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## Anima by Wajdi Mouawad: Unnatural or Naturalized?

Sylvie Patron

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## CHAPTER 2

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# *Anima* by Wajdi Mouawad

## *Unnatural or Naturalized?*

SYLVIE PATRON

TRANSLATED BY MELISSA MCMAHON

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is offered as a study of the modes of narration in *Anima*, inspired by current “unnatural narratology” research, and as an attempt to reevaluate certain aspects of unnatural narratology in the light of the study of Wajdi Mouawad’s novel.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on the problem that the notion of naturalization, understood as a reading way or strategy,<sup>2</sup> can pose when we try to apply it to Mouawad’s novel.

Unnatural narratology is the systematic study of narratives that are unnatural or considered as such (or narratives that are the opposite of narratives

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1. A French version of this article was published in Badiou-Monferran and Denooz 41–62. I thank Claire Badiou-Monferran and Laurence Denooz for their gracious authorization to publish a new version of it in translation, and Jan Alber, Brian Richardson, and the three anonymous readers for their useful comments and suggestions for improving this version. *Anima* was published by Talonbooks in November 2017, in a translation by Linda Gaboriau. Here I use the original French version. The quotations are translated by Melissa McMahon.

2. The term used in particular by Jan Alber and Henrik Skov Nielsen is “naturalizing” or “unnaturalizing reading strategies.” Alber, “Impossible Storyworlds” 81; Alber and Heinze 10; Alber et al., “What Is” 376, 377, 381, “What Really” 109, and Poetics 8; Alber, “Unnatural Narratology” 451–52 and “Unnatural Spaces” 49; Nielsen, “Naturalizing” 67–68 and “The Unnatural” 239–40; Alber, “Postmodernist Impossibilities” 261–62.

considered to be natural by certain theorists).<sup>3</sup> It calls for an approach that combines classical narratology, postclassical narratology, and interpretive criticism. While it has become increasingly popular since the end of the 2000s, it is not without a certain number of problems and may be seen as “work in progress,” as much on the theoretical level as the analytic and interpretive level.<sup>4</sup> For Brian Richardson, an unnatural narrative is defined as

one that conspicuously violates conventions of standard narrative forms, in particular, conventions of nonfictional narratives, oral or written, and fictional modes like realism that model themselves on nonfictional narratives. Unnatural narratives furthermore follow fluid, changing conventions and create new narratological patterns in each work. In a phrase, unnatural narratives produce a defamiliarization of the basic elements of narrative. (“What Is” 34; Richardson, “Unnatural Narratology” 97; Alber et al., “What Is” 372)

Richardson takes care to differentiate between what he calls the nonmimetic or nonrealistic poetics that govern traditional nonrealistic works such as fairy tales and ghost stories, and the antimimetic work of an author like Beckett that defies the principles of realism. His conception of unnatural narratives clearly privileges antimimetic narratives or other types of antimimetic text.

Jan Alber, for his part, understands the term *unnatural* as referring to “impossible scenarios and events, that is, impossible by the known laws governing the physical world, as well as logically impossible ones, that is, impossible by accepted principles of logic” (“Impossible Storyworlds” 80, qtd in Alber and Heinze 4–5), or else humanly impossible, which is to say impossible in relation to the limits of human abilities, in particular cognitive abilities (Alber et al., “What Is” 373; Richardson, “Unnatural Narratology” 98; Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 3–4). Henrik Skov Nielsen puts more emphasis on the question of interpretation. For him, unnatural narratives are fictional narratives that “cue the reader to employ interpretational strategies that are different from those she employs in non-fictionalized, conversational storytelling situations” (“Fictional Voices” 59; Alber et al., “What Is” 373).

3. See Fludernik, *Towards*. See also the debate between Fludernik (“How Natural”) and Alber et al. (“What Is”).

4. Among the main works on unnatural narratology, we can cite Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*; Alber, “Impossible Storyworlds”; Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives”; Alber and Heinze; Hansen et al.; Alber et al., *Poetics*; Alber and Hansen; Richardson’s contributions to Herman et al.; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative*; and Alber, *Unnatural Narrative*, which has just been published and which I could not use extensively in this article. See also the Unnatural Narratology website: <http://projects.au.dk/narrativeresearchlab/unnatural/>. Among the debates raised by unnatural narratology, see above n. 3, and Klauk and Köppe and Alber et al., “What Really”.

*Anima* seems to lend itself particularly well to an unnatural narratological approach. In three of the four parts of the novel, the narration is taken over by animals: those owned by the protagonist (the cat of the first and sixth chapters) and those, much more numerous and varied, that he meets on the different stages of his journey. Narratives taken over by animals could be invoked to illustrate all of the definitions of unnatural narrative. They violate conventions of standard narratives, in particular those of nonfictional narratives, oral or written; they present scenarios that are impossible in the real world, empirically and logically (from the point of view of the distinguishing criteria between human and animal); and they cue the reader to employ interpretational strategies that are different from those employed in standard situations of narration. Such narratives are moreover mentioned in all the works of unnatural narratology.<sup>5</sup> Unnatural narratologists generally trace the origins of narration taken over by animals to Tolstoy's *Kholstomer* (literally "the land surveyor," the name of a horse) and also often refer to *Sweet William: A Memoir of Old Horse* by John Hawkes. Richardson effectively differentiates traditional nonrealist works such as fables, and, we could add, certain children's stories, from the narrative experiments of a Tolstoy or a Hawkes, which take place within a realist context and in particular within one of psychological realism ("What Is" 34; *Unnatural Narrative* 4). Alber speaks in the first case of unnatural scenarios that have been conventionalized, and he also reserves the defamiliarizing effect for the second category ("Impossible Storyworlds" 94 n. 4; Alber and Heinze 13; Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 20, 42–43, 225).

However, because of the way it embeds the first three parts of the novel inside the "manuscript" evoked in the fourth part, *Anima* calls on unnatural narratologists to address the question of the naturalization of unnatural elements. On the one hand, Mouawad's novel provides another example of Alber's attempt to itemize the strategies used or usable by readers when they are confronted with unnatural elements (strategies that Alber initially sees as "naturalization strategies"). The first strategy is: "Some impossible elements can simply be explained as dreams, fantasies, or hallucinations ('reading events as internal states')" ("Impossible Storyworlds" 82).<sup>6</sup> This first strategy

5. See Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* x, 3; Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds" 82, 89, 93–94; Alber et al., "Unnatural Narratives" 116, 131; Alber and Heinze 7; Richardson, "What Is" 34; Alber, "The Diachronic" 41, 49–50; Richardson, "Antimimetic" 23; Alber, "Interview" 13, 14 n. 4, "Unnatural Narratology" 450, 452, 456, and "Unnatural Narrative" 10; Alber et al. Poetics 2; Alber and Hansen 4; Alber, "Postmodernist Impossibilities" 274 n. 17, 18; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 4, 33; and Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 62–71. See also Bernaerts et al., which takes a critical distance from the unnatural narratology approach.

6. The other strategies are (2) "foregrounding the thematic," (3) "reading allegorically," (4) "blending scripts," and (5) "frame enrichment" (Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds" 82–83;

becomes the third in Alber et al., but the description remains the same: “We can explain some impossibilities by attributing them to the *interiority* of the narrator or one of the characters; in this case, the natural is *naturalized* insofar as it turns out to be something entirely natural (namely somebody’s hallucination)” (“What Is” 377). A note in the same article specifies that the term *naturalization* should be reserved for this third reading strategy, “while all the other navigational tools are perhaps better described as explanatory mechanisms or as ways of coming to terms with the unnatural” (381; see also Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 51, 237 n. 14).

Mouawad’s novel adds to explanations by reference to dreams, fantasies, or hallucinations, in short by reference to the internal states of the narrator, the explanation by way of fictionality—which is to say, the fictionality inside the fiction. The manuscript received by the coroner, the narrator of the fourth part of the novel, is in fact described as a “work of fiction that recounts the facts” (388). It is presented as having been written by the protagonist, Wahhch Debch, who wanted to tell his story by entrusting the task of narration to animals. On the other hand, the manuscript is only brought up in the fourth part of the novel and nothing in the writing of the first three parts hints at their embedded status (and change of ontological level: a fiction inside the fiction). If we consider only the first three parts of the novel, *Anima* occupies an interesting place in the debate between Alber and Nielsen.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Alber identifies reading strategies based on the experiential frames of the real world, Nielsen argues for the legitimacy of an unnaturalizing reading of unnatural narratives, resisting the application of real-world limitations to all narratives and refraining from limiting interpretations to what is possible in literal communicative acts and representational models. He even posits an incompatibility between Alber’s third reading strategy, and perhaps the other strategies, and the unnatural narratological approach:

An unnatural approach . . . allows the reader to construct such situations as authoritative, reliable or matter-of-fact renderings of the fictional universe.

This also goes to show that if the reader constructs something strange within

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Alber and Heinze 10; Alber, “Interview” 12–13). See also Alber (“Unnatural Spaces” 48–49) for a slightly different list, and Alber (*Unnatural Narrative* 47–48) for a singularly expanded one. I will briefly evoke the last strategy in the most recent list, “the Zen way of reading,” at the end of this article.

7. This also includes Stefan Iversen and Brian Richardson. See Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives” 129–30; Alber and Heinze 9–11; Richardson, “Unnatural Narratology” 101–2; Alber et al., “What Is” 376–78; Alber et al., Poetics 7–9; Iversen 95; Alber, “Unnatural Narrative”; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 19–20; and Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 17–19.

the fictional universe as, say, a dream or a hallucination then, for me, that would not count as unnatural which in turn goes to show that naturalization or familiarization, for me, annihilates the unnatural. (“The Unnatural” 241)

In opposition to his unnaturalizing reading, Nielsen calls “naturalization” the process of normalizing the unnatural emblemized by Alber’s project.<sup>8</sup>

In the rest of this essay, I will turn my attention first to the unnatural elements, or those considered to be such by unnatural narratologists, in the first three parts of *Anima*. Then I will address the question of the naturalization by fictionality that takes place in the fourth part of the novel, in order to finish with the possible effects of this naturalization on a second reading of the novel.

## THE UNNATURAL ELEMENTS IN *ANIMA*

As unnatural narratologists recognize, unnatural elements are always in a dialectical relationship with other natural or mimetic elements of the narrative (see Richardson, “What Is” 33; Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 4). An examination of Mouawad’s novel also shows that some elements can be considered to simultaneously accentuate the unnatural character of the narrative and to naturalize or render more plausible elements inside the unnatural situation created by the text of the novel. In the following sections, I will discuss the narrators, the narrative situation, epistemic consistency, and other unnatural elements on macro- and micro-textual levels.

### *The Narrators*

The term *narrator* comes from Mouawad himself, in the “Notice” that is given as an appendix to the novel: “Writing *Anima* required, given the nature of the multiple narrators and the geography covered by the character of Wahhch, a certain amount of research” (393). The story of how the novel came about that appears on the website of publisher Actes Sud also contains synonyms of or comments on this term: “a voice,” “a voice that says I” (an “I” who is not co-referential with the “I” of the author: “It wasn’t me”), “an animal voice,” “a

8. Alber, for his part, warns against the risk of monumentalizing the unnatural, which results, according to him, from Nielsen’s position (see Alber et al., “Unnatural Voices” 365; Alber, “Unnatural Narratology” 455; Alber, “Unnatural Narrative”).

cat, their cat, their pet, tells the story of the macabre discovery and the man fainting,” and “in the second chapter, the birds at the window of his hospital room take up the story.”<sup>9</sup> In the novel, the narrators are identified in the chapter titles by their scientific name (genus, species, sometimes subspecies)—*Felis sylvestris catus carthusianorum*, *Passer domesticus*, *Canis lupus familiaris inauratus investigator*, and so on—and by certain indicators generally linked to their behavior (e.g., in the case of the cat: “I ate the tuna that was in the bag and drank the water in the toilets” [14]).<sup>10</sup> The “I” sometimes becomes a “we”—from the second chapter: “Did he get up when night came . . . ? Our nature, linked to the diurnal movement of existence, prevents us from saying so with any certainty despite the attention our whole group paid to him” (15). In some short chapters, the “I” is completely effaced: “He’s sleeping. A man comes in. A giant. The cat sits up” (85).

The nature and multiplicity of the narrators has as its corollary a specific lexicon, made up of numerous references to “the man” or “humans” or else to Wahhch’s “kind,” and a set of stylistic choices that are supposed to correspond to the characteristics of the species in question. I will just give one example:

The yapping of the dog decided everything.

Yes.

Together, obeying the voice of prudence, we slid over the partitions of the present to leave the statues and crevices of the clock tower where we nest.

Spreading our wings, we launched our bodies into the void.

Yes. (“Columba livia” 19)<sup>11</sup>

The first three parts of the novel also contain typical passages of what the Russian Formalists called “defamiliarization”: the defamiliarization of certain gestures (the sign of the cross, 30); certain objects (the telephone, on several occasions, 35, 41, 42, 56, 57, 122, 322, 344); certain foods, especially beverages (beer, 51, 181, 307); and even human language (54, 291–92). The discourse of the chimpanzee on the misuse of possessive pronouns in human discourse—

9. See <http://www.actes-sud.fr/catalogue/litterature/anima>. Accessed 21 Sep. 2014.

10. We can observe a certain nominalism in the choice of gender of the animal narrators: Thus, the skunk (Lat. *mephitis*, Fr. *la mouffette*, feminine noun) is a female skunk, and the spider (Lat. *tegenaria domestica*, Fr. *l'araignée*, feminine noun) is a female spider; on the other hand, the fox (Fr. *le renard*, masculine noun) is male, as is the butterfly (Fr. *le papillon*, masculine noun) (Mouawad 48, 50, 58, 141). A counterexample would be the female raccoon (Fr. *le raton-laveur*, masculine noun) (140).

11. The translation focuses on the signified, to the detriment of the signifier. In French, the repetition of “Oui” (“Yes”) is supposed to imitate the cooing of the pigeon.

“The humans say My, my, my. For example, Coach says My monkey, pointing to me” (102)—seems to be taken directly from Tolstoy’s “Kholstomer” (1863).

The result of this narratorial choice is that the character of Wahhch is always described from the outside (no internal monologue, no representation of his thoughts in free indirect style, no authoritative presentation of his thoughts in general, barring a few exceptions I will return to). On the other hand, he is described with an unusual precision and type of detail that is linked to what could be called “animal experientiality.” Here is a typical example:

We dogs perceive the colored emanations that living bodies produce when they are in the grip of a violent emotion. Often humans have the aura of the green of fear or the yellow of grief and sometimes still more rare shades: the saffron of happiness and the turquoise of ecstasy. This man, tired, worn out, engulfed by the opaline opacity of the journey, gives off a jet black from the center of his back, the color of drifting and sinking, the signature of natures unable to leave behind their memory and their past. (“Canis lupus familiaris” 216–17)

### *The Narrative Situation*

The term *narrative situation* refers to the situation of the narrator at the moment he or she tells the story. It is part of the fiction. It can be oral or written (or thought, in the case of an interior monologue, though there is the question of whether it is appropriate in this case to use the notion of the narrative situation, which is based on the model of natural narrative situations). It may or may not imply someone who is addressed by the narrator and located in the same fictional world. It includes the motivation the narrator may have for telling the story.

In *Anima*, the situation of the narrators is neither oral nor written, and it is only by default that it can be called thought (few narratives, in fact, deserve to be called interior monologues). The text does not suggest that the narrative act involves any sort of medium. On the contrary, it thematizes the fact that the narrators are not able to speak, and a fortiori write, on several occasions (105, 270, 295, 330). Nor does the text suggest that the narrators are telling the story to an addressee, or that they have a motive for their narration, or even that they are aware of being engaged in the act of narrating. On the contrary, it thematizes the fact that they are alone, or that they are the only ones of their kind, facing humans for example, on several occasions (20, 33, 42–43, 49).

Most narratives are told in the past tense, indicating that the moment of narration comes after the narrated story. But some are told in the present tense. Here is an example:

They sit down. She pours a dark liquid into the cups placed in front of them. I sing. I move from one trapeze to another then from the trapeze to the rock and from the rock to the trapeze. I sing. He looks at me. I sing. I leave the trapeze, hang on to the cage with my feet, wear down my beak on the metal, turn myself around, head upside down, I sing. She gets up, opens the window of my house, holds out her finger. I sing. I climb onto her hand. She turns around and sits down. She places me on her shoulder. He looks at me. I sing. (“Serinus canaria” 33)

This is neither a case of the historical present nor the present tense used in an internal monologue, but rather what Dorrit Cohn has called the “fictional present” (106) to highlight the fact that it is specific to fiction.<sup>12</sup> The absence of an oral or written narrative situation is further emphasized here by the impossibility of distinguishing between the moment of the narration and the moment of the experience, the narrating self, and the experiencing self.

### *Epistemic Consistency*

I have taken the expression “epistemic consistency” from Richardson (“What Is” 23–24 and *Unnatural Narrative* 39–40). This is his shorthand for the fact that it is impossible for a character based on the model of a real-world person to know in any detail the contents of the mind of another character.<sup>13</sup> We find several (more or less) clear-cut violations of this principle in *Anima*. See, for example, the following three passages:

12. See also Richardson, “Beyond” 53; Nielsen, “The Impersonal Voice” 141; Hansen, “First Person” 319; Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives” 130; Nielsen, “Natural Authors” 290 and “Fictional Voices?” 60; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 26.

13. The violation of this principle or commitment is referred to as “paralepsis” in Genette 195. See also Nielsen, “The Impersonal Voice” 144; Heinze 280–81; Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives” 130; Richardson, “What Is” 26–28; Nielsen, “Unnatural Narratology” 75–77 and “Fictional Voices” 55, 67–68; Hansen, “Backmasked Messages” 164, 167; Alber et al., Poetics 3; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 26, 39; Alber, *Unnatural Narrative* 80–84. James Phelan, for his part, refers to “implausibly knowledgeable narration” (“Implausibilities” 168–69).

Get the soil off my head, he wanted to scream, like the day when some men had buried him alive. I mustn't cry, he repeated to himself, if I cry, if I cry out, they will start again, take me out, kill me and put me back inside. And there again, standing in the middle of the entrance hallway, losing all notion of time, he did not move, did not breathe, for fear of it starting again, of her dying again, which was in the end absurd since she was obviously dead, her hands clutching the blade, a bunch of flowers on her broken belly. ("Felis sylvestris catus carthusianorum" 13)

This man, if it were up to him, would have preferred to give his mind over to insanity than be judged in his sorrow as he was. ("Corvus corax" 30)

If he had found the strength to save his dog, he would find the strength to save her [Winona]. Hearing him speak, in the hut, she knew we were her only chance of being saved. She could not be wrong. (The dog of the third section, 317–18)

However, some narrators deny having any knowledge of Wahhch's thoughts: "I can't say what thought crossed his mind, nor what abyss opened up beneath his feet, nor what he fell towards" ("Felis sylvestris catus" 91). Others engage in conjectures or inferences on the subject of these thoughts, in a way that is not fundamentally different from what people in the real world do.

Richardson notes that violations of epistemic consistency frequently occur in "we" narrations (*Unnatural Voices* 40–43, "What Is" 27–28, and *Unnatural Narrative* 34). This is also true in *Anima*, but it seems to me that we should see this more as an element of naturalization inside the fiction. It always concerns social animals, who live in colonies (or are gathered together by man, in the case of the rabbits who are used as food for the boa constrictor):

There were, it is true, a lot of us, and we found it very hard to stay calm, so maddening was the smell of the cadaver. We were coming out of winter and we were starving, crazed with the need to feast on a rotting corpse. ("Corvus corax" 29)

We all believed in his fall, but he did not show the least hesitation. ("Larus delawarensis" 39)

The box opened. Terrified, we lifted our heads to try to understand where we were and what had to be done to regain a comforting sense of security.

Everything was hostile: smells, perceptions, lights, sounds and the face of the man. (“*Oryctolagus cuniculus*” 77)

### *Other Unnatural Elements*

Here I should mention the often very long passages of dialogue presented as direct speech, in French or other languages.<sup>14</sup> I have already mentioned that the text does not suggest that the narrative act involves any kind of medium. Similarly, it does not suggest that the dialogues are communicated in the same medium as the rest of the narrative. The text sometimes makes a point of the fact that the words exchanged during these dialogues are understood by the narrators (68, 76, 102–3, 105, 163) and, more rarely, the fact that they are not (159, 302). But most often it says nothing about the abilities of the narrators to understand when they are confronted with human language.

On the microtextual level of certain chapters or passages of chapters, we can identify other unnatural elements that have often been noted in the works of unnatural narratologists. There is first the case of narratives where the narrator narrates his or her own death.<sup>15</sup>

I move away. I flit about. I don't see the danger come. I don't see it. I am hardly aware of the rustle of wings. I don't know that I'm lost. I am lost. (“*Papilio polyxenes asterius*” 141)

I step back on the large joist to return to the shadows, but, lost, scared, losing my bearings, I take one step too many and tumble into the void. (“*Mus musculus*” 240–41)

In these two examples, the narrative of the prey is immediately followed by that of the predator (the crow, the cat), which confirms the event of their

14. On dialogues, see Nielsen, “Natural Authors” 290; Alber et al., “What Really” 110; Nielsen, “The Unnatural” 241–42.

15. Narratives that are taken over by a cadaver or dead person are mentioned in all works of unnatural narratology. See Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* x, 3, 100; Heinze 288–89; Alber, “Impossible Storyworlds” 82, 89–90; Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives” 116; Alber and Heinze 7; Alber, “The Diachronic” 41; Richardson, “Antimimetic” 23; Alber, “Interview” 13; Alber et al., “What Is” 376; Alber et al., “What Really” 109, 116 n. 11 and Poetics 2; Alber, “Unnatural Narratology” 452 and “Unnatural Narrative” online; Alber and Hansen 4; Alber, “Postmodernist Impossibilities” 261–62; Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 18, 33, 43. See also Nielsen, “Natural Authors” 291, 297 on passages that narrate that the narrator is falling asleep.

death. The mare also narrates her own death in the cattle truck full of horses destined for the abattoir:

Fatigue overcomes me, sadness, I collapse. In the animal faeces, I collapse. I won't get up, I won't get up. I am losing consciousness. I am slipping away. Finally, finally. (209)

There is also this narrative in the future tense (where we can see another kind of violation of the principle of epistemic consistency):<sup>16</sup>

The persistence of the fireflies will color the valleys, just as the dog will save the fainted man. He will be his shadow and the man, his light. He will make him his master and the man will make him his dog. Nothing will be able to separate them. One, guardian of the other, one, in the footsteps of the other, they will go, binding their destinies together, to the edge of the ends of the earth and will have no more fear of the fear of death. ("Lampyris noctiluca" 262)

We can also cite the internal monologue of the chimpanzee, containing ironic references to human speech, which indicates a knowledge that the chimpanzee simultaneously has and does not have:<sup>17</sup>

They were flabbergasted. Naturally. A "monkey" eats bananas and scratches its armpits going Oooh! Oooh! It doesn't roll cigarettes! It's an animal, a "monkey," it doesn't know that it is inhabited by an immortal soul! It's true. I admit it. I don't know that my soul is immortal. So? What's the difference, because watching these men the way I watch them, I sometimes wonder if they know it any more than me. (104)

On the other hand, *Anima* does not contain any narratives of facts or episodes that the narrators have not witnessed (this point is even made explicit in the sparrow's narrative; 15, 17). Nor does it contain any "denarrated" narratives, which is to say narratives that deny facts previously posited as existing in the

16. See Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 29, 68, 144 n. 5; Heinze 280, 291–92; Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds" 90.

17. On certain passages of narratives that narrate something that the narrator does not notice or know, see Nielsen, "The Impersonal Voice" 140–41.

fictional world.<sup>18</sup> It never gives contradictory versions of the same events (at most, these events are sometimes perceived differently by the different narrators according to their nature and experientiality<sup>19</sup>).

This list of unnatural elements is, however, not without its problems. In particular, it places fictional elements proper, which is to say ones posited as existing in the fictional world created by the text (the animal narrators, their knowledge or not of Wahhch's thoughts, for example) on the same level as elements that are just the result of using certain narrative techniques (such as narration in the present tense, for example). Unnatural narratologists very often amalgamate the two, even if some of them sometimes show a certain awareness of the problem. For example, Nielsen takes a stand against Phelan about narratives in the fictional present tense: "Right, there is 'no occasion of narration' . . . , but to describe this as the narrator 'doing the impossible—living and telling at the same time' runs the risk of placing the paradox and the impossibility at the story world level as if this was a story about a character capable of the impossible" ("Fictional Voices" 65).

Sometimes unnatural narratologists even amalgamate fictional elements proper and elements that are just the result of certain habits of language created by the theory: For example, the "omniscient narrator" to describe narrative modes for presenting the internal life of characters in third-person fictional narratives.<sup>20</sup> This can be explained by the dependence of unnatural narratologists on classical narratology as well as on forms of postclassical narratology they claim to be opposed to: natural narratology and rhetorical narratology.<sup>21</sup> They do not have any well-developed conception of the status of fiction and its relationship to different domains of reality. In particular, they do not have at their disposal the concept of "representational correspondence,"

18. On denarration, see Richardson, "Denarration" and *Unnatural Voices* 87–94. See also Richardson in Herman et al. 79.

19. I could go so far as to speak of unreliable narration for the narrative of the fish (20–24) or for the nightmare of the dog (125–26). But here again, it is a case of an element of naturalization inside the fiction (see, moreover, this information contained in the narrative of the coroner: "Have, I too, a memory of less than seven seconds" [377]).

20. See, for example, Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 42, 60; Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds" 94 n. 4; Alber et al., "Unnatural Narratives" 120, 124, 131; Alber, "The Diachronic" 56, 58 and "Interview" 14 n. 4; Alber et al., "Unnatural Voices" 352; Alber, "Unnatural Narratology" 452, "Pre-Postmodernist," "Postmodernist Impossibilities" 274 n. 17, and *Unnatural Narrative* 43, 61, 87–103. Alber compares the omniscient narrator to "wizards and witches": "Like wizards and witches, the third-person narrators or voices in these types of fiction are capable of omnimortality" (*Unnatural Narrative* 103).

21. This dependency has already been noted by Skalin 103–4 and Patron 31. See also Klauk and Köppe 98 n. 10 on the relationship between unnatural narratologists and alternative theories to classical and postclassical narratology.

nor its corollary, the “limitation of representational correspondence” (Currie 58–64, 78–79), which allows us to conceptualize the fact that in representational works, only certain features of the representation serve to represent features of the things represented.

For example, there is representational correspondence between the words uttered by the actor and the words uttered by the character of Othello in Shakespeare’s play, but while the words uttered by the actor constitute great poetry, they are not represented as constituting great poetry in the mouth of Othello (Currie 59–60; this example is taken from Walton 181–82). Jan-Noël Thon provides other examples of the limitation of representational correspondence: “Even though the English language is used for representing character speech, the characters in Louis Leterrier’s blockbuster film *Clash of the Titans*, Frank Miller’s graphic novel *300*, or SCE’s action-adventure *God of War* are not represented as ‘actually’ speaking English” (86), since the events narrated in all these narrative works are supposed to take place in Ancient Greece. Further, “Michel Hazanavicius’s *The Artist* uses black-and-white pictures for the most part, but there are no good reasons for spectators to imagine the film’s storyworld to be black and white”—this assumption being further reinforced “since none of the characters thematizes what would certainly be a striking lack of color in a world otherwise appearing to largely conform to our (historicized) real world expectations” (Thon 87).

In the same way, in *Anima*, there is a representational correspondence between the words we read (in French or English translation) and the narratives of the animal narrators; however, the words we read are not represented as belonging to language (be it French, English, or any other language) or as being expressed orally or in writing. Nor are they represented, in the case of the present-tense narratives, as being expressed at the same moment that their animal narrators are living the experiences they narrate. These assumptions are further reinforced since none of the narrators thematizes what would certainly be striking contradictions in a world otherwise appearing to largely conform to our (historicized) real-world expectations.

### NATURALIZATION THROUGH THE WRITING OF A FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

The fourth part of *Anima* begins in the following way: “The events I am going to try to relate occurred more than a year ago, not very long after my wife’s death, but well before I received, in a posted parcel, the manuscript of the preceding text” (373). The manuscript itself is described a few pages later, with

its “three distinct parts.”<sup>22</sup> Its content is also summarized by the coroner in a passage that amounts to a recapitulation of the characters and events of the first three parts. Here the coroner takes on the traditional role of the fictional editor, with the difference that the manuscript in question is that of a novel, or more specifically a *faction*—a “work of fiction that recounts the facts” (388)—and not that of a factual narrative.

The revelation of the existence of the manuscript comes as a surprise to the reader. Like all narrative surprises, it leads the reader to reconsider an earlier part of the text—in this case, the first three parts—and to reevaluate the way it has been actualized. This reevaluation precisely concerns the unnatural elements listed above, or at least some of them. As Alber et al. write, “the unnatural is *naturalized* insofar as it turns out to be something entirely natural” (“What Is” 377)—which is to say, the product of someone’s creative imagination.

The choice of the animal narrators is attributed to Wahhch inside the fiction and is explained by what he experienced at the moment of the massacre of Sabra and Chatila: “I remember the muteness, the muteness of all of these beasts who had just been subjected to this appalling thing that nevertheless had nothing to do with them, I remember trying speak for them, putting my words in their mouths” (335–36). It is part of a process to develop resilience, a dynamic, constant process, from Wahhch’s childhood to his age at the moment of writing his story.

There is a narrative situation, in the sense of the situation of writing a story (once again, inside the fiction). It does not imply an addressee intended by the author of the narrative, but the virtual addressee who is the addressee par excellence of the literary text. As for the time of the narration, we know that at least part of the manuscript was written on the road; this part or version of the manuscript was already readable in “Cairo, Illinois” (270).

As it concerns a fictional narrative, even if it is recounting actual facts, we can speak of the infallibility of the epistemic source.<sup>23</sup> It explains the narrations or other modes of presentation of thoughts, for example, Winona’s, and the future-tense narrative of the firefly. The dialogues are invented by Wahhch based on his memory of actual conversations he has had and are represented

22. Curiously, they are called “*Animae verae*,” “*Animae fabulosae*,” and “*Canis lupus lupus*,” whereas the two first parts, as they appear in the novel and in the table of contents, are called “*Bestiae verae*” and “*Bestiae fabulosae*” (11, 117, 387, 397). The text does not offer any explanation of this. We can see in it a voluntary or involuntary limitation of the representational correspondence between the text of Wahhch’s manuscript and that of Mouawad’s novel.

23. One can speak of a case of “illusory paralysis” in Heinze’s sense: “Paralepsis seems present but delayed discourse reveals that there are natural, realistic sources of the character narrator’s unusual knowledge” (285).

in writing in the form of direct speech. There is thus nothing unnatural in their length, or in the fact that we, as readers, have access to them. We can nevertheless wonder, in the case of the dialogues in English, why Wahhch did not translate them into French.

The revelation of the existence of the manuscript also provides an explanation, within the fiction, of the compositional elements and other features of a written text: the division into chapters; the titles; the transitions or links between the chapters; the textual echoes between different chapters, sometimes very far apart, whether literal echoes (e.g., place names) or thematic ones (e.g., the theme of the monster or monstrosity). It also explains why the “disclosure functions” often override the “narrator functions,” to use Phelan’s terminology (see *Living* 12–13), and why the revelation of certain facts happens both within each chapter and through the effect of their interaction. The strong teleology of Wahhch’s overall narrative is stressed by the coroner—“everything pointed to the scavengers of Tank Mountain” (388)—even if the essential function of this passage is to authenticate the narrated facts.

### THE FICTIONAL NATURALIZATION AND THE SECOND READING OF *ANIMA*

Given the fictional naturalization that takes place in the fourth part, we might think that it is necessary to change the logic of the first reading in any second reading of the novel. This would assume the blanket application of a naturalizing reading strategy to the unnatural elements of the first three parts. My hypothesis goes precisely in the opposite direction, based on considerations of a cognitive (memorial) and also of an emotional nature, in order to posit the possibility and perhaps even the necessity of an unnaturalizing second reading, which is to say the opposite of the reading prescribed by the text of the fourth part.

First, I will quote a reflection by Mary Galbraith on the narrator in fictional narratives. She argues that “even the creation of an overt narrator does not necessarily mean that this narrator exists for the reader behind those parts of the narrative that do not evoke his presence,” adding that “if the narrator is not continually activated by signs in the text, and if his or her presence is not of importance to the overall meaning of the work, then it is hypothesized . . . that his or her telling of the story will decay and eventually drop from the reader’s construction” (48). In the same way, I would tend to think that even the creation of a fictional author at the end of *Anima* does not necessarily mean that this fictional author exists for the reader on a second reading.

More specifically, he may exist during the first pages but, as I already said, nothing in the writing of the first three parts hints at their embedded status and change of ontological level (a fiction inside the fiction), and then we can make the same hypothesis as Galbraith: His writing of the story will decay and eventually drop from the reader's construction.

I will turn to the second point. Like the first reading, the second reading requires the reader's investment, based on empathy and identification with the character of Wahnch. It seems to me, however, that an empathetic connection with Wahnch is jeopardized by a naturalizing reading of the first three parts. I am thinking in particular of all of the passages that establish Wahnch's singular ability to relate to animals. Here are just a few examples:

I think he must have sensed my panic because, without making any sudden movement, he sat back down on the rock and started to watch me with a sort of fatigue. He could have crushed me at any moment, but did not do so. His eyes, a clear green, filled with tears.

He carefully brought his hand flat down on the ground. He waited for me to return to solid ground. ("Lasius niger" 42-43)

He looked at me. He smiled at me. I held out my hand to him. Without playing games or showing off, or even expressing delight, he held out his. He placed his palm on my palm. He was not familiar in his manner towards me at any time. If he had been alone, he would have spoken to me the way people speak to those with ears. But without saying anything, he let me contemplate him and revealed the distress of his soul to me in the faltering of his glazed eyes. I loved him from that moment. ("Pan troglodytes" 110)

He crouched down, he watched me, I watched him, I whined, he held out his hand towards me and said Me too! Me too! under the ground, under the ground, and alone! and he burst out sobbing. Moved by his friendship, by his deep affection, free and generous, I could offer him nothing in return. How could I match such a gift that allowed me to glimpse what is sublime in the gesture of holding out a hand to one's fellow creature? ("Ratus norvegicus" 134)

The effect of these passages is completely changed if they are read on the presupposition that they were written by Wahnch. They become expressions of self-satisfaction, self-complacency, smugness even.

Another argument will no doubt appear stronger than the first due to the greater number of passages involved. It seems to me that the trust in the reli-

ability of the narration is also jeopardized by a naturalizing reading of the first three parts. Here is one example among many others:

He screams. He screams again and sits straight up, without waking. His arms sweep the air. No! No! He says words, makes sounds that I can't quite understand. I become frightened. He wants to get up, but barely does he put any weight on his sore leg than he collapses at the foot of his bed. He wakes up. He stays there, dazed, gradually reorienting his thoughts. We, the animals, hear him crying. He calms down. He says Léonie . . . Léonie . . . and falls back asleep right there on the floor, fists clenched, pressed against his face, grinding his teeth. ("Equus asinus" 159)

Reading a passage like this, the reader may be tempted to ask: Why does Wahhch narrate this, and how can he narrate this, so long after the event? What is fact and what is fiction, or reconstruction, in what he narrates? Or, in relation to other passages: What is observation and what is anthropomorphic projection in the narratives he attributes to the animal narrators? There is also this passage that narrates events Wahhch did not witness:

The door closed again. The old man was alone again. He returned to his chanting, louder than usual, as if he was trying to accompany the person who had just left him:

*And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death; and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.* ("Boa constrictor" 81)

Here again, the effect of this passage is completely changed if it is read on the presupposition that it was written by Wahhch; it becomes a pure product of his imagination, with, in addition, a quote from Leviticus that is difficult to interpret from his position. Even more generally, the effect of the first three parts is completely changed, or at least the text is rendered difficult or even impossible to interpret, if it is read on the presupposition that all the "he"s referring to Wahhch, or all the circumlocutions describing him, are "actually" (i.e., fictionally) hidden "I."

Against the hypothesis of a second naturalizing reading, I think we can posit the possibility and even the necessity of a second unnaturalizing reading, setting aside the fictional naturalization that takes place in the fourth part of the novel. Such a reading is perfectly captured in the terms used by Nielsen to describe the unnaturalizing reading that he defends as a general rule: "The

reader has the option to try to maximize relevance by applying a qualitatively different set of interpretational rules. For example, the reader can strategically assume that it actually makes sense to trust narrative details which the first-person narrator cannot possibly know” (“Fictional Voices” 79). Nielsen also argues that “an unnatural approach . . . allows the reader to construct such situations as authoritative, reliable or matter-of-fact renderings of the fictional universe,” and that “an unnaturalizing reading is an interpretational choice that, unlike naturalizing readings, does not assume that real world conditions and limitations have to apply to all fictional narratives when it comes to logic, physics, time, enunciation, framing, etc.” (“The Unnatural” 241).<sup>24</sup>

It seems to me, for example, that even on the second reading of the novel, the reader can and perhaps even must consider that it makes sense to believe that animal narrators take over the narration. He or she can and no doubt even must represent the narrated facts to him- or herself as corresponding to recognized facts in the fictional world, including when it is a case of the thoughts of characters that in principle the narrators should not be able to know.

I also think that even on the second reading of the novel, the reader can and perhaps must consider that it makes sense to accept the narrative in which the mare narrates her own death, the future-tense narration of the firefly, the interior monologue of the chimpanzee that reveals a knowledge that the chimpanzee simultaneously has and does not have, and the narrative of the boa constrictor that recounts events that Wahhch did not witness, as reliable and authoritative narratives, recounting recognized facts in the fictional world.

Regarding the dialogues, I think these statements of Alber et al. can also be applied to them:

We make a legitimate but naturalizing choice if we interpret the words in a dialogue novel told by a character-narrator, or the rendering of a dialogue that took place fifty years ago, as only *appearing* to be verbatim accounts. If we believe instead that such speech exchanges are part of the invented act of narration, we can also treat these dialogues as literally verbatim accounts and thus base interpretations on the claim that the characters are saying some words rather than others. (Alber et al., “What Really” 110; Nielsen, “The Unnatural” 241)

24. Alber, “Unnatural Narratology” 454–55 establishes a link between Nielsen’s unnaturalizing reading and his last reading strategy, “the Zen way of reading.” But it seems to me that Nielsen’s unnaturalizing reading is active and Alber’s Zen way of reading more passive. Moreover, the idea of a Zen way of reading fits very poorly with the reading of *Anima*, which contains passages of unbearable violence.

On the other hand, and even on the second reading of the novel, there are certain specifically textual phenomena that the reader can only explain by referring to the author, by which I mean not the fictional author (Wahhch), but the real author of the novel (Mouawad). These phenomena include the compositional elements and other features of a written text (the division into chapters, the titles, etc.); the fact that the “disclosure functions” often override the “narrator functions” and that the revelation of a certain number of fictional facts occurs both inside each chapter and through the effect of their interaction; and the refusal to translate the dialogues in English. The reader does not need to assume a representational correspondence between these external phenomena and the facts posited as existing in the fictional world.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the examination of unnatural elements in *Anima* invites us to reevaluate the key concept of unnatural narratology, i.e. the concept of the unnatural itself, and in particular to distinguish between the unnatural elements that properly belong to the fiction and elements that are only the result of certain narrative techniques, or even certain habits of language created to account for these techniques.<sup>25</sup> Insofar as the novel contains a process of fictional naturalization in its fourth part, it also invites us to reflect on the nature of a possible second reading of the first three parts. This reflection seems to support Nielsen against Alber when the first asserts the legitimacy of an unnaturalizing reading of unnatural narratives.<sup>26</sup> In the case of *Anima*, not only does an unnaturalizing reading seem “a more appropriate choice than applying the principles of naturalization and familiarization” (Nielsen, “Naturalizing” 67), I could go so far as to say that the naturalizing reading, which follows logically from the fictional naturalization that takes place in the fourth part, blocks the second reading of the novel as it is designed to be read.

25. This observation seems to agree with that of Klauk and Köppe 81–82 concerning the necessity of defining unnatural narratives as narratives containing an impossible storyworld in the strong sense of the term. They do not, however, specify how they understand “strong sense.”

26. Or Alber, when he recognizes the possibility of a “Zen way of reading,” even if the expression itself is misfitted. I must add that, in my opinion, the choice between a naturalizing or unnaturalizing reading of the first three parts of *Anima*, on a second reading, has no impact on the application of Alber’s other strategies, in particular “foregrounding the thematic” (the animal theme and totemism, the more general theme of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals) and “reading allegorically” (the allegory or the myth of the golden age, where human and nonhuman animals were speaking the same language).

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