CHAPTER 5

Persuasion and Other Novels

THIS CHAPTER is rather different in structure from the previous two. Those were in-depth analyses of single novels; this one is more wide-ranging. It focuses first on Anne Elliot in Persuasion and considers how she functions within the intermental network of the novel’s storyworld. This analysis of a single character differs from the treatment of Lydgate in chapter 3 because there I analyzed the construction of his character at a very basic level (by examining, for example, its “gappiness”). Here, I take the analysis a stage further and look at how the intermental nature of Anne’s social mind is central to our understanding of the whole novel. The second section of this chapter looks at the topic of characters’ emotions in Persuasion. The subject of emotions is a huge one that would require another book to do it justice. I will therefore limit myself to a few brief words in order to give an indication of what such a full study might look like. The third section will make a few general points about a wide range of nineteenth-century novels. The intention here is to demonstrate that the intense interest in social minds shown by my three main example texts is entirely typical of the century as a whole. I use the fourth and final section to summarize some of the similarities and differences to be found in the novels under discussion.

SOCIAL MINDS IN PERSUASION

Persuasion, like Middlemarch and Little Dorrit, is preoccupied with the bal-
ance between public and private thought, intermental and intramental functioning, social and individual minds. Like the other two, it contains frequent references to attributions of mental states, theory of mind, and intermental thought. These include general statements about the functioning of minds such as the narrator perceptively commenting that “Husbands and wives generally understand when opposition [to the wishes of their spouse] will be vain” (81). There are also many more specific instances. The Musgrove daughters are able to see their mother’s thought: “mamma is thinking of poor Richard” (91). Anne Elliot, who is generally, as we shall see, a good mind reader, “is ready to do good by entering into [Henrietta’s] feelings” (124).

The character of Anne Elliot cannot be seen in isolation. Her mind is public, social, and engaged. In Bakhtinian terms, it is dialogic, frequently anticipating the views of others, successfully or not, and often judged by others, again favorably or not. This inescapability of the social has a profound effect on the value judgments that are made about her mind by others and also about others by her. When she is deciding whether she likes Mr Elliot or not, she arrives at this damning judgment: “Mr Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,—but he was not open” (173). This word “open” is an important one within the debate on social minds and requires further analysis. On the one hand, for people such as Anne and Clennam, whose default assumption about others is that their minds should work together to share the benefits of their mental functioning, honesty, goodwill, and openness are of great significance. She likes people whose minds are responsive, spontaneous, and generous. This coincides with the prevailing cultural preference in Austen’s novels, in which secrecy is disliked and characters such as Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Fairfax in *Emma* are criticized for being “cold” or “reserved.”

On the other hand, when it comes to the most important elements of Anne’s mind, her feelings for Wentworth, she does not share them with anybody else until the indirect indication in chapter 23 that she gives in her speech to Harville that finally gives Wentworth the spur he needs to propose to her. And she never tells Lady Russell her conclusions about taking her advice. Nor is she open with Mary about her thoughts on Mary’s behavior. So it is certainly not a simple matter of being open at all times. The fact that Anne is closed on these points is a result of moral choices, and they are moral choices that the implied author appears to approve of. It is legitimate to be closed in certain circumstances: for example, for reasons of politeness and courtesy, or when openness would cause unnecessary hurt to others or to oneself. The open/closed binary is an important one, in my view, but, like so many others, it does not work in a simplistic right/wrong way. Difficult
moral choices are required on the right level of openness to be adopted in specific circumstances.

The emphasis in the text of *Persuasion* on the social nature of cognitive functioning is relentless. In a discussion between Anne and Mr Elliot on what constitutes “good company,” this phrase is used seven times in ten lines (162). There are also references on the following page to “society,” “the connexion,” “your family,” “related,” “acquaintance,” “the relationship,” “acquaintance” (again), and “society” (again). All of these terms convey a sense of the context of the large-scale group frame of society within which Anne as an individual and also her smaller-scale relationships function. Anne's behavior is inexplicable without an awareness of the pressures brought to bear by the group norms that are imposed on her. The following two passages explicitly acknowledge the importance of the role played by social minds in the novel. Furthermore, they show that Anne is self-consciously aware of this fact:

Anne had not wanted this visit to Uppercross, to learn that a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea. . . . Yet, with all this experience, she believed she must now submit to feel that another lesson, in the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle, was become necessary for her. (69)

She acknowledged it to be very fitting, that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse; and hoped, ere long, to become a not unworthy member of the one she was now transplanted into.—With the prospect of spending at least two more months at Uppercross, it was highly incumbent on her to clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible. (70)

These quotes, in demonstrating beyond doubt the narrator’s awareness of the externalist perspective, may surprise you (as they surprised me) in spelling out so clearly the practical implications of the theoretical framework described in chapter 2. To me, they sound like George Eliot. Reading them, it is easy to see how *Middlemarch* will come to be written. The language is not as obviously cognitive as that of the later novel, but the sensibility, the sensitivity to the workings of social minds, is the same.

**The Party**

Anne is sometimes alone. At the end of chapter 3, she “left the room, to seek
the comfort of cool air for her cheeks,” thinking to herself, “a few months more and he, perhaps, may be walking here” (54). The passage in chapter 4 that gives the backstory specifies that Anne is alone while reviewing that story herself: “With all these circumstances, recollections, and feelings, she could not hear that Captain Wentworth’s sister was likely to live at Kellynch, without a revival of former pain; and many a stroll and many a sigh were necessary to dispel the agitation of the idea” (58). Also, she must be alone for lengthy periods in order to do all that reading that she talks with Benwick about. However, despite her frequent longing for solitude, few of the scenes presented in the novel show her to be alone. When she is not with her father and Elizabeth, she is usually part of a shifting, ever-changing group of people that I am calling the party. The composition of the party changes from day to day but its core consists of Charles and Mary, Mr and Mrs Musgrove, Henrietta and Louisa, Admiral and Mrs Croft, Captain Wentworth, Captain and Mrs Harville, Captain Benwick, and Charles Hayter. As with all groups, the dynamics of the party raises interesting questions related to individuality, the self, and situated identity. Some of the members of the party such as Mrs Musgrove are difficult to imagine alone, as being an individual or a self apart from it. Others, though, remain distinct characters despite having part of their identity defined in terms of it. Wentworth is one such. He becomes the centre of its attention. There is “but one opinion of Captain Wentworth, among the Musgroves and their dependencies” (97). Unsurprisingly, when he is thinking of leaving the party to visit his brother, “the attractions of Uppercross induced him to put this off. There was so much of friendliness, and of flattery, and of everything most bewitching in his reception there; the old were so hospitable, the young so agreeable” (97).

Intermental units sometimes engage in joint decision making. For example, joint decisions have to be taken by the party during the period after Louisa’s accident. In the moments immediately following her fall, under the impact of the trauma, the party fractures into individuals. Then, an initial decision, what to do with the injured Louisa, is required. It is an easy one for the group to make: “That Louisa must remain where she was, however distressing to her friends to be involving the Harvilles in such trouble, did not admit a doubt” (132). Later, more long-term plans are required. This time, the precise membership of the core decision-making subgroup of the party is specified. “Charles, Henrietta and Captain Wentworth were the three in consultation, and for a little while it was only an interchange of perplexity and terror . . . At first, they were capable of nothing more to the purpose than such exclamations . . . The plan had reached this point . . . The other two warmly agreed . . . One thing more and all seemed arranged” (133–34). Notice that, at first, they are capable only of sharing their emotions. However,
they gradually find themselves able to take on the more cognitively oriented functions of short- and medium-term planning. The group then has second thoughts: “A much better scheme followed and was acted upon” (137). “It was soon determined that they would go” (138). This decision-making intermental unit is functioning well. It is decisive but, when flexibility is required, it is able to change its mind and adopt a better plan. It is noticeable that Anne is not a part of the decision-making process but is indispensable to it, as she is the chief means by which its decisions can be implemented.

Anne thinks constantly about her relationship with the party. She “admired again the sort of necessity which the family-habits seemed to produce, of every thing being to be communicated, and every thing being to be done together, however undesired and inconvenient” (106). “The two families were so continually meeting, so much in the habit of running in and out of each other’s house at all hours, that it was rather a surprise to her to find Mary alone” (64). The word “Uppercross” is frequently used as a metonymy for the party (in the same way as the names of large houses in Middlemarch are used). “Scenes had passed in Uppercross, which made it precious” (139); “Anne could not but feel that Uppercross was already quite alive again” (148); and Anne “looked back, with fond regret, to the bustles of Uppercross” (149). Her warm feelings about the group are clearly apparent.

However, Anne is also ambivalent about what she calls the “domestic hurricane” (149). Sometimes she enjoys it as a welcome contrast to the sterility and coldness of her own family; Anne envies the Musgrove sisters “nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together, that good-humored mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters” (67–68). But at other times, she wishes to be alone. During the crisis in Bath, when what she really wants is some space, “she gave herself up to the demands of the party, to the needful civilities of the moment” (194), but with some reluctance. At the end of novel, the value to Anne of being part of this intermental unit is heavily underscored. Although she is delightfully happy to be engaged again to Wentworth, she has “the consciousness of having no relations to bestow on him which a man of sense could value . . . nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters” (252–53). Anne is uncomfortably aware that her own immediate family is of little value compared with the shared humanity and warmth of the party. As I said in chapter 2, our real-world knowledge tends to entail the default assumption that our theory of mind works better with spouses, friends, and immediate family than it does with total strangers. Sometimes, these default slots are filled; sometimes, when our assumptions are wrong, they are not. In the case of Anne’s relationship with her father
and older sister, where her word has “no weight,” major reconstruction is required. By the end of the novel, Anne almost abandons her family in her eagerness to embrace a new one.

Anne and Smaller Intermental Units

Anne is constantly engaged with other minds, and her knowledge of them is generally pretty good. “With a great deal of quiet observation, and a knowledge, which she often wished less, of her father’s character” (62), Anne generally knows how Sir Walter’s mind is going to work. When he and Elizabeth talk to Anne in exaggerated terms about their renewed acquaintance with Mr Elliot, “allowances, large allowances, she knew, must be made for the ideas of those who spoke” (153). Anne’s perceptive “quiet observation” is often of the body language of others, in particular of their looks and glances. That Elizabeth and Mrs Clay agree on the merits of Mr Elliot “seemed apparent [to Anne] by a glance or two between them” (154). When Mr Elliot talks to Anne about his supposed suspicions of Mrs Clay, but without mentioning her name, “he looked, as he spoke, to the seat which Mrs Clay had been late occupying, a sufficient explanation of what he particularly meant” (163). And Anne does know immediately what he means.

Nevertheless, the novel frequently demonstrates that care should be taken with the interpretation of evidence of the apparent mental functioning of others. When Anne confronts Mrs Clay with the fact that she, Anne, saw her talking to Mr Elliot, “It seemed to her [Anne] that there was guilt in Mrs Clay’s face as she listened” (232). Anne is right about Mrs Clay’s feelings of guilt, but wrong about their cause. Anne thinks that Mrs Clay feels guilty because she has been confronted by Mr Elliot about her designs on Sir Walter, whereas, in reality, it is because she thinks that her affair with Mr Elliot has been discovered. In another example of half-successful, half-mis-taken theory of mind, Mrs Smith says to Anne, “Your countenance perfectly informs me that you were in company last night with the person, whom you think the most agreeable in the world” (210). She is right, but wrong about the identity of the “most agreeable” person. It is not Mr Elliot, as Mrs Smith thinks, but Captain Wentworth. This confusion throws Mrs Smith so completely that she later says, “Now, how I do wish I understood you! How I do wish I knew what you were at!” (203).

One of the major reasons for theory of mind breakdown is the solipsistic tendency that we all have to forget that other people have minds too and that they work differently from ours. Anne is conscious of this possibility in herself. She has to remind herself that not everyone knows or even
cares about her feelings. Most of the time, her reminders to herself work. She is usually acutely conscious of other minds and knows that it is sometimes not possible to predict the reactions of others: “She had spoken it; but she trembled when it was done, conscious that her words were listened to, and daring not even to try to observe their effect” (229). But at other times, as Anne herself knows, her tendency to solipsism can get the better of her. On one occasion, Anne thinks that Mrs Croft is talking about Captain Frederick Wentworth when she is actually referring to her other brother, Edward Wentworth. Anne “immediately felt how reasonable it was, that Mrs Croft should be thinking and speaking of Edward, and not of Frederick; and with shame at her own forgetfulness, applied herself to the knowledge of [Edward’s] present state, with proper interest” (75). Anne has noticed that her “forgetfulness” is of the fact that Mrs Croft has a mind that will necessarily work differently from hers. The important point is that she realizes that her misreading of Mrs Croft’s mind is caused by her understandable absorption in Wentworth’s arrival. Another example of Anne’s (admittedly fairly mild) solipsistic tendency is an elaborate set piece that takes up a whole page of text. When Anne is walking with Lady Russell in Bath she sees Captain Wentworth approaching on the other side of the road. During the course of a long paragraph Anne attributes a variety of states of mind to Lady Russell on the assumption that she has seen him and still disapproves of him. She anticipates a meeting between the two with growing dread. Finally, however, Lady Russell bathetically reveals that all she has been thinking about are curtains! On hearing this, “Anne sighed and blushed and smiled, in pity and disdain, either at her friend or herself” (189).

The last-mentioned misunderstanding is indicative of the complexity of the friendship between Anne and Lady Russell. Although Lady Russell is referred to as Anne’s “one very intimate friend” (36), it is also mentioned that, after her refusal of Wentworth, Anne and Lady Russell “knew not each other’s opinion, either its constancy or its change” (57). The point is made again: “It was now some years since Anne had begun to learn that she and her excellent friend could sometimes think differently” (160). And repeated: “They did not always think alike” (160). The relationship then strengthens again. When Anne discovers Mr Elliot’s true nature, one of her first thoughts is that “She must talk to Lady Russell, tell her, consult with her” (218). And, when matters are resolved, “Anne knew that Lady Russell must be suffering some pain in understanding and relinquishing Mr Elliot, and be making some struggles to become truly acquainted with, and do justice to Captain Wentworth” (251). But, although the friendship is restored, they are never really a strong intermental unit. Anne has turned out to be a much better judge of character with regard to both Wentworth and Mr. Elliot, and, as a
result, she is not open with her about the differences in their views on other people generally. It is hardly a friendship of equals.

The Croft marriage is an interesting attributional case study. On the one hand, the strongly intermental nature of the relationship between the Admiral and Mrs Croft is frequently emphasized. In Uppercross, “The Admiral and Mrs Croft were generally out of doors together . . . dawdling about in a way not endurable to a third person” (97). In Bath, they “brought with them their country habit of being almost always together . . . [Anne] delighted to fancy she understood what they might be talking of” (179). Anne responds to them as a couple, not as individuals: The Crofts “were people whom her heart turned to very naturally” (174). While thinking about her earlier engagement to Wentworth, she pays them this heartfelt tribute: “With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved” (88). In addition to her emotional response to them, Anne is also aware that they function as a cognitive unit. She watches the Crofts “with some amusement at their style of driving,” which involves their taking joint decisions on the steering, and “which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs” (114). There is only one occasion on which they are of different minds. When the Admiral warmly praises the Musgrove girls as possible objects of Wentworth’s affection, Mrs Croft refers to them “in a tone of calmer praise, such as made Anne suspect that her keener powers might not consider either of them as quite worthy of her brother” (114).

On the other hand, much is also made of the Crofts’ regular attributional breakdowns involving others. At one point, Admiral Croft talks to Wentworth “without taking any observation of what he might be interrupting, thinking only of his own thoughts” (92–93). When Anne wishes to be reassured by the Admiral that Wentworth is not grieving over losing Louisa to Captain Benwick, he is not sensitive enough to pick up on her emotional needs and “Anne did not receive the perfect conviction which the Admiral meant to convey” (183). To do him credit, he is sensitive enough to wish to convey the reassurance, but not sufficiently attuned to the workings of other minds to do so successfully. In addition, there is an enjoyably comic example of Mrs Croft’s solipsism. When she is insistent to Mrs Musgrove about not referring to Bermuda or the Bahamas as “the West Indies,” “Mrs Musgrove had not a word to say in dissent; she could not accuse herself of having ever called them any thing in the whole course of her life” (94). It is an interesting question whether it is a coincidence that the two individuals in the
tightest intermental unit in the novel are also the ones who are among the most solipsistic in their relations with others. It is also worth comparing the centripetal nature of this unit with Anne's and Wentworth's centrifugal relationship as described at the end of the novel in the long quote (see page 156 below) with which this discussion of social minds in *Persuasion* concludes. The older couple are, in their cognitive relations with others, rather sealed off from them by their absorption with each other, while the love between the younger pair includes a heightened awareness of other minds.

**Anne and Wentworth**

The key to the novel is the construction of Wentworth's mind by Anne and by the reader. The central question posed by the text is: What does he now think of her? He appears at first to have no feelings for her and it then slowly becomes apparent that he does still love her. Anne experiences intense feelings of anguish toward the end of the novel when she is not sure what Wentworth is thinking. Her record in this respect is patchy. Sometimes she does know: “When he talked, she heard the same voice, and discerned the same mind” (88–89). And when he talks lightly of being ready to make a foolish match: “He said it, she knew, to be contradicted” (86). At other times she does not know. It is odd that this is a unit that does not function particularly well. As I said, though, when discussing *Little Dorrit*, this is consistent with the default assumptions contained in the cognitive frame for lovers, by which we assume that the course of true love never runs smooth and misunderstandings can often arise.

Anne's knowledge of Wentworth's views on others is generally accurate, but it is much less so when he is thinking about her. When he is listening to Mrs Musgrave becoming sentimental about her useless son, “there was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face at this speech, a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne” that she knew what he was thinking, “but it was too transient an indulgence of self-amusement to be detected by any who understood him less than herself” (92). Anne can always discern his views on her family. When Mary makes an excessively snobbish remark to him about the Haytters, she “received no other answer, than an artificial, assenting smile, followed by a contemptuous glance, as he turned away, which Anne perfectly knew the meaning of” (19). When Sir Walter and Elizabeth ostentatiously offer him a visiting card because they know that he will “look well” in their drawing room, Anne “knew him; she saw disdain in his eye” (231). And when Anne sees Elizabeth snub Wentworth in the shop in Bath: “It did not
surprise, but it grieved Anne to observe that Elizabeth would not know him. She saw that he saw Elizabeth, that Elizabeth saw him, that there was complete internal recognition on each side; she was convinced that he was ready to be acknowledged as an acquaintance, expecting it, and she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness” (186). (For a treatment of this scene as an example of “deep intersubjectivity,” see Butte 2004, 3.)

In contrast, Anne’s knowledge of his feelings about her is much more intermittent. It is fascinating to follow the fluctuations in their relationship in terms of the successes and the failures in their theory of mind. At the beginning, Anne lacks any knowledge of his state of mind. Before they meet again, “She would have liked to know how he felt as to such a meeting. Perhaps indifferent, if indifference could exist under such circumstances. He must be either indifferent or unwilling” (83). When it appears that the latter possibility is the correct one, “Anne understood it. He wished to avoid seeing her” (84); “Anne felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself” (88); and “She understood him. He could not forgive her,—but he could not be unfeeling” (113). Anne is wrong, though; she does not understand him because she is unaware of his growing renewed love for her. Nevertheless, she slowly begins to understand him better and to interpret his behavioral clues correctly. As is so often the case, there is a gap between characters’ interpretations of others’ minds and readers’ interpretations of those minds. The reader will be ahead of Anne here in picking up on those clues about Wentworth’s renewed love. Anne, who is such a good reader of others, does not understand him yet because she is afraid to let herself believe in his love. It makes her too vulnerable to the kind of pain that she experienced eight years before and that she is living with still.

In the scene in Lyme in which Anne, Wentworth, and Mr Elliot meet briefly, it seems to Anne that Wentworth sees that Mr Elliot is attracted to her: “It was evident that the gentleman . . . admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, ‘That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again’” (125). But, even in Bath, her success rate is mixed: “He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her, than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red . . . The character of his manner was embarrassment. She could not have called it either cold or friendly, or any thing so certainly as embarrassed” (185). This is another instance of partially successful theory of mind. She knows his mind well enough to know that he is embarrassed, but not well enough to know why. However, typically, she knows that she does not know what is troubling him: “She could not understand his present feelings, whether he was really suf-
faring much from disappointment or not; and till that point was settled, she could not be quite herself” (187). Similarly, “Either from the consciousness, however, that his friend had recovered, or from other consciousness, he went no farther” (192). Anne does not know which.

Finally, Anne realizes that Wentworth does love her. The point at which she finally realizes this reads like an attribution manual in its analysis of the behavioral clues on which theory of mind rests. For this reason, the passage is worth quoting in full:

His choice of subjects, his expressions, and still more his manner and look, had been such as she could see in only one light. His opinion of Louisa Musgrave’s inferiority, an opinion which he seemed solicitous to give, his wonder at Captain Benwick, his feelings as to a first, strong attachment,—sentences begun which he could not finish—his half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance,—all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past. She could not contemplate the change as implying less.—He must love her. (195)

But a problem remains—his jealousy of Mr Elliot. Anne does not realize this at first: “Anne knew not how to understand him” (239). As previously, she knows that something is the matter but does not know for sure what it is: “She saw him not far off. He saw her too; yet he looked grave, and seemed irresolute, and only by very slow degrees came at last near enough to speak to her. She felt that something must be the matter. The change was indubitable” (198). She correctly guesses the reason why: “Jealousy of Mr Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive” (199). Later, her guess is confirmed: “She had not mistaken him. Jealousy of Mr Elliot had been the retarding weight, the doubt, the torment” (243). In the meantime, the reader is given the only direct access in the novel to Wentworth’s side of the relationship and, significantly, it is put in theory of mind terms. In his letter to her, he cries out in evident exasperation and suffering, “For you alone I think and plan.—Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?” (240).

As I began this discussion with some large-scale group cognitive frames before going on to talk about medium- and then small-scale frames, I would like to conclude with a passage that brings us full circle by combining all three. The novel ends with Anne and Wentworth together. She is adjusting to her new life, and getting used to how her mind will be working together with other minds, and particularly Wentworth’s, in the future. This passage beautifully encapsulates the functioning of Anne’s social mind in action by showing her at the center of an intermental network:
Mr Elliot was there; she avoided, but she could pity him... Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret; they would soon be innoxious cousins to her. She cared not for Mrs Clay, and had nothing to blush for in the public manners of her father and sister. With the Musgroves, there was the happy chat of perfect ease; with Captain Harville the kind-hearted intercourse of brother and sister; with Lady Russell, attempts at conversation, which a delicious consciousness cut short; with Admiral and Mrs Croft, every thing of peculiar cordiality and fervent interest, which the same consciousness sought to conceal;—and with Captain Wentworth, some moments of communication continually occurring, and always the hope of more, and always the knowledge of his being there. (247–48)

**EMOTIONS IN PERSUASION**

Much of the mental functioning that we attribute to fictional characters consists of strong emotions and feelings. Emotions drive narratives. They are the teleological motors of narratives. A novel with all of the emotions and feelings taken out would not make much sense. This crucially important element in the whole fictional mind was neglected by traditional, structuralist-derived, Genettian narratology for three reasons, I think. One is that it is difficult to find room for the messiness and complexity of emotions within a character paradigm limited to actants with carefully defined roles within the text. The second is that structuralist narratologists historically thought of the representation of consciousness in the novel in terms of linguistic categories such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and free indirect discourse, and these categories do not lend themselves easily to analysis in terms of the concept of emotion. (See *Fictional Minds*, chapter 3, for the theoretical background to this problem.) The final, more general reason is that emotions are difficult—in particular, they are difficult to talk about systematically and analytically. Whenever I discuss with other narrative theorists my interest in fictional emotions, I often sense a blank in their minds, a moment of panic arising from an inability to see how such a theoretical study could be undertaken. This is so despite the fact that so much of their actual, practical criticism involves talking about specific emotions. I recognize this panic because I so often feel it myself. Of all of the various elements of fictional minds that I have tried to explore, I have found emotions to be much the most difficult. It is with a feeling of relief, if I am honest, that I can say that, within the confines of this study, it is only possible to hint at the complexity of the subject.

However, it should be said that the current position on theoretical
interest in emotions and fiction is now much healthier than before. Quite a bit of attention has been paid to this topic recently within other, nonstructuralist traditions. Of particular importance is the rhetorical criticism of the Chicago School, exemplified by the work done by James Phelan (1989) and Peter Rabinowitz (1987), who take account of characters’ emotions while investigating readers’ emotions. Much of their work is concerned with reasoning back from the emotional effects of a work on the reader to the causes of those effects in the interaction of authorial choices and reader knowledge of narrative conventions. Philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum link emotions with ethics, and, in particular, turn to the novel to investigate ethics in ways that supplement analytic philosophy, because the novel recognizes the cognitive value of the emotions (for example, Nussbaum’s Love’s Knowledge [1992]). In Having a Good Cry (2002), Robyn Warhol foregrounds the emotional dimensions and cultural consequences of readers’ engagement with popular-culture narratives. Finally, postclassical narrative theorists such as David Herman (2007a) and Patrick Colm Hogan (2003) have also made important advances in the theorizing of characters’ emotion. As a small contribution to this process, I will briefly discuss the presentation of emotions in chapter 23 of Persuasion.

In order to reinforce the point made just now about the centrality of emotion to narrative, I want to present here a set of short quotes from Persuasion. Taken together, they compose a kind of condensed abstract of some of the emotions to be found in this novel. It is only a selection. A list of all of the references to emotions in the novel would be far longer than this one. I have focused on the most extreme and deeply felt emotions only for maximum impact.

“The pride, the folly, the madness of resentment” (244). “Her heart revelled in angry pleasure, in pleased contempt” (140). “You must allow for an injured, angry woman” (206). “The inevitable sufferings of her situation had been such as could not be related without anguish of spirit” (215). “She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him” (86). “He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! He is black at heart, hollow and black” (206). “Anger, resentment, avoidance were no more” (195). “[It] made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed” (216). “[She] fully submitted, in silent, deep mortification” (85).

“Treading back with feelings unutterable” (131), “He exclaimed in the bitterest agony” (130). “[Her] shudderings were to her herself alone” (90). “As if overpowered by the various feelings of the soul” (132), “they were sick with horror” (132). “The horror of that moment to all who stood around . . . in an
agony of silence” (129). “The horror and distress you were involved in—the stretch of mind, the wear of spirits” (193), “How could I look on without agony?” (246). “What wild imaginations one forms, where dear self is concerned.” (199).

“All the overpowering, blinding, bewildering, first effects of strong surprise were over with her. Still, however, she had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery” (185). “She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly” (233). “As if wholly overcome” (135), he said: “You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope” (240).

“She could not command herself enough to receive that look” (242). “Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless . . . She could only hang over [him] with most disordered feelings . . . Such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from” (103). “Her own emotions still kept her fixed. She had much to recover from, before she could move” (111). “For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost” (185). “She gave herself up to the demands of the party . . . with exquisite, though agitated senses” (194). “She heard nothing distinctly; it was only a buzz of words in her ear, her mind was in confusion” (235). “She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed” (238). “Full of astonishment and emotion, she quitted [the place]” (135).

“She had some feelings that she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy!” (178). “Every moment rather brought fresh agitation. It was an overpowering happiness” (240). “[Her] spirits were dancing in private rapture” (242).

Chapter 23 of Persuasion is the one in which Wentworth overhears Anne’s discussion with Harville about love and gender differences. Wentworth writes his letter to Anne, who then has great difficulty in finding an opportunity to be alone with him once she has read it. However, they do eventually manage to meet and are finally reunited. This chapter contains a passage of three and a half pages in which, in effect, the plot of the novel is retold from Wentworth’s point of view. What follows is a list of the emotions and feelings that are explicitly referred to in this passage.

Jealousy, torment, pouring out his feelings, love, indifference, anger, suffering, fortitude and gentleness, angry pride, pride (again), the “madness of
resentment,” horror, remorse, being “startled and shocked,” not caring, feel-
ings, happiness, pleasure, warm attachment, pride (yet again), astonishment, happiness (again), feelings (again), love (again), “exquisite moments,” hope, despondence, feelings (yet again), reluctance, indifference (again), agony, indifference (yet again), feelings of being “overwhelmed, buried, lost” that he had “smarted under,” and a “year of misery.”

And all this in less than four pages.

You may need to remind yourself at this point that the novel in question is by Jane Austen, and not, say, a Gothic novelist of the period, or even an overwrought Russian novelist such as Dostoevsky. There has long been a tradition of unthinkingly assuming that what emotions there are to be found in Jane Austen are of a rather thin, attenuated, and bland variety. For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s view, “the Passions are perfectly unknown” to Jane Austen (Letter to W. S. Williams, 12 April 1850). This view persists to the present day. In her introduction to the Penguin edition of Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848), Stevie Davies states of the Brontë novel that “Social comedy after the manner of Jane Austen characterizes Markham’s letters but they also incorporate glimpses of another, emotionally and intellectually ampler world” (1996, xiv; my emphasis). The assumption behind her unfavorable comparison is that the world of Jane Austen novels is emotionally impoverished. Anyone who has shared this view will probably join with me in the sense of surprise that I felt when I completed the two lists and discovered the sheer amount, density, and extremity of the emotions to be found in a Jane Austen novel.

A potential drawback to cognitive approaches to literature is the possibility that they will focus only or mainly on the more obviously cognitive aspects of the mind such as what philosophers call practical reasoning: decisions on alternative courses of action. In studying the whole mind, we need to consider other, less obviously cognitive areas such as emotions and feelings. The need to recognize the importance of emotion is especially pressing because cognitions cause emotions; emotions cause cognitions. Emotions are therefore woven so deeply into the fabric of fictional discourse that it is difficult to separate them out from the other elements of a narrative. In the words of the psychologists Jerome Singer and John Kolligian, “Our ways of knowing the world are intrinsically bound up with our ways of feeling” (1987, 548), and, in the view of Antonio Damasio, “consciousness and emotion are not separable” (2000, 16). Psychologists and philosophers stress repeatedly that cognition and emotion are inextricably linked (Damasio 2000, Elster 1999, Le Doux 1999). In addition, the psychologist Keith Oatley maintains that “emotions are not on the periphery but at the center of human cogni-
tion” (1992, 3) and that, as a result, “most philosophical work on emotions has been cognitive” (1999, 274). In the context of fictional minds, Lubomír Doležel feels that emotions have “regained their status as powerful motivational factors but continue to elude theoretical grasp” (1998, 65). While discussing real minds, Damasio refers to “the scientific neglect of emotion” (2000, 39) but reassures us that, in recent years, “both neuroscience and cognitive neuroscience have finally endorsed emotion” (2000, 40). It is good that narrative theory is now following suit.

It seems to me that there are two broad and general tendencies in theoretical approaches to emotions. One is to emphasize their irrational, uncontrollable quality. This is the view of the emotions as passions. The other broad tendency is the stress, as in the previous paragraph, on the cognitive role of the emotions, especially in relation to the achievement of goals and plans. Oatley (1992) argues that emotions consist of four elements. Two of them—(a) private, subjective experiences such as conscious preoccupation and phenomenological tone; and (b) public bodily disturbances, facial expressions, and gestures—belong to the former tendency. The other two—(c) judgments, reactions relating to goals and plans, appraisal significance, and evaluation; and (d) action readiness—belong to the latter. With regard to the second, more cognitive tendency, I said just now that emotions function as the teleological motors of narrative. I want to pursue this point a little further. Fictional emotion has to be evaluated in the context of the interrelated issues of attribution, motivation, and teleology. Readers comprehend narratives primarily by means of their attributions of characters’ states of minds as stated or implied in the text. Much of this attribution process concerns motivation—attributing motives, intentions, plans, goals, reasons for, or causes of, actions. And a good deal of the motivation for characters’ actions arises from their emotional reactions to what happens to them. Once characters’ motivations, and especially those related to their emotions, are apparent to the reader, the plot will unfold. It is in this way that attributions of motivation arising from emotions are the basis of teleology.

As I say, Oatley works within a teleological perspective on the emotions that focuses on their role in relation to the achievement of goals and plans. His central argument is that “Emotions are a human solution to problems of our simultaneous multiple goals, of our limitations and uncertain knowledge, and of our interactions with others” (1992, 411). Specifically, “emotions can communicate the need for cognitive change” (1992, 412) and the “normal function of an emotion is to change goal priorities and to load into readiness a small suite of plans for action” (1992, 89). (Notice how far we have come from uncontrollable passions.) Emotions communicate both to ourselves and to others that goals are being met or that they are not, and
what action is appropriate. Obviously, positive emotions relate to the fulfillment of plans and goals, and negative emotions to the various disjunctions that occur between our expectations or hopes and the actual situation. With regard to fictional minds, readers and characters are sometimes fairly sure about the teleological implications of a particular emotion. “She had not mistaken him. Jealousy of Mr Elliot had been the retarding weight, the doubt, the torment” (243). This is a free indirect representation of what may be called historical motivation. It is Anne’s third-person attribution of the emotion of jealousy to Wentworth in order to explain his past conduct. She knows now that she was right to think that the motivation behind his behavior was the emotion of jealousy. In addition, though, the use of the word “retarding” has a teleological implication. His jealousy has, in effect, retarded for a short while the story of their reignited romance. Now that she is sure of this, she can try to bring about their eventual reconciliation. She can, to adopt Oatley’s language, load into readiness a small suite of plans for action. Her long-term goal is this reconciliation but shorter-term ones include, ideally, being alone with him or, at the least, if they are in public, trying to adopt the best course of dramaturgical action that will reassure him that he has no reason to feel any jealousy.

Anne’s third-person attribution of an emotional state to Wentworth is then supplemented by Wentworth’s own first-person attribution of emotional states to himself to explain his conduct: “He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry” (244). So Wentworth was for some time mistaken about his own emotional states. This is yet another example of the unreliability of first-person attribution that, although I said in chapter 2 would not be systematically pursued in this study, has cropped up with some regularity during my discussions of the reliability of third-person attribution.

The two broad tendencies in the approaches to emotions are reflected in Oatley’s important distinction between the semantic messages and the control messages that are sent by emotions. Semantic messages are those that have a specific cognitive content. They are intentional. (I am again using this word in the sense that I referred to in chapter 2, not with the normal, everyday meaning relating to motivation but in its technical, philosophical sense of a mental state that is about something, that is directed out into the world.) Emotions and feelings often contain cognitive judgments on states of affairs in the world. Decisions to act in certain ways are made up, on the one hand, of desires, emotions, and feelings, and, on the other hand, of beliefs and cognitions. And these two elements are difficult to disentangle. I desire something because I believe that it is good; I believe that it is good because I find that I desire it. Many of the cognitive judgments of characters in Persuasion
are presented in terms of their feelings. Characters are happy or sad that something, in their view, is the case. Presenting characters’ cognitive judgments in terms of their feelings allows the narrator to register their approval or disapproval of these states of affairs. In many of these cases, the causation may be said to be forward. A character feels an emotion that is based on a cognitive judgment about an aspect of the storyworld and so takes action in order to change the current situation. The emotion causes a future action. Anne’s feelings of relief and happiness that she now knows what was causing Wentworth’s behavior and also her belief that she is able to do something about it will, together, result in future action—specifically, her attempts to be alone with him.

By contrast, the control messages that are sent by emotions are non-semantic. They function as a kind of alarm system. They arise out of the emotions as uncontrollable passions. These are the occasions when Anne is overcome by emotion to the point where she does not know what is happening around her. “Anne heard nothing distinctly; it was only a buzz of words in her ear, her mind was in confusion” (235). “She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed” (238). There is often a correlation between control messages and the physical manifestations of emotions: starting, blushing, stammering, crying, and so on. In these cases, the causation is typically backward. Anne feels an emotion because of what has just happened: the event causes the emotion; the emotion is a reaction to the event. In practice, of course, emotions will often form part of a causal chain, and specific examples of emotions will have both backward and forward elements. In any event, though, as is so often the case, the distinction between the semantic messages and the control messages that are sent by emotions is more of a spectrum than a dichotomy. Take this example: “She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness” (233). Although this is a reaction to past events that is similar in some respects to the examples of Anne being overwhelmed by emotions cited earlier in this paragraph, it has a more cognitive element than they have, I think. This sentence involves a judgment that Anne is a long way from fulfilling her objective. However, it does not contain any semantic messages and does not involve any element of planning for future action. So I would put this example roughly in the middle of the semantic/control spectrum.

Moving back to the semantic end of the spectrum, attributions of emotions can contain local (or short-term) motivation or extended (or teleological) motivation, and often both. Take these two examples: “In desperation, she said that she would go home” (241). “Anxious to omit no possible precaution, Anne struggled and said . . .” (241). In these cases, the motivation is both local (or short-term)—the examples explain Anne’s specific actions
at that point in the story—and also teleological (or long-term)—they are geared to Anne’s long-range plan of being reunited with Wentworth. To take another illustration, Anne overhears a conversation between Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft on the desirability of short engagements. “Anne found an unexpected interest here. She felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her, and at the same moment . . . her eyes instinctively glanced towards [Wentworth]” (235). Anne’s nervous thrill results from her cognitive judgment on the applicability of the conversation to her situation. She appraises it in terms of her long-term goal of a rekindled relationship with Wentworth. It is also the motivation for her short-term response—the glance toward Wentworth.

Oatley’s use of the term control is significant. Much of the teleological value of the emotions is related to the expression of emotions. Sometimes emotions are involuntarily expressed, for example by blushing, crying, and facial expressions. At other times, it is possible to control the expression of emotions in order to conceal them. In those cases, decisions can be made about how much emotion to express. One consequence of the concealment of strong emotion is that misunderstandings will arise. Initially, Wentworth and Anne do not express their emotions either to each other or to other people. This makes it more difficult for them to know what the other is feeling and thinking. Later, they do see signs of emotions in each other—one sees that the other is moved or disturbed—but they do not know what is causing the emotion. Doubt can arise because much of the action resulting from the feeling of an emotion is related to the concealment of that emotion. There is a need for her to control her “overpowering happiness” (240). “Anne could command herself enough to receive that look” (242); and “Smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture” (242).

The reasons for the need for concealment are complex. One is the general issue of social constraint. Anne has great concern for feelings of others: when her brother-in-law insists for the kindest of reasons in interfering with her desire to see Wentworth at the climax of the novel, thereby infuriating her almost beyond endurance, “She set off with him, with no feeling but gratitude apparent” (242). As she has been conditioned by the duty to be polite, her dramaturgical action is faultless. A second reason for concealment is the unreliability of first-person attribution. Characters are often not sure themselves precisely what their feelings mean or what their causes are, and so are apprehensive about expressing them. Wentworth thought he was feeling indifference when, as he eventually discovers about himself, he was experiencing anger. A third, related reason for concealment is the knowledge that emotions may cause actions that can be misinterpreted. Wentworth’s rekindled love for Anne causes him to undertake kind actions toward her. He takes the boisterous nephew off her back when she is obviously bothered by him,
and he lifts her into the carriage at the end of a long walk when she is noticeably exhausted. Anne, however, mistakenly attributes these acts to his general thoughtfulness, rather than to any remaining feelings of love for her.

SOME OTHER NOVELS

I thought it would be a good idea at this point in the book to supplement detailed consideration of the three main texts with some remarks on other nineteenth-century novels. In this way, I can demonstrate some breadth as well as depth. In particular, I want to show that the explicit and self-conscious debate on the balance between public and private thought, intermental and intramental functioning, social and individual minds that is such a striking feature of my main example texts is also characteristic of the fiction of the period as a whole. Within this balance, authors will use differing emphases to display the balance. Jane Austen, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Maria Edgeworth, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Anthony Trollope tend toward the social end of the spectrum. Their novels are characterized by an assumption that characters’ thought processes are frequently transparent and public. It is for this reason that secrets (the device around which so many of their plots revolve) are so difficult to keep. In fact, several of the novels discussed below, and especially Maria Edgeworth’s *Helen*, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*, and Wilkie Collins’s *No Name* (1862), would certainly benefit from the kind of in-depth analysis given earlier to *Middlemarch* and *Little Dorrit*. In contrast, other writers such as Walter Scott and Henry James are rather more ambivalent about social minds and are often more comfortable with the assumption that minds are usually inaccessible and private.

*The Warden* is one of the many novels of the nineteenth century in which characters read the minds of others: “Mr Harding knew that the attorney-general regarded him as little better than a fool, but that he did not mind; he and the attorney-general had not much in common between them; he knew also that others, whom he did care about, would think so too; but Eleanor, he was sure, would exult in what he had done, and the bishop, he trusted, would sympathize with him” (155). This passage vividly indicates the necessity for seeing the character of Mr Harding as situated within a distributed cognitive network. As part of this network, he and the bishop form a small intermental unit of long standing. “The bishop and Mr Harding loved each other warmly” (24), and, for this reason, “Mr Harding determined to open his mind and confess his doubts” (25). He feels able, in this telling phrase, to “open his mind” to the mind of another, and, as in the passage from *Helen*...
that was quoted at the beginning of this book, there is often no need for words. As with the characters of Dickens, gestures can be enough: when the bishop puts his hand on his knee as a gesture of comfort, “Mr Harding well knew what that pressure meant” (26).

*Shirley* is another text that debates the epistemological and ethical implications of mind reading: “Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly” (215). This novel is extraordinary in combining a large amount of staginess, awkwardness, and clunkiness in the presentation of the internalist perspective on characters’ minds (by such means as elaborate spoken soliloquies, highly unlikely diary entries, and the like) with great sensitivity, fluidity, and insight in the externalist perspective. One of the many examples of the latter is a beautiful and moving passage in which, following a period of estrangement, the minds of Shirley and Louis Moore start to work together again in perfect unison. They renew themselves as an intermental unit by slipping into their previous, familiar roles of tutor and pupil (378–89).

The externalist perspective is, as I have said, an opportunity to widen and deepen our conception of such apparently internalist notions as character, interiority, subjectivity, and identity. Individuals do not exist in a vacuum. As the passage quoted above shows, Mr Harding can only be fully understood in terms of his functioning within intermental units. Similarly, other characters such as Lydgate in *Middlemarch* can be seen in relation to the units that they are not part of (for example, when they are identified as outsiders, scapegoats, and so on). There are many other ways in which a social-minds approach can be used to identify patterns in relationships that may not be apparent from the use of more orthodox tools. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, there are few examples of characters knowing what other characters are thinking. The one exception is the relationship between Helen, the eponymous heroine, and Hargrave, the sexual predator who tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. During their brief passages of dialogue, there are at least seven explicit references to one of them being able to read the mind of the other. To put this in context, I have discovered only six other examples in the rest of the book. On the face of it, this finding seems surprising. Helen says that she finds Hargrave’s attentions abhorrent. However, the evidence of the closeness of their joint mental functioning suggests that her feelings for him may be deeper and more complex than her own narration, as contained in her diary, is willing to admit.

Wilkie Collins is similar to Charles Dickens in his emphasis on the surface: the looks, facial expressions, bodily movements, and sign language by which characters communicate with others. This is unsurprising, given the close working relationship between the two men. “Surface” is a word that
recurs throughout *No Name*. There is hardly any direct report of internal thought in this novel, but there is a good deal of highly visible thinking. “When [Magdalen] withdrew [her hands from her face], all the four persons in the room noticed a change in her. Something in her expression had altered, subtly and silently; something which made the familiar features suddenly look strange, even to her sister and Miss Garth; something, through all after years, never to be forgotten in connection with that day—and never to be described” (124). Magdalen’s sister, governess, solicitor, and family friend can see the change in her mental functioning. It is so marked that they find it unforgettable. But there is an internalist side too. Although others can see the alteration in Magdalen’s face, it is strange to them. They do not know its precise nature. The change in her appearance arises from a decision that she had just made: her intention to avenge the wrong done to her and her sister. The others do not know this because she has also made another decision: to keep her desire for revenge a secret.

Magdalen now has a secret. Edgeworth’s Helen also has a secret. Its beginnings are apparent in the passage with which this book began. The general comes to believe that the dead man was Helen’s lover, not Cecilia’s. Out of loyalty to Cecilia, Helen cannot tell him that he is wrong. The plot of *Helen* hinges on this secret. *Shirley* and *Wives and Daughters* are similarly preoccupied with secrets: How much can be concealed from others? For how long? And for what purpose? In *Wives and Daughters*, Mrs Gibson has a secretive disposition; Osborne is secretly married; Roger and then Molly discover the marriage and are forced to keep Osborne’s secret too; Cynthia conceals her relationship with Preston; Molly, again, finds it out and has another secret to keep. There are several passages in this novel, often involving Cynthia, in which characters either think about or discuss the difficulty of hiding aspects of their minds. And it is this difficulty of concealment that is precisely the point. On the face of it, the combination of secrets with social minds might seem paradoxical. But the juxtaposition of these apparently disparate elements highlights the epistemological and ethical dilemmas that characters face while trying to keep secrets from other minds within a community in which people tend to be open and cognitively available to each other. The characters who are attempting to hide something are forever fearful that their actions, facial expressions, looks, blushes, and silences will give them away, especially to other characters who know them well. (For an analysis of secrets in Wilkie Collins, see Bachman 2010.)

The strong sense of social entanglement (especially through the medium of gossip) that is characteristic of the nineteenth-century novel is reinforced by the visibility of thought. People will gossip when they notice that someone blushes when a particular person comes into the room. Once the object of
the gossip becomes aware that they are talked about, they will blush all the more. In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne in particular suffers from the extremely public ways in which what she regards as her innermost feelings are openly discussed by such prying gossips as Mrs Jennings. Marianne in turn can cause suffering to others by her own behavior, specifically her displays of emotion. Brandon, on entering the room on one occasion, sees Marianne rush past him because she cannot contain her intense disappointment that he is not Willoughby. This pains him deeply. It is against this background of intensely public thought that I will now discuss some of the different types of intermental units to be found in my selection of nineteenth-century novels. After starting with a few large and medium-sized units, I will focus on small ones that comprise parents and daughters, and then sisters or near-sisters.

I mentioned in chapter 1 that Mr Harding quotes an old proverb in *The Warden*: “Every one knows where his own shoe pinches!” (114). I said that this is an internalist motto that vividly expresses the apparent truth that only we know what we are experiencing and no one else can. Oddly, this contribution to the internalist/externalist debate in the nineteenth-century novel is totally at odds with the whole tenor of this profoundly externalist novel. Mr Harding feels that “all the world knew” (23) about his circumstances. “All Barchester was by the ears about it” (59). Susan Sniader Lanser (1992) has shown that the town of Cranford in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel of that name works in much the same sort of way as Barchester does. The village of Raveneoe in George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* is another example. The role of the local community, in the form of “gossip,” “rumour,” and “scandal” (all words used in *The Warden*), is as important in these places as it is in Middlemarch, and so the sense of oppression that, for example, Mr Harding feels is similar to that felt by Dorothea, Lydgate, and Ladislaw. In *Wives and Daughters*, the collective mind of the town of Hollingford exerts perceptible pressure on Mr Gibson to marry again (he asks himself, “Why did people think” that he had to remarry? [104]), and its speculations about Mr Gibson’s past are similar to those about Lydgate's. (In fact, there are curious parallels between the characters of Gibson and Lydgate: though at different stages in their lives, both are cultivated country-town doctors who are interested in scientific research, but who blunder into unfortunate marriages to similarly shallow women.)

It could be argued that the main character of Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) is the medium-sized intermental unit formed by the crew of the ship. At one point, the men of the crew attempt to rescue the black man of the title, James Wait:

A rage to fling things overboard possessed us. We worked fiercely, cutting
our hands and speaking brutally to one another . . . The agony of his fear wrung our hearts so terribly that we longed to abandon him, to get out of that place . . . to get out of his hearing, back on the poop where we could wait passively for death in incomparable repose. (54)

This is extremely complex intermental thought. It starts with an emotion (rage) that is presented causally, that is, as an intention to perform an action (flinging things overboard) and therefore as a cause of that action. The intention is presumably unfulfilled and so the action remains hypothetical. The passage then presents realized joint action: intense labor and the unintended consequence of hands being cut, then speech. Both actions are expressed in ways that vividly convey shared states of mind: working fiercely and speaking brutally. Next a complex of strong emotions (hearts being wrung) are described as a response to an individual’s emotion (Wait’s agony of fear). This is followed by another causal emotion (longing), presented as an unfulfilled intention that relates to two decisions that are not made (wanting to abandon him and to get out of his hearing). This short passage concludes with a hypothetical desire (to wait passively for death). In addition, some emotions are implied, but not openly stated: compassion, fear, desperation, and so on. The thought processes are initially focused on an individual, Wait, but then become almost mystical or metaphysical (“waiting passively for death in incomparable repose”) in a way that is characteristic of this narrative, but is completely alien to all of the other novels under discussion in this section.

This passage is an example of a “we” narrative (as explained in chapter 2, these are written predominantly in the first-person plural). As such, it is an indication of the presence of what might be called, in parallel, “we” cognition: that is, intermental thought. As this book’s focus on heterodiegetic narratives will have demonstrated, “we” narration is only one such indicator. “Narcissus” oscillates weirdly between this sort of narration and what might be called “they” narration, and both indicate the presence of intermental thought. Analysts of “we” narration often express concern about what they regard as “illicit” access to individual mental functioning in texts of this sort. “How can the homodiegetic narrator know what is going on in the minds of his shipmates?” It seems to me that an important consequence of situating “we” narration within the much wider context of “we” cognition is that concerns of this sort can, to a certain extent, be allayed. Within the externalist perspective, at least some knowledge of the mental states of others is the expected norm, not a mysterious aberration. This is a good example of a narrative that can be illuminated by a discussion of its social minds. Within the tradition of the action novel, this is a novel of collective action; within the
tradition of the novel of consciousness, this is a novel of collective consciousness.

Close cognitive relationships between parents and daughters are a notable feature of several novels of the nineteenth century. In *Shirley*, while Caroline is being nursed by her mother, Mrs Pryor, the two “coalesced in wondrous union” (331). “Mrs Pryor could not complete her broken sentences . . . but Caroline comprehended” (296). Shirley does not need to be told that Caroline and Mrs Pryor are mother and daughter—she sees it by watching them together. However, she conceals from them the fact that she knows it: “I may be communicative, yet know where to stop” (354). When the mother and daughter discuss love and marriage, they contribute to the social-minds debate by disagreeing over the degree of intermentality to be expected within a marriage. Caroline suggests that, “Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage must be happy.” Her mother disagrees, arguing that “It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one” (300). There is an equally close relationship between Mr Gibson and his daughter Molly in *Wives and Daughters*, and there are frequent references to their ability to know what the other is thinking. “We understand each other” (76). Molly feels great pain at her father’s decision to suspend the openly acknowledged working of the unit following his marriage. He does this because he quickly realizes that his mind and that of the new Mrs Gibson will never be “harmonious.” By continuing to be as obviously close to his daughter in the future as he was in the past, he would, he thinks, appear to be disloyal to his new wife. Molly is sad that they now no longer share their minds. They enter into an unspoken pact that the intermental quality of their relationship should from now on be implicit. Of course, by doing so, the father and daughter reinforce the intermental element in their relationship, albeit by different means.

Mr Harding is another father who forms a close unit with his daughter. He notices quickly that Eleanor loves John Bold. She knows that he is upset by the affair of the hospital. However, even this relationship contains misunderstandings and concealments. He wrongly thinks at one point that she is more worried about herself than she is about him. Initially, Mr Harding suffers in silence, and for a long time he cannot tell anyone, even Eleanor, what he is thinking and feeling. On the other hand, he cannot “prevent her from seeing that he was disturbed” (83). “Eleanor saw well how it was” (83). His isolation hurts her: her desire is “to be allowed to share his sorrows” (84). Tellingly, she exclaims, “Oh! papa, your face tells so much; though you won’t speak to me with your voice, I know how it is with you every time I look at you” (88). She knows some of what he is thinking, but not all. She knows that he is suffering, but not that it is bad enough to make him want to resign
as warden. When he eventually tells her everything, “he laid bare the inmost corners of his heart to her” (89). Their mind reading also works well when they undertake joint actions. Mr Harding gives Eleanor a letter to his son-in-law that explains that he is going to London to speak to the attorney general “with the perfect, though not expressed, understanding that its delivery was to be delayed” (138). Eleanor knows that Mr Harding wants the letter to arrive only after it is too late for his son-in-law to stop him going.

Another interesting pattern to emerge from novels of this period is the high degree of intermentality between sisters or near-sisters. Examples include Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility (real sisters), Molly and Cynthia in Wives and Daughters (stepsisters), Shirley and Caroline in Shirley (close friends who become sisters-in-law), and Helen and Cecilia in Helen (almost-foster sisters). Shirley and Caroline have a fascinating conversation in which they debate the visibility of thought, and emotion in particular. Caroline: “I saw you disturbed.” Shirley: “You saw nothing, Caroline. I can cover my feelings.” But then, Shirley: “You can never tell how your look, mien, carriage, shook me . . . I soon saw you were diffident” (340). Shirley then “took Caroline in her arms, gave her one look, one kiss, then said—‘You are better’” (353). However, the familiar theme of the patchiness and unreliability of intermental thought recurs. Caroline remarks to Shirley: “I thought I knew you quite well: I begin to find myself mistaken” (357). In another similarly complex scene, Caroline tells Robert Moore about an intimate conversation between her and Shirley that probes the mechanics of intermentalism (474–75). In summary, Caroline explains to Robert that Shirley tells her some things but not others; Caroline can guess and infer some aspects of Shirley’s mind but not all of them. What neither finds out about the other is the identity of the person they love. In Wives and Daughters, there are frequent occasions on which Molly and Cynthia know what the other is thinking and they are able to communicate this knowledge by means of looks and gestures (for example, their shared disapproval of Mrs Gibson’s behavior). The picture is mixed again, though; Cynthia does not know about the most important aspect of Molly’s mind, because she does not suspect Molly’s feelings for Roger.

Any survey of internalist and externalist perspectives in the nineteenth-century novel would be incomplete without a brief discussion of Henry James. I will, therefore, comment at this point on a curious feature of one of his unjustly neglected books, The Tragic Muse (1890). Misunderstandings between characters can occur when, during a conversation, one will not quite follow what the other has said and will ask them to explain what they meant to say. In The Tragic Muse there are, extraordinarily, at least 175 examples of this phenomenon. (That is not a typing error—it does indeed
happen at least one hundred seventy-five times.) You may be thinking that this is Henry James, after all, and his characters are prone to employ masterly indirection in order to avoid being understood or to pretend misunderstanding. However, this novel is different from other James novels in that it has few Machiavellian schemers and plotters. Characters here are trying to be straightforward with each other, and so the vast majority of their non-understandings are genuine. It is just that the minds in this novel are private, solitary, and mysterious. As a result, characters’ conversations are too gnomic for easy communication. The tone is typically cagy—people circle each other watchfully, never saying precisely what they mean, not through deceit, but through self-absorption. Only rarely does a reader get a clear sense of a character knowing another’s mind. Specifically, they do not put themselves in somebody else’s place and ask themselves: What does that person already know, and what do I need to tell them in order to make myself intelligible? In almost every conversation in the novel, statements have to be made more explicit because the original formulation is unclear to the interlocutor. As a result, communication is a laborious effort. The predominant feeling is one of apartness. There is never any sense of a meeting of minds, of two characters being on the same wavelength. Revealingly, the narrator describes two participants in one conversation as “speaking a different language” (346).

Consider the contrast between the storyworld of this novel and those of the novels of Austen, Edgeworth, Gaskell, and Eliot. In cognitive terms, it is a huge distance to travel from *The Tragic Muse*—where characters do not know what others are thinking, despite their endlessly trying to explain—to the many earlier novels in which characters often know perfectly well what others are thinking without the need for speech. Within the externalist paradigm, the emphasis is on ease of communication; within the internalist one, it is on its difficulty. However, it is important not to exaggerate the differences between Henry James and these other novelists. It is certainly not black and white—we are talking about shades of grey. In the James novel, characters do occasionally know what others are thinking. Equally, as I have shown, there are many secrets and frequent misunderstandings and mind-misreadings in the other novels. There are more secrets, in fact, in the externalist novels than in *The Tragic Muse*. Nevertheless, the general tendency is unmistakably different. The few examples of intermentality in the James novel have to be set against the 175-odd occasions when it is conspicuously absent.

**COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE NOVELS**

At this point in the book I will return to the three main example texts in
order to comment on some of the similarities and differences between them. I will also refer occasionally to some of the novels discussed in the previous section.

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The default setting for the sharing of thought is speech. When we want to let someone know what we are thinking, the obvious way to do so is to tell them in words. This is why communication by such nonverbal means as the look, the face, and body language presupposes more intermentality than speech. These communicative mechanisms are particularly salient in both *Little Dorrit* and *No Name*. Because there is a good deal of emphasis in both these novels on the visibility of thought, much is often deliberately left unsaid. Dickens in particular had an extraordinarily visual sense of cognitive functioning that accounts, I think, for much of the distinctively vivid and dramatic quality of his writing. In other novelists there is a little more stress on characters unconsciously betraying themselves, rather than consciously communicating by signs. In addition, George Eliot had a characteristic interest in the complex, intricate development of large, medium, and small units over time. It should be stressed, however, that these are all differences of emphasis only.

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Most nineteenth-century novels contain intermental minds (that is, high-functioning units). The town of Middlemarch is well defined enough to be thought of as a group mind. Indeed, it is a major character in that novel. The village of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce is another good example. Other towns such as Barchester, Cranford, and Hollingford function in similar ways. The candidates for group-mind status in *Persuasion* and *Little Dorrit* tend to be small units. I am thinking here of such pairings as the Crofts, the clever ones (Flintwinch and Mrs Clennam), and the Meagles. The parent-daughter and sister pairings that were referred to in the previous section, together with the crew of the “Narcissus,” also qualify, in my view.

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All intermental units contain a balance between long-term dispositions to behave in certain ways and short-term, immediate, individual mental events. In some cases a knowledge of the former does not assist very much with the latter. Clennam knows that his mother has a secretive disposition, but he does not know the precise nature of her biggest secret, the one that
forms the plot of the novel. In other cases, knowledge of dispositions does help with day-to-day awareness of the mind of the other.

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Characters try to read other minds from a variety of motives—selfishness, altruism, curiosity, ambition, and so on. Like intramental thought, intermental thought is morally neutral in itself. It is not necessarily good or bad, although, of course, specific examples will be. All of the novels interpreted in this study show evidence of beneficial, ethical, and rewarding and also of stupid, selfish, and destructive intermental thought. The range in terms of quality and ethics is similar to that for intramental thought.

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Arthur Clennam, Anne Elliot, Dorothea Brooke, Mr Harding, Helen, and others are open characters who believe in social minds, favor openness in others, and are disposed to form intermental relationships. This does not preclude the possibility of secrecy for good reasons. Other characters are devious, secretive, and self-absorbed by nature. They are inclined to use mind reading for selfish and exploitative reasons and they manipulate the theory of mind of others. They do not take part in intermental units at all or else they form dysfunctional and unbalanced ones. Examples of closed characters are Mr Elliot, Mrs Clennam, Gowan, Miss Wade, Mr Casby, and Casaubon. Some of these like mindfucking for the pleasure of it; other minds are closed out of weakness.

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Open or closed minds can often be linked to the issue of control. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs Gibson vents her ill humor on Molly, “from whom she feared neither complaint nor repartee” (439). In other words, she selfishly makes use of her awareness of Molly’s mind, safe in the knowledge that she is able to manipulate and control her. Characters with closed minds tend to try to control others: Sir Walter and Elizabeth try to control Anne; the clever ones control Affery and try to control Clennam; Casaubon tries to control Dorothea; Rosamond tries to control Lydgate.

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All of the novels contain examples of small intermental units that function well. Middle-aged and elderly couples such as the Crofts, the Meagles,
and the Vincys seem to be the template in this respect. In these cases, the degree of intermentality, cognitive or emotional, is balanced or symmetrical; other units function differently. All of the novels that I have studied for this book portray small intermental units such as friendships, lovers, and marriages that are both balanced and unbalanced. In their different ways, the destructive relationship between Flintwinch and Mrs Clennam and the beneficial one between Little Dorrit and Pet are well balanced and symmetrical. The relationships between the clever ones and Affery, and between Clennam and Gowan, are not. There are also imbalances between Casaubon and Dorothea, and between Lydgate and Rosamond.

Imbalances are frequently related to the link between emotions and cognition. Little Dorrit and Pet often know what the other is thinking on an obviously cognitive level because they instantly developed a strong and immediate emotional bond and therefore know what the other is feeling too. But there are relationships in which this is not the case. The clever ones are a good example. Casaubon and Rosamond do not acknowledge Dorothea’s or Lydgate’s feelings.

It is interesting to note that dysfunctionality arises in the context of small units and, also, to an extent, with medium-sized units, but not in the case of large units. It is difficult to imagine what it would mean to say that a whole town such as Middlemarch is dysfunctional. It might be too sweeping to say that it would be impossible, rather that it would be much less likely than, say, a dysfunctional marriage.

Anne and Clennam are major characters whose theory of mind is fairly good. This would also tend to be true of the major characters featured in the novels briefly referred to in the previous section (for example, Molly and Helen). Dorothea and Lydgate, however, are rather too self-absorbed and focused on their high ambitions to be keen observers of other people. As a result, they make big mistakes and end up in unhappy marriages with manipulative spouses. Both Anne and Clennam self-consciously confront the dangers of solipsism, while Dorothea and Lydgate do not.
There is a good deal of emphasis in *Little Dorrit*, *Persuasion*, and the other novels on the workings of families; perhaps surprisingly, there is much less in *Middlemarch*. The nearest that this novel comes to the sustained presentation of the workings of a family unit is the Vincy family, but they do not have the central place in the novel that the Dorrits or the Elliots have. The three main characters, Lydgate, Dorothea, and Ladislaw, are not shown as having relationships with parents. (The roles that Mr Brooke and Casaubon play as the guardians of Dorothea and Ladislaw, respectively, hardly count in this context.)

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I mentioned in chapter 4 that some families have a strong self-image. The Dorrits (minus Little Dorrit and Frederick) are one example, and the Elliots (minus Anne) are another. The common factor is social insecurity. The Dorrits would like to be regarded as members of the middle class despite being in the debtors prison. Sir Walter and Elizabeth would like to be regarded as members of the upper class despite having to leave their family home. Pride and vanity have important roles to play in this social insecurity. Little Dorrit and Anne have a similar position (skepticism) on the question of the family honor. Oddly, as I say, there is no comparable family in *Middlemarch*. The question of class insecurity is much less of an issue in this novel than one might expect. The Chettams have a concern about Dorothea aligning the family with a man such as Ladislaw, who is “not quite out of the top drawer” (an obnoxious British phrase that used to be employed in these circumstances), but this concern is hardly of the same scale as the paranoia that grips both the Elliots and the Dorrits.

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Dickens was acutely aware of the phenomenon of physically distributed cognition and, in keeping with his absorption in the surface, and therefore physical, nature of thought, showed a greater interest in it than other nineteenth-century novelists (with the possible exception of Wilkie Collins).

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There are several examples of collective action and joint decision making in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* in particular, but also in *Persuasion*, *The Warden*, and others. It is perhaps a little surprising that there is little combined joint decision making in *Middlemarch*. I mentioned that Lydgate and Rosamond do not engage in any joint actions. Obviously, an engagement is
a joint decision, but Lydgate and Rosamond’s is noticeably accidental and contingent. There is at no point a real meeting of minds. Similarly, Clennam rather drifts into his joint decision with Pancks to invest in Merdle.

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Several novels contain characters who function as mouthpieces for the local intermental minds. In their different ways, Sir James Chettam and Mrs Cadwallader have this role in *Middlemarch*, as do Lady Russell in *Persuasion* and Mrs Merdle in *Little Dorrit*.

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On a related point, many of the novels feature large and medium-sized units that are relentlessly judgmental of individuals such as Dorothea and Lydgate. *Wives and Daughters* and *The Warden* are good examples also. Group focalization is a particular feature of *Middlemarch*. There is also group focalization of Anne (by her family) and Clennam (by the clever ones and the public in the passage from *Little Dorrit* that I used as an example of action theory). A linked issue is the transgression of group norms. Some major characters such as Dorothea, Lydgate, and Ladislaw, in their different ways, are all norm-transgressors, while others such as Anne and Clennam are much less so.

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*Fuzzy sets* (intermental units with imprecise memberships) are a noticeable feature of *Middlemarch*, where there are several discussions on the subject. There is little specific reference to this issue in the other novels.

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Scapegoating occurs with depressing frequency in most novels: for example, Bulstrode and Lydgate; Clennam in relation to the Dorrits; Mrs Smith in relation to the Elliots; Anne briefly for refusing Mr Elliot; Mr Harding for taking a principled stand.

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Unsurprisingly perhaps, the intermental units that are made up of lovers do not function particularly well. As I said when discussing *Little Dorrit*, this
is consistent with the default assumptions contained in the cognitive frame for lovers. Difficulties may also be necessary in order to ensure that storylines can be sustained over the course of a novel.

In most cases, readers have to be aware of what may be called the sociogeography of the storyworld. This is most obviously true of the novels that are set in market towns such as Middlemarch, Wives and Daughters, and The Warden. Sociogeography can ensure that the class structure of a storyworld is precisely and vividly delineated. It is necessary to an understanding of Little Dorrit to know that the Marshalsea prison, Bleeding Heart Yard, and the home of the Barnacles have different sociogeographical locations. Similarly, it is important to be aware of the significance of the different country houses in Persuasion. The names of such houses are often used as metonymies for the upper middle class. One also needs to know about the geopolitical significance of Bath in Austen. However, sociogeography is taken to the highest level of sophistication in Middlemarch.

I referred in chapter 3 to what I called the intermental rhythm in Middlemarch. The only other novel considered by this study that shares this feature is “Narcissus.” For example: “Some thought . . . others disagreed . . . the boat-swain said . . . many did not understand, others did not care; the majority further aft did not believe . . .” et cetera (66).

The ephemeral quality of many of the intermental units in Middlemarch is unique; none of the other books have anything like it. The same is true of intermental free indirect thought.

By contrast, all of the novels feature intramental functioning that has a strong intermental component (in particular in anticipating the thought of others). For example: “Even much stronger mortals than Fred Vincy hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love best.” (Middlemarch, 167).
The use of the passive voice for the purpose of constructing large-scale intermental thought is quite common. (See the beginning of chapter 3 for detailed examples from *Middlemarch.*

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To summarize this summary: for depth, complexity, and subtlety, and despite being in a high-quality field made up of truly wonderful novels, *Middlemarch* is in a class of its own.