Social Minds in the Novel
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CHAPTER 2

Introduction to Social Minds

*Mixing blue and yellow which together makes green.*
—Edith Somerville (describing her writing partnership with Martin Ross)

**SPEAKING BROADLY,** there are two perspectives on the mind: the internalist and the externalist. These two perspectives form more of a continuum than an either/or dichotomy, but the distinction is, in general, a valid one.

- An internalist perspective on the mind stresses those aspects that are inner, introspective, private, solitary, individual, psychological, mysterious, and detached.
- An externalist perspective on the mind stresses those aspects that are outer, active, public, social, behavioral, evident, embodied, and engaged.

I use the term *social mind* to describe those aspects of the whole mind that are revealed through the externalist perspective.

It seems to me that the traditional narratological approach to the representation of fictional character is an internalist one that stresses those aspects that are inner, passive, introspective, and individual. This undue emphasis on private, solitary, and highly verbalized thought at the expense of all the other types of mental functioning has resulted in a preoccupation with such concepts as free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, and interior monologue. As a result, the *social* nature of fictional thought has
been neglected. But, as Antonio Damasio suggests, “the study of human consciousness requires both internal and external views” (2000, 82), and so an externalist perspective is required as well, one that stresses the public, social, concrete, and located aspects of mental life in the novel.

As table 2.1 shows, a number of the concepts that are used to analyze the workings of fictional minds tend to fit easily into one or other of these perspectives. Some of these pairs oppose each other precisely; other pairings are much looser. The types of relationships within the pairings include opposition, complementarity, and intersection (as, for example, when an interior monologue shows evidence of Bakhtinian dialogicality). The term *aspectuality*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, refers to the fact that storyworlds are always experienced under some aspects and not others by the characters who inhabit them. People experience the same events in different ways. Within the internalist/externalist framework, I see focalization and aspectuality as complementing each other. Focalization occurs when the reader is presented with the aspect of the storyworld that is being experienced by the focalizer at that moment. In this context, the concept of aspectuality serves as a reminder that, meanwhile, the storyworld is also being experienced differently, under other aspects, by all of the characters who are not currently being focalized in the text. Any of those other characters could have been focalized if the author had chosen to do so. The term *continuing consciousness*, as I have said, stands for the process whereby readers create a continuing consciousness for a character out of the scattered, isolated mentions of that character in the text. The idea of continuing consciousnesses links nicely with the concepts of aspectuality and focalization. Other characters’

**TABLE 2.1**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNALIST PERSPECTIVE</th>
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<td>Private minds</td>
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<td>Intramental thought</td>
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<td>Personal identity</td>
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<td>Focalization</td>
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<td>Stream of consciousness</td>
<td>Continuing consciousness</td>
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<td>Interior monologue</td>
<td>Bakhtinian dialogicality</td>
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consciousnesses are continuing while, at any single point in the narrative, only one consciousness is being focalized.

The internalist/externalist framework is also helpful in expanding our awareness of the implications of the concept of subjectivity. As the list suggests, the term can be used in both a first-person way (subjectivity of self) and a third-person way (subjectivity of others). The term situated identity locates selfhood and identity between the two. Aspectuality acts as a reminder here too, this time of the existence of the subjectivity of others, as available to us through the use of our theory of mind. The concept of aspectuality is a way of bringing to center stage previously marginalized characters whose voices may not often be heard. Knapp (1996) has applied the techniques of family systems therapy to D. H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers (1913) in order to reinterpret the emotional landscape of that storyworld from the point of view of Paul’s father. This is an unusual perspective because the focalization in the novel (through Paul, who has a difficult relationship with his father and tends to side with his mother) does not encourage it.

An important part of the social mind is our capacity for intermental thought. Such thinking is joint, group, shared, or collective, as opposed to intramental, or individual or private thought. It is also known as socially distributed, situated, or extended cognition, and also as intersubjectivity. Intermental thought is a crucially important component of fictional narrative because, just as in real life, where much of our thinking is done in groups, much of the mental functioning that occurs in novels is done by large organizations, small groups, work colleagues, friends, families, couples, and other intermental units. Notable examples include the army in Evelyn Waugh’s Men at Arms, the town in William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” (1930), the group of friends in Donna Tartt’s The Secret History (1992), the villainous Marchioness de Merteuil and the Viscount de Valmont in Laclos’ Les liaisons dangereuses (1782), and Kitty and Levin in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina (1877), who, in a famous scene, write out only the initial letters of the words that they wish to use but who nevertheless understand each other perfectly. However, these are only a few of the most notable examples. My argument is that intermental units are to be found in nearly all novels. It could plausibly be argued that a large amount of the subject matter of novels is the formation, development, maintenance, modification, and breakdown of these intermental systems. As storyworlds are profoundly social in nature (even Robinson Crusoe has his Friday), novels necessarily contain a good deal of collective thinking. However, intermental thought in the novel has been invisible to traditional narrative approaches. Indeed, many of the samples of this sort of thought that follow in later chapters would not even count as examples of thought and consciousness within these approaches.
But shared minds become clearly visible within the cognitive approach to literature that underpins this book.

A good deal of the significance of the thought that occurs in novels is lost if only the internalist perspective is employed. Both perspectives are required, because a major preoccupation of novels is precisely this balance between public and private thought, intermental and intramental functioning, and social and individual minds. Within this balance, I will be emphasizing social minds because of their past neglect. In illustrating the importance of the functioning of the social minds in my main example texts, *Middlemarch*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Persuasion*, I aim to show that it is not possible to understand these novels without an awareness of these minds as they operate within their storyworlds. They are one of the chief means by which the plots are advanced. If you were to take all of the social thought out of these three novels, they would not be comprehensible. So, given the importance of this subject to the study of the novel, it seems to me that it is necessary to find room for it at the center of narrative theory.

I will take one example from many in order to illustrate the issues that may arise from an overreliance by literary critics on the internalist perspective. I have chosen *Reading the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Austen to Eliot* (2008) by Alison Case and Harry E. Shaw, because it is an excellent study that contains many valuable internalist insights. (For example, it points out that Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* [1847] starts with a tight, uncontextualized focus on Jane’s consciousness and explains how revolutionary this decision was within the evolution of the nineteenth-century novel.) But, more troubling from an externalist perspective, Case and Shaw also remark on “how difficult it is for people to be simply themselves in any social setting” (2008, 24). These questions occur to me: Why assume that the self can only be found (or easily found) in solitude? Could it not be the other way round? Is it possible that we are only really ourselves when with others? When we are alone, are we not more easily tempted to construct convenient, comfortable, easy-to-live-with narratives for ourselves that may be distortions of reality? Similarly, Case and Shaw talk about *Wuthering Heights’s* “conflicting fantasies of escape from, or reconciliation with, the multiple restraints of selfhood that enable a stable, social world” (2008, 68; my emphasis). (Although this appears to be an objective description of the novel, I sense authorial agreement too.) Well, that is one way of looking at selfhood. Another, more externalist way is to see the social world as providing the possibilities for, or affordances for, the expression of selfhood.

Within the real-mind disciplines of psychology and philosophy there is a good deal of interest in *the mind beyond the skin* (as opposed to *the mind inside the skull*): the realization that mental functioning cannot be under-
stood merely by analyzing what goes on within the skull but can only be fully comprehended once it has been seen in its social and physical context. Case and Shaw put the point nicely in their otherwise internalist study when they speculate about Walter Scott’s wish to “reveal human nature, not from the skin in, but from the skin out” (2008, 37). Social psychologists routinely use the terms mind and mental action not only about individuals but also about groups of people working as intermental units. So, it is appropriate to say of these groups that they think or that they remember. James Wertsch explains that “the notion of mental function can properly be applied to social as well as individual forms of activity” (1991, 27). As he puts it, a dyad (that is, two people working as a cognitive system) can carry out such functions as problem solving on an intermental plane (1991, 27). It is significant that cognitive scientists are now beginning to share the interest of social psychologists in the mind beyond the skin. For an overview of the work being done in the new research area called social neuroscience, see The Neuroscience of Social Interaction: Decoding, Influencing and Imitating the Actions of Others, edited by Chris Frith and Daniel Wolpert (2004).

You may be asking what is achieved by talking in this way, instead of simply referring to individuals pooling their resources and working in cooperation together. The advocates of the concept of distributed cognition such as the theoretical anthropologists Gregory Bateson (1972) and Clifford Geertz (1993), the philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers (1998) and (2009) and Daniel Dennett (1996), and the psychologists Edwin Hutchins (1995) and James Wertsch all stress that the purpose of the concept is increased explanatory power. They argue that the way to delineate a cognitive system is to draw the limiting line so that you do not cut out anything whose absence leaves things inexplicable (Bateson 1972, 465). To illustrate, Wertsch tells the story of how his daughter lost her shoes and he helped her to remember where she had left them. Wertsch asks: Who is doing the remembering here? He is not, because he had no prior knowledge of where they were, and she is not, because she had forgotten where they were and was only able to remember by means of her father’s promptings. It was therefore the intermental unit formed by the two of them that remembered (Sperber and Hirschfeld 1999, cxxiv). If you draw the line narrowly around single persons, and maintain that cognition can only be individual, then things remain inexplicable. Neither on their own remembered. If you draw the line more widely, and accept the concept of an intermental cognitive system, then things are explained. The intermental unit remembered. The same applies not just to problem solving but also to joint decision making and group action. Here is a simple example from Evelyn Waugh’s Vile Bodies (1930) that I will use again when explaining the philosophical concept of action in
chapter 4: “The three statesmen hid themselves” (86). The decision to hide is an intermental one that is taken together by all three individuals, and the action of hiding is also one that they perform together.

Intermental cognitive systems are, to some extent, independent of the individual elements that go to make them up. This is not to say that the whole is necessarily greater than the sum of its parts; it is simply to say that it is different from the sum of its parts. One example of this difference is the vivid metaphor with which I began this chapter and which was used by the author Edith Somerville to describe her writing partnership with Martin Ross: a question of “mixing blue and yellow which together makes green.” Something similar happened when the poet John Ashbery wrote a novel with James Schuyler in the 1950s, each contributing a line or two at a time. In the diary section of the Times Literary Supplement (5 December 2008), the diarist wondered which of the two wrote the line “Why don’t you admit that you enjoy my unhappiness?” The following response from Ashbery was published two weeks later: “In regard to the line in question, I can’t remember. Schuyler and I were often unable to remember who had written what, as our lines seemed to emerge from an invisible third person” (Times Literary Supplement [19 December 2008]). There are musical examples too. Keith Rowe, a member of the free improvisation group AMM, once told me that while the group was playing, he would sometimes not know whether it was he or another member of the group who was producing the sounds that he could hear.

However, in considering the wide-ranging nature of intermental functioning (problem solving, decision making, coming to ethical judgments, and so on), it should be borne in mind that analyses of this sort of thought should involve no preconceptions about its quality. Intermental thought is as beautiful and ugly, destructive and creative, exceptional and commonplace as intramental thought. The communal creativity described in the previous paragraph should be balanced against, for example, the scapegoating tendencies of many groups, and also against Pentagon “groupthink.”

An emphasis on social minds will inevitably question these twin assumptions: first, that the workings of our own minds are never accessible to others; and, second, that the workings of our own minds are always and unproblematically accessible to ourselves. This book will, in the main, question the first assumption and will make much less reference to the equally questionable second, although the subject does come up occasionally (as in the Men at Arms case study that follows). But in disputing the first-named assumption by discussing the public minds that are to be found in Middle-march, Little Dorrit, and Persuasion, I must stress that I am certainly not saying that fictional minds are always easily readable. Sometimes, they are;
sometimes, they are not. In these three novels, I will argue, they frequently are. In other novels, especially those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, different levels of readability and unreadability will apply. For more discussion on this, see Porter Abbott’s “Unreadable Minds and the Captive Reader” (2009).

In an illuminating article titled “Diagramming Narrative,” Marie-Laure Ryan uses diagrams as a semiotic tool for the understanding of narrative in relation to three aspects of plot—time, space, and mind. On the question of mind, she refers to the subject matter of narrative as the “evolution of a network of interpersonal relations” (2007, 29) and convincingly shows how diagrammatic representations of these networks can add a good deal to our understanding of the narrative process. She illustrates this approach with two highly technical analyses, one of a minimal, two-sentence narrative and the other of the fable “The Fox and the Crow” (which was also used in Ryan 1991). It seems to me that a modified and necessarily greatly simplified variant of this sort of approach could be used to analyze the workings of social minds in whole novels. For example, the complex interrelations between different intermental units can be thought of as resembling the patterns made by Venn diagrams, in which overlapping circles are used to express the relationships between classes of objects. Such a diagram would show that the memberships of some groups are completely included within larger ones, some might have no overlap of membership with any others, others would have partial membership overlaps, and so on. With at least some of the novels to be discussed later, it would be possible, though difficult, to construct Venn diagrams that could vividly illustrate this complexity in visual terms.

Little narratological work has been done on social minds in the novel. Exceptions include studies of aspects of distributed cognition by John V. Knapp (for example, 1996) and also by the postclassical narrative theorists David Herman (2003a, 2003b, 2007a, 2008, and 2010) and Uri Margolin (1996b and 2000). The exploration of “we” narratives (that is, narratives written predominantly in the first-person plural) that was initiated by Margolin and continued by Brian Richardson (2006) has produced rewarding results (see, for example, Marcus 2008). A welcome and related development has been the important work done by the literary critic Susan Sniader Lanser in Fictions of Authority (1992), in which she focuses on the concept of communal voice. Her use of the term voice shows that she is concerned with the relationship between “we” narration and “I” narration in which one speaker represents others. That is to say, she explores the telling, the mode of narration, the discursive practices of the novels that she discusses. Lanser writes persuasively about some of the important issues raised by the
notion of communal thought such as the problematic erasure of differences between individuals and the need to make speculative and potentially mistaken assumptions about the thoughts of others. I want to take a more inclusive approach, however, and set these issues as well as some of the more positive ones arising from intermentality into a wider context. Most of the nineteenth-century novels that feature plentiful evidence of shared thought have heterodiegetic narrators and are not therefore examples of a communal voice. The studies mentioned above are pioneering, but they have focused in the main only on the relatively small number of narratives written in the “we” form; my point is that little attention has been given to the much larger group of what, in response, I would call “they” narratives: that is, narratives that feature social minds.

You may be feeling some doubt about this claim regarding the neglect of intermental thought. Surely we have always known about the importance of groups right from the beginning of Western literature. What about the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy? Well, yes, undoubtedly, but my claim is that this knowledge has not been reflected in the theory on mental functioning in narrative. Obviously, we all know about the proverbial vox populi, both in literature (especially in drama) and also in our daily lives, but the purpose of the present book is to examine the socially situated or intermental cognition lying at its basis and the various ways in which it is represented in narrative. What about Menakhem Perry’s masterly analysis of William Faulkner’s short story “A Rose for Emily” (1979), in which the townspeople as a group play such an important role? Perry’s article is a groundbreaking contribution to our knowledge of the role of cognitive frames in the reading process, but I do not think that it was part of his intention explicitly to recognize the status of the town as an intermental unit. That is the purpose of this book.

A TYPOLOGY

Obviously the extent, duration, and success of intermental activity will vary greatly from occasion to occasion. Because this is such a wide, relatively uncharted area in the context of literary studies, the following, rather basic typology may be of some value.

1. **Intermental encounters.** At the minimal level, this consists of the group thought that is necessary for conversations between individuals to take place. It is not possible to have a coherent dialogue without at least some intermental communication. A minimal level of mind reading and
theory of mind is required for characters to understand each other and thereby make everyday life possible. It is made easier or more difficult by a variety of factors such as solipsistic versus emotionally intelligent individuals, easily readable versus impenetrable minds, familiar versus unfamiliar contexts, similar versus different sorts of social background, and so on. A heightened awareness of the mental functioning of another can occur within random encounters between people who do not know each other particularly well or even between complete strangers. I am sure that most readers of this book will have had the experience of meeting somebody for the first time and instantly feeling that you are both on the same wavelength. A focus on the workings of long-term, stable intermental units such as couples and families as itemized below can give a misleading impression if it suggests that intermental thought can only occur within such units. As we know from our real-life experience, mind reading can occur in a variety of situations. Sometimes, it is what might be called reciprocal: there is a conscious and fully intended sharing of thought and so people will know that others know what they are thinking. At other times, it is inadvertent: someone may reveal their thoughts without meaning to. In these cases, that person may not know that their mind has been read by another person, or they may notice that it has been, for example by the other’s facial expression.

In addition to our various encounters with countless strangers and acquaintances over the course of our lives, we all belong to intermental units. I would define these as stable, fairly long-lasting groups that regularly employ intermental thinking. They vary greatly in size, and I will adopt the rather simplistic approach of referring to them as small, medium, and large units. Obviously, many other, rather more sophisticated typologies are possible. John V. Knapp (personal communication) has suggested one that would measure group membership along a scale of interpersonal intensity. For example, someone may feel an intense involvement in the unit formed by their work colleagues but may have a much more distant relationship with their own family.

2. Small intermental units. Characters tend to form intermental pairs and small groups of various sorts such as marriages, close friendships, and nuclear families. It is likely that, over time, the people in these units will get to know quite well what the others are thinking. However, these small groups will obviously vary greatly in the quality of their intermental thought, and readers’ expectations may not be met. Many fictional marriages have much less intermental thought than one might think (depending on the level of one’s expectations in this matter, of course). For an excellent analysis of the small intermental unit of a mar-
riage, see Elena Semino’s “Blending and Characters’ Mental Functioning in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Lappin and Lapinova’” (2006).

3. **Medium-sized intermental units.** The intermentality that occurs between the individuals in medium-sized units such as work colleagues, networks of friendships, and neighborhoods is rather different from the one that arises in random encounters and small units. Here, the emphasis is less on individuals knowing what another person is thinking, and more on people thinking the same way (whether or not they know that others are also thinking that way). Examples that are highlighted in later chapters include some of the subgroups of the Middlemarch mind in chapter 3, the Circumlocution Office in chapter 4, and the party to which Anne Elliot belongs in chapter 5.

4. **Large intermental units.** Individuals are also likely to belong to larger groups that will also have a tendency to think together on certain issues and so produce a collective opinion or consensus view on a particular topic. To pursue this point in greater depth would be to take this study into concepts such as ideology that are well beyond the scope of this book. The dynamics involved in large groups are similar to those that govern medium-sized units. Examples from the novels studied in future chapters include the town of Middlemarch, “Society” in Bath (Persuasion), and the important role that the public plays in the passage from Little Dorrit that is discussed at the end of chapter 4.

5. **Intermental minds.** These are intermental units, large, medium, or small, that are so well defined and long-lasting, and where so much successful intermental thought takes place, that they can plausibly be considered as group minds. Couples who have been together for a long time, who know each other’s minds well, and who are able to work well together on such joint activities as decision making and problem solving are the best examples. However, larger groups may also acquire some of these characteristics. Though well defined, these groups will contain individuals who will often be completely different from each other. Opinions will inevitably differ widely on the point at which a particular collection of people can be regarded as sufficiently stable, well-functioning, and distinctive to be defined as an intermental mind. I will argue that the town of Middlemarch, a large unit, may be called an intermental mind, together with some marriages such as the Crofts in Persuasion and the Meagles in Little Dorrit.

The simplicity of this typology hardly begins to do justice to the complexity and range of the intermental units to be found in novels. Nevertheless, it does have some value in providing a map, however rudimentary, by
which this unfamiliar territory may be initially explored. It is obvious that there is a wide spectrum of phenomena covered by the term *intermental thought* and also by this typology: it ranges from chance encounters between two strangers to the life of a whole town over a long period. I do not see any harm in this, as long as we remain conscious of it. The priority is to establish the viability of the externalist perspective on fictional minds as a whole. Then it will be possible to specify the intricate complexities that can be revealed by that perspective. In his review of Dorrit Cohn's inspirational study *Transparent Minds*, the narratologist Brian McHale said that the “history of our poetics of prose is essentially a history of successive differentiations of types of discourse from the undifferentiated ‘block’ of narrative prose” (1981, 185). These wise words have guided me throughout my narratological studies. I see the first book as having hacked off a huge, previously undifferentiated block of prose and labeled it *fictional minds*. This current stage involves detaching a smaller but still sizeable chunk (labeled *social minds*) from the fictional-minds block, for the purpose of reducing it further into ever smaller and finer fragments. The intention is that, by these means, the work may eventually, over time, become progressively less industrial and heavy-duty in nature and rather more craftsmanlike.

As with all other aspects of the reading process, we bring our real-world cognitive frames to bear when we encounter fictional intermental units. As I say, these frames will entail the default assumption that our theory of mind works better with spouses, close friends, and immediate family than it does with total strangers. We assume that the attributional success rate will be higher than average in such relationships. Within the externalist perspective, it is not surprising that we often know what other people are thinking. It is not a question of occasional sudden flashes of insight, but of a steady pattern of shared thought processes resulting in fairly accurate prediction rates. This pattern is, of course, regularly disrupted by intermental breakdowns, sometimes serious, and my intention is certainly not to minimize the importance of these breakdowns. As I will repeat at regular intervals throughout this book, it is a balance. Sometimes, as we shall see, the default slots are filled; sometimes, when our assumptions are wrong, they are not. When there are frequent misunderstandings or a fundamental lack of communication, the reader has to reconsider the nature of the relationship and amend the frame. In extreme cases, such as Anne Elliot’s relationship with her father and older sister, and Clennam’s with his mother, major reconstruction, such as the use of a new, dysfunctional-family frame, is quickly required.

I have found that some literary scholars tend to react with initial skepticism and even hostility to the idea of intermental thought. However, it is my experience that this hostility tends to wear off with time, to be replaced by
curiosity and even enthusiasm. Others are interested from the beginning in the concept of intermental thought, but resist the concept of an intermental mind. It is a step too far. But there is really little difference between what I have in mind for the concept of an intermental mind and what these skeptics are prepared to accept. Intermental minds consist simply of individual minds pooling their resources and producing different results. Have a look again at the definition of an intermental mind that I gave above and ask yourself whether you disagree that couples can get to know each other so well that they are frequently “of one mind” and can solve problems together very efficiently. I doubt that you do. So what we are really talking about is whether the use of the term mind is appropriate for this mutual cooperation.

While considering this question, it is worth bearing in mind the functionalist perspective on mental life that is characteristic of a good deal of the cognitive sciences and that asks what thinking does, what it is for. In questioning what constitutes a mind and what does not, this perspective has an extremely liberating effect because it leads you to question what is meant by a mind. Artificial-intelligence (AI) researchers look at the mind in term of outputs, or what the brain does. They therefore investigate whether these outputs can only be produced by wetware (that is, the physical composition of the brain) or whether the same results can also be obtained from computer hardware. And once your concept of mind is flexible enough for you to question the commonsense assumption that the physical brain is necessary to the production of a mind, you are then free to wonder whether a mind can also consist of more than one brain.

In his famous “Chinese Room” thought experiment, John Searle (1980) asks us to imagine someone who cannot understand Chinese but who is put into a room containing some Chinese writing together with instructions for handling this writing. The instructions say what writing should be passed out of the room as answers to particular questions. Using these instructions, the person is able to “answer” questions written in Chinese even though he or she does not understand that language. From the outside, the room looks like a thinking mind because when questions are submitted to it, they are correctly answered. (I can cite a similar sort of case from my day job. I am able to produce perfectly adequate minutes of meetings despite having had very little understanding of what was being discussed. I am being serious.) Searle’s point is that computers function in the same way as the Chinese room. They appear to work as minds do, but in fact they do not. He wishes to undermine the claim of the “strong AI” argument that computers can have minds. John Searle’s Chinese Room experiment is controversial, and people disagree vehemently over its significance. Can you regard the (non-Chinese-speaking) individual-plus-the-writing-plus-the-instructions as a
“mind”? Most people would not. But if you are one of those, how do you explain the fact that the brain is also made up of equally blind, unknowing elements? Within the brain, consciousness is distributed across constituent modules that are just as incapable of independent cognition as the various elements that go to make up the Chinese room. Why not just talk of these individual modules pooling their resources to produce better results? Well, we do, except that we have a single word for this process—the mind.

Some of the philosophers and psychologists who subscribe to the notion of socially distributed cognition are also interested in another aspect of the mind that is called physically distributed cognition: “our habit of off-loading as much as possible of our cognitive tasks into the environment itself” (Dennett 1996, 134). Andy Clark calls this process *Supersizing the Mind* (2009). It is achieved mainly through tools such as pen and paper and computers. However, in a less obvious sense, we also make use of our whole environment as a cognitive aid. In her seminal study *The Art of Memory*, the historian Frances Yates describes how ancient orators used parts of the auditorium as memorial reference points for sections of their oratory. On a more mundane level, when we are in our own homes, we know where everything is and our cognitive functioning runs smoothly; when we are put into an alien environment, the quality of our thinking can suffer. Dennett convincingly illustrates the importance of physically distributed cognition to old people when he describes how they tend to become disoriented when taken out of their own homes and put into the unfamiliar environment of a nursing home. As Dennett says, “Taking them out of their homes is literally separating them from large parts of their minds” (1996, 128). Examples of physically distributed cognition are mentioned in the following chapters. Within the context of the present discussion, it may be regarded as the argument that a mind can correspond to a brain plus inanimate objects. Yet another opportunity for flexibility in one’s conception of the mind is the doctrine of behaviorism, which can be interpreted, in a certain sense, as the argument that when we talk of the mind, we are talking of (the behavior of) the body.

The more you read of philosophical and psychological debates such as these, the more flexible your concept of mind becomes, whether by breaking it down into its constituent elements, or by building it up (that is, distributing it) to include external elements. To summarize, there are at least four different ways in which the cognitive sciences can open up our thinking about the mind and, in particular, loosen the rigid correspondence of one mind to one brain. These are as follows:

- A mind can be realized by machinery: one mind corresponding to no (wetware) brain;
A mind can be interpreted in terms of behavior: one mind corresponding, in a certain sense, to one body;

A mind can be physically distributed: one mind corresponding to one brain plus inanimate objects; and

A mind can be socially distributed: one mind corresponding to more than one brain.

Within this context, I hope that the use of the term mind to refer to a group may not seem so surprising. To put the point simply: the mind is a fuzzy concept.

Even so, you may be wondering how intermental units are able to survive Occam’s razor, the principle that entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity. Why create a new entity of an intermental unit instead of simply talking of individuals? I would turn the question around and point out that the advocates of socially distributed cognition are postulating one theoretical entity (the intermental unit, made up of two or more different elements) to explain a joint mental operation, whereas the traditional view posits at least two (the sum of the individuals involved). So Occam’s razor should apply to the internalist rather than to the externalist position.

Some skeptics argue that cognitivists put old wine into new bottles. I acknowledge that there are points in this book where an analysis in the noncognitive language of mainstream literary theory would produce similar results (for example, the discussions in chapter 4 of the role of the face, nonverbal communication, and the look). However, I would argue that the cognitive orientation displayed in this study links together disparate, previously only partially visible aspects of the novel and combines them into a complete cognitive theory of social fictional minds. Within this theoretical framework, new insights into these various elements, even those that are capable of noncognitive explanations, will, I think, emerge.

CASE STUDY: MEN AT ARMS

I will now illustrate some of the concepts discussed so far in this chapter and the previous one by applying them to a short passage of text. I will attempt to reveal what I think are important insights into this passage by approaching it from the following four perspectives: storyworlds, theory of mind, intermental thought, and unconscious thought. My example text is one of the great passages of twentieth-century English literature: the description of Guy Crouchback’s departure from Italy at the beginning of Evelyn Waugh’s Men at Arms. Crouchback is leaving his family home outside the Italian village.
of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce on the eve of the Second World War in order to go to London to enlist in the army. As he is driven away, he thinks about the Italian word *simpatico* (meaning sympathetic in the sense of congenial, compatible, or of similar mind or temperament):

He was not loved, Guy knew, either by his household or in the town. He was accepted and respected but he was not *simpatico*. Grafina von Gluck, who spoke no word of Italian and lived in undisguised concubinage with her butler, was *simpatica*. Mrs Garry was *simpatica*, who distributed Protestant tracts, interfered with the fishermen’s methods of killing octopuses and filled her house with stray cats.

Guy’s uncle, Peregrine, a bore of international repute whose dreaded presence could empty the room in any centre of civilization—Uncle Peregrine was considered *molto simpatico*. The Wilmots were gross vulgarians; they used Santa Dulcina purely as a pleasure resort, subscribed to no local funds, gave rowdy parties and wore indecent clothes, talked of “wops” and often left after the summer with their bills to the tradesmen unpaid; but they had four boisterous and ill-favoured daughters whom the Santa-Dulcinesi had watched grow up. Better than this, they had lost a son bathing from the rocks. The Santa-Dulcinesi participated in these joys and sorrows. They observed with relish their hasty and unobtrusive departures at the end of the holidays. They were *simpatici*. Even Musgrave who had the castelletto before the Wilmots and bequeathed it his name, Musgrave who, it was said, could not go to England or America because of warrants for his arrest, “Musgrave the Monster,” as the Crouchbacks used to call him—*he* was *simpatico*. Guy alone, whom they had known from infancy, who spoke their language and conformed to their religion, who was open-handed in all his dealings and scrupulously respectful of all their ways, whose grandfather built their school, whose mother had given a set of vestments embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework for the annual procession of St. Dulcina’s bones—Guy alone was a stranger among them. (15–16)

The four issues (storyworlds, theory of mind, intermental thought, and unconscious thought) resolve themselves into the following simple statements:

- The passage constructs a fictional storyworld that readers have to gain access to in order to understand the narrative.
- Readers gain access to this storyworld primarily by trying to follow the workings of the minds of the characters described in it, and, in par-
ticular, by following how these characters try to follow the workings of each other's minds.

- One of the minds that is active in the passage is the collective or group mind of the inhabitants of the town.
- Some of the thinking that this group mind does is unconscious.

I will now explain the background to each of these statements in turn.

Readers employ the notion of the storyworld when they say of novels, as we all do, that they are “true to life” or “realistic,” or that they are “inconsistent” or “farfetched,” and so on. When we say things such as these we are positing the existence of a storyworld and then comparing it to our own real world. Let us try the real-world/storyworld comparison on this beautiful piece of writing. I think it is likely that, when we do, the reaction of many readers will be “How true! It's so accurate, so true-to-life. That is how people behave! Life is unfair!” But what do we mean when we say these things? After all, we are talking about a semiotic construct: an imaginary town peopled by imaginary characters. Well, we mean that this imaginary world is like the real world in certain important ways, but what is the relationship that is conveyed by that single, simple word “like”?

The storyworld described in the passage consists in part of physical spaces containing various objects. Let us have a detailed look at this world. It is set in Italy and the Second World War is about to begin. It contains taxis, households, towns, butlers, fishermen and fishing nets, octopuses, houses, cats, uncles, bores, pleasure resorts, funds, parties, clothes, bills, tradesmen, rocks, holidays, arrest warrants, language, religion, ways of doing things, grandfathers, schools, mothers, vestments, processions, bones, and strangers. I have listed these elements in such exhaustive and slightly surreal detail in order to illustrate how dense even short descriptions of storyworlds can be. The passage that contains these thirty-odd elements is less than three hundred words long. Even the most apparently simple reading process involves a number of complex cognitive operations. An obvious point follows, but it is one that is well worth making explicit: in order to understand the passage, in order to reconstruct this storyworld, the reader has to know what taxis, butlers, and fishing nets are. As the length of the list shows, a good deal of this sort of real-world knowledge is required for narrative comprehension. But, in addition to knowing what these things are, we also have to be capable of the many inferences contained in the language that describes them if we are to achieve full understanding. When the text says that Uncle Peregrine could empty a room, we have to work out what this really means: everybody knows that he is so boring that people leave the room hastily when they see him in it.
Because it is obvious that this storyworld is like the real world in the sense that all of the objects contained in it exist in reality, we are able to apply to it what Marie-Laure Ryan calls the **principle of minimal departure** (1991). That is, we assume that any narrative storyworld is like our own until the text provides evidence of such departures from the real world as magical or supernatural entities or events. Her concept is a description in different terms of the default values contained in the frames that we apply to fictional texts. Our assumption that the storyworld will not depart from the real world unless we are told otherwise is a default position. So, when we study a narrative, we look for the clues that will tell us in what ways, if at all, the storyworld created by that narrative differs from the real world. The default position applies in the case of *Men at Arms*, where there are no magical beings with supernatural powers.

However, a further comparison between the storyworld and the real world is required. In addition to consisting of physical spaces and objects, storyworlds also comprise the minds of the characters who inhabit those spaces: Guy and the other people who live in the town. Although the sense of place and the existence of objects are important, these fictional minds are far more so. If I am right that reader responses to the passage will tend to go along the lines of “Life’s just like that!” then these responses would be concerned with fictional minds. Spaces and objects usually have significance only insofar as they affect the mental functioning of the characters in the storyworld. Just as our real minds always operate within a physical and social context, so fictional minds always operate within the specific social and physical context of their storyworld. The fishing nets, the taxis, the cats, and the location of the town are important because they mean something to the fictional minds of the characters who experience those things. Does the principle of minimal departure apply to these fictional minds just as it does to the physical objects? How do the minds described in the text correspond to what we know of our own minds and what we know of the minds of other people? Do the characters behave like real people? These questions bring us to the next issue: theory of mind.

Just as the physical spaces and objects of the storyworld are experienced by characters, so readers also interpret the *events* that take place there as characters’ *experiences*. The Wilmots’ flight from the town is not simply an event. It is something that is experienced by the Wilmots because it is an action that they take. They arrive at the belief that they have run out of money; they have the desire to escape the consequences of their lack of money; and they come to the decision that it would be in their best interests to take the action of leaving the town. It is also an experience for the town. It watches the departure with relish because it is using its own theory of
mind on the Wilmots. It has followed the causal mental network that I have just described, and therefore understands why they are leaving. Finally, and more indirectly, it is an experience for Guy. He, presumably, has also followed the thinking behind the Wilmots’ action, and he is also aware of the inexplicably tolerant attitude of the town toward it. The death of the son is another obvious example of an experience for both the family and the town. (By the way, to get back to intermental minds for a moment: please note that I have been talking quite naturally here about both the Wilmot family and the town as joint or group minds. I wonder whether any reader of this book who was having difficulty with the theory presented earlier in this chapter thought to themselves while reading this paragraph: “How can a group of people such as a town or a family have a collective mind?” I doubt it. What may seem bizarre in theory can often seem perfectly natural in practice.)

The *Men at Arms* storyworld is aspectual. Like the real world, it varies depending on the diverse aspects under which it is viewed, and its characters can experience it only from a particular perceptual and cognitive aspect at any one time. The storyworld will therefore appear different to, and be experienced differently by, the various minds of the characters. Guy has a set of knowledge, values, opinions, beliefs, and so on that differs substantially from those of the other people in the passage. The notion of *simpatico* forms an important part of his mind because he so keenly feels its absence, whereas it appears that it does not form part of theirs. Guy obviously knows much more about the town than the Wilmots do as he has taken the trouble to study it. He is respectful and knowledgeable about it; they flaunt the fact that they are not. He therefore views the storyworld as it relates to the town completely differently from them. In fact, the whole *Men at Arms* storyworld is so aspectual in nature that the Guy storyworld is a substantially different one from the Wilmots’ storyworld. His town is a different town from theirs. (I pursue this point further when I talk about the “Lydgate storyworld” in chapter 3.) Even this, though, is an oversimplification. The contrast so far has been with the Wilmots, but they are not the only other people in this passage. More generally, the notion of simpatico is one that Guy shares with the whole community. Indeed, it is plausible to speculate that he gets it from that community. In other words, even his intramental thought has an inter-mental component.

You may be thinking that I have gone too far. “We are only talking here about 298 words on the page. The proper names contained in those words refer only to literary constructs. We should not talk about them as though they’re real people.” I would fundamentally disagree. In recognizing their status as semiotic constructs, we *do* have to approach fictional characters in similar ways to real people. We have to hypothesize, speculate, and theorize
in precisely the way I have been doing and will be doing in order to make any sense of the 298 words. When we enter a storyworld, we have to try to fill the gaps in it. Guy’s relationship with the town is a prelude to the rest of the novel, which is concerned with his relationship with his army regiment. If we do not understand the former, we will not understand the latter. The relationship with the army is explored in much greater depth and over a longer period, but the initial cognitive frame provided by the passage I am discussing here helpfully illuminates the problematical nature of his future army career.

As the passage represents Guy’s thoughts and is seen from Guy’s point of view, it is focalized through Guy. But look again at this sentence: “Better than this, they had lost a son bathing from the rocks.” If the sentence is taken in isolation, the phrase “better than this” is extraordinary. How can it be better for a young boy to die? It cannot be better for the narrator that the Wilmots have lost their son, and it is obviously not better for the Wilmots that they have. The focalization in this case is complex. One approach is to say that it is better for the town, in the sense that his death makes the Wilmots even more simpatico. On this view, the Wilmots are being presented from the town’s point of view: the description of the event is focalized through the town. So, although the whole passage is focalized through Guy, this specific intermental focalization is embedded within Guy’s focalization. But an alternative and richer interpretation is that the focalization continues to be Guy’s: it is he, not the villagers, who is thinking (resentfully) “better than the daughters, there is the dead son” because that loss makes the vulgar Wilmots more simpatico with the villagers than he is. His awareness of the villagers’ response to the son’s death influences his judgment here, but it is he, not the villagers, who is the focalizer. Saying that it is the villagers who are thinking “better than this” makes them seem awfully callous, and that runs counter to what we learn in the next sentence: “The Santa-Dulcinesi participated in these joys and sorrows.” A further complication is that you can also hear in that sentence the ironic timbre of the voice of the cool and dispassionate narrator of the novel.

To put my general point another way, it is revealing to analyze fiction in terms of levels of intentionality. (This term is used in the philosophy of mind quite differently from its usual meaning to refer to the “aboutness” of mental states. Such states nearly always have some content, are directed at something, are about something.) In this sentence, I have counted five levels of intentionality:

1. The narrator presents
2. how Guy experiences
3. how the town experiences
4. how the Wilmot family experiences
5. the fact that the son experienced his fatal accident.

So, this apparently simple sentence of only twelve words (“Better than this, they had lost a son bathing from the rocks”) contains a complex set of several different levels of thought. Note in particular, though, that the second and fifth levels relate to individual minds while the third and fourth levels relate to group minds. This leads us on to the next point.

An internalist perspective will not by itself tell us much about the mental functioning that is going on in this passage. True, it will show that the text is describing Guy’s individual, private feelings, but after that, it is not much use. Only an externalist perspective will reveal, for example, that the town has an intermental mind, that the cognitive functioning of the individual characters is apparent to the town from their action and behavior, and that Guy’s feelings make sense only when understood as a reaction to the feelings of the town. The passage is not just about the intramental functioning of one individual, and not just about the intermental functioning of the town: it is about the complex, dialogical relationship between the two. What do I mean by referring to the mind of this town? Look again at the passage and at the range of cognitive functioning of which this group mind is capable. It has known Guy since infancy. It does not love him because it does not find him simpatico, but it does accept and respect him. It finds Guy still a stranger. It does find simpatico the other individuals who are listed in the passage. It can forgive those others their faults. It watches the Wilmot daughters grow up. It participates in the joys and sorrows of the Wilmots. It observes “with relish” their departures. It has its language, its religion, and its ways. How can an entity that is capable of such wide-ranging and sophisticated cognitive functioning not be called a mind?

I would now like to talk about some of the ideas on unconscious thought that are developed in a fascinating book by the psychologist Timothy Wilson called *Strangers to Ourselves* (2002). The notion of unconscious thought is not central to this book. I am talking about it here simply to illustrate that the social-minds approach is a versatile one that can be taken in many different directions. A good deal of work has been done by a number of psychologists on unconscious thought, but I am using Wilson because he synthesizes this work in a clear and approachable way. Although he discusses only individuals, it will be illuminating, I hope, to apply his ideas on the role of the unconscious to the thinking of groups. I will be arguing that, because the workings of the town’s mind have a significant unconscious element, the town judges people in the same way as the intramental unconscious mind,
the town’s attitudes to individuals are conditioned by feeling rules, and, as a result, the town has dual attitudes toward Guy and the other individuals. (The two italicized terms are explained below.) And, most importantly, these features account for what is most remarkable and distinctive about the passage—its counterintuitive and apparently paradoxical quality.

The unconscious thought that I will be discussing consists of much more than just the Freudian unconscious of psychoanalytical theory. (I referred to this wider concept in Fictional Minds as nonconscious thought, precisely in order to differentiate it from the Freudian unconscious. However, I will talk about “the unconscious” here because that is what Wilson calls it.) Here are three examples of this much wider category of unconscious thought. First (2002, 164), Wilson quotes an estate agent as saying that she always listens carefully to what her clients tell her about the sort of house they want to buy. She then completely ignores what they have said and simply watches them as they react to the different sorts of houses they visit. Often, a very different picture of their real wants emerges. The estate agent finds the evidence of what customers do much more reliable than the evidence of what they say. In the second example (2002, 85), students were asked if they would buy a flower as part of a campus charity event and eighty-three percent said they would. In fact, only forty-three percent did. When they were asked whether other people would buy a flower, their prediction (of fifty-six percent) was much more accurate. In a similar sort of study, people predicted that they would donate an average of $2.44 of their earnings to charity and that other people would donate $1.83. The actual figure was $1.53. The final example (2002, 101–2) is an extraordinary one. Young men were approached by an attractive young woman in a park and asked to take part in an experiment. During the discussion, she gave them her phone number. Some of the men were approached while negotiating a flimsy and scary footbridge over a deep gorge and others while sitting on a park bench. Sixty-five percent of the men on the footbridge called her and asked for a date, while only thirty percent of the men on the bench did so. Why the difference? The researchers predicted that the men on the footbridge would mistakenly attribute their beating hearts, shortness of breath, and perspiration to physical attraction rather than just fear of falling off the bridge, and this appears to be exactly what happened.

Psychologists such as Wilson conclude from this evidence that people are often simply mistaken about the nature of their own mental functioning. They think with their conscious mind that they are going to do one thing, but, because the decisions are in fact taken by their unconscious mind, they end up doing another. For this reason, we are often much more accurate in predicting other people’s behavior than we are in predicting our own.
According to Wilson, “There is no direct access to the . . . unconscious, no matter how hard we try . . . It can thus be fruitless to try to examine the . . . unconscious by looking inward. It is often better to deduce the nature of our hidden minds by looking outward at our behaviour and how others react to us and coming up with a good narrative” (2002, 16). What Wilson is saying is that our private thought is often not immediately accessible and available to us. We have to infer what we ourselves are thinking in much the same way as we infer what other people are thinking. We deduce the nature of the workings of our unconscious mind by looking outward at the behavior that results from it. That is what Guy does in deducing that his behavior has made him non simpatico to the town even though his conscious mind has tried so hard to be simpatico. So, although thought can be private and inaccessible to others (no one else will know exactly what thoughts Guy is having in the precise form in which he is having them), thought can also be public and available to others. The workings of the individual minds of Grafin von Gluck, Mrs Garry, and the Wilmots are visible to the town and to Guy, and the workings of the town's intermental mind are visible to Guy as well. In particular, he believes from the behavior of the townspeople that they find others simpatico but not him. This is the externalist perspective in practice.

The notion of unconscious thought can also usefully be linked, not just to specific mental events, but also to the concept of dispositions. According to Wilson, the nineteenth-century psychologist William Hamilton “wrote extensively about the way in which habits acquired early in life become an indispensable part of one's personality. These mental processes are said to constitute a kind of ‘automatic self’ to which people had no conscious access—an idea that was not to reappear in psychology for more than 100 years” (2002, 11–12). Hamilton argued that our dispositions become part of our unconscious mind. It is in this way that the town has acquired habits of thought that have become an indispensable though unconscious part of its intermental personality.

Am I right in saying that the town has unconscious feelings and does not have any direct access to them? Let us speculate. Imagine an inhabitant of the town being asked to make his or her feelings explicit, and therefore conscious: “How do you feel about Mr Crouchback? Do you like Mr Musgrave more?” I find it quite likely that they would then be conscious of what they are supposed to feel and so reply that certainly they like Mr Crouchback as much as Mr Musgrave, if not more. However, that is the sort of insincere reassurance that people feel they have to produce in order to be polite. So let us put the hypothetical question to the inhabitants in a different way and ask them, as Wilson suggests, to analyze their behavior. “Do you behave in a less open and more reserved way towards Mr Crouchback than towards Mr Musgrave?” It seems quite plausible to me that they would be genuinely surprised to hear
that this was a possibility and that Mr Crouchback had noticed any difference. Their conscious minds would find it difficult to recognize the behavior that has resulted from the workings of their unconscious minds.

The unconscious is “a spin doctor that interprets information outside of awareness [and that] does a reasonably accurate job of interpreting other people’s behaviour” (Wilson 2002, 31). “One of the most interesting properties of the . . . unconscious is that it uses stereotypes to categorize and evaluate people” (2002, 11). In doing so, it is fast, unintentional, uncontrollable, and effortless (2002, 49). Specifically, it has a tendency to jump to conclusions, and often fails to change its mind in the face of contrary evidence (2002, 55–56). This sounds to me like a fairly good description of the cognitive functioning of the town. It certainly categorizes and evaluates people. Precisely how it arrives at its views is a gap in the storyworld, but I would suggest that it is likely to be done in a fast, unintentional, uncontrollable, and effortless way. It is difficult to imagine the townspeople agonizing at length about what they should think about Guy, Grafin von Gluck, and the others. It also seems that the town tends to jump to conclusions and fails to change its mind in the face of contrary evidence. Guy has been trying for twenty years to get the town to change its mind about him and has failed. On the other hand, as I will now go on to argue, it has done a reasonably accurate job of interpreting Guy’s mind.

Wilson points out that, while forming its views, the unconscious can produce feelings and preferences that are not always “rational.” That is to say, the workings of the unconscious have their own rationality, which is often different from the alternative rationality of the workings of the conscious mind (2002, chapter 8). He then draws attention to the resulting difficulty in recognizing the feelings generated by the unconscious mind: “The conscious system is quite sensitive to personal and cultural prescriptions about how one is supposed to feel . . . People might assume that their feelings conform to these prescriptions and fail to notice instances in which they do not. These ‘feeling rules’ can make it difficult to perceive how one’s . . . unconscious feels about the matter” (2002, 129; my emphasis). Wilson refers to the resulting “phenomenon in which people have two feelings towards the same topic, one more conscious than the other, as ‘dual attitudes’” (2002, 132; my emphasis). To illustrate, he quotes from a short story in which two adult cousins reminisce about their childhoods. One of them, Blake, says that he was about thirty before he realized that he had always hated their childhood pony, Topper. “It wasn’t until Blake said it that Kate realized that she, too, had always hated Topper. For years they had been conned into loving him, because children love their pony, and their dog, and their parents, and picnics, and the ocean, and the lovely chocolate cake” (quoted in 2002, 118). This last sentence is a list of feeling rules: children must have positive feelings.
about their pony, their dog, and so on. As a result, the cousins had a dual attitude toward the pony: the positive feelings that they knew they were supposed to have according to the feeling rules; and the negative feelings that they subsequently and consciously discovered that they had unconsciously had all along.

The *Men at Arms* passage is a list of feeling rules and also of dual attitudes. It is a list of the reasons why Guy thinks that the conscious mind of the town *ought* to find him simpatico. It is also two other lists: why Guy thinks that the town ought to find the others less so, and why the town nevertheless finds the others more so.

As with individual minds, collective minds can also experience feeling rules and dual attitudes. These feeling rules are implied in all the details that are given about Guy and the others. Every one of the descriptions of the individuals is a reason for disapproval: not bothering to learn Italian, interfering with the fishing, being boring, being gross vulgarians, being a criminal. Every one of the descriptions of Guy is a reason for approval: he speaks their language and follows their religion, and he is open-handed and scrupulously respectful of all their ways. Nevertheless, each of these descriptions is balanced by a conclusion that contradicts it: the others are simpatico; Guy is not. The unconscious mind of the town feels the opposite of what it should feel. It is in this way that every sentence in the passage contains a dual attitude toward Guy or toward the others. This conflict gives the passage its characteristic sense of tension and unease, which arises, as I said earlier, from its apparently paradoxical and counterintuitive nature. The one who seems most likely to be found simpatico is not; all those who seem least likely to be, are. So there are deeper, unspecified reasons at work that must account for the feelings of the town.

I talked just now about the fact that the apparent irrationality of unconscious thought is simply a different rationality from conscious thought. The narrator exploits this difference by making use of readers’ assumptions about what they would think the villagers might find simpatico on the conscious level: this is the list of feeling rules. But in the case of the town of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, these considerations do not seem to rate very highly. Another apparent irrationality is the disregard for the importance of the theory of mind that I discussed earlier. The individuals who are simpatico are not aware of the fact that they are. They do not give the impression that they are particularly self-aware or aware of the feelings of others. Otherwise, they would not behave in such antisocial ways. Guy, on the contrary, tries hard to read the mind of the village and is found to be non simpatico. The moral seems to be that the less you care about being simpatico, the more likely it is that you will be. The reader may then be tempted to conclude that
the fictional mind of the town is irrational. But it is clear, I think, that this is not so. It is simply that the town is employing a different rationality. What is this unconscious rationality? In my view, it is simply a love of life. They favor humanity, facing life with gusto, with self-confidence, with self-belief, and, as the passage says, “with relish.” They like generosity of spirit. Guy is not simpatico because, for all his timid efforts to be liked, he has a poverty of spirit, a meanness of the soul, a meagerness about him that they recognize. This poverty of spirit is evident in the way that he thinks resentfully of the others and especially in the “better than this” phrase that was discussed above. To use a vulgar British expression, he is “tight-arsed.” His life is sterile. In the words of Deuteronomy (30:19), and also of the opening sequence of the film *Trainspotting*, he should “Choose life!” Once this point is realized, the apparent paradoxes dissolve, it is counterintuitive no longer, and the passage makes perfect sense.

CONCLUSION

It may be helpful if I conclude this chapter by specifying how much I want to claim for the significance of the topic of social minds in the novel. I argue that this issue looms large as a technique and as a subject matter in all of the novels that I discuss, but techniques and subject matters are parts of novels, not purposes of them. They are means rather than ends. What matters, ultimately, is the purpose to which a particular sort of consciousness representation is put. So my concern in the chapters that follow is with the purposes of presentations of social minds. These chapters are opportunities to expand on the relationship between analyses of collective consciousness and our larger understanding of the whole novel. Put in general terms, I would summarize the purposes of fictional presentations of social minds as follows:

1. Social minds exist in storyworlds because they exist in real life. Our lives consist of a balance between publicly available thought processes and secret and private thoughts. For novels to be worth reading, they have to reflect that balance. Villages and towns tend to behave in reality in the way that Santa Dulcina delle Rocce behaves. An important part of the pleasure that the *Men at Arms* passage gives its readers is the recognition of this fact.

2. The study of social minds sheds a good deal of light on the workings of individual minds. Characters can only be fully understood as elements in complex social networks. Guy’s relationships first with the town and then with his regiment have a key role in his situated identity. People
may have many different sorts of relationships with intermental units: fully assimilated into them; within them, but in conflict with other parts of the unit; outside, and in opposition to them; acting as a public mouth-piece for them; and so on. Some of these relationships will be explored in the chapters to come.

3. Narrative progression is regulated by the flow of information that the narrator of a novel makes available to its reader. This information frequently concerns the workings of fictional minds. Characters have different levels of knowledge of, and understanding of, the storyworld they inhabit. The narrative theorist Lubomír Doležel refers to the storyworld knowledge that characters possess as their *encyclopedias* (1998). These encyclopedias are basic plot motors. Storylines tend to revolve around the consequences of some characters knowing more than others. Characters have an interest in keeping secrets in order to keep the balance of knowledge, and therefore power, in their favor. However, the tendency of social minds is toward the sharing of knowledge. As explored in chapter 5, many nineteenth-century novels are concerned with the practical problems that arise when characters attempt to practice secrecy within distributed cognitive networks in which people can see very easily what other people are thinking.

4. As I said at the beginning of this book, a fierce debate took place within the nineteenth-century novel on the nature of social minds. The epistemological aspect related to the extent to which it is possible to have knowledge of the workings of other minds. The ethical aspect questioned the purposes to which our knowledge of other minds should be put. Social minds raise complex and difficult ethical issues. Characters face sharp and painful dilemmas relating to attempts to exercise control over other minds and the motives in trying to do so. Guy’s predicament has just been discussed. Should Dorothea bend to the will of the Middlemarch mind? Should Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* have been so persuadable? What are the moral purposes behind the gaining of information about other characters’ thoughts? (For example, in *Little Dorrit*, Henry Gowan uses this knowledge to manipulate others.) What are the moral purposes behind trying to conceal one’s own? The reasons for the latter can be immoral (Gowan again) or moral (Anne Elliot concealing her continued feelings for Wentworth). Anne prefers openness except where it would harm herself or others. She knows that Mr Elliot prefers secrecy because he can make use of the resulting control of information and knowledge for his own purposes. Other perplexities will be investigated in the chapters that follow.