRATOLOGIES

It is in David Herman's 1997 article "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology" that the term postclassical narratology made its first appearance. Drawing on the concepts of cognitive science such as schemata, scripts, and frames, Herman intends to "assemble some elements of a specifically cognitive approach to narrative discourse," and in talking about cognitive narratology, he unconsciously narrows down the scope of postclassical narratology though he argues that it "is being energized by a variety of theoretical models and perspectives." (Herman 1997: 1049) Yet, instead of meeting its due acceptance, postclassical narratology was questioned and challenged. (Richardson & Herman 1998) The widespread reception and use of the term postclassical narratology did not come until 1999, the year when Herman published a ground-breaking collection of essays *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. In a 30-page long "Introduction" to the collection, Herman (1999: 1) writes the following oft-quoted sentences:

> Adapting a host of methodologies and perspectives—feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive, reader-response, psychoanalytic, historicist, rhetorical, film-theoretical, computational, discourse-analytic and (psycho) linguistic, narrative theory has undergone not a funeral and burial but rather a sustained, sometimes startling metamorphosis since Rimmon-Kenan published her study. In the intervening years narratology has in fact ramified into narratologies; structuralist theorizing about stories has evolved into a plurality of models for narrative analysis.

Herman (1999: 2) further states that

> the extraordinarily vital and innovative work now being done in narrative studies……Put otherwise, narratology has moved from its classical, structuralist phase—a Saussurean phase relatively isolated from energizing developments in contemporary literary and language theory— to its postclassical phase.

Markedly, it is the "narrative turn" (from the classical to the postclassical) that helps narratology to formally take "its place at the centre of contemporary literary criticism" (Phelan 1989a: xviii), or "become increasingly central to literary studies." (Richardson 2000: 174)

Recent years have seen the proliferation of papers and books on the definitions, insights, and research methods of postclassical narratology. (Fludernik 2000; Herman, Jahn & Ryan 2005; Herman & Vervaeck 2005; Nünning, A. 2003; Phelan 2006a; Phelan & Rabinowitz 2005; Rimmon-Kenan 2002; Shen 2005a, 2005b) A brief sketch of these works shows that, instead of being a single and unified discipline, postclassical narratology is a "critical passepartout"—a hybridization of feminist narratology, cognitive narratology, rhetorical narratology, cultural-historical narratology, etc. That is, it seems no longer proper to talk about "a postclassical narratology" (the sub-title of Herman's 1997 essay) but postclassical narratologies. Given the plurality of postclassical narratology, two issues might well deserve our attention: (1)

the categorization of these various postclassical narratologies, and (2) the relationship among these postclassical narratologies.

This paper argues that the plurality of postclassical narratology is manifested at least in two aspects: (1) beyond the literary narrative, or to put it differently, plurality in the sense of narrative media, and (2) beyond the single structuralist paradigm, or plurality in the sense of approaches. Accordingly, we can arrive at two criteria for categorizing postclassical narratologies: *media* and *approaches*. In terms of media, we have across-media narratology in general sense (Ryan 2001, 2004, 2006), or media narratology in specific sense (Brooks 2005; Maus 2005; Nadel 2005; Stewart 2003). While in terms of approach, we have feminist narratology (Case 1999; DuPlessis 1985; Lanser 1981, 1986, 1992; Mazei 1996a; Page 2006; Robinson 1991; Warhol 1989, 2003), postcolonial narratology (Prince 2005), postmodern narratology (Currie, M. 1998; Gibson 1996; McHale 1987, 1992, 2004; Punday 2003), rhetorical narratology (Chatman 1990a; Kearns 1999; Phelan 1989b, 1996, 2005, 2007b), and cognitive narratology (Bortolussi & Dixon 2002; Fludernik 1996; Herman 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; 2006, 2007; Herman & Childes 2003; Jahn 1997, 2004; Ryan 1991), and so on. Compared with the yardstick of media, the yardstick of approach seems to be more prevalent in classifying postclassical narratologies. Ansgar Nünning (2004: 354) argues that "given the plethora of new narratological approaches, however, it seems no longer appropriate to talk about narratology as though it were a single approach or a monolithic discipline". In his view, postclassical narratologies are diverse at a myriad of levels, entailing the following sub-branches: new historical narratologies, postmodern narratology, feminist narratology, cognitive narratology, rhetorical narratology, possible world narratology, etc. (Nünning, A. 2003) In *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005), Herman and Vervaeck focus upon the following postclassical narratologies: rhetorical narratology, feminist narratology, postmodern narratology, cognitive narratology, possible-world narratology, etc. In her newly published book, Dan Shen (2005a) mainly elaborates on four sub-branches of postclassical narratologies: rhetorical narratology, feminist narratology, cognitive narratology, and poststructuralist narratology.

No matter what criterion is adopted, the classification of postclassical narratologies fully manifests its nature of plurality. As is mentioned already, in contrast to the single paradigm of classical structuralist narratology, postclassical narratologies turn out to be a "critical passepartout" including more than one disciplines of narratological studies, about which, Monika Fudernik holds a similar view. She argues that "out of the diversity of approaches and their exogamous unions with critical theory have now emerged several budding narratologies." (Fludernik 2005: 37) For the hard fact of plurality, problems arise concerning the relationship among postclassical narratologies. Jahn (2004: 106) notes somewhere that "the problems raised by this pluralification of schools and approaches are obvious." Unfortunately, Jahn does not go any further to explicate those "obvious problems." To some extent, Ansgar Nünning might

have made up what is lost in Jahn's paper, arguing that these problems mainly centre on two things: theorization and narratologicalness. Ansgar Nünning (2003: 256) observes:

> First, though all the new approaches are equally concerned with narratives, both the degree of elaborateness with which they are consciously theorized and the degree of explicitness with which the underlying theoretical assumptions are set out vary quite a bit. Second, some of the new approaches outlined above are obviously more equal, i.e., more oriented towards genuine narratological concerns, than others.

Although a large number of books and papers have been produced on the relationship between classical narratology and its postclassical counterpart (Herman 1999; Herman & Luc 2005; Nünning 2003; Shen 2005a, 2005b; Sommer 2004), the relationship among postclassical narratologies still remains a blind spot. In what follows, I argue that the sub-branches of postclassical narratologies could complement each other to a great extent. When drawing on each others' insights, different postclassical narratologies are likely to prevent their blindness and thus become more theoretically stronger. My focus will be on the two sub-branches of postclassical narratologies—cognitive narratology and rhetorical narratology, both of which are typical in the sense of being postclassical. In elaborating on complementarity between them, I'll take *unreliable narration* as a case study in detail.

2. COMPLEMENTARITY AMONG POSTCLASSICAL NARRATOLOGIES

It has been generally agreed that complementarity is one of the salient features of contemporary literary theories. (Shen 2002) The same is true of postclassical narratologies, which can be demonstrated by the much disputed issue "unreliable narration".

More than two decades ago, Tamar Yacobi argued that "there can be no doubt about the importance of the problem of reliability in narrative and in literature as a whole." (Yacobi 1981: 113) At the turn of the last century, Yacobi's statement was echoed in Bruno Zerweck's essay "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction" (2001), which on the outset reads: "it seems hardly necessary to emphasize how important the concept of unreliable narrator has been in literary studies since it was introduced by Wayne C. Booth in 1961." (Zerweck 2001: 151) Recently, some narratologists have reinforced this position, claiming that unreliability has become "a hot issue in narratology" (Fludernik 2001: 98) or "such a central issue in contemporary narrative theory." (Nünning, A. 2005: 91)

Despite the prominent position occupied by unreliable narration in narratological studies, Gregory Currie sees the other side of the story. He argues that "as consumers of fiction, we have become skilled at recognizing unreliable narratives; as theoreticians, we are less able to say what constitutes unreliability and how it is detected." (Currie, G. 1995: 19) Here Currie seems to say that the typologies and the sources accounting for unreliable narration are such a puzzle to the narratologists, and yet in turn his remark helps to explain why unreliable narration,

together with the term "implied author", turns out to be a "subject of intense debates and even heated controversy." (N ünning, A. 2005: 90)

Generally speaking, there are two major approaches to unreliable narration: the dominant rhetorical approach represented by Wayne C. Booth (1961) and James Phelan (2005, 2007a), and the newly arising cognitive or constructive approach developed by Tamar Yacobi (1981, 1987, 2000, 2001, 2005), Ansgar N ünning (1997, 1999, 2005), and Vera N ünning (2004). In Dan Shen and Dejin Xu's (2007) view, these are the "two contrasting approaches". The fact is that in the contrast or the exclusiveness of the two approaches lies the possibility as well as the necessity for these "contrasting approaches" to complement each other for their respective strengths and weaknesses.

As is acknowledged, it is Wayne C. Booth (1921-2005) who has coined the term unreliable narration. Instead of defining unreliable narration, Booth defines unreliable narrator. In his oft-quoted monograph *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, when discussing the types of narration, Booth claims that "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not." (Booth 1961: 158-159, italics original) Given the definition above, we know the so-called unreliable narration, in Booth's view, is due to the distance that the narrator deviates from the implied author's norms. Booth further explains that "unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their authors' norms; the older term 'tone,' like the currently fashionable terms 'irony' and 'distance,' covers many effects that we should distinguish." (ibid.: 159) The first half of this sentence strengthens Booth's yardstick to judge the narrator's unreliability—how his values and perceptions differ from those of the implied author; the latter half of the sentence points directly to the function of unreliable narration—Booth seems to view narrator's unreliability as a function of irony.

So far as unreliable narration's function is concerned, I agree with Greta Olson, who argues that "irony provides the formal means by which distance is created between the views, actions, and voice of the unreliable narrator and those of the implied author." (Olson 2003: 94) Booth (1961: 304)'s descriptions of irony might serve as a further explication of the concept of unreliable narration:

> Secret communication, collusion, and collaboration. All of the great uses of unreliable narration depend for their success on far more subtle effects than merely flattering the reader or making him work. Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least a part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting.

According to Booth, what lies behind the unreliable narration is "the secret communication, collusion, and collaboration" between the author and the reader. For instance, in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), the first stanza of the poem reads "When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table". The narrator compares "the evening" to "a patient etherized upon a table", which is apparently not reliable, given England's real air conditions. Yet, if taking the genre of this poem into consideration, we are aware that Eliot is a typical representative of modernist literature, and his "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a modernist poem intending to depict the decayed mental state of the man in modern industrialized society. In this sense, the secret communication between the poet and the reader is completed, and the ironic effects of the unreliable narration are disclosed accordingly.

Furthermore, Booth makes a distinction between different types of unreliable narrators. Remarkably, he deploys the words "unreliable," "untrustworthy," "inconscience" (unconscious), and "fallible" to describe different types of narrator. In different places of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth (1961: 158-160) argues that

> I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not.

> If [the narrator] is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed.

> It is most often a matter of what James calls inconscience; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him.

> Sometimes it is almost impossible to infer whether or to what degree a narrator is fallible.

In the definitions above, the first pair of words "unreliable" and "untrustworthy" suggest that the narrator deviates from the norms of the work (the implied author's norms), owing to which the narrator can not be trusted on a personal level. Put it another way, this pair of terms concern the narrator's qualities as a person. By contrast, the second pair "inconscience" and "fallible" suggest that the narrator commits errors about how he perceives himself or his fictional world. In other words, this pair of terms concerns the narrator's ability to perceive and report accurately. (Olson 2003: 96)

To sum up, in Booth's view, the unreliability occurs along two axes: events and values. Four decades later, Phelan develops Booth's axis of unreliability from two to three, adding "knowledge/perception". He broadens Booth's original definition of unreliable narration by

claiming that "a character narrator is 'unreliable when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account the implied author would offer.'" (Phelan 2005: 49) To be specific, according to Phelan, there are six types of unreliability: misreporting and underreporting along the axis of "facts/events", misregarding and underregarding along the axis of "ethics/evaluation", and misreading and underreading along the axis of "knowledge/perception". (Phelan 2005: 66-97; Phelan & Martin 1999)

In his newly published article "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*" (2007), given the effects that unreliability exerts upon the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience, Phelan classifies unreliability into two broad categories: estranging unreliability and bonding unreliability. By estranging unreliability, Phelan means unreliable narration that underlines or increases the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience, while by bonding unreliability, he means unreliable narration that reduces the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience. (Phelan 2007a: 223-224) As for the previous debate about unreliability, Phelan (ibid.: 224-225) makes an insightful summary and reflection, which is worth quoting in full:

> We debate such things as whether unreliability is located in the reader, in the text, in the author, or in some interrelation among them; whether the concept of the implied author is more of a hindrance than a help in our understanding of unreliability; whether a naïve narrator's accurate but uncomprehending reports should be called unreliable narration, discordant narration, or something else.

In Phelan's view, the debate on unreliability in these issues have prevented narratologists from "paying sufficient attention to the diversity of unreliable narration existing in the wild, that is, in the almost countless number of character narrations in the history of narrative (and indeed, in some noncharacter narrations)." (ibid.: 225)

As for the detailed elaborations on the two broad categories of unreliability: estranging unreliability and bonding unreliability, Phelan asserts that since most previous work has been keen on estranging unreliability, he dwells on the single of issue of bonding unreliability by proposing six of its subtypes: *literally unreliable but metaphorically reliable, playful comparison between implied author and narrator, naïve defamiliarization, sincere but misguided self-deprecation, partial progress toward the norm, and bonding through optimistic comparison.* (ibid.: 226-232, italics original) Though Phelan argues that any one of the six types of unreliability can function as estranging unreliability or as bonding unreliability, he does not make further clarification of the estranging unreliability as he does with bonding unreliability, since it is the bonding unreliability that arouses most disputes on the issue of unreliable narration. Therefore, Phelan's classification of unreliability is somewhat asymmetry or imbalanced.

More remarkably, like Booth, Phelan upholds the norms of the work or the norms of implied author as the yardstick to the narrator's reliability. In terms of the role of implied author, Phelan argues somewhere that it is necessary to "provide a model for reading unreliable narration", and he even refines Booth's original definition of implied author as "*a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text.*" (Phelan 2005: 45, italics original) Comparing rhetorical approaches to unreliable narration pioneered by Booth and developed by Phelan, we can easily arrive at a conclusion that both Booth and Phelan consider unreliable narration as an intratextual element, failing to take account of the audience's cognition, and the audience's interpretive strategy in particular.

In contrast to the rhetorical approach to unreliable narration, the cognitive or constructive approach to unreliable narration puts much weight on the importance of the audience' s conception of unreliability. It is Tamar Yacobi who has waged the first attack on rhetorical approach to unreliable narration. She argues that Booth does not answer why, how, and where a "distance" arises between a narrator and the implied author, since Booth's definition of unreliable narration takes the narrator's distance from implied author's norms as the yardstick. (Yacobi 2005: 109) Influenced by Meir Sternberg's (1978, 1983) theory of fictional discourse as a complex act of communication, Yacobi (2005: 109-110) redefines unreliable narration as "a reading-hypothesis: on that is formed in order to resolve textual problems (from unaccountable detail to self-contradiction) at the expense of some mediating, perceiving, or communicating agent—particularly the global speaker—at odds with the author." In Yacobi's point of view, unreliability is not a character trait of a narrator but merely a feature ascribed on a relational basis. What is deemed "reliable" in one context may turn out to be unreliable in another. (ibid.: 110)

Believing that narrator is the mediator between the author and the reader, Yacobi (1987: 336) observes somewhere: "reliability (as a hypothesis of perspectival accord between reflector and author) is nothing but a textual neutralization of mediation-gap," and "unreliability (as a hypothesis of *perspectival* discord between them) is a contextual realization of the mediation gap." In this light, we might safely infer that there is only one of Yacobi's five mechanisms that is related to unreliable narration, which turns out to be perspectival mechanism. To put it another way, it is *perspectival* mechanism that is concerned with the gap between the narrator and the implied author.

Ansgar Nünning (2005: 95), following the footsteps of Yacobi, holding high the banner of cognitive or constructive approach to unreliable narration, argues that "unreliability is not so much a character trait of a narrator as it is an interpretive strategy of the reader." Finding evidence for his argument in Vera Nünning's (2004) article on unreliability of Oliver Goldsmith in *The Vicar of Wakefield* which is subject to historical and cultural changes, Ansgar

Nünning believes in the variability of unreliability in accordance with the different readers' conceptions. Accordingly, viewed in this light, the degree of a narrator's reliability varies from one reader to another. The example Nünning cites is Nabokov's Humbert in *Lolita* (1955). Most likely, a male pederast will not consider Humbert as unreliable, since they stand upon the same ethical ground. In other words, to Nünning, unreliability is neither a character trait of the narrator nor a text-immanent phenomenon, but one of the readers' reading strategies.

However, the next step that Ansgar Nünning moves towards elaborating on unreliability is somewhat problematic. In order to demonstrate how the narrator's unreliability is subject to change historically and culturally, he lists some specific textual markers used to indicate unreliability. Greta Olson (2003: 97-98) makes a lucid summary of those textual markers enumerated by Nünning as follows:

> (1) the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse; (2) discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions; (3) divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' descriptions of her; (4) contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself; (5) contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the story and discourse; (6) other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals; (7) multiperspectival arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events; (8) an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; (9) an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy; (10) syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; (11) explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability; (12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations; (13) a confessed or situation-related prejudice; (14) paratextual signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces.

Nünning's enumeration of textual markers indicating unreliability is in sharp contradiction with his view that unreliability is non-text-immanent. If unreliability is not text-immanent, why does he intend to discover it from those textual markers numerated? More seriously, Nünning fails to take "the designer" (the implied author) of these textual marks into consideration.

From what is illustrated above, it can be easily perceived that the two dominant approaches to unreliable narration are contradictory to or exclusive of each other. In contrast to the rhetorical approach, which takes the narrator's reliability and the norms of the implied author as its major concern, the cognitive or constructive approach focuses on the audience's conception of unreliable narration and the audience's interpretive mechanism of textual incongruities, failing to take the stance, attitude, ideology, and morality (the norms) of the implied author into consideration. In other words, to the rhetorical narratologists, unreliability is immanent to the

text, while to the cognitive narratologists, unreliability is the concept of the audience, something beyond the realm of text, which is likely to vary both historically and culturally.

A scrutiny of these two dominant approaches shows that what lies behind their exclusiveness is none other than complementarity. As is mentioned already, despite their respective strengths, both rhetorical approach and cognitive approach are not short of their weaknesses. One of the strengths of cognitive approach is to account why different readers are endowed with different interpretive mechanisms, which in turn lead to divergent readings of unreliable narration. And this is a blind spot in rhetorical approach, which concerns more about how the flesh-and-blood audience can enter into the authorial audience so as to make a correct interpretation of unreliable narration, failing to take account of different readings of unreliable narration, not to mention the audiences' interpretive mechanisms. Given that the two approaches are combined, the rhetorical approach facilitates the cognitive approach with the yardstick of implied author's norms, which helps to explain the sources of textual inconsistency; the cognitive approach provides the rhetorical approach with interpretive mechanisms, which helps to account for the divergent readings of unreliable narration. Accordingly, a synthesis of these two approaches is most likely to drive home a more complete understanding of unreliable narration both inside and outside the text.

Fortunately, the complementarity of these two approaches has caught the eyes of narratologists from both camps. Unlike Yacobi, Ansgar Nünning (2005: 95) moves further in regarding unreliable narration as "not only structural or semantic aspect of the text but also a phenomenon that involves the conceptual frameworks readers bring to it." In his newly published paper "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches" (2005), Nünning attempts to make a synthesis of cognitive and rhetorical approaches. Though taking a firm stance on the cognitive approach to unreliable narration, Nünning (ibid.: 105) believes that rhetorical approach can make a balance of it, saying "while cognitive narratologists single out reader response and the cultural frameworks that readers bring to texts as the most important basis for detecting unreliability, narrative theorists working in the tradition of rhetorical approaches to narrative have redressed the balance". Nünning (2005: 95) provides a revised definition of unreliable narration. He observes that

> "whether a narrator is regarded as unreliable not only depends on the distance between the norms
> and values of the narrator and those of the text as a whole (or of the implied author) but also on the
> distance that separates the narrator's view of the world from reader's or critic's world model and
> standard of normalcy, which are themselves, of course, subject to change."

Like Ansgar Nünning, Phelan also realizes the possibility of the two approaches to learn from each other. At "International Conference on Narrative" (March 15-18, 2007, Georgetown University, USA), when addressing "Current (and Recurrent) Issues in the Study of Unreliable Narration", Phelan delivers a speech entitled "What Cognitive and Rhetorical Narrative Theories Can Do for Each Other: The Case of Unreliable Narration", in which he elaborates on

the complementarity between rhetorical approach and cognitive approach to unreliable narration.

3. CONCLUSION: PLURALISM AS A WAY TO THE FUTURE

In a point of fact, the significance of illustrating the exclusiveness and complementrarity of rhetorical narrratology and cognitive narratology lies in suggesting that postclassical narratologies in general are of exclusive and complementary relations as well. For instance, cognitive narratology might facilitate feminist narratology and rhetorical narratology with the advantages derived from the theories of scripts, frames, schemata, and mental models to analyze the role played by the narrative conventions and generic audience in narrative construction as well as narrative comprehension. In a similar way, feminist narratology helps cognitive narratlogy and rhetorical narratology to realize the important role played by the gendered audience and gendered author in narrative production and narrative interpretation in a given sociocultural context. With the aid of rhetorical narratology, cognitive narratology and feminist narratology are likely to see the dynamic nature of narrative.

In short, it is advisable for the critics to take note of the blindness and insights of postclassical narratologies, either from the perspective of narrative poetics or from the perspective of narrative analysis. Therefore, one of the best things that critics can do is to draw on the strengths of one postclassical narratology to make up the weakness of another, so as to arrive at a fuller study of a narrative text when doing postclassical narratol"gial criticism on the one hand, and to help postclassical narratologies develop in a harmonious manner on the other. In other words, what critics can do best is to decrease their exclusiveness, while enhancing their complementarity, which points directly to the issue of pluralism.

In "Introduction" to *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (1999), David Herman argues that "Postclassical narratology, because it requires pooling the resources of many disciplinary traditions, many kinds of expertise, is something that no single researcher can accomplish, no one perspective define." (Herman 1999: 14) Herman means that postclassical narratologies are just a giant enterprise, which requires the not only the contributions of classical narratology, but also its various sub-branches from a plethora of approaches and perspectives. Only by doing so can postclassical narratologies have a better chance of developing in a healthy manner. I want to go further arguing that all the approaches, perspectives, and sub-branches of postclassical narratologies are indispensable to each other, so far as their future development is concerned. I suggest that a metatheoretetical position be taken, so as to make pluralism as the right road for the future development of postclassical narratologies.

In the present era of "post-theory" (Eagleton 2003; Seldon, Widdowson & Brooker 2005), it would be incomprehensive to conduct narrative criticism or construct narrative poetics from a single perspective in isolation of other disciplines and approaches. Taking the position of

pluralism, one postclassical narratologist might be open to other postclassical narratologies, which are even contradictory to or exclusive of his approach. What's more, by adopting the position of pluralism and making use of other postclassical narratologies, a posclassical narratologist is more likely to arrive at a thorough understanding of the significance of a narrative text, which in turn can be interpreted at myriad levels.

More than a decade ago, Richard Levin appealed that "interdisciplinarity in literary criticism" has become a must for the literary critics. On the very outset of his oft-quoted paper "The New Interdisciplinarity in Literary Criticism" (1993), Levin argues that "it seems clear that one of the best things a literary critic can do today is to become interdisciplinary." (Levin 1993: 13) Along somewhat similar lines, I also argue that one of the best things that a postclassical narratologist can do in the future is to get intersected with other types of postclassical narratologies. In his newly published article written in memory of Wayne C. Booth, when talking about the merits and advantages of pluralism, James Phelan makes a comparison between pluralism and monism by making the following insightful remark that "Pluralism is better than monism or relativism because it is the metatheoretical position that promotes the flourishing of three central virtues in any critical community: vitality, justice, and understanding." (Phelan 2007c: 94)

Phelan's remark above further echoes his position of pluralism that he expresses in somewhere else, when elaborating upon "rhetorical aesthetics and other issues in the study of literary narrative" (the title of his 2006b essay). Phelan argues that "The current study of literary narrative is various because narrative theory has remained in dialogue with broader trends in critical theory. Consequently, it is not dominated by a single orthodoxy but rather is marked by a range of approaches: formalist, feminist, cognitive, rhetorical, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and others." (Phelan 2006b: 86) To generalize Phelan's point, I want to conclude this essay by claiming that if postclassical narratologies burgeoned by these various critical trends remain in dialogue and embark upon the road of pluralism, the study of postclassical narratologies is bound to be more flourishing and promising in the future, with three virtues highlighted: "vitality, justice, and understanding."

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