

4 Cultural History: Ideologies of Mind

The similarities and differences between these two practices—thinking about others’ internal states and/or talking about them—are often at the heart of culture.

—Bambi B. Schieffelin

4.1 The “Opacity of Mind” Model

“There is no doubt that humans in all known cultures learn to infer intention . . . from the behavior of other humans,” writes the psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhmann, “yet at the same time, ethnographers observe that the inferences they draw are probably shaped not only by developmental capacity but by cultural specificity.”¹ Cultural variation of mindreading practices, underwritten by local ideologies of mind, is not something that literary historians tend to think about when they consider circumstances in which genres arise, develop, and change into other genres. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate by the end of this chapter, this factor is crucial to the production and reception of literature, especially literature as awash in explicit and implied embedments of mental states as ours has come to be.

To start thinking of our daily mindreading practices as reflecting a particular model of interiority, we first have to recognize the existence of other models. Consider, for instance, what is known as the “opacity of mind” model, “found in varying forms throughout the South Pacific and Melanesia.” Its most striking feature is a consistent and vocal “refusal to infer what other people are thinking unless they verbalize their intentions.”² This refusal underwrites a variety of daily practices, ranging from a taboo against eye contact and a tendency to repeat verbatim others’ statements

about their mental states, without questioning or elaborating them, to the caretakers' avoidance of verbally guessing at the "unclear meanings" of very young children.³

Even just these three examples alert us to the possibility that some of our familiar cultural rituals (such as looking people in the eye, publicly second-guessing others' stated intentions, and interpreting toddlers' babbling for them) are locally specific ways to perform mindreading, indicative of a particular ideology of mind. Let us consider this possibility in some detail, by first taking a closer look at the "opacity" model and then thinking through its implications for our cultural and literary analysis.

4.2 Refusing to Talk about Others' Mental States

When anthropologists and ethnographers had initially confronted what they would come to call the opacity model, they wondered if it meant that, in some Melanesian and Micronesian societies, for instance, among the Bosavi (aka Kaluli), Korowai, Ku Waru, and Yap, "it is impossible or at least extremely difficult to know what other people think or feel."⁴ This prompted a conversation about methods used for studying mindreading in concrete cultural contexts. The distinction, formulated by Rita Astuti (see chapter 3) between the "conscious reflection about the mind" and the mindreading that happens "outside conscious reflection and probably conscious control" is directly relevant here. For, as she points out, "ethnographic methods are of course well suited to record the former, while experimental methods are best suited to tap into the latter."⁵ This means that ethnographers, used to ways in which some forms of "conscious reflection about the mind" are performed in their own communities, should be careful not to substitute their informants' assertions "of how the world should be" for a description of what they may actually "find in the world."⁶ Thus, if we focus on the mindreading that happens outside conscious reflection and control, we discover that, while Bosavi, Korowai, and others may avoid public references to other people's minds, they may actually be "more attentive to [their] intentions as a result."⁷

For instance, struck by such a recurrent feature of the opacity model as the taboo against direct eye contact, an ethnographer may assume that Bosavi do not pay attention to each other's facial expressions. She will thus miss the fact that Bosavi keep their foreheads clear of hair or head dresses,

letting others “read” their emotions off their foreheads.⁸ Similarly, as the ethnomusicologist Steven Feld explains, while Bosavi may not explicitly impute thoughts to others, “there is an impeccable and ubiquitous attendance to what others feel, and that is coded at every linguistic level, but particularly marked by lexical items, emphatics, prosody, and a range of gestural, stance, facial expressive, and other paralinguistic markers coordinated with everyday speech.”⁹

Keep in mind, too, a variety of forms that a particular feature associated with the opacity model may take in different communities. For instance, the same injunction against looking “directly into another’s eyes” (because that may lead to “inferring privately held intention”)¹⁰ manifests itself differently in Yap (Micronesia) than it does in Bosavi. Here is how the ethnographer C. Jason Throop describes it:

[One] of the first notes I took when arriving in Yap concerned what I held to be a striking lack of eye contact when individuals spoke to one another and a marked tendency for speakers to turn their bodies and heads away from their interlocutors. In fact, it was not uncommon to observe individuals carry on complete conversations with their backs to each other, gazing off in opposite directions. Likewise, during community meetings individuals often sat with their backs against the beams supporting the community house facing out away from the meeting, gazing at the horizon, the dance ground, or other parts of the village center. One conversation I noted early on during my second stay in Yap in the summer of 2001, well before I had acquired the communicative competence necessary to follow along with an ongoing, multi-party conversation, included six individuals speaking for over an hour, none of which were facing one another.¹¹

As in Bosavi, so in Yap there is a telling tension between publicly performed and private mindreading. On the one hand, Yap practice what Throop describes as a series of “communicative strategies used to conceal one’s thoughts from others.” On the other hand, the very fact of using these strategies implies that they intuitively expect that others will attempt to read their words and body language as indicative of underlying thoughts and feelings. Private preoccupation with what people know or don’t know about each other’s mental states drives the public attempt to prevent mindreading:

By talking in opposites, being elusive, facing meta-pragmatic restrictions on turn-taking and questioning, only providing the absolutely minimal amount of information necessary, being sarcastic, playing jokes, teasing, avoiding eye contact, or situating one’s body such that one’s voice is muted and one’s facial expressions are concealed from the view of others, individuals are thus able to insure that

their interlocutors are never able to garner a clear idea as to what they are really thinking or feeling. A significant benefit to engendering such communicative opacity, one elder noted to me, is that by putting one's interlocutors off guard and off balance, and by making them uncertain as to one's true feelings and motives, an individual is granted an advantage inasmuch as the speaker is the only one who truly knows what his or her plans are, which could perhaps be importantly used to his or her advantage at some later date.¹²

The gap between publicly following the rules of etiquette associated with the opacity model and the private preoccupation with others' mental states can assume a more obvious form, that is, that of the difference between a public and a private conversation. For instance, on the island of Vanatinai (Papua New Guinea), "Islanders publicly, rhetorically deny the possibility of empathy, of imaginative understanding of and identification with the thoughts/feelings of another being. In private, within a current, constantly fluctuating group of trusted confidants—spouses, lovers, siblings, matrilineal kin—they conjecture at length, in exacting detail, based upon a range of external cues, about what others are thinking and feeling . . . and how this may affect their interactions with others in the recent past, present, or future."¹³ This avid conjecturing about others' thinking—conducted with trusted confidants but not in public—reminds us that the opacity model is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon.¹⁴ A community as a whole may adhere to principles of opacity, but those principles don't have to govern every single aspect of social interaction.

4.3 Not Interpreting Infants' Babbling

Another important feature of the opacity model is the refusal, on the part of caregivers, to interpret infants' babbling as expressive of intentions. To put this point into sharper perspective, compare some parenting practices in North America and in Kaluli. North American parents may model their children's articulation of mental states by doing it *for them* early in development, as in, "Aren't you hungry!" or "It must feel very frustrating not to be able to reach that ball!" According to the linguistic anthropologists Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin, particularly, "In the white middle class developmental story, [assisting the child to clarify and express ideas] is associated with good mothering. The mother responds to her child's incompetence by making greater efforts than normal to clarify his or her intentions."¹⁵ In

contrast, when “talking to young children, Kaluli caregivers do not propose possible internal states of their addressees.” Thus, when “a child whines or acts inappropriately, caregivers ask, ‘Ge oba?!’ ‘what’s with you?!’ If a child doesn’t eat, they pose a rhetorical question, ‘Ge mo:nano?!’ ‘you don’t eat?!’ rather than, ‘are you hungry?’”

Along the same lines, in Kaluli, when young siblings “do put a referential gloss to the babbles of an infant, [older] caregivers repeat the sounds” but do not use a verb form “which would imply that something meaningful was produced in such vocalizations. Thus through this type of modeling and verb choice, small children are gently socialized to use culturally appropriate ways to verbally report what they hear without attributing meaning, including what constitutes reportable speech and what does not.”¹⁶

This does not mean that Kaluli children are not “encouraged to verbalize their own desires and intentions.” They are. It does mean, however, that “they are explicitly socialized,” first, not to “verbally guess at or express others’ unvoiced intentions and unclear meanings” and, second, not to feel compelled to explain their own motivations when they don’t want to.¹⁷ This prepares them for functioning in a society in which, while “almost everything else could be known about a person, people [resist] being coerced into giving moral accounts or making explicit what they were thinking about.”¹⁸

Furthermore (again, in contrast to some North American parents), Kaluli parents use

no baby-talk lexicon as such, and claim that children must hear . . . ‘hard [i.e., real] language’ if they are to learn to speak correctly. . . . Kaluli recognize babbling but say that this vocal activity is not communicative and has no relationship to the language that will eventually emerge. Adults . . . will occasionally repeat vocalizations back to toddlers (aged 12–16 months), reshaping them into the names of people in the household or into kin terms of people nearby, but they do not claim that the toddler is saying these names or wait for the child to repeat these vocalizations in an altered form.

The absence of baby-talk lexicon does not result in an impoverished verbal environment. As Schieffelin reports, “although there is relatively little speech directed to preverbal children, the verbal environment of these children is rich and varied, and from the beginning infants are surrounded by adults and older children who spend a great deal of time talking to each other . . . [and hearing] their actions . . . referred to, described, and

commented upon by members of the household, especially older children, speaking to one another.”¹⁹

Moreover, Kaluli “mothers and infants do not gaze into each other’s eyes, an interactional pattern that is consistent with adult patterns of not gazing when talking to others.” Instead,

Within a week or so after a child is born, Kaluli mothers act in ways that seem intended to involve infants . . . in dialogues and conversations with others. Rather than facing their babies and engaging in dialogues with them in ways many English-speaking mothers would, Kaluli mothers tend to face their babies outward so that they can be seen by and see others who are part of the social group. Older children greet and address infants, and in response to this mothers hold their infants face outward and, while moving them, speak in a special high-pitched, nasalized register (similar to that Kaluli use when speaking to dogs). These infants look as if they are talking to someone while their mothers speak for them.²⁰

By speaking “for” their infants, mothers socialize them into a community in which expressing their own feelings as well as reporting others’ feelings verbatim are acceptable practices while interpreting others’ feelings is not. As Schieffelin puts it,

[While] Kaluli obviously interpret and assess one another’s observable behaviors and internal states, these interpretations are not culturally acceptable as topics of talk. Individuals talk about their own feelings (“I’m afraid”; “I feel sorry”), but there is a cultural dispreference for talking about or making claims about what another might think, and what another might feel, or another is about to do, especially if there is no obvious behavioral evidence. Kaluli, however, use extensive direct reported speech, and children use this linguistic resource by 24 months of age. . . . [These] culturally constructed behaviors have several important consequences for the ways in which Kaluli verbally interact with children, and are related to other pervasive patterns of language and social interaction.²¹

4.4 Opacity on a Continuum

Compelling as the concept of opacity seems to be, it is important to remember that we have on our hands yet another case of far-from-perfect terminology. The term “opacity of mind” may seem to imply a sharp break between cultures that are wholly governed by that model and cultures that are not. In reality, both types of cultures function on “a not-very-rigid continuum” of opacity.²² This means, among other things, that features strongly associated with the opacity model in one culture may be present in another, and

yet that other culture may gravitate, as a whole, toward the transparency end of the spectrum.²³

Sometimes such features would be indicative of specific challenges faced by members of the community under particular circumstances. Consider, for instance, that since Bosavi live in close physical proximity to each other, the inside of a person's head is often the only private space available to them. The pragmatics of protecting that space from others are expressed through specific features of verbal etiquette and contribute to the maintenance of psychological well-being.²⁴ In Bosavi, these features of verbal etiquette are integrated with the ethos of opacity. Yet as the psycholinguist Catherine Caldwell-Harris and her colleagues observe, we find similar features geared toward "allowing people their psychological privacy" in other communities whose members live "in close quarters" but that are not necessarily viewed as conforming to the opacity model.²⁵

Or consider the long history of US racism engendering a behavior on the part of oppressed minorities that has features of the opacity model, *within* what we may broadly characterize as the overall North American model, which tends toward transparency. For instance, take the African American practices of "signifyin." As Aaron Ngozi Oforlea explains, signifyin can function as a mindreading strategy aimed at protecting the self by misleading, misdirecting, and outwitting "well meaning acquaintances and powerful adversaries." Thus, he writes, "Zora Neal Hurston describes her way of disguising her mental state to protect her 'business' or personal experiences from white researchers who often visit her to collect folklore. Aware of the interloper's intentions, Hurston strategically decides which information to share or withhold. [She] writes: ['The] white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song.'"²⁶

When occurring specifically in the context of interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed, signifyin may also reflect the status dynamic discussed in chapter 2, which is that people in stronger social positions don't read minds as actively and perceptively as do people in weaker social positions. This may make the former good targets for signifyin, because they are easily satisfied with the "toys" (i.e., token insights into the minds of the oppressed), set outside for them "to play with and handle." As a protective and defensive measure, opacity can thus be a marker of inequality,

social stress, and communal adversity. This is quite different from the role it plays in (for instance) highly egalitarian Bosavi, where it is supposed to contribute to social cohesion.

Here is another example of a particular feature of the opacity model present in a society that does not subscribe to that model. We have already seen that one aspect of Bosavi socialization is the refusal, on the part of caretakers, to expand on their young children's utterances (which would necessitate imputing mental states to them). We encounter the same refusal in Samoa (also already discussed in chapter 2), but there it is driven not by the opacity model but by rigid social stratification. In Samoa, people of higher social standing are not supposed to be guessing what people below them in the social hierarchy mean when they express themselves less than clearly. If the meaning is unclear, "the burden of clarification" is always on the low-status person. As very young children are the lowest-ranking members of their household, people around them do not attempt to read their minds (which would mean lowering themselves to their level).

Here is how Ochs and Schieffelin, working, respectively, with Samoan and Bosavi populations, describe this dynamic: "[Neither] the Kaluli [aka Bosavi nor] the Samoan caregivers . . . appear to rely on expansions, but the reasons expansions are dispreferred differ. The Samoans do not do so in part because of their dispreference for guessing and in part because of their expectation that the burden of intelligibility rests with the child (the lower status party) rather than with more mature members of the society. Kaluli do not use expansions to resay or guess what a child may be expressing because they say that 'one cannot know what someone else thinks,' regardless of age or social status."²⁷

"One cannot know what someone else thinks" is a key tenet of the opacity doctrine. "It is not one's business to figure out an underling's meaning" can be, as it were, a key tenet of a rigidly stratified society. That two very different ideologies of mind can lead to pretty much exactly the same observable behavior is something to be aware of as we (i.e., students of literature) begin to test the usefulness of the "opacity of mind" concept for our cultural and literary analysis.

4.5 Opacity and Ethics

We have focused, so far, on the psychology and epistemology of the opacity model, but another productive way of approaching it is to think of its

ethics. For, as the anthropologist Webb Keane explains, the taboo on attributing intentions to others often reflects the local notion of personal integrity and inviolability, according to which the loss of ability to keep one's feelings hidden is considered shameful:

It is not that inner thoughts are inherently unknowable but that they ought to be unspeakable, or at least, it matters greatly who gets to speak these thoughts. . . . [Thus it] is not the case that [the Melanesians] have no capacity to read minds or invent fictions: rather, these capacities serve ethical thought, leading to emphatic denial of something that they are in fact doing. . . . To reiterate, if Theory of Mind and intention-seeking are common to all humans, how these get played down or emphasized can contribute to quite divergent ethical worlds. Elaborated in some communities, suppressed in others, these cognitive capacities appear as both sources of difficulties in their own right and affordances for ethical work.²⁸

What happens if we apply these insights—prompted, originally, by the studies of cultures subscribing to the opacity model—to more familiar cultural settings? The reason that I find this idea appealing is that it offers a new perspective on a whole array of social practices that we take for granted. For we do not, usually, go around thinking about how this or that cultural institution (including literature!) “elaborates” or “suppresses” mindreading. Yet, once you adapt this perspective, you realize that mindreading does not take place in a vacuum. Instead, it is shaped by culture-specific ideologies of mind that have both epistemological and ethical dimensions. This is to say that it is shaped, first, by people's beliefs about whether their own and others' “inner thoughts” are knowable and, second, by their assumptions about “who gets to speak those thoughts.” To quote Schieffelin again, the “similarities and differences between these two practices—thinking about others' internal states and/or talking about them—are often at the heart of culture.”²⁹ What do we learn about our culture by inquiring into our own practices of talking and thinking about others' mental states?

4.6 Direct Eye Contact and Ideologies of Mind

She saw something in that image that she hadn't noticed in person. In the photo, his eyes shifted away from the camera. Eventually London had understood that look as one she could not trust.

—Johka Al Harthi, *Celestial Bodies*

Let us revisit the injunction against direct eye contact among Yap and Bosavi. First of all, the psychological intuition that underlies this injunction

is the same intuition that, in many Western cultures, makes eye contact a socially desirable behavior. For, just as we believe, to quote Cicero, that eyes are “the mirror of the soul,” so do, it seems, the Yap. To quote Throop again, “It is interesting to note the extent to which the face, and particularly the eyes (*laen mit*, *laen awochean*) are held, in local configurations of subjectivity and social action, to represent that part of the person that is most susceptible to directly evidencing inner feeling states and thoughts.”³⁰

In cultures subscribing to the opacity model, infants and young children have to be taught not to look people in the eyes. Bosavi “mothers do not engage in sustained gazing at, or elicit and maintain direct eye contact with, their infants as such behavior is dispreferred and associated with witchcraft.”³¹ As to Yap, Throop suggests that the etymology of the Yap word “child” (*tiiir*) is tied to the expression “is eyes,” and as such, it reflects the fact that it doesn’t come naturally to children not to betray their feelings by their gaze: “Children simply look at what they desire; they show no concern for hiding their intentions, emotions, needs, and cravings from others. They have thus yet to cultivate self-governance and have yet to learn to manage their emotions in such a way that there is less of a direct link between their inner feeling states and their expressivity.”³²

Now think about the tendency of Western caretakers to look into their infants’ eyes and to encourage reciprocal gazing. We may experience this as a default child-rearing behavior (indeed, associate it with good parenting!) and do not think of it as indicative of some special “transparency of mind” model. Yet, put in the comparativist perspective, this behavior does indicate a certain ideology of mind, one that gravitates, on the whole, toward the transparency side of the spectrum. Were we to explicitly formulate this ideology—which may come out sounding awkward and artificial precisely because we have internalized it—we might say that one *can* know what someone else thinks and that making one’s inner thoughts available to others and attempting to penetrate their inner thoughts are generally experienced as prosocial behaviors.

(Thinking of transparency as prosocial may seem to contradict our tendency to value “privacy”—unless one recognizes that the concept of privacy may cover a spectrum of practices. For instance, in contrast to Bosavi, for whom unavoidable physical proximity makes them eager to protect the privacy of their minds, Western cultures may put more emphasis on

physical—which may be relatively easy to achieve, as when one is alone in a room—than on mental privacy.)

To see how the unspoken ideology of *knowable* minds undergirds our daily social interactions, think of how we respond to politicians, doctors, salespeople, or even next-door neighbors when they seem to avoid eye contact. Instead of experiencing them as virtuously protecting their own and our personal integrity and inviolability—as we might, were we to operate under the auspices of the opacity of mind model—we perceive them as “shifty-eyed” and thus untrustworthy (or, perhaps more charitably, as painfully shy).

In fact, there seems to be a gap between the broad range of our reactions to direct eye contact—which are not always positive!—and the cultural ideology that codes such contact as mostly good. This is to say that even in societies associated with the transparency model, direct eye-gazing can provoke mixed emotional responses. While it can be experienced positively—as signaling motivation to approach or romantic interest—it can also be taken as indicating “hostility and impending peril.”³³ Still, this variety of actual reactions notwithstanding, the dominant expectation seems to be, and has been for some time, that people who look at us directly are “more caring, trustworthy, harmonic, inclusive and respectable” than are those who avert their gaze.³⁴

Accordingly, consider Western parents’ discomfort when their children refuse to make eye contact. A popular website that offers “11 Reasons a Child Cannot Look You in the Eyes” may acknowledge that the dispreference for eye contact may be the result of “cultural differences,”³⁵ yet the majority of the listed reasons still reflect the belief that all is not well when a child cannot meet your gaze. The child may be suffering from “social anxiety” or “low self-esteem” or may be “lying about something.”³⁶ (Ironically, in some cultures of opacity, it is direct eye contact that indicates an intention to deceive.)³⁷

Generally, it does not take very long for the ideology of knowable minds to turn ugly. What is felt as the right to read other minds “can run in tandem with a need for mastery over others that has been the cause of great suffering over the . . . long course of our history.”³⁸ As the cognitive narratologist Porter Abbott reminds us, what in the context of the European colonial project was presented as “the heroic quest to penetrate the unknown can be hard to separate from the desire to appropriate and tame—in effect to

spread knowability.” But this “illusion of knowability” is built “on preexisting terms,” that is, those legible to the colonizer. As Abbott puts it, “when one is sent into a land where one not only does not know the language of the people but [also] cannot read their faces, the effect goes deep.” The shattered “illusion of knowability” augments “the fusion of fear and fury that grip a soldier fighting in a strange land.”³⁹

On a different note, recall the notorious practice of diagnosing autistics as “mind-blind” (that is, “lacking” in theory of mind) because they fail to perform such a culturally sanctioned way of mindreading as focusing on their interlocutors’ eyes.⁴⁰ In a critique of this practice, the cognitive neuroscientist Gregory Hickok reminds us that “behavior does not *automatically* reveal its cause and can be misleading.”⁴¹ For instance, the autistic individual’s Fusiform Face Area could be hyperactive—as opposed to the conventional view, implied by the “mind-blindness” hypothesis, according to which it is hypoactive (i.e., inhibited): “Hyperresponse to social stimuli can be explained in terms of the emotional intensity of the signal, which triggers anxiety and avoidance responses. [This means that the person’s] active avoidance of eye contact provides just as much evidence for [the person’s increased] sensitivity for the information contained [in the eyes] as does active engagement of eye contact.”⁴²

Or, to quote Lucy Blackman, a nonspeaking autistic writer, “It may be that the social deficits which are the cornerstone of an autism spectrum diagnosis tell us far more about the person who made them markers for such a diagnosis than about the child whom she observes. . . . That is, the whole testing procedure is somehow actually constructed on whether the tester observed the person to socialize in a way that the tester understood to be socialization. . . . We often use the term ‘communication’ when really we mean that we have observed in another human being a behavior from which we derive meaning.”⁴³

Because a Western culture may assign a very particular meaning to direct eye contact, it takes a comparativist perspective to be reminded that it is a culturally constructed behavior, associated with what we may call an “ideology of transparency,” or the idea that other minds are knowable and that, under most circumstances, we have a right to know them. When we are denied the valuable social knowledge that, we believe, can be obtained that way—or, as it were, denied the right to that knowledge—we may feel a range of negative emotions toward the person who seems to deny it to us.

Keeping in mind this cultural construction of direct eye contact as a sign of prosocial behavior, imagine how different our art, movies, poetry, and novels would be if reading assiduously “the language of the eyes” were considered inappropriate, antisocial, and dangerous: associated, for instance, with the intent to harm by witchcraft (especially in societies in which suspected witches used to be killed, as in Bosavi and Korowai).⁴⁴

Thus, when the protagonist of Samuel Richardson’s novel *Clarissa* (1747) observes that she and her would-be seducer, Robert Lovelace, “are both great watchers of each other’s eyes,” we make sense of her comment within the context of a “transparency of mind” model largely governing Western representations.⁴⁵ We know that Clarissa and Lovelace don’t trust each other and hope to catch a glimpse of another’s true intentions during unguarded moments; and we are also aware of erotic overtones of their behavior. But such interpretations are a product of a particular ideology of mind. Were we to read the same body language in the context of the “opacity of mind” model, Lovelace’s and Clarissa’s deliberate eye watching might acquire different overtones, ranging from the socially uncouth to the physically dangerous.

Here, then, is one preliminary observation about fictional narratives. When works of literature foreground the language of the eyes in their representation of characters’ mental states, they build on a particular aspect of the mindreading adaptation that can be considered universal. For, both in cultures of opacity and in cultures of transparency, “the face, and particularly the eyes” are considered a direct conduit to the person’s “inner feeling states and thoughts.”⁴⁶ But it is reasonable to expect that, in cultures of opacity, fictional situations featuring direct eye contact would often be bundled up with contexts and expectations that are less indicative of prosocial behavior than they would be in cultures of transparency.⁴⁷

4.7 From the “Monastic Theory of Mind” to the Academic One

If communities indeed elaborate some mindreading practices and suppress others, we can view a variety of cultural institutions as implicated in this project. For instance, a recent study, Paul Dilley’s *Monasteries and the Care of Souls in the Late Antique Christianity: Cognition and Discipline* (2017), builds on Luhrmann’s view of culture-specific models of mindreading to suggest that “the training of thoughts practiced by early Christian monks led to the gradual acquisition of a new and particularly monastic theory of mind.”

Some of the key precepts of this monastic theory of mind were that the mind was both permeable and accessible. This is to say that monks had to learn that their cogitations arose “not only from the interior self, but also through divine guidance or demonic temptation” and that “God was aware of their private thoughts, which were also known to certain inspired saints.”⁴⁸

Learning these precepts demanded introspection, physical exercise, and communal activities. Also, interestingly, monks were encouraged to read hagiographies, which, Dilley argues, constituted a particularly instructive and pleasurable training in mindreading.⁴⁹ Hagiographies facilitated the acquisition of “the monastic theory of mind, by offering a privileged perspective on the saints’ internal deliberations, including the use of clairvoyance and other revelations in their disciplinary decisions.”⁵⁰

Where would the “monastic theory of mind” fall on the continuum of opacity? It seems that, on the whole, it gravitated toward the transparency end of the spectrum. Other people’s minds were considered inherently knowable, and a particular virtue was attached to being able to figure out the source of one’s own and other people’s thoughts (i.e., divine or demonic). Moreover, one’s “secret thoughts” were not really secret, for God was aware of them and so were the saints.⁵¹ This means that “thinking about others’ internal states and/or talking about them” (Bambi Schieffelin) was both a useful and an ethical thing to do.

If we remember that monasteries were “the centers of learning before the rise of the universities”⁵² and that Sorbonne, Oxford, and Cambridge continued to be theological schools “until the middle of the fourteenth century,”⁵³ it makes sense to think about the “academic theory of mind” as influenced by the monastic one. We can consider, for instance, the role of the dual belief that other people’s thoughts are knowable and that there is a particular virtue associated with tracing the provenance of those thoughts in the development of some academic disciplines; and we can also talk about the gradual suppression of explicit mindreading as a prerequisite for the emergence of others. I can’t hope to do full justice to this topic here (it would require a separate book), but let us take a quick preliminary look at some forms of mindreading associated with academic learning, in a culture that edges toward the transparency end of the opacity spectrum.

4.8 Patterns of Mindreading in Conversations about Literature

One academic subject that is unthinkable today without mindreading is literature. Talking about mental states of fictional characters is something that secondary-school students begin to do quite early. By the time they reach college, they are, at least in principle, primed for the kind of sophisticated mindreading that will be expected from them in literature courses.

To see how some of them rise to such expectations, consider works of fiction that intuitively experiment with theory of mind by suppressing all mentalizing references, explicit or implied. Take, for instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957), which is notorious for its depiction of actions drained of mental states. Here is a characteristic excerpt from the chapter describing the banana plantation where the action takes place:

Prolonging this patch toward the bottom, with the same arrangement of rows, another patch occupies the space included between the first patch and the little stream that flows through the valley bottom. This second patch is twenty-three trees deep, and only its more advanced vegetation distinguishes it from the preceding patch: the greater height of the trunks, the tangle of fronds, and the number of well-formed stems. Besides, some stems have already been cut. But the empty place where the bole has been cut is then as easily discernible as the tree itself would be with its tuft of wide, pale-green leaves, out of which comes the thick curving stem bearing the fruit.

Furthermore, instead of being rectangular like the one above it, this patch is trapezoidal; for the stream bank that constitutes its lower edge is not perpendicular to its two sides—running up the slope—which are parallel to each other. The row on the right side has no more than thirteen banana trees instead of twenty-three.

And finally, the lower edge of this patch is not straight, since the little stream is not: a slight bulge narrows the patch toward the middle of its width. The central row, which should have eighteen trees if it were to be a true trapezoid, has, in fact, only sixteen.

In the second row, starting from the far left, there would be twenty-two trees (because of the alternate arrangement) in the case of a rectangular patch. There would also be twenty-two for a patch that was precisely trapezoidal, the reduction being scarcely noticeable at such a short distance from its base. And, in fact, there are twenty-two trees there.

But the third row too has only twenty-two trees, instead of twenty-three which the alternately-arranged rectangle would have. No additional difference is introduced, at this level, by the bulge in the lower edge. The same is true for the fourth row, which includes twenty-one boles, that is, one less than an even row of the imaginary rectangle.⁵⁴

How does one respond to a work of literature that makes it this difficult to read intentionality into it? It turns out that some readers may actually redouble their efforts to discern complex mental states in such texts. Thus, according to David Richter, who teaches literature at CUNY, when he assigns *Jealousy* to his undergraduates, “they read the repeated narrative about the centipede that horrifies A and is killed by Franck as coming from a jealously obsessive narrator noticing and recalling over and over Franck’s responsiveness to A. They even read the chapter in which we are told about how many banana trees are in each row in each segment of the plantation as coming from a mind that was forcing itself to pay attention to objective facts about his banana plantation in an attempt to stop himself from obsessively thinking about his wife A and her possible relation to Franck.”⁵⁵

Think about what these students are doing. Broadly speaking, they are “naturalizing” a difficult text, making it easier to comprehend.⁵⁶ Yet the particular way in which they are achieving it—that is, by constructing complex embeddings of mental states—is a product of a specific culture. This culture has institutional settings that reward people for speaking and writing about intentionality. This means that they learn to approach texts marked as fiction with the expectation of mindreading, and of a particularly elaborate kind at that, if they happen to encounter those texts in a literature course.

As a corollary to Richter’s experience, consider the history of critical readings of Herman Melville’s short story “Bartleby the Scrivener” (1853), whose protagonist behaves in such a way that neither other characters in the story nor its readers can attribute any mental states to him. But, as Porter Abbott puts it, the “experience of unreadable fictional minds, meant as such, is very hard to maintain.”⁵⁷ So one strategy for responding to an “unreadable character” is to interpret him as a “generic stereotype,” as in, Bartleby is insane, and that explains his incomprehensible behavior. Another strategy is to shift “the mode of reading” altogether and cease regarding Bartleby as a human being (or a representation of a human being), whose mental states can be inferred. Instead, he becomes a “catalyst” for understanding *other* characters or an idea, a symbol, as in, “Bartleby is the ghost of social conscience haunting the precincts of the ruling class.”⁵⁸

Note that a symbolic reading also involves mindreading. For, when we say that “Bartleby is the ghost of social conscience haunting the precincts of the ruling class,” we *still* attribute a mental state—such as a vague feeling of guilt—only now not to a specific person but to a more abstract entity such as the “ruling class.”

As Abbott observes, the shift to the symbolic “allows meaning to rush in” (read: opens up a whole new cluster of mental states), and this is “what has happened almost invariably in the critical response to *Bartleby*.” Taken as a human being, “and not as a symbol, *Bartleby* remains unreadable.” But this state of affairs is “unendurable” for Melville’s audiences, so, “one way or another, [they] will generally find some strategy to make it go away.”⁵⁹

Yet another course of action for making the unendurable go away is to use the difficult-to-read characters as catalysts for generating readers’ *own* complex mental states. Consider the experiment run by the cognitive literary critic Emily Troscianko, who studied readers’ response to a short story by Franz Kafka, “Jackals and Arabs” (1917). “Kafka’s fictions,” Troscianko explains, “never really give us privileged access to the workings of his protagonists’ minds.” Instead they confront us with characters “whose capacities for introspection . . . or capacities for insight into other’s minds . . . are limited.” Troscianko found that her subjects were “fascinated” by this “scarcity of insight” and that they compensated for it by constructing embedments that involved their own embedded insights. As one of them put it (emphasis added): “I *find it intriguing, fascinating*, to be guided through the story without ever fully *understanding* what the narrator *feels*.”⁶⁰

Thus, while Richter’s students made sense of *Jealousy* by force-reading into it thoughts of its characters, and Abbott’s readers reached out to the minds radically outside the story (e.g., the mind of the “ruling class”), Troscianko’s subjects responded to Kafka by imagining their own mental states. Elsewhere, I have discussed a similar dynamic structuring our response to paintings that actively prevent us from attributing mental states to anybody/anything within them.⁶¹ Finding ourselves in situations such as college courses or critical conversations, in which we are expected to talk about such paintings, we begin to attribute mental states to their creators (by trying to figure out what the artist meant), or to ourselves (by explaining how these paintings make us feel), or to some external entities (by treating the work in question as a cultural symbol).

This is to say that while we may be “designed by nature,” as Abbott puts it, to read mental states into behavior, we still need to be “trained by culture” in the locally appropriate ways to perform such readings.⁶² Thus, we respond to cultural incentives to engage in mindreading—but also remain sensitive to the disincentives—as we learn that intense mindreading is a prerequisite of success in some academic disciplines but not in others.

It is not surprising that the technique of close reading—or, as I argued earlier, close mindreading—is closely related to the history of religious exegesis and, most immediately, to the history of biblical textual criticism. Still, we can't quite say that talking about the minds of fictional characters, their authors, other critics, and our own in college literature courses is the exclusive legacy of the monastic theory of mind. Traditions of monastic mindreading may have shaped formal practices of Western literary interpretation, but the tendency to talk about mental states when discussing literature is not limited to communities influenced by Christian monasticism.

To take a quick look at the forms that such conversations may take in the absence of monastic influences, we turn to literary traditions of the Bosavi and Ku Waru. We will use as our starting point Webb Keane's observation that, while cultures of opacity may suppress explicit intention-seeking in their discourse, "it is not the case that [their members] have no capacity to read minds or invent fictions," and we will see what kind of mindreading is encouraged by their "fictions."

We start with the Bosavi. On the one hand, "prior to missionization," which began in the 1970s, there "were no equivalencies in . . . metalinguistic and metapragmatic repertoire for reporting the private thoughts or internal states of others,"⁶³ unless one repeated verbatim what the other person had said about their feelings and used a source tag—an "evidential marker"—to clearly indicate the original speaker.⁶⁴ On the other hand, there *was* one important exception: a linguistic context that allowed reporting others' hidden thoughts. That exception was the "traditional story genres that recounted Bosavi origins, or the bawdy adventures or social dilemmas of fictitious cultural heroes, schlemiels, and animals."⁶⁵ Such narratives appeared to "mobilize different linguistic resources as part of the register of the genre." For instance, a "morpheme–mosoba ['I wonder'], relatively rare in spontaneous speech, was found more in stories" (as in, "o:no gasa a:no: eno: ko:lo: go:mosoba?"; "that dog I wonder if it was his?"). In addition, storytellers disclaimed "responsibility for the information" about the characters' mental states, by reminding listeners that this was all "in the story."⁶⁶

Or consider the Ku Waru, who live to the east of Bosavi:

[While] in-principle assertions of the opacity doctrine are common [among the Ku Waru], they are contradicted by other things that people do, including the stories that they tell. For example, in a genre of sung tales of courtship that are

composed and performed in the region, at the point in the story when the lovers first meet, there is often a passage such as this: “Right then he wanted to marry her. / That’s what the man was thinking. / And she thought the same about him. / The minds of both, you see / Were working completely as one.” In other words, given the lovers’ strong mutual attraction, it is possible for each of them to know what is in the other’s mind because it is the same as what is in his or her own.⁶⁷

Another important example of mindreading involved in literary production—especially if we understand “literature” broadly and include performative genres as well⁶⁸—has to do with performers attributing mental states to their audiences and adjusting their behavior as they go along to reflect their perception of those mental states. Consider *Gisalo*, a song and dance ceremony practiced by the Kaluli, that is, the people of Bosavi. (Note that, although I talk about it in the present tense, my discussion of it refers to the period of the 1960s–1980s, for it is not clear if *Gisalos* still take place today.) *Gisalos* are designed to evoke strong feelings of nostalgia, sorrow, and loneliness in their audiences by integrating into their sung narratives references to specific locations that have profound personal meaning for the listeners. A *Gisalo* is considered successful if listeners weep and try to hurt (i.e., burn) performers in a ritualistic way, to make them pay, as it were, for having thus gotten under their skin.⁶⁹ As Edward Schieffelin explains, “The listeners’ feelings and reactions are not merely a response to the performance; they are integral to its structure and significance. The dancing and singing by the performers and the weeping and burning by the audience stimulate and aggravate one another. If the [listeners] fail to respond to the songs, even enthusiastic performers soon lose interest, and the ceremony falls apart before the night is over.”⁷⁰

Once the ceremony is over, the mindreading continues, albeit now in a more explicit form. Here, recall again that the Kaluli subscribe to the opacity model; that is, they consider it inappropriate to talk about other people’s mental states. Yet they do talk about those mental states—with a vengeance!—when discussing recent *Gisalo* songs. Those remain the subject of conversation for many days after a performance, as appreciative members of the audience keep uncovering “subtlety and complexity in the [singers’] interweaving of geography and personal allusion.”⁷¹ In situations when a tape recording of a *Gisalo* made by an ethnographer is available, hearing this tape may prompt a “discussion session,” which would last “for hours” and in which “several older Kaluli men” would listen “repeatedly to

the same song, . . . recalling the history of its performance, who had wept and why, and how the song [reached its emotional climax].”⁷²

It seems, in other words, that to talk about cultural representations that build on our mindreading adaptations—prose fiction, certainly, but also performance genres whose success is judged by their capacity to evoke emotional responses in their audience—we *have to* talk about mental states, be they those of fictional characters or those of performers and audience members. Societies closer to the transparency end of the mindreading spectrum, such as ours, may have codified formal venues for doing so (including college courses in film and literature), but societies closer to the opacity end may engage in such conversations even in the absence of historically entrenched institutional structures designed to elicit and facilitate them.

Ironically, public exercises in communal mindreading that occur in a literature classroom may be accompanied by disavowals of interest in intentionality that would not be out of place in a community subscribing to the opacity model. It is not inconceivable that, were an ethnographer to approach a literature professor and ask her how knowable she considers various minds under consideration in her course, the professor would deny any special access to those minds. She might say, for instance, that we have no way of knowing what the author was thinking, that characters don’t exist, so they can’t really have thoughts and feelings, and so on.

We may think of this response as underwritten by healthy epistemological skepticism, by the ethics of personal integrity and inviolability, or, more broadly, by what the linguistic anthropologist Alessandro Duranti characterizes as a “defense strategy against the accountability that comes with making claims about what others think or want.”⁷³ But however we choose to account for it, the larger point remains. Even if some of us (i.e., teachers of literature) sincerely believe that we are *not* in the business of mindreading, our classroom conversations revolve around mindreading, focusing on our own and other people’s (including fictional characters’) mental states.

And so do our scholarly conversations. Consider this brief sampler of quotes from prominent literary critics (with attributions of mental states italicized). What it shows is that the thoughts and feelings of characters, authors, and audiences have been their prime subject since Aristotle and that to talk about those thoughts and feelings, critics have always had to construct complex embeddings of their own. The “monastic theory of mind” must have both tapped this tendency (what with the monks

following avidly mental states of saints, in hagiographies) and given it a more defined institutional expression.

- Aristotle mentions disapprovingly those who “make an unreasonable prior *assumption* and, having themselves made their decree, . . . draw their conclusions, and then criticize the poet as if he had said whatever they *think* he has said if it is opposed to their *thoughts*” (*Poetics*).⁷⁴
- Wayne Booth observes in his analysis of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* that upon meeting Captain Wentworth “after their years of separation that follow her refusal to marry him,” Anne Elliot “is *convinced* that he is *indifferent*,” while the reader “is likely to *believe* that Wentworth is still *interested*” (“Control of Distance in Jane Austen’s *Emma*”).⁷⁵
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses Victor Frankenstein’s “ambiguous and miscued *understanding* of the *real motive* for the monster’s vengefulness” (“The Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”).⁷⁶
- Susan Sontag wonders if “perhaps Tennessee Williams *thinks* [A *Streetcar Named Desire*] is about what [Elia] Kazan *thinks* it to be about” (“Against Interpretation”).⁷⁷

You may notice that these critics range widely in their choice of people whose minds they read: Aristotle talks about embedded mental states of readers; Booth, about those of characters and implied readers; Spivak, about those of characters; Sontag, about those of the author. It so happens that the last three scholars discuss works of literature that seem to offer plenty of room for moving between different types of minds. But in some cases, the decision to read a text in terms of mental states of its implied readers signals more than just an immediate interpretive choice of a particular scholar. It may indicate a change in the wider cultural perception of the text, such as a redefinition of its genre or a renegotiation of its place in the literary canon. To put it differently, a cultural repositioning of the text is usually accomplished through switching mindreading targets associated with that text.

For instance, the late sixteenth-century anonymous Chinese novel *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Chin P’ing Mei*) has long occupied an ambiguous place in Chinese literary history. Lay readers consider it pornography, while scholars treat it as a literary masterpiece. It is reasonable to assume that readers who turn to this novel for its explicit sex scenes register mainly mental states of its characters, thus missing the complex mutual awareness between the implied reader and the implied author. In contrast, students

of classic Chinese literature pay a great deal of attention to mental states of those nebulous entities, speculating about their intentions vis-à-vis each other.⁷⁸

Thus, Andrew Plaks cites the critical responses to *The Plum*, provided by medieval Chinese commentators, which contain such observations as, “the author definitely has his own intentions” and “there is an object to [the text’s] ironic stabs.” Plaks himself discusses at length “the possibility of hidden intentions” implied by the author’s use of “borrowed material,” such as songs and poems, as well as the role that “frequent interpolations of authorial asides” play “to periodically remind the reader of the presence of the narrator somewhere between himself and the story.”⁷⁹ What this focus on the mental states of *The Plum*’s narrator and implied reader indicates is that the novel deserves to be taken seriously as part of the Chinese literary canon.

To return to European literary history, consider Eliza Haywood’s novella *Fantomina* (1725), an amatory romp following sexual stratagems of a young aristocratic woman in early eighteenth-century London. *Fantomina* had remained outside the canon until the 1980s, when feminist literary critics adjusted drastically the mindreading lens associated with it. Instead of continuing to read it focusing on the mental states of the inventive Fantomina and her clueless lover, Beauplaisir, they began using those as jumping-off points for a conversation about the cultural work accomplished by this piece of genre fiction—this is to say, about the mental states of the novella’s implied author and its original readers. For instance, the feminist literary critic Ros Ballaster writes about the novella’s capacity to change the self-perception of women in a world in which they did not have much power. As she puts it, “by dehistoricizing and mythologizing the public sphere, the romantic fiction writer provided the female reader with a sense of feminine power and agency in a world usually closed to her participation.”⁸⁰

Observe what happens here. Making *Fantomina* a subject of scholarly conversation and, consequently, putting it on our course syllabi depend on opening up a new vein of mindreading associated with it. We talk about the (hypothetical) mental states of the author, her readers, and the broader English public (which we imagine here as *not willing* to grant women much power or agency). In other words, as with *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, the admission of a text into the canon involves recalibration of the mindreading effort associated with it.

Moreover, in an environment as fundamentally dependent on elaborate attributions of mental states as are departments of literature, such recalibrations may be par for the course. Casting out for new minds to read, or else for new ways to read the minds already associated with a particular text, constitutes the bread and butter of literary interpretation.

4.9 Critical Thinking and the “Transparency Model”

To give the screw yet another turn, recall that advocates of the humanities often say that taking courses in literary and film studies develops students’ critical thinking and thus contributes to the well-being of the community at large.⁸¹ Yet what is “critical thinking,” in the particular context of these disciplines,⁸² but the heightened capacity for convincingly questioning and elaborating people’s intentions? If in Bosavi, the statement of one’s intentions is taken as precluding further public speculation about them (what goes on in private and how much others actually believe those stated intentions are, of course, different matters),⁸³ in Western culture, such a statement often serves as an invitation for open scrutiny. Clever public contestations of other people’s mental states are applauded. An ability to construct a convincing argument about what a politician or a writer *must have really meant*—in direct opposition to what they claimed to have meant or even may have sincerely believed to have meant—is a prized skill. As Elinor Ochs observes,

In legal and other contexts, if it is established that a negatively valued behavior was consciously intended, then sanctions are usually more severe than if the speaker/actor “didn’t mean to do it.” . . . [While] establishing intentionality is not always critical to sanctioning . . . , [the] important point is that . . . what a person means or meant to do or say is an important cultural variable. For this social group, what a person means to do is distinguished from what he does. This orientation leads members to take seriously, and to pursue the establishing of, individuals’ motivations and psychological states.⁸⁴

But even when taken “seriously,” the pursuit of someone else’s “motivations and psychological states” is a deeply fraught process, both in legal contexts and beyond them. The rise of today’s therapeutic culture, for instance, seems to reaffirm the value of opacity, for the notion of “sharing” one’s emotions emphasizes the deliberateness of the personal choice of how and when to render oneself transparent to others. And, in general,

if you think of the ethos of transparency as an unalloyed social good, just recall situations in which someone else (a family member, a colleague, a reviewer of your book) made assertions about your motivations—this is to say, *interpreted* your mental states for you—instead of merely reporting something that you said. As far as I see, such assertions do not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion, either in personal communication or on the global stage. Still, plenty of our cultural institutions—indeed, those that we may think of as fundamental to a liberal democracy (e.g., the prized right to “free speech”)—are geared toward rendering people’s motivations transparent, or temporarily legible, by various eloquent others.

This is to say that the “transparency” model works better in some contexts than in others, just as, presumably, does the “opacity” model. To adapt Webb Keane’s formulation, both models are “sources of difficulties and . . . affordances” for their respective communities, meeting their needs in some respects and failing in others. That both prove to be, fundamentally, mixed blessings is, perhaps, unavoidable, given the precarious nature of the phenomenon that they attempt to regulate and describe (i.e., people’s mental states).

4.10 Mindreading in the Social, Natural, and Physical Sciences

Academic disciplines, in their current cultural configurations, differ widely in their attitudes toward using mental states—or referring to intentions—in their discourses. This means that when a student decides to major in history, mathematics, chemistry, evolutionary biology, or literary and film studies, they effectively commit themselves to a mostly unspoken paradigm of mindreading specific to a particular academic environment. We have already seen how this paradigm plays itself out in literary studies. Let us now take a closer look at several other academic environments.

Departments of history depend on mindreading in their construction of narratives of cause and effect (although not everybody is happy about this state of affairs).⁸⁵ Indeed, historians routinely attribute feelings and intentions not just to people but also to geopolitical entities. Here is a random excerpt from Michael Howard’s *The First World War* (2002), with emphasis added, in which countries feel “proud” and “anguished,” coalitions “wish” they could “ignore” certain political realities, and the world is busy keeping a running total of its great empires:

A liberal-radical coalition [that] came to power [in Britain] in 1906 . . . *could not ignore* the paradoxical predicament in which Britain found herself at the beginning of the century. She was still the wealthiest power in the world and the *proud* owner of the greatest empire that the *world had ever seen*; but she was more vulnerable than ever before in her history. . . . Ideally [successive British governments] *would have wished* to remain aloof from European disputes, but any indication that their neighbors were showing signs, singly or collectively, of threatening their naval dominance had for the previous twenty years been a matter of *anguished* national concern.⁸⁶

In contrast, the physical sciences have worked long and hard to remove references to intentionality, divine or human, from their discourses and have largely succeeded. Still, if you pick up a standard science textbook, you notice that its authors sometimes liven up their material with appeals to their readers' theory of mind. Consider this passage (emphasis added) from Nivaldo J. Tro's *Chemistry: Structure and Properties* (2017): "Table E1 shows the standard SI base units. For now *we focus* on the first four of these units: the meter, the standard unit of length; the kilogram, the standard unit of mass; the second, the standard unit of time; and the kelvin, the standard unit of temperature."⁸⁷ The phrase "we focus" conjures up a momentary image of joint attention, a speck of sociality in a sea of data. Because of this brief evocation of mental state, the data may now be easier to process, especially for readers who find this material only moderately exciting.⁸⁸

Medical schools present an interesting case. On the one hand, they seem to actively suppress mindreading, at least in their written discourse, by discouraging students from referring to their own and their patients' mental states. According to the physician and literary scholar Rita Charon, as "students are groomed to speak in medicine's language," the style of their "written language flattens out." She offers the following example of an exercise produced by a third-year student (in which "HPI" stands for "history of present illness"): "HPI: 51 yo man with HIV (diagnosed in 20xx, recently began HAART in February, March 20xx CD4 204 / 27%, VL UD, CD4 nadir 191 in 11/20xx, no OIs, RF: multiple transfusions), hemophilia A, HTN c/b ESRD on HD w/ TLC c/b multiple MSSA infections, HCV (genotype 1b, untreated), with recent prolonged hospitalization 02/4/xx–04/7/xx for MRSE MV endocarditis c/b MCA CVA 2/2 septic emboli who presents with high blood pressure and headache."⁸⁹

On the other hand, there is a growing recognition that draining medicine of language that serves as "a means to access a person's inner sensations

and thoughts” denies the humanity of both patients and doctors and is having devastating effects on the profession.⁹⁰ Thus, the new field of narrative medicine,⁹¹ spearheaded by Charon, challenges this status quo by reintroducing a conversation about mental states into interactions between the doctor and the patient.⁹²

References to mental states may also find their way into other disciplines whose very foundation depended on excising any notion of intentionality from their discourse. For instance, an evolutionary biologist may write an article on the genetic basis of color adaptation—a subject in which intentionality has no place—and yet find a way of encouraging mindreading in her audience. “Thus Hopi Hoekstra (emphasis added): ‘Many aspects of modern evolutionary research are *motivated* by the *desire* to *understand* how diversity arises and is maintained in nature. How and why do organisms look and act so differently, and in some cases, so strangely? In fact, these are the same questions that *inspired* Darwin, but thanks to Watson and Crick, *we now can look* for the answers in the language of DNA.’”⁹³

Hoekstra’s writing has long been admired by her students and colleagues, and we can see one reason why. She evokes mental states: those of the implied researcher, her readers, and other scientists. The effect is such that, while not detracting from the rigor of her insights, it makes those insights easier to follow. A bit of sociality, created by references to mental states, makes the account of the genes involved in color adaptation reader-friendly.

What I wanted to show with this set of examples is that, even in a culture that gravitates, on the whole, toward the transparency end of the spectrum, attitudes toward explicit mindreading remain in flux. Even in a narrowly circumscribed institutional setting, such as the university, forms, targets, and ethical meanings of various mindreading practices are subject to constant renegotiation.

This is not terribly surprising, given the fundamental ontological instability of the phenomenon in question: after all, mental states are not “really” there—they are something that we cobble together as we move along, to make sense of our social environment. While communities that subscribe to the opacity model respond to this instability by claiming that minds are *not* knowable (even as their private practices may belie the official doctrine), communities that subscribe to the transparency model insist that minds *must be* knowable and scramble to construct those “knowable”

minds, with very mixed results, or else declare certain areas of (academic) inquiry mindreading-free. The historical approach to cognition that I advocate in this book thus proposes to take into consideration this spectrum of attitudes toward other people's minds and to view specific cultural developments (e.g., the rise and fall of certain literary genres and practices of interpretation) in relation to these inescapably flawed models of social reality.

Here is, then, how my approach differs from that of more traditionally minded literary historians. They may inquire into ways in which, for instance, the growth or decline of adult literacy rates or the repeal or introduction of censorship laws may affect a cultural career of a particular literary genre. What I would also want to know in such cases is whose minds are rendered as more or less knowable as a result of those changes or, to put it differently, which mindreading practices are newly perceived as more or less publicly acceptable, desirable, and ethical. Community-specific ideologies of mindreading may be all but invisible to members of the community, but they shape both daily social practices and literary reimaginings of these practices.

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