Reading minds: Mentalization, irony and literary engagement
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The concept of 'mentalization' has recently provided a fertile resource for thinking about various issues in psychoanalysis, including attachment, children's play, personality disorders and the work of interpretation within the analytic setting. Mentalization also provides fruitful ways of thinking about how we read. This paper will suggest that book reading is akin to mind reading: engaging with certain literary texts is akin to understanding the minds of others from the subjective perspective required by mentalization. This way of thinking about literature provides a useful way of understanding its value. The paper will focus specifically on the uses of irony and free indirect speech in Jane Austen's novel Persuasion. Austen's use of literary techniques provides a way of understanding the inner lives of her characters via the ironic voice of the implied author, and requires the reader to engage in the kinds of understanding and insight required for mentalization.

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A few words on mentalization
In recent years, the concept of 'mentalization' has come to the fore in psychoanalytic explorations, and has proved a fertile resource for thinking about, among others, issues of attachment, children's play, pretence, borderline personality disorder, and the work of interpretation within the analytic setting. Mentalization, as I shall propose in this paper, also provides fruitful ways of thinking about how we read. 'Mind reading' sheds light on book reading. If we compare fictional engagement in adults with play in children, insight gained from the latter may shed light on the former - if reading is akin to playing in important respects, the psychical benefits of playing may assist in explaining why we, as adults, find reading so pleasurable. But, more than this, there is something very specific about the way we engage with literary texts that distinguishes it from other kinds of play activities. In reading, we engage with the text - or, more specifically, with the implied author or narrator - in much the same way as we engage with the mind of another. Reading requires - and perhaps facilitates - mentalization. This claim is limited to certain kinds of literature - not all kinds of reading will require that we mentalize when reading, and part of the discussion that follows will attempt to tease out the value that 'mentalizing literature' (the literature that does require mentalization) brings to us. Thus, understanding our engagement with books as akin to mind reading may shed light on the value of reading. It may also - although this is an empirical point, and lies beyond the bounds of this paper - suggest ways in which reading may be important for the facilitation of mentalization, and hence why reading certain novels should be encouraged in childhood.

The rest of this paper will develop these ideas more fully. I shall examine the concept of mentalization, highlighting those aspects relevant to my project. Although I shall assume that the concept is broadly familiar to most readers, some of the central issues regarding mentalization will be discussed, in order to highlight and clarify those aspects of the theory relevant to the reading of literature. I shall then illustrate the ways in which the concept of mentalization can aid us in understanding how literary works
are able to engage us cognitively and emotionally. In particular, I shall examine the uses of irony and free indirect speech in some of Jane Austen's novels, as a way of illustrating how much of Austen's writings require a highly developed capacity in the reader to mentalize. The writing of Jane Austen will serve as an example of the kinds of psychological skills required for engaging with complex fictions. Finally, the paper will gesture in the direction of the value of literary engagement that requires mentalization.

The concept of 'mentalization' is in some respects an old one. As Target notes: "Mentalization as a mental capacity and process has long been recognized in philosophy and psychoanalysis" (Target, 2008, p. 262), as it refers to our ability to think about the minds of others in terms of their beliefs, desires and other cognitive and affective states. Mentalization can thus be used broadly to refer to the recognition that "having a mind mediates our experience of the world" (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 3), and that the experiences of others are similarly mediated by their mental states. Fonagy et al. further state that mentalization "is intrinsically linked to the development of the self, to its gradually elaborated inner organization, and to its participation in human society, a network of human relationships with other beings who share this unique capacity" (2002, p. 3). This account of mentalization points to a general capacity - the capacity to situate oneself as a mental subject within a world of other mental subjects. The concept has recently received more focused attention within the psychoanalytic literature, and current research stresses the role of mentalization within discussions on attachment theory, developmental psychopathology and affect regulation.4 Fonagy and Target have stressed the importance of what they term 'reflective function', a concept that highlights the characteristics of mentalization that are particularly applicable to literary interpretation. Reflective function "is defined as the capacity to envision and think about mental states, in oneself and in others, in the service of building realistic models of why they behave, think, and feel as they do" (Bouchard et al., 2008, p. 48). Research has looked at the ways in which secure or insecure attachment impact on reflective function (Bouchard et al., 2008; Steele and Steele, 2008), the impairment of reflective function in patients with borderline personality disorder (Bateman and Fonagy, 2006; Clarkin et al., 2006; Fonagy et al., 2002), and the importance of reflective function for self-knowledge and insight in therapy (Sugarman, 2006).

For my purposes, the concept of reflective function captures one of the essential skills that reading much literature requires (and perhaps facilitates), and the focus of this paper will be in the development of this claim; thus, in this paper, I use the term 'mentalization' with particular emphasis on the capacity for reflective functioning, as this lies at the core of the set of issues that concerns me.

Fonagy and Target, in defining mentalization, discuss the concept as follows:

Mentalization or reflective function is the developmental acquisition that permits children to respond not only to another person's behaviour but to their conception of others' attitudes, intentions, or plans. Mentalization enables children to 'read' other people's minds. By attributing mental states to others, children make people's behaviour meaningful and predictable [...] Exploring the meaning of others' actions, in turn, is crucially linked with children's ability to label and find meaningful their own psychic experiences, an ability which underlies affect regulation, impulse control, self-monitoring, and the experience of self-agency. (Fonagy and Target, 2000, p. 69)

Put simply, mentalization is the ability to recognize that other people have mental states; such recognition crucially involves the understanding that mental states are representational - they provide
their bearer with subjectivity and a unique perspective on the world - a perspective which others may or may not share. Researchers on mentalization stress that the capacity to mentalize is a developmental achievement; it may also be temporarily suspended in times of stress or distress even in an individual who has otherwise a well-developed capacity for considering the mental states of others. But for most of us, the capacity to mentalize is taken for granted: philosophical scepticism aside, there seems nothing more obvious than that I, as subject, engage with others as subjects with inner mental states. The literature shows us that mentalization is a developmental achievement, which is typically lacking in children younger than three years of age (Perner et al., 1987). Mentalization may also be impaired in many adults: in their development of a treatment model for borderline patients, Bateman and Fonagy note that: "In borderline personality disorder inhibition of mentalization occurs specifically in the context of intimate attachment relationships" (Bateman and Fonagy, 2006, p. 19). This emphasizes the important link between mentalization and empathy. The ability to engage with the mind of another differs from the manipulation of mere objects, because recognizing another as an other means recognizing the essential subjectivity of the other. In manipulating objects, all that is required is a recognition that the object is different from me - that there is a gap between it and me. But mentalization implies a closing of this gap: in recognizing the other as not-me, I simultaneously acknowledge that it is like me in crucial respects - most crucial of all, in our shared capacity for subjectivity, for mindedness. Thus mentalization requires not only the ability to think of or look at another's mental states, it also requires that I can think about her mental states. This thinking about may often - and usually does - require that I look through the mental states of another at the world as she sees it. Mentalization requires essentially a first-person perspective - the ability to 'put oneself in another's shoes' - when thinking about the mind of someone else. This thus illustrates the importance of mentalization for the development of empathy and other developmental capacities, which mentalization may either facilitate or require.

Mentalization requires an ability to distinguish between reality and representations of reality; the term 'psychic equivalence mode' refers to a level of mental functioning where no sharp divide is made between psychic reality and external/objective reality. At the psychic equivalence mode, fantasy and reality are not clearly distinguished, and the capacity for abstract thought is impaired, as is the ability to contemplate that others have beliefs about the world that may differ from one's own. Psychic equivalence mode is most clearly operative in very young children, and in psychotic episodes in adults; however, just as the ability to mentalize is not an 'all or nothing' phenomenon, a person's mental functioning may at some times but not others be dominated by psychic equivalence mode. On the other hand, it is the capacity for reflective function that enables one to form second order beliefs about one's mental representations, where one recognizes that the first-person perspective is inherent to the structure of belief. The move from the psychic equivalence mode to a level of mental functioning that does allow for mentalization, that recognizes the distinction between external reality and psychic reality, requires an intermediary step. This step is that of the 'pretend mode'. Fonagy et al. claim that: "In the world of play it becomes possible partially to free representations from their referents and allow these freed representations to be modified, creating a more flexible mode of thought that encourages the emergence of latent mental structures" (2002, p. 261). In play children are able to understand that what happens in a game of make-believe may differ from what happens in real life. Indeed, in order to engage properly in play, it is necessary that children do not confuse reality with make-believe and so the ability to play already requires an emergence from the psychic equivalence mode. Where this emergence has not fully occurred, as is the case with very young children, or with children (and even
adults) who are mentally disturbed, the ability to play will also be compromised. Fonagy et al. also point out that a make-believe game that conjures up powerful emotions may be experienced as threatening. Play contributes to the ability to mentalize with others when it is demarcated from reality; this enables the child both to develop beyond the equivalence mode of mental functioning, and also to provide an emotional space cushioned from the demands of reality so that the child can safely explore difficult emotions and developmental hurdles, providing what Winnicott (1988, p.15) observed as a relief from “the strain of relating inner and outer reality.”

Thus we see that mentalization lies at the core of our understanding of others' subjectivity; it requires a development from the 'psychic equivalence mode', where the child believes that mental states reflect exactly the nature of external reality, to a view of the self which understands that mental states such as beliefs reflect a perspective on reality without being identical to it. Mentalization thus allows for both self-reflection and empathy, and it requires a minded world to facilitate its growth. Cognitive capacity and emotional sensitivity come together, because mentalization shows us that the capacity for thought and the ability to receive and demonstrate care are inextricably linked. The ability to play may assist in facilitating the development of mentalizing capacities by providing a space uncoupled from the cognitive and emotional demands of reality.

The bullet points below summarize some of the key concepts central to the notion of mentalization:

* Mentalization requires an advancement from the equivalence mode of thinking.

* The ability to mentalize requires that one is able to differentiate between the pretend world and reality.

* Mentalization requires an awareness of the real consciousness of the other, and a recognition that this consciousness differs from one's own.

* Reflective function is a core component of mentalization.

* Mentalization is a capacity rather than a static state.

Mentalization and literary engagement

In his famous essay, Of the standard of taste, the philosopher David Hume wrote that: "We choose our favourite author as we do our friend, from a conformity of humour and disposition" (Hume, 1987[1742], p. 244). Hume's observations strike a chord with many a reader of literature; indeed, we seem to befriend not only authors, but the books they have authored. Who has not had the experience of sitting in a library, with the feeling that one is surrounded, not by lifeless objects leather-bound on shelves, but by friends one has known and loved, sometimes since childhood? We feel not only that we are able to enter worlds different from ours, and engage with characters as disparate as Molly Bloom, Elizabeth Bennet and Sherlock Holmes, to name but merely a few, but we very often feel that we befriend the character who accompanies us - the narrator or author. Most of us, though, tend to view this befriending of authors and books as nothing more than a kind of metaphor for our enjoyment of literature; I would like to suggest, however, that we take at face value Hume's insight that reading is akin to befriendning a person. The 'is' here lies somewhere between the 'is' of strict identification, and the 'is' of metaphor. It is, of course, not literally true that books are persons, or that we engage directly
with the authors as though they were real people. My claim, rather, is that engaging with certain kinds of literature requires the same kinds of mental abilities required for engaging with other persons; such literary engagement may even facilitate our responses to others, and may bring us insight into the emotional lives of those around us. In many ways, this claim is not new - it lies at the core of humanist approaches to literature. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has argued that the writings of Henry James provide us with insight into our emotional lives by giving us a unique way of accessing and understanding ourselves (Nussbaum, 1983), and the literary critic Wayne Booth has argued for the 'implied author-as-friend' approach to literature, stating that:

"When I read Don Quixote, Persuasion, Bleak House, or War and Peace, I meet in their authors friends who demonstrate their friendship not only in the range and depth and intensity of pleasure they offer, not only in the promise they fulfill of proving useful to me, but finally in the irresistible invitation they extend to live during these moments a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own" (Booth, 1988, p. 223).

In what follows, I shall explore how Jane Austen engages the attention of her novels' readers by requiring us not only to follow the gaze of the narrator, but to trace our reading back to the mind that directs our gaze. The literary techniques of Austen require in her readers a sophisticated sensibility, a heightened awareness to tone and irony. Such an awareness requires that we think about the narrator's own thoughts on the subjects she brings to our attention - in other words, that we mentalize.

Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice famously begins with the following opening sentence: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' What entices the reader, what engages her attention, is the multi-faceted lens such a sentence immediately provides, through which the reader is invited to engage with the characters of the novel. They are introduced to us in the sentences that follow, first in a general form as 'a neighbourhood' with its 'surrounding families' and 'their daughters', and then, more specifically, in the persons of Mr and Mrs Bennet. The irony of the opening sentence, of course, is that it is precisely not a universal a priori truth that single men of good fortune seek wives. On the contrary, Austen is indicating to the reader the concerns of her characters as they seek husbands for their daughters. The irony allows the reader to engage in multiple viewpoints simultaneously: we are made privy to the ambitions of the families of the neighbourhood to whom we are introduced, and we are made aware of the importance to them of 'marrying well', which means, for them, marrying into money. The use of the ironic tone also enables us to see the viewpoint of the narrator, who takes a somewhat amused, wry glance at her characters. Emotionally, the effect on the reader is to feel befriended by the narrator - we are in on the little joke while the characters are not. This is especially so because the irony is subtle and humorous, and not cruel or undermining; too heavy an ironic hand runs the risk of the reader losing sympathy either with the narrator, or with the characters - but Austen's use of irony ensures a subtle and stable sympathy for both. Although we are asked to be sympathetic to the characters, we are also required to view their actions in ways that they may be unable to see themselves - irony is used as a vehicle for insight. But the levels of uses to which Austen's irony are put are rich and complex: the narrator also indicates that, to the families themselves, single rich men should want to marry. The statement has a universal quality for the characters because its normative tone will determine to a great degree the lengths to which these families will go in order to ensure that it becomes a truth! Thus the reader is introduced to the
social mores of the characters, their preoccupations and concerns, and we are also told not to expect that this viewpoint is one the narrator herself wholeheartedly endorses. Furthermore, the reader understands that the characters themselves are unaware of - and would not appreciate - the ironical tone of the sentence; since they are the objects of amusement - although not an unsympathetic amusement - they would not be privy to the perspective that the narrator - and the reader - adopts towards them. Thus, by providing the reader with a vantage point from which to read the characters' lives, the narrator also lets us know that we are provided with an insight unavailable to (most of) the characters themselves.

This brief analysis of the opening line of Pride and Prejudice requires many of the same kinds of abilities necessary for the recognition of others' minds: firstly, the reader must understand that the sentence is not to be taken literally - the narrator is not simply asserting a proposition, but she requires the reader to examine the proposition from a variety of perspectives, some of which may even falsify the literal truth of the statement proposed.

This capacity is simply impossible without the ability to engage in abstract thinking. It will also be obvious that the ability to engage in games of make-believe and pretence, although necessary, is not sufficient for the kind of literary engagement required. To see this, contrast Austen's opening line with something like "Once upon a time there was a man who lived in the forest", or "Hercule Poirot looked with interest and appreciation at the young woman who was being ushered into the room" (Christie, 1981[1943], Five Little Pigs, Introduction, p. 9). These texts invite the reader to enter a fictional world and to view it as though it were another world akin to the real one - to adopt what Hanna Segal terms an 'as-if' relationship with the world of fiction, where the voice of the narrator is merely the medium through which the events in the fictional world are presented to the reader. These texts require an ability to engage in pretence and make-believe, but they do not require the ability to reflect on the act of reading, as Austen's texts require. They do not engage fully the capacity for reflective function. Once we enter into the fictional world of Hercule Poirot or Harry Potter, we may even become so absorbed in the fictional world that we may forget, albeit temporarily, that it is a fictional world - the pretend mode becomes the dominant mode of relating, and connection with the real world (temporarily) forgotten. Writing that encourages remaining in this kind of 'pretend' mode (and such writing is characteristic of children's books and most pulp fiction) does not encourage mentalization because it attempts to elide the distinction between reality and fantasy, to enter the world of the fiction and leave, as much as possible, the real world behind. This, of course, is likely to be a matter of degree - most adult fiction, in order to be realistic, must create characters that are psychologically plausible, and such plausibility may require that the reader think about the characters' inner lives. Merely treating literary characters (which are, after all, created out of mere whole cloth, marks on a page) as having inner lives requires an ability to mentalize. But the more complex the writing, the more the reader is encouraged to consider her own consciousness, as well as the voice of the narrator - in other words, the more the reader is encouraged to reflect on her engagement in the pretend mode of reading fiction, the greater is the demand for the capacity for reflective function. Such literature asks us to hold on to both the fictional and the real worlds, and not to collapse them. This distinction between literature that encourages genuine psychological involvement from fiction that is fantastical or escapist has been made by others.

Hanna Segal, as noted above, distinguishes between "as-if" fantasy fiction which "is pure escapism, making even day-dreaming easy, since someone else has made the effort to plot it", and "what-if"
fiction, which requires "imagining what would happen if some parameter were changed ... This kind of imagination does not deny reality to produce an 'as-if' world, but explores possibilities" (Segal, 1991, p. 107).

Ronald Britton distinguishes serious from pulp fiction in terms of the avoidance or engagement of real emotions:

The more a work of fiction resembles obvious 'daydreaming', the more likely it is to be banal, emotionally undemanding, populist and to be ignored by serious critics. The more a work resonates with something unconscious and profoundly evocative, the more likely it is eventually to be recognized by the critically enlightened ... (Britton, 1998, p. 113).

Britton makes explicit the connection between serious fiction and unconscious phantasies, and argues - and illustrates - that much of the emotional power of great fiction lies in its ability to evoke and work through unconscious phantasy.9

My claims in this paper are different as the focus is on the ability to mentalize rather than on the role of unconscious phantasy. Although mentalization is silent on the role of the dynamic unconscious (and is thus not regarded by many critics as making a contribution to psychoanalytic theory), I myself think that mentalization is a change of focus rather than a change of subject;10 an emphasis on the role of cognition and the ego-function rather than a denial of the importance of unconscious phantasy. Indeed, following Klein, any notion of projection or identification must acknowledge, at root, its unconscious elements. Although a full exploration of the place of unconscious phantasy with regard to the capacity for mentalization lies beyond the scope of this paper, I shall touch on, although not in great detail, the role of unconscious processes in the appreciation of literature. I do however wish to acknowledge its importance. At the very least, the claims I am making here regarding mentalization and reading are consistent with the insights of Segal, Britton and others on the importance of our emotional engagement with literature. Both Segal and Britton stress that literary works that encourage a flight into fantasy fail to engage us emotionally; similarly, literary works that encourage (or require) mentalization, such as the novels of Jane Austen, rather encourage the reader not to forget that she is engaging in a particular kind of literary make-believe, which requires, in addition to an engagement with the world of the novel, a kind of self consciousness.11

Persuasion

The plot of Austen's Persuasion can be summed up briefly as follows: the heroine, Anne Elliot, mourns the loss, some eight years earlier, of Captain Wentworth. They had been in love but Anne was persuaded by a family friend, Lady Russell, to break off the engagement. Captain Wentworth's fortunes as a sailor were unsure, and Lady Russell did not consider him a suitable match for Anne. The novel traces Anne and Wentworth's eventual reunion, despite the pursuit of Wentworth by Louisa Musgrove, Anne's sister Mary's relation, and despite the pursuit of Anne by William Elliot, Sir Walter Elliot's heir, who is later revealed as a fortune hunter.

Persuasion is a particularly nice example of the kinds of issues I hope to highlight; this is so partly because the novel itself is concerned with a certain kind of mind reading.12 Austen's characters display an unease regarding how to read the moral minds, if you will, of others. Austen's characters inhabit
social worlds - they define themselves by their place in society, their manners, etiquette, marriage partners, and so on. The problem with such external cues is that - as Anne discovers with respect to her father's heir, William Elliot - such cues can hide a person's character as much as reveal it, and part of the journey of self-discovery of Austen's heroines is to learn to distinguish the outward signs that are expressive of a person's character from those that conceal it.13 Austen's heroines develop their own minds by learning how to distinguish more carefully between persons who seem trustworthy but are not, and those who are really trustworthy (but may not appear so at first blush). It is thus no accident that it is only when Anne finally makes up her own mind about her feelings for Wentworth that she can gain the true happiness she deserves; and we, the readers, similarly develop our own mental capacities by following the wonderings - and wanderings - of Anne. We become minded not only by learning important lessons from reading Anne's story, but - as I hope to show - by engaging with the very literary style by which her story is told.

Persuasion begins with a failure on the part of Anne Elliot in just this respect - how to see into the mind of another; or rather, in the case of Anne, it is a failure to trust her own judgement regarding how best to 'read' people because she relies too heavily on the judgement of another.14 This preoccupation with 'reading' inward lives from outward signs is parodied in the character of Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot; the novel begins with the narcissistic Sir Walter reading about himself in the Baronetage. Sir Walter's preoccupation is entirely with the external signs of what he takes to be nobility and success, to the extent that he inserts, in his own script, the marriage of his daughter Mary as well as his wife's untimely death. For Sir Walter, life events seem to have no meaning unless thus inscribed: he seems to exist, literally, via his social persona. But all Austen's characters are inherently social beings, and they are defined - as they define themselves and others - in relation to the social network they inhabit. Social status - especially marriage, family connections, and wealth - are extremely important ways in which people are defined and known to one another. Hence the difficulty of placing people who live outside the known social order, which may be partly responsible for the distrust of Lady Russell for Captain Wentworth. The very style of Austen's writing reflects these social engagement; we are regularly treated to a great many descriptions of social events - balls, dances, concerts, outings. Austen rarely, if ever, lays bare the internal thoughts of her characters, and we seldom catch her characters in a purely private moment.

If we compare her novels with those of Henry James, where a great many pages are spent analysing, and finding the correct imagery for, characters' internal worlds, Austen by contrast remains reticent on such matters. In The Portrait of a Lady, for instance, James provides this description of Isabel Archer's meeting with her cousin Ralph:

She was really tired; she knew it, and knew that she should pay for it on the morrow; but it was her habit at this period to carry fatigue to the furthest point and confess to it only when dissimulation had become impossible. For the present it was perfectly possible; she was interested and excited.

(James, 1997 [1881], Ch. 5, p. 42)

By contrast, in Persuasion, the very moment the reader anticipates with great emotion - the declaration of Wentworth's love for Anne - is told indirectly, via a letter he writes to Anne. Even when Anne and Wentworth finally speak of their love, the narrative withdraws from the scene, and we are told about
what they talked only after the event, as if somehow too clear an exposition of such an intimate scene would be indecorous; as a reader of Austen, one learns to read between the lines.

Austen's literary voice also contributes to this uncertainty regarding how to understand the minds of her characters; in Persuasion the use of free indirect discourse provides a multi-layered reading. Free indirect discourse is the literary technique whereby the first-person thoughts of the character are written in the grammatical third-person. Here is an early description of Anne's initial relationship with Captain Wentworth:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she grieved to think of! (Austen, 1997[1818], Ch. 4, p. 18)

Although this is written in the third-person, the views are not those of the narrator, but are rather those of Lady Russell; it is she who opposes the match, and it is her voice that dominates here - as it dominated Anne. We hear clearly the content and tone of the voice that persuaded Anne to change her decision about marrying Wentworth. This presentation of the first-person voice in third-person narration is typical of free indirect discourse. Rather than quote directly the words of the character, the narrator chooses to adopt an omniscient gaze, while simultaneously providing a perspective from the point of view of a character - now from one viewpoint, now from another. Free indirect discourse allows the narrative flow to remain unimpeded as it directs the reader's gaze without drawing attention to itself. In the above passage, the use of free indirect discourse allows Lady Russell's views to be presented as though they were those of the omniscient narrator; this is a subtle comment on the position in which Lady Russell views herself with regard to the Elliot family and, particularly, with regard to Anne. Lady Russell has taken on the position of dowager and mother, and thus regards her own perspective as rightly the dominant one. There is thus an added tone of irony in the use of free indirect discourse when Austen uses it to report Lady Russell's views, especially regarding Anne and Wentworth (and especially because the narrative illustrates the error of such views).

Thus the literary style reflects the theme of moral scepticism that colours the characters' interactions with one another, and it asks that the reader reflect upon their morals and motivations. In this way, Austen imbues the ability to mentalize, to reflect critically on the actions of her characters, with an essentially ethical tinge. This seems to illustrate that, for Austen, ethical reflection requires that we pay particularly close attention to the minds of others - morality is deeply embedded in the details of our lives, rather than either given or discovered impartially.

In the following paragraph we are presented with another fine illustration of Austen's use of free indirect discourse:

Captain Wentworth had no fortune. He had been lucky in his profession, but spending freely, what had come freely, had realized nothing. But he was confident that he should soon be rich; full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to ever thing he wanted. He had always been lucky; he knew he should be so still. Such confidence, powerful
in its own warmth, and bewitching in the wit which often expressed it, must have been enough for Anne; but Lady Russell saw it very differently. His sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind, operated very differently on her. She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong. Lady Russell had little taste for wit; and of any thing approaching to imprudence a horror. She deprecated the connexion in every light (Austen, 1997[1818], Ch. 4, p. 19).

As David Lodge points out, in a very nice exposition of this passage, Wentworth's character is presented to the reader “from four points of view in succession: (1) the narrator's, (2) Wentworth's own, (3) Anne's, (4) Lady Russell's” (Lodge, 2002, p. 15). Lodge also points out how the qualities of life, ardour, luck, confidence and wit are experienced by Lady Russell as negatives - he is dangerous, headstrong, imprudent - indeed, someone by whom she is horrified. The reader is encouraged to consider Captain Wentworth from these various perspectives, and to judge for ourselves whether he really is a suitable mate for Anne.

The use of free indirect discourse in many ways offers the reader a more intimate sense of the character's inner world than would direct speech given in quotes; in direct speech we are given what the characters say, and we can very often deduce from their words what they are thinking and feeling. But, of course, characters - like the rest of us - may speak falsely. Free indirect speech, however, allows the characters to reveal themselves; the narrator is both privy to these thoughts, but is able to comment on them, and in Persuasion the voice of the author moves seamlessly from character to character, tracing a path the reader must likewise follow. The use of free indirect speech also creates an intimacy between reader and narrator which is often lacking in third-person omniscient narrators, and it is precisely this intimacy that encourages reflective function and is so crucial for mentalization. We notice Anne's reluctance to express her desires even to herself, and we sense too her fear that her very expression of these desires would render them inaccessible. In free indirect speech, the reader not only is provided with a tool via which the perspectives of characters and narrator can be viewed from a variety of angles - in the hands of Austen the technique also acts as a kind of camera lens, decreasing or increasing, narrowing or enlarging, the view of the characters' mental states. And the result is always expressive, in the sense that the literary style provides the reader with a way of understanding the emotional lives of the character through our understanding of how such style is used. In other words, Austen's use of literary technique encourages mentalization not only because it facilitates the perception of different perspectives, but also because it asks the reader to engage in a variety of ways of thinking and feeling about the characters: textual interpretation facilitates psychological interpretation.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that Austen's literary style requires that the reader engages with the minds of both characters and narrator, and that she notes the subtle changes of viewpoints, is sensitive to emotional tone, to nuance and implication, and can empathize with various characters without losing a sense of critical perspective and distance.

Austen's writing is such that the reader must think constantly about the characters and their actions from various perspectives simultaneously. Now, such literary engagement highlights the accordance with mentalization. What is of central importance in the ability to mentalize is the capacity to take on or adopt the perspective of another, whilst maintaining one's own sense of identity. Empathy on this account does not imply or require merging of identities - indeed, such merging may be inconsistent with the development of empathy. But without the ability to take a perspective, to shift perspectives, to
wonder what one character is thinking about in relation to another, to note that the use of irony creates multiple readings of a situation, and so on, our ability to engage with the complexities of Austen's writing would be either impossible or severely impaired. The claim I am making is a stronger one than that reading literature requires mentalization, for it is also true that reading requires many complex mental tasks - such as the ability to understand language, or the capacity to construct representations. But these abilities, although necessary for reading, do not lie at the heart of our engagement with literature. On the other hand, I do think that mentalizing does lie at the heart of our engagement with valuable literary texts such as those of Jane Austen. When we read such literature, we are doing something very much like what we do when we engage with the mind of another. Not only do we think about the thoughts of the characters in the way we might think about the thoughts of another person, but we treat the literary narrator as a kind of friend or companion whose perspective we take when engaging with the literary events presented to us. We thus think about events through the mind of another, and wonder what perspective the other is taking on the events as described. This in turn leads us to reflect on our own responses as readers to the literary events - literature thus not only requires but perhaps may facilitate mentalization. I would thus like to suggest that the metaphor of writer-as-friend is more than a metaphor - reading really is a kind of engagement with the mind of another. This picture of the reader as engaged in a kind of mind reading also goes some way to explain the normative force of literature; although a full defence of this claim goes beyond the scope of the paper, novels regularly require that we make judgements about characters and their actions. However, if we are asked to adopt normative values with which we are unsympathetic, our ability to engage with the narrative may be severely impaired. As David Hume himself noted in Of the standard of taste, we cannot adopt the point of view of a narrator whose moral nature we condemn. If reading literature is indeed akin to reading the mind of another in the ways outlined above, this goes some way to explaining the source of such imaginative resistance. Reading good literature is not merely a cognitive skill, but a normative exercise: it engages our sympathies and understanding in exactly the same kinds of ways that our engagement with others requires.

In the final discussion of this paper, I shall examine the role mentalization plays in reading by contrasting it with two other literary techniques: stream-of-consciousness and metaphor. Stream-of-consciousness, as a literary technique, promises a perspective on the character that is immediate, and hence seems to provide even better material for my claim that reading requires mentalization. Metaphor is much more complex: it seems to require a process of deep interpretation that is akin to the discovery of unconscious processes in manifest content. By exploring the differences and similarities between Austen's uses of irony and free indirect speech, and stream-of-consciousness technique and metaphor, I hope to elucidate further the role of mentalization in reading, and explore its advantages and limitations. Stream-of-consciousness first: as a literary technique, it was developed partly in response to Freud's discoveries about the mind. The Freudian model of the mind, claims David Lodge, "encouraged the idea that consciousness had a dimension of depth, which it was the task of literature, as of psychoanalysis, to explore" (Lodge, 2002, p.61). Stream-of-consciousness was born. "The play of human memory disrupts and shuffles the chronological order of events in the minds of Joyce's characters, and Virginia Woolf's" (Lodge, 2002, p. 61). Here is the beginning of Woolf's Mrs Dalloway:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like
the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling (Woolf, 1996[1925], p. 5).

Woolf's narrative style allows us immediate entrance into the mind of her protagonist; we see, hear, and feel through the consciousness of Mrs Dalloway; there is an interweaving and layering of past and present, so that the "little squeak of the hinges" is both the sound of the hinges of the door, and the remembered sound she experienced when a girl of 18. The uncertainty of memory is nicely captured, as is the movement of ideas via a process of association. The reader hears and feels with her - we plunge into the cool fresh air, feel in imagination the flap of the wave, and see in our mind's eye the smoke rising. Stream-of-consciousness presents us with immediate access to the mental states of literary characters - and to the textured feel of that consciousness. Stream-of-consciousness has resonances with poetry: the rhythm and cadence of the lines determine their expressive power, and the imagery does the dual work of allowing us to look through the character's mental states, and at them, simultaneously. For instance, the descriptions of the morning capture both the freshness of the air, as well as Mrs Dalloway's responses to the morning air. As she looks at the rooks "rising, falling", we experience an internal sense of movement of her thought patterns. The effect of Woolf's writing is to simulate in the reader a shared sense of Mrs Dalloway's state of mind - the reader's thought patterns adopt a meditative state, and we adjust the tempo of our reading to the rhythm of the lines.

On the face of it, stream-of-consciousness as a literary technique would also seem to require the kinds of mentalizing abilities I have been arguing for above with respect to irony and free indirect speech. We are provided with a sense of the inner consciousness of the characters, and with their perspective on the world. Certainly an ability to mentalize is necessary for the appreciation of this literary technique - this seems too obvious to deny. However, and what may seem a counter-intuitive claim, I would like to argue that it is the very immediacy of stream-of-consciousness that may present something of a barrier to mentalization. If - as claimed earlier - a key component of mentalization is reflective function, then stream-of-consciousness, as a literary technique, works to dim reflective function rather than to sharpen it. Whereas the free indirect speech of Austen allows us to share the perspective of Anne or Wentworth while retaining a critical distance, stream-of-consciousness erases this critical distance and, to this extent, lessens our capacity for reflective function. In her use of irony, for instance, Austen requires that the reader adopt (temporarily) the perspective of the author on the lives of the characters, whereas stream-of-consciousness attempts to erase the voice of the narrator and provide the reader with an immediate sense of the character's state of mind. Sympathy, though, is not sufficient for mentalization; what is required is an ability to differentiate one's own mental states from that of another; in attempting to erase this barrier, stream-of-consciousness may work against the development of reflective function.

This is more evident when the literary style mimics the inner thought patterns of the character in ways that distort syntactic structure: in the 'Penelope' episode of Ulysses, for instance, Joyce attempts to capture something of the unconscious chain of associations that lead Molly Bloom from one idea to the next:
I suppose he was glad to get shut of her and her dog smelling my fur and always edging to get up under my petticoats especially then still I like that in him polite to old women like that and waiters and beggars too he's not proud out of nothing but not always if ever he got anything really serious the matter with him its much better for them go into a hospital where everything is clean but I suppose I'd have to bring it into him for a month yes (Joyce, 1986[1922], p. 608).

In ways more extreme than Woolf, Joyce presents us with the inner voice of Molly Bloom, which meanders from one idea to the next, and it is up to the reader to attempt to reconstruct the development of her ideas. But, it seems, the development of reflective function is compromised - partly by Molly's lack of insight into her own motivations, and partly as a result of the literary style, which, by attempting to capture the ebb and sway of interiority, sacrifices the syntactic structure necessary for sense and sense-making. Perhaps another way of saying it would be to claim that language makes sense because it is under the sway of the features of secondary mental processing, of which syntax is an essential component; in attempting to illustrate the impact of primary processing mental function on thought patterns, these features are underplayed by Joyce - not entirely, of course, for then we wouldn't have language at all! But to the extent that they are underplayed, mentalization and the capacity for reflective function are less engaged. In addition, the sense-making perspective of the author is absent: we are given no third person perspective that provides the locus for reflective function provided in Persuasion. The literary techniques that best allow for mentalization are ones that provide a perspective on the mental lives of the characters while simultaneously requiring that we reflect upon not only the characters, but our own responses to the characters' inner lives. By contrasting Jane Austen's style with stream-of-consciousness, I hope to have further illustrated the appeal of Austen's techniques.

Finally, I would like to contrast my discussion on mentalization with other ways of bringing psychoanalytic understanding into literary criticism; my focus will be on a paper that analyses unconscious dynamics in the narrative of Persuasion. By illustrating the differences between how other kinds of psychoanalytic insight unravel the mysteries of reading, I hope to illustrate more clearly the kinds of claims I am making for mentalization.

In her insightful paper on Persuasion, Margaret Hanly (2007) traces the effects of unresolved mourning on the character of Anne, and, in particular, on her refusal of marriage to Wentworth. Hanly argues that: "An unfinished mourning and an unconscious identification with her dead mother helped to persuade the heroine Anne Elliot to break her engagement, to create a 'final parting' as her mother had done to her in dying" (Hanly, 2007, p. 1001). Hanly thus uses her psychoanalytic reading of Persuasion to provide insight into the characters' actions and to illustrate the ways in which Austen's literary technique is used to provide such insight. Understanding that what lies at the heart of Anne's initial refusal of Wentworth are her unresolved unconscious feelings about her mother's death sheds light on the trajectory of the novel: the reader must feel that it is important that Anne marry Wentworth for the right reasons, and that Anne become independent of Lady Russell's pseudo-forms of mothering. Via Hanly's psychoanalytic insights, the reader is also provided with a deeper understanding of why Anne heeded the advice of Lady Russell: we no longer think of Anne as a poor misguided young girl, led astray by the bad advice of an older family friend, but understand more completely how her inability to mourn the loss of her mother acted as a psychological burden that coloured her relations with others. Although such feelings on the part of the reader may be unconscious, we would gauge the success of the novel by the ways in which it manages to satisfy these psychological demands. Hanly's reading of
Persuasion brings to bear psychoanalytic insights - the nature and vicissitudes of mourning - on literary interpretation; her reading is an example of the kind of deep interpretation that constitutes much of psychoanalytic interpretation, and it is also characteristic of other kinds of literary readings, such as the unravelling of metaphor.

The philosopher Donald Davidson famously wrote that: "Metaphor is the dreamwork of language" (Davidson, 1984, p. 245); by this, he meant that the 'meaning' of a metaphor is not to be equated with the 'meaning' of a sentence. We discover the meaning of an ordinary sentence by noting its semantic and syntactic properties, but Davidson noted that: "There is no manual for determining what a metaphor 'means' or 'says'' (Davidson, 1984, p. 245). Metaphors invite us to make interpretations, and, like art, their meaning "is not propositional in character" (Davidson, 1984, p. 263). Some recent discussions on metaphorical meaning argue that the ways we understand metaphor are influenced by unconscious mental processes (Melnick, 2000). The literature on metaphor is vast, and it is impossible to explore it fruitfully here; however, I take it that it is uncontroversial to assert that, at least in central cases, metaphor requires the kind of deep interpretation similar in kind to psychoanalytic understanding of unconscious mental processes. Such interpretation lies at the heart too of much psychoanalytic interpretation of literature, illustrated by Hanly's reading of Persuasion, and it is invaluable: tracing unconscious dynamics within literature provides extremely useful ways of coming to grips with what a novel or a poem is 'really' about. Metaphors too employ the techniques of association, bodily experiences and nonverbal cues, and thus do not directly activate the capacity for reflective function (although, of course, the interpretation of metaphor certainly would). The effects of poetry, for instance, may rely on unconscious associations, on rhyme, rhythm, meter and cadence. Thus the ways in which metaphors effect us may neither require nor facilitate reflective function to the degree that other writing techniques do. The uses of metaphor within literature are a complex affair; although I have stressed some of the differences for the purposes of this paper, I do not wish to imply that the matter is settled. It does seem to me that the theory of mentalization fits within the broader aims of psychoanalysis, if we consider that at least one of the latter's aims is to develop ways of thinking that are less prone to the sway of unconscious dynamics.23 I thus merely note the complexities without pursuing them further here.

By attempting to show the ways in which literary techniques support mentalization and reflective function in particular, I hope to provide an argument for the importance of reading literature, as well as a way of explaining the cognitive, emotional and moral hold that many literary texts make upon us.

If engaging with the narrator of a novel is akin to our engagement with the mind of another, this goes a long way towards explaining the allure and allure of literature - in reading, we engage with the mind of another, and feel that we are not alone. My discussion may also explain our willingness to treat the characters as persons, with beliefs, desires and other complex mental states, and with whom we empathize, sympathize and sometimes criticize. Indeed, before applying the kinds of psychoanalytic interpretations offered by Hanly and others regarding the unconscious mental states of characters, it is vital that we first treat fictional characters as the kind of entities that possess mental states in the first place. My suggestion is that literature enables us to do this via narrative techniques that facilitate the reader's capacity for mentalization, partly by creating the narrative conditions whereby we treat the (implied) narrator or author as a person with mental states, and it is via the narrator's perspective that we are further encouraged to treat the characters as having mental states. It is only once this has happened that we can start to think about the conscious and unconscious mentality of the characters themselves. This further encourages the reader's own capacities for mentalization. Furthermore, if, in
reading, we develop our moral capacities and normative sensitivities, tracing the similarities between reading and engaging with the mind of another may go some way towards explaining why this is so. The discussion about the importance of literature, and the ways in which it may or may not influence our moral and psychological selves, is at least as old as Plato, and it was certainly a live issue during the time of Austen, while, more recently, writers like Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth, and philosophers like Noil Carroll (1996) and Berys Gaut (2004), have argued for the importance of reading as an ethical activity. It is my hope that this discussion will contribute to this debate; on the literary side, by showing that reading certain kinds of literature engages our ability to mentalize, I hope to provide yet another argument for the importance of reading. By tracing the ways in which such mentalizing abilities are facilitated through literary technique, I also open the door for further investigations into the ways in which literary form facilitates mental functioning. On the psychoanalytic side of the fence, I hope that my discussion may contribute further to an understanding of the ways in which we develop the capacities for mentalization and reflective function; if, for instance, there is a close relationship, as Bouchard et al. have argued between the capacity for reflective function and attachment, then, if reading certain kinds of literature supports reflective function, the importance of reading, and of ways of reading, for the development of such attachment may be highlighted. There may thus be good therapeutic reasons to encourage children to read literary novels such as those of Jane Austen. I thus would like the above discussion to extend the current explanatory interest of the concept of mentalization. I hope to have illustrated how the concept of mentalization has uses that extend beyond the clinical setting, and to gesture in the direction of the ways in which literary analysis may benefit from the application of psychoanalytic concepts. Obviously, a complete exploration of the application of mentalization and other psychodynamic concepts to aesthetics lies beyond the bounds of this paper, but it is hoped that the use of mentalization as an explanatory tool provides a rich and interesting way of understanding the relationship between literary form and readers' emotional responses, and opens a door for future explorations of the ways in which literary techniques may foster - or hinder - mentalizing capacities.24 Although the above discussion focuses on issues of literary style, I do not intend to disregard the importance of mentalization with respect to our ability to empathize and sympathize with literary characters; we clearly do feel for the likes of Anna Karenina and Elizabeth Bennet, and our sympathetic engagement is invoked by a wide array of artistic genres, from plays to movies to opera - indeed, by most art forms that tell stories with interesting characters. But literature is unique in that it enables a process of mentalization via literary form and technique; it is via this ability to present a wide array of perspectives from the inside that literature both requires and stimulates our engagement with the minds of others, and, reciprocally, with our own.

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1 The claim that mentalization lies squarely in the field of psychoanalysis is not uncontroversial (see Target, 2008, p. 262).
2 See, for instance, Bateman and Fonagy, 2006; Fonagy and Target, 2007; Fonagy, Gergely et al., 2002; Sugarman, 2006.

3 By the term ‘implied author’, I mean to refer to the fictional author or narrator of the events in the story, who is not necessarily the flesh-and-blood author. Although the implied author is sometimes a character in the fiction, this is not necessarily the case.

4 For further discussion, see Bouchard et al., 2008.

5 This emphasis on understanding the psychological states of others from a first-person perspective is precisely what distinguishes psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theories from many cognitive and behavioural psychological theories, where mental states are functionally defined in terms of causes and effects.

6 This distinction is not quite right; as Fonagy and Target point out, it is important to distinguish between psychic reality and the subjective experience of that reality. The former term is used by Freud to refer to "the inner source of subjective experience, rather than subjective experience per se" (Fonagy and Target, 2007, p. 918). Unconscious mentality would thus be an instance of psychic reality, which consciousness views as on a par with external reality, only its source is internal rather than external. For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘psychic reality’ will refer to the subjective experience of mental states.

7 Fonagy et al. note that: "It is probably that joint pretend play or playfulness fosters the understanding of mental states" (2002, p. 47).

8 The name of Jane Austen is used here to refer to the implied author.

9 Segal too makes the connection between unconscious phantasy and art in various places, most famously in her paper, A psycho-analytical approach to aesthetics (Segal, 1952).

10 Target makes this point in her commentary (Target 2008), as does Seligman (2007).

11 Austen parodies such pulp novelists and their readers in Northanger Abbey.

12 Adela Pinch claims that: "[Persuasion] explores, that is, the influence reading can have on one's mind by comparing it to the influence of one person's mind over another's" (Pinch, 1996, p. 139).

13 Anne enters into just such deliberations later in the novel, when she is considering a marriage proposal from William Elliot: "Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character" (Austen, 1997 [1818], Ch. 17, p. 118).

14 It will not be the concern of this paper to examine the reasons for such a reliance. For discussion on this aspect of the novel, see Hanly (2007).

15"Free indirect speech is a deviation from strict grammar and strict logic, and thus perhaps comparable to the more obvious non-logical linguistic features of poetry" (Lodge, 2002, p. 16).
16 So much so that critics often fail to pick it up. An early critic of James Joyce apparently accused Joyce of bad writing in his short story The Dead, not noticing that the bad grammar of the opening sentence was the character's and not Joyce's.

17 This claim can, I suspect, be tested empirically.

18 If this claim can be defended, it may help us think of the mind not as a thing (brain, spiritual substance), but rather as that which is synonymous with personhood.

19 Some might argue that in Finnegans Wake, Joyce is attempting to create a language dominated by primary processing.

20 In the psychoanalytic literature, the interaction between patient and analyst is seen as crucial for developing insight. See Sugarman (2006), whose paper discusses the relationship between insight and mentalization.

21 Hanly also makes claims for the ways in which literature may assist with psychoanalytic understanding, but I shall focus on the issues that relate most directly to the matter at hand.

22 Ernest Jones's famous reading of Hamlet is also naturally brought to mind.

23 See Sugarman (2006) for further discussion on this issue.

24 In poetry, for instance, the sonnet form seems to encourage our engagement with the mind of the poet, whereas the ballad form seems less suited to mentalizing engagement.

References


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